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content impacts perceptions of luxury**

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Abstract

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly visible in creative industries, brands face a crucial question: how does disclosing AI authorship affect consumer response? This study examines the issue through an experiment testing six hypotheses grounded in research on authenticity, creativity, and branding. While AI is often associated with efficiency and practicality, its role in emotionally charged domains such as luxury demands closer scrutiny. Results show that disclosure of machine-made content does not uniformly harm luxury brand evaluations but selectively undermines certain dimensions. Specifically, AI disclosure significantly reduced perceptions of authenticity, brand attitude, and honesty, with a marginal effect on brand trust and perceived craftsmanship. Creativity, brand essence, emotional bond, and perceived human touch remained intact—an intriguing outcome that challenges the common assumption that consumers reject AI across all symbolic dimensions. Serial mediation analyses revealed that authenticity and brand attitude fully mediate the impact of disclosure on purchase intention, while willingness to pay remained unaffected. Familiarity with AI and luxury did not moderate disclosure outcomes, although AI familiarity improved baseline evaluations across conditions. Taken together, the findings highlight authenticity as the pivotal psychological lever through which consumers assess AI-authored creativity. The study contributes by showing construct-specific vulnerabilities rather than wholesale skepticism and extends the literature on authenticity in luxury branding by highlighting which symbolic dimensions are most at risk. Practically, the findings suggest that transparency about AI authorship can temper enthusiasm but does not erode core brand identity or monetary valuation, offering professionals a nuanced strategy for integrating AI disclosure into luxury branding.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Gen AI, Authenticity, Creativity, Disclosure, Luxury Branding

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Chapter 2 Literature Review & Hypotheses Development.....	4
2.1 Generative AI in Luxury	5
2.2 Role of Disclosure.....	7
2.3 Authorship and Attribution	9
2.4 Creativity Perceptions	11
2.5 Authenticity Perceptions	16
2.6 Role of Familiarity	19
2.6.1 AI Familiarity	19
2.6.2 Luxury Familiarity.....	19
2.7 Trust, Brand Attitudes, and Purchase Intention	21
2.8 Summary and Conceptual Framework	25
Chapter 3 Empirical Study.....	28
3.1 Method	28
3.2 Results	38
3.2.1 Effects of Disclosure on Brand-Level Cognitions.....	38
3.2.2 Effects of Disclosure on Product-Level Perceptions.....	39
3.2.3 Moderating Role of Familiarity.....	40
3.2.4 Predictors of Purchase Intention and Willingness to Pay.....	42
3.3 Discussion	45
3.3.1 Effects of Disclosure on Brand-Level Cognitions.....	45
3.3.2 Effects of Disclosure on Product-Level Perceptions.....	46
3.3.3 Moderating Role of Familiarity.....	47
3.3.4 Predictors of Purchase Intention and Willingness to Pay.....	49
Chapter 4 Conclusion.....	53
4.1 General Discussion.....	53
4.2 Contributions.....	54
4.3 Limitations	55
Appendix.....	59
References.....	62

List of Figures & Tables

Figure 1	
Conceptual Framework.....	26
Figure 2	
Experimental Stimuli	30
Figure 3	
Serial Mediation via Authenticity and Brand-Level Cognitions on Purchase Intention	44
Table 1	
Key Constructs and Related Terminology	27
Table 2	
Disclosure Captions by Experimental Condition.....	31
Table 3	
Overview of Dependent, Mediating and Moderating variables.....	32
Table 4	
Overview of Study	37
Table 5	
Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results	52

Chapter 1

Introduction

What if the most impressive content piece of 2025 was authored by no one? Luxury brands, in particular, have long stood as symbols of exclusivity, craftsmanship, and the unmistakable mark of human artistry. Yet today, many are quietly turning to generative AI to craft the very narratives that once relied on legacy, heritage, and human touch—driven by a need for scalable creativity, data-driven personalization and faster production cycles (BCG, 2025). What once considered the antithesis of luxury due to its associations with automation and efficiency—artificial intelligence—now quietly shapes its future narrative. By 2025, creative fields such as art, design, entertainment, and media account for 10.3% of all AI interactions—second only to computer and mathematical occupations, which dominate at 37.2% (AI Index Report, 2025). The AI market in the luxury sector alone is projected to grow by 16.2% over the next decade (Statista, 2025).

From fashion visuals to music scores and video campaigns, AI is no longer a backstage assistant but a co-creator in luxury's most emotive expressions. Adoption is accelerating rapidly: according to McKinsey & Company (2025), 71% of global organizations—across sectors including marketing, retail, and design—reported regular use of generative AI in at least one business function in 2024, more than doubling from just 33% the year before.

The rise of AI-generated content (AIGC) is reshaping the creative and commercial strategies of luxury brands, prompting urgent questions about authenticity, authorship, and emotional resonance (Raut et al., 2025). AI offers clear advantages in terms of efficiency and scalability by automating repetitive tasks and enhancing strategic focus, allowing marketers to anticipate trends and optimize creative outputs (De Freitas and Ofek, 2024). However, little is known about how AIGC affects luxury consumer perceptions—particularly when the presence of AI is disclosed. This study's originality lies in positioning AI disclosure within the symbolic and cognitive dimensions of luxury brands, an area largely unexplored in prior research.

Consumers are becoming accustomed to algorithmically mediated content, yet their perceptions of AIGC in luxury remain ambiguous. Existing research suggests that AI is often better suited as an editorial or supportive tool rather than a true creative agent (De Freitas and Ofek, 2024; Li et al., 2024). That said, most research focuses on functional products or mass-market retail (Luo et al., 2019), overlooking emotionally charged domains like luxury fashion (Marin et al., 2022). Yet, the disclosure of AI authorship undermines perceived creativity, authenticity, and trust to the brand (Liu et al., 2025; Pantano et al., 2024, To et al., 2025), challenging content originality, emotional resonance, and transparency (Jago et al., 2022; Lermann Henestrosa and Kimmerle, 2024). Similarly, AI continues to reveal limitations in tasks requiring imagination, narrative coherence, and emotional nuance (Li et al., 2024). For luxury brands, maintaining credibility therefore depends on balancing AI-driven efficiency with the human touch. As human and machine outputs converge into hybrid models of creativity that blur traditional notions of authorship (Wu et al., 2021), the role of disclosure becomes critical. Conventional definitions of “human-made” content no longer fully apply, making disclosure a central yet underexplored factor in shaping how consumers interpret AI’s presence in luxury branding.

Current literature often treats constructs such as creativity, authenticity, and trust in isolation, without examining their interplay in consumer evaluations of AIGC. The moderating role of consumer familiarity—with AI tools and with luxury products—also remains underexplored, despite evidence that these factors can shape how consumers evaluate content origin (Liu et al., 2025; Pantano et al., 2024).

This thesis addresses these gaps by experimentally investigating how disclosure of AI vs. human authorship influences consumer perceptions of luxury product design, and how these perceptions shape brand-level evaluations and behavioural intentions. Specifically, the research seeks to: (1) Assess the influence of AI authorship on product-level perceptions and brand-related cognitions (Kahneman, 2011; Lavidge and Steiner, 1961); (2) Investigate whether consumer familiarity moderates the disclosure effects on these perceptions; (3) Test how these variables collectively shape behavioural outcomes. Accordingly, the central research question guiding this thesis is:

How does disclosing AI authorship in luxury product design influence consumer perceptions, and how do these perceptions shape brand evaluations and purchase intentions?

This research is grounded in dual-process theory (Kahneman, 2011), which posits that individuals form impressions through two systems: fast, intuitive, emotional judgments (System 1) and slower, deliberative cognitive reasoning (System 2). Applied to luxury branding, disclosure of AI authorship may trigger both intuitive skepticism about authenticity and rational brand-level evaluations. Complementing this, the study draws on consumer response models (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961), which suggest that purchase behaviour follows a sequence of emotional (product-level) and cognitive (brand-level) responses. This framework supports the study's conceptual model (Chapter 2.8). According to it, disclosure shapes immediate perceptual judgments, such as authenticity, creativity, craftsmanship, emotional bond, and human touch. These perceptions shape cognitive appraisals, including brand attitude, essence, honesty, and trust, which ultimately affect behavioral outcomes. However, these outcomes may be weakened by disclosure.

This research aspires to make several contributions to marketing research and practice. It may extend the theory of disclosure and transparency in marketing with empirical evidence. Also, it may broaden the understanding of authenticity and creativity in the context of AI-generated content, highlighting how perceptions shift when authorship is disclosed. Practically, it may provide managers, particularly in the luxury segment, with insights into whether and how to disclose AI involvement in product design and communication, expand their knowledge of risks and opportunities of AI adoption with regards to influence on customer reactions.

The present study is organized into four chapters. Chapter 2 provides the synthesis of relevant literature across thematic areas and develops the hypotheses guiding the empirical study. Chapter 3 presents the empirical test of proposed theory and describes the results of these tests. Finally, Chapter 4 concludes the thesis by summarizing the main contributions, identifying limitations, and proposing directions for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review & Hypotheses Development

The growth of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed how creative work is produced, circulated, and consumed. Scholars and practitioners alike have begun to examine its influence not only as a technological advancement but also as a cultural and commercial force that reshapes expectations around creativity and authorship (Baykal, 2020; Jago et al., 2022). While generative AI offers opportunities for efficiency, personalization, and innovation (Joshi et al., 2025), it simultaneously raises concerns about the erosion of authenticity, trust, and the emotional depth historically associated with human-made creation (Rapp et al., 2025).

Despite increasing attention, scholarly understanding of consumer responses to AI-generated content (AIGC) remains fragmented. Existing studies tend to focus on specific aspects of consumer perception—such as disclosure (Lermann Henestrosa and Kimmerle, 2024; Lim and Schmälzle, 2024), authorship (Amirjalili et al., 2024; Formosa et al., 2024), or creativity (Cropley, 2023; Pantano et al., 2024)—yet often neglect how these dimensions interact to shape broader brand-level outcomes such as trust, attitude, and purchase intention. Moreover, while generative AI has been explored in domains including advertising, entertainment, and communication (Hwang et al., 2024; Meng and Dai, 2021), its role in luxury branding remains underexamined, despite luxury’s distinct reliance on heritage, craftsmanship, exclusivity, and emotional resonance (Kautish et al., 2021; Lin, 2013). This context makes luxury an especially revealing setting in which to study consumer responses to AIGC, since tensions between tradition and technological innovation are heightened.

This chapter synthesizes the literature across seven interconnected thematic areas: (1) Generative content in luxury field, (2) Disclosure, (3) Authorship, (4) Creativity, (5) Authenticity, (6) Familiarity, and (7) Trust, Attitude and Purchase Behaviour.

These areas reflect both established concerns in prior research and the critical areas where consumer perceptions of AIGC diverge most sharply from perceptions of human-generated content. Collectively, they provide the theoretical foundation for the hypotheses that guide this study.

I begin by examining how consumers perceive AI-generated content in luxury domains. These following sections establish a baseline for understanding how perceptions of authorship and disclosure shape subsequent judgments of creativity, authenticity, and trust. From there, the discussion develops toward broader questions of consumer–brand relationships, culminating in hypotheses on brand attitude, willingness to pay, and purchase intention.

2.1 Generative AI in Luxury

Generative AI’s capabilities can enhance the appeal of luxury brands, particularly by increasing customer engagement, as more appealing products tend to attract greater consumer interaction (Baykal, 2020). Some high-fashion brands have already embraced AI in creative production: Gucci employed AI in sneaker development (Loyens, 2019), and Acne Studios developed an AI-led menswear collection for Fall/Winter 2020 (Vogue, 2020). These early adoptions reflect how generative AI is entering spaces long reserved for human craftsmanship, intensifying debates around authenticity and the emotional value of luxury.

Still, substantial resistance to AI persists within the luxury and art industries. This resistance stems from their deep-rooted emphasis on heritage, craftsmanship, and originality—qualities that AI has yet to meaningfully replicate (Jago et al., 2022). This tension raises a critical paradox: although AI can stimulate engagement and innovation, its integration may simultaneously threaten the traditional values that define luxury.

Stronger evidence of attributes such as values, brand consciousness, and behavioural intentions predicts luxury fashion consumption; that said, the role of AI still remains underexplored, especially concerning counter-values that highlight the negative side of customer behaviour, such as manipulative intent and brand dishonesty, which are not perceived positively (Kautish et al., 2021).

The perception of AI-generated products and their impact on brand identity depends largely on the product category and its level of consumer involvement. Luxury goods are typically considered high involvement purchases due to their high price, rarity, and complexity (Lin, 2013), and often derive their value from emotional engagement, appealing to a customers' identity, memories, and aspirations. In such emotionally charged contexts, AI-driven design can reduce both the perceived value of the product and the distinctiveness of the brand. Conversely, low-involvement products tend to offer greater functional value, addressing practical needs and delivering tangible benefits. In these categories, customers tend to prefer AI-generated items, and the use of AI can enhance the brand's essence by reinforcing efficiency and innovation (Xu and Mehta, 2022).

