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Luxury Market:

Analysis of the driving forces in the context of Iranian luxury hand-woven carpet market

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Chapter 1

A literature review on the driving forces in the context of Iranian luxury hand-woven carpet market .

**“ Luxury
will be
always
around ,
no
matter
what
happens
in the
world.”**

Carolina Herrera

1. Introduction

Throughout human history, luxury has shown a significant impact on consumer behaviors and ambitions, regardless of their social level (Jhamb et al., 2020). Modern-day luxury consumption is no longer limited to the affluent and privileged strata of contemporary society due to a mix of socioeconomic circumstances and growing consumer patterns (Dhaliwal et al., 2020; Paul, 2019). The sale of luxury goods increased exponentially during the last decade (Kapferer and Laurent, 2016; Shukla et al., 2015) thanks to this downward extension propelling the luxury sector's growth (Husic and Cicic, 2009); with further optimistic future projections concerning the anticipated pool of consumers captured by the luxury industry (Husain et al., 2021; Kessous and Valette-Florence, 2019; Paul, 2015).

According to a market research report by Fortune Business Insight (2021), the global luxury brands market was worth USD 316.16 billion in 2019, and is expected to reach USD 352.84 billion by 2027. Interestingly, less than fifty percent of these sales relate to the established markets in the U.S. and Europe. Whereas, recent trends illustrate that emerging markets in other regions, especially in Asia, have been growing at a much faster rate (Deloitte, 2019; Kemper et al., 2022). Followingly, luxury brands have grown in popularity during recent decades (Truong et al., 2008; Shahid and Paul, 2021), capturing a wide range of outlets such as personal luxury goods, luxury vehicles, luxury lodging, fine wines and spirits, cuisines, fine arts, and luxurious cruise lines (D'Arpizio and Levato, 2014). However, among these items studies on luxury carpets are scarcely done by luxury marketing researchers.

On the other hand , the paradigm of luxury manufacturers' marketing efforts have transformed dramatically from focusing on the developed market to the emerging economies such as China, India, Brazil, Russia (Voight, 2007) during the recent years; whereas none of the earlier studies indicate to the flourishing luxury market in Iran as another emerging economy among the others. Luxury is typically linked to the expressing of desires and feelings (Loureiro et al., 2020). It entails deviating from the

"trend's" path, paving one's own way, and imposing one's own set of rules (Wang et al., 2021).

Luxury brands, regardless of their success, must remain current and agile in their understanding and response to market-based dynamics driven by cultural and demographic shifts (Joy et al., 2012), technological advancements (Eri et al., 2014), evolving consumer trends (Seo and Buchanan-Oliver, 2015), and a variety of other socioeconomic and geopolitical forces (Atwal and Bryson, 2017; Whelan and Hingston, 2018). Despite the exponential rise in luxury spending, there is little research on how customers' emotional, mental, and cognitive responses to luxury items are affected (Wang et al., 2021).

From branding point of view, brand reputation has been found to influence perceptions of legitimacy and prestige, as well as consumer well-being (Loureiro et al., 2018). Furthermore, luxury values tend to elicit positive assessments of specific outcomes such as brand coolness and passionate desire, all of which have a beneficial impact on consumer-brand interactions (Loureiro et al., 2020). Although luxury consumption is frequently associated with materialistic orientations (Sharda and Bhat, 2018) and conspicuous consumption (Bagwell and Bernheim, 1996; Janssen et al., 2017), scholars recognize the broader significance of establishing positive emotional connections between consumers and brands (Loureiro et al., 2018), which ultimately trigger intense sentimental expressions and aspirations (Loureiro et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021).

Luxury brands are significant to consumers because they can represent a source of status (Kessous and Valette-Florence, 2019; Nelissen and Meijers, 2011), prestige (Heine et al., 2016), and mass prestige (Paul, 2015, 2019), as well as a variety of socio-economic benefits (Martinez et al., 2009). Moreover, different social motives have already been linked to consumer engagement in the luxury fashion strata, with ultimate positive contributions to an improved sense of subjective well-being (Prentice and Loureiro, 2018). Finally, social values can influence subjective norms positively but negatively influence behavioral control (Loureiro and Arajo, 2014). Developing countries are thought to be places

where neo-rich people are eager to spend money on luxury goods to flaunt their newly obtained social standing (the Infinium Global research,2020). Among them, Iran is one of the growing countries whose exponential market growth potential has attracted global luxury interest (E. Panton,2016). Mordo Intelligence Analysis conducts a research in respect of luxury market in Iran during the period of 2020-2025 , which shows that this country is quickly appearing as a market of the future luxury goods, owing to its inherent potential, international developments, and technology progress. Among the various segmentation of luxury goods market in Iran, this research decided to investigate Persian luxury hand-woven carpet market in this country based on strong, subtle and sufficient reasons :

A. Persian hand-woven carpet is not only a consumer good, but also it is a capital good. That is , it is a kind of luxury product beside its response to the consumption need of individuals, it can be purchase as an investment for the future.

B. Even though Persian hand-woven carpet is accounted as an art masterpiece of Iranians, none of the earlier studies in the art context indicate to this luxury market.

C. Iran has allocated the third place among its competitors to itself. That is, this country has a share of 7.9% in the handwoven carpet export market in 2019 when India was the top exporter with a 31.7 share, followed by Egypt with 18.2%. Then, it was followed by Nepal with 6.5%, Pakistan with 6.2%, Turkey with 4.7%, and China with 3.8% (financial tribune,2021).

D. it were accounted as luxury items before their emergence as the modern commodities (Moallem, M. 2018)..

E. Persian luxury hand-woven carpet is one of Iran's most well-known industries which has inspired and attracted global attention to the Persian art through the centuries (pope,1938: p2257)..

F. Studies that investigate luxury brands and luxury consumption focusing specifically on the Iranian context remains limited and constrained to narrow domains.

2. Background of the study

2.1 luxury consumption and Luxury brands

Luxury consumption has traditionally been associated with characteristics of exclusivity, scarcity, one-of-a-kind features, generally higher price, and superior quality (Christodoulides et al., 2021). Scholars generally agree that luxury tends to be subjective, continuously evolving, and contextual; that is, consumer views and perceptions determine it to a large extent (Christodoulides et al., 2021; Husain et al., 2021). This kind of consumption often embraces a signaling value that enables consumers to display to everyone else their self-concept that is often connected to being prestigious (Loureiro et al., 2020). Along with, luxury brands communicate with consumers in various ways (e.g., advertising, branding strategy, and warranties) that altogether transmit a notion of credibility linked with observable as well as unobservable product characteristics (Loureiro et al., 2019) in turn can enhance individuals' social image, enable a projection of wealth, and serve as a point of comparison to achieve a desired social position (Loureiro et al., 2020). Luxury brands have also been shown to denote cultural connections among peer groups that in turn can provide a form of differentiation (Wilcox et al., 2009) and a sense of fulfillment by embodying a symbolic significance in the minds of consumers (Choo et al., 2012; Nueno and Quelch, 1998).

From the consumers' identity project perspective, motivations often entail affordances of individuality and distinctions from the mainstream (Albrecht et al., 2013; Zhang and Kim, 2013). In this respect, consumer motivation to buy luxury brands can be driven by a wide range of purposes, including practical, intimate, economic, and emotional desires (Eng and Bogaert, 2010; Husain et al., 2021). For instance, consumers have been shown to consume and use luxury brands to accentuate their sense of self (Andersson and Andersson, 2006; Lundqvist et al., 2013; Zarantonello et al., 2007), enhance their perceived social status (Vickers and Renand, 2003), and establish a unique collective identity for respective

social groups (Park, 2014). Additionally, luxury consumerism manifests itself through both the acquisition of classic items that have served as a staple of luxury brand collections for decades, as well as ephemeral objects that tend to be more seasonal (Das and Jebarajakirthy, 2020; Dubois et al., 2021). As the high-end items are extremely durable, purchasing luxury things can be seen as a unique way to engage in sustainable consumerism, providing an additional source of potential motivation (Jennifer et al., 2021).

The significance of consumer involvement in marketing and brand management has long been recognized (Michaelidou and Dibb, 2008). Involvement is an individual-level variable that reflects differences in consumer decision-making and communication patterns (Chaudhuri, 2000; Karpinska-Krakowiak, 2014). It refers to the amount of information processed and the value a consumer places on luxury brands (Bapat and Thanigan, 2016). Recent consumer involvement studies have shifted their focus to a more consumer-centric approach (Cheng and Huang, 2013; Karpinska-Krakowiak, 2014; Klein et al., 2016; Sharma and Klein, 2020; Wang et al., 2019).

Consumer participation has been found to have a major impact on consumer behavior, particularly throughout the purchase decision process (Sharma and Klein, 2020). Consumer involvement research has mostly focused on how corporations employ consumer participation to maximize profit and preserve a competitive edge in the market (Prentice and Loureiro, 2018), and it has become one of the most important aspects of luxury brand consumption (Prentice et al., 2019). Special care must be made while designing effective consumer involvement strategies and techniques in order to obtain long-term advantage (Karpinska-Krakowiak, 2014). It is feasible to convert potential customers into actual purchases, keep them interested and involved, and eventually convert them into repeat customers with strong consumer participation (Klein et al., 2016; Sharma and Klein, 2020).

2.2 Brand Image

The concept of brand image has grown over time and is now a significant concept in marketing literature (Keller, 1993). Early marketing researchers (Dichter, 1985; Durgee and Stuart, 1987) focused mostly on the cognition-oriented aspect of brand image. These researchers defined brand image as the sum of a consumer's impressions of a brand's qualities, functions, and meanings. The brand image relates to memories of associations with a brand (Keller, 1993), and it can be expressed in the form of brand-related terms. These associations endow the brand with a unique meaning (Huvé-Nabec, 2004), which is the total of brand associations in customers' minds (Bauer et al., 2008). The brand image represents attitudes, qualities, and practical, symbolic, or experiential benefits (Keller, 1993; Bauer et al., 2008). Emotional and sensory linkages are also vital in developing a positive brand image, according to marketing researchers (Chang and Chieng, 2006; Low and Lamb, 2000). According to Keller, each of these three dimension are separate yet have connected entity (1993).

2.2.1. Brand Image Dimension

2.2.1.1. *Cognitive association: mystery*

Consumers' personal views, opinions, and judgments of a brand's product attributes (e.g. style), service attributes, performance, and meaning are reflected in cognitive associations (Keller, 2001). Non-product-related qualities (e.g. price, user or usage images), functional advantages (e.g. problem solving and safety benefits), and symbolic benefits are revealed through direct and indirect encounters with the brand (e.g. prestige and social approval). Consumers may form beliefs and thoughts about a brand by acknowledging non-product-related attributes such as price level, occasions where people wear the brand (i.e. usage imagery), and

the symbolic benefit of social approval based on its popularity within a subculture as part of an indirect interaction with a brand through an advertisement. According to Roberts' (2005) mystery dimension, a positive brand image is created when amazing stories about the brand are articulated by the company or developed by consumers, and embodied through worldwide icons (for example, Nike's swoosh and Burberry's plaid).

2.2.1.2. Emotional association: intimacy

Subjective feelings such as excitement, happiness, and joy are examples of emotional associations (Keller, 2001). Product-related and non-product-related attributes perceived through direct and indirect interactions with the brand shape emotional associations, which contribute to experiential benefits. A consumer, for example, may be stimulated by direct interaction with a product's scent or may feel an emotional connection by participating in a non-product-related birthday promotion or customer rewards program. An empirical study found that a brand's consistent support of its customers increases positive feelings toward the brand (Albert et al., 2008). Furthermore, consumers may feel comfort or connectedness as a result of a long-term relationship with the brand (Fournier, 1998; Shimp and Madden, 1988). The intimacy dimension, as defined by Roberts (2005), captures the pleasant emotional associations with a brand that are shaped by affective and connective encounters between customers and the brand. These experiences, according to Roberts (2005), include a company's awareness of its customers' ideas and preferences, long-term consumer devotion to a brand, and consumer delight from interacting with a brand.

2.2.1.3. Sensory association: sensuality

The consumer's physical senses are engaged in sensory associations (i.e. vision, smell, sound, touch and taste). Hultén (2011) and Schmitt (2011) assert that sensory associations are

mostly created through direct experiences with product-related and retail environment-related qualities, which is also corroborated by empirical studies (Biswas et al., 2014a, 2014b; Peck and Childers, 2003). Product look and texture (Peck and Childers, 2003); texture and color of packaging elements (Hultén et al., 2009); color, aroma, lighting (Hultén, 2012); and music (Jain and Bagdare, 2011) of retail environment are elements among these features. Indirect experiences, such as commercials (Lindstrom, 2005), also contribute to sensory associations that promote brand image (Hultén, 2011).

2.3. Perceived Quality

The concept of perceived quality has been defined by a number of academics. Perceived quality is "a distinctive form of connection," according to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000), "partly because it influences brand associations in various situations and partly because it has been empirically proved to effect profitability." Perceived quality, according to Zeithaml (1988), is "the consumer's assessment of a product's overall excellence or superiority." He underlined that perceived quality is (1) distinct from objective or actual quality, (2) a higher level abstraction rather than a specific product attribute, (3) a global assessment that mimics attitude in some circumstances, and (4) a judgment made inside a consumer's evoked set. Aaker (1991) defines perceived quality as "the customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of the product or service in relation to its intended purpose, as compared to alternatives." In truth, perceived quality differs from actual or objective quality, as well as product-based and manufacturing quality (Aaker, 1991). It might be seen of as the distinction between overall and unnoticed quality. Furthermore, consumer pleasure is determined by perceived performance and anticipation, which is determined by perceived quality (Chaudhuri, 2002). Although there are different definitions from many researchers, they all have the same meaning: perceived product quality is the

consumer's assessment of the product's total components—both tangible and intangible attributes. Performance, features, reliability, compliance, durability, serviceability, and aesthetics are only a few examples. Above all, it differs from the actual product quality (Aaker, 1991).

2.4. Status Consumption

The desire for status motivates much of consumer behavior (Eastman, J. K., *et.al.*,1999). Researchers usually link the willingness for social status to the hierarchical social differences resulted from income level and occupation type that are described as “ social class” (Eastman, J. K., *et.al.*,1999). While these hierarchical social relationships are critical in defining the amount of social status that an individual has, those with whom one makes invidious social comparisons, and the status symbols one craves, there is another sense in which consumers are motivated by the desire for status ; this is the concept of *status consumption*. That is , status consumption is defined as an individual difference variable that addresses a person's motivation to consume for status (Clark, Zboja & Goldsmith , 2007 ; Goldsmith & Clark , 2012). While there are several definitions of status consuming in the literature, they all tend to focus on the underlying motivations for such consumption. In detail , external incentives include signaling riches through public display (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004), improving social position (Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 1999), gaining social prestige (O'Cass and Frost, 2002), and gaining the acceptance and envy of others (Truong, et al., 2008). While internal incentives are including self-esteem and self-respect (Truong, et al., 2008) or self-reward without public display of products (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Thus, the literature demonstrates that the construct of status consumption is somewhat various from that of conspicuous consumption (i.e., status consumption can occur that is not conspicuous), and both need to be considered when modeling status consumption (Eastman, J. K., & Eastman, K. L., 2015).

2.5. Luxury Willingness To Purchase

Luxury brands provide consumers with a sense of indulgence while they are expensive for them (Nueno & Quelch, 1998). Although luxury brands allocates the features such as of premium quality, a heritage of craftsmanship, recognizable style, premium price, uniqueness, and global reputation (Nueno & Quelch, 1998), to themselves, consumers purchase luxury brands primarily for symbolic reasons to reflect their individual or social goals (Wilcox et al., 2009). Meanwhile, perceptions of luxury brands are not consistent across market segments, since luxury is a subjective concept (Phau & Prendergast, 2000) that depends on each consumer's perception of indulgent value. Consumption of luxury brands is largely defined by social- function attitudes (i.e. self-expression attitude and self-presentation attitude) as consumers express their individuality (e.g., need for uniqueness) and exhibit their social standing (e.g., self-monitoring) through luxury brands (Wilcox et al., 2009). Consumers in both Western and Eastern cultures follow to purchase luxury brands to illustrate their individuality and/or social standing (Nueno & Quelch, 1998; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

Luxury brands' distinctive image, along with their scarcity value, can response to the consumers' need for uniqueness (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004), as a result a self-expression attitude is arousing (Katz, 1960). Furthermore, the ability of luxury brands to symbolize social classifications and group affiliations can strengthen social image, arousing a self-presentation attitude (Park, Rabolt, & Jeon, 2008; Snyder & DeBono, 1985). Regardless of whether consumption of luxury brands differs by culture, underlying motivations to purchase the same luxury brand may differ by culture. For example, those in collective societies are more tight bound together sharing common values and norms such

as emotional predispositions, common interests, and mutually agreed upon social practices (Etzioni, 1968). Therefore, people in collective societies may perceive self in a depersonalized way through which individual personalities are blurred (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Thus, collectivist consumers are likely to engage in more self-monitoring and display a stronger self-presentation attitude to portray their individuality and/or their social standing. In contrary, consumers in individualist societies emphasize on consciousness, emotional independence, and individual initiative (Hofstede, 1980) which may strengthen their need for uniqueness and bolster their self-expression attitude (c.f., Hofstede, 1991). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the underlying forces of willingness to purchase in a luxury hand-woven carpet market in the context of a developing collectivist society (Iran).

3. Research questions

Base of the focus of each paper on a specific topic for investigating a particular goal, related research questions were defined as following:

3.1. Research Paper.1

Through this first study, we are looking for responding to the following questions regarding the influence brand image dimensions on perceived quality. A. Dose mystery, as a cognitive dimension of brand image, has a positive relationship with luxury perceived quality ?, B. Dose sensuality, as a sensory dimension of brand image, has a positive relationship with luxury perceived quality ? C. Dose intimacy, as an emotional dimension of luxury brand image, has a positive relationship with luxury perceived quality ? D. How managers and retailers in this luxury sector

would be able to improve the brand image dimensions so as to forming a favorable quality perception in consumers' minds ?

3.2. Research Paper.2

This paper allocating to the study of the status signaling need of Iranian consumers through the lens of mystery, sensuality and intimacy. Therefore, the following questions are defined : A. Dose mystery, as a cognitive dimension of brand image, has a positive relationship with status consumption ?, B. Dose sensuality, as a sensory dimension of brand image, has a positive relationship with status consumption?, C. Dose intimacy, as an emotional dimension of brand image, has a positive relationship with status consumption?, D. What kind of strategies should be designed for responding to the status signaling need of consumers in luxury carpet industry and the other luxury sectors like fashion luxury industry through the lens of brand image dimensions ?

3.3. Research Paper.3

The third paper investigates the influence of brand image dimension on luxury willingness to purchase through two studies. we are looking for answering the following questions :

Study.1 : A. Dose mystery, as a cognitive dimension of luxury brand image, has a positive relationship with luxury willingness to purchase ?, B. Dose sensuality, as a sensory dimension of brand image, has a positive relationship with luxury willingness to purchase?, C. Dose intimacy, as an emotional dimension of brand image, has a positive relationship with luxury willingness to purchase? Study.2: The mediating and moderating role of

perceived quality and status consumption are considered through this study. So , the related research questions are as followed: A. Dose perceived quality mediate the relationship among mystery and luxury willingness to purchase ?, B. Dose perceived quality mediate the relationship among sensuality and luxury willingness to purchase ?, C. Dose perceived quality mediate the relationship among intimacy and luxury willingness to purchase ?, D. Dose status consumption moderate the relationship among mystery and luxury willingness to purchase?, E. Dose status consumption moderate the relationship among sensuality and willingness to purchase?, F. Dose status consumption moderate the relationship among intimacy and willingness to purchase?

4. Structure of the thesis

This empirical research has accomplished in Persian luxury hand-made carpet market in Iran, contains three studies all of which are chained to each other and the collected data were analyzed in R. The first study concentrates on the influence of brand image dimension on perceived quality of consumers. The second study focuses on the effect of brand image dimension on status consumption. The last study divided into two subcategory (study.1 and study. 2).

Study.1 investigates the direct effect of brand image dimensions on luxury willingness to purchase, while study.2 investigates the indirect and interaction effects of perceived quality of consumers and status consumption on relationship between brand image dimension and luxury willingness to purchase. All of these papers starts with a section presenting the literature review. Then review hypotheses are formed and followed by the methodology and the results. Conclusion section with discussion of the finding, managerial relevance, and future research directions are coming the following sections.

Figure 1. illustrates a summary of this research.

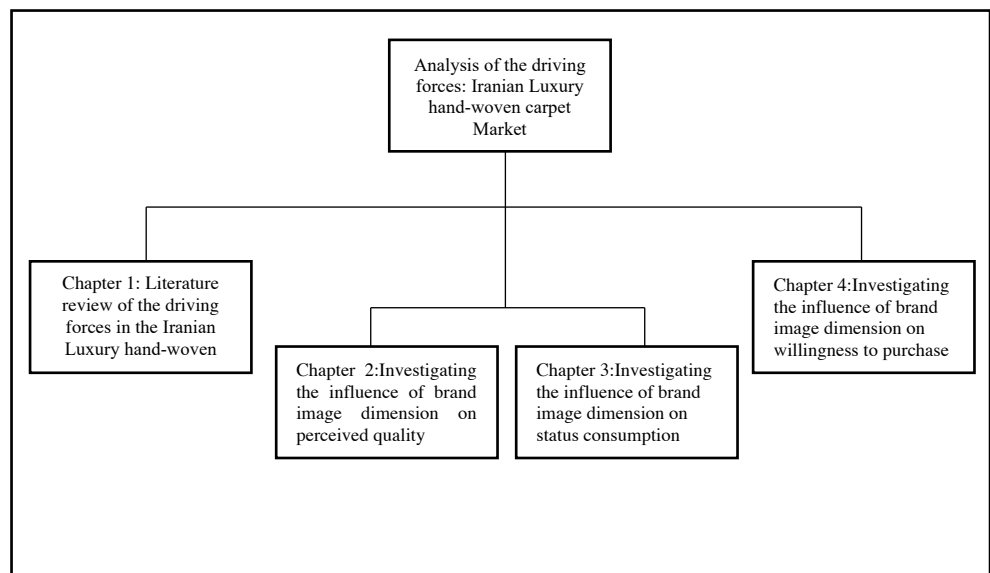


Figure 1. Thesis structure

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Chapter 2 (Paper 1)

**“ Judging the book by its cover?
How consumers decode quality in luxury
markets.”**

Abstract

This study provides insights into how brand image dimensions shape consumers' quality perception of luxury goods. Using a sample of Iranian consumers, this study investigates and compares the influences of brand image dimensions – mystery, sensuality, intimacy – on luxury perceived quality in order to clarify the qualitative status of luxury brands in consumers' minds. It also intends to highlight which of these dimensions playing a major role in creating competitive advantage in Iranian luxury hand-woven carpet market. While mystery and intimacy influences were found to be significant on quality perception of Iranian consumers, the role of sensuality influences were not be effective on their perceived quality. Through the significant impact of intimacy, as an emotional association of brand image dimension, it was demonstrated that the affective and connective interactions of consumers with the luxury brands build a superior perception of quality for consumers. Furthermore, intimacy and mystery are respectively the dimensions having critical roles in creating competitive advantage in our target luxury market. Regarding the non-significant relationship of sensuality on perceived quality, it is suggested to specifically focus on the stores' atmosphere through improving brand color scheme and its display format.

