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Does the devil wear Prada? Luxury product experiences can affect prosocial behavior

Yajin Wang^{a,*}, Deborah Roedder John^b, Vladas Griskevicius^b

^a Department of Marketing, University of Maryland, United States of America

^b Department of Marketing, University of Minnesota, United States of America

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Despite the explosive growth of luxury consumption, researchers have yet to examine how the experience of using luxury products affects us both psychologically and behaviorally. In this research, we explore how the experience of using a luxury product can alter a user's perceptions of themselves and their behavior toward other people. We gave women either a luxury product (e.g., Prada handbag) or a non-luxury product (e.g., unbranded handbag) to use, and afterwards, we presented women with opportunities to exhibit either selfish or generous behaviors toward others. We found that, after using a luxury product, women exhibited more selfish behavior, such as sharing fewer resources with others and contributing less money to charity than women who used a non-luxury handbag. We also found this pattern can be reversed, with luxury users exhibiting more generous behavior when the generous behavior can be performed in front of other people. Further, we show that these patterns of selfish and generous behaviors are mediated by changes in perceived status and superiority that are triggered when women experience using a luxury product.

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1. Introduction

Once the purview of only the rich, luxury goods are in the hands of more consumers than ever before. Sales of luxury goods have skyrocketed to €1.2 trillion globally, and over the last decade, the number of luxury consumers has tripled to over 330 million (D'Arpizio, 2018). Fueling this growth is a change in the composition of luxury consumers, with a shift from the ultra-affluent to younger less-affluent individuals (D'Arpizio, 2018; Phillips, 2012). In fact, Generations Y and Z now represent 45% of all luxury consumers and account for 35% of luxury purchases (Arienti, 2019; D'Arpizio, 2018). Luxury goods are now more available than ever, with luxury brands expanding their online presence and adding new product lines at lower prices (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Luxury goods are also readily available from online consignment shops and online rental stores, where the finest designer handbags and clothing can be rented for a brief time.

Despite the widespread growth of luxury consumption, there has been little examination of the consequences of introducing luxury goods into the lives of so many consumers. Key to such an inquiry is understanding how the experience of using luxury goods affects us both psychologically and behaviorally. Consumers are motivated to acquire luxury goods for several reasons,

* Corresponding author at: University of Maryland, Robert H. Smith School of Business, 3319 Van Munching Hall, College Park, MD 20740, United States of America.
E-mail address: yajinw@rhsmith.umd.edu. (Y. Wang).

such as boosting one's self-esteem, happiness, or feelings of power (Belk, 1985; Charles, Hurst, & Roussanov, 2007; Richins, 1987; Rucker, Galinsky, & Dubois, 2012), communicating one's sense of self (Berger & Ward, 2010; Han, Nunes, & Drèze, 2010; Mazzocco, Rucker, Galinsky, & Anderson, 2012; Sundie et al., 2011), and to satisfy one's hedonic and aesthetic needs (Berry, 1994; Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2009). Clearly, these are powerful motivations, and thus, there is reason to believe that using luxury products should have substantial psychological and behavioral consequences. For example, when consumers experience using luxury products, do they see themselves differently? Do they behave differently or interact with other people differently?

In this article, we begin to address these questions, exploring how the experience of using a luxury product can alter a user's perceptions of themselves and their behavior toward other people. We provide women with either a luxury product (e.g., Prada handbag) or a non-luxury product (e.g., unbranded handbag) to use, and then assess their psychological state while using the product. Afterwards, we provide women with opportunities to exhibit either selfish or generous behaviors toward others. For example, we ask them to allocate money to themselves versus others, indicate how likely they would be to help a person in need, and donate money to a charity.

We find that the experience of using a luxury product leads women to exhibit more selfish behavior, such as sharing fewer resources with others and contributing less money to charity than women using a non-luxury handbag. We also found this pattern can be reversed under certain conditions. Women using a luxury product behave in a more generous manner, donating more money to charity than women using a non-luxury product, when their donations occur in public, in front of other people. Further, we show that both patterns of behavior, whereby luxury users exhibit more selfish and more generous behavior, are driven by changes in women's self-perceptions of social status that are triggered by luxury product experiences.

Our findings make several contributions to luxury research. To our knowledge, we are the first to study the psychological and behavioral consequences that are triggered by actual experiences with luxury products. Prior research has examined the motivations for why people desire luxury goods, how luxury goods can help repair feelings of inadequacy, how luxury goods can enable people to express and communicate who they are (e.g., Belk, 1985; Berger & Ward, 2010; Rucker et al., 2012; Sundie et al., 2011), and how luxury use affects people's perceptions of the user (Cannon & Rucker, 2018; Nelissen & Meijers, 2011). However, most of these studies have utilized hypothetical scenarios about using or obtaining luxury products, stopping short of examining the actual experience of using luxury products and how it might impact the user in psychological or behavioral terms.

Further, we provide a methodology for studying actual luxury experiences in the laboratory. To date, luxury research using experimental methods has often employed hypothetical scenarios asking participants to respond in terms of imagined luxury experiences and hypothetical responses. This approach has proven useful in understanding facets of luxury consumption, yet studying actual consumer experiences and capturing their responses to these experiences in real time can reveal deeper aspects of consumer behavior (Schmitt, 2010). Using our methodology, researchers can expand our line of research and begin to capture what it actually feels like for consumers to experience the use of a luxury product, and how these experiences produce important psychological and behavioral changes.

2. Conceptual background

Luxury products are offered at a premium price and quality level (Patrick & Hagtvedt, 2009). A defining feature of luxury products is their relative rarity and exclusivity (Fuchs, Prandelli, Schreier, & Dahl, 2013; Han et al., 2010; Phau & Prendergast, 2000; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Our research focuses on products from high-end luxury brands such as Prada, Louis Vuitton, and Burberry.

We propose that the experience of using a luxury product has important psychological and behavioral consequences related to prosocial behavior, as shown in Fig. 1. First, we predict that the experience of using a luxury product elicits a perception of higher social status. Second, we predict that perceived higher social status impact willingness to engage in prosocial behavior, depending on the context in which the behavior occurs. In a private context, perceived higher social status results in less prosocial behaviors (e.g., being more selfish); in a public context, perceived social status results in more prosocial behaviors (e.g., being more generous).

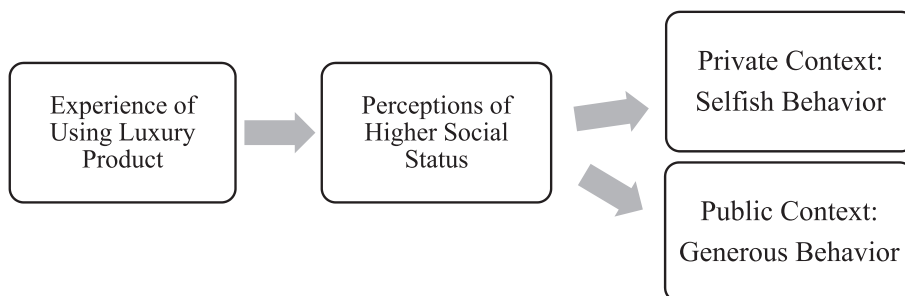


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of the effects of luxury product experiences.

In this section, we discuss the conceptual rationale for these predictions. Following Fig. 1, we begin by examining the link between the experience of using a luxury product and perceptions of higher social status. This is followed by a discussion of theoretical and empirical work that links social status to selfish behavior and lack of concern for others. Finally, we discuss theoretical and empirical work that links social status to generous behavior.