Even as consumers wrestle with AI's role, many designers themselves worry that AI may constrain rather than inspire genuine creativity. Some designers remain cautious about their growing presence in creative practice. Akverdi and Baykal (2024) note that AI tools may limit perceived creativity rather than enabling it. Many view these tools as experimental and insufficient for conveying texture and emotional depth (Ma et al., 2023)—qualities central to human-centered design. While chatbots assist with idea generation, they often suggest concepts within a narrow range, constraining originality. This highlights the need to investigate how AI tools can be implemented in ways that support, rather than restrict, autonomous creative exploration.

Having established baseline differences in how consumers and designers view AI vs. human luxury content, I next turn to the question of disclosure: does explicitly naming AI involvement amplify or mitigate those perceptions?

2.2 Role of Disclosure

At times, content of ambiguous origin may be sensed even without explicit labeling. This fosters a dual tension—between awareness and skepticism, and between what is cognitively known and intuitively felt—leaving consumers suspended between recognizing the artificial and experiencing the authentic.

The conflict grows more acute in scenarios when the presence or absence of disclosure influences content interpretation. While audiences may show a slight preference for human-made content when its origin is known, AI-generated outputs often rival—or even surpass—its human counterpart in performance when the source behind the work remains unseen. Beyond disclosure, attitudes toward AI significantly shape evaluations, particularly when authorship is disclosed. The AI author is rated as less competent and intelligent; and the disclosure of its authorship is shown to reduce the perceived honesty of both the content and its creator (Lermann Henestrosa and Kimmerle, 2024). Tracking whether individuals actually notice disclosure disclaimers is essential to understand how AI-related attitudes influence judgment in the absence of explicit awareness (Lim and Schmäzle, 2024). Thus, this research includes disclosure awareness checks in its experimental design model.

Insufficient clarity often surrounds the disclosure of AI’s role in innovation: creators may prevaricate AI assistance disclosure to preserve full authorship credit or, conversely, emphasize it to demonstrate transparency and technical oversight. The implication is profound—as AI becomes increasingly autonomous, the attribution of creative credit to human creators may gradually erode unless they actively link AI’s contributions to their personal identity (Draxler et al., 2023).

Regardless of whether AI’s involvement is disclosed or not, its impact on honesty hinges on both cognitive awareness and intuitive impression. While disclosure can substantially shape perception, its absence does not necessarily diminish that impact; in some cases, it amplifies it, inviting subjective interpretation and emotional projection (Liu et al., 2025). In this sense,

disclosure may function less as an act of transparency and more as a recognition that perceived honesty is an illusion.

The lack of clear disclosure mechanisms intensifies existing skepticism. To address the urgent need for AI regulation—particularly regarding bias, misinformation, and user confusion surrounding AI-generated content (Wang et al., 2023)—the European Parliament introduced the first comprehensive AI law, known as the AI Act (European Parliament & Council, 2024). However, as of 2025, public trust in AI companies continues to decline, with only 47% of people believing these companies adequately protect data (AI Index Report, 2025).

Regulatory considerations encompass not just data privacy, but also the emotional reactions conveyed by AI. If consumers believe AI is neutral and empathetic (Kim et al., 2022), they may respond differently to disclosed AI authorship. The disclosure of AI-generated content holds profound significance, shaped by complex social dynamics and pressing ethical considerations. Consumers, perceiving AI as free from social judgment, may be inclined to share sensitive information, drawn by a sense of emotional neutrality and perceived understanding. This willingness invites concern: while AI may simulate empathy, it fundamentally lacks the nuanced contextual awareness that human interaction requires, making the reliability and propriety of entrusting AI with personal disclosures seriously contested (Kim et al., 2022).

The emotional dimension of AI interaction is further complicated by findings from Meng and Dai (2021) who distinguish between empathy and sympathy in AI communication, highlighting that, unlike a close person's relatable struggles, a machine's lack of genuine empathy can render its responses strange or unhelpful. Similarly, Cheng et al. (2021) find that perceived empathy and friendliness in chatbot communication positively influence brand attitude, though the effects of other characteristics on customer responses remain underexplored.

Disclosure of AI involvement tends to lower perceived value, particularly in contexts like argumentative writing, where logical coherence and persuasive strength are essential (Li et al., 2024). Yet the broader impact of disclosure—whether AI involvement is made explicit or remains

ambiguous—remains underexplored, especially in relation to consumer–brand relationships and perceptions of authorship integrity (Jago et al., 2022). This gap is increasingly relevant as AI-generated content spans multiple modalities, from text and images to music and video.

Existing studies emphasize the complex interplay between AI authorship, human perception, and content type. Collectively, they reveal several limitations in the existing research: a lack of diverse content and contextual analysis, and an underdeveloped understanding of how AI transparency influences brand attitude and essence, and perceived honesty.

Addressing these gaps, this study investigates how disclosing AI authorship affects brand perceptions in the context of product design:

H1: Content disclosed as AI (vs. human) authored will be rated lower on perceived brand attitude, essence, and honesty.

Disclosure hinges on knowing who—or what—is behind a design. This brings us to the broader issue of authorship, which Section 2.3 explores in depth.

2.3 Authorship and Attribution

In branding, the perception of authorship can carry more weight than the actual origin. In certain contexts, the presence of a human creator is not only visible but felt—even without explicit disclosure. Subtle cues, rather than stated authorship, often make the audience feel recognized. The tone, rhythm, and emotional imprint suggest an origin that transcends algorithmic logic (Rimas and Rimas Jr., 2024). Such cues make audiences feel seen rather than targeted. In a world increasingly shaped by generative tools, the desire for emotional reality remains both heightened and harder to verify (Hopwood et al., 2021).

This tension between perceived and actual authorship becomes even more pronounced with AI-generated content. Perceptions of authorship are closely tied to the level of AI involvement; as AI assistance increases, content recognition becomes more difficult, making authorship more abstruse. This increases the importance of disclosure. Research shows that disclosing human involvement tends to take precedence over disclosing AI authorship, as human contributions are seen as markers of creativity and trustworthiness—qualities largely perceived as beyond AI’s scope (Formosa et al., 2024). Human-generated content is often recognized by its nuanced voice, diverse vocabulary, and rhetorical depth—elements that AI-generated outputs still struggle to replicate, especially in domains requiring individuality and emotional resonance (Amirjalili et al., 2024). Consumers associate authentic creation with thoughtful ideation, metaphors, and a distinct narrative voice, while viewing AI as a tool for refinement rather than origination (Epstein et al., 2023; Hwang et al., 2024). Although these insights largely stem from text-based studies, Buchanan and Hickman (2024), and Lim and Schmäzle (2024) emphasize that research on authorship perceptions in non-textual formats (e.g., images, music, video) remains underdeveloped.

As AI-generated content becomes more prevalent, debates surrounding intellectual property and creative ownership are intensifying—exposing regulatory gaps and challenging norms of artistic legitimacy (Joshi et al., 2025). Buchanan and Hickman (2024) find that individuals are more likely to fact-check when made aware of AI authorship before evaluating potential errors. Transparency appears to prompt more critical engagement. However, Liu et al. (2025) notes that those with low AI self-efficacy—lacking confidence in their ability to evaluate AI—tend to be skeptical of AI, yet paradoxically less critical of its output, making them more susceptible to misinformation, especially with deepfakes.

As AI becomes a regular ideation partner, some creators report feeling displaced or devalued, and question whether algorithmic outputs flatten cultural diversity by repeating patterns based on dominant data sources. De Cremer et al. (2023) suggest that creators view AI as “fast but shallow,” and believe that human insight adapts more quickly to cultural shifts. Yet little is known about how authorship labels—such as “crafted by a human designer” vs. “generated by AI”—affect perceived authorship and value in luxury design contexts.

Recent findings suggest that authorship significantly shape consumer perceptions in luxury branding. For instance, Marin et al. (2022) find that including an artist’s name in the description of an art-infused product improves perceived luxury through heightened associations with aesthetics, exclusivity, and quality. These results suggest that authorship—whether human or AI—plays a central role in shaping how consumers respond to luxury offerings.

Building on prior research in text-based content, where AI-generated work is often rated lower in trustworthiness than human-generated equivalents (Epstein et al., 2023; Formosa et al., 2024; Hwang et al., 2024), this study extends the inquiry to visual product design. In this context, authorship cues may similarly influence brand trust:

H2: Content disclosed as AI (vs. human) authored will be trusted less.

Beyond disclosure and authorship’s direct effect on brand related variables, consumers also judge the content itself—particularly its creativity. In the next section, I review how AI’s involvement shapes perceptions of creative merit.

2.4 Creativity Perceptions

Debates about artificial creativity center on what we mean by “creativity.” Creativity is commonly defined as the ability to produce ideas, content, or products that are both novel and appropriate—a dual emphasis widely accepted across marketing and consumer research, often attributed to Amabile (1983). It has become a central focus in the field, particularly in areas such as advertising (Goldenberg et al., 1999), product development (Gill and Dubé, 2007), and broader brand communication strategies (Miceli and Raimondo, 2020). Studies often categorize creativity in marketing using the 4Ps framework: *Person, Process, Product, and Press* (Rhodes, 1961; Runco, 2004), and typically assess it through semantic scales or expert evaluations (Quin and Besemer, 1989). Despite growing interest, the literature remains fragmented, underscoring the

need for greater theoretical integration and cross-contextual synthesis (Miceli and Raimondo, 2020).

Componential models argue creativity requires domain-relevant knowledge, creativity-relevant processes, and intrinsic task motivation—attributes traditionally associated with humans (Amabile and Pratt, 2016). Philosophers and AI researchers (e.g., Boden, 1998; du Sautoy, 2019) show that AI systems can produce outputs that meet formal creativity criteria (combination, exploration, transformation), yet questions remain about whether these processes contain the intentionality, free choice, or motivational context that characterize historical human creativity. Empirically, audiences often devalue works known to be AI-authored: experiments show that artworks or cultural products labeled as AI-created tend to receive lower aesthetic and market valuations even when the sensory stimulus is identical, implying an anthropocentric bias in appreciation (Fortuna and Modliński, 2021). At the same time, generative AI (LLMs, GANs) demonstrably amplifies ideation and enables rapid exploration of variants—a capability brands can strategically use, though limitations remain (Beghetto et al., 2025; Noy and Zhang, 2023). This ambivalence—AI as both creative-tool and perceived “less-authentic” author—helps explain why disclosure effects can be construct-specific rather than uniformly negative.

As AI technologies become increasingly integrated into design processes, they significantly enhance idea generation, creativity, and problem-solving (Cichocki and Kuleshov, 2021). This positions AI as a supportive instrument in early-stage ideation, rather than a replacement for human creators. The role of the designer remains essential, particularly in structuring prompts to ensure that AI-generated outputs align with their creative vision and result in meaningful, feasible outcomes. While AI accelerates the initial stages of idea development, it continues to depend on human judgment for refinement and final decision-making (Kwon et al., 2024).

This dynamic is further complicated by AI’s surprising capacity for divergent thinking. Marrone et al. (2024) find that AI can perform at a high-average level in verbal divergent thinking, comparable to humans. For example, systems like GPT-4 may outperform human benchmarks in

ideation tasks, yet users often report issues with repetitiveness and a perceived lack of originality over time (Cropley, 2023). These limitations contribute to the broader view that AI lacks domain-specific intuition and emotional intent—key components of human creativity, particularly in storytelling and culturally sensitive design (Hardman, 2021).

While AI can efficiently support tasks such as information gathering and feedback generation, it still depends on human input to guide direction, context, and meaning. This interdependence allows human creators to focus on more complex, high-level creative challenges.

Still, a critical question remains: will human–AI co-creation primarily support personal, everyday creative insights—*mini-c creativity*—or will it contribute to paradigm-shifting societal innovation—*Big-C creativity* (Kaufman and Beghetto, 2009)? Further research is needed to understand how collaboration strategies between designers and AI can be optimized to fulfill designers’ creative intentions (Kwon et al., 2024).

A recent study by Pantano et al. (2024) examined consumer attitudes toward AI-generated luxury handbags under different disclosure conditions, showing that transparency about AI involvement influenced perceptions of creativity. While some participants questioned the alignment between the brand and AI-generated designs and expressed concerns about AI replacing human designers, many still reported a sense of emotional connection, brand recognition, and sustained purchase intentions. AI was often viewed as a tool that enhances rather than diminishes creativity. This blurring of creative value and authorship is not limited to design. In 2018, Christie’s auctioned *Portrait of Edmond de Belamy*, a painting generated entirely by a Generative Adversarial Network (GAN), for over \$432,000. The sale sparked global debate over whether AI can produce “real” art—yet it also demonstrated that perceived creativity and market value may not depend solely on human authorship (BBC, 2018). This example underscores how creative merit is increasingly judged by output rather than origin.

