Reframing Luxury: How the Diamond Industry Shifts Consumer Perception from Ethical Concerns to Status Symbolism

Student name: Milana Cerniha

Student number: 566146

Supervisor: Dr. Annet Toornstra

Master Media Studies - Media & Business

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication Erasmus University Rotterdam

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Abstract

Diamonds have traditionally been marketed as symbols of love, eternity, and prestige, mostly through emotionally charged marketing efforts by major companies such as De Beers. However, growing consumer awareness of ethical concerns about diamond sourcing, including issues of conflict, environmental degradation, and labour methods, has put further pressure on the industry to match emotional branding with sustainability. This thesis looks at how emotional and ethical appeals are strategically used in diamond industry advertising, and how these opposing messages impact customer perceptions, rationalisation, and purchase intentions. The study used a mixed methods approach, combining a qualitative thematic analysis of five recent De Beers advertisements with a quantitative survey of 235 consumers. The study uses the Theory of Planned behaviour, Bourdieu's Theory of Distinction, and symbolic interactionism to investigate the connection between emotional symbolism, ethical consciousness, and consumer behaviour.

Thematic analysis identified five central narratives: (1) Timeliness as Cultural and Emotional Imperative, where urgency and erotic humour in the "*Seize the Day*" (2023) campaign frame diamond gifting as an impulsive emotional ritual; (2) Becoming Worthy of Love, in which "*Worth the Wait*" (2024) repositions diamonds as markers of personal growth and emotional resilience; (3) Emotional Presence and Generational Continuity, where "*Forever Present*" (2024) extends diamond symbolism to self-love, friendship, and legacy; (4) Conservation as Corporate Legacy, highlighting environmental stewardship in "*The Diamond Route*" initiative through quantifiable claims; and (5) Building Ethics into the Brand Core, where "*Building Forever*" (2020–2023) institutionalises CSR via traceability, STEM equity, and biodiversity pledges.

The quantitative component used factor analysis and multiple regressions to test four hypotheses concerning the effects of emotional symbolism and ethical awareness on consumer attitudes and behaviour. Emotional symbolism significantly predicted consumers' willingness to overlook ethical concerns in emotionally salient scenarios, while ethical awareness strongly predicted ethical purchase intentions. The findings reveal how emotional branding can suppress ethical scrutiny through symbolic association, and how institutional CSR framing replaces individual ethical empowerment.

This research contributes to debates on ethical consumerism, emotional branding, and symbolic capital in luxury markets. It reveals how emotion can function as both a persuasive tool and a mechanism of ethical disengagement, with implications for marketing strategy and sustainability discourse in the diamond industry.

KEYWORDS: Sustainability in Luxury, CSR Communication, Consumer Perception, Luxury Branding, Diamond Industry

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1.Introduction

Diamonds have been a symbol of love and luxury since the 19th century. Their cultural meaning has been systematically built and sustained through the rise of capitalism; diamond companies have created common identifications of these carbon crystals as symbols of wealth, status, and love through decades of continuous advertising campaigns (Epstein, 1982). Diamond companies, particularly De Beers, meticulously constructed and maintained the cultural significance of diamonds by associating them with wealth, status, romance, and enduring emotional commitment through carefully curated advertising campaigns. (Epstein, 1982). From "*A Diamond is Forever"* (De Beers, 1947) to Marilyn Monroe's iconic line, *"These rocks don't lose their shape; diamonds are a girl's best friend*" (Monroe, 1953), the association between romance and diamonds has been well ingrained and consistently reinforced. Thus, consumers across the globe now perceive diamonds as psychologically and materially essential for their engagements, anniversaries, and other significant life events (Epstein, 1982). While other luxury jewellery brands such as Tiffany & Co. and Cartier significantly influence the diamond industry, De Beers' historical dominance and pioneering role in global diamond marketing make it a critical focus for studying consumer perceptions and marketing strategies within the diamond trade (Kapferer et al., 2014).

However, De Beers' marketing influence is not limited to classic campaigns like "*A Diamond Is Forever.*" Instead, the company's contemporary strategies heavily rely on emotional narratives that adapt to modern consumer values (Kapferer et al., 2014; Lim et al., 2021). For instance, recent campaigns emphasize personal storytelling, women's empowerment, and the celebration of individuality, broadening the concept of diamonds beyond mere symbols of romantic love (De Beers, 2020; Linde et al., 2022). For example, De Beers' "*For You, Forever*" initiative, which highlights the personalization of diamond jewellery and resonates with consumers seeking authenticity in an increasingly polarized world (De Beers, 2021). By foregrounding emotional resonance over basic product attributes, these campaigns reinforce the symbolic status of diamonds and sustain their appeal among evolving consumer expectations (Bain & Company, 2020).

