

PROMOTING A GREEN LUXURY PRODUCT TO BELONG OR TO STAND OUT: A CONCEPT COMPARISON TEST APPROACH

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Abstract. Literature on luxury products reveals that product promotion involves two status-signaling goals as psychological mechanisms of social adaptation: the value-expressive function (to stand out: status enhancement) and the social-adjustive function (to be accepted: status affirmation). Traditionally, the value-expressive mechanism has been the most effective in promoting luxury goods. However, how these mechanisms operate for sustainable products, given the common assumption that luxury customers tend to disregard sustainability attributes, remains underexplored. This study challenges the aforementioned assumption by assessing how status-signaling goals influence willingness to pay for luxury products with sustainability attributes. Findings indicate that brand promotion that uses the social-adjustive function can be effective. This study recruits 464 participants and adopts an experimental approach involving concept comparison testing to explore the differences in consumers' willingness to pay for a green luxury car. The car is presented with two distinct claims related to the above-mentioned luxury mechanisms and the absence or presence of a sustainable feature. Across all combinations of stimuli, participants perceive the sustainable luxury car as more appealing. This study shows that introducing a sustainability attribute in luxury brand communications can enhance consumers' willingness to pay under either of the two status-signaling mechanisms.

Keywords: green luxury products, status goals, social-adjustive needs, value-expressive needs, sustainable behavior, concept comparison test.

JEL Classification: M14, M30, M31, M37, M39, D91, Z10, Q50.

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1. Introduction

The luxury industry is increasingly responding to consumer demands for sustainability; therefore, industry practitioners and scholars have been focusing on exploring effective marketing strategies for luxury goods with sustainability attributes (Amatulli et al., 2021; Park et al., 2022). Luxury brands face significant challenges in overcoming the incompatibility between *luxury* as an indulgent experience and the principles of sustainability, as perceived by consumers (Eastman et al., 2021; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014). Consumers' growing awareness of the environmental impact of their purchases may diminish the enjoyment traditionally associated with luxury experiences. Additionally, when evaluating the sustainability attributes of luxury goods, consumers may pursue status-signaling goals. These goals can result from two primary concerns regarding their societal position: self-expression, driven by

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the need for differentiation or status enhancement, and self-presentation, driven by the need for assimilating into a group or receiving status affirmation. Previous research has extensively explored the dyadic dynamics of status signaling through luxury brands (Dubois et al., 2021; Fuentes et al., 2023). Luxury brands must avoid inconsistencies between the brand image and their consumers' status goals in their communication campaigns (Torelli et al., 2012). This study explores whether luxury brand communications based on sustainability might resolve consumers' information processing disfluency that results from the incompatibility they perceive between their status goals and those promoted by the brand. In the context of green luxury consumption, sustainability may facilitate a balance between self-presentation and self-expression concerns. Consequently, sustainability attributes could enhance consumers' desire for luxury brands (Vanhamme et al., 2023).

Research has investigated the interplay between status-signaling goals and the sustainability attributes of luxury goods, commonly referred to as *green luxury* (Kunz et al., 2020). Some studies suggest that sustainable messaging is more effective for non-luxury brands (Kong et al., 2021) and that upcycled offerings are suitable only for emerging luxury brands that lack a strong heritage (Adigüzel & Donato, 2021). However, despite existing demand and positive attitudes toward sustainable luxury goods, consumers often do not scrutinize the authenticity of sustainability claims in advertising or the true environmental impact of their purchases (Davies et al., 2012; Han et al., 2017). Nevertheless, consumers appear to perceive value in green luxury in terms of status signaling owing to its novelty and uniqueness (Amatulli et al., 2021). These findings imply that although consumers may seek green luxury for self-expression, such purchases mainly address self-presentation or affiliation concerns.

