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**Are there differences between traditional
and digital customer experiences in high
jewellery? Evaluating the effects on
consumers**

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**Esistono differenze tra customer
experience tradizionali e digitali nell'alta
gioielleria? Valutazione degli effetti sui
consumatori**

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the luxury industry has undergone a digital transformation that extends beyond communication and retail channels to influence the ways in which products are designed, produced, personalized and presented to consumers. Within the high jewellery sector, traditionally characterised by craftsmanship, savoir-faire, exclusivity and highly personalized in-store experiences, the growing adoption of technologies such as 3D modelling, additive manufacturing and augmented reality has created new opportunities for customer interactions, while raising questions about how different customer experience configurations influence consumers' behaviours. In this vein, this research aims at investigating how traditional and digital customer experiences influence consumer perceptions and behavioural intentions in the high jewellery sector. Particular attention has been devoted to some specific characteristics, such as perceived product quality, perceived accessibility and product personalization, as well as to some specific constructs, such as customer involvement and brand innovativeness, in addition to the consumer's behavioural aspects of purchase intention and word of mouth. To reach the research goals, a between-subjects experimental design has been adopted, testing two customer experience scenarios developed using Cartier as the reference context. Data have been collected through a structured questionnaire based on measurement items adapted from previous studies or developed on the basis of the relevant literature. The main analysis focused on assessing the differences between a traditional and a digital experience. In addition, the study also explores whether the effects of the two customer experience configurations differ between Generation Z and older consumers. The findings show that the digital customer experience, compared with the traditional experience, significantly affects the perceived accessibility, product personalization, customer involvement, brand innovativeness, purchase intention and word of mouth, showing that luxury brands that innovate their strategies through the use of

digital technologies can achieve superior marketing performance. Generational differences are more limited and concern specific outcomes within the two customer experience conditions. Finally, an additional mediation analysis provides evidence of significant indirect effects of the customer experience on purchase intention and word of mouth through product personalization. By comparing traditional and digital customer experiences within the same luxury context, the research contributes to the literature on luxury consumption and digital transformation by providing a better understanding of how different customer experience configurations shape consumer perceptions and behavioural intentions in the high jewellery sector. From a marketing perspective, the findings provide useful insights for luxury brands seeking to integrate digital technologies and personalization into their customer journeys while maintaining a coherent high jewellery experience.

SOMMARIO

Negli ultimi anni, il settore del lusso ha attraversato una trasformazione digitale che va oltre la comunicazione e i canali di vendita al dettaglio, influenzando le modalità attraverso cui i prodotti vengono progettati, realizzati, personalizzati e presentati ai consumatori. Nel settore dell'alta gioielleria, tradizionalmente caratterizzato da artigianalità, savoir-faire, esclusività ed esperienze in-store altamente personalizzate, la crescente adozione di tecnologie quali la modellazione 3D, la manifattura additiva e la realtà aumentata ha creato nuove opportunità di interazione con il cliente, sollevando al contempo interrogativi su come differenti configurazioni della customer experience influenzino i comportamenti dei consumatori. In quest'ottica, la presente ricerca si propone di analizzare come le customer experience tradizionali e digitali influenzino le percezioni dei consumatori e le intenzioni comportamentali nel settore dell'alta gioielleria. Particolare attenzione è stata dedicata ad alcune caratteristiche specifiche, quali la qualità percepita del prodotto, l'accessibilità percepita e la personalizzazione del prodotto, nonché a specifici costrutti, quali il coinvolgimento del cliente e l'innovatività del brand, oltre agli aspetti comportamentali relativi all'intenzione di acquisto e al passaparola. Per raggiungere gli obiettivi della ricerca è stato adottato un disegno sperimentale between-subjects, testando due scenari di customer experience sviluppati utilizzando Cartier come contesto di riferimento. I dati sono stati raccolti attraverso un questionario strutturato, basato su item di misurazione adattati da studi precedenti o sviluppati sulla base della letteratura pertinente. L'analisi principale si è concentrata sulla valutazione delle differenze tra una customer experience tradizionale e una digitale. Inoltre, lo studio ha esaminato se gli effetti delle due configurazioni della customer experience differissero tra la Generazione Z e i consumatori più adulti. I risultati mostrano che la customer experience digitale, rispetto a quella tradizionale, influenza significativamente l'accessibilità percepita, la

personalizzazione del prodotto, il coinvolgimento del cliente, l'innovatività del brand, l'intenzione di acquisto e il passaparola, evidenziando come i brand del lusso che innovano le proprie strategie attraverso l'utilizzo delle tecnologie digitali possano ottenere performance di marketing superiori. Le differenze generazionali risultano invece più limitate e riguardano specifici risultati all'interno delle due condizioni di customer experience. Infine, un'ulteriore analisi di mediazione evidenzia effetti indiretti significativi della customer experience sull'intenzione di acquisto e sul passaparola attraverso la personalizzazione del prodotto. Confrontando customer experience tradizionali e digitali all'interno dello stesso contesto di lusso, la ricerca contribuisce alla letteratura sul consumo di lusso e sulla trasformazione digitale, offrendo una migliore comprensione di come differenti configurazioni della customer experience influenzino le percezioni dei consumatori e le intenzioni comportamentali nel settore dell'alta gioielleria. Da una prospettiva di marketing, i risultati forniscono indicazioni utili ai brand del lusso che intendono integrare tecnologie digitali e personalizzazione all'interno dei propri customer journey, mantenendo al contempo una customer experience coerente con il contesto dell'alta gioielleria.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preface

Luxury has historically been associated with products and experiences that go beyond ordinary consumption. Its value is not based solely on utility but also on desirability, rarity, symbolic associations and the ability to create a sense of distinction. Consumers engage with luxury products not only for functional reasons but also for the emotions, meanings and social references attached to them (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999). Over time, the luxury industry has become more visible, international and diversified. Luxury brands continue to rely on heritage, craftsmanship, exclusivity and carefully controlled brand identities to preserve their desirability. As the luxury market evolves, brands must adapt to changing consumer expectations without losing the characteristics that define their identity (D'Arpizio and Levato, 2025).

Jewellery occupies a distinctive position within this context. Although precious stones and metals provide an evident material value, they do not fully explain jewellery's role within luxury consumption. Jewellery is often associated with personal milestones, emotional relationships, memory and self-expression, while its meaning is shaped by materials, craftsmanship, design, brand heritage and the experience surrounding its acquisition. This relationship between material value and symbolic meaning becomes even more pronounced in high jewellery, where rarity, artisanal expertise and exclusivity are fundamental (Serdari and Levy, 2020).

The high jewellery experience has traditionally been centred on the physical boutique, where consumers can observe the jewel directly, appreciate its details, try it on and receive

guidance from the luxury house. In this setting, the encounter with the product also becomes an encounter with the brand, its service standards and its symbolic world.

In recent years, digital transformation has reshaped the ways in which luxury brands communicate, sell and interact with consumers. Digital channels, online services and new technologies have introduced alternative ways of discovering, evaluating and experiencing luxury products. In jewellery, tools such as 3D modelling, additive manufacturing, augmented reality and virtual try-on support product visualisation, personalization and more interactive forms of exploration. Rather than replacing the boutique experience, these developments create new opportunities to extend the relationship between consumers, products and brands.

The coexistence of traditional and digital forms of interaction raises an important question for the sector: what is the most appropriate and engaging form of consumer interaction in the context of luxury jewellery? Physical experiences may strengthen perceptions of quality, exclusivity and personal attention, whereas digital experiences can offer greater accessibility, interactivity and opportunities for innovation. Understanding how these different customer experiences influence consumer responses without compromising the distinctive values of high jewellery has therefore become an important challenge for luxury brands.

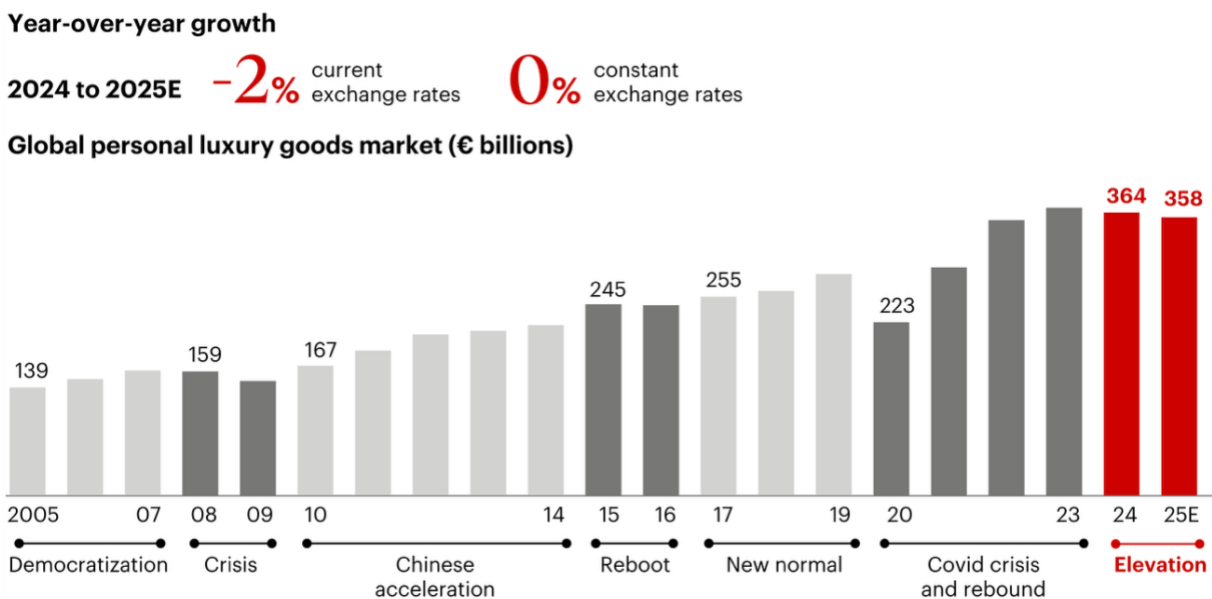
1.2 The luxury jewellery market

The contemporary luxury market has entered a phase in which growth is less uniform across categories and increasingly dependent on brands' ability to sustain desirability and perceived value. Within this changing landscape, jewellery has emerged as a particularly resilient category, attracting continued attention from both specialised maisons and diversified luxury groups. Its economic and strategic relevance can therefore be better understood by considering the recent evolution of the broader personal luxury goods market, which provides

the context in which the performance of jewellery can be assessed (D’Arpizio and Levato, 2025).

After the strong rebound that followed the pandemic, the global personal luxury goods market reached €364 billion in 2024 and was estimated at €358 billion in 2025. This corresponded to a 2 percent decline at current exchange rates, while the market remained broadly stable at constant exchange rates (D’Arpizio and Levato, 2025). As illustrated in Figure 1, this development marked a shift from rapid post-pandemic expansion towards a more cautious phase characterised by slower growth and increasingly selective consumer demand. Rather than necessarily signalling structural weakness, the slowdown points to a more selective market environment in which luxury brands face greater pressure to preserve desirability, strengthen customer relationships and sustain perceived value over time. In this context, future growth appears to depend increasingly on brands’ ability to remain relevant to consumers and to create meaningful experiences rather than on broad market expansion alone.

Figure 1: *Global personal luxury goods market 2005–2025*

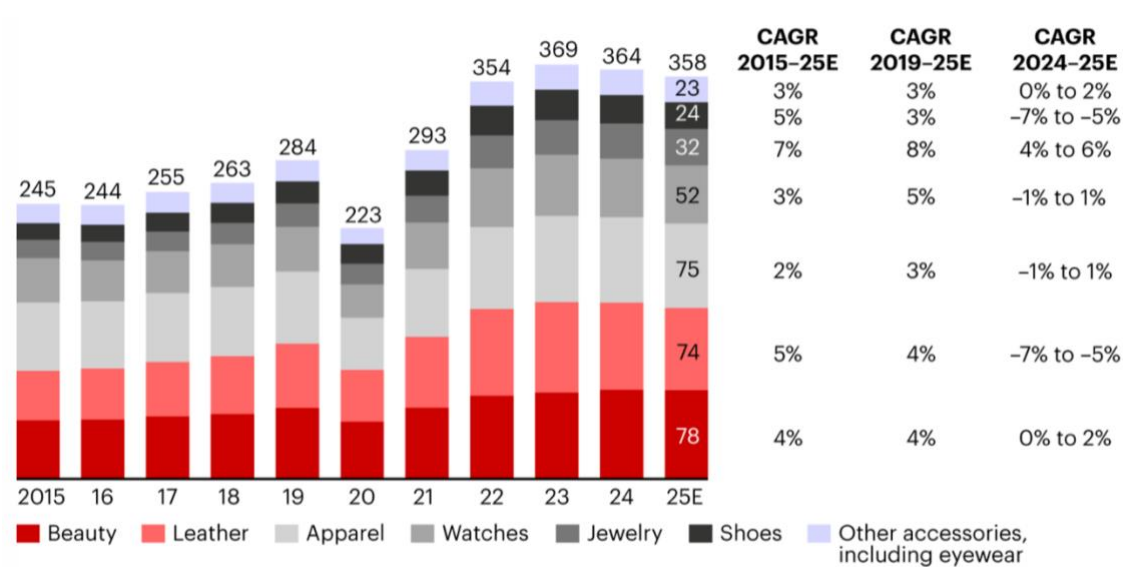


Notes: E indicates estimated value.
Source: D’Arpizio and Levato (2025)

The market is expected to return to moderate growth in 2026. An increase of between 2 and 4 percent is forecast for the personal luxury goods market, with total sales projected to reach between €365 billion and €373 billion (D’Arpizio and Levato, 2026). This projected stabilisation provides the broader context for the stronger performance of jewellery.

Against this backdrop, jewellery continues to outperform most other luxury categories. In 2025, the category was estimated to grow by between 4 and 6 percent, reaching a market value of approximately €32 billion (D’Arpizio and Levato, 2025). This comparatively strong performance highlights the resilience of jewellery within a market characterised by uneven results across product categories. Its positive trajectory reinforces the relevance of jewellery within the luxury sector and provides a useful basis for examining the specific characteristics of high jewellery. Figure 2 compares the estimated performance of the main personal luxury goods categories in 2025.

Figure 2: *Personal luxury goods category performance in 2025*



Notes: Growth shown at current exchange rates; E indicates estimated value.
Source: D’Arpizio and Levato (2025)

The growing strategic relevance of jewellery is also reflected in the performance of leading luxury groups. In the financial year ending 31 March 2026, Richemont reported sales of €16.5 billion for its Jewellery Maisons, including Cartier, Van Cleef & Arpels, Buccellati and Vhernier, representing growth of 8 percent at actual exchange rates and 14 percent at constant exchange rates (Richemont, 2026). Although these figures originate from a corporate report and should therefore be interpreted as company-level evidence rather than an independent assessment of the market, they nevertheless illustrate the commercial strength of jewellery within one of the world's leading luxury groups.

Industry reports and corporate evidence position jewellery among the most dynamic segments of the contemporary luxury market. This market relevance, together with the distinctive characteristics of high jewellery, makes the category an appropriate context for examining how different customer experiences shape consumer perceptions and behavioural intentions.

1.3 Tradition and high jewellery

The market relevance of jewellery is closely connected to the traditional codes through which this category has been constructed within luxury. High jewellery occupies a distinctive position within these codes. Rather than representing simply the highest price segment, it brings together exceptional materials, artisanal expertise, creativity and personalized service. It is generally associated with rare gemstones, precious metals, complex techniques and uniqueness. High jewellery comprises unique creations, often developed for specific clients, and is associated with museum-quality standards, exceptional craftsmanship, artistic imagination and the long-term savoir-faire of heritage brands (Serdari and Levy, 2020). Its value therefore extends beyond the materials themselves to encompass the creative process, rarity and the symbolic authority of the maison.

Craftsmanship lies at the heart of this conception of value. Every creation involves a process that may include design, stone selection, technical experimentation, setting, polishing and finishing. Together, these stages contribute to the perception of the jewel as an object embodying time, skill and human expertise. This interpretation is consistent with contemporary views of luxury, in which consumers appreciate design, workmanship, sensory appeal and socio-cultural narratives alongside wealth and exclusivity (Wang, 2022). The maison further strengthens this perception, as each jewel is understood not only as an individual product but also as an expression of a broader universe of heritage, style, creative continuity and technical know-how. Cartier provides an illustrative example of how luxury houses communicate these values. On its official high jewellery savoir-faire page, the maison presents its creations as the result of collaboration between specialised craftspeople, including stone experts, designers, jewellers, polishers, gem-setters and lapidaries. The page also highlights how bespoke creations reflect Cartier's style and expertise, from design and stone selection to the final stages of production (Cartier, 2026a).

These traditional values are also expressed through the physical boutique, where consumers encounter the maison, its service standards and its symbolic world. Luxury retail creates an aesthetic and emotionally engaging environment built around heritage, atmosphere and symbolic value (Dion and Arnould, 2011). In high jewellery, direct contact with the jewel makes its quality, detail and rarity more tangible, while personalized guidance enables consumers to appreciate complex craftsmanship and bespoke possibilities.

For these reasons, the traditional high jewellery customer experience has long been centred on physical presence, human interaction and controlled access. Through direct product trial and personalized assistance, consumers can appreciate qualities that are difficult to convey through images alone, including proportions, light, movement, texture and fit. These elements enhance

perceptions of quality, exclusivity and personal relevance, providing the reference point against which more digitally mediated experiences can be understood.

1.4 Digital transformation in the jewellery context

Although physical presence, direct product observation and personalized assistance remain central to the traditional high jewellery experience, the interaction between consumers and jewellery maisons is no longer confined to the boutique. Digital channels have progressively introduced additional opportunities for product discovery, communication and service, extending the customer journey across a wider range of touchpoints. Jewellery brands were initially cautious about this transition, as greater visibility, accessibility and speed appeared difficult to reconcile with exclusivity, controlled distribution and personal attention. However, changes in consumer behaviour and the growing relevance of online interactions have made digital transformation an increasingly important component of the sector (Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024).

Within luxury jewellery, digitalization extends beyond online selling. It includes brand communication, customer relationship management, product presentation, service personalization and the integration of physical and digital environments. These developments allow consumers to interact with jewellery maisons before, during and after the boutique visit, while enabling brands to maintain continuity across the different stages of the customer journey. Digital touchpoints can support initial product exploration, provide additional information and facilitate contact with the maison, without necessarily replacing the role of physical retail (Verhoef et al., 2015).

Omnichannel and phygital approaches reflect this increasing integration. Rather than functioning as separate alternatives, physical and digital touchpoints can operate within the

same brand ecosystem and contribute to a more continuous customer experience. Research on luxury retail interiors indicates that technologies such as augmented reality, virtual reality and connected systems can influence sensory experience, spatial design and narrative expression, affecting how consumers engage with luxury spaces and brand narratives (Ratnayake et al., 2026). In jewellery, however, this integration presents specific challenges because consumers continue to value material presence, craftsmanship, personal guidance and direct observation of the product. Digital experiences that appear overly standardised or detached from human expertise may therefore weaken the qualities traditionally associated with the maison.

The role of technology is consequently not limited to improving convenience or operational efficiency. Its relevance depends on its ability to enrich product exploration, personalization and consumer engagement while preserving the experiential and symbolic qualities associated with jewellery. This balance is especially important in high jewellery, where rarity, artisanal expertise and personalized service remain fundamental. Technologies such as 3D modelling, additive manufacturing, augmented reality, virtual try-on and digital personalization illustrate how innovation can support both product development and customer interaction (Baber et al., 2026; Cerrato et al., 2024; Saniuk et al., 2020; Yap and Yeong, 2014).

1.5 Technological innovation

Digital innovation is reshaping jewellery across multiple stages, from design and production to product presentation and consumer interaction. New tools expand the possibilities for prototyping, visualisation and personalization without replacing traditional craftsmanship, while materials, heritage and savoir-faire remain central to the value of the final creation.

A first area of innovation concerns 3D modelling and additive manufacturing. Additive manufacturing produces objects layer by layer from digital models, offering greater design

freedom than conventional fabrication methods. In fashion and jewellery, it enables intricate forms, complex geometries and more efficient customisation. Additive manufacturing has been applied to jewellery through both direct and indirect methods, including the production of metal components and master patterns for casting (Yap and Yeong, 2014). Digital modelling enables designers to develop, modify and visualise creations before fabrication, while computational design generates forms and variations that would be difficult to achieve manually. Combining additive manufacturing with computational strategies further expands design possibilities by enabling greater shape complexity, functional complexity and new forms of interaction (Cerrato et al., 2024). These technologies encourage experimentation, customisation and product development, while complementing rather than replacing craftsmanship. Traditional techniques remain essential in high jewellery, particularly for stone selection, setting, polishing, finishing and quality control. The value of the final creation continues to depend on material quality, technical expertise, aesthetic coherence and the standards of the luxury house.

Digital technologies have also transformed the way jewellery is presented to consumers. Augmented reality and virtual try-on enable users to visualise products through digital interfaces, helping them evaluate proportions, fit, colour, brightness and compatibility with their personal style. Although virtual try-on cannot reproduce the tactile and material experience of handling a jewel, it can reduce the distance between online browsing and physical evaluation. Recent research confirms the relevance of these technologies in luxury jewellery. Augmented reality virtual try-on can enhance immersiveness, user engagement, perceived innovativeness and purchase intention (Baber et al., 2026). Their study highlights luxury jewellery as a high-involvement category, in which consumers continue to value physical interaction, authenticity and emotional connection with the product. Accordingly, virtual try-on is most effective when the experience is realistic, credible and consistent with luxury expectations.

Practical applications illustrate how these technologies are already being adopted. Cartier, for example, offers an online virtual try-on service that allows users to compare selected creations by model, size and material (Cartier, 2026b). This example refers to jewellery retail more broadly and should not be interpreted as evidence that virtual try-on is routinely used for high jewellery collections. LVMH presents Bvlgari Infinito as an immersive high jewellery experience for Apple Vision Pro, combining interactive journeys, ultra-high-resolution 3D visualisation and real-time rendering. In this case, technology extends the narrative and emotional dimensions of high jewellery rather than simply simulating product trial (LVMH, 2025).

Overall, technological innovation operates across both product creation and consumer interaction. While 3D modelling, computational design and additive manufacturing support design and production, augmented reality, virtual try-on and immersive visualisation transform how consumers explore and interpret jewellery. Their integration creates new opportunities for consumer interaction and personalization, provided that the exclusivity, symbolic value and experiential quality associated with luxury are preserved.

1.6 Research aims and research questions

The growing integration of digital technologies into jewellery design, production and customer interaction raises a central issue for high jewellery: whether innovation can reshape the customer experience without weakening the distinctive qualities traditionally associated with the category. The distinction between physical and digitally mediated experiences is not limited to the channel through which consumers encounter the product, as it may also influence how they evaluate its quality, accessibility and the personalization of products, as well as their

involvement with the experience and their perception of the brand, with consequences for their behavioural intentions.

Against this background, the aim of this research is to compare consumer responses to two customer experience configurations in the high jewellery sector: traditional and digital. The traditional experience is centred on physical stores, direct product trial and personalized human assistance, whereas the digital experience is built around online platforms, virtual product exploration and digitally mediated interactions. The study examines whether these two kinds of experiences lead consumers to have different perceptions of both products and brands as well as different behavioural intentions. Moreover, due to the different relevance of the digital environment across consumer generations, the study aims to assess whether there are differences between Generation Z and older consumers.

Accordingly, the following research questions are formulated:

RQ1: Do traditional and digital customer experiences differently affect consumer perceptions and behavioural intentions in the high jewellery sector?

RQ2: Do traditional and digital customer experiences differently affect Generation Z and older consumers?

1.7 Research structure

To address the research questions, four main chapters follow this introductory chapter, each corresponding to a distinct stage of the research process. The structure develops progressively

from the construction of the theoretical framework to the empirical investigation and the interpretation of the findings. This organisation allows the concepts underlying the study to be clarified before being translated into the research design and subsequently examined through the analysis of the collected data. The chapters are therefore interconnected components of a single research process rather than separate sections. Together, they provide the basis for assessing how traditional and digital customer experiences influence consumer perceptions and behavioural intentions in the high jewellery sector and for discussing the broader implications of the results. The following subsections briefly explain the role of each chapter within this overall structure.

1.7.1 Summary of chapter two: Luxury consumption and consumer perceptions

Chapter Two develops the theoretical foundation of the research by examining luxury consumption and the role of customer experiences in shaping consumer responses. It begins by discussing the multidimensional nature of luxury value and the relationship between luxury products and luxury brands. The chapter then distinguishes customer experience from the customer journey before examining how traditional and digital touchpoints operate within luxury contexts. Building on this discussion, it considers generational differences in luxury consumption and the growing role of digitalization. The final sections examine the consumer perceptions associated with different customer experience configurations and their relationship with behavioural intentions, providing the theoretical basis for the empirical analysis.