Through carefully crafted advertising campaigns that emphasized emotional resonance over intrinsic value, diamonds were transformed into perceived necessities for major life milestones such as engagements, weddings, anniversaries, and personal celebrations. These campaigns extended beyond traditional gender roles and were later adapted to modern audiences, promoting diamonds as tokens of empowerment,

independence, and even self-love, particularly for women. The success of these efforts is evident in consumer behaviour: according to Bain & Company (2020), approximately 60–70% of consumers in the United States, China, and India believe that engagement rings should include diamonds. As more people become aware of the industry's darker aspects, like conflict diamonds and environmental harm, new technologies are beginning to challenge the traditional belief that "natural is best" (Lim et al., 2021). In particular, lab-grown diamonds have emerged as a promising option for ethically conscious consumers, since they are often marketed as conflict-free and more eco-friendly (Osburg et al., 2020). Despite shifting generational values, increasing consumer awareness of ethical and environmental issues, and the rise of synthetic alternatives, the global traditionally mined diamond jewellery market was still valued at approximately $84 billion in 2021 (Linde et al., 2022).

By blending tradition, luxury, and evolving social values, the diamond industry positions itself as both timeless and forward-thinking (Lim et al., 2021; Linde et al., 2022). Even though consumers are becoming more aware of the ethical and environmental problems linked to diamond mining, many still opt for diamonds due to their emotional and cultural meaning (Osburg et al., 2020). To understand how the industry maintains this strong allure, it's essential to examine the psychological factors that encourage consumers to overlook ethical doubts in favor of status, sentiment, and social pressures tied to diamond ownership (Bray et al., 2011).

1.2 The Ethical Paradox and Industry Criticism

Beneath the surface appeal of diamonds lies a web of complex and often controversial realities. The mining and trade of diamonds have been closely linked to a range of human rights abuses and environmental harms (Grant & Taylor, 2004). Most infamously, the term "*blood diamonds*" or "*conflict diamonds*" refers to gems mined in war zones and sold to finance armed conflict against governments often resulting in extreme violence, displacement, and suffering for local populations (Grant & Taylor, 2004).

The global awareness of such issues reached a peak during the late 1990s and early 2000s, prompting widespread public outcry and leading to the establishment of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) in 2003 (Grant & Taylor, 2004). This multilateral initiative sought to prevent conflict diamonds from entering mainstream markets by certifying the origins of rough diamonds. However, the effectiveness of the Kimberley Process has been heavily critiqued. Scholars and watchdog organizations have pointed out that the system lacks robust enforcement mechanisms, covers only a narrow definition of

conflict, and can be easily manipulated by illicit actors (Brandão & De Miranda, 2022). Beyond conflict financing, the diamond industry has been associated with exploitative labor practices, lack of fair wages, unsafe mining conditions, displacement of indigenous communities, and significant environmental degradation, including deforestation, water pollution, and biodiversity loss (Schulte et al.; Lynch et al., 2022). These associations with violence and systemic abuse have led to increasing ethical concerns among consumers, especially in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

As a result of these ethical and environmental concerns, the diamond industry has been pushed to increase transparency and accountability across its value chain (Lim et al., 2021). Diamond corporations have started to use eco-friendly and socially responsible branding practices. However, the degree to which such principles are meaningfully implemented varies widely across the industry (Moraes et al., 2017). With increasing demand for ethical and sustainable consumption, luxury brands have incorporated environmental and social responsibility into their marketing strategies, often through green advertising appeals that evoke positive emotional responses and position diamond ownership as a socially responsible act (Lim et al., 2021, p.288-289). However, implementation varies significantly, raising concerns of "greenwashing," wherein superficial claims of sustainability mask ongoing unethical practices (Moraes et al., 2017, p.110)

Younger generations, including Millennials and Gen Z, frequently tend to voice concerns about sustainability and ethics (Osburg et al., 2020). However, despite such awareness, consumers continue to purchase natural diamonds, often prioritizing emotional appeal, brand heritage, and symbolic meaning over ethical considerations. This paradox, wherein consumers express concern about unethical practices yet continue to support industries implicated in them, is central to understanding the modern diamond trade. (Schulte et al., 2020). In symbolic markets like luxury jewellery, emotional value and cultural status often supersede ethical reflection (Bray et al., 2011). This paradox highlights deeper social, psychological, and economic drivers that influence consumption. These developments have stimulated both academic research and public debate over whether consumers truly understand the ethical ramifications of diamond production or whether their perceptions are primarily driven by emotionally charged branding and carefully constructed luxury narratives.

Psychologically, this tension arises through cognitive dissonance: consumers feel torn between their ethical values and their desire for a culturally significant symbol (Schulte et al., 2020). To ease this discomfort, they may downplay industry abuses, focus on the diamond's

emotional meaning, or rely on certifications without critically examining them (Lim et al., 2021). Meanwhile, marketing narratives reinforce the emotional appeal of diamonds, offering consumers a sort of "moral cover" to purchase items that might otherwise conflict with their ethical beliefs (Bray et al., 2011). By uniting emotional branding, sustainability claims, and a rich history of romantic symbolism, the diamond industry has built a marketplace where many consumers choose the reassuring idea of "forever" over the disturbing facts of conflict and environmental harm (Osburg et al., 2020). Understanding this ethical paradox, especially the ways consumers psychologically navigate these contradictory values stands at the core of this study (Moraes et al., 2017).