Luxury brands with an international consumer base have adopted communication strategies to promote green luxury by focusing on individualistic values rather than environmental consciousness to appeal to consumers' status-signaling goals (Kwon et al., 2016). This type of messaging evokes scenarios in which consumers associate sustainable luxury brands with self-expression. For instance, campaigns such as "Agents of Change" by Stella McCartney (introducing their Fall 2019 fashion collection), "What We Carry" by Prada (introducing their recycled nylon product line "Re-nylon"), or "Some fear change, others drive it" by BMW (introducing the electric BWM i3) may appear unrelated to sustainability at first glance. However, this messaging has been used in real advertisements to promote luxury products with sustainability attributes. In each case, the advertisements subtly promote sustainability while highlighting status-signaling goals.

This study determines the specific status-signaling goal – value expressive or social adjustive – that increases consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) for luxury goods with sustainability attributes. It focuses on these constructs as psychological functions of luxury brands (Wilcox et al., 2009), suggesting that consumers select luxury brands based on their signaling goals. In these cases, status enhancement can be achieved through the value-expressive function, whereas status affirmation can be achieved through the social-adjustive function.

According to the literature, consumers may favor sustainable luxury for its value-expressive function (Amatulli et al., 2021; Eastman et al., 2021; Li & Kang, 2024). However, this study shows that consumers exhibit comparable WTP regardless of the status goal associated with the presentation of a green luxury product. In contrast with previous studies, this study finds that the lack of significant differences in consumers' WTP for green luxury products regardless of their status-signaling function suggests that the sustainability attributes of such products can simultaneously address consumers' self-expression and self-presentation goals. The study presents a discussion on the notion that sustainability enhances luxury value rather than

creating a type of “counter argument” based on the inconsistency between the brand image and its message, as suggested by previous studies (e.g., Torelli et al., 2012) that propose an incompatibility between marketing the concepts of luxury and sustainability. These results challenge the idea that marketers should primarily focus on differentiation or novelty when promoting green luxury products. Moreover, the findings suggest that social adaptation may be achieved through deceptive signaling.

The rest of this study is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the conceptual framework and hypothesis development, Section 3 presents the methodology of the study, Section 4 presents the results, and Section 5 discusses the implications of the results and proposes directions for future research. Finally, Section 6 highlights certain research limitations and concludes the study.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. Sustainability attributes of luxury goods

According to the status-signaling theory, any object can be perceived as a luxury if it facilitates the social adaptation of consumers (Dubois et al., 2021). With individuals tailoring their consumption choices to signal their status, marketers across various product categories have capitalized on this trend by commanding premiums for green, sustainable, or ecological products (Wei et al., 2018). Some of these purchases are intended for private use and represent everyday luxuries, such as organic food, biodegradable laundry detergents, and energy-efficient home appliances. However, many of these purchases may be essentially intended for display, such as “being seen” wearing fashion accessories made from upcycled materials or “arriving” driving electric cars. Research has shown that consumers are willing to pay more for reputable brands in certain product categories that they consider important to their lives (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2018). Furthermore, luxury brands typically emerge in product categories meant to be displayed, such as jewelry (e.g., Rolex), fashion (e.g., Prada), or cars (e.g., Porsche). Consequently, luxury consumers are likely to increase their WTP for green luxury items in proportion to the extent to which these items enable social adaptation.

In some cases, consumers’ sustainable consumption choices may be influenced by personal convictions, peer pressure, or public policies. However, consumers often wish to shift from traditional to sustainable products for status-signaling (Hemonnet-Goujot et al., 2022). This behavior, known as conspicuous conservation, reflects a desire to achieve social adaptation by displaying one’s green or sustainable consumption choices (Griskevicius et al., 2010). In this context, the conspicuousness of luxury goods involves consuming for others rather than oneself to gain individual social benefits (Garcia et al., 2019; Nelissen & Meijers, 2011). Therefore, consumers’ social adaptation goals can inform the attributes they seek in luxury brands (Sundie et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). Moreover, displaying luxury with *ethical* or *green* attributes may represent a more sophisticated form of status signaling than simply displaying one’s wealth (Palomo-Vélez et al., 2021; Thomsen et al., 2020). However, the relationship between consumers’ preference for luxury items with sustainability attributes and specific status-signaling goals remains unclear. To address this gap in the literature, this study examines the differences in consumers’ WTP for luxury vehicles promoted for different characteristics (sustainable versus traditional luxury) and status goals. Different versions of the same luxury goods were used as random stimuli and presented to participants for evaluation.

