

THE EFFECTS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN LUXURY BRAND ADVERTISING ON LEBANESE YOUNG-ADULT FEMALES

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A blue ink signature of Dr. Maria Bou Zeid is written over a horizontal line. Below the line, the word 'Supervisor' is printed in a black serif font.

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Abstract

Feminist movements have been getting their voices heard in multiple countries, while NGOs and lobbyists are pressuring governments to legislate laws protecting women from sexual harassment and violent acts. However, multiple brands have decided to neglect the trend by swimming against the stream and keep on dehumanizing women using them as sexual objects and projecting violent images in their ads.

Using the cultivation theory along with the social learning theory, this study aims to shed light on the normalization of sexism and violence against women in luxury brands' ads addressing women and how this may affect their purchasing behavior.

An online survey was distributed to Lebanese women nationwide in addition to two interviews with professionals from the fields of Marketing and Sociology. The results showed that Lebanese women are building acceptance toward the use of sexism in luxury brands' ads but not for violent scenes. Violence in luxury brand ads is refuted by women and it affects their relationship with the brand.

This research took place during challenging times in the world and particularly in Lebanon, triggering multiple limitations such as the sample size, cultural bias, the Lebanese socio-political situation, and the covid-19 outbreak. These facts deeply affected the income, purchase power, and employment status of the core target audience of the study.

Keywords:

Luxury Brands Advertisement – Violence – Sexism – Sexual Objectification – Purchasing Behavior – Lebanese Women

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Chapter I**Introduction**

Advertising is a force to be reckoned with, and its effects on viewers cannot be taken for granted. In fact, luxury goods make buyers weak in the knees, thus advertising for luxury brands is an undeniable attraction tool (Cohen-Almagor, 2001). Nowadays, luxury brands audience is very vast, and their ads reach multiple countries. These countries have different values and customs; thus, international brands' ads use different connotations for diverse cultures; and interpretive strategies are distinct from one country to another. This shows that an advertisement has more than only a visual appeal and a consumer appeal; it is crammed with cultural content. It is certainly inescapable and has great effects on our daily lives. This subject has been tackled in multiple journal articles like that of Al-Olayan and Karande (2000) on the difference of content of ads among the United States and the Arab World, and that of Firth, Shaw, and Cheng (2006) on cross-cultural analysis between the United States and Asian countries. The latter highlighted the same idea and stressed that cultures differ, and interpretation of ads consequently diverges. It is unfortunate that media can resort to extreme effects and cross ethical boundaries to promote and persuade customers to buy their products. Extreme effects include the dehumanized visual representation of women in advertisements such as: glorifying sexual violence, normalizing violence against women, and portraying women in vulnerable positions... Advertising is the foundation of mass media; and its primary purpose is to sell products. Not only does it sell products, but it also sells values, concepts of love, sensuality, romance, success, and normalcy. Advertising tells us who we are and who we should be like the beauty standards that the fashion industry imposes on women, and unconsciously

pushes them into thinking that there is only one standard of beauty (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004). Again, we ask ourselves, when did it become morally tolerable to treat women as a commodity? What can justify the integration of violence in advertisements? And what does advertising tell us about women today when we have continuous ads normalizing battering? Are we trying to confirm and normalize gender-based violence? In fact, the UNHCR conducted a study in 2016 on family violence in Lebanon and concluded that each Lebanese person knows on average 1.8 women victim of domestic violence (KAFA & UNHCR, 2016).

The topic of violence against women in advertising and its effect is a wide topic, but this study will be discussing the effects of violence in high end brands on Lebanese women aged between 25 and 35 and their reactions to such discrimination: some would still buy regardless of the violent images, others would boycott the product or the brand while some might resort to social actions and rebel against the brand and its consumers. In other words, this research aims at identifying the effects of violence against women in advertisements used to promote fashion luxury brands. The objective is to explore the various types of appeals, and most importantly the “shock appeal” (Rifon, Royne, & Carison, 2014).

This thesis will discuss the previous studies that have confirmed that consumer attitudes to shocking advertising are influenced by socio-demographic and socio-cultural factors such as: religiosity, moral principles, age, gender, individualism-collectivism, and high-low context language (Virvilaite & Maluteviciene, 2013), supporting the idea that shock material in advertisements is unpredictable or as Dahl, Frankenberger and Manchanda (2003) would say: “Shock appeals deliberately startle and upset audiences”.

As for the methodology, a survey will be distributed, and the collected data will be analyzed, testing the different variables since luxury brands target a specific range of people: People with higher age range and people who can afford to buy these high-end brands.

Statement of the Problem

Advertisers of high-end brands tend to visualize violence towards women or showcase women in dead-like posture covered in bruises or marks. They also use women as sexual objects when portraying them wearing provocative clothing and posing in questionable positions. They disguise it as edgy, humorous or as an artistic form of expression, willing to trigger the shock factor and generate promotional magic for their products (Green, 2013). In other words, sex sells. Shock factors like nudity, sexual references, and violent visuals (a bruise, a kick, or a punch) may be key to a successful advertisement. According to Javed and Zeb (2011), an "unexpected factor is the main ingredient that turns a normal advertisement into shock advertisement". Hackley and Hackley (2015) also believe that "shock is considered to be more effective in getting attention than in generating sales". However, at what price are we introducing this shock factor? Is it at the price of women decency and well-being in our societies?

Purpose of the Study

Luxury brands have a certain image to maintain and must pertain a unique selling proposition to retain their audience and consumers. Incorporating violence within their communication must be justified and intended towards reaching a wider audience.

The violent and sexual images of women used in luxury brands advertisements have negative effects on females on different levels: psychological, sociological, consciously,

and unconsciously, as well as on their self-esteem and worth. Moreover, women consumers' purchasing behavior is affected by either acting indifferently, boycotting the brand, or taking social actions against the brand. This is shock advertising. It is true that it creates huge impact on consumers' purchasing decisions, yet the impact cannot be predicted as it could be positive or negative. This study discusses shock advertising revolving around the dehumanized representation of women in ads. It raises questions about its impact on the purchasing behavior of Lebanese customers aged between 25 and 35 years old: how they would respond to the sexual objectification of women and violent representations of females in luxury brands advertisements and how will it affect them as human beings and as consumers.

Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that:

- 1- Lebanese women refute the violent offensive portrayals of female figures in luxury brands advertising images.
- 2- The use of violence in fashion luxury brands advertising has negative effects on Lebanese women aged between 25 to 35

Research Questions

To explore the impact of violent and offensive content in luxury brands' ads on Lebanese young females, the following questions are raised:

- How does the infiltration of gender-based violence in luxury brands' ads affect Lebanese female consumers?
- How do Lebanese women react to discriminative content?

- Do Lebanese women resort to boycotting luxury brands as a reaction to this offensive content?

Chapter II

Literature Review

Discrimination against women in advertising is present in multiple forms and is translated through shock advertising. In this study, we will focus on violence and sexual appeal in luxury brands' ads.

A. Advertising: Definitions across the Literature

Over the course of literature, advertising has been defined in multiple ways. Some believe that advertising is just a way to sell a brand and an image while others agree that advertising plays a big role in creating and normalizing cultural and social values. For instance, Nichifor (2014) defined advertising as “a communicational paid effort, its financial supporter is identifiable, and the sent message is impersonal” (Nichifor, 2014). Poepescu et al. (1994) described advertising as a visual or an audio piece on a product to help sell this product while sending indirect/impersonal messages. This definition of advertising focuses on the ad and the different possible interpretations of it (Nichifor, 2014). At the end of the day, people think differently and perceive things differently. A more recent characterization from Popescu (2004) provides a more recent characterization of designated advertising as “a communication technique that involves running a complex persuasive process aiming to cause a psychological pressure on the concerned public. The initiator of the ad or the sponsor, who intends to achieve communication objectives, wants to send an impersonal message to a well-defined audience regarding the enterprise, its products or services” (Nichifor, 2014). This new interpretation alludes those advertisements represent a way to lure in the consumers and

persuade them of the product. But how can you do that if the product is being presented in a manner that counters the consumers' way of thinking and disregards totally the market needs at the era of the ad. In fact, there are multiple theories on advertisement effectiveness that Nichifor tackled in his paper:

- 1- The "Market Response" theory that assumes a direct connection between the market and the branded product translated by sales and acquisition of the brand goods.
- 2- The "Cognitive Response" theory that assumes that the acquisition of the good based on purely rational reasons and that treats advertising as persuasive by nature.
- 3- The "Affective Response" theory slightly differs since it assumes an emotional connection between the consumer and the brand or the product. In this case, advertisers try to reach the consumers by addressing their emotions and maximizing the pleasure of consuming the product (Nichifor, 2014).

A modernized definition of advertising was given by Guilloux, Micu and Pentina in 2018. Their focus is mainly on social media, and they highlight that social media has gotten major success that all brands are switching their advertising strategies to the digital world: they can reach more people faster. For example, the latest trend nowadays is for someone to become a social media influencer. These people use Social Media platforms to promote all sorts of brands, from the basic ones to luxury brands. It is now very common for Chanel to gift some new collection items to influencers like Chiara Ferragni to post a picture wearing them. Social media platforms have extended the world of advertising and changed the equation of the concepts of imagery and promotion (Pentina, Guilloux, & Micu, 2018). Another example is the Adidas brand who confirmed that digital advertising is key to them

and that their focus will be on building their digital market. However, according to Voolverd, van Noort, Muntinga and Bronner (2018) there is a difference between social media advertising and social media engagement. For them, even if a social media platform is accessible or its access metrics are high, it doesn't mean that people are engaging with the content of the ad but rather with the platform itself, and they state "We therefore suggest that engagement on a social media platform spills over into how people engage with advertising within the platform and consequently affects ad evaluations" (Voorveld, van Noort, Muntinga, & Bronner, 2018). For them, all social media platforms fight to stay up to date, but each platform has a different and separate consumer experience. For instance, Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat are more for social interaction, as per Voolverd, van Noort, Muntinga and Bronner (2018). While Pinterest and YouTube are not. Pinterest is the only platform that supports innovation and creativity and allows the consumer to express his/her own ideas. The main findings of the study highlight that "social media advertising can be engaging even beyond engagement with the social media platform or vice versa (Voorveld, van Noort, Muntinga, & Bronner, 2018)". This means that even if both the social media platform and the brand are popular, there is still an advertisement level engagement that the consumer relies upon to select a brand over its counterparts. For instance, it is very appealing for a brand to have a social media page as it makes it reachable and accessible for anybody. The latter might impact their behavior and incite them to buy a product that they see on the platform. However, even though brand has a social media page, if it uses it to promote negative ideologies, people will react differently, such as the boycotting action that People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) took in 2015 against Hermès for selling real-reptiles' accessories. Lakshmi (2012) defined advertisement as a "public announcement" that intends to inform and send a message to

everyone. Nowadays, advertisement is more than just a public announcement; it represents a way to persuade the public of a specific product. For that, advertisements also follow a set of ethics and social grounds that Lakshmi discussed thoroughly in his paper published in 2012. One of the ethical rules depicts the importance of being truthful in the advertisement, or marketers will lose their credibility. Another one is the consciousness that advertisement is “public”, and it will be visible to everyone, including kids. Thus, it is important for the ad to respect the audience’s cultural and religious backgrounds especially when selling controversial concepts within the ad (Lakshmi, 2012). He also considers important, is that the marketer must always keep in mind that an ad is supposed to educate consumers and has the full capacity to do that by promoting righteous values and valuable information. Advertising can also help improve the living standard by persuading people of going after quality rather than quantity. Advertising can also impact the public’s wellbeing and happiness. For instance, all current advertisements in Lebanon are implicating the current state of Beirut that is quite sad and depressing. Nevertheless, there are multiple ads that spread joy and motivation to incite a change and help people go back to their normal lives. Most importantly, marketer should never forget the power of advertising in promoting values and persuasion (Lakshmi, 2012).

B. Shock Advertising: Violence as a Means

Advertisers are always looking for fresh new concepts to make the advertisement stand out and attract consumers’ attention. They use advertisement appeals like sexual appeal, romance appeal and fear appeal. The aim of these attractions is to “influence the way consumers view themselves and how buying certain products can prove to be beneficial for them. The message conveyed through advertising appeals influences the purchasing

decisions of consumers” (Lakshmi, 2012). De Pelsmacker and Van Den Bergh (2015) supported the same idea that marketers use violent or shocking ads that will grab the consumer’s attention. Since this kind of advertisement is “memorable” and cannot be forgotten, and this is exactly what marketers are looking for. However, the “unforgettable” aspect of such violent ads has a negative impact, as discussed by Huessman and Bushman (2006) in their article on the effect of ads on adults and children published in 2006. They said that “for both adults and children, we expect that there will be positive relationships between their degree of exposure to media violence and their subsequent short-term displays of aggressive behaviors, emotions, and ideas. Priming, imitation, and excitation transfer would all contribute to these effects”. They also discussed how this effect can be long-term and will cause reactions to various emotional conditions like anger or fear. Thus, an adult or a child can react to a violent scene in media with disturbed reaction of fear or anger, and he or she will correlate this negative reaction generated by the media with any other vicious act or scene. The consecutive exposure of a child to media brutality will lead to a certain adoption of these cruel scenes and causing this negative image to become less rejected and shocking and more normative. These repeated “media violence” scenes could lead to a new understanding in children’s minds and settle the idea of violence as a normal act or reaction. Not only does the latter impact children behavior, promoting violence impacts teenagers also. For instance, a game in Japan is called “RapeLay” that allows its players to hurt women in subways in multiple graphical and harmful ways (Capella, Hill, Rapp, & Kees, 2010). Capella et al (2010) referred to multiple studies that show how “the emphasis on dominance and aggression by men based on stereotypical sex roles causes development of rape-permissive attitudes (Walker, Rowe, and Quinsey 1993)” (Capella, Hill, Rapp, & Kees, 2010). They further investigated the “Social Learning Theory” which

states that the continuous exposure to violent content will lead to social acceptance and normalization of any act of violence against women. In other terms “Research shows that both children and adults acquire attitudes, emotional responses, and new styles of conduct through mass media, which play an important role in shaping behavior and social attitudes (Bandura 1973; Liebert, Neale, and Davidson 1973)” (Capella, Hill, Rapp, & Kees, 2010). Bushman and Bonacci (2002) found that “violent and sexually explicit TV programs might not be a profitable venture for advertisers” because viewers are already repeatedly exposed to sexual and violent materials through TV programs, and thus the shock introduced within an ad will lose its provocative impact. But what if we reverse the fact by having violent ads and neutral TV shows that portray regular content, would consumers pay more attention to the ads? And will that impact the consumer buying pattern and thus make more profits for advertisers? This brings us back to the idea of *desensitization* that Bushman and Huesmman discussed in 2002 positing that after repeated exposure of violent/sexual content, consumers will lose the sense of shock and arousal when they see a violent ad or an ad with sexual content Some studies have shown the contrary. Reiterating the findings of Bushman and Haussman’s 2006 article: violent ads have a direct arousal on viewers or potential consumers when seen the first time, but after that the impact of violence becomes less appealing and might even trigger repellent reactions. Moreover, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) that was adopted in 1979 calls to “eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation” (Montiel, 2020) by adopting specific rules that will help eradicate all sorts of sexual stereotypes in advertisements. Violent scenes tend to portray women in vulnerable positions or covered in bruises or women getting beaten by men or running away from

danger. Rarely will advertisers show beaten men in an advertisement. These ads are perpetuating the stereotypical image of women, portraying her as submissive, inferior, and passive and in constant need for support or help. As advertisers are pushing to frame women in violent scenes, they are creating new social and domestic values, thus, shaping a new understanding of the role and power of women. They are also trying to make a correlation between material gain and happiness to promote the idea that consumers need their branded product to feel happy and satisfied. A Spanish study was conducted to differentiate between symbolic and material violence against women and how television helps normalize symbolic violence against women. They defined the symbolic behavior as the values and ideologies that are being portrayed and that help build the social aspect of an issue and its normalization (E Galarza, Bedía, & Cer, 2016). In fact, they showed that television plays a huge role in promoting symbolic violence as it “contributes decisively to the perpetuation of a patriarchal system characterized by the subordination of women to men through the dissemination of gender stereotypes and roles“ (E Galarza, Bedía, & Cer, 2016). For instance, they talked about how women do not exist in the news area, and how women with expertise are never interviewed or considered when investigating an accident or when discussing any subject matter of expertise. For them, this helps promote the idea that women are not ‘skilled’, and their sayings are not to be considered. Violent ads are much more common in the United States and European areas compared to the Arab world due to cultural differences and social norms that depict violence and sex as taboo subjects. Preston (1998) discussed how women’s perception of themselves affects how they are treated and what they can tolerate. Advertisements at the time were objectifying women and diminishing their value. In fact, throughout the course of her study on the 1990s advertisements, she depicted that “many contribute to the perpetuation of a culture in which

violence against women is not only predictable but expected or at least accepted” (Preston, 1998). At a much later time, in 2010 Capella et. al. released a study on the impact of violence against women in advertisements. They started by describing the album cover of Rolling Stones’ 1976 album “Black and Blue”, that depicts a woman dressed in a white bodysuit, covered in bruises, and tied up. She had her legs wide open and had an aroused facial expression. This type of imagery is promoting pleasure in pain and pleasure in sexual harm and abuse when the latter is inappropriate and incorrect (Capella, Hill, Rapp, & Kees, 2010).

