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경영학박사학위논문

**Your Dream Is My Reality: How  
Functional Consumption of Luxury  
Brands Becomes a Status Symbol**

럭셔리 브랜드의 기능적 소비가 지위인식에 미치는 영향

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## **Abstract**

# **Your Dream Is My Reality: How Functional Consumption of Luxury Brands Becomes a Status Symbol**

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A new trend of the luxury industry seems to be emerging, namely, the accentuation of functionality in luxury brands is becoming popular. Is it possible that the functional usage of luxury brands delivers a particular message to others that hedonic usage (i.e., conventional luxury consumption) cannot provide? Across five studies ( $N = 1248$ ), we propose that functional usage of products from luxury brands can infer higher social status compared to using the same products hedonically. This positive link between functional consumption of luxury brands and higher social status inference is triggered by perceptions that owners are indifferent to wear and tear on goods from luxury brands. Furthermore, we show that the link among functional consumption of luxury brands, perceived owners'

indifference to wear and tear on goods from luxury brands, and higher status inference is maintained only when brands do not provide aftercare to fix wear and tear. The current research not only suggests a new psychological effect of functional consumption (i.e., perceived owners' indifference to wear and tear on goods) but also bridges literature on consumption goals and social status. In addition, the findings build on emerging research on alternative status signaling by showing that mere usage information can act as an alternative signaling method.

**Keyword:** Luxury, functional consumption, status inference, indifference to wear and tear

**Student Number:** 2014-30165

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# Introduction

People in a modern society represent their ideal images in various ways. For example, people present themselves to possess desirable qualities such as social success, competence, cultural capital (e.g., knowledge, taste), respect, and power, and consuming luxury brands is one of the most popular ways to do so (e.g., Banerjee and Duflo 2007; Berger and Ward 2010; Han, Nunes, and Drèze 2010; Wernerferlt 1990). Luxury brands refer to relatively expensive and socially-admirable brands, which are thus available to signal one's high status (Belk 1988; Wang and Griskevicius 2014). Indeed, consumers tend to perceive the owners of luxury brands to be more successful, wealthy, powerful, and autonomous, which are the qualities associated with high social status (Bellezza, Gino, and Keinan 2014; Berger and Ward 2010; Han et al. 2010; Ordabayeva and Chandon 2011; Richins 1994a). Moreover, since the appeals of luxury brands focus on desirable qualities related to high status, luxury consumptions are known to be conspicuous consumption. That is, consumers are more likely to make aspirational choices that can represent relatively higher status, use luxury brands more in public than private situations, and adopt louder logos to distinguish themselves from the masses.

This costliness and conspicuousness of luxury brands is often attributed to hedonic benefits (i.e., emotional and experiential benefits, Hirschman and

Holbrook 1982), and the purchase of luxury brands is often considered as hedonic consumption (e.g., Keinan, Kivetz, and Netzer 2016; Kivetz and Simonson 2002a). Evidently, the luxury industry has been developed on highly hedonic product categories such as apparel, sports car, and cosmetics than those with high functionality (Arienti 2017; Strahilevitz and Myers 1998).

However, a new trend of the luxury industry seems to be emerging, namely, the accentuation of functionality in luxury brands is becoming popular. Utility looks including vests or pants with many pockets (e.g., Gucci's sleeveless cotton blend fishing vest) are on fashion magazines and Instagram. Louis Vuitton introduced a hybrid cross-body bag with multiple pockets and compartments that can be used as one item or separately, and belt bags have also become an international trend. In addition, luxury brands are increasing their investments in products conventionally categorized as functional (Aaker 1997; Shavitt 1992). Brands like Dolce and Gabbana introduced high-end home appliances, Gucci made erasers, and Louis Vuitton presented dumbbell and jump ropes.

This trend raises important questions - Is it possible that the functional usage of luxury brands delivers a particular message to others that hedonic usage (i.e., conventional luxury consumption) cannot provide? If so, what is the message?

To address this question, we propose that functional consumption of luxury brands can act as a signaling method that implies unexaggerated high

status. Across five studies, we demonstrate that functional usage of products from luxury brands can signal even higher social status than using the same luxury products hedonically. Further, we suggest that this positive link between functional consumption of luxury brands and status is triggered by perceptions that owners are indifferent to wear and tear on goods from luxury brands. In addition, we show that the link among functional consumption of luxury brands, perceived owners' indifference to wear and tear on goods from luxury brands, and higher status inference is maintained only when brands do not provide aftercare to fix wear and tear.

By suggesting the new effect of functional consumption, this research not only deepens the understanding of functional consumption but also bridges the literature on consumption goals and social status. Given that functional consumption may not be the best option to signal one's desirable values (Shavitt 1992), this research sheds new light on the signaling aspect of functional consumption. Moreover, this research contributes to the literature on unconventional status signaling. Due to individuals' increased income and diversified product lines, luxury brands have become more attainable (Chadha 2006; Eckhardt, Belk, and Wilson 2015; Holt 1998). Thus, nowadays, the mere possession of luxury brands may be sometimes not enough to signal desirable status. In line with this trend, status research has focused on unconventional, alternative status signals, such as nonconforming behaviors (Bellezza et al. 2014), informing long working hours and lack of leisure times (Bellezza, Paharia, and Keinan 2016), or

mixing luxury with lowbrow brands (Bellezza and Berger 2019). This research builds on an emerging research area by showing that mere usage information can act as an alternative signaling method even within a luxury domain.

## **Theoretical Foundations**

### **Luxury brands as a conspicuous status signal**

Luxury brands are often defined as top-tier brands, which are associated with high price, ideal lifestyle, craftsmanship, scarcity, competence, and prestige (Han et al. 2010; Kapferer 1997; Keinan, Crener, and Goor 2019).