2.2. Achieving status goals through luxury brand functions

Status signaling involves using luxury items to gain social benefits (Lee et al., 2015; Nelissen & Meijers, 2011). These benefits are derived from recognition by other members of a group or society (Garcia et al., 2019; Sundie et al., 2020; Wang & Griskevicius, 2014) – specifically, recognition of an individual's position within the social hierarchy (Gaur et al., 2015; Han et al., 2010). Possessions can convey crucial information about their owners; thus, consumers to luxury brands based on two primary goals: differentiation versus assimilation (Dubois, 2020; Dubois et al., 2021) and status enhancement versus status affirmation (Fuentes et al., 2023). Based on these goals, luxury brands can serve two functions for consumers (Grewal et al., 2004; Wilcox et al., 2009). The value-expressive function arises from self-expression concerns and aligns with differentiation goals. In this context, consumers seek to differentiate themselves from their peers by expressing their individuality and values. Conversely, the social-adjustive function stems from self-presentation concerns and is linked with assimilation goals, enabling consumers to integrate into a group by demonstrating similarities with their peers. These luxury brand functions form part of the independent variables used in this study. While both luxury functions positively influence green luxury purchases (Eastman et al., 2021), studies have frequently demonstrated that the value-expressive function is a stronger predictor of luxury brand choice (Ngo et al., 2020; Schade et al., 2016; Shao et al., 2019). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: A luxury good endorsed with a value-expressive claim elicits greater WTP compared with a similar product endorsed with a social-adjustive claim.

2.3. Green luxury fulfills the value-expressive function

Some recent studies have posited that consumers value sustainable luxury items owing to their perceived uniqueness (Amatulli et al., 2021) and novelty (Eastman et al., 2021). Consumers who aim to stand out may seek atypical products. In this context, green luxury products can enhance consumers' status by allowing them to differentiate themselves from others without changing their brand choices.

Moreover, luxury brands must distinguish themselves from competitors. In this context of inter-brand differentiation, studies have identified a link between brand choice and luxury products with sustainability attributes when luxury brands communicate effectively using competence/superiority claims instead of warmth/caring claims (Septianto et al., 2022). This link may be stronger when consumers have an abstract understanding of the product's context of use. Similarly, promoting green luxury with pride (versus gratitude) claims may increase customers' intention to choose a sustainable brand (Septianto et al., 2021). If green luxury fulfills the value-expressive function, consumers may exhibit a preference for luxury items with sustainability attributes than for traditional luxury items promoted with social-adjustive claims. Based on this discussion, we propose the following hypotheses:

H2: A luxury good endorsed with a value-expressive claim elicits a similar WTP compared with a similar good infused with sustainability attributes.

H3: A luxury good infused with sustainability attributes elicits greater WTP compared with a similar good without sustainability attributes.

2.4. Social-adjustive function: revealing usage rather than intention for green luxury

Consumers often find themselves choosing between brands serving different signaling functions. While consumers find value in both functions (Wilcox et al., 2009), few studies acknowledge scenarios where consumers may simultaneously aim to achieve differentiation and assimilation. This scenario may be more common in choices in single-brand categories (e.g., luxury cars) than in multiple-brand categories (e.g., luxury fashion). Consumers may prefer a value-expressive brand when they have an abstract understanding of the product's context of use (Septianto et al., 2021). In contrast, the social-adjustive function requires a detailed understanding of the conditions necessary for successful signaling and group assimilation, requiring consumers to gather information, learn about the context, and potentially experience social competitiveness (Barrera & Ponce, 2021). Thus, status signaling through altruism or self-sacrifice from sustainable purchases (conspicuous conservation) may pose a greater challenge for consumers (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Sekhon & Armstrong Soule, 2020). Rather, consumers may derive the most value from a luxury good with sustainability attributes when it is simultaneously introduced with a social-adjustive claim. In this case, the product's uniqueness owing to its sustainability attributes can simultaneously satisfy value-expressive and social-adjustive attitudes. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: A luxury good infused with sustainability attributes and endorsed with a social-adjustive claim elicits greater WTP compared with a similar good without sustainability attributes and endorsed with a value-expressive claim.