Recent findings suggest that consumers perceive AI-generated luxury products as comparable in creativity and brand alignment to human-generated ones, and emotional

engagement with the product remains strong even when AI authorship is disclosed. Although disclosure of AI involvement had a minor impact on perception, it did not reduce product desirability. Additionally, in luxury contexts, craftsmanship—viewed as the thorough execution of fine detail and the visible imprint of human touch—is often blended with, or seen as a concrete manifestation of, creative skill (Baykal, 2020; Jago et al., 2022). Thus, perceptions of craftsmanship are a key facet of overall creativity judgments.

Beyond individual perception, broader social and cultural concerns emerge around the value of AI-assisted creative work. From one perspective, AI accelerates idea generation and enables faster experimentation, enhancing creative output, and AI-generated art may unexpectedly stimulate creativity rather than diminish it. Haase et al. (2023) found that users, when unaware that visuals were machine-generated, perceived these images as creative, which in turn broadened their associative thinking and inspired new ideas. Alternatively, the expanding influence of AI raises concerns about the erosion of authentic human creativity, with some creators withdrawing from competitive creative spaces due to AI's influence. They appear to place a premium on human-made content, driven by the belief that cultural dynamics evolve more rapidly than generative algorithms can adapt. This perceived lag preserves the value of human creativity, which is seen as more authentic and less susceptible to the mechanistic nature of AI-generated outputs (De Cremer et al., 2023).

Aesthetic appeal also plays a significant role in how consumers perceive AI-generated content. Users often struggle to differentiate between AI- and human-generated images, as AI visuals can evoke strong emotional reactions and are frequently rated as visually appealing. Nevertheless, concerns persist about the perceived lack of emotional or conceptual depth that is often attributed to human creativity. While AI-generated content has proven practical across industries such as marketing and entertainment, skepticism surrounding originality and ethical boundaries remains (Rapp et al., 2025).

The discussion is extended by considering how democratized creativity reshapes professional identity. Creativity is no longer seen as the exclusive domain of artists or writers;

rather, it is a cognitive process applicable across diverse fields, including science, technology, and everyday problem-solving—and everyone is considered creative (Boden, 2009). With AI positioned as a creative enabler, the perceived value of professional creators may decline, as, for instance, functional creativity is already widespread in other domains. AI music generation platforms such as Amper, Jukedeck, and Melodrive offer fast, royalty-free background music for marketing, YouTube videos, or product ads. While these tools enhance productivity and democratize content creation, they rarely convey emotional nuance or cultural complexity—qualities that remain essential to luxury branding and creative industries (Peukert, 2019).

In this context, AI is seen as a quicker and easier alternative to traditional creative work, especially as fewer people are motivated to invest time and effort into developing creative skills (Lee, 2022). Yet it is still unclear how these shifting perceptions affect creators' long-term motivation to pursue original, human-driven work in a saturated, AI-driven creative economy. From the customers' standpoint, some still place higher value on human-made content, believing that cultural trends evolve more rapidly than AI can adapt and sustaining the perception that human creativity remains uniquely valuable. These findings suggest that perceived creativity may not stem from content alone but from assumptions about its origin. Whether a design is seen as truly creative may depend on whether it is attributed to a human creator or an autonomous system.

All these threads merge with one critical question: does the perceived origin (human vs. AI) shape creativity judgments even when the output may be visually indistinguishable? Previous work (Pantano et al. 2024; Marrone et al., 2024) hints that attribution matters. I therefore hypothesize:

H3: Content disclosed as AI (vs. human) authored will be rated lower on perceived creativity, craftsmanship, emotional bond, and human touch.

Creativity ties closely to authenticity: a design perceived as highly creative may feel more “real.” In Section 2.4, I delve deeper into what “authenticity” means when AI is in the mix.

2.5 Authenticity Perceptions

As discussed in previous sections, AI's limitations in conveying emotional nuance and design depth continue to shape both creativity and authenticity perceptions. In a world increasingly shaped by generative systems, consumers still want to be understood as individuals—not processed like data (Andrus et al., 2021). This tension becomes particularly pronounced in luxury contexts, where emotional resonance and personal meaning are central to perceived value (Raut et al., 2025). Can a work be considered authentic when it is generated by an algorithm that performs authorship with synthetic confidence and no lived experience? At the heart of this dilemma lies an even deeper question: what does authenticity mean when the creator is no longer clearly human?

In a broad sense, authenticity is the quality of being true to one's set values (Rachmad, 2023) and is shaped by six key component judgments: accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency (Nunes et al., 2021). The rapid integration of AI into artistic and professional fields enhanced research over the authenticity of AI- vs. human-generated work. As algorithms gain the ability to mimic human outputs in realism, coherence, and technical skill, understanding the human perception of authenticity in these outputs becomes critical (Garcia, 2024). This subchapter synthesizes recent empirical findings to explore the evolving landscape of authenticity perceptions in human–AI collaboration and identify related gaps.

Latest, seemingly contradictory findings highlight that creators assisted by algorithms are perceived as more competent than those assisted by humans. This belief stems from the perception that AI, due to its complexity and autonomy, requires more rigorous monitoring, thereby enhancing trust in humans overseeing it. Despite this, when reminded that human assistance also requires oversight, the perceived credit gap between AI and human assistance disappears (Jago and Carroll, 2024). This finding aligns with earlier research showing that fully automated outputs are often perceived as less authentic than those produced through human–AI co-creation. Such co-creation is seen as a more balanced and veracious mode of creation, as perceptions of AI-generated

content are limited by its lack of human intent, emotional depth, and cultural sensitivity (Jago et al., 2022).

AI's reputation as a tool rather than a creator is reinforced by the fact that, even with its speed and practicality, it consistently fails to produce unique and culturally sensitive content—a shortcoming that, combined with the persistence of bias and ethical issues, further dilutes perceptions of authenticity (Jago et al., 2022; Rapp et al., 2025). That is particularly relevant for creative industries, as, for example, AI-made art and music are perceived as less pleasant and less trustworthy (Jago, 2019).

Despite these clear gaps in AI's ability to convey authenticity, a substantial portion of existing literature focuses on immediate responses to AI-generated outputs, yet there is a notable lack of longitudinal data examining the lasting effects of AI on brand-level responses. As a result, key questions about how AI's influence evolves over time remain unanswered. This issue is compounded by increasing difficulties in determining the authenticity of AI-generated images from a visual media perspective. Earlier techniques like Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), which use semantic segmentation masks, produced highly realistic images that were difficult to distinguish from real photos. Conversely, diffusion models, such as MidJourney AI and DALL·E, recently surpassed GANs in image quality, stability, and controllability (Matatov et al., 2024). These advancements make it even harder to reliably verify authenticity (Baraheem and Nguyen, 2023).

Although sophisticated algorithms make detection of AI creation harder, this very opacity can heighten consumer discretion once the label “AI-generated” is disclosed, because the visual may look realistic but lack human touch. In consumer goods sectors such as fashion, AI-generated clothing is often perceived as less authentic than human-generated alternatives, largely due to concerns surrounding creativity, quality, and emotional depth. Lee and Kim (2024) find that co-creative customization reintroduces emotional attachment—key to perceived authenticity—when raw AI outputs might feel impersonal. These perceptions are closely tied to how people evaluate AI-generated images more broadly, where judgments often hinge on visual realism and emotional

resonance. If an image appears oddly artificial, it can trigger unease—a phenomenon known as the *uncanny valley*, which can extend distrust to the AI itself (Gray and Wegner, 2012). To cope with such discomfort, individuals respond in varied ways: some minimize AI’s role; others elevate AI as a superior entity; and some compare themselves to it, leading to existential discomfort. These strategies reflect an ongoing cognitive and emotional struggle to integrate AI into creative human spaces, particularly when its outputs challenge existing definitions of authenticity (Rapp et al., 2025).

Research on mind perception and social judgment suggests that people readily separate capacities for agency (doing) from experience (feeling); machines are often seen as low on the latter, which makes their emotional competence suspect in social contexts. Gray et al. (2007) show that attributions of experience (feeling) are central to how people perceive minds, and this affects moral and social attributions toward non-human agents. In consumer contexts, emotional capabilities matter because affective reactions shape social and product evaluations (Forgas, 1994). Scholars argue that firms may try to design “empathetic” or emotion-capable AI for service and marketing tasks (Huang and Rust, 2018; Wirtz et al., 2018), but the authenticity of such displays is fragile: consumers can detect (and sometimes resent) scripted or inauthentic empathy from machines, and this can backfire in high-attachment contexts where consumers expect human warmth and care (Hess et al., 2003; Monga and John, 2008). In short, disclosure that a creative output or communication was authored by AI may reduce perceived emotional authenticity and thereby weaken key brand dimensions.

Given this context, it becomes critical to test how authorship attribution—AI vs. human—shapes perceived authenticity in product design:

H4: Content disclosed as AI (vs. human) authored will be perceived as less authentic.

While brand and product level perceptions matter, individual background also shapes how labels are interpreted. In Section 2.6, I examine the moderating role of consumers' familiarity with AI and luxury.

2.6 Role of Familiarity

2.6.1 AI Familiarity

Consumer familiarity with AI plays a critical role in shaping responses to AI-generated content. While previous studies have explored attitudes toward AI in retail and communication contexts (Hwang et al., 2024; Lee and Kim, 2024; Meng and Dai, 2021), few have examined how AI literacy or self-efficacy influences perceptions of AI-generated creative outputs—particularly in emotionally resonant categories such as luxury branding.

This study addresses that gap by incorporating AI familiarity as a key moderating variable. It draws on findings by Liu et al. (2025), who emphasizes that individuals with low AI self-efficacy—those who lack confidence in understanding or evaluating AI systems—tend to show greater skepticism toward AI-generated content, yet paradoxically engage in less critical scrutiny. These individuals tend to be more vulnerable to misinformation and less likely to verify content accuracy.

2.6.2 Luxury Familiarity

Prior research, such as Kautish et al. (2021), and Xu and Mehta (2022), offers valuable insights into consumer attitudes but tends to focus on younger participants and occasional luxury buyers, without considering a higher degree of luxury familiarity as a potential influencing factor. Traditional luxury buyers—characterized by strong brand loyalty, higher status consciousness, and

an appreciation for exclusivity—may exhibit different traits. These consumers might place greater emphasis on functional product features and respond differently to AI-generated products. Pantano et al. (2024), by contrast, considered only participants already familiar with luxury brands and products, but still did not assess how much familiarity influenced perceptions of AI-generated designs. This leaves open the question of whether different levels of luxury familiarity produce different reactions to AI involvement in design.

Furthermore, previous studies such as Xu and Mehta (2022) have used widely recognized luxury brands like Louis Vuitton, Burberry, and BMW. These familiar names may bias participants' evaluations due to existing emotional attachments, brand loyalty, or pre-existing perceptions of quality and status. Emerging or lesser-known brands may not carry the same baggage and could instead leverage AI to reshape or define their brand identity from the ground up.

To avoid such brand equity bias, this study uses a fictional brand, ensuring that participants' prior brand familiarity does not confound measurement of their general "luxury familiarity" and its effect on perceptions of AI-generated product design. The absence of prior exposure allows for a more controlled evaluation of how psychological factors—such as credibility, authenticity, and emotional bond—are formed when consumers encounter luxury products made with AI.

By examining both AI and luxury familiarity, this research investigates whether prior experience serves as a buffer against the decline often associated with AI-generated content. Specifically, it explores whether these forms of familiarity mitigate drops in perceived authenticity and emotional bond when AI involvement is disclosed. Although emotional reactions are central to luxury perception, it remains unclear whether familiarity with AI tools and brand heritage can reliably protect those perceptions in the face of automated authorship.

In this context, consumer expectations around creativity and previous exposure to AI-generated media may also act as moderating factors—yet they remain largely unaccounted for in current frameworks. Additionally, Haase et al. (2023) call for further research into how disclosed

vs. undisclosed AI-generated content affects both creative performance and audience interpretation:

H5: Familiarity—both with AI tools and with luxury brands—will attenuate declines in product-level perceptions (e.g., creativity) when AI authorship is disclosed.

Finally, I connect these perceptual and moderating variables to business-relevant outcomes—trust, attitude, and purchase decisions—in Section 2.7.

2.7 Trust, Brand Attitudes, and Purchase Intention

Research into consumer responses to AI-generated content (AIGC) unveils a landscape of paradoxes—where curiosity meets skepticism, and innovation exists in a subtle equilibrium with tradition. The findings reflect the complex nature of evolving human–AI dynamics in content creation, revealing not only shifts in perception, but transformation across multiple dimensions, including purchase behaviour, trust, and emotional engagement.

One such dimension is consumer purchase intention, which may vary depending on the perceived source of creation. Moreau et al. (2023) found that consumers demonstrated a higher willingness to pay for AI-generated products in the fashion category (e.g., t-shirts) compared to those co-created by humans, suggesting that AI-generated fashion may be perceived as more aligned with luxury brand identity. However, this trend is not universal. A segment of consumers still preferred co-created products, indicating that AI-generated fashion is not necessarily seen as more novel. Further investigation is needed to understand why some consumers respond less favourably to AI-produced clothing and how factors such as training data or model capabilities might influence these outcomes.

