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DOES THE RAP WEAR DIOR?
THE IMPACT OF RAP ENDORSERS ON LUXURY BRAND PERSONALITY

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1. Introduction

Luxury brands spend millions of dollars for their image in advertising (US spend \$ 4,93 billions)¹. One solution which has been used to capture consumers, increase effectiveness of the campaign or gain brand attitude is the celebrity endorsement (Schimmelpfennig & Hunt, 2020), as for example alliance with movie stars (Robert Pattinson for Dior²).

As brands have personal and social meanings for consumers (McCracken, 1989) and can extend the self (Belk, 1988), companies choose celebrities' endorsers to share their values with consumers. Companies try to create the match-up hypothesis (Kamins, 1990), that is characterized by a congruence between brand and the endorser, based on credibility, social meanings or attractiveness (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2019). Endorsers can support or modify brand personality (Ambroise & Albert, 2020) that may positively affect brand attitude and intention behaviors.

On the other hand, it is also possible to create incongruence to increase brand image, brand effectiveness or sales (Lee & Thorson, 2008). For example, brands can select an influencer that has no interest on the brand to reach the influencer's community and revitalize the brand image (Breves & al., 2019). Fleck and Maille (2010) propose that a moderate mismatch between a sponsor and the sponsored brand should be more effective than a match and is preferable for strongest brand attitudes.

Our article is following this idea to "work with incongruence" for luxury communication campaigns as it is suggested by Ambroise and Albert (2020). Previous research has mainly focused on the causes of celebrity endorsement (attractiveness, credibility) and on the concept of congruence but few of them are focusing on the impact of incongruent pairs, which is supposed to lead to negative impact on the brand perception and company's benefits. The aim of this research is therefore to extend the current knowledge by examining the effects of celebrity's incongruence on brand personality of luxury brand.

In this article, we specifically study the impact for a luxury brand to use a rap artist endorser on brand personality. Luxury is mainly considered as elitist and rap is a musical style that is more popular and "from the street" (Dion & Borraz, 2017;). At first sight, and following endorser model effects (Wong & al., 2020), the association between luxury brand and a rap artist will lead to negative impacts on brand personality and brand attitude. However, as noted by Burgh-Woodman (2020), it is possible to "*reinvent luxury in the streets*" with an assemblage between luxe and rap (Rokka & Canniford, 2016).

Such research might provide answers to understand the role of "non logical" associations and to find news strategies for luxury brands to revitalize their image, renew the brands and to target other/new consumers without diluting the original brand personality. We first present the luxury brands meanings, then the conceptual link between celebrity endorsement and brand personality, and finally the rap culture. Experimental method is presented, and we discuss the results.

2. Research background & conceptual framework

1. Luxury brands meanings

Originally for an elite, the luxury market changed over the years. The year 2000 balanced the affinities towards the brand while the current generation attaches importance to the values and authenticity (Roux, 2009). It was at the beginning a niche sector which is today an actively growing sector, targeting an expanding clientele (Kapferer, 2015).

The luxury sector has some specificities (De Barnier & al., 2012) which vary in terms of personal and interpersonal values (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Price is considered as the first

¹ <https://www.statista.com/topics/4149/luxury-advertising-and-marketing/>

² <https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/grooming/article/robert-pattinson-dior-interview>

factor which explains the luxury product (Ko & al., 2019). However, we have also to consider social and psychological meanings. One specific dimension of luxury is the rarity and uniqueness which can explain why people want to possess luxuries (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). From a personal perspective, the feeling to possess a unique product is hedonic and provides a strong emotional response. Furthermore luxury brands are fundamentally different from mass-markets because luxury is considered as an exclusive privilege for elite and a way to share a specific status (Han & al., 2010). This is effective in several categories such as cars, handbag or watches. We can also consider the renown of the luxury brand (high quality, excellence, history, reputation) (Kapferer, 1998). Depending on these dimensions, people will be attracted to consume luxury goods with their specific needs and their identity. Even if the luxury market still “play” with these dimensions, with specific services, privileges, uniqueness feelings, high customer relationship management (Holmqvist & al., 2020a; Wirtz & al., 2020), it is also faced to new challenges. With the democratization of luxury or the luxury bandwagon effect (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012), brands use various strategies to revitalize their image, target new audience, diversify their offer. Luxury consumption is no longer restricted to the traditional elite and includes new consumers, younger, modern. Luxury brands can use a masstige strategy (Truong & al., 2009). From a communication perspective, they extend their presence on online social media (Song & Kim, 2020) to diffuse quickly brand messages and capture attention. They also use new types of endorsers like rap artists³. Even if it seems inappropriate and result to an incongruent endorsement, brands sometimes make this choice: Pharrel Williams with Chanel, Mocha La Squale with Lacoste, ASAP Rocky with Dior. In this article, we focus on this new strategy of celebrity endorsement in order to know if it is efficient for the luxury brands.

