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Title	Facebook and luxury fashion brands: self-congruent posts and purchase intentions
Author(s)	Wallace, Elaine; Buil, Isabel; Catalán, Sara
Publication Date	2020-04-07
Publication Information	Wallace, Elaine, Buil, Isabel, & Catalán, Sara. (2020). Facebook and luxury fashion brands: self-congruent posts and purchase intentions. <i>Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management</i> . doi:10.1108/JFMM-09-2019-0215
Publisher	Emerald
Link to publisher's version	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-09-2019-0215">https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-09-2019-0215</a>
Item record	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10379/16029">http://hdl.handle.net/10379/16029</a>
DOI	<a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-09-2019-0215">http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-09-2019-0215</a>

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## Facebook and luxury fashion brands: self-congruent posts and purchase intentions

Journal:	<i>Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management</i>
Manuscript ID	JFMM-09-2019-0215.R1
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	Luxury fashion, Facebook, Self-congruence, Materialism, The self, Purchase intention

## Facebook and luxury fashion brands: self-congruent posts and purchase intentions

### **Abstract:**

**Purpose:** This study explores consumers' self-congruence with luxury fashion brands they mention on Facebook. It investigates the extent to which those brands are congruent with the actual self (ASC) or the ideal self (ISC), and whether ASC or ISC of luxury fashion brands on Facebook predicts purchase intention. It also examines trait antecedents of both ASC and ISC Facebook mentions of luxury fashion brands, specifically materialism, self-monitoring, and self-esteem.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Findings are presented from a survey of Facebook users who mention luxury fashion brands on the social medium.

**Findings:** Self-esteem was revealed as an antecedent of ASC luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook, while materialism and high self-monitoring predicted ISC luxury fashion brands. Only ASC luxury fashion brands mentioned online were positively associated with purchase intention.

**Research limitations/implications:** Results are exploratory and they are limited to those who are active Facebook users, and who mention a luxury fashion brand on Facebook.

**Practical implications:** The study offers implications for managers of luxury fashion brands seeking to utilise Facebook to enhance the purchase intention for their brands or to increase the idealization of the brand.

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3 **Originality/value:** The paper provides new insights into the relationship between self-  
4 congruent mentions of luxury fashion brands on Facebook and purchase intention of  
5 those brands, distinguishing between ISC and ASC. This research also offers valuable  
6 and useful insights into ISC and ASC antecedents.  
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15 **Keywords:** Luxury Fashion, Facebook, Self-congruence, Materialism, the Self,  
16 Purchase Intention.  
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23 **Article Classification:** Research paper.  
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# Facebook and luxury fashion brands: self-congruent posts and purchase intentions

## 1. Introduction

Do Facebook posts about fashion reflect consumers' reality? Extant literature is divided on the relationship between the virtual and the actual. For instance, Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) suggest that social media such as Facebook offer a means for individuals to continue offline relationships, and so there is little difference between the 'real' self, and the ideal or actual self that is presented on Facebook. Similarly, Back *et al.* (2010) argue that false, idealised identities are difficult to present on Facebook, as Facebook friends would question the validity of the post, given their knowledge of the 'real' person. On the other hand, Schau and Gilly (2003) assert that the Facebook post reflects an idealised self and online posts may not reflect the person's material reality. In other words, when someone posts about a brand, such as luxury fashion, on Facebook, this may be for the purpose of self-expression and impression management, and have little relation to their intention to purchase that brand offline.

This study seeks to address the gap in knowledge about online and offline self-presentation through brands, by exploring consumers' self-congruence with brands they mention on Facebook, and investigating the extent to which those brands are congruent with the actual self (who they are) or the ideal self (the expansion of the self). In addition, it examines the relationship between actual self-congruence (ASC) and ideal self-congruence (ISC) Facebook mentions and purchase intention, and it investigates trait antecedents of both ASC and ISC mentions.

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3 Drawing on theories of conspicuous consumption, this study focuses specifically  
4 on Facebook mentions about luxury fashion brands. Despite the extensive literature on  
5 luxury branding, there is still no consensus definition of luxury brand (Ko, Costello and  
6 Taylor, 2019). As noted by Kapferer (1997, p. 251), 'the problem with the word 'luxury'  
7 is that it is at once a concept (a category), a subjective impression and a polemical term,  
8 often subjected to moral criticism'. According to Heine (2012, p. 60), luxury brands are  
9 those with 'a high level of price, quality, aesthetics, rarity, extraordinariness, and a high  
10 degree of non-functional associations'. More recently, Ko *et al.* (2019, p. 40) propose  
11 that a luxury brand is:

12 'a branded product or service that consumers perceive to: 1) be high quality; 2)  
13 offer authentic value via desired benefits, whether functional or emotional; 3)  
14 have a prestigious image within the market built on qualities such as artisanship,  
15 craftsmanship, or service quality; 4) be worthy of commanding a premium price;  
16 and 5) be capable of inspiring a deep connection, or resonance, with the  
17 consumer'.

18 Common to the definitions is the idea that luxury brands have a strong  
19 connection with the consumer. These brands 'go beyond functionality and emphasise  
20 the status and image of an individual' (Liu, Mizerski and Soh, 2012, p. 924). Indeed,  
21 luxury brands are particularly helpful in shaping identity through self-expression (Belk,  
22 2013). While much of the extant literature on luxury branding focuses on the brand in  
23 the offline, physical reality, Facebook posts about luxury fashion brands are also a form  
24 of conspicuous consumption, because conspicuous consumption is defined as 'the social  
25 and public visibility surrounding the consumption of a product' (Piron, 2000, p. 209).  
26 Given the highly visible nature of Facebook, and the opportunity it provides for self-

