

Luxury and lyrics: Investigating the desire for luxury brands driven by brand references in rap lyrics

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the influence of rap music referencing luxury brands on young adults in the Netherlands. It specifically measures the desire for luxury products when exposed to rap lyrics referencing luxury brands, while the aspiration for wealth mediates this relationship. In addition, the societal, managerial, and academic implications of this topic were examined, drawing on empirical research. Subsequently, the research question “How are young adults aged 18 – 30 years in the Netherlands influenced by rap lyrics referencing luxury brands to desire luxury brands, and to what extent do aspirations for wealth mediate this relationship?” was introduced to bridge the existing academic gap through the proposed three hypotheses guided by two empirical theories. Answering the research question would contribute to previous academic findings as an implication. The theories used to develop the three hypotheses are the conspicuous consumption theory and the social comparison theory. Throughout this thesis, a clear discussion was conducted, labeling the desire for luxury as the dependent variable, lyrics referencing luxury brands serving as the independent variable, and the aspiration for wealth as the mediating variable. A clear illustration of the variables is provided, followed by the formulated hypotheses in the theoretical framework of this thesis.

To test the proposed hypotheses, a between-subjects experiment was conducted with three different conditions. Each condition featured an identical rap verse in which the brand mentioned was manipulated. The conditions were labeled as (luxury, midrange, and affordable). The selected product to serve as a manipulation within the three conditions is a wristwatch, as a wristwatch was deemed appropriate due to its varying prices in the market and multiple price tiers. All participants were recruited through Prolific. The Hayes PROCESS Model 4 was used to conduct the main tests of the experiment. The first and third hypotheses were not shown to be significant. However, the second hypothesis yielded substantial results supporting the claim that a strong desire for wealth leads to a higher desire for luxury brands.

KEYWORDS: Rap, Luxury, Branding, Influence, Consumer

1. Introduction

In recent years, rap music has emerged as a powerful cultural and commercial platform (Metcalf & Ruth, 2020, p. 44). An analysis by Metcalfe and Ruth (2020) of the top-charting songs revealed that 73% featured at least one product mention (p. 44). A closer look by Metcalfe and Ruth (2020) showed that 52% of R&B songs included product mentions (p. 44). Rap and hip-hop songs have grown in influence and reach, with the genre described as a multi-billion-dollar industry (Metcalf & Ruth, 2020, p. 44). Furthermore, among the highest-grossing songs of 2018, four of the most-streamed tracks were by hip-hop artists, demonstrating its dominance in digital media (Metcalf & Ruth, 2020, p. 44). Today, rap music is highly influential and accessible to a large audience, making it an effective platform for advertising and influence, which accounts for 25.6% of all music consumption and affirms its societal impact (Metcalf & Ruth, 2020, p. 44).

The success of rap and hip-hop as musical genres has subsequently reached the Netherlands, where Dutch hip-hop has become one of the most popular music genres among young people (van Erp et al., 2024, p. 1). In addition to its musical growth, content analysis research by Dankoor et al. (2023) over the past decade has found that rap music videos and lyrics often portray artists as financially successful, typically associated with extravagant homes, jewelry, high-end vehicles, and especially designer apparel (p. 59). This portrayal of luxury and wealth is not coincidental, as it is a central theme within hip-hop and rap culture. In a study by Carbone et al. (2024), 4,117 popular Spotify lyrics were investigated across six Western countries. Their findings emphasized that 46% of the tested popular music showcased status through economic capital, including the consumption of luxury products (p. 891). These portrayals are most common in rap lyrics (p. 891). Carbone et al. (2024) also clarified that status is predominantly shown through references to luxurious economic and cultural consumption within popular rap songs, highlighting luxury products (p. 892).

Such lyrical indications are both artistic expressions and cultural indicators that often influence the way consumers, particularly young ones, perceive success and value. This is supported by the outcomes of Dankoor et al. (2023), who observe that engagement with rap music and the assimilation of its materialistic themes may drive individuals in Western capitalist societies to strive for financial success or aspire to wealth (p. 73). Consistent exposure to these themes influences consumer aspirations in a way that shapes how they perceive wealth and social mobility (Dankoor et al., 2023, p. 73). Discoveries by Metcalfe & Ruth (2020) have tremendously shown that rap music, specifically rap lyrics, has been successful and widely accessible to their audience and listeners (p. 44). This makes it an influential advertising tool to societies (Metcalf & Ruth, 2020, p. 44). Therefore, rap is considered an effective medium for advertising by marketers (Metcalf & Ruth, 2020, p. 44). Although this topic holds

information that could benefit both marketers and musical artists, there has been little empirical research conducted on it, which could yield managerial, societal, and academic benefits.

Although the previously mentioned findings are essential for understanding the influence of rap lyrics, the direct relationship between rap lyrics and the desire for luxury items has not been adequately explored in previous empirical research. This highlights the importance of understanding the persuasiveness of rap lyrics in popular songs while considering the aspiration for wealth as a mediating factor, as rap lyrics explicitly mentioning luxury brands could influence consumers' purchasing decisions regarding luxury items. In addition, the widespread commercialization of hip-hop has transformed the genre into a global cultural force that shapes consumer identities and aspirations, confirming its dominance in the musical market (Polfuß, 2022, p. 281). Rap music, specifically lyrics, has increased the desire for luxury brands, as they are frequently featured as symbols of unattainable wealth, signaling success and social mobility, and resonating deeply with young audiences (Polfuß, 2022, p. 278). This influence positioned rap lyrics that reference luxury as a catalyst for the desire for material goods, status, and recognition among many young adults who face socioeconomic pressures (Polfuß, 2022, p. 281). In addition, hip-hop and rap music serve both as a platform and a vehicle for promoting luxury consumption, making their influence on luxury desire an essential subject of study (Polfuß, 2022, p. 281).

Beyond mere entertainment, rap lyrics express identity, monetary aspirations, and responses to inequality (van Erp et al., 2024, p. 3). Rap lyrics serve more than just entertainment due to their activist and socially critical nature; they consistently shape young perspectives, encourage aspirations for financial success, foster identity development, and promote social awareness, confirming rap lyrics' influence in a critical field of academic research (van Erp et al., 2024, p. 3). This is correlated with findings by de Roest (2022), which have shown a significant rise in rap and hip-hop music on the Dutch charts in recent years, exemplifying the high reach and influence of the genre among young Dutch listeners and additionally showcasing their societal relevance (p. 75). This further clarifies that rap music operates not just as a cultural expression but also as a channel that influences how individuals, particularly young people, view themselves and their place in society. Upon closer examination of the Dutch context, these cultural and psychological dynamics are highly relevant. Wong & Park (2023) emphasized that the European luxury market is expected to increase by 5.62% (p. 1806). More specifically, the Dutch luxury market is projected to grow at a rate of 6.54% (Wong & Park, 2023, p. 1806). The significant increase in demand and interest for luxury goods among younger Dutch consumers has driven this substantial market expansion, positioning the Netherlands in a competitive position when gauging the rise in demand for luxury brands, with surrounding countries such as Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany (Wong & Park, 2023, p. 1806).

Such observations confirm that young Dutch consumers are increasingly influenced by symbols of status, which are often reinforced through cultural media, including music (Wong & Park, 2023, p. 1810). Thus, Wong & Park's (2023) findings aid in understanding that the desire for status and reputation is closely tied to social worth (p. 1810). Additionally, it has been observed that Dutch consumers strive to enhance their public image by acquiring and displaying luxury goods, as well as seeking social validation within upper-middle-class communities (Wong & Park, 2023, p. 1810). Publicly displaying luxury items influences social interactions and inform Dutch consumers on the impression their appearance has on others (Wong & Park, 2023, p. 1810). Consequently, the use of social media sites by young Dutch individuals further reinforces these dynamics. By routinely comparing their lifestyles and possessions with those of others, they heighten their awareness of social positioning and increase their desire for higher social status (Wong & Park, 2023, p. 1810).

These insights suggest a strong need for further investigation into this topic. While rap music and the desire for luxury have both shown a significant rise in global and Dutch youth culture, the connection between the two remains largely unexamined. Thus, this thesis does not investigate rap music as a genre; instead, it focuses on the appeal of luxury brands as reflected in explicit mentions displayed within popular rap lyrics. Therefore, a research question bridging the current academic gap and contributing to existing empirical knowledge is suggested:

“How are young adults aged 18 – 30 years in the Netherlands influenced by rap lyrics referencing luxury brands to desire luxury brands, and to what extent do aspirations for wealth mediate this relationship?”

The main dependent variable to be tested is the desire for luxury brands influenced by the exposure to rap lyrics that explicitly reference luxury brands, while the aspiration for wealth mediates this relationship. Moreover, the cultivated research question is answered through the utilization of two theories to build sound hypotheses: Veblen's Conspicuous Consumption Theory (1899) and Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954). Both theories help in developing suitable hypotheses that address previously discussed gaps. The theory of conspicuous consumption emphasizes that consumers purchase goods not only for their functional value but also for their display value (Jiang et al., 2022, p. 471). Additionally, Social Comparison Theory suggests that individuals evaluate their worth through comparing themselves to others. This is primarily within upward social comparison (Ling, 2025, p. 495). The utilization of these two theories provided a compelling explanation of how referencing luxury in lyrics can trigger an aspiration for wealth and ultimately lead to a greater desire for luxury.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework entails the combination of the previously discussed theories that contributed to the formation of the hypotheses presented. It is essential to note that both the “conspicuous consumption” and “social comparability” theories were drawn from prior empirical studies that specifically focused on music. This further validated the outcome of the formulated hypotheses that effectively addressed the research question. Furthermore, a thorough synthesis of both theories was conducted, resulting in a comprehensive and well-structured response to the research question. Additionally, a clear discussion of the relevant variables was elaborated, leading to the formulation of the three hypotheses. Lastly, the conceptual model was introduced to guide the testing process of the discussed concepts.

The Conspicuous Consumption theory, introduced by Veblen (1899), is regarded as an appropriate framework for cultivated hypotheses, making it a suitable theoretical foundation for this research. This theory is based on the idea that consumers seek expensive goods and services to achieve social status (Jiang et al., 2022, p. 471). It is essential to note that Jiang, Gao, and Xie (2022) argue that, while not all luxury consumption is conspicuous, most of it is, which provides one academic perspective on luxury consumption (p. 471). This notion is relative to the research question discussed in this study, as rap lyrics referencing luxury brands often serve as a display of public luxury consumption (Jiang et al., 2022, p. 471). Jiang, Gao, and Xie (2022) also identified several antecedents to conspicuous consumption, including pride, the desire for uniqueness, and the striving to access the social elite strata (p. 472). This helps in building a proper framework that investigates the influence of rap lyrics referencing luxury brands and how the aspiration of wealth mediates that relationship (Jiang et al., 2022, p. 471).