These concerns extend beyond static media and into dynamic consumer interactions, particularly within retail and conversational interfaces. Luo et al. (2019) found that disclosing a chatbot’s machine identity significantly reduced purchase rates, as consumers were more likely to end conversations early or disengage when the bot was perceived as less empathetic or articulate. In response, Wu et al. (2021) proposed a six-phase Human–AI co-creation model—*perceiving, thinking, expressing, collaborating, building, and testing*—which has since been expanded (Wu et al., 2023) to emphasize transparency, regulation, and the positioning of AI as a complement to human creativity rather than a replacement. Although chatbots speak to immediate purchase behaviour, underlying that is the same core driver: brand trust and brand attitude shape consumers’ willingness to pay premium prices for luxury offerings, whether delivered by a human or AI.

In marketing contexts, Joshi et al. (2025) identify clear advantages of generative AI, including speed, personalization, predictive analytics, and creative efficiency. Yet these gains are accompanied by significant risks. Wang et al. (2023) highlight how AIGC can inherit bias from training data, generate deceptive narratives, and blur the line between authentic and synthetic content, raising serious concerns for both consumers and policymakers.

Among the most pressing ethical concerns is the malicious use of generative AI for blackmail and reputational sabotage. Fabricated content, particularly deepfakes, can be exploited for financial extortion, as victims often struggle to persuasively disprove false imagery or video that appears convincingly real. Beyond individual harm, AI-generated media also contributes to a broader erosion of trust in digital information. Hyper realistic falsifications increasingly blur the line between legitimate and fabricated content, fundamentally challenging the trust in all digital media and undermining public confidence in the integrity of evidence and truth (AI Index Report, 2025).

As AI expands artistic possibilities and democratizes access to creative tools, deeper philosophical and legal tensions emerge. While it allows individuals without formal training to produce high-quality content, it simultaneously blurs the lines between skill, originality, and authorship. Since AI systems are trained in pre-existing works, true originality often remains

difficult to achieve. As creative output becomes increasingly machine-assisted, long-standing cultural benchmarks for what constitutes “art” or “authenticity” are called into question, prompting a reevaluation of human contribution in creative domains (Epstein et al., 2023). Ongoing regulatory ambiguity around authorship further underscores the need for consistent governance frameworks in creative industries.

While human-generated content (HGC) has traditionally played a central role in digital branding, AI integration overcomplicates its trust-building. Demba et al. (2019) found that trust in HGC correlates strongly with brand trust, yet this relationship may be disrupted when algorithmic systems alter how such content is curated, modified, or presented. Ozuem et al. (2023) highlights the emotional complexity in how consumers interpret content: satisfied users may view high-quality HGC as exceeding expectations, while dissatisfied users often interpret it negatively, seeking emotional validation. These asymmetries raise important questions about how hybrid forms of content—blending AI assistance with human input—may reshape trust, authenticity, and emotional engagement in brand communication.

AI’s capacity to generate false or misleading narratives, ranging from fabricated user reviews to entirely fictional brand stories, poses serious ethical risks by distorting public perception and undermining consumer trust (Carrasco-Farré, 2022). This concern is heightened by what Sun et al. (2024) describe as *hallucinated outputs*: content that is factually incorrect yet highly plausible. As trust erodes through repeated exposure to AI-generated deepfakes and misleading content, skepticism can extend beyond the synthetic and begin to undermine genuine brands, ultimately dampening purchase intentions. This repeated confrontation with confident yet inaccurate output weakens perceived credibility, blurring the line between the real and the artificial, and between tool and creator. For example, a case of a photography competition won by an artist–AI collaboration raised a public debate over authorship integrity and artistic merit (Hurler, 2023). This supports concerns that as AI takes on more autonomous roles in creative tasks, consumers and juries alike struggle to determine the true source of creativity (see Section 2.4).

Taken together, these patterns of misinformation underscore the urgent need for transparency and robust validation mechanisms to preserve trust in AI-generated content. A critical yet underexplored area concerns whether humanizing machines enhances or undermines trust, and whether trust is better supported by clearly presenting AI as a tool—thereby promoting transparency, enhancing perceived authenticity, and reducing potential misperceptions (Rapp et al., 2025). In sum, brand attitude and trust are shaped by perceptions of content origin and authenticity—factors deeply influenced by AI authorship and presentation. These dimensions, in turn, mediate consumers’ willingness to pay and purchase intentions.

To examine how authenticity and brand-level cognitions (e.g., trust) support behavioural decisions, I propose:

H6: Disclosure condition will influence purchase intention and willingness to pay indirectly through its effects on perceived authenticity, brand attitude, and trust.

While prior research on AI-generated content has explored perceptions of authenticity, it has often treated authenticity in isolation, neglecting how it interacts with related constructs such as perceived creativity, emotional connection, and brand trust in shaping consumer responses (Lee and Kim, 2024). Studies also remain limited in examining how individual differences—such as familiarity with luxury or with AI—moderate these perceptions, particularly in emotionally charged domains like luxury branding, where authenticity and craftsmanship are core to consumer experience. Likewise, the role of disclosure—whether AI involvement is explicitly stated or left ambiguous—has not been sufficiently explored in relation to its impact on consumer-brand relationships or perceptions of authorship integrity. These gaps matter: perceptions of AI vs. human-generated design are not shaped by output alone, but by a dynamic interplay of emotional resonance, cognitive expectations, contextual cues, and industry-specific values. Despite rapid advances in generative AI’s creative capabilities, its perceived lack of intentionality, emotional depth, and cultural nuance continues to affect how its contributions are evaluated, especially in sectors where human artistry remains central (Jago et al., 2022). Addressing these gaps, this study

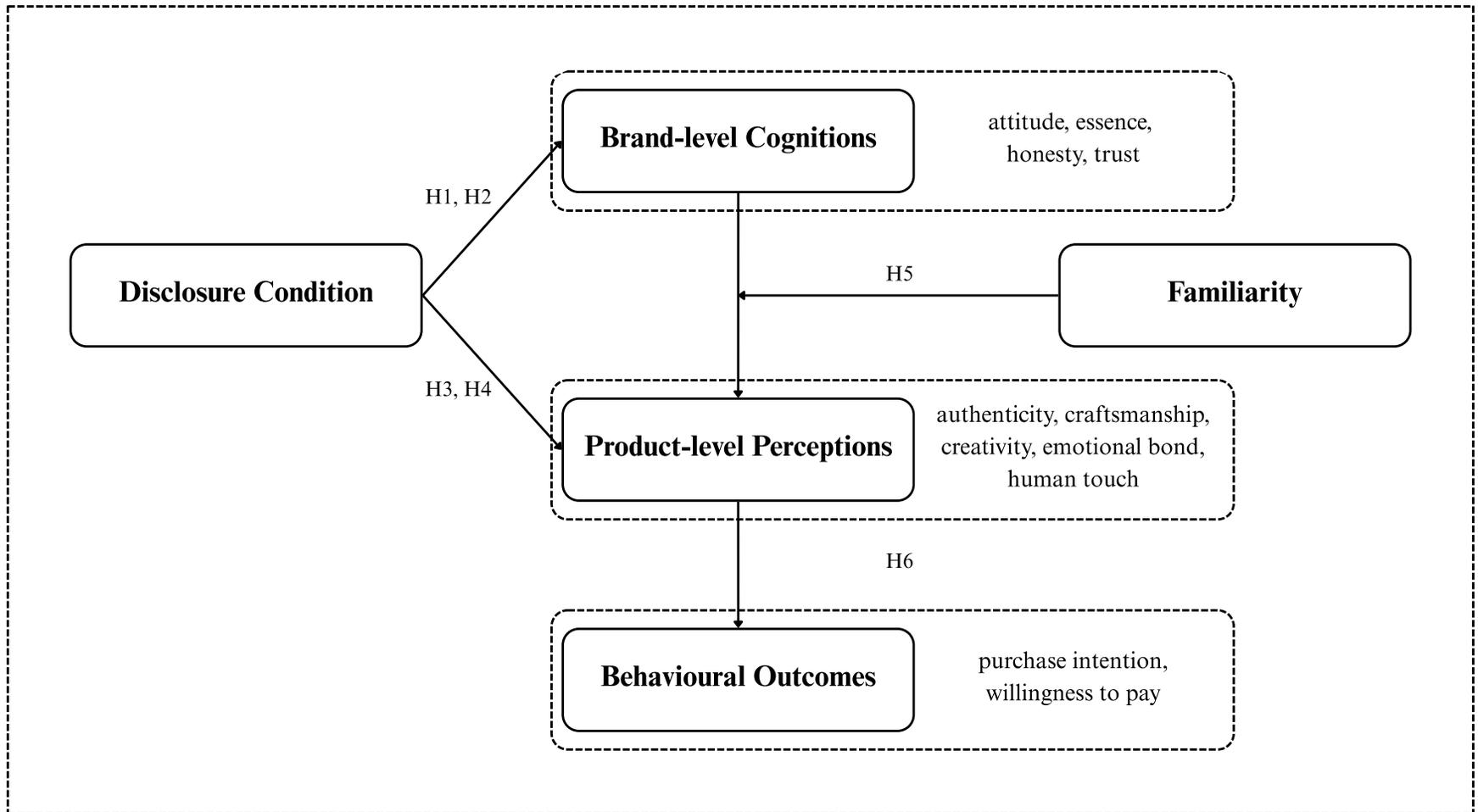
aims to systematically investigate how disclosure, authorship, and familiarity shape consumer perceptions of luxury product design, and how these perceptions influence trust, brand attitude, and purchase intention.

2.8 Summary and Conceptual Framework

To visually consolidate the hypotheses and the theoretical logic discussed in this chapter, I include the conceptual framework presented below. To simplify the model and improve clarity, I group the study's variables into interconnected levels.

First, the disclosure type indicates whether the product is AI-generated, human-generated, or unlabeled. This disclosure influences a set of *product-level perceptions*. These include perceived authenticity, creativity, craftsmanship, emotional bond, and human touch. These immediate perceptions then shape *brand-level cognitions*, such as brand attitude, essence, honesty, and trust. Together, these emotional and cognitive responses drive ultimate *behavioural outcomes*: purchase intention and willingness to pay. The proposed division is guided by dual-process theory (Kahneman, 2011) and consumer response models (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961), which suggest that individuals form impressions through an emotional–cognitive sequence. Additionally, familiarity with AI and luxury brands is modeled as a moderating factor that can attenuate negative effects of AI disclosure. This grouped structure offers a rationalized and psychologically meaningful way to model how disclosure cues influence consumer evaluations.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



To enhance clarity, I present the common synonyms to the key constructs used in this study, adapted from the Cambridge Thesaurus (Cambridge University Press, 1994). This overview is intended to help readers align the terminology employed here with the broader vocabulary used across the literature.

Table 1. Key Constructs and Related Terminology

Construct	Synonyms / Related Terms
<i>Product-Level Perceptions</i>	
Authenticity	faithfulness, fidelity, genuineness, integrity, preciseness, reliability, trueness, veracity
Creativity	imagination, inventiveness, novelty, unorthodoxy, uniqueness
Craftsmanship	artwork, handcraft, handiwork, manufacture
Emotional Bond	meaningful connection, mental relation, sentimental attachment
Human Touch	direct contact, human interaction, physical engagement, social connection
<i>Brand-Level Cognitions</i>	
Attitude	outlook, perspective
Essence	core, meaning, nature, principle, quintessence, substance
Honesty	guiltlessness, morality, reputability, truthfulness, trustworthiness
Trust	belief, certainty, confidence, faith, reliance, sureness

The literature review in this chapter revealed key relationships and gaps that underpin the study’s hypotheses, as well as the conceptual framework used to test them, which guide the methodological approach described in the following section.

Chapter 3

Empirical Study

Building on the theoretical framework and hypotheses developed in Chapter 2, this chapter presents the empirical study designed to test them. It outlines the research design and analytical procedures, then reports and interprets the results.

The study adopts an experimental survey design to establish empirical evidence within the proposed conceptual framework (Figure 1). This design was chosen to test how content source (AI vs. human) and authorship disclosure influence consumer evaluations. By using a fictional brand and standardized product visuals, the study eliminates prior brand familiarity as a confounding factor and ensures that responses are shaped directly by the manipulated variables.

3.1 Method

Design and Stimuli. Because the research question focuses on how disclosure shapes perceptions, I conducted a between-subjects experiment with three disclosure conditions, allowing participants' reactions to be directly attributed to disclosure. Participants were randomly assigned to view one product image that was either (1) disclosed as AI-generated, (2) disclosed as human-generated, or (3) presented without any disclosure of authorship (control condition). In the control group, participants were randomly and equally assigned to view either the AI- or human-generated image, both accompanied by a neutral caption. Post-hoc analysis confirmed no significant differences between the two image types, allowing the control group to be treated as a single condition. Each participant was exposed to one condition only, enabling clear attribution of perceptual responses to the respective stimulus type (Lavrakas, 2019).