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3 presentation (Hollenbeck and Kaikiti, 2012), luxury fashion brands mentioned on  
4  
5 Facebook are an ideal focus for this study.  
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8 Due to its network structure, Facebook offers unique advantages for those who  
9  
10 love luxury fashion brands. First, when a consumer 'Likes' a luxury brand's Facebook  
11  
12 page, that brand's new posts appear directly on the consumer's newsfeed on their  
13  
14 personal Facebook page (Pentina, Guilloux and Micu, 2018). This presents  
15  
16 opportunities for self-presentation through 'Liking' the luxury brand, as the luxury  
17  
18 brand becomes part of the consumer's virtual identity, and the brand persona is linked to  
19  
20 the individual (Hollenbeck and Kaikiti, 2012). Second, unlike other social media,  
21  
22 Facebook is a reciprocal network. That is, when person A befriends person B on  
23  
24 Facebook, person B automatically becomes friends with person A too, and receives  
25  
26 updates from Person A's newsfeed (Trusov, Bodapati and Bucklin, 2010). Therefore,  
27  
28 luxury brands that appears on Person A's newsfeed will be visible to Person B. In this  
29  
30 way, Facebook presents a unique opportunity to associate with brands that become part  
31  
32 of one's profile, where that profile is visible to all one's friends on the social network.  
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38 As Person A may associate with brands simply because they are aware of the  
39  
40 ability to impress Person B, it is possible that those brands are congruent with an ideal,  
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42 rather than an actual self. More generally, self-congruity with brands is thought to  
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44 enhance marketing effectiveness (Close, Krishnen and LaTour, 2009), and brand loyalty  
45  
46 (Kressmann *et al.*, 2006). However, less is known about the effect of self-congruence of  
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48 Facebook mentions on brand purchase intention. In recognition that Facebook posts  
49  
50 may bear little resemblance to an individual's offline reality (Schau and Gilly, 2003),  
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52 this research explores the relationship between ASC and ISC of luxury fashion brands  
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54 mentioned on Facebook, and purchase intention of those luxury brands. To the best of  
55  
56 authors' knowledge, this is the first study to investigate this issue.  
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3 Moreover, this study explores antecedents of ASC and ISC of luxury fashion  
4 brands mentioned on Facebook. Common to the literature on conspicuous consumption,  
5 luxury brand consumption, and self-congruence are the traits materialism (Rhee and  
6 Johnson, 2012), self-esteem (Pounders, Kowalczyk and Stowers, 2016; Sirgy, 1985)  
7 and self-monitoring (Bian and Forsythe, 2012; Hung *et al.*, 2011; Kauppinen-Räsänen  
8 *et al.*, 2018; Rhee and Johnson, 2012). Therefore, this research investigates these traits  
9 as antecedents of ASC and ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook.  
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20 This study makes a number of important theoretical contributions. First, drawing  
21 on self-congruence theory, it provides new support for the role of social media in  
22 fostering purchase intention. In previous research, Hutter *et al.* (2013) identified the  
23 positive effect of social media use and purchase intention. This study advances this  
24 knowledge as it is shown that ASC luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook are  
25 significantly associated with purchase intention for those brands, whereas ISC luxury  
26 brands mentioned are not. Second, this research shows that trait antecedents influence  
27 the self-congruence of luxury fashion brand mentions on Facebook. Specifically, higher  
28 materialism and higher self-monitoring are associated with posts about ISC luxury  
29 goods. When self-esteem is high, individuals will post about ASC luxury goods.  
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43 The paper is structured as follows. It opens with the literature review, which  
44 presents the theoretical grounding for the hypotheses and the conceptual framework.  
45 Then, the methodology is described. The results of the study are provided and the  
46 discussion examines those results in relation to the literature. The paper provides  
47 guidance for brand managers of luxury fashion brands. Recommendations for further  
48 research are presented, and conclusions are drawn.  
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## 2. Literature review and hypotheses

### 2.1 Facebook and the self-concept

Self-congruence, also referred to as self-image congruence, is ‘the match between consumers’ self-concept (actual self, ideal self, etc.) and the user image (or ‘personality’) of a given product, brand, store, etc.’ (Kressmann *et al.*, 2009, p. 955). Self-congruence can pertain to the ‘real’ actual self of consumers (Mälar *et al.*, 2011) or the ‘ideal’ self, which represents an aspiration or a means of self-improvement (Mälar *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, self-congruence with a brand may be reflected as ‘this brand’s personality is like who I really am’ (actual self) (Mälar *et al.*, 2011, p. 36), or ‘this brand’s personality is like who I would like to be’ (ideal self) (Mälar *et al.*, 2011, p. 36).

Extant literature (such as Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak and Sirgy, 2012; Graeff, 1996; Kaufmann *et al.*, 2016; Mälar *et al.*, 2011) has explored the influence of both ASC and ISC on consumer behaviour and brand outcomes. The literature has also suggested that congruity theory can be extended to studying consumer behaviour on social media. Facebook is a highly conspicuous medium where items mentioned form part of a virtual self (Belk, 2013). Consumers may wish to attain status through Facebook, because their mentions of luxury brands may signal something about their taste and status to others (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012). On the other hand, mentions of luxury brands may provide a virtual means of fitting in socially (Liebenstein, 1950), and a signal of membership of one group, and disassociation with another (Christodoulides, Michaelidou and Ching Hsing, 2009). Thus, individuals may choose to represent an ideal or an actual self on Facebook, cognisant of their social network (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012).

In Belk’s (1988) conceptualisation of levels of self, the symbolic meaning of possessions as consumption objects may differ. When individuals acquire products such

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2  
3 as clothing that extend the self, these items become a ‘second skin’, in which others see  
4 them (Belk, 1988, p. 151). Similarly, when individuals mention brands on their social  
5 media profiles, they do so, at least in part, cognisant of the impression this makes on  
6 others. A Facebook mention includes any Likes, comments, shares of photographs or  
7 video of the brand that appears in the individual’s Facebook profile. People often  
8 mention brands in this way, to maintain and enhance their sense of self on social media  
9 (Strizhakova, Coulter and Price, 2011). In line with extant research (e.g., Hollenbeck  
10 and Kaikati, 2012), this study acknowledges that, on Facebook, the presentation of the  
11 self may represent the actual self or ideal self. However, to date, little quantitative  
12 research has been conducted on the ASC and ISC of Facebook posts.  
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## 26 ***2.2 Conceptual framework and hypotheses***

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29 The conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1. The proposed model  
30 considers antecedents of ASC and ISC on Facebook posts about luxury fashion brands.  
31 It also investigates whether ASC or ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on  
32 Facebook predict purchase intention in the ‘real’ world. The theoretical support for the  
33 hypotheses is outlined below.  
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41 Figure 1 here.

