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# The form of AI-driven luxury: how generative AI (GAI) and Large Language Models (LLMs) are transforming the creative process

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the extent to which generative AI (GAI) tools and Large Language Models (LLMs) can design new creative and meaningful products in the luxury industry. To this end, the research involves three qualitative studies to understand the cognitive and emotional response towards the creative outcome. Results reveal that consumers perceived that the GAI-designed luxury products reflect and reinforce the essence and symbolic values of the brands, and that their perception is influenced by knowledge of GAI authorship of the product. Finally, our findings open new possible scenarios based on the high/low GAI creativity employment for product design vs. high/low quality of manufacturing and materials on product/brand essence (namely product/brand essence matrix).

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Generative AI (GAI); Large Language Models (LLMs); luxury; creativity; consumer's behaviour

## Introduction

AI in general and generative AI in particular have received huge attention from scholars and practitioners, who saw those systems as effective tools to bring meaningful advancements and opportunities. Specifically, AI applications in marketing, with emphasis on generative AI, have been developed with several different purposes. They have been used to (i) solicit emotions in consumers (Chaturvedi et al., 2023; Kozinets & Seraj-Aksit, 2024; Moons & De Pelsmacker, 2012; Pantano & Scarpi, 2023); (ii) create new services and automate existing ones (including consumer's assistance and recommendations) (Allal-Cherif et al., 2024; Hui et al., 2023); (iii) generate new concept products (Cooper, 2024) and products when directly connected to 3D printers (Bertacchini et al., 2021); (iv) develop new and personalised products and experiences (Ameen et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024); (v) generate hyper-personalised contents and advertising (Campbell et al., 2023; Oc et al., 2023); and (vi) even provide relevant silicon samples for marketing and consumer research that are as reliable as the human ones (Sarstedt et al., 2024).

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AI consists of algorithms that mimic human intelligence and are multifaceted and subject to change as with human intelligence (Pantano & Scarpi, 2022). The recent shift from AI to generative AI (GAI from now on) refers to the applications of new algorithms (machine learning models) that can generate new information in different forms (e.g. text, images, video, etc.) (Hermann & Puntoni, 2024). Large Language Models (LLMs) represent a new type of (machine learning) algorithms able to augment, imitate, and even replace human capabilities (Hermann & Puntoni, 2024). To do so, they receive a set of instructions (prompts) to complete cognitive tasks similar to the ones completed by humans (Hermann & Puntoni, 2024). For instance, LLMs applications include the usage of statistical models to analyse *large* amounts of data, identify the patterns within the data, create connections within the data, and generate solutions accordingly (Chiarello et al., 2024; Fang et al., 2024; Matz et al., 2024; Sarstedt et al., 2024).

However, the usage of GAI and LLMs like DALL-E, BARD, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion, among others, stimulate a large debate among experts who have questioned the extent to which, and under what circumstances, humans can collaborate with AI (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Frank & Otterbring, 2023), to augment or devalue human creativity (Eapen et al., 2023). For instance, some preliminary studies demonstrated that consumers perceive humans as more creative and authentic than AI and can provide better product/service recommendations (H. Im & Lee, 2023; Lee & Kim, 2024).

Nevertheless, studies demonstrated that prior knowledge of authorship (whether human or AI) would influence the human evaluation of the creative outcome (Chiarella et al., 2022). For instance, under certain circumstances, virtual influencers based on AI are perceived as more authentic and trustable than humans (Allal-Cherif et al., 2024; J. Kim et al., 2024). Indeed, recent authors argued that AI might reduce emotional values while enhancing functional value for luxury products (Xu & Mehta, 2022). Indeed, luxury products are characterised by scarcity, high quality and price, and (even more importantly) by the ability to create a unique and desirable identity that consumers aspire to reach (Oc et al., 2023; Pantano, 2021; Pantano & Stylos, 2020). Moreover, luxury fashion brands are challenged by the frequent copycats and dupes provided by fast fashion (Shi et al., 2023). Thus, the debate on using GAI led by LLMs as an opportunity or threat for the luxury industry still requires further investigation.

In this vein, the aim of this paper is to deeply understand GAI's and LLMs' capability to generate creative and meaningful products, and to create an emotional connection between the brand and the consumer and between the consumer and the *artificial designer*. To this end, we identified the following guiding research questions: (1) *How can GAI be exploited to design luxury products able to reflect the brand essence?* (2) *How can GAI be exploited to design luxury products able to create an emotional connection with consumers similar to the one created with the traditionally human-designed products?* (3) *How can the knowledge of GAI authorship influence the cognitive and emotional response towards the creative outcome?*

Accordingly, this research is one of the first to catalyse scholarly discourse on the topic of GAI in the luxury sector, by focusing on text-to-image tools such as Midjourney to generate luxury bags (starting from the most iconic luxury bags) and involves three studies with prospective consumers to understand their perception. Specifically, in Study 1 consumers are informed of generative AI authorship (the products are designed by AI), while in Study 2, they are not informed, and in the follow-up Study, the sample

from Study 2 is informed. Results reveal that GAI can produce creative luxury products, maintaining and enhancing the luxury brand's essence and symbolic values.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. The next section discusses the theoretical background focusing on new product creativity, luxury industry, and AI. The subsequent section proposes our methodology of research and the key findings. Then, we finally discuss our results, proposing theoretical contributions and practical implications, with suggestions for future research.