Consequently, this is linked to the second theory that aided in the construction of the hypotheses, namely, Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory. The theory suggests that people tend to evaluate themselves in comparison to others, where such comparisons shape their perceptions of abilities, beliefs, and emotions (Ling, 2025, p. 495). Ling (2025) elaborates that Social Comparison Theory occurs when consumers base their purchasing decisions on what others from a higher status group purchase, specifically to achieve recognition within a particular social class or to convey a type of social status (Ling, 2025, p. 495). This entails fashion, technology, and specifically, luxury goods (Ling, 2025, p. 496). This complements the previously discussed theory of conspicuous consumption, as it achieves the same purpose: showcasing ownership of luxury goods to others, aiming to signal and gain recognition (Ling, 2025, p. 496). This is also commonly seen in popular rap lyrics, as revealed by Farwell, Stickle, & Shackelford's (2023) findings, which dissect music, specifically popular rap songs from 2007 to 2020. Their study illustrated that luxury products were referenced in 78% of the investigated songs, with many of these products being wrist watches (Farwell, Stickle, & Shackelford, 2023, p. 95). This demonstrates

the consistent referencing of luxury items in rap lyrics, presenting the potential influence of rap lyrics on listeners' desire for luxury (Farwell, Stickle, & Shackelford, 2023, p. 95).

It is necessary to note that when discussing the Social Comparison Theory, there are two types of comparisons: Upward Comparison and Downward Comparison (Ling, 2025, p. 497). The Upward Comparison entails people's comparisons and evaluations of themselves with people they perceive as more advanced than themselves. Examples would be better fame, higher skills, and societal attractiveness (Ling, 2025, p. 497). Ling (2025) also describes Downward Comparison as the act of associating oneself with and comparing oneself to people perceived as being less than, inferior, or underprivileged (Ling, 2025, p. 497).

2.1 Conspicuous Consumption Theory

Elibol (2023) elaborated on Veblen's (1899) theory of conspicuous consumption, which suggests that consumers prioritize a product's symbolic meaning, such as self-expression and social recognition, over its functional benefits (p. 1101). Elibol (2023) expands on this by explaining that these consumers are more likely to favor brands perceived as prestigious, as the social groups they consider significant influence their purchasing decisions and serve as reference points in their consumption decisions (p. 1101).

The conspicuous consumption theory also aligns with van Erp et al. (2024) findings, who noted that rap lyrics convey identity, financial aspirations, and responses to inequality (p. 3). This supports the core value of the conscious consumption theory, as it utilizes consumption to convey social status, identity, and personal value (Elibol, 2023, p. 1101). In addition, de Roest (2022) found that Dutch rap, specifically, frequently promotes wealth accumulation and conspicuous spending as symbols of status, reflecting the desires of young people overcoming poverty, stigma, and discrimination (p. 83). These lyrical displays of luxury provide aspiration for wealth and reinforce consumer behaviors that encourage status signaling (de Roest, 2022, p. 83). Exposure to luxury brand references in rap music can influence consumer behavior by glamorizing wealth and material success (de Roest, 2022, p. 83). Thus, these lyrical cues may ignite a desire for high-status products among young listeners, forming a basis of later proposed hypotheses (de Roest, 2022, p. 83).

This is further confirmed by Mijs and Carbone (2022), who state that lyrics reflect societal values and effectively communicate themes like inequality and meritocracy (p. 709). Previous research on lyrical content has identified recurring themes of status and conspicuous consumption (Mijs & Carbone, 2022, p. 709). In recent years, musical content has portrayed luxury objects as symbols of social status and success, such as high-end cars and pricey jewelry (Mijs & Carbone, 2022, p. 709).

According to the Conspicuous Consumption Theory, individuals often prefer products that convey symbolic meaning, using these items to express self-identity and gain social validation (Elibol, 2023, p. 1101). Within this framework, luxury brands have shown to signal visible indicators of status and social advancement. Therefore, when rap lyrics prominently feature luxury items, they may stimulate consumers' aspirations to emulate the affluent lifestyles these symbols represent and further increase the aspiration for wealth (Carbone et al., 2024, p. 891).

To further evaluate the Conspicuous Consumption Theory, it is also noteworthy that Bronner and de Hoog (2018) discussed the increase in expenditure in the Netherlands. They explained that conspicuous consumption is not limited to luxury items alone but can also include vacation choices, dining out, and entertainment (p. 90). These three areas are growing (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018, p. 90). Bronner and de Hoog (2018) also argued that advertisers should explore the opportunities offered by conspicuous consumption to understand consumers' decision-making better when purchasing products (p. 101). This further emphasizes the importance of applying such a theory for more effective marketing strategies, as status signaling can extend to not only luxury items (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018, p. 101).

At the same time, Social Comparison Theory posits that individuals evaluate their social standing by comparing themselves to others, often engaging in upward comparisons with those perceived as more successful or influential (Gerber et al., 2018, p. 177). As a result, rap lyrics that associate luxury brands with ideas of success and dominance can serve as aspirational benchmarks for measuring success, motivating listeners to strive for similar material achievements. Together, these theoretical perspectives illuminate how lyrical references to luxury brands in rap music may directly influence young adults' desire toward high-status consumption (Carbone et al., 2024, p. 892).

2.2 Social Comparison Theory

Exposure to luxury brand references in rap lyrics cultivates a desire for wealth, intensifying the longing for luxury goods. According to the Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), individuals assess their standing by comparing themselves to others, particularly in terms of status and material possessions. Gerber et al. (2018) argue that upward comparisons, where individuals compare themselves to those perceived as more successful, are often made, even when they result in diminished self-confidence (p. 177). In this context, rap lyrics that promote luxury may encourage upward comparisons, thereby fostering aspirational goals related to acquiring wealth (Gerber, Wheeler, & Suls, 2018, p. 177). This was further elaborated by Carbone, Alvarez-Cueva, and Vandenbosch (2024), who found that musical artists often serve as essential reference points for individuals to understand themselves and others, especially in defining success and social standing (p. 891) Artists frequently utilize symbols of

luxury, such as premium automobiles and jewelry, particularly in music videos, to signify status, distinction, and identity (Carbone, Alvarez-Cueva, & Vandenbosch, 2024, p. 891).

Social comparison refers to the mechanism by which individuals acquire knowledge and evaluate themselves in relation to others (Pan, Mu, & Tang, 2022, p. 3). This concept has been extensively used to explain how exposure to conventional media, such as television and music that promote specific standards of living, can lead to life dissatisfaction (Pan, Mu, & Tang, 2022, p. 3). Recent research exploring the connection between media use and body image issues has increasingly relied on social comparison as a fundamental explanatory framework. Two types of social comparison exist; the first process is situational or state-based, indicating the degree and direction of comparisons made in response to specific contexts or stimuli (Pan, Mu, & Tang, 2022, p.3). The second is trait-based, suggesting a more stable and continuous tendency to assess oneself in relation to others within social settings (Pan, Mu, & Tang, 2022, p. 3). State-based social comparison is often triggered by exposure to idealized imagery and has been identified as a mechanism linking this exposure to adverse outcomes, such as dissatisfaction (Pan, Mu, & Tang, 2022, p. 3).

Recent studies have connected the luxury sector with the rap and hip-hop industry, where an unexpected success has emerged (Billot et al., 2021, p. 1). Marketers tried utilizing the idea of incongruent collaborations of luxury brands and rap artists (Pantin-Sohier et al., 2025, p. 554). This has led to unexpected successful results (Billot et al., 2021, p. 1). Furthermore, their findings confirm that many rap artists from the past have generated high returns on revenue through collaborations with brands (Billot et al., 2021, p. 3). This demonstrates that luxury and rap are two industries with a proven history of collaborative success (Pantin-Sohier et al., 2025, p. 543). Such ideas further connect the previously discussed theories in building a proper framework to assess the influence of rap lyrics referencing luxury brands on the desire for luxury brands.

Additionally, social comparison theory plays a key role in explaining the link between a desire for luxury brands and a higher aspiration for wealth. The theory suggests that people often judge their social status by comparing themselves to others, which can shape their ambitions, preferences, and buying habits. One form of this process is upward social comparison, where individuals compare themselves to others they see as more successful, wealthier, or higher in status. According to Ling (2025), brands closely linked to social standing tend to benefit from these upward comparisons (p. 497). When people see others using or displaying luxury products, they may begin to associate those products with recognition, achievement, and higher social status.

Moreover, this constant exposure to high-status brands boosts the appeal of luxury spending. As Ling (2025) points out, luxury brands become more attractive, even when their quality may not necessarily justify their high perception (p. 497). This further demonstrates that the actual features or

performance of the product do not always determine desirability in luxury consumption. Instead, it's mainly about what the brand stands for socially (Ling, 2025, p. 497). Consumers are attracted to these brands because they symbolize status, identity, and aspirations, rather than just offering better functionality (Ling, 2025, p. 497).

The symbolic power of luxury brands has a significant influence on consumer choices. From the viewpoint of social comparison theory, luxury items are not just useful objects but also tools for managing social identity (Ling, 2025, p. 498). When consumers see others gaining social benefits from owning luxury items, they may feel more motivated to acquire similar products to boost their own perceived status. As a result, the desire for luxury brands grows, driven less by the product itself and more by their perceived ability to signal wealth and success (Ling, 2025, p. 498).

Therefore, the link between wanting wealth and craving luxury brands becomes clearer when examining the impact of upward comparisons. Ling's (2025) research suggests that luxury brands continue to be successful in a culture where social comparison is prevalent and where image often takes precedence over substance (p. 497). These dynamic highlights the significance of symbolic consumption and helps explain why luxury remains a dominant element in consumer culture.

2.3 Desire for Luxury Brands

Outcomes by Wang, Sung, and Phau (2024) showcased the practice of limiting production quantity, whether through natural or virtual rarity, in multiple products to increase their exclusivity (p. 576). When manufacturers limit production due to natural or artificial causes, it leads to product exclusivity (Wang, Sung, & Phau, 2024, p. 576). This practice is observed across various products, including cars, jewelry, watches, and fashion (Wang, Sung, & Phau, 2024, p. 576). It was shown that consumers seek luxury because it provides them with a sense of fulfillment (Wang, Sung, & Phau, 2024, p. 577). It offers consumers pleasure and indulgence, with many aiming to acquire and desire luxury brands as a means of expressing their self-identity and fostering a sense of belonging to other social groups (Wang, Sung, & Phau, 2024, p. 577). Furthermore, the pursuit of luxury has increased in geographical scope, making the desire for luxury brands more widespread (Wang, Sung, & Phau, 2024, p. 578). Such findings illustrate the reasons why the desire for luxury has grown over time.

This leads to the understanding of the desire for luxury goods as an innate human objective and part of our behavior. It is driven by the aim of showcasing symbolic attributes of status, achieving exclusivity, and eventually appealing to others (Lee & Chang, 2025, p. 3). Additionally, the feelings produced by a product's scarcity increase its desirability and exclusivity (Lee & Chang, 2025, p. 3). This positions luxury consumption as a powerful social signaling mechanism. (Lee & Chang, 2025, p. 3). When compared with rational purchasing, the desire for luxury is often associated with belonging to a

specific group and earning upper-class approval. This places luxury brands in a powerful marketing position (Lee & Chang, 2025, p. 3).