The validity of such a design depends on carefully constructed and standardized stimuli. Sneakers were selected as the stimulus product due to their growing relevance in the luxury sector and their appeal across diverse consumer groups (Shin, 2023). Building on previous research into accessible luxury categories such as t-shirts (Moreau et al., 2023) and handbags (Pantano et al., 2024), sneakers offer a balanced combination of stylistic versatility and cultural neutrality, making them ideal for minimizing confounding influences such as gender-specific design or status signaling, while maintaining validity within a fashion-driven context. Two product images were created for the experiment:

1. Human-generated Image

An existing, but edited sneaker model was used to streamline the stimulus design process and ensure visual realism. The product selected for the experiment—Hermès Unisex Bouncing Sneakers in Blanc/Blanc—was chosen for its minimalistic, neutral design and color palette. To prevent brand recognition bias, the product was edited using Potoroom and Snapseed photoshop services—the "H" logo was removed, and the colors were darkened. The photograph was taken with a Nikon Coolpix S220 camera (see Figure 2).

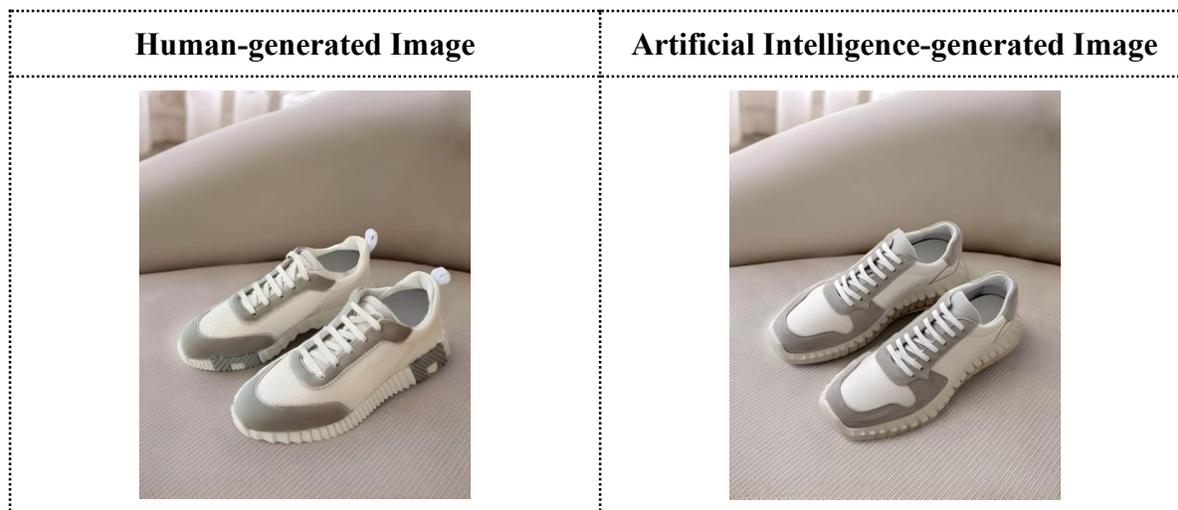
2. Artificial Intelligence-generated Image

The Generative Artificial Intelligence product image (see Figure 2) was created using the Midjourney AI program that generates images from natural language descriptions (Midjourney AI, 2025). The human-generated picture from p.1 (see Figure 2) was attached as a reference to the following input (prompt):

high-end sneakers placed on a wide white sofa with high backrest, crafted from smooth calfskin and suede with low top silhouette, top and toe parts are light grey colored, the rest is soft white. the sneakers have a realistic modern luxury street style, clear details. the lighting is soft, natural look sofa with high backrest.

In addition to the textual prompt, Midjourney image generation parameters were applied to ensure stylistic consistency and realism¹.

Figure 2. Experimental Stimuli



Upon consenting, participants were first directed to a product page introducing *Nèro*, the fictitious fashion brand, though its fictional nature was not disclosed at this stage. Participants were instructed to observe the image carefully before being randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions and exposed to a single product image (see Figure 2) accompanied with the respective caption (see Table 2).

¹Midjourney parameters:

- ar 3:4: Sets a vertical 3:4 aspect ratio.
- raw: Disables default artistic enhancements.
- sref: Applies the visual style of a reference image (tone, color, composition).
- profile raz2bjb: A custom Midjourney profile for stylistic standardization.
- stylize 0: Minimizes stylistic exaggeration.
- v 7: Specifies use of Midjourney Version 7 (2025).

Table 2. Disclosure Captions by Experimental Condition

Condition	Caption
Human	This sneaker was designed by a human designer as part of a luxury capsule collection. The image was captured using a Nikon Coolpix S220 and edited with Photoroom and Snapseed.
AI	This sneaker design was generated using Midjourney AI—a tool powered by Artificial Intelligence, with a detailed luxury fashion prompt inspired by minimalist streetwear aesthetics.
Control (Non-disclosed)	This product is a part of Spring / Summer capsule - Limited edition release.

Survey Instrument. Participants evaluated the stimuli through a structured online questionnaire designed to capture product-level, brand-level, and behavioral responses. The survey consisted of both experimental manipulations and standardized item blocks, totaling 13 sections. It began with an introduction and consent page, followed by an introduction to *Nèro*, a fictitious fashion brand. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions, which served as the independent variables. Next, the questionnaire measured 2 dependent (incl. one open-ended item), 9 mediating and 2 moderating variables using likert-scale items (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree), which were selected due to their clarity and higher response rates (Parasuraman et al., 1994). To ensure robustness, all constructs were measured using established and validated scales, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Overview of Dependent, Mediating and Moderating variables

Variable	Items (N)	Sample Item	Context	Adapted from
<i>Dependent Variables</i>				
Purchase Intention	2	I would consider purchasing this product.	Scale for brand purchase intention in advertising/branding settings.	Spears and Singh (2004)
Willingness to Pay	Maximum € price	What is the maximum price (€) you'd be willing to pay for this product?	Meta-analysis on methods for accurately measuring WTP; Price range based on typical market positioning of luxury sneakers from brands like Gucci and Prada.	Lectra (2023), Schmidt and Bijmolt (2020)
<i>Mediating Variables</i>				
Authenticity	3	This product feels authentic.	Integrative framework and validated scale for brand authenticity.	Morhart et al. (2015)
Brand Attitude	3	I like this brand.	Scales for brand experience and attitude.	Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009)
Brand Essence	3	This product captures the essence of a luxury brand.	Definition of brand essence and how it captures brand identity and luxury.	Barnham (2009)
Brand Honesty	3	The brand's transparency is questionable.	"Honesty" dimension within a validated brand authenticity scale.	Van-Dat (2018)
Brand Trust	3	I trust the intentions of this brand.	Link of trust to brand performance, loyalty, and equity.	Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001)
Craftsmanship	3	This product reflects detailed craftsmanship.	Model to assess perceived craftsmanship in product design.	Ersal et al. (2011)
Creativity	3	The design shows elements of creativity.	Effects of perceived creativity on WTP for design products.	Christensen, Kristensen and Reber (2015)

Emotional Bond	3	Using this product would make me feel confident or self-assured.	Emotional attachment to brands.	Thomson, MacInnis and Park (2005)
Human Touch	2	The design reflects human involvement.	Human vs. AI service touch.	Choi, Yi and Zhao (2024)
<i>Moderating Variables</i>				
AI Familiarity	3	I often use AI based tools or services.	Technology Readiness Index 2.0 applied to measure AI familiarity.	Parasuraman and Colby (2015)
Luxury Familiarity	3	I regularly purchase or receive luxury fashion items.	Definition of consumer expertise and brand familiarity.	Alba and Hutchinson (1987)

Note: The full item list is available in Appendix A.

The order of variables was structured to reflect emotional-to-cognitive progression, based on the assumption that emotional and cognitive impressions mediate the relationship between stimuli (e.g., AI disclosure) and behavioural outcomes. This sequence begins with intuitive and affective judgments—such as purchase intention and emotional bond—and advances toward more deliberate, evaluative constructs—such as brand trust and familiarity. This approach aligns with several theoretical principles:

1. *Dual-processing theory*, which distinguishes between intuitive, fast, emotional (System 1) and analytical, slow, deliberate (System 2) thinking (Kahneman, 2011).
2. *The hierarchy of effects model*, which proposes that consumers initially respond emotionally before forming cognitive judgments and buying decisions (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961).
3. *Brand experience research*, which recommends starting with affective and experiential components (such as feelings and design appeal) prior to assessing cognitive evaluations like trust or attitude (Brakus et al., 2009).

To align these theories with present study and to consider the literature discussed in Chapter 2, I included key product-level perceptions—authenticity, craftsmanship, creativity, emotional bond and human touch—most relevant to luxury consumption and representing the symbolic values of heritage and artistry (Jago et al., 2022). In addition, I incorporated brand attitude, essence, honesty and trust to capture brand-level cognitions. Together, these variables serve as mediators. Prior research identifies these responses as key antecedents to purchase behaviour in luxury contexts (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Christensen et al., 2015; Morhart et al., 2015).

The dependent variables—purchase intention and willingness to pay—reflect the behavioural outcomes brands seek to influence (Schmidt and Bijmolt, 2020; Spears and Singh, 2004).

Familiarity with AI and luxury serve as moderating variables that shape how these perceptions form. Finally, disclosure awareness acts as a manipulation check to ensure the experimental condition was perceived as intended—an established practice in experimental design (Kirk and Givi, 2024).

Upon completion, participants were redirected to a debrief page containing an ethical disclosure stating that *Nèro* was a fictitious brand created solely for academic research purposes. This disclosure was placed at the end of the questionnaire to minimize confirmation bias—preventing responses from being influenced by participants’ prior beliefs (Nickerson, 1998)—and priming effects—avoiding the enhancement of the brand's impact on participants' perceptions and reducing the likelihood that they would interpret the information through the lens of the disclosure itself (Tulving, 1983).

The questionnaire concluded with four demographic questions—age, gender, residence, and education level—and an optional open-ended comment.

Sample and Recruitment. Data were collected from a sample of participants recruited online via Qualtrics survey platform, with steps taken to minimize low-quality responses and ensure reliability. To safeguard against automated or low-quality responses, the built-in Q_RecaptchaScore was activated, with an exclusion threshold of 0.5.

Prior to launch, the survey was pre-tested with three participants to ensure clarity, flow, and reliability. Respondents were encouraged to think aloud and provide feedback on wording, question structure, and visual layout. Insights from the pre-testing resulted in minor corrections in typographical errors and the font.

The final questionnaire was distributed via social media platforms, such as Instagram, LinkedIn, Telegram, WhatsApp, and via SurveyCircle, using convenience sampling. This method was chosen due to its accessibility and efficiency in reaching a large number of participants within time and resource limitations. Although convenience sampling limits the generalizability of findings, it is appropriate for studies aimed at identifying patterns or associations rather than establishing population-level conclusions (Golzar et al., 2022). All participants took part voluntarily and anonymously after being informed about the nature and purpose of the study at the beginning of the survey. No identifying information was collected, and responses were stored for academic use only. Since the research posed minimal risk and involved adult participants, formal ethical approval was not required.

A total of 212 responses were collected. However, 30 incomplete responses were excluded. Responses were also screened for inattentiveness or non-differentiated answering patterns. Specifically, participants who selected only the “Neutral” option across all key perception measures were removed ($N = 4$). An additional 4 responses were excluded based on a low Q_RecaptchaScore (< 0.5). Overall, a sample of $N = 174$ responses were used for the final analysis (68% Female, Median_{age} = 21)—59 in Human, 58 in AI, and 57 in Control conditions. The young adult demographic is particularly relevant as younger consumers both drive the growth of accessible luxury and are the generation most accustomed to interacting with AI in daily life. Their perceptions therefore offer valuable insights into how the future of luxury branding may evolve.

Once the final dataset was obtained, I proceeded with statistical analyses designed to evaluate the reliability of the measures and test the hypotheses.

Data Analysis Strategy. The data analysis strategy was guided by the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2. It was designed to assess the reliability, validity, and underlying factor structure of the constructs used in the study, as well as to examine the influence of experimental conditions on dependent variables. The statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 3.5.3). First, each variable was assessed through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using Principal Axis Factoring to test construct dimensionality; Reliability Testing using Cronbach’s alpha to evaluate internal consistency and Composite Score Computation by averaging items within each construct. Then, each construct was tested in accordance with the underlying hypothesis. Table 4 summarizes the hypotheses, the aims and analytical tools used to test them, and the key variables.

Table 4. Overview of Study

Main Aim / Hypotheses Tested	Key Variables	Analytical Technique Used
Test of disclosure effect on brand-level cognitions (H1-H2)	IV: Disclosure condition (3 levels) DVs: Attitude, Essence, Honesty, Trust	General Linear Model
Test of disclosure effect on product-level perceptions (H3-H4)	IV: Disclosure condition DVs: Authenticity, Creativity, Craftsmanship, Human Touch, Emotional Bond	General Linear Model
Test of moderating effects of familiarity (H5)	Moderators: AI Familiarity, Luxury Familiarity Outcomes: Product-Level Perceptions	PROCESS macro Model 1
Test of mediating effects on behavioural outcomes (H6)	IV: Disclosure condition Mediators: Authenticity, Attitude, Trust DVs: PI, WTP	PROCESS macro Model 81

Having established the analytical framework, the following section presents the results of these analyses in relation to the hypotheses.