### 42 ***2.2.1 Trait antecedents of self-congruent mentions of luxury fashion brands***

#### 43 ***2.2.1.1 Materialism***

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47 First, this study investigated the relationship between materialism and both ASC and  
48 ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook. Belk (1984, p. 291) defines  
49 materialism as ‘the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions’. As an  
50 extrinsic goal (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002), materialism is concerned with  
51 ‘making material possessions a central value in life, a sign of success, and a source of  
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3 satisfaction' (Rhee and Johnson, 2012, p. 257). Cohen and Cohen (1996) found that  
4  
5 materialism is associated with traits such as narcissism, especially among younger  
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7 consumers. Materialism also has long been associated with conspicuous consumption  
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9 behaviours (Chaudhuri, Mazumdar and Ghosal, 2011). Therefore, on social media, it is  
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11 likely that those high in materialism would take great care in their presentation of the  
12  
13 self, as a form of conspicuous consumption. Schau and Gilly (2003) also assert that  
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15 people use possessions to forge a narrative of the self on social media. The relationship  
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17 between materialism and the self-congruent nature of such posts clearly merits further  
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19 investigation.  
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25 In their study of apparel brands and adolescents, Rhee and Johnson (2012) found  
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27 that, offline, materialistic individuals were more likely to prefer brands that linked to the  
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29 ideal self, rather than to the actual self. On social media, one is less constrained by the  
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31 need to consume the good in the 'real' world, in order to display the good online and  
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33 enhance the virtual self-image (Schau and Gilly, 2003). In interviews with consumers of  
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35 Facebook brand pages, Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) found that participants tended to  
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37 self-report that brands that represented aspects of their ideal selves. Yet the study also  
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39 found some evidence of blending of the two identities (ASC and ISC), when consumers  
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41 found 'harmony between their ideal and actual selves' (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012, p.  
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43 401). However, their research did not investigate materialism as an antecedent of self-  
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45 congruent Facebook mentions.  
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51 To authors' knowledge, no study has fully investigated the relationship between  
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53 materialism and ASC or ISC of posts about luxury fashion goods. Therefore, to allow  
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55 for the possible influence of materialism on both ASC and ISC, and also consider the  
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57 influence of ASC and ISC as separate aspects of self-congruence, it is hypothesised:  
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3 *H1a: Greater materialism will be positively associated with the ASC of luxury fashion*  
4 *brands mentioned on Facebook.*

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8 *H1b: Greater materialism will be positively associated with the ISC of luxury fashion*  
9 *brands mentioned on Facebook.*

#### 10 11 12 13 14 2.2.1.2 Self-monitoring

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17 Offline, extant literature identifies self-monitoring as an antecedent of behaviour in the  
18 context of luxury brands (Bian and Forsythe, 2012) and status consumption  
19 (Lertwannawit and Mandhachitara, 2012). Therefore self-monitoring is of interest to  
20 this study. Self-monitoring is ‘the self-observation and self-control guided by situational  
21 cues to social appropriateness’ (Snyder, 1974, p. 526). Individuals can be high or low  
22 self-monitors. While low self-monitors maintain a consistent presentation of the self in  
23 all situations (Rose and DeJesus, 2007), high self-monitors are concerned with the  
24 situational appropriateness of behaviour (Gangstead and Snyder, 2000), using  
25 surrounding cues to modify their behaviour. High self-monitors are therefore ‘people  
26 with a knack for presenting themselves in whatever way seems best for the social  
27 situation’ (Rose and DeJesus, 2007, p. 96).

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43 On Facebook, individuals seek to create friendships under a high degree of  
44 visibility (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012), with high self-monitors more likely to take  
45 care in self-presentation, to avoid censure, and to achieve approval from others. Just as  
46 those who are concerned about social disapproval will believe that others judge them by  
47 their purchases (Kim *et al.*, 2016), they may be more likely to worry about their posts  
48 about products on social media. Will high self-monitors be willing to present their  
49 actual, or their ideal selves on Facebook? If high self-monitoring individuals wish to  
50 present the self which achieves most approval from others, they are likely to post about  
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3 brands congruent with their ideal selves, but perhaps less likely to seek to represent their  
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5 actual selves. In order to fully investigate the relationship between self-monitoring and  
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7 self-congruence, it is hypothesised:  
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11 *H2a: High self-monitoring will have a non-significant effect on the ASC of luxury*  
12  
13 *fashion brands mentioned on Facebook.*

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16 *H2b: High self-monitoring will be positively associated with the ISC of luxury fashion*  
17  
18 *brands mentioned on Facebook.*

### 21 22 2.2.1.3 Self-esteem

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24 Self-esteem is ones' evaluation of their self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). People with high  
25  
26 self-esteem 'like, value and accept themselves, imperfections and all', and strive to  
27  
28 confirm their self-views (Mälar *et al.*, 2011, p. 37). People try to maintain positive self-  
29  
30 esteem, and one way to achieve this is through consumption of brands that are ASC or  
31  
32 ISC (Sirgy, 1982). Self-esteem has long been discussed in relation to self-congruence  
33  
34 (Kressmann *et al.*, 2006; Sirgy, 1982; Tuškej, Golob and Podnar, 2013), self-association  
35  
36 and luxury brands on social media (Walker-Naylor, Lamberton and West, 2012), and  
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38 self-congruence on Facebook (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012). Therefore, self-esteem is  
39  
40 relevant to this study.  
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46 Huber, Eisele and Meyer (2018) assert that both ASC and ISC are desired end  
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48 states and are therefore connected to self-esteem. Sirgy (2018) observed that consumers  
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50 seek to consume goods and services to help them realise their ideal selves, thereby  
51  
52 boosting their self-esteem. He asserts that 'actual self-congruity is motivated by a need  
53  
54 for self-constancy', whereas 'ideal self-congruity (ISC) is motivated by a need for self-  
55  
56 esteem' (Sirgy, 2018, p. 200). In their research on brand attachment, Mälar *et al.* (2011,  
57  
58 p. 45) suggested that consumers with high self-esteem prefer ASC brands, 'because of a  
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3 self-verification process', while consumers with low self-esteem prefer ISC brands, for  
4  
5 self-enhancement. In summary, extant literature would suggest that higher self-esteem  
6  
7 would predict preference for ASC brands.  
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10 Yet extant research is limited in relation to virtual conspicuous consumption via  
11  
12 brands mentioned on Facebook, where consumption is virtual. In line with the literature  
13  
14 regarding offline brand preferences, Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) found that  
15  
16 Facebook users with higher self-esteem were more likely to link to ASC brands,  
17  
18 because they were sufficiently confident to reveal their true selves on Facebook. These  
19  
20 findings contribute substantially to understanding self-congruence on social media.  
21  
22 However, their study was qualitative in nature and relationships between self-esteem  
23  
24 and ASC and ISC require further testing. Drawing on extant literature, it is hypothesised  
25  
26 that greater self-esteem will predict ASC brands, but will not be significant in predicting  
27  
28 ISC brands.  
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34 *H3a: High self-esteem will be positively associated with the ASC of luxury fashion*  
35  
36 *brands mentioned on Facebook.*  
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39 *H3b: High self-esteem will have a non-significant effect on the ISC of luxury fashion*  
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41 *brands mentioned on Facebook.*  
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#### 45 *2.2.2 Outcomes of ASC and ISC luxury fashion brand mentions: Luxury fashion brand* 46 47 *purchase intention* 48 49