Lee and Mori's (2019) findings have confirmed this phenomenon, explaining that expenditures made solely to flaunt wealth are not for the consumer's comfort, but rather to achieve a specific social status, which is labeled as conspicuous consumption, a theory first proposed by Veblen (1899) and further discussed in this thesis (Lee & Mori, 2019, p. 558). Furthermore, it was elaborated that luxury buyers prioritize status over comfort, aiming for high-end products to showcase their identity, which is strongly connected to their social status (Al-Issa et al., 2024, p. 3).

Moreover, Polfuß's (2022) insights into the association of conspicuous consumption in the rap and hip-hop industry were explicitly discussed (p. 278). Polfuß (2022) further explains that the success and commercialization of rap led to a direct association with luxury consumption (p. 278). Although many rap artists have recently attempted to disassociate themselves from this connection, it has been challenging due to its association with luxury for decades (Polfuß, 2022, p. 278). This has led to the international success and commercialization of rap as a genre in displaying luxury goods, often associated with conspicuous consumption (Polfuß, 2022, p. 278). This also places rap lyrics in a position where the desire for luxury brands is driven by the need to showcase success (Polfuß, 2022, p. 278).

2.4 Rap Lyrics Referencing Luxury Brands

Rap lyrical referencing of luxury brands has been further analyzed by Pantin-Sohier et al. (2025), who elaborate on how rap serves as a medium through which the luxury brands are continuously marketed in rap lyrics (p. 543). It is essential to recognize the influence of rap lyrics as a platform that references and promotes luxury brands, exclusivity, and social status (Pantin-Sohier et al., 2025, p. 543). This aligns with the second theory, which posits that the social comparison mechanism is the process by which individuals acquire knowledge and evaluate themselves in comparison to others (Pan, Mu, & Tang, 2022, p. 3). This concept has been extensively used to explain how exposure to conventional media, such as television and publications that promote specific standards of living, can lead to life dissatisfaction (Pan, Mu, & Tang, 2022, p. 3). In this case, the focus is specifically on rap lyrics as a medium that encourages luxury brands (Pan, Mu, & Tang, 2022, p. 3).

Carbone et al. (2024) demonstrate that rap lyrics frequently highlight product mentions, particularly luxury items, more often than other mainstream genres, in comparison to pop and rock (p. 894). This focus on material wealth in rap is linked to a cultural shift, symbolizing a newly gained sense of freedom and aspiration for wealth (Carbone et al., 2024, p. 894). Furthermore, Castillo-Villar et al. (2020) elaborated that conspicuous consumption serves as a theoretical lens that can be beneficial for analyzing similar materialist and consumption practices prevalent in other music subcultures beyond hip-hop or rap (Castillo-Villar et al., 2020, p. 355). The discussions within Castillo-Villar et al.'s (2020) study

provided a broad vision of how conspicuous consumption practices within music subcultures promote power, status, prestige, and wealth.

2.5 Aspiration of Wealth

Chen et al. (2024) describe the aspiration for wealth as the search of financial success to achieve higher status, power, and self-expression (p. 301). Money is a key motivator, driving individuals to seek better opportunities and higher earnings, particularly through job mobility in academic and managerial fields (Chen et al., 2024, p. 301). Beyond its economic function, wealth symbolizes social standing and accomplishment, thereby increasing the desire among people to acquire material goods (Chen et al., 2024, p. 301). Furthermore, Chen et al. (2024) elaborate that the conspicuous consumption of rare or uncommon goods is used to enhance one's unique self-image, among other factors, with signaling effects being a crucial factor in understanding the primary motivations behind luxury purchases (p. 305).

Due to rap lyrics often associating luxury with power, status, and prestige, they may inspire stronger aspirations for wealth among listeners. This effect is reinforced by the conspicuous consumption theory, which suggests that luxury is used as a means of signaling success. Additionally, the social comparison theory emphasizes how individuals evaluate themselves through upward comparison with those from higher-status groups.

H1: Exposure to rap lyrics explicitly referencing luxury brands will significantly increase the aspiration for wealth among Dutch young adults aged 18 to 30.

Furthermore, Castillo-Villar, Cavazos-Arroyo, and Kervyn (2020) applied Conspicuous Consumption Theory to analyze materialistic themes in music (p. 355). Their findings depicted that music generally conveyed materialistic and conspicuous consumption practices (Castillo-Villar, Cavazos-Arroyo, & Kervyn, 2020, p. 355). This is primarily aimed at achieving signaled success or recognition within a specific social class (Castillo-Villar, Cavazos-Arroyo, & Kervyn, 2020, p. 355). Moreover, Castillo-Villar, Cavazos-Arroyo, and Kervyn (2020) elaborated that music is generally a positive source of self-identity formation, stating that it is crucial to pay great attention to symbolic markers' (brands) usage of music as a medium to promote luxury items (p. 355). This strengthens the credibility of the conspicuous consumption theory in evaluating rap lyrics that reference luxury brands (Castillo-Villar, Cavazos-Arroyo, & Kervyn, 2020, p. 355). Utilizing this theory to assess music is a proper indicator that it is also highly valid for studying the influence of a different genre, such as rap music.

In addition, social comparison refers to the mechanism by which individuals acquire knowledge and evaluate themselves to others (Pan, Mu, & Tang, 2022, p. 3). This concept has been extensively used to explain how exposure to media, such as music, television, and social media, promotes specific standards of living, which can lead to life unhappiness (Pan, Mu, & Tang, 2022, p. 3). The first process is

situational or state-based, indicating the degree and direction of comparisons made in response to specific contexts or stimuli (Pan, Mu, & Tang, 2022, p.3). The second is trait-based, suggesting a more stable and continuous tendency to assess oneself with others within social settings (Pan, Mu, & Tang, 2022, p. 3). State-based social comparison is often triggered by exposure to idealized imagery and has been identified as a mechanism linking this exposure to adverse outcomes, such as dissatisfaction (Pan, Mu, & Tang, 2022, p. 3).

Both the conspicuous consumption and social comparison theories suggest that people who aspire to have wealth may seek luxury brands to demonstrate their success by displaying luxury to others, who are perceived as having a higher status or class.

H2: Among Dutch young adults aged 18 to 30, higher aspiration for wealth is positively associated with a stronger desire for luxury brand consumption.

Miguélez-Juan and Rebollo-Bueno (2025) argue that featuring luxury brands in lyrics and videos offers a powerful advertising approach for young audiences, promoting these brands effectively (p. 2). As such, these placements are in media that are extremely popular, such as highly streamed songs (Miguélez-Juan & Rebollo-Bueno, 2025, p. 12). Miguélez-Juan and Rebollo-Bueno (2025) also noted that conspicuous consumption products frequently appear in musical pieces, whether in lyrics or music videos (p. 12). They further elaborate that brands placed in lyrics or videos catalyze audience recognition of these brands and further entice a desire for these brands among the audience (Miguélez-Juan & Rebollo-Bueno, 2025, p. 12). The prevalent placement of these brands within music serves as a successful communication strategy for marketers, not only familiarizing audiences but also promoting these luxury product brands to them (Miguélez-Juan & Rebollo-Bueno, 2025, p. 12).

This is confirmed by Castillo-Villars' findings, as well as those of Cavazos-Arroyo and Kervyn (2020), regarding how music fosters the creation of subcultures (p. 355). They elaborated that music is a powerful driver for listeners, influencing specific consumption practices (p. 355). Furthermore, music can promote conspicuous consumption by encouraging listeners to use certain items as symbols. For example, owning a high-end product can serve to signal and communicate social identity (Castillo-Villar, Cavazos-Arroyo, & Kervyn, 2020, p. 359). Therefore, it is understandable that belonging to a particular group or music subculture (genre) can influence the consumer purchasing behavior of its audience (Castillo-Villar, Cavazos-Arroyo, & Kervyn, 2020, p. 359). This confirms that genres like rap can have influential lyrics that impact their audiences' purchasing decisions and desires.

Additionally, Ling, B. (2025) discussed how consumers rarely make choices without the influence of others (p. 495). Instead, they heavily depend on reviews and the behaviors of others (Ling, 2025, p. 495). In a society where social signaling strongly influences purchasing decisions, this

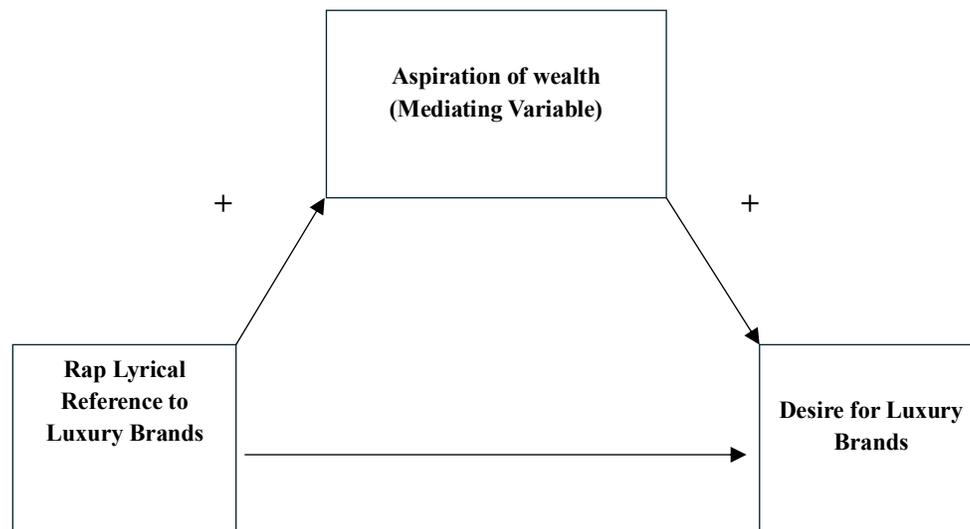
phenomenon is highly significant (Ling, 2025, p. 495). Social comparison plays a key role in understanding why consumers make specific purchasing choices (Ling, 2025, p. 497). Generally, consumers observe the purchases of those they admire or aspire to be like (Ling, 2025, p. 497). This often leads to a positive perception of these brands (Ling, 2025, p. 497). Therefore, brands associated with prestige or status greatly benefit from social comparison, especially upward social comparison. This correlates with how rap audiences are influenced to value brands mentioned in rap lyrics.

He and Tsvetkova (2025) describe consumption as not just an economic phenomenon, but also social and cultural (He & Tsvetkova, 2025, p. 2). They further explain that consumption practices usually pertain to personal and social identities (He & Tsvetkova, 2025, p. 2). These perspectives suggest that status-seeking individuals are drawn to specific consumption practices. (He & Tsvetkova, 2025, p. 2). In other words, people who pursue a certain status are encouraged to spend more to signal that status with specific purchases (He & Tsvetkova, 2025, p. 2). Furthermore, previous cultural psychology findings have demonstrated that consumptions serve to distinguish consumers' social position (He & Tsvetkova, 2025, p. 2). Both conspicuous consumption and social comparison work together to foster a positive perception among consumers for luxury brands, especially those that are explicitly mentioned in rap lyrics, resulting in an increased desire for these luxury brands. Based on this theoretical foundation, it is expected that aspiration for wealth mediates the relationship between lyrical exposure and luxury brand desire. Thus, aspiration for wealth may serve as the psychological mechanism linking lyrical exposure to heightened desire for luxury brands.