2.1. Luxury use and social status

Social status refers to an individual's rank in a social hierarchy or position in society (Dreze & Nunes, 2009; French Jr. & Raven, 1959; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Higher social status is often associated with having power (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008, 2009; Wong & Shavitt, 2010) and being admired by others (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Ridgeway & Walker, 1995). Social status is relative in that one's rank in a social hierarchy depends on the relative power or resources of others in a group. Accordingly, a person may have higher social status in one group, but have lower social status in a different group.

Traditionally, luxury products have been described as status symbols, and consumer motivations for obtaining these products have often been linked to the desire for status and power (Han et al., 2010; Veblen, 1899). For example, consumers with a higher need for status show a stronger desire for luxury products (Han et al., 2010), and a sense of powerlessness leads people to exhibit a greater interest in luxury products in order to compensate for their lack of power (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008, 2009). However, there is no research that examines whether the experience of using a luxury product *actually* provides these psychological benefits, which can be captured by assessing consumer self-perceptions while using a luxury product.

We predict that the experience of using a luxury product will elevate the user's perceptions of their social status. People who use luxury products generally distinguish themselves from others by possessing an object that is relatively rare, exclusive, and difficult to obtain. Using products owned by many consumers does not identify the user as one higher in social status (Kuksov & Xie, 2012), whereas the rarity and exclusivity of luxury products confers status to the user (Nelissen & Meijers, 2011; Plourde, 2008). Further, most luxury products are used in public settings (D'Arpizio, 2018), which facilitates favorable social comparisons between the luxury user and other people who do not possess the luxury item. The salience of having something rare and desirable that others do not have is likely to contribute to a sense of elevated social status.

2.2. Social status and selfish behavior

Possessing higher social status is a desirable state associated with psychological and social benefits (Fiske, 2010; Nelissen & Meijers, 2011). Therefore, individuals are naturally motivated to promote status once it is acquired (Griskevicius & Kenrick, 2013; Kenrick, Griskevicius, Neuberg, & Schaller, 2010). Most of the time, the motivation to promote status is associated with selfish behavior and an unwillingness to help others (Maner & Mead, 2010; Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010; Stellar, Manzo, Kraus, & Keltner, 2012). This is consistent with Schwartz's (1992) value framework, which suggests that concern with promoting one's status is consistent with some types of values (self-enhancement values) and inconsistent with other values (self-transcendence values: Maio, Hahn, Frost, & Cheung, 2009; Torelli, Monga, & Kaikati, 2012), and these values have strong implications for social behavior.

According to Schwartz (1992), there are four higher-order categories of values, which are universal abstract representations of desired end-states that serve as guiding principles in people's lives: self-enhancement (hedonism, achievement, power), self-transcendence (benevolence, social concerns, concerns with nature), openness to change (self-direction, stimulation), and conservation (tradition, security, conformity). These values can be placed on a circular graphic, where compatible values are adjacent to one another and incompatible values are opposite to one another. For example, openness to change, which captures people's motivation to be open to change and follow their own intellectual and emotional interests, is in opposition to conservation, which captures people's motivation to be conservative and preserve the status quo. Similarly, self-enhancement, which captures people's motivation to enhance their self-interests (e.g., status), is in opposition to self-transcendence, which captures people's motivation to transcend self-interests and promote the welfare of others.

Based on these lines of research, we predict that using a luxury product will generally lead people to engage in selfish behavior. This is because using a luxury product elicits perceptions of higher social status, which motivates luxury users to maintain and promote this higher status level. Promoting one's status is consistent with self-enhancement values (putting one's self-interest above others), but is counter to self-transcendence values (concern for the welfare of others). Thus, using a luxury (vs. non-luxury) product will encourage women to engage in more selfish behaviors, such as taking more scarce resources away from others, splitting a pool of money in a way that favors themselves, and donating less money to a charity. In these examples, the luxury user places their own self-interest in obtaining money and other resources ahead of concern for others. Further, we expect this effect of luxury consumption on selfish behavior to be statistically mediated by self-perceptions of social status.

2.3. Social status and generous behavior

Although the experience of using a luxury product should generally lead to more selfish behavior, we propose that this pattern of behavior can be reversed, whereby using luxury products can result in behaving in a more generous way. At times, behaving generously toward others can be a way to enhance one's reputation and status; thus, in some situations, behaving generously is consistent with self-enhancement values, which are linked to luxury use.

Anthropological research shows that having a reputation as a cooperative and helpful member of a group elevates a person's status. Across cultures, engaging in behaviors that benefit others can help build a good reputation (Semmann, Krambeck, & Milinski, 2005; Wedekind & Braithwaite, 2002), which elevates one's status in a group (Smith & Bird, 2000). For example, past research shows that people promote their status by sharing more food with others (Gurven, Allen-Arave, Hill, & Hurtado, 2000), contributing more to public goods (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Van Vugt & Hardy, 2009), and giving more resources to people in need (Cole & Chaikin, 1990; Murdock, 1970).

Although behaving in a generous way can be beneficial in terms of promoting status, this type of behavior also increases the well-being of others at a cost to the individual. Donating money to charity, for example, may be advantageous as a way to promote one's status, but the individual donating money is also giving up resources, which is disadvantageous in terms of enhancing or promoting one's status.

We propose that women who experience using a luxury product will be more considerate and generous to others *only* when there is an explicit opportunity for such behavior to enhance their reputation. Typically, these opportunities take place in public, where the giver's generous behavior can be seen and readily acknowledged by other people. For instance, consider donating money at a charity event where givers are acknowledged in public. Publically visible prosocial behaviors allow an individual to benefit in terms of reputation, whereas private prosocial behaviors do not (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Van Vugt & Hardy, 2009). Accordingly, consumers with a status-seeking motive are more willing to sacrifice benefits to themselves and make choices that benefit the group when making such choices in public but not in private contexts (Kenrick et al., 2010).

In summary, the experience of using a luxury product can result in either more selfish or more generous behavior, depending on context. If the behavior is enacted in a private context, with no opportunity to boost reputation by displaying one's generosity, luxury (vs. non-luxury) users will behave more selfishly (e.g., donating less money to charity). If the behavior is enacted in public, which provides an explicit opportunity to boost reputation by displaying one's generosity, luxury (vs. non-luxury) users will behave more generously (e.g., donating more money to charity). Although the public setting elicits generous behavior, while the private setting encourages selfish behavior, both types of behaviors are self-interested in nature. In the public setting, the luxury user can gain status by giving money to others; in the private setting, the luxury user can gain status by keeping more money for themselves.

3. Overview of current research

We test our predictions shown in six studies. The first three studies examine predictions regarding the effects of using a luxury product and behaving more selfishly in a private context. Specifically, Studies 1 & 2 show that the experience of using a luxury (vs. non-luxury) product results in more selfish behavior in a private context. Study 3 shows this effect is mediated by heightened perceptions of social status, which are triggered when women use a luxury product.

The next two studies examine predictions about the moderating effect of private/public contexts on the relationship between using luxury products and prosocial behavior. These studies reveal that the experience of using a luxury product can, under certain conditions, encourage more generous behavior. Studies 4 & 5 show that luxury (vs. non-luxury) users behave more generously when donating to charity in public, but behave more selfishly when donating to charity in private. Study 6 shows that the finding of more generous behavior is mediated by perceptions of social status. Specifically, we show that when a luxury product is perceived to be more (less) exclusive, resulting in higher (lower) perceptions of social status, luxury users are more (less) generous. In fact, when the luxury product is perceived to be less exclusive, and women do not experience a boost in perceived social status, luxury users do *not* donate more money than non-luxury users.

