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INFLUENCE OF CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY ON NEO-LUXURY BRAND PURCHASE INTENTIONS: ARE THERE DISTINCTIONS AMONG INCOME GROUPS?

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the direct effect of brand market value on consumer purchase intentions of neo-luxury brands. Additionally, this study examines how the consumer's income affects the established relationship in the conceptual research model, i.e. how the market value of the brand affects consumer purchase intentions. The data was collected through an online survey of a representative group of evenly distributed respondents, observed by different income categories. In order to validate the suggested conceptual model, we used structural equation modeling. The results show that, for neo-luxury brands, consumer purchase intentions are positively impacted by the brand's market value. Furthermore, our results show that the level of customer income is not statistically significant, leading us to draw the conclusion that there are no significant differences between how customers from various income groups perceive various brand value components or how these components affect their intentions to purchase neo-luxury brands. This research expands the knowledge about consumer purchase intentions of neo-luxury brands.

Keywords: Neo-luxury brands, brand equity, purchase intention, income groups

JEL: M0, M30, M31, M37

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1. INTRODUCTION

When we look at luxury brands, we can conclude that their characteristics stand out compared to brands of the same category in terms of features such as design, exclusivity, quality, status features, and the like. Additionally, compared to non-luxury brands, luxury brands can be identified by certain connotations (Tynan et al., 2010). Beverland (2004), Okonkwo (2009), and Petina et al. (2018) claim that associations like (a) authenticity, heritage or pedigree, (b) stylistic consistency, (c) commitment to quality, (d) unique aesthetic symbolism, and (e) hedonic and emotional promotional appeals are used by companies to create their luxury brand identities.

In the past, luxury brands were often associated with high-income consumers, who were more willing to pay higher premium prices than low- or middle-income consumers. But in the modern era, buyers from various socioeconomic backgrounds all over the world are getting more and more interested in luxury brands since these brands are becoming more popular (Kapferer and Michaut, 2015). Such changes, accompanied by changes in consumption patterns, lead to the need to develop a completely new category of luxury brands, called neo-luxury brands (Kumar et al., 2020). Neo-luxury brands emerged from the concept of luxury brands, and in the literature, they are also called "masstige" brands. As stated by Silvestein et al. (2003), neo-luxury brands can be defined as more affordable luxury brands that possess a higher level of quality, taste, and aspiration than non-luxury brands. The target consumer category for neo-luxury brands is middle-income consumers who want a high-quality, creative, innovative and authentic product at an affordable price. In this sense, a huge research potential is opened related to the category of neo-luxury brands in general, and especially for research with a focus on the market value of these brands, as the most comprehensive model of brand consideration acknowledged in the literature.

As an intangible variable and resource of every company, the market value of a brand is one of the most important determinants of a company's competitive advantage. Although brand value is one of the most controversial topics in marketing, the ultimate goal of marketing managers is to create and maintain high brand value. The market value of a brand can be defined from a consumer-based perspective as the distinction between the customer response to a branded product versus an unbranded product, assuming both items have the same amount of marketing stimuli and product qualities (Keller, 1993). This different consumer reaction shows the effects of a long-term investment in brand marketing. The concept of brand market value is of particular importance for luxury and neo-luxury brands because these brands are distinguished from non-luxury brands by their characteristics. Despite an increase of the number of studies on neo-luxury brands, this area is still insufficiently

researched. In this context, this research is focused on the context of the market value of the brand and the relationship between the consumer and the brand, viewed in the context of non-luxury brands (Kumar et al., 2020).

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Neo-luxury brands have emerged from the concept of luxury brands, and are defined as affordable luxury brands that possess a higher level of quality, taste, and aspiration than non-luxury brands (Silverstein et al., 2003). Although neo-luxury brands have a number of common characteristics with traditional luxury brands, the key distinction is that neo-luxury brands reflect the transformative aspects of luxury consumption where worthiness and belonging merge with the hedonic needs of consumers (Cristini et al., 2017). The target population for purchasing neo-luxury brands is middle-income consumers. Such consumers, for the most part, do not have an established habit of buying and consuming luxury brands, and their expectations from the purchased service or product are lower (Seringhaus, 2002).