H3: Aspiration for wealth mediates the relationship between exposure to rap lyrics referencing luxury brands and the desire for luxury brands.

To efficiently test the proposed hypotheses, Hayes' PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2022) was employed. This model demonstrates how an independent variable (IV) influences a dependent variable (DV) through a mediating variable (Coutts & Hayes, 2023, p. 3372). It estimates both the direct and indirect effects of the IV on the DV, enabling a formal test of mediation (Coutts & Hayes, 2023, p. 3773). In this thesis, the influence of rap lyrics referencing luxury brands on the desire for luxury brands was examined, with aspiration for wealth serving as the proposed mediator.

Figure 1: Hayes PROCESS Model



It is interesting to note that Wang et al. (2024) highlight that status signaling is not limited to genuine luxury items but also extends to counterfeit versions (p. 978). Their findings revealed that some consumers are motivated to purchase counterfeit luxury products to project the same image of wealth and status that authentic brands represent. This shows that the social function of luxury consumption can be fulfilled even when the products are not authentic. In their study, Wang et al. (2024) also noted that the growing global demand for luxury goods has contributed to the rise of counterfeit luxury markets (p. 978). As luxury brands become increasingly desirable and culturally significant, the pressure to acquire them intensifies, even if that means resorting to imitations. This is especially relevant in contexts where social appearance holds value, but affordability is a barrier. These findings align with this thesis's focus, suggesting that participants exposed to rap lyrics referencing luxury brands may also be drawn to counterfeit luxury products. The cultural emphasis placed on luxury through music could influence consumer behavior toward both authentic and non-authentic goods, depending on financial access.

3. Method

The previously discussed hypotheses were tested through an in-between-subjects experimental design to explore how references to luxury brands in rap lyrics influence young adults' desire for luxury items, with the aspiration for wealth serving as a mediator. The study recruited participants aged 18 to 30 living in the Netherlands via Prolific. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: luxury (Rolex), mid-range (Swatch), or affordable (Casio). It is important to note that introducing "Casio"

as a brand representing the affordable condition was deemed necessary after the pre-test results; further details are provided in this section. Additionally, each participant listened to a 20-second AI-generated rap verse featuring identical lyrics, with only the brand name changed according to the assigned condition. To ensure validity, only self-identified rap listeners were included; those who answered “never” to the rap listening filter or failed the attention check were excluded. Wristwatches were chosen as the product to be manipulated in the experiment due to their prominence in rap lyrics (Farwell, Stickle, & Shackelford, 2023, p. 3). Rolex, Swatch, and Casio were selected to represent luxury, mid-range, and affordable brands, respectively.

The manipulation aimed to precisely test how brand tier, embedded within rap lyrics, influences consumer desire for these luxury brands. The stimulus (rap verse) was generated using a subscription-based AI tool. Prior research by Collins & Manji (2024) utilized AI-generated music as an experimental stimulus, confirming its effectiveness (pp. 9-10). This design facilitated a controlled manipulation of brand status within a culturally relevant format to assess the psychological impact of luxury branding in music.

3.1 Design

A between-subjects experiment was conducted to examine how rap lyrics referencing luxury brands, serving as an independent variable, affect the desire for luxury brands, with the aspiration for wealth acting as a mediator of this relationship. The experiment included three different conditions, where participants listened to an identical 20-second rap verse; all three conditions featured the same lyrics. However, the luxury tier of the brand was manipulated. This study aims to investigate the impact of rap lyrics on listeners' desire for luxury brands. On Prolific, 189 participants ($N = 189$) were recruited and randomly assigned to one of three conditions: luxury ($n = 67$), midrange ($n = 61$), and affordable ($n = 61$). The Prolific filtering feature enabled the selection of participants aged 18 to 30 years who lived in the Netherlands. Additionally, to ensure a practical experiment, participants had to confirm they listened to rap music; if a participant indicated they did not, they were automatically screened out and excluded from the results. Furthermore, participants' responses were eliminated if they failed the attention check or took longer than the average allotted time.

Prior empirical findings suggested that it was necessary to ensure that the experiment included a specific product. In this case, the selected brand to be manipulated in the generated rap verse was wristwatches. This decision was not driven by the aim to test the appeal of different watch categories, but rather to further explore what each category (condition) represents, with a focus on gauging the influence that rap lyrics mentioning luxury brands have on listeners. As previously mentioned in the theoretical

framework, watches are confirmed to be one of the most mentioned products in popular rap music. Additionally, watches are available from a variety of brands at different prices with different luxury tiers. Thus, selecting the brand name of wrist watches as the central manipulation provided a proper insight to evaluate the dependent variable (desire for luxury brands) and the mediating variable (aspiration for wealth), while manipulating the independent variable, which is rap lyrics specifically mentioning wristwatch brands within an AI-generated rap verse. To further confirm the effectiveness of the stimulus, findings by Choi et al. (2020) confirmed how watches entail a wide range of luxuries, offering researchers the opportunity to examine the psychological effects of how consumers perceive luxury (Choi et al., 2020, p. 523).

Furthermore, the findings of Collins and Manji's (2024) also illustrate that AI-generated music is effective when used as a stimulus, where they elaborated "AI-generated music was able to fool approximately half of the listeners into believing that it could be human-generated" (Collins & Manji, 2024, p. 1). This further confirms that using subscription-based AI tools to create music is effective in testing participants' responses (Collins & Manji, 2024, pp. 9-10). Such findings strengthen the relevance of the stimulus created for this experiment, changing only the brand name as the manipulation. The primary focus is to understand what each watch tier (luxury, mid-range, or affordable) represents in terms of how the effectiveness of the rap lyrics influences the consumer's decision to promote a specific product.

3.2 Sample

The focus of this study was to explore how rap lyrics that specifically mention luxury brands might influence people's desire for those luxury brands. The aim was to examine whether exposure to such lyrical content could increase the appeal of luxury brands among listeners. To ensure the research targeted a relevant group, an age range of 18 to 30 years was chosen through the platform recruiting participants (Prolific). This decision was directly based on findings from Cundiff (2013), who identified that individuals between 16 and 30 years old are the most frequent listeners of rap music (p. 75). Such findings provided a strong reason to target this specific age group. Cundiff's (2013) findings confirmed that the selected age group matched the targeted audience of the lyrics, as outlined in the main research question.

This thesis also focused specifically on rap listeners from the Netherlands. This choice was deliberate and supported by academic research. De Roest (2022) explained that American and Dutch rap music had already become popular in the Netherlands in recent years (p. 75). Since 2013, rap has not only gained popularity but has also become one of the most dominant music genres in the Netherlands. It has regularly topped the music charts, demonstrating its strong cultural presence (de Roest, 2022, p. 75).

Although Dutch rap is highly influenced by American rap, it is not a simple copy. According to de Roest (2022), Dutch rap is influenced by its unique local context, including national experiences and cultural concerns (p. 76). These local elements make it resonate strongly with Dutch listeners, allowing it to reflect social dynamics specific to the Netherlands. Although it draws from the American style, it has developed into something that reflects Dutch identity and concerns. Therefore, making the focus on Dutch citizens a sensible decision.

Prolific was used to recruit participants for this study. Prolific is a well-established online tool for collecting survey responses and is widely employed in academic research, especially in Europe. It enabled researchers to reach participants who met specific criteria and were essential for this study. Douglas et al. (2023) described Prolific as a reliable platform for conducting hypothesis-driven research with European populations (p. 1). Their findings highlighted several reasons why researchers trust Prolific. These include using strong attention checks to ensure participants are attentive, the platform's capacity to meet technical research standards, and the tendency for responses to be thoughtful and of high quality (Douglas et al., 2023, p. 1). Since the experiment required a focused and dependable sample of young Dutch rap listeners, Prolific was considered the best platform for participant recruitment. It allows filtering by age and location, increasing confidence in response quality.

3.3 Stimulus Materials

This experiment aims to examine how rap lyrics referencing luxury brands influence listeners' desire for those brands. It was essential to select a specific popular product with variation in price and luxury, as the central manipulation involves only changing the brand name while keeping the verse the same in all three conditions. The selected product was wristwatches, with the experiment to be conducted under three conditions: a luxury condition, a midrange condition, and an affordable condition.

To ensure the stimulus (rap verse) is realistic for participants, specific well-known brands were chosen to be incorporated into the lyrics. With this approach, listeners are more likely to be influenced by the brand mention if they are exposed to a familiar brand. (Inglada-Tort et al., 2022, p. 1569). For the luxury condition, Rolex was selected as the brand that embodies luxury. According to Rauf et al. (2023), Rolex watches have a long heritage that distinguishes them as a luxury item, making them a proper brand to be referenced in the luxury rap verse (luxury condition), as many view them as an item of prestige and status (p. 2126). Moreover, when addressing the mid-range condition, a quality Swiss watch with a good reputation, which is not as expensive as a Rolex, is considered the most appropriate. According to Drasković et al. (2018), Swatch is recognized as "remarkably affordable for a Swiss-made watch and, therefore, quite accessible" (p. 106). This positions Swatch as an appropriate intermediary brand to be

mentioned in the mid-range rap verse (mid-range condition), specifically due to its wide accessibility to a customer demographic (Drasković, Marković, & Petersen, 2018, p. 102). Regarding the affordable rap verse (affordable condition), no specific brand was mentioned. The aim was to confirm that participants in this condition did not face confusion when hearing a particular brand that they could associate with high quality. Therefore, the rap verse referenced the watch as an “affordable watch”. It is necessary to note that after analyzing the pre-test, the introduction of a specific brand for the affordable watch was deemed necessary. Further details are elaborated in this section.

3.4 Pre-test

To effectively check the manipulation within each condition (rap verse), a pre-test ($N = 65$) was conducted. Participants were randomly assigned to each of the three conditions (luxury, mid-range, and affordable). Participants’ ages in the pre-test ranged from 18 to 30 ($M_{age} = 25$). Of the 65 participants, 58.5% identified as male ($n = 38$), 40.0% as female ($n = 26$), and 1.5% as non-binary ($n = 1$). All participants were residents of the Netherlands.

After consenting and listening to the 20-second verse, participants then completed three items aimed at measuring the manipulation, specifically the brand mentioned, within each condition.

To ensure internal consistency among the three conditions before proceeding with the main experiment, a reliability analysis, factor analysis, and one-way ANOVA were conducted to assess the differences in perception among the three conditions. The first question, “The rap lyrics in the verse made luxury brands a key theme,” was aimed to measure the response of participants within the luxury conditions. Then, “The rap lyrics referenced a reasonably priced and accessible item,” measured participants’ responses for the midrange condition. Lastly, “The rap lyrics mentioned a brand that most people could afford” was aimed at measuring participants’ responses from the affordable condition. All three items were measured through a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). For consistency in reporting, the questions will be referenced as Item 1 (luxury), Item 2 (mid-range), and Item 3 (affordable), respectively, in the tables below.