4. Study 1: luxury product experience leads to selfish behavior

Study 1 examined how the experience of using a luxury product influences women's selfish behavior. Participants walked around a busy area using either a luxury (Prada) or non-luxury (control) handbag. Afterwards, they were presented with opportunities to behave in a selfish or generous way. We predicted that women who experienced using the luxury handbag would behave more selfishly.

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Participants

Seventy-two female students ($M_{\text{age}} = 19.90$, $SD = 1.01$) at a large North American university participated in the study in exchange for course credit. Five participants did not follow the instructions (e.g., using their own pen instead of choosing a pen from a tray as instructed) and were excluded from the data analysis.

To confirm that women in this population were familiar with high-end luxury brands, such as Prada, we conducted a survey with a sample of 189 females ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.04$, $SD = 0.87$) from the same population as the main study. They were asked two questions about high-end luxury brands: (1) Have you ever purchased any of the following brands: Gucci, Prada, Louis Vuitton, and Burberry? (2) Have you ever seen your friends or classmates with products from these brands? Findings showed that 58.71% of women had purchased at least one of these four brands, and 95.8% of the women had seen friends or classmates using these brands. Thus, women in our sample population were quite familiar with high-end luxury brands.

4.1.2. Procedure

Participants arrived individually for the study, and their arrival times were staggered so that they could not see the types of handbags being used in the study to reduce suspicion about the study purpose. Participants were told they were going to participate in several different studies to reduce suspicion that measures taken at different points in time during their session were related to each other.

The first study was described as a study about women's accessories, where participants would be asked to use and evaluate a handbag. Participants were randomly assigned to use either a luxury or a non-luxury (control) handbag. In the luxury condition, participants were given a Prada bag (retail price = \$1890); in the non-luxury control condition, participants were given a non-luxury handbag similar in size and style to the Prada bag (retail price = \$75; see Appendix A for pictures). Prada was chosen as the luxury brand because it is not only well-known, but is also highly desirable. Pretesting indicated that our participant population rated the Prada brand an average of 5.7 in desirability on a 1–7 scale.

To provide a more realistic experience, participants were instructed to imagine that they owned this handbag and were instructed to put their personal items into the handbag (see Appendix B for full instructions). Then, participants were given instructions to walk around the building in a specified path. This path included taking a specific elevator to a specified floor, walking through a busy area to a specific coffee shop, and then following the same path to get back. After coming back to the lab about 15 min later, each participant was directed to a private room with a computer to fill out a survey about the handbag. Prior to entering their private room, participants were informed that they would need a pen to complete part of the survey and were asked to select a pen from several pens placed on a tray. Their pen choice was recorded and served as one of the dependent measures for the study (see description below).

After completing survey questions about the handbag, participants were told that the researcher needed feedback for a separate study to be conducted in the future. In this future study, two people would compete with each other for a prize of \$10 that would be divided between the winner and the loser. Participants in the *current* study were asked to imagine they were in that study and won the competition by answering 7 out of 10 questions correctly. Participants were asked how the researcher should split the \$10 of prize money between the winner (the participant) and the loser (the other person). Their allocation of prize money served as the second dependent measure for the study (see description below).

4.1.3. Measures

The study had two dependent measures. The first measure examined the type of pen each participant chose from a lab tray, which contained three pens specifically chosen for the study. One pen looked brand new and two other pens were clearly less desirable; they had been slightly chewed on and had dark smudges from ink leaks. The experimenter casually noted that the participant should take only one pen because other research participants would need pens for other studies going on in the lab. The dependent measure was whether the participant took the last desirable pen or whether she left it on the tray for other participants. This measure was based on the notion of selfishly taking the last desirable item from a group's common resources, such as when a person takes the last piece of food from a communal plate.

The second dependent measure was taken from a previous study that measured selfish behavior (Zitek, Jordan, Monin, & Leach, 2010) by examining how people split communal prize money when they win a contest. Participants were asked how the researcher should split the \$10 prize between the winner (the participant) and the loser (the other person). They chose one of 11 options ranging from “\$0 to me, \$10 to my opponent” to “\$10 to me, \$0 to my opponent” in \$1 increments. The dependent measure was the amount of money participants gave to themselves.

4.2. Results

We first examined the percentage of people who took the last desirable pen in the luxury and non-luxury (control) condition. Consistent with our prediction, women were twice as likely to take the last desirable pen in the luxury condition compared to the non-luxury control condition (61.8% vs. 30.3%; $\chi^2(1) = 6.67, p = .01, \text{Exp}(B) = 3.72$).

Next, we examined how much of the \$10 prize money people gave to themselves in the luxury and non-luxury (control) conditions. The results revealed that participants in the luxury condition gave significantly more money to themselves ($M = \$7.44, SD = 1.52$) than participants in the control condition ($M = \$6.69, SD = 0.95; t(66) = 2.39, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = 0.081$). Thus, women who used the Prada handbag gave themselves more money when dividing a communal prize between themselves and another person.

4.3. Discussion

Study 1 provided initial support for our predictions. Women who experienced using a luxury product behaved more selfishly, compared to women who used a non-luxury product. Women using the Prada handbag were twice as likely to take the last desirable pen, leaving used undesirable pens for others to use. They also awarded themselves more prize money, leaving less prize money for another person.

In the next study, we examine an alternative explanation for our findings. Specifically, we test whether our findings only occur with actual usage of luxury products, or if mere exposure to luxury brands would elicit the same selfish behavior we observed in Study 1. Consumers are frequently exposed to luxury brands through advertising and signage for luxury brands in magazines, stores, and shopping malls. Our conceptualization suggests that perceptions of higher social status accrue from actually using

luxury brands, not simply being exposed to them, and we test this reasoning in the next study. In addition, we use a product from a different luxury brand, Louis Vuitton, to generalize our results across high-end luxury brands.

5. Study 2: luxury product experience or mere exposure?

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Participants and design

One-hundred and eleven female students ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.46$, $SD = 1.57$) at a large North American university participated in exchange for course credit. Twelve participants did not follow the study instructions (e.g., clicked through the survey without reading, didn't understand questions) and were excluded from data analysis. The study had a 3-condition (luxury use vs. luxury exposure vs. control) between-subjects design.

5.1.2. Procedure

All participants arrived individually to the lab, with their arrival times intentionally staggered so they would not be aware of the experimental conditions, especially the use of a luxury handbag in one condition. Upon arrival, participants were told that they would be asked to complete several studies, and for the first study, were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: luxury use, luxury exposure, and control.

In the *luxury use condition*, participants were told the study was about women's accessories, and they would be given a handbag to use and evaluate (see Appendix B for full instructions for all conditions). They were given a Louis Vuitton bag (retail price = \$750; see Appendix A for picture), which was chosen because the Louis Vuitton brand is well-known and highly desired among women in our sample population. A pretest showed that our participant population rated Louis Vuitton an average of 5.67 in desirability on a 1–7 scale. After receiving the handbag, participants followed the same procedure described in Study 1. After walking around a predetermined path, and returning to the lab about 15 min later, participants were directed to a private room to fill out a computer survey with questions about the handbag. After completing these questions, participants were given instructions for a second study, which was the prize money allocation task described in Study 1.