1.7.2 Summary of chapter three: Research methodology

Chapter Three presents the methodological approach adopted to investigate how traditional and digital customer experiences influence consumer perceptions and behavioural intentions in

the high jewellery sector. It first introduces the research purpose and the two research questions, before describing the quantitative design based on an online between-subjects experiment. Participants were assigned to one of two customer experience scenarios developed using Cartier as the reference context, while the brand, product and purchasing situation remained constant across the experimental conditions. The chapter then presents the questionnaire, the operationalisation of the constructs, the data collection procedure and the characteristics of the final sample. The analytical approach includes the calculation of composite scores and descriptive statistics, the one-way ANOVAs used to compare the customer experience and generational groups, and the mediation analysis conducted through Hayes' PROCESS Macro to examine the role of product personalization in the relationship between the customer experience and behavioural intentions (Hayes, 2018).

1.7.3 Summary of chapter four: Research results

Chapter Four presents the empirical results according to the sequence of analyses outlined in the methodology. It first compares the traditional and digital customer experiences across the constructs included in the research model by reporting descriptive statistics and the corresponding ANOVA results. The second part examines generational differences separately within each customer experience configuration. The chapter concludes with the mediation analysis investigating the role of product personalization in the relationship between the customer experience and behavioural intentions.

1.7.4 Summary of chapter five: Discussion and conclusions

Chapter Five interprets the empirical evidence in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework. The discussion first considers the comparison between the traditional

and digital customer experiences and then examines the generational analysis. It also interprets the mediation results concerning the role of product personalization in linking the customer experience to purchase intention and word of mouth. Building on these findings, the chapter draws the main conclusions of the research and develops its theoretical and marketing implications. It concludes by acknowledging the principal limitations of the study and identifying directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LUXURY CONSUMPTION AND CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS

2.1 Introduction

Luxury consumption has evolved considerably in recent years as digital technologies have transformed the ways in which consumers discover, evaluate and interact with luxury brands. While luxury has traditionally been associated with exclusivity, craftsmanship and carefully controlled experiences, the growing integration of digital channels has expanded the range of interactions available throughout the customer journey (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Okonkwo, 2009). This evolution has made the consumption experience increasingly relevant to the way luxury value is perceived, as consumers encounter brands through a combination of products, services, physical environments and digitally mediated interactions (Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024; Wiedmann et al., 2007).

The theoretical discussion developed in this chapter provides the basis for examining how different customer experience configurations may be associated with different consumer responses in luxury markets. Particular attention is given to the way consumers evaluate product quality and accessibility, perceive personalization and brand innovativeness, and become involved in the experience, while brand familiarity provides an additional perspective on how previous knowledge may shape these evaluations. These perceptual dimensions are examined in relation to behavioural intentions, specifically purchase intention and WOM. Generational differences are also considered to account for the possibility that Generation Z and older consumers approach traditional and digital customer experiences differently.

2.2 The concept of luxury

Luxury is a multidimensional concept that combines tangible product attributes, such as high price, rarity and exclusivity, with the symbolic, emotional, social and cultural meanings associated with consumption (Mortelmans, 2005; Berthon et al., 2009). From a socio-semiotic perspective, luxury can also be interpreted as a form of sign value embedded in narratives and processes of social distinction (Mortelmans, 2005). Consequently, the same product may be regarded as exceptional by one consumer and relatively ordinary by another, depending on individual expectations, prior experience and social background. Luxury value therefore develops through the interaction of material, individual and collective components, corresponding to functional, experiential and symbolic forms of value (Berthon et al., 2009).

The meaning attributed to luxury varies across time, markets and consumer groups (Ko et al., 2019). Despite this variability, luxury brands are generally associated with high quality, authentic value, a prestigious image, premium prices and the ability to establish strong relationships with consumers. These characteristics do not operate independently: price and rarity can reinforce exclusivity, while quality, aesthetics and symbolism contribute to the perceived extraordinariness of the offering (Heine, 2012).

How these characteristics are interpreted by consumers is therefore central to luxury perception. Luxury brand perceptions combine personal and non-personal dimensions, including conspicuousness, uniqueness, quality, hedonism and the extended self (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). Luxury consumption may consequently reflect expressive motives related to status and identity, as well as individual motives associated with product excellence, sensory gratification and hedonic pleasure (Hudders, 2012).

Contemporary interpretations of luxury therefore extend beyond wealth signalling to encompass material excellence, symbolic meaning and consumer experience (Wang, 2022). These dimensions influence both how consumers evaluate luxury products and how they

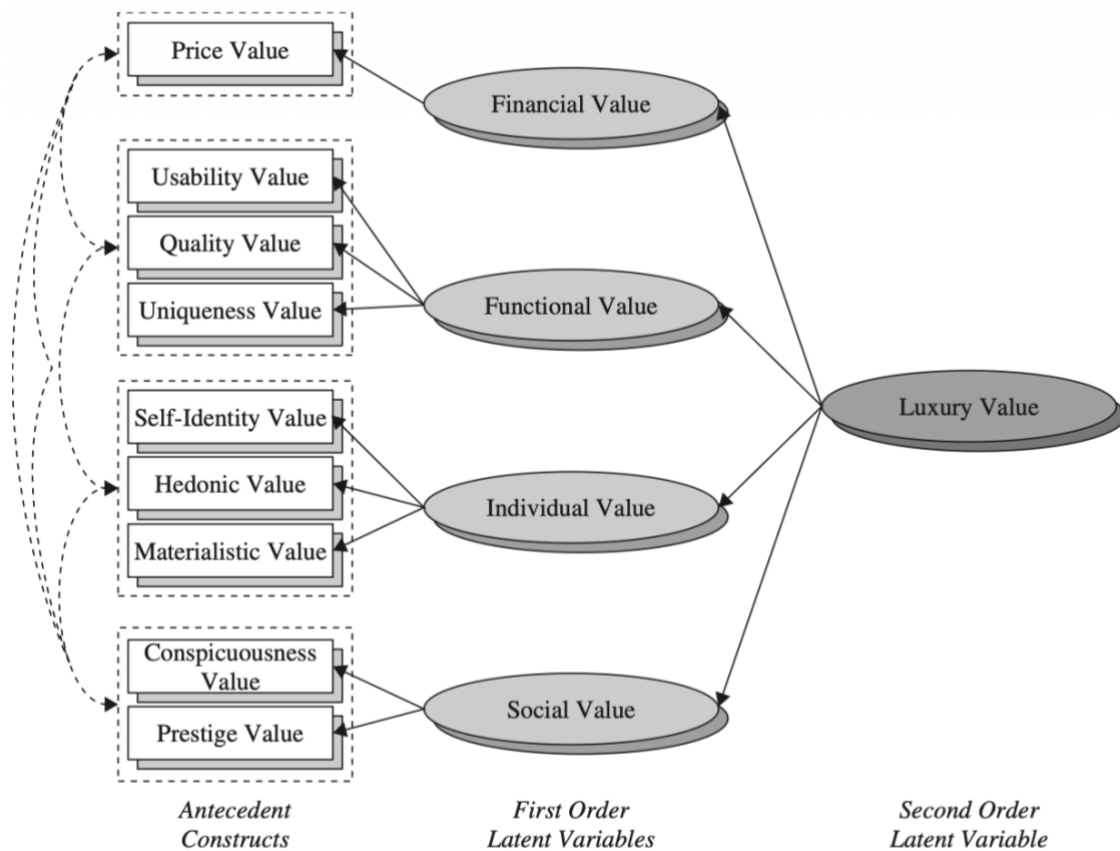
develop relationships with luxury brands. This perspective provides the theoretical foundation for examining luxury value perception and, subsequently, how different customer experiences influence consumer perceptions and behavioural intentions.

2.3 Luxury value perception

Beyond the attributes commonly associated with luxury, understanding how consumers evaluate the value of luxury products and brands is equally important. Luxury value perception captures this multidimensional process of evaluation. More broadly, consumer choices may be influenced by different forms of consumption value rather than by a single source of utility (Sheth et al., 1991). Five perceived values are associated with prestige consumption: conspicuous, unique, social, hedonic and quality value. The evaluation of prestigious products therefore combines interpersonal motivations, such as status and social recognition, with personal motivations related to pleasure, uniqueness and perceived excellence (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999).

Luxury value therefore derives not only from product characteristics but also from the meanings consumers attach to them. Building on previous research, luxury value can be conceptualised through four dimensions: financial, functional, individual and social. This framework moves beyond the assumption that luxury consumption is driven solely by social distinction by recognising the importance of economic considerations, product performance, emotional appeal and personal significance (Wiedmann et al., 2007). Figure 3 illustrates this multidimensional model of luxury value perception.

Figure 3: *Conceptual model of luxury value perception*



Source: Wiedmann et al. (2007)

The model presents overall luxury value as the result of different layers of consumer evaluation. Specific antecedent constructs contribute to four broader dimensions: price value to financial value; usability, quality and uniqueness to functional value; self-identity, hedonic and materialistic value to individual value; and conspicuousness and prestige value to social value. These antecedents represent subjective judgements rather than objective measurements, since consumers may assign different importance to each source of value when evaluating the same product or brand. Although the four dimensions are conceptually distinct, they are interconnected and jointly contribute to the overall perception of luxury value.

The financial dimension concerns the monetary aspects of luxury, including price, perceived sacrifice and investment value. High prices may operate as signals of rarity, exclusivity and superior quality, but price alone is not sufficient to make a product luxurious. Its meaning depends on whether consumers consider the required sacrifice justified by the benefits and symbolic relevance of the product.

The functional dimension refers to product-related benefits such as quality, reliability, durability, usability and uniqueness. In luxury markets, these attributes extend beyond practical performance to encompass superior materials, refined design and craftsmanship, all of which shape consumers' evaluations of luxury brands (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004).

The individual dimension concerns the personal meanings and emotional rewards associated with luxury consumption. Luxury products may provide pleasure, sensory gratification, self-expression and a sense of identity, making consumption a source of personal fulfilment rather than solely a means of obtaining social recognition.

The social dimension concerns the value that luxury acquires through its visibility and recognition within a social context. Luxury products can communicate prestige, status and belonging, while also helping consumers differentiate themselves from others or associate themselves with a desired reference group. The importance assigned to these financial, functional, individual and social components may therefore vary across consumers and consumption contexts (Wiedmann et al., 2007).

Contemporary luxury consumption cannot consequently be reduced either to economic sacrifice or to the public display of status. Consumers may also appreciate luxury products for their design, workmanship, sensory appeal and socio-cultural narratives (Wang, 2022). This perspective helps explain why different customer experiences may shape consumer evaluations in different ways.

2.4 Luxury products and luxury brands

The multidimensional nature of luxury value makes it important to distinguish between the characteristics of the product itself and the meanings associated with the brand through which it is presented. At product level, materials, design, craftsmanship and durability provide tangible cues of excellence and superior performance, while price and brand reputation may further reinforce perceived value (Nueno and Quelch, 1998). An important aspect of product evaluation is perceived product quality. Unlike objective quality, perceived product quality reflects consumers' judgement of a product's overall superiority or excellence rather than a purely technical assessment. Such judgements are formed through both intrinsic cues, concerning the characteristics of the product itself, and extrinsic cues, including price and brand name. Their influence may vary according to the product and the context in which it is evaluated (Rao and Monroe, 1989; Zeithaml, 1988). In luxury markets, the combination of refined materials, craftsmanship and other product-related cues can therefore contribute to perceptions of superior quality.

The luxury brand adds a further layer of meaning to this evaluation. Beyond identifying the producer, it connects individual products with a broader set of associations concerning reputation, identity, uniqueness and social recognition (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). A luxury product can therefore be appreciated for its material characteristics while simultaneously acquiring additional significance through its association with a particular maison.

Product and brand should consequently be considered as closely related but distinct components of the luxury offering. The product provides tangible evidence of quality, design and craftsmanship, whereas the brand situates these characteristics within a wider symbolic and relational context. Their interaction helps explain why similar physical attributes may acquire different meanings depending on the brand with which they are associated. This distinction

becomes particularly relevant when considering how luxury products and brands are presented and experienced across different customer experiences.

2.5 Customer experience and customer journey

Customer experience represents the broader concept through which consumers' interactions with a brand can be understood. It encompasses the responses that consumers develop in relation to the different stimuli associated with a firm and its offering, rather than referring only to a single transaction or individual encounter. These responses may develop across different moments and interactions and can involve cognitive, emotional, sensory and behavioural dimensions (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Becker and Jaakkola, 2020). Customer experience is therefore cumulative, as perceptions formed during one interaction may be influenced by previous encounters and may, in turn, affect subsequent evaluations.

This broader perspective also means that customer experience cannot be reduced to the interactions occurring within a single purchasing process. Consumers approach a brand with existing knowledge, expectations and previous experiences that may influence how new stimuli are interpreted. Customer experience can therefore reflect both the interactions occurring at a specific moment and the broader relationship that consumers have progressively developed with the brand.

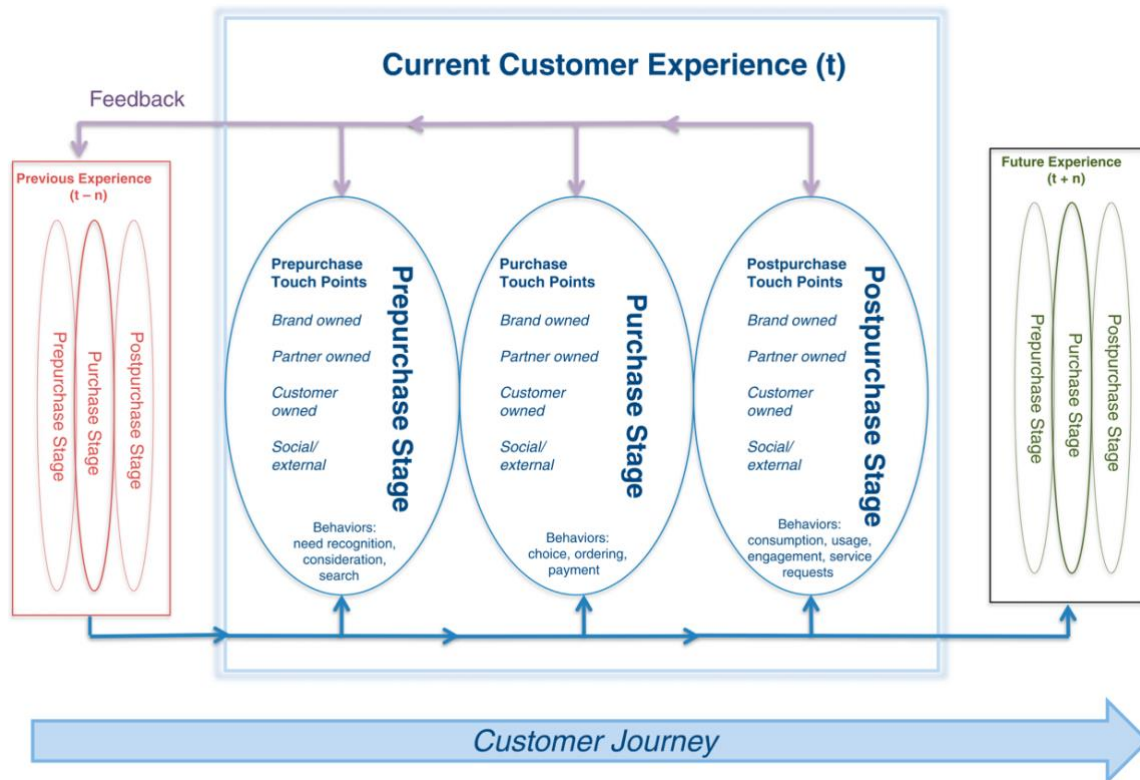
Within this broader concept, the customer journey describes the path through which interactions between the consumer and the brand unfold over time. It represents the sequence of stages and touchpoints that consumers encounter throughout their relationship with a firm and its offering (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Følstad and Kvale, 2018). Customer experience and customer journey are therefore closely related but should not be considered synonymous. The customer journey provides the temporal and interactional structure through which

consumers move, whereas customer experience concerns the perceptions and responses associated with those interactions. In this sense, the customer journey represents one of the processes through which customer experience develops, rather than the broader experience itself.

The customer journey is dynamic and does not necessarily follow a linear path. Consumers may move between different stages, return to previous touchpoints or follow different routes according to their needs and decision-making processes (Grewal and Roggeveen, 2020). It is commonly organised into three broad stages: pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase. During the pre-purchase stage, consumers become aware of a need, search for information and evaluate available alternatives. The purchase stage includes interactions directly associated with selecting and acquiring a product or service, whereas the post-purchase stage encompasses product use, customer service, recommendations and continued interaction with the brand (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Previous experiences may influence the current journey, while interactions occurring during the current experience can contribute to expectations and responses in future encounters.

Figure 4 illustrates this relationship by positioning the customer journey across the pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase stages while showing how previous, current and future customer experiences are interconnected. The model highlights that the journey develops through a sequence of touchpoints, while customer experience extends beyond an individual interaction and evolves over time.

Figure 4: *Process model for customer journey and customer experience*



Source: Lemon and Verhoef (2016)

Across the different stages of the journey, consumers encounter several categories of touchpoints. Brand-owned touchpoints are directly designed and managed by the firm and include elements such as advertising, websites, products, services and sales personnel. Partner-owned touchpoints involve interactions managed together with external organisations, while customer-owned touchpoints originate from consumers' own activities, including information search, purchase decisions and product use. Social and external touchpoints include influences outside the direct control of the firm, such as online reviews, social media interactions, recommendations and other consumer-generated content (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Touchpoints may also differ according to their physical, human or digital nature and according to the stage of the journey in which they occur (De Keyser et al., 2020).

The relevance of individual touchpoints depends on the stage of the journey and on the characteristics of the consumer, product and service (De Keyser et al., 2020). Their combination contributes to the overall customer experience, but it does not represent its entirety, since consumers may also interpret current interactions through previous knowledge, expectations and accumulated brand-related experiences. Distinguishing between customer experience as the broader phenomenon and customer journey as the path through which interactions unfold therefore provides the conceptual basis for examining traditional and digital customer experiences in the luxury context.

2.6 Customer experiences in the luxury context

Within luxury markets, customer experience acquires particular significance because the way consumers interact with products, services, environments and communications contributes to how luxury value is perceived. Consumers evaluate luxury brands through a combination of encounters that may develop over time and across different contexts. Physical settings, personal assistance and brand-controlled communications can convey craftsmanship, exclusivity and attention to detail, while their consistency contributes to the way the brand is interpreted across different encounters (Dion and Arnould, 2011; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

Luxury customer experiences may therefore develop through both traditional and digitally mediated forms of interaction.

2.6.1 Traditional customer experience

A traditional customer experience is primarily shaped by offline interactions occurring through physical touchpoints, where consumers engage directly with a brand before, during and after purchase (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Among these touchpoints, the physical store

represents a central element because it allows consumers to observe and touch products, interact with sales personnel and experience the brand through direct and sensory engagement. The in-store environment therefore plays a fundamental role in shaping how consumers gather information, evaluate products and establish relationships with luxury brands.

The importance of the physical environment in customer experiences has been widely recognised in marketing literature. The concept of the “servicescape” describes the physical surroundings in which service interactions occur and highlights how environmental elements can influence consumers’ cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses (Bitner, 1992). Consumers therefore evaluate not only the core product or service, but also the atmosphere, spatial organisation and symbolic elements through which the firm communicates its identity.

This aspect is particularly relevant in luxury retailing, where boutiques represent more than transactional spaces. Luxury brands carefully design physical environments to express heritage, exclusivity and craftsmanship through architecture, interior design, product presentation and personalized service. The boutique becomes an experiential context in which consumers encounter the symbolic and emotional dimensions of luxury consumption, reinforcing brand identity and perceived value (Atwal and Williams, 2009; Dion and Arnould, 2011).

Another distinctive characteristic of the traditional customer experience is the role of interpersonal interaction. Direct relationships with sales personnel allow luxury brands to provide expert advice, personalized assistance and a sense of recognition and exclusivity. These interactions contribute not only to product evaluation but also to the emotional and relational dimensions of the overall experience.

2.6.2 Digital customer experience

A digital customer experience is shaped by interactions occurring through digital touchpoints, enabling consumers to engage with brands across multiple online environments

before, during and after purchase (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Compared with offline experiences, digital environments reduce geographical and temporal limitations by allowing consumers to search for information, explore products, compare alternatives and interact with brands independently from physical retail locations.

Within digital environments, consumers interact with multiple sources of information that contribute to their overall experience. Brand-owned touchpoints, such as websites, e-commerce platforms, mobile applications and social media channels, provide product information and brand narratives, while external touchpoints, including online reviews, user-generated content and word of mouth, influence expectations and perceptions. These interactions may occur across interconnected touchpoints rather than following a linear purchasing process (Rosenbaum et al., 2017).

For luxury brands, digital customer experiences involve specific challenges. Unlike physical boutiques, digital environments cannot rely on direct sensory experiences, immediate product examination or face-to-face relationships with sales personnel. Brands must therefore translate elements traditionally associated with luxury, such as craftsmanship, exclusivity and authenticity, into digital formats while preserving their symbolic value (Okonkwo, 2009).

To address these challenges, luxury brands have progressively integrated digital technologies into the customer experience. Technologies such as augmented reality, virtual try-on and artificial intelligence allow consumers to interact with products in more immersive ways and strengthen the connection between digital and physical experiences. These technologies expand the range of digitally mediated interactions and create new opportunities for product exploration and visualisation (Ratnayake et al., 2026).

2.6.3 Traditional and digital customer experiences: a comparative perspective

Traditional and digital customer experiences represent different ways in which consumers interact with luxury brands across multiple touchpoints. Traditional experiences rely primarily on physical presence, direct interaction and personalized assistance, whereas digital experiences expand opportunities for exploration, accessibility and engagement through technologically enabled environments. These differences concern not only the channels involved, but also the ways in which consumers access information, evaluate products and develop perceptions throughout the overall experience.

However, traditional and digital customer experiences should not be considered mutually exclusive alternatives. Contemporary luxury consumption increasingly involves the integration of physical and digital touchpoints, allowing consumers to move between different environments according to their needs and the stage of the decision-making process (Grewal and Roggeveen, 2020). This evolution reflects the transition towards omnichannel experiences, in which multiple channels and touchpoints form part of the same relationship with the brand (Verhoef et al., 2015).

The coexistence of these different experience configurations raises questions about whether consumers respond differently to traditional and digital customer experiences and how such differences may be reflected in their perceptions and behavioural intentions.

2.7 Generational differences in luxury consumption and digital customer experiences

The possibility that consumers respond differently to alternative customer experience configurations also raises the question of whether such responses vary across generations. Generational boundaries are not absolute, but they provide a useful framework for examining

consumers who have grown up in different social and technological contexts (Dimock, 2019). The classification adopted by the Pew Research Center identifies Baby Boomers as those born between 1946 and 1964, Generation X between 1965 and 1980, Millennials between 1981 and 1996, and Generation Z from 1997 onwards (Dimock, 2019). These categories should nevertheless not be interpreted as homogeneous representations of consumer behaviour, since individual characteristics and personal experiences may also influence consumption choices.

Generational differences are particularly relevant when considering luxury customer experiences because consumers of different ages have developed their relationships with brands under different social and technological conditions. Research on heritage luxury consumption also indicates that age can be associated with differences in the motivations underlying consumers' relationships with luxury brands (Halwani, 2020). Such differences do not imply that generations follow entirely separate consumption patterns, but they suggest that the relative importance attributed to particular aspects of the luxury experience may vary across age groups.

Generation Z is especially relevant in this context because its formative years coincided with the widespread presence of digital technologies, mobile connectivity and social media. Unlike previous generations, for whom these technologies became established progressively, Generation Z has experienced constant connectivity and mobile access as an ordinary part of everyday life from an early age (Dimock, 2019). Digital channels therefore form an established part of the environment in which younger consumers search for information, interact with brands and move across different touchpoints. At the same time, familiarity with digital environments should not be interpreted as a rejection of physical experiences. Traditional and digital interactions may instead coexist within the same customer journey, depending on consumers' needs and the characteristics of the purchase situation (Grewal and Roggeveen, 2020).

Generational differences should therefore not be reduced to a simple opposition between traditional and digital preferences, particularly as digital technologies have become relevant across age groups. Consumers may instead differ in the relative importance they attribute to particular elements of the luxury experience. Against this background, comparing Generation Z and older consumers provides a useful basis for examining whether responses to traditional and digital customer experiences differ across generations.