Although luxury brands may have superior qualities compared to mass or non-brands (Kapferer 1997), the main benefits of luxury brands tend to be in symbolizing ideal qualities, which generally represent high social status (Goor et al. 2019; Wang and Griskevicius 2014). For example, luxury consumers are perceived to have desirable, socially-preferred qualities such as privilege, respect, influence, wealth, cultural capital (e.g., knowledge, taste), and competence (Bellezza et al. 2014; Berger and Ward 2010; Nelissen and Meijers 2011; Wang and Griskevicius 2014; Ward and Dahl

2014).

Although luxury brands may successfully signal a high position in the social hierarchy, interestingly, luxury brands do not always represent the real, authentic status of owners. Luxury consumption is also known as conspicuous consumption, whereby consumers tend to flaunt and publicly exhibit luxury brands compared to other brands, in the process of status signaling (Veblen 1899). As the term conspicuousness suggests, luxury consumption tends to entail exaggeration in the process of signaling. For example, as luxury brands represent ideal and admirable rather than actual or realistic values (Goor et al. 2019; Holt 2004), consumers often choose luxury products to signal higher levels of prestige than they actually own, aspiring to associate themselves to a higher social class (Han et al. 2010). This exaggerating tendency accompanied with conspicuousness of luxury consumption can also be supported by the fact that consumers tend to perceive luxury consumption as an undue privilege rather than a reality (Goor et al. 2019) or as a waste which overpays compared to usual consumption (Keinan et al. 2016), and decreased conspicuousness lowers demand for counterfeits (Wilcox, Kim, and Sen 2009).

In addition, the notion that consumers avoid using products with a lot of production effort (Wu et al. 2017) can boost perceived exaggeration in status inferences that luxury brands make. Effort heuristics suggest that consumers tend to link high quality to high effort (Kruger et al. 2004). Luxury branded products, which are known to be of high quality and thus

made with greater effort, are less likely to be used and more likely to be kept. Given that the excessive treasuring of material items is generally regarded as superficial and materialistic (Ger and Belk 1999; Wuthnow 1998), observers may believe status signals from luxury brands can be overrated and exaggerated.

Taken together, consuming luxury brands surely signal users' desirable qualities associated with high status, but, at the same time, the signaled qualities and status can be perceived to be exaggerated as well as aspirational than real due to the conspicuousness of luxury.

## **Functional consumption of luxury brands**

Literature often categorizes consumption into functional or hedonic. Functional consumption is consumption for utilitarian and instrumental benefits to achieve higher-order goals (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000; Strahilevitz and Myers 1998). As functional consumption is closely linked to objective criteria, cognitive features are more likely to be weighted (Batra and Ahtola 1991; Carter and Gilovich 2012; Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000; Shiv and Fedorikhin 1999). In contrast, hedonic consumption refers to consumption that provides emotional and experiential benefits such as fun, enjoyment, and pleasure (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). These characteristics lead consumers to rely more on feelings and subjective criteria when they make choices for hedonic

consumption (Carter and Gilovich 2012; Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000; Pham 1998).

Generally, luxury brands are regarded as hedonic consumption since they are not only high priced but also provide pleasurable emotions and experiences from signaling desirable qualities and ideal lifestyles (e.g., Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000; Czellar, Dubois, and Laurent 2004; Durante and Laran 2016; Keinan, Kivetz, and Netzer 2016; Poynor and Haws 2009).

However, luxury brands are not always hedonic (Kivetz and Simonson 2002). Conceptually, while functional and hedonic consumption seems to be mutually exclusive, the two concepts are two discrete poles on a continuum. That is, the categorization of either functional or hedonic consumption is a matter of degrees on a continuum than a dichotomy. Most products have both functional and hedonic features and thus can be categorized as either functional or hedonic consumption depending on the consumer's goals for the purchase (Batra and Ahtola 1991; Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000). In line with this, luxury brands can be also functionally consumed. Evidently, adding extra practical features to luxury products can lower psychological barriers in using the product for functional purposes (e.g., luxury bags as diaper bags, Keinan et al. 2016).

## **Functional consumption of luxury brands and status inference: effects of perceived owners' indifference to wear and tear on goods from luxury brands**

Functional and hedonic consumptions differ across multiple dimensions, and one is evaluation criteria. Since functional consumption aims to gain usefulness and instrumentality to a goal, consumers tend to assess *how useful and helpful* a purchase decision is to achieve higher-order goals (Babin, Darden, and Griffin 1994; Batra and Ahtola 1991). This assessment about usefulness and helpfulness as an instrument should entail the actual usage of a product. That is, as the definition of usefulness suggests, to evaluate whether a product is useful or not, the product should “be of use” (dictionary.com). For example, to evaluate whether a purchased bag is useful, one should actually put some items into it or bring the bag with them to various places. From this association, consumers may hold a belief that products for functional consumption are more likely to be actually used rather than kept or displayed. Furthermore, given that functionally used products are highly correlated to necessities (i.e., essentials for daily survival, Durante and Laran 2016; Kivetz and Simonson 2002), consumers may associate functional consumption of brands with greater usage likelihood in daily life, even when the brands are an expensive luxury.

In contrast, hedonic consumption relies heavily on affective benefits such as enjoyment, and consumers are likely to think about *how pleasant* those associated feelings are with a purchase decision (Babin et al. 1994; Batra and Ahtola 1991). Although hedonic consumption can also entail actual usage, unlike functional consumption, this is not always the case. Evaluations of pleasure can be made without actual usage. For example, if a bag is purchased for hedonic consumption, one can feel enjoyment not just from carrying the bag but in collecting or displaying it. Moreover, given that experiential consumption often entails savoring (Bryant and Veroff 2017), hedonic consumption can be much slower than functional consumption. Drawn on this, consumers may have a lay belief in usage likelihood, wherein goods from functional consumption are more likely to be used compared to those from hedonic consumption.