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to explore how the diamond industry, particularly De Beers, has strategically shaped consumer perception through emotional branding, symbolic storytelling, and the selective use of ethical certifications. The study seeks to understand how these branding strategies contribute to a moral dissonance wherein ethically aware consumers justify the purchase of diamonds despite knowledge of the industry's problematic practices. To achieve this, the following research objectives are defined:

1. To analyze the emotional and symbolic narratives employed in diamond advertising, with a focus on De Beers' campaigns.
2. To examine consumer attitudes toward ethical concerns in the diamond industry.
3. To explore the psychological mechanisms, such as symbolic consumption and ethical dissonance that influence consumer decision-making in the luxury sector.

1.4 Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this study is:
How does the diamond industry strategically utilize emotional branding in contemporary advertising to influence consumer perceptions amid growing ethical awareness about diamond sourcing?

Sub-questions:

1. What emotional and symbolic narratives dominate recent diamond industry advertising, exemplified by De Beers' contemporary campaigns, and how do these narratives address or divert attention from ethical concerns?

2. How do consumers psychologically rationalize purchasing diamonds in light of ethical concerns such as conflict diamonds and environmental harm?
3. To what extent do consumers perceive sustainability certifications and ethical claims made by diamond brands as credible, and how do these claims influence their purchase decisions?

1.6 Justification and Relevance of the Study

This research is relevant for several reasons. First, it addresses a real and ongoing ethical dilemma within the luxury industry: the tension between consumer values and market behavior. While there has been substantial public discourse around the issues of blood diamonds and unethical sourcing, little academic work has systematically analyzed how marketing narratives enable consumers to overlook or reframe these concerns (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Additionally, while a lot of research has been conducted on luxury goods in general, there is relatively little focused specifically on diamonds as a niche. Second, this study offers insights into the mechanics of luxury branding and its power to shape cultural norms and personal rituals. As industries across sectors face increasing pressure to adopt sustainable and ethical practices, understanding how emotional branding can overshadow such concerns is critical for both marketers and policy makers. Third, by integrating macro-level industry analysis with micro-level consumer psychology, this research bridges gaps between marketing, sociology, and ethical consumption studies. It contributes to a deeper understanding of why consumer behavior often fails to reflect stated ethical preferences and what role corporations play in enabling this contradiction. Finally, as new technologies, such as lab-grown diamonds challenge the traditional narrative of the "natural" diamond, this research has timely implications for the future of the diamond industry and the evolving relationship between symbolism, ethics, and consumer choice (Osburg et al., 2022).

1.7 Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on the global diamond industry, with particular attention to marketing strategies employed by major companies and the symbolic meanings that consumers attach to diamonds. Although data is drawn from multiple international contexts, the primary emphasis is on Western markets, where the cultural association between diamonds and romantic commitment is most deeply entrenched. Limitations include potential biases in self-reported data on ethical consumption, as well as challenges in accessing proprietary corporate marketing materials. Additionally, consumer behavior and ethical

awareness can vary across cultural contexts, which are not exhaustively explored within this study. Nonetheless, the findings aim to contribute valuable insights into the dynamics between marketing, ethics, and consumer behavior in the luxury goods sector.

2. Theoretical Framework

The goal of this chapter is to explain why diamonds still sell as symbols of love and status even though many people now know about conflict mining, environmental harm, and labour abuse (Grant & Taylor, 2004). Many scholars call this tension an "ethical paradox," because admiration for an object survives alongside solid evidence of wrongdoing in its supply chain (Bray, Johns, & Kilburn, 2010). To study a paradox, researchers need a clear set of "glasses" or what Babbie calls a paradigm that directs attention to both what is happening and how it is happening (Babbie, 2020, p. 31). A paradigm matters because it tells us which stories from the field count as data and which remain background noise (Babbie, 2020, p. 34). This thesis adopts a structuration-informed, critical-realist paradigm, which can be explained as a view that treats industry structures and consumer choices as mutually shaping elements within the same causal loop ((Brandão & De Miranda, 2022). With this perspective, advertising campaigns and social rituals look like two ends of the same rope, constantly pulling each other tighter (Lynch et al., 2022).