## Theoretical background

### *New product creativity and AI*

Creativity describes the capacity to generate original and adaptive ideas (Ameen et al., 2022; Mednick, 1962). Specifically, the theory of creativity proposed by Mednick (1962) suggested that grouping different ideas in new ways can create novel solutions, which in turn might generate new processes, procedures, and products (Amabile, 1983; Verganti et al., 2020). Thus, creativity plays an important role in developing new products, services, and experiences that consumers might engage with (W. B. Kim & Choo, 2023). Precisely, creativity has a huge impact during each phase of new product development (Cooper, 1990), due to its ability to enhance the degree of deviance from existing products, enticing consumers' purchase intentions (S. Im et al., 2015), while it contributes by adding flexibility, fluency, and originality (Guilford, 1957). Thus, creativity is considered the crucial driver for product differentiation (Das et al., 2023), and the leading factor for organisations' profitability and sustainability (Ameen et al., 2024).

Creativity is essential in marketing areas such as product design/development, advertising, and marketing strategy (Ameen et al., 2022; Das et al., 2023). Moreover, new product creativity (i.e. the development of a creative product) is a complex procedure encompassing two main dimensions: (i) meaningfulness, and (ii) novelty (Amabile, 1983; Chuang et al., 2015; Dean et al., 2023). A product is perceived as *meaningful* when consumers perceive it as significant, useful, and appropriate when compared to the existing ones (N. Kim et al., 2013). By contrast, it is perceived as *novel* when consumers perceive it as unique and original when compared to the existing ones (Nakata et al., 2017). Therefore, both novelty and meaningfulness were identified as the basis of creativity (Vakratsas & Wang, 2020). Indeed, when the meaningfulness does not emerge, we cannot consider the resulting product as creative (Lehnert et al., 2014).

Yet, the developing of creative ideas is a risky process, due to the high level of uncertainty in new product creativity (Büyükköçkan & Feyzioğlu, 2004; Chin et al., 2009) and in demand prediction (Dean et al., 2016). This high level of uncertainty creates tensions that make organisations to be highly reluctant towards new product creativity (Kauppila et al., 2010). To mitigate the tensions and reduce the failure risk, researchers are exploring the possibility of employing AI and related generative tools in new product creativity (Cooper, 2024; Sarstedt et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). In doing so, other authors are questioning the disclosure of AI authorship to consumers in certain sectors (Chiarello et al., 2024).

The integration of AI with human intelligence (e.g. cognitive and emotional skills) might act as a game-changer for creativity in businesses (Ameen et al., 2022, 2024). Hence,

GAI can play a central and direct role in boosting the creative process and reducing companies' risk of product failure (Wang et al., 2024), by collecting continuous consumer's input and consequently using this input for constructive editing of the new products. As a consequence, integrating AI in innovation processes successfully is expected to be a key challenge for managers and companies for many years (Calabretta & Kleinsmann, 2017; Chiarello et al., 2024). Thus, new research studies are encouraged to investigate how AI and GAI can enhance creativity in new product development processes (Ameen et al., 2024; Chiarello et al., 2024; Cooper, 2024; Das et al., 2023), offering scholars and practitioners a clearer view of advantages and disadvantages related to the application of GAI technology in business.

### ***Luxury products and AI***

Luxury brands are usually reluctant to adopt technology, preferring to be anchored to traditional values that the concept of luxury represents, namely heritage, know-how, craftsmanship and artisanship, human capital, and timelessness (Pantano et al., 2022). Accordingly, they are slower in embracing digital transformations if compared to non-luxury brands, since this adoption can potentially damage the exclusivity of their products and the experience that they provide to their customers (Pantano et al., 2022). Indeed, the luxury brand creates a unique and memorable experience (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012), while past studies suggested that the introduction of new technology in this sector is not aligned with the essence of this sector and can be counterproductive for the business (Pantano et al., 2018).

Specifically, luxury is characterised by the sense of uniqueness and exclusivity embedded in each product and experience (Kivetz & Simonson, 2002; Wirtz et al., 2020; Xu & Mehta, 2022). The sense of exclusivity and uniqueness is driven by the prohibitive costs of these superior products, which are of superior craftsmanship and quality (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Kivetz & Simonson, 2002). Moreover, luxury makes consumers' experience a hedonic experiential and symbolic benefit while shopping (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Kivetz & Simonson, 2002). Consequently, luxury is associated with high social status and prestige (Dubois et al., 2021; Hansen & Wänke, 2011). However, luxury brands also need to manage the process of evolution through innovation and craftsmanship as a consequence of organisational and environmental changes (Athwal & Harris, 2018).