We argue that this association of functionally consumed brands and usage likelihood in daily settings can generate perceptions about wear and tear. Wear and tear refers to natural damage or change to the original state of a product caused by normal use (Collins Cobuild Dictionary). The concept of wear and tear may seem similar with carelessness, but it is different from it in several ways. Whereas carelessness implies more wasteful nuance (e.g., pouring more product than usual, endangering the product, Bellezza et al. 2017), wear and tear indicates natural and ordinary decay along with usual usage. Also, carelessness focuses on the behaviors unlike usual consumption patterns; however, wear and tear is rooted in usual consumption.

Literature suggests that a product is more likely to be destroyed the more it is used (Wu et al. 2017). Alternatively, if someone uses certain brands more frequently and actively, observers may perceive that the individual is relatively indifferent to the wear and tear on the goods from the brands. Therefore, if our hypothesized effect of functional consumption is true, observing functional consumption of certain brands would result in perceived owners' indifference to wear and tear on goods from the brands.

In addition, based on the fact that perceived high quality hinders product usage (Wu et al. 2017), the increased perceived owners' indifference to wear and tear regarding luxury branded goods can result in particularly higher status inferences. While luxury brands are usually seen as conspicuous and aspirational than realistic (Charles, Hurst, and Roussanov 2009), if the brands are not particularly handled specially, the exaggerating tendency stemming from conspicuousness can be attenuated. Thus, when consumers see someone consuming products from luxury brands for functional purposes, they can infer higher status (i.e., not aspirational but real) as they would perceive the person is privileged enough to be indifferent about the wear and tear on their expensive goods.

To formally summarize:

H1. Functional consumption of luxury brands can lead to inferences of higher perceived status as compared to hedonic consumption of luxury brands.

H2. Positive inferences of status in response to functional consumption of luxury brands will be mediated by perceptions that owners are more likely to be indifferent to wear and tear on goods from luxury brands.

Hence, the mediating role of perceived owners' indifference to wear and tear on goods from luxury brands suggests an important boundary condition for the effect of the functional consumption of luxury brands on status inferences. Specifically, even though product usage entails wear and tear, there are some practical solutions provided by brands in fields, for instance, aftercare services. If brands provide a decent aftercare service to fix wear and tear on their goods, observers should no longer think that consumers who use luxury brands functionally are truly indifferent to wear and tear as they can repair the goods anytime they want. Thus, we hypothesized:

H3. Positive inferences of status and perceived owners' indifference to wear and tear on goods from luxury brands in response to functional consumption of luxury brands will be particularly prominent when the brands do not provide aftercare to fix wear and tear.

## Summary of Studies

Via five studies, we test our predictions across various consumption contexts, using different product categories and brands. Table 1 provides an overview of the studies and each of the findings. Studies 1A, 1B, and 1C show that functional consumption of luxury brands increases perceived status of the owner compared to conventional hedonic consumption across discrete product domains.

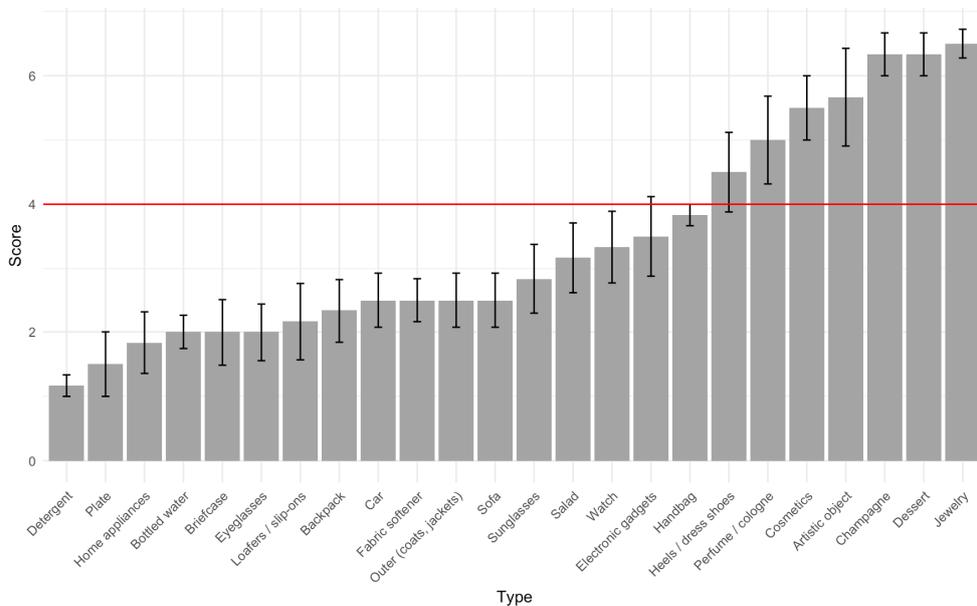
Although a product can be categorized as functional and hedonic depending on the consumers' motivations for the purchase, when specific consumption goals are not prominent, some products are more likely to be associated with either functional or hedonic features from past experiences. For example, previous research show that products such as stationary or household cleaning agents tend to be considered functional (Khan, Dhar, and Wertenbroch 2005; Strahilevitz and Myers 1998), whereas chocolates and massage chairs are likely to be classified as hedonic (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). To provide converging evidence that functional usage of luxury brands generates higher status inferences regardless of these previous associations, we aimed to test our predictions from hedonic- to functional-associated cases.