3.5 Reliability Analysis of Pre-test

The Analysis showed that the experiment had an acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach’s $\alpha = .710$, exceeding the minimum threshold of $.70$ (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). This indicates that the measured items had a comprehensible construct. The items’ means ranged from 3.97 ($SD = 1.73$) to 5.05 ($SD = 1.72$), indicating variability in how each item was interpreted by participants ($N = 65$). (See Appendix A)

Table 1: Reliability Analysis

Scale	α	N of Items
Manipulation check scale	.71	3

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis

Item	M	SD	N
Item 1	3.97	1.73	65
Item 2	4.74	1.87	65
Item 3	5.05	1.72	65

3.6 Factor Analysis of Pre-test

To assess whether the three manipulation check items reflected a coherent construct, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. All items were significantly and positively correlated, indicating strong inter-item consistency. Specifically, the item labeled "*Affordable*" was strongly correlated with "*Mid-range*," $r(63) = .67, p < .001$, and moderately correlated with "*Luxury*," $r(63) = .32, p = .010$. The *Luxury* item also showed a moderate positive correlation with the *mid-range*, $r(63) = .36, p = .003$. These results suggest sufficient internal consistency to justify computing a composite mean score.

Table 3: Factor Analysis

Variable	1	2	3
1. Luxury		.32*	.36**
2. Affordable	.32*		.67**
3. Mid-range	.36**	.67**	

3.7 One-Way ANOVA

It is necessary to note that the difference in sample sizes is due to how SPSS handles missing data: for ANOVAs, it automatically excludes any cases with missing values on either the condition or outcome variable, whereas reliability and descriptive statistics may include more cases, depending on the analysis settings. Furthermore, to conclude the pre-test of this experiment, we evaluated whether the

manipulation produced distinct perceptual responses across the three experimental conditions (Luxury = 1, Swatch = 2, Affordable = 3). A one-way ANOVA was conducted for each manipulation check item.

For the item “The rap lyrics in the verse made luxury brands a key theme,” a significant effect of condition was found, $F(2, 62) = 9.35, p < .001$. Participants in the luxury condition ($M = 5.09, SD = 1.11$) rated this item significantly higher than those in the Swatch ($M = 3.64, SD = 1.62$) and Affordable ($M = 3.14, SD = 1.82$) conditions. A second ANOVA revealed a significant effect for the item “The rap lyrics referenced an item that appeared reasonably priced and accessible to most people,” $F(2, 62) = 11.54, p < .001$. Participants rated this item highest in the Luxury condition ($M = 6.09, SD = 0.97$), with significantly lower means in the Swatch ($M = 4.00, SD = 1.75$) and Affordable ($M = 4.10, SD = 2.00$) conditions. Finally, the ANOVA for the item “The rap lyrics mentioned a brand that most people could afford” was also significant, $F(2, 62) = 8.76, p < .001$. Again, the Luxury condition ($M = 6.14, SD = 0.94$) elicited the strongest agreement, compared to the Swatch ($M = 4.27, SD = 1.70$) and Affordable ($M = 4.71, SD = 1.85$) groups.

These results indicate that the pre-test yielded significant differences across the three intended conditions (luxury, mid-range, and affordable), suggesting that participants were able to distinguish between them. However, closer inspection revealed that participants often failed to differentiate between the mid-range and affordable conditions. To strengthen the manipulation in the main experiment, a specific brand—Casio—was introduced in the affordable condition to enhance recognizability. According to Farhan and Putra (2024), Casio watches are perceived as cheap and popular due to their reasonable pricing and consumer loyalty (p. 430). Their findings indicate that affordability plays a key role in shaping consumer perceptions and demand (Farhan & Putra, 2024, p. 430). Thus, Casio was included in the rap lyrics to represent the affordable condition, ensuring a more distinct separation from the mid-range and luxury conditions.

Table 4: One-Way ANOVA

Item	F	df1	df2	p
Item 1	9.35	2	62	<.001
Item 2	11.54	2	62	<.001
Item 3	8.76	2	62	<.001

3.8 Procedure of the Main Experiment

A total of 189 participants ($N = 189$) completed the main experiment. All participants were within the target age range of 18 to 32 years ($M_{age} = 25.00$, $SD = 3.29$), aligning with the study's focus on young adults. Most participants were between 20 and 30 years old, indicating that the recruitment strategy successfully reached the intended demographic.

Participants identified their gender as male (48.1%, $n = 91$), female (49.2%, $n = 93$), or non-binary (2.6%, $n = 5$), resulting in a sample that was gender balanced. Educational backgrounds varied: 26.5% held a research master's degree ($n = 50$), 19.6% had a professional bachelor's degree ($n = 37$), and 20.6% possessed a high school diploma ($n = 39$). Other qualifications included research bachelor's degrees (16.4%, $n = 31$), two-year diplomas (8.5%, $n = 16$), professional master's degrees (7.4%, $n = 14$), and doctoral degrees (1.1%, $n = 2$). These results suggest that participants were generally well-educated, with diverse academic backgrounds.

Recruitment was conducted through the online platform Prolific. While compensation was listed in Prolific British pounds ($M_{payment} = £6.61$), it was converted to approximately €7.74/hour for each participant. The survey was built via Qualtrics, which enabled random assignment to conditions and provided a controlled digital environment through the embedded data feature. The average survey completion time was 224.48 seconds ($M_{time} = 3.74$ minutes; $SD = 112.76$), indicating the study was both time-efficient and engaging.

Upon entry, participants read an introductory text outlining the study's purpose, estimated duration, data protection policy, and contact information. Informed consent was obtained following Erasmus University's ethical guidelines. Only those who consented proceeded to the experimental tasks. After consenting, participants received basic instructions, which advised them to prepare items such as headphones or speakers and to complete the experiment in a quiet setting to minimize distractions and ensure consistency. They then entered their Prolific ID into a designated box to enable proper tracking and payment. Furthermore, participants responded to a screening question about their listening habits to rap music, with options ranging from "very often" to "never." Those who selected "never" were automatically excluded from further analysis to ensure the final sample included only rap listeners, which was essential for measuring the intended effects.

Participants who passed the screening were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions using Qualtrics' built-in randomizer (embedded data feature). The conditions varied based on

the brand mentioned in the rap lyrics: luxury, midrange, or affordable. All participants listened to the same lyrics, but the brand name varied according to their assigned condition. The lyrics were presented in a video format, including lyrics, allowing participants to hear and read simultaneously. This method ensured consistent lyrical exposure across participants, with the brand name being the only manipulated variable, testing the focus of the study.

3.9 Reliability of the Main Experiment’s Scales

To assess the internal consistency of the scales used in this study, reliability analyses were conducted for the three multi-item scales. It is necessary to note that the LDS scale was divided into two scales: one to measure the desire for luxury and the other to measure the desire for luxury counterfeits. This further ensures the reliability of the results derived from the main experiment, as the desire for counterfeit was used as a covariate. The Desire for Luxury scale, consisting of six items, demonstrated good reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha of .784, indicating that the items measured a consistent construct. Additionally, the Desire for Counterfeit Luxury scale consisted of three items and demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .767. Finally, the Money Ethics Scale, which consisted of fifteen items, yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .861, indicating excellent internal reliability.

Table 5: Reliability of Main Experiment Scales

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha
Desire for Luxury	6	.784
Desire for Counterfeit Luxury	3	.767
Money Ethics Scale	16	.861

Additionally, during the experiment stimulus, the screen remained locked for 20 seconds—the duration of the verse—to ensure participants listened to the entire song. Furthermore, participants are asked to complete a survey that begins with a scale designed to assess their desire for luxury and aspiration for wealth. These two scales are discussed in detail in the operationalization of both the Luxury Desire Scale (LDS) and Money Ethics Scale (MES).

After participants completed the questions within the operationalized scales, they proceeded to complete the demographic questions. They were asked about their age, educational background, and gender. Finally, before concluding the experiment, participants are asked about the gender of the rapper performing the rap verse as an attention check.

3.10 Operationalization

3.10.1 Luxury Desire Scale (LDS)

To further operationalize the previously demonstrated conceptual model properly, two previously established scales were utilized. All scales were measured using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Lee and Chang (2025) validated the Luxury Desire Scale (LDS) as a reliable tool for measuring the motivations behind luxury consumption, demonstrating its ability to capture the symbolic, exclusive, and emotional aspects of desire (p. 3). Given its relevance to both genuine and counterfeit luxury goods, the scale is used in this study to evaluate the dependent variable (Lee & Chang, 2025, p. 10). The LDS includes multiple dimensions assessed using a seven-point Likert scale (Lee & Chang, 2025, p. 5). In this study, three specific dimensions are applied: desire for luxury, desire for status, and social counterfeit. The desire for social counterfeit was separated to be used as a covariate (external factor) in the tests conducted within SPSS. (see Appendix B).

3.10.2 Money Ethics Scale (MES)

Moreover, Tang (1993) describes in his findings the Money Ethics Scale (MES), where attitudes toward money are composed of three primary dimensions. The affective component reflects whether individuals view money as inherently good or bad (Tang, 1993, p. 94). The cognitive component pertains to the belief that money represents achievement, respect, independence, or power (p. 94). Lastly, the behavioral component focuses on how individuals manage their finances, including their budgeting and spending habits (p. 94). In the present study, the following dimensions are included: money is good, money is an achievement, and money is freedom (or power). (see Appendix B).

4. Results

This section analyses the outcomes of the statistical analyses used to test the three hypotheses that address the main research question presented. It includes a manipulation check, descriptive statistics, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with counterfeit luxury attitudes as a covariate, and a mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2022).

4.1 Manipulation Check

A manipulation check was conducted to assess whether participants correctly perceived the tier of the watch brand referenced in the rap lyrics (luxury, mid-range, or affordable). Furthermore, participants were asked to categorize the brand as either “luxury,” “mid-range,” or “affordable” via a multiple-choice

question introduced after completing the scale measuring the dependent variable. A chi-square test of independence revealed a statistically significant relationship between condition and tier of the manipulated brand, $\chi^2(4) = 76.06, p < .001$, suggesting that responses to the manipulation check varied across conditions. A total of 77.6% of participants in the luxury (Rolex) condition correctly identified the brand as luxury, 57.4% in the mid-range (Swatch) condition chose “mid-range,” and 42.6% in the affordable (Casio) condition selected “affordable.” Overall, 59.8% of participants correctly classified the brand as intended, indicating that the manipulation was partially successful, especially in the luxury condition.

Table 6: Manipulation Check Accuracy by Condition

Condition	Correct (%)	<i>n</i> (Correct)	<i>n</i> (Total)
Luxury (Rolex)	77.6%	52	67
Mid-range (Swatch)	57.4%	35	61
Affordable (Casio)	42.6%	26	61
Total	59.8%	113	189

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were conducted to observe differences in mean luxury desire across the three conditions. Participants in the mid-range condition reported the highest mean desire for luxury ($M = 4.49, SD = 0.99$), followed by the affordable condition ($M = 4.39, SD = 0.85$), and finally the luxury condition ($M = 4.26, SD = 1.15$).