3. Methodology

This study used an experimental design incorporating multiple independent variables, employing a Vickrey second-price auction simulation to measure differences in consumers' WTP for a sustainable luxury good – a luxury car that claims zero environmental impact (Noussair et al., 2004). This method can either confirm the findings of previous studies or highlight inherent issues in earlier correlational research. To establish causality between sustainability and luxury preferences, we compare WTP among groups that receive different treatments randomly. This approach helps estimate the treatment effects of sustainability attributes in luxury goods (Canavari et al., 2019). The research question is to determine the luxury brand function that more strongly influences consumers' WTP for green luxury. Therefore, the study adopted a 3×2 experimental mixed-subject design (a partial within-subject design explained below) to assess the maximum amount of money (in USD) that consumers were willing to bid in an auction for two versions of the same luxury car. Each version differed in two dimensions: luxury type (green versus non-green) and advertising claim (value-expressive versus social-adjustive), along with an additional control advertisement without any signaling claim. The difference in WTP between each pair of stimuli served as the study's dependent variable.

Consumer and advertising research often employs monadic concept testing, wherein participants in each experimental group are exposed to only one concept (e.g., one advertising stimulus). The dependent variable values are then compared among different groups. However, this study employed a concept comparison test, exposing participants in each group to two advertising stimuli. Although less common in academic consumer research, this method is frequently used in market research and offers some advantages over the monadic approach

(Cui et al., 2015; Varnes, 2019). Comparison testing is more prevalent than monadic testing in market research (Peng & Finn, 2008). This approach eliminates the risk of sample heterogeneity because the same group evaluates both stimuli, allowing for precise assessment with smaller experimental groups (Cui et al., 2015). Moreover, perceived differences between stimuli are often clearer because participants tend to differentiate more effectively when evaluating multiple stimuli. In this study, each group was exposed to only two stimuli (advertising concepts) to minimize potential negative impacts on perception caused by overexposure (Friedman & Schillewaert, 2012). Thus, the concept comparison methodology facilitated a comprehensive experimental comparison between pairs of advertising stimuli.

Participants and design

The study recruited 464 participants (male: 245 [53%], female: 210 [45%], other: 9 [2%]) from an online panel. Participants were 18–78 years old, with a mean age of 33.3 years and a standard deviation of 12.1. Of these participants, 80% were under 44 years old. All participants were luxury car owners and residents of the United States. They accessed the study through a link directed to an auction simulation created using Qualtrics. The participants were randomly assigned to conditions that presented a combination of two of six advertising stimuli, resulting in 15 within-subject research groups. Each stimulus consisted of advertisements promoting the same luxury car but varied in terms of advertising claims (Figure 1). A preliminary pilot study (pre-test) with 75 participants validated the operational features of the experiment, ensuring clear identification of the effects of the stimuli (observed differences in WTP from participants' perspective). Before the experiment, several rehearsals and stimulus checks were conducted to ensure that the claims related to the stimuli for value-expressive (express who you are), and social-adjustive (welcome to the club) functions and the sustainability feature (with zero impact on the environment) were clearly understood and properly evoked the intended meaning.

Using pseudonyms, participants engaged in a hypothetical luxury car auction scenario. Through a fictional luxury car dealer (Luxcars), they were invited to participate in an exclusive auction for VIP clientele, with a chance to acquire a forthcoming car model. Participants were encouraged to imagine acquiring this luxury car and were given the following instructions:

You will have the opportunity to win a luxury car that has yet to be released onto the market. The participant who guesses the real or closest price will get the exclusive car FOR FREE before anyone else. However, by entering, you supposedly commit to buying the car from the auction after the winner is announced and the actual price is disclosed.

This is how it works:

If your bid is equal to or the closest to the undisclosed list price, you will win the car in the auction.

If your bid exceeds the real undisclosed list price, you must PAY according to your bid.

If your bid is lower than the list price, you will still PAY the list price after the announcement of the winners.