C. Shock Advertising: Sexual Appeal

Sex sells: a very common saying among the advertising community, and indeed it does. Sexual content is appealing to the eye of the consumer and triggers a sense of arousal and desire for them. The latter will automatically leave them wanting whatever appears in a sexually induced ad. For instance, young females are exposed to various lingerie ads like Calvin Klein ads that follow the hashtag #mycalvins. These ads show both men and women looking appealing in intimate moments. The female consumer will automatically feel attracted to a man wearing the advertised brand or even feel more desired when wearing the branded lingerie. Lakshmi (2012) confirmed that sex and nudity are best sellers in the world of advertisement by stating that “Sexuality, sexual suggestiveness, over sexuality or sensuality raises curiosity of the audience and can result in strong feelings about the advertisement. It can also result in the product appearing interesting” (Lakshmi, 2012). Boddewyn and Loubradou tackled in their research what is considered as sexual advertising. They referred to it as full nudity images, the use of sexual products in advertisements, the “display of sexual intercourse, homosexual relations, fellatio,

sadomasochism, and violence against women” (Boddewyn & Loubradou, 2011) along with pornography and shock advertising that include sexual visuals. According to them, the use of sex in advertisements amplifies sexism by diminishing one gender against the other and promotes sexual objectification of women as “decorative or attention-getting objects” (Boddewyn & Loubradou, 2011). The continuous and recurring emphasis on women appearing in stereotypical contexts will lead to people erroneously viewing women as sexual objects for men’s pleasure and satisfaction. They also quoted Lanis and Covell (1995), “viewing women as exclusively sexual beings whose purpose is to sexually arouse and gratify men, a power differential is created in which women generally are subordinate. This power hierarchy may support development of perceptions of women as appropriate targets for sexually aggressive behaviors” (Capella, Hill, Rapp, & Kees, 2010).

Lakshmi (2012) also explained that sexual content in an ad comes in the form of “nudity, sexual behavior, physical attractiveness, sexual referents and sexual embeds”. Nudity, for instance, is the undressing of the model or the wearing of revealing outfits. Sexual behavior is mostly related to the body language of the models and their stances, or two models photographed amid sexual contact while physical attractiveness is the inclusion of a beautiful and attractive model to trigger the desire of the consumer. Lakshmi (2012) considered sexual referents as the use of text and imaging that allude to sex or remind people of sex and sexual embeds as “subliminal advertising” that “are defined as referents or forms of sexual representation designed to be perceived subconsciously” (Lakshmi, 2012). Ads containing this kind of sexual imagery will help serve the ultimate brand goals that is to sell its goods to the biggest number of people. Mittler (2007) confirmed that advertisers use sex appeal the most and discussed how it affects the viewers. In fact, she stated that “seeing indeed became “everyday life” (Mittler, 2007) by focusing on the

importance of the visual aspect of advertising in the process of persuading the consumers. The latter is quite applicable nowadays with the increased focus on social media and people's appearances. She also added that visual advertising is all about telling a story across time in a series of images. Then in this case what history are advertisers showing when portraying women in weak positions? It tells the story about how women are the weaker gender, how women are present to fulfill sexual desires in view and act, and how women are satisfied being put as a powerless gender. She also showed how in different images, throughout the history of China, that women are always portrayed as the person who cleans, cooks, and works at home while caring for the male child and looking after her hard-working husband, while men are depicted as strong individuals who look after their families and provide for them. In support of that, Gallagher (2015) posited that "Media sexism and male-dominated power structures are continually shifting and finding new forms of representation and practice by referring to pornography and its consequences like women sex trafficking" (Gallagher,2015). Nowadays, we still find advertisements portraying the same set of values. Mittler (2007) took a step further by demanding a gender revolution through imaging and advertising: images that show men working at home, while women are providing for the family. Long before Mittler based her research on the Chinese market, The Belkaouis studied how 1958 advertisements contributed to creating the stereotype that was available in 1970 and 1972 and still known until today. These 1958 ads contained imagery of women as unemployed and working at home doing cleaning chores, women as low wagers and always working as secretaries for men in executive positions, women who only buy housework items, not cars nor houses, and women as a decorative item like a flower vase in a living room. 25 years later, women are still depicted as houseworkers with limited to no power outside, in addition to being a beautifully setup

accessory. The Belkaouis emphasized the role of print advertisements in building stereotypes and highlighting “history” and “evolution” in our societies: “Comparison of 1958 ads with those of 1970 and 1972 suggests that some of the standards of expected behavior prevalent in 1958 have remained as the stereotypes of the present decade” (Belkaoui & Belkaoui, 1976).

D. Shock Advertising: Impact on Consumer Behavior

According to Matuleviciene and Virvilaite (2013), people react differently to advertisements based on their cultural background and knowledge. For that, advertisers try to touch consumers’ emotion through shock advertising. Shock advertising has been used in the sector for a long time now and has been proven to be an efficient way of promoting ideas and values. One of the brands that launched the use of the shock factor within their ads is “United Colors of Benetton” and has proven to be very effective, until today, (Virvilaite & Matuleviciene, 2013). Even with shock advertising, marketers should be distinct in the content they provide, otherwise the impact will lose its shocking power. Furthermore, a study was conducted by Capella and his colleagues in 2010 on 3 advertisement campaigns: one for Dolce and Gabana (a woman laying on her back surrounded by 6 men on top of her), another for Old Khaki fashionwear (a man holding a whip and in position to spank a woman wearing underwear from the brand’s denim jacket) and an ad from Virtus Communications (a dead-looking woman laying on her stomach on a hospital stroll with a cut on her shoulder with the arm of a man holding the tool that caused the cut where both models are in underwear) . Their major findings stated that “attitude toward the ad varied significantly across the three ad conditions, but exposure to ads with increased levels of sexualized violence did not directly influence consumers’

attitudes toward the firm or behavioral intentions” (Capella, Hill, Rapp, & Kees, 2010). Results showed that women and men both react in similar ways but in different degrees. Younger audience was less receptive of the depicted violence and showed more acceptance of the ads as they look “appealing” (Capella, Hill, Rapp, & Kees, 2010). “According to Dahl et al. (2003) Andersson and Pettersson (2004), Vezina and Paul (1994), shock tactics are effective when an advertisement displays what is generally perceived as taboo” (Virvilaite & Matuleviciene, 2013). And what is tabooer than sex and sexism? Nevertheless, the positive or negative impact of the shock factor on brand profits is also linked to “socio-demographic and cultural-social factors” such as “religiosity, moral principles, age, gender, individualism-collectivism, high-low context language” (Virvilaite & Matuleviciene, 2013). What is popular and acceptable in the Arab World might not be tolerated in other countries, similarly what is appropriate in the United States may bother consumers in the Arab World. Andersson and Petterson (2004) and Sabri (2012) found that religiosity influences consumer’s behavior negatively while others like Brugiere and Barry (2011) considered that even if the moral values of the consumers are broken, he/she will not refrain from buying the products especially luxurious products. In fact, a study conducted on a diverse sample of 527 Lebanese consumers from different religions and geolocations indicated that “religious consumers were largely more offended by the advertisement of the 17 products studied than their non-religious counter-parts. Also, Muslim consumers from both sects, showed greater level of offense than their Christian counterparts” (Farah & El Samad, 2014).

Most high-end brands like Dior, Chanel, Calvin Klein use very graphic imagery of women in minimal amount of clothing on, but this does not stop these brands from becoming one popular worldwide. A study in Poland conducted by Plazyk (n.d.) proved

the same especially that owning luxurious goods is a sign of wealth, comfort, and respect nowadays. Lakshmi (2012) confirmed also that sex sells since sexual appeals incite the consumer's curiosity and thus make the branded good look more interesting and strengthen the consumer's feeling towards the brand or the good. However, she stated that the use of sexual appeal, if shown in a vulgar way, might have a "boomerang effect" as it "can interfere with the actual message of the advertisement and purpose of the product and can also cause low brand recall" (Lakshmi, 2012). "Today, any product is made of two things: the product itself and its image. And the image is getting bigger (Luciano Benetton, Financial Times, 2000) (Andersson, Hedelin, Nilsson, & Welander, 2004). That is why, it is very important for a brand to keep up with the market and maintain their high-end image. Andersson, Hedelin, Nilsson and Welander studied in their paper published in 2004 about 3 famous clothing brands: Benetton, Diesel and Sisley that are famous for their highly provocative advertisements. Their aim was to understand the consumer's reactions to such ads. They also referred to a study conducted by Quickwise to interpret Sisley's advertisements and they concluded that three out of four women and half the men of their 500-sample population "were ready to abandon clothing, which was advertised in an inappropriately sexual way" (Andersson, Hedelin, Nilsson, & Welander, 2004). Going back to Andersson and others' findings, they found that both males and females reacted in a pejorative way on the use of violent pictures and sexual connotations in the cited brands' advertisements as "the advertiser's message was not interpreted in the way that was intended" (Andersson, Hedelin, Nilsson, & Welander, 2004). They also added that, when introducing imageries and taboo topics, viewers react differently based on their sociocultural context, and the way they relate to the ad itself. In fact, women tend to reject a sexually humiliating ad, as themselves are subject of sexual abuse while men might

accept the sexual ads as they please their eye and their sexual curiosity. Maybe people are tired of the violent and sexual ads and are looking for something more interesting. A proof on the latter is the fact that Benetton and Diesel have changed their advertising strategies and modernized them to suit the current market that is full of feminist movements fighting against discrimination of women in media.

E. Luxury Brands and Consumers

“Consumers seek new forms of luxury that shows respect for natural resources and human beings, yet standing by traditional factors such as quality, creativity, originality, craftsmanship and savoir-faire” (Pavione, Pezzetti, & Dall'ava, 2016). People are looking for “responsible luxury”. For instance, the anti-fur campaigns have forced the luxurious brands to create faux-fur clothing. People are now interested in an idea, and not just in the brand. Another example is that of the vegan beauty lines which incite the idea that cosmetics can be of good quality yet be cruelty-free. New strategies are all rooting toward sustainable development and social responsibility (Pavione, Pezzetti, & Dall'ava, 2016). The concept of luxury was first used to highlight bourgeoisie, quality, and exclusive wellness, (Dubois and Czellar, 2002). Others stated that a brand of luxury “has specific strategic implications connected to the ability of the company to offer extremely differentiated products characterized by excellent quality, exclusivity, uniqueness, rarity, and craftsmanship (Della Bella, 2002; Dubois & Paternault, 1995; Ciornea, 2013)” (Pavione, Pezzetti, & Dall'ava, 2016). In fact, the world of luxury has been there for over 100 years, it is mainly characterized by inaccessibility, price, and privilege. Turner (2016) defined the word luxury by referring to the literature: “The origin of the world luxury is derived from the Latin words “luxus” and “luxuria”. Luxury should hold a positive value

of splendor. However, it takes a negative meaning of decadence when used in association with ‘private’ and ‘excess’ and put into a social context” (Stegemann 59) (Turner, 2016). The reason behind the negative connotation is the fact that when goods are of exclusive prices and limited quantities, they automatically stimulate the creation of social groups: groups that can afford the item, and groups that cannot. So, for the group who can afford the branded item, they have a more positive view of the brand while other groups might have a negative view of the brand, since these items are inaccessible for them (Turner, 2016). Was the luxury world, dating for more than 100 years, impacted by the digital age? The answer is yes. E-commerce and globalization have impacted all business industries, and luxury brands is one of them. In fact, consumer behavior has shifted towards e-commerce where three out of four shoppers own a smartphone and about half of them own a tablet as per McKinsey Group studies (Turner, 2016). With the average shopper being more technologically capable, the whole attention has shifted towards e-commerce. However, the live shopping experience plays a major part in the world of luxury, so how did the latter impact luxury brands? According to Turner (2016) “it used to be that a luxury buying experience involved dressing up and going into a high-end boutique to consult with a salesperson on what to buy and enjoying a glass of champagne while it was being carefully wrapped up for you”. However, with the current lifestyle, people would rather stay home and shop for things on the fly from their smartphones rather than taking time off to go and buy things especially busy people who have so little time within the day. So, in this area, e-commerce and social media have helped luxury brands expand their sales by making their goods available on e-commerce websites or having their own online boutiques. Farfetch is a well-known online shop that sells luxury brand items since 2008, and according to Forbes, they are one of the top-selling online luxury boutiques, and it is

very famous among the Arab buyers. Another example is that of Gucci. The team of Gucci understood the necessity of adapting to the current times, and at the same time to maintain the luxurious experience even when shopping online: from extensive packaging to fast response and delivery (Turner, 2016).

On a more close-to-home and regional aspect, the Middle East has been market to multiple international luxury brands especially in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon (Beraja, 2016). Beraja explained that “Globalization made borders transparent and, in some cases, eliminated them at all as a result slightly homogenizing tastes, preferences and consumer behavior, but it did not destroy the culture and traditions especially in conservative Middle Eastern countries” (Beraja, 2016). This takes us back to the idea that advertisements can be perceived differently based on the social and cultural background. But does that affect purchasing behaviors? Beraja also discussed this point in her thesis that was published in 2016. She considered that luxury goods “are thought to bring prestige, acceptance of higher social groups or can be an indicator of success”. She also cited Kapferer (2013) “Once you succeed, you want to enjoy. Luxury has become the self-reward of high growth countries” (Beraja, 2016). In fact, it is quite common for Middle Eastern buyers to invest their money in personalized items or limited-edition products such as Nike sneakers, Dior bags, and other similar items, to show off their status and wealth as a sign of success and distinction. Not only is it a sign of wealth, but it also brings up a sense of satisfaction and self-development as luxury goods represent a sign of “quality, uniqueness, conspicuousness and extended-self” (Beraja, 2016). The Middle Eastern people buy luxury goods regardless of the underlying advertisement. The loud logo of the brand and the branded good itself represent the importance for them rather than the image or advertisement behind it. For example, Dior perfumes are famous for their advertisements that include famous women

in sensual portraits or positions. Even if the latter can be perceived as diminishing to women, they would still buy the perfume regardless because it is “Dior”. The perception of luxurious goods can be different from one person to another and from one culture to another, depending on the overall society requirements and the personal needs and desires. For Farah and Fawaz (2016), “Luxury consumption is a field of particular interest to the Arab world, which has a population of 422 million people sharing the same language, a broad variety of cultural similarities, and a remarkable reserve of natural resources. In addition to common cultural similarities, the latter factors make this region a very lucrative market for luxury brands” (Farah & Fawaz, 2016). For the Lebanese consumers, “Luxury is no longer reserved to the wealthy but also to the middle class” (Khoury, 2008) especially as they “feel a stronger need to conform to their local social groups’ expectations than to the broader national group requisites” (Farah & Fawaz, 2016). In 2008, the Lebanese consumers were mostly fond of Chopard, Furla, Lancel, Longchamp, Lacoste, Mont Blanc, and Valentino (Khoury, 2008). Nowadays the most seen brands around the Lebanese consumers are Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Dior, Chanel, Fendi, Balenciaga and Rolex amongst others. According to Khoury, people who are perfectionists in their personal lives and always seek quality in their relationships and daily routines are the biggest consumers of luxury goods in Lebanon as these luxurious brands represent a “Sense of belonging, warm relationships and self-respect”. Moreover, she added that people in Lebanon really care about other’s opinions. In her findings, a high correlation was deduced between the people who value the notion of being well respected and the people who care about what others think. In fact, she concluded that “a socially motivated consumer cares a lot about the opinion of others and is concerned about how to make good impressions on them, among other” (Khoury, 2008). Another reason is the high consumption of luxury brands in the

Lebanese market, as Khoury (2008) puts it, “Lebanese conspicuous consumers believe that they deserve the finer things in life and offer themselves the best”. This consumption behavior is in-line with Veblen’s theory on conspicuous consumption explained in his book “The Theory of the Leisure Class” published in 1899.

Another example for one important Luxury seller group is: Kering Group that managed to increase their turnover to 10 billion euros all by promoting sustainability and adapting to the current market and society interests (Pavione, Pezzetti, & Dall'ava, 2016). Kering Group holds a huge set of brands like Gucci, Bottega Veneta, Saint Laurent, Alexander McQueen, Balenciaga, etc... The CEO of Kering Group Francois-Henri Pinault believes that “sustainable development is a business opportunity and leadership” because a sustainable company “has the ability to adapt to changes, to innovate, to anticipate risks and to identify an ongoing opportunity” (Pavione, Pezzetti, & Dall'ava, 2016). By saying this, he is emphasizing the importance of building a sustainable company that not only maintains its growth but enhances life situations for the people also. For instance, Gucci had a 2012-2016 objective to decrease water consumption, and they did shrink it by 30% and reduced energy water by 20% since 2014. Saint Laurent Paris also had the same ideology but implemented it differently when “Hedi Slimane, the artistic director of the French fashion house, developed a store concept that, in the two years 2012-14, produced energy savings for 27% across the network of Saint Laurent stores in Paris (Pavione, Pezzetti, & Dall'ava, 2016). Alexander McQueen on another hand started using organic cotton in collection creation and Balenciaga used around 1000 meter of unused fabric in the creation of almost 2000 tote bags. The above examples were all studied by Pavione, Pezzetti and Dall’ava in their paper on Kering Group in 2016.

Chapter III

Theoretical Framework

Two important psychological and educational theories will be used in this paper: The “Cultivation Theory” by George Gerbner and the “Social Learning Theory” by Bandura. This section will discuss the concepts and limitations of the selected theories to link them to the topic under-study.