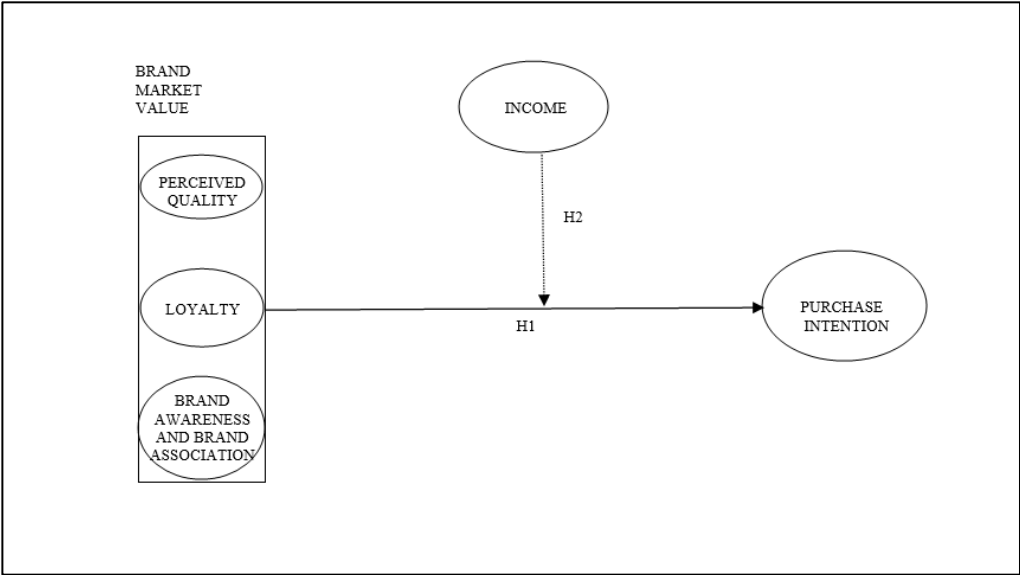
A new brand positioning sub-plan, known as a "mass prestige strategy" in the literature, was required with the rise of neo-luxury brands. Silverstein and Friske (2003) introduced the concept of mass prestige ("Mass Prestige") for the first time in the literature, describing it as "a strategic expression for entering the market of premium brands, which are based on high-value brand and price acceptability, thereby targeting a prestigious niche based on the knowledge, likeability, and love of consumers." The innovativeness of this marketing and branding strategy is reflected in the fact that neo-luxury brands offer lower prices than traditional luxury brands, yet higher than mid-range brands. As a result, neo-luxury brands are guaranteed to be more accessible than traditional luxury brands and therefore exclude the characteristic dimension of traditional luxury brands - their inaccessibility to a large consumer base. By introducing this innovative strategy, luxury brand companies actually deviate from traditional methods for marketing and branding and introduce a new innovative approach of "Mass Prestige" marketing, as a brand positioning strategy that combines prestige with reasonable prices in order to attract middle-class consumers (Paul, 2018).

Companies can perfectly plan, adapt and implement business strategies, but the final success is determined by consumers, through their decisions whether to buy a product or service of a certain brand or not. Each consumer makes their own unique buying decision, according to Kotler and Armstrong (2006). According to Crosno, Freling, and Skinner (2009), purchase intentions are the likelihood that a consumer would select a particular brand within a particular product category. The research focused on consumer purchase intentions decades ago is of great importance to researchers. The literature states that one of the most common predictors of consumer purchase intentions is the market value of the brand (Aaker, 1991). The

market value of the brand has special importance because it represents a comprehensive concept and is defined as the additional value that the brand provides to the product, i.e. the value with which it "enriches" the product (Farquhar, 1989) and thus can play a key decision in establishing purchase intentions among consumers (Ashil and Sinhe, 2004; Chang, Hsu and Chang, 2008; Liu et al., 2017).

The role that the brand plays in the context of luxury goods should not be particularly emphasized, and neither should the role of the market value of these brands for consumer purchase intentions, which has been confirmed by numerous studies (Jung and Shen, 2011; Godey et al, 2016; Husain, Ahmad and Khan, 2022). Given that the phenomenon of neo-luxury brands is relatively recent, there is not a large number of empirical studies conducted in this context, so it is of scientific and practical importance to examine this relationship in the context of neo-luxury brands. Accordingly, a conceptual research model was established that observes the market value of the brand as an indicator of consumer purchase intentions in the context of neo-luxury brands. In addition, within this research, we start from the point of view that consumers with different levels of income may have different purchase intentions of neo-luxury brands. Therefore, the influence of the market value of the brand on the purchasing intentions of consumers of neo-luxury brands is investigated, along with the testing of the moderating influence of the level of consumer income on the above-mentioned relationship.