2. *Celebrity endorsement*

Several brands use celebrity endorsement (Knoll & Matthes, 2017;) which impacts the attitude towards the brand in various ways such as attractiveness and likability of celebrity, product expertise category and/or celebrity-brand fit (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kamins & Gupta, 1994). Celebrity endorsement can be understood as an alliance between a celebrity and a corporate brand which can influence brand equity, purchase attention, brand attitude (Albert & al., 2017; Choi & Rifon, 2012). Previous research show the importance of the fit between brands and celebrities (Knoll & Matthes, 2017). Fit, or congruence, refers to the similarity between celebrity and brand and it leads to a positive attitude towards the brand (Choi & Rifon, 2012). Brand congruency can be seen with a tridimensional view (Albert & al., 2017) : brand-consumer congruency, celebrity-consumer congruency and celebrity-brand congruency. Consumer will perceive brand image by several ways as for example the association between the ingredient brands and people/ads who endorse this brand (Aaker & Keller, 1990). For example, Fiat choose Leonardo Di Caprio for its last ad campaign for « the electric Fiat 500 ». He is well-know with his engagements for environment, the association Di-Caprio/Fiat is said congruent for the electric.

Several studies define this fit or congruence by the match-up hypothesis (Kamins,1990) that assumes the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements is partially dependent on the degree of perceived fit between an endorsed object and the respective celebrity (Erdogan, 1999) and that the fit is a moderator of the effects of celebrity endorsement on brand attitude.

At the opposite, the incongruence can be defined by the inconsistency between pre-existing consumer expectations and new information (Fleck & al., 2012). The incongruence impacts the attention, memory and attitude of the consumer (Lee & Thorson, 2008). If there is no fit (or lack of fit), it can imply a negative evaluation of the brand (Campbell & Warren, 2012).

³ <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/luxury/the-new-kings-and-queens-of-fashion-kanye-west-asap-rocky-cardi-b>

Previous research have mainly shown that the fit is essential and very few research have demonstrated that incongruence, or a moderated mismatch could be preferable for brand attitude (Jagre & al., 2001).

Regarding congruence (or incongruence) of celebrities, the concept of brand personality remains important (Pradhan & al., 2020). Indeed, the celebrity is a human brand (Hofmann & al., 2021) which whom consumer can be attached. The brand also has a personality (Aaker, 1997, p. 347) which are divided in five dimensions : sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness.

In this way, consumers choose brands that express who they are/ want to be or they are not/do not want to be (Swaminathan & al., 2009). The choice of brands, based on brand-personality process, is dependent of several attributes (cheerful, imaginative, up-to-date, reliable, ...) and the endorser that will reflect the meanings of the brand. As consumer see various ads, campaigns, several strategies can be adopted by brands such for example to be incongruous with the endorser to amaze consumers and mark their memory or to be congruent with the endorser so that consumers view it in a positive way.

In the specific case of luxury brands, we choose to focus on incongruency and new endorsement strategies implying rap singers. Next, we will explain why Rap culture can be considered as incongruent with luxury meanings.

3. *The rap culture*

Very few research have studied rap or hip-hop culture regarding celebrity endorsement (Ferguson & Burkhalter, 2015), especially in luxury sector. Even if endorsement has been widely used in luxury sector, new endorsement strategies appear as digital influencers associations or rap artists. So, the question is to know if a luxury brand (considered as elitist) will gain from an association with rap artists who are historically associated with popular culture. We are wondering if congruence between rap celebrities and luxury brands could have a positive impact on brand personality.

Historically, rap has emerged in the working-class neighborhoods of large cities in the northern United States (Hebdige, 2004). At the same time, a larger culture called hip-hop has developed around rap, largely influenced by music and its artists (Motley & Henderson, 2008). This culture, which brings together several elements - fashion , graffiti art, music, language - and all the experiences shared by participants and consumers (Hebdige, 2004), has spread around the world mainly to marginalized populations.

