LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

LJMU Research Online

Bai, H, Tassiello, V, Sun, Y and Shi, J

 Do Second-Hand Luxury Retailers Affect Luxury Brand Image? Exploring the Mediation of Construal Level Theory between Official and Unofficial Retailers

https://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/27161/

Article

For more information please contact researchonline@ljmu.ac.uk

Do second-hand luxury retailers affect luxury brand image? Exploring the mediation of construal level theory between official and unofficial retailers
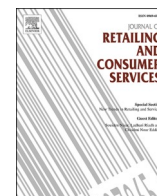
Huifeng Bai [a],[*] , Vito Tassiello [b] , Yan Sun [c] , Jin Shi [d]

[a] Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University, RB313, Redmonds Building, Brownlow Hill, Liverpool, L3 5UG, UK
[b] Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University, UK
[c] Oxford Brookes Business School, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, UK
[d] Faculty of Economics, Saitama University, Saitama, Japan

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates whether purchasing a second-hand luxury product via either an official or an unofficial retailer direct affects luxury brand image. This connection may be shaped by the activation of different levels of psychological construal (high vs. low) at the consumer level that mediate the consumer-brand relationship. Two online experiments were employed to observe the cause-effect connection and to assess whether the contextual conditions (i.e., retailer types) play a pivotal role in luxury brand image, especially when second-hand purchases are gaining popularity. The findings revealed that when consumers purchased second-hand luxury items from unofficial retailers, their perception of luxury brand image fell due to activation of a lower level of construal. This suggests a psychological focus on the product's tangible elements. The opposite occurred when consumers made second-hand luxury purchases from official retailers. Our paper extends the theoretical understanding of luxury brand image through integrating construal level theory and comparing unofficial and official retailers. Managers should develop an eco-system framework to redistribute second-hand products, carefully select where these products are sold, and adjust emphases on brand attributes to suit the retail context.

1. Introduction

The second-hand luxury market (i.e., buying and selling authenticated and previously-owned luxury branded goods) has significantly expanded in recent years (Turunen et al., 2020; Murtas and Pedeliento, 2025). Its market value reached $64 billion, with an annual growth rate (CARG) of 14.5 % from 2020 (Luxonomy, 2024). Further steady growth is expected up to 2027 (McKinsey, 2025).

Meanwhile, second-hand luxury consumption has emerged as an important academic research field (Ki et al., 2024; Luo and Park, 2024). Typical research topics include consumers' perceived values of second-hand luxury goods (Lou et al., 2022; Tu et al., 2022; Aycock et al., 2023), purchase motives (Kessous and Valette-Florence, 2019; Stolz, 2022; Rathi et al., 2023; Husain et al., 2025), and satisfaction (Ozuem et al., 2024). Other work covers the psychological reactions stemming from contextual elements such as retailers' types (Turunen and Pöyry, 2019) and characteristics (Turunen and Leipamaa-Leskinen, 2015). Overall, the second-hand luxury market is rapidly growing.

Prestigious retail brands such as Selfridges (one of the UK's most reputable high-end department stores) have launched initiatives like RESELFRIDGES to distribute second-hand luxury goods, and Rolex has restructured its distribution strategy to include officially authorized retailers for pre-owned Rolex watches (Bloomberg, 2024). Meanwhile, informal retailers such as jewelers and private resellers continue to expand their market presence. Digital platforms and social media are also prominent; for example, DesignerExchange.com, a UK-based online retailer, offers a wide range of second-hand luxury products, and social media influencers like Lorenzo Ruzza have amassed over 635,000 followers on TikTok, further driving market participation and consumer engagement. However, this growth appears to be largely unregulated, with few prior studies examining the roles of unofficial and official retailers as venues for second-hand consumption, or their potential impact on luxury brand image (Park et al., 2025).

Exploring the effect of unofficial retail channels on luxury brand image is particularly pertinent due to the risks that uncontrolled consumption experiences can pose to that image, potentially leading to

---

This article is part of a special issue entitled: Luxury Retail & Consumer Services published in Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: H.Bai@ljmu.ac.uk (H. Bai), V.Tassiello@ljmu.ac.uk (V. Tassiello), Ysun@brookes.ac.uk (Y. Sun), Shijin@mail.saitama-u.ac.jp (J. Shi).

negative outcomes for consumers and a damaged brand image (Debenedetti et al., 2025; Murtas and Pedeliento, 2025). The expanding combination of unofficial and official retailers has increased the number of touching and selling points in favor of a more diversified clientele (Hu et al., 2025). The increasing diffusion of second-hand retailers has impacted on consumers volumes, attracting more occasional luxury consumers, boosted by opportunistic factors such as affordability and obtaining a luxury piece faster (Bellezza and Keinan, 2014; Kumar et al., 2022). These factors, combined with the retailer context (unofficial versus official), activate different psychological construals. This leads consumers to adopt various mindsets, and consequently, different behaviors.

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether purchasing a second-hand luxury product, either from an unofficial or an official retailer, has direct effects on luxury brand image due to the activation of construal mindsets that mediate the relationship. Through a series of experiments, it explores whether the retailer format (unofficial *vs.* official) changes consumers' mindset, and thus increases or decreases their luxury brand image perceptions. It finds that unofficial retailers trigger a more concrete mindset focusing on the product's tangible elements, and consequently, can decrease brand image value, while official retailers offer a high-level consumer experience, triggering an abstract mindset and boosting brand image. The present study uses the lens of consumers' mental representations (i.e., construal level theory; CLT) while addressing this special issue's research question on customer experiences and market dynamics (Klaus and Tynan, 2022; Klaus et al., 2023; Pangarkar and Shukla, 2023).

