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The Effect of Advertising on Consumers Self-Improvement Motivation: When and How Advertising Motivates Consumers

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THE EFFECT OF ADVERTISING ON CONSUMERS
SELF-IMPROVEMENT MOTIVATION:
WHEN AND HOW ADVERTISING
MOTIVATES CONSUMERS

A Dissertation

by

SUWAKITTI AMORNPAN

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major Subject: Business Administration

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

July 2024

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ABSTRACT

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In today's modern world, advertising permeates nearly every facet of consumers' daily lives, from billboards over city streets to posts seamlessly integrated into social media feeds. The current research identifies a positive unintended consequence of advertising on consumer behavior: increased consumer self-improvement motivation. Across four studies, I find that exposure to mass (vs. luxury) advertising increases consumer motivation to engage in self-improvement. Specifically, I argue that because advertisements for mass (vs. luxury) products prime attainable (vs. unattainable) consumption goals, they increase consumer confidence in their ability to achieve their consumption goals (i.e., they enhance self-efficacy perceptions). This, in turn, puts consumers in a growth mindset, which fosters the motivation to improve one's standing in life in pursuit of those consumption goals. I find that these effects materialize for consumers to whom consumption goals are important, and thus establish consumer materialism as a moderator of these effects.

DEDICATION

The first person I would like to express my deepest gratitude to is my wife, Sasawan Heingraj. She has always been by my side, supporting and believing in me every moment. To my son, Kierin, who was born during the crucial phase of my dissertation journey: your smiles turned sleepless nights and intense work into joy. Thank you for giving me strength.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In today's modern world, advertising permeates nearly every facet of consumers' daily lives, from billboards over city streets to posts seamlessly integrated into social media feeds. Consumers are exposed to anywhere from 50 to 10,000 ads each day through numerous marketing channels (75media, 2024; Siteefy.com, 2024) and that number is likely only going to increase. For instance, digital marketing has seen tremendous growth over the last few decades. Google's ad revenue in 2007 was 16.41 billion U.S. dollars, growing nearly 13 times to 224.47 billion U.S. dollars in 2022 (Siteefy.com, 2024). Similarly, Facebook's Meta Ad revenue increased significantly from 39.94 billion U.S. dollars in 2017 to 113.6 billion U.S. dollars in 2022. Indeed, advertisers reach consumers through their digital devices in numerous ways, including through search engine results, website banner ads, influencer content, email campaigns, text campaigns, and mobile apps. One of the most significant advantages of digital advertising is it can target specific audiences precisely. Unlike traditional media, which often relies on broad demographic segments, digital platforms can determine users based on a wide range of criteria, including their interests, behaviors, and geographic location. This level of targeting ensures that ads reach the most relevant consumers, thereby increasing brand awareness, engagement, and sales. Digital advertising also provides interactive ad formats, such as video, animations, and clickable links, inviting users to actively participate and fostering deeper connections with the brand. Social media platforms further enhance this engagement by enabling two-way communication, where consumers can interact directly with brands through comments, shares, and likes. In addition, traditional forms of advertising are still powerhouses of

influence, particularly when used strategically alongside digital channels. For example, the global television advertising market, which includes commercials on broadcast, cable, and satellite TV channels, was valued at 235.9 billion U.S. dollars in 2023, according to IMARC (2023). Indeed, television advertising is particularly popular in industries such as the automotive industry, hotels and restaurants, insurance and financial services, and food and beverages. Similarly, print advertising (e.g., newspapers, magazines, brochures, and other printed materials), outdoor advertising (e.g., billboards, banners, posters), and direct mail also increase the visibility of advertising to consumers (Rabindranath & Singh, 2024). Direct mail advertising revenue in the United States was estimated at 13.2 billion U.S. dollars, accounting for approximately one-fifth of the direct mail advertising revenue worldwide (Statista, 2023). Thus, consumers are constantly bombarded through various channels with persuasive messages that aim to influence their preferences, perceptions, and purchasing decisions. Such exposure holds a profound influence over consumer behavior, shaping not only what consumers buy but also how they perceive brands, products, and societal norms (Eng & Keh, 2007).

Given the widespread and deep reach of advertising in consumers' lives, an important question arises: What are the effects of advertising on consumer well-being? Previous research has found that advertising positively and negatively influences consumer well-being. On the one hand, to facilitate consumer engagement, favorable brand attitudes, and purchase intentions, advertisements usually aim to evoke positive emotions such as joy, happiness, or excitement (Kang et al., 2020; Otamendi & Sutil Martín, 2020; Woltman Elpers et al., 2004). Advertising also often provides valuable information about product features, benefits, and uses. For instance, ads for technological products can inform consumers about the latest advancements and how these innovations can improve their daily lives. This informational role of advertising helps

consumers make better purchasing decisions and contributes to consumer confidence and satisfaction (Luo & Homburg, 2007).

On the other hand, advertisements can also have negative consequences on consumer well-being. For example, Selensky and Carels (2021) found that Victoria's Secret advertising, which features skinny female models, can negatively impact consumers' emotions about their bodies and decrease self-esteem. Also, advertisements can be viewed as a significant source of human dissatisfaction as consumers are exposed to products they covet but cannot attain. Indeed, increases in national advertising have been shown to be followed by decreases in national life satisfaction (Michel et al., 2019).

While there has been much progress in understanding the effects of advertising on well-being, a significant gap in our understanding remains. In particular, we know little about the effect of advertising on consumers' self-improvement motivations. The motivation to self-improve has significant implications for consumer well-being as it facilitates goal striving and achievement, which can enhance consumers' standing in life (Bauer et al., 2019). While previous research has investigated the role of consumer motivations as predictors or moderators in determining advertising effectiveness (Feng et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2012; Zhang & Mao, 2016), there is limited research investigating consumer motivation as a consequence of advertising.

My research attempts to fill this knowledge gap by investigating the following research questions:

RQ1: Does exposure to advertising influence consumers' self-improvement motivation?

RQ2: If exposure to advertising does influence consumers' self-improvement motivation, under what conditions does this influence occur?

RQ3: What are the underlying mechanisms of this relationship?

Specifically, I explore how mass vs. luxury brand advertising affects consumer self-improvement motivation. Relative to mass products, luxury products are positioned and advertised as conveying high quality and a sense of prestige, indulgence, and exclusivity (Berry, 1994; Ko et al., 2019; Tynan et al., 2010) and are perceived as being less attainable than mass products (Kowalczyk & Mitchell, 2022). While much of the prior research has focused on how the relative unattainability of luxury brands helps marketers of such products and services, the current research explores how such unattainability hurts the motivational potential of luxury brand advertising. Thus, I argue that advertisements that feature mass brands are more motivating for consumers with consumption goals than advertisements that feature luxury brands.

Across four studies, I find that exposure to mass (vs. luxury) advertising increases consumer motivation to engage in self-improvement. Specifically, I illustrate that because advertisements for mass (vs. luxury) products activate attainable (vs. unattainable) consumption goals, they increase consumer confidence in their ability to achieve their consumption goals (i.e., they enhance self-efficacy perceptions). This, in turn, puts consumers in a growth mindset, which fosters the motivation to improve one's standing in life in pursuit of those consumption goals. I

find that these effects materialize for consumers to whom consumption goals are important, and thus establish consumer materialism as a moderator of these effects. This dissertation reveals the significant impact of advertising on consumer motivation and behavior, emphasizing the crucial roles of perceived product attainability, materialism, and psychological mechanisms such as consumption self-efficacy and growth mindset.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

In this chapter, I present the theoretical background for my work and develop the hypotheses I will test in my studies. First, I discuss the documented intended and unintended consequences of advertising on consumers. Then, I argue that a previously unexplored unintended consequence of advertising is increased consumer self-improvement motivation. I review the goal literature to provide support for my predictions and to hypothesize that this effect occurs only when consumers perceive that the advertised products and services are attainable, which in turn increases consumers' self-efficacy, which then activates a growth mindset, and finally increases motivation for self-improvement. Finally, I argue that this effect should only attain for consumers who care about the consumption goal, and thus propose that materialism is a moderator of the effect. The chapter ends with an overall conceptual model and a summary of my studies.

Intended Consequences of Advertising on Consumers

The primary objective of advertising is to influence marketing-related or brand-related outcomes, such as market share and sales (Sutherland, 2020), awareness (Barroso & Llobet, 2012), purchase intention (Bayer et al., 2020; Dehghani & Tumer, 2015), and brand preference (Ayanwale et al., 2005). Indeed, research has found that advertising can enhance consumer purchase intention (Martins et al., 2019) by increasing consumers' awareness of products or services (Barroso & Llobet, 2012), providing consumers with product information (Chakravarti

& Xie, 2006; Fennis & Stroebe, 2020), persuading consumers (Mikołajczak-Degrauwe & Brengman, 2014) and improving brand image (Kirmani & Zeithaml, 2013).

When brands consistently advertise across various media platforms, consumers experience increased brand awareness (Sawant, 2012). This awareness means consumers are more likely to remember and consider the brand during their decision-making (Pae et al., 2002). Furthermore, effective advertising not only introduces a brand to consumers but also helps to build and maintain a relationship between them. Advertising can foster a sense of connection, emotion, and trust between a consumer and a brand, encouraging repeat purchases and long-term loyalty (Ghorbanzadeh & Rahehagh, 2021). Brand loyalty translates into increased sales and revenue streams, as well as positive word-of-mouth, which is essential in expanding the brands' customer base (v. Wangenheim & Bayón, 2007).

Advertising also plays a crucial role in determining consumer perceptions of product quality and value (Kirmani & Zeithaml, 2013). Advertisers can highlight the unique features, benefits, and competitive advantages of their products, which can place those products in a superior position in consumers' minds relative to alternatives. For example, luxury brands often use high-quality visuals and sophisticated messaging to convey a sense of exclusivity and premium quality, thereby justifying higher price points and appealing to status-seeking consumers (Ko, 2020). Yu et al. (2022) propose that comparative advertising, which highlights the superior qualities of one brand over its competitors, can also boost consumers' willingness to pay a premium.

Furthermore, advertising plays a crucial role in determining consumer expectations and satisfaction. Advertising helps to align consumer expectations with actual product performance

by setting clear expectations about what a product can deliver (Loef, 2002). This alignment is crucial for enhancing customer satisfaction and reducing the risk of disappointment (Fu et al., 2020). Research suggests that satisfied customers are more likely to become loyal consumers and brand advocates and contribute to brand equity (Torres & Tribó, 2011). Conversely, if advertising sets unrealistic or unmatched expectations, it can result in negative outcomes such as consumer dissatisfaction and negative word-of-mouth, which in turn, damage the brand's reputation (Souca, 2014). Therefore, honest and transparent advertising is essential for building trust and sustaining long-term customer relationships (Soh et al., 2009).

Finally, advertising can influence society and consumer well-being in positive ways (Chandy et al., 2021; Ghosh Dastidar et al., 2023). For instance, advertising can disseminate helpful information and foster positive attitude change through anti-smoking campaigns, road safety campaigns (Wundersitz et al., 2010), and health campaigns (Fennis, 2003). Advertising for well-being promoting products, such as gym memberships or meditation apps, can also foster consumer well-being (Gupta et al., 2021).

Unintended Consequences of Advertising on Consumers and Society

Advertising is designed to communicate messages from organizations to audiences to intentionally achieve marketing objectives. However, communication efforts can produce unintended consequences in both positive and negative ways (Xu, 2020). There are numerous calls for research to understand the unintended impacts of advertising on consumers, especially in terms of consumer and social well-being outcomes (Gilbert et al., 2021; Royne Stafford & Pounders, 2021) to prevent consumers from potentially negative effects. Xu (2020) proposes five

dimensions of unintended effects of advertising: 1) valence (undesirable or desirable), 2) level of analysis (individual or societal), 3) content-specific or content-diffusive effects, 4) target audience (intended or unintended) and 5) time-lapse (long or short term). These dimensions indicate the wide range of unintended effects of advertising in society. I will now discuss some of these unintended consequences and will organize my discussion using valence, the first dimension identified by Xu (2020).

Negative Unintended Consequences

Although advertising aims to inform and persuade consumers, it often yields several negative unintended effects beyond its intended positive outcomes. Advertising can negatively affect a consumer's self-concept or sense of belonging. For example, the use of models in fashion advertising can cause body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem among both target and non-target consumers (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2003; Hoplamazian & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014; Tiggemann & McGill, 2004) as they feel inferior or out-grouped from the models presented in the ads. Further, the lack of diversity in fashion advertising can lead underrepresented and underserved female consumers to feel excluded from the eyes of the brands and fashion industry (Atik et al., 2022; Cavusoglu & Atik, 2021, 2023). The lack of diversity in the fashion industry portrayed via fashion advertising remains, although brands and media are attempting to promote more diversity in their marketing communications.

Advertising can also induce negative health outcomes, particularly among young consumers. For instance, fast food advertising not only increases the occasional consumption of unhealthy food but also contributes to rises in childhood obesity (Chou et al., 2008). In addition,

exposure to alcohol advertising can increase the tendency for adolescents to start to drink alcohol or consume larger amounts of alcohol (Anderson et al., 2009). Henriksen et al. (2010) conducted a longitudinal study and found that exposure to cigarette advertising in stores was positively related to smoking initiation among adolescents. Thus, messages in advertising can negatively impact consumers, particularly among vulnerable populations like young consumers.

Furthermore, advertising has the power to shape cultural norms and values (Abokhoza et al., 2019) and influence perceptions of beauty, success, and lifestyle (Royne Stafford & Pounders, 2021). Exposure to advertisements can create desires that can lead to changes in consumption patterns. For instance, a consumer may purchase products not out of necessity but to fulfill emotional or psychological desires created by advertising (Dimofte et al., 2015). This behavior can contribute to consumerism and materialism, where personal and social worth is associated with the acquisition and possession of goods (McNaught, 2021; Sirgy et al., 2012; Xu, 2020). This emphasis on materialism can lead to negative social and psychological outcomes, such as parent-child conflict and life dissatisfaction (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003).

The negative unintended effects of advertising are crucial in the context of consumer well-being. Table 1 shows the negative unintended effects of advertising that have been investigated in previous literature.

Table 1: Negative Unintended Effects of Advertising in Previous Literature

| Citation | Advertising Type | Key Findings |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2003) | Television | Idealized female thin images increased body dissatisfaction among girls. |
| Hoplamazian and Knobloch-Westerwick (2014) | Printed | White participants reported lower self-esteem after viewing lower-status Black models in advertisements. |
| Tiggemann and McGill (2004) | Magazines | The images of thin-idealized females in advertisements increased negative mood and body satisfaction among women. |
| Cavusoglu and Atik (2023) | Any types | Minority consumers perceived a sense of social exclusion from the fashion industry. |
| Chou et al. (2008) | Television | Fast-food advertising was positively associated with child obesity. |
| Anderson et al. (2009) | Mass media | Alcohol advertising is associated with alcohol drinking initiation and behaviors. |
| Dimofte et al. (2015) | Experiments | Perceived inferior identity from advertising decreased consumer self-esteem. |
| McNaught (2021) | Any types | Advertisements are positively associated with consumerism in children. |
| Sirgy et al. (2012) | Television | Advertisements cause materialism, standards comparison, negative self-evaluations, and life dissatisfaction. |

Positive Unintended Consequences

On the other hand, advertising can also have positive unintended effects on consumers. For instance, some advertisements promote positive social change by challenging societal norms and stereotypes. Ads that feature diverse families break traditional gender roles, or highlight social issues such as racism or LGBTQ+ rights can contribute to broader social acceptance and inclusivity (Eisend et al., 2023). These advertisements can help to normalize diversity and encourage positive social attitudes, even if their primary goal is to connect with the consumer to sell a product (Campbell et al., 2023; Eisend et al., 2023; Nölke, 2018).