Image 1: *Conceptual research model*



2.1. MARKET VALUE OF THE BRAND AND CUSTOMER'S INTENTION TO PURCHASE NEO-LUXURY BRANDS

One of the key and comprehensive concepts through which the importance of the brand is expressed is the concept of brand value. Brand value can be viewed from the financial and consumer perspective. Accountants tend to view brand value through financial contributions, i.e. in the context of monetary value. In this regard, brand value can be defined as the incremental cash flow resulting from the association of the brand name with the product (Kim, Kim, and An, 2003). On the other hand, marketers define this concept in terms of the relationship between the customer and the brand (consumer-oriented definitions), or as something belonging to the brand owner (company-oriented definitions) (Wood, 2000). Given the dominant marketing nature of this work, we look at the brand market value from the consumer-based perspective.

Aaker (1991) suggests that the market value of a brand is a set of assets, but also promises, associated with the brand name and sign in such a way as to result in an increase or decrease in the value that the product/service represents to the company or its customers. Market value of a brand implies "the effect of brand awareness as a consumer's response to brand marketing" (Keller, 1993). The stronger the brand's market value, the greater the preference for the brand that exists in the consumer's mind, which leads to a higher market share and higher profits. As a result, brand equity is considered to have numerous advantages. After Keller (1993) published one of the seminal works in this field, brand market value has been extensively studied for physically tangible products.

In the literature, there are different models of conceptualizing brand market value. According to Aaker's Managerial Brand Equity, the categories that make up brand equity are brand loyalty, brand familiarity, perceived quality, brand associations, and other assets of the protected brand (Aaker, 1996). A very important reference in the scientific marketing community is Keller's (1993) model of the market value of the brand, which is also based on the context of the consumer perspective and has a great similarity with Aaker's model. Unlike Aaker's model, Keller's model takes brand knowledge as a starting point. According to this model, brand knowledge is defined by two components: brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness is determined by brand recognition by consumers. On the other hand, within this model, brand image is defined as the consumer's perception of the brand.

Based on Aaker's (1991) conceptual model, Yoo, and Donthu (2001) developed a model that is most often used in empirical research when measuring brand market value. Since this model was derived from the aforementioned Aaker's conceptualization of brand value, it is clear that it is a multidimensional model of brand market value, as it includes the following dimensions: perceived quality, brand

loyalty and familiarity, and brand association. In their research, Yoo and Donthu (2001) come to the conclusion that it is justified to merge the dimensions of brand familiarity and brand association into one construct.

The main reasons for buying luxury brands go beyond functionality. Customers buy luxury brands to gain exclusivity (Berthon et al., 2009), status, and prestige (Amaldoss and Jain, 2005). Fionda and Moore (2009) explain the importance of the concept of luxury brands in the context of a status symbol that has deep psychological value for consumers, stating that purchasing a luxury brand is a "highly involved consumption experience that is strongly congruent with a person's self-concept". Given that consumers use luxury as a status symbol, the higher price of these brands compared to other brands in the same category is not crucial in the purchase intention but can be seen as an indicator of prestige (Veblen, 1899). In fact, brand equity is what will differentiate consumer choice between identical products (Yoo et al., 2000). Among other things, high brand value can result in a higher intention to purchase a given brand (Chang, Hsu, and Chung, 2008; Liu et al., 2017; Husain et al., 2022; Rojas-Lamoren et al., 2022). Starting from the assumption that consumers of neo-luxury brands (which are strategic variants of luxury brands) are oriented towards the features that these brands provide them in the context of a different or significantly higher level of functionality and psychological-sociological values, high market value can be seen as a relevant indicator of the buyer's intention for buying neo-luxury brands. In accordance with the above-mentioned, we propose the following research hypothesis:

H1: *There is a positive influence of the market value of the brand on the customer's intention to purchase neo-luxury brands.*