Nevertheless, past studies encouraged the usage of AI to improve how products are communicated to and experienced by consumers (Ameen et al., 2021; Letheren et al., 2020; Oc et al., 2023). Indeed, recent studies put emphasis on AI as a more satisfying technology for consumers (Flavián et al., 2024; Sullivan & Wamba, 2024), becoming a differentiator factor between *winning* and *losing* brands based on their (successful) adoption. Specifically, LLMs are considered the new game-changers due to their ability to provide comprehensive answers, by creating new information based on relevant prompts, which brands might successfully exploit (Puntoni et al., 2024).

Accordingly, there are some preliminary attempts to investigate the extent to which AI can also improve the luxury sector, investigating how consumers react towards luxury products designed with AI (Xu & Mehta, 2022). Although a luxury brand derives its essence primarily from emotional value, the utilisation of AI for

design creation might negatively influence the brand perception, reducing the perceived emotional value associated with the luxury (Xu & Mehta, 2022). Specifically, brand essence is the symbolic identity embedded into a brand by the core characteristics and values that drive consumers to purchase a luxury product or to experience a certain attitude (Chandler & Owen, 2002). In other words, the brand essence reflects the brand personality, while creating and reinforcing a unique and memorable brand image for consumers (Becker et al., 2019), and each product should contain the essence of the brand (Newman & Dhar, 2014). Thus, each luxury brand has a distinctive set of core characteristics and values, which makes its essence unique (Xu & Mehta, 2022). However, deviating from the brand essence with advertising, products, and services might capture attention but also produce a sense of surprise in consumers (Becker et al., 2019). Likewise, brand essence is part of the brand identity, contributing to the set of all tangible and intangible characteristics that define a brand (e.g. colours, values, texture, etc.) (J. L. Aaker, 1997; D. A. Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2012).

Literature also shows that consumers develop emotional bonds (in the form of connections, relationships, and love/hate) with the brand and the product, similar to the ones they develop with other consumers (Loureiro et al., 2012). Literature further highlights that individuals can develop an emotional attachment even to technologies like robots and other anthropomorphised devices, showing social reactions and treating them kindly (Schwaitzer et al., 2019; You & Robert, 2017). Despite the past investigations of emotional bonds like attachment between consumers and AI-generated products (Oc et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2023; Sestino, 2024; Xu & Mehta, 2022), the emotional relationship that consumers would develop with the AI-designed product is not fully investigated in marketing literature.

## Research design

Our research is based on a three-step approach that involves (i) GAI for designing new luxury bags from iconic bags, and (ii) consumers' appraisal of the outcome of this specific tool. To this end, the research first identifies some iconic bags from luxury brands and employs a GAI to design new ones; secondly, it collects consumers' responses towards the new bags, knowing that the bags are designed by a GAI (Study 2a) or ignoring the nature of the designer (Study 2b); thirdly, a follow-up study investigates how the responses of consumers in Study 2b change after being informed that the bags are designed by AI. In this way, the research explores the knowledge of the GAI as designer in consumers' evaluation of the creative outcomes.

### ***Study 1: GAI and LLM generation of luxury bags***

There is a vast number of LLMs that create vivid and visually rich, highly appealing, and memorable images from written texts (prompts) that align with the users' imaginary (Miao & Yang, 2023). We want to investigate how GAI employing LLMs is able to create tangible symbols of luxury (in the form of bags). We focused on bags since it is the most important segment in the luxury industry (holding about 36% of the global luxury products market) (Statista, 2024a).

### Exemplar prompt

**Brand 1**

/image: can you create an image of [xxx] bag monogram canvas, in the style of dark gold and pink, realistic forms, classical propotion,detailed rendering, restored and repurposed, delicate precision, late 19<sup>th</sup> century

*Generative AI*



**Figure 1.** Example of AI-designed bag image and related prompt.

Since AI does not have human reasoning abilities (Huang & Rust, 2024) but can mimic human abilities like problem-solving, language processing (Pantano & Scarpi, 2022), and even human creativity (Ameen et al., 2024), it is able to generate images that imitate the given context without effectively understanding it as humans do. Therefore, providing a clear indication of the context to simulate would help GAI to provide outcomes able to reflect that context. To this end, we selected some of the most iconic luxury bags that are still available on the market from four different luxury brands. In this way, GAI can use those bags as the starting point for designing new ones without understanding the meaning of luxury. Subsequently, we developed the prompts to make GAI generate new bags. We chose Midjourney due to its availability to associate the written prompt and the image of the original bag. The prompts consist of the command '/image' and the following request to start from the specific bag of a certain brand to design new ones. [Figure 1](#) shows an example of a blurred image and the related prompt, without the specific reference to the brand name and to the folder where the image of the original bag is stored for anonymity purposes (which reads as [XXX]).