Advertising can also increase consumer psychological well-being. For instance, advertising can trigger feelings of self-esteem and inclusion among consumers who can relate to the models (Dimofte et al., 2015; Henderson et al., 2023). For instance, Henderson and colleagues (2023) find that ads featuring multi-racial ensembles can improve feelings of inclusion and societal identification among minority consumers. In addition, advertising can promote a sense of environmental mastery, openness to new experiences, purpose in life, and autonomy (Oprea et al., 2016). It may also induce inspiration and a sense of gratitude (Chang, 2020).

Finally, advertising stimulates consumer demand, which promotes economic growth (Van der Wurff et al., 2008). Businesses can utilize advertising to create awareness and generate interest in their products and services, encouraging consumers to purchase and increasing overall spending. This increased consumption leads to higher revenues for businesses, which in turn benefits the economic conditions in society (Kopf et al., 2011). Thus, advertising has a complex and multifaceted impact on consumers, with both positive and negative, as well as intended and

unintended effects. While it can provide valuable information, foster brand loyalty, and promote positive social change, it can also promote consumerism, exclude underrepresented consumers, and negatively influence consumers' health and behavior. Understanding these effects is crucial for developing responsible advertising practices that balance commercial objectives with the well-being of consumers and society.

Although there are some positive unintended effects of advertising, scholars still need more research to understand the impacts of advertising on consumer and societal well-being under Transformative Advertising Research (TAR) (Gilbert et al., 2021; Gurrieri et al., 2022). This research theme aims to investigate the better outcomes of advertising. To respond to this call, the current research explores another positive unintended effect of advertising on consumers that has not yet been explored by the literature. Specifically, I investigate the effect of exposure to advertising on a consumer's motivation to improve themselves. I now turn to the extant literature on consumer motivation and advertising.

Advertising and Consumer Motivation

Consumer Goals and Motivation

Goals, or desired end states, play an important role in consumers' purposive behavior (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 1999). Goal setting involves the identification of desired end states, the formation of intentions to achieve those desired end states, and the appraisal of means to achieve them. When choosing goals, consumers can be influenced by external factors, internal motivations, and conscious decision-making processes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For instance, some goals include the fulfillment of basic human needs; consumers are motivated to satisfy biological needs (e.g., hunger or thirst), psychological needs (e.g., belongingness or self-esteem), and social

needs (e.g., recognition or status; (Maslow & Lewis, 1987). Unattained goals and unmet needs create a state of tension or discomfort, known as a “drive,” which motivates individuals to engage in behaviors that will reduce or satisfy that tension and fulfill their goals and needs. Goal striving encompasses the planning, initiation, and regulation of actions necessary to achieve goals. For example, consumers who set improved health as their desired end state will find ways to achieve this goal via various actions (e.g., exercising, eating healthy, and getting enough sleep). Products and services can assist consumers in achieving their goals (e.g., gym, healthy food, personal trainer), if consumers are motivated to do so.

Motivation is goal-directed arousal (Park & Mittal, 1985) and consumer motivation refers to the internal drive that prompts individuals to purchase goods and services to achieve their goals. Consumer motivations play an important role in consumer behavior (Xiao et al., 2022) and can be considered as one of the most important predictors of consumer purchase decisions (Akram et al., 2021). For instance, a consumer could buy a car to meet their need for transportation, they could buy a new phone to achieve happiness or excitement, or they could buy shoes by a particular brand to fit in with an aspirational group. Consumers can also view specific products and services as goals in and of themselves, such as a consumer who saves money to purchase her dream car for the sole sake of owning that car. Or, consumers could be motivated to engage in consumption in general, rather than wanting a specific product or service, because consumption itself can satisfy deeper needs. For instance, the ability to consume can provide a sense of freedom (Varman & Vikas, 2007), offer leisure and fun (Butsch, 1990) and improve one’s mood (Atalay & Meloy, 2011).

Research has investigated the roles of motivations as predictors or moderators of advertising effectiveness. Table 2 demonstrates the roles of consumer motivations that have been studied in previous literature.

Table 2: The Roles of Consumer Motivations on Advertising Effectiveness Literature

| Citation (Authors, year) | Advertising Type | Role of Motivation | Outcomes |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Feng et al. (2016) | Mobile Advertising | Mediators | Attitude Toward Advertising |
| Taylor et al. (2012) | Online Advertising | Independent Variable | Online Ad Sharing |
| Zhang and Mao (2016) | Online Advertising | Independent Variables | Ad clicks, Purchase Intention, WOM |
| Rodgers (2002) | Banners | Moderator | Attitude Toward Ad, Ad clicks |
| Chebat et al. (2003) | Experiments | Moderator | Advertising Readability |
| Carlson et al. (2022) | Social media | Independent Variables | Trust in Social Media Ad |
| Sook Kwon et al. (2014) | Twitter | Independent Variables | Following Brands |

There is limited research investigating consumer motivation as a consequence of advertising. Thus, this research aims to fill this gap by investigating the effect of advertising on consumer motivation, which I discuss this relationship drawing from the theory of goal pursuit.

The Effect of Advertising on Consumer Motivation and Goal Pursuit

Advertisements often activate consumer goals and motivations by presenting desirable outcomes and making certain goals salient (Labroo & Lee, 2006). For example, an advertisement showcasing a fit individual using a particular brand of running shoes can activate fitness and health goals in the viewer. Moreover, advertisements contribute to the formation of new goals by highlighting problems or needs that consumers may not have previously considered, inducing them to set new objectives. For instance, the aforementioned consumer may now have a new goal of attaining the running shoes featured in the advertisement. Advertising may also more broadly activate the goal of consumption in general, without a particular product or service in mind (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003; Oprea et al., 2014).

According to goal priming theory, goal priming theory posits that exposing individuals to certain stimuli can activate specific goals, influencing their subsequent thoughts, behaviors, and attitudes without their conscious awareness (Aarts et al., 2008; Bargh et al., 2001). Goal priming operates on the principle that our cognitive systems are highly interconnected. When a specific goal is primed, related concepts and actions become more accessible and likely to influence behavior. This process is often subconscious and can be triggered by various cues, such as words, images, or environments. For example, Bargh et al. (2001) demonstrated that participants exposed to words related to achievement (e.g., win, succeed) subsequently performed better on tasks requiring persistence and effort. The priming effect occurs because the stimuli activate mental representations of the goal, which then guide behavior in line with the primed goal. Moreover, Papies and Hamstra (2010) also found that priming people with the goal of dieting can reduce the amount of snacks consumed, which enhances consumers' self-regulation in eating behavior.

Advertising also reinforces existing goals through consistent reminders and messages. Ads can strengthen consumers' commitment to goals by frequently communicating the benefits of achieving these goals. For example, financial institutions repeatedly emphasize the importance of saving and investing wisely, reinforcing consumers' goals of financial security (Sanayei et al., 2013). Additionally, advertising illustrates the process of goal striving, showing how a product or service can help consumers achieve a desired end. Consequently, consumers are more likely to understand the utility of a product in the context of their goals and increase their knowledge of their consumption, which in turn, increases product desire and purchase intention (Wang et al., 2019).

Consumer Self-Improvement Motivation

In this research, I focus on the consumer motivation to self-improve and the role of advertising in activating that goal. Self-improvement motivation refers to “a general desire to identify areas for improvement, learn and grow from mistakes, hold high personal standards, and be motivated to change” (Moffitt et al., 2018, p. 69). Self-improvement can lead to increased self-esteem, self-efficacy, and a sense of mastery, all of which are crucial components of well-being (Bauer et al., 2019; Breines & Chen, 2012). As individuals progress toward their goals and overcome challenges, they experience greater fulfillment and satisfaction with their lives (Zawadzka & Szabowska-Walaszczyk, 2014). Self-improvement motivation can come from various factors, including intrinsic factors such as personal values, interests, and passions and extrinsic factors such as rewards, recognition, and social approval (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Various self-improvement products are available in the market to help consumers achieve their self-improvement goals. For example, consumers who want to improve their health can

consider exercise programs, healthy food, supplements, etc., to fulfill their goals. A consumer who wants to have better emotional regulation can buy self-improvement books and meditation apps or hire a life coach. The purchase of self-improvement products can be driven by a desire to compensate for a perceived discrepancy in the self (Kim & Gal, 2014; Mandel et al., 2017). For example, consumers who feel less healthy than desired can buy gym memberships and supplements to resolve their self-discrepancy. Emotions can also lead to the desire for self-improvement. For instance, Allard and White (2015) find that feeling guilty can lead consumers to prefer self-improvement products, even in domains unrelated to the original source of the guilt, in an attempt to boost their self-perceptions.

Despite the marketing literature's attention to consumer self-improvement goals and products, there has so far been no investigation regarding the effect of advertising on a consumer's motivation for self-improvement. I turn now to a discussion of how advertising can activate consumption goals for consumers who espouse those goals and how such priming can lead to the activation of self-improvement motivations.

The Effect of Advertising on Self-Improvement Motivation

As previously discussed, consumers can have a general goal to consume, rather than a motivation to consume a specific product or service, because the act of consumption itself can meet specific needs like pleasure and freedom (Atalay & Meloy, 2011; Butsch, 1990; Varman & Vikas, 2007). And, as discussed previously, advertising can activate such broad consumption goals and motivate consumers to pursue it by exposing them to desirable products (Oprea et al., 2014). Financial resources are a critical means by which consumers can pursue consumption goals. Thus, I posit that activating the consumption goal through exposure to advertising will

motivate consumers to improve their standing in life so that they are able to attain their consumption goals.

My research considers how mass vs. luxury brand advertising may differentially activate the motivation to self-improve in pursuit of consumption goals. I will discuss the difference between mass and luxury brand advertising next.

Mass vs. Luxury Brand Advertising

Mass and luxury brands exist on the same continuum, and where one ends and the other begins depends on the subjective perception of the consumer. Relatedly, luxury products have been defined as “anything unneeded” (Sekora, 1977, p. 23), a definition which suggests that luxury is a relative term based on what a particular society deems as necessary (Berry, 1994). Luxury brands as those that are high quality, those that offer expensive and non-essential products and services that are perceived as rare, exclusive, and prestigious, and those that offer consumers high levels of authentic symbolic and hedonic value (Ko et al., 2019; Tynan et al., 2010). Indeed, a rich marketing literature documents the symbolic value of luxury brands to signal prestige, success, and exclusivity, both to other consumers (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996; Griskevicius et al., 2007; Han et al., 2010; Rucker & Galinsky, 2009; Veblen, 2017) and to the self (Pandelaere & Shrum, 2020). Thus, by design, luxury brands are harder to attain than mass brands due to factors including higher costs, product rarity, brand-selective distribution, and limited availability (Kowalczyk & Mitchell, 2022).

In general, consumers perceive luxury brands and mass brands differently based on various dimensions such as quality, status, emotional value, and consumption behavior. In terms

of quality, luxury brands are perceived as symbols of superior quality. Consumers associate luxury brands with superior craftsmanship, premium materials, and exceptional design (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). The perception of high quality extends to the overall brand experience, which includes exclusive shopping environments and personalized customer service (Wang et al., 2022). In contrast, mass brands are perceived more for their functionality and affordability. Consumers view mass brands as practical choices that deliver expected quality at a reasonable price, focusing more on utilitarian benefits than on exclusivity or prestige (D'Arienzo, 2016).

Notably, the status associated with luxury brands plays a significant role in consumer perception. Luxury brand consumption is often driven by the desire for social distinction and status signaling (Kapferer, 2017). Consumers use luxury consumption to communicate wealth, success, and social status (Nelissen & Meijers, 2011; Vigneron & Johnson, 2017). Luxury brands are particularly central to the concept of conspicuous consumption, as they offer products that are not only expensive but also carry a prestigious image that consumers seek to associate with (Wang & Griskevicius, 2014). According to Wiedmann et al. (2007), luxury brands provide symbolic value beyond functional utility, allowing consumers to exhibit their economic power and social standing through visible consumption. This form of consumption is often motivated by the desire to gain respect, admiration, or envy from others, reinforcing the consumer's perceived status within their social group (Hung et al., 2011; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). However, this status-driven consumption behavior is less dominant with mass brands, which are seen as more accessible for most consumers. Consumers typically choose mass brands for their utilitarian values rather than social-status benefits.

Luxury brands often evoke strong emotional responses, including feelings of pleasure, pride, and self-worth (Hung et al., 2011). This emotional attachment stems from the symbolic meanings attached to luxury goods and the experiential aspects of luxury brand consumption (Han & Kim, 2020). On the contrary, mass brands induce a more utilitarian emotional response. Mass brand advertisements often highlight the practical advantages of a product, such as its efficiency, reliability, cost-effectiveness, and utility. For example, an advertisement for a household cleaning product might emphasize how effectively it cleans various surfaces, saving consumers time and effort. While Consumers of mass brands may be satisfied with utilitarian benefits, they do not usually form deep emotional connections with mass brands (Aaker, 2012).

While much of the prior research has focused on how the relative unattainability of luxury brands elevates these brands in the eyes of consumers, the current research explores how such unattainability limits the motivating potential of luxury brand advertising. This is because in order for goal exposure (e.g., exposure to product advertising) to motivate consumers to want to engage in goal pursuit (e.g., desire for self-improvement), the goal needs to be perceived as reasonably attainable. I will discuss the construct of *goal attainability*, and its relevance to my theorizing, next.

Goal Attainability

Ideally, every goal is expected to be achieved. However, not every goal is achievable for everyone. *Goal attainability* is an important element of the goal-striving process (Pounders et al., 2017) and refers to “the subjective perception of opportunity, control, and support of goal pursuit” (Brunstein, 1993, p. 1062; Bühler et al., 2019). Consumers who believe a goal is achievable are more motivated to engage in goal pursuit. On the other hand, an unattainable goal

tends to decrease motivation for goal pursuit (Baron et al., 2016). For example, a consumer exposed to an advertisement featuring a slim model may experience the activation of their weight loss goal but feel discouraged about pursuing that goal if the model's body size seems unattainable to them (Hogg & Fragou, 2003). Therefore, goal attainability is an essential element that makes consumers eager or disengaged in the goal-striving process (Pounders et al., 2017).