The Cultivation Theory

The Cultivation theory is one of the most important theories in the field of communication. This theory was founded by George Gerbner in the 1960s. The purpose of this theory is to tackle media effects: how it impacts people’s perceptions and decisions. This theory states that “people who watch television frequently are more likely to be influenced by the messages from the world of television” (Cultivation Theory, 2012). In other words, the core idea is that people who are frequently exposed to media will build up a perception close to what the media show, even if the media showcase wrong or false ideologies. Thus, if a media outlet portrays situations in exaggerated and false ways, a false and exaggerated perception will be formed by the people who are following up with the content of the latter. In fact, "Cultivation researchers have argued that television has long-term attitudinal effects which are small, gradual, indirect, but cumulative and significant: viewers come to believe the television version of reality the more they watch it, most notably over-estimating the amount of violence in everyday life” (Cultivation Theory, 2012). What people see on TV is not the real world. People are very aware that the media

represent an image of the world that is not real, yet with over consumption of media products, these communicated ideologies become unconsciously part of these people's realities and normalcy. For example, we grow up watching movies that make us believe that life always has a happy ending and that bad things only happen to others. However, when we grow up and start experiencing life, we come to know that what movies depict is not real and that our perception has been falsified. Cultivation researchers argue that "over a period, a fixed image of various groups of people is formed and viewers start to absorb these ideas which they then use as a map to navigate through life. This constant exposure to the media content cultivates specific values, beliefs, attitudes, and desires in people" (Cultivation Theory, 2012). In consequence, people wind up forming their ideologies, preferences and behavior unintentionally based on what they are exposed to. According to Moyer-Gusé, Giles and Linz (2008), there is likewise proof that continuous exposure to media (television, advertisements ...) can prompt twisted and erroneous discernments about the nature, predominance, and reasons for violence within society. The latter will also prompt fear amongst the watchers of becoming victims of such violence and discrimination themselves. "George Gerbner's cultivation theory argues that television demonstrates how society works by dramatizing its norms and values. Due to the fact that violence is massively overrepresented in the television environment as compared to its occurrence in the real world, heavy viewers of television will lead to an overestimation of the level of violence within society and an increased fear of becoming a victim of violence" (Moyer-Gusé, Giles, & Linz, 2008). In the cultivation theory, Gerbner distinguishes between three types of viewers: light viewers (less than 2 hours a day), medium viewers (2-4 hours a day) and heavy viewers (more than 4 hours a day). There are other differences between the types of viewers. For instance, heavy viewer relies extensively on the

television as a source of news while light and medium viewers might have different sources of news (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). In other words, the more people watch television on a regular basis, the more prone they become to believing the television's false reality.

On the other hand, this theory has received extensive criticism on both conceptual and methodological grounds, according to Moyer-Gusé, Giles and Linz (2008). One of its limitations is the fact that it focuses a lot on television in general, rather than a specific genre within the television as it is a very vast market for different categories of shows, movies, news sections, etc. Furthermore, the fact that the cultivation theory deals solely with television, is a limitation itself since there are other media outlets that help spread out ideas and concepts that television might fail to show. This theory does not talk about the impact of other media outlets like visual ads, radio ads, and nowadays social media. "The current consensus is that, although there is evidence that some cultivation effects do exist, the model fails to take account of moderating factors such as differential individual perceptions of the reality of television, or the effects of living in areas with different crime rates" (Moyer-Gusé, Giles, & Linz, 2008). For instance, Robert S. Wyer, Jr., L.J. Shrum, and Thomas C. O'Guinn who are supporters of the Cultivation analysis conducted a study based on it while taking into consideration external social factors such as: experience and maturity. What they revealed is that people who are knowledgeable of the stereotypes are less likely to believe in them as they are mature and experienced enough to understand that the latter are only stereotypes. However, people who are less experienced like children or young adolescents are more receptive of media images and are more likely to believe in the typecasts and normalize them (White, 2012).

This theory is very close to what we are trying to show in this paper. If people are continuously exposed to images of beaten women or of semi-naked women in

advertisements, the image of women will become that of submission, vulnerability and sexualism. The younger children see beaten women, the more they accept the act of beating a woman and perceive a bruise as a “normal” and “appealing” thing especially when a brand like Dior shows it in its ads. In fact, “whereas priming, mimicry, and excitation transfer are thought to be important mechanisms for the short-term effects of media violence on aggression, observational learning and desensitization have been hypothesized as key mechanisms for long-term effects” (Krahé, et al., 2011). When exposed to violent or sexual media, viewers will instinctively try to mimic the behavior and experience a high sense of arousal. Moreover, viewers will learn to accept violent and obscene materials, even in situations where it is not normalized. However, according to Krahe et. Al (2011), a counter effect can also show because of continuous exposure to violent or sexual imaging on TV: with constant exposure to violent scenes or sexual images, people will lose the interest and lose the shock impact of such staggering imagery or in other terms, people will experience desensitization. The sense of arousal will reduce with time and dissatisfaction with the content will increase, and thus viewers will lose interest in the underlying topics. Women are also highly impacted by the continuous exposure to violent ads and sexual ads. Luxury goods were previously defined in this paper as items that people aspire to have and to own, and their ads portray the same thing: a high-standard beautiful model and a high standard pricey item. Two things’ women nowadays want to be and want to have.

The Social Learning Theory

The Social Learning Theory is applicable in multiple fields pertaining to human behavior and well-being. This theory was founded by Albert Bandura in 1977 and it

represents an educational practice and method by learning from people and society. This theory proposes that the procurement and maintenance of compulsory conducts depend on the associations between individual and natural factors, and the behavior itself. According to Bandura and as mentioned in the book of Atkin, "most of the behaviors that people display is learned, either deliberately or inadvertently, through the influence of example" (Atkin, 1976). As a matter of fact, Bandura is a firm believer that mistakes can be avoided by observing a good and proficient role model that is able to show the appropriate response rules. He also shows that complex behaviors like language and new response patterns are only taught through modeling and observational patterns. Atkin equally explains two basic processes of social learning: "direct instrumental training, where a teacher explicitly attempts to shape responses via differential reinforcement, and imitation, where an observer matches responses to discriminative cues provided by responses of a model" (Atkin, 1976). These two processes highlight the role of two people in the game of social learning, the role model, and the person, where the person imitates the role model's behavior and responses and learn from them. Furthermore, "social learning theories emphasize the importance of the social context and posit those individuals can learn by observing others' actions and whether these individuals are positively or negatively reinforced when exhibiting aggressive behaviors" (Sutcliffe & Feldman, 2009). In fact, Bandura mentions that children imitate adults' violent behavior activities that they witness in artificial or manufacture social settings, for instance. Thus, brutal behavior is thought to happen because it has been either modeled or demonstrated over time. Peter Miller (2013) also proposes that social learning explains that people learn by watching the behaviors of others (models). They then assess the impact of those behaviors by watching the positive and negative results that take after. Luxury ads are conveying

high and unreachable beauty standards for women which will eventually impact their well-being and their self-esteem. In addition to the fact that women are becoming victims of sexual assault and rape because of the objectification and submission images that the ads are conveying to men.

Like any other theory the social learning theory has limitations. According to LaMorte, a researcher in the School of Public Health at the University of Boston, the theory assumes that every environment change will inevitably include change in the person, when this might not be right in all cases. Also, he discusses that this theory does not clearly define to what extent the external factors might impact the change in people's behavior and which external factor has more impact than the other. In addition, that, there's negligible consideration on the impact of one's emotion or motivation to the entire learning process (LaMorte, 2019).

A lot of the social learning theory was reiterated in the literature related to the impact of violent and sexual advertisements on women and people in general. This theory's main purpose is to prove that people are influenced by what they witness in life, and most importantly learn from it, and eventually imitate it. So, this study will explore the impact of advertisements focusing on women's vulnerability and sexuality on women in general and on Lebanese women specifically: Are we trying to teach them that it is okay to be beaten and submissive? Or that they are sexual objects serving the purpose of pleasing the sexual desires and repressions?

Chapter IV

Methodology

This study adopts a triangulation of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Triangulation methodology refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1990). In fact, Denzin (1978) and Patton (1990) agree that using a mixed approach allows an optimal combination of numerical measurement and in-depth exploration ensuring accurate results.

To test our hypotheses, we decided to use the survey method to thoroughly understand Lebanese women's views and find links between ad content and social ideologies.

Quantitative Method: The Survey

In the survey, the questionnaire is divided into three sections: demographics, lifestyle, and luxury brand ads. The demographics part focuses on finding the right target audience for our survey. The lifestyle section allows to get more in-depth knowledge about luxury brand consumer behavior in the purchase of products. The core emphasis however lies in the last part on luxury brand ads where the focus is on the consumers' perceptions with regards to luxury brands advertisements and how it impacts their purchasing behavior of branded goods. The survey consists of thirty questions: twenty-eight multiple-choice questions and two open ended ones. We aimed to reach two hundred Lebanese women to complete the sample. The survey was shared as an online link sent through e-mail, WhatsApp, and Instagram for one week on google forms.

As for the sample, it consisted of Lebanese women aged between 25 and 35 living mainly in urban areas, such as Mount Lebanon and Beirut. Both age range and location were conditioned to reach women with adequate purchase power since our focus is on luxury brands consumers. Therefore, our target audience belongs to a specific socio-economic classification of the high earners (high and intermediate managerial, administrative, and professional occupations).

The data generated from the survey was analyzed using a statistical software (Google Forms) via Google Spreadsheet.

Qualitative Method

Besides, the qualitative methodology is drawn from two semi-structured interviews with two experts. We interviewed the luxury brand marketing manager of ABC mall Ms. Jennifer Khoury as well as Ms. Pamela Azouri, sociologist, to whom we asked questions within their line of expertise. The interviews were conducted and recorded through videoconferencing and the questions focused on the impact of violence in luxury brands advertisements on Lebanese women to building an overall view on how women are affected by luxury brands ads.

Validity and generalizability

Validity is the extent to which data collection method or methods accurately measure what they were intended to measure, and the extent to which research findings are really about what they profess to be about (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill 2009). In this research validity refers to the extent to which the questions in the questionnaire give

adequate coverage of the investigative questions, and to the responses which do not fall under the selected target audience that are withdrawn from the questionnaire.

Chapter V**Data Collection and Findings**

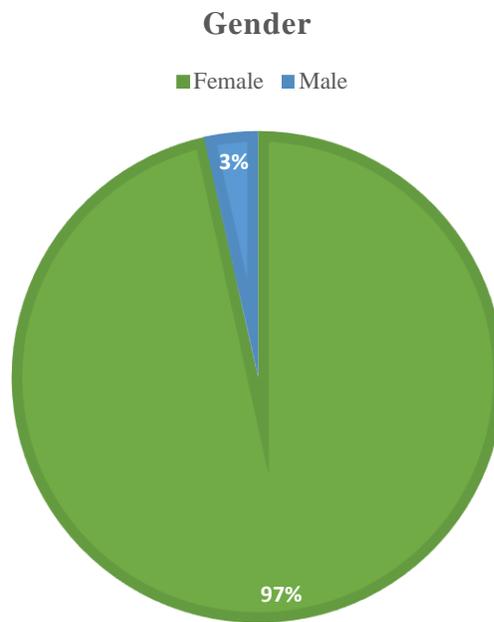
This chapter presents the survey results as well as the main points generated from the interviews conducted with experts in the field of marketing and sociology.

The Survey

The survey was shared with the audience via digital channels. The target group consisted of Lebanese women aged between 25 and 35. The data were collected between the 26th of October 2020 and the 15th of November 2020. 229 answers were gathered, from which 167 were women thus their answers can be used.

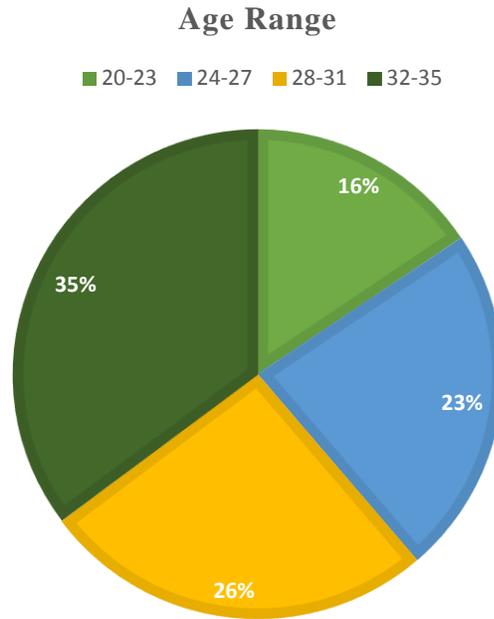
In the following section, the findings will be presented. The raw findings are fully available in Appendix 2.

Chart 1: Gender distribution.



Female respondents constitute 97% of the total respondents.

Chart 2: Age distribution



As shown in chart 2, we have a wide range of age groups: 16% of the respondents are aged between 20 and 23, 23% aged between 24 and 27, 26% aged between 28 and 31, and 35% aged between 32 and 35.

Chart 3: Country of residence

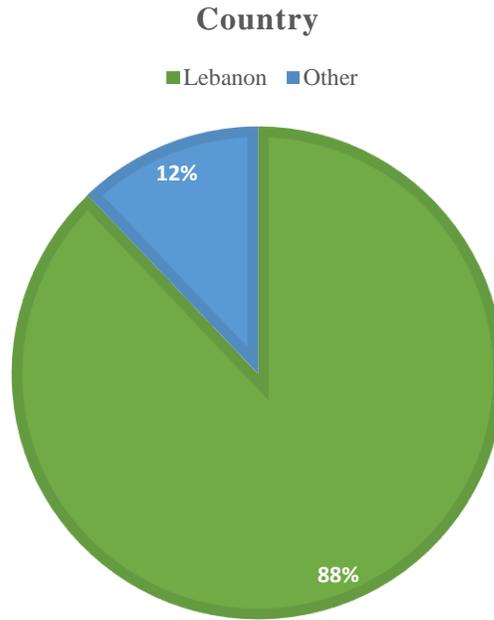


Chart 3 showcases that 88 % of the respondents are in Lebanon with only 12% living abroad.

Chart 4: Governorate dispersal

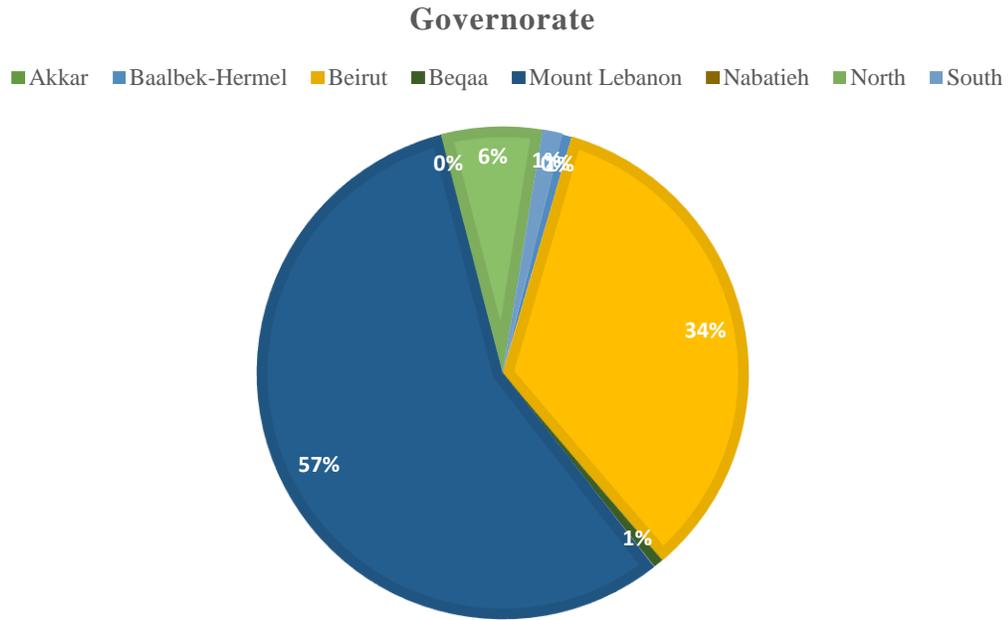


Chart 4 shows the distribution of the respondents among the different governorates in Lebanon with 57% living in Mount Lebanon, 35% in Beirut, 10% in the North, 1% in South, Beqaa and Baalbek-Hermel, and 0% living in Nabatieh and Akkar.

Chart 5: Educational Level

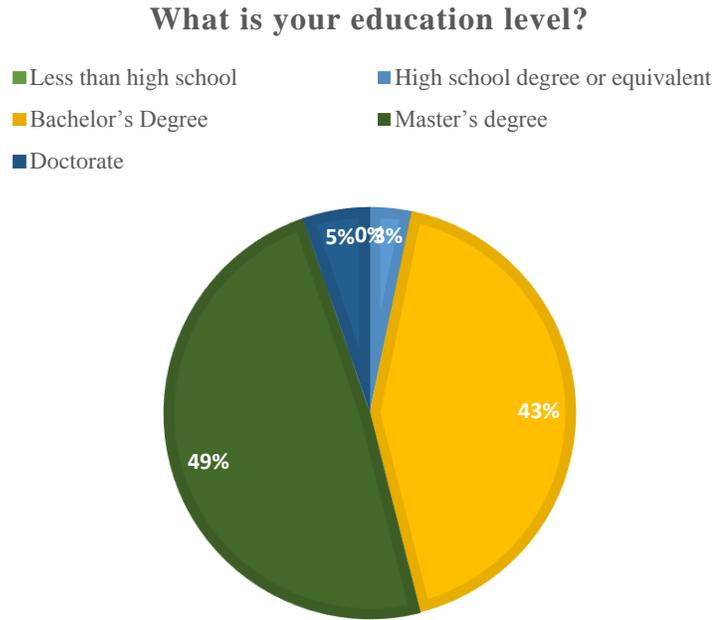


Chart 5 displays the level of education of the respondents. It is worth highlighting that none of them have less than a high school education and 49% are holders of a master's degree. Whereas 3% have a high school degree or an equivalent, 43% hold a bachelor's degree and 5% hold a doctorate.

Chart 6: Employment status

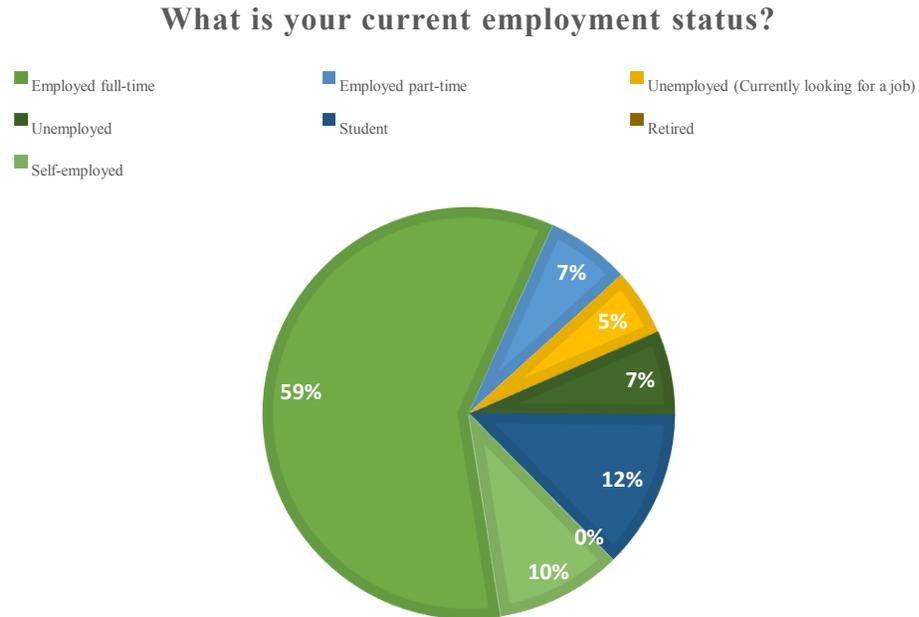


Chart 6 presents an overview of the employment status of the participants: 59% have a full-time job, 12% are students, 10% are self-employed, 7% are unemployed or part-time, 5% are unemployed and currently looking for a job, and 0% retired.