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics of Desire for Luxury by Condition

Condition	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Luxury (Rolex)	4.26	1.15	67
Mid-range (Swatch)	4.49	0.99	61
Affordable (Casio)	4.39	0.85	61
Total	4.37	1.01	189

4.3 ANCOVA with Counterfeit Luxury Attitudes

An ANCOVA was conducted to examine whether counterfeit luxury attitudes influenced the desire for luxury across the three conditions. There was no significant main effect of condition on desire for luxury, $F(2, 185) = 0.815$, $p = .444$, partial $\eta^2 = .009$, nor a significant effect of the covariate. Specifically, the main effect of condition on the desire for luxury was not significant, $F(2, 185) = 0.815$, $p = .444$, partial $\eta^2 = .009$, nor was the covariate, $F(1, 185) = 0.004$, $p = .951$, partial $\eta^2 < .001$. These results suggest that, after responding to attitudes toward counterfeit products, the condition did not significantly affect participants' desire for luxury.

Table 8: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Desire for Luxury

Source	Type III SS	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial η^2
Corrected Model	1.672	3	0.557	0.544	.653	.009
Intercept	661.662	1	661.662	646.130	<.001	.777
Counterfeit Attitude (Covariate)	0.004	1	0.004	0.004	.951	<.001
Condition (IV)	1.670	2	0.835	0.815	.444	.009
Error	189.447	185	1.024			

4.4 Mediation Analysis (Hayes PROCESS Model 4)

To examine whether the effect of brand condition on desire for luxury was mediated by aspiration for wealth, a mediation analysis was conducted using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4), with counterfeit luxury attitudes included as a covariate. Model 4 of Hayes' PROCESS macro was utilized to test a simple mediation model, aligning with this thesis's conceptual framework, which proposes aspiration for wealth as a mediator between rap lyrics referencing luxury brands and desire for luxury. Counterfeit luxury attitudes were included as a covariate in all model paths to account for pre-existing tendencies toward luxury consumption that could weaken the mediation effect. To ensure accurate estimation of the indirect effect, 5,000 bias-corrected bootstrap samples were used to generate confidence intervals. While aspiration for wealth significantly predicted luxury desire, the absence of a direct link

between condition and aspiration suggests that brand references in rap lyrics may not strongly influence aspirational values as theorized, a finding further explored in the discussion.

The first path of the model examined the effect of condition on aspiration for wealth. This path, which represents the first hypothesis (H1), was not statistically significant ($B = -0.041$, $SE = 0.064$, $p = .524$), indicating that exposure to different watch brand tiers in rap lyrics did not significantly influence participants' wealth aspirations. Therefore, H1 was not supported.

Furthermore, the relationship between aspiration for wealth and desire for luxury was examined. This path reflects the second hypothesis (H2). The results showed a significant positive association ($B = 0.349$, $SE = 0.099$, $p = .001$), suggesting that individuals with higher aspirations for wealth were more likely to report a greater desire for luxury goods. Thus, H2 was supported.

The third hypothesis (H3) proposed that aspiration would mediate the relationship between condition and luxury desire. The indirect effect of condition on luxury desire through aspiration was non-significant, as the 95% confidence interval included zero ($B = -0.014$, $Boot SE = 0.023$, $95\% CI [-0.061, 0.029]$). Therefore, the proposed mediation (H3) was not supported.

In addition, both the total effect of condition on desire ($B = 0.066$, $SE = 0.089$, $p = .462$) and the direct effect ($B = 0.080$, $SE = 0.087$, $p = .359$) were non-significant. These findings reinforce the conclusion that the brand tier featured in the rap lyrics did not meaningfully influence luxury desire within this mediation model.

Table 9: Mediation Analysis Results (Hayes PROCESS Model 4)

Path	Coefficient (<i>B</i>)	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI
Path a (H1)	-0.0410	0.0642	-0.6386	.5239	[-0.1677, 0.0857]
Path b (H2)	0.3448	0.0987	3.4924	.0006	[0.1500, 0.5396]
Indirect effect (ab) (H3)	-0.0141	0.0225			[-0.0613, 0.0290]
Total effect (c)	0.0658	0.0893	0.7364	.4624	[-0.1104, 0.2419]
Direct effect (c')	0.0799	0.0868	0.9203	.3586	[-0.0914, 0.2512]

The table below summarizes the outcomes of the three hypotheses presented in this thesis, which aim to answer the proposed research question.

Table 10: Description of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Test Path	Coefficient (<i>B</i>)	<i>p</i> -value	95% CI	Status
H1	Path <i>a</i> ($X \rightarrow M$)	-0.0410	.5239	[-0.1677, 0.0857]	Not supported
H2	Path <i>b</i> ($M \rightarrow Y$)	0.3448	.0006	[0.1500, 0.5396]	Supported
H3	Indirect effect ($a \times b$)	-0.0141	—	[-0.0613, 0.0290]	Not supported

In summary, the results of the statistical analyses offered partial support for the previously proposed conceptual model. Although the manipulation was only partially effective across the three conditions, especially in the mid-range and affordable tiers, it was strong enough in the luxury condition to justify proceeding with inferential testing. The ANCOVA showed that attitudes toward counterfeit luxury products did not significantly influence the relationship between the experimental condition and desire for luxury. Mediation analysis indicated that, while aspiration for wealth significantly predicted desire for luxury (supporting H2), the manipulated brand tier in the rap lyrics did not significantly impact aspiration (rejecting H1), nor did aspiration mediate the effect of condition on desire for luxury (rejecting H3). These findings reveal a nuanced dynamic. This is because aspirational values are indeed connected to luxury desire but may not be directly impacted by exposure to lyrical brand references alone.

5. Discussion

5.1 Reflection on Hypotheses

Schramm and Kraft (2024) highlighted that the connection between music and branding can be a highly effective advertising tool, especially in rap and hip-hop, where nearly half of music videos feature brand references (p. 1). They noted that endorsements are most convincing when the artist appears authentic and aligns with the product, a concept called congruence, which measures how well an artist's image naturally fits the promoted product (p. 4). Their findings also show that when this alignment is present, ads tend to have stronger persuasive effects and lead to higher purchase intentions (Schramm & Kraft, 2024, p. 4). This may help explain why the first hypothesis in this thesis was not supported. While the theoretical framework drew a logical connection between exposure to luxury brand references and higher aspiration for wealth, using an AI-generated rap verse probably weakened this effect. The lack of a recognizable or culturally relevant artist may have led to an incongruent message, lowering the stimulus's

impact on participants' wealth aspirations. Therefore, the absence of artist-product congruence could be a reason behind the non-significant results for H1.

Sabuncuoğlu, Gökaler, and Saatcioğlu (2025) emphasized that music plays a vital role in shaping brand associations, enhancing identity formation, and increasing brand recall (p. 10). They argue that omitting music in advertising is a missed opportunity for product promotion (p. 10). However, their findings also reveal that instrumental music often evokes more favorable responses than music with lyrics, which may partly explain the rejection of the third hypothesis in this study. This result seems to diverge from expectations based on the theoretical framework, which highlighted the persuasive potential of lyrical content. Nonetheless, lyrical music can promote deeper engagement, especially when listeners sing along and process the lyrics mentally (Sabuncuoğlu, Gökaler, & Saatcioğlu, 2025, p. 11). This does not automatically ensure effectiveness in all cases. The AI-generated rap lyrics used in this experiment may have lacked emotional resonance or recognition, reducing their persuasive power. Despite the recognized marketing value of music in promoting luxury goods, these findings suggest that lyrical content alone may not be enough to stimulate consumer desire without other factors like artist credibility or musical quality. Therefore, the rejection of the third hypothesis can be better understood within this more detailed context.

5.2 Methodological Design Limitations

Although this thesis presented a strong argument about how rap lyrics influence listeners' desire for luxury, it has limitations. The main experiment included a manipulation check. In general, the manipulation check was found to be significant, with a high rate of correct responses in the luxury condition. However, a notable confusion was observed in participants' responses regarding the mid-range and affordable conditions. This is expected, as there is a nuance to what some participants consider affordable, and others do not. Moreover, the elimination of failed attention checks and longer-than-normal response times has yielded a slight imbalance between the in-between conditions. Although such variation is minor, unequal group sizes could raise a slight concern that they may negatively affect the statistical accuracy of the administered tests.

Furthermore, although it is innovative and supported by previous research, using AI-generated rap verses results in a more robotic-sounding outcome. The previously discussed findings in this thesis by Collins and Manji (2024) indicate that AI-generated music can be compelling; however, the absence of a real artist with a distinct vocal identity and production quality that sounds remarkably human may reduce the authenticity of the music stimulus (Choi et al., 2020, p. 523). Therefore, it is essential to note that

participants might respond differently to lyrics performed by well-known artists. Parasocial relationships, listener loyalty, and fandom could influence this. However, this has not been captured in this study. Another limitation concerns the homogeneity of the sample. The study specifically focused on Dutch rap artists. Consequently, participant selection through Prolific was restricted to individuals aged 18 to 30. According to the previously discussed empirical reading, this age group is the prime demographic for rap music consumption. While this aligns with the research question, it constrains the findings to this demographic. Important factors, such as cultural differences, sociological background, and country-specific economic conditions, can influence how listeners interpret rap lyrics that reference luxury brands. Therefore, expanding this research to include a more diverse and international audience would produce more comprehensive and accurate results.

Prolific was used to recruit participants, and a question within the survey, powered by Qualtrics, ensured that participants were rap listeners. More thorough testing of participants' consumption of rap music would have been beneficial for obtaining more accurate results. Such self-reporting methods may have introduced bias because participants could have overestimated their usage and familiarity with rap music. No digital system was used to measure the frequency of listening to rap music. This presents a challenge in determining whether the level of rap consumption is sufficiently high.

5.3 Implication

5.4 Theoretical Contribution

Metcalf and Ruth (2020) have demonstrated the importance of the hip-hop and R&B industry in terms of revenue, as it is considered a multi-billion-dollar industry (p. 44). They elaborated that understanding the placement of products in such genres can facilitate better research in the future (Metcalf & Ruth, 2020, p. 44). Thus, the findings from the experiment conducted in this thesis contribute to the existing literature on understanding the importance of product placement in rap music. In addition, this correlates with findings by Ferguson et al. (2015), who investigated the efficacy of placement in hip-hop music (p. 53). It was clarified that the prominent placement of brands within songs leads to a higher recall score among consumers (Ferguson et al., 2015, p. 53).

The findings in this thesis regarding rap lyrics referencing luxury brands are a significant theoretical addition to Ferguson et al.'s (2015) work, as they further confirm the need for more research on the topic. This thesis aimed to fill that gap while also providing additional insights into these findings. Another angle where this thesis could be highly valuable to previous empirical findings is not just product placement, but also product congruence with the artist referencing these products. Vereenooghe et al.

(2022) found that the stronger the congruence an artist has with a product they are promoting, the more effective the promotional impact could be (p. 8). Moreover, they elaborated that this could be highly beneficial in guiding music producers and directors in making decisions related to products being promoted, aiming for a more effective promotional impact (Vereenooghe et al., 2022, p. 8). With rap and R&B being widely known for mentioning luxury products in their lyrics, discoveries within this thesis would be effective in providing a proper understanding of how such genres serve as a medium for promoting luxury brands. As discussed by Ferguson (2015), who focused on brand placement, especially in Hip-Hop music (Ferguson, 2015, p. 55), they demonstrated that understanding the proper placement of famous brands to be mentioned leads to success in advertising (Ferguson, 2015, p. 55). They also emphasized that such findings are not only necessary for marketers and advertisers to understand but also for musicians (Ferguson, 2015, p. 55). This thesis is a theoretical contribution to research, such as Ferguson's (2015), due to the necessity of exploring this field.