Key words : Luxury consumption, Luxury brands , Brand Image, Brand Image Dimensions, Perceived quality.

1. Introduction

Traditionally, luxury consumption has been studied through the purchase and display of highly visible items by well-known luxury brands (Frank, R. H & Veblen, T, 2007). This topic has attracted the interest of marketing researchers. However, there is little understanding on how to optimize the market and manage customer expectations in this particular consumption context (Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2009; Vigneron & Johnson,

2004). The objective of this paper is to examine the impact of three dimensions of brand image - mystery, sensuality, intimacy – (Cho, 2011) on consumers perceived quality in luxury hand-woven carpet market. It explores how brand image dimensions illustrate a well-qualified perception in consumers mind when this luxury product is being evaluated through the perspective of quality. It also analyzes which dimension of brand image for this product should be improved so as to bridge the gap between producer defined quality and consumers based quality perception for creating competitive advantage in a rapidly developing and emerging luxury market (Iran).

Significance of brand image appears where Keller (2009) suggests luxury brands and their image are frequently the key competitive advantage that generates enormous value and wealth for organizations. Besides, luxury brands charge an additional premium because they use their brand image as a critical component of their marketing campaign (Ait-Sahalia, Parker, & Yogo, 2004). So, consumers' actions and attitudes towards a brand are likely to depend on this marketing construct (Keller, 2009). Besides, one method for building and maintaining a positive and successful relationship with consumers is via establishing a desirable brand image (Keller, 1993) . Since brand image is defined as the consumer's perceptions of a brand, which are stored in his/her memory as a network of associations that can be transformed into attributes, benefits, and attitudes (Keller, 1993).

According to Low and Lamb (2000) , there are some multidimensional and interrelated concepts within the brand associations. Perceived quality is one of these concepts, by which brand image can be measured based on the product category (Low and Lamb , 2000). Kotler and Armstrong (1996) also observes that consumers applied brand image to measure the perceived quality of products. Therefore, it can be speculated that luxury consumption in the under-research market may be also influences highly through the interactions among dimension of brand image and perception of quality by its consumers. Therefore, it is

reasonable to suggest that clarifying the qualitative status of a luxury brand in consumer's mind necessitates examining the impact of brand image dimensions of that specific brand on consumers perception of quality. This study accomplishes across the sample of Iranian consumers in luxury hand-woven carpet market of Iran. Although Persian hand-woven carpet is considered as a luxury product with high value (Mahdi Daniel,2006; Mohammadi,2016) and this market has a global reputation (Pope,1938: p. 2257) , measuring quality perception of through brand image dimensions in this market is still remained unexplored. The importance of brand image cannot be neglected as it is a crucial element in consumer decision making (Oliver,1997). Therefore, a major contribution of this study is the provision of an empirical assessment of the mystery, sensuality and intimacy on how a luxury brand can construct its qualitative status in consumers' mind , understanding which of these dimensions playing a considerable role on the perception of quality and resulting competitive advantage for this market. And lastly, filling the existing gap between producer defined quality and consumers based quality perception.

Brand image evaluations that are currently available have mainly captured cognitive dimension of this marketing construct; however, its application to integrate three dimensions – cognitive, emotional and sensory are limited (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990; Esch *et al.*, 2006; Keller, 2001; Low and Lamb, 2000 ; Chang & Chieng, 2006; Esch *et al.*, 2006; Faircloth, Capella, & Alford, 2001; Low & Lamb, 2000). Moreover, Hofstede and Hofstede (2004) showed that because of the variations in cultural aspects, theoretical models and frameworks developed in one socio-cultural context may not be applicable to other environments. Hult, Keillor, and Hightower (2000), for instance, focused on the clothing and automobile preferences of French and Malaysian consumers and figured out the substantial variations in consumer motivations as well as factors affecting consumption. Furthermore, the increasing consumption of luxury goods in emerging markets warrants additional research (Datamonitor, 2009; Tynan, McKechnie & Chhuon, 2009; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). Through using national

data collected from Iranian consumers, this study provides insights into the cultural stability of the antecedent and the interactions proposed for the first time. Additionally it highlights the significant factors associated with each dimension of brand image related to luxury brand consumption in an emerging luxury market which has the potential to assist in building a better luxury brand(image) strategy that is sensitive to global standardization and to the local adaptation.

This paper starts with a section presenting the literature review. From this review hypothesis are formed followed by the methodology and the results. And concluding section with discussion of the findings, managerial relevance, and future research directions is followed.

2. Theoretical background and conceptual model

2.1. Luxury consumption

Throughout human history, luxury has played an important role, influencing consumer habits and aspirations regardless of social status (Jhamb et al., 2020). Luxury consumption has long been studied through the purchase and display of highly visible items by well-known luxury brands (Frank, R & Veblen, T, 2007). This term traditionally is linked with qualities of exclusivity such as rarity, uniqueness, high pricing, and excellent quality (Christodoulides et al., 2021) , as well as aspects that transcend intrinsic product features such as hedonism, aesthetics, and authenticity (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Vigneron & Johnson 2004).

Among divers definitions of luxury, researchers generally agree that luxury is subjective, dynamic, and relative; it is determined by consumers' perceptions (Tynan, McKechnie, & Chhuon, 2010; Brun & Castelli, 2013; Ko, Costello, & Taylor, 2019).

That is , it takes a verity of forms for various individuals and is determined by the consumer's mood and experience (Wiedmann et al., 2009).

The term "Luxury" refers to high-quality goods or services; however, it evokes no clear understanding (Wiedmann et al., 2009). In other words, "Luxury is particularly slippery to define" because of the obvious involvement of the human element and value recognition from others (Cornell, 2002, P.47).

Apart from their functional utility, luxury items, according to studies, are conducive to leisure and comfort, are difficult to obtain, and give the owner with esteem. Consequently, consumers who purchase luxury items are able to meet their socio-psychological requirements to a higher extent than those who purchase regular goods (Shukla, Shukla & Sharma, 2009).

Researchers have been more attracted to the phenomenon of luxury consumption as a consequence of luxury brands growth over the last two decades. The previous research efforts have focused on luxury brand typology (Calori, Melin, Atamer & Gustavsson, 2000; Dubois & Duquesne, 1993; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004); attainment of luxury product and brands (O'cass & Frost, 2002); cross-cultural comparison of luxury brands (Dubois, Czellar & Laurent, 2005; Shukla et al., 2009; Shukla, 2010; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998); and counterfeits (Commuri, 2009; Shultz & Saporito, 1996; Wilcox, Kim & Sen, 2009). Despite the fact that one of the most lucrative and fastest-growing brand segments is luxury brands (Han, Nunes & Dreze, 2010) and there is an exponential rise in luxury spending, there has been little research about whether using luxury goods may affect consumers emotionally, mentally, and cognitively (Wang et al., 2021).

2.2. Brand image

The brand image illustrates a major concept in the marketing literature (Keller, 1993). Over time, the concept of brand image has modified. However the most recent definition of this marketing construct represented by Sürücü et al.,(2019), "brand image is the collection of beliefs, ideas and impressions that the consumer develops for the brand." In the minds of consumers, brand image is perceived by the favorability, strength, and uniqueness of brand associations (Mitra & Jenamani, 2020). While early marketing scholars (Dichter, 1985; Durgee and Stuart, 1987) particularly stressed on the cognition-focused dimension of brand image and defined brand image as the sum of consumers' impressions of a

brand's attributes, functions, and meanings, during the last two decades, marketing scholars have realized the importance of emotional and sensory associations in developing a positive brand image (Chang and Chieng , 2006; Low and Lamb, 2000). Interestingly, Keller(1993), coined that each of these three associations are distinct yet forming an interconnected construct. In this regard, Roberts(2006) represent three dimensions for the brand image named mystery, sensuality and intimacy each of which respectively connected to the cognitive, sensory and emotional associations of brand image. Followingly, Cho(2011) in his seminal work developed the measurement scales for the brand image dimensions represented by Roberts(2006).

2.2.1. Brand Image Dimensions

Cognitive associations: mystery

According to Keller (2001), cognitive associations represent a consumer's personal beliefs, thoughts, and evaluations of a brand in relation to its product attributes (for e.g., style), service attributes, performance, and meaning of a brand. Direct and indirect interactions with the brand shape cognitive associations whilst also revealing non-product-related attributes (e.g., price, user or usage imagery), functional benefits (e.g., problem solving and safety benefits), and symbolic benefits (e.g. prestige and social approval). For example, as part of an indirect interaction with a brand via advertisement, consumers may form beliefs and opinions about a brand by recognizing non-product-related attributes such as price level, situations where people wear the brand (i.e. usage imagery), and the symbolic benefit of social acceptance based on its popularity within a subculture. Briefly, mystery is known as the cognitive experience created by the present and previous relationships with a brand, as well as future dreams and goals that reflect a certain lifestyle (Roberts,2006).

Emotional associations: intimacy

The emotions customers have while engaging with a brand drive the emotional aspect of brand image (Roberts, 2006). Subjective feelings such as excitement, happiness, and joy are examples of emotional associations (Keller, 2001). Product-related and non-product-related attributes perceived through direct and indirect interactions with the brand shape emotional associations, which contribute to experiential benefits. For example, a consumer may be energized by direct interaction with a product's scent or may form an emotional connection by participating in a non-product-related birthday promotion or customer rewards program. In addition, an empirical study found that a brand's consistent support of its customers increases positive feelings toward the brand (Albert et al., 2008). So, consumers may feel comfort or connection as a result of a long-term relationship with the brand (Fournier, 1998; Shimp and Madden, 1988). The intimacy dimension captures the pleasant emotional associations with a brand that are shaped by affective and connective experiences between consumers and the brand (Roberts, 2005). These experiences, according to Roberts (2005), include a firm's understanding of its consumers' thoughts and preferences, long-term consumer commitment to a brand, and consumer enjoyment from engaging with a brand. The affective and connective interactions between customers and brands are captured by intimacy (Roberts, 2006).

Sensory associations: sensuality

Sensory associations reflect the consumer's engagement with their physical senses (vision, smell, sound, touch, and taste) (Hultén, 2011; Schmitt, 2011). According to Keller (1993), and supported by empirical studies (Biswas et al., 2014a, 2014b; Peck and Childers, 2003), sensory associations are extensively produced by direct experiences with product-related and retail environment-related attributes, which result to experiential benefits (e.g. sensory enjoyment). Product appearance and texture (Peck and Childers, 2003); texture and color of packaging elements (Hultén et al.,

2009); color, scent, lighting (Hultén, 2012), and music (Jain and Bagdare, 2011) of retail environment elements are examples of these attributes. In addition, indirect experiences like advertisements (Lindstrom, 2005) make a contribution to sensory associations that strengthen brand image (Hultén, 2011). Sensuality represents an enjoyable sensory experience (Roberts, 2006).

While many marketing scholars and practitioners have demonstrated the importance of brand image dimensions in determining consumer reactions to a variety of products (e.g., Esch et al., 2006; Ismail & Spinelli, 2012; Kim, Kim, & An, 2003; Lassar, Mittal, & Sharma, 1995; Park & Rabolt, 2009; Gobé, 2001; Landwehr, McGill, & Herrmann, 2011; Landwehr, Wentzel, & Herrmann, 2012; Roberts, 2005; Schmitt & Simonson, 1997), none of the earlier studies address how these dimensions affect consumers' luxury perceived quality.

2.3. Perceived quality

Perceived quality (PQ) is a pressing topic for both producers and marketers since it may give a chance of distinction (Zeithaml, 1998, p.3). Consumers quality perception have been investigated extensively in recent decades because it is recognized as strong predictor of consumer purchase intention and choice, among other elements (e.g. Tsotsou, 2006; Van Osselaer, 2008; Zeithaml, 1988). In general, perceived quality is defined as a consumer's subjective evaluation of superiority or a product's superiority (Aaker and Jacobson, Che Anniza et al, 2011: 778). This element is an attitude formed by comparing consumers expectations to actual performance (Parasuraman et al, 1985).

In the light of the preceding discussion, this study focuses on how mystery, intimacy and sensuality as dimensions of brand image influence on quality perception of consumers and followingly lead to competitive advantage .

The proposed conceptual model is illustrated in Fig.2.

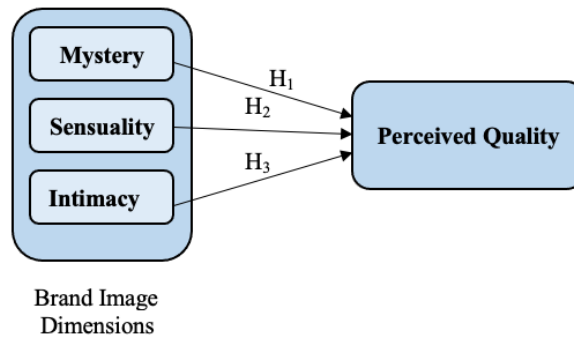


Fig.1. Conceptual model

3. Hypotheses development

3.1. Country selection

The “democratization” of luxury as a phenomenon has arisen extensively over the last few of decades (Wiedmann et al., 2009; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). Previously, luxury consumption was mostly a privilege reserved for the wealthy. The majority of luxury manufacturers' marketing efforts were focused in developed markets such as the United States, Japan, and the United Kingdom (Shukla, 2010). With the rapid expansion of emerging economies such as China, India, Brazil, Russia (Voight, 2007) and Iran (Heirati, N., & O’Cass, A., 2016), this paradigm has dramatically transformed (Voight, 2007). In recent years, the luxury market in Iran has flourished. This phenomenon can be described in a variety of ways. Global luxury brands such as Gucci, Prada, Polo, Omega, Rolex, Louis Vuitton, and Versace have all made a presence in fashion. Each year, luxury car sales in Iran approach new records. Automobiles are one of the most prominent signs of luxury consumption in Iran (Teimourpour, B., & Hanzae, K. H., 2011). Following the lead from these observations, Iran as a developing, collectivist market (Hofstede, 2001) was chosen. Although

consumer behaviors vary according to cultures and features of markets, study of luxury consumption of a particular market in a particular country is scarce. Moreover, according to the various indexes related to the national cultural dimensions, Iran differs significantly from the other Asian countries and provides a fair representation of the economic group to which it belongs (Hofstede, 2001). Several experts have recommended studies that directly compare luxury consumption in developed and emerging markets (Dubois et al., 2005; Shukla, 2010; Wiedmann et al., 2009). By responding to such requests, this study may be able to find both similarities and differences in an emerging market (Iran), as well as creating a fascinating context for the future cross-country comparisons of another country with Iranian consumers in the context of luxury consumption behavior. This study also offers an initial examination of whether luxury consumption as a phenomenon can be generalized across countries.

3.2. Brand image dimensions and perceived quality

Consumer's perception of a product's quality is affected by his or her needs and desires, as well as his or her beliefs about the benefits that product provides (Steenkamp, 1990). Product's quality is determined not only by its technical functions, but also, to a large extent, by its emotional component (Schmitt, 2014). This entails a subjective evaluation of a product's quality and value. Schmitt defines the transition from external perception via the five senses to a quality evaluation as a conscious and unconscious cognitive and emotional comparison process between sensory perception and personal expectations, actual experiences and preferences (Preff, 2003 ; Schmitt, 2009). In the meantime, consumers besides applying the intrinsic cues (Konuk, 2018) , using extrinsic cues to make inferences about a product's quality attributes and to develop their overall perception of quality (Steenkamp, 1990). Extrinsic qualities are exterior signals of the products such as price, brand name, brand image, corporate reputation, manufacturer's image, retail shop image, and place of origin (Zeithaml, 1988b). Among these extrinsic cues , brand image is a marketing construct embraces all the cognitive , sensory and emotional associations each of which are related to one of the

brand image dimensions presented by Robert (2006). Hence, this study aims to investigate the influence of mystery, sensuality and intimacy (BI dimensions) on perceived quality due to the following logics:

Firstly: the effect of these dimensions on PQ is still remained unexplored in the context of luxury market. Secondly: the aim of Perceived quality is to provide a coherent general effect across all sensory channels, which not only conforms to the expected function but also adds emotional value (Haverkamp, 2009). So, we suppose that as brand image dimensions consist of cognitive, sensory and emotional associations, they may influence the process of providing the aforementioned effect in order to adding values such as emotional value pointed by Haverkamp (2009) and forms a favorable perceived quality for consumers. Thirdly, this study also investigates the qualitative status of luxury products in the minds of consumers through the lens of brand image dimensions. Since consumers use brand image to recognize a product and evaluate its quality (Nagar, 2015). Therefore, as this evaluation of quality is processed through BI, we decide to evaluate luxury quality perception more accurately through these dimensions. Thus the following hypotheses are raised :

H₁: Mystery, as a cognitive dimension of brand image, positively influences perceived quality of luxury brands.

H₂: Sensuality, as a sensory dimension of brand image, positively influences perceived quality of luxury brands.

H₃: Intimacy, as an emotional dimension of brand image, positively influences perceived quality of luxury brands.

4. Methodology

4.1. Measures

To test the hypotheses, a structured questionnaire scale was designed focusing on brand image dimensions and perceived quality. The first set of items for mystery, sensuality and intimacy were derived from the existing measurement scales developed by Cho, E (2011). The scale items relating to perceived quality was derived from Grewal, D. *et al.* (1998). These items are defined based on the standard measurement scales to evaluate the influence of BI dimensions on perception quality of Iranian consumers in the luxury hand-woven carpet market in Iran. To assess the content and face validity, the questionnaire was sent to three marketing professionals associated with luxury brand. They were asked to refine the questionnaire to reflect the market reality. The questionnaire was then submitted to four academics who assessed each times for representativeness¹, specificity , and clarity. The final questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part contained questions regarding respondents' demographics, and the second part focused on measurement scales. All the variables in the second part of the questionnaire were close-ended five-point Likert scales, anchored by “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree.”

4.2. Sample

Using probability sampling, simple random sample technique (Kadilar, C., & Cingi, H.,2006), the study attempted to draw on a well-defined and homogeneous sample which be alike in as many respects as possible to the research population. Using Iranian census, the respondents were chosen on the basis of urban socio-economic classification (i.e., upper class, middle class). The questionnaire was pre-tested among the suggested socio-economic groups (n =74). This ensured that the final sample was validated across the country. Then the final questionnaire is distributed online to respondents in different cities of Iran. More than 1200 consumers were responded from all over the country, resulting in a final usable sample of 801 (response rate 66.75%) in our selected

¹ By 'representative' we do not necessarily mean the sample matches the population in terms of observable characteristics, but rather that the results from the data we collect from the sample are consistent with the results we would have obtained if we had collected data on the entire population.

statistic population. The involvement of actual consumers for filling the questionnaires provided a more realistic assessment of their consumption behavior than prior studies that have used imaginary consumption scenarios with respondents. The data were collected during nine-week period, with various location in different cities, the times of the day, and the days of the week. This allowed the final sample to be representative of the population of shoppers at large as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Respondent profile.

| IRAN | |
|--------------|--------|
| Gender | |
| Female | 61.92% |
| Male | 38.07% |
| Age | |
| 18-28 | 13.10% |
| 29-39 | 38.20% |
| 40-50 | 29.71% |
| 50 and above | 18.97% |
| Education | |
| Diploma | 20.72% |
| Bachelor | 45.81% |
| Master | 24.71% |
| PhD | 8.73 % |

From the respondent profile (Table 1.), 61.9% of the Iranian respondents were women. The majority of the Iranian respondents (38.2%) were between the age of 29 to 39. With regard to the education profile, the majority of the respondents had bachelor degree (45.8%), fairly similar had Master and diploma degree, 24.7% and 20.7% respectively. Solely, 8.7% were PhD graduated.

5. Analysis and results

5.1. Measure validity and reliability

Accordance to the Gerbing and Hamilton's (1996) recommendation, the scales were examined using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify poorly fitting items and then confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for further measure purification (see Table 2). All the scales were measured in R 4.1.3. Table 2 represents the coefficient alphas for the brand image dimensions (mystery, sensuality, intimacy) and perceived quality scales exceeded the recommended threshold value of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978) in the case of all constructs, implying reliability of the constructs. The average variance extracted (AVE) for the measures was 0.50 and above for all constructs, which is greater than the level recommended by Dillon and Goldstein (1984). Where average variance extracted (AVE) is less than 0.50, it is accepted, if the composite reliability is higher than the acceptable level of 0.6 (Lam, L.W. ,2012).

Table 2
Measurement scale item.

| Scale items | Item reliability |
|---|------------------|
| Brand Image Dimension | IR |
| Mystery | |
| Brand captures the times | 0.69 |
| Brand has changed my life for the better | 0.79 |
| Brand captures a sense of my life | 0.77 |
| Brand comes to mind immediately | 0.70 |
| Brand is a part of my life | 0.79 |
| Brand adds to the experience of my life | 0.80 |
| Brand adds to the quality of my life | 0.81 |
| Brand always has what I am looking for | 0.73 |
| Composite reliability | 0.89 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.49 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.89 |
| Sensuality | |
| Brand has incredible displays | 0.60 |
| Website design for this brand is really well done | 0.83 |
| Brand has a beautiful color scheme | 0.65 |
| Design of this brand's ads is really well done | 0.81 |
| Brand is as pleasing as the product | 0.81 |
| Store environment of this brand is pleasing | 0.79 |
| Composite reliability. | 0.85 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.51 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.84 |
| Intimacy | |
| I am Happy when I purchase this brand | 0.78 |
| My relationship with this brand will last a long time | 0.77 |
| I Rely on this brand | 0.78 |
| I Connected to this brand | 0.84 |
| I Disappointed if this brand was no longer available | 0.79 |
| I Trust this brand | 0.75 |
| I Stay with this brand | 0.75 |
| Composite reliability | 0.90 |
| Average variance extracted. | 0.42 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.89 |
| Perceived Quality | |
| The Persian handmade carpet appears to be of good quality | 0.81 |
| The Persian handmade carpet appears to be durable | 0.87 |
| The Persian handmade carpet appears to be reliable | 0.85 |
| The Persian handmade carpet appears to be dependable | 0.88 |
| Composite reliability | 0.88 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.36 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.87 |

Discriminant validity was assessed through using the test suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). According to this test, a scale possesses discriminant validity if the average variance extracted by the underlying latent variable is greater than the shared variance (i.e., the squared correlation) of a latent variable with other latent variable.