2.8 The evolution of luxury consumption: The role of digitalization

These generational developments form part of a broader transformation in luxury consumption, as the growing presence of digital touchpoints has altered the conditions under which consumers encounter, evaluate and interpret luxury brands. Whereas access in traditional luxury contexts is typically mediated through selective distribution, boutique environments, personalized service and carefully controlled communication, digital environments make brands more visible, searchable and continuously accessible. Greater accessibility creates a fundamental tension, since the same technologies that facilitate interaction and information may also reduce the distance and rarity on which luxury desirability often depends. The internet initially challenged luxury brands because global reach, speed, convenience and continuous availability appeared difficult to reconcile with the exclusivity traditionally associated with luxury (Okonkwo, 2009). This transformation therefore involves more than the introduction of an additional channel, as it reshapes how consumers access and interpret cues of quality, exclusivity and authenticity.

The relationship between exclusivity and accessibility lies at the centre of this transformation. Simply transferring digital practices developed in non-luxury contexts may undermine the distinctive characteristics of the luxury service experience (Holmqvist et al.,

2020). Digital interactions must instead be adapted to the physical, social and symbolic dimensions of luxury so that they reinforce rather than weaken the brand image. Online visibility can strengthen consumers' relationships with luxury brands by extending access to heritage, aesthetics and storytelling. Social media platforms also allow brands to combine communication with entertainment, interaction, customisation and word of mouth, thereby contributing to brand awareness and brand image (Godey et al., 2016). However, excessive exposure and uncontrolled access may weaken the exclusivity traditionally associated with luxury brands (Okonkwo, 2009). Digital channels therefore create value only when their broader reach remains consistent with the positioning of the luxury brand.

Digital environments also influence consumers' expectations before any physical interaction with a brand. Consumers may explore collections, compare alternatives, examine product details, engage with brand narratives and interact with digital services before visiting a boutique. These activities reduce uncertainty while shaping expectations through both material and symbolic cues, requiring digital channels to communicate craftsmanship, rarity and refinement through visual, narrative and interactive forms.

Recent literature confirms that this area has become increasingly relevant within luxury studies. Academic interest in luxury digitalization has grown substantially since 2020, with increasing attention to themes such as customer engagement, digital tools, innovative products and sustainability (Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024). The literature also distinguishes the adoption of individual digital technologies from broader digital transformation involving business models, organisational processes, products and customer relationships (Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024). This distinction highlights the importance of integrating technologies into a coherent luxury experience.

From the consumer perspective, these developments have increased expectations of immediacy, personalization and continuity across channels. However, convenience alone is

insufficient in luxury contexts. Digital interactions must reinforce emotional value, symbolic coherence and brand meaning rather than simply improving efficiency. Their relevance to luxury consumption therefore also depends on how effectively they convey the values traditionally associated with the luxury experience.

2.9 Consumer perceptions in luxury customer experiences

As luxury consumption becomes increasingly shaped by both physical and digital interactions, understanding how consumers interpret these experiences becomes particularly important. Consumer responses depend not only on the characteristics of the interaction itself, but also on the meanings and evaluations developed throughout the experience. These perceptions contribute to the formation of attitudes and behavioural intentions towards luxury brands (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

These responses can be examined through the perceptions developed during the experience. Consumers may differ in their familiarity with the brand and its products, which can influence how subsequent evaluations are formed. They may assess perceived product quality and accessibility, interpret the degree of product personalization offered by the experience, become more or less involved in the interaction, and form perceptions of the brand's innovativeness. Considered together, these dimensions provide the theoretical basis for comparing traditional and digital customer experiences and examining how they may contribute to subsequent behavioural intentions.

2.9.1 Perceived product quality

Among the perceptions that may develop throughout the customer experience, perceived product quality represents a central element of product evaluation. It refers to consumers'

judgement of a product's overall excellence or superiority rather than to an objective assessment of its technical performance (Zeithaml, 1988). Such evaluations are based on the information and signals available to consumers throughout the customer journey. These may include intrinsic product attributes, such as materials, design and craftsmanship, as well as extrinsic cues related to price, brand reputation, communication and the environment in which the product is presented (Rao and Monroe, 1989; Zeithaml, 1988). As an important cognitive component of product evaluation, it may contribute to consumers' subsequent behavioural responses (Dodds et al., 1991).

Within luxury customer journeys, perceived product quality may develop across multiple touchpoints. Direct physical interaction allows consumers to examine materials and product details more concretely, whereas digital environments rely on visual representations, storytelling and interactive features to communicate similar qualities. Consequently, different customer experience configurations may influence how consumers interpret quality cues and evaluate luxury products.

2.9.2 Brand familiarity

Brand familiarity influences how consumers perceive and evaluate brands and products. In general terms, familiarity reflects the experience and knowledge that consumers accumulate in relation to a brand or product category over time. More specifically, it can be defined as the number of product- and brand-related experiences accumulated by the consumer (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). It therefore extends beyond purchase and may develop through different forms of interaction with the brand and its products.

Prior knowledge provides consumers with more developed structures for encoding, selecting and organising new information, although its effects may depend on the type of evaluation being performed (Johnson and Russo, 1984). Familiar brands are generally easier to

recognise and evaluate because their characteristics and associations are already partly established in consumers' minds. They are also associated with richer knowledge structures, whereas unfamiliar brands are more likely to require extensive learning and impression formation (Campbell and Keller, 2003).

Familiarity can consequently affect both product evaluations and confidence in brand judgements. Greater familiarity is associated with higher confidence in brand evaluations and attitudes, which may subsequently influence purchase intention (Laroche et al., 1996).

Advertising research further highlights the cognitive advantages associated with familiarity. Familiar brands are more easily recalled and less affected by competing brand messages (Kent and Allen, 1994). Although these findings concern advertising, they illustrate how established brand knowledge can provide a cognitive reference point through which new brand-related information is interpreted.

At the same time, familiarity does not eliminate the importance of consistency between previous knowledge and subsequent brand experiences. Brand familiarity can thus be understood as a background factor that contributes to the way consumers process information, form evaluations and respond to subsequent brand-related experiences. This is particularly relevant when customer experience is considered as a broader concept than the customer journey, since consumers may interpret current interactions in light of knowledge and experiences accumulated before the specific journey takes place.

2.9.3 Perceived accessibility

Within luxury consumption, accessibility represents a particularly complex dimension because it must be considered in relation to the exclusivity traditionally associated with luxury brands. Perceived accessibility can be understood as consumers' subjective perception of how attainable or psychologically close a product or brand appears, rather than depending solely on

objective conditions such as physical proximity or affordability. This interpretation draws on Construal Level Theory, according to which psychological distance concerns the perceived distance of objects, events and experiences from the individual in temporal, spatial, social and hypothetical terms (Trope and Liberman, 2010). Psychologically distant objects tend to be represented more abstractly, whereas psychologically closer objects are construed more concretely (Trope and Liberman, 2010).

In luxury markets, this relationship is particularly relevant because exclusivity remains one of the defining characteristics of luxury consumption. Scarcity, selectivity and limited availability contribute to perceptions of prestige and distinction, creating a tension between making luxury brands more approachable and preserving their symbolic value (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012). Digital transformation has intensified this tension by allowing consumers to explore collections, interact with products and engage with brands across multiple digital channels (Okonkwo, 2009).

Different touchpoints may affect consumers' sense of psychological proximity to a luxury brand in different ways. During the pre-purchase stage, websites, social media and digital platforms facilitate product discovery and information search, potentially making the brand and its products feel more accessible to consumers. As consumers progress through the journey, personalized recommendations, virtual consultations and augmented reality applications may provide additional opportunities for interaction, while physical boutiques offer curated environments and personalized assistance. Accordingly, perceived accessibility captures how different customer experience configurations influence consumers' sense of proximity to luxury brands while maintaining the exclusivity associated with luxury consumption.

2.9.4 Perceived product personalization

Product personalization has become an increasingly important element of luxury consumption, as consumers seek experiences that recognise their individual preferences and create a sense of uniqueness. In this context, perceived product personalization concerns the extent to which consumers feel that a product, service or experience has been adapted to their individual needs, preferences or expectations (Saniuk et al., 2020). Unlike objective personalization, which refers to the actual implementation of customised features, perceived personalization concerns how consumers interpret and value the degree of individual attention they receive during their interactions with a brand. An experience may therefore be perceived as highly personalized even when only limited objective customisation has occurred, provided that it conveys relevance, recognition and responsiveness. Although personalization was traditionally associated with customised products or services, advances in digital technologies have considerably expanded its scope. By integrating consumer information into design, production and communication processes, firms can tailor recommendations, interactions and services to individual preferences (Saniuk et al., 2020).

In luxury markets, personalization represents a source of differentiation because consumers increasingly expect experiences that recognise their individuality while preserving the exclusivity associated with the brand. Historically, luxury houses have achieved this through dedicated sales advisors, bespoke consultations and product customisation, creating a sense of individual attention and strengthening emotional connections with consumers (Dion and Arnould, 2011). Customer data, artificial intelligence and digital platforms allow brands to tailor online content, recommend products and support more relevant interactions across physical and digital channels, while virtual appointments, augmented reality applications and digital configuration tools further enrich the experience (Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024).

Rather than depending on a single encounter, perceived personalization is reinforced when consumers receive consistent individual attention before, during and after purchase. Communications, product exploration, purchase assistance and after-sales services can contribute to the perception that the brand understands and responds to specific needs. This continuity is particularly important in omnichannel environments, where consumers move across different touchpoints during the same journey. Consistency between these touchpoints can therefore strengthen both perceived personalization and consumers' relationship with the luxury brand.

2.9.5 Customer involvement

Customer involvement is an important dimension of consumers' responses to luxury experiences, as it captures the degree of personal relevance attached to a product, brand or purchase decision. It reflects a psychological state arising from the relationship between an object and an individual's needs, values and interests, and is therefore subjective and context dependent (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Higher levels of involvement are generally associated with greater attention to available information, more careful comparison of alternatives and more active participation in the purchasing process.

In luxury markets, involvement may be intensified by the financial, symbolic and emotional implications of the purchase. Luxury products may require considerable economic commitment while also expressing identity, status and personal values. These characteristics can make the decision more consequential and help explain why the same customer experience may generate different responses across consumers.

Digital technologies have broadened opportunities for customer involvement across different stages of the purchase process. Interactive websites, social media platforms, virtual consultations, augmented reality applications and digital storytelling encourage consumers to

engage with luxury brands well before entering a physical boutique, while personalized assistance and after-sales services help maintain this engagement over time. In particular, immersive technologies such as augmented reality can increase active participation by allowing users to interact more directly with products and brands in digital environments (Baber et al., 2026). Taken together, these touchpoints illustrate how customer involvement may be supported through different forms of interaction across the journey. It therefore provides a relevant dimension for comparing consumer responses to different customer experience configurations.

2.9.6 Perceived brand innovativeness

As luxury brands increasingly integrate new technologies and digital solutions into the customer experience, consumers' perceptions of brand innovativeness become particularly relevant. Perceived brand innovativeness reflects consumers' evaluation of a brand's ability to introduce meaningful innovations and respond to changing market conditions (Kunz et al., 2011). Unlike objective innovativeness, which concerns the actual development of new products, technologies or processes, perceived brand innovativeness depends on how innovative the brand appears from the consumer's perspective. Consumers may therefore regard a brand as innovative even when they have limited knowledge of its technological capabilities, provided that its actions and communications convey novelty and value in a consistent manner (Hoeffler, 2003).

Within luxury markets, innovation must nevertheless remain coherent with the established identity and positioning of the brand. Consumers may evaluate new developments not only according to their novelty, but also according to whether they meaningfully improve their interaction with the brand. Artificial intelligence, augmented reality, virtual try-on applications, immersive online environments and personalization tools can therefore shape perceived brand

innovativeness when they provide relevant and credible benefits rather than functioning as isolated technological additions.

Perceptions of brand innovativeness develop through the signals consumers encounter during repeated interactions with the brand rather than through a single technological feature or product launch. These signals contribute to the overall impression that the brand combines creativity, technological advancement and customer orientation in a consistent manner (Kunz et al., 2011). When innovation is integrated coherently into the customer experience, it can reinforce perceptions of modernity without weakening the brand's established identity.

2.10 Behavioural intentions in luxury consumption

The perceptions developed throughout the customer experience may influence how consumers subsequently respond to the brand. Behavioural intentions capture this subsequent orientation towards action and refer to consumers' willingness to perform specific behaviours. Within the Theory of Planned Behavior, intentions are considered the immediate antecedent of behaviour and reflect the motivational factors that influence the likelihood of performing a given action (Ajzen, 1991).

Although strong intentions generally increase the probability of future behaviour, actual actions may also depend on situational factors and external constraints. Since future purchasing behaviour cannot always be observed directly, marketing research frequently relies on behavioural intentions as indicators of consumers' likely responses. These may include purchase intention, recommendation and willingness to maintain a relationship with a brand, reflecting favourable or unfavourable orientations towards the company (Zeithaml et al., 1996).

In luxury markets, behavioural intentions may reflect the evaluations developed through consumers' interactions with products and brands. Purchase intention and word of mouth are

particularly relevant in this context, as they respectively capture consumers' willingness to consider acquiring a luxury product and to communicate favourable evaluations to others.

2.10.1 Purchase intention

Purchase intention refers to consumers' willingness or likelihood to purchase a specific product or brand in the future (Dodds et al., 1991). Rather than representing actual purchasing behaviour, it captures consumers' predisposition to undertake a purchase when the opportunity arises. It develops through the evaluation of information, experiences and perceptions accumulated throughout the decision-making process. Positive perceptions of the product, the brand and the overall experience may strengthen consumers' willingness to purchase, whereas uncertainty or negative evaluations may reduce this likelihood (Zeithaml et al., 1996).

In luxury markets, purchase intention may reflect evaluations of both product-related and symbolic aspects of the offering. Digital and immersive experiences can also contribute to these evaluations by providing additional opportunities to explore and interact with luxury products. Recent research on augmented reality and virtual try-on in luxury jewellery highlights the role of immersive experiences and perceived innovativeness in purchase-related responses (Baber et al., 2026).

2.10.2 Word of mouth

Word of mouth (WOM) refers to consumers' willingness to share information, experiences and evaluations about a brand or product with others (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Recommendation represents one possible form of WOM, while the construct more broadly captures consumers' tendency to communicate their opinions to other individuals.

Positive WOM can represent an important outcome of favourable customer experiences, as consumers may perceive information shared by other individuals as more credible and trustworthy than firm-generated communications. Consumers who develop favourable perceptions of a brand may therefore be more inclined to share positive experiences and recommend it to others (Zeithaml et al., 1996). This relational dimension is particularly relevant in luxury markets, where consumers may communicate not only their satisfaction with a product, but also the meanings associated with the brand and the experience.

Digital platforms and social media have broadened the reach of WOM, allowing consumers to communicate their evaluations to wider audiences and potentially influence the decisions of other consumers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). At the same time, interpersonal recommendations remain relevant in luxury markets, where trust, credibility and personal relationships continue to shape consumer decisions.

WOM therefore represents a behavioural outcome through which consumers' evaluations of a luxury experience can extend beyond the individual and contribute to broader perceptions of the brand.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research purpose and research questions

The literature reviewed in the previous chapter highlighted how the digital transformation of the luxury industry is reshaping the way consumers interact with brands throughout the customer journey. While high jewellery has traditionally relied on craftsmanship, personal relationships and in-store experiences to communicate exclusivity and superior quality, digital technologies such as 3D modelling, additive manufacturing and augmented reality are progressively becoming part of product development, personalization and customer interaction. These developments raise important questions regarding whether different customer experience configurations influence consumers' perceptions of luxury and their subsequent behavioural intentions. Against this background, the present research aims to examine how traditional and digital customer experiences differently affect consumer responses in the high jewellery sector. Specifically, the study compares two alternative customer experience scenarios developed using Cartier as the reference context. The traditional scenario emphasises handcrafted design, artisanal production, personalized in-store assistance and physical interaction with the jewellery, whereas the digital scenario incorporates technologies such as 3D modelling, additive manufacturing, augmented reality virtual try-on and digital personalization tools. By comparing these two customer experience configurations, the research investigates whether they generate different evaluations of perceived product quality, perceived accessibility, product personalization, customer involvement, brand innovativeness and behavioural

intentions. Brand familiarity is also considered as a background factor that may be associated with consumers' evaluations.

The study also examines whether these effects differ between Generation Z and older consumers. As discussed in Chapter 2, differences in the social and technological contexts in which consumers have developed may be associated with different responses to traditional and digital luxury experiences. To address these objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: Do traditional and digital customer experiences differently affect consumer perceptions and behavioural intentions in the high jewellery sector?

RQ2: Do traditional and digital customer experiences differently affect Generation Z and older consumers?

3.2 Methodology

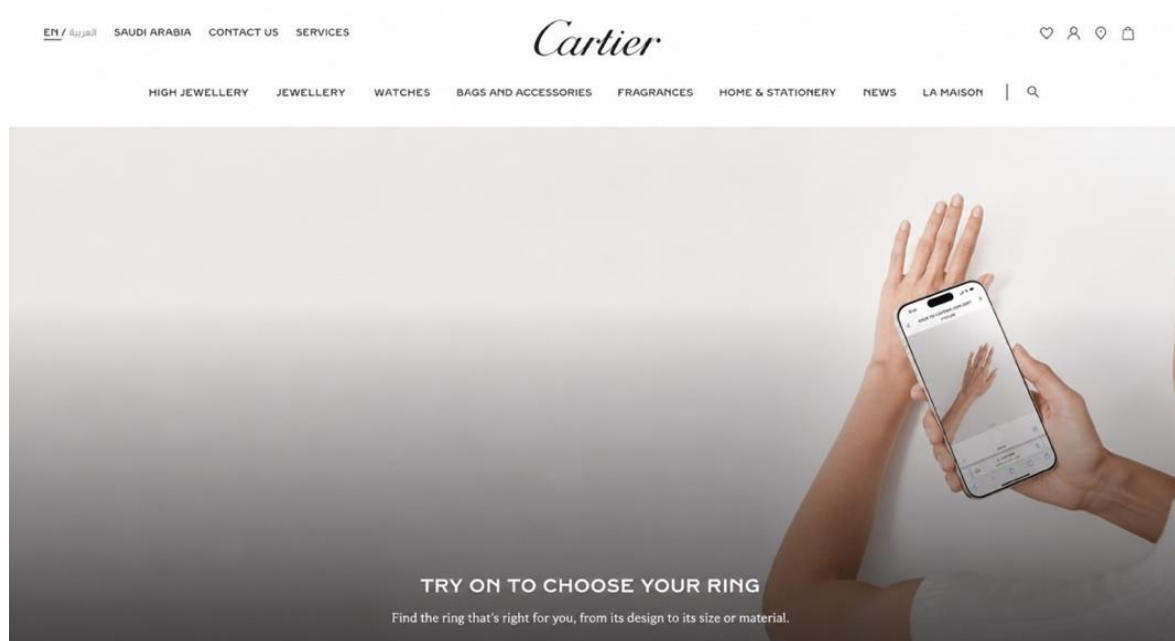
To address the research questions presented in the previous section, this study adopts a quantitative research approach based on an experimental design. The objective is to compare consumers' responses to two alternative customer experience configurations while keeping the brand, product and purchasing context constant. The empirical research was conducted using Cartier as the reference context and was structured around two scenarios representing a traditional and a digital luxury experience. Each participant was exposed to only one experimental scenario, allowing the two customer experience configurations to be compared without requiring respondents to evaluate both experiences.

The experimental manipulation consisted of varying the customer experience configuration while keeping the main contextual elements unchanged. This design provided the basis for examining consumers' perceptions and behavioural intentions across the two customer experience configurations.

3.3 Cartier as the reference context

Cartier was selected as the reference context for this study because it represents one of the most established and internationally recognised luxury maisons in the high jewellery industry. The maison combines a long tradition of craftsmanship, heritage and exclusivity with a strong reputation for product excellence, making it an appropriate context for investigating consumers' responses to different customer experience configurations. Using a well-established luxury brand provided a recognisable context for evaluating the proposed scenarios. Alongside its artisanal heritage, Cartier has progressively integrated digital technologies into the customer experience, complementing its traditional in-store experience with innovative digital services. Among these initiatives, the brand offers a virtual try-on experience that enables customers to visualise selected jewellery pieces through augmented reality before making a purchase decision. This combination provides a consistent reference for comparing alternative customer experience configurations within the same brand. An example of Cartier's official virtual try-on experience is presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5: *Cartier Ring Virtual Try-On on the official Cartier website*



Source: Cartier (2026b)

To ensure consistency throughout the experiment, both scenarios were based on the Cartier Love ring, one of the brand's most recognisable jewellery collections. Using the same ring in both scenarios allowed the comparison to focus on the customer experience configuration while limiting variation related to the product itself. Although the experimental materials were specifically developed for this research, they were designed to reflect plausible situations inspired by Cartier's brand identity and digital initiatives. The visual stimuli and accompanying descriptions were created to represent plausible luxury experiences, with the customer experience configuration constituting the main difference between the two scenarios.

3.4 The experiment

The experiment was conducted through an online questionnaire developed using QuestionPro. A single survey link was disseminated through social media platforms, instant messaging applications and personal networks, with respondents encouraged to share it with other potential participants. Respondents accessing the survey were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions. The assignment procedure was configured to maintain a balanced distribution of the traditional and digital scenarios within the two generational groups, Generation Z (born in 1997 or later) and older consumers (born before 1997).

Before being exposed to the experimental manipulation, participants completed a short introductory section assessing their general perceptions of and attitudes towards luxury products. These responses were collected before exposure to the experimental stimuli.

The experimental manipulation consisted of presenting two alternative customer experience scenarios referring to the same luxury brand, the same jewellery product and a comparable purchasing context, differing in the type of customer experience presented. Both scenarios were developed using Cartier as the reference context and centred on the Love ring. Each scenario consisted of a brief textual description accompanied by a visual stimulus specifically created for this research. Participants were asked to carefully read the description and examine the accompanying image before completing the evaluation phase. The experimental stimuli were designed to represent plausible luxury shopping experiences while clearly distinguishing between a traditional in-store experience and a digital technology-enabled experience. After viewing the assigned scenario, respondents completed the questionnaire measuring the constructs included in the conceptual framework. The survey concluded with a series of socio-demographic questions used to describe the sample and support the subsequent analyses.

3.4.1 Traditional customer experience scenario

The traditional customer experience scenario was designed to represent the experience of purchasing a Cartier jewellery product in a physical boutique. Participants were asked to imagine entering a Cartier boutique to discover the Love ring, observe its aesthetic details and artisanal characteristics, try the jewellery on and consider possible bespoke modifications together with Cartier artisans. The scenario therefore emphasised direct product experience, personal assistance and the artisanal dimension traditionally associated with high jewellery.

The experience was structured around elements intended to distinguish the traditional customer experience from the digital alternative. Particular attention was given to craftsmanship, artisanal expertise, personalization and interaction within the boutique environment. These elements allowed participants to evaluate the jewellery in a setting centred on personal service, exclusivity and appreciation of artisanal quality.

The textual description, reported in the Appendix as part of the complete questionnaire, was accompanied by the visual stimulus presented in Figure 6. The image illustrated the main elements of the scenario, including the design process, artisanal production and presentation of the finished jewellery in the boutique. The visual material was created to reflect Cartier's visual identity and to support the representation of the traditional customer experience described to participants.

Figure 6: *Traditional customer experience scenario*



Source: Author's elaboration

3.4.2 Digital customer experience scenario

The digital customer experience scenario was designed to represent a technology-enabled luxury shopping experience while maintaining the same brand and product context as the traditional scenario. Participants were asked to imagine using Cartier's augmented reality virtual try-on application to visualise the Love ring on their hand, observe its aesthetic details and assess how the jewellery appeared when worn. They were also invited to consider possible

digital personalization options by making modifications directly to the three-dimensional model. The scenario therefore emphasised augmented reality, digital product exploration and digitally enabled personalization.

The experience was structured around technological elements intended to distinguish the digital customer experience from the traditional alternative. Particular attention was given to augmented reality, three-dimensional modelling and additive manufacturing, reflecting the different stages through which the jewellery could be visualised, modified and produced within the proposed digital experience. These elements allowed participants to evaluate the jewellery within a setting centred on technologically mediated interaction and product personalization.

The textual description, reported in the Appendix as part of the complete questionnaire, was accompanied by the visual stimulus presented in Figure 7. The image illustrated the main elements of the scenario, including three-dimensional modelling, additive manufacturing and virtual try-on. The visual material was created to reflect Cartier's visual identity and to support the representation of the digital customer experience described to participants.

Figure 7: *Digital customer experience scenario*



Source: Author's elaboration

3.5 The questionnaire

Following the experimental design described above, the questionnaire was structured to measure the constructs included in the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2. The measurement items were adapted from previous studies or developed on the basis of the relevant

literature and, where necessary, adjusted to reflect the high jewellery context and the characteristics of the two experimental scenarios. All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The complete questionnaire, including the experimental scenarios and all measurement items, is reported in the Appendix.