My research explores *product attainability* in the context of the consumption goal. *Product attainability* refers to the perception that a person feels psychologically capable of affording and possessing products. Note that product attainability is not only product affordability (Notani, 1997) which is based solely on consumer purchasing power relative to the specific product. Product attainability also involves other factors, such as product availability, product accessibility, and distribution accessibility. For example, a consumer may be able to afford a Rolex watch, but other factors such as limited availability, product rarity, and brand-selective distribution, may make the watch unattainable to that consumer (Kowalczyk & Mitchell, 2022). In contrast, consumers who are not able to afford a product right now may still perceive the product as being attainable if they believe they will be able to afford it in the future.

Due to the high prices, exclusivity, and rarity of luxury products, mass products are generally perceived as being more attainable than luxury products (Brun & Castelli, 2013). Because unattainable goals are not motivating, I predict that when advertisements features luxury products, such exposure will not activate self-improvement motivation. Instead, self-improvement motivation will only increase when consumers are exposed to advertising featuring mass, or attainable, products, because exposure to such products will activate the consumption

goal and the desire to achieve a better life standing to pursue that goal. Therefore, I hypothesize the following:

H1: Consumers exposed to mass brand advertisements will have a higher degree of self-improvement motivation than consumers exposed to luxury brand advertisements.

Underlying Mechanisms

I argue that exposure to mass (vs. luxury) advertising will increase self-improvement motivation. In this section, I introduce two constructs that I posit may explain why this effect occurs. Specifically, I argue that when advertisements prime attainable consumption goals, they increase consumer *self-efficacy* perceptions. In other words, consumers are reminded of the products they want and can attain, and this helps them feel as if they can make their now-active consumption goals a reality. This, in turn, puts consumers in a *growth mindset*, which fosters the motivation to engage in self-improvement in pursuit of those goals.

The Role of Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her ability to execute required actions to achieve specific goals (Bandura, 1977). This concept has been widely applied across several disciplines, such as entrepreneurship (Newman et al., 2019), consumer behavior (Ben-Ami et al., 2014), healthcare (Lev, 1997), and psychology (Ajzen, 2002). In a marketing context, *consumption self-efficacy* refers to consumers' confidence in their ability to navigate various consumption-related tasks, such as purchasing decisions, product use, product attainability, and so on (Bandura, 1977; Ben-Ami et al., 2014). Consumers who exhibit a high degree of consumption self-efficacy will more confidently execute tasks to achieve their consumption goals. For example, if a consumer wants to travel by plane, he/she is required to decide on travel

dates, evaluate flight options, purchase a flight, and effectively navigate tasks at the airport. A consumer with high perceived consumption self-efficacy regarding airplane travel will be more likely to take on these tasks, while a consumer with low perceived consumption self-efficacy may consider using a travel agency or finding another way to travel instead.

Advertising can increase or decrease consumer consumption self-efficacy. For instance, advertisements can improve consumer perceptions of consumption self-efficacy regarding the consumption of specific products and services by providing detailed information about them, including step-by-step guides and demonstrations, to help consumers understand how to use them effectively (Delbaere & Smith, 2006; Eden, 2001). I argue that advertisements can also increase consumption self-efficacy if the product or service being featured is attainable to the consumer. On the other hand, advertisements of unattainable products and services can decrease individuals' internal self-efficacy (i.e., "I could never acquire that product") because it generates a sense of goal difficulty (Baron et al., 2016).

The Role of Growth Mindset

Moreover, this research also draws on the concept of implicit theories, including entity theory and incremental theory. Consumers who espouse an entity theory, or a fixed mindset, view individual characteristics as fixed traits. These consumers believe that people are born with abilities, skills, intelligence, and talent, and there is not much anyone can do to alter these qualities. Consumers who espouse an incremental theory, or growth mindset, on the other hand, believe that individual characteristics are malleable; abilities, intelligence, and talent can be developed and improved over time through hard work, perseverance, and learning from mistakes

(Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Individuals who have a growth mindset are more likely to improve themselves because they think their abilities and skills are changeable.

In sum, I predict that exposure to mass advertisements will prime consumers to perceive that their consumption goals are attainable, thus increasing consumption self-efficacy, belief in a growth mindset, and, finally, increased self-improvement motivation. I formalize these hypotheses below:

H2: Growth mindset mediates the relationship between exposure to advertisements and self-improvement motivation.

H3: Product attainability and consumption self-efficacy mediate the relationship between exposure to advertisement and growth mindset, respectively.

The Moderating Effect of Materialism

An important condition that determines whether goal priming activates consumer motivation is *goal importance*. If an individual does not view a goal as being important, they are less likely to respond to any goal activation (Carver & Scheier, 2001; Custers & Aarts, 2005a; Förster et al., 2007). For instance, Halliwell et al. (2007) find that media exposure to muscular male models can positively motivate consumers to engage in self-improvement behavior. However, this effect occurs only with consumers to whom muscularity is a relevant important goal; consumers without this goal do not experience such increased motivation.

Deci and Ryan (1985) and Ryan and Deci (2000) emphasize that goal importance is intrinsically linked to an individual's values and intrinsic motivation. Goals that resonate with an individual's core values and sense of self are perceived as important, thereby fostering a

motivation to pursue them. In the current context, the value of materialism can be used to measure whether the goal to consume is important to consumers. I predict that individual differences in materialism will moderate the relationship between exposure to mass advertisements and self-improvement motivations. Below, I expand on the materialism construct and explain its role in my predictions.

Materialism

Materialism has been studied in several disciplines, including philosophy (Wolfe, 2014), consumer behavior (Graham, 1999), marketing (Scott et al., 2014; Srikant, 2013), psychology (Dittmar et al., 2014), economics (Richins & Rudmin, 1994), and social sciences (Fox & Alldred, 2019). Larsen et al. (1999) propose two broad perspectives of materialism, including 1) a socio-cultural perspective where materialism is studied at the societal level and 2) an individual perspective where materialism is studied at the individual level. In their view, a materialistic society like the United States (Belk & Pollay, 1985) can foster materialism in its individual citizens through value transference and conforming to social norms.

From a marketing perspective, materialism has been defined and redefined to gain a better understanding of materialism and consumption. Richins and Dawson (1992, p. 308) define materialism as “a set of centrally held beliefs about the importance of possessions in one’s life.” The three dominant values in the context of materialism, according to Richins and Dawson (1992), are 1) *acquisition centrality*, the importance of material possessions and acquisitions that are important to materialists’ lives, 2) *happiness*; the belief that the desirable possessions cause people’s well-being, and 3) *success*; the belief that possessing material goods indicates individuals’ success. While Richins and Dawson (1992) focus on the personal value perspective,

reflecting the importance of possessions, Belk and Pollay (1985) define materialism as a composite of personality traits such as possessiveness, envy, and non-generosity. These traits influence one's tendency to acquire and value possessions. Kasser and Ryan (1996) also provide an association between materialism and goals. In their view, materialism is linked to extrinsic goals, where the focus is on obtaining rewards and approval from others rather than intrinsic satisfaction. Extrinsic motivations like financial success and social recognition are contrasted with intrinsic goals such as personal growth and relationships.

Another well-recognized perspective relies on identity goal pursuits to define materialism. According to Shrum et al. (2013), materialism is “the extent to which individuals attempt to engage in the construction and maintenance of the self through the acquisition and use of products, services, experiences, or relationships that are perceived to provide desirable symbolic value” (Shrum et al., 2013, p. 1180). Shrum et al. (2013) expand on prior definitions of materialism by 1) specifying the underlying motivations of materialism regarding the construction and maintenance of self-identity, 2) redefining the acquisition of products and services to include not only buying but also attaining through gifts, inheritances, or other means, 3) proposing materialistic behavior refers not only to acquiring products but also to use them (e.g., displaying a purchase to others), 4) and including not only products as the targets of acquisition but also experiences (e.g., vacations) and relationships (e.g. friendships, family) and 5) specifically refers to the symbolic nature of the acquisition and its ability to signal to the self or to others (e.g. the extended self; Belk, 1988).

According to the definitions of materialism mentioned above, the primary aspect relevant to this research is the importance of acquiring products, services, experiences, and relationships.

From this perspective, advertising is typically used to influence and attract consumers regarding brands' products, services, and experiences. Brands advertise their marketing messages to activate consumers' sense of acquisition (e.g., purchase intention) (Jovanovic et al., 2016), which should thus amplify materialistic consumers' desire for possessions. This desire is often driven by advertisements showcasing idealized lifestyles and desired products, making materialistic consumers feel that owning these items is essential for their happiness and success.

Materialistic Consumers and Advertising

Materialistic consumers tend to have positive attitudes towards advertising. Studies have shown that they are more likely to find advertisements appealing and entertaining. This positive disposition is partly because advertisements often portray desirable lifestyles and values that resonate with materialistic individuals. Pollay and Mittal (1993) suggest that materialistic consumers perceive advertising as a source of information about products that can enhance their social status and personal satisfaction. Maison and Adamczyk (2020) find that advertisements featuring materialistic values are more attractive and appealing to materialists, leading to a more positive perception of the advertised product and company. On the other hand, nonmaterialists perceive such communication more negatively, resulting in a decrease in their evaluation of the product and company. Richins (1991) also finds that materialistic consumers are more likely to be influenced by advertisements that highlight the social and emotional benefits of owning certain products. Status appeals, which emphasize the social prestige associated with a product, and aspirational appeals, which portray idealized lifestyles, are particularly effective on materialist consumers.

Furthermore, materialistic consumers are generally more responsive to advertising influence. They tend to have higher levels of brand consciousness and are more likely to be persuaded by advertising messages. This susceptibility can be attributed to their inherent desire for possessions and the belief that material goods can improve their lives. Additionally, materialistic individuals often exhibit lower levels of skepticism toward advertising, making them more receptive to persuasive messages (Chang & Arkin, 2002).

Materialism and Importance of Consumption Goals

Advertising can influence consumers' motivations by activating their goal to acquire products and, thus, their desire to improve their life standing in order to pursue their consumption goals. Because exposure to goal primes is more likely to induce motivation and goal pursuit among consumers who hold that goal as important, this effect is more likely to occur for materialistic consumers, who care the most about consumption goals, and less likely to occur for non-materialistic consumers, who care less about consumption goals. For example, an advertisement for a desirable automobile might be relevant and motivating for a highly materialistic consumer but not relevant whatsoever for a consumer who is not materialistic. Therefore, I hypothesize the following:

H4: Materialism will moderate the relationship between exposure to mass advertisements and consumers' self-improvement motivation, such that the effect will occur among high, but not low, materialists.

Conceptual Model and Study Overview

Figure 1 provides the conceptual overview of my research and hypotheses, and Table 3 provides an overview of my studies.

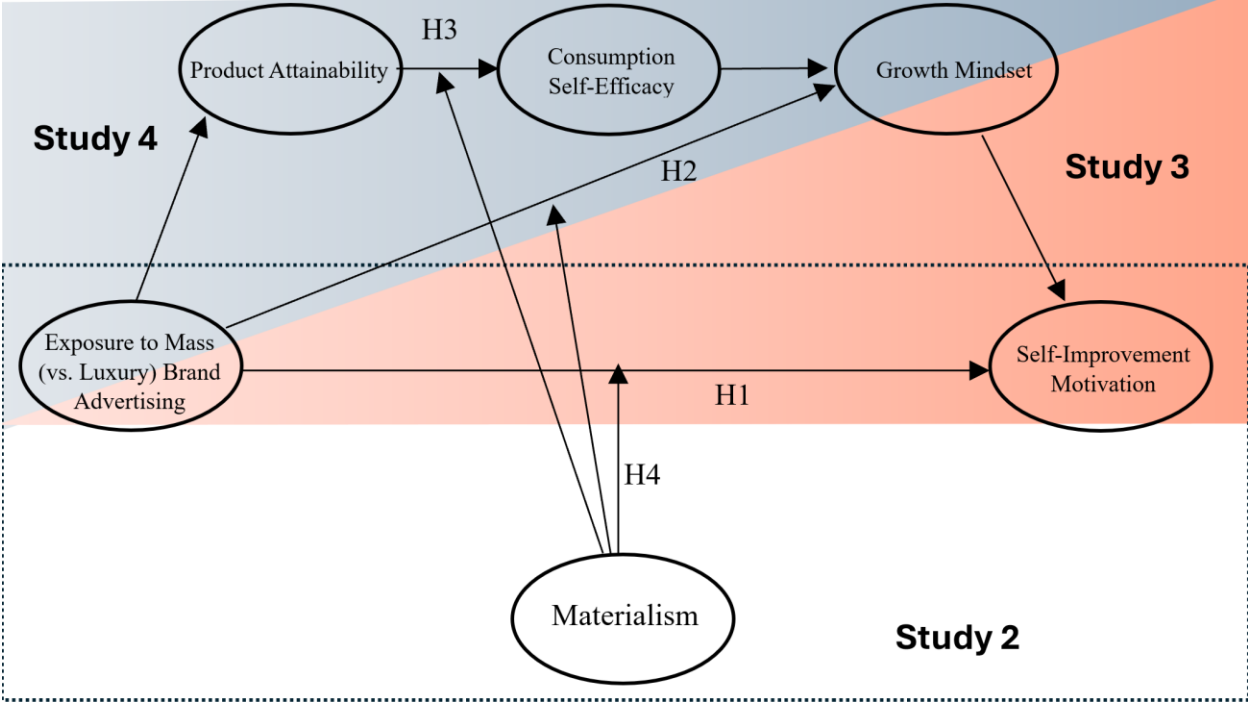


Figure 1: Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

Table 3: Studies and Objectives

| Study | Objective(s) | Hypotheses Tested | Research Method | Number of Participants |
|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Study 1 | Explore the effect of advertising on consumers. | Exploratory Study | Qualitative research (Interview) | 14 |
| Study 2 | Test the effect of exposure to advertising (Mass brands vs. Luxury brands) on consumers' self-improvement motivation. | <i>H1</i> and <i>H4</i> | Experimental design | 185 |
| Study 3 | Test the effect of exposure to advertising (Mass brands vs. Luxury brands) on consumers' self-improvement motivation and investigate the mediating role of growth mindset. | <i>H1</i> , <i>H2</i> , and <i>H4</i> | Experimental design | 270 |
| Study 4 | Investigate the relationship between exposure to advertising (Mass brands vs. Luxury brands) and growth mindset, and investigate the role of two mediators (product attainability and consumption self-efficacy) in this relationship. | <i>H3</i> and <i>H4</i> | Experimental design | 166 |

CHAPTER III
STUDY I: QUALITATIVE APPROACH

Introduction

This study adopted a qualitative-precisely (interpretative) phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994) to gain an understanding of consumers from their real-world experiences. This approach allows participants to express their thoughts and experiences about a particular situation that is not easily accessible through other research methods such as surveys, experiments, or database modeling (Arnould & Thomson, 2005). The primary purpose of this study was to explore whether advertising has an impact or an association with consumers' motivation and to investigate the mechanism involved in any uncovered relationship.

Although the focal product categories in this dissertation are mass brands and luxury brands, this exploratory study focused on luxury brand advertising because prior literature suggests that it can offer feelings of self-enhancement, superiority, and a privileged lifestyle to consumers (Goor et al., 2020). Previous literature indicates that the drive to afford luxury consumption may motivate consumers to pursue more career and financial success (Dhaliwal et al., 2020). From this perspective, I initially expected luxury brand advertising to be positively associated with consumers' self-improvement motivation. Therefore, this exploratory study investigated whether viewing luxury brand advertising can influence consumers' self-improvement motivation.