Chart 7: Marital status

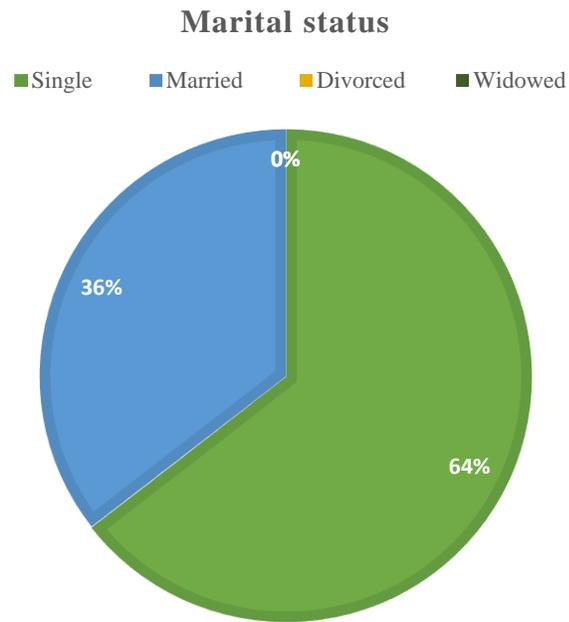


Chart 7 shows that respondents are divided between two categories out of the 4 where single and married constitute respectively 36% and 64% of the results and 0% are divorced or widowed.

Chart 8: Monthly income

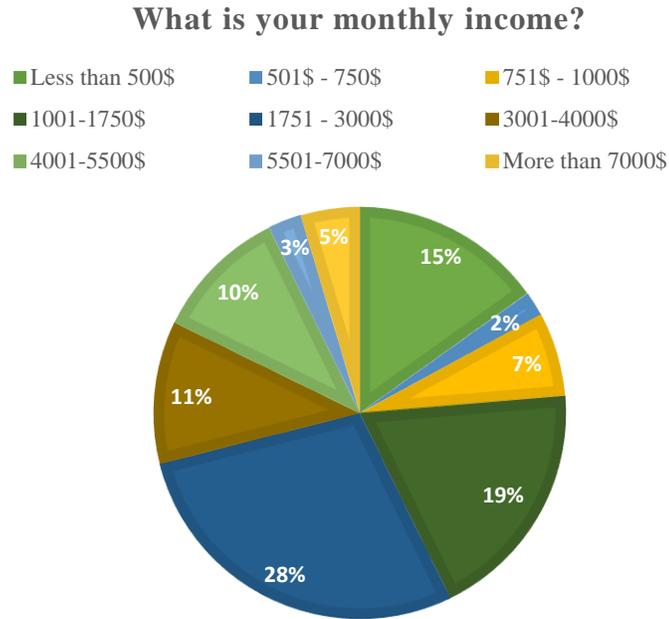
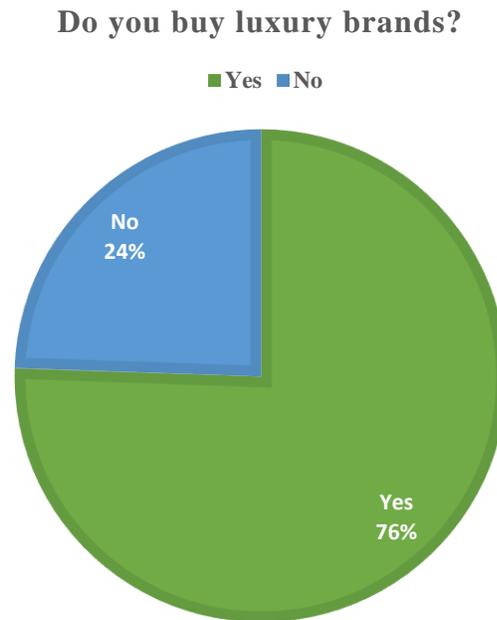


Chart 8 indicates the monthly income of the respondents visualized as follows: 2% earn between 501 and 750\$, 3% earn between 5501 and 7000\$, 5% earn above 7000\$, 7% earn between 75 and 1000\$, 10% earn between 3001 and 4000\$, 11% earn between 3001 and 4000\$, 19% earn between 1001 and 1750\$, and 28% earn between 1751 and 3000\$. It is important to note that the data was collected before the huge devaluation of the Lebanese currency.

Chart 9: Purchase of luxury brands



Most of the respondents buy luxury brands with a number of 173 persons out of 229. Having a bulk of respondents who buy luxury brands contributes to a broader view on the audience's behavior.

Chart 10: Purchase of luxury brands frequency

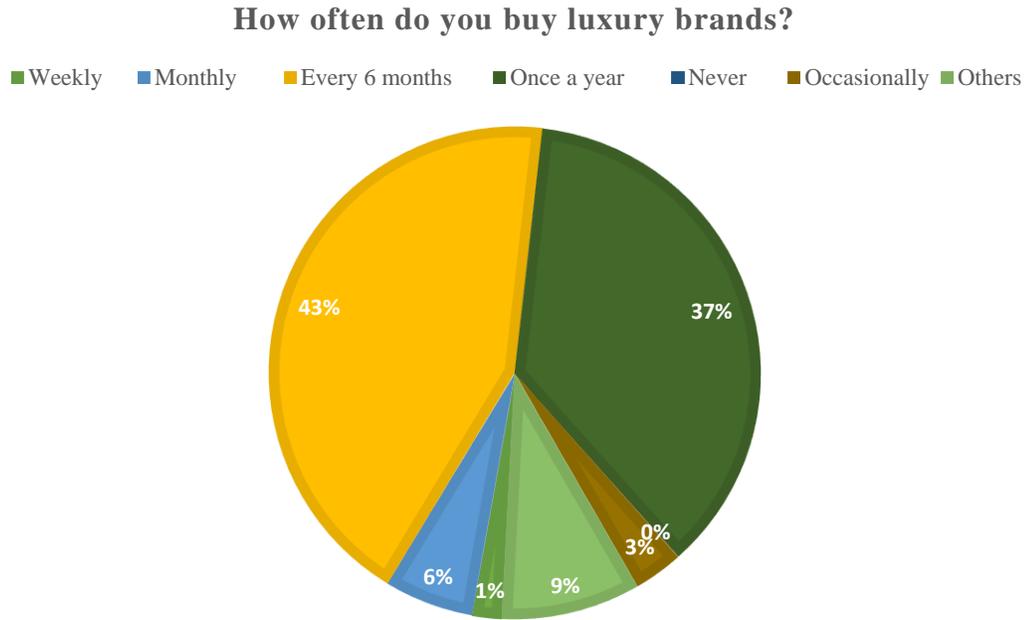
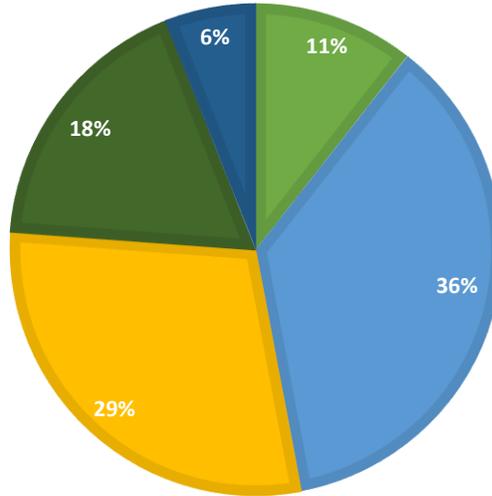


Chart 10 showcases how often do women buy luxury brands. The numbers reveal 43% twice a year, 37% once a year, 9% others, 6% monthly, 3% occasionally, and 1% weekly. Women who answered others were asked to specify, and the results can be found in Appendix 2 – Table 1.

Chart 11: Luxury brand selling points

From where do you usually buy your luxury brands items?

■ Online ■ Shopping Malls ■ Brand Stores ■ Department Stores ■ Others



As presented in Chart 11, women buy luxury brands mostly from shopping malls (36%) followed by 29% from brand stores, 18% from department stores, 11% online, and 6% others. Among the 6%, the answers came as follows: outlet stores, abroad, duty free, and personal shopper.

Chart 12: Average spending on luxury brands

How much do you spend approximately on luxury brands per year?

- Less than 500\$
- 1001 - 1750\$
- 4001 - 5500\$
- 501\$ - 750\$
- 1751 - 3000\$
- 5501 - 7000\$
- 751\$ - 1000\$
- 3001 - 4000\$
- More than 7000\$

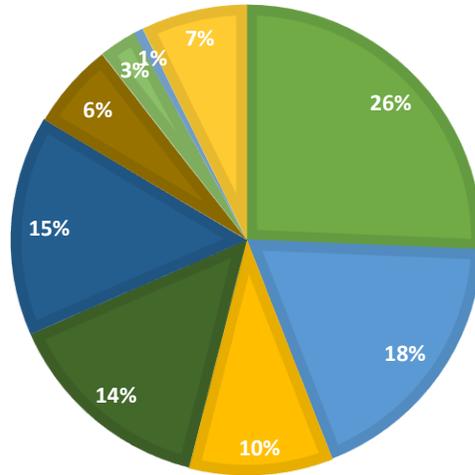


Chart 12 reveals that 26% spend less than 500\$, 18% between 501 and 750\$, 15% between 1751 and 3000\$, 14% between 1001 and 1750\$, 10% between 751 and 1000\$, 7% more than 7000\$, 6% between 3001 and 4000\$, 3% between 4001 and 5500\$, and 1% between 5501 and 7000\$.

Chart 13: Luxury brands advertisement

From where do you get information about luxury brands?

- Advertisement on TV
- Advertisement on street
- Magazines
- Brand website
- Brand Social Media page
- Influencers
- Others

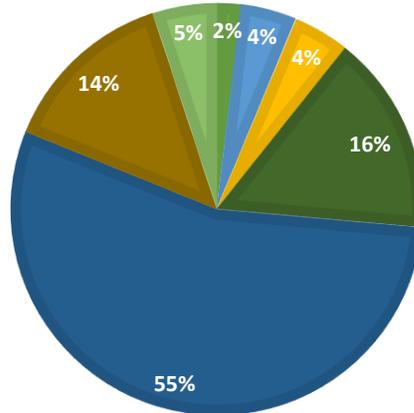


Chart 13 shows that 55 % of the respondents get their information from the brand’s social media pages, 15% from brands’ websites, 14% from influencers, 5% from street advertisements, 4% from magazines, 2% from TV advertisements, and 5% others.

Chart 14: Reasons to buy luxury brands

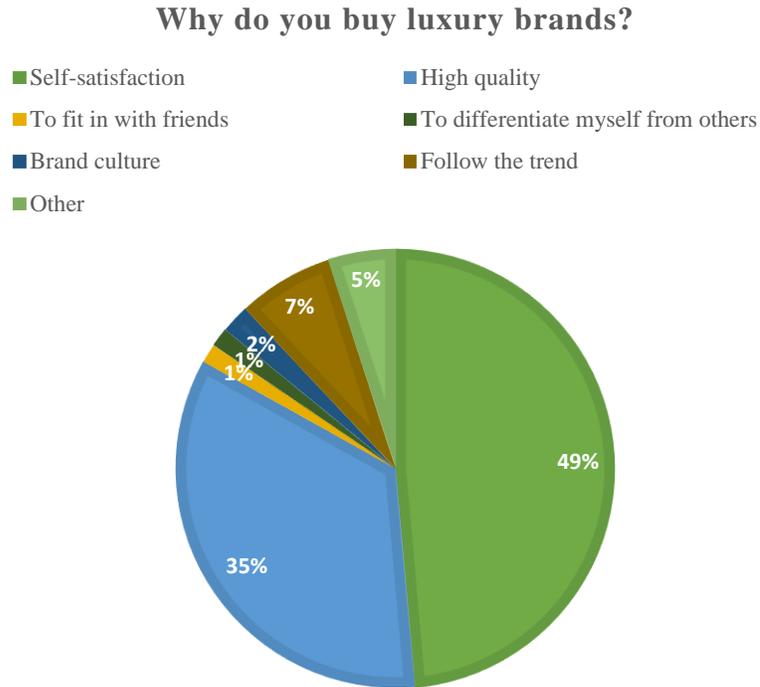


Chart 14 illustrates the different reasons why women buy luxury brands. The motive is different and divided as follows: 49% of the women buy luxury brands for self-satisfaction, while 35% for its high quality, 7% to follow the trend, 2% that adopt the brand culture, 1% to fit in with friends, 1% to differentiate themselves from others, while 5% answered “other” and inputted reasons like “If the brand has new fashionable items”, “They happen to be pretty”, and “If I like it, I buy it”.

Chart 15: Luxury brands features

On which aspects do you place more emphasis when you purchase a luxury brand?

- Product/Service quality
- Price
- Popular
- Self reflection
- Practicality
- After-sale service
- Package
- Feature of environment protection
- Design

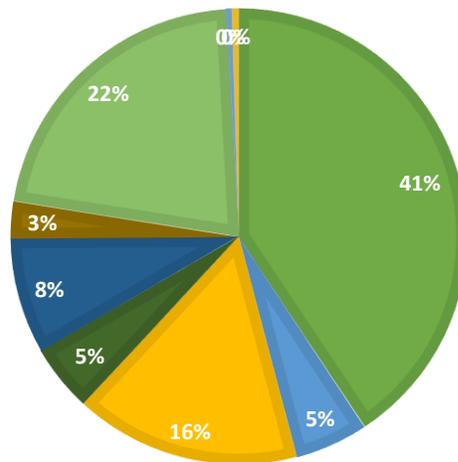


Chart 15 shows the different aspects on which women place emphasis when buying luxury brands. The answers were as follows: 41% product/service quality, 22% self- reflection, 16% price value, 8% popular, 5% package, 5% after-sale service, 3% feature of environment protection, and 0% for price, popularity, design, or practicality.

Chart 16: Luxury brands ads' attributes

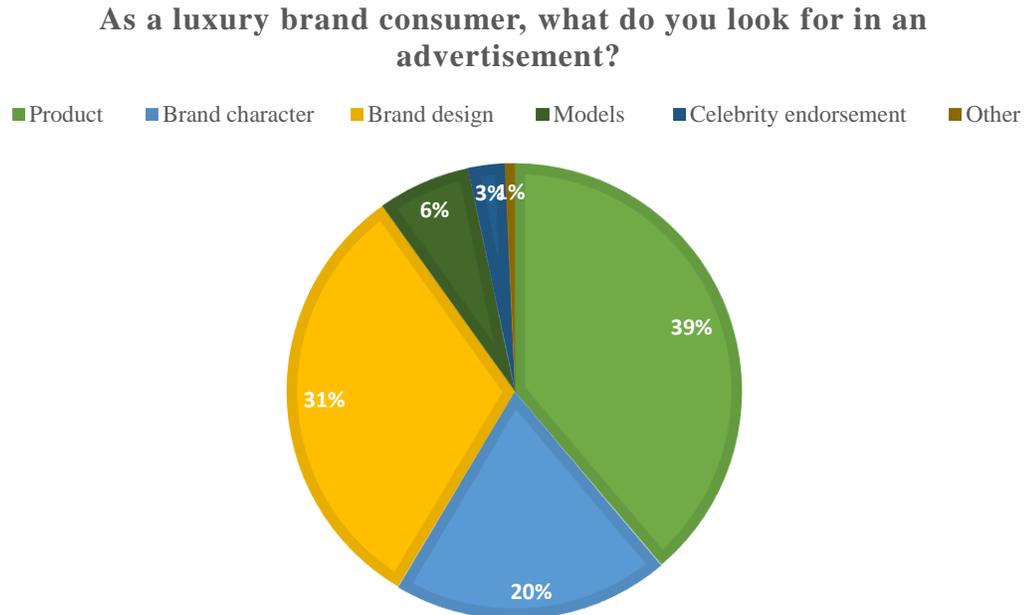


Chart 16 illustrates the answers to what women look for in luxury brands' ads and the answers varied between 39% who look for the product itself, 31% looking for the brand design, 20% the brand character, 6% the ad models, 3% looking for celebrity endorsement while 1% other with no specification.

Chart 17: Advertisement values

Do you believe advertisements can help build an image of society? and convey social values?

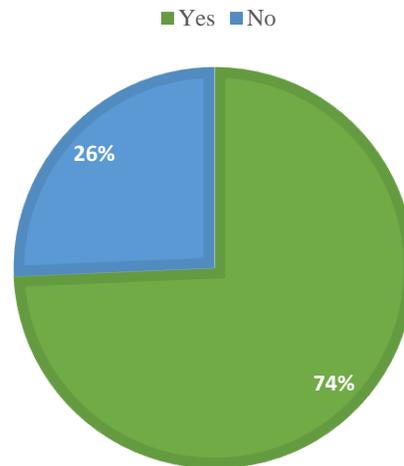


Chart 17 showcases that 74% of the respondents believe that advertisement helps build an image of society and convey social values. However, 26% believe that it does not. As a follow up question, we requested from the participants who answered “Yes” to the previous question to list the different values they think ads convey. The answers ranged between positive, negatives and neutral and details can be found in Appendix 2 - Table 2.