A total of 100 images were generated. To avoid information overload or excessive effort in respondents required to evaluate the design of the shown bags, two researchers individually selected 10 images each (10% of the total images). Subsequently, four independent experts (two practitioners and two researchers in marketing) evaluated the initial set of 100 images and selected 10 as potential exemplar images to be shown to respondents for Study 2. The 5 most common selected images have been considered for Study 2 (Study 2a and 2b). This two-stage procedure resulted in the refinement of the images selected and kept for Study 2 (Study 2a and 2b).



## **Study 2: consumers' response**

Through an exploratory design, we investigate consumers' response towards luxury bags designed by AI, and we compare and contrast this response when consumers are informed of GAI authorship (GAI designed the bag) (Study 2a), when they are not (Study 2b), and when they are informed after they provide an initial response (Follow-up Study). This method is effective for an evolving topic such as the one investigated in this research (consumers' response to GAI creative outcome) (Oc et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2023; Sestino, 2024), which might serve as a starting point for future investigations and theory-building (Eisenhardt, 1989). Thus, our design follows the Grounded Theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Studies 2a, 2b and the Follow-up are based on face-to-face semi-structured one-to-one interviews with a total of 46 consumers recruited in Italy in February 2023 (23 participants per Study 2a and 23 per Study 2b). The follow-up study with 15 participants was then conducted to test the extent to which interviewees in Study 2b changed their responses when informed about GAI authorship of those products. Data for all studies were collected in Italy due to the (i) constant increase in annual growth of the luxury market; (ii) reputation of the country in terms of history, art, and design able to inspire the luxury fashion market worldwide; and (iii) large number of Italian brands leaders in the luxury sector the way in elegance and craftsmanship (Statista, 2024b).

Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was collected one-on-one, following Langley and Meziani's (2020) work related to investigative genre interviews. This study involved a non-probabilistic convenience sample, where members of the target population(s) met the criteria of easy accessibility, availability at a given time, geographical proximity, and willingness to participate voluntarily (Etikan et al., 2016). We further set the criteria of familiarity with luxury brands and related bags, and age. In this context, we defined familiarity as if the respondent is a buyer of luxury bags or is passionate about luxury bags, which includes having a substantial knowledge of luxury brands, past and present collections, logos, etc. Interviewees are between 25 and 40 years old across studies, due to the huge value of these cohorts to the industry (BCG Report, 2023). We selected only female participants as women's bags are one of the most essential products in the luxury accessories market (Statista, 2024a). This sampling technique is purposive in nature, and it is particularly effective when the goal is theoretical development rather than generalisability of the findings as per the quantitative approaches (Kelly & McAdam, 2022).

Interviews were conducted in the respondents' original language (Italian), and then translated into English. The analysis is based on the inductive technique as outlined by Gioia and colleagues (2013). Specifically, in the first step, keywords were identified. Then, the thematic chart was developed to code each of the events, defying the codes assigned to each concept expressed in the interviews. After identifying similarities in the codes, the analysis ended with aggregating the first- and second-order concepts in a macro-theme (aggregate dimensions). This process allowed the development of data structured to develop the theory.



### **Study 2a: informed consumers about GAI authorship**

Two main themes emerged in the studies: the ability of the GAI product to (1) reflect the luxury brand essence, and to (2) create an emotional bond between the consumer and the new product.

*Luxury brand essence.* In this study, consumers were informed before the interview about the adoption of GAI to design luxury bags, but not about the original branded bags used by the GAI to create the new ones. Thus, consumers expressed their opinions about the new products with no explicit indication to refer to a particular brand. Even so, during the interviews, respondents frequently associated the bag with the (original) brand, noticing similarities between the new bags and the traditional brand ones. Indeed, they recognised some characteristics of each brand reflected in the GAI bags. Nevertheless, participants also noticed some differences with the traditional products of the brands, like colour, style, or material, appreciating the ability of the GAI to innovate while keeping the traditional characteristics (essence) of the brand. They also observed small glimmers of innovation in the bags designed by GAI. For instance, a respondent said:

In my opinion, they [GAI] do well because when you revisit something that is, let's say, traditional, you keep the tradition and in addition, there is the progress, which represents the evolution of society: tastes change [...] maybe they add that extra detail to it that maybe at the right time is more suitable [...] The shape always remains the classic and iconic shape, like the bowler bag, which is classic. What changes are the extra details, which make the bag more modern. (#5)

While another one replied:

I think they are very nice bags that I would wear because I like the colours and also the fact that they are very different from each other. Each one can be used to embellish a slightly more casual outfit or to go with slightly more elegant outfits. So that's why I would choose all of them because they are very different from each other anyway. Um, yes mainly because of the colours. (#10)

Another said that *'When you look at the bag, you immediately recognize the brand. They were very beautiful in my opinion; I particularly liked the colours. It is incredible that AI made them'* (#9). The adoption of GAI to generate new brands was not perceived by respondents as being able to create innovative products, or disruption with the past collections. Instead, GAI maintained the luxury essence and its symbolic characteristics, just adding minimal changes.