50 Consistent with extant literature on luxury brands (for example Eastman *et al.*, 2018;  
51  
52 Giovannini, Xu and Thomas, 2015; Hung *et al.*, 2011), this study also investigates  
53  
54 purchase intention of luxury fashion brands. As Hung *et al.* (2011, p. 458) noted 'much  
55  
56 remains to be understood behind the motivating factors behind the purchase intention  
57  
58 for luxury brands'. They assert that purchase intention 'has wider implications and will  
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3 often have a positive effect on an individual's actions' (Hung *et al.*, 2011, p. 458). This  
4  
5 study sought to understand purchase intention as behavioural effect (Fritz,  
6  
7 Schoenmueller and Bruhn, 2017), as it has been suggested by the literature that  
8  
9 Facebook mentions may not match ones' actions offline (Schau and Gilly, 2003).  
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12  
13 Purchase intention is at the end of the affective stage of the hierarchy of effects  
14  
15 model (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961), and critical to understanding the relationship  
16  
17 between social media activities and the goal of developing consumers' willingness to  
18  
19 buy the product (Hutter *et al.*, 2013). Specifically, this research sought to consider the  
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21 relationship between both ASC and ISC, and purchase intention of luxury fashion  
22  
23 brands. In an offline context, Giovannini *et al.* (2015) asserted that, for luxury purchases  
24  
25 of young adults, the social motivation of conspicuous consumption had a positive effect  
26  
27 on purchase intention. Eastman *et al.* (2018) also found that status consumption affects  
28  
29 the purchase intention for luxury fashion. Is this also true when the 'consumption' of  
30  
31 the brand is through mentions on Facebook? Will individuals have greater purchase  
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33 intention for luxury fashion brands that they perceive reflect the actual self, or the ideal  
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35 self?  
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42 The concept of authenticity informs these hypotheses (Fritz *et al.*, 2017). As an  
43  
44 attribute, self-authenticity implies that the self is 'independent, original'... 'free from  
45  
46 strategic self-presentation' and the 'true self' (Fritz *et al.*, 2017, p. 326). Fritz *et al.*  
47  
48 (2017) found that ASC had a positive influence on brand authenticity, while ISC was  
49  
50 non-significant. In turn, brand authenticity ultimately enhanced purchase intention. To  
51  
52 add insights to the extant literature, this study therefore considered the relationship  
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54 between ASC and ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook, and purchase  
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56 intention for those luxury brands. Drawing on the work by Fritz *et al.* (2017), and  
57  
58 considering that individuals may mention brands on Facebook solely for the purpose of  
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3 impressing others, with little intention to purchase (Schau and Gilly, 2003), the  
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5 following hypotheses are proposed:  
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8 *H4: ASC of a luxury fashion brand mentioned on Facebook will have a positive effect*  
9  
10 *on purchase intention for the brand.*  
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13 *H5: ISC of a luxury fashion brand mentioned on Facebook will have a non-significant*  
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15 *effect on purchase intention for the brand.*  
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### 21 **3. Research methodology**

#### 22 **3.1 Sampling and research design**

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27 This study was based on a sample of University students in Ireland. Consistent with  
28  
29 previous research on luxury brands, this research sought to understand the student's  
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31 attitude because their perceptions tend to affect their long run behaviours, and because  
32  
33 students are more homogeneous in terms of their age, intelligence, and income, which  
34  
35 reduces potential effects of covariates in results (Liu *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, younger  
36  
37 consumers tend to start purchasing luxury brands at a younger age than their parents,  
38  
39 and their level of spend on luxury fashion goods alone is increasing (Giovannini *et al.*,  
40  
41 2015), therefore they are an interesting cohort for this study. In addition, previous  
42  
43 research on luxury brands has focused on students (e.g., Doss and Robinson, 2013;  
44  
45 Godey *et al.*, 2013; Eastman *et al.*, 2018).  
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51 Studies examining online methods of self-presentation have also focused on  
52  
53 student samples (Pounders *et al.*, 2016), and Belk (2013) argued that younger  
54  
55 consumers are more likely to see possessions as part of the extended self. Student  
56  
57 samples and samples of young consumers are also commonly used in related studies  
58  
59 such as self-congruence and brand preferences (Rhee and Johnson, 2012; Graeff 1996),  
60



1  
2  
3 materialism and self-monitoring (Bearden and Rose, 1990; Rose and DeJesus, 2007), as  
4 well as luxury brands and Facebook (Kim and Ko, 2012). Therefore, a student sample  
5 was considered appropriate for this research.  
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10 As noted earlier, this study focuses on the Facebook social network in particular,  
11 due to its advantages as a reciprocal network (Trusov *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, items  
12 mentioned on Facebook are very visible to others on the network, and can be utilised to  
13 enhance the presentation of the self to Facebook friends (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012).  
14 Furthermore, it acknowledges Tian and Belk's (2005) contention that persons outside of  
15 the home, such as in the workplace, reveal 'aspects of self', and may seek to extend the  
16 self by displaying personal possessions. It is suggested that an individual's Facebook  
17 page offers them a means to virtually display those 'aspects of self' in the out of home  
18 context.  
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31 To protect the respondents' identities, the study was distributed to all students at  
32 the Irish University, via a hyperlink within an email from the University's Students'  
33 Union. Respondents accessed the survey via the hyperlink which linked to the  
34 SurveyMonkey survey hosting site. As an incentive, participants who answered the  
35 survey in full were entered into a draw for an iPad mini 2. Two screening questions  
36 were included. First, participants were required to have an active Facebook account,  
37 accessed within the past month. Second, participants were required to have mentioned a  
38 luxury fashion brand on Facebook in the past year. To clarify the meaning of 'mention'  
39 in the study, respondents were told the following: 'For example you might have 'liked'  
40 the brand, or shared a photo of the product, or posted a selfie of you with the brand, or  
41 added a reaction emoticon to a post about the brand, or made a comment on your profile  
42 about the brand. These are all mentions of the brand'.  
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3 Following previous studies (e.g., Bian and Forsythe, 2012; Francis *et al.*, 2015;  
4  
5 Shukla *et al.*, 2016), the students were allowed to identify a fashion clothing or  
6  
7 accessories brand they classified as 'luxury'. By taking this approach we draw on  
8  
9 Kapferer (1996, p. 252) who stated 'what is luxury for some is just ordinary for others'.  
10  
11 The important point is that the individual who chose to mention the brand on Facebook  
12  
13 perceived the brand to be a luxury brand, and mentioned the brand with this belief in  
14  
15 mind. For them, the brand they mentioned served an expressive function as a luxury  
16  
17 brand. Therefore, the survey stated: 'Luxury means different things to different people,  
18  
19 so think about a brand that you would consider to be a luxury'.  
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24 In the survey, it was explained 'Clothing might include coats, shirts, sweaters,  
25  
26 jeans, shoes or other clothing you might wear every day or on special occasions.  
27  
28 Accessories might include sunglasses, wallets, headphones, scarves, bags, or watches'.  
29  
30 Respondents were asked to answer all questions in the survey thinking about the brand  
31  
32 they had mentioned on Facebook. Where more than one brand was mentioned on  
33  
34 Facebook by a single respondent, participants were advised to 'think about the brand  
35  
36 that comes to mind first' and to answer all questions thinking about that brand. In total,  
37  
38 completed responses were received from 138 respondents who had both an active  
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40 Facebook account, and had mentioned a luxury fashion brand on Facebook in the past  
41  
42 year.  
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48 A profile of the survey respondents is presented in Table 1.  
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50 Table 1 here.  
51