2.2. INCOME

Demographic variables (income, age, gender, education, etc.) can influence consumer purchase intentions (Lee, 2010; Madahi and Sukati, 2012). Yang et al. (2011) state that demographic characteristics affect purchase intentions in such a way that consumers with different demographic characteristics show different purchase intentions. Consumer income, as a demographic variable, is viewed as total personal income on a monthly basis. There is a large number of studies that show different influences of consumer income on consumer purchase intention. Hyun, Cho, Xu, and Fairhurst (2010) suggest that there is an indirect relationship between the level of income and the customer's intention to purchase a product. Consumers with a higher level of income have a greater tendency to deal with self-image and thereby show more interest in goods and services that reflect the consumer's purchasing ability (Alam, 2006). In the context of this research, the income variable can be of great importance for research, because the strategies of neo-luxury brands are aimed at attracting consumers who prefer authentic products of high quality, but

with affordable prices. These strategies are much closer to the strategies used by luxury brand companies than to the strategies used by non-luxury brand companies. Since neo-luxury brands emerged from the concept of luxury brands, the branding strategy of neo-luxury brands, known in the literature as the "Mass Prestige" strategy, includes a large number of common elements as the branding strategy of traditional luxury brands. The key difference is that Mass Prestige strategies exclude the "unattainable dream" function by offering lower prices than luxury brands, yet higher than mid-range products. Taking into account the statements of the author Alam (2006) and the nature of neo-luxury brands, which possess a higher level of quality, taste, and aspiration than non-luxury brands, with an affordable price (Silverstein et al., 2003), the observation of consumer income can be of particular interest, and challenge, as a potentially determining moderator in the context of the relationship between the consumer and the neo-luxury brand. In this regard, we propose the following research hypothesis:

H2: *There are different effects of the market value of the brand on the buyer's intention to purchase neo-luxury brands among consumers with different levels of income.*

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. PRODUCT CATEGORY AND BRAND

The research was conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a European developing/emerging country (IMF, 2021) with an approximate population of 3.3 million. Emerging markets provide an ideal context for studying the value of neo-luxury (Paul, 2015; Kumar et al., 2019). In the context of neo-luxury brands, there is no precise report in the domain of evaluating the value of brands, nor their market shares. In this sense, the existing research can serve as a basis for choosing a specific brand for this research. In the research conducted so far, empirical analyses were most often based on the category of electrical devices (Kumar and Paul, 2018; Baber et al., 2020; Kumar, 2020; Kumar et al., 2021). Baber et al. (2020) measured the prestige coefficient of Apple, Xiaomi, and Samsung mobile phones in the emerging market of India and came to the conclusion that the highest degree of prestige can be associated with the Apple brand. Subsequently, Kumar et al. (2021) also investigated the degree of prestige of mobile phone brands in the Serbian market as well as developing markets, taking into account Apple, Samsung and Huawei brands, and identified only Apple as a non-luxury brand. In this sense, the focus of this research is the category of electrical devices, with a focus on the Apple brand, as a typical representative of the mass luxury strategy. It is of great importance that the Apple brand is known to consumers since brand awareness is of great importance in examining the market value of the brand. In addition, Apple brand products are used

by different income categories of respondents, which is an important aspect according to the objectives and hypotheses of this research.

3.2 SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE

Research hypotheses were tested by conducting quantitative research. The primary data was collected online, through a GoogleForms questionnaire, and included respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina of different genders, ages, levels of education, and different levels of income. Invitations to participate in the survey, including a URL that directed respondents to the survey website, were sent via email or private messages via social media platforms. The final usable sample included a total of 354 respondents. The data obtained from the research were analyzed using the SEM analysis, using the AMOS 24.0 statistical program. An overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Demographic characteristics*

Variables	%	Variables	%
Sex		Education	
Female	68.4	High school or lower	0.6
Men	31.6	College or vocational school	33.9
Age		Bachelor	48.3
20 - 24 years	15.9	Master of Science/Profession or higher	17.2
25 - 29 years	16.3	Generations	
30 - 34 years	22.2	X-generation (40 - 60)	26.3
35 - 39 years	19.3	Y-generation (30 - 39)	41.5
40 - 49 years	14.4	Z-generation (20 - 29)	32.2
50 - 60 years	11.9		
Monthly income			
BAM 1,000 or less	35.0		
BAM 1,001 - 1,500	33.3		
BAM 1,501 - 2,000	20.9		
BAM 2,000 +	10.7		

Source: *The author's findings*

Table 1 shows that out of 354 respondents, 242 respondents (68.4%) were women, and 112 respondents (31.6%) were men. The majority of respondents 147 (41.5%) belong to the age group between 30 and 39 year olds. When it comes to personal income, it can be seen that it is a fairly even distribution of respondents, observed by different income categories. Only the category of respondents with incomes greater than 2,000 BAM (38 respondents) has a more significant deviation. A total of 124 respondents (35.0%) belongs to the income group below 1,000 BAM. Then, 118

respondents have an income of 1,001 to 1,500 BAM. There are 74 (20.9%) respondents from income groups of 1,501 to 2,000 BAM. Most respondents have a university degree.