Participants in the *luxury exposure condition* were told the first study would involve evaluating some campus brochures, including a campus map, walking guide, and transit guide. They were asked to read them while sitting in a private room, where a poster of the Louis Vuitton brand name and logo was hung on the wall in full view of participants. After 15 min, participants were asked to evaluate the campus brochures by completing a computer survey. After completing these questions, participants were given instructions for a second study, which was the prize money allocation task described in Study 1. Afterwards, a manipulation check question asked participants whether they noticed the poster on the wall, and all participants responded affirmatively.

Participants in the *control condition* were told that the first study would involve evaluating some campus brochures, including a campus map, walking guide, and transit guide. They were asked to use these brochures to walk around campus in the same path given to participants in the luxury consumption condition. After coming back to the lab about 15 min later, each participant was directed to a private room with a computer to fill out a survey with questions about the campus brochures. After completing these questions, participants were given instructions for a second study, which was the prize money allocation task described in Study 1.

5.1.3. Measure

Our dependent measure was the prize money allocation task described in Study 1. As before, we measured how much of a \$10 prize participants would give to themselves rather than another person. After providing their response, and finishing the rest of the survey, participants were asked what they thought the purpose of the experiment was and whether one part of the experiment was connected to another part. None of the participants guessed the study purpose and no one expressed awareness that the first study (evaluating a handbag/campus brochures) was related to the second study (prize money allocation).

5.2. Results and discussion

We examined how much of the \$10 prize money people gave to themselves across three conditions. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a main effect ($F(2,96) = 3.98$, $p = .022$). Participants in the luxury use condition gave more money to themselves ($M = \$8.65$, $SD = 1.76$) than participants in both the control condition ($M = \$7.67$, $SD = 1.98$; $t(96) = 2.66$, $p = .009$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.069$) and in the luxury exposure condition ($M = \$7.36$, $SD = 2.11$; $t(96) = 2.09$, $p = .039$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.044$). There was no difference in money allocation between participants in the control condition and the luxury exposure condition ($p > .50$).

The findings conceptually replicate those from Study 1. The experience of using a luxury product resulted in more selfish behavior versus the control group. In contrast, merely being exposed to the Louis Vuitton brand logo did not elicit more selfish behavior versus the control group. This result is consistent with our prior reasoning as to why luxury use elicits selfish behavior. Using a luxury product is a visible sign of social status, which makes salient the social comparison between the user and others who do not have such a rare and exclusive object. Simply being exposed to a luxury brand, such as seeing it in a store or viewing a brand logo, is unlikely to elicit the same level of perceived higher social status, which drive selfish behavior.

In the next study, we move our research to a more naturalistic setting with a broader population of women. Female participants were recruited at a large State Fair in the United States, which draws a wide cross-section of people. Participants followed

the same basic procedure as Study 1, with two exceptions. First, we included a measure of prosocial behavior in the study, and consistent with prior findings, predicted that women who experienced using the luxury handbag would be less willing to engage in behaviors to help others. Second, we also incorporated a measure of social status to examine our prediction that using a luxury good increases the user's sense of social status, which then results in more selfish and less helpful behavior toward others.

6. Study 3: social status mediates the effect of luxury product experience on selfish behavior

6.1. Method

The study was conducted at a large State Fair in the U.S., which draws two million visitors each year. The research site was a building on the State Fair premises, which included individual spaces for use by university researchers to collect data. Our space was set up with tables, chairs, and privacy screens to accommodate a maximum of 6 participants at a time. A small poster with the name of the study, participant eligibility, and short description was placed on an easel in front of the space to gain interest from visitors to the research building.

6.1.1. Sample and procedure

One-hundred twenty-six women ($M_{age} = 39.81$, $SD = 16.72$) attending the State Fair were recruited to participate in the study. Women 18–65 years of age were invited to participate, and received a small string backpack as an incentive to participate. Participants were given a Louis Vuitton handbag (luxury condition) or a non-luxury handbag similar in size and style (non-luxury condition), and were instructed to go outside the research building and walk around the State Fair using a predetermined path for about 15 min. Upon returning to the building, they were seated at a table with privacy screens, completed several filler tasks, and then filled out a paper-and-pencil survey, which contained the measures of interest.

6.1.2. Measures

We used the Prosocial Behavioral Intentions Scale, a validated multi-item scale for measuring prosocial behavior (Baumsteiger & Siegel, 2018). Participants indicated their willingness to help others on a scale from 1 (Definitely would not do this) to 7 (Definitely would do this) in four different situations: "Comfort someone I know after they experience a hardship," "Help a stranger find something they lost, like their key or a pet," "Help care for a sick friend or relative," "Assist a stranger with a small task (e.g., help carry groceries, watch their things while they use a restroom)." Responses to these items were averaged ($\alpha = 0.75$).

To assess whether the experience of using a luxury handbag affected women's perceptions of social status, participants completed a survey while walking around the State Fair. They were asked to stop at one of the buildings on their walk and fill out a short survey that was placed inside the handbag along with a pencil. Embedded in the survey were five items measuring women's perceptions of their current social status: "Do you feel... (1) you have higher status, (2) you are superior to others, (3) you are powerful, (4) like you are at the top, and (5) you have the power to influence others?" Participants provided responses to each item on a 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much) scale. Responses to these items were averaged to form a perceived social status index ($\alpha = 0.78$).

6.2. Results

We first analyzed how willing participants were to help others in the luxury and non-luxury conditions. We found that participants in the luxury condition were less willing to help others ($M = 5.69$, $SD = 0.93$) than participants in the non-luxury condition ($M = 6.13$, $SD = 0.70$; $F(1,124) = 9.10$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$). Thus, consistent with findings from the first two studies, women who experienced using a luxury handbag were less likely to behave in a way that reflects concern for others.

Next, we tested whether women differed in their sense of social status in the luxury and non-luxury conditions. Findings showed that participants in the luxury condition perceived having significantly higher social status than participants in the non-luxury condition ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.17$ vs. $M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.33$, $F(1,124) = 4.17$, $p = .043$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$). Thus, women who experienced using the Louis Vuitton handbag perceived themselves as having higher social status, compared to women using a non-luxury handbag.

Finally, we examined whether women's perceptions of social status mediated the effect of luxury use on willingness to engage in prosocial behavior. We conducted a 5000 resample bootstrap test of the indirect effect of luxury use (0 = non-luxury; 1 = luxury) on the prosocial behavior index (Hayes, 2018, Model 4), which revealed that perceived higher social status statistically mediated this effect ($b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI: $[-0.1917, -0.0022]$).

6.3. Discussion

Our findings show that, as predicted, the experience of using a luxury product increases women's sense of social status, which leads them to behave in a less helpful way toward others. Using a different measure than our prior studies, which focused on monetary resources, we find that luxury use results in less concern for others even when money is not an issue.

In the next study, we examine whether the experience of using a luxury product might lead to more generous behavior. Per our earlier theorizing, using a luxury product should have a different effect on behavior depending on whether the situation explicitly provides a self-enhancement opportunity by behaving generously. If the situation does not present such an opportunity,

per our first three studies, using a luxury product results in more selfish behavior. However, if the situation explicitly presents an opportunity to self-enhance by being generous, we predict that luxury use will result in more generous behavior.

We examine this prediction in the next study by varying the context of an opportunity to donate to charity. When the donation opportunity presents itself in a public (private) context, we predict that luxury users will exhibit more generous (selfish) behavioral intentions. Evidence to this effect would support our theorizing that the behavioral context (private vs. public) is an important moderator of the effect of luxury product experiences, and would also be consistent with our conceptual argument that self-enhancement can drive both more generous and more selfish behavior under different conditions.