The questionnaire followed the sequence of the experimental procedure. After providing informed consent, participants first reported their year of birth, which was used to classify respondents into the two generational groups considered in the study. They then completed a preliminary section measuring their perceptions of and attitudes towards luxury products before being exposed to one of the two experimental scenarios. After evaluating the assigned customer experience, respondents completed the remaining measurement scales before providing their socio-demographic information.

3.5.1 The measurement scales

The measurement framework comprised nine constructs, which are presented according to the conceptual structure adopted in this study. In addition to the socio-demographic data, the questionnaire aimed at assessing respondents' general perceptions of and attitudes towards luxury products before exposure to the experimental manipulation, and then perceived product quality, brand familiarity, perceived accessibility, product personalization, customer involvement, brand innovativeness, purchase intention and WOM after exposure to the assigned customer experience scenario.

3.5.1.1 Luxury value perception

The first section of the questionnaire investigated respondents' luxury value perception, operationalised as their general perceptions of and attitudes towards luxury products before exposure to the experimental customer experience scenarios. This pre-stimulus measure captured respondents' pre-existing attitudes towards luxury independently of the assigned scenario. An adapted version of the Brand Luxury Index (BLI) was used for this purpose (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). Respondents indicated their level of agreement with seven statements referring to superior quality, attention to detail, durability, prestige, high social status, positive emotions and the expression of personal style. Together, these items measured respondents' overall luxury value perception.

3.5.1.2 Perceived product quality

The second section measured perceived product quality. Respondents evaluated the same Cartier ring after exposure to either the traditional or the digital customer experience. The measurement items were adapted from the literature on perceived quality to reflect the context of high jewellery (Zeithaml, 1988; Dodds et al., 1991). Respondents assessed whether the jewellery appeared to be made of high-quality materials, conveyed a sense of excellence, reflected careful attention to detail, demonstrated superior workmanship, appeared precise and well finished, and seemed durable over time.

3.5.1.3 Brand familiarity

The third section measured brand familiarity, which was included as a background measure because respondents' prior knowledge of Cartier could influence their evaluations

independently of the experimental manipulation. The measurement items were adapted from the literature on brand familiarity (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; Kent and Allen, 1994). Respondents indicated their level of familiarity with Cartier, how well they knew the brand and whether they had previous experience with its products. Together, the three items captured participants' prior knowledge and experience of the brand.

3.5.1.4 Perceived accessibility

The fourth section examined perceived accessibility. The measurement items were developed for this study on the basis of the concept of psychological distance and adapted to the context of luxury consumption (Trope and Liberman, 2010). Rather than referring to economic affordability, the construct captured the extent to which the Cartier jewel appeared psychologically closer to consumers and easier to consider as a potential purchase. Four statements assessed whether the assigned customer experience made the jewel appear less distant than expected, more accessible, closer to respondents' personal needs and easier to consider.

3.5.1.5 Product personalization

The fifth section focused on product personalization. The measurement items were adapted from the literature on product personalization to reflect the high jewellery context and the characteristics of the assigned customer experience (Saniuk et al., 2020; Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024). Respondents assessed whether the jewellery appeared adaptable to their personal preferences, whether the experience allowed them to participate in the design process, whether it offered greater opportunities for customisation and whether these possibilities enhanced the perceived uniqueness of the product.

3.5.1.6 Customer involvement

The sixth section investigated customer involvement. The construct was assessed using an adapted version of the Personal Involvement Inventory (PII) developed by Zaichkowsky (1985). Rather than adopting the original semantic differential format, respondents were asked to express their level of agreement with five statements referring directly to the shopping experience presented in the experiment. The items assessed whether the proposed experience captured participants' attention, made them feel involved with the Cartier jewel, stimulated their interest through the opportunity for personalization, created an engaging interaction and aroused their curiosity towards the product.

3.5.1.7 Brand innovativeness

The seventh section investigated brand innovativeness. The measurement items were developed with reference to the literature on perceived innovativeness and consumer responses to innovation, particularly Hoeffler (2003) and Kunz et al. (2011), and were adapted to assess respondents' perceptions of Cartier after exposure to the assigned customer experience. Respondents indicated whether they perceived Cartier as innovative, up to date, open to innovation, capable of evolving without losing its identity and able to combine tradition with innovation.

3.5.1.8 Purchase intention

The eighth section measured purchase intention. The measurement items were adapted from the framework developed by Zeithaml et al. (1996) to reflect the context of high jewellery.

Participants indicated their willingness to consider purchasing the jewellery, their interest in buying a Cartier product and the likelihood of purchasing Cartier jewellery in the future.

3.5.1.9 Word of mouth

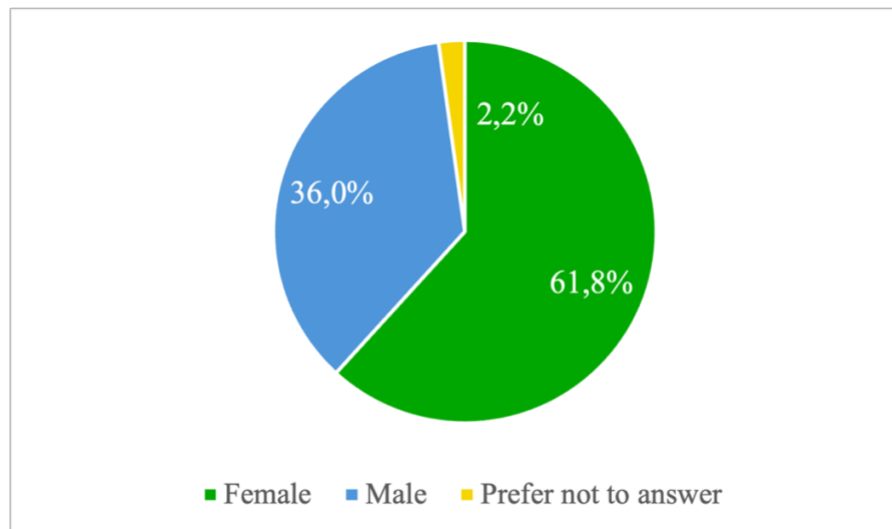
The final section measured WOM. The measurement items were adapted from the framework developed by Zeithaml et al. (1996) to reflect the context of high jewellery. Participants indicated their intention to recommend the Cartier brand, their willingness to speak positively about it and their intention to recommend the specific product to others.

3.5.2 The sample

A total of 281 usable responses were collected through the questionnaire, constituting the final sample. Of these, 136 respondents were assigned to the traditional customer experience and 145 to the digital customer experience. The demographic characteristics of the two groups were examined to assess their comparability across the main socio-demographic variables.

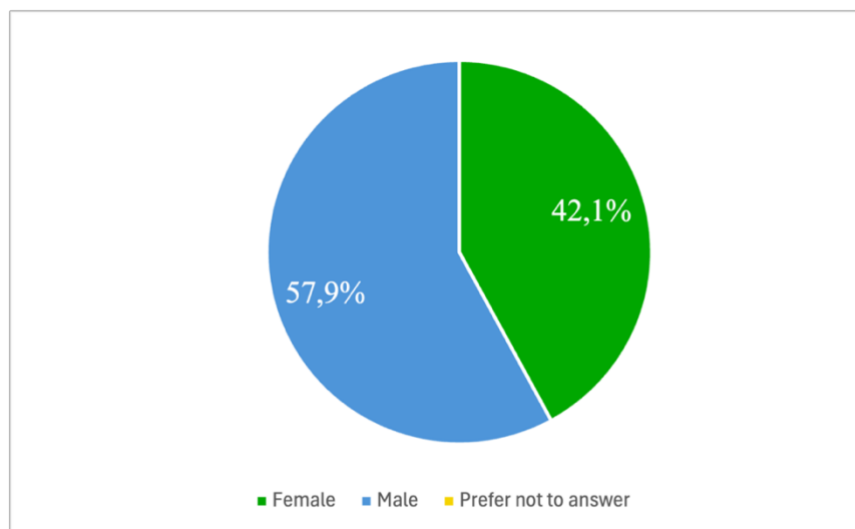
Regarding gender, the traditional customer experience included a higher proportion of female respondents (61.8%), while males accounted for 36.0% of the sample and 2.2% preferred not to disclose their gender. By contrast, the digital customer experience was characterised by a higher proportion of male respondents (57.9%), whereas female respondents represented 42.1% of the sample.

Figure 8: *Gender distribution in the traditional customer experience scenario*



Notes: N = 136.

Figure 9: *Gender distribution in the digital customer experience scenario*

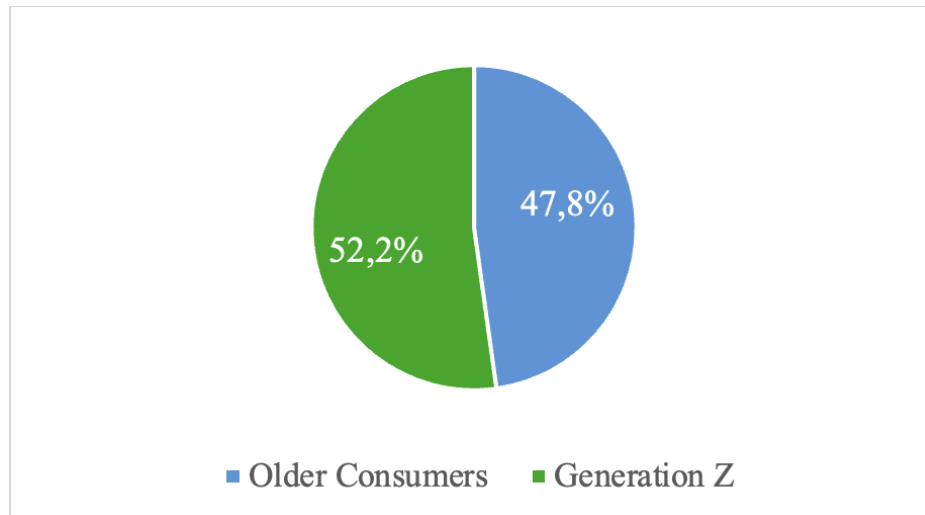


Notes: N = 145.

The distribution of respondents across the two generational cohorts was balanced between the two experimental conditions. In the traditional customer experience, 52.2% of participants belonged to Generation Z, while 47.8% belonged to the older consumer group. Similarly, the

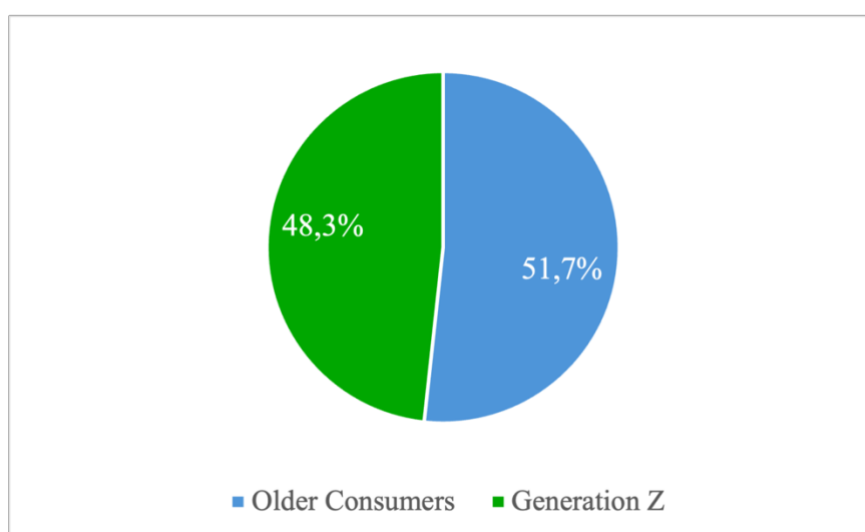
digital customer experience included 48.3% Generation Z respondents and 51.7% respondents from the older consumer category.

Figure 10: *Generational distribution in the traditional customer experience scenario*



Notes: N = 136.

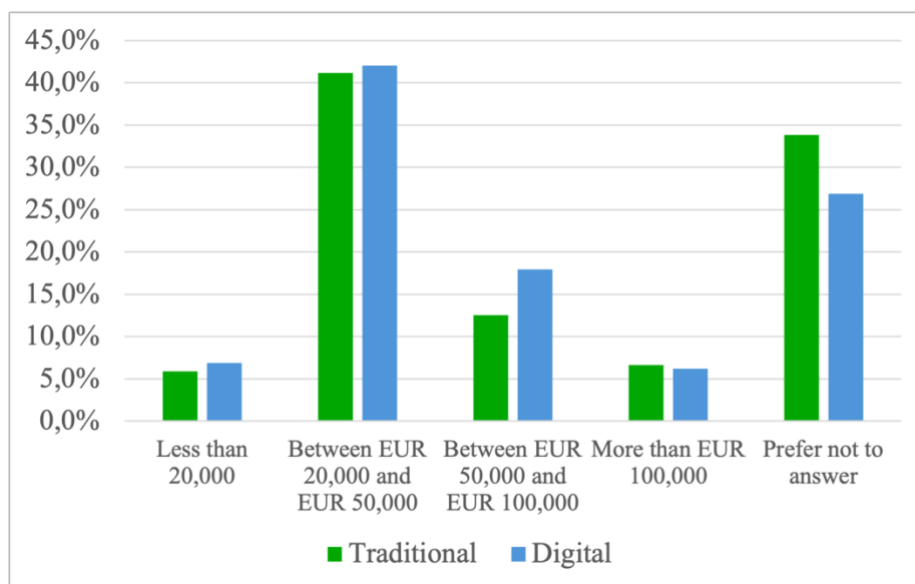
Figure 11: *Generational distribution in the digital customer experience scenario*



Notes: N = 145.

Household income showed a similar distribution across the two experimental conditions. The largest proportion of respondents reported a household income between EUR 20,000 and EUR 50,000 (41.2% in the traditional scenario and 42.1% in the digital scenario). Around one third of participants preferred not to disclose their household income, while the remaining respondents were distributed across the other income categories without substantial differences between the two groups.

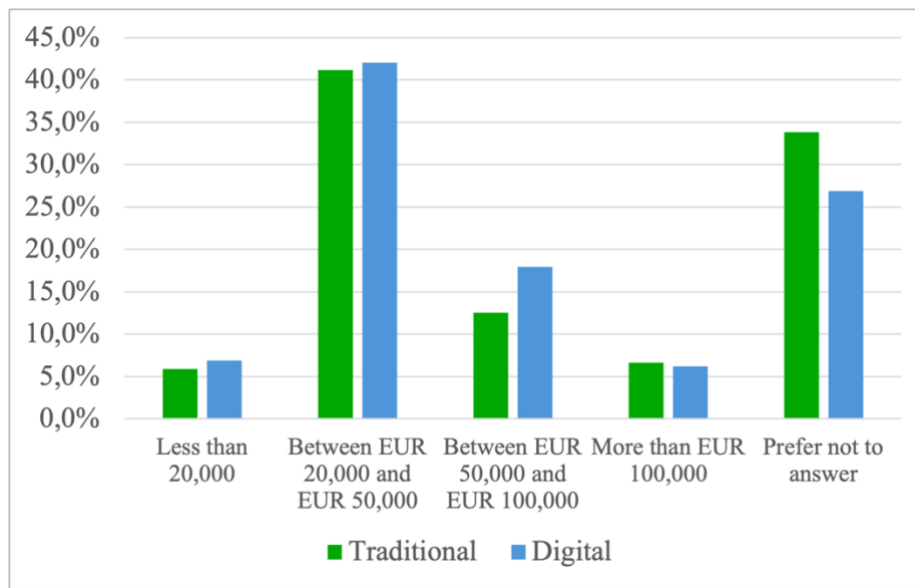
Figure 12: *Household income by experimental condition*



Notes: Traditional scenario: N = 136; Digital scenario: N = 145.

The educational profile of the sample was also comparable across the two experimental conditions. In both groups, the largest proportion of respondents held a bachelor's degree (41.9% in the traditional scenario and 49.0% in the digital scenario), followed by participants with a high school diploma. Approximately 11% of respondents reported holding a master's degree or PhD, whereas only a limited proportion indicated lower levels of educational attainment.

Figure 13: *Educational level by experimental condition*



Notes: Traditional scenario: N = 136; Digital scenario: N = 145.

Overall, the demographic characteristics provide an overview of the composition of the two experimental groups across the variables considered in the study.

3.6 Analysis methodology

Once data collection had been completed, composite scores were calculated for each construct by averaging the corresponding questionnaire items. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were then computed for all variables.

To address the first research question, a series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) was conducted to compare respondents assigned to the traditional customer experience and the digital customer experience. Customer experience configuration represented the independent variable. Perceived product quality, perceived accessibility, product personalization, customer involvement, brand innovativeness, purchase intention and WOM were analysed as outcome variables. Luxury value perception, measured before exposure to the experimental scenario,

and brand familiarity, included as a background measure, were also compared across the two experimental conditions.

The second research question was examined through additional one-way ANOVAs conducted separately within each customer experience condition. In these analyses, generation represented the grouping variable, with Generation Z respondents (born in 1997 or later) compared with older consumers (born before 1997). The analyses were conducted separately within the traditional customer experience condition and the digital customer experience condition.

All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Statistical significance was assessed using a significance level of 5% ($p < .05$).

As an additional analysis, a mediation analysis was conducted using Hayes' PROCESS Macro for IBM SPSS Statistics (Model 4) (Hayes, 2018) to examine whether product personalization mediated the relationship between customer experience configuration and behavioural intentions. Two separate mediation models were estimated, considering purchase intention and WOM as dependent variables. In both models, customer experience configuration represented the independent variable, product personalization was included as the mediator, and either purchase intention or WOM represented the dependent variable. The indirect effects were estimated through a bootstrapping procedure based on 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals. The results of all statistical analyses are presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1 Presentation of results

This chapter presents the results of the empirical analyses conducted on the final sample of 281 respondents. Building on the methodological approach described in Chapter 3, the analysis investigates how different customer experience configurations influence consumers' perceptions and behavioural responses in the context of high jewellery. The results are presented by progressively addressing the research objectives of the study. First, the traditional and digital customer experiences are compared to identify whether the two experiences generate different evaluations across the constructs included in the conceptual framework, ranging from consumers' perceptions of the product and the brand to their behavioural intentions. Subsequently, the analysis explores whether these effects vary across generational groups by examining the responses of Generation Z and older consumers within each customer experience condition. The chapter concludes with the results of the additional mediation analysis, which investigates whether product personalization helps explain the relationship between the customer experience configuration and consumers' purchase intention and word of mouth. Together, these analyses provide an empirical assessment of the role played by traditional and digital luxury experiences in shaping consumer responses.

4.2 Customer experience comparison results

The comparison between the traditional and digital customer experiences represents the main empirical analysis of this research. Mean scores for each construct are presented together

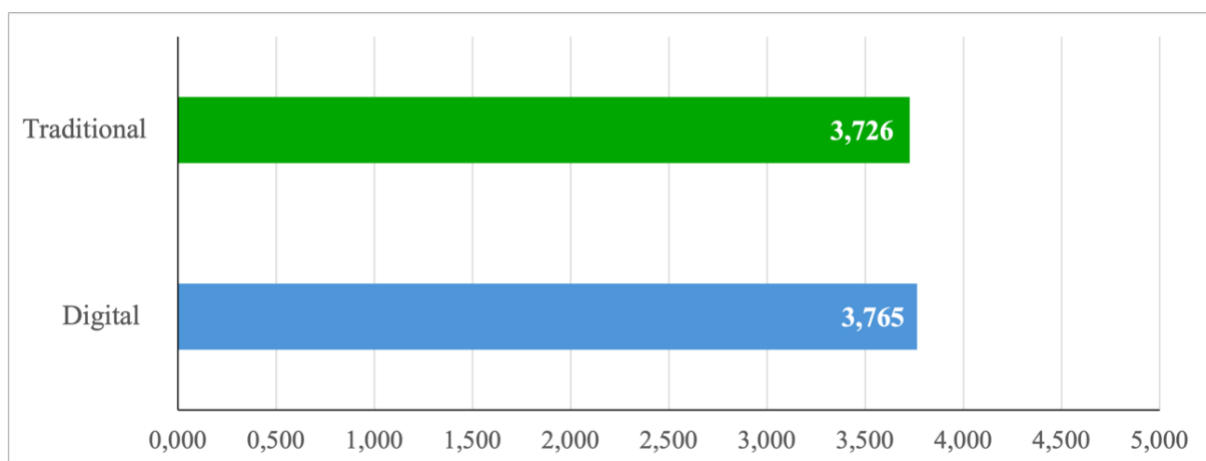
with the corresponding one-way ANOVA results, allowing differences between the two experimental conditions to be examined.

The analysis begins with luxury value perception, which was measured before respondents were exposed to the experimental scenarios in order to capture their general attitudes towards luxury products. It then examines the constructs assessed after the experimental manipulation: perceived product quality, brand familiarity, perceived accessibility, product personalization, customer involvement, brand innovativeness, purchase intention and WOM.

4.2.1 Luxury value perception

Luxury value perception was the only construct measured before respondents were exposed to the experimental scenarios. Figure 14 reports the mean scores obtained by participants assigned to the traditional or digital customer experience.

Figure 14: *Luxury value perception*



Notes: N Traditional = 136; N Digital = 145.

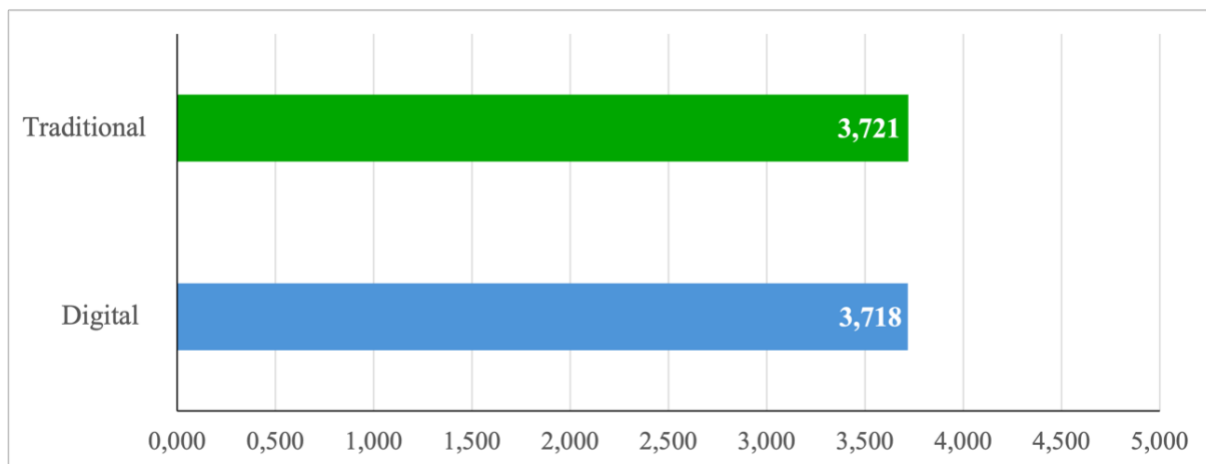
The two experimental conditions show almost identical levels of luxury value perception before the manipulation. Participants assigned to the traditional customer experience report a

mean score of 3.726, compared with 3.765 for those assigned to the digital customer experience. The difference was not statistically significant ($F = 0.300$, $p = .584$), indicating no evidence of a difference in luxury value perception between the two sub-samples.

4.2.2 Perceived product quality

Perceived product quality is the first construct assessed after exposure to the scenario. Figure 15 reports the mean scores observed under the traditional and digital customer experience scenarios.

Figure 15: *Perceived product quality*



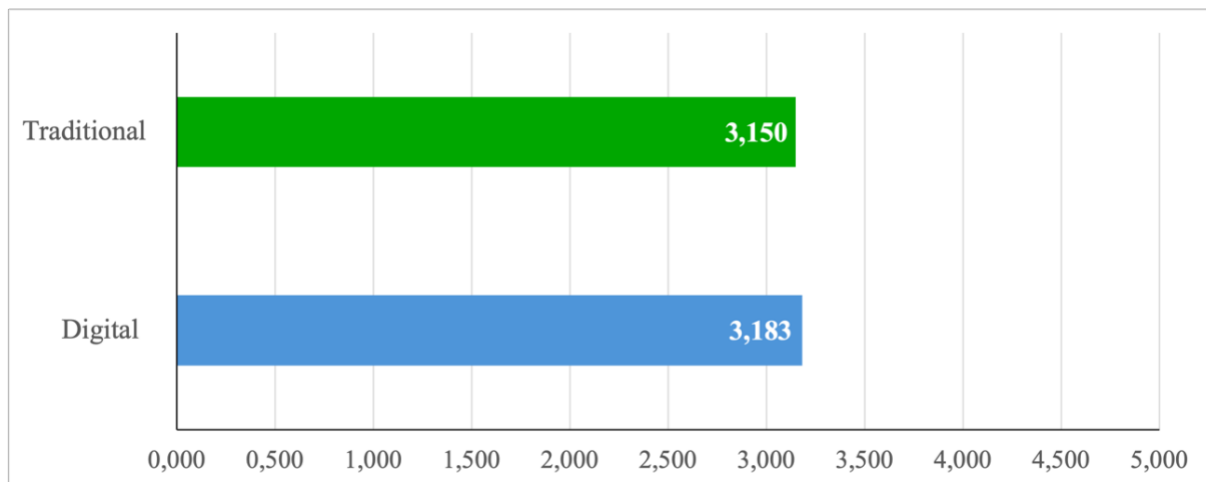
Notes: N Traditional = 136; N Digital = 145.