For this, we conducted a pilot test. We asked 240 respondents to indicate the extent to which a functional and/or hedonic product can be

characterized (1 = extremely functional, 4= equally functional and hedonic, 7 = extremely hedonic). Among 24 product domains, each respondent rated six randomly presented product domains. The results (Figure 1) show that consumers hold different associations in the extent to which a product domain is regarded as more functional or hedonic. For example, detergents are believed to be most functional, and jewelry is perceived to be most hedonic. We selected slip-ons as more functional products (Study 1A), handbags as equally functional and hedonic products (Study 1B), and jewelry as more hedonic products (Study 1C).

**Figure 1.**

Pilot study: Associations regarding functional or hedonic features



NOTE. — Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Study 2 shows the mediating process and rules out the alternative explanation of perceived nonconformity. Study 3 examines the moderating role of aftercare to fix wear and tear.

**Table 1.**  
Summary of studies

Study	Findings
<p><b>Study 1: Main effect</b></p> <p>Study1A: Slip-on shoes (functional vs. hedonic)</p> <p>Study1B: Handbag (functional vs. hedonic vs. control)</p> <p>Study1C: Jewelry (functional vs. hedonic)</p>	<p>Functional consumption of luxury brands</p> <p>-&gt; High status inferences.</p> <p>Confirming that the perceived fit between associated hedonic/functional features of a product and consumption goals does not drive this relationship</p>
<p><b>Study 2: Mediation effect (handbag)</b></p> <p>Mediator: Perceived owners' indifference to wear and tear on goods from luxury brands</p>	<p>Functional consumption of luxury brands</p> <p>-&gt; Perceived wear and tear</p> <p>-&gt; High status inferences</p> <p>Ruling out the nonconformity account</p>
<p><b>Study 3: Moderation effect (handbag)</b></p> <p>Moderator: Potential aftercare</p>	<p>When aftercare is not provided:</p> <p>Functional consumption of luxury brands</p> <p>-&gt; High status inferences</p>

# Study 1A

The objective of Study 1A is to test the main effect of functional consumption of a luxury brand on status inference (H1) using products with relatively high functional belief. Using a pair of slip-ons, we examine whether functional consumption of a product from a luxury brand leads consumers to infer higher status on an owner than when it is consumed hedonically.

## Methods

We recruited 200 adults ( $M_{\text{age}} = 35.84$ , 51% female) via the online survey platform Prolific. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions in one factor between-subjects design (luxury brand usage: functional vs. hedonic).

First, participants were asked to read a scenario depicting a hypothetical individual named Jane who owned a pair of Chanel slip-ons and infer about Jane. We manipulated luxury brand consumption by explaining the context where Jane usually used the pair of Chanel slip-ons.

In functional [hedonic] usage condition, participants read:

Jane is 35 years old.

A month ago, Jane bought a pair of shoes from the luxury brand Chanel.

She purchased the shoes mainly because they are lightweight and comfortable [stylish and trendy]. She wears them whenever she needs to walk longer than usual [to feel good], and, so far, she has worn them 5 times in total.

With this scenario, a pair of Chanel slip-ons was displayed.

After reading Jane's description, participants inferred her status by rating the following three items ( $\alpha = .89$ , Bellezza et al. 2017): "How would you rank the social status of the individual described above?" (1= low, 7= high), "Do you think the individual is financially wealthy?" (1= not wealthy, 7= extremely wealthy), "What income level do you think this individual has?" (1= low, 7= high).

Next, participants indicated their subjective socioeconomic status (1 = people at the bottom, 10 = people at the top, Adler et al. 2000) and demographic questions and were debriefed.

## **Results and discussion**

As expected, an ANOVA analysis revealed that consumption goals result in different levels of perceived status. Consumers inferred higher status on the owner of Chanel slip-ons functionally than hedonically ( $M_{\text{functional}} = 5.29$  vs.  $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 4.90$ ,  $F(1, 198) = 7.98$ ,  $p = .005$ , Figure 2).

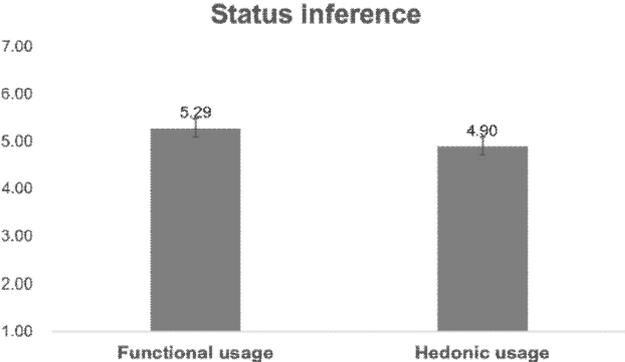
In addition, to check that this effect of functional luxury consumption

does not differ across the status of observers, we ran another ANOVA test including an interaction term between luxury brand usage and subjective SES. Results show that there is no significant interaction effect ( $b = .03, p = .68$ ). Thus, this effect of functional luxury brand consumption on status inference is consistently emerging, regardless of observer status.

Lastly, since we used the name Jane and showed a picture of female slip-ons, we also ran the same ANOVA test including an interaction term between luxury brand usage and gender. We ran this test as this may generate different patterns between males and females. We found no significant interaction effect ( $F(1, 196) = .59, p = .45$ ). Thus, functional usage of luxury brands increases perceived status of the owner regardless of the gender of a luxury brand user and observers.

**Figure 2.**

Study 1A: The effect of functional consumption of luxury brands on status inference (slip-ons)



NOTE.—Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

## Study 1B

Study 1B is designed to test the generalizability and robustness of the main effect of functional consumption of a luxury brand on status inference (H1). We then add a baseline condition, which can strengthen our hypothesis by examining whether heightened status inference is truly triggered not due to hedonic consumption of a luxury brand decreasing status perceptions but since functional consumption of the luxury brand increases perceived status. Hedonic consumption often captures a failure of self-control or self-regulation (e.g., Baumeister 2002; Loewenstein 1996; O'Guinn and Faber 1989), implying a lack of competence. Given that perceived competence results in high status perceptions (Bellezza et al. 2016), using a brand or a product hedonically has the potential to decrease status inferences. Thus, by adding a baseline condition, we can confirm the increasing tendency of the functional consumption of a luxury brand and status perceptions. Also, we use a handbag which is perceived to be almost equally functional and hedonic by nature (see our pilot study) and aim to generalize the hypothesized effects.