Methodology

Interview Procedure

Following the interview procedures suggested by Athwal et al. (2019), I adopted a purposive sampling approach and observed connections on social media platforms (i.e., Facebook and Instagram). Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

1) Active Social Media Users: Participants had to be active users of major social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or Instagram, with a minimum daily engagement.

2) Exposure to Luxury Brand Advertisements: Participants needed to have encountered at least two luxury brand advertisements on these platforms. The ads that appear in their social media feed can be the outcome of a retargeting technique from brands in social media (Zarouali et al., 2017). *Retargeting* refers to the use of consumers' previous online data, such as visited websites or searched content, to re-engage consumers who have previously interacted with a brand or website but haven't completed a desired action, such as making a purchase. It works by tracking consumers' online behaviors, such as visiting a website, clicking on an ad, or adding items to a shopping cart, and then showing them targeted ads on social media platforms based on their past actions (Goldfarb, 2014). Retargeting can be highly effective because it focuses on reaching users who have already shown interest in products or services. Therefore, if the participants have seen luxury brand ads on their social media, it is more likely that they have some interest in luxury products.

Recruitment was conducted through private online messaging channels. Participants were informed about the research aims and were asked to sign a consent form. They were then requested to capture at least two luxury brand advertisements from their social media feeds using their mobile phones' screen capture function. These captured advertisements were brought to the interview sessions for discussion. Interviews were conducted via tele-interview programs and recorded with participants' consent.

This exploratory study was conducted with 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews and one focus group interview with two participants to gain insights from participants' experiences related to luxury brand advertising in naturalistic settings. One focus group was conducted because a participant suggested that his wife was familiar with this topic, and they were willing to participate in the interview together. One of the benefits of conducting focus group interviews is participants often build on each other's ideas, generating more comprehensive and diverse insights than in one-on-one settings. Each interview was conducted for about 45 minutes to one hour and 30 minutes. The questions used in the interviews are listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Interview Questions

| <p style="text-align: center;">Questions about Luxury Advertising Experiences</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Questions about Luxury Consumption Perceptions</p> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have you ever seen luxury brand ads appear on your social media platforms? What does it look like? Can you give me examples? 2. What brands of luxury product ads have you seen on social media? Can you give examples? 3. How often do you see luxury brand ads? 4. How do you distinguish between mass and luxury brand ads on social media? Can you give examples? 5. If you do not see luxury brand ads on social media, through which channels do you see those ads? 6. How do you feel when you see luxury brand ads on social media? Can you give examples? 7. Have you ever purchased luxury products? Can you share with me your story? | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you think everyone should have at least some luxury products once? How do you feel about this? 2. Do you want to buy or possess luxury products? What is your thought? 3. If you want to buy a luxury product, what and how do you do to get there? 4. What does luxury mean to you? |

Coding Procedure

Interviews were organized and analyzed using MAXQDA software, which is widely used to analyze qualitative research (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019). MAXQDA is a qualitative software used to analyze mixed methods data and qualitative findings, combining several content types, including text, photos, and video, to conduct social and cultural research (Marjaei et al., 2019). MAXQDA benefits researchers in terms of data organization, allowing for coding, grouping, and creating themes from rich text. The researcher can track the frequency of each code in the whole data set. The coding process followed the methodology outlined by Spiggle (1994):

1. *Open coding*: In this initial stage, the transcribed interview data were examined line-by-line to identify significant concepts and ideas. Tentative labels, or "codes," were assigned to segments of text that represented distinct themes related to the research questions and objectives. For example, a participant's comment about experiencing social benefits from owning luxury products was coded as "social acceptance." The goal was to generate as many codes as necessary to capture the diversity of participants' responses.
2. *Axial coding*: Similar codes were grouped under similar themes, developing categories and constructs derived from the integration between data and existing theories. Several themes and constructs arose in this process and were used to answer research questions. For instance, codes like "social acceptance" and "social status signaling" were grouped under a broader theme such as "social improvement."
3. *Selective coding*: The main categories and themes that answer research questions were carefully selected. The similarities among themes and patterns were understood to explain the phenomenon. This involved selecting core themes that captured the essence of the participants' experiences and systematically relating them to other categories. For

example, the main themes answering the impact of luxury advertising on self-improvement motivation were "Engagement," "Disengagement," and "Mixed." The sub-themes related to each theme were selected to address the research questions and objectives.

Throughout this process, MAXQDA software facilitated efficient data organization and analysis. The software's capabilities allowed for creating, grouping, and tracking codes, making it easier to manage large amounts of qualitative data. Additionally, MAXQDA enabled me to revisit and revise codes as needed, ensuring a flexible and iterative approach to data analysis. Also, it helped me maintain consistency and transparency in data analysis and management (Silver & Lewins, 2014).

To enhance a rigorous analysis of the qualitative data and reduce possible biases, using semi-structured interviews, theory-based coding, and following this structured coding process (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002) provides robust insights into the impact of luxury brand advertising on consumers' self-improvement motivation. This methodology captured the richness of participants' experiences and allowed for the development of well-supported themes and conclusions.

Results

Participants Information

All recorded interviews were transcribed and translated manually by me; I am fluent in English, and Thai is my native language. The participants' information is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Participant Information

| Name code | Gender | Location | Age | Occupation | Luxury product consumer | Product (s) / brand (s) |
|------------------|---------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Jeerasupa | Female | Thailand | 33 | PhD student | Yes | Coach, Longchamp, Van Cleef & Arpels |
| Nat | Male | Thailand | 37 | Online marketing manager | Yes | Watches, Houses, Jewelry, Cars |
| Panom | Male | Thailand | 37 | Pre-owned luxury product seller | Yes | Perfumes, Gucci purses, Nissan 370Z |
| Nongnong | Female | Thailand | 37 | Business owner | Yes | Cars, men's wallets |
| Kelvin | Male | Thailand | 36 | Marketing consultant and business owner | Yes | Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Prada, Cars, Balenciaga |
| Watchara* | Male | Thailand | 41 | IT Engineer | No | Houses, Cars, Sports Jersey, Bikes |
| June* | Female | Thailand | 45 | Financial Consultant | Yes | Wallets, Watches, Shoes |
| Surachet | Male | Thailand | 55 | Bank manager and business owner | Yes | Cars, Watches |
| Puchong | Male | England | 37 | PhD student | No | Fashion clothes, Watches, Cars |
| Dokkae | Female | France | 37 | Instructor | No | Gucci |
| Zong | Male | Thailand | 38 | Engineer | No | Luxury hotels, BMW |
| Nathan | Male | England | 37 | PhD student | Yes | Clothes, Wallets, Shoes, |
| Arkom | Male | Thailand | 40 | Business owner | No | Cars, Car Accessories, Watches |
| John | Male | Thailand | 36 | Business owner | Yes | Hotels, Houses, Travel destinations |

*Focus group interview

Participants reported having seen luxury brand ads from several social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. Luxury brands reported by participants included both products and services in a wide range of categories. Although some participants reported not being luxury product consumers, they still saw luxury brand ads on social media. This indicates that luxury brands' use of social media can increase the visibility of ads, resulting in high exposure to advertising among consumers (White & Denis, 2019).

The main research question was whether viewing luxury brand ads can affect participants' self-improvement motivation. My interview questions also explored consumers' perceptions of luxury consumption in general. Three main themes emerged from the transcripts related to the effect of luxury brands on self-improvement motivation and regarding the concept of luxury consumption: 1) disengagement, 2) engagement, and 3) mixed. The Disengagement theme indicates that luxury brand advertising discourages consumers from consuming luxury products and services. The Engagement theme indicates that viewing luxury brand ads activates self-improvement motivation to attain luxury products and services. The Mixed theme indicates that the participant experienced mixed feelings about luxury consumption from viewing the luxury brand ads. These three themes and their subthemes are discussed further below.

Disengagement Theme

The Disengagement theme indicates that exposure to luxury consumption can cue consumers to detach or dissociate from consumption goals. Two sub-themes are discussed below.

Negative Perceptions of Luxury Consumption: The interviews revealed that some consumers have negative attitudes toward luxury consumption and luxury brand consumers.

They view luxury consumption as unnecessary, overly frivolous, and useless (Sung et al., 2019), preventing them from wanting to participate in this consumption. Some participants provided some expressions to support this perspective.

Luxury products are superfluous and designed for rich people who want to brag about their lives. People who want to make others feel jealous about their lives. People who want the spotlight on them from others (Zong, male, 38 years old).

I can give you my experience of meeting new people. I feel uncomfortable with a person who wears too many luxury products. It seems he/she is not friendly and inaccessible. I feel better with someone who wears normal clothes. It is more friendly and warm (Puchong, male, 37 years old).

I think I did not want it or want to buy it at all. It did not appeal to me. Maybe it did not fit my fashion style. I held it and tried to see how a purse was on my arms. It was not good. So, I did not feel anything with a luxury product. I personally felt uncomfortable when my friend asked me to take her to a luxury store. She asked me why I did not use a luxury product. I said I did not like it (laughing). It is about how you value a luxury product. Some may do, but some may not (Dokkae, female, 37 years old).

The Negative Perceptions of Luxury Consumption sub-theme reveals that not all consumers respond positively to luxury brand advertising. Instead, some participants hold negative attitudes towards luxury consumption, viewing it as unnecessary, frivolous, and a symbol of excessive wealth and superficiality. Participants who held these negative perceptions often expressed discomfort with luxury products and those who use them. They associated

luxury consumption with a desire to display wealth and social status, which they found daunting and unappealing. These negative perceptions can lead to disengagement from luxury brand advertising, as these consumers do not see luxury products as relevant or desirable.

This finding is significant because it highlights a segment of the consumer population that is resistant to the typical aspirational messages conveyed in luxury brand advertising. For these consumers, luxury products do not represent a goal worth striving for; they are excessive and unnecessary indulgences. Consequently, luxury brand advertising fails to motivate these consumers and can reinforce their negative perceptions.

Sense of Unattainability: Luxury products and experiences are often associated with exclusivity, rarity, and high cost (Tynan et al., 2010), which can create a perception that they are unattainable or out of reach for the average person. This perception can be reinforced by advertising, social media, and societal norms emphasizing the luxurious lifestyles of wealthy and famous people.

For some people, this message of exclusivity can be perceived as motivation, driving them to work harder and strive for success to afford luxury items or experiences (I speak more about this in the Engagement theme). However, for others, it can lead to feelings of inadequacy, envy, or frustration (van de Ven et al., 2009), particularly if they perceive themselves as unable to reach the same level of wealth or status. Some participants expressed this perspective, as evidenced in their words below.

I love sports cars, and I want them, such as affordable sports cars or convertible Mercedes-Benz cars. It would be great to own them. But for some products like a

million-dollar home, I just watch it but have no feelings about it. It is impossible to own it. It is overreaching. I think the luxury products that trigger me are things that are possible to own (Zong, male, 38 years old).

In the case of Hermès brand, if you are not their customer, I will not have any access. Although you may need to buy a specific model, you cannot buy it from the official store. You have to buy a resale product which definitely has a higher price. People who have this access can make a lot of profit from their resale products. This situation teaches me the difference between rich people and poor people (Nat, male, 37 years old).

The Sense of Unattainability sub-theme highlights that luxury products' high prices and exclusivity can create a sense of unattainability, making them appear out of reach for the average consumer. This perception can evoke feelings of inadequacy and frustration, diminishing the potential motivational impact of luxury brand advertising. Instead of inspiring consumers to strive for these products, unattainability can lead to disengagement and to consumers distancing themselves from luxury consumption altogether.

Engagement Theme

Luxury brand advertising usually influences consumer motivation and goal pursuit by tapping into psychological needs for status, prestige, and self-enhancement (Mandel et al., 2006). Such advertising often employs sophisticated imagery and messaging that suggests luxury goods are associated with personal success and social recognition. This can motivate consumers to set goals aligned with acquiring these high-status items. Research indicates that exposure to luxury brand advertisements can heighten an individual's desire for upward social mobility and self-

improvement, driving them to engage in behaviors aimed at achieving the financial means necessary to purchase these products (Mandel et al., 2006; Mo & Wong, 2019)

The Engagement theme indicates that exposure to luxury advertising can activate a motivation for self-improvement and that luxury consumption is desired for social and professional enhancement. I discuss the three sub-themes below.

Social Improvement: Luxury consumption may facilitate access to exclusive social circles. For example, Doormen at an exclusive nightclub filter out individuals who do not match the upscale image by judging their dresses, shoes, watches, and accessories. This case demonstrates that luxury products are crucial to signal an individual's image and social status (Rivera, 2010). Participants also mentioned this perspective, indicating the importance of social acceptance by using luxury products.

It is about the next step of social acceptance: to be part of this kind of society. I need this product to be like a ticket to that place. I do not think much about its functionality; social status is more important in this situation (Nongnong, female, 37 years old).

Participants indicated that luxury products serve as social symbols facilitating access to prestigious groups and events, thus enabling them to improve their social skills and broaden their connections. The ownership of luxury items was perceived as a ticket to higher social status and acceptance within elite circles, reinforcing the idea that luxury consumption can have significant social benefits.

This finding underscores the importance of social dynamics in luxury consumption. Consumers are not solely driven by the intrinsic value of luxury products but also by the social capital these items represent.

Enhancing Professional Image: Possessing luxury items can help consumers signal professionalism in their work lives. Some consumers may view luxury goods that they see in advertisements as tools for career advancement, believing that projecting a successful image can lead to professional opportunities (Wiedmann et al., 2009). Some participants mentioned this perspective below.

I have been in different moments of luxury consumption. I used to buy many luxury purses in the past. But when I grew up, I spent more time on accessories because I needed them for my profession. I work as a financial consultant. I must contact many wealthy clients, so my professional look is one of the most important things. They will not trust me if I do not look professional (June, female, 45 years old).

I do not expect much social benefit from having a luxury product. I do not emphasize this thing. However, there are many social events that I may need this thing to signal my social status or something like that. Even though luxury products do not entirely fit my preference, having at least one on my shelf may be a good idea when using it. I may need it in some situations because a luxury product can enhance my social credibility.

Sometimes, people may judge me by my appearance. My appearance is relatively minimal and non-fashionable; others may perceive me as unprofessional. So, I need this thing to protect me from this situation (Dokkae, female, 37 years old).

It is about social acceptance. People will look at your appearance at first and judge you from that, specifically in a professional context. This is why many businesspeople must dress professionally. It matters. I am not saying that it is a must, but I would say using luxury products has some impact on others' perceptions. It can gain your credibility (Nathan, male, 37 years old).

Participants indicated that possessing luxury items, such as high-end accessories and clothing, could contribute to a more polished and credible professional appearance. Such enhancement is useful in specific career contexts to positively impact professional interactions and opportunities. Luxury consumption is directly linked to career advancement and social credibility for these individuals.

The Enhancing Professional Image sub-theme underscores that consumers believe luxury consumption can enhance their professional image and boost their career prospects. This study revealed that luxury products are not just symbols of wealth but also tools for enhancing a professional and successful image for some consumers.