The paper is organized as follows: the next section reviews the existing literature on luxury brand image to provide theoretical background. Subsequently, we develop our hypotheses to consider the effects of (i) unofficial and official retailers and (ii) CLT as a psychological condition activated in consumers' minds. Two web experiments are then presented, detailing the study design, measurements, and results. Finally, we set out the theoretical and managerial implications, suggest future research avenues, and discussing limitations.

2. Theoretical framework

Luxury brands are defined as "branded product or service that consumers perceive to: be high quality; offer authentic value via desired benefits, whether functional or emotional; have a prestigious image within the market built on qualities such as artisanship, craftsmanship, or service quality; be worthy of commanding a premium price; and be capable of inspiring a deep connection, or resonance, with the consumer" (Ko et al., 2019, p.406). Luxury brands are intrinsically linked with the concept of brand image (e.g., the perception present in consumers' memory, as a network of associations) resulting from the effects of mental associations and consumer behaviour (Mitra and Jenamani, 2020). The brand image is a vital marketing factor for luxury sector organizations (Klaus and Tynan, 2022).

Studies have highlighted how luxury brand image is characterized by tangible values such as top-level, authentic, high-quality consumer goods, along with intangible values such as status signaling (Han et al., 2010; Boisvert and Ashill, 2022) and social recognition (Loureico et al., 2020). Using the brand luxury index (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004), Wiedmann et al. (2009) categorized four elements of luxury brands' perceived values: financial value (including price), functional value (including usability, quality, and uniqueness), individual value (including self-identity, hedonism, and materialism), and social value (including conspicuousness and prestige). Studies have also explored which elements from a successful luxury brand image (Veloutsou et al., 2022). Premium price, high quality (in terms of materials and durability), a prestigious image, a clear brand identity (e.g., logo, brand story, and package), signature designs, and premium aesthetics, ancestral heritage, and emotional resonance with consumers all contribute to building a successful luxury brand image (Keller, 2009).

The fashion sector presents some peculiar conditions to identifying a luxury brand image, with a pivotal role for retailing. Moore et al. (2010) argued that luxury brands are retailers, and emphasized the importance of controlled retail distribution channels in providing premium customer services. Fionda and Moore (2009) and Bai et al. (2022) revealed that over-exposure caused by over-distribution and unauthorized parallel distribution can dilute and damage luxury brand images by enabling easier accessibility. Importantly, luxury brand image is an organizational dimension that temporally fluctuates, provoking diverse consumers reactions (Shukla et al., 2015; Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2022; Milanesi et al., 2024). Causes of declining luxury brand image can include easier accessibility and affordability (Dall'Olmo et al., 2015), over-distribution by unofficial retailers (both online and offline) (Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2016), and inconsistent consumer experiences across online and offline channels (Bai et al., 2024). Indeed, consumers' in-store experiences have a significant impact on their psychology and perceptions (Sinha and Lu, 2019; Scarpi, 2021). CLT suggests that subjective psychological distance is primarily shaped by egocentric reference points across various dimensions: space, time, social, and hypothetical (Trope and Liberman, 2003, 2010). Analogously, retail environments represent a spatial condition that influences consumers' psychological distances. The physical setting of a store, whether a prestigious, official store or an unofficial, informal marketplace, acts as a spatial cue affecting how consumers construe their purchase experience. Thus, the spatial aspects of retail spaces significantly shape consumer mindset and behavior by activating different levels of psychological construal.

Therefore, luxury brand image is a variable condition that depends on consumers' mental representations of the experience, and is influenced by the retail context (Dion and Borraz, 2017).

3. Hypotheses development

3.1. Official vs. unofficial retailers

Retailers can be categorized as official or unofficial (Thi Hong Nguyen et al., 2013). Official retailers (also known as authorized retailers) are distributors with formal approval from manufacturers and/or brands to sell their products and provide services, and are usually clearly acknowledged as such. Official retailers often display official communications or ad hoc visual cues, and offer comprehensive guarantees of product authenticity. They deliver the same consumers experiences as an original store, and adhere to established brand guidelines and standards (Lunardo and Mouangue, 2019). Consumers thus benefit through buying authentic products, ensuring quality and reliability, official warranties, and after-sales customer support including efficient returns and exchange processes (Robertson et al., 2020).

Unofficial retailers, in contrast, lack formal agreements with the original manufacturers to sell their products (Huang et al., 2008). Although some may offer official warranties, they do not guarantee the prime consumption experience equal to the official retailer's, nor do they necessarily adhere to brand guidelines and standards. Unofficial retailers sell in secondary markets, on unauthorized online platforms (e. g., resale websites and social media marketplaces), and even in the grey market. They may offer discounted deals, but cannot add value to the consumer experience. Consumers therefore cannot enjoy unconditional trust due to products sourced via parallel imports and overstock, and the possibility of unofficial private vendors selling counterfeits or defective products (Xu et al., 2024). For example, Moore and Birtwistle (2004) found that Burberry's brand image had been diluted due to the over-distribution of its product by unofficial retailers.

Retailers' official or unofficial nature can influence consumers' overall experience, with outcomes potentially impacting the brand image (Shahid et al., 2022). A key contextual condition for this research is consumers' physical in-store experience. Official retailers' store

designs, layouts, and visual merchandising all meet luxury brands' requirements, which are set to demonstrate their values and maintain their luxury brand image (Joy et al., 2014). Unofficial retailers, in contrast, often operate multi-brand stores with imprecise layouts and multiple marketing messages. In them, selling is more important than maintaining a positive luxury brand image (Kumagai and Nagasawa, 2022). Consumer skepticism can arise from concerns about counterfeits, subpar quality, or misleading representations (Ferraro et al., 2016). As a result, the brand image can suffer because the perceived product value falls when associated with less reputable selling environments. In contrast, interactions with official retailers elevate the brand image, ensuring that customers receive authentic products and high-quality service, thus maintaining the aspirational status often associated with luxury brands. Therefore:

H1. Second-hand luxury products sold by an unofficial retailer (vs. an official retailer) decrease (vs. increase) luxury brand image.