7. Study 4: effects of luxury product experience differ for private versus public contexts

7.1. Method

One-hundred and seven female students ($M_{\text{age}} = 19.94$, $SD = 0.97$) at a large North American university participated for course credit, and were assigned to one of the conditions in a 2 (product type: luxury vs. non-luxury) \times 2 (donation context: public vs. private) between-subjects design.

Participants arrived individually to the lab. They were given the same instructions described in Study 1, and followed a similar procedure in terms of receiving a luxury (Prada) or non-luxury handbag and then wearing the handbag to walk around campus on a specified path. After returning to the lab, participants completed a computer survey, which included a measure of their willingness to donate to a charity.

Participants were asked to imagine they had an opportunity to donate money to a charity. In the *private* condition, the donation opportunity was described as occurring at the checkout stage on the website of an online retailer. In the *public* condition, the donation opportunity was described as occurring in a checkout line at an actual store. Participants indicated how much money they would be willing to donate on a scale that ranged from \$0 to \$8.

7.2. Results

An ANOVA with product type and donation context did not show main effects, but did reveal the predicted interaction ($F(1,103) = 8.46$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.08$). As seen in Fig. 2, the experience of using a luxury product had a different effect on willingness to donate depending on whether the donation was being made in public versus in private. To test our specific hypotheses, we performed a series of planned contrasts in the private and public donation conditions.

In the *private* context, women indicated they would donate *less* money to charity in the luxury condition versus the non-luxury condition ($M = \$2.06$ vs. $\$3.08$; $F(1,103) = 4.30$, $p = .043$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$). Thus, as in Studies 1–3, using a luxury product led women to be more selfish when the situation did not explicitly provide an opportunity to enhance reputation through generosity. However, in the *public* context, women indicated they would donate *more* money to charity in the luxury condition compared to the non-luxury condition ($M = \$3.32$ vs. $\$2.22$, $F(1,103) = 4.27$, $p = .041$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$). Thus, when the donation was made in public, and presented an opportunity to enhance reputation, women who used the Prada handbag were more generous.

To look at the findings another way, participants in the luxury condition were much more generous in their willingness to donate in the public versus private donation context ($M = \$3.32$ vs. $\$2.06$; $F(1,103) = 7.69$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$). However, participants in the non-luxury condition did not vary in the amount of money they were willing to donate in the public versus private donation context ($M = \$2.22$ vs. $\$3.08$; $F(1,103) = 3.07$; $p = .24$).

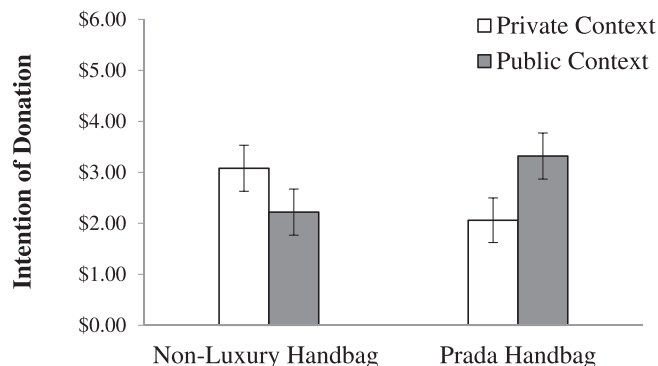


Fig. 2. Study 4: effect of luxury product experience on willingness to donate by public versus private donation context.

7.3. Discussion

Our findings support the prediction that the experience of using a luxury product can result in more generous behavior when it occurs in public. The reversal in findings for public versus private donation contexts is consistent with the idea that using a luxury product spurs self-interested behavior. Self-interested behavior is manifested as more selfish behavior in private, but is manifested as more generous behavior in public where it can boost a person's reputation.

In the next study, we pursue more support for our predictions by examining real donation behavior. In Study 4, we asked women about their willingness to donate, which does not impose real costs for being generous; in this case, luxury users can appear to be more generous in the public donation context without actually parting with money. In Study 5, we examine whether luxury users will continue to be more generous in the public (vs. private) donation context when they are asked to donate money they have earned for participating in the study.

8. Study 5: effect of luxury product experience on public versus private donations to charity

8.1. Method

One-hundred and two female students ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.10$, $SD = 1.07$) at a large North American university participated for course credit. Two participants who did not follow instructions (e.g., spent too much time walking around and came back to the lab late) were excluded from the analyses. Participants were assigned to one of the conditions in a 2 (product type: luxury vs. non-luxury) \times 2 (donation context: public vs. private) between-subjects design.

The procedure was similar to Study 4, with three exceptions. First, we used a different luxury brand (Burberry) and product (scarf) in the study (see Appendix A for pictures). In the luxury condition, women were given a Burberry scarf (retail price: \$385) to wear in any style they preferred. In the non-luxury condition, participants were given a non-luxury scarf similar in size and style to the Burberry scarf (retail price = \$45) to wear in any style they preferred. Burberry is a very desirable luxury brand, per results from a pretest showing that college women rated Burberry an average of 5.50 in desirability on a 1–7 scale.

Second, participants were told that they would receive money as a thank you gift for participating in the study, in addition to the expected course credit. This procedure was incorporated into the study to ensure all participants would have cash available for donation.

Third, participants were given an opportunity to donate some of the money they received to a charity of their choice (see Appendix B for full instructions). Participants in the *private donation* condition were instructed to return to the lab after walking around campus. Upon their return, they were seated in a private room to fill out a survey on the computer. The computer instructions directed them to open an envelope that was placed on the desk, which contained a note, a donation request card, and a pencil. The note told participants they would be receiving \$5 as a thank you for participating in the study, and explained the opportunity to donate money to a charity of their choice. The card provided six options for the donation amount: \$0, \$1, \$2, \$3, \$4, or \$5. The amount donated was used as the dependent measure for the study. After making a choice, participants were directed (via computer) to place the card back in the sealed envelope and put it on the table. Participants then completed a brief survey, and when finished, they were given their monetary payment (\$5 minus the amount of their donation).

Participants in the *public donation* condition were asked to return to an administrative office after walking around campus. Upon arrival, they proceeded to a donation desk, where they were greeted by a person working at the desk, who was a female research assistant blind to the study hypotheses. Participants were then handed the donation request letter, and after reading it, were given the same donation card and pencil used in the private condition. Participants were verbally informed that after they made a decision, they would need to hand the card to the person at the desk so that she could write down the person's name and record the donation. No further instructions or encouragement to donate were given. After handing in their donation card, participants were directed back to the lab to complete a brief computer survey. When finished, participants were given their monetary payment (\$5 minus the amount of their donation).

8.2. Results

The average donation amount in the study was \$3.57 ($SD = \1.87). To test whether using the luxury scarf had a different effect in public and private donation contexts, we conducted an ANOVA with product type and donation context as fixed factors. The results did not reveal main effects, but did show the predicted interaction between product type and donation context ($F(1,98) = 8.87$, $p = .004$). As illustrated in Fig. 3, the experience of using a luxury product had a different effect on donations depending on whether the donation was made in a public context or in a private context.

In the *private donation* condition, women donated *less* money to charity in the luxury condition versus the non-luxury control condition ($M = \$2.84$ vs. $\$3.88$; $t(98) = 2.06$, $p = .041$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.043$). As expected, using a luxury product led women to behave in a more selfish manner when the situation did not offer an explicit opportunity to enhance their reputation by being generous. In contrast, in the *public donation* condition, women donated *more* money to charity in the luxury condition compared to the non-luxury control condition ($M = \$4.31$ vs. $\$3.20$, $t(98) = 2.14$, $p = .034$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.038$). Thus, when the donation was made in public, women who experienced using a luxury product became more generous.