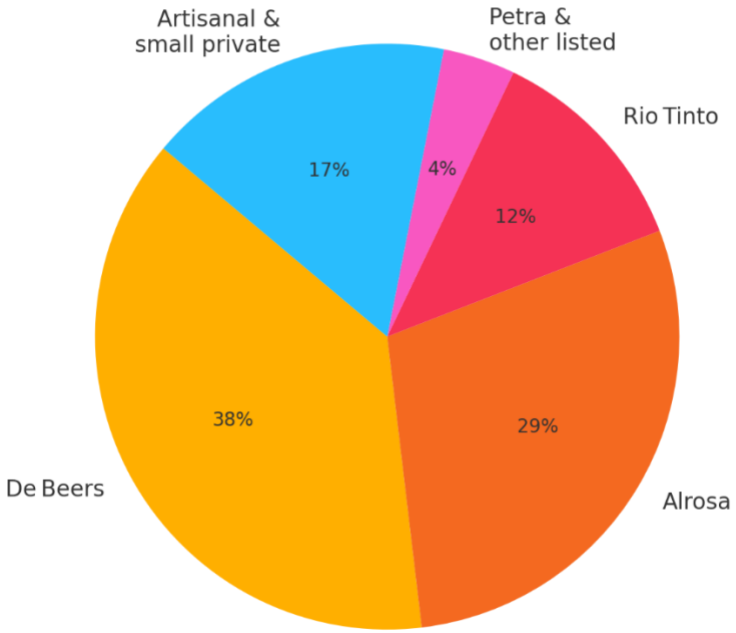
Because this thesis examines both big-picture forces and everyday choices, the chapter is organised around macro and micro theories, the two lenses on the same dance between industry and consumer (Kapferer et al., 2014). On the macro side, diamonds are more than luxury gifts; they form a shared project in which mining companies, governments, and NGOs all have stakes. That partnership is most visible in the Kimberley Process, where these unlikely allies sit at the same table to keep "conflict-free" claims alive (Haufler, 2009; Koyame, 2005). National treasuries add another twist: rough-diamond exports generate hard currency and tax revenue, giving states strong incentives to defend the trade even as activists highlight human-rights and environmental costs (Sadik-Zada, 2021). It is the same double edge we see with alcohol or tobacco products that boost public coffers yet carry social risks and public health. Macro theory, then, shows how branding, certification, and government interests knit together to present diamonds as rare, glamorous, and officially "safe."

Micro theories ask why, in everyday life, shoppers are happy to accept that package. They reveal how individual buyers interpret industry stories, weigh their own status goals, and ultimately decide whether to purchase diamond jewellery (Osburg et al., 2020). By combining the two tiers, this thesis avoids blaming only the industry or only the consumer; instead, it analyses the interaction that runs between them (Lim et al., 2021). That interaction keeps natural diamonds desirable even in the age of lab-grown stones and high-profile supply-chain scandals in traditional mining (Journal Terekam Jejak [JTJ], 2024).

The chapter unfolds in four main parts, each grounded in published theory. Part One introduces Pierre Bourdieu's idea of distinction, which states that people use luxury goods to mark social distance and display cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Part Two draws on luxury branding theory to show how companies convert raw minerals into emotional assets by telling stories of rarity and tradition (Kapferer et al., 2014). Part Three examines the Kimberley Process as a governance tool that promises ethical reassurance yet still falls short in practice (Schulte et al., 2020). Part Four shifts to the micro side with three lenses: the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the Myth of the Ethical Consumer, and Symbolic Interactionism together explain why consumers purchase diamonds even when they are aware of ethical issues (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). A short integrative section then shows how macro signals and micro motives weave together, setting up testable hypotheses for the study (Moraes et al., 2015).

Although this study looks at the whole diamond industry, De Beers naturally pops up again and again. The reason is simple: it is still the biggest player by a comfortable margin. The company's own Diamond Insight Report 2023 shows that De Beers sold roughly 38 percent of all rough diamonds by value in 2022, while its nearest rival, Alrosa, sat around 29 percent and every other miner shared the rest (De Beers Group, 2023, p. 6). Figure 1 visualises those shares. With that kind of influence, the slogans, grading language, and "conflict-free" claims De Beers promotes quickly become the yardstick for everyone else. So, while the thesis is not a single-company case study, it would be unrealistic to ignore the firm that still sets much of the tone for the entire niche.

Figure 1. Global Rough-Diamond Sales by Value, 2022*



2.2 Bourdieu's Theory of Distinction (Macro-Level)

Pierre Bourdieu argues that everyday consumption doubles as a social performance in which people display their place in the hierarchy through "tastes" shaped by economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Cultural capital, in his view, is not merely education or wealth but the learned ability to recognise and appreciate objects that signal refinement to one's peers (Bourdieu, 1984). Because luxury goods have high entry costs and coded aesthetics, they become perfect markers of distinction, separating those who "get it" from those who do not (Bray et al., 2010). Diamonds fit this model precisely, functioning less as practical adornments and more as social passports that grant acceptance into aspirational circles (Osburg et al., 2020).

Bourdieu's framework clarifies why a one carat solitaire can matter more for status than a larger semiprecious gem of equal brilliance: the diamond carries a shared cultural story that other stones lack, and thus it confers stronger symbolic capital on the wearer (Bourdieu, 1984). Marketers leverage this distinction effect by teaching consumers to read small cues, such as carat weight, colour, clarity much as connoisseurs learn wine terroirs, therefore turning technical details into class signals (Kapferer et al., 2014). As a result, knowing how to pronounce "VVS2" or "ideal cut" becomes itself a form of cultural capital, separating insiders from outsiders (Lim et al., 2021). The more complicated the code, the easier it is for

elites to stay ahead, because decoding luxury takes time, money, and social exposure (Brandão & De Miranda, 2022).