## Methods

We recruited 341 adults via the online survey platform Prolific ( $M_{\text{age}} = 35.13$ , 58.9% female). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions in one factor between-subjects design (luxury brand usage: functional vs. hedonic vs. no information).

First, participants were asked to read a similar scenario with Study 1A depicting Jane and inferring about Jane based on her luxury possession (Appendix A). Using a Louis Vuitton handbag, we manipulated luxury brand consumption by explaining the purpose of Jane's purchase (Botti and McGill 2011) and the context where Jane usually used the handbag. Specifically, participants in the functional usage condition read that Jane purchased a Louis Vuitton bag to better carry her items, and she uses this bag whenever she needs to carry bulky items such as piles of papers and her big 17-inch laptop. Those in the hedonic usage condition read that Jane purchased a Louis Vuitton bag for self-rewarding activities, and she uses brings the bag whenever she needs to engage in pleasurable activities such as treating herself to an enjoyable meal in a fine dining restaurant. Those in the no-information condition read just the fact that Jane purchased a Louis Vuitton bag.

After reading the scenario, participants rated Jane's status by answering

the same three items used in Study 1A ( $\alpha = .89$ , Bellezza et al. 2017).

Lastly, participants gave their demographic information and were debriefed.

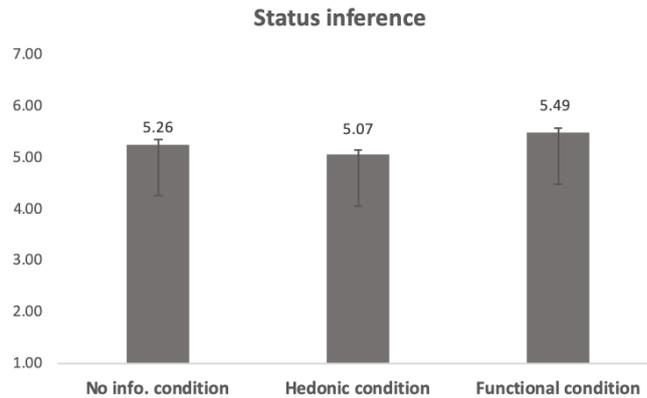
## **Results and discussion**

An ANOVA analysis revealed that a significant difference in status inferences among conditions ( $F(2, 338) = 6.18, p = .002$ , Figure 3). As expected, consumers inferred higher status on an individual who carries a Louis Vuitton bag for functional rather than hedonic purposes ( $M_{\text{functional}} = 5.49$  vs.  $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 5.07, F(1, 338) = 12.30, p = .001$ ) and when no specific information was provided ( $M_{\text{no-info.}} = 5.26, F(1, 338) = 3.66, p = .05$ ). There was no difference between the hedonic and no information conditions ( $F(1, 338) = 2.41, p = .12$ ).

We also ran the interaction analysis between luxury brand consumption and gender, and, again, no interaction effect emerged ( $F(2, 335) = .42, p = .65$ ). Thus, we examined that the differences in status inferences between functional and hedonic luxury consumption emerge not since hedonic consumption decreases but as functional consumption increases perceived status, and this effect is consistent regardless of gender.

**Figure 3.**

Study 1B: The effect of functional consumption of luxury brands on status inference (handbag)



NOTE.—Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

## Study 1C

The objective of Study 1C is to replicate the main effect of functional consumption of a luxury brand on status inference (H1), using an extremely hedonic product, namely, jewelry. If the expected results emerge even with a product basically considered hedonic, we can partially rule out the alternative explanation that perceived fit between products' inherent features and consumption goal may increase information processing fluency and thus

better predict perceived status of the owner. In addition, we add questions for a manipulation check to ensure our stimuli successfully manipulated consumption goals.

## **Methods**

We recruited 271 adults ( $M_{\text{age}} = 35.13$ , 58.9% female) via the online survey platform Prolific. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions in one factor between-subjects design (luxury brand usage: functional vs. hedonic).

First, participants were asked to read a similar scenario with Study 1A and 1B depicting Jane and infer about Jane based on her jewelry possession from luxury brand Tiffany & Co (Appendix B). We again manipulated luxury brand usage by explaining the purpose of Jane's purchase. Specifically, participants in the functional usage condition read that Jane purchased a Tiffany & Co. bracelet to wear when she needs to cover a burn scar on her wrist. Those in the hedonic usage condition read that Jane purchased the same Tiffany & Co. bracelet to wear when she needs to have a pleasurable moment.

Participants then answered one status inference question used in the previous two studies, two questions for hedonic and functional perceptions ("To Jane, the bracelet seems to be hedonic; functional"; 1 = not at all, 7 =

very much), and demographic questions.

