

## Inclusive Marketing of Luxury Brands: It Won't Work for Moms

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**Introduction** Inclusive marketing has drawn an increasing amount of attention recently. For example, a study (Kantar Global Monitor, 2021) found that “65% of consumers said it’s important that the companies they buy from actively promote diversity and inclusion in their own business or society as a whole.” Despite the growing attention to inclusive marketing in industry and academia, little is known regarding luxury brands. The brands that succeeded in inclusive marketing (e.g., Nike, Fenty Beauty) are not necessarily high fashion luxury brands. Also, very few luxury brands used inclusive marketing in the past featuring unconventional models. For instance, Gucci Beauty featured a model with Down syndrome, and Louis Vuitton with pregnant Rihanna showing her bump. Therefore, this research aims to examine the impact of inclusive marketing of luxury brands on consumers’ brand attitudes.

**Background** The theoretical lens of the study is based on the evolutionary perspective on motivation. It suggests an inverse relation between two motivational systems: one regulates mate acquisition and the other regulates parental care-giving (Schaller, 2018). Luxury brand consumption is often associated with the mate acquisition motivation system. For example, luxury consumption as a female competition strategy (Hudders, et al., 2014; Wang & Griskevicius, 2014), the costly signal in male intrasexual competition (Hennighausen, et al., 2016), and women’s desire for men who own luxury and men’s desire to buy them upon recession (Bradshaw, Rodeheffer, & Hill, 2020). However, little is known about parental care motivation and luxury consumption. When the parental care motivational system is activated by the perception of young children or other childlike things (e.g., imagine taking care of a baby), people show more risk-averse attitudes and intergroup (vs. ingroup) prejudice to protect their children (Murray & Schaller, 2012). Also, parenting motivation was associated with risk aversion and social conservatism (Kerry & Murray, 2018). Specifically, to strengthen the ties of the ingroup facing an outside threat, people demonstrated greater conformity. Additionally, women but not men were more receptive to the activation of the parental care motivational system (Beall & Schaller, 2019). Therefore, this research focused on women’s attitudes toward inclusive luxury when the parental care motivational system is activated. We predicted that women with parental care motivation would not be favorable toward inclusive advertising of luxury brands because they would be risk-averse and conservative according to the previous findings. Rather, they would like to conform to their ingroup’s preference and prefer conventional advertising. As a first step, we tested the following hypotheses.

**Hypothesis 1.** When parental care motivation is activated (vs. social condition), participants have a lower attitude towards luxury featuring a disability model.

**Hypothesis 2.** When parental care motivation is activated (vs. social condition), participants perceive the luxury featuring a disability model to be socially and financially risky.

**Methods** The recruitment process involved 68 female participants sourced from Prolific, an online survey recruitment website. Participants were informed that they would be partaking in

two separate studies. For the first study, participants were randomly allocated into two conditions. In the parenting care condition, participants were instructed to envision themselves as the parent of a selected baby from a set of images and were asked to articulate their thoughts and feelings regarding their imagined role as the baby's parent, including their envisioned goals, activities, and responsibilities, with specificity. Conversely, participants in the social condition were directed to imagine they were seeking to establish a new friendship and select an individual from a set of images that they believed could potentially become their new friend. Following the selection, participants were prompted to describe the experience of being friends with this individual. After completing the first study, participants were introduced to a study regarding luxury brands and products. Participants were then presented with an advertisement for Grandioso, an Italian luxury brand specializing in men's and women's clothing featuring a disabled individual posing as a model. Following this exposure, participants were presented with a series of questions regarding their attitudes toward the brand, perceived social risk, perceived financial risk, and a manipulation check.

**Results** Manipulation Check was measured by asking the extent to which the first study made them think about being a parent and taking care of a child and it was successful (ANOVA:  $F(1, 66) = 109.01, p < .001$ , parenting condition:  $M = 6.08$  vs. social condition:  $M = 2.12$ ). Attitudes toward the luxury brand were assessed using two items (unfavorable-favorable, dislike-like). A one-way ANOVA indicated that participants in the social condition ( $M = 5.53$ ) reported more favorable attitudes compared to those in the parenting condition ( $M = 4.69$ ),  $F(1, 66) = 4.47, p = .04$ . Social risk, measured by the perception of negative impacts on how others perceive oneself when using the luxury brand's products, showed that the parenting condition ( $M = 4.82$ ) showed statistically significant higher social risk than and the social condition ( $M = 4.06$ ),  $F(1, 66) = 4.53, p = .04$ . Financial Risk was assessed through participants' perception that the products of this luxury brand are not worth the investment. There was no significant difference observed between the parenting and social conditions regarding financial risk perception,  $F(1, 66) = 3.04, p = .09$ . While the difference did not reach conventional levels of significance, participants in the parenting condition ( $M = 5.85$ ) showed a tendency to perceive the luxury brand's products differently compared to those in the social condition ( $M = 5.12$ ).

**Discussion and Implications** The findings suggest participants primed with parenting roles exhibited greater risk perception and less favorable brand attitudes toward a luxury brand featuring a disabled person compared to those in the social condition. This aligns with prior research indicating that individuals tend to adopt more risk-averse attitudes when primed with parental care cues. These results underscore the importance of considering the psychological context in which advertising is presented, particularly for luxury brands seeking to embrace inclusivity in their marketing strategies. Our findings imply that activating social aspects (e.g., social gatherings/parties) rather than parental care may be more effective in fostering positive brand perceptions and attitudes, particularly inclusive advertising featuring individuals with disabilities. The implications extend to the marketing strategy development, suggesting that luxury brands aiming to engage in inclusive advertising should carefully consider the activation of social cues within their retail/advertising settings. By emphasizing social aspects such as friendship and community, luxury brands may be better positioned to cultivate positive brand

attitudes and mitigate perceived risks among consumers. Future research plans to test whether women with parenting motivation would be keener to the ingroup's preference (e.g., bestselling, celebrity models) and conform, and whether it explains their attitude toward inclusive advertising of luxury brands.

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