Respondents assigned to the traditional customer experience report a mean score of 3.721, while those assigned to the digital customer experience report a nearly identical value of 3.718. The difference was not statistically significant ($F = 0.002$, $p = .961$), indicating no evidence of a difference in perceived product quality between the two customer experience conditions. In both conditions, mean scores remained above the midpoint of the scale.

4.2.3 Brand familiarity

Brand familiarity was examined to assess whether respondents assigned to the two experimental conditions differed in their previous knowledge of the Cartier brand. Figure 16 presents the corresponding mean scores.

Figure 16: *Brand familiarity*



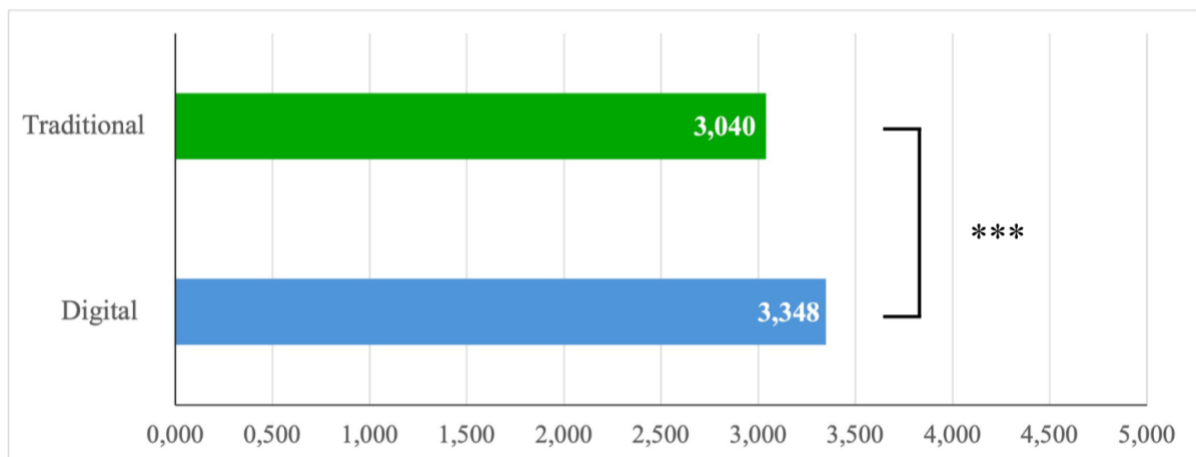
Notes: N Traditional = 136; N Digital = 145.

Figure 16 shows very limited variation between the two customer experience conditions. Respondents assigned to the traditional customer experience report a mean brand familiarity score of 3.150, while those assigned to the digital customer experience report a slightly higher average of 3.183. The difference between the two groups was not statistically significant ($F = 0.085, p = .771$). The result indicates no evidence of a difference in prior familiarity with Cartier between the two sub-samples.

4.2.4 Perceived accessibility

Perceived accessibility is the first construct for which the two customer experience conditions show clearly different evaluations. Figure 17 presents the corresponding mean scores.

Figure 17: *Perceived accessibility*



Notes: N Traditional = 136; N Digital = 145. *** $p < .001$

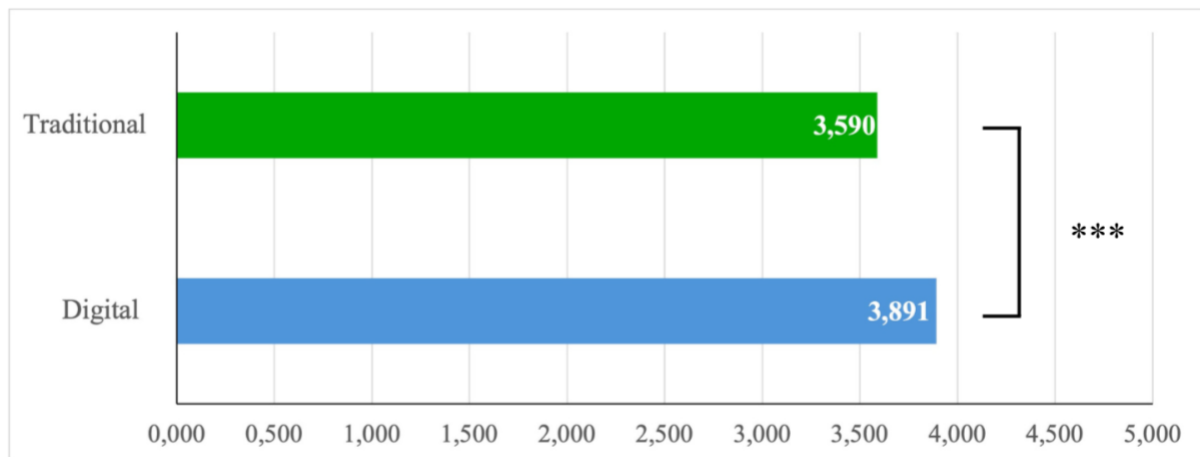
The distribution of the mean scores shows a visible separation between the two experimental conditions. Respondents assigned to the traditional customer experience report an average perceived accessibility score of 3.040, whereas those assigned to the digital customer experience report a mean value of 3.348. The mean difference between the two conditions is approximately 0.31 points.

This difference is statistically significant ($F = 15.671$, $p < .001$), with the digital customer experience receiving higher perceived accessibility scores than the traditional customer experience.

4.2.5 Perceived product personalization

Perceived product personalization shows a clear difference between the two customer experience conditions. Figure 18 reports the mean scores observed under the traditional and digital customer experience conditions.

Figure 18: *Perceived product personalization*



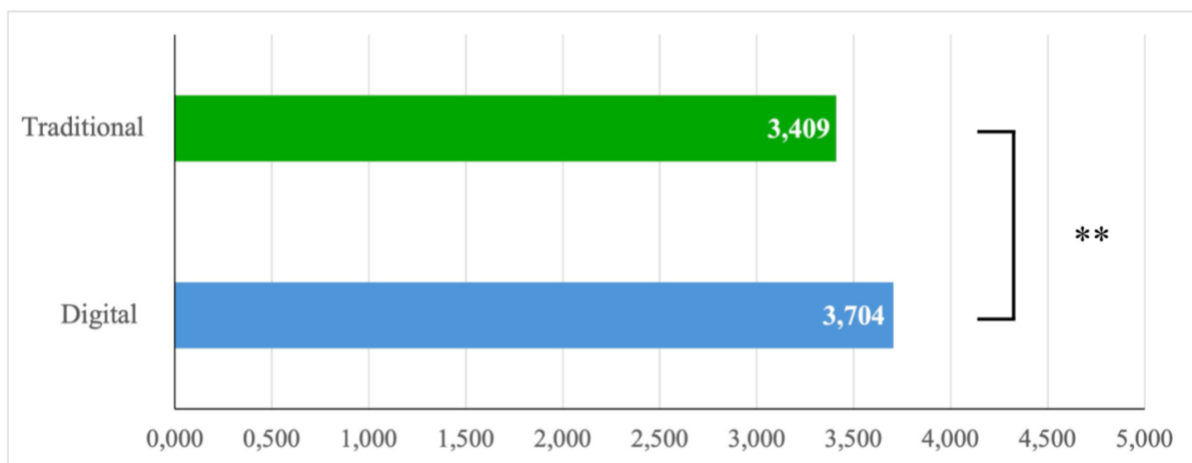
Notes: N Traditional = 136; N Digital = 145. *** $p < .001$

Figure 18 highlights a noticeable shift in respondents' evaluations. Participants assigned to the traditional customer experience report a mean score of 3.590, whereas those assigned to the digital customer experience report an average of 3.891. The increase of approximately 0.30 points brings the mean score in the digital condition close to four on the five-point scale, while the traditional condition remains below this threshold. This difference is statistically significant ($F = 15.516$, $p < .001$), with the digital customer experience receiving higher product personalization scores than the traditional customer experience.

4.2.6 Customer involvement

Customer involvement was assessed after respondents were exposed to the assigned customer experience. Figure 19 presents the corresponding mean scores for the two experimental conditions.

Figure 19: *Customer involvement*



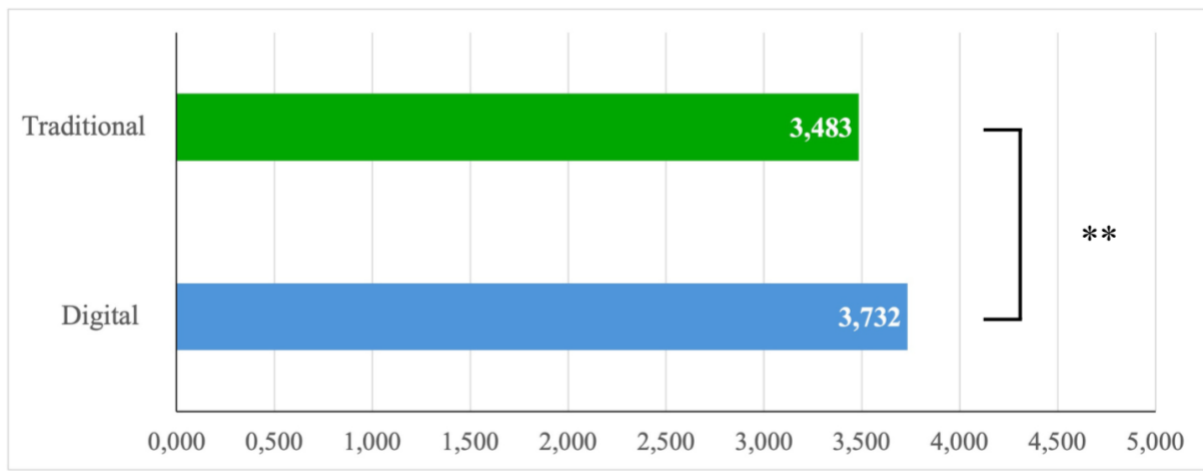
Notes: N Traditional = 136; N Digital = 145. ** $p < .01$

Customer involvement receives positive evaluations under both customer experience conditions, with mean scores exceeding the midpoint of the scale in each condition. Respondents assigned to the traditional customer experience report a mean score of 3.409, whereas those assigned to the digital customer experience report a mean of 3.704. The mean difference between the two conditions is approximately 0.30 points. The difference between the two experimental conditions is statistically significant ($F = 11.564$, $p = .001$). The digital customer experience therefore receives higher customer involvement scores than the traditional customer experience.

4.2.7 Perceived brand innovativeness

Brand innovativeness was assessed after respondents experienced either the traditional or the digital customer experience. Figure 20 presents the mean scores reported for the two experimental conditions.

Figure 20: *Perceived brand innovativeness*



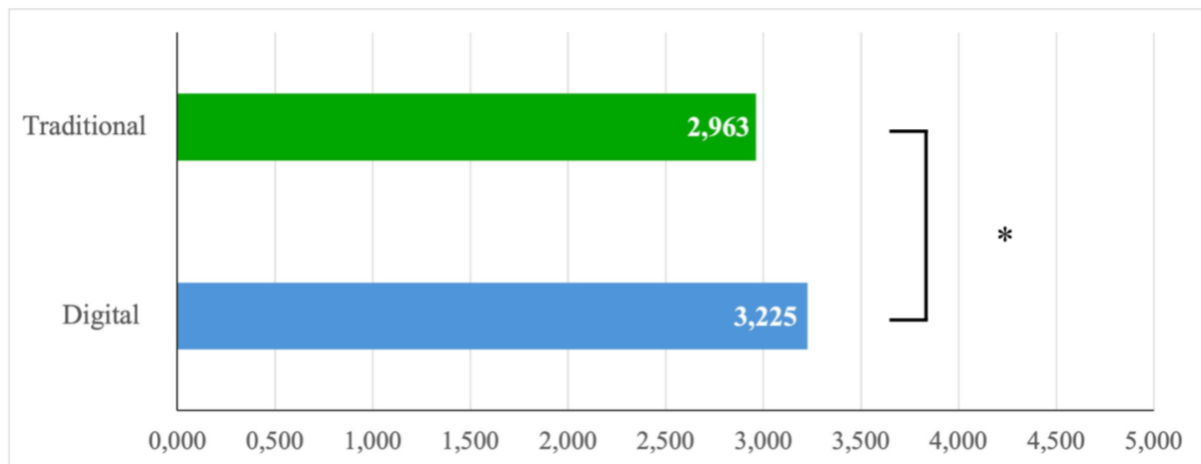
Notes: N Traditional = 136; N Digital = 145. ** $p < .01$

Respondents assigned to the two customer experience conditions report different evaluations of the brand's innovativeness. The traditional customer experience records a mean score of 3.483, whereas the digital customer experience records a mean score of 3.732. The mean difference between the two conditions is approximately 0.25 points. The difference between the two experimental conditions is statistically significant ($F = 11.582$, $p = .001$). The digital customer experience therefore receives higher brand innovativeness scores than the traditional customer experience.

4.2.8 Purchase intention

Purchase intention was assessed as one of the two behavioural outcomes considered in the study. Figure 21 reports the purchase intention scores recorded under the traditional and digital customer experience conditions.

Figure 21: *Purchase intention*



Notes: N Traditional = 136; N Digital = 145. * $p < .05$

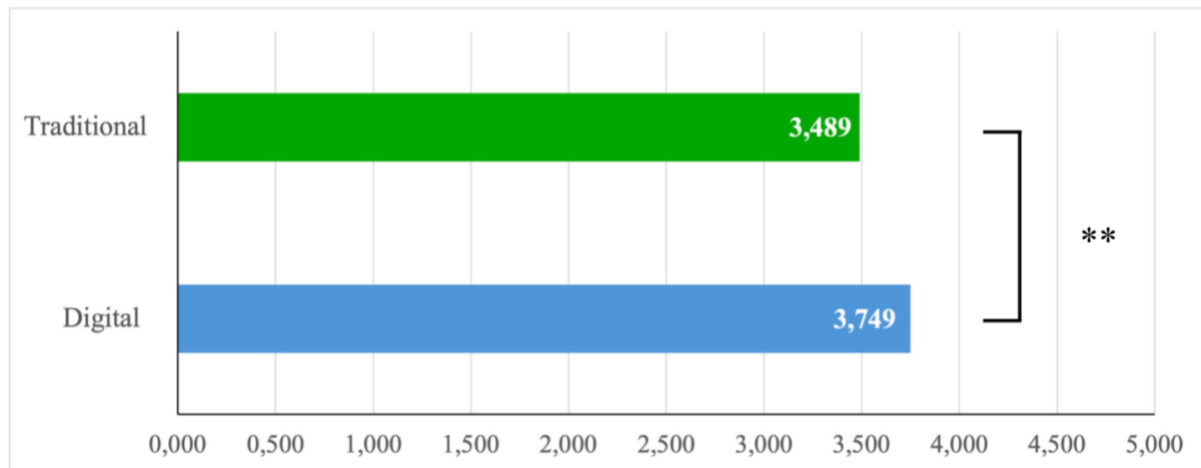
A different pattern emerges for purchase intention. The traditional customer experience records a mean score of 2.963, whereas the digital customer experience records a mean score of 3.225. Respondents assigned to the digital customer experience therefore report higher purchase intention than those assigned to the traditional customer experience. The difference between the two experimental conditions is statistically significant ($F = 5.444$, $p = .020$).

4.2.9 Word of mouth intention

WOM was assessed as the second behavioural outcome considered in the study, capturing respondents' willingness to recommend the product or brand after experiencing one of the two

customer experience conditions. Figure 22 reports the corresponding mean scores for the traditional and digital conditions.

Figure 22: *WOM*



Notes: N Traditional = 136; N Digital = 145. ** $p < .01$

Respondents report positive WOM evaluations under both customer experience conditions. Mean scores increase from 3.489 for the traditional customer experience to 3.749 for the digital customer experience. The difference between the two experimental conditions is statistically significant ($F = 9.291$, $p = .003$). The digital customer experience therefore receives higher WOM scores than the traditional customer experience.

4.3 Generational analysis results

The second stage of the analysis examined whether responses differed across generational groups within the traditional and digital customer experience conditions. Separate one-way ANOVAs were performed within each customer experience condition, comparing the two generational groups across all the constructs included in the research model. Tables 1 and 2 summarise the results.

Table 1: *Generational differences within the traditional customer experience*

	Traditional Customer Experience			
Construct	Older Consumers Mean	Gen Z Mean	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Sign.</i>
Luxury perception	3,7125	3,7391	.813	<i>ns</i>
Perceived product quality	3,6851	3,7545	.518	<i>ns</i>
Brand familiarity	3,3282	2,9671	.037	*
Perceived accessibility	3,0679	3,0141	.640	<i>ns</i>
Product personalization	3,5000	3,6725	.179	<i>ns</i>
Customer involvement	3,3500	3,4627	.401	<i>ns</i>
Brand innovativeness	3,5215	3,4479	.500	<i>ns</i>
Purchase intention	2,6718	3,2300	< .001	***
Word of mouth	3,4769	3,5000	.851	<i>ns</i>

Notes: Older consumers (N = 65); Generation Z (N = 71). ns = not significant; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Within the traditional customer experience, only two constructs display statistically significant generational differences. Although small numerical differences are observed for several variables, statistical significance emerges only for brand familiarity and purchase intention. Older consumers report higher levels of brand familiarity than Generation Z ($M = 3.328$ vs. $M = 2.967$; $p = .037$), whereas Generation Z records a significantly higher purchase intention ($M = 3.230$ vs. $M = 2.672$; $p < .001$). The remaining constructs do not differ significantly between the two groups.

Table 2: *Generational differences within the digital customer experience*

	Digital Customer Experience			
Construct	Older Consumers Mean	Gen Z Mean	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Sign.</i>
Luxury perception	3,7402	3,7905	.555	<i>ns</i>
Perceived product quality	3,6653	3,7738	.303	<i>ns</i>
Brand familiarity	3,3000	3,0571	.103	<i>ns</i>
Perceived accessibility	3,3300	3,3679	.723	<i>ns</i>
Product personalization	3,7867	4,0036	.012	*
Customer involvement	3,6678	3,7429	.506	<i>ns</i>
Brand innovativeness	3,7227	3,7429	.839	<i>ns</i>
Purchase intention	3,0578	3,4048	.027	*
Word of mouth	3,6667	3,8381	.154	<i>ns</i>

Notes: Older consumers (N = 75); Generation Z (N = 70). ns = not significant; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

A similar pattern emerges within the digital customer experience. Most of the analysed constructs do not show statistically significant differences between Generation Z and older consumers. Statistical significance is observed only for product personalization and purchase intention. Generation Z reports higher evaluations of product personalization than older consumers ($M = 4.004$ vs. $M = 3.787$; $p = .012$) and also records a significantly higher purchase intention ($M = 3.405$ vs. $M = 3.058$; $p = .027$).

The generational analysis therefore identifies only a limited number of statistically significant differences within the two customer experience conditions. Purchase intention is the only construct that differs significantly in both conditions, with Generation Z reporting higher mean scores than older consumers. Brand familiarity reaches statistical significance only within the traditional customer experience, whereas product personalization is significant only within the digital customer experience.

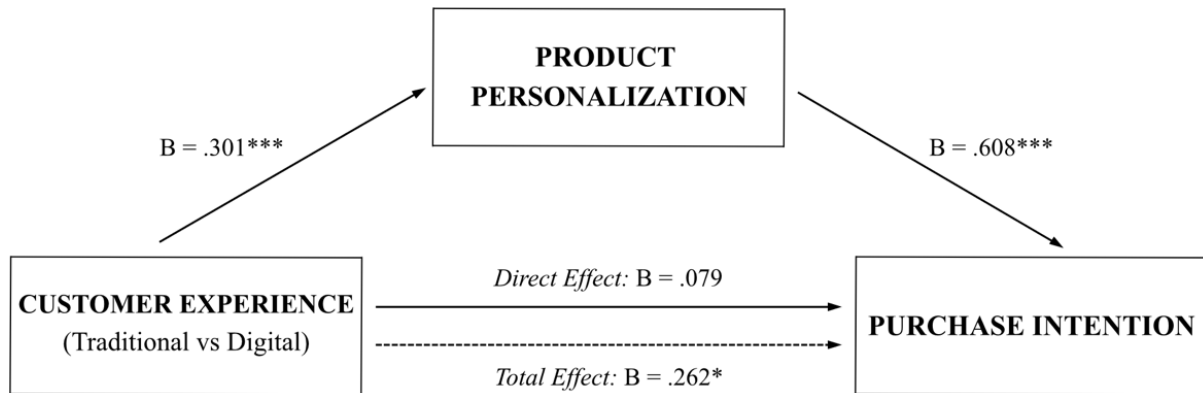
4.4 Mediation analysis results

Building on the conceptual framework and the previous findings, a mediation analysis was conducted to investigate the role of product personalization as a mediator of the relationship between customer experience and the two behavioural outcomes considered in the study, purchase intention and WOM. The following sections report the results of the two mediation models.

4.4.1 The mediating role of perceived product personalization in purchase intention

The first mediation model examined whether perceived product personalization mediated the relationship between customer experience configuration and purchase intention. Figure 23 presents the estimated model, including the regression coefficients for the direct and total effects.

Figure 23: *The mediating role of perceived product personalization in the relationship between customer experience and purchase intention*



Notes: N = 281. Customer experience was coded as 0 = Traditional customer experience and 1 = Digital customer experience. Unstandardised regression coefficients (B) are reported. The solid line represents the direct effect, while the dashed line represents the total effect. The indirect effect was estimated using 5,000 bootstrap samples. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Figure 23 shows that respondents assigned to the digital customer experience report higher perceptions of product personalization than those assigned to the traditional customer experience, indicating that the digital experience positively affects perceived product personalization ($B = .301, p < .001$). Higher levels of perceived product personalization are, in turn, positively associated with purchase intention ($B = .608, p < .001$), indicating that respondents who perceive the experience as more personalized also report a greater willingness to purchase the product.

The direct effect of customer experience configuration on purchase intention is not statistically significant once product personalization is included in the model ($B = .079, p = .454$). The total effect is positive and statistically significant ($B = .262, p = .020$).

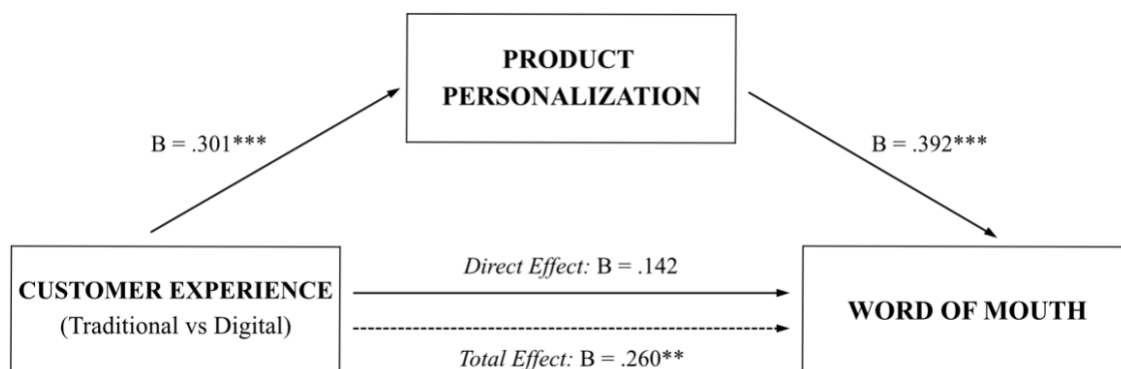
The indirect effect is positive ($B = .183$), and its bootstrap confidence interval does not include zero (BootLLCI = .087; BootULCI = .289), confirming a statistically significant

indirect effect through perceived product personalization. The pattern of results is consistent with full mediation.

4.4.2 The mediating role of perceived product personalization in word of mouth

The second mediation model examined whether perceived product personalization mediated the relationship between customer experience configuration and WOM. Figure 24 presents the estimated model, including the regression coefficients for the direct and the total effects.