The difference between the professional image and enhancement and social improvement themes is the context of interest. While social improvement themes are more general, the professional image and enhancement theme is more specific regarding professional and career contexts.

Goal Striving and Rewards: Luxury consumption can be viewed as a goal for consumers and, therefore, exposure to luxury products and services through advertising may motivate consumers to engage in self-improvement so that they can be in a better position to engage in

luxury consumption. In addition, luxury consumption can serve as a reward for achieving goals. People may use luxury consumption to celebrate or mark attaining goals such as career advancement, financial milestones, or personal achievements, and use luxury items or experiences to celebrate or mark those accomplishments (Atkinson & Kang, 2022). Participants mentioned these themes below.

I must buy it. It makes me set my future goals. I want to have those experiences of luxury consumption once in my life. I want to know how it is. At some point, I will definitely buy it if I can. By setting this goal, I would say once we know the price, then we have to ask ourselves how to have sufficient money to buy it. Either saving more money or working extra time should be good for having luxury consumption experiences once in life. I would say we can set this goal as a life goal, specifically for women. This is how I think (Jeerasupa, female, 33 years old).

Many things are better than what we have. For example, when I spent ten days on my travel, I thought, why do I have to work all year long to spend ten days on a trip? Why do I not try to find a way to work only ten days a year for travel? This question arose to me. More importantly, I found that many people spend their lives like this. It exists. I then imagined and asked a lot about this. Why not me? Why cannot I do this like them? I stepped back and looked back at my job. Am I on the right track? Does my current job offer me that life? No. My job is not like that. So, it made me think a lot about my life and my future (John, male, 36 years old).

Personally, I do. It is about self-reward. We should have these rewards to encourage ourselves to work harder. It can tell us what we are working for. I would buy a luxury car and watch for my celebration when I achieved something (Nat, male, 37 years old).

It provokes my dreams and lifestyles. Undoubtedly, many women are willing to pay for luxury purses, although it seems to be an overreaching purchase for them. It is like an "American dream" in which we want to have this special moment once in our lives. Wearing luxury clothes and holding a luxury purse is such a good pride (Nongnong, female, 37 years old).

When exposed to attractive ads, participants reported that desired products become their aspirational goals toward which they strive. Here is the expression from one participant.

Honestly, many times when I see attractive products, I ask myself, "When do I possess these?... When can I have those watches? When can I get those cars?" I wish one day I could drive this car (Nat, male, 37 years old).

The sub-theme of Goal Striving and Rewards highlights how exposure to luxury brand advertising relates to consumers' personal and professional goals. It revealed that luxury consumption often serves as a powerful incentive for goal striving, and as a reward.

Participants in the study reported that the desire to experience luxury consumption drives them to work harder, save more, and pursue additional opportunities for advancement. Luxury products are often perceived as symbols of success and personal achievement, providing tangible goals that consumers aim to reach. This motivational effect underscores the role of luxury brand advertising in shaping consumer aspirations and encouraging a forward-looking mindset.

In conclusion, luxury brand advertising can effectively drive goal pursuit among consumers by presenting luxury products as desirable rewards for achievement.

Mixed Theme

The Mixed theme captures consumers' mixed reactions to luxury advertising. Luxury items often come with high price tags, but their perceived value can vary greatly depending on individual preferences, experiences, and cultural influences. Ambivalence arises when people question whether the cost of luxury goods truly reflects their actual worth or if the high price is due to branding, marketing, or social norms. For this reason, individuals may have mixed feelings about the luxury concept. One participant provided his thoughts about this.

Sometimes, I think luxury products are unreasonably expensive, and buying them doesn't make sense. However, I have wanted it many times. I am afraid of regretting when we buy something so expensive and regret it after. But later, we may feel better and think it is worth buying. I do not want to feel like that. It is a mixed feeling (Puchong, male, 37 years old).

A participant expressed mixed feelings about luxury consumption, sometimes viewing luxury products as unreasonably expensive and not necessarily better in quality or functionality than more affordable alternatives. This ambivalence led to a cautious approach towards luxury purchases, with a consumer weighing the potential regret of spending a significant amount on luxury items against the social and personal satisfaction he might derive from such purchases.

Discussion

Study 1 provides insightful findings that are crucial for the exploratory stage. First, the effects of exposure to luxury brand advertising are mixed. Based on their beliefs, experiences, and attitudes about luxury consumption, some participants responded to luxury brand advertising by becoming disengaged and uninterested. These participants viewed luxury consumption negatively, perceiving it as unnecessary or frivolous. This negative perception discouraged them from engaging with luxury brand advertising. Additionally, the sense of unattainability further distanced some participants from luxury consumption, as they perceived luxury products as out of reach and unattainable. In contrast, others responded to luxury advertising with a sense of engagement. These participants viewed luxury consumption as a goal worth striving for, driving them to work harder to afford luxury items and experiences. Some viewed luxury consumption as a means to enhance their social and professional image, and as a reward for achieving personal and professional milestones. Still, other participants reported having conflicted responses to luxury brand advertising because they questioned the value of luxury products.

Attainability as a Boundary Condition

One major takeaway from the findings of the qualitative interviews was that luxury products and services induced engagement and motivation to pursue consumption goals only when those products and services were perceived as attainable; when luxury products were viewed as unattainable, luxury advertising did not elicit this reaction. In other words, product attainability may be a boundary condition in determining when advertising does or does not motivate consumers to pursue consumption goals. Here are some thoughts from the participants which support this idea.

I often feel neutral about some unattainable products. However, for some attainable products, I would buy them because I want to sense the feeling of the winner. Now, I think many products are so far from my financial situation, but one day, if I can drive myself to that position where many things are affordable, I will buy them (Nat, male, 37 years old).

Lamborghini is an unattainable car for me when we talk about luxury cars. It is costly. It is extremely difficult to own. It is impossible for me unless I am a millionaire. When I see this kind of product, I just watch it. I do not think further about it. However, for some attainable cars like BMW or other brands in this price range, I can own them. I will take a closer look at them. I pay more attention to this kind of product (Zong, male, 38 years old).

The concept of attainability emerged as a potential boundary condition in determining how product advertising affects consumer motivation. The data suggest that the perceived attainability of luxury products plays a crucial role in shaping consumer responses to luxury brand advertisements.

When consumers perceive luxury products as attainable, they are more likely to be motivated by luxury brand advertising. This perception of attainability can drive consumers to engage with the advertised products, aspire to own them, and set personal and professional goals to achieve luxury consumption. In these cases, luxury brand advertising can enhance self-improvement motivation, encouraging consumers to work harder and strive for success to afford these luxury items and experiences.

Conversely, when luxury products are perceived as unattainable, advertising makes consumers less likely to be motivated. Instead, they may experience disengagement or neutrality towards the luxury brand, viewing it as out of reach and irrelevant to their consumption goals. This unattainability can lead to feelings of inadequacy, frustration, or indifference, which diminish the potential motivational impact of luxury brand advertising.

Therefore, the attainability of desired products may serve as a boundary condition that influences whether product advertising will effectively motivate consumers toward self-improvement and goal-setting. Building on these findings, Study 2 investigates the effects of exposure to advertising on consumers' goal-relevant self-improvement motivation. I manipulated product attainability to observe the effect of exposure to advertisements of relatively more attainable (i.e., mass products) vs. relatively more unattainable (i.e., luxury products) on goal-relevant self-improvement motivations.

CHAPTER IV

STUDY II: MAIN EFFECT AND THE MODERATING ROLE OF MATERIALISM

Introduction

The goal of Study 2 was to investigate the effect of exposure to advertising for attainable vs. unattainable products on self-improvement motivation. Specifically, I predicted that exposure to mass (vs. luxury) brand advertisements would increase self-improvement motivation. I predict that this effect will be strongest for consumers with a high level of materialism, or high perceived importance of the consumption goal. In this study, I exposed participants to a series of mass (vs. luxury) ads and then assessed their self-improvement motivation by measuring their preference between a joke book and a self-improvement book.

Methodology

Pretest

I conducted a pretest to ensure that selected brands used in the experiment were perceived as mass or luxury brands as expected. Four mass brands and five luxury brands were selected (see Table 6). Moreover, brands included various product types to reduce the effects of consumer product preferences, product familiarity, and product relevance.

Table 6: Selected Brands for Pretesting

| Product Type | Mass Brand | Luxury Brand |
|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Watch (Male Style) | Timex | Rolex |
| Watch (Female Style) | Timex | Rolex* |
| Car | Toyota | BMW |
| Clothes | H&M | Gucci |
| Hotel | LaQuinta | The Ritz-Carlton |

*Note: Although I pretested a female Rolex watch, the main study used Hermès (a well-known luxury brand; Siyao, 2021) because participants who are knowledgeable about luxury watches would easily notice that the watch used in the pretested female Rolex ad was not a genuine Rolex style. Therefore, the Hermès brand was used for the female watch in the main study.

The pretest data were collected from undergraduate business students at a public university in the United States. One hundred ten students participated in the pretest study for course credit (41.8% men, $M_{Age} = 20.74$, S.D. = 1.34). After informed consent and survey instructions, participants were shown the nine brand logos from Table 6. They rated each brand on perceived luxuriousness with two questions: “This brand is...” (7-point semantic differential scale, 1=Not high class, 7=High Class) and “This brand is...” (7-point semantic differential scale, 1=Not luxurious, 7=Luxurious; Li et al., 2022).

A paired samples t-test on each mass vs. luxury pair revealed that the mass brands were perceived as less luxurious than the luxury brands (see Table 7). Therefore, all selected brands were used in the experiment stimuli. All experiment stimuli are shown in the Appendix.

Table 7: Paired Samples T-Test Results

| Product | Brand | Mean | Std. Deviation | Mean Difference | p-Value |
|---------|---------------------|------|----------------|-----------------|---------|
| Watches | Timex (Mass) | 3.54 | 1.62 | 3.03 | <.001 |
| | Rolex (Luxury) | 6.57 | 1.08 | | |
| Cars | Toyota (Mass) | 3.56 | 1.49 | 2.20 | <.001 |
| | BMW (Luxury) | 5.77 | 1.17 | | |
| Hotels | LaQuinta (Mass) | 3.04 | 1.48 | 3.01 | <.001 |
| | THE RITZ- | 6.05 | 1.49 | | |
| | CARLTON (Luxury) | | | | |
| Clothes | H&M (Mass) | 3.23 | 1.56 | 2.86 | <.001 |
| | Gucci (Luxury) | 6.09 | 1.03 | | |

Main Study

A between-subject experimental design was conducted in order to test whether exposure to mass (vs. luxury) advertising increased self-improvement motivation (*H1*) and whether materialism moderated the effect (*H4*). A total of 185 participants from Prolific participated in this study in return for \$1.20 (51.4% men, $M_{Age} = 38.31$, $SD = 13.59$). Prolific is an online platform that allows researchers to collect data from diverse participants who voluntarily sign up to participate in research for money in return. Participants who failed at least one of two attention check questions were forced to stop completing the survey and were not included in the final set of participants.

After reading the consent form and survey instructions, participants were randomly assigned to either the mass brand ads condition or the luxury brand ads condition. Participants viewed five ads for three seconds each in random order. Participants then answered a filler question (“Please indicate your experience from watching ads”) designed to disguise the purpose of the ad exposure (“Those ads are” [7-point semantic differential scale, 1 = unappealing, 7 = appealing and 1 = unpleasant, 7 = pleasant]) and then proceeded to an ostensibly unrelated part of the study.

Participants were asked to imagine that there was a publisher launching two online books and was giving away a free copy of one of them. They were asked to express which book they would prefer between a “Best Joke Book” and a “Better Self” book (see Figure 2). The preference between books served as a measure of self-improvement motivation (Allard & White, 2015), with a preference for the “Better Self” book illustrating greater self-improvement motivation. I ran a separate pretest with the same book stimuli that confirmed that preference for the self-help book over the joke book was significantly correlated with desire for self-improvement ($N = 99$, $r = 0.246$, $p = .014$) as measured by four self-improvement motivation questions from Allard and White (2015).

Finally, participants completed the 15-item Material Values Scale (MVS) from Richins (2004). The scale included items such as, “Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.” The appropriate items were reverse-scored, and all items were averaged together to form a materialism index ($\alpha = .89$). Demographics were collected at the end of the survey. All questions are shown in Appendix B.



Imagine that the publisher wanted to give you a free copy of one of the e-books.
Which one would you choose?

Figure 2: Two Book Choices

Results

I used the PROCESS macro (Model 1) to test the moderating effect of materialism (Hayes, 2017). Advertising condition was set as the independent variable, book choice was set as the dependent variable, and materialism was the moderator (note that the following results are expressed in a log-odds metric given the dichotomous dependent variable). The results revealed a marginal main effect of advertisement condition on self-improvement motivation ($\beta = -.203$, $SE = 1.23$, $Z = -1.65$, $p = .098$). There was also a main effect of materialism on self-improvement motivation ($\beta = .79$, $SE = .26$, $Z = 2.99$, $p = .003$). Importantly, there was an interaction between materialism and advertisement condition on book choice ($\beta = .67$, $SE = .34$, $Z = 2.01$, $p = .045$).

Specifically, for participants with high levels of materialism (one standard deviation above the mean of materialism; $M = 4.66$), participants in the mass brand ads condition had a higher probability of choosing the self-improvement book than participants in the luxury brand ads condition ($\beta = 1.10$, $SE = .49$, $Z = 2.24$, $p = .0248$, 95% CI [0.1381, 2.0571]). For participants with low levels of materialism (one standard deviation below the mean of materialism; $M = 2.58$), there was no difference in preference for the self-improvement book between the mass and luxury advertisement conditions ($\beta = -.30$, $SE = .45$, $Z = -.65$, $p = .51$, 95% CI [-1.1833, .5911]).