3.2 Results

This subchapter presents the results of the empirical analyses outlined in subchapter 3.1. The results are presented in four stages: first, manipulation check that verifies the success of the experimental manipulation; second, hypotheses testing across brand-level (H1-H2), and product-level (H3-H4) variables; third, examination of moderating role of familiarity (H5), and fourth, examination of behavioural outcomes (H6).

Manipulation Check. To verify that participants noticed the type of content they were exposed to, I conducted a manipulation check on awareness at the end of the survey. Across the three conditions, there was a small but statistically significant difference in awareness, $F(2, 171) = 3.88, p = .022, \eta^2 = .043$, with slightly lower awareness in the AI condition ($M = 1.85, SD = .55$) compared to the control ($M = 2.13, SD = .57$) and human conditions ($M = 2.08, SD = .58$).

However, when comparing only the Human and AI conditions, there was no significant difference in awareness, $F(1, 55) = .001, p = .981, h^2 = .000$, indicating that the critical experimental manipulation did not meaningfully alter participants' awareness. Therefore, awareness was not included as a covariate in subsequent analyses.

3.2.1 Effects of Disclosure on Brand-Level Cognitions

Hypotheses 1 and 2 propose that content disclosed as AI (vs. human) authored will negatively affect brand-level cognitions. H1 addresses perceptions of brand attitude ($\alpha = .91, \lambda = .96-.83$), essence ($\alpha = .93, \lambda = .91-.89$), and honesty ($\alpha = .76, \lambda = .88-.53$), while H2 extends this inquiry to brand trust ($\alpha = .89, \lambda = .91-.82$).

To test these hypotheses, a series of univariate analyses were conducted (see Table 4). They revealed a significant effect of disclosure condition on brand attitude, $F(2,171) = 4.53, p = .012, h^2_p = .050$, and on perceived brand honesty, $F(2,171) = 3.29, p = .040, h^2_p = .037$, with AI condition being rated lower² ($M_{attitude} = 3.06, SD = .90; M_{honesty} = 2.44, SD = .77$) than human condition ($M_{attitude} = 2.84, SD = .98; M_{honesty} = 2.72, SD = .86$). The effect on brand essence was not statistically significant, $F(2,171) = 1.56, p = .214, h^2_p = .018$, indicating that these perceptions did not differ meaningfully between conditions. For brand trust, the results indicated a marginally significant effect of disclosure, $F(2,171) = 2.64, p = .074, h^2_p = .030$, with AI condition also being rated lower ($M_{trust} = 3.12, SD = .92$) than human one ($M_{trust} = 2.81, SD = 1.01$).

Therefore, both hypotheses received marginal support. Disclosure of AI authorship had a negative and significant impact on perceptions of brand attitude and honesty, but not on brand essence. While the effect on brand trust did not reach the conventional threshold for statistical significance, the direction of the findings suggested that perceived authorship may influence consumer trust to some extent.

3.2.2 Effects of Disclosure on Product-Level Perceptions

Hypotheses 3 and 4 propose that content disclosed as AI (vs. human) authored will negatively affect product-level perceptions. H1 addresses perceptions of creativity ($\alpha = .84, \lambda = .85-.74$), craftsmanship ($\alpha = .88, \lambda = .88-.82$), emotional bond ($\alpha = .85, \lambda = .83-.78$), and human touch ($\alpha = .89, \lambda = .90$), while H2 extends this inquiry to perceived authenticity ($\alpha = .87, \lambda = .87-.79$).

²All items were rated on a 5-point scale, with 1 indicating a more favourable evaluation and 5 indicating a less favourable evaluation, so the mean skewed towards 5 is less favourable.

To test these hypotheses, a series of univariate analyses were conducted (see Table 4). The results showed that the effect of disclosure condition on perceived creativity, $F(2,171) = 1.52, p = .222, h^2_p = .017$; emotional bond, $F(2,171) = .91, p = .403, h^2_p = .011$; and human touch, $F(2,171) = 1.74, p = .178, h^2_p = .020$ was not statistically significant. Similarly, the effect on craftsmanship was marginal but did not reach statistical significance, $F(2,171) = 2.75, p = .067, h^2_p = .031$, with AI condition being rated lower ($M_{craftsmanship} = 3.15, SD = .93$) than human condition ($M_{craftsmanship} = 2.79, SD = 1.02$). As expected, a statistically significant effect was revealed on perceived authenticity, $F(2,171) = 3.07, p = .049, h^2_p = .035$. Follow-up pairwise comparisons indicated that authenticity ratings were significantly lower in the AI condition ($M_{authenticity} = 3.33, SD = 1.00$) compared to the human condition ($M_{authenticity} = 2.87, SD = 1.09$), with a mean difference of $-.469$ ($p = .017$).

The findings indicate that disclosing AI authorship did not significantly impact any of the four examined variables proposed in Hypothesis 3—creativity, craftsmanship, emotional bond and human touch. Alternatively, disclosure of AI authorship did impact respondents' perceptions of authenticity. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not, and Hypothesis 4 was supported.

3.2.3 Moderating Role of Familiarity

Hypothesis 5 proposed that familiarity—both with AI tools and with luxury brands—will attenuate declines in product-level perceptions (e.g., creativity) when AI authorship is disclosed. To test this, a series of moderation analyses were conducted using PROCESS Macro Model 1 (Hayes, 2018). Two separate sets of analyses were run—one with AI familiarity and the other with luxury brand familiarity as moderators.

AI Familiarity as a Moderator

In the first set of models, the disclosure condition was entered as the independent variable, the five product-level responses were used as dependent variables, and AI familiarity was entered as a moderator of the effect. The results showed that AI familiarity had a significant positive main effect on perceptions of authenticity ($b = .47, SE = .16, 95\% CI = [.15, .79]$), creativity ($b = .32,$

$SE = .16$, 95% CI = [.01, .64]), and human touch ($b = .38$, $SE = .17$, 95% CI = [.06, .71]). The effect on craftsmanship was marginal ($b = .31$, $SE = .16$, 95% CI = [-.01, .63]), while emotional bond was not significant ($b = .23$, $SE = .16$, 95% CI = [-.08, .54]). Despite this, none of the interaction terms with disclosure were significant (for ex., for authenticity, the interactions were $b = -.36$, $SE = .21$, 95% CI [-.78, .06] and $b = -.06$, $SE = .24$, 95% CI [-.52, .41]). These results indicate no moderation by AI familiarity.

Although AI familiarity was associated with more favourable product perceptions, it did not moderate the negative effect of AI authorship disclosure. In other words, regardless of whether the participants were highly or lowly familiar with AI, this familiarity did not buffer their perceptions of disclosure, so Hypothesis 5 was not supported in this context.

Luxury Brand Familiarity as a Moderator

In the second set of models, the disclosure condition remained the independent variable, the five product-level responses were used as dependent variables, and luxury familiarity was entered as a moderator of the effect. For the luxury familiarity, neither of the main effects (for ex., authenticity: $b = .20$, $SE = .15$, 95% CI = [-.10, .50]) nor the interaction effects (for ex., creativity: $b = .10$, $SE = .20$, 95% CI [-.29, .49] and $b = -.03$, $SE = .21$, 95% CI [-.44, .39]) on any of variables reached statistical significance. Identical to AI familiarity, these results indicate no moderation by luxury familiarity.

Familiarity with the luxury field did not significantly influence how participants reacted to AI-generated content. This means that participants with higher luxury familiarity did not evaluate products disclosed as AI-authored differently from those with lower familiarity, so Hypothesis 5 was not supported in this moderating context as well.

3.2.4 Predictors of Purchase Intention and Willingness to Pay

Hypothesis 6 proposed that disclosure condition will predict purchase intention ($F(2,171) = 1.60, p = .204, h^2_p = .018, \alpha = .83, \lambda = .84$) and willingness to pay ($F(2,171) = 1.07, p = .344, h^2_p = .012$) indirectly through its effects on perceived brand authenticity, attitude, and trust. To test this, a serial multiple mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Macro Model 81 (Hayes, 2018) with 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. The models included disclosure conditions (Human, AI, Control; dummy coded into two contrasts) as the independent variable; authenticity, brand attitude, and brand trust as mediators; and purchase intention (PI) and willingness to pay (WTP) as dependent variables.

Comparing Human vs. AI disclosure. In comparison of experimental conditions to each other, content disclosed as human-authored was perceived as more authentic ($b = .47, SE = .19, t = 2.41, p = .017$), but neither condition significantly changed perceptions of brand attitude ($b = -.07, SE = .13, t = -.58, p = .563$), and brand trust ($b = -.01, SE = .12, t = .03, p = .977$). 95% CI indicated that disclosure of human authorship has a significant positive indirect effect on PI via authenticity ($b = .13, SE = .07, 95\% CI = [.02, .28]$) and via the combined path of authenticity and attitude ($b = .13, SE = .06, 95\% CI = [.02, .27]$). Direct effects were non-significant ($b = -.05, SE = .14, 95\% CI = [-.32, .22]$), and no significant direct or indirect effects were observed for WTP ($b = -1.82, SE = 11.91, 95\% CI = [-25.35, 21.70]$).

Comparing Human/AI disclosure vs. No disclosure. In comparison of experimental conditions to the control group separately, content disclosed as AI-authored was perceived as less authentic ($b = -.27, SE = .11, t = -2.37, p = .019$). In contrast, disclosure of human authorship was a marginally positive predictor of authenticity ($b = .20, SE = .11, t = 1.80, p = .074$), which in turn increased both brand attitude ($b = .63, SE = .48, t = 12.97, p < .001$) and brand trust ($b = .66, SE = .47, t = 14.16, p < .001$).

Perceived authenticity ($b = .27, SE = .81, t = 3.31, p < .001$) of content and positive brand attitude ($b = .43, SE = .10, t = 4.18, p < .001$) resulted in increased PI. The effect of brand trust was non-significant ($b = .09, SE = .11, t = .83, p < .406$). 95% CI indicated that AI disclosure reduced PI indirectly as AI content was perceived as less authentic ($b = -.07, SE = .04, 95\% CI = [-.16, -.01]$). Disclosure of AI authorship also negatively affected PI indirectly through the

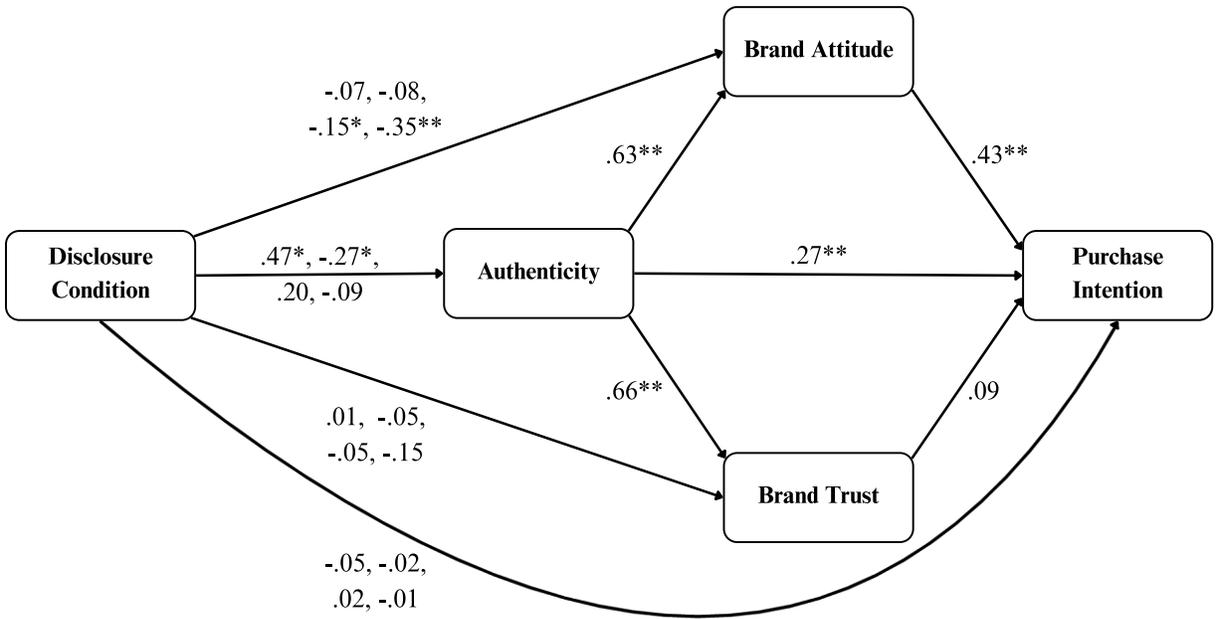
sequential path of authenticity and attitude ($b = -.07$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI = [-.15, -.01]). No significant direct effects were found, and there were no indirect effects through trust.