### 52 53 **3.2 Measures**

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55 The study elicited attitudes using the following measures from the literature (see Table  
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3 *Materialism* was measured using the Richins' (1987) scale. Items were  
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5 measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = 'strongly disagree'; 7 = 'strongly agree'), in line  
6  
7 with the literature.  
8  
9

10 *Self-monitoring* was measured using the attention to social comparison influence  
11 (ATSCI) scale by Lennox and Wolfe (1984). This scale was derived from the original  
12 self-monitoring scale (Snyder, 1974). In particular, the measure has a strong  
13 relationship with social anxiety (Bearden and Rose, 1990). Therefore it was considered  
14 appropriate for the study on Facebook mentions, as Facebook is socially visible. Items  
15 were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = 'always false'; 5 = 'always true').  
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25 *Self-esteem* was measured using the scale by Rosenberg (1965). In line with the  
26 literature, items were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = 'strongly disagree'; 5 = 'strongly  
27 agree').  
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32 *Actual self-congruence (ASC)* and *ideal self-congruence (ISC)* were measured  
33 using the direct measure of self-congruence, based on Sirgy *et al.* (1997). In line with  
34 the process outlined by Sirgy *et al.* (1997) the following statement was first presented:  
35 'Think about the luxury clothing or accessories brand that you mentioned on Facebook.  
36 Take a moment to think about that brand as if it were a person. Describe this person in  
37 your own mind using personality characteristics such as reliable, cool, etc.' Both ASC  
38 and ISC were measured using 5-point Likert scales, in line with the literature (1 =  
39 'strongly disagree'; 7 = 'strongly agree').  
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51 *Luxury fashion brand purchase intention* was measured using a 7-point Likert  
52 scale (1 = 'strongly disagree'; 7 = 'strongly agree') from Bian and Forsythe (2012).  
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### 3.3 Common method bias assessment

As this study relies on data from self-reported measures in a one-time survey, several techniques were used to address common method bias. Following Podsakoff *et al.* (2003), both procedural and statistical methods were employed. Regarding procedural methods, participation in the study was voluntary and the process guaranteed anonymity and data confidentiality. This reduced the possibility that participants responded artificially or in a dishonest way (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Moreover, the dependent and independent variables included in the questionnaire were introduced on different pages of the electronic survey, preventing respondents from inferring cause-effect relationships among the constructs. Regarding statistical procedures, a full collinearity test based on variance inflation factors (VIFs) was implemented. This test specifies that a VIF value greater than 3.3 suggests the existence of common method bias (Kock, 2015). Estimations showed that VIF values ranged from 1.071 to 1.181. Therefore, there is no evidence to suggest the presence of common method bias in this research.

## 4. Analysis and results

To test the proposed model, Partial Least Squares (PLS) Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with the software SmartPLS 3.0 was used (Ringle, Wende and Becker, 2015). PLS is more suitable when, as in this case, the sample size is lower than 250 (Reinartz, Haenlein and Henseler, 2009) and the conceptual model includes many indicators and latent variables (Chin, 2010; Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2011). The measurement and the structural model are described next.

#### 4.1 *Measurement model results*

First, the measurement model was assessed. The indicator reliability was evaluated based on the criterion that loadings should be higher than 0.6. Results suggested the deletion of two items of the materialism measure, four items of the self-monitoring construct and one item of the self-esteem scale, because they had factor loadings lower than 0.6. Once these items were removed, all standardised factor loadings were above 0.6, which indicates that individual item reliability was adequate (see Table 2). Moreover, the composite reliabilities (CR) of the constructs were greater than 0.7, which suggests that they are internally consistent (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). The average variance extracted (AVE) values were also above 0.5, which indicates that the constructs met the convergent validity criteria (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was also supported. In all cases, the square root of the AVE for any two constructs was greater than the correlation estimate for any two constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table 2 here.

#### 4.2. *Structural model results*

The analysis of the hypotheses was based on the examination of standardised paths. The path significance levels were estimated using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resampling iterations (Chin, 1998). The model accounted for 13.6% of the variation of ideal self, 10.1% of the variation of actual self, and 11.2% of the variation of brand purchase intention. The predictive relevance of the model was also assessed through the Stone-Geisser test. The results show that the  $Q^2$  value for the dependent variables was positive.

As can be seen in Table 3, the results indicate materialism predicted ISC positively and significantly ( $\beta = 0.275$ ,  $t = 3.434$ ), providing support for H1b. However, H1a was not supported, as the relationship between materialism and ASC was not significant ( $\beta = 0.149$ ,  $t = 1.484$ ). Self-monitoring was positively and significantly associated with ISC ( $\beta = 0.179$ ;  $t = 2.347$ ), and non-significantly associated with ASC ( $\beta = 0.055$ ;  $t = 0.520$ ), supporting H2b and H2a respectively. Similarly, as proposed in H3a and H3b, self-esteem had a positive and significant influence on ASC ( $\beta = 0.276$ ;  $t = 2.996$ ), but had no impact on ISC ( $\beta = 0.035$ ;  $t = 0.362$ ).