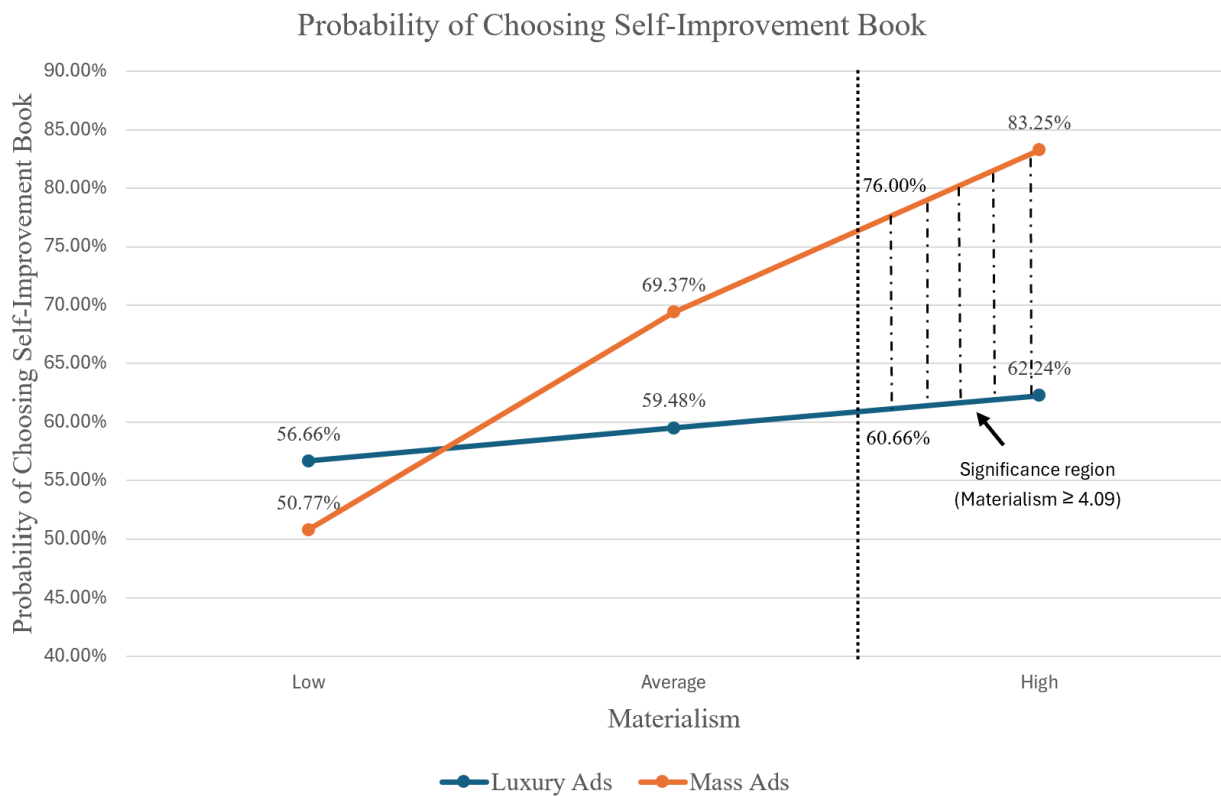


Figure 3: Probability of Choosing a Self-Improvement Book at Different Values of Materialism

From Figure 3, the difference between the two conditions was significant only with the highly materialistic participant group (materialism values = 4.66). Participants in the mass brand ads condition had a higher probability of choosing the self-improvement book (83.25%) than participants in the luxury brand ads condition (62.24%) at the p-value of .0248. Meanwhile, the results were insignificant for the other two groups. The results indicated that this effect only occurred with highly materialistic participants. Moreover, the significance region started from the materialism value at 4.09 (the probabilities of choosing the self-improvement book between two conditions were 76.00% and 60.66%). Beyond this point, the effects were significant with positive coefficients.

Table 8 presents the results from a Johnson-Neyman analysis to understand which values of materialism yielded a significant effect of the advertising condition on self-improvement motivation. The results revealed that participants in the mass (vs. luxury) ad condition were significantly more likely to choose the self-improvement book when materialism (measured on a 7-point scale) was 4.09 and above. Johnson-Neyman analysis is widely used to understand interactions between continuous predictor variables in regression models by determining the conditions under which these interactions are significant. It allows for a more detailed examination of how the relationship between variables may vary across different ranges or values of the predictors (Johnson & Neyman, 1936).

Table 8: Significance Regions at Values of Materialism on Self-Improvement Motivation

| Materialism | Effect | se | Z | <i>p</i> | LLCI | ULCI |
|-------------|---------|-------|---------|----------|---------|---------|
| 1.20 | -1.2252 | .8475 | -1.4457 | .1483 | -2.8863 | .4358 |
| 1.43 | -1.0704 | .7765 | -1.3785 | .1680 | -2.5922 | .4515 |
| 1.66 | -.9155 | .7067 | -1.2955 | .1952 | -2.3006 | .4696 |
| 1.89 | -.7607 | .6387 | -1.1910 | .2337 | -2.0124 | .4911 |
| 2.12 | -.6058 | .5730 | -1.0573 | .2904 | -1.7288 | .5172 |
| 2.35 | -.4509 | .5105 | -.8833 | .3771 | -1.4516 | .5497 |
| 2.58 | -.2961 | .4526 | -.6541 | .5130 | -1.1833 | .5911 |
| 2.81 | -.1412 | .4013 | -.3519 | .7249 | -.9278 | .6453 |
| 3.04 | .0136 | .3594 | .0379 | .9698 | -.6907 | .7180 |
| 3.27 | .1685 | .3304 | .5099 | .6101 | -.4791 | .8160 |
| 3.50 | .3233 | .3180 | 1.0168 | .3092 | -.2999 | .9465 |
| 3.73 | .4782 | .3240 | 1.4759 | .1400 | -.1568 | .1.1132 |
| 3.96 | .6330 | .3475 | 1.8217 | .0685 | -.0481 | 1.3141 |
| 4.09 | .7195 | .3671 | 1.9600 | .0500 | .0000 | 1.4390 |
| 4.19 | .7879 | .3853 | 2.0448 | .0409 | .0327 | 1.5431 |
| 4.42 | .9427 | .4337 | 2.1737 | .0297 | .0927 | 1.7928 |
| 4.66 | 1.0976 | .4895 | 2.2421 | .0250 | .1381 | 2.0571 |
| 4.88 | 1.2524 | .5506 | 2.2748 | .0229 | .1733 | 2.3315 |
| 5.11 | 1.4073 | .6152 | 2.2874 | .0222 | .2014 | 2.6132 |
| 5.34 | 1.5621 | .6825 | 2.2888 | .0221 | .2244 | 2.8999 |
| 5.57 | 1.7170 | .7515 | 2.2841 | .0224 | .2436 | 3.1904 |
| 5.80 | 1.8719 | .8224 | 2.2762 | .0228 | .2601 | 3.4836 |

Figure 3 visualizes the interaction effect by graphing preference for the self-improvement book at average levels of materialism ($M = 3.66$), at one standard deviation below the mean of materialism ($M = 2.67$), and at one standard deviation above the mean of materialism ($M = 4.66$). The Johnson-Neyman region of significance is highlighted as well.

Discussion

The results from this study illustrate that exposure to mass (vs. luxury) brand advertising increases self-improvement motivation for consumers with high materialistic values. Specifically, the data reveal marginal support for *H1*, that exposure to mass (vs. luxury) brand advertising increases self-improvement motivation, and they support *H4*, that this effect obtains for more (but not for less) materialistic consumers. These results support the assertion that priming attainable consumption goals through exposure to mass advertising (i.e., seeing all the great, attainable products that are available for purchase) motivates consumers to want to strive toward attaining those goals (i.e., wanting to achieve greater success in life) for consumers who care about consumption goals (i.e., those that are high in materialism). These findings are aligned with extant literature that finds that goal priming will only activate goal pursuit for consumers who value the goal (Aarts et al., 2008; Barbopoulos & Johansson, 2016; Papies, 2016). In study 3, I provide additional evidence for my theorizing by exploring the underlying mechanism of this effect.

CHAPTER V

STUDY III: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF GROWTH MINDSET

Introduction

Study 2 illustrated that, among materialistic consumers, exposure to mass (vs. luxury) advertising increased motivation for self-improvement. Study 3 has three aims (see Figure 1). First, study 3 was designed to test the effect of exposure to mass (vs. luxury) advertising on motivation for self-improvement with a new measure for self-improvement motivation (*H1*). Second, study 3 once again investigates the moderating effect of materialism on the relationship between ad exposure and self-improvement motivation (*H4*). Finally, study 3 explores the underlying mechanism of the focal effect. Specifically, why does exposure to mass (vs. luxury) advertising increase desire for self-improvement? I hypothesize that a growth mindset (Dweck & Leggett, 1988) will mediate the relationship between exposure to advertising and self-improvement motivation. I propose that when people are exposed to advertising that features products that are both desirable and attainable goals for them, it activates the belief in growth mindset (i.e., I am able to better my standing in life) and, therefore, increases self-improvement motivation related to their consumption goals. Thus, I predict that participants exposed to mass (vs. luxury) brand ads will have a higher degree of growth mindset, which in turn, will positively influence self-improvement motivation (*H2*). Additionally, I predict that materialism will moderate the relationship between ad exposure and self-improvement motivation (*H4*).

Methodology

Two hundred and eighty-eight undergraduate business students from a public university in the United States participated in this study in return for course credit in their undergraduate marketing classes. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (mass brand or luxury brand ads) and saw the same ads from Study 2. Then, participants responded to four items that captured their *self-improvement motivation* (i.e., “I want to achieve success,” “I want to do better,” “I strive to be better,” and “I want to prosper”; 7-point scale, -3 = totally disagree, 3 = totally agree; Allard and White 2015). These measures were averaged together to form a self-improvement motivation index ($\alpha = .93$).

Next, participants responded to eight items, four of which measured their incremental, or growth, mindset (e.g., “Everyone, no matter who they are, can significantly change their basic characteristics”) and four of which measured their entity, or fixed, mindset (e.g., “The kind of person someone is, is something basic about them, and it can't be changed very much”; 1 = total disagree, 7= totally agree)(Levy et al., 1998). The entity mindset items were reverse-scored and averaged with the incremental mindset items to form a growth mindset index ($\alpha = .85$). Finally, participants responded to the same 15-item Material Values Scale (Richins 2004) used in Study 2. The appropriate items were reverse-scored, and all items were averaged together to form a materialism index ($\alpha = .82$). Demographics were collected at the end of the survey.

Results

Eighteen participants who failed at least one of two attention check questions were dropped from the analysis. This left 270 participants in the final analysis (35.7% men, $M_{Age} = 21.76$, $S.D. = 4.52$).

The Effect of Advertising Condition and Materialism on Self-Improvement Motivation

The SPSS PROCESS macro (Model 1) was used to test the effect of advertising condition, materialism, and their interaction on self-improvement motivation. Advertising condition was set as the independent variable, self-improvement motivation was set as the dependent variable, and materialism was set as the moderator. The model revealed no main effect of advertising condition on self-improvement motivation ($\beta = .34$, $t(266) = .85$, $p = .40$). Thus, *H1* was not supported. Furthermore, contrary to expectations, there was no interaction between advertising condition and materialism on self-improvement motivation ($\beta = -.07$, $t(265) = -.70$, $p = .49$, 95% CI [-.2371, .1530]). This result is inconsistent with the moderating effect of materialism that I found in Study 2. I will discuss some post-hoc explanations for the inconsistency in the study summary and discussion chapter. However, as I present below, materialism did moderate the mediating path between advertising condition and self-improvement motivation.

Mediation by Growth Mindset

I used the SPSS PROCESS Macro (Model 8) to analyze the moderated mediation effect. The use of moderated mediation analysis allows for the examination of whether the indirect effect of the advertising condition on the self-improvement motivation through the mediator (i.e., growth mindset) varies depending on the level of a moderator variable (i.e., materialism) (Hayes,

2017). I set the independent variable as advertising condition, the moderating variable as materialism, the mediating variable as growth mindset, and the dependent variable as self-improvement motivation. The predicted moderating effects of materialism were on two paths, including 1) the main effect path (c path) and 2) the path between advertising condition and growth mindset (a path). I predicted that materialism would moderate the mediating path between advertising condition and growth mindset instead of the mediating path between growth mindset and self-improvement motivation because, as explained in the theoretical discussion, consumers low on goal importance (i.e., those with low materialism) should be less likely to experience any type of goal or motivational activation after being exposed to goal cues such as advertising featuring desirable and attainable products and services (Bargh et al., 2001). There was no main effect of advertising condition ($\beta = -.70$, $SE = .58$, $t(266) = -1.20$, $p = .23$) or materialism ($\beta = -.03$, $SE = .10$, $t(266) = -.25$, $p = .80$) on growth mindset. As predicted, however, there was a significant interaction between advertising condition and materialism on growth mindset ($\beta = .28$, $SE = .14$, $t(266) = 1.93$, $p = .05$). Specifically, for participants high on materialism, those in the mass ads condition exhibited higher levels of growth mindset than those in the luxury ads condition ($M > 3.5$). On the other hand, there was no effect of advertising condition on growth mindset for participants low on materialism ($M < 3.5$). Thus, *H4* is supported.

Figure 4 presents growth mindset by advertising condition and materialism at the mean of materialism ($M = 3.92$), one standard deviation below the mean of materialism ($M = 3.03$), and one standard deviation above the mean of materialism ($M = 4.80$). Johnson-Neyman analysis reveals that the region of significance is above materialism values of 3.50 (70% of the sample; see Table 9).

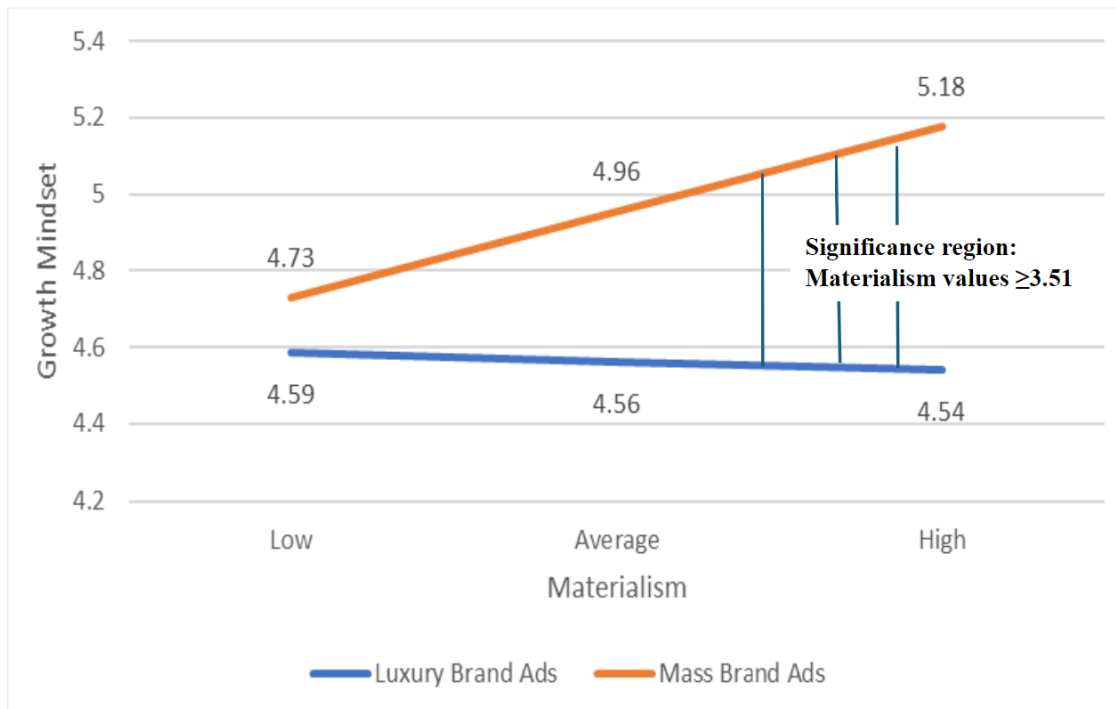


Figure 4: Effect of Advertisement Condition and Materialism on Growth Mindset

Furthermore, as predicted, there was a significant effect of growth mindset on self-improvement motivation ($\beta = .10$, $SE = .04$, $t(266) = 2.30$, $p = .02$), whereby participants who embraced the growth mindset were also more likely to be motivated to engage in self-improvement.