3.2. Consumers' mental representations and construal level theory

Consumers' mental representations of objects and consumption events are influenced by their interpretations of the surrounding reality (Liberman et al., 2007). These representations lead consumers to psychologically construe objects and events, in turn impacting their behavior and reactions (Liberman et al., 2007). These mental representations are described by scholars as either high- or low-level construal, where construal activation is context-dependent in that different consumption experiences and different locations (i.e., different retailers) activate distinctive mindsets, affecting consumers' predictions, decisions, or behaviors (Liberman et al., 2007).

High-level construal occurs when consumers think abstractly by focusing on abstract elements, and on the bigger picture rather than details. They are thus more likely to concentrate on the central features that capture the overall essence of the object or event (Hernandez et al., 2015), paying attention to the desirability of that object or event, and emphasizing the "why" of an action (Rosendo-Rios and Shukla, 2023). Low-level construal is more detail-oriented and subordinate to mental processes. It occurs when consumers think more concretely and imagine actions in very close psychological proximity. In this condition, consumers focus on the present in great detail, to capture the overall gist of the object or event (Septianto et al., 2021), and emphasize "how" an object or event differs from others (Dhar and Kim, 2007). Consumers here tend to mentally focus on the feasibility of the action (Kim et al., 2016).

These two different mental paradigms produce diverse behaviors when activated in consumers. When adopting higher construal, consumers tend to consider desirability-related choices, whereas consumers with lower construal envision feasibility-related choices (Liberman and Trope, 1998). Therefore, consumer shopping behavior is closely linked to construal activation. Scarpi (2021) found that CLT is a moderating factor behind shopping behavior and that hedonic purchases (i.e., those processed for pleasure) are elaborated at higher construal levels (i.e., abstract), while utilitarian ones (i.e., those with task-orientation intention) are elaborated at lower construal (i.e., concrete). Retailers are not exempt from this mental representation, although the relevant literature is scarce. According to Park et al. (2023), situational factors such as in-store art elements can significantly influence consumer perceptions and evaluations at the construal level. Similarly, Sinha and Lu (2019) examined the impact of negative in-store experiences on consumers' construal levels, particularly in terms of recovery actions. They recommended that retailers should align their compensation strategies with consumers' construal levels to enhance post-recovery customer satisfaction, improve reviews, and boost intended loyalty and brand referral behavior. Indeed, the allure of luxury brands is often driven by their exclusivity and ability to convey status, which fosters consumer desire (Klaus and Tynan, 2022).

Official second-hand luxury retailers promote a high level of construal, where consumers focus on abstract attributes and the prestige associated with ownership over time. In contrast, unofficial second-hand retailers emphasize materialism and functional utility, thus diminishing the intangible value of luxury brands (Murtas and Pedeliento, 2025). This produces a lower level of construal, where attention shifts to concrete features over time, aligning with the earlier discussion on how context affects construal levels and consumer behavior. Overall, we posit that these findings suggest an effect of contextual retail conditions on construal level. We suggest that when consumers are in official (vs. unofficial) retail contexts, they are more likely to activate higher (lower) construal and focus on detailed elements of the luxury product such as intangible (tangible) and abstract (concrete) features, consequently increasing (decreasing) their mental representation of the luxury brand image. In other words, an unofficial retail environment, activating as a more proximal and tangible focus, may trigger more concrete, low-level construals focused on feasibility and immediate details. Conversely, official retail spaces, activating as more distant or detached from the consumer's immediate environment, may evoke more abstract, high-level construals centered on desirability and broader brand perceptions. Therefore:

H2. Second-hand luxury products distributed by an unofficial retailer (vs. an official retailer) decrease (vs. increase) luxury brand image due to the activation of lower (vs. higher) mental construal.

4. Methodology

A series of two experiments was designed to test our theory. Experiments were preferred over other methods because controlled, well-defined scenarios enable the systematic manipulation of the key variable (unofficial versus official store), allowing precise comparisons of respondents' perceptions and behaviors. Guiding participants to imagine specific contexts minimizes extraneous variability, thereby enhancing internal validity and enabling more accurate causal inferences regarding different retail environments and the activation of distinct mindsets. Additionally, detailed, realistic scenarios enhance ecological validity by closely simulating real-world decision-making processes, increasing the relevance and applicability of the findings.

In Study 1, we examined the main effect of whether the nature of the retail setting (official vs. unofficial) of second-hand luxury goods influences different mental representations of brand image. In Study 2, we delved deeper into the nuanced aspects of consumer psychology as predicted by our model. Specifically, study 2 investigated whether the type of retail setting prompts consumers to activate different levels of mental construal (high vs. low). We employed the 10-item Behavioral Identification Form (BIF; adapted from Vallacher and Wegner, 1989) to observe whether this serves as the mediating factor for varying perceptions of brand image. We used the BIF to assess mindset activation across scenarios, with respondents randomly assigned to conditions. The BIF was tailored to the retail context and focused on the intention to purchase a luxury watch to enhance ecological validity and capture authentic psychological responses. It measures how individuals interpret their actions at different levels of abstractness (ranging from concrete behaviors to identity-related meanings), making it suitable for our study. This allowed us to explore how various retail scenarios activate distinct mindsets and influence decision-making. Both studies were designed with realistic scenarios, and the data were collected online from different countries (the UK, China, and Japan) between December 2024 and February 2025.

5. Study 1: the retail context's effect on brand image

Study 1 examined the main prediction that purchase experiences in unofficial (vs. official) retailers of luxury products decrease (increase) the perception of the brand image.