Comparing Disclosure vs. No disclosure. In comparison of the control group to the two experimental conditions, the absence of authorship disclosure reduced brand attitude ($b = -.35$, $SE = .11$, $t = -3.27$, $p = .001$). Alternatively, no significant differences between conditions were found for authenticity ($b = -.09$, $SE = .17$, $t = -.55$, $p = .580$), and brand trust ($b = -.15$, $SE = .10$, $t = -1.5$, $p = .137$).

The absence of disclosure had a significant negative indirect effect on PI via brand attitude ($b = -.15$, $SE = .06$, 95% CI = [-.29, -.05]). There were no direct effects on PI ($b = -.01$, $SE = .12$, 95% CI = [-.25, .23]), and no significant direct or indirect effects were observed for WTP ($b = -7.27$, $SE = 13.41$, 95% CI = [-33.75, 19.22]).

Taken together, these findings suggest that perceived authenticity and brand attitude fully mediate the relationship between disclosure and purchase intention. Willingness to pay remains largely unaffected, suggesting that while perceptions shape intentions, they do not easily shift consumers' valuation of price.

Figure 3. Serial Mediation via Authenticity and Brand-Level Cognitions on Purchase Intention



Note: Paths from mediators to purchase intention were the same across all models. The rest of the coefficients are reported in the sequence: Human vs. AI, Human vs. No disclosure, AI vs. No disclosure, Disclosure vs. No disclosure; ** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$

3.3 Discussion

3.3.1 *Effects of Disclosure on Brand-Level Cognitions*

Initial observations suggest that consumer evaluations are selectively sensitive to AI authorship cues. The decline in brand attitude and perceived honesty in the AI condition supports prior literature discussed in Chapters 2.2 and 2.3, showing that consumers often respond to AI-generated content with a degree of skepticism or detachment (Jago et al., 2022; Lermann Henestrosa and Kimmerle, 2024). This aligns with the notion that AI involvement, when disclosed, introduces ambiguity rather than assurance, leading consumers to question the integrity of the brand's design process. This reaction is also consistent with Draxler et al. (2023) and Wang et al. (2023), who argue that AI transparency can heighten consumers' critical awareness, prompting scrutiny of the brand's purpose. Similarly, Liu et al. (2025) notes that disclosure acts not just as a factual update but as a symbolic cue, shaping interpretive frameworks that may influence consumers' deeper judgments about the brand.

Although disclosure condition exerted a marginal effect on brand trust, the trend toward reduced trust in the AI condition is consistent with prior work suggesting that consumers place greater trust in human authorship, particularly in high-value and emotionally charged domains like luxury branding. The observed decline when AI authorship is disclosed aligns with the opinion of Formosa et al. (2024) who argue that human involvement serves as a proxy for credibility. This finding is particularly relevant in the luxury context, where trust is often intertwined with perceptions of craftsmanship, narrative heritage, and exclusivity (Marin et al, 2022). The data suggests that participants may have viewed AI-generated content as lacking the depth or resonance necessary to meet the expectations of a luxury brand. The disclosure of AI as the author may have disrupted trust by calling into question the product's symbolic and emotional legitimacy. The results also support findings by Buchanan and Hickman (2024), and Liu et al. (2025), who argue that transparency around AI involvement can provoke more critical consumer scrutiny. In this study, the explicit disclosure of AI authorship may have amplified awareness of the content's non-human origin, leading participants to question its intentionality or its capacity to embody brand values.

Disclosure did not significantly affect brand essence by disclosure, indicating that consumers' broader perceptions of brand identity or vision may be more stable or less immediately reactive to authorship cues. This aligns with findings from Xu and Mehta (2022), who suggest that AI integration may sometimes reinforce brand essence by evoking associations with innovation, efficiency, or technological leadership, especially in design-forward sectors.

Taken together, these results suggest that AI authorship disclosure activates selective cognitive filters. While it does not totally damage all aspects of brand meaning, it does significantly influence perceptions tied to attitude and perceived honesty. Even marginal declines in trust could carry reputational risks when consumers perceive a lack of human intentionality behind the product. For branding professionals, this underscores the importance of strategic messaging around AI use, particularly in emotionally charged domains.

3.3.2 Effects of Disclosure on Product-Level Perceptions

The results for perceptual theorizing contrast with theoretical expectations outlined in Chapter 2.4, which emphasized the importance of perceived authorship in driving evaluations of creativity, craftsmanship, emotional bond and human touch. Prior literature has highlighted that AI disclosure can diminish perceptions of creativity and emotional depth (De Cremer et al., 2023; Pantano et al., 2024), while non-disclosed AI-generated content may paradoxically enhance perceived creativity (Haase et al., 2023). In this study, the absence of statistically significant differences suggests that these effects may be weaker or more context-dependent than previously assumed. While participants may foster subtle skepticism toward AI-generated content, these reservations did not translate into strong evaluative penalties in this experimental setting. In luxury or emotionally resonant contexts, where craftsmanship, human effort and intention often underpin creative evaluation (Jago et al., 2022), these results hold space for further exploration, particularly in larger samples skewed towards more experienced luxury consumers.

The hypothesized negative impact of AI disclosure is directionally evident because of the lower mean scores trend, yet it did not reach the threshold for statistical support. The contradiction of the results of this study with the previously reviewed literature highlights the complexity of

consumer perceptions of AI authorship, suggesting that the cost of disclosure may be more subtle, situational, or dependent on other variables.

One of these other variables could be the perception of authenticity, as the results for related theorizing offer stronger support for prior theoretical claims. Consistent with Section 2.5, disclosure significantly affected perceptions of authenticity, suggesting that it is shaped not only by product composition or visual qualities but also by its origin. Consumers may interpret AI authorship as lacking attributes typically associated with authentic creative work—symbolic value, intentionality or cultural grounding. Accordingly, full automation can diminish perceptions of authenticity due to AI’s limited capacity for emotional or cultural resonance (Jago and Carroll, 2024; Rapp et al., 2025).

The significant contrast between the AI and human conditions—but not between AI and control conditions—also points to an important nuance: it is not necessarily the absence of human authorship that triggers lower authenticity judgments, but the explicit presence of AI authorship. Consequently, negative reactions can be moderated when AI involvement is collaborative or undisclosed (Lee and Kim, 2024). And again, these results are particularly relevant in emotionally charged domains such as luxury, as they highlight the fragility of authenticity perceptions in contexts where the story behind the product carries as much weight as the product itself (Jago et al., 2022).

Together, these findings present a complex picture of product-level perceptions. Within the scope of this study, they suggest that authenticity may be a more immediate and sensitive evaluative lens for consumers than other attributes like creativity, craftsmanship, emotional bond, or human touch.

3.3.3 Moderating Role of Familiarity

The results of the moderation analyses showed that AI familiarity is a significant main effect predictor of several outcome variables, including authenticity, creativity, and human touch, with a marginal effect on craftsmanship. Participants with greater familiarity with AI generally perceived products more positively on these dimensions, regardless of disclosure condition.

However, the interaction terms were not significant, indicating that AI familiarity did not moderate the effect of AI authorship disclosure. In other words, while individuals with higher AI exposure tended to rate products more favourably overall, their evaluations still declined when AI authorship is disclosed, to a similar extent as those with lower familiarity.

This finding nuances the theoretical framework proposed in Section 2.6. While prior literature (e.g., Hwang et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2025) suggested that AI fluency could reduce skepticism and bias, the data from this study indicate that familiarity alone does not attenuate declines in disclosure effects. One possible explanation is that familiarity may enhance baseline perceptions of products or brands but is insufficient to counteract the specific skepticism triggered by disclosure of AI authorship. Behavioural factors, such as trust in AI, positive experiences with related tools, or a sense of agency in engaging with them, may be more critical in shaping perceptions. Future research could test this by integrating measures of AI attitudes and confidence, which may interact with familiarity to influence disclosure responses.

Similarly, luxury brand familiarity did not attenuate the impact of AI disclosure. This finding may reflect a consistent expectation across consumer segments that luxury products are rooted in human craftsmanship and cultural intentionality (Jago et al., 2022), or it could indicate a *ceiling effect*, where emotional expectations for luxury are already high and resistant to influence, regardless of familiarity level (Garin, 2023).

Additionally, the use of a fictional luxury brand—intended to minimize brand equity bias—may have limited the salience of luxury familiarity in shaping responses. Without a real brand identity that may activate associations with heritage or quality, participants may have defaulted to generalized attitudes about AI in design rather than brand-specific judgements. Prior work (Pantano et al., 2024; Xu and Mehta, 2022) suggests that familiarity effects are often more pronounced in the presence of brand recognition, where loyalty and personal experience can anchor evaluations.

Overall, familiarity—whether with AI tools or luxury brands—did not meaningfully influence product-level perceptions with AI authorship disclosure in this study context. When it comes to sensitive evaluations like authenticity and emotional bond, the disclosure may carry enough weight to nullify the potential effects of prior familiarity.

3.3.4 Predictors of Purchase Intention and Willingness to Pay

Purchase Intention. The hypothesis suggested that disclosure condition will influence perceived authenticity, leading to increased brand trust and attitude and therefore increased purchase intention. The results marginally supported this theory.

Specifically, when comparing human vs. AI disclosure, human authorship increased perceptions of authenticity, which in turn enhanced purchase intention both directly and via the combined path of authenticity and attitude. By contrast, AI disclosure lowered perceptions of authenticity relative to control, which indirectly reduced purchase intention through authenticity and the sequential path of authenticity and attitude. These findings indicate that authenticity serves as a key mechanism through which disclosure shapes consumer behaviour.

The analysis further revealed that the absence of disclosure (control condition) negatively affected brand attitude, which subsequently reduced purchase intention. This suggests that transparency itself—regardless of whether authorship is human or AI—is beneficial and more effective for fostering favourable consumer responses than no disclosure.

More broadly, the model highlighted brand attitude as a consistent positive predictor of purchase intention across all conditions, reinforcing prior work by Rapp et al. (2025) and Ozuem et al. (2023). Although authenticity positively influenced brand trust, it did not significantly predict purchase intention. This divergence supports arguments made by Carrasco-Farré (2022) and Demba et al. (2019) that trust alone, when not accompanied by strong attitudinal or emotional resonance, may not be sufficient to drive behavioural patterns.

The absence of significant direct effects, coupled with the presence of meaningful indirect effects, suggests that the relationship is fully mediated. In line with Lee and Kim (2024), and Sun et al. (2024), these findings imply that consumer responses to AI-generated content are governed less by novelty and more by perceptions of credibility and emotional fit.

Willingness To Pay. In contrast to the findings for purchase intention, disclosure condition did not significantly affect willingness to pay (WTP), either directly or indirectly through the proposed mediators. This highlights the complexity of consumer decision-making and supports

established theories suggesting an imperfect correlation between consumer intentions and actual behavior (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 1999; Gollwitzer, 1999).

Previous studies discussed in Chapter 2.7 suggested that consumers might be willing to pay more for AI-generated fashion (Moreau et al., 2023). One explanation of misalignment may lie in the use of a fictional brand in this study, which may have limited the influence of brand equity or loyalty—key drivers of premium pricing in luxury markets (Xu and Mehta, 2022). Additionally, perceived uncertainty around AI design may heighten cognitive risk aversion, dampening willingness to pay despite favourable attitudes (Sun et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023). This, however, supports the growing view in literature that authorship labels alone are not the decisive factor in consumer acceptance. Instead, perceptions of authenticity and positive attitudes toward the brand are the most important forces shaping behavioural outcomes (Jago et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2023).

Summary of Hypotheses Testing. The results of the statistical analyses provide marginal support for the proposed conceptual model. Out of the six hypotheses tested, one was fully supported, three were marginally supported, and two were not supported.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were marginally supported. The disclosure of AI authorship significantly reduced perceptions of brand attitude and honesty, and marginally reduced perceptions of brand trust ($p = .074$). Although it did not influence perceptions of brand essence, the directionality of the findings aligned with theoretical expectations.

Hypothesis 3 was not supported; although mean ratings were directionally lower in the AI condition, none of the differences in emotional evaluations (creativity, craftsmanship, emotional bond, and human touch) reached statistical significance. Hypothesis 4 was supported, with AI disclosure strongly and significantly lowering perceived authenticity compared to human disclosure.

Hypothesis 5 was not supported. Familiarity with either AI or luxury brands did not significantly moderate the effect of disclosure on product-level evaluations.

Finally, Hypothesis 6 was marginally supported. Disclosure condition did not directly affect purchase intention or willingness to pay; but several significant indirect effects emerged. Authenticity and brand attitude mediated the relationship between disclosure and purchase intention in both AI and human conditions. These mediators did not, however, significantly influence willingness to pay.

Taken together, the findings suggest that while authorship disclosure alone does not consistently alter consumer behaviour, it exerts meaningful indirect effects through cognitive and perceptual variables, with the strongest effect lying in perceived authenticity. A summary of the hypotheses outcomes is presented below.