Table 3
Correlation between latent Variables

| | IRAN | | | |
|----|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | MY | SE | IN | PQ |
| MY | <i>0.697</i> | | | |
| SE | 0.554 | <i>0.715</i> | | |
| IN | 0.786 | 0.542 | <i>0.650</i> | |
| PQ | 0.430 | 0.176 | 0.532 | <i>0.598</i> |

Notes: Italicized numbers on the diagonal show the square root of the average variance extracted. MY = mystery, SE = sensuality, IN = intimacy and PQ = Perceived quality.

As Table 3 shows, this criterion was met by all the variables in the study, as no correlation exceeds the square root of the average variance extracted. There is only an exception for intimacy which possess higher amount of correlation than the square root of the average variance extracted evaluated for this dimension of brand image. Even though the standard procedures for improving discriminant validity had done, it was failed. In this regard, Podsakoff *et al.* (2016) asserted that a lack of conceptual clarity leads to a variety of issues, both conceptually and operationally. First, a lack of clarity at the conceptual level makes it difficult to identify the focal concept from other identical concepts in the field, then putting discriminant validity at risk. In other words, this is important because several scholars (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Blalock, 1968; Le et al., 2010; Morrow, 1983; Popper, 2002; Singh, 1991; Tepper & Henle, 2011) have mentioned that one of the main factors undermining discriminant validity and inhibiting conceptual progress in science is the proliferation of different

terms for the same concept. As improving the conceptual definition of a construct is behind the scope of this study, so we decide to report the evaluated amount for discriminant validity and ignore its deviation. The composite reliability was above 0.70 across the constructs, exceeding the recommended threshold value, which also provides strong evidence of discriminant validity.

Table 4

Fit measures for the conceptual model

| | NFI | RFI | IFI | TLI | CFI | GFI |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Iran conceptual model | 0.823 | 0.799 | 0.840 | 0.817 | 0.839 | 0.786 |

According to the evaluated indices presented in the Table 4 the conceptual model fit significantly.

Table 4 illustrates the indices of fit measures for the conceptual model.

GFI stands for *Goodness of Fit Index* and is used to calculate the minimum discrepancy function necessary to achieve a perfect fit under maximum likelihood conditions (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1984; Tanaka & Huba, 1985). *NFI* refers to Normed Fit Index also referred to as Delta 1 (Bollen, 1998b), and consists of values scaling between (terribly fitting) independence model and (perfectly fitting) saturated model. A value of 1 shows a perfect fit while models valued < 0.9 can be usually improved substantially (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). *RFI* is Relative Fit Index and derived from *NFI* where values closed to 1 indicate a very good fit while 1 indicates a perfect fit. *IFI* is Incremental Fit Index where values closed to 1 indicates a very good fit while 1 indicates a perfect fit. *TLI* is Tucker-Lewis coefficient also known as Bentler-Bonett non-normed fit index (*NNFI*) ranges from (but not limited to) 0 to 1 where a value closer to 1 represents a very good fit while 1 represents a perfect fit. *CFI* is Comparative Fit Index has value truncated between 0 and 1 where values closed to 1 show a very good fit while 1 represents the perfect fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

The value of interest here is CFI for the default model. A CFI value of ≥ 0.95 is considered an excellent fit for the model (West et al., 2012).

5.2. Testing research hypotheses H₁ to H₃

To examine the hypothesized relationships, SME method was employed in R. To test differences in the magnitude of effects, a series of comparisons were used. The path coefficient analysis (see Table 5) also shows the structure of the hypothesized relationships in the study.

Table 5
Summary of results

| Path coefficients | IRAN | |
|--------------------------------|----------|---------|
| | Estimate | z-value |
| Brand image dimensions | | |
| Mystery → Perceived quality | 0.089 | 1.816 |
| Sensuality → Perceived quality | -0.176 | -4.877 |
| Intimacy → Perceived quality | 0.558 | 11.464 |

As hypothesized mystery, as a cognitive dimension of brand image, were found to have a positive relationship with luxury perceived quality ($\beta = 0.089$; z -value = 1.816). Thus, H₁ is supported; suggesting mystery, as a cognitive dimension of luxury brand image, has positively influence luxury perceived quality. H₂ to H₃ were tested in the same fashion as H₁. Hypothesis 2 focused on the influence of sensuality on luxury perceived quality. Suggesting sensuality, as a dimension of luxury brand image, has positively influence luxury perceived quality ($\beta = -0.176$; z -value = -4.877); whereas, H₂ is not supported according to the path coefficient analysis. Hypothesis 3 deals with the influence of intimacy on the luxury perceived quality. As hypothesized, intimacy were found to have a positive and significant influence on luxury perceived quality($\beta = 0.558$; z -value = 11.464). Thus, H₃ is significantly supported.

6. Discussion

The effects of brand image dimensions – mystery, sensuality, intimacy – on luxury perception of quality of consumers were investigated in this research. The study highlights which of these dimensions playing a major role in clarifying the qualitative status of the luxury brands in the minds of consumers and followingly lead into competitive advantage in Iranian luxury hand-woven carpet market. The study was conducted in Iran (a developing, collectivist country which has a rapidly growing luxury market). According to the Hofstede model of national culture, it has proved that this country like others, vary across the cultural dimensions and consumer behavior in respect of luxury consumption (Hofstede, 2001). The results demonstrate that the model is effective in explaining consumer luxury consumption tendencies through the influence of brand image dimensions on perceived quality. Moreover, it demonstrates the significant positive effect of intimacy and followingly positive relative influence of mystery on perceived quality. In the meanwhile, for leading to the creating competitive advantages for the luxury hand-woven carpet market in Iran, sensuality as a sensory dimension of brand image should be improved in order to fill in the gap between producer defined quality and consumers based quality perception along with two other dimensions . In this regard, the study has significant theoretical contributions and managerial implications.

6.1. Theoretical contributions

The primary insight derived from this empirical study is about the significantly varying influence of brand image's cognitive, sensory, and emotional dimensions in a developing market (Iran). The results of this study provide interesting consumption similarities and contrasts about consumers' behavior in national and international context. This research builds on prior studies and explores the unique contribution of brand image dimensions on luxury perceived quality of consumers. The brand image

dimensions scale that Cho (2011) developed in his seminal work, has been considerably validated with developed/Western consumers, but its application to non-Western consumers has been limited; e.g. Jacob, I. & *et.al* (2020) studied brand image dimensions in their research on luxury brand in Mumbai, India. This study provides added empirical support to the cultural stability of the scale by testing it in an emerging market as well as adding the unique context to the luxury consumption. Besides, this study also responds to the calls for additional research on luxury consumption in an international context (Dubois et al., 2005; Wiedmann et al., 2009) and, is also the first to empirically support the arguments regarding the impact of brand image's cognitive, sensory, and emotional dimensions on luxury perceived quality in a national context.

Significant impact of intimacy, as an emotional association of brand image dimension, was observed on consumers perceived quality across the country(Iran). It demonstrates that the affective and connective interactions of consumers with the available luxury brands build a superior perception of quality for them. Followingly, through shaping superior perceived quality in their minds, consumers using luxury consumption across this market to build a superior image in the eyes of significant other. This is due to the growth of global lifestyles in the luxury industry, as manufacturers and retailers are beginning to standardize their messages internationally. In turn, this creates similarities in terms of consumers' reference point to consumption.

Another important contribution of this study pertains to the impact of sensuality influences on luxury perceived quality across the country. Iranian consumers were found to give a satisfiable feedback pertaining to the direct experiences with product-related and retail environment-related attributes. However, a surprising element of this finding was the non-significant relationship in terms of the impact of sensuality on quality perception among Iranian luxury consumers. The finding suggests that when consuming luxury products, consumers in developing collectivist markets, like Iran, do not show desirable reaction regarding brand displays and the color scheme. This could be rooted in two main reasons: firstly , store atmosphere mainly referring to the unpleasant color scheme which affects customers' aesthetic perceptions in retail environments , and secondly is brand display

format. Environmental psychologists have studied the impact of a store's atmosphere on customers' approach or avoidance behavior (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982). Customers generally react positively or negatively to environmental atmospheres. All positive customer behaviors are known as "approach behavior," whereas negative customer behaviors are referred to as "avoidance behavior" (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). In this regard, the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm, initially introduced by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), provides brief explanations through three stages: environmental stimuli that customers encounter in a retail setting, emotional intervening factors, and behaviors. In this research, according to the findings, we focus on the environmental stimuli that customers encounter in a retail setting a. Customers' perceptions of the retail space and in-store atmosphere provided by interior design, lighting features, and décor have been the focus of studies using the S-O-R paradigm in the retail setting (Schielke,2010;Tantanatewin and Inkarojrit, 2018; Wardono et al., 2012). The S-O-R paradigm has been utilized in previous research to explain consumers' emotional states in terms of pleasure, arousal, and dominance (PAD) and analyze their behavioral reactions in retail settings across diverse sectors (e.g., Cho and Lee, 2017; Tantanatewin and Inkarojrit, 2018). In this study the unpleasant item related to the store atmosphere is color scheme. As color may take on a range of meanings based on context, studies on the impacts of color should come in advance to the studies on the context effect (Roschk et al., 2017). Color has long been applied as a marketing tool, but its influence has not been well researched from an academic perspective (Ettis, 2017).The impact of color on meaning perception is context-dependent, and this is equally true for aesthetic value perception (Taft, 1997). The aesthetic evaluation of the same thing might differ from person to person (Jacobsen, 2010). It is anticipated that the emotional and behavioral reactions due to aesthetic perception will vary depending on customers' motivations (Kim, D., Hyun, H., & Park, J., 2020). According to Schloss and Palmer (2011), customers' aesthetic perceptions can be influenced by hue, saturation, and value of color.

In detail, color hue has been the subject of most research on the impact of color as a servicescape (e.g., Lin, 2016; Roschk et al., 2017). The wavelength of light determines the color hue. Customers experienced higher attractiveness and enjoyment when exposed to cool hue interiors in terms of emotional reaction (Roschk et al., 2017). A pleasurable emotional state has been found to boost intention to shop (Bellizzi and Hite, 1992), so the advantage of cool colors over warm colors in a retail setting is consistent with the findings of this research. Warm colors have a more uplifting physiological impact on humans, such as increased blood pressure or frequent eye blinking, which is more equivalent to a high-tension reaction than pleasure (Bellizzi and Hite, 1992). Color saturation has gotten less attention in marketing literature as well as the retail industry. Color saturation indicates the quantity of pigment in a color; greater saturation levels suggest more vibrant colors, while lower saturation levels indicate duller colors (Labrecque and Milne, 2012). Arousal increases as color saturation increases (Valdez and Mehrabian, 1994). Customers experience excitement when they view a product with high saturation, which is linked to arousal (Blijlevens et al., 2011). So, improving the interior retail setting of luxury market of this research necessitates application of high color saturation.

Color value is a term that describes how much black or white is contained in the original color; lower color values are associated with black and are darker, while higher color values are associated with white and are brighter (Labrecque and Milne, 2012). Value of color has the opposite effect on emotional arousal as color saturation. To put it another way, as the color value rises, buyers become less excited, implying that the color becomes less expressive (Gorn et al., 1997). Customers perceive light and bright colors as being similar to cool colors in terms of hue (Gorn et al., 1993).

Iranian luxury consumers would have superior aesthetic perceptions in luxury hand-woven carpet market provided that pleasant color scheme be considered for the interior space of the retail setting. That is, cool hue come along with high levels of saturation and low color value in order to illustrate a favorable

store atmosphere and followingly preparing a superior aesthetic perception for consumers.

Likewise, the format of product display within stores is essential not only for meeting customers' needs, but also for molding their preferences and choices by providing a specific decision context. The fundamental assumption is that, given the presentation style, consumers analyze information and evaluate alternatives in the most efficient way possible (Bettman and Kakkar 1977). A retailer can categorize items in a variety of ways, including by attributes (Huffman and Kahn 1998), benefits (Lamberton and Diehl 2013), and consumer goals (Morales et al. 2005). By-brand and by-category displays are two of the most used display formats (Simonson 1999). Retailers organize items in a by-brand display format so that similar products from the same brand are placed together. Alternatively, retailers organize items in a by-category display format so that various brands in the same category are grouped together. According to the findings and the nature of luxury hand-woven carpet market in Iran, it seems that retailers did not apply these formats of displaying their products to present a well-qualified and effective display in consumers' minds.

7. Managerial relevance

To our knowledge, this is the first effort to parallel scholarly and industry literature to conceptualize brand image dimensions' influences on customer quality perception. This research suggests various approaches for building localized strategies for attracting luxury customers. Furthermore, the study's findings have management implications for luxury brand managers and retailers. The findings of the interviews reveal that in order to generate an appropriate perception of quality in the minds of customers, brand managers and retailers should focus on building and promoting all three components (cognitive, emotional, and sensory) of a luxury-related brand image. More specifically, paying considerable attention to improving the sensory associations of their brand image dimension through considering and applying suitable color scheme and display format for not only pinning a favorable aesthetic

perception in consumers' minds, but also presenting their luxury brands/ products in a consistent format.

Beside, to create a favorable luxury brand image, managers and retailers should not take away their focus from keeping positive cognitive connections including product attributes and performance, memorable product-use associations, aspirations, and self-congruency with the brand. This is also true in respect of keeping positive emotional connections through applying brands and customer relationship management approaches. In case of wishing to improve positive cognitive and emotional connections with a brand, it may utilize big data to identify major life events, such as a child's birth or a university graduation or job promotion, and send individualized congratulations, appropriate presents, discounts, and social media activities to members of its loyalty programs.

Considering the nature of the market and cultural context, managers of luxury products and brands should be conscious of the overall considerable influence of sensuality as one of the dimensions of brand image in developing, collectivist markets (i.e., Iranian market). For a luxury brand, sensory associations such as unique color scheme, web site features, retail environment, and appealing textural aspects of the product, effective display methods should be stressed. Updating multi-sensory features of a web site or shop design may provide a high return on investment, but managers and retailers have to evaluate the proper level of sensory stimulation for the target client in advance.

Managers and practitioners should precisely understand individual customers' preferences and traits in order to improve customer perception quality. To this goal, the following suggestions are made: 1) conducting a regular survey to gather feedback from customers in order to improve and make their products, services, and overall experiences as appealing as possible in order to boost customer perception of quality ; 2) creating customer profiles and work logs in order to stay on top of customer feedback and suggestions. Employees will benefit from knowing repetitive clients' unique preferences in order to provide them with more pleasant service; and 3) creating exceptional situations, such as

giving a discount or a complimentary gift in order to make a pleasant moment which pins in consumer's mind.

Moreover, managers and retailers could improve the excitement and mystery of their brand by producing a documentary, music video, or other types of storytelling in advertising design and publicity, so as to enabling customers to like and pay more attention to the brand. When designing the interior decoration to create a warm and intimate store atmosphere, managers should fully consider the rationality of the layout of furniture and decorations, the softness of the lighting, the smell, the music, the comfort of color and air humidity, etc., so that customers' in-store experience is more sensual and memorable. Additionally, they should improve employee training in order to provide more professional services, and instruct employees to establish friendly and intimate communication with customers in order to stay on top of customer preferences and needs, making customers feel as close and trustworthy as friends at their stores.

The findings could help luxury-related brand managers devise competitive marketing strategies by considering various techniques that consist of dimensions of brand image so as to elevate a better perception of quality in consumers.

8. Conclusion

Overall, this study makes several significant contributions. First, this study provides insights into how to develop meaningful engagement with consumers through using the construct of brand image dimensions and perceived quality which can define the qualitative status of luxury brands in consumers' minds and followingly lead to the competitive advantage for the luxury markets. Second, as luxury brands spend a considerable part of their revenues on building branding image (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008) the findings demonstrate that such investment if directed towards creating social desirability of the brand, it will provide increasingly prolific results. Third, in contrast to prior studies in the domain of luxury consumption that focused largely on developed markets such as United States, Japan, and the United

Kingdom, this study represents an empirical investigation of the effective dimensions of brand image on consumers' quality perception in luxury consumption context of an emerging market (Iran) which still has not been investigated among emerging luxury markets studies. Fourth, emerging markets are becoming critical markets for luxury goods (Datamonitor, 2009). Thus, findings of this study may be of considerable interest to luxury managers in developed markets faced with the daunting task of marketing luxury brands in these developing markets. Fifth, the constructs and measurements applied here can serve as a basement for additional national studies or cross-national researches in luxury consumption field and highlight its peculiarities.

Sixth, the findings may have implications for cross-national luxury consumption theory and practice, so as to corroborating the notion that several key constructs may be common among all cultures and countries while others should be adjusted for unique national distinctions (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2004; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). Seventh, this study further affirms the requirements of managers to understand national and cross-national idiosyncrasies and differences when managing luxury brands. Lastly, consumers do not see luxuries as they are produced, products are seen as consumers perceive.

9. Limitations and future research directions

Because of the study's limitations, the findings should be interpreted with caution. Franke and Richey (2010) expressed concerns about measuring across sample variation when (a) the overall number of countries analyzed is fewer than eight and (b) the comparative difference between effect sizes is minor. Despite the fact that every attempt was made to conforming the measurement invariance tests (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998), the study findings are restricted to only one country. Additional comparative investigations including other countries are required before the results can be extended internationally. The findings of this study represent the perspectives of urban residents and are not necessarily representative of the entire population of the

investigated country. According to researchers, there are distinctions between urban and rural consumers, which may influence consumer attitudes toward luxury consumption. Furthermore, respondents were asked to answer online questionnaire in different cities of the selected country. This could have decrease the stage effect. That is, every attempt was made to avoid such effect through randomly selecting consumers.

According to the findings, this study represents a number of suggestions for the future research directions. In case of improving sensory dimension of brand image in luxury carpet section, one interesting future research can focus on involving scents/odors as an effective factor in sensory dimension of brand image which can arouse sensory feelings in consumers and followingly may affect the qualitative status of products in consumers' minds. As odors pin brands in consumers brain, designing an specific odor for in-store atmosphere of luxury carpet markets in order to arousing particular sections of consumers' brain responding to the effect of odors, would be a fundamental basis for this empirical evaluation. Furthermore, sound as another thin component of brand image sensory dimension and an impressive facet of five senses may also have an influence on quality perception which can be also considered through the future researches. That is, broadcasting a favorable music in store-atmosphere of the luxury retail setting may improve the sensuality dimension of BI.

Future studies can expand the conceptual model through adding other variables such as price image, store image , country- of-origin image. As the study used a single industry example, future research should include more studies involving different sectors to boost the overall generalization of the findings. As younger consumers would like to accept global trends faster than older consumers, it would also be useful to investigate the role of socio-demographic characteristics such as age, as moderators of luxury consumption behavior.

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Chapter 3 (Paper 2)

“ Luxury Consumption Satisfy Status Signaling Need : Investigating the Influence of Mystery, Sensuality and Intimacy.”

Abstract

In emerging markets, individuals' desire to purchase status products so as to demonstrating their wealth and ameliorating their lifestyle. To unveiling whether the status signaling need through consumption of luxurious products in an emerging market (Iran) is responded , this study focus on the role of brand image dimensions – mystery, sensuality, intimacy – on status signaling among Iranian consumers through consumption of luxury products . This research specifically highlights whether status need through the lens of luxury brand image dimensions is responded in Iranian Luxury hand-woven carpet market and followingly which of these aspects are playing an outstanding role in motivating and attracting consumers to luxury consumption. Drawing data from 669 individuals , we found that intimacy, sensuality and mystery as dimensions of brand image are respectively influence status consumption in Iranian luxurious hand-woven carpet market . According to the findings, number of theoretical contributions were suggested.

Key words: Luxury consumption , Mystery, Sensuality, Intimacy, Status Consumption, Social comparison and Social identity theories

1.Introduction

The rise of middle-class consumers in emerging markets, along with increased financial resources and a thirst for consumption, has boosted consumption of products and services linked to higher social status (Kamakura and Mazzon, 2013). Status is a basic human motivation that create organizations, relationships, and marketplaces (Anderson, Hildreth, & Howland, 2015). Possessing status has enduring attraction, yet missing status is deeply repulsive, because high status confers plenty of advantages on individuals while low status incurs costs (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2009; Ridgway & Walker, 1995). As a result, individuals devote a significant amount of work and expenditure in order to achieve and indicate high status to others (Griskevicius et al., 2007; Veblen, 1899).

People in developing countries are becoming more educated, with well-paid jobs, higher income, and greater purchasing power (O'Cass and Siahtiri, 2014; Kamakura and Mazzon, 2013). While socioeconomic developments in emerging markets have boosted consumption, we already face deficiency to understand the underlying causes of status consumption (SC). Eastman, J. K., & Eastman, K. L. (2015), defined status consumption as the interest a consumer has to improve one's social and/or self-standing through consumption of consumer products that may be conspicuous and that confer and symbolize status for the individual and surrounding significant others. Investigating the underlying determinants of SC is critical in emerging Asian countries since they will potentially host 3 billion middle-class residents by 2030, which is ten times more than North America and five times more than Europe (Yueh, 2013). Scholars have called for further study to increase our understanding of SC and its triggers in these countries as a result of this massive potential market (O'Cass and Siahtiri, 2014; Eastman and Eastman, 2011). With rising wealth, many emerging-market customers are following their emotions and purchasing things that demonstrate their achievements and uniqueness (Bian and Forsythe, 2012).

They are shifting from meeting their fundamental requirements to meeting higher order psychological needs, in seek of esteem, companionship, and a sense of belonging. According to existing research, consumers in developing countries desire and attempt to promote acceptable images of themselves among others, and as a result, they participate in conspicuous consumption (Shukla, 2010). Moreover, luxury items signify the high status of their owners as they are the greatest in their class, costly, and only available to a select few (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

In order to uncover the underlying mechanism behind this behavior, we rely on social comparison and social identity theories as significant grounding for understanding status consumption. Beside this, identify the influence of brand image dimensions that trigger status signaling and may enhancing the level of status among consumers in a rapidly developing and emerging luxury market (Iran).