5.1. Design, stimuli, and procedure

We tested our proposed effect using a designed and manipulated scenario. Participants were prompted to imagine themselves in a specific purchasing context: either at an unofficial (unauthorized, peer-to-peer) or at an official (certified, authorized) retailer. In this imagined scenario, the respondents were asked to consider purchasing a luxury second-hand Rolex watch, and to mentally simulate the experience of acquiring the product within that environment. To enhance the realism of this mental construction, detailed descriptions were provided, emphasizing the intention to acquire and possess the watch as soon as possible. Additionally, to manipulate the experimental conditions, participants were randomly assigned to one of two scenarios, each with tailored descriptions of the retail environment. The unofficial retailer was characterized as a generic reseller of pre-owned timepieces, located within a jewelry and pawnbroker store, whereas the official retailer was a prestigious luxury department store specializing in authentic luxury watches. These contrasting descriptions were designed to observe the respondents' perceptions in line with their assigned condition, enabling the examination of differences in attitudes towards brand image based on the purchase retail context. Then, the respondents were exposed to manipulation checks (This reseller is an official one; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), then a double measure for brand image (How does the reseller impact the brand image of the watch that you intend to buy?; Buying a watch from this reseller will have a positive or negative impact on the image of Rolex as brand and company; 1 = very negatively; 7 = very positively). Finally, the respondents gave attention checks and demographics information.

5.2. Results and discussion

In all, 226 respondents (63 % Female, M_{age} = 32.6 SD = 9.8) voluntarily took part in our online study. They were distributed to the conditions as follows: official retail n = 119; unofficial retail n = 107. Initially, we checked for manipulation and their correct functionality in the study ($M_{unofficial\ retail}$ = 2.45, SD 1.7; $M_{official\ retail}$ = 5.2, SD 1.7; F (1, 224) = .56, t −11.8; p = .001), the results suggesting statistical significance. Then, we averaged the items for brand image (Cronbach's Alpha = .8; Cronbach's Alpha measures the internal consistency of scale items, with values above .7 suggesting good reliability and validity) and employed brand image as a dependent variable. To test H1, we employed a one-way ANOVA because it assesses whether different

conditions have distinct effects on a variable of interest, thus identifying underlying patterns in the data. We scrutinized the differences between the manipulated conditions, observing significant statistical differences in the perception of brand image ($M_{unofficial\ retail}$ = 3.7, SD 1.3; $M_{official\ retail}$ = 4.5, SD 1.3; F (1, 224) = 18.4; p = .000; see Fig. 1). We also checked for contrasts, and confirmed a statistical difference between the conditions (t (1, 224) = −4.9; p = .001 C.I. 95 % = [−1.1, −.4]). No effects for gender and age were observed.

The results provide initial evidence in support of our proposed H1, suggesting that when consumers are in a position to purchase a second-hand luxury product, those buying the same product from an unofficial retailer state have a lower brand image of that product than those who buy it from an official retailer. The latter develop a stronger and more positive brand image of the product. This also suggests that a psychological component in consumers plays a pivotal role, as investigated in Study 2.

6. Study 2: the mediating effect of construal level theory

Study 2 investigated the mediating role of mental construal activation (high vs. low) on brand image, triggered by the contextual conditions in which consumers act (unofficial vs. official retailers). The mediation model was preferred over the moderation model because it more effectively explains the underlying psychological process driving consumer behavior. Specifically, by using the BIF score (which reflects the activation of different mindsets) as a mediator, the model captures how the retail context influences consumer perceptions indirectly through changes in mindset. This exploration was conducted to test H2.

6.1. Design, stimuli, and procedure

This study retained the structure of Study 1 with the integration of the BIF scale (Vallecher and Wegner, 1989; e.g., construal level) through the adaptation of the ten items (see Table 1), presented before the dependent variable measurements. The adaptation of the 10-item scale was pretested online with 43 participants recruited from Prolific.com, who were compensated for their time (n = 43; 56 % female; M_{age} = 40.6, SD = 11.5). The pretest confirmed that the statements were correctly perceived as either lower construal (coded as 0 for concrete items) or higher construal (coded as 1 for abstract items). In Study 2, the items were aggregated to create the BIF index, representing the level of mental construal. Higher scores on the BIF index signify the activation of higher
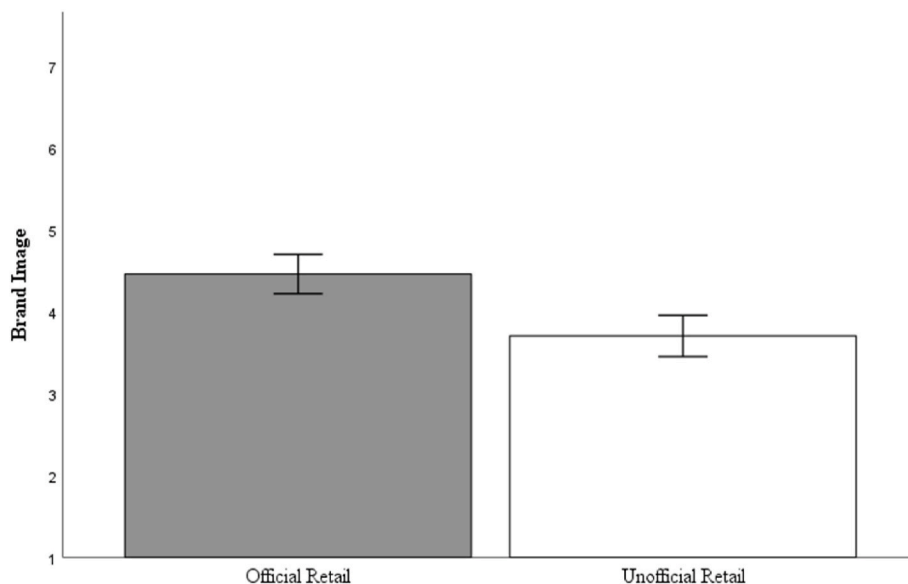

Fig. 1. _ Mean differences per condition.