Historically, De Beers shaped the very rules of diamond consumption in two ways: first, by controlling the physical flow of stones, and second, by telling stories that framed those stones as rare, "forever" objects suitable for life's biggest rituals (engagements, anniversaries, heirloom gifts) (De Beers, n.d.). On the supply side, the company held ten private sales a year called "sights", where only a select group of hand-picked buyers could purchase rough diamonds. At each site, De Beers decided both the mix and the quantity of stones released. By deliberately limiting the number of large, top-quality diamonds offered, even when global demand was climbing, the company made sure those premium stones stayed scarce and therefore expensive for everyone else (Brilliant under Pressure: The Global Diamond Industry 2020–21, 2022). The result was a carefully managed sense of exclusivity: most consumers could admire big flawless diamonds in adverts, but only a wealthy few could actually own them, which reinforced the social cachet De Beers wanted the stones to carry. Every element of those campaigns echoed Bourdieu's principle that luxury goods act as "social differentiators," rewarding those who can decipher and afford their codes (Bourdieu, 1984, p.2-6).

Even after its formal monopoly era, De Beers' stylistic cues primed the rest of the industry: rival brands copied the formula of large solitaire rings, 4C's grading language (Cut, Color, Clarity, and Carat), and black-tie photo shoots, reinforcing a single worldwide script for "proper" diamond gifting (Kapferer et al., 2014). The script pushed consumers to link larger carats with higher devotion and finer cuts with superior taste, thereby tying purchasing behaviour to visible status hierarchies (Lim et al., 2021). In emerging markets, newly affluent buyers quickly adopted these cues because they offered a globally recognised badge of success, allowing them to leapfrog local status markers and join a perceived international elite (Journal Terekam Jejak [JTJ], 2024). Hence, distinction theory suits well: wherever disposable income grows, diamonds appear as fast, legible status signs that bridge old and new social orders (Osburg et al., 2020). Concrete advertising examples illustrate the point. De Beers' recent "Trilogy" ads present three stone rings as symbols of "past, present, future," subtly suggesting that a single stone is no longer enough for a truly discerning couple (De Beers, n.d.). The brand's "Only Natural Diamonds" platform invites consumers to "celebrate rarity," implying that lab-grown stones lack the cultural meaning that natural diamonds have (Brilliant under pressure, 2022). Meanwhile, high jewellery houses stage red-carpet events, where A-list celebrities flaunt multicarat diamonds, reinforcing a visible hierarchy that

trickles down to mainstream consumers, who then chase modest versions of the same look (Lynch et al., 2022). All these tactics draw directly on Bourdieu's idea that visual cues and insider knowledge work together to signal class position (Bourdieu, 1984).

Bourdieu's theory clarifies why many buyers value a diamond's exclusivity more than its ethical origins. A high-end stone is a visible status badge, because people instantly recognise it, whereas "ethical consumption" signals are still niche and often go unnoticed, so they do far less social work for the wearer (Bray et al., 2010). Even shoppers who care about conflict diamonds often go ahead and buy, telling themselves the violence is "somewhere else" and the prestige of showing a brilliant stone at an engagement party, or the office is right here, right now (Grant & Taylor, 2004). From the industry's side, the math is simple: as long as bigger or rarer stones win social points, brands will keep spotlighting special cuts, hefty carats, and exotic origins to fuel the story of scarcity and feed the cravings for status (Kapferer et al., 2014). This never-ending game of leapfrog, in which people follow elites who embrace more rarer stones, helps explain why market demand remains high even after films reveal harmful mining conditions (Osburg et al., 2020).

Equally important, distinction theory illuminates why campaigns that promise "ethical luxury" often struggle: if rarity and moral purity clash, many status-oriented consumers quietly side with rarity because it offers clearer social returns (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). In Bourdieu's terms, cultural capital gained from owning a headline worthy gem outweighs the symbolic capital of ethical virtue, which remains diffuse and sometimes suspect among peers (Lim et al., 2021). Understanding this trade-off keeps the research focus on the real battleground: not moral messaging versus immoral silence, but status gains versus status losses in a competitive social space (Brandão & De Miranda, 2022). Critics such as Gartman (1991) note that Bourdieu highlights social structure and says less about individual agency. That concern will be taken up in the micro-level section, where theories of consumer psychology highlight how people negotiate and sometimes resist status rules.

Luxury Branding Theory offers a helpful complement: while it keeps us at the macro level, it also shows how firms deliberately craft signals that consumers then use to express their own status choices. The next section therefore turns to Luxury Branding Theory to trace how marketers manufacture the status space that keeps diamonds at the top of the luxury pyramid (Kapferer et al., 2014).

2.3 Luxury Branding Theory (Macro-Level)

Luxury branding theory argues that high-end brands create value not from functional utility but from carefully crafted symbolic worlds that promise distinction, heritage, and emotional elevation (Kapferer et al., 2014). Within that worldview, diamonds occupy the apex of desirability because they have been wrapped in stories of rarity, eternity, and romantic destiny for more than a century (De Beers, n.d.). Luxury companies typically leverage five pillars, such as heritage, scarcity, craftsmanship, symbolism, and controlled distribution in order to keep prices high and demand aspirational (Brilliant under pressure: The Global Diamond Industry 2020–21, 2022). By emphasising heritage, companies convey to customers that a diamond is a part of a tradition of royal jewellery and timeless customs, transforming the stone into a wearable piece of history (Kapferer et al., 2014). Selective sourcing narratives that highlight how only a small percentage of mined rough diamonds fulfils high jewellery requirements serve to emphasise rarity and support expensive markups (Lynch et al., 2022). Craftsmanship is highlighted in advertising that zooms in on the cutter's artistry, signalling that value lies in human skill as much as in geological rarity (Lim et al., 2021). Symbolism becomes the emotional glue, connecting the physical object to milestones such as engagements, anniversaries, or personal victories (Osburg et al., 2020). Finally, controlled distribution, through flagship boutiques and invitation only high jewellery events creates a gatekeeping effect that magnifies perceived exclusivity (Husic & Cicic, 2009).