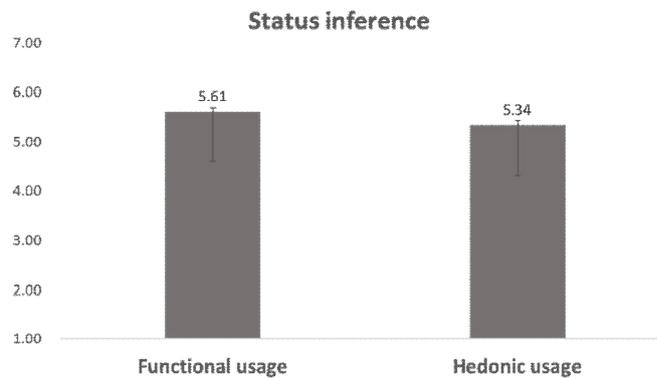
## **Results and discussion**

*Manipulation Check.* The manipulation check confirmed that wearing a Tiffany & Co. bracelet to cover a scar was perceived to be significantly more functional than wearing it to have a pleasurable moment ( $M_{\text{functional}} = 6.21$  vs.  $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 3.88$ ,  $F(1, 269) = 188.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Hence, wearing the bracelet for pleasurable purposes was perceived to be more hedonic than for functional purposes ( $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 4.91$  vs.  $M_{\text{functional}} = 3.36$ ,  $F(1, 269) = 64.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

*Status Inferences.* More importantly, we conducted an ANOVA analysis using brand usage and status inference as the independent and dependent variables, respectively. The analysis revealed significant difference in status inferences between functional and hedonic usage conditions. Compared to participants in the hedonic usage condition, participants in the functional usage condition perceived Jane as higher in social status ( $M_{\text{functional}} = 5.61$  vs.  $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 5.34$ ,  $F(1, 269) = 4.90$ ,  $p = .02$  Figure 4). We ran another interaction analysis between luxury brand consumption and gender, and no interaction effect emerged ( $F(1, 267) < .01$ ,  $p = .99$ ).

**Figure 4.**

Study 1C: The effect of functional consumption of luxury brands on status inference (jewelry)



NOTE.—Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

### **Study 1A, 1B, and 1C discussion**

Study 1A, 1B, and 1C provide consistent results that functional usage of luxury brands increases perceived status of owners. Specifically, the results suggest that this positive relationship between functional consumption of a luxury brand and higher status inferences emerges across various product categories, observers' status as well as genders and also confirms that the perceived fit between associated hedonic/functional

features of a product and consumption goals does not drive this relationship.

## **Study 2**

Study 2 has two objectives. First, we aim to establish the mediating process of perceived owners' indifference to wear and tear on goods from luxury brands (H2). Second, we seek to rule out perceived nonconformity explanation directly. Nonconformity refers to a behavior or belief that is inconsistent with norms or standards (Nail, MacDonald, and Levy 2000). As luxury brands inherently have hedonic values and thus have been conventionally used for hedonic purposes, consumers may hold a standard belief or a stereotype regarding luxury brand usage as a hedonic consumption. Since nonconforming behaviors can signal high status (Bellezza, Gino, and Keinan 2014), this stereotype or norm about luxury brand consumption can also lead to higher status inferences.

### **Methods**

We recruited 224 adults ( $M_{\text{age}} = 39.31$ , 53.6% female) via the online survey platform Prolific. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions in one factor between-subjects design (luxury brand usage:

functional vs. hedonic).

Participants first read the similar hypothetical scenario used in Study 1B. To increase generalizability, they are exposed to different Louis Vuitton handbag from the one used in Study 1B (Appendix C). Participants in the functional usage condition read that Jane uses a Louis Vuitton handbag when she needs to carry small items such as a couple of credit cards, phones, and a key, and those in the hedonic usage condition read Jane uses the handbag when she needs to engage in pleasurable activities such as going to a fine dining restaurant.

Participants then answered the same three status inference questions used previously ( $\alpha = .90$ , Bellezza et al. 2017) and three questions for perceived owners' indifference to wear and tear on goods from luxury brands ("Jane is indifferent to the bag being worn out or damaged," "Jane is insensitive to the wear and tear of the bag," and "Jane is inattentive to preserving the bag in its original state"; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much). The first question is modified from the item for concerns for wear and tear (Graul, Brough, and Isaac 2019), and others were created based on opalization and concepts.

Next, participants answered a question for perceived nonconformity ("Jane seems to behave in a way that is inconsistent with norms or standards"; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much), the same two questions for manipulation check used in Study 1B and 1C, and demographic questions.

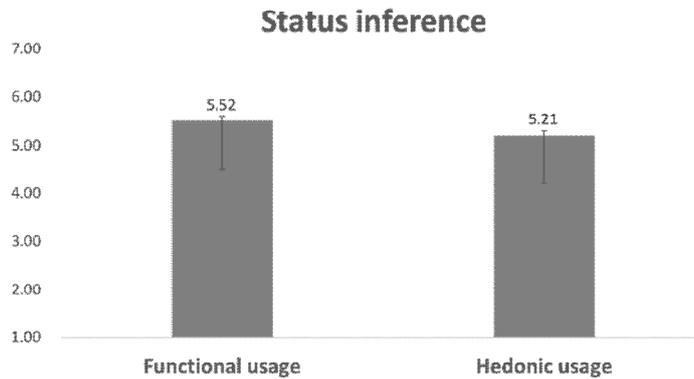
## Results and discussion

*Manipulation Check.* The manipulation check confirmed that her carrying a Louis Vuitton handbag when she needs to carry small items only was perceived to be significantly more functional ( $M_{\text{functional}} = 5.42$  vs.  $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 3.68$ ,  $F(1, 222) = 76.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and less hedonic ( $M_{\text{functional}} = 3.89$  vs.  $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 5.20$ ,  $F(1, 222) = 32.82$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than carrying the bag when she needs to engage in pleasurable activities.

*Status Inferences.* Next, we conducted an ANOVA analysis using brand usage and status inference as the independent and the dependent variables, respectively. The results showed that consumers inferred higher status when an owner of a luxury brand uses it for functional rather than hedonic purposes ( $M_{\text{functional}} = 5.52$  vs.  $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 5.21$ ,  $F(1, 222) = 5.98$ ,  $p = .01$  Figure 5), and this effect was consistent across genders ( $F(1, 220) = 2.70$ ,  $p = .10$ ).