As expected, growth mindset mediated the relationship between advertising condition and self-improvement motivation at high levels of materialism ($\beta = .06$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [.0161, .1222]) and average levels of materialism ($\beta = .04$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI [.0084, .0810]) but not at low levels of materialism ($\beta = .01$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI [-.0267, .0716]). Thus, $H2$ is supported.

Table 9: Significance Regions at Values of Materialism on Growth Mindset

| Materialism | Effect | se | t | <i>p</i> | LLCI | ULCI |
|-------------|--------|-------|--------|----------|---------|--------|
| 1.00 | -.4221 | .4408 | -.9576 | .3391 | -1.2899 | .4458 |
| 1.28 | -.3440 | .4022 | -.8553 | .3932 | -1.1359 | .4479 |
| 1.56 | -.2659 | .3640 | -.7305 | .4662 | -1.1032 | .4214 |
| 1.84 | -.1878 | .3264 | -.5754 | .5660 | -.9673 | .4305 |
| 2.12 | -.1097 | .2895 | -.3789 | .7051 | -.9673 | .4305 |
| 2.40 | -.0316 | .2538 | -.1245 | .9010 | -.5314 | .4681 |
| 2.68 | .0465 | .2197 | .2115 | .8326 | -.3834 | .4791 |
| 2.96 | .1246 | .1882 | .6618 | .5087 | -.2460 | .4952 |
| 3.24 | .2027 | .1608 | 1.2605 | .2086 | -.1139 | .5192 |
| 3.51 | .2770 | .1407 | 1.9689 | .0500 | .0000 | .5539 |
| 3.52 | .2808 | .1398 | 2.0078 | .0457 | .0000 | .5561 |
| 3.80 | .3589 | .1286 | 2.7907 | .0056 | .1057 | .6120 |
| 4.08 | .4369 | .1296 | 3.3717 | .0009 | .1818 | .6921 |
| 4.36 | .5150 | .1426 | 3.6120 | .0004 | .2343 | .7958 |
| 4.64 | .5931 | .1648 | 3.5997 | .0004 | .2687 | .9176 |
| 4.92 | .6712 | .1930 | 3.4780 | .0006 | .2912 | 1.0512 |
| 5.20 | .7493 | .2250 | 3.3304 | .0010 | .3063 | 1.1923 |
| 5.48 | .8274 | .2594 | 3.1900 | .0016 | .3167 | 1.3381 |
| 5.76 | .9055 | .2953 | 3.0663 | .0024 | .3241 | 1.4870 |
| 6.04 | .9836 | .3323 | 2.9600 | .0034 | .3293 | 1.6379 |
| 6.32 | 1.0617 | .3700 | 2.8693 | .0044 | .3332 | 1.7902 |
| 6.60 | 1.1398 | .4083 | 2.7918 | .0056 | .3359 | 1.9436 |

Discussion

Study 3 revealed that exposure to mass (vs. luxury) advertising increased self-improvement motivation. Contrary to expectations and to the results in Study 2, materialism did not moderate the relationship between advertising condition and self-improvement motivation. However, materialism did moderate the indirect path from advertising condition to growth mindset (which Study 3 revealed as the underlying mechanism of the effect) and finally to self-improvement motivation. Consistent with our theorizing and with Study 2, mediation by growth mindset was significant only for participants with an average and a high degree of materialism, but not for those with a low degree of materialism. These findings are aligned with our theorizing about the role of growth mindset as an underlying mechanism. Specifically, exposure to mass advertising activates the consumption goal for consumption-oriented consumers (i.e., those who are materialistic). Because consumers perceive mass brands as attainable, such exposure activates growth mindset. Growth mindset, in turn, leads consumers to be motivated to engage in self-improvement in order to attain their consumption goals.

In the next study, I dive deeper into the underlying process by examining why mass advertising would prime growth mindset. I show that exposure to mass (vs. luxury) advertising increases consumer perceptions that desirable products are attainable, which in turn increases self-efficacy, which finally increases growth mindset.

CHAPTER VI

STUDY IV: THE MEDIATING ROLES OF PRODUCT ATTAINABILITY AND CONSUMPTION SELF-EFFICACY

Introduction

Study 3 illustrated that growth mindset mediates the relationship between exposure to advertising and self-improvement motivation. This study aims to investigate the underlying mechanisms involved in the relationship between exposure to advertising and growth mindset. Drawing on goal-priming and goal-striving theories, exposure to desirable products will activate consumption goals. I propose that when a consumption goal seems attainable, it will increase consumer self-efficacy (i.e., they feel capable of attaining products), which then activates the belief of growth mindset (i.e., “I am able to better my standing in life”). Thus, I propose that the perceived product attainability (attainable vs. unattainable) and consumption self-efficacy are the mediators of this relationship (*H3*).

Methodology

Two hundred and fifty-seven undergraduate marketing students from a public university in the United States participated in this study in return for partial course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (mass brand or luxury brand ads condition as in Studies 2 and 3). Then, they completed the *Growth Mindset* questionnaire that was used in Study 3 ($\alpha = .84$). Next, participants reported *Product Attainability* using the following items I

developed: (1) “I could get the types of products I saw in the ads if I wanted them,” (2) “I could buy the types of products I saw in the ads,” (3) “If I wanted the types of products I saw in the ads, I know I could get them,” (4) “If I desired the types of products I saw in the ads, I know I could satisfy that desire,” and (5) “There are products I saw in the ads that I could get if I wanted to” (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; $\alpha = .92$). Finally, participants reported perceptions of *Consumption Self-efficacy* using 5 items that I adapted from the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Chen et al., 2001): (1) “I will be able to reach most of the product ownership goals that I have,” (2) “In general, I think that I can purchase the products that are important to me,” (3) “I believe I can buy almost any products to which I set my mind to buying,” (4) “I will be able to successfully purchase what I want,” and (5) “I am confident that I can buy what I want in my life” (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; $\alpha = .83$). Demographics were collected at the end of the survey.

Results

Sixty-one participants who had already taken this survey from another survey panel and 30 participants who had failed at least one of two attention check questions were dropped from the data. This left 166 participants in the final analysis (38.6% men, $M_{Age} = 21.49$, S.D. = 3.67).

First, I ran the SPSS PROCESS macro (model 1) to investigate whether, consistent with Study 2, advertising condition (mass vs. luxury) interacted with materialism to predict growth mindset. There was no main effect of advertising condition on growth mindset ($\beta = -.76$, SE = .77, $t(162) = -.99$, $p = .33$). Contrary to expectations, there was no interaction between advertising condition and materialism on growth mindset ($\beta = .22$, SE = .19, $t(162) = 1.12$, $p = .26$, 95% CI [-.1640, .5952]).

Zhao et al. (2010) suggest that even if there is no total effect from the IV to the DV, there can still be an indirect effect through mediators, which can be illuminating and relevant to theory. To investigate this possibility, I ran the SPSS PROCESS macro (model 91) to test moderated serial mediation. I set advertising condition as the independent variable, growth mindset as the dependent variable, product attainability as the first serial mediator, consumption self-efficacy as the serial second mediator, and materialism as a moderator. Model 91 specifies that the materialism moderator affects the path between the two mediators, or the path between product attainability and self-efficacy. I chose this model because I expected that product attainability should increase consumption self-efficacy only for consumers to whom the consumption goal is important. Results of the analysis revealed a main effect of advertising condition on product attainability, such that mass products were perceived as more attainable ($M = 4.63$) than luxury products ($M = 3.65$; $p = .0007$). However, contrary to expectations, there was no positive main effect of product attainability on consumption self-efficacy ($p = .24$) and no positive main effect of materialism on consumption self-efficacy ($p = .62$). Also, there was no interaction between product attainability and materialism on consumption self-efficacy (95% CI [-.0611, .1326]). Finally, there was a positive main effect of consumption self-efficacy on growth mindset ($\beta = .18$, $SE = .09$, $t(162) = 2.06$, $p = .04$). The moderated serial mediation was not significant (95% CI [-.0105, .0325]).

Finally, I investigated the possibility of a simple serial mediation by running the SPSS PROCESS macro (model 6). I set advertising condition as the independent variable, growth mindset as the dependent variable, product attainability as the first serial mediator, and consumption self-efficacy as the second serial mediator. As expected, there was a positive effect of advertising condition on product attainability ($\beta = .98$, $SE = .23$, $t(162) = 4.20$, $p = .00$), such

that consumers in the mass advertising condition reported higher product attainability ($M = 4.63$) than consumers in the luxury advertising condition ($M = 3.65$). There was a positive effect of product attainability on self-efficacy ($\beta = .38$, $SE = .04$, $t(166) = 8.44$, $p = .00$), and a positive effect of self-efficacy on growth mindset ($\beta = .18$, $SE = .09$, $t(166) = 2.06$, $p = .04$). Finally, the model revealed significant serial mediation ($\beta = .07$, 95% CI [.0025, .1567]; see Fig. 5). In sum, exposure to mass (vs. luxury) advertising increased product attainability beliefs, which increased consumption self-efficacy, which in turn increased growth mindset. Taken together, the results of this study support *H3*.

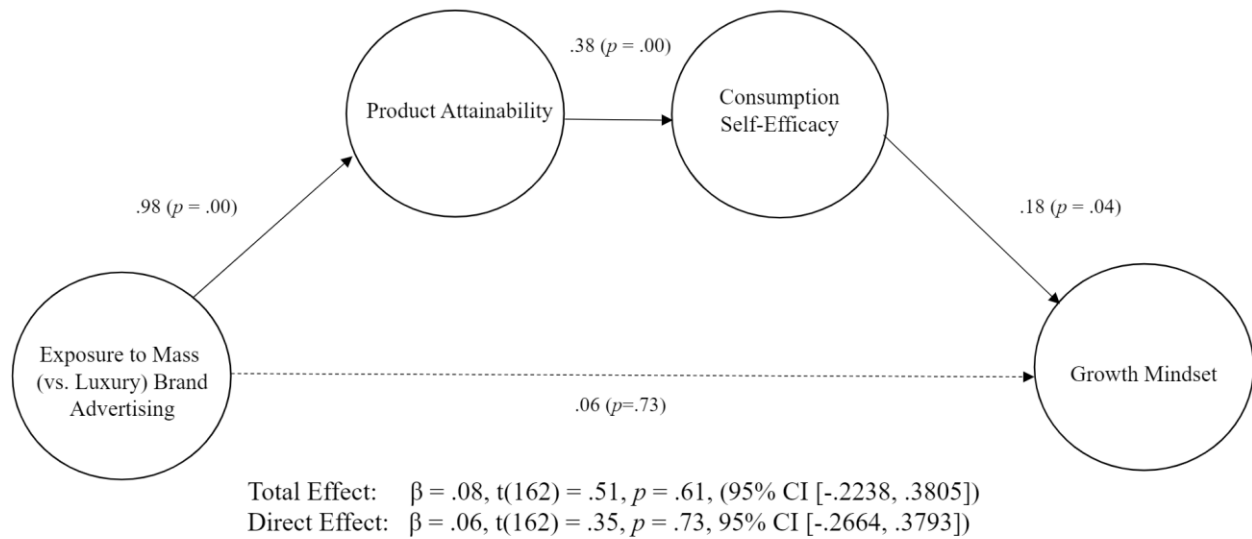


Figure 5: Serial Mediation Model and Coefficient Paths

Discussion

Although advertising condition did not affect growth mindset on its own or while interacting with materialism, Study 4 still provided theoretical evidence for one possible mechanism for why these effects may have emerged in other studies (Zhao et al., 2010). Study 4 provides evidence that the indirect path between exposure to advertising and growth mindset may operate via two mediators: product attainability and consumption self-efficacy, respectively. This could explain why exposure to advertising can activate a growth mindset. Specifically, Study 4 suggests that when consumers are exposed to advertising, the belief of product attainability derived from the advertisements influences people's perceptions of self-efficacy in consumption. Indeed, participants in the mass brand ads condition perceived a higher degree of product attainability than those in the luxury brand ads condition, which, in turn, increased consumption self-efficacy. In other words, when consumers are exposed to attainable products through advertising, it activates a sense of consumption self-efficacy (i.e., "I will be able to successfully purchase what I want"). This, in turn, activates a growth mindset (i.e., "I am able to better my standing in life"). On the other hand, consumers who are exposed to unattainable products through advertising, they attenuate perceptions of self-efficacy in consumption. A low degree of self-efficacy decreases the belief of a growth mindset, or the ability to improve one's life standing.

CHAPTER VII

STUDY SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This dissertation examines how advertising influences consumer motivation by conducting one qualitative and three quantitative investigations. Each study offers insights to understand the effects of advertising on consumers. I find that exposure to mass (vs. luxury) advertising increases consumer self-improvement motivation. Advertisements for mass (vs. luxury) products activate attainable (vs. unattainable) consumption goals, thereby increasing consumer self-efficacy, which, in turn, puts consumers in a growth mindset. Such a mindset fosters the motivation to improve oneself in pursuit of those consumption goals. These effects materialize for consumers who are high on materialism and thus consider consumption goals as important.

Study 1 used in-depth interviews and one focus group to examine how luxury brand advertising influences consumer behavior, specifically focusing on the motivational impacts of such advertising. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study uncovered diverse consumer responses to luxury brand advertisements, offering valuable insights into the complex dynamics of luxury consumption. The study identified three main ways in which consumers respond to luxury advertising and luxury consumption: disengagement, engagement, and mixed feelings. A key finding of this study is the role of perceived product attainability in shaping consumer responses to luxury brand advertising. When luxury products are perceived as attainable, consumers are more likely to be motivated by the advertisements. On the contrary, consumers may feel disengaged or indifferent if luxury products are seen as out of reach. This

insight led to the design of Study 2 to test the effect of exposure to advertising featuring mass (attainable) vs. luxury (unattainable) products and services on consumer self-improvement motivation.

Study 2 illustrated that exposure to mass brand advertisements marginally increases self-improvement motivation relative to exposure to luxury brand advertisements, and that materialism significantly moderates this path. Among participants with high levels of materialism, mass brand advertisements significantly increased the likelihood of choosing a self-improvement book over a joke book, illustrating greater self-improvement motivation. This effect was not observed among participants with lower levels of materialism. In support of *H1* and *H4*, this study demonstrated that mass brand advertisements (which highlight attainable goals) can significantly enhance self-improvement motivation, particularly among highly materialistic consumers.

Study 3 demonstrated that growth mindset mediated the relationship between exposure to mass vs. luxury ads and self-improvement motivation, and that materialism moderated the indirect path. Contrary to Study 2 and *H4*, materialism did not moderate the total effect of advertising condition on self-improvement motivation in this study. Note that the sample in Study 2 came from Prolific (51.4% men, $M_{Age} = 38.31$, $SD = 13.59$), while the sample in Study 3 was a much younger college student sample (38.6% men, $M_{Age} = 21.49$, $S.D. = 3.67$). It is possible that among college students, exposure to mass brand advertising increases self-improvement motivation in additional ways than it does for the older Prolific sample, and these additional ways wash out the moderating effect of materialism on the total path. For instance, perhaps exposure to mass brand advertising reminds college students about peers who own such products, thus activating social acceptance goals which in turn motivates a desire for social

connection rather than for self-improvement. And perhaps this goal for social acceptance washes out the moderating effect of materialism on the relationship between exposure to mass brand advertising and self-improvement motivation. Future research should examine the different goals that exposure to mass advertising activates for various age groups to investigate this possibility. Nevertheless, materialism moderated the effect of exposure to mass advertising on growth mindset, offering evidence for my proposed moderator and underlying mechanisms.