What you must do is make your best effort to guess the real price to win the car at the auction for free!

Participants were reminded that they would be presented with two versions of the same car and were required to place a bid for both. Despite being the same car, versions one (stimuli A) and two (stimuli B) featured different attributes indicated in the advertising claims.

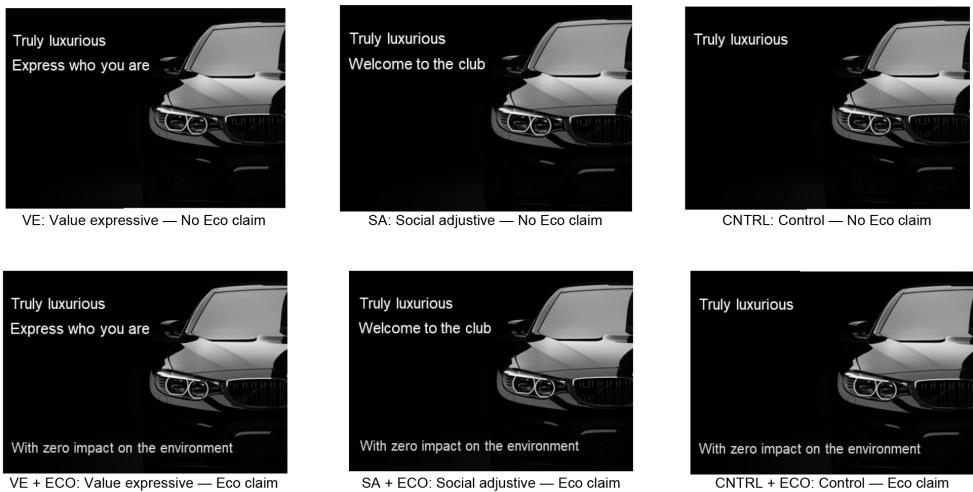


Figure 1. Stimuli (base image acquired from Shutterstock with a license for editorial usage)

These stimuli were randomly presented to minimize bias from any learning effect of the first concept on the second (Cui et al., 2015). Figure 1 illustrates the advertising stimuli used in this study. Within-group differences were analyzed using Wilcoxon's non-parametric test for small samples, with each research group consisting of 30 participants. Paired sample *t*-tests were conducted to validate the results. Table 1 presents the stimulus combinations across the 15 research groups.

Table 1. Stimulus combinations across research groups

Research	Stimulus combinations	
group	A	B
1	Value expressive	Social adjustive
2	Value expressive + ECO	Social adjustive + ECO
3	Value expressive	Control
4	Social adjustive	Control
5	Value expressive	Value expressive + ECO
6	Social adjustive	Social adjustive + ECO
7	Control	Control + ECO
8	Value expressive	Control + ECO
9	Social adjustive	Control + ECO
10	Value expressive + ECO	Control + ECO
11	Social adjustive + ECO	Control + ECO
12	Value expressive + ECO	Control
13	Social adjustive + ECO	Control
14	Social adjustive	Value expressive + ECO
15	Value expressive	Social adjustive + ECO

The dependent variable, consumer WTP for luxury cars, was defined as the maximum price consumers were willing to pay for a product or service. Participants were asked to enter the maximum price in USD and in numerical characters, without decimals, for both car versions under each condition. This instruction was accompanied by a reminder of the auction scenario: "A reminder that the [auction] guest that gets the closest or bids the real price will get the car for free!"

4. Results

Table 2 displays the differences in WTP among the various groups. Notably, participants who evaluated value-expressive and social-adjustive functions simultaneously (Groups 1 and 2) did not show a statistical difference in WTP. Overall, participants in conditions where only one of the stimuli included an ecological claim consistently demonstrated higher WTP for that item. These results align with the findings of previous studies, suggesting that sustainable luxury items appeal to consumers who seek differentiation. For example, the results of Groups 8 and 10 indicate that participants exhibited similar levels of WTP for a luxury car promoted with value-expressive claims compared with one promoted as sustainable without any status-signaling claim.