Table 1
_ Items adapted from the 10-Item Behavioral Form used in Study 2.

Item	Behavior (concrete vs abstract)
Make a Purchase	Buying a watch from a store *or* Acquiring a reliable timepiece
Choosing a seller	Comparing watch prices from different sellers *or* Evaluating a seller's trustworthiness
Researching the Watch	Reading the watch's specifications and features *or* Understanding the watch's quality
Assessing Authenticity	Checking for authenticity certificates *or* Ensuring the value of my investment
Considering After-Sales Support	Inquiring about warranty options *or* Securing long-term satisfaction with my purchase
Making a Decision	Deciding which watch to buy *or* Selecting a watch that fits my lifestyle
Interpreting Customer Reviews	Reading online reviews from previous buyers *or* Gaining insights into the watch's performance
Negotiating the Price	Discussing price with the seller *or* Maximizing value for my money
Finalizing the Payment	Completing the checkout process *or* Investing in a quality accessory
Returning the Watch (if necessary)	Taking the watch back to the seller *or* Ensuring that I'm happy with my purchase

construal (i.e., an abstract mindset), whereas lower scores denote lower construal (i.e., a concrete mindset). Finally, attention checks were employed, and demographic information was collected.

6.2. Results and discussion

A total of 451 respondents participated (59 % Female, $M_{age} = 32.3$ $SD = 9.5$), and were distributed on conditions as follows: unofficial retailer $n = 199$; official retailer $n = 252$. A manipulation check assessed the statistical validity of our designed scenario in line with Study 1 ($M_{unofficial\ retail} = 2.2$, SD 1.7; $M_{official\ retail} = 6.1$, SD 1.5; $F(1, 449) = 5.3$, t 25; $p = .001$). Subsequently, we averaged the two items measuring brand image ($\alpha = .9$) and employed brand image as the dependent variable. We aggregated measurements for the BIF (i.e., the construal level) by summing the values selected for each item to create a general index, which we used as a mediator. We conducted a one-way ANOVA to assess the primary differences between the manipulated conditions (see Table 2), which yielded statistically significant results. We then examined the differences between the conditions and found a statistically significant difference for both brand image (t(1, 449) = −2.6; p = .001; 95 % confidence interval = [−1.6, −0.2]) and BIF (t(1, 449) = −18.4; p = .001; 95 % confidence interval = [−3.1, −2.5]). No effects related to gender or age were observed.

6.3. Mediation

To test H2, we employed a mediation model (see Fig. 2) using the bias corrected method (Hayes, 2017; model 4; 5000 bootstrap). The model shows a general fit relation among the variables included in the model ($R^2 = 0.4$, $p = .000$). BIF (e.g., construal level) has a significant effect on the whole model, in both manipulated conditions (unofficial retail vs. official retail; $b = −1.5$; SE = .34, t(452) = −4.4 $p = .000$; 95 % confidence interval (CI) = [−2.1, −.83]). Further, the direct effect of the manipulated condition shows a significant tendency on the brand image ($b = −2.8$; SE = .15, t(448) = −17, p = .000, 95 % CI = [−3, −2.4]). The

Table 2
_ Statistical differences of the main conditions employed in the study.

		Mean	SD	
BIF	Official retail	5.6	3.7	F(1, 450) = 19.30; p = .001
	Unofficial retail	4.1	3.5	
Brand Image	Official retail	5.4	1.4	F(1, 450) = 340; p = .001
	Unofficial retail	2.6	1.8	

indirect effect of BIF (e.g., construal level) on brand image was also statistically significant (($b = .1$; SE = .5, 95 % CI = [−.11, −.10]), confirming our H2.

This study demonstrates that the nature of the retailer influences consumers' mental representations, subsequently affecting brand image. Specifically, we find that when consumers are asked to imagine purchasing a second-hand luxury watch from an official retailer, they are more likely to form a more positive brand image with the activation of a higher mental construal (i.e., an abstract mindset). In contrast, when prompted to envision purchasing the same item from an unofficial retailer, consumers activate lower mental construal (i.e., a concrete mindset), which negatively impacts their perception of the brand image.

7. Conclusion

This research has examined the effects of purchasing second-hand luxury products through unofficial vs. official retail channels. This inquiry is significant because the existing literature largely overlooks how contextual factors, such as the retail environment, influence consumers' perceptions of luxury brand image (Turunen et al., 2020; Klaus and Tynan, 2022; Stolz, 2022; Rosendo-Rios and Shukla, 2023; Liu, 2024). We hypothesized that different retail contexts activate different psychological perceptions as explained by CLT. Through two online experiments, by examining the activation of CLT (high vs. low construal levels), we demonstrated how unofficial vs. official retail channels impact consumers' perceptions of luxury brand image differently. Our findings indicate that CLT mediates the relationship between retail type and luxury brand image. Specifically, purchasing through official retailers tends to activate a high-level construal, leading consumers to evaluate the luxury brand image more highly. In contrast, unofficial retailers invoke lower-level construal, prompting a focus on the product's tangible elements and diminishing the perceived luxury brand image.