In fact, hip-hop culture is linked not only by an awareness and proximity to hip-hop elements, but also by a feeling of “connective marginality” - a paradigm linking culture, class and historical oppression in young people around the world (Osumare, 2001). Thus, hip-hop artists worldwide are inspired by African-American hip-hop (resistance to oppression and struggles against discrimination and racism (Motley & Henderson, 2008). Then they bring a productivity and a cultural originality specific to the receiving country, which echoes the pains, struggles and political problems they experience at the national level (Osumare, 2001). Since its development in the 1980’s, rap music has been the subject of much debate as to its content (Dixon & Brooks, 2002;). The controversies have mainly focused on the messages sent to the public - violence, drugs, misogyny, materialism - (Conrad & al., 2009), their reception by the audience and their impact on the social behaviors of young listeners ; Miranda & Claes, 2004).

These controversies disrupt the artistic legitimacy of rap music (Hammou, 2016). Although many initiatives have succeeded in having rap recognized as one of the main forms of popular art of the late twentieth century (Forman & Neal, 2012), disputes about its status still are significant (Hammou, 2016). According to Armstrong (2001), this negative perception of rap

probably stems from too much media visibility of negative rap music (gangsta) compared to “positive and constructive” rap (Tyson, 2002, 2004).

In parallel, some research indicates that rap can have a positive impact on the population, if it is viewed as a tool of resistance, self-esteem, respect, (Dixon & al., 2009), empowerment and self-affirmation of individuals (Tyson, 2006).

In addition to the music market, rap is now recognized as a major player in marketing. Rap artists like brands and they use product placements in music videos (Burkhalter & Thornton, 2014) and mention brand names in songs⁴ (Ferguson & Burkhalter, 2015). Martin and Collins (2002) noticed that nearly half of rap clips contained specific brand references. It also seems to be the most appropriate musical style for brand placement (de Gregorio & Sung, 2009). However, since rap artists are not unanimously popular, there is a lot of potential for positive or negative attitude. Thus, if properly framed, rap clip videos provide an ideal environment for integrating brands and products (Schemer & al., 2008). Beyond that, the congruence between the brand and the rap artist must also be taken into account because the identity of hip-hop or rap culture can have an impact on the affective responses to congruent brands (Ferguson & Burkhalter, 2015). Regarding luxury brands, a priori incongruent because opposed to hip hop culture (elitist vs popular) (Holmqvist & al., 2020b; ; Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2019), the placements of their brands are legion in hip-hop and rap videos and seem to be a good way for brands to reach a young or new audience (Burkhalter & Thornton, 2014).

Beyond that, the endorsement of a rap / hip-hop celebrity by luxury houses offers new perspectives to analyze the match-up hypothesis. Consistent with our theoretical background, we should expect a public controversy, or a negative brand attitude caused by a perceived incongruence. Indeed, luxury is associated with a high status and a social class (Han & al., 2010; Roux & al., 2017) while rap is more linked to the street and popular culture which seem far from this idea of elitism. We also assume the main hypothesis that:

H1: Non-Matching/incongruent endorsers (vs neutral) elicit less favorable brand personality traits (a: excitement, b: sincerity, c: competence, d: sophistication and e: ruggedness).

4. Main experiment

In this study, we examine the influence of celebrity endorsement on brand personality and measure the degree to which the celebrity incongruency elicits less favorable personality traits.

A within-subjects experiment (neutral condition versus incongruent condition) was designed to validate the predictions of this study. The experimental conditions were implemented through four corresponding print advertisements. Participants were exposed to two ads that included a branded product endorsed by a celebrity (for a description of the ad copy and images, see Appendix A1&2).

To test the research model and its associated hypotheses, the authors conducted a two-phase study with 129 consumers (64 for the first pair: neutral model with brand A and incongruent model with brand A and 65 for the second one: neutral model with brand B and incongruent model with brand B).

The participants (129) were told that they would be evaluating test advertisements involving celebrity endorsements for luxury brands and were asked to complete an online questionnaire. The questionnaire began with a short study introduction, after which participants were asked to evaluate the brand personality twice (firstly in the neutral celebrity condition and secondly in the incongruent celebrity condition). In order to focus the attention of the respondents on the incongruent condition, we noticed that the second endorser was a rap singer without

⁴ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/these-are-the-fashion-brands-rappers-namedrop-the-most-11555943601>

naming it. Reversely, we gave no indication concerning the celebrity in the first condition. We supposed that this information is sufficient to create specific meanings and convey new brand personality traits. This was followed by questions about whether the association between the brand and the rap singer was congruent in order to check if our choice of incongruent celebrity was verified.