Regarding the relationship between ASC and ISC, and purchase intention of luxury fashion brands, the results show that ASC positively influenced purchase intention for the brand mentioned on Facebook ( $\beta = 0.238$ ;  $t = 2.571$ ), supporting H4. Similarly, as hypothesised in H5, ISC did not have a significant effect on purchase intention for the brand ( $\beta = 0.164$ ;  $t = 1.690$ ).

Table 3 here.

## 5. Discussion

This study draws on theories of the self-concept and conspicuous consumption to investigate the self-congruence of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook, distinguishing between luxury fashion brands that are congruent with the actual self (ASC) and those that are congruent with the ideal self (ISC), to identify trait antecedents of ASC and ISC, and to explore the relationship between ASC and ISC luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook and purchase intention for those brands.

Findings reveal that antecedents of ASC and ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook are different. The study indicated that materialism was

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2  
3 significant in predicting ISC, but not ASC. This finding adds to the existing materialism  
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5 literature, as it is seen that if ‘making material possessions... a sign of success’ (Rhee  
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7 and Johnson, 2012, p. 257) is important to the consumer, they are also more likely to  
8  
9 show brands on Facebook that reflect their ideal self. Moreover, the finding supports the  
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11 literature that suggests materialism is associated with conspicuous consumption  
12  
13 (Chadhuri, Mazumdar and Ghosal, 2011), as the materialistic individual is choosing a  
14  
15 brand that most reflects an ideal, rather than a brand that reflects the ‘true’ self. This  
16  
17 result also empirically supports previous qualitative findings by Hollenbeck and Kaikati  
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19 (2012) that individuals tend to express an ideal self on Facebook. This study finds that  
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21 this is more likely when the individual is more materialistic.  
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27 Furthermore, as expected, findings show that high self-monitors are more likely  
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29 to mention ISC luxury brands, but this relationship is not significant for ASC luxury  
30  
31 fashion brands. In line with Rose and DeJesus (2007), the results show that participants  
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33 on Facebook also wish to present themselves in a way that reflects them best, and  
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35 therefore choose to reflect an ideal self, rather than their ‘true’ selves, when they  
36  
37 mention luxury fashion brands on Facebook. It is suggested that the public nature of  
38  
39 Facebook, and the high degree of visibility of ones’ choices to the social network,  
40  
41 influences the selection of ISC luxury fashion brands by high self-monitors. The  
42  
43 relationship between ISC luxury fashion brands mentions and actual purchase intention  
44  
45 for those brands will be discussed later.  
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51 By contrast, this study found that high self-esteem predicted ASC luxury fashion  
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53 brands mentioned on Facebook, but was not significant in predicting ISC luxury fashion  
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55 brands mentioned. These findings show that people with a high self-worth are motivated  
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57 by the same need for self-constancy on Facebook as they are offline (Sirgy, 2018).  
58  
59 Again, the findings provide empirical support for the suggestions by Hollenbeck and  
60

1  
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3 Kaikati (2012) that higher self-esteem would predict ASC posts on Facebook, because  
4  
5 people are confident to reveal their true selves. In this research, this holds true for  
6  
7 luxury fashion brand mentions.  
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10 These findings therefore show a distinction between antecedents of ASC luxury  
11  
12 fashion brands mentioned on Facebook and antecedents of ISC luxury fashion brands  
13  
14 mentioned, even when the brands mentioned are all luxury fashion brands. These results  
15  
16 would suggest that some luxury can be considered 'real' to the self, and other luxury  
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18 can be considered 'ideal'. Further research would investigate this distinction between  
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20 ASC and ISC of luxury fashion brands, both in terms of their use for self-presentation  
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22 on social media, and offline.  
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27 Finally, this study sought to identify whether ASC and ISC of luxury fashion  
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29 brands mentioned on Facebook resulted in purchase intention for those brands. By  
30  
31 doing this, this research contributes to the extant understanding of motivating factors for  
32  
33 the purchase of luxury brands (Hung *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, the study distinguished  
34  
35 between ASC and ISC mentions of luxury fashion brands. The findings revealed that  
36  
37 only ASC luxury fashion brands are positively associated with purchase intention for  
38  
39 the brand. By contrast, the relationship between ISC luxury fashion brands mentioned  
40  
41 on Facebook and purchase intention for those brands was not significant. These findings  
42  
43 add insights to the contention by Schau and Gilly (2003) that individuals who post on  
44  
45 Facebook may present brands that are outside of their material realities, with little  
46  
47 intention to purchase them. Results show that those who post about luxury on Facebook  
48  
49 will intend to purchase those brands only when the brand is congruent with the actual  
50  
51 self. For young consumers with a more limited purchasing power, luxury brands can be  
52  
53 seen as 'desirable and a sign of achievement' (Godey *et al.*, 2013, p. 235). Further  
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55 longitudinal research should investigate whether the passage of time would influence  
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3 the relationship between ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook now,  
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5 and purchase intention at a future date.  
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8 Moreover, O’Cass and McEwen (2004, p. 34) suggest that luxury good  
9  
10 acquisition can be a form of status consumption which is private, to ‘value status and  
11  
12 acquire products that provide status to the individual’. It is suggested that individuals  
13  
14 who mention goods that reflect the actual self, are doing so to gain intrinsic benefits  
15  
16 from displaying their choice. These brands may be more ‘quiet’ luxury goods  
17  
18 (Kauppinen-Räsänen *et al.*, 2018), which are more discreet or minimalistic. Further  
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20 research would investigate whether ‘quiet’ luxury goods are more likely to lead to  
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22 purchase intention.  
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## 30 **6. Managerial implications**

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32 This study also has implications for managers of luxury fashion brands. Consistent with  
33  
34 the findings of Hutter *et al.* (2013), it indicates the importance of achieving social media  
35  
36 mentions in fostering purchase intention. Moreover, this research provides new insights  
37  
38 in this area, as it is shown that managers should be aware that individuals who post  
39  
40 about their brands may be reflecting their actual selves, or their ideal selves. Yet  
41  
42 findings indicate that only the brands that reflect the actual self will lead to purchase  
43  
44 intention. Earlier it was noted that brands that are ASC are considered to be more  
45  
46 authentic (Fritz *et al.*, 2017). If managers wish to enhance consumers’ perception of  
47  
48 ASC of luxury fashion brands, thereby enhancing purchase intention, they could focus  
49  
50 on messages about the authenticity of the brand, with messages about the brand’s  
51  
52 originality, and avoidance of strategic self-presentation.  
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58 By contrast, luxury fashion brand managers may wish to retain the exclusivity of  
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60 the brand, focusing less on immediate purchase intention, but instead ensuring that the