3.3. QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The questionnaire used for this research consists of two parts. The first part of the questionnaire includes the demographic characteristics of respondents in terms of gender, years of education and personal income. The second part of the questionnaire includes previously validated scales measuring brand market value and purchase intentions measured on a seven-point Likert scale. The construct of brand market value implies a second-order variable, which includes three first-order variables: perceived quality, consumer loyalty, and brand awareness and brand association. In this regard, perceived quality was measured using a scale from previous research by Yoo and Donthu (2001) and Thong and Hawley (2009). Loyalty was measured using scales from the Yoo and Donthu (2000, 2001) research, and brand familiarity and brand association using scales from the Yoo and Donthu (2000), Washburn and Plank (2002), and Thong and Hawley (2009) research. To measure consumers' purchase intentions, scales from previous research conducted by Sweeney et al. (1999) and Liljander et al. (2009) were used. The scales used were translated and adapted to the research context in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The answer to each question in the questionnaire was mandatory. Given that we wanted to include in the research only those respondents who considered the Apple brand a neo-luxury brand, a filter question was asked at the very beginning of the questionnaire: "Do you consider the Apple brand a neo-luxury brand?". All respondents who provided an affirmative response were included in the further research. Also, since the variables in the conceptual model can only be assessed in individuals who own or have owned a specific Apple brand product, the following filter question was asked at the beginning of the questionnaire: "I use or have used the Apple brand". Only the respondents who confirmed the answer to this question were included in the further of the research.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

With the aim of testing the set research hypotheses and drawing appropriate conclusions, the collected data were analyzed in three phases. First, the internal reliability of the used scales was assessed by determining the Cronbach alpha coefficient and the correlation of individual items within the used scales (Hair et al., 2010). As can be seen from Table 2, all used scales show a satisfactory level of reliability.

In the second step, the structural equation modeling (SEM) technique was applied to test the hypotheses from the proposed research model. Following the methodological

suggestions of Anderson and Gerbing (1988), a two-step approach was used to estimate the model. The first step includes the evaluation of the measurement model, while the second step involves testing the structural relationships (hypotheses) among the latent constructs. The two-step approach eliminates the interaction between measurement and structural models and re-specification error (Hair et al., 2010).

4.1. QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

First, the reliability of all constructs was verified using Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All constructs were found to be highly consistent and reliable as their composite reliability (CR) scores were above the required cut-off value of 0.7 (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012) and the average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010) (Table 2).

Table 2: *Measures properties*

Second order	Construct (number of items)	Items (Codes)*	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach alph(N=354)	Item-total correlation	Standardised factor loading (λ)	CR	AVE
Customer-based brand equity (CBE)	Perceived quality (PQ)	I trust the quality of products from 'Apple'. (PQ1)	5.88	.754	.767	.576	.698	.793	.562
		Products from 'Apple' would be of very good quality. (PQ2)	5.25	1.097		.593	.711		
		Products from 'Apple' offer excellent features. (PQ3)	5.79	.792		.694	.833		
	Brand loyalty (BL)	I consider myself to be loyal to brand 'Apple'. (BL1)	5.59	1.321	.927	.906	.940	.924	.846
		'Apple' would be my first choice. (BL2)	5.69	1.256		.933	.983		
		I will not buy other brand if 'Apple' is available at the store. (BL3)	6.01	.852		.810	.829		
	Brand awareness and brand associations (BAA)	I can recognize 'Apple' among other competing brands. (BAA1)	6.29	.554	.906	.791	.836	.915	.684
		I am aware of 'Apple'. (BAA2)	6.08	.751		.757	.822		
		Some characteristics of 'Apple' come to my mind quickly. (BAA3)	6.16	.641		.833	.883		
		I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of 'Apple'. (BAA4)	6.28	.555		.776	.809		
		I have difficulty in imagining 'Apple' in my mind. (r) (BAA5)	6.00	.816		.740	.781		
	Purchase intentions (PI)	I will definitely consider buying an 'Apple' branded products (PI1)	5.62	.870	.994	.985	.988	.994	.982
		There is a strong likelihood that I will buy an 'Apple' branded product (PI2)	5.64	.871		.991	.989		
		I prefer another brand. (r) (PI3)	5.36	.859		.985	.996		

Source *Analysis of data obtained by primary research*

Note: * Items reflect respondents' opinions measured on a Likert scale (1-7), where 1 means significantly worse, and 7 means significantly better, compared to the competition

Also, as shown in Table 2, the standardized factor loading of items (manifest variables) and first-order constructs ranged from 0.698 to 0.996, and all were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that convergent validity is satisfied.