The research design features (1) two brands and four celebrities, which improves ecological validity and (2) a sample of consumers aged from 21 to 73. The celebrity selection involved two steps. First of all, this celebrity should be a rap singer because rap is a popular culture which is incongruent with luxury brands. In order to generalize our results, we decided to replicate the same study with two conditions and two different rap singers. So, for each ad, we had an ad (with an unknown endorser: neutral condition) and another ad (with a well-known rap singer: incongruent condition).

We selected rap artists with two criteria. The first one is their popularity (their image and their music), so we selected the number of followers on Instagram and Youtube, also the number of views and likes in Youtube which are good indicators for a positive word-of-mouth and engagement (De Vries & Carlson, 2014). Indeed, the number of followers on social media is important for brand attitude (Veirman & al., 2017) because the number of followers positively affected the influencer's likability. The second one is based on the style of music. Rap artists are well known to have a flow, to have a pace, a rhythm, and "punchlines". Based on their fashion style, their music, we then selected Kaaris and Eddy de Pretto.

We selected two luxury brands that are valued in the top 10 luxury brands⁵ all over the world and which have a long heritage and renown that reveal their high quality (Beverland, 2006; De Barnier & al., 2012) : Hermès (10,6 million followers) and Dior (35,7 million followers). The feature product category is common (fashion) to reflect a realistic situation and because these brands are very well-known in France (our country of data collection).

Both rap singers are Kaaris and Eddy de Pretto differ in terms of popularity⁶, they are perceived as incongruent by respondents (Minc Kaaris = 3,36 and Minc De Pretto = 2,88, $F = 3,290$, $p = 0,072$) and this difference is significant. So, we can compare two levels of incongruency between brands and celebrity. The association between Dior and Kaaris is considered as less incongruent than Hermès and De Pretto. Congruency was measured with a single item (Do you think that this association between this brand and this endorser is relevant?, 7 points Likert Scale).

Using real advertisements from Dior and Hermès, the authors added a picture of each selected celebrity (Appendices A1&2). All the created pairings were fictitious but the use of real brands and celebrities in realistic ads increased the ecological validity of the study.

Brand personality was measured using the 15 most salient adjective traits from Aaker's (1997) scale, in line with prior research (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013) on five dimensions (excitement, sincerity, competence, sophistication and ruggedness).

5. Results

We conduct an ANOVA using a repeated measure design with incongruency (neutral versus incongruent) as a within-subject variable. In the model, we find a main significant effect of celebrity incongruency on brand personality dimensions.

Results shown in Table 1 (Appendix 3) confirm a significant effect of celebrity/brand incongruency on three dimensions of brand personality for brand 1 (DIOR), on excitement (F

⁵ <https://www.businessinsider.fr/porsche-gucci-rolex-les-10-marques-de-luxe-les-mieux-valorisees-au-monde-185625>

⁶ 3,2 million followers on Instagram and 1 047 818 114 views for Kaaris and 220 000 followers on Instagram and 96 000 000 view on Youtube for De Pretto

= 3.28, $p = 0.077$) supporting H1a but with reverse effect, on competence ($F = 13.111$, $p = 0.001$) supporting H1c and on Sophistication ($F = 49.518$, $p = 0.000$) supporting H1d. Incongruent endorser leads to more excitement for Brand 1 (DIOR, $M = 4.224$) compared to neutral endorser. On the reverse, incongruent endorser conveys less competence (Mincongruent = 4.187 vs Mneutral = 4.609) and sophistication (Mincongruent = 4.242 vs Mneutral = 5.527) than neutral endorser. This means that incongruency can increase some dimension of brand personality as excitement and decrease others as competence and sophistication. No effects were found for sincerity ($F = 1,081$, $p = 0,302$) and Ruggedness ($F = 4,188$, $p = 0,275$), so H1b and H1e are not supported.