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3 majority of consumers perceive the brand's association with an ideal, not actual, self.  
4  
5 The findings show that high self-monitoring and materialism predict ISC mentions of  
6  
7 luxury fashion brands. To enhance ISC mentions, brand managers could ensure  
8  
9 marketing communications strategies would appeal to these traits. For example,  
10  
11 mentions of status, prestige, or social desirability associated with the brand may appeal  
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13 to highly materialistic individuals, and messages about reference group approval may  
14  
15 appeal to high self-monitors, leading them to post about those ISC luxury fashion  
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17 brands.  
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22 Managers seeking to develop and build relationships with consumers can benefit  
23  
24 from the insights of this study. First, findings show that ASC of luxury brands is  
25  
26 associated with purchase intention. Therefore, managers seeking to build immediate  
27  
28 consumption-based relationships with consumers should appeal to the 'actual self'. As  
29  
30 self-esteem was found to be associated with high ASC, appealing to the consumer's  
31  
32 self-esteem and self-worth could be a means to encourage them to think of the luxury  
33  
34 brand as congruent of the actual self. That is, linking the luxury brand to self-belief, or  
35  
36 to self-worth, could have a positive effect on ASC, thereby enhancing purchase  
37  
38 intention. Second, managers may wish to improve long-term relationships with  
39  
40 consumers, enhancing consumers' lifetime value. We advocate that luxury brands that  
41  
42 are perceived to be aspirational and appeal to the ideal self may enhance the long-term  
43  
44 appeal of the brand. As noted earlier, we suggest that mentions of exclusivity and social  
45  
46 desirability may enhance the perception of the brand as appealing to the ideal self.  
47  
48 Results indicate that an ISC brand may not be associated with purchase intention.  
49  
50 However, this result may be because the brand is perceived to be unattainable in the  
51  
52 short term, yet highly desirable. We note that our respondents are young consumers. We  
53  
54 suggest that these young consumers may build a bond with the brand that develops over  
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3 their lifetime, perhaps moving from advocates of the brand on social media, to loyal  
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5 consumers when older.  
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## 10 **7. Limitations and directions for further research**

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13 As with all research, there are limitations to this study. First, the study was conducted  
14  
15 with younger consumers. It is acknowledged that luxury brands may be unattainable to  
16  
17 some of this age cohort. However, earlier it was explained that extant research has also  
18  
19 sought to understand this age cohort in the context of luxury brands (Eastman *et al.*,  
20  
21 2018; Godey *et al.*, 2013) and younger consumers start purchasing luxury brands at a  
22  
23 younger age, and their level of spend on luxury fashion goods is increasing (Giovannini  
24  
25 *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, their views about ASC and ISC of luxury fashion brands  
26  
27 mentioned on Facebook have relevance for theory and practice. Related to this, the  
28  
29 sample size is limited by the fact that respondents were required to 1) have an active  
30  
31 Facebook account that they had used in the past month, and 2) have mentioned a luxury  
32  
33 fashion brand on their Facebook account in the past year. However, by screening out  
34  
35 other potential respondents, the study has provided solid insights about ASC and ISC of  
36  
37 luxury fashion brands, among those who choose to mention them on Facebook.  
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43 **Second, the study is limited to those who mention Fashion brands on Facebook.**

44  
45 **It is acknowledged that younger consumers may be likely to use many sources of social**  
46  
47 **media, and it is recommended that further research would explore findings on SNS such**  
48  
49 **as Instagram, which attracts young followers. However, as explained earlier, Facebook**  
50  
51 **offers unique advantages for a study about self-expression as, when one ‘likes’ a brand,**  
52  
53 **for example, it appears in one’s own news feed, potentially enhancing one’s image.**  
54  
55 **Moreover, unlike some other social networks, Facebook is a reciprocal network, where**  
56  
57 **friendships are dyadic. Therefore, one’s posts are visible to others one one’s network,**  
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3 and the potential for self-expression is arguably greater in this structure than in an  
4  
5 asymmetric network, where one follows a brand or individual, but that person or brand  
6  
7 does not follow back.  
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10  
11 Third, the study is cross-sectional and therefore does not consider the  
12  
13 longitudinal effect of Facebook mentions. Longitudinal research would consider  
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15 whether current Facebook mentions are affected by subsequent network response, and  
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17 whether this influences purchase intention.  
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20  
21 Fourth, respondents to the study are skewed female (62.2%). This may be  
22  
23 because female participants were more likely to have mentioned a luxury fashion brand  
24  
25 on Facebook, and those who did not mention a luxury fashion brand were excluded  
26  
27 from the study. Further research would be conducted to investigate whether insights  
28  
29 from a larger male sample who mention luxury fashion brands would provide new  
30  
31 insights into our conceptual framework.  
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34  
35 Fifth, the study did not consider brand evaluations post purchase. Graeff (1996)  
36  
37 suggested that brand evaluation may be more strongly correlated with ISC than with  
38  
39 ASC. Therefore, further research could consider brand evaluation following purchase  
40  
41 intention, as a further outcome of ASC and ISC. This may inform cognitive dissonance,  
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43 as consumers with greater ISC with a brand may feel more 'let down' if the evaluation  
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45 of the brand does not meet with expectations.  
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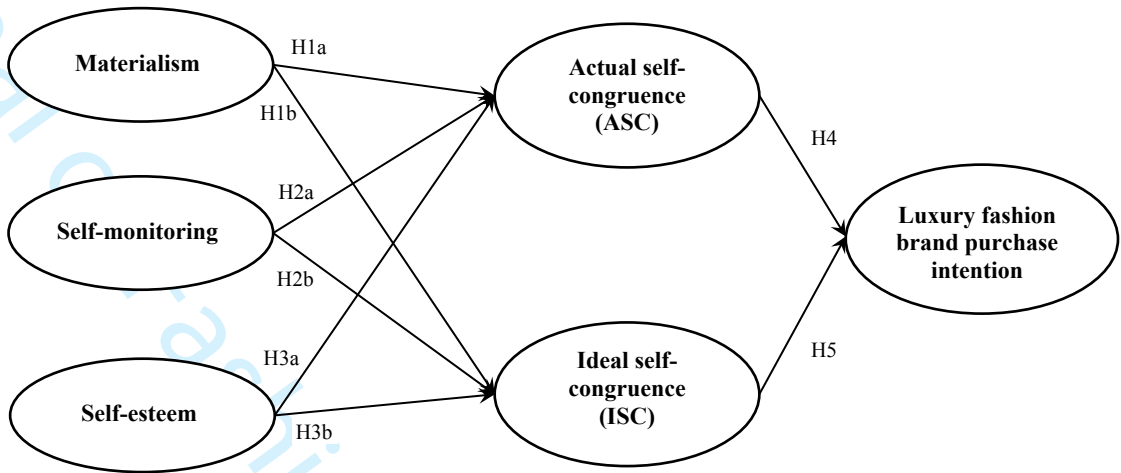
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**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework



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**Table 1.** Profile of survey respondents

Category	N = 138
Gender	65.2% = Female 34.8% = Male
Age	Mean = 21.4 years SD = 4.55
Nationality	92% = Irish 8% = Other
Employment status	52.2% = Yes 47.8% = No
Level of education	Current level of education: 84.8 % = Undergraduate Student 3.6 % = Higher Diploma 8 % = Masters student 3.6 % = Doctoral student
Has a Facebook account, accessed in past month	100% = Yes
Has mentioned a luxury fashion brand on Facebook in the past year	100% = Yes
Type of mention*	17.4 % = Profile activities/interests 83.3 % = 'Liked' or reacted to a post or message about the brand 71.7 % = 'Liked' or reacted to a photo or video of the brand 34.1 % = 'Liked' or reacted to a photo or video about the brand from a celebrity 18.8 % = Shared stories about the brand from friends 8.7 % = Shared stories about the brand from the manufacturer 29.7 % = 'Liked' or reacted to stories about the brand from friends 15.9 % = 'Liked' or reacted to stories about the brand from the brand manufacturer 17.4 % = 'Liked' or reacted to stories about the brand from celebrities 22.5 % = Shared a photo or video of me with the brand 20.3 % = Shared a photo or video of the brand 35.5 % = Tagged a friend in a story or post about the brand 1.4 % = Other
Number of Facebook friends	Mean = 690.98 friends SD = 403.40
How long do they spend on Facebook on a typical day?	Mean = 180.90 minutes SD = 116.10

Note: SD = Standard deviation from the mean. \* Percentages sum to greater than 100, as some respondents engaged in more than one type of mention.

**Table 2. Constructs, items, and measurement model results**

<b>Constructs and items</b>	<b>FL</b>
<b>Materialism</b> (CR = 0.854; AVE = 0.595)	
MAT1. It is important to me to have really nice things	0.796
MAT2. I would like to be rich enough to buy anything I want	0.792
MAT3. I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things	0.796
MAT4. It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I want	0.697
MAT5. People place too much emphasis on material things (r) <sup>a</sup>	-
MAT6. It's really true that money can buy happiness <sup>a</sup>	-
<b>Self-monitoring</b> (CR = 0.916; AVE = 0.551)	
SM1. It is my feeling that if everyone else in a group is behaving in a certain manner, this must be the proper way to behave <sup>a</sup>	-
SM2. I try to make sure that I am wearing clothes that are in style <sup>a</sup>	-
SM3. At parties I usually try to behave in a manner that makes me fit in	0.847
SM4. When I am uncertain how to act in social situations, I look to the behaviour of others for cues	0.767
SM5. I try to pay attention to the reactions of others to my behaviour to avoid being out of place	0.780
SM6. I find that I tend to pick up slang expressions from others and use them as part of my own vocabulary <sup>a</sup>	-
SM7. I tend to pay attention to what others are wearing	0.628
SM8. The slightest look of disapproval in the eyes of a person with whom I am interacting is enough to make me change my approach	0.685
SM9. It's important for me to fit into the group I'm with	0.806
SM10. My behaviour often depends on how I feel others wish me to behave	0.702
SM11. If I am the least bit uncertain as to how to act in a social situation, I look to the behaviour of others for cues	0.782
SM12. I usually keep up with clothing style changes by watching what others wear	0.656
SM13. When in a social situation, I tend not to follow the crowd, but instead I behave in a manner that suits my mood at the time (r) <sup>a</sup>	-
<b>Self-esteem</b> (CR = 0.925; AVE = 0.608)	
SE1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	0.709
SE2. At times I think I am no good at all (r) <sup>a</sup>	-
SE3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities	0.761
SE4. I am able to do things as well as most people	0.771
SE5. I feel that I have much to be proud of	0.820
SE6. I feel that I am a person of worth	0.801
SE7. I have a lot of respect for myself	0.714
SE8. All in all, I am inclined to think I am a success	0.815
SE9. I take a positive attitude toward myself	0.838

<b>Constructs and items</b>	<b>FL</b>
<b>Ideal self congruence (ASC) (CR = 0.923; AVE = 0.857)</b>	
IS1. The personality of this brand is consistent with how I would like to be (my ideal self)	0.906
IS2. The personality of the brand is a mirror image of who I would like to be (my ideal self)	0.946
<b>Actual self congruence (ISC) (CR = 0.867; AVE = 0.766)</b>	
AS1. The personality of this brand is consistent with how I see myself (my actual self).	0.936
AS2. The personality of this brand is a mirror image of me (my actual self)	0.810
<b>Luxury fashion brand purchase intention (CR = 0.960; AVE = 0.857)</b>	
BPI1. If I were going to purchase a luxury product, I would consider buying this brand	0.909
BPI2. If I were shopping for a luxury brand, the likelihood I would purchase this luxury brand is high	0.951
BPI3. My willingness to buy this brand would be high, if I were shopping for a luxury brand	0.939
BPI4. The probability I would consider buying this luxury brand is high	0.904

Note: <sup>a</sup> Item deleted in the validation process. FL: factor loading; CR: composite reliability; AVE: average variance extracted.



**Table 3. Results of the structural model**

	$\beta$ (t-value)	Expected result	Supported?
H1a: Materialism $\rightarrow$ ASC	0.149 (1.484)	+ Sig	No
H1b: Materialism $\rightarrow$ ISC	0.275** (3.434)	+ Sig	Yes
H2a: Self-monitoring $\rightarrow$ ASC	0.055 (0.520)	NS	Yes
H2b: Self-monitoring $\rightarrow$ ISC	0.179** (2.347)	+Sig	Yes
H3a: Self-esteem $\rightarrow$ ASC	0.276** (2.996)	+Sig	Yes
H3b: Self-esteem $\rightarrow$ ISC	0.035 (0.362)	NS	Yes
H4: ASC $\rightarrow$ LFB purchase intention	0.238** (2.571)	+Sig	Yes
H5: ISC $\rightarrow$ LFB purchase intention	0.164 (1.690)	NS	Yes

Note: \*\*p < .05; + Sig = positive and significant relationship; NS = non-significant relationship. LFB = Luxury Fashion Brand.