***Emotional bond with the new product.*** Despite being informed about the GAI products, respondents still showed the desire to own one of the bags. Specifically, they showed how wearing one would make them feel as good as wearing an original bag from one of those brands. Thus, even when designed by GAI, the luxury bag becomes a sought-after accessory to embellish consumers' outfits, generating positive emotional reactions in consumers. Accordingly, an interviewee said that *'Wearing a bag like this would still make me well. It's that accessory that makes your outfit more valuable. Doesn't matter who designed it. This is [xxx brand], and this is enough'* (#19). While another specified that:

When you wear a bag from a higher range, you feel more valued. A bag like this makes your outfit better or embellishes it because you put on an expensive item. If I put on jeans and a white T-shirt, I would be anonymous, however, if I put on a bag from [xxx brand] even if the jeans are from a fast fashion brand, the jeans take value: it makes the whole thing more beautiful. (#18)

Respondents further assumed that the materials for these new bags would be the same as used for the original bags, thus retaining the same artisanship and high quality, and therefore requiring the same care. They would also expect to wear it on certain occasions as per any of the bags by the same brand. Moreover, respondents presumed that the bags were designed by the same designer of the previous collections. Accordingly, they reported that the uniqueness, exclusivity, and rarity of the new bags are the same as any of the brand's other bags, and they showed the same attachment to these new bags as they showed towards any of the bags by the same brand. Specifically, consumers declared that they would feel *unique* and *modern* (#5), *eccentric* (#12), and *sophisticated* and *elegant* (#18). These elements lead the luxury brand to create an unbreakable bond with the consumer even when using GAI for the design process. At the same time, consumers seem willing to accept the small changes introduced by GAI when compared to the traditional style of the brand. Thus, the introduction of this technology in the creative process seems to have almost no effect on consumer's perception of the GAI-designed product.

### ***Study 2b: not informed consumers about GAI authorship***

Also, in Study 2b, the two emerging themes are related to the ability of the GAI products to (i) reflect the luxury brand essence, and (ii) create an emotional bond between the consumer and the new product.

***Luxury brand essence.*** In this study, consumers were not informed that the bags were designed by GAI. Similarly to Study 2a, they were unaware of the brands of the original bags (the same used in Study 2a), but in this case they were not informed either about the GAI authorship. Thus, consumers expressed their opinions about the new products with no explicit indication to refer to a particular brand. However, during the interviews, consumers often correctly associated the bag with the brand that inspired the GAI design, identifying many similarities with the essence of each brand. Thus, they perceived the GAI-designed bags as aligned with their idea of the brand image. They further found both similarities in the shape and the usage of certain textures, and differences in terms of colours or style. Some still showed a sense of detachment from previous collections and did not particularly like the new style and the colours used for these new bags. For instance, when comparing with other collections from the same brands, they described the new bags as *too colourful* (#6), *fancy* (#17), *flashy* (#7), *eccentric* (#15), and *tacky* (#16). Accordingly, some respondents declared that '*They seem from this brand, but they also seem quite different from what I've seen so far from them*' (#16), and '*I am a lover of classic bags, so in my opinion, these brands are not doing well in launching these collections*' (#15).

However, an element that emerged from the interviews was the need to communicate this sort of disruption from traditional brand choices. Although the proposed bags are not the ones they usually expect to see from these brands, they accept the new brand choices, showing an interest in knowing why these new collections embrace such innovation. Accordingly, an interviewee stated that '*These bags seem aesthetically ugly to me, but the brand is able to make also them fashionable or trendy. If they do with this collection too, I might change idea and appreciate more*' (#6). Another said that:

They are not all really my style. Some of them I find too flashy. (...) In my opinion, these Brands do well to create them. We are all different and tastes vary, so offering different things for even the most whimsical and innovative tastes can be a winning choice for the Brand. (#7)

While another interviewee specified that:

It immediately jumped out at me for not being in the usual trend of this Brand [...] I think there should be some communication behind this choice to make this sort of re-branding and special editions understood. I don't understand why they decided to launch something so new. Are they limited editions? (#3)

In this case, interviewees perceived the bags as part of a new (and quite a breakthrough) collection from the brands, but they did not appreciate completely the innovative elements in these new products, due to the detachment from the original collections, considering the new as quite distant from the traditional collections. Accordingly, another interviewee specified that:

Compared with previous collections, it seems to me that they twist the colours. I like this detachment from the traditional, and I like these patterns much better than the previous ones, but there is a difference with the bags I saw previously. (#14)

***Emotional bond with the new product.*** In contrast with the previous study, interviewees ignoring the adoption of GAI for designing new bags expressed a sense of unease towards the colours and creative choices expressed in these new bags. This feeling leads to a sense of potential discomfort in wearing one of these bags. Indeed, interviewees stated that wearing these bags would make them feel *observed* (#16) or *in the spotlight* (#11). Others even expressed fear for their safety when wearing such a flashy product, claiming that they hardly wear them in daily life. Therefore, while they still showed a willingness to own one of those, they would prefer to keep it at home to look at and touch at their convenience just to feel better, but not to walk down the street with. These bags can still represent a high social status that they would like to own regardless of the specific aesthetic. Indeed, one interviewee stated that *'Wearing such a bag is like giving extra value to the outfit in general. It makes you feel satisfied and accomplished, status attainment'* (#14). While another specified that:

Owning one of these bags would make me feel more responsible. Luxury brands, especially handbags, are an important accessory for a woman. Inevitably, I would feel placed on a social ladder. It would clash with losing my car keys, though. (#8)

Finally, the interviews revealed a strong link between owning or wearing one of these bags and the expected benefits. Respondents stated that some of these bags led them to imagine hedonic (e.g. a trip to the lake) or utilitarian (e.g. daily office use) scenarios based on the brand texture, colour, and shape. This result strengthens the emotional bond between the consumer and the new product even if they ignore the design authorship. Accordingly, interviewees said *'This bag makes me think of a trip or a walk by the lake'* (#8), and *'I would wear it for a gala or a wedding. An important event for sure'* (#3). Although these bags did not seem to match the interviewees' preferences at first glance, the bags are still able to reinforce the emotional bond that consumers have with the brand.

### **Follow-up study**

To validate the results of Study 2a and 2b, we invited participants from Study 2b (consumers not informed of GAI authorship) for a follow-up interview, discussing both the interpretation of the results and their implications (Longoni & Cagliano, 2018; Rowley, 2012). In particular, 15 out of 25 participants were involved, and each interview lasted about 40 minutes. During the follow-up study, participants were informed that all the bags that they previously saw were designed by GAI. The first reaction was astonishment, since they believed that the bags resulted from an intense creative process produced by humans. For instance, participants declared that *'So, don't they exist? Wow! With AI now you can create needs or curiosity that maybe one doesn't even imagine. You go beyond reality'* (#8); *'You are telling me that the bags were made by AI, which means that the machine was able to meet so well [...] Honestly, AI was able to come up with new styles that still meet people's needs'* (#11); and *'So, are these collections created with AI? Well, I see them as in line with each Brand's past collections... I never would have guessed, honestly'* (#17).

Moreover, interviewees stated also that the introduction of GAI does not really affect the essence of these brands and remains faithful and in line with past collections. Thus, the knowledge that GAI had been used for designing the bags did not impact their previous perception of the bags, and they considered GAI as a way to improve human creativity. Indeed, a respondent said that:

In my opinion, the use of AI in new product development does not make lose the brand's essence. But I think that the final product should be approved by a human. So, in this way, AI can contribute to the creative process where the human brain does not. (#16)

Another added:

We hold in our hands a big opportunity to create wonderful ideas, even just by writing down a thought. These ideas are then reworked in zero time by the machine. I think it's a unique opportunity. So, I'm super pro AI. Obviously, for people who work in design and creation process, it might be perceived as a negative aspect, but I think it goes to support their ideas, so I'm super pro. (#14)

However, respondents showed some initial fear about the risk of replacing human designers with AI (and GAI in particular). They expressed further concerns about the threat of a future where GAI imposes the trends of fashion, driving the new collections of luxury brands. For instance, an interviewee said:

This artificial intelligence can be scary in the long run. The person becomes a superfluous tool; AI can do everything. There is no longer the stylist... maybe before there was the stylist who followed the fashion world and the fashions of the moment and now there is a program. You click and you have a new bag. It scares me in the long run. (#17)

While another added that:

It scares me because I think it can pick up on a lot of people's characteristics. So, I would say wow, but it also scares me. It seems designed by a thinking mind. It fascinates me at the same time. (#7)

Overall, interviewees expressed the desire of some future actions to protect human creativity against *machine creativity* (GAI), especially in the (luxury) fashion industry. Accordingly, an interviewee stated that:

I think it could be a good cue to go beyond what we are used to seeing and so maybe AI could be a first step in finding new design cues and matching colours or raw materials. That said, I think the human artist should retain the ability to add a personal touch (. . .) Fashion is a form of art and the artist, the fashion designer, has to keep his centre in this process as well. (#11)

Results of the follow-up corroborate new evidence that GAI can boost the creative process, maintaining and enhancing the luxury brand's essence and symbolic values. However, these findings still show that consumers might be afraid that machine-based design might replace the traditional human-based design.

## Conclusion

This paper investigates (i) how GAI and LLMs can design creative and meaningful products in the luxury industry, (ii) how consumers perceive these products compared to the same products designed by a human, and (iii) how their perception changes when notified about the GAI authorship. Results of the three studies provide empirical evidence of the opportunities for GAI to contribute to the creative process in the case of luxury products, being able to reflect and reinforce the essence and symbolic values of luxury brands. Indeed, almost no differences in the ability to reflect brand essence have been identified in the three studies, while products have been perceived by all interviewees as in line with the more traditional ones just with some changes (e.g. colours, texture, etc.).