7.1. Theoretical and managerial implications

The theoretical contributions of this paper are twofold. Firstly, it confirms that luxury brand image is dynamic in nature, as it varies over time (Ko et al., 2019) and can be perceived differently in different conditions (Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2022). We identify retailers as a contextual condition that leverages brand efforts. This study contributes to the literature on luxury retailing by differentiating between official and unofficial second-hand luxury goods retailers. Although Liu (2024) explored the influence on consumer loyalty of second-hand luxury goods retailers' distribution channels, many retailers are unauthorized by luxury brands (Turunen and Pöyry, 2019). Rapid technological development, especially e-commerce, has lowered market entry barriers for unofficial retailers unable to offer the official brand experiences of luxury brands (Murtas and Pedeliento, 2025). Unofficial retailers' profit maximization emphasizes the physical elements of products such as affordability, features, and wearability rather than the intangible values intrinsically offered by luxury brands (Moore and Birtwistle, 2004). Secondly, this research combines luxury brand image, second-hand luxury retailing, and the CLT. Its findings suggest that the CLT is a context-dependent psychological condition. Physical immersion in one retail contexts (unofficial vs. official) leverages specific mental construal and inclines consumers to focus on certain attributes of the luxury products, producing different consumption expectations.

As we have demonstrated, the activation of different mindsets generates valuable insights for managers and practitioners and aligns with previous CLT findings (Liberman et al., 2007). For instance, managers can tailor their language during communications, being mindful that psychological mindsets are associated with specific semantic structures (Schellekens et al., 2010). In unofficial retail contexts, conversations may emphasize action verbs (e.g., "This watch is ready to wear"), whereas in official retail, language may use more adjectives (e.g., "This
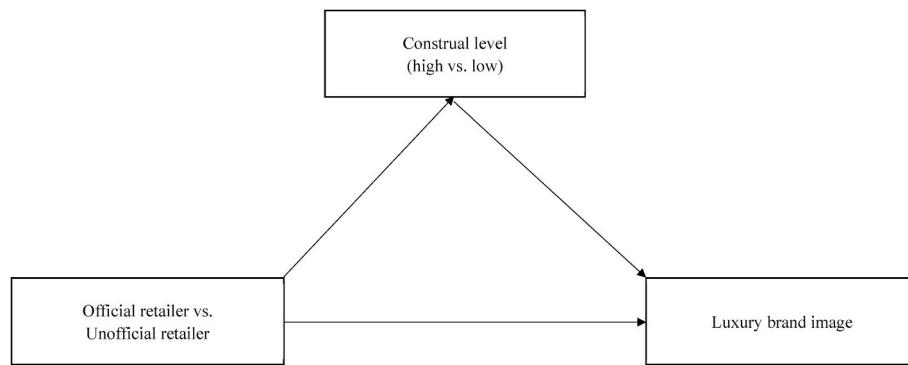
Fig. 2. _ The mediation model.

watch is beautiful on you"). Such strategic language use can influence consumer perceptions by aligning communication with the relevant mindset. Furthermore, our findings suggest that the consumers' decision-making varies depending on retailer's type. In unofficial retail settings, consumers' decisions depend on the utility perceived by the action, while in official retail, it depends on the desirability of the product.

7.2. Limitations and future research direction

Despite its original contributions, this paper's limitations are four-fold. Firstly, luxury brand image was employed as the theoretical framework. The CLT and retailer's types (unofficial vs. official) were evaluated. Other dimensions should also be considered by future studies, such as in-store layout, communication, and staff behavior. Further, consumer psychology researchers might investigate how consumers establish alternatives in-store, and how they weigh products' attributes. Secondly, the research data was collected from different countries (China, Japan, and the UK), possibly raising different levels of sensitivity to the unofficial vs official retailers' cultural influences. Therefore, future studies could explore the key cultural factors influencing consumers' perceptions of second-hand luxury retailers (unofficial vs. official). Also, alternative psychological paradigms (i.e., self-esteem and signal-identity) need to be considered to understand if complementary factors shape brand evaluations. Future research may focus on different consumers outcomes, such as intentions to re-purchase from unofficial vs. official retailers, and intentions to share consumption experiences with others (i.e., WOM). Thirdly, a new perspective on brand and marketing management could be taken. For instance, scholars could explore whether/how luxury brands should engage in, or avoid, the second-hand luxury retail market. Studies may investigate what are the effects of controlling the second-hand market directly or indirectly (or not) and the alternative reasons encouraging consumers to buy second-hand luxury products. For instance, not all second-hand luxury consumers are motivated by savings, as many seek collection pieces and nostalgic products (Liu, 2024), such as Tom Ford's Gucci, John Galliano's Givenchy and (Christian) Dior. Finally, scholars could investigate whether second-hand luxury retailers should invest in, and focus on, different store layouts and visual merchandising to enhance consumers' experiences (high construal level) and/or sale-oriented display (low construal level).

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Huifeng Bai: Writing – original draft, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Vito Tassiello:** Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis. **Yan Sun:** Methodology, Data curation. **Jin Shi:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Resources, Project administration, Funding acquisition.

Ethical approval

It was performed in accordance with the ethical standards as laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The authors adhered to the highest level of integrity and transparency throughout the process of data analysis and reporting.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

References

Aycock, M., Cho, E., Kim, K., 2023. "I like to buy pre-owned luxury fashion products": understanding online second-hand luxury fashion shopping motivations and perceived value of young adult consumers. J. Globl. Fashion Marketing 14 (3), 327–349.

Bai, H., McColl, J., Moore, C., 2022. Luxury fashion retailers' localised marketing strategies in practice – evidence from China. Int. Mark. Rev. 39 (2), 352–370.

Bai, H., Shi, J., Song, P., McColl, J., Moore, C., Fillis, I., 2024. Localised multiple channel distribution strategies of luxury fashion retailers – evidence from China. J. Fashion Marketing Manag. 28 (6), 1151–1169.

Bellezza, S., Keinan, A., 2014. Brand tourists: how non-core users enhance the brand image by elicting pride. J. Consum. Res. 41 (2), 397–417.

Bloomberg, 2024. Rolex will now sell you a used watch – but you'll pay a price. Available at: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-09-24/rolex-will-now-sell-you-a-used-watch-but-you-ll-pay-a-price?embedded-checkout=true.