De Beers mastered this five-pillar model early, framing its stones as heirlooms that secure family legacies, an approach totally in line with luxury branding principles (De Beers, n.d.). The slogan *"A Diamond Is Forever"* condensed heritage and symbolism into four words, turning a geological fact, like diamonds' hardness into a metaphor for eternal commitment (Bray et al., 2010). Modern digital campaigns such as *"Only Natural Diamonds"* extend that narrative, presenting lab-grown stones as lacking the aura that centuries of romance have bestowed on natural gems (Journal Terekam Jejak [JTJ], 2024). Luxury branding theory explains why that message resonates: authenticity tales reinforce a hierarchy in which "real" rarity trumps accessible alternatives, protecting the premium (Kapferer et al., 2014). The theory also clarifies the role of certification stories like the Kimberley Process, which are folded into branding not merely to address ethics but to strengthen the sense that true luxury comes with documented provenance (Grant & Taylor, 2004).

Scarcity narratives thrive when supply is tightly managed, and De Beers historically used supply control to choreograph price and desire, a textbook luxury branding strategy (Brilliant under pressure, 2022). Even as its market share fell, the company kept promoting

limited-edition “collection” diamonds, borrowing tactics from haute couture to sustain value perceptions (Kapferer et al., 2014). Competitors followed suit, launching numbered highjewellery sets, thereby reinforcing the cycle of artificial rarity across the sector (Lim et al., 2021). Such tactics echo luxury branding’s edict that visibility must be balanced with inaccessibility; enough people must see the dream, but only a few should be able to buy it (Ward & Chiari, 2007). Social media now plays a paradoxical role: brands tease pieces on Instagram while reserving actual sales for private client appointments, extending reach without diluting exclusivity (Mettenheim & Wiedmann, 2021). Luxury branding theory labels this “dream management,” a process of staging desirability while policing ownership (Kapferer et al., 2014).

Craftsmanship messaging, another pillar, is evident when brands film artisans hand setting micro pavé diamonds, transforming labour cost into aesthetic virtue (Moraes et al., 2015). Such content draws on the luxury principle that visible human skill justifies premium pricing, even in a market where the raw material may originate from low wage mining contexts (Lynch et al., 2022). By celebrating the final steps of production while remaining silent about extraction, brands redirect attention from ethical hotspots to workshop romance (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013). Luxury branding theory calls this “selective storytelling,” which highlights brand enhancing chapters and omits reputational risks (Gibson & Seibold, 2014). That selectivity is further evident when De Beers showcases its inhouse designers sketching bespoke rings, casting itself as a Maison of haute artistry rather than an integrated mining giant (De Beers, n.d.). The creative atelier narrative aligns with consumers’ desire for meaningful goods, feeding the notion that each piece is infused with human passion and therefore transcends mass production (Lim et al., 2021).

Symbolism, the fourth pillar, converts diamonds into carriers of emotion by embedding them in rites of passage marketing (Osburg et al., 2020). Engagement campaigns depict surprise proposals in cinematic settings, encouraging viewers to map their own love stories onto the branded gem (Bray et al., 2010). Anniversary ads push the idea of “upgrade pathways,” suggesting that deepening commitment should be marked by bigger stones, thus merging emotional growth with escalating expenditure (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988, p.12-15). Luxury branding theory describes this as “laddering,” an upselling technique that moves consumers through progressively pricier tiers of the product line while maintaining emotional continuity (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988, p.12). Emotional resonance also protects brands when ethical scandals surface; consumers invested in the romance story may dismiss negative press as background noise unlikely to tarnish their personal symbolism (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001).

Controlled distribution, the fifth pillar, explains why high-end diamond houses avoid deep discounting or mass-market channels, even when under competitive pressure (Ward & Chiari, 2007). Store design features, like velvet trays, private viewing rooms, soft spoken sales staff enact a ritual that reminds visitors they are entering a rarefied realm (Kapferer et al., 2014). Purchasing rituals also encourage social media "reveal" posts that double as free advertising, reinforcing Bourdieu's idea that public display of luxury goods locks in social capital gains (Bourdieu, 1984). The interplay of store theatre and digital bragging rights cements diamonds as the definitive badge for milestone moments, satisfying both personal ego and peer recognition (Lim et al., 2021). Luxury branding theory frames such rituals as "experiential moats," barriers that cheaper or more ethical substitutes struggle to cross because they lack the surround sound of sensory and social cues (Gibson & Seibold, 2014).