Results of the replication of the study for another pair celebrity/brand shown in Table 2 (Appendix 4) confirm a significant effect of celebrity/brand incongruency on four dimensions of brand personality for brand 2 (HERMES), on sincerity ($F = 3.553$, $p = 0.064$) supporting H1b, on competence ($F = 44.489$, $p = 0.000$) supporting H1c, on sophistication ($F = 82.668$, $p = 0.000$) supporting H1d and on ruggedness ($F = 13.732$, $p = 0.000$) supporting H1e. Regarding sincerity, the mean rating is higher for neutral endorser ($M_{congruent} = 4,51$) than incongruent endorser ($M_{incongruent} = 4,184$). Moreover, the incongruent endorser conveys less competence ($M_{incongruent} = 4.10$ vs $M_{neutral} = 5,257$), less sophistication ($M_{incongruent} = 3.661$ vs $M_{neutral} = 5,665$) and less ruggedness ($M_{incongruent} = 3.546$ vs $M_{neutral} = 4,092$). The results suggest that incongruency has no effect on excitement ($F = 0,005$, $p = 0,943$) for brand 2, so H1a is not supported.

6. Discussion

The goal of this study was to compare the effectiveness of brand/endorser incongruency on brand personality perception. We have investigated our main hypothesis in two experiments, using different celebrities (neutral versus incongruent) across two luxury brands.

Our results show that incongruency plays an important role through brand personality perception by decreasing four dimensions. Competence and sophistication decrease in both cases (brand 1 and 2) when the endorser is incongruent with the luxury brands. Moreover, Brand 2 (Hermès) seems to be less sincere and rugged when there is no fit between endorser and brand. In contrast to expectations, incongruency seems to be able to convey better evaluation of excitement for the luxury brand DIOR. This result is of particular interest because it means that the luxury brand personality can be expanded when the rap artist has a personality moderately incongruent to the luxury's brand.

As an association between a luxury brand and a rap singer seems to convey less sophistication for the brand, it appears to lead a positive effect on excitement. Although participants are more likely to consider the brand as less sophisticated when it is endorsed by an incongruent celebrity, they could consider the brand as more exciting as well. These results have many implications. In line with previous research, the results improve current understanding of celebrity endorsement by focusing on the antecedents of endorsement formation but suggest that incongruent endorsement alliances can be beneficial (Zamudio, 2016). They, also, show both negative (dilution of the original luxury brand personality) and positive (expansion of personality) effects of brands' alliances with rap artists as Kim et al. (2018) demonstrated between artist and retail brand personality.

The findings have several implications for marketers. The integration of rap artists into luxury brands is a growing trend and the risk of a such alliance demands a better understanding of the mechanisms that govern how consumers react to such alliances. Luxury brands often need to broaden their personality dimensions to increase the number of consumers and to catch new young consumers but this strategy is critical because it exists a risk of dilution of the original brand personality and a risk of loss of the existing consumers.

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Appendix A1 : Hermès stimuli

Real ad with a supermodel



Experimental ad with the rap artist Eddy de Pretto



Appendix A2 : Dior stimuli

Real ad with a supermodel
Kaaris



Experimental ad with the rap artist



Appendix A3

Table 1. Tests of Within-Subjects Effects (Brand 1: DIOR)

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable (Congruency)	Means	Standard Deviation	F	Sig. (p)
Excitement	Neutral	3.943	1,178	3.238	0.077*
	Incongruent	4,224	1,330		
Sincerity	Neutral	3.64	1,264	1.081	0.302
	Incongruent	3.736	1,285		
Competence	Neutral	4.609	0,852	13.111	0.001***
	Incongruent	4.187	0,911		
Sophistication	Neutral	5.527	1,105	49.518	0.000***
	Incongruent	4.242	1,445		
Ruggedness	Neutral	3.547	1,275	4.188	0.275
	Incongruent	3.695	1,164		

* p < 0.10

** p < 0.05

*** p < 0.01

Appendix A4

Table 2. Tests of Within-Subjects Effects (Brand 2: HERMES)

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable (Congruency)	Means	Standard Deviation	F	Sig. (p)
Excitement	Neutral	4.128	1.123	0.005	0.943
	Incongruent	4.113	1.455		
Sincerity	Neutral	4.51	1,226	3.553	0.064*
	Incongruent	4.184	1,273		
Competence	Neutral	5.257	0.968	44.489	0.000***
	Incongruent	4.10	1,381		
Sophistication	Neutral	5.665	1,018	82.668	0.000***
	Incongruent	3.661	1.432		
Ruggedness	Neutral	4.092	1,019	13.732	0.000***
	Incongruent	3.546	1,178		

* p < 0.10

** p < 0.05

*** p < 0.01