5.5 Managerial Implications

Metcalf and Ruth (2020) additionally discussed how hip-hop and R&B account for 25.6% of US music consumption (Metcalf & Ruth, 2020, p. 44). They further illustrated, saying “four songs surpassed one billion digital streams in 2018, hip hop artists performed all four.” (Metcalf & Ruth, 2020, p. 44). Although these numbers are relevant to the main research question, they are statistics gauging the success of the genre in the United States. However, as discussed previously, de Roest (2022) explained that Dutch rap might be heavily inspired by American rap music (de Roest, 2022, p. 76). This confirmed the probable success of rap as a genre in the Netherlands. Additionally, they stated that both American and Dutch Rap music have been dominating the charts in the Netherlands (de Roest, 2022, p. 75). This corroborates that the growing popularity in the United States is similar to the success of the genre in the Netherlands, confirming the value of additional research on this topic.

Luxury brand managers seeking to improve their advertising strategies in a competitive market will find many practical insights in this thesis. According to Pantin-Sohier et al., (2025), brands continue to invest heavily in advertising (p. 542). These investments amount to \$5.49 billion in the U.S. alone (Pantin-Sohier et al., 2025, p. 542). The high level of investment emphasizes the need for advertising managers to understand effective techniques that not only focus on gaining exposure but also ensure that the context in which the brand is mentioned aligns with the audience's aspirations. The conducted experiment shows that aspiration is not always positively influenced by luxury brand mentions in lyrics, providing guidance for managers in their future advertising approaches, especially in the context of rap music.

6. Conclusion

The popularity of rap lyrics among young people is undeniable, making them a powerful tool for marketers (Metcalf & Ruth, 2020, p. 44). Metcalf and Ruth (2020) analyzed the top-charting songs, showing that rap lyrics are not only dominating the charts but also serve as a strong medium for advertising and marketing. Furthermore, Dankoor et al. (2023) have illustrated the significant societal reach of hip-hop and rap music in embedding materialistic themes, thereby proving its influence (Dankoor et al., 2023, p. 73). In addition, van Erp et al. (2024) discussed how rap lyrics are not mere entertainment due to their activist and socially critical nature (p. 3). This correlates with de Roest's (2022) findings, which illustrate that hip-hop and rap music have dominated the Dutch charts, captivating the attention of young Dutch listeners (p. 75). Such revelations have shown the existing academic gap in the utilization of rap lyrics as a marketing tool for increasing the desire for luxury brands, leading to the formulation of the research question "How are young adults aged 18 – 30 years in the Netherlands influenced by rap lyrics referencing luxury brands to desire luxury brands, and to what extent do aspirations for wealth mediate this relationship?".

To address the proposed research question, a synthesis of two theories was utilized: Veblen's Conspicuous Consumption Theory (1899) and Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954). Conspicuous consumption was described by Elibol (2023) as the purchase of specific high-end goods primarily to signal one's higher social status to other groups (p. 1101). According to Erp et al. (2024), such phenomena have been consistently displayed throughout the years in hip hop and rap music (p. 3). These findings have led to the conspicuous consumption theory being deemed a proper framework for guiding the development of the hypotheses discussed in this thesis. Additionally, Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954) was applied alongside conspicuous consumption, offering a comprehensive perspective. The focus of social comparison theory was mainly on upward comparison, where individuals compare themselves to others who are more successful (Gerber et al., 2018, p. 177). Since rap artists often mention wealth in their lyrics, social comparison theory was necessary to address the influence these lyrics might have on listeners. Three hypotheses were developed using the established framework responding to the proposed research question.

Moreover, a consensus of three different variables was tested through an intermediate experiment. Wang, Sung, and Phau (2024) examined how brands increase the desire for their luxury products by using exclusivity, positioning these brands as a rare commodity and thus boosting consumer desire (p. 576). This has led to the desire for luxury being identified as the dependent variable to be measured in this thesis. Furthermore, Pantin-Sohier et al. (2025) noted that rap lyrics are a rich medium for marketers and advertisers targeting luxury consumption due to their broad reach and influence, positioning it as the

independent variable (p. 543). The aspiration for wealth mediated the relationship between these two variables, as findings by Chen et al. (2024) demonstrated how money serves as a primary motivator for achieving higher status, power, and self-expression (p. 301). The three hypotheses were tested using Hayes PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2022).

To target the appropriate group described in the research question, Prolific was used to recruit young Dutch adults aged 18–30. Additionally, an AI tool was employed to create a short rap verse serving as the experiment's stimulus, with the brand tier varied in each of the three conditions. It was crucial to select a brand that is widely used and offers different luxury tiers (price variation) to achieve effective manipulation. Thus, Rolex was selected to be the chosen brand for the luxury condition, as according to Rauf et al. (2023), Rolex watches have a long heritage that distinguishes them as a luxury item (p. 2126). Furthermore, for the midrange tier, Swatch was elected. Drasković et al. (2018) describe Swatch watches as being recognized as “remarkably affordable for a Swiss-made watch and, therefore, quite accessible” (p. 106). Lastly, Casio was designated as being in an affordable condition, as Casio watches are perceived as being cheap and popular due to their reasonable pricing and consumer loyalty (Farhan and Putra, 2024, p. 430).

All scales were measured using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The validated Luxury Desire Scale (LDS) by Lee and Chang (2025) was deemed appropriate to gauge the dependent variable, serving as a reliable tool for assessing the motivations behind luxury consumption and demonstrating its ability to capture the symbolic, exclusive, and emotional aspects of desire (p. 3). It is necessary to note that the desire for luxury counterfeit, which is a dimension in the LDS, was utilized as a covariate throughout the testing process through the Hayes PROCESS Model 4. The mediating variable, which is the aspiration for wealth, was measured using Tang’s (1993) Money Ethics Scale (MES), where attitudes toward money are considered to consist of three primary dimensions (p. 94). All allocated dimensions were essential to build the in-between experiment through Erasmus Qualtrics, where a sample of (N=189) respondents was collected after eliminating failed attention checks, dropouts, and long response times.

The experimental results were analyzed using SPSS, which tested the first hypothesis, indicating that rap lyrics referencing luxury brands influence the aspiration for wealth. However, the tests showed no significant relationship. In addition, the second hypothesis tested whether a high aspiration for wealth yields a high desire for luxury, and the result was significant. Lastly, the direct influence of rap lyrics on the desire for these luxury brands was also tested, with the results showing no significance. Empirical research findings by Schramm and Kraft (2024) elaborate on the rejection of the first hypothesis, highlighting the importance of relatability and congruence between artists or musicians and promoted

brands (p. 4). Thus, relatability to the participants was weakened because the stimulus was an AI-generated rap verse. This could justify rejecting the first hypothesis. In addition, Sabuncuođlu, Gökalller, and Saaticiođlu (2025) noted that although music is essential for the success of many advertisements, instrumental music without lyrics tends to be the most effective for marketing purposes (p. 10). Such takes could justify the rejection of the third hypothesis.

7. Ethics Checklist

Your proposed research project is expected to meet the guidelines of the Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, as set forth by the Netherlands Association of Universities (VSNU), which can be found [here](#).

Please complete the following checklist, regarding the proposed research project

- No potential harm of any kind (physical, psychological or reputational) is envisaged for the researcher, participants or the population from which participants have been drawn.
- Participants are healthy adults who are not in a vulnerable position, notably in their relationship with the researcher.
- Participants will give active, informed consent for participation in the research.
- Participants receive complete and accurate information about the goals of the research before they participate.
- No important details about the purpose of the research are either withheld or misrepresented.
- Participants will be able to withdraw from the study at any point in (or following) the data collection process.
- Personal and sensitive data are kept confidential and are stored in a secure environment.

If your research deviates from any of these standards, please consult your supervisor. You may need to apply for approval from the ESHCC Ethics Review Board, before commencing data collection.

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9. Appendices

Appendix A

Pre-test SPSS Outputs

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	65	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	65	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.710	.710	3

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
The rap lyrics in the verse made luxury brands a key theme. - .	3.9692	1.73177	65
The rap lyrics referenced an item that appeared reasonably priced and accessible to most people. - .	4.7385	1.87314	65
The rap lyrics mentioned a brand that most people could afford. - .	5.0462	1.71784	65

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
The rap lyrics in the verse made luxury brands a key theme. - .	Between Groups	44.458	2	22.229	9.345	<.001
	Within Groups	147.481	62	2.379		
	Total	191.938	64			
The rap lyrics referenced an item that appeared reasonably priced and accessible to most people. - .	Between Groups	60.926	2	30.463	11.543	<.001
	Within Groups	163.628	62	2.639		
	Total	224.554	64			
The rap lyrics mentioned a brand that most people could afford. - .	Between Groups	41.621	2	20.811	8.763	<.001
	Within Groups	147.240	62	2.375		
	Total	188.862	64			

Post Hoc Tests

Multiple Comparisons							
Tukey HSD							
Dependent Variable	(I) Condition_Final	(J) Condition_Final	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
The rap lyrics in the verse made luxury brands a key theme. - .	1	2	1.455*	.465	.007	.34	2.57
		3	1.948*	.471	<.001	.82	3.08
	2	1	-1.455*	.465	.007	-2.57	-.34
		3	.494	.471	.549	-.64	1.62
	3	1	-1.948*	.471	<.001	-3.08	-.82
		2	-.494	.471	.549	-1.62	.64
The rap lyrics referenced an item that appeared reasonably priced and accessible to most people. - .	1	2	2.09091*	.48982	<.001	.9147	3.2671
		3	1.99567*	.49562	<.001	.8056	3.1858
	2	1	-2.09091*	.48982	<.001	-3.2671	-.9147
		3	-.09524	.49562	.980	-1.2853	1.0949
	3	1	-1.99567*	.49562	<.001	-3.1858	-.8056
		2	.09524	.49562	.980	-1.0949	1.2853
The rap lyrics mentioned a brand that most people could afford. - .	1	2	1.86364*	.46464	<.001	.7479	2.9794
		3	1.42208*	.47014	.010	.2931	2.5510
	2	1	-1.86364*	.46464	<.001	-2.9794	-.7479
		3	-.44156	.47014	.618	-1.5705	.6874
	3	1	-1.42208*	.47014	.010	-2.5510	-.2931
		2	.44156	.47014	.618	-.6874	1.5705

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Nonparametric Correlations

Correlations					
			The rap lyrics referenced an item that appeared reasonably priced and accessible to most people. - .	The rap lyrics mentioned a brand that most people could afford. - .	The rap lyrics in the verse made luxury brands a key theme. - .
Spearman's rho	The rap lyrics referenced an item that appeared reasonably priced and accessible to most people. - .	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.667**	.329**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	<.001	.007
		N	65	65	65
	The rap lyrics mentioned a brand that most people could afford. - .	Correlation Coefficient	.667**	1.000	.353**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.	.004
		N	65	65	65
	The rap lyrics in the verse made luxury brands a key theme. - .	Correlation Coefficient	.329**	.353**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	.004	.
		N	65	65	65