Table 2. Estimates of differences in willingness to pay

n	Group	Stimulus combinations		Willingness to pay (WTP)			Wilcoxon		Paired sample test	
		A	B	WTP (\$) A	WTP (\$) B	ΔWTP (\$) A-B	Z	Two-sided p-value	t	Two-sided p-value
31	1	VE	SA	69,660	68,976	684	-0.803	0.422	0.552	0.585
29	2	VE + ECO	SA + ECO	72,871	76,078	3,207	-1.302	0.193	-1.321	0.197
32	3	VE	CNTRL	75,217	72,349	2,868	-0.9	0.368	1.053	0.301
30	4	SA	CNTRL	87,344	89,168	1,824	-0.633	0.526	-0.315	0.755
32	5	VE	VE + ECO	70,021	80,812	10,791	-3.963	<.001	-3.724	<.001
32	6	SA	SA + ECO	72,668	80,065	7,397	-3.755	<.001	-4.57	<.001
32	7	CNTRL	CNTRL + ECO	64,562	80,406	15,844	-4.709	<.001	-4.361	<.001
32	8	VE	CNTRL + ECO	73,316	80,985	7,669	-3.151	0.002	-3.147	0.004
30	9	SA	CNTRL + ECO	62,292	72,854	10,562	-4.108	<.001	-4.599	<.001
31	10	VE + ECO	CNTRL + ECO	65,260	64,274	986	-0.676	0.499	0.35	0.729
30	11	SA + ECO	CNTRL + ECO	63,795	66,772	2,977	-1.458	0.145	-1.868	0.062
30	12	VE + ECO	CNTRL	82,427	68,110	14,317	-4.168	<.001	-4.028	<.001
32	13	SA + ECO	CNTRL	99,175	99,315	140	-2.239	0.025	0.021	0.984
30	14	SA	VE + ECO	57,243	66,497	9,254	-3.472	<.001	-3.641	<.001
31	15	VE	SA + ECO	72,540	86,629	14,089	-3.993	<.001	-3.31	<0.002

Note: VE: Value-expressive function; SA: Social-adjustive function; +ECO: Ecological claim. Groups with statistically significant differences are highlighted in bold.

The results supported most of the hypotheses, except for Hypothesis 1 (Groups 1 and 2). Contrasting with previous findings, this study observed no statistically significant difference in WTP between value-expressive and social-adjustive functions, regardless of the status-signaling claim. Furthermore, participants consistently exhibited higher WTP for luxury goods with sustainability attributes than for those without these attributes. Isolating the effects of each status goal provided interesting insights. For example, the results of Groups 4, 11, and 13 indicate that the participants did not perceive social-adjustive claims as cues for value. Meanwhile, the results of Group 12 suggest that even when sustainability attributes are promoted, value-expressive claims do not significantly boost WTP. Consistent with the findings of previous studies, green luxury may represent a “self-expression” value. A luxury product with sustainability attributes promoted using a social-adjustive claim elicited higher WTP levels compared with one promoted using a value-expressive claim (Group 15). Table 3 summarizes the supported hypotheses.

Table 3. Summary of test results

	Difference in willingness to pay by research group:		Conclusion
	Expected	Not expected	
H1: VE WTP > SA WTP The value-expressive function elicits higher WTP compared with the social-adjustive function	G1* G2*		Rejected
H2: VE WTP = ECO WTP The value-expressive function elicits similar WTP compared with sustainability attributes	G5 G6 G7 G8 G9	G12 G13 G14 G15	Supported
H3: ECO WTP > X WTP The sustainability attributes elicit higher WTP compared with a similar non-green luxury	G11*	G10	Supported
H4: SA ECO WTP > VE WTP The social-adjustive function, infused with sustainability attributes, elicits higher WTP compared with the value-expressive function	G15	G13*	Supported

Note: VE: value expressive; SA: social adjustive; GX: Research group number; GX in bold: Statistically significant (vs. observed) Δ-in-WTP; * The results for statistical difference differ from those expected.