Chart 18: Values conveyed by ads

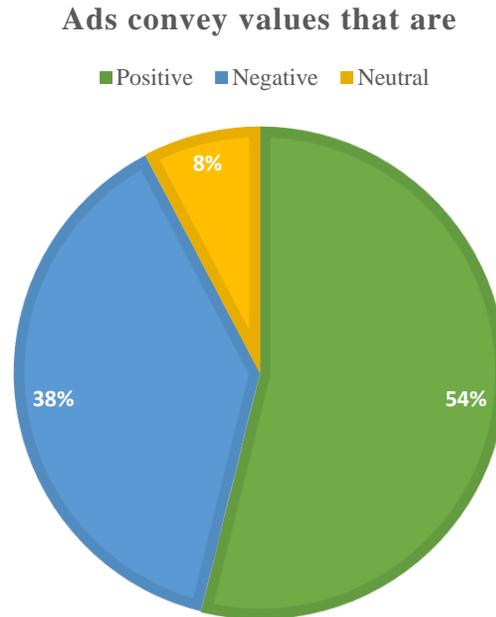


Chart 18 will help us understand what people believe ads are conveying in terms of value categories. 54% consider that the values conveyed are positive while 38% believe they are negative, and 8% are neutral.

Chart 19: Usage of social media

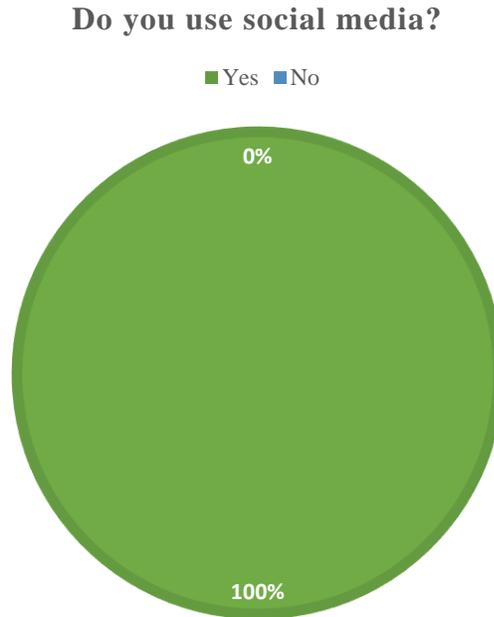
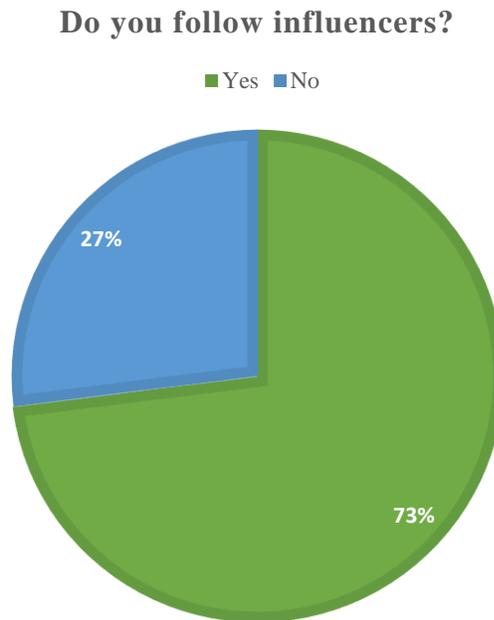


Chart 19 shows that 100% of the respondents use social media platforms.

Chart 20: Influencers



73% of the participants follow influencers on social media while 27% do not.

Chart 21: Influencers' beauty standards

Do you think influencers are conveying unattainable beauty standards/life standards?

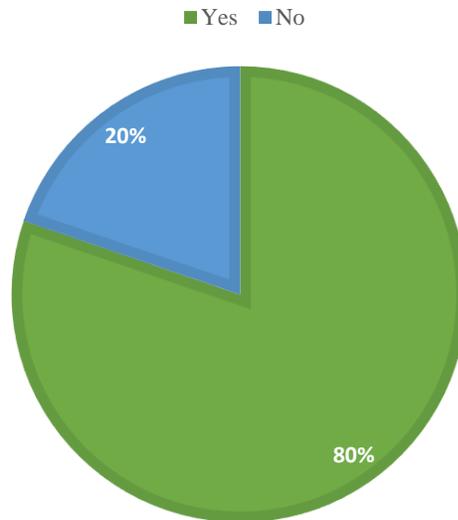
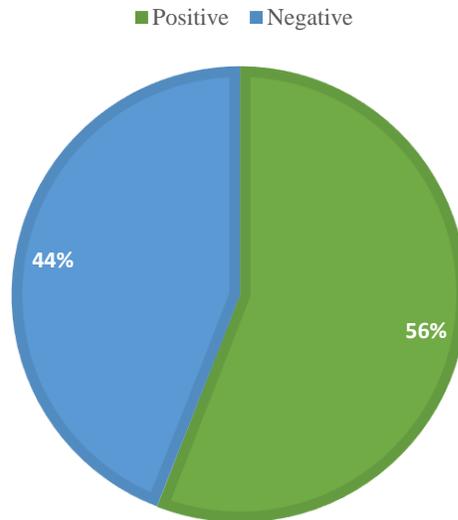


Chart 21 shows that 80% of women consider that influencers convey unattainable beauty and life standards, whereas 20% of women disagree with the latter.

Chart 22: Social media advertisements

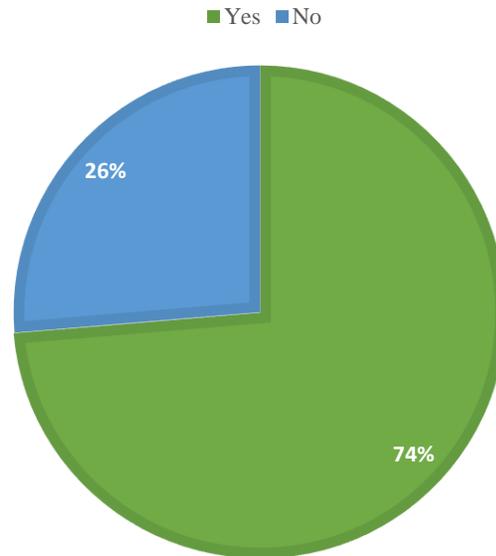
Does advertising on social media influence in a positive or negative way?



56% of the respondents consider that advertising on social media has a positive influence on the people while the rest does not (44%).

Chart 23: Luxury brands desire

Do you feel frustrated if you can not get the desired item?



We asked women if they get frustrated when they do not get a desired branded item and 74% answered “yes” and 26% answered “no” as shown in Chart 23 to highlight that people do desire branded items and strive to purchase it.

Chart 24: Women self-esteem

Do you compare yourself to influencers/models?

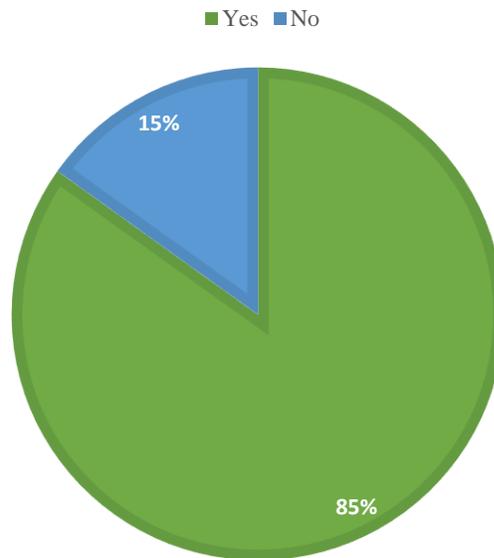


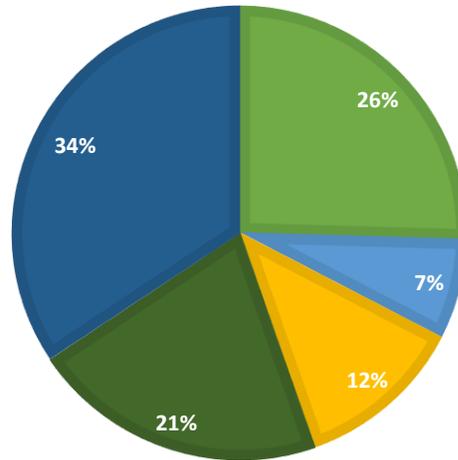
Chart 24 shows that 85% of women respondents do not compare themselves to influencers or models, whereas 15% do.

Chart 25: Luxury brands' advertisements



Pick your favorite by inserting the number of the ad and explain why?

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 0



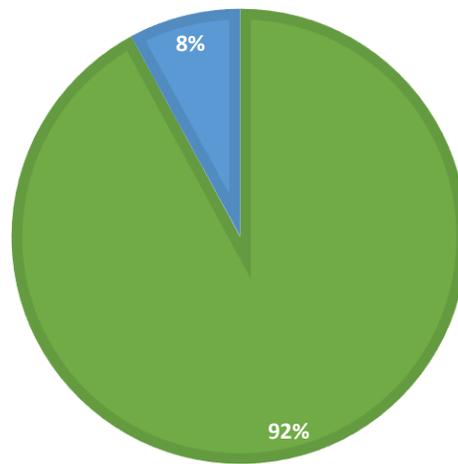
We displayed four ads for the respondents to select from and to justify their choice. Chart 25 depicts which ads were mostly selected: ad 1 leads with 26%, followed by ad 4 with 21%, ad 3 with 12%, ad 2 with 7%, while 34% had no favorite. As a follow-up question, we requested from the participants to specify the reasoning behind their choice and the answers broadly diverged on each ad. The detailed answers are in Appendix 2 – Table 3.

Chart 26: Luxury brands and violence



Does it bother you to see women with beating signs in a luxury brand advertisement?

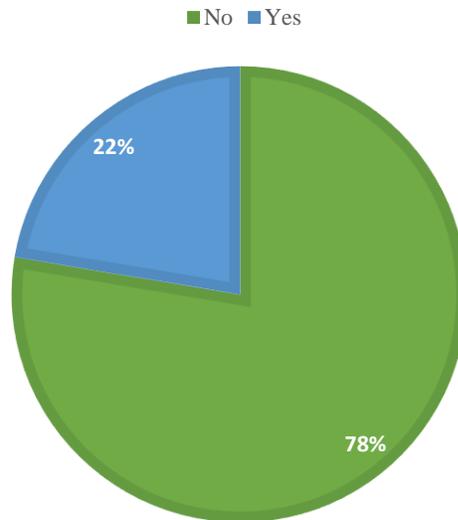
■ Yes ■ No



We selected diverse ads for well-known luxury brands that show violent scenes against women, and we asked participants if seeing women with beating signs bothers them and the answers were: 92% yes and 8 % no.

Chart 27: Buying brands with violent expression.

Would you still buy from the brand using violence as a means of expression?



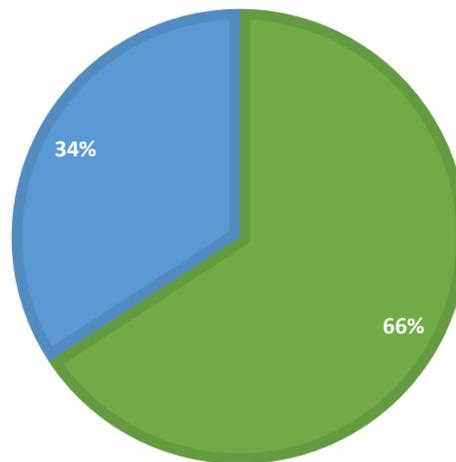
After asking participants if they were bothered by violent scenes, we proceeded with examining if they would continue to buy products from these brands that use violent scenes to sell. 78% of women would refrain from purchasing these brands while 22% would not.

Chart 28: Brands and sexual or stereotypical representations



Does it bother you to see women in sexual or stereotypical representations in a luxury brand advertisement?

■ Yes ■ No



66% of the participants are bothered by sexual and stereotypical depictions and 34% are not as shown in Chart 28.

Chart 29: Brands and sexual stereotyping

Would you still buy from the brand with sexual or stereotypical representations?

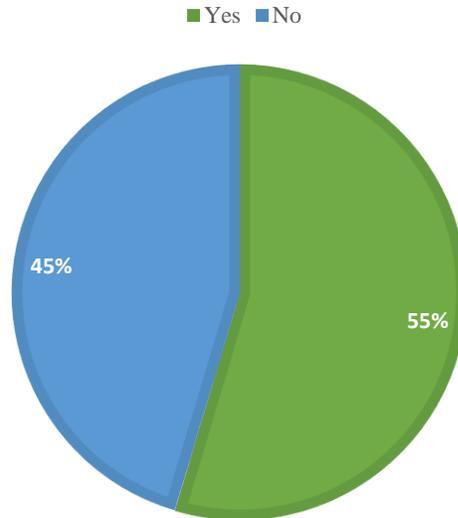
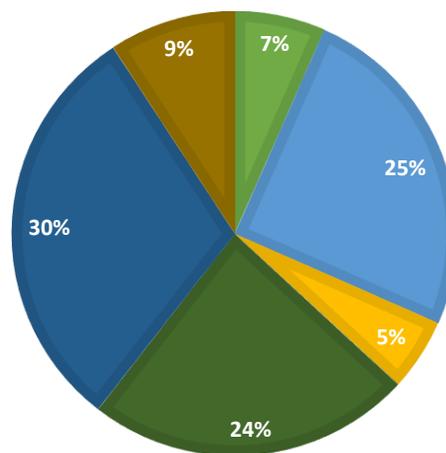


Chart 29 shows that 55% of women would buy the luxury brand items despite them using sexual or stereotypical representations of women while 45% would refrain from doing so.

Chart 30: Action towards luxury brands ads.

What would be your reaction to luxury brand ads that portray beating signs or women in sexual or stereotyping signs?

- I am a Brand loyal I will keep on buying it
- I will stop buying the brand
- I will file a complaint and stop buying the brand
- I will voice it out on social media and among my circle and stop buying the brand
- I will do nothing
- Other



When asked about their reactions towards scenes of violence against women and sexual/stereotypical depictions of females. The responses varied with 30% of the participants said that they would do nothing about it while 25% would boycott the brand, and 24% would voice it out on social media. All answers can be found in Appendix 2 – Table 4.

Expert Interviews

For this thesis, we interviewed two experts selected in relevance to our quest to complement our research. We interviewed Ms. Pamela Azouri, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Humanities, Department of Religious, Cultural, and Philosophical Studies at Notre Dame University (NDU) and Ms. Jennifer Khoury, a seven-year marketing manager

at ABC Mall (home to multiple and prime luxury brands nationwide). In the following section we will share the focal outcomes of the interviews, noting that the full transcripts are available in Appendix 3.

The interview with Ms. Pamela Azouri tackled the media effect on women, specifically the influence of luxury brands' advertisement on self-perception when using violent and sexist representations of women. Most importantly, we attempted to understand from a sociological and psychological perspective what deters women from acting against these brands whenever they feel offended.

The key take-outs were thoroughly linked to the Lebanese society formation: an extremely materialistic society where people consider external appearance and materialistic items as a core value and a must-have. Therefore, Lebanese women are extremely affected by the media, digital media, and influencers that dictate actions. Given the structure of our society, most Lebanese women purchase luxury brand items as a statement underlining their social status and emphasizing their integrity to a defined milieu. The latter justifies the indifference and inability of these women to pull the trigger on the misrepresentation of women in luxury brands advertisement, even when showcasing women's imagery within violent and sexist sceneries. Nonetheless, they remain silent when offended and insulted by these representations for the sake of preserving their identity and presence within the society.

In our second interview, we discussed with Ms. Jennifer Khoury, the marketing manager at ABC, about luxury brand advertisement from a shopper and brand perspective. We deliberated on the influence of luxury brands on women, the effective ways to reach female shoppers, and most importantly, the brands' social responsibility.

It is predominant to point out that throughout her years of experience, Khoury has observed that luxury brands became more conscious about multiple aspects of the marketing and advertising industry. They can no longer discard the market they are advertising for because of the importance of localizing their messages to cater to their target audience, and the impact of the two-way communication made possible by social media. That said, local marketing managers play a vital role in acting as gatekeepers while ensuring an unblemished transition of advertisements from international to local standards, preventing and anticipating backlashes that may harm the brand and root to boycott. She did not face a similar situation while managing luxury brands at ABC. Nonetheless, she confirmed that violent and sexist ads that offend customers are most likely harmful to the brands, especially in a local context like Lebanon. Under those circumstances, the brand will be facing a public relations crisis that will immediately impact the brand and its sales. The consequences vary from a brand to another depending on its market establishment, the scale of the impact on the public, and the crisis management methodology; nonetheless, the overall approach will define the short and long-term repercussions that the brand may face. Brands may be unable to recover from such a setback.

Chapter VI**Analysis**

The purpose of the study was to show how Lebanese women react to offensive portrayals of females in luxury brand advertisements and how the use of violent images has negative effects on women and brand-consumer behavior. From the results of the survey, we can conclude that a big number of respondents are luxury brand consumers and buy branded goods for multiple reasons such as self-satisfaction and the high quality of the products. These people also believe that advertisements have great effects on society and help create values and normalize them. It is important to add that in the Lebanese community, television, and radio ads along with billboard advertisements are still a common communication mean, in addition to the proliferation of social media presence. The latter is proven by the fact that all our respondents are on social media, regardless of their age and gender. Among these people, 73% follow influencers on social media. Influencers are a new form of advertising that requires people to show how they are using a specific product through their social media accounts notably Instagram to “influence” people to purchase the same. A lot of the respondents believe that social media has a positive impact on people and that advertisements on social media show a greater impact on people’s purchase behavior. However, 80% of the respondents believe that influencers are bringing to the table high beauty standards that are somehow unattainable. People see influencers dressed in all sorts of branded items and have tons of makeup and they like what they see. However, this is only one side of the story that would also bring them frustration as shown since 85% of the respondents compare themselves to these influencers and models and 78% get frustrated whenever they cannot buy the desired item. This shows

that influencers are creating a fake image of their life, making people strive to achieve something that is not achievable leading to pure frustration and low self-esteem.