**Figure 5.**

Study 2: The effect of functional consumption of luxury brands on status inference

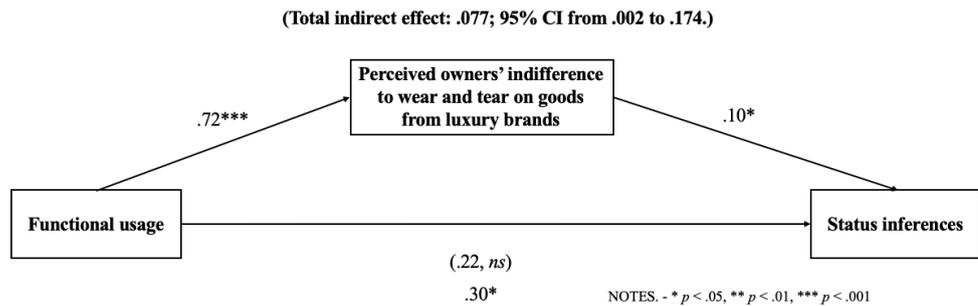


NOTE.—Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

*Mediation.* A mediation analysis (Model 4 in PROCESS within SPSS with 10,000 bootstrap samples and 95% bias-corrected intervals, Hayes 2013) confirmed that perceived owners' indifference to wear and tear on goods from luxury brands mediated the effect of functional (vs. hedonic) luxury consumption on status inferences (.077; 95% CI = [.002, .174], Figure 6).

**Figure 6.**

Study 2: The mediational effect of perceived owners' indifference to wear and tear on goods from luxury brands



## Study 3

Study 3 aims to establish the moderating role of potential aftercare to fix wear and tear on goods from luxury brands (H3). Specifically, we seek to examine whether the hypothesized effect of functional luxury brand consumption disappears if brands provide decent aftercare service to fix wear and tear on their goods.

## Methods

We recruited 212 female participants ( $M_{\text{age}} = 34.24$ ) via the online

survey platform Prolific. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions in 2 (luxury brand usage: functional vs. hedonic) by 2 (aftercare service: complimentary aftercare vs. control condition) between-subjects design.

We manipulated luxury brand consumption by using the same scenario in Study 2. We then manipulated the existence aftercare services by adding a short description at the end of the scenario. Specifically, participants assigned to the complimentary aftercare condition were told that Louis Vuitton would provide complimentary aftercare on scratches or patinas from world-renowned leather surgeons (i.e., artisans who specialize in precision repair of luxury handbags), whereas this information was omitted to those in the control condition.

Next, participants answered one question from the set of three status inference questions used in previous studies (Bellezza et al. 2017) and demographic questions.

## **Results and discussion**

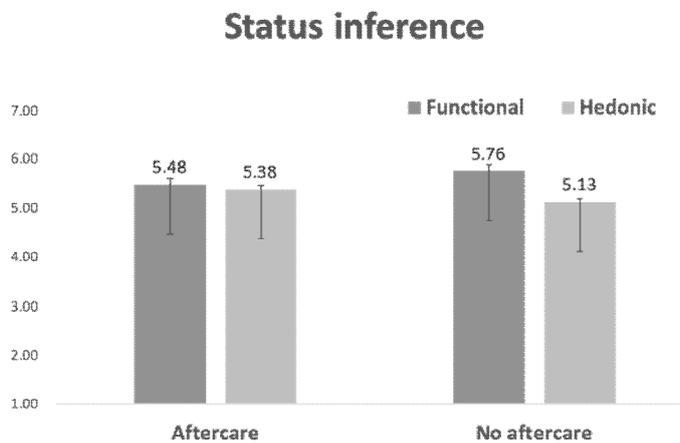
We conducted a 2 (luxury brand usage: functional vs. hedonic) by 2 (aftercare service: complimentary aftercare vs. no service) between-subjects ANOVA analysis using status inference as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed a significant interaction ( $F(1, 208) = 3.85, p = .05$ ),

depicted in Figure 7.

Next, we conducted a planned contrast for the effect of aftercare service. The contrast results showed that when aftercare service for wear and tear is not provided, the effect of functional consumption on status inference was replicated ( $M_{\text{functional}} = 5.76$  vs.  $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 5.13$ ,  $F(1, 208) = 11.34$ ,  $p = .001$ ). However, this effect disappeared when aftercare service was provided ( $M_{\text{functional}} = 5.48$  vs.  $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 5.38$ ,  $F(1, 208) = .25$ ,  $p = .61$ ); thus, our hypothesis was supported successfully.

**Figure 7.**

Study 3: The effect of functional consumption of a luxury brand and aftercare services on status inferences



NOTE.—Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

## General Discussion

Luxury consumption indeed signals high status, but oftentimes the signaled status is more conspicuous and admirable than realistic. Through five studies, we suggest that functional consumption of luxury brands can signal even higher status on owners than when they are using the same products hedonically, since functional consumption of luxury brands generates perceptions that owners are indifferent to wear and tear on goods from luxury brands as high-end brands are not particularly treated specially. Further, we confirm that the effect of functional luxury brand consumption on perceived owners' indifference to wear and tear on luxury goods and status inference only remains when the wear and tear is unmendable. These effects remain across genders and various product categories, and the effects are not driven by nonconformity perceptions or perceived fit.

Our findings contribute to prior research in several ways. First, our findings extend the existing literature on functional consumption. Prior research demonstrates the psychological consequences functional consumption can provide. For example, the virtuous, rational nature of functional consumption provides consumers with easier justification (Sela, Berger, and Liu 2009) and problem-solving perceptions (Chen, Lee, and Yap 2016). Our research identifies another attribute (i.e., indifference to wear and tear) of functionally used brands or products that makes them more

desirable. In addition, we uncover a condition that would affect perceived owners' indifference to wear and tear on products (i.e., aftercare services to mend wear and tear).