Bolsvert, J., Ashill, N., 2022. The impact of luxury brand status signaling, extension authenticity and fit on luxury line extension evaluation: a cross-national study. Int. Mark. Rev. 39 (2), 395–422.

Dall'Olmo, R., Pina, J., Bravo, R., 2015. The role of perceived value in vertical brand extensions of luxury and premium brands. J. Market. Manag. 31 (7/8), 881–913.

Debenedetti, A., Philippe, D., Dion, D., 2025. Balancing exclusivity and inclusivity through the strategic domestication of the luxury retail experience. Int. J. Res. Market. 42 (1), 32–54.

Dhar, R., Kim, E., 2007. Seeing the Forest or the Trees: Implications of Construal Level. J. Consum. Psychol. 17 (2), 96–100.

Dion, D., Borraz, S., 2017. Managing status: how luxury brands shape class subjectivities in the service encounter. J. Market. 81 (5), 67–85.

Ferraro, C., Sands, S., Brace-Govan, J., 2016. The role of fashionability in second-hand shopping motivations. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 32, 262–268.

Fionda, A., Moore, C., 2009. The anatomy of the luxury brand. J. Brand Manag. 16 (5/6), 347–363.

Han, Y., Nunes, J., Drèze, X., 2010. Signaling status with luxury goods: the role of brand prominence. J. Market. 74 (4), 15–30.

Hernandez, J., Wright, S., Rodrigues, F., 2015. Attributes versus benefits: the role of construal levels and appeal type on the persuasiveness of marketing messages. J. Advert. 44, 243–253, 3.

Hu, L., Olivieri, M., Giovannetti, M., Cedrola, E., 2025. The retail strategies of luxury fashion firms in the metaverse: enhancing brand experiences. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 84, 104202.

Huang, J., Lee, B., Hsiao, C., 2008. Managing channel quality: the consequential impacts of the grey market. Total Qual. Manag. Bus. Excel. 19 (12), 1235–1247.

Husain, S., Kamath, R., Moorthy, J., 2025. Navigating the sustainability – luxury paradox: bibliometric insights and research directions. J. Consum. Behav. 24 (3), 1222–1248.

Joy, A., Wang, J., Chan, T., Sherry, J., Cui, G., 2014. M(Art)Worlds: consumer perceptions of how luxury brand stores become art institutions. J. Retailing 90 (3), 347–364.

Kapferer, J., Valette-Florence, P., 2016. Beyond rarity: the paths of luxury desire – how luxury brands grow yet remain desirable. J. Prod. Brand Manag. 25 (2), 120–133.

Kapferer, J., Valette-Florence, P., 2022. The myth of the universal millennial: comparing millennials' perceptions of luxury across six countries. Int. Mark. Rev. 39 (2), 149–165.

Keller, K., 2009. Managing the growth tradeoff: challenges and opportunities in luxury branding. J. Brand Manag. 16 (5), 290–301.

Kessous, A., Valette-Florence, P., 2019. "From Prada to Nada": consumers and their luxury products: a contrast between second-hand and first-hand luxury products. J. Bus. Res. 102, 313–327.

Ki, C., Li, C., Chenn, A., Chong, S., Cho, E., 2024. Wise consumer choices in online secondhand luxury (OSHL) shopping: an integrated model of motivations, attitudes, and purchase intentions for OSHL as wise, conspicuous, and sustainable consumption. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 76, 103571.

Kim, J., Kim, P., Kim, J., Magnini, V., 2016. Application of construal-level theory to promotional strategies in the hotel industry. J. Trav. Res. 55 (3), 340–352.

Klaus, P., Tynan, C., 2022. The future of luxury management – 5 megatrends that are here to stay: guidance for researchers and managers. J. Market. Manag. 38 (13/14), 1271–1277.

Klaus, P., Kuppelwieser, V., Heinonen, K., 2023. Quantifying the influence of customer experience on consumer share-of-category. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 73, 103375.

Ko, E., Costello, J., Taylor, J., 2019. What is a luxury brand? A new definition and review of the literature. J. Bus. Res. 99, 405–413.

Kumagai, K., Nagasawa, S., 2022. Hedonic shopping experience, subjective well-being and brand luxury: a comparative discussion of physical stores and e-retailers. Asia Pacific J. Mark. Logistics 34 (9), 1809–1826.

Kumar, V., Khan, I., Fatma, M., Singh, A., 2022. Engaging luxury brand consumers on social media. J. Consum. Market. 39 (1), 121–132.

Liberman, N., Trope, Y., 1998. The role of feasibility and desirability considerations in near and distant future decisions: a test of temporal construal theory. J. Pers. Soc. Psychol. 75 (1), 5–18.

Liberman, N., Trope, Y., Wakslak, C., 2007. Construal Level Theory and Consumer Behavior. J. Consumer Psychol. 17 (2), 113–117.

Liu, H., 2024. Investigating Pre-loved Luxury Fashion Consumption: Evidence from the Chinese Consumers. Liverpool John Moores University, UK. Unpublished PhD thesis.

Lou, X., Chi, T., Janke, J., Desch, G., 2022. How do perceived value and risk affect purchase intention toward second-hand luxury goods? An empirical study of U.S. consumers. Sustainability 14 (18), 11730.

Loureico, S., Jiménez-Barreto, J., Romero, J., 2020. Enhancing brand coolness through perceived luxury values: insight from luxury fashion brands. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 57, 102211.

Lunardo, R., Mouangue, E., 2019. Getting over discomfort in luxury brand stores: how pop-up stores affect perceptions of luxury, embarrassment, and Store evaluations. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 49, 77–85.

Luo, H., Park, S., 2024. Exploring barriers to secondhand luxury consumption among Chinese consumers and changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. J. Bus. Res. 174, 114497.