Another aspect of the study was the reaction of people to the discriminative content in the advertisements. 92% of the respondents are bothered when they see beaten women in a luxury brand ad and 66% are bothered by sexual content. In contrast, 78% would still buy the branded goods even when portraying violent content and 55% would still buy sexually branded products. There are multiple reasons behind those high numbers. One reason being the fact that we live in a materialistic society, here in Lebanon, where standards are high, and show-off is one of the core social code. In fact, over the course of time people got used to the idea that brands will lift the person socially and give them a higher stand within society. Another reason would be that sexual assault is normalized in a way that people feel offended but have accepted it as a fact and a normal aspect of life. Ads over the years have influenced people's decisions and point of view. This was reiterated by Ms. Khoury who said that Lebanese television is still considered a highly reliable source in the region and has always been a host of multiple abusive advertisements of luxurious brands throughout the years thus tearing a woman's vision towards herself and the society's views towards women. As stated in the cultivation theory, that constant portrayal of violent and sexual content repeatedly could make people change their values and accept them and start acting as per the values portrayed in the content. The social learning theory also shows that people learn from society, so if society accepts violence and sexual assault, young people will get used to the same idea. Moreover, the rates of sexual assault and violence have risen during quarantine, and it took women a long time before voicing the issue and reporting their incidents. What helped Lebanese women was the idea that the rise of violence and sexual assault was outspoken on social media by

various influencers and a hotline was advertised over TV and radio for the same reason. In fact, NGOs are training the Internal Security Forces (ISF) on how to take calls on domestic violence and how to handle such situation in support of the abused (who are mainly women), even a law incriminating sexual harassment and domestic violence was not put in place up until December 2020, where the government passed 205 law criminalizing sexual harassment and amending the pre-existing domestic violence law.

However, it is quite interesting that 55% would not buy brands with violent content and 45% would refrain from buying the branded goods when showing sexual content, especially within the Lebanese society. This means that women are already starting to feel powerful enough to speak up and take a stand against harassment and that comes with the help of social media influencers or celebrities who spoke about their own experiences. This shows how social media gave everyone a voice, and many women have used social media as a platform to tell their experiences on sexual assaults and violent incidents. So over time, this would also create a new value as per the cultivation theory, where youngsters and women victims would learn not to accept this anymore. In addition to that, in our survey 25% of the women would boycott the “offensive” brands and 24% would voice out their frustration on social media.

Social media is a double-edge sword on one hand, social media provides a platform for people to speak up and have an opinion and encourages freedom of speech, on the other hand, it provides a platform for people to lie and show a distorted version of reality. Another major advantage of social media is that it brought up a way to restrict “bad” or “offensive” contents by setting rules and thus restricting the number of abusive contents for brands. We have seen multiple posts being taken down for offensive content and multiple profiles being reported and shut down for voicing out online harassment. This is

actually forcing brands to provide a minimum amount of respect or give them a line that they are not allowed to cross in their advertisements. Furthermore, brands cannot afford to post discriminative content as they no longer have control of the people's reactions. For instance, Saint Laurent, an immense French fashion house, released in 2017 a series of porno-chic ads with the intention of "empowering women" back in 2017. Instead of receiving compliments, they got backlashes and petitions to ban their ads across Europe noting that Great Britain banned a Saint Laurent ad just two years before that. This story is just one example to show how people's reactions can damage a brand's reputation. On the opposite side, lots of brands took advantage to send positive messages against sexual and violent assaults and against social stereotypes. One example would be *girls.girls.girls* magazine that spoke of the contradiction mandated by society against women. Their video repeatedly voiced "Be a lady, they said" along with all sorts of expressions that society imposes on women. Their video reached 1.3 million views and touched the whole world as every woman related to every word said in the 2:45 minutes long video.

In fact, the hypothesis that Lebanese women refute violent and offensive portrayals of women in luxury brand ads and that the use of such provocative means has negative effects on the audience and on the purchase, behavior was proved by showing how offensive ads have gotten more backlash than praise and by showing that women, especially Lebanese, have started to stand for their being as humans and not as objects for pleasure and oppression.

Chapter VII

Conclusion and Limitations

In conclusion, the purpose of this research was to analyze the reaction of Lebanese women aged between 25 to 35 on the use of violence in luxury brands advertisements. It can be concluded that there are multiple behavior patterns that proved the hypotheses. However, I strongly believe that women in Lebanon still have a long way towards taking the right stand against violence promotion, yet they are on the right track by getting the needed exposure to do so. Future exploration into the Lebanese women's behavior and their tendency of not taking a stand against gender-based discrimination issues is needed.

Limitations

While conducting our study, some unanticipated challenges emerged that led to limitations related to the sample size, cultural bias, and study area. The sample size does not represent the whole Lebanese population; it focuses only on two governorates Mount Lebanon and Beirut. In addition to the sample size, multiple conflicts arose from the political and financial situation in Lebanon and the Covid-19 outbreak. In fact, the political and financial situation, that deeply hit the income, purchase power, and employment status for the core target audience of the study altered their lifestyle leaving them hanging between the past and the present. Finally, the pandemic outbreak delayed the whole data collection process and even the purchasing routines and habits.

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Appendix 1

Survey

Good day!

My name is Nicole Khawand, and I am a graduate student at Notre Dame University (NDU). I am conducting a research study to determine the impact of women's portrayals in violent luxury brand advertisements on Lebanese young-adult female buyers. Your answers will help me to understand the effect of violence representation in Luxury brand ads on women.

Kindly note that your response will be used for academic purposes only.

In case you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me via email at Nicolekhawand@gmail.com.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Demographics:

1-Gender

Male

Female

2-Age Range

20-23

24-27

28-31

32-35

3-Country

Lebanon

Other

If you are not Lebanese, thank you for your time

4-Governorate

Akkar

Baalbek-Hermel

Beirut

Beqaa

Mount Lebanon

Nabatieh

North

South

5-What is your education level?

Less than high school

High school degree or equivalent

Bachelor's Degree

Master's degree

Doctorate

6-What is your current employment status?

Employed full-time

Employed part-time

Unemployed (Currently looking for a job)

Unemployed

Student

Retired

Self-employed

7-Marital status

Single

Married

Divorced

Widowed

8-What is your monthly income?

Less than 500\$

501\$ - 750\$

751\$ - 1000\$

1001-1750\$

1751 - 3000\$

3001-4000\$

4001-5500\$

5501-7000\$

More than 7000\$

Lifestyle:

Luxury brand is a branded product that is perceived to:

1) be high quality.

3) have a prestigious image within the market built on qualities.

4) be worthy of commanding a premium price. E.g.: Louis Vuitton, Gucci,

Hermes, Prada, Chanel, Ralph Lauren, Burberry, and Versace.

9-Do you buy luxury brands?

Yes

No

10-How often do you buy luxury brands?

Weekly

Monthly

Every 6 months

Once a year

Never

Others

11-From where do you usually buy your luxury brands item?

Online

Shopping Malls

Brand Stores

Department Stores

12-How much do you spend approximately on luxury brands per year?

Less than 500\$

501\$ - 750\$

751\$ - 1000\$

1001 - 1750\$

1751 - 3000\$

3001 - 4000\$

4001 - 5500\$

5501 - 7000\$

More than 7000\$

13-From where do you get information about luxury brands?

Advertisement on TV

Advertisement on street

Magazines

Brand website

Brand Social Media page (Specify)

Influencers

Others (Specify)

14-Why do you buy luxury brands?

High quality

To fit in with friends

To differentiate myself from others

Brand culture

Follow the trend

15-On which aspects do you place more emphasis when you purchase a luxury brand?

Product/Service quality

After-sale service

Price

Package

Popular

Feature of environment protection

Self-reflection

Others (Specify)

Ads:

16-As a luxury brand consumer, what do you look for in an advertisement?

Product

Brand character

Brand design

Models

Celebrity endorsement

Other (Specify)

17-Do you believe advertisements can help build an image of society? and convey social values?

Yes

No

18-In your opinion what type of values are ads conveying nowadays?

19-Do you use social media?

Yes

No

20-Do you follow influencers?

Yes

No

21-Do you think influencers are conveying unattainable beauty standards/life standards?

Yes

No

22-Does advertising on social media influence in a positive or negative way?

Yes

No

23-Do you feel like buying the item or do you feel frustrated if you don't have it?

Yes

No

24-Do you compare yourself to influencers/models?

Yes

No

25-Show a series of ads by luxurious brands and ask them to pick your favorite and explain why by selecting a reason.



Model looks "sexy"

The man looks tough

I like the brand

I like the model

Other (Specify)

26-Does it bother you to see women with beating signs in a luxury brand advertisement?

(Picture included)

Yes

No

27- Would you still buy from the brand in question?

Yes

No

28- Does it bother you to see women in sexual or stereotyping signs in a luxury brand advertisement?



Yes

No

29- Would you still buy from the brand in question?

Yes

No

30- What would be your reaction to luxury brand ads that portray beating signs or women in sexual or stereotyping signs?

I am a Brand loyal I will keep on buying it

I will stop buying the brand

I will file a complaint and stop buying the brand

I will voice it out on social media and among my circle and stop buying the brand

I will do nothing

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. We truly value the information you have provided. Your responses will contribute to our analysis and findings.

Appendix 2

Survey Results

Chart 1: Gender distribution.

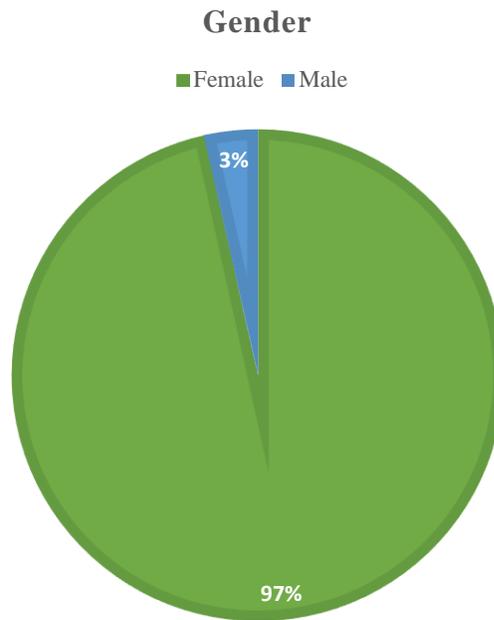


Chart 2: Age repartition

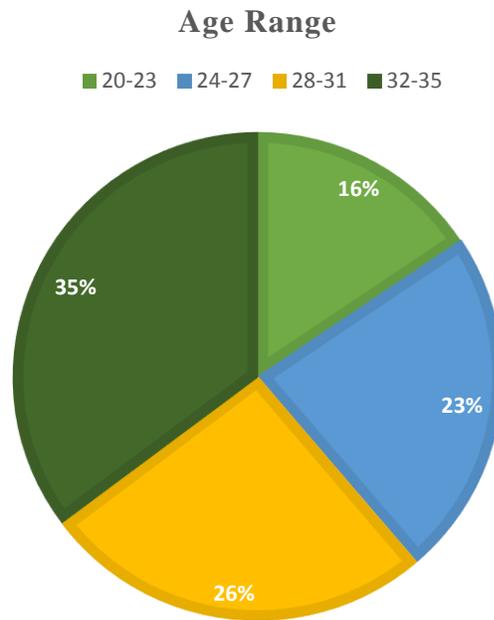


Chart 3: Country of residence

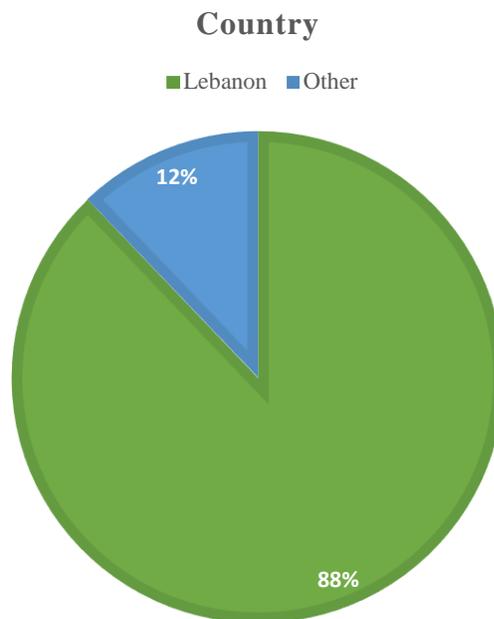


Chart 4: Governorate dispersal

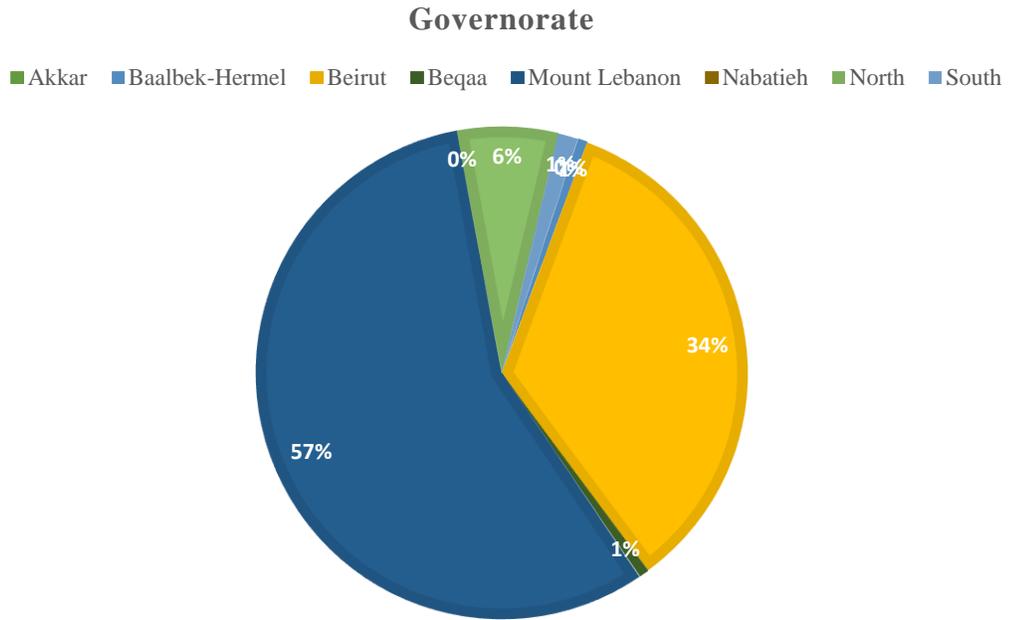


Chart 5: Education Level

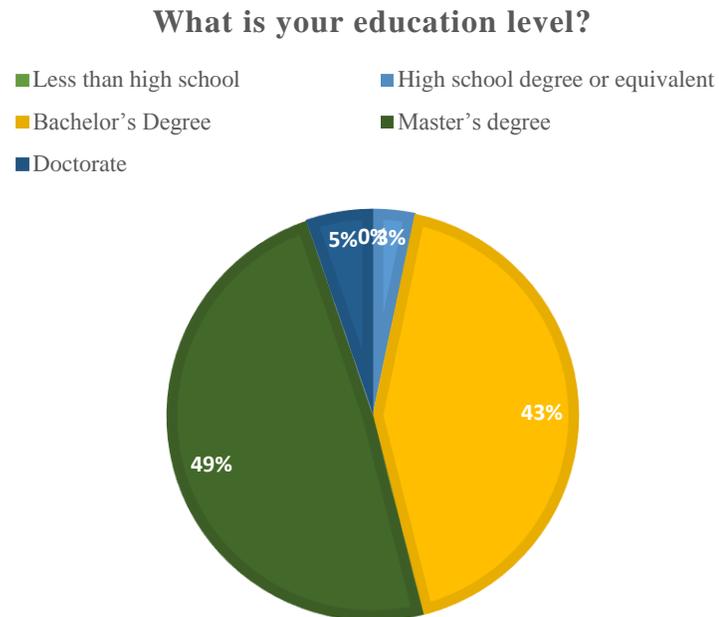


Chart 6: Employment status

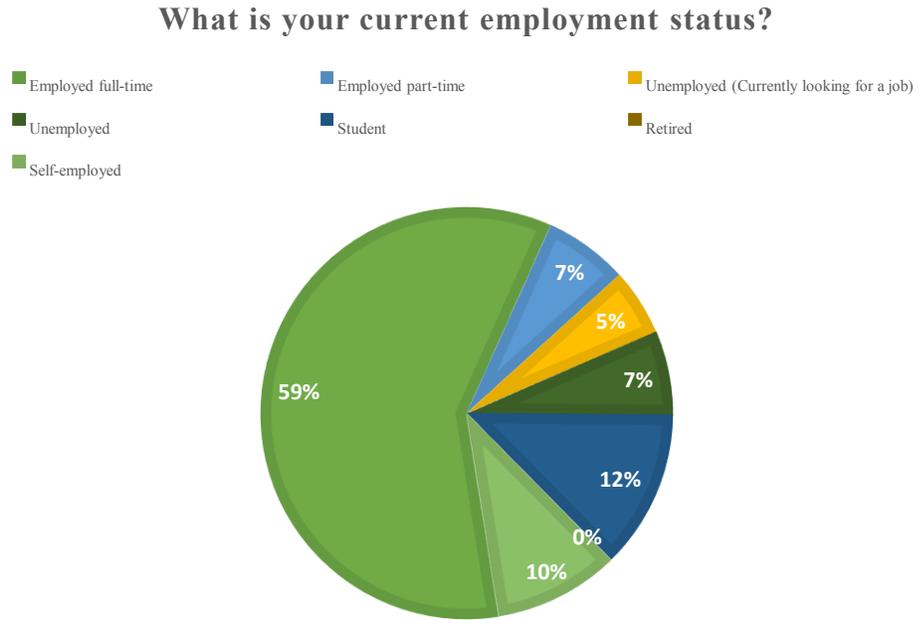


Chart 7: Marital status

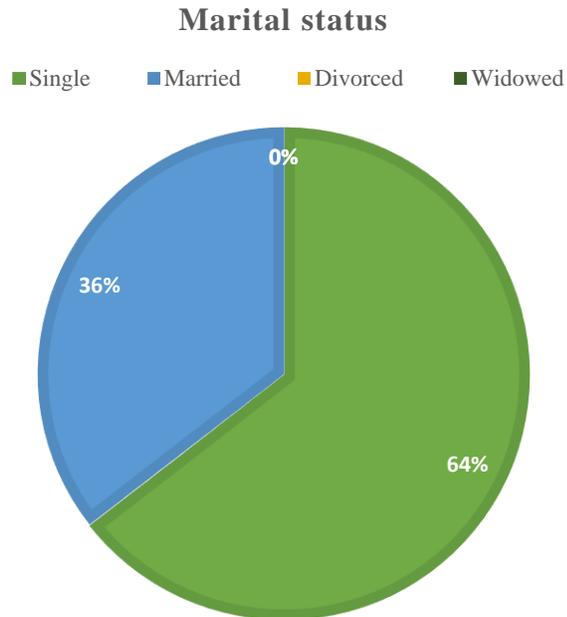


Chart 8: Monthly income

What is your monthly income?