Study 4 highlighted product attainability and consumption self-efficacy as mediators in the relationship between advertising exposure and growth mindset. Exposure to mass brand advertising led to higher perceived attainability of products compared to luxury brand advertising. This heightened sense of attainability enhances consumers' consumption self-efficacy, making them feel more capable of achieving their consumption goals. In turn, this increased self-efficacy fosters a growth mindset, characterized by the belief that personal outcomes can be enhanced through effort and persistence.

The research highlights that exposure to mass brand advertising significantly increases consumer self-improvement motivation compared to luxury brand advertising. This effect is mediated by two critical factors: perceived product attainability and consumption self-efficacy. Mass brand advertisements, which display attainable products, enhance consumers' beliefs in their ability to achieve these consumption goals. This heightened consumption self-efficacy, in turn, increases a growth mindset, motivating consumers to improve their personal and professional lives to achieve these goals

I am the first, to my knowledge, to illustrate enhanced self-improvement motivation as a positive unintended consequence of advertising on consumers. As such, my research offers theoretical, managerial, and public policy implications, which I will discuss next.

CHAPTER VIII

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This dissertation provides several theoretical contributions to marketing literature. First, this dissertation expands goal-priming and goal-striving theories by demonstrating how advertising exposure can influence goal activation and pursuit (Aarts et al., 2008; Bargh, 2002; Custers & Aarts, 2005b). Specifically, the studies show that exposure to mass brand ads increases product attainability beliefs and self-efficacy, which in turn fosters a growth mindset and self-improvement motivation. This highlights a nuanced understanding of how advertising serves as a motivational trigger for consumers and thus contributes to goal theories in marketing literature.

Second, this dissertation reveals the moderating role of materialism in the relationship between advertising type and self-improvement motivation. Materialistic consumers expressed higher self-improvement motivation when exposed to mass brand ads compared to luxury brand ads. This insight adds depth to existing literature by highlighting how personal values, such as materialism, influence the motivational potential of different types of advertising on consumption goals.

Third, this dissertation identifies growth mindset and consumption self-efficacy as crucial mediators in the relationship between advertising exposure and self-improvement motivation. This contribution emphasizes the psychological mechanisms through which advertising impacts consumer behavior, offering an in-depth explanation of the pathways leading from ad exposure to motivational outcomes. Also, this dissertation contributes to the self-efficacy literature. It

highlights the role of self-efficacy not only in personal achievement and motivation but also in consumer behavior and beliefs.

Fourth, this dissertation also proposes new measurements for *product attainability* (5 items, 7-point scale; $\alpha = .92$) and *self-efficacy* in the context of consumption (5 items, 7-point scale; $\alpha = .83$). These two measurements add new dimensions to our understanding of goal attainability and self-efficacy and their relevance in marketing contexts.

Fifth, this dissertation demonstrates that exposure to mass brand advertising can foster a growth mindset, which is an implicit belief that personal abilities can be developed through effort and learning (Dweck, 2006). This finding indicates that advertising not only affects explicit consumer attitudes and behaviors but also shapes deeper, implicit beliefs about personal development. This expands the scope of implicit personality theory by showing how external stimuli, such as advertising, can alter core beliefs about the malleability of personal traits.

Overall, this dissertation advances theoretical frameworks in marketing and psychology, especially in the advertising, consumer research, and goal pursuit literature. In the next chapter, I provide managerial and public policy implications.

CHAPTER IX

MANAGERIAL AND PUBLIC POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation provides insights for managers on how to increase the effectiveness of advertising and marketing strategies. It is in the interest of marketing managers for consumers to stay engaged and motivated in their consumption goals. For mass brand advertising, managers should focus on highlighting the attainability of their products so that consumers remain motivated to pursue their consumption goals. Products and services that provide self-improvement benefits, such as educational products, gym memberships, or health food products, should especially benefit from this advertising strategy.

Further, luxury brands who attempt to build long-term relationships with consumers and the public, and to reduce the risk of negative perceptions of luxury consumption, may consider applying the findings from this research to strategize marketing campaigns. Luxury brand managers should note that while focusing on the exclusivity of their products may enhance their prestige appeal, it may also demotivate some consumers from their consumption goals. Indeed, “new luxury” brand positioning, which involves conveying high perceived prestige with reasonable price premiums (Truong et al., 2009) may be an effective way for companies to balance appealing to the luxury sentiment and keeping middle-class consumers motivated enough to pursue their consumption goals. In addition, luxury brand managers may consider strategies that make luxury products seem more attainable without diluting the brand's prestige, such as offering entry-level products or highlighting financing options. Once consumers have attained the brand in some way, they may have more confidence in their ability to attain such

brands in the future, perhaps increasing their motivation to continue to self-improve so that they may attain similar or even more prestigious consumption goals in the future.

Moreover, managers can build long-term consumer engagement through consistent messaging that reinforces a growth mindset, which may lead to sustained motivation for self-improvement, including in pursuit of one's consumption goals. Brands can create content that supports personal growth, such as inspirational stories, educational materials, and community support forums. This strategy should enhance brand image in the eyes of consumers, which in turn may support brand-consumer relationships.

Policymakers should collaborate with mass brands to promote advertising that keeps consumers motivated to self-improve. For example, mass brands can create social campaigns motivating consumers to make positive changes, such as healthy behaviors, mental improvement, and education. This is crucial in terms of enhancing consumer well-being because self-improvement motivation leads to increased self-esteem, self-efficacy, and a sense of mastery, all of which are crucial components of well-being (Bauer et al., 2019; Breines & Chen, 2012).

In the next chapter, the limitations and future research are discussed.

CHAPTER X

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This dissertation also has several limitations that should be addressed. First, a limitation across all studies is that the samples used may not be representative of the broader consumer population. For the sake of convenience and to operate within my research budget, I recruited participants I had access to rather than selecting a random sample of consumers from around the world. In Study 1, the sample was drawn from Thai social media users to whom I was connected, and the call for participation explicitly asked consumers who had an interest in luxury consumption. These participants, then, may not represent consumers who engage with luxury brand advertising through other channels, in other cultures, and outside of my own social circle, and they may have overly favorable attitudes toward luxury advertising than the average consumer. Further, this study was conducted with a relatively small sample size of 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews and one focus group interview with two participants. Although qualitative research aims for depth rather than breadth, the limited number of participants may not fully capture the diversity of consumer responses to luxury brand advertising.

Study 2 utilized a U.S. sample from Prolific, while Study 3 and Study 4 utilized a U.S. undergraduate business student sample. Prolific participants tend to be younger, more female, and less wealthy than the average U.S. adult consumer (Douglas et al., 2023), and college students are certainly not representative of the broader consumer market. Finally, my focus on only Thai and U.S. consumers limits the generalizability of my findings to other cultures,

economies, and countries. Future research can test my research questions in different consumer samples to gain a broader understanding of these effects.

The fact that the samples were varied (different studies drew samples from different sources, like Thailand, the U.S., Prolific, and a business school may raise some concerns. For instance, the findings from Thai participants may not be entirely comparable to the findings with U.S. participants due to cultural and individual differences. Although the use of diverse samples can enhance the generalizability of this research, it still raises concerns about how to draw conclusions from the findings, especially because this dissertation does not explore cultural and demographic differences. Future research should be conducted on particular consumer groups or should consider cultural differences in the research question.

Another limitation is the use of the same mass vs. luxury advertisement manipulation across Studies 2, 3, and 4. Although the use of several different ads should have minimized the chance of confounding effects, there are still some concerns that the advertisements I happened to choose for these studies may have effects that might not arise with different brands or product categories. Future research can expand my findings by using different manipulations to expose consumers to advertisements. For instance, scholars can expose consumers to only one (instead of many) advertisement to isolate effects.

Finally, while the current research examined the effect of mass vs. luxury advertising on consumer self-improvement motivation, future research should investigate the effect of mass and luxury advertising relative to no advertising on consumer self-improvement motivation. Such an investigation will allow us to draw conclusions on the effect of advertising in general on consumer motivations. Future studies should also examine the effects of different types of advertising beyond the mass vs. luxury dichotomy, such as sustainable vs. unsustainable brands,

local vs. global brands, or the effect of celebrities vs. digital influencers, to understand a broader range of advertising impacts. Finally, future research can explore other psychological mechanisms, such as emotional responses, cognitive dissonance, social comparison, and identity signaling, which can provide a deeper understanding of how advertising influences consumer motivation.

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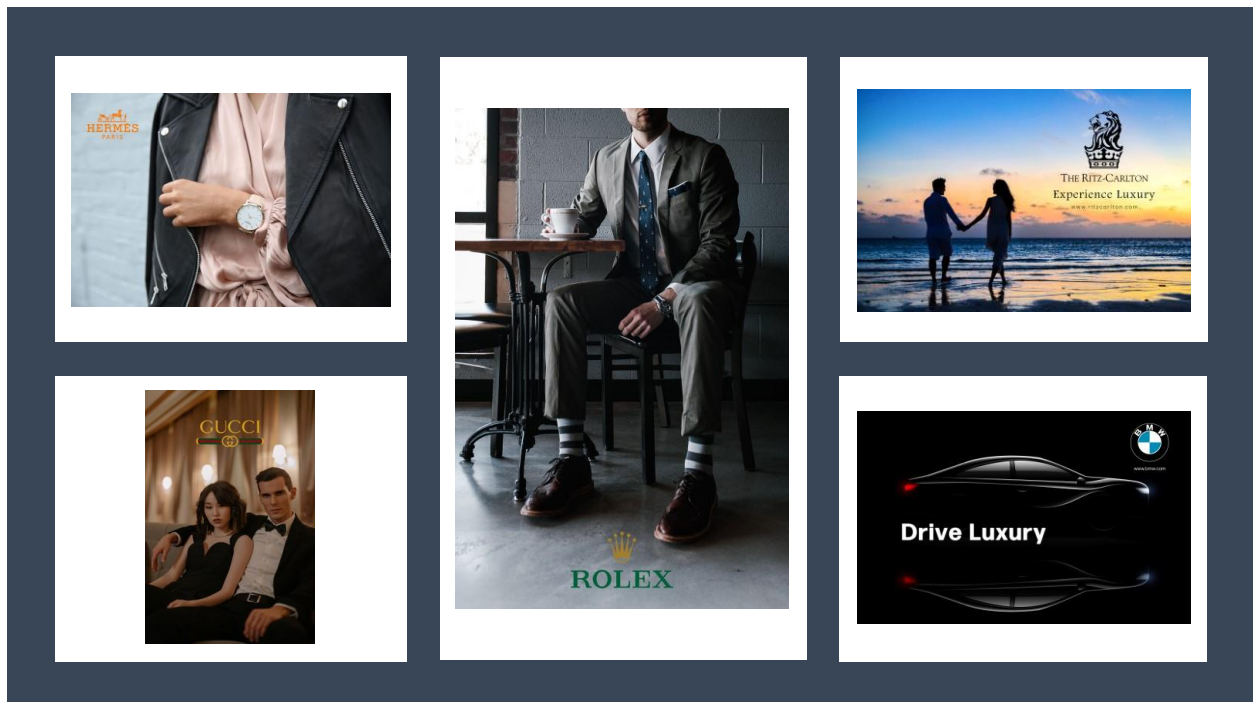
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APPENDIX A

Stimuli used in Studies 2, 3 and 4



Luxury Brand Ads Condition



Mass Brand Ads Condition

APPENDIX B

Constructs and Measurements

Self-Improvement Motivation: General motivation to self-improve using four 7- point items (-3, strongly disagree; +3, strongly agree) adopted from Allard and White (2015)($\alpha = .93$).

1. “I want to achieve success”
2. “I want to do better”
3. “I strive to be better”
4. “I want to prosper”

Materialism: 7-point items (1, strongly disagree; 7, strongly agree) adopted from Richins (2004) ($\alpha = .82$).

1. I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes.
2. Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.
3. I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success. (R)
4. The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.
5. I like to own things that impress people.
6. I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned. (R)
7. The things I own aren't all that important to me. (R)
8. Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.
9. I like a lot of luxury in my life.

10. I put less emphasis on material things than most people I know. (R)
11. I have all the things I really need to enjoy life. (R)
12. My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.
13. I wouldn't be any happier if I owned nicer things. (R)
14. I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.
15. It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.

Growth Mindset: 7-point items (1, strongly disagree; 7, strongly agree) adopted from Levy et al. (1998) ($\alpha = .84$).

Entity mindset (Fixed mindset):

1. "The kind of person someone is, is something basic about them, and it can't be changed very much"
2. "People can do things differently, but the important parts of who they are can't really be changed"
3. "Everyone is a certain kind of person, and there is not much that they can do to really change that."
4. "As much as I hate to admit it, you can't teach an old dog new tricks. People can't really change their deepest attributes"

Incremental mindset (Growth mindset):

5. "Everyone, no matter who they are, can significantly change their basic characteristics"
6. "People can substantially change the kind of person they are"
7. "No matter what kind of a person someone is, they can always change very much"
8. "People can change even their most basic qualities."

Product Attainability: 7-point items (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree;) ($\alpha = .92$).

1. "I could get the types of products I saw in the ads if I wanted them,"
2. "I could buy the types of products I saw in the ads,"
3. "If I wanted the types of products I saw in the ads, I know I could get them,"
4. "If I desired the types of products I saw in the ads, I know I could satisfy that desire"
5. "There are products I saw in the ads that I could get if I wanted to"

Consumption Self-Efficacy: 7-point items (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree;) adapted from Chen et al. (2001) ($\alpha = .83$).

1. I will be able to reach most of the product ownership goals that I have.
2. In general, I think that I can purchase the products that are important to me.
3. I believe I can buy almost any product to which I set my mind to buying.
4. I will be able to successfully purchase what I want.
5. I am confident that I can buy what I want in my life.

VITA

Suwakitti Amornpan earned his bachelor's degree in marketing from Mahasarakham University, Thailand, in 2009. He further pursued his academic career at the same institution, obtaining a master's degree in marketing management in 2012. Building on his foundational knowledge and experience, Suwakitti achieved a significant milestone by earning a doctoral degree in Business Administration with a concentration in marketing from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in 2024.

His research interests are broad and impactful, encompassing consumer behavior, consumer psychology, and transformative consumer research (TCR). He is deeply passionate about leveraging marketing strategies to create positive impacts on consumer well-being. His work aims to explore and implement marketing practices that not only drive business success but also contribute to the overall improvement of consumer lives. His research examines the psychological underpinnings of consumer decisions and seeks to uncover ways in which marketing can foster healthier, more sustainable consumer behaviors.

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