To look at the findings another way, women in the luxury condition gave substantially more money (50% more) to charity when the donation context was public rather than private ($M = \$4.31$ vs. $\$2.84$; $t(98) = 2.91$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.061$). However,

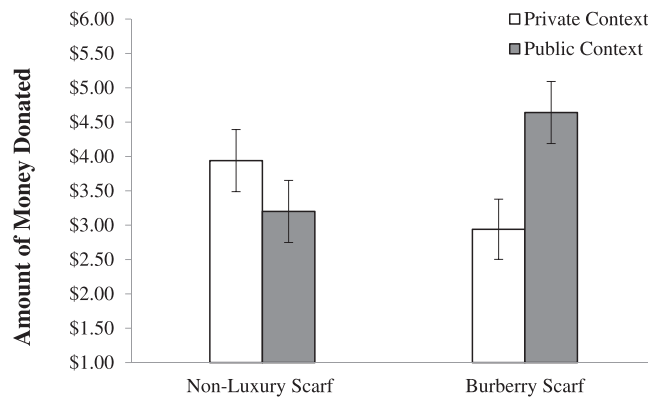


Fig. 3. Study 5: effect of luxury product use on charity donations by public versus private donation context.

for women in the non-luxury condition, donations were not significantly different for the public versus private donation context ($M = \$3.20$ vs. $\$3.88$; $t(98) = 1.03$, $p = .19$).

8.3. Discussion

Our results provide further support for our predictions regarding the effects of a luxury product experience. When asked to make a donation to charity in private, women using a Burberry scarf donated over 25% less money than those using a non-luxury scarf. But when asked to make a donation in public, those using a Burberry scarf donated over 50% more money than those using a non-luxury scarf. Thus, the experience of using a luxury product can spur more generous behavior when the opportunity exists to enhance one's reputation by exhibiting generosity in front of others.

These findings are consistent with our theorizing that the experience of using a luxury product can result in more selfish and more generous behavior because both types of behavior align with self-enhancement motives related to social status. Further, these findings reduce the viability of alternative explanations because they must be capable of explaining two entirely different behaviors—more selfish behavior in private contexts and more generous behavior in public contexts. We did, however, examine an alternative explanation based on the idea that luxury users in our studies donated more or less money based on stereotypes of how luxury consumers typically behave, for example, less caring and warm (Cannon & Rucker, 2018). To examine this possibility, we repeated Study 5, but asked participants to imagine using a luxury (or non-luxury) product going through the same procedures as described in Study 5. If a luxury user stereotype drives participants' behavior, imagining the use of a luxury product should elicit that stereotype, and we should replicate the Study 5 findings. We conducted an analysis of the donation data, and our results did *not* replicate those of Study 5. Specifically, neither of the main effects of product type or donation context reached significance, and importantly, the critical product type \times donation context interaction also failed to reach significance (see Appendix B for full description of the study and results). These findings do not support the alternative explanation, and instead, provide further evidence that it is the actual usage experience that leads participants to behave in selfish or generous ways.

9. Study 6: the moderating role of exclusivity

In this study, we examine the exclusivity of luxury products as a moderator. Specifically, we test whether the same effects of luxury use occur for luxury brands that are less exclusive. Luxury products are positional goods that derive their value from being rare, exclusive, and difficult to obtain (Nelissen & Meijers, 2011; Plourde, 2008). However, in the realm of luxury brands, some are more exclusive than others. On one extreme, brands such as Hermes have very limited distribution and customers wait years to receive one of their iconic Birkin handbags. On the other hand, brands such as Gucci have expanded their lines to include lower-priced products (e.g., key chains, socks) that are purchased by a wider range of consumers. When luxury brands become less exclusive, and more people use them, they lose their ability to increase one's sense of social status (Kuksov & Xie, 2012).

In prior studies, we have found that the experience of using luxury products can alter behavior toward other people, and that this effect occurs because this experience increases the user's sense of social status. In light of these results, we propose that when luxury brands become less exclusive (more consumers use them), using products from these brands will not elicit the same effects on prosocial behavior we have observed thus far, because less exclusive luxury brands will be less effective in raising women's perceived sense of social class.

We test this prediction using the same luxury product (Burberry scarf), same prosocial behavior (donating to charity), and one of the donation contexts (public donation) described in Study 5. We directly manipulate the perceived exclusivity of the Burberry

brand, and observe the effect of exclusivity on perceived social status and monetary donations. Our prediction is that when the Burberry scarf is perceived as less exclusive, using it will no longer boost a women's sense of social status, and therefore, will no longer influence charitable donations.

9.1. Method

9.1.1. Participants

One-hundred and seven female students ($M_{age} = 20.09$, $SD = 1.03$) in an introductory business course at a North American university participated in the study for course credit. Seven participants failed to follow instructions (e.g., did not wear the scarf as instructed) and were not included in the data analysis. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: luxury, less exclusive luxury, and non-luxury (control).

9.1.2. Procedure and measures

The basic procedure was similar to the public donation condition in Study 5. Participants came to the lab individually and were told they would participate in several studies. The first study was described as one about women's accessories, and participants were randomly assigned to receive either a Burberry scarf (luxury and less exclusive luxury conditions) or a non-luxury (control) scarf. Participants were asked to wear the scarf as they wished, and were instructed to walk around campus with the scarf on a specified path. During their walk, participants were instructed to stop by a coffee shop, find a place to sit, and complete a short survey. Embedded in this survey were five items measuring perceptions of their current level of social status (described in Study 3), which were averaged to form a perceived social status index ($\alpha = 0.83$). After completing their walk, participants returned to a busy administrative office, where they were provided with a public opportunity to donate money they received for participating in the study to charity, using the same procedure as Study 5.

9.1.3. Luxury exclusivity manipulation

Unlike our prior studies, the current study had two different luxury conditions: luxury and less exclusive luxury. Participants used the same luxury Burberry scarf in both conditions, but were exposed to different information about the Burberry brand to manipulate perceptions of the brand's exclusivity.

In the *less exclusive luxury* condition, participants read a short news article about Burberry before they were given the scarf. The article briefly described the history of the brand, including the iconic check pattern. One sentence in the article noted that products with the check pattern were becoming more commonplace, with over 50% of women owning a Burberry accessory with the check pattern. This material was, in fact, taken from an actual news article (Jones, 2008). To bolster the notion that the check pattern was commonplace, several Burberry products sporting the iconic check pattern were placed along the walking path these participants followed: (1) a female confederate with a large Burberry check pattern tote bag was stationed on a sofa next to the elevator used by participants; (2) in the office where charity donations were solicited, a check-patterned Burberry garment bag and a pair of Burberry check-patterned rain boots were placed by a chair; and (3) a Burberry umbrella with the check pattern was placed in a lost and found box next to the donation desk.

In the *luxury* condition, participants also read a short news article about Burberry before they were given the scarf, which ensured consistency in procedures for both luxury conditions. The article was identical in most respects to the one provided in the less exclusive luxury condition, however it did not mention how commonplace items with the check pattern had become (see Appendix B for both Burberry articles). Further, we did not place Burberry products along the walking path, as we did in the less exclusive luxury condition to signal how commonplace the Burberry check pattern products had become.