Importance of brand image unveils where study of Keller (2016) shows consumers' brand perceptions is a significant part of marketing and consumer research (see e.g., Keller 2016) as consumers' actions and attitudes regarding a brand are likely to depend on the brand image (Keller,2009). In this respect, brand image can be viewed as a major indicator of how customers feel about a brand and whether or not the brand and consumers have a favorable connection (Plumeyer, A, *et.al.*, 2019). Brand image is defined as the consumer's perceptions of a brand, which are stored in his/her memory as a network of associations that can be transformed into attributes, benefits, and attitudes (Keller,1993; Sürücü et al., 2019). Based on the previous literature, the link between brand image and other marketing constructs has been empirically investigated in a number of studies. Brand image has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on brand trust (see, for example, Esch et al. 2006), customer satisfaction (see, for example, Cretu and Brodie 2007), brand equity (see, for example, Faircloth et al. 2001), and willingness to pay a price premium (see e.g., Anselmsson et al. 2014). However, none of the previous studies pay attention to assessment of the link between dimension

of brand image and status signaling need in consumers. The importance of brand image cannot be neglected as it is a crucial element in consumer decision making (Oliver,1997).Therefore, it can be speculated that luxury consumption and followingly status signaling behavior in this specific market - luxury hand-made carpet market - may be highly influenced by brand image dimensions and the need of Iranian consumers to gain status among others. So, it is reasonable to firstly, clarifying the role of brand image dimensions – mystery, sensuality, intimacy – regarding whether responding to the status signaling need among Iranian consumers and secondly, investigating whether these dimensions enhance the level of status among consumers in this luxury market. Thus, these reasons necessitate examining the impact of brand image dimensions on status consumption.

This study is implemented across the sample of Iranian consumers in luxury hand-woven carpet market of Iran. Measuring the impact of brand image dimensions on status consumption of this luxurious product is still remained unexplored, although Persian hand-woven carpet is considered as a luxury product with high value (Mahdi Daniel,2006; Mohammadi,2016) and this market has a global reputation (Pope,1938: p. 2257).

Therefore, a major contribution of this study is the provision of an empirical assessment of the brand image dimensions on how arousing status signaling need which lead to status consumption among consumers , understanding of whether these dimensions enhancing the level of status. Brand image evaluations that are currently available have mainly captured cognitive dimension of this marketing construct; however, its application to integrate three dimensions – cognitive, emotional and sensory are limited (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990; Esch *et al.*, 2006; Keller, 2001; Low and Lamb, 2000 ; Chang & Chieng, 2006; Esch et al., 2006; Faircloth, Capella, & Alford, 2001; Low & Lamb, 2000).

Besides, the variations in cultural aspects, theoretical models and frameworks developed in one socio-cultural context may not be applicable to other environments (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2004). According to the previous studies , the increasing consumption of

luxury goods in emerging markets warrants additional research (Datamonitor, 2009; Tynan, McKechnie & Chhuon, 2009; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). This study provides insights into the cultural stability of the antecedent and the interactions proposed for the first time through applying national data collected from Iranian consumers. Additionally it highlights the significant factors associated with each dimension of brand image related to luxury brand consumption in an emerging luxury market which has the potential to assist in building a better luxury brand(image) strategy that is sensitive to global standardization and to the local adaptation.

This paper starts with a section presenting the literature review. From this, review hypothesis are formed then followed by the methodology and the results. Conclusion section with discussion of the finding, managerial relevance, and future research directions are followed.

2. Theoretical background and conceptual model

2.1. Luxury consumption

luxury consumption is a tool for customers to increase their esteem or status (Eastman, J. K., & Eastman, K. L. , 2015). Since classical era, scholars and social commentators have been fascinated by the subject of luxury and its consumption. Luxury has been studied from both micro-economic and a marketing perspective, and it has been discovered to be multidimensional due to its subjective nature (Wiedmann et al., 2009). According to Cornell (2002), "Luxury is pretty complicated to define," (p. 47).

Kapferer (1998) coined that luxury is something that "defines beauty; it is an art applied to functional items . " Like light, Luxury is illuminating. Luxury products provide more pleasure and appeal to all of your senses at the same time," (p. 253). While essentials are quite practical, what distinguishes luxury from non-luxury is the level of psychological and intangible advantage it provides to a

customer (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004; Nueno & Quelch, 1998). Consequently, consumers who purchase luxury items are able to meet their socio-psychological requirements to a higher extent than those who purchase regular goods (Shukla, Shukla & Sharma, 2009).

Researchers have studied luxury consumption in the areas of conceptualization (Dubois, Laurent, & Czellar, 2001; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004); consumption drivers (Dubois & Duquesne, 1993; Zhan & He, 2012; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012); consumer typology (Han et al., 2010; Wiedmann et al., 2009); and cross-cultural distinctions in consumption (Han et (Phau & Prendergast, 2000; Shukla & Purani, 2012); luxury brand typology (Calori, Melin, Atamer & Gustavsson, 2000; Dubois & Duquesne, 1993; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004); attainment of luxury product and brands (O'cass & Frost, 2002); cross-cultural comparison of luxury brands (Dubois, Czellar & Laurent, 2005; Shukla et al., 2009; Shukla, 2010; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998); and counterfeits (Commuri, 2009; Shultz & Saporito, 1996; Wilcox, Kim & Sen, 2009).

The key work of Veblen (1899), defined the 'happy few,' as luxury buyers, who bought these items as a status signal. Consumers of luxury have been found to make purchases based on the dominant interpersonal aspect of the need for snobbery and popularity (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012); personal traits of hedonism, self-identity, and materialism (Wiedmann et al., 2009); and environmental aspects of culture, prestige value, and societal norms (Shukla & Purani, 2012; Zhan & He, 2012). However, status-seeking consumption, remains central to all conceptions of luxury.

Despite the fact that one of the most lucrative and fastest-growing brand segments is luxury brands (Han, Nunes & Dreze, 2010) and there is an exponential rise in luxury spending, there has been little research about whether using luxury goods may affect consumers emotionally, mentally, and cognitively (Wang et al., 2021). By considering this point, previous studies did not consider to the effects of brand image dimensions which contains cognitive, emotional and sensual associations of luxury brands and their influence on status consumption.

2.2. Brand image

Branding is a “process of illustration : specific practices of production, consumption, and distribution of the brand between organizational agents and ultimately consumers” (V´asquez, Sergi, & Cordelier, 2013). Brand image is defined in the consumers’ minds through favorability, strength, and the uniqueness of brand associations (Mitra & Jenamani, 2020). Beside definitions represented by the early marketing scholars (Dichter, 1985; Durgee and Stuart, 1987) who mainly focused on the cognitive dimension of brand image, more recently marketing scholars (Chang and Chieng, 2006; Low and Lamb, 2000) have realized the importance of emotional and sensory associations in developing a positive brand image. In this regard, Roberts (2006) represents three dimensions for the brand image, respectively mystery, sensuality and intimacy, each of which are connected to the aforementioned associations were cited by the recent marketing scholars. Followingly, for measuring brand image dimensions Cho.E.(2011), represents a measurement scale which are also applied through this study.

2.2.1. Brand Image Dimensions

Cognitive associations: mystery

Mystery is known as the cognitive experience created by the present and previous relationships with a brand, as well as future dreams and goals that reflect a certain lifestyle (Roberts,2006). Cognitive associations as considered by Keller (2001), represent a consumer's personal beliefs, thoughts, and evaluations of a brand in relation to its product attributes (for e.g., style), service attributes, performance, and meaning of a brand. Direct and indirect interactions with the brand shape cognitive associations whilst also revealing non-product-related attributes (e.g., price, user or usage imagery), functional benefits (e.g., problem solving and safety benefits), and symbolic benefits (e.g. prestige and social approval).

For example, as part of an indirect interaction with a brand via advertisement, consumers may form beliefs and opinions about a

brand by recognizing non-product-related attributes such as price level, situations where people wear the brand (i.e. usage imagery), and the symbolic benefit of social acceptance based on its popularity within a subculture.

Emotional associations: intimacy

Intimacy embraces the pleasant emotional associations with a brand that are shaped by affective and connective experiences between consumers and the brand (Roberts , 2005). In better terms, the emotions customers have while engaging with a brand drive the emotional aspect of brand image (Roberts, 2006). Subjective feelings such as excitement, happiness, and joy are examples of emotional associations (Keller, 2001). Product-related and non-product-related attributes perceived through direct and indirect interactions with the brand shape emotional associations, which contribute to experiential benefits.

These experiences, according to Roberts (2005), include a firm's understanding of its consumers' thoughts and preferences, long-term consumer commitment to a brand, and consumer enjoyment from engaging with a brand.

Sensory associations: sensuality

Sensuality represents an enjoyable sensory experience (Roberts, 2006). That is, sensory associations reflect the consumer's engagement with their physical senses (vision, smell, sound, touch, and taste) (Hultén, 2011; Schmitt, 2011). According to Keller (1993), and number of empirical studies (Biswas et al., 2014a,2014b;Peck and Childers, 2003), sensory associations are extensively produced by direct experiences with product-related and retail environment-related attributes, which result to experiential benefits (e.g. sensory enjoyment). Product appearance and texture (Peck and Childers, 2003); texture and color of packaging elements (Hultén et al., 2009); color, scent, lighting (Hultén, 2012), and music (Jain and Bagdare, 2011) of retail

environment elements are examples of these attributes. Besides, indirect experiences like advertisements (Lindstrom, 2005) make a contribution to sensory associations that strengthen brand image (Hultén, 2011).

While many marketing scholars and practitioners have demonstrated the importance of brand image dimensions in determining consumer reactions to a variety of products (e.g., Esch et al., 2006; Ismail & Spinelli, 2012; Kim, Kim, & An, 2003; Lassar, Mittal, & Sharma, 1995; Park & Rabolt, 2009; Gobé, 2001; Landwehr, McGill, & Herrmann, 2011; Landwehr, Wentzel, & Herrmann, 2012; Roberts, 2005; Schmitt & Simonson, 1997), none of the earlier studies investigates the influence of these dimensions in the luxury industry and how they affect consumers' status signaling need that may lead to status consumption.

2.3. Status Consumption

Status consumption as an individual difference variable that addresses a person's desire to consume for status, is defined by Clark, Zboja, & Goldsmith (2007) and Goldsmith & Clark (2012). While there are several definitions of status consumption in the literature, they all tend to focus on the underlying motives for such consumption. Some of these motivations are external, such as signaling wealth through public display (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004), improving social standing (Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 1999), gaining social prestige (O'Cass and Frost, 2002), and acquiring the approval and envy of others (Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 1999). Other motivations are internal motives, such as self-esteem and self-respect (Truong, et al., 2008) or self-reward without public display of items (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Status consumption was originally defined as "the motivating process through which individuals attempt to enhance their social position via the conspicuous consumption of consumer goods that bestow and represent status both for the person and for others around them" (Eastman, et al., 1999, p. 41). However, Eastman, J. K., & Eastman, K. L. (2015) review and update this definition to recognize that: (1) consumers seek to improve their social (for external reasons) and/or personal (for internal reasons) standing;

(2) this external and/or internal motivation leads to a desire to consume for status; and (3) status consumption may or may not be visible. It is vital to remember, however, that consumer goods must be viewed as symbols of status for both the person and others (Nelissen & Meijers, 2011). The new definition is represented by Eastman, J. K., & Eastman, K. L. (2015) , is as follows:

“Status Consumption is the interest a consumer has to improve one’s social and/or self- standing through consumption of consumer products that may be conspicuous and that confer and symbolize status for the individual and surrounding significant others.”

As high status brings social, economic, and psychological rewards, people frequently through conspicuous consumption of luxury products spend a lot of money to obtain and indicate it to others (e.g., Anderson et al., 2015; Berger et al., 1972; Nelissen & Meijers, 2011; Sundie et al., 2011; Veblen, 1899). Indeed, observers consider luxury (vs. non-luxury) consumers to be of higher status than non-luxury consumers, and confer numerous perks on them as a consequence (Dubois & Ordabayeva, 2015; Griskevicius et al., 2007; Nelissen & Meijers, 2011). For example , in one research, those who wore a luxury (vs. non-luxury) brand of clothing received higher levels of compliance and monetary awards (Nelissen & Meijers, 2011). In another study, when a financial advisor wore a luxury (vs. non-luxury) watch, he garnered more consumer interest (Scott et al., 2013). According to previous studies, observers tend to link persons' capacity to obtain high status and luxury brands to individuals' tremendous success and performance, (e.g., Mandel et al., 2006; McFerran et al., 2014; Scott et al., 2013). In this respect , social comparison and social identity theories propose a significant foundation for understanding status consumption (Nabi, N., O’Cass, A., & Siahtiri, V. , 2019) in depth.

2.3.1. Social comparison and Social identity theories

Festinger (1954), claims that individuals possess inclination to compare what they have to what others have in order to assess how well they are doing. One facet of this issue is that people try to set themselves apart from others in lower social classes by imitating their higher-class counterparts' actions (Yang and Mattila, 2014). Individuals fulfill their desires to belong to an elite social class (e.g., higher social group) by purchasing and consuming social signifiers while participating in comparisons (Zhang and Kim, 2013). Moreover, individuals' consumption of things to meet identity-related goals is the subject of social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1985). According to this theory, people try to improve their self-image and self-esteem by categorizing themselves and others into in-groups and out-groups, which exist in all societies (see Huang et al., 2010). As a result, people engage in actions based on the group norms with which they identify themselves in order to increase their sense of belonging (Hall-Phillips et al., 2016).

In the light of the preceding discussion, this study focuses on whether mystery, intimacy and sensuality dimensions of brand image influencing on status need of consumers. Fig.1 illustrates the proposed conceptual model for the supposed relationships between these variables.

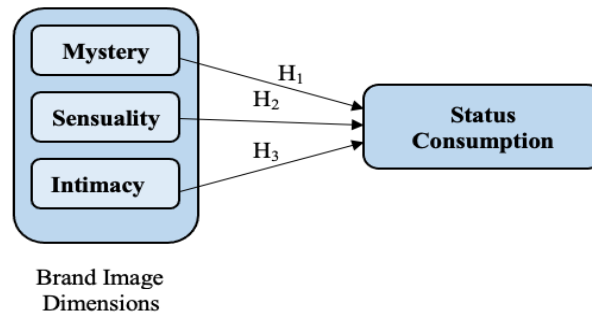


Fig.1. Conceptual model

3. Hypotheses development

3.1. Country selection

Previously, luxury consumption was mostly a privilege reserved for the wealthy. The majority of luxury manufacturers' marketing efforts were focused in developed markets such as the United States, Japan, and the United Kingdom (Shukla, 2010). With the rapid expansion of emerging economies such as China, India, Brazil, Russia (Voight, 2007) and Iran (Heirati, N., & O’Cass, A.,2016), this paradigm has dramatically transformed (Voight, 2007). During the recent years, the luxury market in Iran has flourished through presence of luxury brands such as Gucci, Prada, Polo, Omega, Rolex, Louis Vuitton, Versace or even luxury Automobiles all of them are the prominent signs of luxury consumption in Iran (Teimourpour, B., & Hanzae, K. H., 2011). Based on the considered logics, Iran as a developing, collectivist

market (Hofstede, 2001) was chosen. Furthermore, study on luxury consumption of a particular market in a particular country is scarce even though consumer behaviors vary according to cultures and features of markets. According to the various indexes related to the national cultural dimensions, Iran differs significantly from the other Asian countries and provides a fair representation of the economic group to which it belongs (Hofstede, 2001).

Studies that directly compare luxury consumption in developed and emerging markets have been recommended by several experts (Dubois et al., 2005; Shukla, 2010; Wiedmann et al., 2009). By responding to such requests, this study may be able to find both similarities and differences in an emerging market (Iran), as well as creating a fascinating context for a cross-country comparison of luxury consumption behavior among Iranian consumers with other countries.

3.2. Brand image dimensions and Status consumption

Customers apply brand image to recognize a product, evaluate its quality, comprehend and resolve purchase risks, and obtain specific experience and satisfaction (Nagar, 2015). Specifically, for status consumers, the indicator of quality and exclusivity is commonly price (Dubois and Duquesne, 1993). As far as price is concerned, premium prices and a prestigious image are significant features for the luxury sector (Han et al., 2010; Ko et al., 2019). That is, prestige sensitivity is aroused and related to favorable perceptions of the price cue based on the status or prominence of higher-priced products signal to others (Lichtenstein et al., 1993). In this regard, some authors believe that a high price is among the features defining luxury and refers to a price which exceeds what functional values command (Berry, 1994; Han et al., 2010; Kapferer et al., 2014; Ko et al., 2019). Luxury consumers should not be price-sensitive and luxury is expected to be expensive (Fraccaro & Macé, 2020). For others, prestige-seeking has also a critical role to play in luxury consumption where luxury brands are

the extreme-end along the prestige continuum includes of upmarket brands, premium brands, and luxury brands (Vigneron & Jonhson, 1999). Particularly, prestige delineates exclusivity via social class (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). In this respect, Leibenstein (1950) coined the term 'Snob effect' to explain a consumer who desires to make purchases based on high prices or uniqueness so as to differentiate themselves from others in their social group. This segment of the society enjoys paying higher prices for the social desire to stand out from the crowd or display wealth and status (Amaldoss and Jain, 2005). For example, the reason consumers purchase expensive wine is not rooted in the quality perceptions, but instead is based on their perception that others will perceive the high price as reflecting the internal traits of the purchaser (Lichtenstein et al., 1993). Thus, snob consumers are more likely to purchase expensive or rare products/services that other groups could not afford. The positive perception of the price cue is based on perceptions of what it signals to others socially. On top of all these points and simultaneously looking more deeply, we think that brand image and its dimension embrace and illustrate all these features while a consumer evaluating a luxury brand from status point of view and consequently this marketing construct plays a critical role in motivating and outstanding the status-seeking need in consumers . The logic behind this thought returns to the definition of Cho (2011) of mystery, sensuality and intimacy (brand image dimension). Mystery is formed by personal hopes , an inspiration from a story , personal objectives and even previous brand experiences all of which can influence on consumer's present and future impressions of a brand or firm (Cho, 2011). Thus, the belief that cognitive association of a brand image , which includes individuals' hopes, objectives and primer experiences may affect the status signaling need in consumers as an objective, whether they like to stand out their wealth or social class ; both of which lead in status consumption.

Thus , the following hypothesis is raised :

H₁: Mystery, as a cognitive dimension of brand image, positively influences on status consumption.

Followingly, sensuality dimension of brand image points to the visual, olfactory, auditory, tactile, and gustatory sensations form sensory pleasure, and are elicited by branding aspects such as color scheme or design style, product displays (Roberts, 2005). All of these branding aspects as summarize in the brand image, are

supposed to respond the status-signaling need of consumers and thus influence on status consumption.

Therefore, this study proposes the following:

H₂: Sensuality, as a sensory dimension of brand image, positively influences on status consumption.

Lastly, it is interesting to know whether brand image of luxury brands tickles the feelings in decision making process of status consumers. In this respect, Cho and Fiore (2015) assert that the feelings consumers experience while they are interacting with the brand is rooted in the emotional aspect of brand image . Cho and Fiore (2015) call this emotional dimension of brand image, intimacy which captures the affective and connective experiences among consumers and brands (Roberts,2006). It is notably shaped by subjective feelings like enthusiasm, happiness, and joy. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis :

H₃: Intimacy, as an emotional dimension of brand image, positively influences on status consumption .

4. Methodology

4.1. Measures

To test the hypotheses, a structured questionnaire was designed focusing on brand image dimension (mystery, sensuality, intimacy) and status consumption . The first set of items for brand image and its dimension were derived the existing measurement scales developed by Cho. E (2011). The scale items relating to status consumption was derived from Pino & et.al.(2019); Liao & et.al.(2013). The statistic population of the research is Persian luxury hand-woven carpet market in Iran and the sample of the research is Iranian consumers.

To evaluate the content and face validity, the questionnaire was sent to two marketing professionals specialized in luxury brand. They were asked to refine the questionnaire to reflect the market reality. The questionnaire was then submitted to four academics who assessed each times for representativeness¹, specificity, and

clarity. The final questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part contained questions regarding respondents' demographics, and the second part focused on measurement scales. All the variables in the second part of the questionnaire were close-ended five-point Likert scales, anchored by "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree."

4.2. Sample

Using probability sampling , simple random sample technique (Kadilar, C., & Cingi, H.,2006), the study attempted to draw on a well-defined and homogeneous sample which be alike in as many respects as possible to the research population. Using Iranian census, the respondents were chosen on the basis of urban socio-economic classification (i.e., upper class, middle class). The questionnaire was pre-tested among the suggested socio-economic groups (n =70). The questionnaire was distributed online to respondents in different cities of Iran. More than 900 consumers were responded from all over the country, resulting in a final usable sample of 669 (response rate 74.33%). The involvement of actual consumers for filling the questionnaires provided a more realistic assessment of their motivations behind their consumption behavior than prior studies that have used imaginary consumption scenarios with respondents. The data were collected during eight-week period, with considering to the various location in different cities, the times of the day, and the days of the week. This allowed the final sample to be representative of the population of shoppers as large as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Respondent profile.

| | IRAN |
|------------------|--------|
| Gender | |
| Female | 61.88% |
| Male | 38.11% |
| Age | |
| 18-28 | 10.01% |
| 29-39 | 36.77% |
| 40-50 | 32.88% |
| 50 and above | 20.32% |
| Education | |
| Diploma | 22.86% |
| Bachelor | 46.93% |
| Master | 21.97% |
| PhD | 8.22 % |

From the respondent profile, 61.88% of the Iranian respondents were women. More than 36.77% of the Iranian respondents were between the age of 26 to 39. With regard to the education profile, the majority of the respondents had bachelor degree (46.93%), fairly similar had Master and diploma degree, 21.97% and 22.86% respectively. Solely, 8.22% were PhD graduated.

5. Analysis and results

5.1. Measure validity and reliability

According to the table.2, the scales were analyzed by using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify poorly fitting items and then confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for further measure purification, as recommended by Gerbing and Hamilton (1996). In order to achieve the simple structure for the factor loadings , exploratory factor analysis has been done two times with different factor numbers. All the item scales were measured in R 4.1.3.

Table.2 represents the coefficient alphas for the brand image dimensions (mystery, sensuality, intimacy) and status consumption scales which are all above the suggested threshold value of 0.70 (Nunnally,1978) in all cases of all constructs, demonstrating construct reliability. The average variance extracted (AVE) for all constructs was 0.50, which is equal to Dillon and Goldstein's (1984), suggested standard level. However, the average variance extracted of intimacy and status consumption are around 0.4 which are also accepted, since their composite reliability (CR) are more than the acceptable level of 0.6 recommended by Lam, L.W. (2012). Discriminant validity was assessed by using the test recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981) . According to this test, a scale possesses discriminant validity if the average variance extracted by the underlying latent variable is greater than the shared variance (i.e., the squared correlation) of a latent variable with other latent variable.