Figure 24: *The mediating role of perceived product personalization in the relationship between customer experience and WOM*



Notes: N = 281. Customer experience was coded as 0 = Traditional customer experience and 1 = Digital customer experience. Unstandardised regression coefficients (B) are reported. The solid line represents the direct effect, while the dashed line represents the total effect. The indirect effect was estimated using 5,000 bootstrap samples. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Figure 24 indicates that respondents assigned to the digital customer experience report higher perceptions of product personalization than those assigned to the traditional customer experience, indicating that the digital experience positively affects perceived product

personalization ($B = .301, p < .001$). Perceived product personalization is, in turn, positively associated with WOM ($B = .392, p < .001$), indicating that respondents who perceive a more personalized experience also report a greater willingness to recommend the product or brand to others.

The direct effect of customer experience configuration on WOM is not statistically significant once product personalization is included in the model. The total effect is positive and statistically significant ($B = .260, p = .003$).

The indirect effect is positive ($B = .118$), and its bootstrap confidence interval does not include zero (BootLLCI = .050; BootULCI = .202), confirming a statistically significant indirect effect through perceived product personalization. The pattern of results is consistent with full mediation.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Discussion of results

The purpose of this research was to examine if and how traditional and digital customer experiences influence customer perceptions and behavioural intentions within the high jewellery sector. The study compared a traditional customer experience centred on the physical boutique with a digital customer experience incorporating 3D modelling, additive manufacturing and augmented reality. It also investigated whether responses to these two customer experience configurations differed between Generation Z and older consumers, while an additional mediation analysis explored the role of product personalization in the relationship between customer experience configuration and behavioural intentions. Drawing on the empirical evidence presented in Chapter 4, the discussion interprets the results by connecting them with the theoretical framework developed in the literature review and considers what they reveal about the evolving role of digital technologies in luxury customer experiences.

The evidence collected addresses both research questions and offers a broader perspective on how customers evaluate contemporary luxury experiences. The influence of customer experience configuration varies across the constructs examined, affecting some perceptions and behavioural intentions more clearly than others. Generational differences are comparatively limited, whereas the mediation analysis clarifies how product personalization contributes to the relationship between customer experience configuration and the two behavioural outcomes. These three perspectives provide a coherent basis for interpreting customer responses in the

high jewellery sector and for developing the theoretical and marketing implications of the research.

5.1.1 Traditional and digital customer experiences

The comparison between the traditional and digital customer experiences represents the core of this research and provides the basis for addressing the first research question concerning how different customer experience configurations influence customer perceptions and behavioural intentions in the high jewellery sector. The analysis shows that the two experiences do not generate identical customer responses. While perceived product quality and brand familiarity do not differ significantly across the two experimental conditions, significant differences emerge for perceived accessibility, product personalization, customer involvement, brand innovativeness, purchase intention and WOM, all of which receive higher evaluations under the digital customer experience. Luxury value perception, which was measured before exposure to the experimental scenarios, also shows no significant difference between the two groups, indicating similar initial perceptions of and attitudes towards luxury products. Overall, the findings suggest that customer experience configuration is associated with some dimensions of customer evaluation more clearly than with others.

This distinction is particularly relevant when considering perceived product quality and brand familiarity. High jewellery is traditionally characterised by craftsmanship, superior materials, design and symbolic value, which represent central components of luxury evaluation (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004; Wang, 2022). In the present study, perceived product quality remains almost identical across the traditional and digital customer experiences. This suggests that changing the way in which customers encounter and explore the Cartier jewel does not necessarily correspond to a different evaluation of its perceived excellence or workmanship. The stability of this construct is especially noteworthy because the digital condition introduced

a substantially different mode of interaction with the product while maintaining the same brand and jewellery item.

Brand familiarity requires a different interpretation. As discussed in Chapter 2, familiarity reflects knowledge and experience accumulated through previous encounters with a brand and its products (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; Kent and Allen, 1994). It was therefore included in this study as a background measure rather than as an outcome expected to be generated by the experimental experience. The absence of a significant difference between the two conditions is consistent with this role: respondents assigned to the traditional and digital experiences reported similar levels of prior familiarity with Cartier. Rather than indicating an effect of the experimental manipulation, this result shows that previous brand knowledge was broadly similar across the two groups.

A different pattern emerges for the constructs that displayed statistically significant differences. The digital customer experience generated higher evaluations of perceived accessibility, product personalization, customer involvement and brand innovativeness. Taken together, these findings suggest that digitally mediated interaction may be particularly relevant for dimensions connected with proximity, participation and the way customers engage with a luxury product and brand. This interpretation is consistent with the broader transformation of luxury consumption discussed in Chapter 2, where digital technologies were shown to extend the range of interactions available to customers while creating new ways of presenting and exploring luxury products (Okonkwo, 2009; Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024).

The result for perceived accessibility is especially relevant because accessibility represents a complex issue in luxury markets. From the perspective of Construal Level Theory, greater psychological proximity can make an object appear more concrete and easier to consider without accessibility necessarily being reduced to economic affordability or physical availability (Trope and Liberman, 2010). At the same time, luxury brands have traditionally

relied on scarcity, selective access and controlled distribution to preserve distinction and prestige (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012; Okonkwo, 2009). In the present study, respondents exposed to the digital customer experience reported significantly higher perceived accessibility than those exposed to the traditional experience. This suggests that technologies such as augmented reality and digital visualisation may reduce the perceived distance between customers and the luxury product by making exploration and interaction more immediate. The finding should not, however, be interpreted as direct evidence that exclusivity itself was unaffected, since perceived exclusivity was not measured as a separate construct. Rather, it shows that the digital experience increased perceived accessibility within the same high jewellery brand and product context.

Product personalization follows a similar pattern. Respondents exposed to the digital customer experience perceived significantly greater opportunities for personalization than those assigned to the traditional experience. This is consistent with research showing that digital technologies can extend product adaptation and customer participation by allowing customers to interact more actively with design and configuration possibilities (Saniuk et al., 2020; Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024). In the experimental scenario, the possibility of interacting with a three-dimensional model and considering digital modifications may therefore have made personalization more visible and immediate to respondents. The finding does not imply that traditional high jewellery lacks personalization, which has historically been associated with bespoke service and direct relationships with artisans, but rather that the digital configuration made these possibilities particularly salient within the proposed experience.

The higher level of customer involvement observed in the digital condition further supports the relevance of active interaction. Customer involvement reflects the personal relevance attached to a product, brand or purchase decision and is associated with greater attention and participation in the evaluation process (Zaichkowsky, 1985). In this study, the digital customer

experience produced significantly higher involvement scores than the traditional condition. The use of virtual try-on and interactive product exploration may have encouraged respondents to participate more actively in evaluating the Cartier jewel rather than simply observing the product. This interpretation is also consistent with recent research on augmented reality in luxury jewellery, which highlights the potential of immersive technologies to increase user engagement and participation (Baber et al., 2026).

Brand innovativeness displays the same directional pattern. Respondents exposed to the digital customer experience perceived Cartier as significantly more innovative than those exposed to the traditional experience. Perceived brand innovativeness concerns the way customers evaluate a brand's capacity to introduce meaningful innovations and respond to changing market conditions, rather than the objective presence of technology alone (Hoeffler, 2003; Kunz et al., 2011). The higher score observed in the digital condition therefore suggests that augmented reality, digital personalization and technologically mediated product exploration provided salient signals of innovation. At the same time, perceived product quality did not decline under the digital condition. This combination is important because it suggests that, within the experimental context, stronger perceptions of innovativeness were not accompanied by lower evaluations of the product's perceived excellence. It is consistent with the broader argument that digital innovation in luxury is most effective when it complements, rather than replaces, the qualities traditionally associated with the brand (Okonkwo, 2009; Holmqvist et al., 2020).

Differences between the two customer experiences also extend to the behavioural outcomes. Both purchase intention and WOM were significantly higher in the digital condition. The digital customer experience therefore influenced not only perceptual evaluations but also customers' stated behavioural intentions. This result is consistent with the behavioural intentions framework proposed by Zeithaml et al. (1996), according to which favourable

evaluations of an experience can be reflected in intentions to purchase, recommend and communicate positively about a brand. It is also consistent with recent evidence from luxury jewellery showing that immersive and innovative virtual try-on experiences can be associated with purchase-related responses (Baber et al., 2026).

Taken together, these findings provide a clear answer to the first research question. Traditional and digital customer experiences do not influence all customer perceptions in the same way. The strongest differences concern perceived accessibility, product personalization, customer involvement and brand innovativeness, together with the two behavioural outcomes, purchase intention and WOM, all of which are higher in the digital condition. Perceived product quality, by contrast, remains stable across the two experiences, while brand familiarity reflects similar levels of previous knowledge across the experimental groups. The results therefore suggest that the digital customer experience primarily affects dimensions connected with interaction, proximity, participation and innovation, while the perceived quality of the jewellery remains comparatively stable. This provides a more nuanced interpretation than simply considering the digital experience as either superior or inferior to the traditional one: its main contribution lies in changing specific aspects of how customers interact with and respond to the luxury offering.

5.1.2 Generational differences

The second research question examined whether responses to the traditional and digital customer experiences differed between Generation Z and older consumers. The results indicate that statistically significant generational differences were relatively limited. Within both customer experience conditions, most of the constructs considered in the analysis did not differ significantly between the two groups. This finding is particularly relevant in light of the different social and technological contexts in which generations have developed. Generation Z

reached its formative years in an environment characterised by widespread digital connectivity and mobile technologies, whereas older generations encountered the large-scale adoption of these technologies later in life (Dimock, 2019). Previous research on luxury consumption also suggests that age may be associated with differences in the motivations underlying customers' relationships with luxury brands (Halwani, 2020). The present findings nevertheless show that such generational differences do not extend uniformly across the perceptions and behavioural intentions examined in this study. Consequently, the second research question receives a differentiated rather than uniform answer: some differences emerge between Generation Z and older consumers, but they concern only specific constructs within each customer experience condition.

Within the traditional customer experience, statistically significant differences emerged only for brand familiarity and purchase intention. Older consumers reported higher levels of brand familiarity than Generation Z. This result is consistent with the nature of brand familiarity as a form of knowledge accumulated through previous encounters and experience with a brand over time (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; Kent and Allen, 1994). The difference may therefore reflect greater accumulated exposure to an established maison such as Cartier among older respondents rather than a response generated by the experimental experience itself. This interpretation is particularly important because brand familiarity was included in the study as a background measure.

By contrast, Generation Z reported significantly higher purchase intention within the traditional customer experience despite showing lower familiarity with Cartier. The two findings therefore indicate that greater previous knowledge of the brand did not correspond, in this sample, to higher purchase intention. The result is noteworthy because the generational difference in purchase intention emerged even in the physical boutique condition. It suggests that Generation Z's higher willingness to purchase high jewellery cannot be attributed

exclusively to the presence of digital technologies in the proposed experience. At the same time, the analysis does not establish why this difference occurs, and it would therefore be inappropriate to attribute it directly to a stronger general interest of younger customers in luxury without additional evidence.

No statistically significant generational differences emerged for the remaining constructs within the traditional customer experience. This means that perceived product quality, perceived accessibility, product personalization, customer involvement, brand innovativeness and WOM did not show evidence of different mean evaluations between Generation Z and older consumers in this condition. These results are compatible with the idea that traditional luxury elements such as physical interaction, craftsmanship and personal service can retain relevance across age groups, although the absence of statistical significance should not be interpreted as evidence that the two generations evaluate these dimensions identically.

A similarly selective pattern emerged within the digital customer experience. Most of the analysed constructs did not show statistically significant differences between Generation Z and older consumers. The two exceptions were product personalization and purchase intention. Generation Z reported significantly higher product personalization than older consumers, suggesting that younger respondents were particularly responsive to the personalization opportunities represented in the digital experience. This result is coherent with the different technological contexts in which the two generational groups developed (Dimock, 2019) and with the literature showing how digital technologies can expand possibilities for product adaptation and active customer participation (Saniuk et al., 2020; Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024). Within the proposed digital experience, interaction with the three-dimensional model and digitally enabled modification options may therefore have been particularly salient to Generation Z.

Purchase intention again differed significantly between the two groups, with Generation Z reporting a higher mean score than older consumers. Because the same directional difference also emerged within the traditional customer experience, purchase intention represents the most consistent generational difference identified in the study. Importantly, however, these separate within-condition ANOVAs do not constitute a test of interaction between generation and customer experience configuration. The findings therefore show that Generation Z reported higher purchase intention within both conditions, but they do not establish whether the effect of the traditional versus digital experience itself differs significantly by generation.

The broader pattern therefore provides a nuanced answer to the second research question. Generational differences are present, but they are confined to a limited number of constructs. Brand familiarity differs only within the traditional customer experience, product personalization differs only within the digital customer experience, and purchase intention differs within both conditions. For the remaining measures, no statistically significant generational differences were observed. These findings suggest that generational differences do not produce a uniform pattern of responses to luxury customer experiences. At the same time, the stronger response of Generation Z to product personalization within the digital condition indicates that digitally enabled opportunities for adaptation and participation may be particularly relevant for younger customers. More generally, the results are consistent with the view that physical and digital interactions need not correspond to completely separate generational preferences, as different touchpoints can coexist within contemporary customer experiences according to customers' needs and purchasing situations (Grewal and Roggeveen, 2020).

5.1.3 The mediating role of perceived product personalization

As a final step of the analysis, the mediation analysis provides a deeper understanding of the relevance of product personalization in the customer experience. Indeed, the results show that perceived product personalization mediates the relationship between customer experience configuration (digital compared with traditional) and consumer behavioural intentions. While the one-way ANOVAs showed that the digital customer experience generated significantly higher evaluations of product personalization, purchase intention and WOM, the mediation models examined whether product personalization contributed to the relationship between customer experience configuration and these two behavioural outcomes. Rather than representing a separate result, the mediation analysis complements the previous findings by moving beyond the comparison of mean scores and examining the indirect pathway through perceived product personalization.

Both mediation models showed a statistically significant indirect effect through perceived product personalization. In the model predicting purchase intention, the total effect of customer experience configuration (digital compared with traditional) was positive and statistically significant, whereas the direct effect was no longer statistically significant once perceived product personalization was included. The indirect effect was positive and its bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero. The same pattern emerged for WOM: the total effect was statistically significant, the direct effect was not statistically significant after the mediator was included, and the bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect excluded zero. Taken together, these results are consistent with full mediation in both models and indicate that perceived product personalization plays an important role in the relationship between customer experience configuration and the two behavioural outcomes.

This finding gives particular relevance to product personalization within the overall interpretation of the results. The digital customer experience was associated with higher

perceived personalization, and higher levels of perceived personalization were in turn positively associated with both purchase intention and WOM. The results therefore suggest that the behavioural advantage observed for the digital experience is closely connected with the extent to which customers perceive the experience as offering opportunities for adaptation, participation and individual relevance. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that personalization can create value by adapting products and interactions to individual preferences and by increasing customers' participation in the design and configuration process (Saniuk et al., 2020; Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024).

The finding is also coherent with the broader characteristics of luxury consumption discussed in Chapter 2. Personalization has traditionally been associated with bespoke service, dedicated assistance and direct relationships between customers and luxury brands, all of which contribute to individual recognition and uniqueness (Dion and Arnould, 2011). Digital technologies can extend these possibilities by allowing customers to visualise products, interact with different configurations and consider modifications through technologically mediated tools (Saniuk et al., 2020; Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024). In the present study, the digital scenario made these opportunities particularly visible through three-dimensional modelling and digitally enabled personalization. The results therefore suggest that digital interaction can complement traditional forms of personalization by creating additional opportunities for customers to participate in the experience.

At the same time, the mediation findings should not be interpreted as showing that technological novelty alone produces stronger behavioural intentions. The models specifically identify perceived product personalization as the relevant indirect pathway examined in this study. This distinction is important because it suggests that the value of digital technologies in high jewellery may depend not simply on their presence, but on the experiential possibilities they enable for customers. In this case, the ability to interact with the product and perceive

greater opportunities for personalization appears to be closely connected with more favourable purchase intention and WOM. The findings therefore reinforce the importance of considering digital technologies not only as functional tools, but also in terms of how they contribute to the customer experience and to customers' perception of individual relevance.

5.2 Conclusions

The findings of this research show that the digital transformation of high jewellery does not necessarily imply the replacement of traditional luxury experiences. Rather, traditional and digital customer experiences appear to emphasise different aspects of the relationship between consumers, products and brands. While the traditional experience preserves the physical, artisanal and relational dimensions historically associated with high jewellery, the digital experience can introduce additional opportunities for interaction, exploration and personalization without necessarily weakening consumers' perceptions of product quality.

In relation to the first research question, the study therefore concludes that traditional and digital customer experiences influence consumer responses differently, but not uniformly across all the dimensions examined. The digital customer experience was associated with stronger evaluations of accessibility, personalization, involvement and brand innovativeness, as well as higher purchase intention and word of mouth, whereas perceived product quality remained substantially stable. These findings suggest that the main value of digital technologies in this context lies in the way they can modify how consumers approach and interact with a luxury product rather than in changing their perception of its intrinsic excellence.

The second research question leads to a more differentiated conclusion. Generational differences were limited to specific dimensions and did not reveal a general opposition between Generation Z and older consumers in their responses to traditional and digital experiences. The

results therefore suggest that digitalisation should not be interpreted as relevant only to younger consumers, just as traditional luxury experiences should not be considered inherently more appropriate for older consumers. Instead, the effectiveness of different customer experience configurations appears to depend on the specific dimension of the experience being considered.

The additional mediation analysis further clarifies the role of product personalization within the digital customer experience. The significant indirect effects identified for both purchase intention and word of mouth indicate that the greater personalization perceived in the digital condition represents an important mechanism connecting customer experience configuration with behavioural intentions. This result suggests that the value of digital technologies is not determined simply by their technological novelty, but by their ability to create experiences that consumers perceive as more adaptable, participative and personally relevant.

Overall, this research supports a view of high jewellery in which tradition and digital innovation can coexist rather than compete. Craftsmanship, product excellence, exclusivity and personal service remain fundamental elements of the luxury experience, while technologies such as augmented reality, three-dimensional modelling and digitally enabled personalization can extend the ways in which consumers engage with them. The central implication is therefore not that luxury brands should choose between physical and digital experiences, but that they should consider how digital capabilities can be integrated into the customer journey while preserving the distinctive characteristics on which high jewellery is built.

5.3 Theoretical implications

The present study contributes to the literature on luxury customer experience by providing empirical evidence that different customer experience configurations can be associated with

different customer responses within the high jewellery sector. Existing literature distinguishes customer experience as the broader set of responses developed through interactions with a firm from the customer journey, which describes the sequence of stages and touchpoints through which those interactions unfold over time (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Becker and Jaakkola, 2020). The findings of this study reinforce the relevance of this distinction. Although respondents evaluated the same luxury brand and the same jewellery product, the traditional and digital customer experiences produced different evaluations for several constructs. This indicates that variations in the way interactions are configured can influence the experience developed by customers even when the central brand and product remain unchanged. The study therefore extends the theoretical discussion by showing that the configuration of interactions through which customers encounter a luxury offering represents an important component of customer experience rather than merely the channel through which the offering is presented.

A second theoretical contribution concerns the relationship between digitalisation and luxury consumption. Previous literature has highlighted the potential tension between the greater accessibility enabled by digital technologies and the exclusivity traditionally associated with luxury brands (Okonkwo, 2009; Kapferer and Bastien, 2012). The findings provide a more nuanced perspective on this relationship. The digital customer experience generated significantly higher perceived accessibility, customer involvement, product personalization and brand innovativeness, while perceived product quality remained virtually unchanged between the two experimental conditions. Moreover, the two groups did not differ in their pre-existing perceptions of and attitudes towards luxury products before exposure to the scenarios. These results suggest that greater perceived accessibility and digitally enabled interaction can coexist, within the context examined, with stable evaluations of product quality.

This pattern is consistent with the multidimensional perspective of luxury value, according to which luxury evaluation emerges from the interaction of financial, functional, individual and

social dimensions rather than from a single attribute (Wiedmann et al., 2007). More specifically, the findings suggest that digital technologies may be particularly relevant for dimensions connected with accessibility, participation, personalization and perceived innovativeness, while perceived product quality appears comparatively stable across traditional and digital customer experiences. The study therefore contributes to the theoretical debate on digital luxury by supporting a perspective in which technological innovation can complement established dimensions of luxury rather than necessarily replacing them. This is also consistent with the broader literature showing that the integration of digital technologies into luxury requires attention to the distinctive experiential and symbolic characteristics of the sector rather than the simple transfer of practices developed in non-luxury contexts (Okonkwo, 2009; Holmqvist et al., 2020).

A further theoretical contribution emerges from the mediation analysis. The results extend the discussion of product personalization by showing that perceived product personalization represents a significant indirect pathway linking customer experience configuration with both purchase intention and WOM. Previous literature has emphasised personalization as an increasingly relevant characteristic of contemporary customer experiences and as a means of adapting products and interactions to individual preferences (Saniuk et al., 2020; Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024). The present findings add to this perspective by showing that perceived product personalization represents a significant indirect pathway linking customer experience configuration with the two behavioural outcomes examined. The digital customer experience was associated with higher perceived personalization, which in turn was positively associated with both behavioural outcomes. In both models, the indirect effect was statistically significant and the direct effect was no longer significant once perceived product personalization was included, producing a pattern consistent with full mediation. The theoretical relevance of digital

technologies may therefore lie not only in their innovative character, but also in the experiential possibilities for adaptation and participation that they make available to customers.

This contribution is particularly relevant in the luxury context, where personalization has traditionally been associated with bespoke products, dedicated assistance and direct relationships between customers and luxury brands (Dion and Arnould, 2011). Digital technologies can extend these possibilities by providing additional ways to visualise products, consider modifications and participate in the configuration process (Saniuk et al., 2020; Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024). The findings therefore suggest that digitally enabled personalization should not necessarily be viewed as an alternative to traditional forms of personal service. Instead, it can represent an additional dimension of the customer experience through which customers perceive greater individual relevance and participation. This provides a theoretical link between digitally enabled personalization and the behavioural intentions associated with the resulting customer experience.

The generational analysis also contributes to the literature on age-related differences in luxury consumption. Generational groups have developed within different social and technological contexts, while previous research suggests that age may be associated with differences in the motivations underlying relationships with luxury brands (Dimock, 2019; Halwani, 2020). In the present study, however, statistically significant generational differences emerged only for a limited number of constructs. Generation Z reported higher purchase intention within both customer experience conditions and higher product personalization within the digital condition, while older consumers reported higher brand familiarity within the traditional condition. For the remaining constructs, no statistically significant generational differences were observed. These findings refine a simple generational interpretation of digital luxury by suggesting that differences between Generation Z and older consumers are concentrated in specific behavioural and experiential dimensions rather than extending

uniformly across luxury evaluation. In particular, the higher evaluation of product personalization among Generation Z within the digital condition suggests that digitally enabled opportunities for adaptation and participation may have particular relevance for younger customers, without implying a general preference for digital over traditional experiences.

Collectively, these contributions support a more differentiated understanding of contemporary luxury customer experience. Taken together, the findings show that customer experience configuration, perceived product personalization and generational variation each contribute to understanding customers' responses to traditional and digitally enabled luxury experiences. They also reinforce the importance of considering customer experience as broader than the customer journey itself: the journey structures the interactions through which customers encounter the brand, while the resulting experience encompasses the perceptions and behavioural responses that develop through those interactions. Within high jewellery, digital transformation can therefore be understood not simply as the introduction of new technological touchpoints, but as a change in the conditions through which particular dimensions of the luxury experience are developed and evaluated.

5.4 Marketing implications

The findings of this research provide several implications for luxury brands seeking to integrate digital technologies into high jewellery customer experiences. The results suggest that digital tools should not necessarily be regarded as alternatives to the physical boutique, but as additional resources through which brands can enrich particular dimensions of the customer experience. Compared with the traditional condition, the digital customer experience generated significantly higher evaluations of perceived accessibility, product personalization, customer involvement and brand innovativeness, together with higher purchase intention and WOM. At

the same time, perceived product quality remained virtually unchanged across the two conditions, while respondents assigned to the two groups did not differ in their pre-existing perceptions of and attitudes towards luxury products before exposure to the scenarios. From a managerial perspective, these findings indicate that technologies such as augmented reality, three-dimensional visualisation and digital configuration tools can be used to expand opportunities for product exploration and interaction while maintaining strong evaluations of product quality.