9.2. Results and discussion

9.2.1. Donation

An omnibus ANOVA revealed a significant effect of condition on donations ($F(2,97) = 3.97$, $p = .05$). As seen in Fig. 4, women in the luxury condition donated *more* money than women in the non-luxury control condition ($M = \$4.35$ vs. $\$3.47$; $t(97) = 2.02$, $p = .047$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.042$). This result replicates the finding from Study 5 that women using a Burberry scarf became more generous when they had an opportunity to donate in public.

By contrast, using the same luxury scarf had no effect on donations when the luxury product was described as less exclusive. There was no difference in donations in the less exclusive luxury condition and the non-luxury control condition ($M = \$3.38$ vs. $\$3.35$; $t(97) = 0.19$, $p = .84$). Further, even though women used a Burberry scarf in both conditions, women in the less exclusive luxury condition donated significantly *less* money compared to women in the regular luxury product condition ($M = \$3.38$ vs. $\$4.35$; $t(97) = 2.24$, $p = .027$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.063$).

9.2.2. Perceived social status

An omnibus ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of condition on perceived social status ($F(2,97) = 3.55$, $p = .033$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.039$). Planned contrasts confirmed that participants in the luxury condition perceived themselves as having higher social status ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.04$) than participants in the less exclusive luxury condition ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.01$, $t(97) = 2.08$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.040$), indicating that our manipulation was successful. Further, there was no difference in perceived social status between the less exclusive luxury condition and the non-luxury control condition ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.09$, $t(97) = 0.42$, $p = .68$). Finally,

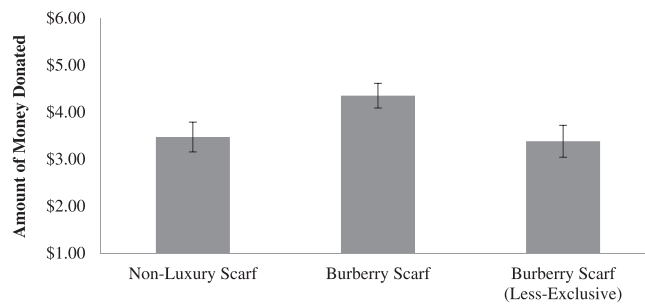


Fig. 4. Effect of luxury product use on public charity donations by luxury product exclusivity.

replicating the previous finding from Study 3, participants in the luxury condition experienced higher perceived social status than participants in the non-luxury control condition ($t(97) = 2.47, p = .015, \eta_p^2 = 0.042$).

9.2.3. Mediation analysis

Next, we tested whether women's perceived social status mediated the effect of luxury use on donation behavior. As reported earlier, there was no difference between the control and less exclusive luxury conditions in terms of the donation amounts and perceived social status. Thus, we combined these two conditions for the mediation analysis. A 10,000 resample bootstrap (Hayes, 2018, Model 4) revealed a significant indirect effect of condition on donation amount via perceived social status, $b = 0.24$ ($SE = 0.13$), 95% CI [0.0421, 0.6142].

We repeated the mediation analysis for the luxury and the less exclusive luxury conditions, since these were the conditions of focal interest for the study. A 10,000 resample bootstrap (Hayes, 2018, Model 4) revealed a significant indirect effect of condition on donation amount via perceived social status, $b = 0.22$ ($SE = 0.16$), 95% CI [0.0132, 0.6610]. Once again, this analysis confirmed that the effect of the luxury condition (luxury vs. less exclusive luxury) on donation amount was statistically mediated by perceived social status.

Taken together, these findings show that the exclusivity of a luxury product is a moderator of subsequent prosocial behavior. That is, the effects of luxury use can be “turned off” when the luxury product is depicted as less exclusive and, therefore, does not increase a person's sense of social status. Thus, the exclusivity of a luxury product is critical to elevating a person's sense of status. These findings regarding social status and generous behavior mirror those for social status and selfish behavior reported in Study 3. This means that the same psychological mechanism responsible for triggering selfish behavior—perceived social status—also proved to be the underlying psychological process that triggers generous behavior when there was an opportunity to enhance reputation through generous behavior.

10. General discussion

Introducing luxury products into our lives has both psychological and behavioral consequences. We show that the experience of using a luxury product makes women perceive themselves as having higher social status, and these perceptions affect behavior toward other people. After using a luxury product, women exhibited more selfish behavior, such as sharing fewer resources with others and contributing less money to charity, than women who used a non-luxury handbag. This pattern of behavior was reversed, with luxury users exhibiting more generous behavior, *only* when being more generous presents an opportunity to enhance one's reputation in front of other people. Thus, regardless of whether luxury users are more selfish or more generous, their behavior is ultimately driven by self-interest rather than concern for others.

We showed these effects across six studies with different luxury brands (Prada, Louis Vuitton, Burberry), different luxury products (handbags, scarves), and women of different ages. We also gathered evidence across different measures, including allocation of common resources (Studies 1 & 2), prosocial helping behavior (Study 3), willingness to donate to charity (Study 4), and actual monetary donations to charity (Studies 5 & 6). Taken together, our findings paint a rather surprising picture of the unintended consequences of using luxury goods, and the potential negative externalities to society at large.

Below, we discuss the contributions of our findings to several research streams, as well as to marketing practice. We conclude with a discussion of limitations of our work and suggestions for future research to expand the scope of our findings.

10.1. Luxury research

Ever since Veblen's (1899) classic work *The Theory of Leisure Class*, researchers in areas such as sociology, psychology, economics, and marketing have been interested in the phenomenon of luxury consumption. For more than a century, researchers have focused on the motivational aspects of luxury consumption. Findings show that consumers desire luxury products for a variety

of reasons, including increasing one's sense of well-being (Belk, 1985; Richins, 1987), increasing self-esteem (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010; Solomon, 1983), compensating for feelings of powerless (Rucker et al., 2012), and affiliating with favored social groups (Berger & Ward, 2010).

We add to this important line of inquiry by examining the experiential aspects of luxury consumption. By providing opportunities for consumers to experience using a luxury product in an experimental setting, we were able to capture psychological responses to the experience in real time. And, we were able to assess behavioral consequences associated with the experience immediately after the luxury product experience occurred, without any intervening factors that could contribute to behavioral responses. Researchers can develop this experiential protocol to examine new issues, such as the effect of motivation on psychological responses to luxury experiences or the effect of longer-term luxury use.

To guide our exploration, we developed a basic model of luxury product experience which identified perceptions of social status as an important psychological response to the experience. We then linked social status perceptions to self-enhancement, which led to theorizing about likely behavioral outcomes related to prosocial behavior. Finally, we incorporated a situational factor, public versus private context, into the model to develop further predictions about when the experience of using a luxury product would affect people's willingness to behave either more selfishly or more generously. Taken together, these concepts and factors provide a starting point for building a more expansive theory of how luxury experiences affect consumer cognitions and behaviors.

10.2. Social class, social status, and prosocial behavior

When women use a luxury product, they perceive themselves as being of higher social status and superior to other people. These self-perceptions often lead to an unwillingness to engage in prosocial behaviors, such as donating money to charity or helping someone in need. These findings add to an interesting stream of research examining the role of wealth and status as influences on prosocial behavior.

Prior research has reported that higher socioeconomic status (SES) is correlated with less prosocial behavior. Higher levels of SES are correlated with higher levels of psychological entitlement and narcissistic personality tendencies (Piff, 2014), lower likelihood of donating money and helping others (Piff et al., 2010), and less compassion toward others' suffering (Stellar et al., 2012). These findings are correlational in nature, and the direction of causation between SES and prosocial behavior could presumably be in either direction. Our results, using an experimental methodology that manipulates social status through the use of luxury goods, add to this line of research by providing stronger evidence that higher levels of status *cause* selfish and less prosocial behaviors. When women in our studies received a boost in social status by using a luxury product, they also exhibited more selfish and less prosocial behavior on multiple occasions.