These results suggest that consumers who purchase green luxury brands engage in deceptive signals. In other words, consumers may aim to convey a status signal that fulfills a self-presentational or status-affirmation goal (e.g., aligning with the social-adjustive luxury brand function) while harboring opposing (and possibly concealed) attitudes aligned with the value-expressive luxury brand function. For example, participants in Group 13 found greater value in a green luxury product without status claims (control) than in a traditional luxury product with a social-adjustive claim. Similarly, Group 12 compared a green luxury product without any status claims (control) to a traditional luxury product with a value-expressive claim; no significant statistical differences were found, suggesting that consumers perceive similar value in both cases. The comparison between Groups 5 and 6, where participants evaluated a traditional luxury product without any status claims against a green luxury product

promoted with either value-expressive or social-adjustive claims, is particularly noteworthy. Only Group 5 showed a difference in consumer preference, suggesting that consumers find similar value in traditional luxury as in green luxury with social-adjustive claims (consistent with Group 13's findings). In cases of deceptive signaling through green luxury, consumers are likely to hold value-expressive attitudes that are satisfied through the product's sustainability attributes (Amatulli et al., 2021; Eastman et al., 2021) while intending to meet a status-affirmation goal (Johnson et al., 2018).

5. Discussion

This study examines the effectiveness of value-expressive and social-adjustive luxury brand functions in product messaging in eliciting high levels of WTP for green luxury items. The results revealed no statistical difference in WTP for a green luxury item promoted via social-adjustive claims and that promoted via value-expressive claims, contradicting previous findings. Previous studies have shown that the value-expressive function is generally a stronger predictor of luxury brand choice, particularly when aligned with constructs such as the need for self-expression or materialistic/individualistic consumer traits (Goenka & Thomas, 2019; Ngo et al., 2020; Schade et al., 2016). Accordingly, the principal theoretical contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that within the context of consumer decision-making for luxury products featuring sustainability attributes, both value-expressive motives (e.g., the desire to stand out) and social-adjustive motives (e.g., the desire to belong or align with collective values) can be concurrently activated. When a sustainable claim or feature is introduced in the promotion of a luxury product, it may trigger additional beliefs during the consumer's information processing stage, expanding the perceived benefits of the luxury product beyond its traditional value-expressive function. For instance, the inclusion of a sustainability attribute in a high-involvement product (e.g., a car) can enhance consumers' purchase intentions by appealing to intrinsic motivations, such as a personal conviction to contribute to the greater good (Edinger-Schons et al., 2018). Moreover, evidence suggests a progressive shift in behavioral patterns toward the consumption of sustainable products, driven by factors such as health consciousness, environmental concern, and subjective social norms (Szaban et al., 2023). These factors may also explain the growing emphasis on social-adjustive needs (status affirmation) as a complementary mechanism influencing the decision to purchase green luxury goods.

The study employed an experimental auction methodology to estimate consumer preferences for sustainability. By incentivizing bidding, this method reduces biases often found in responses to hypothetical survey questions, providing a more realistic measure of consumer valuation (Lusk et al., 2007). Marketers commonly employ A/B comparison tests and auctions for ad placement, a practice that could benefit from the insights of this study (Braun & Schwartz, 2024). This study's approach, which involved random comparisons of two isolated attributes at a time across 15 consumption scenarios, effectively reveals the treatment effects of sustainability attributes on consumers' status signaling (Canavari et al., 2019). Given that consumers may seek to satisfy both status goals simultaneously (Dubois et al., 2021; Fuentes et al., 2023), we suggest a marketing strategy that integrates both signaling functions based on the results. This study empirically proves that global brands, such as luxury brands, should use sustainability claims in their communications to solve contradictions affecting consumer brand evaluations (Torelli et al., 2012). Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by

affirming the positive effect of sustainability attributes on luxury value. However, this effect is not amplified by one luxury brand function over the other. Rather, green luxury consumption is likely promoted via an apparent contradiction in consumers' status-signaling goals.