Table 5. Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Content disclosed as AI (vs. human) authored will be rated lower on perceived brand attitude, essence, and honesty.	Marginally supported ‡
H2	Content disclosed as AI (vs. human) authored will be trusted less.	Marginally supported †
H3	Content disclosed as AI (vs. human) authored will be rated lower on perceived creativity, craftsmanship, emotional bond, and human touch.	Not supported
H4	Content disclosed as AI (vs. human) authored will be perceived as less authentic.	Supported
H5	Familiarity—both with AI tools and with luxury brands—will attenuate declines in product-level perceptions (e.g., creativity) when AI authorship is disclosed.	Not supported
H6	Disclosure condition will influence purchase intention and willingness to pay indirectly through its effects on perceived authenticity, brand attitude, and trust.	Marginally supported *

‡ Brand attitude and honesty showed significant effects, but brand essence did not: $F(2,171) = 1.56, p = .214$

† Marginal effect of disclosure on brand trust: $F(2,171) = 2.64, p = .074$

* Significant indirect effects observed via authenticity and attitude on purchase intention, but not on willingness to pay (PROCESS Model 81)

Chapter 4

Conclusion

4.1 General Discussion

This thesis examined how disclosure of AI authorship in luxury product design shapes product perceptions and, in turn, influences brand evaluations and purchase intentions. While generative AI has rapidly become a co-creator in creative industries, its role in emotionally charged and symbolically rich contexts such as luxury branding remains unclear. Existing literature often treats creativity, authenticity, and trust in isolation, overlooking their interdependence in consumer responses to AI-generated content (e.g., Carrasco-Farré, 2022; Garcia, 2024; Pantano, 2024). By situating disclosure within the luxury sector—where heritage, craftsmanship, and emotional resonance are central—this research contributes to ongoing debates about authenticity, transparency, and the future of human–AI collaboration (e.g., Baraheem and Nguyen, 2023; Pizzi et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2023).

The results reveal nuanced patterns that both confirm and complicate existing theory. First, consumers’ responses were not uniformly negative toward AI authorship. Disclosure of AI involvement reduced perceptions of brand attitude, honesty and, to some extent, brand trust, yet brand essence remained relatively stable. This suggests that core brand identity is less vulnerable to short-term authorship cues, aligning with Xu and Mehta’s (2022) findings that luxury brands may sometimes benefit from being associated with innovation.

Second, product-level perceptions showed a clear divide: authenticity suffered under AI disclosure, whereas creativity, craftsmanship, emotional bond, and human touch remained intact. This highlights authenticity as the most fragile perception in luxury contexts, resonating with Nunes et al. (2021), who define authenticity as a multidimensional construct tied to integrity and cultural grounding.

Third, familiarity with AI or luxury did not mitigate disclosure effects, contrary to expectations (Liu et al., 2025). This suggests that “mere familiarity” may be too superficial; what may matter instead is deeper engagement or trust-building with AI technologies.

Finally, the pathway analysis demonstrated that disclosure influences behavioral intentions indirectly—via authenticity and brand attitude—but does not affect willingness to pay. This distinction underscores how symbolic judgments (authenticity, attitude) shape softer behavioral intentions, while harder financial commitments remain resilient.

Together, these findings confirm dual-process theory’s prediction of layered emotional and cognitive responses (Kahneman, 2011): disclosure cues trigger immediate perceptual shifts (e.g., authenticity), which cascade into brand-level judgments and subsequently shape downstream intentions.

4.2 Contributions

Contributions to theory. This research advances understanding of how explicit disclosure of content origin functions as a symbolic cue, shaping authenticity and brand-level judgments (excluding brand essence) more strongly than immediate evaluations such as creativity. It demonstrates that authenticity serves as a pivotal mediator, extending prior studies that have often treated authenticity in isolation. Furthermore, it enriches the literature on disclosure and transparency in marketing by showing that AI authorship disclosure does not uniformly damage consumer perceptions but selectively undermines authenticity and honesty. This selective sensitivity adds nuance to earlier work that emphasized broad skepticism toward AI in creative domains (Rapp et al., 2025). The findings thus highlight authenticity as a uniquely vulnerable dimension in branding.

Contributions to practice. For luxury managers, the findings underscore a communication dilemma: disclosing AI involvement may erode perceptions of authenticity and honesty; while concealing it risks accusations of inauthenticity if later uncovered. To counter full

skepticism toward AI involvement, brands integrating it into design should adopt framing strategies that emphasize human–AI collaboration rather than full automation, thereby preserving elements of human touch. Transparency policies in luxury branding should carefully balance consumer demand for honesty with the risk of weakening symbolic attributes such as authenticity and craftsmanship. These findings offer practical guidance on framing AI involvement: while disclosure may raise doubts about honesty and authenticity, these risks do not necessarily spill over to core brand essence or willingness to pay. Strategically managing disclosure messaging can help mitigate reputational risks while signaling innovation.

Summary. This study contributes by framing disclosure not only as a matter of transparency but also as a test of symbolic resilience in branding. While prior research often portrays AI disclosure as a uniformly negative signal (Jago et al., 2022; Lermann Henestrosa and Kimmerle, 2024; Rapp et al., 2025), the findings here reveal a conceptual reframing—a "construct-specific vulnerability" perspective—that offers a fresh lens for both scholars and practitioners. Methodologically, the experiment, grounded in emotional and cognitive judgment theories (Kahneman, 2011; Lavidge and Steiner, 1961), may serve as a prototype for studying disclosure in domains where symbolic value and emotional resonance are central. Practically, the study proposes a decision matrix for managers: disclose when symbolic dimensions are likely to remain resilient, but anticipate risks when authenticity is critical to brand positioning. Collectively, these contributions illustrate how research on AI disclosure can move beyond replication and establish novel frameworks for theory and practice.

To the author's knowledge, this thesis is among the first empirical studies to examine AI disclosure in the context of luxury branding. It offers a unique contribution by providing a systematic overview of both product- and brand-level variables.

4.3 Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the data were collected through convenience sampling and were disproportionately skewed toward younger participants ($\text{Median}_{age} = 21$). Consequently, the findings may not be fully generalizable to the broader population of luxury consumers, who are typically older and possess greater purchasing power.

Second, the study examined a single product category (sneakers), limiting the generalizability of the findings to other luxury categories such as haute couture or jewelry, or to non-luxury contexts where AI carries less symbolic risk. Future research could investigate cross-category effects by comparing perceptions of AI disclosure in high-involvement luxury goods (e.g., watches, couture) versus more accessible categories (e.g., cosmetics). Additionally, future studies should test whether disclosure effects extend to utilitarian or low-emotion categories, such as non-luxury offerings, which may elicit different responses due to their lower cultural and symbolic value (Frankel et al., 2021; Wien and Peluso, 2021).

Third, this research considered only fully human- or AI-generated content. Previous research suggested that full understanding of perceived authenticity in marketing contexts depends on the balance between human and algorithmic input (Pizzi et al., 2025). Future work could explore framing strategies that position AI as a creative assistant rather than an autonomous creator, in order to identify conditions that reduce authenticity concerns. Moreover, familiarity did not moderate disclosure effects. Future research should examine whether positive engagement with AI—such as co-creation experiences or trust in AI outputs—plays a more influential role, particularly in emotionally charged domains like luxury branding.

Fourth, although a neutral product was chosen to minimize brand bias, individual differences in taste and visual adoption may still have influenced responses. Notably, some respondents in the control condition misattributed the design to AI, even though no such disclosure was given, with one remarking: *“It was immediately obvious to me as AI, but even if it wasn’t, the design was very bland and unappealing.”* Misattribution is not merely a limitation but also evidence of a cultural shift toward default assumptions of AI authorship (AI Index Report, 2025; Carrasco-Farré, 2022; Liu et al., 2025; Sun et al., 2024). This opens a promising line of inquiry

into “perceived AI” versus “actual AI,” suggesting that perceived style and creativity may influence authorship judgments more strongly than disclosure itself. It also illustrates the growing assumption of AI involvement in digital or minimalist product presentations.

Finally, while this study examined a broad set of product- and brand-related variables, the results do not rule out the influence of other perceptions. Disclosure could also be studied in relation to perceived transparency (Lermann Henestrosa and Kimmerle, 2024; Jago et al., 2022), brand reputation (Haider et al., 2025), perceived risk or innovativeness (Kim et al., 2022; Xu and Mehta, 2022), and the likelihood of word-of-mouth recommendations (Huang and Philp, 2020; Shahzad et al., 2024).

Beyond these study-specific limitations, several broader extensions could deepen and broaden the implications of this research. The first avenue is longitudinal: future studies should test whether disclosure effects persist, attenuate, or intensify with repeated consumer exposure (Laban et al., 2024). A second is cross-cultural: examining disclosure in diverse cultural contexts could reveal whether national differences in uncertainty avoidance, individualism, or technology trust moderate disclosure outcomes (Hofstede, 1984). A third is cross-industry: extending this framework to other symbolic fields such as art, music, film, or hospitality could test whether construct-specific vulnerability is unique to luxury fashion or more generalizable (Hutson et al., 2024; Morreale, 2021; Uddin et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025). Conceptually, future research should also address hybrid authorship scenarios, where human and AI co-creation is disclosed (Pizzi et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2023), and investigate the role of affective computing and “empathetic AI” in mitigating authenticity concerns (Huang and Rust, 2018; Wirtz et al., 2018). Finally, as regulatory initiatives such as the EU AI Act (European Parliament & Council, 2024) increasingly mandate disclosure, longitudinal industry–academic collaborations would ensure that insights remain both forward-looking and practically relevant. These directions articulate a long-term vision in which the present study represents a first but foundational step.

Acknowledging these limitations does not diminish the value of the findings; rather, it highlights the opportunity for further exploration of how disclosure, authorship, and familiarity interact in shaping perceptions of AI in branding.

Although only one hypothesis was fully supported and several received marginal backing, the results point to an important conclusion: authenticity is the backbone in how consumers respond to AI in branding. Disclosure lowered authenticity and, through it, affected brand trust, attitude, and purchase intention, even if not always directly. These findings suggest that AI is neither an automatic threat nor an effortless tool for luxury brands. Rather, its impact depends on how skillfully it is woven into brand stories in ways that protect authenticity while allowing innovation.

Appendix

Appendix A: Full List of Variables and Sample Items Used in the Survey (Chapter 3.1)

Variable	Construct Description	Sample Items	Adapted from
<i>Dependent Variables</i>			
Purchase Intention	Likelihood of product adoption and advocacy	I would consider purchasing this product. I would recommend this product.	Spears and Singh (2004)
Willingness to Pay	Price threshold for perceived value	What is the maximum price you would be willing to pay for this product? (Luxury sneakers typically range from €400–€900)	Lectra (2023), Schmidt and Bijmolt (2020)
<i>Mediating Variables</i>			
Authenticity	Perceived genuineness and originality	This product feels authentic. The design appears genuine and not artificially generated. I perceive this product as original.	Morhart et al. (2015)
Brand Attitude	General feelings toward the brand	I like this brand. I would feel good about being associated with this brand. This brand aligns with my personal values.	Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009)
Brand Essence	Perceived alignment with luxury brand identity	This product captures the essence of a luxury brand. The design is consistent with luxury values. I believe that this product belongs to an established luxury label.	Barnham (2009)
Brand Honesty	Perceived transparency vs. persuasion tactics	The brand's transparency is questionable. This product feels designed to influence my opinion rather than to express creativity. This product feels like it prioritizes commercial appeal	Van-Dat (2018)

Brand Trust	Confidence in brand intentions and transparency	<p>over creative expression.</p> <p>I trust the intentions of this brand.</p> <p>I feel confident making a purchase from this brand.</p> <p>This brand seems transparent in its design process.</p>	Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001)
Craftsmanship	Perception of detail, effort, and design quality	<p>This product reflects detailed craftsmanship.</p> <p>It seems like creating this product involved human effort.</p> <p>The design appears to be the result of thoughtful work.</p>	Ersal et al. (2011)
Creativity	Perceived creative value of the design	<p>The design shows elements of creativity.</p> <p>The design feels thoughtfully styled.</p> <p>The product has a distinct aesthetic character.</p>	Christensen, Kristensen and Reber (2015)
Emotional Bond	Emotional connection to the product	<p>Using this product would make me feel confident or self-assured.</p> <p>This product feels like it could carry personal meaning.</p> <p>Owning this product would help me express my personal style.</p>	Thomson, MacInnis and Park (2005)
Human Touch	Perceived human involvement in design	<p>The design reflects human involvement.</p> <p>It feels like a human had a creative influence in this product design.</p>	Choi, Yi and Zhao (2024)
<i>Moderating Variables</i>			
AI Familiarity	Experience with and understanding of AI tools	<p>I often use AI-based tools or services.</p> <p>I have a good understanding of how AI works in creative fields.</p> <p>I feel comfortable interacting with AI technologies.</p>	Parasuraman and Colby (2015)
Luxury Familiarity	Experience with luxury fashion products	<p>I regularly purchase or receive luxury fashion items.</p> <p>I can easily identify the quality of luxury products.</p>	Alba and Hutchinson (1987)

Brand reputation is important to me when choosing fashion products.

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