Further, by examining different contexts for prosocial behavior, we provide a more nuanced view of the relationship between social status and prosocial behavior. We show that higher social status can be associated with more and less prosocial behavior, and suggest that the common thread to both effects is a self-enhancement orientation.

10.3. Brand research

The current research also relates to findings showing how brands can influence our behavior. Prior research shows that incidental exposure to a brand logo (e.g., Apple logo) can activate behaviors related to the brand's image, such as being creative (Chartrand, Huber, Shiv, & Tanner, 2008; Fitzsimons, Chartrand, & Fitzsimons, 2008). Similarly, using a branded product that is associated with certain outcomes (e.g., Gatorade and athletic performance) can increase the user's exercise performance, despite the fact that the actual beverage consumed has no properties that would be beneficial to this type of performance (Irmak, Block, & Fitzsimons, 2005; Park & John, 2014).

We add to this body of research by showing that using products from luxury brands also impacts behavior, albeit in a very different way than prior demonstrations. Prior research has found that brands affect behavior through direct associations with the brand's image, such as Apple (creative) or Gatorade (athletic performance). Our studies are different in the sense that the behaviors we observe (e.g., splitting money, donations) are not directly related to the brand's image, but are downstream consequences of using a luxury brand more generally. In fact, we find that merely exposing women to luxury brands (poster with brand logo) is not enough to obtain the effects we find in our studies; women need to actually use the luxury product.

Further, we find that use of luxury brands not only affects the user, but also other people who interact with the luxury user. Prior research has focused on a brand's effect on individual behavior, such as being more creative or exercising longer. We extend this research into new territory by examining whether brands use can trigger certain types of behavior that have consequences for others as well as oneself.

10.4. Implications for marketing practice

Luxury products are often referred to as "status symbols," and research shows that consumer motivations for acquiring luxury goods are related to the desire for status and power (Han et al., 2010; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). Our research confirms that the experience of using a luxury product can lead to a status boost for consumers, as long as the luxury product maintains a sense of rarity and exclusivity.

Our findings have several implications for luxury firms. First, our findings suggest how luxury firms might take advantage of the fact that consumers experience a boost in social status from using their products to solicit for charitable donations. Many

luxury firms are involved in charitable causes (Arienti, 2019), and ask consumers to contribute through their websites and in stores. Further, many firms engage in cause marketing, where they sell products and contribute part of the proceeds to charities. Our results suggest that it is important for luxury firms to consider the context in which they make their donation requests. The donation context should be in public, where others can observe a consumer's generous behavior, such as in the store where others can observe their generosity or at fund raising galas where donations are publicly acknowledged. Donation requests in a private context, such as through email or online, are likely to be much less effective.

Second, many luxury brands have aggressively extended to new product categories, many at lower price points. For example, Burberry has greatly expanded its accessory line into keychains, hats, card cases, rain boots, and gloves. Our results (Study 6) suggest that if consumers perceive Burberry as a brand that is less rare and exclusive due to these expansions, Burberry users will not experience the boost in status they expect from a luxury brand. Indeed, luxury firms are concerned about perceptions of reduced exclusivity (The Economist, 2014), and our results suggest that this concern is well founded.

10.5. Limitations and future research

Our research provides a starting point for understanding how consumers respond to luxury experiences, and several directions for future research seem warranted. First, our research was limited to females, who are particularly important as a group contributing to the growth of luxury consumption over the past decade (Brown, 2019; Paton, 2015). Future research could expand the scope of our investigation by studying how males respond to experiences with luxury products. Given that past research has shown that males exhibit a stronger preference than females for signaling power and status (Hays, 2013; Melnyk, Van Osselaer, & Bijmolt, 2009), it is possible that the effects demonstrated in the current paper might be even stronger among male consumers. In fact, research has shown that the experience of driving a luxury (vs. non-luxury) car boosts men's testosterone levels (Saad & Vongas, 2009), which suggests that men may have stronger and more aggressive responses to using luxury products, and therefore might be even more selfish.

Second, our model can be expanded by including more moderators of interest, such as individual differences and cultural differences. For example, an individual's need for status would appear to be a strong candidate in this regard. It might be expected that consumers with a lower need for status (Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 1999; Han et al., 2010), defined as a tendency to purchase products for their status and prestige value, would experience less perceived social status when using a luxury product, leading to smaller effect. Another potential moderator is culture. A limitation of the current research is that the overwhelming majority of participants in our studies were U.S. citizens. Women from other countries and cultures may respond differently. For example, women from Eastern cultures, where the social hierarchy tends to be more salient than in Western cultures, might experience stronger perceived social status and exhibit stronger behavioral effects from using luxury products.







Also of interest as a moderator is luxury product ownership status. Perhaps using a luxury product is more impactful for women who do not own luxury products, where the experience is more eventful and provides a greater boost in social status. Though our studies were not designed to explicitly test this possibility, we did collect data on luxury product ownership for our first study (Study 1) and our study with state fairgoers (Study 3). While sample sizes were not large enough to perform a full moderator analysis, we did explore whether including luxury product ownership (owner vs. non-owner) as a covariate in our analyses would alter our results. For both studies, the results remained unchanged for all dependent measures (see Appendix B for analysis details). These findings indicate that our results are robust for owners and non-owners of luxury products, but a more detailed analysis of this potential moderator is warranted.

A final direction for further research is to expand the scope of the luxury experiences we feature in our studies. Our studies are limited to relatively short experiences with a luxury product, and expanding this research to study longer luxury product experiences would be of interest. It is possible that, over time, the behaviors we have observed could change because the boost in social status from using a luxury product dissipates (due to habituation) or increases (due to multiple occasions where social status is boosted due to product use). The scope of our findings could also be expanded by studying luxury experiences that do not involve product usage, such as luxury vacations or fine dining. We speculate that these types of experiences would produce the same boost in social status we have observed with using luxury products, but future research is warranted to examine what, if any, differences may occur.

Finally, future research might also examine whether the experience of using luxury products has other long-term effects on consumers, such as materialism. Materialism and luxury consumption are different phenomena; one can be materialistic but not use luxury products, and one can use luxury products but not be materialistic. However, among types of material possessions, luxury goods are often mentioned in discussions of materialism, presumably because luxury goods are such a visible symbol of status or success. Therefore, it is possible that the short or accumulated experiences of using luxury goods might trigger consumers' materialistic orientations and affect their social behaviors.

Addressing these issues holds the promise of understanding the consequences of luxury experiences in a more complete and compelling way. Does the devil wear Prada? It depends. We found that using a Prada handbag turned our participants into devils, who behaved in a less caring and more selfish way under certain conditions (private context). However, we also found that using a Prada handbag turned our participants into angels, who behaved in a more caring and generous way under certain conditions (public context). We invite further research to understand the ways that luxury experiences affect our lives and impact those around us.

Appendix A. Products used in studies

Study 1 & Study 4	
Luxury handbag (Prada)	Non-luxury control handbag
	
Study 2 & Study 3	
Luxury handbag (Louis Vuitton)	Non-luxury control handbag
	
Study 5 & Study 6	
Luxury scarf (Burberry)	Non-luxury control scarf
	

Appendix B. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2020.04.001>.

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