Deceptive signaling may occur when consumers make green luxury purchases to demonstrate care for others while pursuing personal goals (Fallis & Lewis, 2019). Conspicuous conservation, for instance, refers to consumers deliberately choosing expensive green alternatives to signal their concern for others through pro-social consumption (Sekhon & Armstrong Soule, 2020). However, this behavior may also be observed in individuals with pro-self (versus pro-others) goals (Li & Kang, 2024). Interestingly, evidence shows that egoism positively moderates the relationship between social-adjustive luxury brand promotion and purchase intention (Vera-Martínez et al., 2024). Furthermore, the role of consumer neuroticism is important – consumers may experience negative emotions associated with their brand choices, potentially driven by social competitiveness to achieve status affirmation using a social-adjustive brand function (Barrera & Ponce, 2021; Goor et al., 2020). Considering the lack of significant differences in WTP between social self-presentation and self-expression goals, it is reasonable to conclude that green luxury may simultaneously satisfy both goals. Based on this speculation, luxury brands could implement green strategies to increase prices, reflecting enhanced value proposition that encompasses both luxury brand functions.

Moreover, future research should examine consumers' deceptive signals through green luxury purchases as a form of social adaptation. Researchers can explore luxury consumption scenarios in which individuals hold specific beliefs or attitudes but make consumption choices that fulfill apparently opposite goals. Additionally, as consumers discover new ways to use luxury brands for social adaptation, the perceived value-to-price ratio may shift. Thus, studies can investigate the impact of this shift on other brand-related outcomes, such as changes in brand loyalty or brand intentions. The product category in this study – luxury sustainable cars – presents a unique consumption scenario in which green signaling is enabled by technological innovation. Consumers may signal status through access to cleaner, superior, or more sophisticated energy sources. Although energy sources such as electricity or fuel are common globally, they could become products through which consumers signal status (Cristini & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2020). Future studies could therefore investigate whether specific types of green signaling are attributable to status-enhancement rather than status-affirmation goals. Finally, this study focuses on one of the three components of sustainability: environmental/green attributes (Niskala & Tarna, 2003; Panwar et al., 2006). Subsequent studies can assess the moderating effects of the other two components (economic and social responsibility) on the relationship between social adaptation goals and luxury branding outcomes, such as increased WTP and other purchase intentions and behaviors.

6. Conclusions

This study finds that consumers do not exhibit a significant difference in WTP for a luxury good promoted via value-expressive claims and that for the same good promoted via social-adjustive claims. This finding suggests that consumers use luxury brands to express deceptive attitudes in anticipation of social benefits. This argument is supported by studies that compare scenarios simulating the interplay of different status goals (e.g., differentiation versus assimilation) and product type (e.g., green versus non-green luxury products). These findings illustrate how consumers continue to perceive luxury purchases as tools for social adaptation.

One limitation of this study is its focus on a single product category, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, the chosen context of luxury sustainable cars is of interest due to its unique status-signaling characteristics: (1) a luxury automobile is inherently conspicuous and intended for display, unlike other luxuries that might be hidden or used discreetly (e.g., home appliances or jewelry); (2) a luxury automobile cannot be easily counterfeited, unlike luxury fashion items; and (3) an environmentally friendly automobile represents a high-tech luxury product, differing from traditional high-craft, artisanal luxury goods such as haute couture gowns. Future research can explore these effects across different product categories that do not share these three characteristics to further validate the findings of this study.

The findings offer actionable insights for luxury marketers. Marketers should not rely solely on traditional status-driven messages. Green luxury products may hold value for consumers even in the absence of status signaling, suggesting that sustainability alone can serve as a compelling value proposition. Given that consumers may purchase sustainable luxury to satisfy both value-expressive and social-adjustive motives, brands could benefit from designing dual-purpose messaging. Marketing communications that convey both value-expressive cues (e.g., "stand out with conscious style") and social-adjustive messages (e.g., "join a community of responsible luxury consumers") may resonate more strongly with consumers motivated by dual signaling goals. Therefore, segmentation strategies could be refined to identify consumers most receptive to such dual signaling, particularly those who seek to affirm social status while maintaining a moral or environmentally responsible image. Regarding the observed parity between green and traditional luxury, marketers should consider positioning sustainable products as equivalent in prestige and desirability compared to their non-sustainable counterparts, thereby reducing the perceived trade-off between ethics and status.

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