Table 2
Measurement scale item.

| Scale items | Item reliability IR |
|---|------------------------|
| Brand Image Dimension | |
| Mystery | |
| Brand captures the times | 0.71 |
| Brand has changed my life for the better | 0.80 |
| Brand captures a sense of my life | 0.79 |
| Brand comes to mind immediately | 0.64 |
| Brand is a part of my life | 0.77 |
| Brand adds to the experience of my life | 0.79 |
| Brand adds to the quality of my life | 0.80 |
| Brand always has what I am looking for | 0.69 |
| Composite reliability | 0.89 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.50 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.89 |
| Sensuality | |
| Brand has incredible displays | 0.56 |
| Website design for this brand is really well done | 0.84 |
| Brand has a beautiful color scheme | 0.65 |
| Design of this brand's ads is really well done | 0.82 |
| Brand is as pleasing as the product | 0.81 |
| Store environment of this brand is pleasing | 0.80 |
| Composite reliability | 0.84 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.51 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.84 |
| Intimacy | |
| I am Happy when I purchase this brand | 0.79 |
| My relationship with this brand will last a long time | 0.73 |
| I Rely on this brand | 0.74 |
| I Connected to this brand | 0.83 |
| I Disappointed if this brand was no longer available | 0.80 |
| I Trust this brand | 0.71 |
| I Stay with this brand | 0.72 |
| Composite reliability | 0.88 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.50 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.87 |
| Status Consumption | |
| I would pay more if the product has status | 0.76 |
| I would buy a product just because it has status | 0.85 |
| A product is more valuable to me if it has some snob appeal | 0.87 |
| I am interested in new products with status | 0.80 |
| Authentic status goods could really show the status | 0.83 |
| Owing authentic status goods confers and symbolizes my status to surrounding significant others | 0.84 |
| Composite reliability | 0.91 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.38 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.90 |

Table 3
Correlation between latent Variables

| | IRAN | | | |
|----|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | MY | SE | IN | SC |
| MY | <i>0.703</i> | | | |
| SE | 0.487 | <i>0.714</i> | | |
| IN | 0.811 | 0.520 | <i>0.694</i> | |
| SC | 0.400 | 0.327 | 0.461 | <i>0.615</i> |

Notes: Italicized numbers on the diagonal show the square root of the average variance extracted. MY = mystery , SE = sensuality, IN = intimacy and SC = Status Consumption.

As Table 3 illustrates, this criterion was met by all the variables in the study, as no correlation exceeds the square root of the average variance extracted. There is only an exception for intimacy which possess higher amount of correlation than the square root of the average variance extracted evaluated for this dimension of brand image. Even though the standard procedures for improving discriminant validity had done, it was failed. In this regard, Podsakoff et al. (2016) asserted that a lack of conceptual clarity leads to a variety of issues, both conceptually and operationally. First, a lack of clarity at the conceptual level makes it difficult to identify the focal concept from other identical concepts in the field, then putting discriminant validity at risk. In other words, this is important because several scholars (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Blalock, 1968; Le et al., 2010; Morrow, 1983; Popper, 2002; Singh, 1991; Tepper & Henle, 2011) have mentioned that as one of the main factors undermining discriminant validity and inhibiting conceptual progress in science is the proliferation of different terms for the same concept. As improving the conceptual definition of a construct is behind the scope of this study, so we decide to report the evaluated amount for discriminant validity and ignore its deviation . The composite reliability was above 0.70 across the constructs, exceeding the recommended threshold value, which also provides strong evidence of discriminant validity.

Table 4 illustrates the indices of fit measures for the conceptual model.

Table 4

Fit measures for the conceptual model

| | CFI | TLI | IFI | RFI | NFI | GFI |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Iran conceptual model | 0.883 | 0.805 | 0.883 | 0.800 | 0.880 | 0.848 |

Through looking at the indices presented in the Table 4., the conceptual models fit favorably.

GFI stands for *Goodness of Fit Index* and is used to calculate the minimum discrepancy function necessary to achieve a perfect fit under maximum likelihood conditions (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1984; Tanaka & Huba, 1985). *NFI* refers to Normed Fit Index also referred to as Delta 1 (Bollen, 1898b), and consists of values scaling between (terribly fitting) independence model and (perfectly fitting) saturated model. A value of 1 shows a perfect fit while models valued < 0.9 can be usually improved substantially (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). *RFI* is Relative Fit Index and derived from *NFI* where values closed to 1 indicate a very good fit while 1 indicates a perfect fit. *IFI* is Incremental Fit Index where values closed to 1 indicates a very good fit while 1 indicates a perfect fit. *TLI* is Tucker-Lewis coefficient also known as Bentler-Bonett non-normed fit index (*NNFI*) ranges from (but not limited to) 0 to 1 where a value closer to 1 represents a very good fit while 1 represents a perfect fit. *CFI* is Comparative Fit Index has value truncated between 0 and 1 where values closed to 1 show a very good fit while 1 represents the perfect fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The value of interest here is *CFI* for the default model. A *CFI* value of ≥ 0.95 is considered an excellent fit for the model (West et al., 2012).

5.2. Testing research hypotheses H1 to H3

To examine the hypothesized relationships, SME method was employed. To test differences in the magnitude of effects, a series of comparisons were used. The path coefficient analysis (see Table 5) also shows the structure of the hypothesized relationships in the study.

Table 5
Summary of results

| Path coefficients | IRAN | |
|---------------------------------|----------|---------|
| | Estimate | z-value |
| Brand image dimensions | | |
| Mystery → Status Consumption | 0.056 | 0.951 |
| Sensuality → Status Consumption | 0.115 | 2.864 |
| Intimacy → Status Consumption | 0.355 | 5.913 |

As hypothesized mystery, as a cognitive dimension of luxury brand image, were found to have a positive relationship with status consumption ($\beta = 0.056$; z -value = 0.951). Thus, H₁ is relatively supported; suggesting mystery, as a cognitive dimension of luxury brand image, have a positive relationship with status consumption. H₂ to H₃ were tested in the same fashion as H₁. Hypothesis 2 focused on the influence of sensuality on status consumption. Suggesting sensuality, as a sensory dimension of brand image, positively influence on status consumption ($\beta = 0.115$; z -value = 2.864). Thus, H₂ is supported more noticeable in compare with H₁. The third Hypothesis deals with the influence of intimacy on status consumption. As hypothesized intimacy, as an emotional dimension of brand image, were found to have a positive influence on status consumption ($\beta = 0.335$; z -value = 5.913). Thus, H₃ is significantly supported. Consequently, intimacy, sensuality and mystery as brand image dimensions respectively influence on status consumption in Iranian luxurious hand-made carpet market.

6. Discussion

The effects of brand image dimensions – mystery, sensuality, intimacy – influence on status consumption of consumers were investigated in this research. The study unveils the effect of brand image dimensions as underlying causes of status signaling among Iranian consumers. This research highlights whether these dimensions lead to responding to the status need among consumers in the Iranian Luxury hand-woven carpet market, regardless of whether they consume this luxury product to show their wealth or to gain a social level among others around themselves. The study was conducted in a developing, collectivist country (Iran) which has a rapidly growing luxury market. According to the Hofstede model of national culture, it has proved that this country like other countries, vary across the cultural dimensions and consumer behavior in respect of luxury consumption (Hofstede, 2001). The results demonstrate that the model is effective in explaining status signaling need and related-tendencies to status consumption through the effective lens of brand image dimensions.

Moreover, it also demonstrates the significantly positive influence of intimacy as an emotional dimension of brand image on responding to the status need of consumers. Then sensuality and mystery respectively are the relatively effective dimensions having a relative impact on motivating consumers to arouse status signaling need in them. In this regard, the study has important theoretical contributions and managerial implications.

6.1. Theoretical contributions

This research has number of theoretical contribution according to the findings. One of the outstanding contributions pertains to the considerable influence of intimacy, as an emotional dimension of brand image, on consumers' status consumption across the country. It demonstrates that the affective and connective interactions of consumers with luxury brands shape pleasant emotional associations with the brand (Roberts , 2005). Thus it arouse status signaling need in luxury consumers and lead in status consumption. Providing to look more deeply , consumers approve that regardless of their objective income or social class level across this market, they desire to seek and consume products which confer status. Thus, according to Freedman (1991) and Miller (1991), it is inaccurate to view the consumption of status goods as only a habit of the very wealthy. That is , this can be rooted in the expansion of global lifestyle in luxury industry, as producers and retailers are starting to standardize their messages across the world. In turn, this creates similarities in terms of consumers' references point to luxury consumption.

Another surprising results of this study refers to the sensuality dimension of BI although it has a relatively positive influence of status consumption. When consuming for signaling status, consumers in developing collectivist luxury market of Iran, are not satisfied with brand displays format and the color scheme which are respectively influences consumers' evaluations of brand and customers' aesthetic perceptions in retail environments. In respect of displaying format, retailers can divide items in a variety of ways, including by attributes (Huffman and Kahn 1998), benefits (Lamberton and Diehl 2013), and consumer goals (Morales et al. 2005). Two of the most applicable display formats are by-brand and by-category displays (Simonson 1999). Relating to color scheme, it is anticipated that the emotional and behavioral reactions due to aesthetic perception will vary depending on customers' motivations (Kim, D., Hyun, H., & Park, J., 2020). According to Schloss and Palmer (2011), hue, saturation, and value

of color can all influence customers' aesthetic perceptions. provided that pleasant color scheme be considered for the interior space of the retail setting , cool hue come along with high levels of saturation and low color value in order to illustrates a favorable store atmosphere and followingly preparing a superior aesthetic perception for consumers are recommended.

One outstanding element of the findings relating to mystery suggests that luxury brands in this market do not comes to consumers' mind immediately. This refers to a key concept in marketing called "top-of-mind awareness" or TOMA. This is a measure of how high brands rank in the consciousness of consumers when thinking of a particular industry or category. To clarify, the first brand that brings to mind when consumers think of a certain niche, product or industry has attained top of mind awareness. Not all consumers think of the same brand, but the results suggests a clear indication of which companies are most well-known within an industry. On the other side, it's worth mentioning that sometimes the first brand consumers think of, is one they dislike or one that was recently embroiled in a scandal. So TOMA can have negative associations. However, being 'top of mind' is usually a big plus for brands. If a specific brand is the first one that consumers think of, they will unconsciously seek out that products when they need them. However, the significance of top of mind awareness doesn't end there. This primary perk has many other knock-on benefits such as: marketing become more effective, PR is painless, search rankings will soar , enhancing brand value and integrity.

On the whole, through considering to these subtle points, brand image dimensions not only would be improved but also would be able to represent an enhanced level of effect.

Last but not least, the results of this study provides intriguing consumption similarities and differences about consumer behavior in luxury context for the national and international setting. Moreover, the application of brand image dimensions to non-Western consumers has been limited according to the recent studies on luxury brands (e.g., Jacob, I. & *et.al* ,2020) ; however, these studies have been considerably validated with

developed/Western consumers (e.g., Cho, E., & Fiore, A. M., 2015 ; Rodrigues, C., & Rodrigues, P.,2019). This study provides additional empirical support to the cultural stability of the brand image dimensions scale that Cho(2011) developed in his seminal work, by testing it in an emerging market as well as adding the exceptional context to the luxury consumption. This research also responds to the calls for additional investigations on luxury consumption in an international context (Dubois et al., 2005; Wiedmann et.al., 2009). So, this study is the first to empirically support the arguments on the impact of brand image dimensions on status consumption in a national context.

7. Managerial relevance

To our knowledge, this is the preliminary effort to parallel scholarly and industry literature to conceptualize brand image dimensions' influence on status consumption. This research suggests various approaches for building localized strategies for reducing and then eliminating available deficiencies in the luxury market context related to BI dimensions and also presenting number of management implications for luxury brand managers and retailers. Responding to the status signaling need of luxury consumers necessitates the focus of brand managers and retailers on promoting some fine particles in all brand image dimensions of luxury hand-woven carpets.

Firstly, to create a top-of-mind luxury brand, managers and retailers should focus on increasing top-of-mind-awareness in consumers through some applicable methods. Building brand visibility through social media and SEO are particularly helpful. Besides, showing up in search results is key to elevating discoverability. So be confident to do some keyword research and create as many blog posts, videos and other resources as possible.

If managers or retailers can establish themselves as a thought leader within their niche, not only this will build brand awareness, but also consumers are more fascinated to turn to their brands in the future. Managers and retailers can increase the impact of their content by sharing it on social media too. As more consumers increase the time they spend on social platforms, it makes sense for

brands to broaden their reach on social media. Achieving top of mind awareness is not easy to do; however, luxury brands can also use viral videos, likes of hashtags, influencer partnerships, paid advertising and competitions to expand their visibility. Likewise, providing an exceptional customer experience is another alternative method for increasing TOMA. That is, if consumers have a memorable experience with a brand, they're more likely to recall it. Best of all, there are endless ways to create great experiences like flexible returns policy or giving free gifts redeemable through its online store. To stand out, managers or retailers could offer anything from industry-leading technical support through to top-notch customer service. If they do sufficiently, consumers may even spread the word. Omnichannel advertising is another effective way pertains to elevating top-of-mind-awareness. If consumers do not interacted with a brand, managers or retailers can still achieve 'top of mind' status through advertising. Social media ads are a critical method to promote products, but they can also extend the reach of managers' or retailers' content and increase their social followers. Similarly, PPC (pay-per-click) advertising can push your content across various websites and search engines. Traditional channels like print media and TV advertising stay significant for building brand awareness too. They offer exposure to large audiences and TV advertising is known to increase branded searches. Considering the nature of the market and cultural context, managers of luxury products and brands should be conscious of the overall considerable influence of sensuality as one of the dimensions of brand image in developing, collectivist (i.e., Iranian) markets. For a luxury-related brand, sensory associations such as unique web site features, retail environment, and appealing textural aspects of the product should be stressed. This shows that updating the multi-sensory features of a web site or shop design may provide a high return on investment, but managers and retailers must evaluate the proper level of sensory stimulation for the target clients. Moreover, managers and retailers could improve the excitement and mystery of their brand by producing a documentary, music video, or other types of storytelling in advertising design and publicity, so as to

enabling customers to like and pay more attention to the brand. When designing the interior decoration to create a warm and intimate store atmosphere, managers should fully consider the rationality of the layout of furniture and decorations, the softness of the lighting, the smell, the music, the comfort of color and air humidity, etc., so that customers' in-store experience is more sensual and memorable. Additionally, they should improve employee training in order to provide more professional services, and instruct employees to establish friendly and intimate communication with customers in order to stay on top of customer preferences and needs, making customers feel as close and trustworthy as friends at their stores.

Through considering to all of these recommendations managers and retailers in this section of luxury industry would be able to primarily improve the shortages related to each brand image dimensions, specifically sensuality and mystery. Then, enhance the level of status signaling need created in consumers while brand image dimensions are enhanced in advance.

8. Conclusion

Overall, this study makes several critical contributions. First, this research provides insights into how to develop meaningful engagement with consumers' status signaling need through applying the construct of brand image dimensions. Second, as luxury brands spend a considerable part of their revenues on building branding image (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008), the findings demonstrate that such investment if directed towards creating an enhanced brand image which can lead to the status consumption and social desirability of the luxury products, much more prolific results will be provided. Third, in contrast to prior studies in the domain of luxury consumption that focused largely on developed markets like United States, Japan, and the United Kingdom this study represents an empirical investigation of the influence of brand image dimensions on status consumption in an emerging market (Iran) which still has not been investigated among emerging luxury markets studies. Fourth, emerging markets are becoming critical markets for luxury goods (Datamonitor,

2009). Thus, findings of this study may be of considerable interest to luxury managers in developed markets faced with the daunting task of marketing luxury brands in these developing markets. Fifth, the constructs and measurements applied here can serve as a basement for additional single country studies or cross-national research related to luxury consumption and highlight its peculiarities. Finally, the findings may have implications for cross-national luxury consumption theory and practice, so as to corroborating the notion that several key constructs may be common among all cultures and countries while others should be adjusted for unique national distinctions (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2004; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). This study further approve the requirements of managers and retailers to understand national and cross-national idiosyncrasies and differences when managing luxury brands.

9. Limitations and future research directions

Number of limitations are accounted. This study only involves respondents from Iran. Results might be different if other countries and cultures were taken into consideration. For example, susceptibility to reference group influence might be a typical trait of consumers from Eastern countries, while consumers from Western cultures might seek other values from status consumption. Thus, future research should explore whether the findings of this study also apply to other countries and cultural contexts. More precisely, the consumption patterns related to luxury products may differ according to culture. This study did not investigate the cultural perspective; thus, future research should also examine the differences and similarities between consumers in the luxury hand-woven carpet markets of various countries and continents. The findings of this study represent the perspectives of urban residents and are not necessarily representative of the entire population of the country. According to researches, there are distinctions between urban and rural consumers, which may influence consumer attitudes toward luxury consumption. As the study used a single industry example, future research should include more studies involving different sectors to boost the overall generalization of the findings. That is, findings are limited to one

product category, so it is not known if the same relationships would be obtained for other luxury products. Future researcher should expand the conceptual model through considering to the other effective variables in terms of responding to the status signaling need in consumers, such as price sensitivity, image pattern and color of luxury products. Furthermore future research can implement a research on the investigation of brand image dimensions of luxury carpets on status needs of consumers providing that carpet patterns are changed (i.e., presenting hand-woven carpets with new patterns which are the combination of the traditional patterns with modern patterns). More interestingly, for expanding the investigation of status consumption, the unique application of luxury hand-woven carpets can be dragged from interior spaces to the other luxury sectors such as fashion luxury industry. That is , using fine pieces of luxury carpets on fabrics, clothing, eyeglasses and shoes. Then investigating status signaling need in consumers through the lens of brand image dimensions, but this time in fashion luxury industry where patterns of luxury carpets paying their glamours roles much more outstandingly.

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Chapter 4(Paper 3)

**“INVESTIHATING LUXURY
WILLINGNESS TO PURCHASE THROUGH
THE LENS OF BRAND IMAGE
DIMENSIONS. ”**

Abstract

This study contributes to literature on luxury consumption in the emerging market by investigating consumers' willingness to purchase of consumers in luxury hand-woven carpet in Iran. Using a sample of Iranian consumers, this study empirically examining the influence of brand image (BI) dimensions on willingness to purchase (WTP) through the mediating effect of perceived quality (PQ) and moderating effect of status consumption (SC) on relationship between BI dimension and WTP. That is, the influential elements to lay behind willingness to purchase of consumers at the target market were investigated. The findings of study.1, illustrates that intimacy as an emotional dimension of BI directly and statistically has a significant influence of willingness to purchase, while mystery as a cognitive dimension of BI, relatively have a direct effect on WTP. However, sensuality-sensory dimension of BI- dose not influence WTP. Moreover, the findings of study.2 focus on the indirect and interaction effect of perceived quality and status consumption on relation between BI and WTP. Perceived quality solely mediate the relationship among intimacy and willingness to purchase. In contrast, status consumption dose not playing moderation role on the relationship among brand image dimensions and willingness to purchase. In the end number of managerial implications are mentioned which pave the way for capturing the consumers' interest and followingly lead to increasing their willingness to purchase for luxury brands.

Key Words: Luxury Consumption, Brand image Dimensions, Percieved quality, Status consumption, Luxury willingness to purchase.

1. Introduction

Luxury consumption has traditionally been linked with attributes of exclusivity such as scarcity, uniqueness, high cost, and great quality (Christodoulides et al., 2021) , as well as factors that exceed intrinsic product features such as hedonism, aesthetics, and authenticity (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Vigneron & Johnson 2004). Luxury brand consumption topic has experienced tremendous popularity among branding specialists and academics over the recent years (Datamonitor, 2007; Okonkwo, 2009; Park et al., 2008; Tungate, 2005). Consumers involving in consumption of luxury brands create unique positions and identities. This idea aids in the understanding of luxury brands, since their exclusivity in the market is attained through differentiating them from more regular and affordable brands (Jacob, I., Khanna, M., & Rai, K. A., 2020). However, in this particular consumption context, little is understood about how to optimize the market and balance consumers' preferences (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004; Wiedmann, Hennigs & Siebels, 2009).

The objective of this research is to uncover the driving factors lay behind luxury willingness to purchase in luxury hand-woven carpet market through the lens of brand image dimensions (mystery, sensuality, intimacy) . Exploring the position of these luxury products in consumers' mind by considering to the brand image dimensions in this market , this study firstly evaluates the direct influence of these dimension on willingness to purchase and then the indirect and interaction effects of perceived quality and status consumption on this relationship. The significance of brand image influence on consumer purchase intentions emerges from the strict emphasis of researchers on assessing the influence of this marketing construct on purchase intentions (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008; Batra et al., 2000; Thakor & Kohli, 1996). According to Gurleen and Pooja (2014) this element considerably effects on buying behavior of consumers. Moreover, it helps them to decide whether or not to purchase a specific brand or repeat the

tendency of purchasing (Dolich,1969). Brand image- as one component of brand related cues – causes competitive advantage for luxury brands wherein consumers’ actions and attitudes towards a brand are likely depend on this element (Keller,2009). Thus, it is reasonable to speculate luxury purchase behavior may be highly influenced by even dimensions of brand image, which has not been investigated through the literature.

As Kotler and Armstrong (1996) observed that consumers applied brand image to measure the perceived quality of products. Thus, in the present study it seems logical to propose that perceived quality would play a mediating role on the relationship between brand image dimension and willingness to purchase . The main reason for creating such assumption is the positive relationship has traditionally existed between product quality and purchase intention (Tsiotso,2006); however, this mediating relationship has not studied yet. On the other hand, luxury consumption is generally linked to the display of individuals’ wealth and social position which are derived from another marketing construct called status consumption (Eng & Bogaert, 2010). Then, considering the moderating influence of status consumption on relationship between brand image dimensions and willingness to pay seems to be logical as it may strengthen the assumed relationship.

As decision making process of consumer is mostly happen through considering to the brand image (Oliver,1997); therefore, a major contribution of this study is the provision of an empirical assessment of the brand image dimensions on how a luxury brand result in consumers’ luxury willingness to purchase. Involving the effects of two other branding associations through this study will simultaneously improve our understanding of how they interact; the magnitude of their effects and how a luxury brand image dimensions enhance beside the effects they have in motivating consumers to purchase luxury products. Available brand image assessments have mainly captured cognitive dimension of a brand image; however, its application to integrate three dimensions – cognitive, emotional and sensory are limited (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990; Esch *et al.*, 2006; Keller, 2001; Low and Lamb, 2000 ; Chang & Chieng, 2006; Esch *et al.*, 2006; Faircloth, Capella, &

Alford, 2001; Low & Lamb, 2000). Moreover, theoretical models and frameworks developed in one socio-cultural context may not be applicable to other environments, because of the variations in cultural aspects (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2004). The increasing consumption of luxury goods in emerging markets warrants additional research (Datamonitor, 2009; Tynan, McKechnie & Chhuon, 2009; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). This study not only providing insights into the cultural stability of the antecedent and the interactions proposed for the first time through using national data collected from Iranian consumers, but also preparing a basement for building a superior luxury brand strategy that is sensitive to global standardization and to the local adaptation through highlighting the significant factors associated with each dimensions of brand image

This paper starts with a section presenting the literature review. From this, review hypothesis are formed, then followed by the methodology and the results. Conclusion section with discussion of the finding, managerial relevance, and future research directions are coming in the following.