## Theoretical contribution

Our study makes several contributions to advancing the current body of knowledge in creativity (Mednick, 1962), emphasising AI creativity, and in the usage of AI and GAI in marketing and consumer's applications. Specifically, we demonstrate how GAI can be creative in designing new luxury bags that consumers do not distinguish from human-designed bags, using Midjourney as an example. Thus, not only human-designed luxury products can contain the brand essence (Newman & Dhar, 2014), but also GAI-designed products can. Consequently, ours is one of the very few studies exploring the role of AI and GAI in luxury fashion creativity (Allal-Cherif et al., 2024; H. Im & Lee, 2023; Lee & Kim, 2024; Xu & Mehta, 2022), by providing in-depth insights on consumers' perception of the value and meaningfulness of GAI-designed products. In doing so, our findings also reply to Chiarello et al. (2024) call for an investigation of GAI's and LLMs' application in innovation and new product development.

We further extend the work of Xu and Mehta (2022), by exploring the emotional relationships of consumers towards AI-created luxury brands. In our research, we investigated the same typology of products (luxury bags) to explore in detail the emotional bonds, and we used two groups of consumers (informed and not informed of GAI authorship). Our findings reveal that the existing solid emotional bond between the informed consumers and the brand remained unaffected by the knowledge of the GAI usage in the design process. Xu and Mehta (2022) found that AI-designed luxury products lessen the perceived emotional value associated with the luxury brand. Instead, for the unaware consumers in our study, the GAI-designed product seems to build up their emotional bond with the brand. This confirms the assertion that creative design source

is critical in establishing the emotional feature of a luxury fashion brand, while providing new evidence on the extent to which AI-designed products solicit emotional bonds with consumers similar to the ones created by human designers (Loureiro et al., 2012; Newman & Dhar, 2014). Our work shows that luxury essence is maintained by the GAI-designed products.

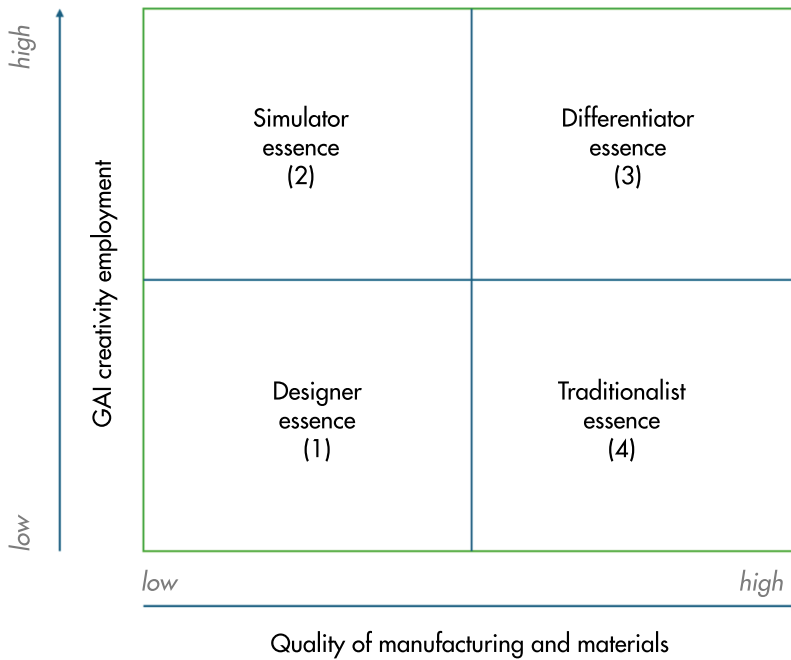
Moreover, awareness of the design source (generative AI authorship) does not influence consumers' perception of the final product, which still reflects the essence of the (luxury) fashion industry. This result extends the study on the knowledge of generative AI authorship as a bias for consumer's evaluation of the creative outcome in the art industry (Chiarella et al., 2022). Accordingly, our results show how consumers perceived the GAI bags as authentic, contributing to the debate on the authenticity of GAI services/products (Allal-Cherif et al., 2024; J. Kim et al., 2024), and on how to better employ GAI for new product innovation processes (Cooper, 2024) as in the idea generation to design of aesthetically pleasing products.

Finally, on the one hand, our results, especially from the follow-up study, corroborate the employment of GAI as a promising tool to improve human creativity (Ameen et al., 2022, 2024; H. Im & Lee, 2023) also in the luxury industry by creating an emotional bond weakly identified in the past studies (Oc et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2023; Sestino, 2024; Xu & Mehta, 2022). On the other hand, some concerns (i.e. GAI driving the fashion trends, GAI replacing humans in the design process) emerge. These align with findings from previous studies on the usage of GAI and LLMs to generate new solutions (Fang et al., 2024; Matz et al., 2024; Sarstedt et al., 2024), which can be biased or not completely reflective of human needs or desires.