- Less than 500\$
- 501\$ - 750\$
- 751\$ - 1000\$
- 1001-1750\$
- 1751 - 3000\$
- 3001-4000\$
- 4001-5500\$
- 5501-7000\$
- More than 7000\$

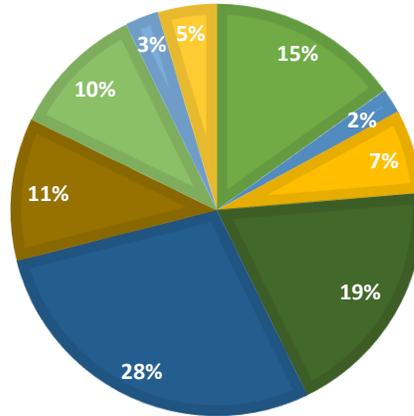


Chart 9: Purchase of Luxury brands

Do you buy luxury brands?

- Yes
- No

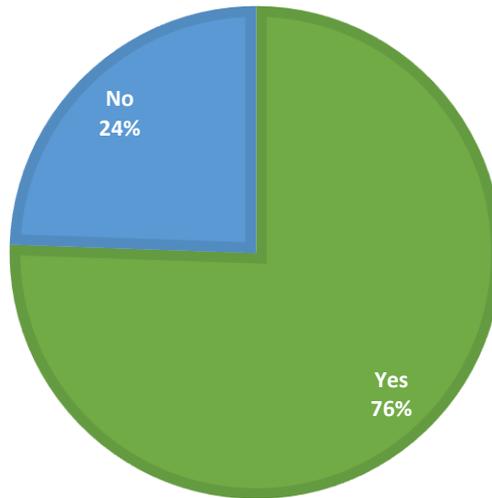


Chart 10: Purchase of Luxury brands frequency

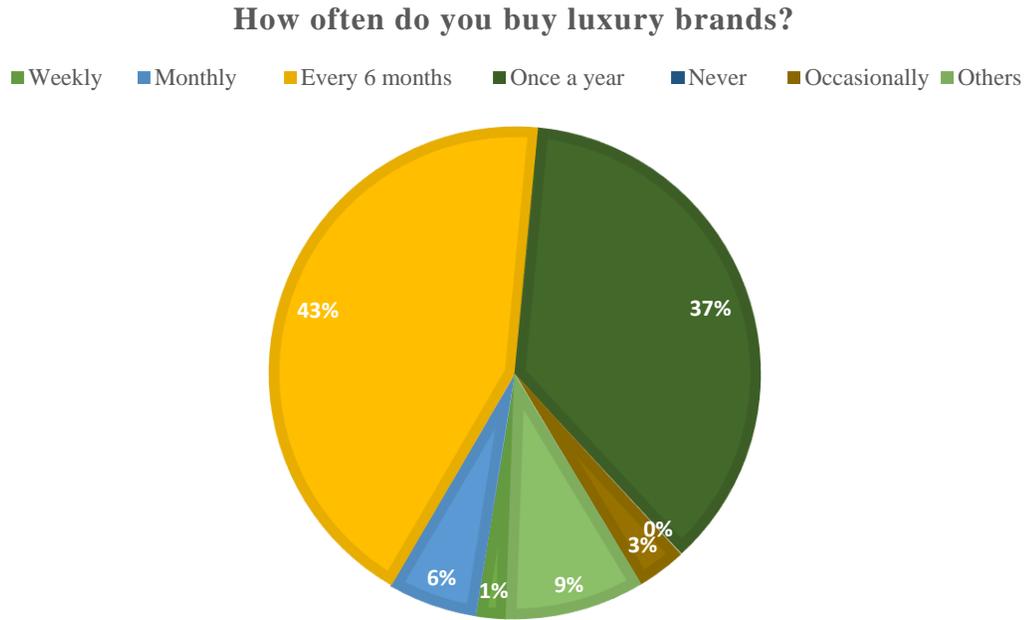


Table 1: Occasions of buying luxury brands

Others	Numbers of respondents
Depends on the occasion/ brand / sales	1
It depends on	2
when I can afford it	2
when I find a good deal or something I like it	1
I used to buy monthly - every 2 months but due to the economic situation I stopped	1
Infrequently	1
When I someone I know is visiting from to USA	1
It's not a target	1
Every two months approx.	1
Every 3 months	1

Chart 11: Luxury brand selling points

From where do you usually buy your luxury brands items?

■ Online ■ Shopping Malls ■ Brand Stores ■ Department Stores ■ Others

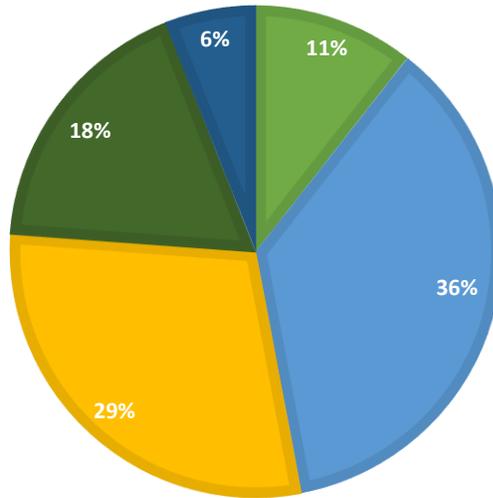


Chart 12: Average spending on luxury brands

How much do you spend approximately on luxury brands per year?

■ Less than 500\$ ■ 501\$ - 750\$ ■ 751\$ - 1000\$
■ 1001 - 1750\$ ■ 1751 - 3000\$ ■ 3001 - 4000\$
■ 4001 - 5500\$ ■ 5501 - 7000\$ ■ More than 7000\$

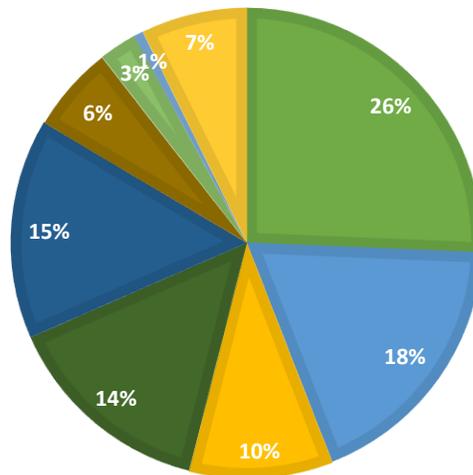


Chart 13: Luxury brands advertisement

From where do you get information about luxury brands?

- Advertisement on TV
- Advertisement on street
- Magazines
- Brand website
- Brand Social Media page
- Influencers
- Others

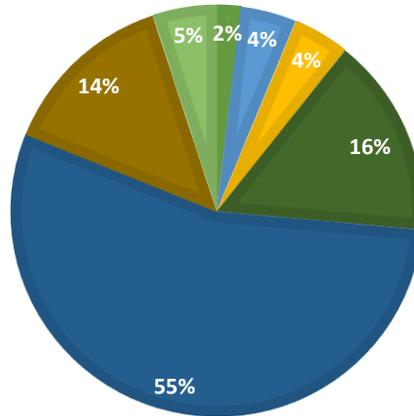


Chart 14: Reasons to buy luxury brands

Why do you buy luxury brands?

- Self-satisfaction
- High quality
- To fit in with friends
- To differentiate myself from others
- Brand culture
- Follow the trend
- Other

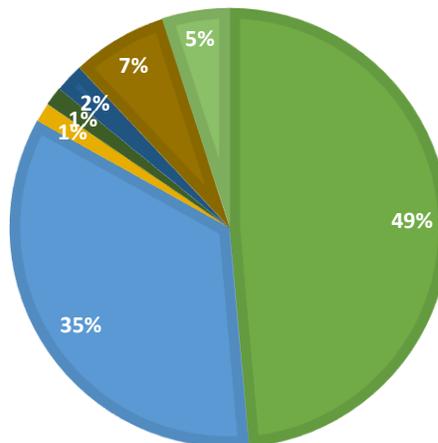


Chart 15: Luxury brands features

On which aspects do you place more emphasis when you purchase a luxury brand?

- Product/Service quality
- Price
- Popular
- Self reflection
- Practicality
- After-sale service
- Package
- Feature of environment protection
- Design

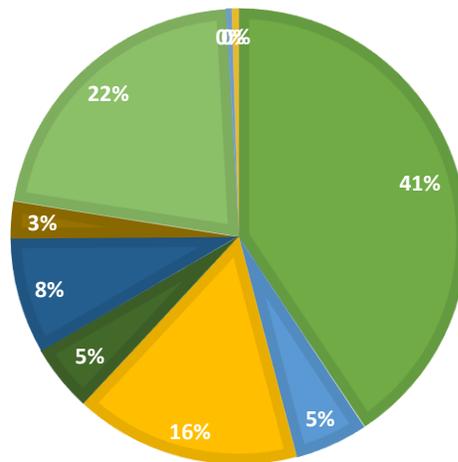


Chart 16: Luxury brands ads attributes

As a luxury brand consumer, what do you look for in an advertisement?

- Product
- Brand character
- Brand design
- Models
- Celebrity endorsement
- Other

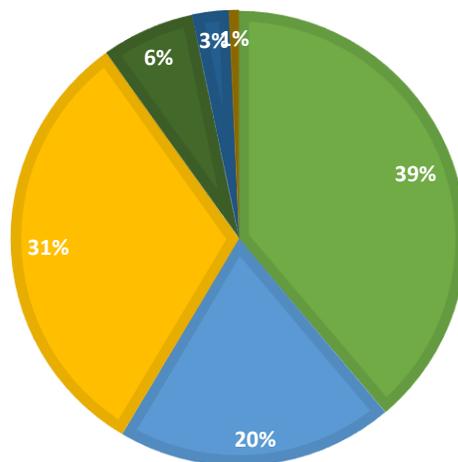


Chart 17: Advertisement values

Do you believe advertisements can help build an image of society? and convey social values?

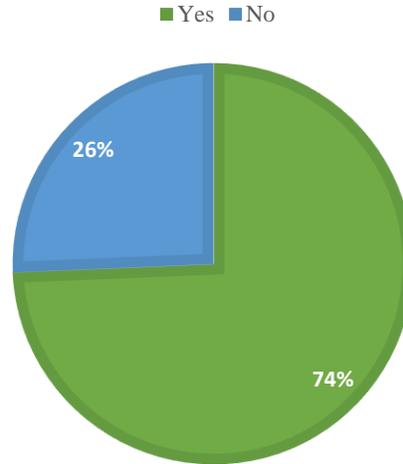


Table 2: Values conveyed by ads

If yes, in your opinion what type of values are ads conveying nowadays?	Number of respondents	Negative/Positive /Neutral
Unrealistic beauty standards where women are essential to the ads since sex sells	1	Negative
Promotes acceptance and changes stereotypes.	1	Positive
Environmental sustainability	1	Positive
Values of shallowness	1	Negative
Empowerment and equality	1	Positive
Ads try to define a "typical self-image" in societies	1	Negative
Ads can help the brand achieve the following: 1-Awareness to new products 2-Improve brand/product image in the prospect mind 3- convert the consumer look of the brand/product from a want to a need	2	Positive
They link individual's professional and social success and satisfaction to the possession of luxury brand.	1	Negative
No values	1	Neutral
Empowerment	1	Positive
Being unapologetically and genuine.	1	Positive
Deteriorating values, transforming the world into a materialistic one	1	Negative
Unity, development, and evolution.	3	Positive

Very shallow values	1	Negative
I don't feel they are conveying any values.	1	Neutral
Depends on the brand, positive being empowerment	1	Positive
Depends on the brand, negative such as standard beauty	1	Negative
Stereotyping people	1	Negative
Lack of self-confidence, lack of respect and way more	1	Negative
Individualism	2	Positive
Personally, I think that the ads now convey how buying luxury brands shows/reinforces your individual power and achievements. Yes, quality is important, but they make you believe that you need those brands to let people know that you're successful and have the money.	2	Negative
Shallowness and fake reality	1	Negative
Environment friendly and women empowerment	1	Positive
Environmental awareness	1	Positive
Brain washing	1	Negative
It depends on each brand.	1	Neutral
Prototype	1	Positive
Be sexy, attractive, and love yourself	1	Positive
Show more acceptance towards different cultures	1	Positive
Unhealthy and unrealistic body image	1	Negative
Bad ones for sure as they picture women dependents on owning brands to show their success on both personal & professional level	1	Negative
Inclusion and diversity	1	Positive
Materializes women and Contentment	1	Negative
Diversity, non-discrimination, and gender equality	1	Positive
Portray social causes	1	Positive
Sex and violence	1	Negative
Sexually charged world that means only sex sells. Nothing is branded or sold for what it is. A shoe is never advertised as just a shoe, usually a near naked model is wearing the shoe, the model is overly thin and often provocative with her style	1	Negative
Raising awareness about common prevailing issues such as: Sexism, Covid-19 protection	1	Positive
Unrealistic lifestyles	1	Positive
Eco-friendly, female empowerment, and lasting investment	1	Positive
Sending more money equals being more worthy	1	Negative
It depends on the brand, but each brand conveys the cultural values of the brand and/or COO.	1	Neutral

They can promote values such as environmental ones.	1	Positive
Body image and objectification of women	1	Negative
Environmentally friendly and equality	1	Positive
Shallowness	1	Negative
Eco-friendly values are getting more and more important	1	Positive
Individualism	1	Positive

Chart 18: Values conveyed by ads

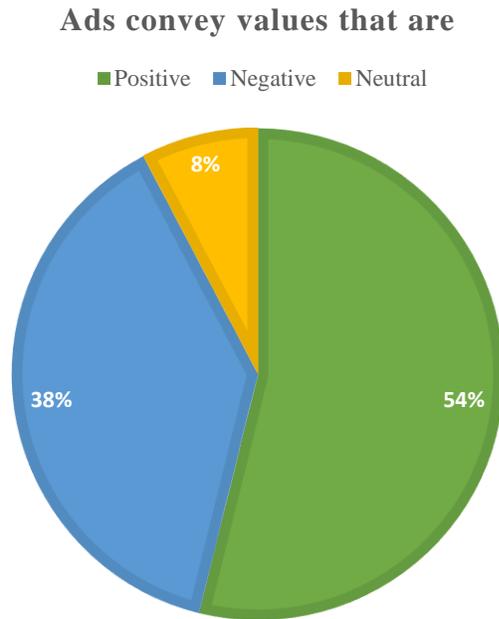


Chart 19: Usage of social media

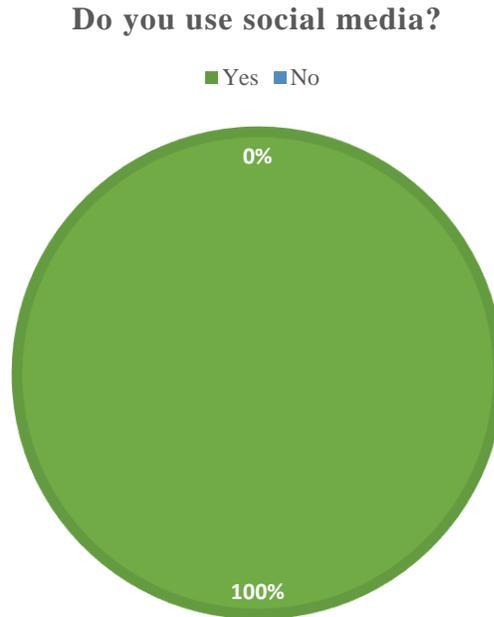


Chart 20: Influencers

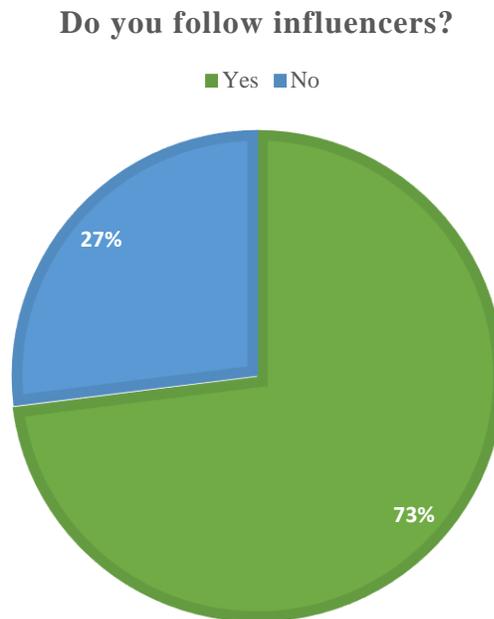


Chart 21: Influencer's beauty standards

Do you think influencers are conveying unattainable beauty standards/life standards?