For luxury brands, the implication is therefore not simply to increase the number of digital touchpoints, but to consider how physical and digital interactions contribute to the broader customer experience. Digital technologies are likely to be most valuable when they perform a clear experiential function, such as helping customers visualise a product, explore alternatives, interact with its characteristics or participate in its configuration. This approach is consistent with the broader development of omnichannel customer journeys, in which customers move between physical and digital environments according to their needs and the stage of the purchasing process (Verhoef et al., 2015; Grewal and Roggeveen, 2020). In high jewellery, the objective should therefore be to integrate digital touchpoints in a way that complements the boutique experience rather than treating online and offline interactions as separate environments. Such integration is particularly relevant in luxury markets, where digital innovation must remain coherent with the distinctive experiential characteristics and identity of the brand (Okonkwo, 2009; Holmqvist et al., 2020).

Particular attention should be devoted to product personalization. The digital condition was associated with higher perceived personalization, which in turn was positively associated with both behavioural outcomes. This suggests that investments in digital technologies may be particularly valuable when they provide customers with meaningful opportunities to adapt, explore or participate in the configuration of a product, rather than when technology is

introduced primarily for novelty. Luxury brands may therefore benefit from designing virtual try-on applications, interactive configuration tools and digitally supported consultations in ways that make individual preferences more visible within the experience. This recommendation is consistent with previous research highlighting how digital technologies can extend possibilities for product adaptation and customer participation (Saniuk et al., 2020; Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024).

The findings also have implications for the way luxury brands approach generational segmentation. The results do not support a simple distinction in which Generation Z responds positively to digital experiences while older consumers favour traditional ones. Statistically significant generational differences were limited to specific constructs. Generation Z reported higher purchase intention within both customer experience conditions and higher perceived product personalization within the digital condition, while most of the remaining constructs did not show statistically significant differences between the two generational groups. Luxury brands should therefore be cautious about designing entirely separate customer experiences solely on the basis of age. A broader integrated experience can remain relevant across generations, while selected elements may be emphasised according to the responses observed among particular customer groups.

For Generation Z in particular, the higher evaluation of product personalization within the digital condition suggests that customization and opportunities for active participation may deserve greater emphasis in customer-facing initiatives. However, the findings do not indicate that younger customers should be approached exclusively through digital channels, since their purchase intention was also significantly higher within the traditional customer experience. Marketing strategies aimed at younger customers may therefore combine digitally enabled personalization with the physical and relational elements of luxury retail rather than assuming a preference for one channel over the other. This reinforces the value of flexible customer

journeys in which physical and digital touchpoints can be combined according to the purchasing situation and individual preferences.

Overall, the managerial value of digital transformation in high jewellery appears to depend less on the mere presence of technology than on the role that technology plays within the customer experience. Digital tools can provide additional opportunities for interaction, personalization and engagement, while also increasing perceived accessibility, but their use should remain connected to the characteristics that define the brand and the product offering. Luxury brands should therefore evaluate technological investments not only in terms of innovation or channel expansion, but also according to whether they create meaningful forms of customer participation and complement existing physical interactions. An integrated approach can allow brands to expand the possibilities available throughout the customer journey while maintaining a coherent overall customer experience.

5.5 Research limitations and future research

Although this study contributes to a better understanding of how traditional and digital customer experiences influence customer perceptions and behavioural intentions within the high jewellery sector, several limitations should be acknowledged. At the same time, these limitations provide opportunities for further investigation and directions for extending the current research.

The first limitation concerns the experimental nature of the study. The research adopted a scenario-based approach in which participants evaluated one hypothetical customer experience scenario. This methodology allowed the traditional and digital conditions to be examined within a comparable experimental setting. However, the manipulation compared two composite customer experience configurations, each combining multiple experiential and technological

elements. Consequently, the observed differences cannot be attributed to a single touchpoint or technology, but should be interpreted as differences between the overall traditional and digital experiences. Future research could isolate individual elements, such as augmented reality, virtual try-on, three-dimensional modelling or digital personalization, to examine their specific contribution to customer responses.

Furthermore, hypothetical scenarios cannot fully reproduce the complexity of real luxury consumption. Participants were asked to imagine the proposed experiences rather than interact with the jewellery, boutique environment or digital technologies directly. This is particularly relevant in high jewellery, where sensory product evaluation, the physical environment, personal relationships with sales advisors and other contextual elements may contribute to the overall customer experience. Future studies could therefore examine whether the patterns identified in this research are replicated in real retail environments, for example through field experiments, actual virtual try-on experiences or longitudinal research following customers across different stages and touchpoints of the customer journey.

A second limitation relates to the empirical context and sample characteristics. The study focused exclusively on the high jewellery sector and adopted Cartier as the reference context, a choice aligned with the objectives of the research given the relevance of craftsmanship, heritage and digital innovation within the brand context. However, luxury categories differ in the way customers interact with products and develop their experiences. Extending the analysis to other contexts, such as fashion, watches, leather goods or luxury hospitality, could help determine whether the relationships observed in this study also emerge across other sectors of the luxury industry.

Moreover, the use of a convenience sample limits the generalisability of the findings. Although the final sample included both Generation Z and older consumers and allowed the two customer experience conditions to be compared, it cannot be assumed to represent the wider

population of luxury customers. Future research could rely on larger and more heterogeneous samples, including customers from different countries, cultural backgrounds and levels of previous luxury purchasing experience. Cross-cultural research would also be particularly useful for examining whether perceptions of traditional and digital luxury experiences vary according to different cultural understandings of luxury, technology and personalization.

The third limitation concerns the scope of the conceptual model. The research focused on a selected set of perceptual and behavioural constructs considered particularly relevant to the research objectives. However, luxury customer experiences may also be associated with a wider range of psychological and contextual factors. Future studies could therefore incorporate additional dimensions such as trust, perceived authenticity, emotional attachment, brand experience or brand loyalty in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of customer responses to traditional and digitally enabled luxury experiences.

The mediation analysis also focused specifically on perceived product personalization as the mediator between customer experience configuration and purchase intention and WOM. Although the results showed statistically significant indirect effects through this construct, other explanatory pathways were not examined. Future research could therefore investigate additional mediators, either separately or within more comprehensive models, to determine whether other dimensions of the experience contribute to behavioural intentions. Similarly, future studies could formally test interactions between customer experience configuration and generational membership, providing a direct assessment of whether the effect of traditional and digital experiences varies across generations.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a basis for further research on the relationship between luxury consumption, customer experience and digital transformation. Future studies can extend the present framework by examining individual technologies, additional customer responses, different luxury categories and more diverse populations. Such developments would

contribute to a more complete understanding of how traditional and digital interactions can be combined within customer journeys and how they contribute to the broader luxury customer experience.

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APPENDIX

Questionario

Ciao,

sono Martina, studentessa di *International Business and Entrepreneurship* presso l'Università degli Studi di Pavia, e sto conducendo una ricerca nell'ambito della mia tesi di laurea magistrale.

In particolare, questo studio analizza l'esperienza di shopping dei prodotti di lusso nel settore dell'alta gioielleria.

Nel corso del questionario ti verrà chiesto di prestare particolare attenzione ad uno scenario in cui bisogna leggere un testo e osservare l'immagine di un gioiello per poi esprimere le tue opinioni.

La compilazione del questionario richiede circa 5 minuti. La partecipazione è completamente anonima e i dati raccolti saranno utilizzati esclusivamente a fini accademici e analizzati in forma aggregata.

Ti invito a rispondere in modo spontaneo: non esistono risposte giuste o sbagliate, ma solo opinioni personali.

Ti ringrazio per il tempo e la disponibilità.

* In quale anno sei nato/a?

- ☐ Sono nato/a nel 1996 o in un anno precedente
- ☐ Sono nato/a nel 1997 o in un anno successivo

*** 1. Percezione e atteggiamento verso i prodotti di lusso**

Considerando i prodotti di lusso, indica, su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo), quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1. Per niente d'accordo	2. In disaccordo	3. Né d'accordo né in disaccordo	4. D'accordo	5. Completamente d'accordo
... si distinguono per l'elevata qualità	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... sono caratterizzati da una grande attenzione ai dettagli	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... durano nel tempo	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... rappresentano uno status elevato	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... sono associati a un'immagine prestigiosa	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... suscitano emozioni positive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... permettono di esprimere il proprio stile	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Istruzioni

Leggi attentamente il testo seguente e osserva con attenzione l'immagine raffigurata. Successivamente, rispondi alle domande tenendo conto di quanto hai visto e letto. Non esistono risposte giuste o sbagliate, ma solo opinioni personali.

Esperienza A – Store (50%)

Il brand Cartier, attraverso l'iniziativa “Vivere Cartier”, sta promuovendo l'alta gioielleria invitando ad entrare nelle proprie boutique per provare di persona i propri gioielli creati artigianalmente ed esplorare eventuali possibilità di personalizzazione insieme agli artigiani Cartier.

Immagina, quindi, di entrare in una boutique Cartier per provare l'anello raffigurato nell'immagine, osservarne dettagli ed estetica e vedere come il gioiello si adatta alla tua mano, valutando eventualmente alcune modifiche da realizzare artigianalmente.



Esperienza B - Digitale, realtà aumentata (50%)

Il brand Cartier, attraverso l'iniziativa "Vivere Cartier", sta promuovendo l'alta gioielleria invitando a provare i propri gioielli attraverso la realtà aumentata (AR) ed esplorare eventuali possibilità di personalizzazione digitale dei modelli realizzati tramite stampa 3D.

Immagina, quindi, di utilizzare l'AR Cartier per provare l'anello raffigurato nell'immagine, osservarne dettagli ed estetica e vedere come il gioiello si adatta alla tua mano, valutando eventualmente alcune modifiche da realizzare direttamente sul file 3D.



* 2. Percezione della qualità

Soffermendoti sulle caratteristiche del gioiello raffigurato nell'immagine, indica, su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo), quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1. Per niente d'accordo	2. In disaccordo	3. Né d'accordo né in disaccordo	4. D'accordo	5. Completamente d'accordo
Il gioiello appare realizzato con materiali di alta qualità	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Il gioiello trasmette una sensazione di eccellenza	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Il gioiello sembra realizzato con grande cura nei dettagli	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Il gioiello presenta una lavorazione di alto livello	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Il gioiello appare preciso e ben rifinito	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Il gioiello appare durevole e resistente nel tempo	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

* 3. Percezione di accessibilità del prodotto

Tenendo conto dell'esperienza di shopping proposta, valuta in che misura il gioiello Cartier appare accessibile al consumatore e indica, su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo), quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1. Per niente d'accordo	2. In disaccordo	3. Né d'accordo né in disaccordo	4. D'accordo	5. Completamente d'accordo
Il prodotto appare meno distante rispetto a quanto mi aspetterei da un bene di lusso	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Questa esperienza di shopping rende il prodotto più accessibile	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mi sento più a mio agio nel considerare questo prodotto	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Percepisco questo prodotto come più vicino alle mie esigenze	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

* 4. Personalizzazione del prodotto

In relazione alla possibilità di personalizzare il gioiello Cartier, indica, su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo), quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1. Per niente d'accordo	2. In disaccordo	3. Né d'accordo né in disaccordo	4. D'accordo	5. Completamente d'accordo
Il gioiello sembra adattabile alle mie preferenze	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
L'esperienza proposta mi consente di intervenire facilmente sul design	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
L'esperienza proposta permette una maggiore personalizzazione del gioiello	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Il gioiello, essendo personalizzabile, appare più unico	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

* 5. Coinvolgimento del consumatore

Pensando all'esperienza proposta con il gioiello Cartier, indica, su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo), quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1. Per niente d'accordo	2. In disaccordo	3. Né d'accordo né in disaccordo	4. D'accordo	5. Completamente d'accordo
L'esperienza proposta da Cartier cattura la mia attenzione	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Attraverso questa esperienza di shopping mi sento coinvolto/a con il gioiello	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
La possibilità di personalizzare l'anello ha suscitato il mio interesse fin dal primo momento	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
L'interazione con il gioiello risulta essere coinvolgente	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

L'esperienza mi porta ad
essere curioso nei confronti
del gioiello



* 6. Familiarità con il brand

Riflettendo sulla tua conoscenza del brand Cartier, indica, su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo), quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1. Per niente d'accordo	2. In disaccordo	3. Né d'accordo né in disaccordo	4. D'accordo	5. Completamente d'accordo
Conosco il brand Cartier	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ho familiarità con il brand Cartier	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ho già avuto esperienza con prodotti Cartier	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

* 7. Innovatività del brand

Considerando il brand Cartier e il modo in cui viene presentato nell'esperienza appena osservata, indica, su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo), quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1. Per niente d'accordo	2. In disaccordo	3. Né d'accordo né in disaccordo	4. D'accordo	5. Completamente d'accordo
Cartier appare come un brand innovativo	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cartier sembra al passo con i tempi	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cartier è capace di evolversi senza perdere la propria identità	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cartier appare aperto all'innovazione	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cartier riesce a combinare tradizione e innovazione	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

* 8. Intenzione d'acquisto

Tenendo conto dell'esperienza appena osservata con il brand Cartier, indica, su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo), quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1. Per niente d'accordo	2. In disaccordo	3. Né d'accordo né in disaccordo	4. D'accordo	5. Completamente d'accordo
Prenderei in considerazione l'acquisto di questo gioiello	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sarei interessato/a ad acquistare un prodotto di questo brand	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
È probabile che in futuro acquisti un gioiello Cartier	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

* 9. Passaparola

Sulla base dell'esperienza appena osservata con il brand Cartier, indica, su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo), quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1. Per niente d'accordo	2. In disaccordo	3. Né d'accordo né in disaccordo	4. D'accordo	5. Completamente d'accordo
Consiglierei il brand Cartier ad altre persone	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parlerei positivamente del brand Cartier	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Raccomanderei questo prodotto ad amici o conoscenti	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Dati socio-demografici

Le seguenti domande sono finalizzate a raccogliere alcune informazioni generali a fini statistici e di analisi. Le risposte saranno trattate in forma anonima.

* 10. Età

* 11. Genere

- ☐ Maschio
- ☐ Femmina
- ☐ Altro
- ☐ Preferisco non rispondere

* 12. Reddito familiare annuo

- ☐ Inferiore a 20.000 €
- ☐ Tra 20.000 € e 50.000 €
- ☐ Tra 50.000 € e 100.000 €
- ☐ Superiore a 100.000 €
- ☐ Preferisco non rispondere

* 13. Titolo di studio

- ☐ Licenza elementare
- ☐ Licenza media
- ☐ Diploma di scuola superiore
- ☐ Laurea
- ☐ Master / Dottorato

* 14. Lascia un commento sulla tua esperienza, se lo desideri

RIASSUNTO IN ITALIANO

La presente tesi analizza le differenze tra customer experience tradizionali e digitali nel settore dell'alta gioielleria, con l'obiettivo di comprendere in che modo due differenti configurazioni dell'esperienza influenzino le percezioni dei consumatori e le loro intenzioni comportamentali. Il tema si colloca nel più ampio processo di trasformazione digitale che negli ultimi anni ha interessato l'industria del lusso. Tale trasformazione non riguarda più soltanto la comunicazione o i canali di vendita, ma coinvolge anche la progettazione, la produzione, la personalizzazione e la presentazione dei prodotti. Nell'alta gioielleria, un ambito tradizionalmente fondato su artigianalità, savoir-faire, esclusività e servizio altamente personalizzato, tecnologie quali modellazione 3D, produzione additiva e realtà aumentata hanno introdotto nuove possibilità di interazione. Questi strumenti ampliano le modalità attraverso cui il consumatore può conoscere, esplorare e configurare il prodotto, ma sollevano anche interrogativi sulla loro capacità di preservare i significati distintivi del lusso e di produrre risposte favorevoli senza impoverire la ricchezza sensoriale e relazionale dell'esperienza fisica.

Il punto di partenza della ricerca è il carattere multidimensionale del lusso. Il valore di un bene di lusso non dipende esclusivamente dalla sua utilità o dal suo prezzo, ma deriva dalla combinazione di rarità, desiderabilità, qualità, simbolismo, piacere e capacità di esprimere identità e distinzione. La letteratura distingue componenti finanziarie, funzionali, individuali e sociali del valore percepito: il sacrificio economico e il valore d'investimento convivono con la superiorità dei materiali e della lavorazione, con il piacere personale e l'espressione del sé, nonché con il prestigio e il riconoscimento sociale. In questa prospettiva, uno stesso prodotto può essere valutato diversamente in funzione delle aspettative, delle esperienze pregresse e del contesto culturale del consumatore. La percezione del valore del lusso costituisce dunque una disposizione generale verso questa categoria di consumo, e nella ricerca viene misurata prima

dell'esposizione allo stimolo sperimentale, così da descrivere l'orientamento iniziale dei partecipanti senza trattarlo come un risultato prodotto dalla customer experience proposta.

La gioielleria occupa una posizione specifica nel mercato del lusso perché unisce valore materiale, significato simbolico e forte rilevanza personale. Metalli preziosi e gemme rappresentano una componente evidente del valore, ma non esauriscono il significato del gioiello, spesso associato a ricordi, relazioni, traguardi e forme di espressione individuale. Nell'alta gioielleria questa combinazione diventa ancora più marcata: rarità dei materiali, complessità tecnica, creatività, competenze artigianali e servizio personalizzato concorrono a trasformare il prodotto in un oggetto eccezionale. Il savoir-faire comprende numerose fasi, dalla selezione delle pietre alla progettazione, dalla sperimentazione tecnica all'incastonatura, lucidatura e finitura. Il valore della creazione deriva quindi anche dal tempo, dalle conoscenze e dall'esperienza umana incorporati nel processo. La maison aggiunge una cornice di heritage, stile, reputazione e continuità creativa che collega il singolo gioiello a un universo simbolico più ampio.

La rilevanza dell'argomento è rafforzata dall'evoluzione recente del mercato. Dopo la rapida ripresa successiva alla pandemia, il comparto dei beni personali di lusso è entrato in una fase più selettiva, nella quale la crescita dipende sempre più dalla capacità dei brand di mantenere desiderabilità, rilevanza e valore percepito. In tale scenario, la gioielleria ha mostrato una resilienza superiore a quella di varie altre categorie, confermando la propria importanza strategica. Questa solidità rende particolarmente utile comprendere come le maison possano integrare innovazione tecnologica e codici tradizionali. Per i brand non si tratta semplicemente di aumentare la visibilità digitale, ma di costruire interazioni significative che sostengano la relazione con il consumatore. L'esperienza diventa quindi una leva fondamentale: in un mercato nel quale la qualità del prodotto è attesa e l'esclusività deve essere continuamente riaffermata,

le modalità attraverso cui il prodotto viene presentato, esplorato e personalizzato possono contribuire in modo determinante alla valutazione complessiva dell'offerta.

Tradizionalmente, la customer experience dell'alta gioielleria si sviluppa nella boutique fisica. In questo ambiente il consumatore può osservare direttamente il gioiello, apprezzarne proporzioni, luce, movimento, texture e vestibilità, provarlo e ricevere assistenza personale. L'incontro con il prodotto coincide anche con l'incontro con il brand, con i suoi standard di servizio e con il suo mondo simbolico. L'ambiente controllato, l'atmosfera, la presentazione e la relazione con il personale contribuiscono a rendere tangibili qualità ed esclusività. La guida umana permette inoltre di spiegare lavorazioni complesse e possibilità bespoke difficili da comunicare soltanto mediante immagini. La customer experience tradizionale non coincide tuttavia con un generico customer journey: quest'ultimo descrive la sequenza di fasi e touchpoint attraversati dal consumatore, mentre la customer experience riguarda le risposte cognitive, emotive, sensoriali e comportamentali che emergono durante e oltre tali interazioni. La distinzione è essenziale per mantenere centrale l'oggetto effettivamente esaminato dalla ricerca.

La trasformazione digitale estende la relazione tra consumatore e maison oltre la boutique. Piattaforme online, realtà aumentata, virtual try-on, modellazione tridimensionale e produzione additiva consentono nuove forme di visualizzazione, esplorazione e configurazione. La modellazione 3D permette di rappresentare con precisione geometrie e dettagli e può facilitare il confronto tra alternative; la produzione additiva può supportare prototipazione e realizzazione di forme complesse; la realtà aumentata sovrappone elementi digitali alla percezione dell'ambiente reale e consente di visualizzare virtualmente un gioiello sul proprio corpo. Queste tecnologie non hanno tutte la stessa funzione e non devono essere considerate automaticamente superiori. Il loro valore dipende dal modo in cui vengono integrate nell'esperienza e dalla capacità di svolgere compiti rilevanti per il consumatore, come ridurre la difficoltà di

immaginare il prodotto, favorire l'interazione o rendere più comprensibili le opzioni di personalizzazione.

Il rapporto tra lusso e digitalizzazione presenta una tensione strutturale. Il digitale può aumentare accessibilità, comodità, velocità e possibilità di coinvolgimento, mentre il lusso si fonda tradizionalmente su scarsità, controllo e selettività. Una maggiore accessibilità non equivale però necessariamente a banalizzazione. Nel presente studio l'accessibilità percepita viene intesa come vicinanza psicologica e facilità di entrare in relazione con l'esperienza e con il prodotto, non come convenienza economica o riduzione del prezzo. Se progettata in modo coerente, una customer experience digitale può avvicinare il consumatore al brand senza eliminare il carattere esclusivo dell'offerta. Allo stesso tempo, non può riprodurre integralmente il contatto con materiali, peso, riflessi e dettagli, né la qualità della relazione personale in boutique. La questione non è pertanto stabilire se il digitale debba sostituire la tradizione, ma comprendere quali risposte possano essere generate dalle due configurazioni e come possano essere integrate.

Il quadro teorico distingue inoltre tra prodotto e brand. Il prodotto offre segnali tangibili di materiali, design, durata e lavorazione, mentre il brand collega tali caratteristiche a reputazione, identità, unicità e riconoscimento sociale. La qualità percepita non rappresenta una misura puramente tecnica: esprime il giudizio del consumatore sulla superiorità complessiva del prodotto e può dipendere sia da segnali intrinseci sia da elementi estrinseci, tra cui prezzo e nome del brand. La brand familiarity riguarda invece il grado di conoscenza e di esperienza pregressa con il marchio. Nella ricerca essa viene trattata come misura di background e non come esito della manipolazione sperimentale, perché un'unica esposizione a uno scenario non può creare la familiarità maturata attraverso precedenti contatti. Questa distinzione evita di attribuire alla customer experience effetti che riguardano, in realtà, il patrimonio conoscitivo già posseduto dal partecipante.

Tra le percezioni post-stimulus considerate vi sono l'accessibilità percepita e la personalizzazione del prodotto. La prima riguarda quanto l'esperienza renda il prodotto e il brand psicologicamente più vicini e comprensibili. La seconda indica la possibilità percepita di adattare il prodotto a preferenze, esigenze o caratteristiche individuali. Nell'alta gioielleria la personalizzazione non è esclusivamente digitale: il servizio tradizionale può includere assistenza dedicata e modifiche bespoke realizzate con artigiani. Le tecnologie digitali possono tuttavia rendere le alternative più visibili, interattive e direttamente esplorabili. La personalizzazione è quindi analizzata inizialmente come variabile dipendente nella comparazione tra condizioni; soltanto nell'analisi di mediazione viene impiegata come mediatore, per verificare se la diversa customer experience influenzi intenzione di acquisto e passaparola attraverso una maggiore percezione di possibilità personalizzative.

Il customer involvement descrive il grado di partecipazione, interesse e coinvolgimento suscitato dall'esperienza. Un consumatore coinvolto non riceve passivamente informazioni, ma presta attenzione, esplora e percepisce una maggiore rilevanza personale. Le interazioni digitali possono sostenere tale coinvolgimento quando consentono di manipolare contenuti, provare virtualmente il prodotto o confrontare configurazioni; anche l'esperienza tradizionale può generarlo attraverso contatto diretto e relazione personale. La brand innovativeness riguarda invece la percezione che il brand sia capace di proporre soluzioni nuove e significative. L'impiego della tecnologia può segnalare innovazione, ma solo se appare coerente con l'identità della maison e utile alla fruizione del prodotto. Nel lusso, infatti, l'innovazione deve dialogare con heritage e savoir-faire: una novità puramente spettacolare o scollegata dal valore dell'offerta rischierebbe di non rafforzare la valutazione del brand.

Gli esiti comportamentali osservati sono l'intenzione di acquisto e il word of mouth, indicato nel lavoro anche con l'acronimo WOM. L'intenzione di acquisto rappresenta la disponibilità dichiarata a considerare o acquistare il prodotto, mentre il WOM riguarda la

propensione a parlare positivamente dell'esperienza o del brand e a raccomandarli ad altri. Entrambe sono intenzioni e non comportamenti effettivamente osservati; i risultati devono pertanto essere interpretati con prudenza. La loro inclusione consente però di verificare se le differenze percettive associate alle due customer experience si estendano a risposte di interesse manageriale. La logica generale della ricerca collega così la configurazione dell'esperienza a specifiche percezioni del prodotto e del brand e, successivamente, alle intenzioni comportamentali, senza assumere che tutti i costrutti debbano necessariamente variare nella stessa direzione.