2.4 Global Governance and the Kimberley Process (Macro-Level)

In an effort to stop the flow of rough diamonds that support armed conflict, the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) was introduced in 2003. It promised consumers a "clean" supply chain for a commodity that has historically been tainted by funding from civil wars (Grant & Taylor, 2004). Following a wave of investigations that showed diamond money was sponsoring wars in Sierra Leone, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, an unusual coalition took shape: governments, mining companies, jewellery associations, and, crucially, the very NGOs, that usually stand outside the system, sat down at the same table to design a fix for the problem (Hughes, 2006). That level of cooperation is rare; NGO's normally expose flaws and lobby from the outside, but the stakes were so high that everyone was urged to collaborate, and many did. For the industry, the resulting Kimberley Process Certification Scheme arrived just in time: brands feared a reputational free-fall and now had a clear, simple reassurance, such as "conflict-free" to offer customers who were growing visibly uneasy (Haufler, 2009). In less than two years, almost every major luxury jeweller displayed Kimberley Process language on websites and point of sale displays, signalling compliance and hoping to keep moral scrutiny at bay (Bruffaerts, 2015).

Despite its quick adoption, critics quickly identified weaknesses in the KPCS, which only classifies conflict diamonds as stones used to finance rebel movements, while neglecting systemic labour violations, state-sponsored violence, or environmental harm (Howard, 2016). Enforcement depends on member states self-reporting imports and exports, which is a vulnerability that allows illegal packages to pass past bribed customs officials or open

borders (Rush & Rozell, 2017). "Conflict free" labels occasionally went with tainted stones since non-governmental organisations like Global Witness pulled out of the program, arguing that certification documents may be falsified or laundered (Schulte et al., 2020). Kimberley's control was only as strong as the weakest participating nation, according to the UN, which even documented recurrent smuggling cases (Security Council, 2002).

Still, the industry highlights Kimberley membership whenever ethics hit the headlines, because the label provides an accessible talking point for frontline sales staff and public relations teams (Koyame, 2005). Schulte et al. (2020) suggest that once shoppers hear the words “certified conflict-free,” they often stop asking further questions; the label gives them just enough reassurance to quiet any unease about buying the stone. In other words, the certification tidies up their cognitive dissonance: it allows them to keep the diamond they desire while feeling they have acted responsibly. The catch is that the Kimberley tag covers only one narrow issue, such as rebel-war funding, whereas many buyers assume it guarantees far more, including decent labour conditions and minimal environmental harm. That mismatch between what the certificate actually means and what people think it means is the communication gap at the heart of the problem (Schulte et al., 2020). Luxury branding theory says this is no accident: brands embrace simple seals that compress complex supply chain realities into a single reassuring icon (Kapferer et al., 2014). The Kimberley stamp functions as a symbolic shield, allowing marketing campaigns to pivot back to love, eternity, and status once basic trust is restored (Lynch et al., 2022).

Due to the scheme's flaws, new levels of control have been established, including private blockchain platforms that promise mine-to-finger transparency and "fair trade" labelling administered by NGOs (Van Bockstael, 2018). As a next-generation solution to Kimberley's paper-based shortcomings, DeBeers, for example, piloted the Tracr blockchain to trace individual stones through cutting, polishing, and sale (Reuters, 2018). In addition to documenting origin, brands used these digital tools to strengthen exclusivity narratives. For instance, blockchain certifications appear high-tech and unique, which is consistent with luxury positioning and ethical assurance (Grant & Taylor, 2004). However, scholars highlight that since blockchain still relies on precise input at the mine, data integrity is vulnerable to modification prior to the application of the first digital tag (Hofmann et al., 2018).

NGOs have also pushed for a wider conflict definition, arguing that state violence, child labour, or forced evictions should invalidate “ethical” claims, but plenary meetings of Kimberley participants repeatedly stalled on reform, revealing political and commercial resistance (Winetroub, 2013). Meanwhile, countries with troubled diamond fields, such as

Zimbabwe's Marange region cycled in and out of partial bans, showing how the scheme struggles when geopolitical and national interests collide with human rights alarms (Nichols, 2011). These stops start sanctions feed consumer confusion: one month a retailer can tout Kimberley authentication, the next month headlines expose atrocities at a Kimberley approved mine (Smillie, 2013). Marketers resolve the tension by foregrounding personal symbolism, such as "forever" trumps "fragile governance", thereby shifting shopper attention back to romance (Kapferer et al., 2014).

For social scientists, the KPCS exemplifies how global governance can serve dual roles: it mitigates real harm by reducing overt rebel financing, yet it also supplies firms with marketable proof points that may exceed the scheme's actual protective power (Haufler, 2009). In Bourdieu's terms, the certificate adds a layer of symbolic capital, like knowledge of ethical compliance that consumers can display alongside the diamond's physical sparkle (Bourdieu, 1984). Brands capitalize on that symbolic capital by embedding "ethically sourced" tags into advertising copy, often in smaller text than the main emotional headline but large enough to satisfy quick moral scanning (Osburg et al., 2020). The result is a marketplace where many buyers feel absolved after seeing a single line of certification, even if underlying abuses persist beyond the narrow remit of rebel funding (Schulte et al., 2020).