Discriminant validity was evaluated by comparing the square root AVE of each construct to its correlations with other constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The results showed that the constructs' discriminant validity is supported because each construct's square root AVE is higher than its correlations with any other construct in the model. Table III shows CR, AVE, square root AVE, and correlation values, supporting constructs' reliability and convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 3: *Reliability, convergent and discriminant validity of constructs*

Composite reliability and convergent validity			Discriminant validity			
Construct	CR	AVE	PQ	BL	BAA	PI
Perceived quality (PQ)	0.793	0.562	0.750^a			
Brand loyalty (BL)	0.924	0.846	0.515	0.920		
Brand aw. and brand ass. (BAA)	0.915	0.684	0.647	0.378	0.827	
Purchase intentions (PI)	0.994	0.982	0.244	0.191	0.304	0.991
Note: ^a Square root AVE values are in diagonals (bold) and correlations (r) are off-diagonal values						

Source: *Author's own results*

Finally, the model fit was tested using several fit indices. The measurement model was estimated using the maximum-likelihood method (MLM). According to the model evaluation criteria, the overall fit of the measurement model to data was acceptable: $\chi^2 = 211.246$ ($p < 0.001$); $\chi^2/df = 2.975$; RMSEA = 0.075, SRMR = 0.0395; CFI = 0.974; TLI = 0.967; GFI = 0.920; AGFI = 0.882.

4.2. STRUCTURAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES TESTING

Structural equation modelling (SEM) analyses were conducted to support the proposed model and to test the hypotheses. The fitting indices of the structural model are as follows: $\chi^2 = 512.730$ ($p < 0.001$); $\chi^2/df = 3.913$; RMSEA = 0.091, SRMR = 0.0728; CFI = 0.949; TLI = 0.940. In comparison with values suggested in the prior discussion, findings demonstrate that the model's fit is satisfactory. Thus, it was deemed appropriate to test the hypothesized paths. (Table 4).

Table 4: Hypotheses testing

Variable	Hypotheses	Model 1	Model 2	Full model
Main effects				
BE → PI (β_1)	H1	0.328***	0.328***	0.338***
Moderator				
Income → PI (γ_1)			0.006 ^{ns}	0.006 ^{ns}
Interaction effect				
BExIncome → PI (ζ_1)	H2			0.014 ^{ns}
Random effects				
<i>Gender</i>		0.057 ^{ns}	0.057 ^{ns}	0.056 ^{ns}
<i>Age</i>		0.027 ^{ns}	0.029 ^{ns}	0.029 ^{ns}
<i>Education</i>		-0.023 ^{ns}	-0.025 ^{ns}	-0.027 ^{ns}
N (number of observations)		354	354	354
Notes: ***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05				

Source: Author's own results

As predicted by hypothesis H1, a positive relationship between consumer-based brand equity and purchase intentions was supported ($\beta = 0.338$; $p < 0.001$), which is in line with the general assertion that consumer brand equity ultimately influences purchase intention (Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal, 1991; Moradi and Zarei, 2011; Tolba and Hassan, 2009; Chang et al., 2008; Chen and Chang, 2008). According to Swait et al. (1993), brand equity is thought to be a significant factor in customers' decisions to purchase one brand over another.

On the other hand, the moderating influence of income on the mentioned relationship is not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.014$; $p = 0.780$), which leads us to the conclusion that the second research hypothesis has not been confirmed. In other words, there are no significant differences in the way consumers belonging to different income groups perceive elements of brand value or in their influence on their purchase intentions for these brands. So, although by their nature neo-luxury brands possess a higher level of quality, taste, or aspirations than non-luxury brands (Alam, 2006), their second strategic determinant—an affordable price for a wider audience of consumers (Silverstein et al., 2003)—indicates a clear orientation and accessibility of these brands to consumers of different income groups. This is also the basis of their differentiation compared to traditional luxury brands, so the name of this

strategy "mass" prestige is fully justified. Purchase intentions were explained by 27.4% of the variances.