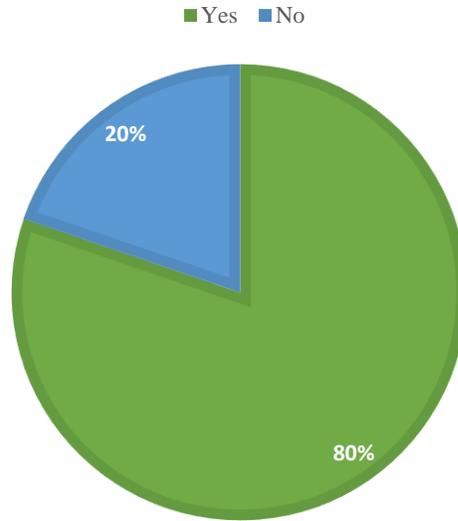


Chart 22: Social media advertisements

Does advertising on social media influence in a positive or negative way?

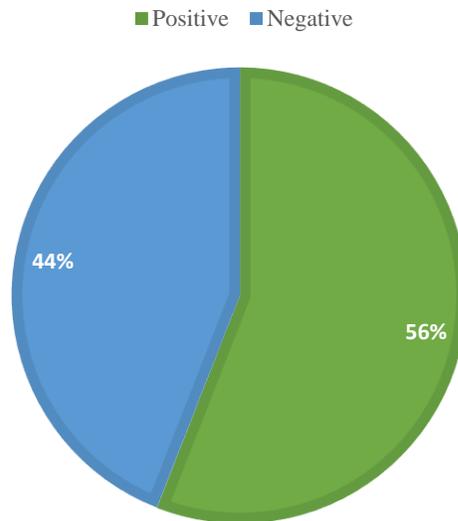


Chart 23: Luxury brands desire

Do you feel frustrated if you can not get the desired item?

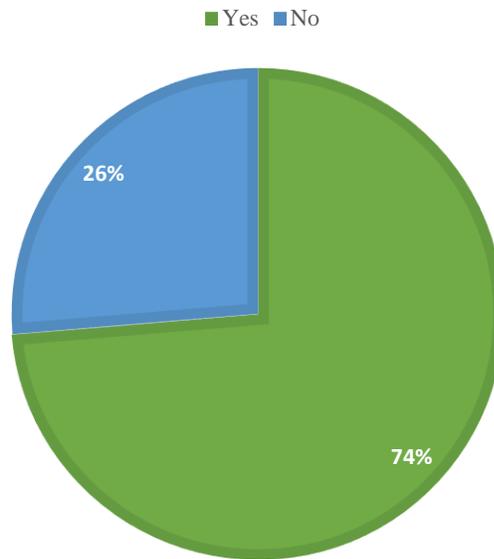


Chart 24: Women self-esteem

Do you compare yourself to influencers/models?

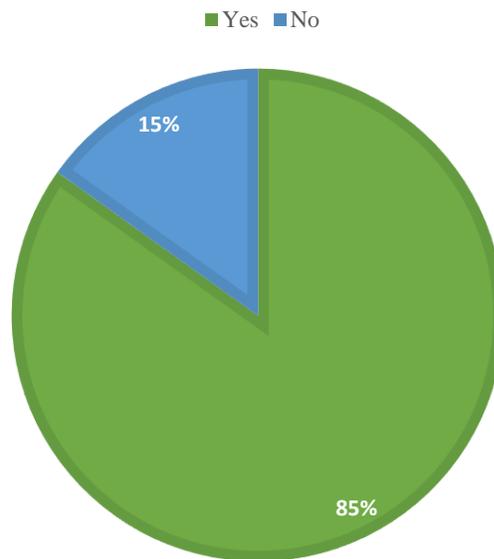


Chart 25: Luxury brands advertisement



Pick your favorite by inserting the number of the ad and explain why?

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 0

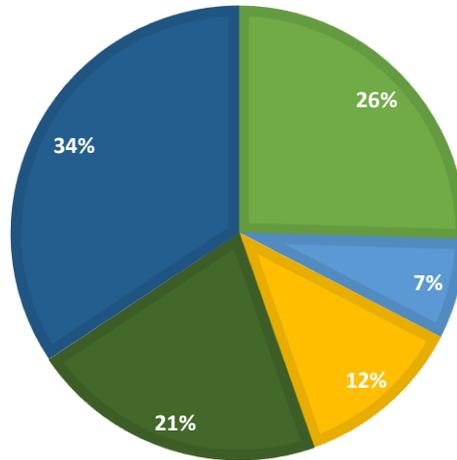


Table 3: Reasoning behind ad selection

Pick your favorite by inserting the number of the ad and explain why?	
Selected Ad	Why do you like this ad?
0	I prefer to see the product only
1	Reflects classiness, elegance, and feminist
	Channels collaborate with a class A celebrity as they are classified as Class A brand. Also, they connected the N•5 fragrance with the elegance of the taken photo
	It reflects the product identity the most and uses the character for portraying that instead of implicitly triggering other irrelevant interests (such as being cool/loved/supporting black people). The use of an elegant female look serves the perfume's identity.
	Very creative

	Classy and beautiful can never go wrong
	Very neat and with a very clear product shot
	Sensual and elegant
	As it reveals beauty and women empowerment in very classy way
	It's about the woman herself and how poised and confident she is.
	It's seductive
	Elegance and beauty without needing to even show the face or body
	Used to it
	The perfume is highlighted in an elegant and unique way giving the image of the beautiful women inside out
	The style
	The style
	Because I like Chanel and n5 is my favorite
	Most elegant, a reflection of class
	Because its minimalistic and elegant
	Classy, simple, timeless, good looking, perfectly what is required, the house of Chanel is not called for its originality but for timeless and chic products which is reflected in this campaign
	Refinement & class
	Because she's classy and beautiful without being overtly sexual
	Because it shows how feminine the perfume is
	One of my favorite perfumes
	Looks like a timeless confident woman
	Classy
	Love the brand
	Looks Classy
	Nicole Kidman is taking more than half the Pic, she's very present. She looks elegant and sexy. The light on her face and shoulders makes her look more like a star but a sexy one because of her shoulders. The warm color of her body also emphasizes the sexiness of the picture.
	Classy
	Shows women empowerment
	Represents the ultimate Parisian taste
	It gives you the desire to buy it
2	No Reason
	It reflects power and everybody wants to feel powerful
	very neat and with a very clear product shot
	Handbag design
	It reflects more who i am.
	Classy

	Because its simpler
3	No Reason
	It's a trendy and eccentric brand
	It clearly shows the product and the line for both genders and reflects the overall style of the brand.
	Connect the brand image with the young look and lifestyle
	It's casual and reflects a realistic casual image that we can see everyday
	Its casual and real
	Its casual and real
	Diesel's advertising spirit is closer to my mindset.
	Trendy outgoing
	Brand quality
	Gender equality
	Playful
	Because it includes both genders and looks dynamic
	Because it reflects the fun side of the brand which Diesel represents. It's more realistic.
	I just like the brand
	diesel's advertising spirit is closer to my mindset.
4	It's not as shallow, beautiful shot, and I think influencing race
	Because it features a person of color
	Represents diversity and does not focus on typical physical attraction; the others are physical representations
	Inclusivity
	I like the portrait and body contrast in the picture
	Used to the product
	Since it shows the product
	She looks confident
	High quality
	Straight forward, direct to the point
	I can see the product
	Elegant and neat, advertising a product not a story/lifestyle
	It features a black model which is sadly rare
	Diversity
	Because the ad is simple, and the women is empowered without any nudity or a man in its picture
	Classy and Inclusive
	Good graphics and product display
	Different than the rest
Diversity	

Unique and attractive
Like the item
Simple and elegant and realistic
More black women should appear in ads
Esthetics
It is more inclusive
The model isn't objectified, and they opted for a colored skin model to represent their collection without focusing on body image standards circulated in nowadays ads
Nice outfit
Ethical brand
It's more real
Shows diversity

Chart 26: Luxury brands and violence



Does it bother you to see women with beating signs in a luxury brand advertisement?

■ Yes ■ No

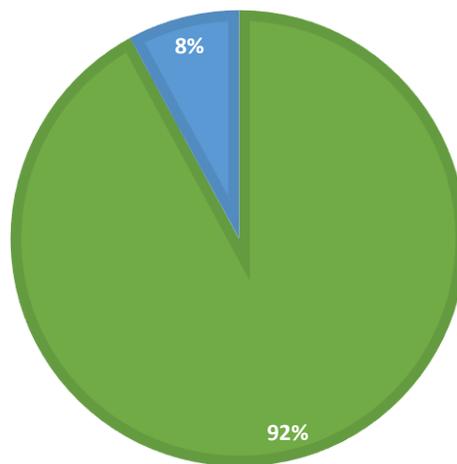


Chart 27: Buying brands with violent expression

Would you still buy from the brand using violence as a means of expression?

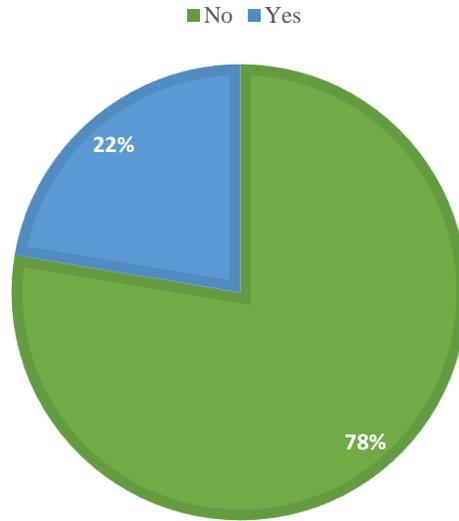


Chart 28: Brands and sexual stereotyping



Does it bother you to see women in sexual or stereotypical representations in a luxury brand advertisement?

■ Yes ■ No

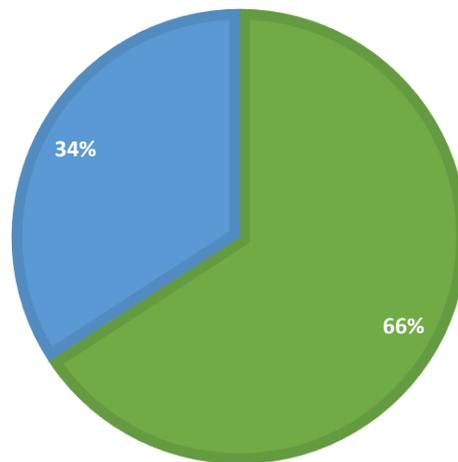


Chart 29: Brands and sexual stereotyping

Would you still buy from the brand with sexual or stereotypical representations?

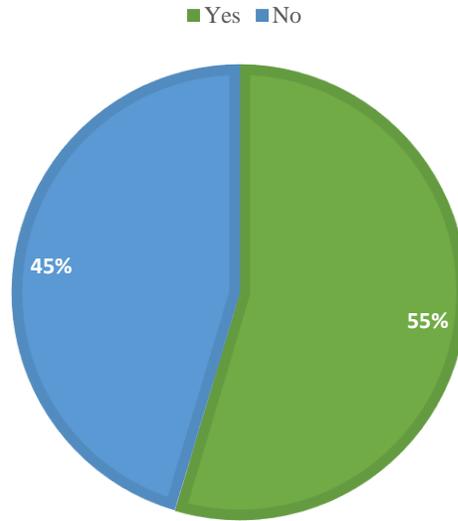


Chart 30: Women response to sexual stereotyping

What would be your reaction to luxury brand ads that portray beating signs or women in sexual or stereotyping signs?

- I am a Brand loyal I will keep on buying it
- I will stop buying the brand
- I will file a complaint and stop buying the brand
- I will voice it out on social media and among my circle and stop buying the brand
- I will do nothing
- Other

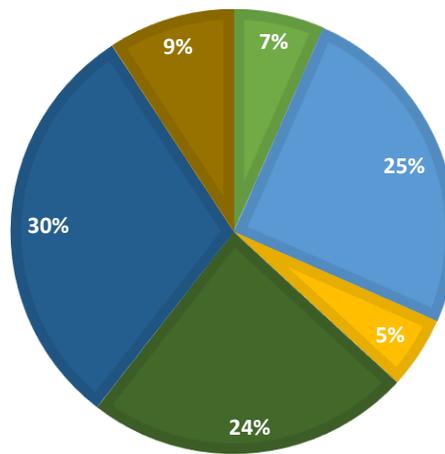


Table 4: Women response to sexual stereotyping

Other	Number of respondents
I will keep on buying the brand, but I will speak up about the ad for its inappropriate visuals.	1
I will voice it out as it might not be the brand image, just a bad ad	1
Depending on the ad idea...and degree of the women/men sexual or stereotyping scenes.	2
I will voice it out among my circle and to brand representatives but not necessarily stop buying it.	1
I sent an email to the brand’s costumer service stating my opinion.	1
The advertisement doesn’t really affect my purchase decision...my choice is on product basis. However, I do voice it out on social media if I’m bothered with the advertisement.	2

It will make me question the brand's policy. If they keep on doing so, I won't buy anymore. For example, Hermes treat customers with arrogance, I don't buy any of their products anymore.	1
I will maybe voice it out with a staff member, brand like these usually give a lot of attention to their clients' remarks, this is not a motive to stop buying the brand.	1
It depends on the context, but I will boycott the brand if it goes against feminism.	1
It depends on what message is the brand trying to communicate	1
Only if the brand is for kids and it was highly sexualized, I will stop buying it and might also complain.	1
Hard to say when I buy so rarely. Not a black and white answer but for sure would speak up.	1

Appendix 3

Expert Interviews

Interview with Ms. Pamela Azouri

Assistant Professor of Sociology

Q1- Based on your experience, how women in Lebanon aged 25 to 35 are affected by the media? Do you perceive that the effect of media decreased or increased with the introduction of social media?

Our Lebanese society is extremely materialistic: people attach an important value to external appearance (physical appearance, branded clothes, luxury watches, jewelry, expensive cars....)

As a matter of fact, Lebanon is one of the most famous countries in terms of cosmetic surgery. Moreover, for the first time ever, Lebanese banks used to grant a specific loan for plastic surgery. So yes, young Lebanese women are extremely affected by the media, and this influence increased significantly with the introduction of social media, especially with the effects of the new” influencers” active in many platforms.

Q2-To what extent are women in Lebanon affected by a brand's image in general, and luxury brands in specific?

Because our society is drastically based on external appearance rather than values or education, most Lebanese women aims to possess and show branded items. Luxury items represent a status symbol: people who are pleased with their status want others to recognize

their position. So, they use status symbols, signs that identify a status (ex: watches, luxury handbags, diamonds...), to announce our status to others.

Not everyone can afford luxury or branded items, which's why we can notice the development of counterfeit goods.

Q3-Can the image of women in ads affect Lebanese women aged 25 to 35, if yes, how?

Of course, because young women tend to imitate these models can represent an ideal to be achieved. All their attitudes and behaviors would be oriented to achieve this ideal goal.

When the goals are not reached, it can create a sense of frustration into women, and eventually deviant reactions.

Q4-Is the perception of women of their image disturbed by violent or sexist scenes in ads?

I believe that any form of violence or sexist behaviors can affect the self-perception of women, because society is like a social mirror: our sense of self develops from childhood, and it is a lifelong process. The self is part of how society makes us human.

The agents of socialization are individuals and groups that influence our orientations to life (our self-concept, our emotions, attitudes, and behaviors). And the Mass Media represent one of the most influential agents of socialization.

Q5-Do violent images affect their behavior towards luxury brands?

I believe that the need to appear, to show our financial success to others (in other words, to show our social status) is so strong, that even violent images (if they are mild) won't affect our impulse to possess luxury items.

But sometimes, the extreme violent images can be considered politically and ethically incorrect, and the brands will probably face boycott as a sign of protest.

Q6-In your opinion, what would prevent women from acting against these brands in case they felt offended?

Women tend not to act toward brands that show offensive content for several reasons that are not related to shame nor lack of confidence. However, the need to show off, display appearances, and claim our status within our circle through luxury brands' symbols and items is far more important than values. Given that the Lebanese society is highly materialistic, women focus more on the external aspects, status symbols, and branded items, which helps their integrity through which they voice out their values. Even when they feel offended by luxury brand advertisements, they pursue the purchase of these items and neglect their values. As the need to appear and the need for integrity is by far more powerful than internal values and belief systems in an over materialistic society, show off became a core value for the Lebanese society.

Interview with ABC Mall Marketing Manager

Ms. Jennifer Khoury

Q1- Are Lebanese women aged 25 to 35 affected by luxury brands' images?

Yes, indeed they are, for multiple reasons such as:

- To be validated
- To look more like the influencers, they follow
- To fit in
- To be trendy
- To reflect a certain image

Q2- In your experience what is the most effective media medium for reaching a luxury brand's target audience?

After working in a luxury mall, I can say that the most effective media are:

- TV Commercials (to partner with Hollywood Stars)
- Instagram (to partner with big influencers)

Q3-Do international luxury brands consider local cultures when creating ads?

Lately, yes, they do. They noticed that the Arab market is spending much more money than the European market, so they are targeting even more the Arab woman in their ads, partnering with Arab or Lebanese influencers as well.

Q4-How do you deal with violent campaigns created for international luxury brands?

From a company perspective we are against violence in general, but sometimes a “subtle” violence used to create awareness about a cause such as domestic violence, child abuse, etc....can be a winning method. However, whenever one of the fashion brands provides us with violent content or ads in an unnecessary environment, we push back and request an alternative that is suitable with our culture, costumes, and considerate of our customer base. We at ABC are very conscious about maintaining and promoting a positive image to our brand, our tenants, and most specifically our customers.

Q5-Have you ever faced a backlash to one of your luxury brands’ ads that have violent scenes? What was the reaction of your female customers, and how did they react?

We as ABC, never had any clash regarding a campaign for our own luxury brands. The thing is, that you need to analyze and understand your target audience.

Knowing exactly what your customers want, can help you send the exact message you want to convey via:

- Campaigns
- Ads
- Instagram IGTV
- Events...

Q6-Following the disturbance of your female customer by violent luxury brand ads, how was the brand affected?

We never had a disturbance about this. But I can tell you that if customers were disturbed by an ad, they will speak up on all their social media channels and they will affect the brand

by creating an effect de masse that will lead to the brand losing notoriety and on the long run money.