Luxonomy, 2024. Report on the global second-hand luxury market. Available at: https://luxonomy.net/report-on-the-global-second-hand-luxury-market/.

McKinsey, 2025. The state of fashion 2025: challenges at every turn. Available at: https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/state-of-fashion.

Milanesi, M., Runfola, A., Guercini, S., 2024. Exploring the internationalization pathways of luxury SMEs: is there an asset of foreignness? Int. Mark. Rev. 41 (3/4), 806–826.

Mitra, S., Jenamani, M., 2020. OBIM: a computational model to estimate brand image from online consumer review. J. Bus. Res. 114, 213–226.

Moore, C., Birtwistle, G., 2004. The burberry business model: creating an international luxury fashion brand. Int. J. Retail Distrib. Manag. 32 (8), 42–422.

Moore, C., Doherty, A., Doyle, S., 2010. Flagship stores as a market entry method: the perspective of luxury fashion retailing. Eur. J. Market. 44 (1/2), 139–161.

Murtas, G., Pedeliento, G., 2025. Investigating the customer journey in second-hand fashion platforms: implications for luxury brand management. J. Consum. Behav. 24 (2), 655–672.

Ozuem, W., Willis, M., Rangagni, S., Rovai, S., Howell, K., 2024. The nature and determinants of user-generated context for dissatisfied customers: evidence from second-hand luxury fashion brands. Qualitative Market Res. 27 (5), 866–891.

Pangarkar, A., Shukla, P., 2023. Conspicuous and inconspicuous consumption of luxury goods in a digital world: insights, implications, and future research directions. Int. J. Advert. 42 (7), 1226–1238.

Park, S., Kim, S., Ahn, S., 2023. The role of consumers' construal level in art-infusion-type effect on retail product evaluation. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 73, 103342.

Park, J., Ahn, S., Lee, S., 2025. Pre-owned, still precious: how emotional attachment shapes pre-owned luxury consumption. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 87, 104420.

Rathi, R., Jain, S., Garg, R., 2023. Exploring young consumer's adoption of secondhand luxury: insights from a qualitative study. J. Fash. Mark. Manag. 28 (1), 117–138.

Robertson, T., Hamilton, R., Jap, S., 2020. Many (un)happy returns? The changing nature of retail product returns and future research directions. J. Retailing 96 (2), 172–177.

Rosendo-Rios, V., Shukla, P., 2023. The effects of masstige on loss of scarcity and behavioral intentions for traditional luxury consumers. J. Bus. Res. 156, 113490.

Scarpi, D., 2021. A construal-level Approach to Hedonic and Utilitarian Shopping Orientation. Marketing Lett. 32 (2), 261–271.

Schellekens, G.A., Verlegh, P.W., Smidts, A., 2010. Language abstraction in word of mouth. J. Consum. Res. 37 (2), 207–223.

Septianto, F., Lee, M., Putra, P., 2021. Everyday "low price" or everyday "value"? The interactive effects of framing and contrual level on consumer purchase intentions. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 58, 102317.

Shahid, S., Paul, J., Gilal, F., Ansari, S., 2022. The role of sensory marketing and brand experience in building emotional attachment and brand loyalty in luxury retail stores. Psychol. Marketing 39 (7), 1398–1412.

Shukla, P., Singh, J., Banerjee, M., 2015. They are not all same: variations in Asian consumers' value perceptions of luxury brands. Mark. (Lond.) 26 (3), 265–278.

Sinha, J., Lu, F.C., 2019. Ignored or rejected: retail exclusion effects on construal levels and consumer responses to compensation. J. Consum. Res. 46 (4), 791–807.

Stolz, K., 2022. Why (Do)n't we buy second-hand luxury products? Sustainability 14 (14), 8656.

Thi Hong Nguyen, H., Wood, S., Wrigley, N., 2013. The emerging food retail structure of Vietnam: phases of expansion in post-socialist environment. Int. J. Retail Distrib. Manag. 41 (8), 596–626.

Trope, Y., Liberman, N., 2003. Temporal construal. Psychol. Rev. 110 (3), 403–421.

Trope, Y., Liberman, N., 2010. Construal-level theory of psychological distance. Psychol. Rev. 117 (2), 440–463.

Tu, J., Hsu, C., Creativani, K., 2022. A study on the effects of consumers' perception and purchasing behaviour for second-hand luxury goods by perceived value. Sustainability 14 (16), 10397.

Turunen, L., Leipämaa-Leskinen, H., 2015. Pre-loved luxury: identifying the meanings of second-hand luxury possessions. J. Prod. Brand Manag. 24 (1), 57–65.

Turunen, L., Pöyry, E., 2019. Shopping with the resale value in mind: a study on second-hand luxury consumers. Int. J. Consum. Stud. 43 (6), 549–556.

Turunen, L., Cervellon, M., Carey, L., 2020. Selling second-hand luxury: empowerment and enactment of social roles. J. Bus. Res. 116, 474–481.

Vallacher, R., Wegner, D., 1989. Levels of personal agency: individual variation in action identification. J. Pers. Soc. Psychol. 57 (4), 660–671.

Veloutsou, C., Christodoulides, G., Guzmán, F., 2022. Charting research on international luxury marketing: where are we now and where should we go next? Int. Mark. Rev. 39, 371–394, 2.

Vigneron, F., Johnson, L., 2004. Measuring perceptions of brand luxury. J. Brand Manag. 11 (6), 484–506.

Wiedmann, K., Hennigs, N., Siebels, A., 2009. Value-based segmentation of luxury consumption behavior. Psychol. Market. 26 (7), 625–651.

Xu, F., Shan, F., Yang, F., Chen, T., 2024. The impacts of grey products and counterfeits in the luxury industry. Int. J. Prod. Res. 62 (14), 5252–5268.