5. CONCLUSION

The current study investigates the relationship between customer-based brand equity and purchase intentions for masstige brands. This study also examines the impact of CBBE on intentions to buy masstige brands across different income segments of customers. According to our research, masstige brand companies can elicit favorable responses from their target audiences by improving the prestige, distinctiveness, and appeal of their masstige brands, as is the case with traditional luxury brands. But what is particularly characteristic and different in comparison to the niche strategies of traditional luxury companies is that masstige brand companies are able to direct their "mass" marketing strategies to a much wider base of consumers without treating them as separate market groups.

5.1. THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

A thorough theoretical framework for explaining purchase intention for mass brands is still absent despite the substantial body of academic research on mass marketing (e.g., Kumar and Paul, 2018; Kumar et al., 2020; Das et al., 2021). This gap is filled in the current study by looking at how CBBE influences purchase intentions for mass-prestige brands. Our research confirms the fundamental process through which customer perceptions of brand equity may influence their decision to buy a brand. However, the current study advances the fundamental mass-prestige hypothesis by contending that consumers from different socioeconomic (income) backgrounds do not have different opinions about mass-prestige brands, which affects their propensity to purchase these products. The significance of such findings stems from the fact that they indicate the complete justification of the mass luxury strategy and, consequently, the masstige theory as a separate discipline of brand management and marketing in general.

From a managerial standpoint, the current study offers masstige brand producers some crucial insights. A first managerial implication is that those who develop masstige brands must build strong brands that will forge strong, memorable, and favorable associations in the minds of consumers, trying to develop and achieve above-average aspects of masstige brand equity (e.g., perceived quality, brand awareness, brand associations, and brand loyalty). The expectations of prestige and luxury that come with masstige brands are crucial, regardless of the consumer's income possibilities.

5.2. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study contains a number of limitations. First, only one well-known neo-luxury brand of long-lasting electronic products, Apple, is included in the data set. Although the findings and recommendations can theoretically be extended to other neo-luxury brands, care should be used when extrapolating the findings to different situations. Therefore, it will be helpful for future research with other product/service brands to confirm the results of this study. The second limitation has to do with the number of important factors used in this study to analyze customers' intentions to purchase a neo-luxury brand. In this sense, future research that will cover many other contextual, psychographic, and behavioral aspects significant for the formation of consumer perception of these brands is desirable. Finally, bearing in mind the used research methodology, which mainly draws on self-report measurements, future research could employ observational techniques to measure the subjects' emotional and behavioral responses to masstige brands.

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UTICAJ TRŽIŠNE VRIJEDNOSTI BRENDNA NA KUPOVNE NAMJERE POTROŠAČA NEO-LUKSUZNIH BRENDOVA: POSTOJE LI RAZLIKE IZMEĐU DOHODOVNIH SKUPINA POTROŠAČA?

SAŽETAK

Ova studija istražuje direktan uticaj tržišne vrijednosti brenda na kupovne namjere potrošača, posmatrano u kontekstu neoluksuznih brendovova. Studija, također ispituje moderirajući uticaj razine dohotka potrošača na uspostavljeni odnos između tržišne vrijednost brenda i kupovnih namjera potrošača. Podaci su prikupljeni putem online ankete, od reprezentativne grupe ispitanika, posmatranih po različitim kategorijama dohotka. U cilju analize predloženog konceptualnog modela istraživanja, korištena je statistička metoda modeliranja putem strukturalnih jednačina (SEM). Rezultati pokazuju da kod neoluksuznih brendova tržišna vrijednost brenda pozitivno utječe na kupovne namjere potrošača. Međutim, rezultati pokazuju da razina dohotka kupaca nema statistički značajan moderirajući efekat, što nas navodi na zaključak da ne postoje značajne razlike u smislu toga kako kupci različitih dohodovnih grupa percipiraju uticaj tržišne vrijednosti brenda na njihove namjere o kupoviti neoluksuznih brendova. Ovo istraživanje proširuje postojeća saznanja o neoluksuznim brendovovima i odnosu potrošača prema njima, sa značajnim naučnim implikacija u kontekstu same teorije neoluksuza, tako i, itekako, praktičnim implikacijama za uspješan marketing ovih brendova.

Ključne riječi: *Neoluksuzni brendovi, vrijednost brenda, namjera kupovine, dohodovne skupine*

JEL: *M0, M30, M31, M37*