2. Theoretical background and conceptual model

2.1. Luxury brand consumption

One of the most lucrative and fastest-growing brand segments is luxury brands (Han, Nunes & Dreze, 2010). Luxury has played a critical role throughout human history by influencing the habits and aspirations of consumers regardless of their social status (Jhamb et al., 2020). Luxury consumption is traditionally studied through the purchase and display of highly observable items by well-known luxury brands (Frank. R & Veblen. T, 2007) . Due to a combination of socioeconomic factors and changing consumption trends, luxury consumption nowadays is no longer limited to the elite and privileged classes of contemporary society (Dhaliwal et al. , 2020; Paul, 2019). As this downward expansion fuels the growth of the luxury sector (Husic and Cicic, 2009), luxury sales have grown exponentially over the past decade (Kapferer and Laurent, 2016; Shukla et al. events, 2015); with other optimistic future projections of the expected consumer base that the luxury industry captures (Husain et al., 2021; Kessous and Valette Florence, 2019; Paul, 2015). Among the various definitions of luxury, researchers agree that it is subjective, dynamic, and relative; that is, it is based on the views of customers (Tynan, McKechnie, & Chhuon, 2010; Brun & Castelli, 2013; Ko, Costello, & Taylor, 2019). Whilst current luxury research takes a goods-centric approach (Cristini et al., 2017), in which the attributes of luxury experiences and services are linked to luxury goods, scholars also argue that experiences and services vary fundamentally from goods in terms of the shopping experience as well as being temporal in nature (Yang & Mattila, 2014; Holmqvist et al., 2020). The word “luxury” refers to products or services of a very high standard; however, it extracts no clear understanding (Wiedmann et al., 2009). Cornell (2002) explains that due to the obvious involvement of human element and value recognition from others, luxury is a difficult word to define. Apart from their practical usefulness, however, researchers conclude that luxury goods are conducive to leisure and comfort, are difficult to

acquire, and provide the owner with esteem. As a result, luxury goods enable customers to meet their socio-psychological needs to a greater extent than ordinary goods (Shukla, Shukla & Sharma, 2009). As a consequence of luxury brands growth over the last two decades, researchers have begun to pay more attention to the phenomenon of luxury consumption . Previous research efforts have focused on luxury brand typology (Calori, Melin, Atamer & Gustavsson, 2000; Dubois & Duquesne, 1993; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004); attainment of luxury product and brands (O'cass & Frost, 2002); cross-cultural comparison of luxury brands (Dubois, Czellar & Laurent, 2005; Shukla et al., 2009; Shukla, 2010; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998); and counterfeits (Commuri, 2009; Shultz & Saporito, 1996; Wilcox, Kim & Sen, 2009). However, studying Luxury consumption in emerging markets through dimensions of brand image is still remained unexplored.

2.2. Brand image and its Dimensions

Brand image has been considered as a critical concept in consumer behavior, since consumers' brand and product choices are based on their assessment of brand image (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). Traditionally, marketing researchers (Bullmore, 1984; Dichter, 1985; Frazer, 1983; Gardner & Levy, 1955; Keller, 2001, 2008; Newman, 1957; Pohlman & Mudd, 1973) have acknowledged the cognitive and affective aspects of experience associated with brand image; however, most studies have not captured the sensory aspect of brand experience. Specifically, brand image defined as the total set of impressions shaped by consumer interactions (e.g., observation and consumption) with a brand (Dichter,1985 ; Newman,1957). Other early marketing researchers referred to brand image as beliefs, perceptions, feelings, and attitudes towards a brand (Bullmore,1984 ; Gardner& Levy, 1955). Frazer (1983), Pohlman and Mudd (1973) argued that brand image is more strongly pertains to intangible aspects, such as social meanings and symbolic value than physical features of products. Similarly,

Keller (2001, 2008) defined brand image as a consumer's perceptions and feelings associated with a brand, its offerings, and imagery attributes, such as user profiles, purchase/usage situations, brand personality, values, history, heritage, and experiences. Among these challenges for defining a unique definition for brand image, Roberts (2006) represents three dimensions for the brand image called mystery, sensuality and intimacy which have been known as related aspects to the cognitive, sensory and emotional associations of brand image by Cho(2011). In his seminal work on brand image, he also developed measurement scale items for these dimensions.

Cognitive associations: mystery

Mystery is known as the cognitive experience created by the present and previous relationships with a brand, as well as future dreams and goals that reflect a certain lifestyle (Roberts,2006). According to Keller (2001), cognitive associations represent a consumer's personal beliefs, thoughts, and evaluations of a brand in relation to its product attributes (for e.g., style), service attributes, performance, and meaning of a brand. Direct and indirect interactions with the brand shape cognitive associations whilst also revealing non-product-related attributes (e.g., price, user or usage imagery), functional benefits (e.g., problem solving and safety benefits), and symbolic benefits (e.g. prestige and social approval).

Emotional associations: intimacy

The emotions customers experience while dealing with a brand drive the emotional aspect of brand image (Roberts, 2006). That is, intimacy dimension captures the pleasant emotional associations with a brand that are shaped by affective and connective experiences between consumers and the brand (Roberts , 2005). These experiences, according to Roberts (2005), include a firm's understanding of its consumers' thoughts and preferences, long-term consumer commitment to a brand, and consumer enjoyment

from engaging with a brand. Besides, the subjective feelings such as excitement, happiness, and joy are examples of emotional associations (Keller, 2001).

Sensory associations: sensuality

Sensuality represents an enjoyable sensory experience (Roberts, 2006). In detail, sensory associations reflect the consumer's engagement with the brand through their physical senses such as vision, smell, sound, touch, and taste (Hultén, 2011; Schmitt, 2011). According to the empirical studies (Biswas et al., 2014a, 2014b; Peck and Childers, 2003), sensory associations are extensively produced by direct experiences with product-related and retail environment-related attributes, which result to experiential benefits (e.g. sensory enjoyment). Product appearance and texture (Peck and Childers, 2003); texture and color of packaging elements (Hultén et al., 2009); color, scent, lighting (Hultén, 2012), and music (Jain and Bagdare, 2011) of retail environment elements are examples of these attributes. In addition, indirect experiences like advertisements of a brand (Lindstrom, 2005) make a contribution to sensory associations that strengthen its brand image (Hultén, 2011).

While many marketing scholars and practitioners have demonstrated the importance of brand image and its dimensions in determining consumer reactions to a variety of products (e.g., Esch et al., 2006; Ismail & Spinelli, 2012; Kim, Kim, & An, 2003; Lassar, Mittal, & Sharma, 1995; Park & Rabolt, 2009; Gobé, 2001; Landwehr, McGill, & Herrmann, 2011; Landwehr, Wentzel, & Herrmann, 2012; Roberts, 2005; Schmitt & Simonson, 1997), none of the previous studies address the influence of these dimensions in consumers' luxury willingness to purchase.

2. 3. Perceived quality

According to Zeithaml (1998, p.3) , perceived product quality is a critical issue for both producers and marketers. Since this marketing construct not only offers number of techniques to differentiate products, but also it has been investigated extensively during recent decades (e.g. Tsiotsou, 2006; Van Osselaer, 2008; Zeithaml, 1988) as consumer decision-making is significantly

influenced by this marketing element (Jin and Yong, 2005). Perceived quality is defined as "a consumer's assessment of a product's superiority or perfection" (Zeithaml, 1998, p.3; Aaker & Jacobson, Che Anniza *et.al*, 2011: 778). This element is an attitude formed by comparing user expectations to actual performance (Parasuraman et al, 1985). Consumer's perception of a product's quality is affected by his or her needs and desires, as well as his or her beliefs about the benefits it provides (Steenkamp, 1990). Consumers, according to Steenkamp (1990), use extrinsic cues to make inferences about a product's quality attributes and to develop their overall perception of quality. This process can be explained through using Wright's (1975) "affect-referral" theory which states consumers do not examine brand attributes every time they make a brand choice decision; instead, they ease their decision-making process by focusing on brand attitudes (summary information) rather than product attribute information. Moreover, product's quality is determined not only by its technical functions, but also, to a large extent, by its emotional component (Schmitt, 2014). This entails a subjective evaluation of a product's quality and value. Schmitt defines the transition from external perception via the five senses to a quality evaluation as a conscious and unconscious cognitive and emotional comparison process between sensory perception and personal expectations actual experiences and preferences (Prefi,2003 ; Schmitt,2009). Perceived quality thus aims to provide a coherent general effect across all sensory channels, which not only conforms to the expected function but also adds emotional value (Haverkamp, 2009). Considering the mediating role of this variable on luxury WTP of consumers with another marketing constructs is still remained un-investigated.

2.4. Status consumption

Products have had symbolic functions (Levy 1959;1978), and using them for displaying has gotten a lot of attention from scholars (Mason1981; Braun and Wicklun 1989). Consumers buy, possess, use, and show particular things and services to improve their sense of self, create an image of themselves, express what

they feel and think, and create the kinds of social relationships they want (Goffman 1959; Belk 1988; Ewen 1988; Braun and Wick 1989). All of these behaviors are summarized in one marketing construct called status consumption. That is, status consumption is defined as a "motivational process by which individuals attempt to elevate their social standing through the public consumption of consumer goods that bestow and represent status both for the individual and for others around them" (Eastman et al., 1999, p. 42). While there are several definitions of status consumption in the literature, they all tend to focus on the underlying motives for such consumption. Some of these motivations are external, such as signaling wealth through public display (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004), improving social standing (Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 1999), gaining social prestige (O'Cass and Frost, 2002), and acquiring the approval and envy of others (Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 1999). Other motivations are internal motives, such as self-esteem and self-respect (Truong, et al., 2008) or self-reward without public displaying of items (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Prior studies have looked at how this variable interacts with other cultural elements, such as consumer religion, and found that some religious ideals can have a negative impact on luxury purchasing (e.g., O'Cass et al., 2013). Other investigations looked at the impact of status consumption on the perceived uniqueness of brands from emerging and mature markets, finding that consumers in emerging economies may bestow greater status to brands from mature markets (O'Cass and Siahtiri, 2013, 2014). Yet none of the earlier studies address the moderator effect of this marketing variable on the relationship between brand image dimensions and willingness to purchase.

2.5. Luxury willingness to purchase

The notion of willingness to purchase as a replacement for purchasing intention firstly applied by Phau et al. (2009) and further reinforced willingness to purchase as an indicator of actual purchase behavior (Liao, C. H., & Hsieh, I. Y., 2013). Veblen (1991) answered why consumers purchase luxury brands by

asserting that luxury or prestige products were seen as more pleasing since the higher price is linked with higher quality or the expense grants consumers at a certain level of prestige (Veblen, 1991). Effectively, such 'Veblen effects' happen because consumers are motivating to pay a premium for a product that may be functionally equivalent to a lower priced alternative (Bagwell and Bernheim, 1996). That is, consumers may purchase a luxury brand because it reflects their central values and beliefs (self-expression) or because it reflects the social image they wish to convey (self-presentation) or both (Shavitt, 1989; Wilcox et al., 2009). Based on the previous studies, the power of attitude is reflected in both cognitive (what we think and believe) and affective (what we feel and experience) responses (Keller, 2001; Morris, Woo, Geason, & Kim, 2002; Petty, Wegener, & Fabrigar, 1997). Both self-expression and self-presentation attitudes reflect consumers' cognitive responses toward luxury brands, considering that consumers attempt to communicate both their central beliefs and social status through luxury brands (Bian, Q., & Forsythe, S., 2012). Consumers' affective attitude also plays a vital role in their cognitive-affective purchase intention formation (Kumar, Lee, & Kim, 2009; Lee, Kim, Pelton, Knight, & Forney, 2008; Zajonc & Markus, 1982). This recognition is based on the understanding that consumers are both rational and emotional (Zajonc & Markus, 1982). Consumers' affective attitude toward luxury brands is derived from the feelings generated by the luxury brands (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Prior cognitive-affective models suggest that consumers' purchase intentions are also impacted by affect (Li, Monroe, & Chan, 1994). Affect may explain the reason of why consumers are willing to pay a premium price for luxury brands even though they have the accessibility to the equal functional benefits through less expensive non-luxury brands. The theory of reasoned action is based on the assumption that people are rational and make systematic use of the information available to them (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975); that is, the individual's attitude affects a person's behavioral intention. Given that attitude has a direct impact on intention toward a behavior (Eastlick & Lotz, 1999; Penz & Stottinger, 2005; Szymanski & Hise, 2000), both self-expression attitude and self-presentation attitude toward luxury brands predict purchase intentions for luxury brands.

In the light of the preceding discussion, this study focuses on how brand image dimensions directly and perceived quality and status consumption by their indirect roles influence on luxury willingness to purchase. Fig.1, illustrates the proposed conceptual model.

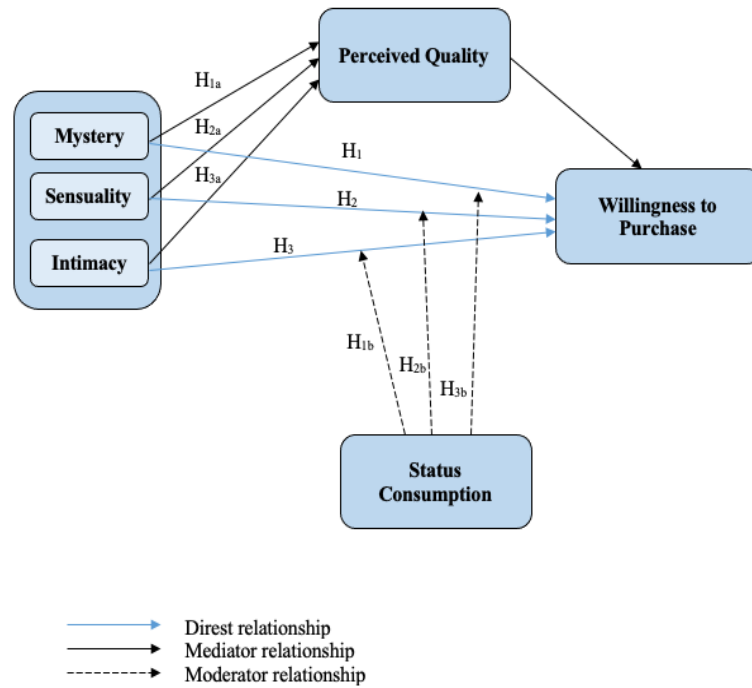


Fig.1. Conceptual mode

3. Hypotheses development

3.1. Country selection

The “democratization” of luxury as a phenomenon has arisen extensively over the last few of decades (Wiedmann et al., 2009; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). Previously, luxury consumption was mostly a privilege reserved for the wealthy. The majority of luxury manufacturers' marketing efforts were focused in developed markets such as the United States, Japan, and the United Kingdom (Shukla, 2010). With the rapid expansion of emerging economies (Voight, 2007) such as Iran(Heirati, N., & O’Cass, A.,2016), this paradigm has dramatically transformed (Voight, 2007). The flourished luxury market in Iran can be described through presence of global luxury brands such as Gucci, Prada, Polo, Omega, Rolex, Louis Vuitton, and Versace or even sales of luxury car (Teimourpour, B., & Hanzae, K. H., 2011). Following the lead from these observation, Iran as a developing, collectivist market (Hofstede, 2001) was chosen. Although consumer behaviors vary according to cultures and features of markets, study of luxury consumption of a particular market in a particular country is scares. Besides, based on the various indexes related to the national cultural dimensions, Iran differ significantly from the other Asian countries and it provides a fair representation of the economic group to which it belongs (Hofstede,2001).

3.2. Brand image dimensions and Luxury Willingness to purchase

Behind purchasing luxury brands multifarious consumer needs and motives such as a desire to illustrate a particular social class, communicate a desired self-image and provide self-concept reinforcement, a visible proof that the consumer can afford higher-priced products , are hidden (Nia and Zaichkowsky, 2000). Beside these motives, number of extrinsic factors also laying behind luxury consumers’ willingness to purchase. For example, studies by Bao *et. al* (2011) and Jaafar et al (2013) investigate the effects

of store image, product signatureness, perceived price, advertisement and packaging as extrinsic factors on willingness to purchase. Furthermore, in the case of luxury goods, brand name and associated image, are also critical extrinsic factors related to purchase decisions (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Okonkwo, 2007). That is, the importance role of brand image uncovered while it is developed as one of the first concepts for defining the influence of consumers' perceptions, attitudes, mind-sets and behavior towards their acceptance of a brand (Meenaghan, 1995; Low and Lamb, 2000). According to the early researchers of brand image, it is defined as consumers' imaginary and functional perceptions of brands (Gardner and Levy, 1955; Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990). Meanwhile, others explained brand image as perceptions formed by brand associations and attributes (Park and Srinivasan, 1994; Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Keller, 1993). Hence, brand image illustrates the meaning that consumers associate with the brand attribute (Bennett and Koudelove, 2000). In this regards, Arnould et al. (2005) coined that brand image embraces the attributes that shape consumers' meaning and perception of a brand which include the physical and functional attributes like packaging and physical appearance as well as intangible attributes like beliefs, emotions, associations and symbolic meanings that are related to the brand. In better term, the developed explanation of brand image dimensions were presented by Roberts (2006) and their measurement scales were developed by the study of Cho (2011). All of these definitions consist the explanations presented by Arnold *et.al.* (2005). The cognitive, sensory, and emotional associations of brand image connected to mystery, sensuality, and intimacy dimensions of BI (Cho, 2011). So with considering the aforementioned definitions of BI dimensions, we suppose that this marketing construct along with its dimension is a vital factor in shaping the position of a luxury brand in consumers mind. Moreover, providing that brand image of a product be favorable, it would have positive impact on purchase intentions (Baksi and Panda, 2018; Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012; Kudeshia and Kumar, 2017; Spears and Singh, 2004). Thus, this study aims to scrutinizing luxury willingness to purchase the

through the lenses of mystery, sensuality and intimacy in order to uncover which of them have the critical influence in motivating luxury consumers to purchase in luxury hand-woven carpet market.

Mystery is the cognitive experience generated by prior and current associations with a brand, as well as future goals and ambitions that symbolize a certain lifestyle (Roberts, 2006). Previous brand experiences can influence a consumer's present and future impressions of a business or brand (Cho, 2011). Thus, it is logical to suppose that mystery may also result in consumers' willingness to purchase in luxury market. Then, the following hypothesis is raised:

H₁: Mystery positively influences on the luxury willingness to purchase.

Followingly, direct product interactions and retail-environment-related attributes are the most effective drivers of a sensory dimension of brand image which are summarized in sensuality (Cho and Fiore, 2015; Hultén, 2011; Krishna, 2010). Sensory element of a brand image refers to the brand experiences that consumers have as a result of their physical senses (Cho and Fiore, 2015). All of the sensory attributes form a sensory experience which suppose motivating consumers to luxury purchasing.

H₂: Sensuality positively influences on luxury willingness to purchase.

Lastly, intimacy as an emotional dimension of a brand image (Cho and Fiore, 2015) captures the affective and connective experiences among consumers and brands (Roberts,2006). The emotional aspect of brand image is formed by the feeling consumers experience while they are interacting with the brand. Therefore, we propose that these feelings may influence luxury WTP of consumers. Thus, the following hypothesis is raised as following:

H₃: Intimacy positively influences on luxury willingness to purchase.

3.3. The role of perceived quality

Various research efforts and theoretical frameworks have validated the mediating effect of a range of factors (i.e. the luxury index, by Chevalier and Gutsatz, 2012) that lead to luxury shopping. According to the confirmations, perceived quality is a crucial factor in consumers' decision-making by which they will evaluate the quality of alternatives in terms of price within a category (Jin and Yong, 2005). On the other hand, consumers apply brand image to evaluate the quality of products. Thus, we assume that perceived quality may have a mediating effect on relationship between dimensions of brand image and luxury willingness to purchase. As a result, the following hypotheses raise :

H_{1a}: Perceived quality mediating the relationship between mystery and luxury willingness to purchase.

H_{2a}: Perceived quality mediating the relationship between sensuality and luxury willingness to purchase.

H_{3a}: Perceived quality mediating the relationship between intimacy and luxury willingness to purchase.

3.4. The role of status consumption

According to Packard (1959), status seekers are those who are constantly striving to surround themselves with visible evidence of the higher rank. That is, they pay a premium price for luxury goods which has a positive influence on their self-esteem (Truong and McColl, 2011). This consequence appears because consumers are not just purchasing a product, but are also purchasing the status that comes with it (Hayakawa, 1958), in what is known as 'status consumption' (Eastman et al., 1999). In such cases, purchase of luxury goods is a form of 'status consumption' happens among consumers with differences in their attitude (Chan et al., 2015). Here, we suppose that dimensions of brand image motivate consumers to purchase luxuries and this relationship may be strengthen or weaken through the impact of status consumption as a moderator variable in this relationship. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H_{1b}: Status consumption moderating the relationship between mystery and luxury willingness to purchase.

H_{2b}: Status consumption moderating the relationship between sensuality and luxury willingness to purchase.

H_{3b}: Status consumption moderating the relationship between intimacy and luxury willingness to purchase.

4. Methodology

4.1. Measures

To test these hypotheses, two structured questionnaires were designed. The first questionnaire focuses on brand image dimensions (mystery, sensuality, intimacy) and willingness to purchase which pertains to the first study in this research. The second questionnaire focuses on brand image dimensions, perceived quality, status consumption, and willingness to purchase. The scale items for brand image and its dimension were derived from the existing measurement scales developed by Cho, E (2011). The scale items relating to perceived quality was derived from Grewal, D. *et al.* (1998). The scale items for willingness to purchase and status consumption were respectively derived from Liao, C.*et al.*(2013), Pino, G., *et al.* (2019). These items are defined to implement the study among Iranian consumers in the Persian luxury hand-woven carpet market in Iran.

To assess the content and face validity, the questionnaires were sent to three marketing professionals associated with luxury brand. They were asked to refine the questionnaires to reflect the market reality. The questionnaires then submitted to four academics who assessed each times for representativeness , specificity, and clarity. The final questionnaires were divided into two parts. The first part contained questions regarding respondents' demographics, and the second part focused on measurement scales. All the variables in the second part of the questionnaire were close-ended five-point Likert scales, anchored by “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree.”