Second, this research adds to the literature on unconventional status signaling. Due to the increased income and diversified product lines, luxury brands have become more attainable (Chadha 2006; Holt 1998; Wilson, Eckhardt, and Belk 2013); thus, today, the mere possession of luxury brands may sometimes not be enough to signal desirable status. For example, 94% of Tokyo women in their 20s own at least one Louis Vuitton bag (Chadha and Husband 2006). Therefore, status research focused on unconventional, alternative status signals is becoming more important. Previous research shows that choosing supersized food (Dubois, Rucker, and Galinsky 2012), mentioning busyness and lack of leisure time (Bellezza et al. 2016), showing nonconforming behaviors (Bellezza et al. 2014), and mixing luxury with low-brow brands (Bellezza and Berger 2019) can act as unconventional status symbols. This research builds on this emerging research area by showing that the mere usage information can act as an alternative signaling method even within a luxury domain.

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Schuster.

# Appendix A

## Stimuli (Study 1B)

<p>Functional usage condition</p>	<p>Jane is 35 years old. A month ago, Jane bought a handbag from the luxury brand Louis Vuitton.</p>  <p>She purchased this Louis Vuitton bag to better carry her stuff. For example, she uses this bag whenever she needs to carry bulky stuff such as piles of papers and her big 17-inch laptop.</p>
<p>Hedonic usage condition</p>	<p>Jane is 35 years old. A month ago, Jane bought a handbag from the luxury brand Louis Vuitton.</p>  <p>She purchased this Louis Vuitton bag for self-rewarding activities. For example, she uses this bag whenever she needs to have pleasurable moments such as going to a fine dining restaurant to treat herself to an enjoyable meal.</p>
<p>No information condition</p>	<p>Jane is 35 years old. A month ago, Jane bought a handbag from the luxury brand Louis Vuitton.</p> 

# Appendix B

## Stimuli (Study 1C)

Functional usage condition
<p>Jane is 35 years old. A month ago, Jane bought a bracelet from the luxury brand Tiffany &amp; Co.</p>  <p>She purchased this Tiffany bracelet for a practical reason. She wears this bracelet when she needs to cover a burn scar on her wrist.</p>
Hedonic usage condition
<p>Jane is 35 years old. A month ago, Jane bought a bracelet from the luxury brand Tiffany &amp; Co.</p>  <p>She purchased this Tiffany bracelet for a pleasurable reason. She wears this bracelet when she needs to have a pleasurable moment such as going to a fine dining restaurant to have an enjoyable meal.</p>

# Appendix C

## Stimuli (Study 2)

### Functional usage condition

Jane is 35 years old.  
A month ago, Jane bought a handbag from the luxury brand Louis Vuitton.



She purchased this Louis Vuitton bag to free her hands.

For example, she uses this bag when she only needs to carry small stuff such as a couple of credit cards, phone, and a key.

### Hedonic usage condition

Jane is 35 years old.  
A month ago, Jane bought a handbag from the luxury brand Louis Vuitton.



She purchased this Louis Vuitton bag for self-rewarding activities.

For example, she uses this bag when she needs to have pleasurable moments such as going to a fine dining restaurant to treat herself to an enjoyable meal.

# 국문초록

한혜주

전통적으로 럭셔리 산업은 쾌락적 소비로 간주되어 왔으나, 최근 대두된 트렌드는 사뭇 다르다. 다양한 럭셔리 브랜드들은 최근 다양한 방식으로 연출할 수 있거나 보다 일상적으로 사용할 수 있는 제품을 시장에 소개하거나 실용재로 분류되는 제품군에서(예: 부엌용품, 사무용품) 새로운 상품을 론칭하는 등, 자사의 브랜드와 실용성을 연관 짓기 위해 많은 투자를 아끼지 않고 있다. 그렇다면 소비자들은 럭셔리 브랜드를 기능적으로 사용함으로써 일반적으로 통용되어온 럭셔리 브랜드의 쾌락적 사용이 제공할 수 없는 독특한 메시지를 전달할 수 있을까? 이상의 질문에 대한 답으로, 본 연구는 총 다섯번의 행동실험을 통해(N = 1248) 럭셔리 브랜드를 기능적으로 소비하는 것이 쾌락적으로 소비하는 것에 비해 더 높은 지위 인식으로 이어질 수 있다는 것을 제시한다. 또한, 이는 럭셔리 브랜드를 기능적으로 소비하는 것이 소비자가 해당 럭셔리 브랜드의 제품이 마모되는 것에 무심할 것이라는 인식을 증가시키기 때문이며, 이에 따라 보다 일반적으로 소중하게 소비되는 경향이 있는 고가의 럭셔리 제품이 마모되더라도 무신경할 수 있을 만큼의 더 높은 지위를 가진 사람이라는 인식으로 이어지기 때문에 발생한다는 것을 증명한다. 더 나아가, 이상의 효과는 럭셔리 브랜드의 제품이 마모되는 것을 수리할 수 있는 기회(예: 애프터 서비스)가

존재하지 않을 때에만 유지된다는 것을 관찰하였다. 본 연구의 결과는 기능적 소비가 야기할 수 있는 새로운 소비자 심리 반응을 발견하고 사회적 지위 시그널의 새로운 대안적 방법에 대해 제시하며, 나아가 소비 목표와 사회적 지위의 두 문헌을 연결함으로서 관련 문헌에 공헌하고 있다.

**키워드:** 럭셔리, 기능적 소비, 지위인식, 인지된 제품 마모에 대한 무신경함

**학번:** 2014-30165