Un ulteriore elemento del quadro teorico è rappresentato dalle differenze generazionali. La Generazione Z comprende nel presente studio i partecipanti nati nel 1997 o successivamente, mentre i nati prima del 1997 sono classificati come consumatori più adulti. La letteratura suggerisce che i consumatori più giovani abbiano maggiore familiarità con ambienti digitali e forme interattive di comunicazione, ma ciò non implica una preferenza automatica e uniforme per ogni tecnologia. Anche i consumatori più adulti utilizzano strumenti digitali, e il consumo di lusso dipende da motivazioni, competenze e occasioni che non possono essere ricondotte alla sola età. Per questa ragione, la generazione viene impiegata come variabile di raggruppamento. Le analisi confrontano Generazione Z e consumatori più adulti separatamente all'interno di ciascuna condizione sperimentale; non viene stimato un modello di moderazione e non viene testata formalmente un'interazione tra generazione e customer experience.

Alla luce di queste premesse, lo studio formula due domande di ricerca. La prima è: "Do traditional and digital customer experiences differently affect consumer perceptions and behavioural intentions in the high jewellery sector?". La seconda è: "Do traditional and digital customer experiences differently affect Generation Z and older consumers?". Le formulazioni sono mantenute identiche nei capitoli introduttivo e metodologico. La prima domanda guida il confronto complessivo tra customer experience tradizionale e digitale rispetto alle percezioni e

alle intenzioni comportamentali incluse nel modello. La seconda indirizza l'analisi esplorativa delle differenze tra gruppi generazionali all'interno delle due esperienze. Le domande sono complementari ma non equivalenti: la prima riguarda l'effetto della configurazione sperimentale, la seconda descrive differenze tra gruppi e non autorizza a concludere che la generazione moderi l'effetto dell'esperienza.

Per rispondere alle domande di ricerca è stato adottato un disegno sperimentale quantitativo between-subjects, realizzato online mediante QuestionPro. Ogni partecipante è stato assegnato casualmente a una sola delle due condizioni, riducendo così il rischio che il confronto diretto tra scenari influenzasse le risposte. Le condizioni rappresentavano una customer experience tradizionale e una digitale nel contesto dell'alta gioielleria. Cartier è stato utilizzato esclusivamente come contesto di riferimento, non come case study. La scelta ha permesso di costruire scenari realistici e riconoscibili mantenendo costanti brand, prodotto e situazione di acquisto. L'obiettivo non era valutare la strategia effettiva di Cartier o generalizzare specificamente alla maison, ma isolare il più possibile la diversa configurazione dell'esperienza all'interno di un medesimo contesto di lusso.

In entrambe le condizioni veniva presentato lo stesso anello Cartier Love, così da evitare che differenze di prodotto alterassero le valutazioni. Nello scenario tradizionale il consumatore immaginava di recarsi in boutique, osservare e provare fisicamente il gioiello e ricevere assistenza personalizzata. La narrazione richiama la progettazione artigianale e la produzione manuale, nonché la possibilità di discutere eventuali modifiche bespoke con personale e artigiani. Nello scenario digitale il consumatore esplorava il medesimo prodotto attraverso realtà aumentata e virtual try-on, modellazione 3D e produzione additiva, con possibilità di visualizzare e personalizzare digitalmente alcune caratteristiche. Le due configurazioni combinavano quindi diversi touchpoint e attributi coerenti con forme tradizionali o digitali di customer experience. Proprio perché ciascuno scenario comprende più elementi, i risultati

riguardano la configurazione complessiva e non consentono di attribuire l'effetto a una singola tecnologia o componente.

Il questionario seguiva una sequenza coerente con il disegno. Prima dello stimolo veniva rilevata la percezione generale del valore del lusso, mediante sette item adattati dalla Brand Luxury Index di Vigneron e Johnson. Successivamente il partecipante visualizzava uno dei due scenari e valutava qualità percepita del prodotto, accessibilità percepita, personalizzazione del prodotto, customer involvement, brand innovativeness, intenzione di acquisto e WOM. La brand familiarity forniva invece un'informazione di background sulla conoscenza pregressa del marchio. Gli item erano adattati da studi precedenti oppure sviluppati sulla base della letteratura pertinente e utilizzavano scale Likert a cinque punti. Per ciascun costrutto è stato calcolato un punteggio composito come media degli item, così da sintetizzare le risposte in una misura utilizzabile nelle analisi successive.

La raccolta ha prodotto un campione finale di 281 rispondenti. La condizione tradizionale comprendeva 136 partecipanti e quella digitale 145. Nella condizione tradizionale erano presenti 71 appartenenti alla Generazione Z e 65 consumatori più adulti; nella condizione digitale i gruppi erano rispettivamente composti da 70 e 75 partecipanti. La distribuzione complessiva ha quindi consentito confronti tra condizioni e analisi generazionali con numerosità relativamente equilibrate. Il campione è tuttavia di convenienza e non può essere considerato rappresentativo dell'intera popolazione dei consumatori di lusso o di alta gioielleria. Le caratteristiche sociodemografiche descrivono il gruppo osservato, ma le conclusioni devono rimanere circoscritte al disegno e al contesto della ricerca.

L'analisi è stata articolata in tre passaggi. In primo luogo sono state calcolate statistiche descrittive e one-way ANOVA per confrontare i punteggi medi della condizione tradizionale con quelli della condizione digitale. In secondo luogo sono state condotte one-way ANOVA separate all'interno di ciascuna condizione per confrontare Generazione Z e consumatori più

adulti. Questa procedura evidenzia differenze generazionali entro lo scenario tradizionale o digitale, ma non costituisce un test di moderazione né un'analisi dell'interazione. In terzo luogo è stata realizzata un'analisi di mediazione con PROCESS Model 4 di Hayes, utilizzando 5.000 campioni bootstrap e intervalli di confidenza al 95 per cento. In tale analisi la customer experience è codificata 0 per la condizione tradizionale e 1 per quella digitale; la personalizzazione del prodotto assume il ruolo di mediatore e gli esiti sono, separatamente, intenzione di acquisto e WOM. Non sono stati introdotti controlli statistici non previsti.

I risultati del confronto principale mostrano anzitutto che i partecipanti delle due condizioni possedevano un orientamento iniziale molto simile verso il lusso. La percezione del valore del lusso, misurata prima dello stimolo, presenta una media di 3,726 nella condizione tradizionale e 3,765 in quella digitale; la differenza non è significativa, $F = 0,300$ e $p = 0,584$. Questo dato non va interpretato come effetto dell'esperienza, ma come indicazione dell'assenza di una differenza iniziale rilevante tra i gruppi sulla misura considerata. Anche la qualità percepita del prodotto non differisce: le medie sono 3,721 e 3,718, con $F = 0,002$ e $p = 0,961$. Il medesimo anello viene dunque valutato come sostanzialmente equivalente in termini di qualità nelle due configurazioni, senza evidenza che la mediazione digitale ne riduca o accresca la superiorità percepita.

La brand familiarity è anch'essa simile tra le condizioni. La media è 3,150 nello scenario tradizionale e 3,183 in quello digitale, con $F = 0,085$ e $p = 0,771$. Poiché la familiarità è una misura di background, il risultato indica che i gruppi non presentano una differenza statisticamente significativa nella conoscenza pregressa del brand. Questo rafforza la leggibilità del confronto, ma non equivale a un controllo statistico della familiarità né dimostra che essa sia stata manipolata. Nel complesso, la stabilità di percezione del valore del lusso, qualità del prodotto e familiarità suggerisce che le differenze emerse sugli altri costrutti non riflettano una generale rivalutazione indiscriminata del prodotto o del marchio. Gli effetti appaiono invece

concentrati sugli aspetti più direttamente connessi alle modalità di interazione proposte negli scenari.

La prima differenza significativa riguarda l'accessibilità percepita. La condizione tradizionale ottiene una media di 3,040, mentre quella digitale raggiunge 3,348; $F = 15,671$ e $p < 0,001$. La customer experience digitale rende quindi il prodotto e l'interazione psicologicamente più accessibili. Il risultato non implica che l'alta gioielleria diventi economicamente più conveniente o meno esclusiva, ma indica una maggiore facilità percepita nell'avvicinarsi, comprendere ed esplorare l'offerta. Strumenti digitali che permettono di visualizzare il gioiello e interagire con esso possono ridurre la distanza con un prodotto altrimenti percepito come remoto. Per le maison questo segnala la possibilità di ampliare il contatto e la comprensione senza necessariamente intervenire sul prezzo o sulla distribuzione.

Anche la personalizzazione del prodotto è valutata più favorevolmente nella customer experience digitale. La media passa da 3,590 nella condizione tradizionale a 3,891 in quella digitale; $F = 15,516$ e $p < 0,001$. Entrambi gli scenari includevano possibilità di adattamento, ma la rappresentazione digitale sembra rendere tali possibilità più visibili e direttamente esplorabili. La configurazione, la modellazione e l'interazione con alternative virtuali possono aiutare il consumatore a immaginare il prodotto come maggiormente rispondente alle proprie preferenze. Il dato non sminuisce il ruolo della personalizzazione artigianale e del servizio umano, che rimangono centrali nell'alta gioielleria; evidenzia piuttosto che il digitale può comunicare e rendere percepibile la personalizzazione in modo efficace. Questa evidenza acquisisce ulteriore importanza nella successiva analisi di mediazione.

Per il customer involvement, la media è 3,409 nella condizione tradizionale e 3,704 in quella digitale, con $F = 11,564$ e $p = 0,001$. La configurazione digitale suscita quindi un coinvolgimento più elevato nel campione analizzato. La maggiore partecipazione può derivare dalla possibilità di esplorare, provare virtualmente e configurare il prodotto, attività che

richiedono un ruolo più attivo del consumatore. Il risultato non significa che la boutique sia intrinsecamente poco coinvolgente: lo scenario sperimentale non riproduce l'intera ricchezza sensoriale e relazionale di una visita reale. Indica però che, nel formato proposto, le funzioni interattive digitali riescono a rendere l'esperienza più partecipativa. La tecnologia appare quindi efficace quando non si limita a trasferire informazioni, ma permette al consumatore di agire sul contenuto dell'esperienza.

La brand innovativeness presenta una media di 3,483 per la condizione tradizionale e 3,732 per quella digitale; $F = 11,582$ e $p = 0,001$. L'integrazione di realtà aumentata, modellazione 3D e produzione additiva rafforza la percezione di un brand capace di innovare. Tale risultato deve essere letto nel contesto di una maison di lusso, dove la novità è credibile quando sostiene la qualità dell'interazione e dialoga con heritage e competenze tradizionali. Non emerge una contrapposizione per cui l'innovazione cancelli la tradizione: la qualità percepita rimane invariata e il contesto del prodotto è mantenuto costante. Il digitale può pertanto segnalare dinamismo senza compromettere necessariamente la valutazione del gioiello, purché l'introduzione tecnologica sia funzionale e coerente con l'identità del brand.

Le differenze si estendono alle intenzioni comportamentali. L'intenzione di acquisto è pari a 2,963 nella condizione tradizionale e 3,225 in quella digitale; $F = 5,444$ e $p = 0,020$. Il WOM registra medie di 3,489 e 3,749, con $F = 9,291$ e $p = 0,003$. Nel campione, la customer experience digitale è quindi associata a una maggiore disponibilità dichiarata a considerare l'acquisto e a parlare positivamente o raccomandare l'esperienza. Gli effetti sono statisticamente significativi, ma non devono essere trasformati in affermazioni su acquisti effettivi o performance economiche direttamente osservate. Gli scenari rilevano intenzioni in un contesto ipotetico. I risultati sostengono comunque l'idea che un'esperienza digitale interattiva e personalizzabile possa produrre risposte favorevoli non soltanto sul piano percettivo, ma anche rispetto a due importanti esiti di marketing.

Considerati congiuntamente, i risultati relativi alla prima domanda di ricerca delineano un quadro selettivo. La customer experience digitale supera quella tradizionale per accessibilità percepita, personalizzazione del prodotto, customer involvement, brand innovativeness, intenzione di acquisto e WOM. Non emergono invece differenze per qualità percepita del prodotto, mentre valore percepito del lusso e familiarità svolgono funzioni descrittive rispettivamente pre-stimulus e di background. Il digitale non determina pertanto un miglioramento uniforme di ogni valutazione. La sua efficacia riguarda soprattutto le dimensioni collegate all'interazione, alla possibilità di esplorare e adattare il prodotto, alla percezione di vicinanza e all'immagine innovativa del brand. Questa specificità è teoricamente rilevante perché mostra che la configurazione dell'esperienza può modificare alcune risposte senza alterare la percezione della qualità del medesimo gioiello.

L'analisi generazionale offre risultati più limitati. Nella condizione tradizionale i consumatori più adulti mostrano una brand familiarity superiore rispetto alla Generazione Z: le medie sono 3,328 e 2,967, con $p = 0,037$. La differenza può riflettere una maggiore esposizione pregressa o una conoscenza accumulata del marchio e non è un effetto generato dallo scenario. Nella stessa condizione, la Generazione Z presenta invece una maggiore intenzione di acquisto: 3,230 rispetto a 2,672, con $p < 0,001$. Per gli altri costrutti non emergono differenze significative tra i gruppi. L'esperienza tradizionale non risulta dunque valutata in modo sistematicamente più favorevole dai consumatori più adulti, né sfavorevole dai più giovani. Il quadro è più articolato delle aspettative basate su una semplice opposizione tra generazioni.

Nella condizione digitale la Generazione Z valuta più elevata la personalizzazione del prodotto, con una media di 4,004 rispetto a 3,787 dei consumatori più adulti e $p = 0,012$. Anche l'intenzione di acquisto è maggiore tra i partecipanti della Generazione Z: 3,405 contro 3,058, con $p = 0,027$. Non si rilevano differenze significative per gli altri costrutti. I più giovani sembrano quindi particolarmente sensibili alla possibilità di configurare il prodotto e

manifestano una maggiore disponibilità all'acquisto in questo scenario, ma non mostrano un vantaggio generalizzato su accessibilità, coinvolgimento, innovatività o WOM. Allo stesso modo, l'assenza di differenze su molte variabili suggerisce che la customer experience digitale possa essere rilevante anche per i consumatori più adulti.

La risposta alla seconda domanda di ricerca deve essere formulata con cautela. Esistono alcune differenze tra Generazione Z e consumatori più adulti all'interno delle due condizioni, ma esse riguardano specifici esiti e non costituiscono un pattern generale. Soprattutto, poiché sono state condotte ANOVA separate entro ciascuna customer experience, non è possibile affermare che la generazione moderi la relazione tra tipo di esperienza e risultati. Una differenza significativa in un gruppo e non nell'altro non equivale di per sé a un'interazione significativa. Le evidenze sostengono quindi una segmentazione meno rigida: l'età può contribuire a spiegare alcune risposte, ma non dovrebbe essere impiegata come unico criterio per progettare esperienze tradizionali o digitali.

L'analisi di mediazione approfondisce il ruolo della personalizzazione del prodotto. Per l'intenzione di acquisto, il percorso dalla customer experience alla personalizzazione è positivo e significativo, con coefficiente $a = 0,301$ e $p < 0,001$. A sua volta, la personalizzazione è positivamente associata all'intenzione di acquisto, con coefficiente $b = 0,608$ e $p < 0,001$. L'effetto totale della customer experience sull'intenzione di acquisto è $0,262$, con $p = 0,020$, mentre l'effetto diretto, una volta incluso il mediatore, è $0,079$ e non significativo, $p = 0,454$. L'effetto indiretto è $0,183$ e il relativo intervallo bootstrap al 95 per cento, compreso tra $0,087$ e $0,289$, non include zero. Il pattern è pertanto coerente con una mediazione completa: la maggiore intenzione di acquisto associata alla condizione digitale opera attraverso la più elevata personalizzazione percepita.

Un risultato analogo emerge per il WOM. Il percorso a rimane pari a $0,301$ e significativo, mentre il percorso dalla personalizzazione al WOM presenta $b = 0,392$ e $p < 0,001$. L'effetto

totale della customer experience sul WOM è 0,260, con $p = 0,003$. Dopo l'inclusione della personalizzazione, l'effetto diretto è 0,142 e non raggiunge la significatività statistica, $p = 0,085$. L'effetto indiretto è 0,118, con intervallo bootstrap tra 0,050 e 0,202, anch'esso interamente superiore a zero. Anche in questo caso il pattern è coerente con una mediazione completa. Non si tratta di una moderazione, né di un'interazione con la generazione: PROCESS Model 4 stima il meccanismo indiretto attraverso cui la configurazione dell'esperienza è collegata al WOM.

Le analisi di mediazione chiariscono che la tecnologia non produce necessariamente effetti favorevoli per il solo fatto di essere presente. Un elemento decisivo è la funzione esperienziale che rende più evidente e concreta la possibilità di adattare il prodotto alle preferenze individuali. La personalizzazione collega l'esperienza alle intenzioni comportamentali perché accresce la rilevanza personale della proposta e può favorire un senso di partecipazione alla definizione del prodotto. Nell'alta gioielleria questo meccanismo è particolarmente plausibile, dato che unicità e servizio su misura fanno già parte del significato della categoria. Il digitale può quindi amplificare e rendere visibile un valore tradizionale, anziché sostituirlo con un codice estraneo. Questa interpretazione resta circoscritta alle variabili e agli scenari studiati e non prova che la personalizzazione sia l'unico possibile mediatore.

Sul piano teorico, la ricerca contribuisce alla letteratura sulla customer experience mostrando che differenti configurazioni di touchpoint e modalità di interazione possono generare risposte selettive anche quando brand, prodotto e situazione rimangono costanti. La distinzione tra customer experience e customer journey consente di interpretare correttamente il contributo: la ricerca confronta le percezioni e le intenzioni associate a due esperienze, mentre il customer journey costituisce il percorso più ampio nel quale touchpoint tradizionali e digitali possono essere combinati. Lo studio integra inoltre la letteratura sul lusso e quella sulla trasformazione digitale, indicando che accessibilità psicologica e innovazione possono

convivere con la stabilità della qualità percepita. Il digitale non appare necessariamente incompatibile con esclusività e heritage, ma può sostenere nuove forme di accesso, coinvolgimento e personalizzazione.

Un secondo contributo teorico riguarda il ruolo della personalizzazione. Il confronto tra condizioni mostra che essa è una percezione influenzata dalla customer experience; la mediazione indica inoltre che costituisce un possibile meccanismo attraverso cui l'esperienza si collega a intenzione di acquisto e WOM. Il risultato sposta l'attenzione dalla presenza astratta di una tecnologia alla funzione che essa svolge per il consumatore. Modellazione, visualizzazione e configurazione hanno valore quando permettono di comprendere meglio le alternative e di immaginare una creazione più vicina ai propri desideri. Il lavoro offre anche una lettura prudente delle generazioni: le differenze osservate sono circoscritte e non sostengono una contrapposizione generalizzata tra nativi digitali e consumatori più adulti. La generazione è una variabile di raggruppamento utile, ma non esaurisce l'eterogeneità delle risposte.

Dal punto di vista manageriale, i risultati suggeriscono alle maison di integrare tecnologie digitali nel customer journey senza concepirle come sostitute automatiche della boutique. L'esperienza fisica conserva vantaggi difficilmente replicabili, tra cui contatto sensoriale con il gioiello, relazione personale, atmosfera e capacità di comunicare artigianalità in modo tangibile. Il digitale può invece estendere l'esperienza prima, durante e dopo la visita, facilitando esplorazione, visualizzazione e configurazione. Una strategia efficace può quindi collegare touchpoint online e fisici: il consumatore potrebbe iniziare a conoscere e personalizzare il prodotto digitalmente, approfondire la scelta con il supporto della boutique e proseguire la relazione attraverso servizi coerenti. L'obiettivo è mantenere continuità tra i canali e costruire una customer experience unitaria.

Le tecnologie dovrebbero essere selezionate in base alla loro utilità esperienziale. Un virtual try-on può ridurre la distanza psicologica permettendo di visualizzare il gioiello sul corpo; la modellazione 3D può facilitare la comprensione di forme e varianti; strumenti di configurazione possono rendere più trasparenti le possibilità di personalizzazione. Se tali funzioni sono integrate con storytelling, competenza artigianale e assistenza qualificata, l'innovazione può rafforzare anziché indebolire il posizionamento del brand. La comunicazione dovrebbe evitare di presentare la tecnologia come fine a sé stessa e mostrare invece come essa sostenga creatività, precisione e servizio. Poiché la qualità percepita non cambia tra le condizioni, il digitale può essere utilizzato per aumentare accessibilità e coinvolgimento senza che ciò comporti necessariamente una svalutazione del prodotto.

I risultati invitano inoltre a non segmentare l'esperienza esclusivamente sulla base dell'età. La Generazione Z manifesta una più elevata intenzione di acquisto in entrambe le condizioni e una maggiore personalizzazione percepita nello scenario digitale, ma molte altre valutazioni non differiscono tra gruppi. I consumatori più adulti non risultano estranei alla customer experience digitale e i più giovani non rifiutano quella tradizionale. Le maison possono quindi offrire percorsi flessibili, lasciando che il consumatore scelga il grado di autonomia digitale e assistenza umana desiderato. Variabili come familiarità con il brand, esperienza con la categoria, motivazioni e preferenze individuali potrebbero essere più informative di una rigida divisione generazionale. La progettazione dovrebbe favorire inclusività d'uso, semplicità e possibilità di passare agevolmente da un touchpoint all'altro.

La ricerca presenta alcuni limiti. Il primo riguarda la natura scenario-based dell'esperimento: i partecipanti hanno immaginato un'esperienza descritta online e non hanno vissuto un reale acquisto di alta gioielleria. Non è stato quindi possibile riprodurre pienamente stimoli sensoriali, emozioni, relazione con il personale e conseguenze economiche di una decisione effettiva. In secondo luogo, gli scenari combinano più componenti. Quello

tradizionale include boutique, prova fisica, assistenza e lavorazione artigianale; quello digitale include realtà aumentata, modellazione 3D, produzione additiva ed esplorazione digitale. Il disegno permette di confrontare due configurazioni coerenti, ma non di isolare l'effetto specifico di ciascuna tecnologia o touchpoint. Studi futuri potrebbero manipolare separatamente tali elementi o adottare disegni fattoriali.

Ulteriori limiti derivano dal contesto e dal campione. L'uso di Cartier e dell'anello Love rende lo scenario credibile, ma circoscrive la ricerca a una specifica maison di riferimento, a un prodotto iconico e all'alta gioielleria. Risultati differenti potrebbero emergere con brand meno familiari, categorie diverse, prodotti più complessi o livelli di prezzo differenti. Il campione di convenienza limita la generalizzabilità e potrebbe non rappresentare acquirenti abituali di alta gioielleria. Ricerche successive potrebbero coinvolgere clienti reali, campioni internazionali o segmenti con diversa esperienza di lusso, nonché confrontare più culture e mercati. Potrebbero inoltre utilizzare dati longitudinali o comportamentali per verificare se le intenzioni dichiarate si traducano in visite, richieste di personalizzazione, raccomandazioni o acquisti.

Infine, il modello comprende un insieme selezionato di percezioni e intenzioni. Altri fattori, quali fiducia, autenticità, rischio percepito, piacere, esclusività, presenza sociale o qualità della relazione, potrebbero contribuire a spiegare le risposte alle customer experience. La personalizzazione del prodotto è l'unico mediatore testato e non deve essere considerata l'unico meccanismo possibile. Anche le differenze generazionali richiedono approfondimenti mediante un disegno che stimi formalmente l'interazione o una moderazione, eventualmente includendo competenza digitale, familiarità con la categoria e precedenti esperienze di acquisto. Queste estensioni permetterebbero di distinguere meglio il ruolo dell'età da quello di altri attributi individuali.

Nel complesso, la tesi mostra che una customer experience digitale, confrontata con una tradizionale nello stesso contesto di alta gioielleria, può aumentare accessibilità percepita,

personalizzazione del prodotto, customer involvement, brand innovativeness, intenzione di acquisto e WOM, senza modificare la qualità percepita del gioiello. Le differenze generazionali sono presenti soltanto per alcuni esiti e non dimostrano moderazione. La mediazione evidenzia che la personalizzazione rappresenta un percorso indiretto significativo verso intenzione di acquisto e passaparola. Il contributo principale consiste quindi nel mostrare come l'innovazione digitale possa sostenere valori esperienziali rilevanti per il lusso quando consente al consumatore di avvicinarsi, partecipare e immaginare un prodotto più personale. La prospettiva più promettente non è la sostituzione della tradizione, ma l'integrazione coerente tra competenza artigianale, servizio umano e strumenti digitali all'interno di una customer experience di alta gioielleria continua e riconoscibile.