4.2. Sample

Using probability sampling, simple random sample technique (Kadilar, C., & Cingi, H.,2006), the study attempted to draw on a well-defined and homogeneous sample which be alike in as many respects as possible to the research population. Using Iranian census, the respondents were chosen on the basis of urban socio-economic classification (i.e., upper class, middle class). The questionnaire was pre-tested among the suggested socio-economic groups (n = 70). This ensured that the final sample was comparable across the country. The final questionnaires were distributed online in two turns to the respondents in different cities in Iran. For the first study, around 300 consumers were responded from all over the country, resulting in a final usable sample of 236 (response rate 78.66%) and regarding the second study, around 600 consumers were responded from all over the country, resulting in final usable sample of 432 (response rate 72%) in Iran. The involvement of actual consumers for filling the questionnaires provided a more realistic assessment of their purchase behavior than prior studies that have used imaginary purchase scenarios with respondents. The data for the first and the second studies were collected during three-week and five-week periods respectively, with various location in different cities, the times of the day, and the days of the week. This allowed the final samples to be representative of the population of shoppers as large as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Respondent profile.

| IRAN | <u>Study 1</u> | <u>Study2</u> |
|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 54.23% | 65.97 % |
| Male | 45.76% | 34.02 % |
| Age | | |
| 18-28 | 7.20 % | 11.57% |
| 29-39 | 34.32 % | 37.96% |
| 40-50 | 36.44 % | 31.01% |
| 50 and above | 22.03% | 19.44% |
| Education | | |
| Diploma | 18.22% | 25.46% |
| Bachelor | 39.40% | 50.92% |
| Master | 27.96% | 18.75% |
| PhD | 14.40% | 4.86% |

From the respondent profile, with respect to the first study, 54.23% of the Iranian respondents were women. More than 36.44% of the Iranian respondents were between the age of 40 to 50. With regard to the education profile, the majority of the respondents had bachelor degree (39.40%), the remains had master , diploma and PhD degree, 27.96% , 18.22% and 14.40 % respectively. In respect of the second study, Like the first study the majority of the respondents were women (65.97%). More than 37.96% of the Iranian respondents were between the age of 29 to 39. Just like the first study regarding the education profile, the majority of the respondents had bachelor degree (39.40%), the remains had diploma, master and PhD degree, 25.46% , 18.75% and 4.86 % respectively.

5. Analysis and results

5.1. Measure validity and reliability

According to the table 2.1 and table 2.2, the scales were analyzed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify poorly fitting items and then confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for further measure purification, as recommended by Gerbing and Hamilton (1996). In order to achieve the simple structure for the factor loadings , exploratory factor analysis has been done two times with

different factor numbers. All the scales were measured in R 4.1.3. Table 2.1 represents the coefficient alphas for the brand image dimensions and willingness to purchase scales, while table 2.2 represents the coefficient alphas for the brand image dimensions, perceived quality, status consumption and willingness to purchase, all of which are above the suggested threshold value of .70 (Nunnally, 1978) in all cases of all constructs, demonstrating construct reliability. The average variance extracted (AVE) for all constructs is better to be 0.50, which is equal to Dillon and Goldstein's (1984) suggested standard level. The average variance extracted of the under-investigated variables for study.1 are around 0.4 which are also accepted as their composite reliability (CR) are more than the acceptable level of 0.6 recommended by Lam, L. W. (2012). However, the average variance extracted (AVE) for all constructs of study.2 are more than 0.50 , except for perceived quality which is around 0.4. This amount is also accepted as the composite reliability (CR) of perceived quality is 0.87.

Table 2.1
Measurement scale item (study.1).

| Scale items | Item reliability |
|--|------------------|
| | IR |
| Brand Image Dimension | |
| Mystery | |
| Brand captures the times | 0.83 |
| Brand has changed my life for the better | 0.83 |
| Brand captures a sense of my life | 0.88 |
| Brand comes to mind immediately | 0.62 |
| Brand is a part of my life | 0.83 |
| Brand adds to the experience of my life | 0.83 |
| Brand adds to the quality of my life | 0.79 |
| Brand always has what I am looking for | 0.69 |
| Composite reliability | 0.91 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.42 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.91 |
| Sensuality | |
| Brand has incredible displays | 0.48 |
| Website design for this brand is really well done | 0.90 |
| Brand has a beautiful color scheme | 0.67 |
| Design of this brand's ads is really well done | 0.89 |
| Brand is as pleasing as the product | 0.88 |
| Store environment of this brand is pleasing | 0.81 |
| Composite reliability | 0.87 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.44 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.87 |
| Intimacy | |
| I am Happy when I purchase this brand | 0.83 |
| My relationship with this brand will last a long time | 0.78 |
| I Rely on this brand | 0.83 |
| I Connected to this brand | 0.87 |
| I Disappointed if this brand was no longer available | 0.85 |
| I Trust this brand | 0.79 |
| I Stay with this brand | 0.71 |
| Composite reliability | 0.91 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.40 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.91 |
| Willingness to Purchase | |
| It is likely I will purchase Persian hand-woven carpet within the next 2 years | 0.90 |
| I intend to continue to purchase and use Persian hand-woven carpet in the future | 0.89 |
| I recommend my family and friends to purchase Persian hand-woven carpet | 0.84 |
| Composite reliability | 0.84 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.34 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.85 |

Table 2.2
Measurement scale item (study.2).

| Scale items | Item reliability |
|---|------------------|
| | IR |
| Brand Image Dimension | |
| Mystery | |
| Brand captures the times | 0.62 |
| Brand has changed my life for the better | 0.77 |
| Brand captures a sense of my life | 0.73 |
| Brand comes to mind immediately | 0.64 |
| Brand is a part of my life | 0.71 |
| Brand adds to the experience of my life | 0.77 |
| Brand adds to the quality of my life | 0.77 |
| Brand always has what I am looking for | 0.68 |
| Composite reliability | 0.86 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.55 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.79 |
| Sensuality | |
| Brand has incredible displays | 0.62 |
| Website design for this brand is really well done | 0.80 |
| Brand has a beautiful color scheme | 0.67 |
| Design of this brand's ads is really well done | 0.76 |
| Brand is as pleasing as the product | 0.75 |
| Store environment of this brand is pleasing | 0.79 |
| Composite reliability | 0.84 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.55 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.82 |
| Intimacy | |
| I am Happy when I purchase this brand | 0.76 |
| My relationship with this brand will last a long time | 0.70 |
| I Rely on this brand | 0.70 |
| I Connected to this brand | 0.80 |
| I Disappointed if this brand was no longer available | 0.76 |
| I Trust this brand | 0.65 |
| I Stay with this brand | 0.72 |
| Composite reliability | 0.85 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.54 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.84 |

| | |
|---|------|
| Perceived Quality | |
| The Persian handmade carpet appears to be of good quality | 0.78 |
| The Persian handmade carpet appears to be durable | 0.86 |
| The Persian handmade carpet appears to be reliable | 0.87 |
| The Persian handmade carpet appears to be dependable | 0.87 |
| Composite reliability | 0.87 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.37 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.87 |
| Status Consumption | |
| I would pay more if the product has status | 0.86 |
| I would buy a product just because it has status | 0.86 |
| A product is more valuable to me if it has some snob appeal | 0.84 |
| I am interested in new products with status | 0.87 |
| Authentic status goods could really show the status | 0.85 |
| Owing authentic status goods confers and symbolizes my status to surrounding significant others | 0.85 |
| Composite reliability | 0.88 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.44 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.88 |
| Willingness to Purchase | |
| It is likely I will purchase Persian hand-woven carpet within the next 2 years | 0.74 |
| I intend to continue to purchase and use Persian hand-woven carpet in the future | 0.86 |
| I recommend my family and friends to purchase Persian hand-woven carpet | 0.80 |
| Composite reliability | 0.73 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.50 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.72 |

Discriminant validity was assessed by using the test recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981) . According to this test, a scale possesses discriminant validity if the average variance extracted by the underlying latent variable is greater than the shared variance (i.e., the squared correlation) of a latent variable with other latent variable.

Table 3.1
Correlation between latent Variables (Study.1)

| | IRAN | | | |
|-----|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | MY | SE | IN | WTP |
| MY | <i>0.653</i> | | | |
| SE | 0.334 | <i>0.668</i> | | |
| IN | 0.804 | 0.345 | <i>0.630</i> | |
| WTP | 0.405 | 0.069 | 0.492 | <i>0.587</i> |

Notes: Italicized numbers on the diagonal show the square root of the average variance extracted. MY = mystery , SE = sensuality, IN = intimacy and WTP = Willingness To Purchase.

Table 3.2
Correlation between latent Variables (Study.2)

| | IRAN | | | | | |
|-----|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | MY | SE | IN | SC | PQ | WTP |
| MY | <i>0.747</i> | | | | | |
| SE | 0.672 | <i>0.741</i> | | | | |
| IN | 0.780 | 0.676 | <i>0.736</i> | | | |
| SC | 0.336 | 0.264 | 0.452 | <i>0.667</i> | | |
| PQ | 0.440 | 0.312 | 0.591 | 0.330 | <i>0.610</i> | |
| WTP | 0.515 | 0.350 | 0.579 | 0.332 | 0.578 | <i>0.711</i> |

Notes: Italicized numbers on the diagonal show the square root of the average variance extracted. MY = mystery , SE = sensuality, IN = intimacy, PQ = Perceived Quality , SC = Status Consumption and WTP = Willingness to Purchase.

As Table 3.1 and Table 3.2 illustrate, all the criterion were met by all the variables in the study.1 and study.2 , as no correlation exceeds the square root of the average variance extracted. There is only an exception for intimacy which possess higher amount of correlation than the square root of the average variance extracted evaluated for this dimension of brand image in both studies. Even

though the standard procedures for improving discriminant validity had done, it was failed. According to Podsakoff et al. (2016) lack of conceptual clarity leads to a variety of issues, both conceptually and operationally. First, a lack of clarity at the conceptual level makes it difficult to identify the focal concept from other identical concepts in the field, then putting discriminant validity at risk. In other words, this is important because several scholars (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Blalock, 1968; Le et al., 2010; Morrow, 1983; Popper, 2002; Singh, 1991; Tepper & Henle, 2011) have mentioned that one of the main factors undermining discriminant validity and inhibiting conceptual progress in science is the proliferation of different terms for the same concept. As improving the conceptual definition of a construct is behind the scope of this study, so this research decides to report the evaluated amount for discriminant validity and ignore its deviation. The composite reliability was above 0.70 across the constructs, exceeding the recommended threshold value, which also provides strong evidence of discriminant validity.

Table 4.1

Fit measures for the conceptual model (Study.1)

| | CFI | TLI | IFI | RFI | NFI | GFI |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Iran conceptual model | 0.765 | 0.730 | 0.766 | 0.692 | 0.731 | 0.680 |

Table 4.2

Fit measures for the conceptual model (Study.2)

| | CFI | TLI | IFI | RFI | NFI | GFI |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Iran conceptual model | 0.800 | 0.777 | 0.800 | 0.724 | 0.749 | 0.727 |

According to the evaluated indices presented in the Table 4.1 and Table 4.2, the conceptual models fit properly.

Table 4.1 and table 4.2 are respectively illustrates the indices of fit measures for the conceptual model of study1 and study 2 .

GFI stands for *Goodness of Fit Index* and is used to calculate the minimum discrepancy function necessary to achieve a perfect fit under maximum likelihood conditions (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1984; Tanaka & Huba, 1985). *NFI* refers to Normed Fit Index also referred to as Delta 1 (Bollen, 1998b), and consists of values scaling between (terribly fitting) independence model and (perfectly fitting) saturated model. A value of 1 shows a perfect fit while models valued < 0.9 can be usually improved substantially (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). *RFI* is Relative Fit Index and derived from *NFI* where values closed to 1 indicate a very good fit while 1 indicates a perfect fit. *IFI* is Incremental Fit Index where values closed to 1 indicates a very good fit while 1 indicates a perfect fit. *TLI* is Tucker-Lewis coefficient also known as Bentler-Bonett non-normed fit index (*NNFI*) ranges from (but not limited to) 0 to 1 where a value closer to 1 represents a very good fit while 1 represents a perfect fit. *CFI* is Comparative Fit Index has value truncated between 0 and 1 where values closed to 1 show a very good fit while 1 represents the perfect fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The value of interest here is *CFI* for the default model. A *CFI* value of ≥ 0.95 is considered an excellent fit for the model (West et al., 2012).

5.3. Testing research hypotheses H1 to H3

To examine the hypothesized relationships, SME method was employed. To test differences in the magnitude of effects, a series of comparisons were used. The path coefficient analysis for study.1 (see Table 5.1) also shows the structure of the hypothesized relationships in the study.

Table 5.1
Summary of results (Study.1)

| Path coefficients | IRAN | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------|---------|---------|
| | Estimate | z-value | p(> z) |
| Brand image dimensions | | | |
| Mystery → Willingness to Purchase | 0.045 | 0.472 | 0.637 |
| Sensuality → Willingness to Purchase | -0.117 | -1.939 | 0.052 |
| Intimacy → Willingness to Purchase | 0.496 | 5.200 | 0.000 |

As hypothesized mystery were found to have a positive relationship with luxury willingness to purchase ($\beta = 0.045$; z -value = 0.472). Thus, H_1 is relatively supported; suggesting mystery, as a cognitive dimension of luxury brand image, have a positive influence on luxury willingness to purchase. H_2 to H_3 were tested in the same fashion as H_1 . Hypothesis 2 assessing the influence of sensuality on luxury willingness to purchase. However, sensuality negatively influence on luxury willingness to purchase ($\beta = -0.117$; z -value = -1.939). Thus, H_2 is not supported. Hypothesis 3 deals with the influence of intimacy on Luxury willingness to purchase. As hypothesized intimacy were found to have a positive influence on luxury willingness to purchase ($\beta = 0.496$; z -value = 5.200). Thus, H_3 is significantly supported. Consequently, intimacy and mystery are positively influence luxury willingness to purchase; however, the impact of sensuality on willingness to purchase is rejected in Iranian luxurious hand-made carpet market.

5.4. Testing research hypotheses H1a to H3a

To examine the hypothesized mediation relationships, structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed in R. The path coefficient analysis for study.2 (see Table 5.2) and Fig.2, Fig.3, Fig.4 show the structure of the hypothesized mediation relationships in the study.

Table 5.2
Summary of results(Study.2)

| Path coefficients | | IRAN | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|----------|---------|---------|
| | | Estimate | z-value | p(> z) |
| Mystery + Perceived quality | Willingness to Purchase | -0.094 | -0.499 | 0.618 |
| Sensuality+ Perceived quality | Willingness to Purchase | -0.120 | -0.656 | 0.512 |
| Intimacy + Perceived quality | Willingness to Purchase | 0.022 | 0.105 | 0.269 |

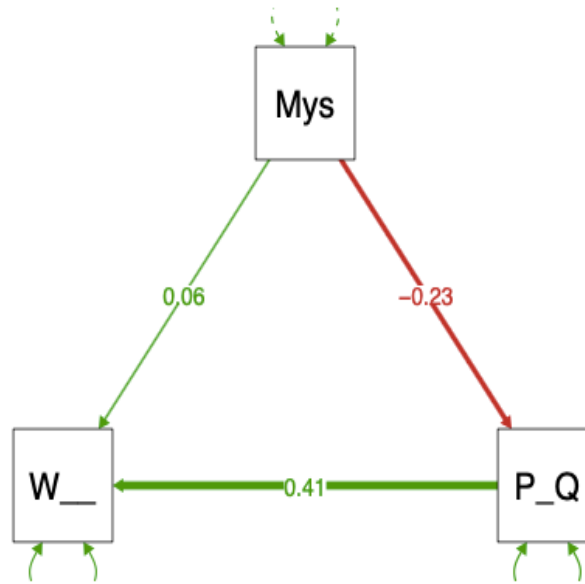


Fig.2

Fig.2 illustrates the mediating effect of perceived quality on the relationship between mystery and luxury willingness to purchase. According to the evaluated amounts represented in the Fig.2, there is a direct positive and relatively significant relationship between mystery and willingness to purchase (Est.= 0.062, z-value = 0.164). While, the relationship between mystery and perceived quality is negative and statistically nonsignificant (Est.= -0.231, z-value = -

0.558). Although the relationship among perceived quality and willingness to purchase is positive and significant (Est.= 0.406 , z-value = 1.120), the mediating role of perceived quality on relationship between mystery and willingness to purchase is nonsignificant. Thus, according to the path coefficients presented (Est.= - 0.094, z-value = - 0.499, $p(>|z|) = 0.618$) on Table 5.2, perceived quality dose not mediate the relationship between mystery and willingness to purchase. Therefore, H1a is not supported.

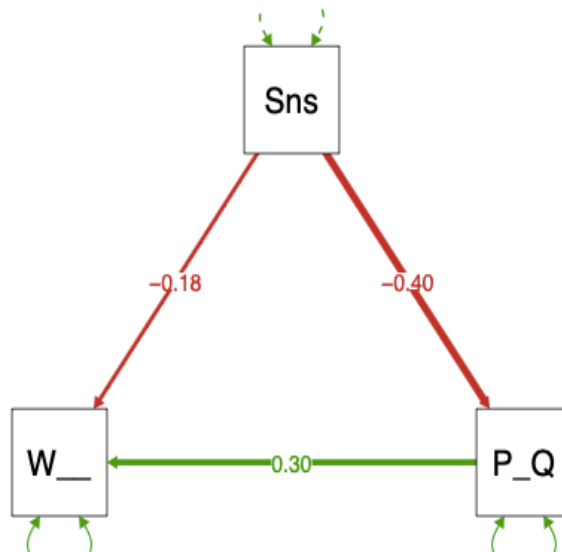


Fig.3

Fig.3 shows the mediating effect of perceived quality on the relationship between sensuality and luxury willingness to purchase. According to the evaluated amounts represented in the Fig.3, there is a negative and statistically nonsignificant relationship between sensuality and willingness to purchase (Est.= -0.181, z-value = - 0.527). Also, the relationship between sensuality and perceived quality is negative and statistically nonsignificant (Est.= -0.401, z-

value = -1.248). However the relationship among perceived quality and willingness to purchase is positive and relatively significant (Est.= 0.300 , z-value = 0.771). Thus, according to the path coefficients presented (Est.= -0.120 , z-value = -0.656 , $p(>|z|) = 0.512$) on Table 5.2, perceived quality dose not mediate the relationship between sensuality and luxury willingness to purchase. Therefore, H2a is not supported.

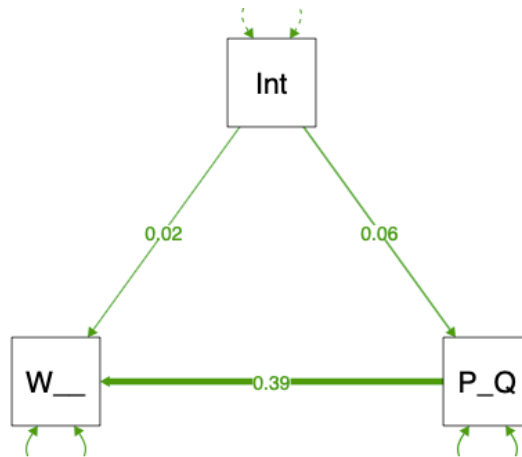


Fig.4

Fig.4 illustrates the mediating effect of perceived quality on the relationship between intimacy and luxury willingness to purchase. According to the evaluated amounts represented in the Fig.4, there is a positive and statistically significant direct relationship between intimacy and willingness to purchase (Est.= 0.024 , z-value = 0.050). Moreover, the relationship between intimacy and perceived quality is positive and relatively significant (Est.= 0.057 , z-value = 0.105). The same case is for the relationship among perceived quality and willingness to purchase is positive and significant

(Est.= 0.392 , z-value = 1.106). Thus, according to the path coefficients presented (Est.= 0.022, z-value = 0.105 , $p(>|z|) = 0.269$) on Table 5.2, perceived quality partially mediate the relationship between intimacy and luxury willingness to purchase. Therefore, H3a is supported.

5.5. Testing research hypotheses H1b to H3b

To examine the hypothesized moderation relationships, linear multiple regression function was employed in R. The path coefficient analysis for study.2 (see Table 5.3) also shows the structure of the hypothesized moderation relationships in the study.

Table 5.3
Summary of results(Study.2)

| Path coefficients | IRAN | | |
|--|----------|---------|----------|
| | Estimate | t-value | pr(> t) |
| Mystery * Status Consumption →Willingness to Purchase | 3.953 | 0.684 | 0.565 |
| Sensuality * Status Consumption →Willingness to Purchase | 1.720 | 0.499 | 0.667 |
| Intimacy * Status Consumption →Willingness to Purchase | 12.43 | 1.515 | 0.269 |

To interpret the H_{1b} which pertains to status consumption moderate the relationship among mystery and willingness to purchase , the simple slopes are examined, which are shown in Table 5.3.1 and Fig.5.

Table 5.3.1
Simple Slope Analysis

Slope of Mystery when Status consumption = - 0.39 (- 1 SD) :

| <u>Est.</u> | <u>S.E.</u> | <u>t. val.</u> | <u>P</u> |
|-------------|-------------|----------------|----------|
| -1.13 | 1.33 | -0.85 | 0.48 |

Slope of Mystery when Status consumption = - 0.11 (Mean) :

| <u>Est.</u> | <u>S.E.</u> | <u>t. val.</u> | <u>P</u> |
|-------------|-------------|----------------|----------|
| -0.05 | 0.77 | -0.06 | 0.96 |

Slope of Mystery when Status consumption = - 0.16 (+ 1 SD) :

| <u>Est.</u> | <u>S.E.</u> | <u>t. val.</u> | <u>P</u> |
|-------------|-------------|----------------|----------|
| 1.04 | 2.11 | 0.49 | 0.67 |

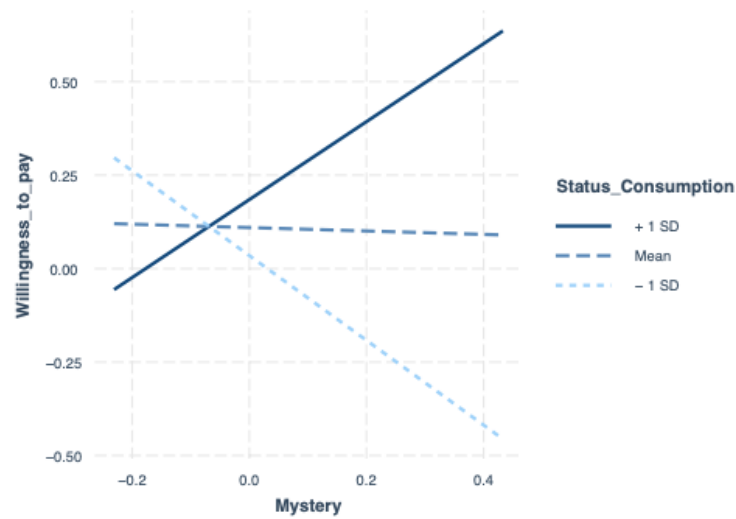


Fig.5. Slopes graph for H1b

From what is illustrated in Fig.5 , we can interpret Table 5.3 and Table 5.3.1 as follows :

While looking at the relationship of mystery and willingness to purchase at three different levels of status consumption; below the mean (- 1 SD), at the mean , and upper the mean (+ 1 SD). As it is obvious, the slope below the mean (Est.= -1.13 , P= 0.48)

shows a negative relationship and it is statistically not significant as the evaluated amount of P should be less than the standard level ($P < 0.05$). This is the same case for the slope at mean (Est.= - 0.05, $P = 0.96$) which shows a negative and nonsignificant relationship. The slope upper the mean shows a positive but statistically not significant relationship (Est.= 1.04, $P = 0.67$). Thus, status consumption dose not moderate the relationship among mystery and luxury willingness to purchase (Est.= 3.95 , $pr(>|t|) = 0.56$). So, H_{1b} is not supported.