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

► **Frequencies**

Main Experiment SPSS Outputs

Frequencies

		Statistics	
		What is your gender?	What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
N	Valid	189	189
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.54	3.65
Median		2.00	4.00
Percentiles	25	1.00	2.00
	50	2.00	4.00
	75	2.00	6.00

Frequency Table

		What is your gender?			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	91	48.1	48.1	48.1
	Female	93	49.2	49.2	97.4
	Non-binary	5	2.6	2.6	100.0
	Total	189	100.0	100.0	

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High school diploma (e.g., HAVO, VWO, MBO-4)	39	20.6	20.6	20.6
	2-year diploma (e.g., Associate degree, MBO)	16	8.5	8.5	29.1
	Professional bachelor's degree (HBO)	37	19.6	19.6	48.7
	Research bachelor's degree (WO)	31	16.4	16.4	65.1
	Professional master's degree (HBO Master)	14	7.4	7.4	72.5
	Research master's degree (WO Master)	50	26.5	26.5	98.9
	WO Doctor (PhD / Doctorate)	2	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	189	100.0	100.0	

Descriptives

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Duration (in seconds)	189	71.00	910.00	224.4762	112.75579
Valid N (listwise)	189				

Reliability

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	189	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	189	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.782	.784	6

Reliability

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	189	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	189	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.747	.767	3

Reliability

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	189	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	189	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.852	.861	16

Crosstabs

Case Processing Summary

	Valid		Cases Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
combined numeric condition * Manipulation_numeric	189	100.0%	0	0.0%	189	100.0%

combined numeric condition * Manipulation_numeric Crosstabulation

			Manipulation_numeric			Total
			1	2	3	
combined numeric condition	1	Count	52	8	7	67
		% within combined numeric condition	77.6%	11.9%	10.4%	100.0%
	2	Count	10	35	16	61
		% within combined numeric condition	16.4%	57.4%	26.2%	100.0%
	3	Count	9	26	26	61
		% within combined numeric condition	14.8%	42.6%	42.6%	100.0%
Total	Count	71	69	49	189	
	% within combined numeric condition	37.6%	36.5%	25.9%	100.0%	

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	76.063 ^a	4	<.001
Likelihood Ratio	77.377	4	<.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	47.068	1	<.001
N of Valid Cases	189		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 15.81.

Univariate Analysis of Variance

[DataSet1] /Users/riyadhshawan/Desktop/new spss/2nd Main Experiment (New).sav

Between-Subjects Factors

		N
combined numeric condition	1	67
	2	61
	3	61

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Desire for luxury average (scale)

combined numeric condition	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1	4.2587	1.14896	67
2	4.4863	.99457	61
3	4.3852	.84631	61
Total	4.3730	1.00826	189

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Desire for luxury average (scale)

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1.672 ^a	3	.557	.544	.653	.009
Intercept	661.662	1	661.662	646.130	<.001	.777
cntmean	.004	1	.004	.004	.951	.000
condnum	1.670	2	.835	.815	.444	.009
Error	189.447	185	1.024			
Total	3805.417	189				
Corrected Total	191.119	188				

a. R Squared = .009 (Adjusted R Squared = -.007)

Run MATRIX procedure:

***** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.2 *****

Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D. www.afhayes.com
Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

Model : 4
Y : luxmean
X : condnum
M : aspmean

Sample
Size: 189

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
aspmean

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.0466	.0022	.5274	.4078	1.0000	187.0000	.5239

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	5.2590	.1370	38.3798	.0000	4.9887	5.5293
condnum	-.0410	.0642	-.6386	.5239	-.1677	.0857

Standardized coefficients

coeff
condnum -.0466

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

luxmean

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.2535	.0643	.9615	6.3858	2.0000	186.0000	.0021

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2.4301	.5512	4.4083	.0000	1.3426	3.5176
condnum	.0799	.0868	.9203	.3586	-.0914	.2512
aspmean	.3448	.0987	3.4924	.0006	.1500	.5396

```

Standardized coefficients
  coeff
condnum .0653
aspmean .2480

***** TOTAL EFFECT MODEL *****
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
  luxmean

Model Summary
  R      R-sq    MSE      F      df1      df2      p
.0538  .0029  1.0191  .5424  1.0000  187.0000  .4624

Model
  coeff      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant  4.2436  .1905  22.2789  .0000  3.8678  4.6193
condnum   .0658  .0893   .7364   .4624  -.1104  .2419

Standardized coefficients
  coeff
condnum .0538

***** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y *****

Total effect of X on Y
  Effect      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI      c'_cs
.0658      .0893   .7364   .4624  -.1104   .2419   .0538

Direct effect of X on Y
  Effect      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI      c'_cs
.0799      .0868   .9203   .3586  -.0914   .2512   .0653

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:
  Effect      BootSE      BootLLCI      BootULCI
aspmean  -.0141      .0225      -.0613      .0290

Completely standardized indirect effect(s) of X on Y:
  Effect      BootSE      BootLLCI      BootULCI
aspmean  -.0116      .0183      -.0495      .0238

***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:
  95.0000

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals:
  5000

----- END MATRIX -----

```

Appendix B

Luxury Desire Scale

Variables	Items	M	SE	λ	α
Desire for Uniqueness	I have a strong desire to express my individuality	5.36	0.04	0.72	0.82
	I have a strong desire to differentiate me from others	5.24	0.04	0.82	
	I have a strong desire to develop my personal uniqueness	5.37	0.04	0.79	
Desire for Material Resources	I have a strong desire to buy expensive things	4.55	0.05	0.82	0.85
	I have a strong desire to own luxurious things	4.69	0.05	0.84	
	I have a strong desire to possess valuable things	4.97	0.04	0.76	
Desire for Arousal	I have a strong desire to feel excitement	5.40	0.04	0.83	0.74
	I have a strong desire to seek an adrenaline rush	4.67	0.04	0.63	
	I have a strong desire to feel pleasure	5.63	0.04	0.68	
Desire for Status	I have a strong desire to get social recognition	4.91	0.03	0.80	0.85
	I have a strong desire to develop my social standing	4.79	0.03	0.88	
	I have a strong desire to join with successful others	5.12	0.03	0.76	
Social _{authentic}	Authentic luxuries would be a symbol of social status	5.23	0.03	0.61	0.85
	I would enjoy it if people knew I was using authentic luxuries	4.75	0.03	0.91	
	I would like to be seen using authentic luxuries	4.84	0.03	0.90	
Value _{authentic}	Authentic luxuries help me communicate my self-identity	4.82	0.02	0.87	0.93
	Authentic luxuries help me express myself	4.84	0.02	0.89	
	Authentic luxuries help me define myself	4.59	0.02	0.94	
Purchase _{authentic}	My intention to purchase authentic luxuries				
	Very unlikely (1)...Very likely (7)	4.94	0.03	0.89	0.92
	Impossible (1)...Possible (7)	5.10	0.03	0.86	
	Improbable (1)...Probable (7)	4.89	0.03	0.92	
Social _{counterfeit}	Luxuries would be a symbol of social status even if they are counterfeit	3.71	0.03	0.87	0.94
	I would enjoy it if people knew I was using luxuries even if they are counterfeit	3.70	0.03	0.92	
	I would like to be seen using luxuries even if they are counterfeit	3.75	0.03	0.91	
Value _{counterfeit}	Luxuries help me communicate my self-identity even if they are counterfeit	3.63	0.02	0.94	0.93
	Luxuries help me express myself even if they are counterfeit	3.72	0.02	0.93	
	Luxuries help me define myself even if they are counterfeit	3.68	0.02	0.92	
Purchase _{counterfeit}	My intention to purchase counterfeit luxuries				
	Very unlikely (1)...Very likely (7)	3.29	0.02	0.91	0.92
	Impossible (1)...Possible (7)	3.74	0.02	0.86	
	Improbable (1)...Probable (7)	3.43	0.02	0.92	

Meaning of Money Scale

Table 1. Factor loadings for the Money Ethic Scale

Item	Loading
Factor 1: Good	
1. Money is an important factor in the lives of all of us	0.68
2. Money is good	0.62
17. Money is important	0.60
46. I value money very highly	0.57
24. Money is valuable	0.52
36. Money does not grow on trees	0.52
27. Money can buy you luxuries	0.52
14. Money is attractive	0.49
45. I think that it is very important to save some money	0.45
Factor 2: Evil	
15. Money is the root of all evil	0.76
4. Money is evil	0.64
21. Money spent is money lost (wasted)	0.59
32. Money is shameful	0.58
19. Money is useless	0.57
37. A penny saved is a penny earned	0.40
Factor 3: Achievement	
5. Money represents one's achievement	0.74
9. Money is the most important thing (goal) in my life	0.61
8. Money is a symbol of success	0.58
3. Money can buy everything	0.52
Factor 4: Respect (self-esteem)	
20. Money makes people respect you in the community	0.71
31. Money is honorable	0.61
25. Money will help you express your competence and abilities	0.60
12. Money can bring you many friends	0.52
Factor 5: Budget	
47. I use my money very carefully	0.83
48. I budget my money very well	0.81
43. I pay my bills immediately in order to avoid interest or penalties	0.59
Factor 6: Freedom (power)	
11. Money gives you autonomy and freedom	0.63
7. Money in the bank is a sign of security	0.57
29. Money can give you the opportunity to be what you want to be	0.51
30. Money means power	0.49

N = 249.

Appendix C

Utilized Rap Verses

Captures of Stimuli Rap Verse and Lyric Video

Luxury Verse Video

Please listen to the following rap verse about a brand carefully.

My wrist got a
Swatch, and the time
is always mine.



Mid-range Verse Video

Please listen to the following rap verse about a brand carefully.

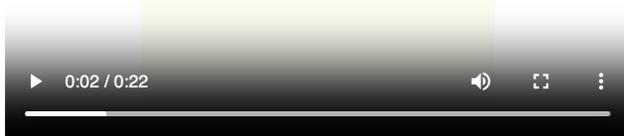
**My wrist got a
Swatch, and the time
is always mine.**



Affordable Verse Video

Please listen to the following rap verse about a brand carefully.

**My wrist got a Casio
watch, and the time
is always mine.**



10. Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis

Student Information

Name: Riyadh F. Alshawan

Student ID: 715218

Course Name: Master Thesis CM5000

Supervisor Name: Kees Smeets

Date: 03 Aug 2025

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools

I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:

- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
- ~~Writing improvements, including~~ grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding verification, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically [Name of the AI Tool(s) or Framework(s) Used], in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature: Riyadh F. Alshawan

Date of Signature: 11 Jun 2025

Extent of AI Usage

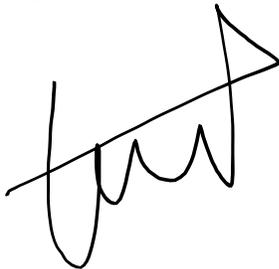
I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.

Ethical and Academic Integrity

I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature: Riyadh F. Alshawan



Date of Signature: 01 Aug 2025