### ***Implications for practitioners***

Our findings also have critical implications for practitioners adopting GAI, which are not limited to the luxury industry. Indeed, managers should be aware that the design will not be the differentiating factor as GAI is diffused. Instead, the differentiating factor will rely almost exclusively on manufacturing and materials. In other words, GAI tools make available a huge creative potential that (luxury and non-luxury) competitors might explore to replicate the essence of luxury products easily. Thus, the employment of GAI to design new products creates four new possible scenarios based on the high/low GAI creativity employment for product design vs. high/low quality of manufacturing and materials on product/brand essence, namely the product/brand essence matrix (Figure 2).

In the case of (i), low usage of GAI for creativity purposes and low quality of manufacturing and materials, the creative function is completely based on the *designer essence of the brand/product*, where the designer is responsible for creating products that are different from competitors' based almost exclusively on the design, and the consumer looks for something unique in the product that would make it different from the traditional ones. In (ii), high usage of GAI for creativity purposes and low quality of manufacturing and materials, the machine is in charge exclusively of the design of the new products, that consequently might be easily replicated by competitors in any market, thus the GAI provides a *simulator essence* and the consumer looks for an iconic product, easily recognised by the specific details even if the result can be *eccentric/tacky*, but it still allows consumers to achieve a certain social status. In (iii), high usage of GAI for creativity



**Figure 2.** New product/brand essence matrix.

purposes and high quality of manufacturing and materials, the one differentiating factor is the superior quality of manufacturing and materials, with the design generated by GAI playing a very limited role, thus this combination leads to the *differentiator essence*, when the consumer recognises uniqueness in the highly innovative product. In (iv), low usage of GAI for creativity purposes and high quality of manufacturing and materials, this combination of creativity/manufacturing represents the more *traditional essence*, where the core is the human designer and the creative benefits of GAI are almost ignored, while the consumer appreciates the choice of superior design/style with a strong link to the brand's heritage, based on extreme care and artcraft characterising each product.

Managers should foster a collaborative and harmonious environment by combining GAI and human involvement in the creative design process of new luxury products in order to increase consumers' emotional bonds and more positive acceptance. As GAI will soon become the norm, our GAI creativity vs quality of manufacturing and materials matrix would help the luxury fashion industry to better act to protect human creativity against machine creativity (GAI), and also from other competitors' innovative efforts.

To summarise, GAI and LLMs can be game changers for brands (not only for luxury ones) due to the enormous benefits that they can provide to the brands, and the high risks involved. Specifically, GAI is able to design new products based on the prompts. In doing so, it accesses knowledge that is already available (e.g. from web content or company documents and other low-quality open access data), but the outcomes can be altered to be more aligned with the actual context only if the sources accessed are aligned. In other words, there is the risk that the outcome is not reflective of the brand strategy due to the source of information used, thus requiring human supervision to ensure this alignment, to constantly monitor the outcome and preserve the brand essence.



### ***Limitations and future works suggestions***

While this study contributes to the existing literature on how generative AI (GAI) and Large Language Models (LLMs) reshape the creativity of luxury, it has some unavoidable limitations. Firstly, our studies start from consumers' familiarity with luxury brands and related products, but we did not evaluate the level of familiarity as a possible driving/preventing factor. For instance, consumers who are passionate about the brand but are not effective buyers might perceive the products differently from actual buyers. Similarly, frequent buyers might have different opinions from consumers who bought one bag of that brand just once. Accordingly, new research might investigate the level of familiarity more in detail to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effective influence, not only on the perception of the products but also on the subsequent behavioural response, including shopping behaviour. Also, our respondents assumed that the GAI-designed products were really developed by the brand. This assumption opens new questions (i) about the emerging phenomenon of astroturfing in the case of AI-generated content (Kreps & Kriner, 2023), ignoring how consumers' exposure to fake brands/dupes created by GAI might normalise the AI-generated image representations by requiring further investigation; and (ii) how the brand authenticity (Athwal & Harris, 2018) is maintained and enhanced in its dimensions (brand styles and standards, honouring brand heritage, and avoiding brand exploitation). Similarly, we showed (AI-generated) images of possible bags, and our respondents were asked to provide their opinions based on the images. In other words, our respondents only evaluated the design as reflective of the brand essence. Thus, new research is needed to investigate how consumers evaluate actual products generated by AI, expressing judgements on more than the design, such as the texture, material, etc., and to provide a better assessment of the quality of the GAI outcomes.

Secondly, we investigated a specific high-involvement product (luxury bag). Still, we did not compare/contrast it with a low-involvement product, and we did not compare the emotional/functional value of the product. In other words, our research provides some preliminary evidence on the effect of GAI on creating high-involvement luxury products, without any evidence on how much this effect is similar or different from the same usage to design low-involvement products, or products with higher/lower emotional vs functional value. Thus, we encourage more research in this direction.

Finally, in this paper, we considered specific iconic bags as a starting point, and the prompts for those bags generated images able to reflect the essence of the original brands producing those bags. However, the same prompts for other iconic bags might also generate cheap product images, as in the case of products with logos including more characters or a particular font. Although our research addresses an issue for the luxury industry and, in general, for new product creativity, it still encourages more investigations to define the boundaries of the GAI design outcomes' validity, which might grow with the advancements and refinements of AI tools.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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