To interpret H_{2b} which pertains to status consumption moderates the relationship among sensuality and luxury willingness to purchase, the simple slopes are examined, which are shown in Table 5.3.2 and Fig.6.

Table 5.3.2
Simple Slope Analysis

| Slope of Sensuality when Status consumption = - 0.39 (- 1 SD) : | | | |
|--|------|---------|------|
| Est. | S.E. | t. val. | P |
| -0.85 | 0.58 | -1.47 | 0.28 |
| Slope of Sensuality when Status consumption = - 0.11 (Mean) : | | | |
| Est. | S.E. | t. val. | P |
| -0.38 | 0.68 | -0.56 | 0.63 |
| Slope of Sensuality when Status consumption = - 0.16 (+ 1 SD) : | | | |
| Est. | S.E. | t. val. | P |
| 0.09 | 1.54 | 0.06 | 0.96 |

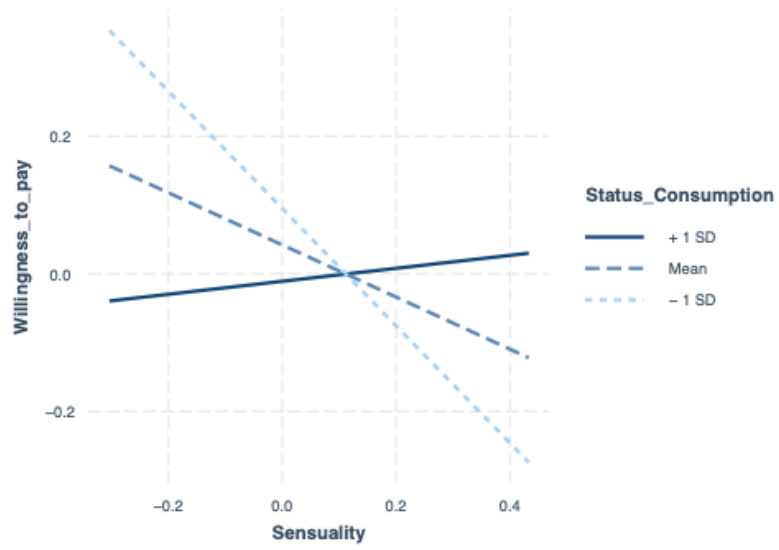


Fig.6. Slopes graph for H_{2b}

According to Fig.6. we can interpret Table 5.3 and Table 5.3.2 as follows :

Through looking at the relationship of sensuality and luxury willingness to purchase at three different levels of status consumption; below the mean (- 1 SD), at the mean , and upper the mean (+ 1 SD) , it is obvious, the slope below the mean (Est.= -0.85 , P= 0.28) shows a negative relationship and it is statistically not significant . The slope at mean (Est.= -0.38 , P= 0.63) also shows a negative and nonsignificant relationship. The slope upper the mean shows a positive but statistically not significant relationship (Est.= 0.09, P= 0.96). Thus, Like H_{1b}, status

consumption dose not moderate the relationship among sensuality and luxury willingness to purchase (Est.= 1.72, $pr(>|t|) = 0.66$). So, H2b is not supported.

To interpret the H3b which pertains to status consumption moderate the relationship among intimacy and luxury willingness to purchase , the simple slopes are examined, which are show in Table 5.3.3 and Fig.7.

Table 5.3.3
Simple Slope Analysis

Slope of Sensuality when Status consumption = - 0.39 (- 1 SD) :

| <u>Est.</u> | <u>S.E.</u> | <u>t. val.</u> | <u>P</u> |
|-------------|-------------|----------------|----------|
| -3.99 | 2.56 | -1.56 | 0.26 |

Slope of Sensuality when Status consumption = - 0.11(Mean) :

| <u>Est.</u> | <u>S.E.</u> | <u>t. val.</u> | <u>P</u> |
|-------------|-------------|----------------|----------|
| -0.57 | 0.65 | -0.87 | 0.48 |

Slope of Sensuality when Status consumption = - 0.16(+ 1 SD) :

| <u>Est.</u> | <u>S.E.</u> | <u>t. val.</u> | <u>P</u> |
|-------------|-------------|----------------|----------|
| 2.86 | 2.12 | 1.35 | 0.31 |

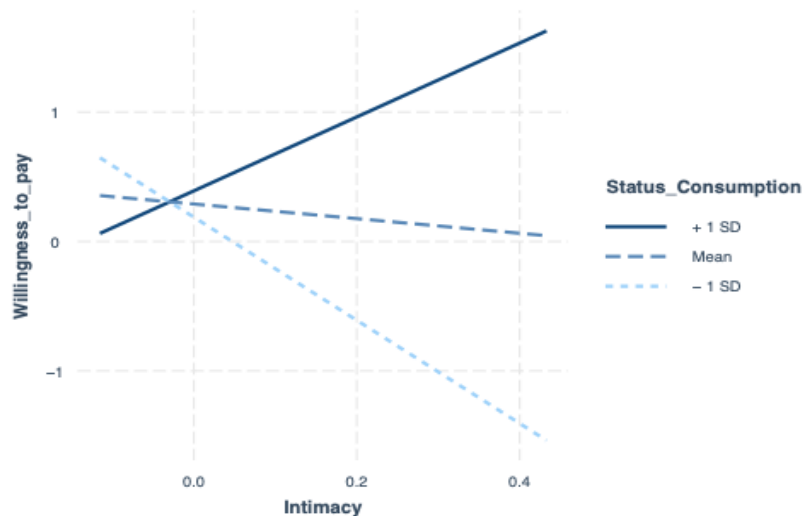


Fig.7. Slopes graph for H3b

According to Fig.7. we can interpret Table 5.3 and Table 5.3.3 as follows :

The graph illustrated the relationship between intimacy and luxury willingness to purchase at three different levels of status consumption; below the mean (-1 SD), at the mean , and upper the mean ($+1$ SD). The slope below the mean (Est.= -3.99 , $P=0.26$) shows a negative relationship and it is statistically not significant . The same case has evaluated for the slope at mean (Est.= -0.57 , $P=0.48$) which shows a negative and nonsignificant relationship. The slope upper the mean shows a positive but statistically not significant relationship (Est.= 2.86 , $P=0.31$). Thus, Like H1b and H2b, status consumption dose not moderate the relationship among intimacy and willingness to purchase (Est.= 12.43 , $pr(>|t|)=0.26$). So, H3b is not supported.

As a result , status consumption dose not playing a moderating role on the relationship between brand image dimensions and luxury willingness to purchase of consumers in the luxury hand-made carpet market in Iran.

6. Discussion

Through this research, not only the direct effects of brand image dimensions on luxury willingness to purchase of consumers were investigated, but also this study investigates the mediating and moderating effects of perceived quality and status consumption on the relationship between BI dimensions and luxury WTP . The study was conducted in a developing collectivist country which has a rapidly growing luxury market. According to the Hofstede model of national culture, it has proved that this country like other countries, vary across the cultural dimensions and consumer behavior in respect of luxury consumption (Hofstede, 2001). The results demonstrate that the model is effective in explaining consumer luxury consumption tendencies with considering to the direct influence of brand image dimensions and mediating effect of perceived quality, whereas ineffective pertains to the moderating

effect of status consumption. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the significantly positive influence of intimacy as an emotional dimension of brand image. Then illustrate the relatively desirable effect of mystery .While the impact of sensuality on luxury willingness to purchase is nonsignificant in Persian luxurious hand-made carpet market. In this regard, the study has important theoretical contributions and managerial implications.

6.1. Theoretical contributions

According to the presented findings of the first and the second studies in this research , one of the surprising elements of findings related to sensuality , suggests that when consuming luxury, consumers in developing collectivist markets, are not satisfied with brand displays format that influences consumers' evaluations and the color scheme which affects customers' aesthetic perceptions in retail environments. According to the recent studies , retailers can influence consumers' in-store purchasing decisions in various ways, including how they organize, label, and display products to consumers (Diehl, Van Herpen, and Lamberton.,2015; Reynolds-McIlroy, Morrin, and Nordfält., 2017; Cho and Baskin.,2018; Frederick, Lee, and Baskin.,2014). The way products are displayed in stores not only plays an important role in satisfying consumer desires, but also in shaping consumer preferences and choices by creating a unique context. The underlying assumption is that consumers process information and evaluate choices in the simplest way, based on the format presented (Bettman and Kakkar.,1977). Retailers can divide items in a variety of ways, including by attributes (Huffman and Kahn 1998), benefits (Lamberton and Diehl 2013), and consumer goals (Morales et al. 2005). Two of the most applicable display formats are by-brand and by-category displays (Simonson,1999). In the prior display format identical products from the same brand are collected together ; however, in the latter format different brands of the same category are grouped together. Likewise, as color may take on a

range of meanings based on context, studies on the impacts of color should come in advance to the studies on the context effect (Roschk et al., 2017). Color has long been applied as a marketing tool, but its influence has not been well researched from an academic perspective (Ettis, 2017). The impact of color on meaning perception is context-dependent, and this is equally true for aesthetic value perception (Taft, 1997). The aesthetic evaluation of the same thing might differ from person to person (Jacobsen, 2010). It is anticipated that the emotional and behavioral reactions due to aesthetic perception will vary depending on customers' motivations (Kim, D., Hyun, H., & Park, J., 2020). According to Schloss and Palmer (2011), hue, saturation, and value can all influence customers' aesthetic perceptions. Providing that display format and color scheme as sensuality particles of brand image dimension improve, sensuality dimension supposed to influence luxury willingness to purchase and also effecting the mediating role of perceived quality on the relationship between sensuality and luxury willingness to purchase.

An alternative contribution of this study is referred to the impact of mystery influences on luxury willingness to purchase in study.1 and study.2 across the country. With considering to the impact of mystery influences on luxury willingness to pay regarding the study.1, luxury brands in Iranian luxury hand-made carpet market , do not capture the time which refers to the average consumers' attention span. That is, luxury brands do not captivate and hold the interests of consumers in this luxury market. This distraction points to a fact that it is not consumers who are unable to focus , they are just selective about what they are focus on. For stopping this distraction and capturing the time of consumers while they are interacting with brands, marketers and storytellers assert, “ it's up to us to not only get our brands in front of consumers but to also pique their interest instantly so they don't scroll right on past”(Cision Contributor,2017).

Moreover, another outstanding element of these findings suggests that luxury brands in this market do not come to consumers' mind immediately. This refers to a key concept in marketing called "top-

of-mind awareness" or TOMA. This is a measure of how high brands rank in the consciousness of consumers when thinking of a particular industry or category. Being a top-of-mind brand has some perks such as : marketing become more effective, PR is painless, search rankings will soar , Enhancing brand value and integrity.

This research brings about additional empirical support to the cultural stability of the brand image dimensions scale that Cho (2011) developed in his seminal work, by testing it in an emerging market as well as adding exceptional context to the luxury consumption, willingness to purchase, perceived quality and status consumption. Last but not least , this research responds to the calls for additional investigations on luxury consumption in an international context (Dubois et al., 2005; Wiedmann et.al., 2009). This study is the first to empirically support the arguments regarding the direct impact of brand image dimensions on willingness to purchase and the indirect and interaction effects of two other marketing constructs- perceived quality and status consumption in a national context.

7. Managerial relevance

To our knowledge, this is the preliminary effort to parallel scholarly and industry literature to conceptualize brand image dimensions influence on luxury willingness to purchase and simultaneously evaluating the mediating and moderating effects of perceived quality and status consumption. The findings of this research have management implications for luxury brand managers and retailers. The most interesting managerial implication relating to the captivating and holding the interest of consumers. That is , managers and retailers should use the power of storytelling to get their target customers' attention and resonate with them on an emotional level. It works in every niche because it relies on human psychology instead of gimmicks. There are some ways to tap into the incredible power of storytelling to captivate customers. A) Choosing the Right Protagonist. In reality, most businesses spend a

lot of time and money for developing quality products or services. While this creates a tendency to discuss what they're selling at length, potential customers aren't interested in their product or service taking center stage. Consumers are only interested in hearing about what these businesses selling; in a limited context: what it can do for them. Managers and retailers should choosing the customer as the hero instead. Framing the story from their perspective helps consumers focus on what's most compelling. It's relatable because managers and retailers marketing begins to sound exactly like the conversations already taking place in their heads. Besides, step B can be allocated to setting high stakes. That is, a majority of ideal customers are in a comfort zone of non-action. Many of them don't even realize how much better their lives could be with the product or service in them. So, in case the "heroes" of target marketing stories don't become customers, managers and storytellers should make the stakes clear, and spell them out early on. Thus by doing so, managers and retailers give consumers a reason to keep listening and encourage more to become buyers. C) Appealing to multiple senses is another way for capturing consumers. In better term, great storytellers pepper their stories with sensory details that spark the imagination; consumers feel like, they are already there, right in the middle of the action. Managers and retailers can do this with their marketing tools. That is, invoking the five senses and paints a mental picture in consumers' minds and gets them receptive to what managers have to say. It is an important method, since it stop consumers from being bored by creating an emotional connection first. As a result, managers and retailers should be trained to use descriptive language and imagery to get their target customers seeing, feeling, hearing, smelling, and tasting so as they experience how different their lives would be with their product or service. Then support that with logical selling points like features and technical specifications. D) Start in the middle of action. Managers and retailers should capture consumers' interest only in a few seconds. If they don't, consumers will find one of the competitors instead. So, manager should concentrate on what their consumers care about the most and leading with their strongest points; ones that

shake consumers on an emotional level. Moreover, managers and retailers could improve the excitement and mystery of their brand by producing a documentary, music video, or other types of storytelling in advertising design and publicity, so as to enabling customers to like and pay more attention to the brand. When designing the interior decoration to create a warm and intimate store atmosphere, managers should fully consider the rationality of the layout of furniture and decorations, the softness of the lighting, the smell, the music, the comfort of color and air humidity, etc., so that customers' in-store experience is more sensual and memorable. Additionally, they should improve employee training in order to provide more professional services, and instruct employees to establish friendly and intimate communication with customers in order to stay on top of customer preferences and needs, making customers feel as close and trustworthy as friends at their stores.

To create a top-of-mind luxury brand, managers and retailers should focus on increasing top-of-mind-awareness in consumers through some applicable methods. Building brand visibility through social media and SEO are particularly helpful. Besides, showing up in search results is key to elevating discoverability. So be confident to do some keyword research and create as many blog posts, videos and other resources as possible. If managers or retailers can establish themselves as a thought leader within their niche, not only will this build brand awareness, but consumers are also more fascinated to turn to their brands in the future. Managers and retailers can increase the impact of their content by sharing it on social media too. As more consumers increase the time they spend on social platforms, it makes sense for brands to broaden their reach on social media. Achieving top of mind awareness is not easy to do; however, luxury brands can also use viral videos, likes of hashtags, influencer partnerships, paid advertising and competitions to expand their visibility. Likewise, providing an exceptional customer experience is another alternative method for increasing TOMA. That is, if consumers have a memorable experience with a brand, they're more likely to recall it. Best of all, there are endless ways to create great experiences like flexible

returns policy or giving free gifts redeemable through its online store. To stand out, managers or retailers could offer anything from industry-leading technical support through to top-notch customer service. If they do sufficiently, consumers may even spread the word. Omnichannel advertising is another effective way pertains to elevating top-of-mind-awareness. If consumers do not interacted with a brand, managers or retailers can still achieve 'top of mind' status through advertising. Social media ads are a critical method to promote products, but they can also extend the reach of managers' or retailers' content and increase their social followers. Similarly, PPC (pay-per-click) advertising can push your content across various websites and search engines. Traditional channels like print media and TV advertising stay significant for building brand awareness too. They offer exposure to large audiences and TV advertising is known to increase branded searches. Considering the nature of the market and cultural context, managers of luxury products and brands should be conscious of the overall considerable influence of sensuality as one of the dimensions of brand image in developing, collectivist (i.e., Iranian) markets. For a luxury-related brand, sensory associations such as unique web site features, retail environment, and appealing textural aspects of the product should be stressed. This shows that updating the multi-sensory features of a web site or shop design may provide a high return on investment, but managers and retailers must evaluate the proper level of sensory stimulation for the target clients.

The findings could help luxury brand managers and retailers to devise competitive marketing strategies by considering various techniques that reflect the response to the status signaling needs of consumers and a better perception of quality through in the luxury target markets.

8. Conclusion

Overall, this study brings about several critical contributions. First, this research provides insights into how to develop meaningful engagement with consumers by improving the construct of brand image dimensions through number of applicable methods for capturing and holding the interest of consumers. Second, as luxury brands spend a considerable part of their revenues on building brand image (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008) the findings demonstrate that such investment if directed towards improving some specific items of mystery and sensuality, brand image dimensions will be improved and will have an enhanced level of influence on luxury willingness to purchase of consumers and their perception of quality along with social desirability of luxury brands, all of which will provide increasingly prolific results. Third, in contrast to prior studies in the domain of luxury consumption that focused largely on developed markets, this study represents an empirical investigation of the influence of brand image dimensions on luxury willingness to purchase in an emerging market (Iran) which still has not been investigated among emerging luxury markets studies. Fourth, emerging markets are becoming critical markets for luxury goods (Datamonitor, 2009). Thus, findings of this study may be of considerable interest to luxury managers in developed markets faced with the daunting task of marketing luxury brands in these developing markets. Fifth, the constructs and measurements applied here can serve as a basement for more national studies or cross-national researches related to luxury consumption and highlight its peculiarities. Finally, the findings may have implications for cross-national luxury consumption theory and practice, so as to corroborating the notion that several key constructs may be common among all cultures and countries while others should be adjusted for unique national distinctions (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2004; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). This study further approves the requirements of managers and retailers to understand national and cross-national idiosyncrasies and differences when managing luxury brands.

9. Limitations and future research directions

Although the data analysis suggested a good model fit, there were inevitably some limitations in this study. While the sample included a wide range of luxury consumers with different backgrounds, educational levels, and ages, there were mostly females through these studies who were the frequent luxury consumers in the target luxury market. Differences might exist between frequent luxury consumers and non-frequent luxury consumers in their willingness to purchase for luxury goods, just future research could explore the existed differences. Luxury carpet was selected as the main luxury product category in this study to understand Iranian consumers' willingness to purchase for luxury goods. While the conclusions of this study can be generalized to other relatively affordable luxury products such as glasses, shoes, clothing, jewelry and handbags, it is not suitable to generalize the conclusions to very expensive luxury products such as luxury houses or luxury cars. Investigating very expensive luxury products that are not affordable to most consumers is another significant topic for future research to gain a better understanding of determinants that influence consumers' willingness to purchase for those luxury goods. Future researches could examine the implications of the proposed conceptual model in different luxury sectors such as fashion luxury sector. In addition, the use of status consumption as a moderator offers avenues for future research to explore other contextual and intervening factors which could facilitate or inhibit future behavioral intention in the context of luxury markets, thus providing more insights particularly in understanding consumer behavior in the luxury setting. Finally, it would be interesting to encompass other emerging luxury markets with different social and cultural settings. As society of today has become increasingly globalized, cross-cultural or cross-border studies would provide more insights and a better understanding of consumer behavior as well as an effective marketing strategy. Applying specifically the moderating effect of status consumption on the relationship between brand image dimensions and luxury willingness to purchase for other luxury sectors in order to understand whether status consumption may strengthen this relationship or not.

Finally, the findings of this study represents the perspectives of urban residents and are not necessarily representative of the entire population of the investigated country. According to researches, there are distinctions between urban and rural consumers, which may influence consumer attitudes toward luxury consumption.

10. Acknowledgments

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Appendix

Questionnaire Paper 1

Brand Image Dimensions:

Mystery (M)

M1: Brand captures the times.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

M 2: Brand has changed my life for the better.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

M 3: Brand captures a sense of my life.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

M 4: Brand comes to mind immediately.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

M 5: Brand is a part of my life.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

M 6: Brand adds to the experience of my life.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

M 7: Brand adds to the quality of my life.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

M 8: Brand always has what I am looking for.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Sensuality(S)

S1: Brand has incredible displays.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

S2: Website design for this brand is really well done.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

S3: Brand has a beautiful color scheme.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

S4: Design of this brand's ads is really well done.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

S5: Brand is as pleasing as the product.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

S6: Store environment of this brand is pleasing.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Intimacy (I)

I1: I am Happy when I purchase this brand.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

I2: My relationship with this brand will last a long time.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

I3: I Rely on this brand.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

I4: I Connected to this brand.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

I 5: I Disappointed if this brand was no longer available.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

I6: I Trust this brand.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

I7: I Stay with this brand.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Perceived Quality(PQ)

PQ1: The Persian handmade carpet appears to be of good quality.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

PQ2: The Persian handmade carpet appears to be durable.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

PQ3: The Persian handmade carpet appears to be reliable.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

PQ4: The Persian handmade carpet appears to be dependable.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Questionnaire Paper 2

Brand Image Dimensions:

Mystery (M)

M1: Brand captures the times.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

M 2: Brand has changed my life for the better.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

M 3: Brand captures a sense of my life.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

M 4: Brand comes to mind immediately.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

M 5: Brand is a part of my life.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

M 6: Brand adds to the experience of my life.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

M 7: Brand adds to the quality of my life.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

M 8: Brand always has what I am looking for.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

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I6: I Trust this brand.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

I7: I Stay with this brand.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Status Consumption(SC)

SC1: I would pay more if the product has status.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

SC2: I would buy a product just because it has status.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

SC3: A product is more valuable to me if it has some snob appeal.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

SC4: I am interested in new products with status.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

SC5: Authentic status goods could really show the status.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

SC6: Owing authentic status goods confers and symbolizes my status to surrounding significant others.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Questionnaires of Paper 3

STUDY 1.

Brand Image Dimensions:

Mystery (M)

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I7: I Stay with this brand.
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Willingness to purchase (WTP)

WTP 1: It is likely I will purchase Persian hand-woven carpet within the next 2 years.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

WTP 2: I intend to continue to purchase and use Persian hand-woven carpet in the future.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

WTP 3: I recommend my family and friends to purchase Persian hand-woven carpet.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

STUDY 2.

Brand Image Dimensions:

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SC4: I am interested in new products with status.

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