From a macro theoretical viewpoint, the Kimberley Process shows how industry and state actors coproduce legitimacy: jewellers need certification to protect brand equity, and governments need private sector cooperation to police a transnational commodity (Grant & Taylor, 2004). This co-production creates a feedback loop where marketing claims and governance labels reinforce each other, cementing the social license of diamond mining while only partially addressing its externalities (Haufler, 2009). The loop explains why consumer surveys still report high trust in diamond sourcing despite periodic exposés, because official stamps and glossy ads arrive in tandem, presenting a united front of reassurance (Brilliant under pressure, 2022). Luxury branding theory interprets this as "ethicslite": enough credibility to keep the romance story intact, but not so much rigour that supply shrinks or costs explode (Kapferer et al., 2014, p.137). For this study, examining the Kimberley Process highlights how macro level governance tools feed directly into microlevel perceptions, acting as a silent partner in the emotional branding of diamonds (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). When buyers hear "certified," they often stop questioning, allowing marketing narratives to dominate their final decision (Schulte et al., 2021).

2.5 Theory of Planned Behaviour (Micro-level)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) posits that people act when three forces line up: their personal attitudes, the social rules they feel around them, and the control they believe they have over the choice (Ajzen, 1991). Attitude matters first; if someone links diamonds with romance, prestige, or self-worth, that positive feeling pushes them toward a purchase (Lim et al., 2021). Years of advertising have drilled those positive cues deep into public memory, so many buyers still see a solitaire as the "proper" proof of commitment (De Beers, n.d.). The second force is subjective norms, the quiet pressure we sense from family, peers, or culture to do what is expected (Osburg et al., 2020). Engagement etiquette and red-carpet imagery tell consumers that "real" love comes with a bright, natural diamond, not a lab-grown stand-in (Bray et al., 2010). Even though to the naked eye and even to most retail staff a lab-grown diamond looks identical to a mined one; only specialist lab equipment can tell them apart (Bain & Company, 2022). The third TPB factor, perceived behavioural control, is about practical feasibility, such as whether a shopper can actually find a certified diamond that fits the budget. By contrast, the belief that a Kimberley-Process label makes the purchase ethically "safe" shapes the attitude component, reinforcing favourable feelings toward buying the stone (Grant & Taylor, 2004)

TPB explains why knowledge of conflict mining does not always stop the sale: buyers balance that concern against strong positive attitudes and very public social scripts (Schulte et al., 2020). If the shop assistant adds "This one is Kimberley certified," perceived control rises, and hesitation drops (Haufler, 2009). Luxury branding piles on by highlighting upgrade paths, like larger stones for milestone anniversaries, so attitudes stay warm even after the first ring is bought (Kapferer et al., 2014). Social media amplifies norms: proposal videos with big diamonds go viral, telling observers what counts as romantic success (Journal Terekam Jejak [JTJ], 2024).

Attitudes, in TPB terms, are shaped early by repetition; a teenager who sees magazine spreads of glittering rings may already link diamonds with "life goals" before dating starts (Lim et al., 2021). Brands nurture that link by framing stones as personal achievements or self-love gifts, keeping the attitude positive for buyers who are single or postponing marriage (Osburg et al., 2020). Perceived control, meanwhile, is boosted by payment plans and lower-priced colour-grade ranges, signalling "anyone can join the diamond story" (Brilliant under pressure: The Global Diamond Industry 2020–21, 2022). Paradoxically, affordability campaigns widen the consumer base without eroding the elite image because high-end lines still headline the advertising (Lynch et al., 2022).

Subjective norms cut deeper than mere fashion; in many cultures the diamond ring has become a public sign that a relationship is serious, so skipping it can feel like breaking an unspoken code (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Couples who worry about sustainability often settle the debate by buying smaller stones rather than abandoning diamonds, because that compromise satisfies the social signal while easing cost and conscience (Bray et al., 2010). TPB predicts this middle path: if social pressure is intense and control feels high enough, because the small, certified stones are easy to find, behaviour will follow the norm even if attitudes are mixed (Ajzen, 1991).

The model also clarifies regional differences. In China and India, rapid income growth and peer comparison have inflated the "acceptable" carat size, illustrating how shifting norms can turbo-charge demand (Osburg et al., 2020). In Western Europe, where green values spread quicker, perceived control now includes checking blockchain provenance apps before buying, a new layer of reassurance brands happily provide (Hofmann et al., 2018). Such digital tools raise control perceptions without altering the underlying positive attitudes or norms, so TPB still holds (Grant & Taylor, 2004).

TPB starts with three determinants of behaviour: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, then shows how these forces push and pull consumers at the moment of choice (Ajzen, 1991). Crucially, the framework also gives us a first look at cognitive dissonance: when a shopper's attitude sours after hearing about mine abuses, two buffers remain, such as norms (partner still expects a ring) and control (Kimberley or blockchain labels promise "safe" stones). Working together, those two determinants can tilt the overall intention back toward purchase (Schulte et al., 2020). Luxury ads actively exploit this balance by adding emotional "rewards," such as images of beaming partners, to re-energise the positive-attitude side of the scale (Kapferer et al., 2014). The result is an intention strong enough to override lingering doubt, exactly as TPB predicts when two determinants (norms and control) outweigh the third (attitude) (Ajzen, 1991).

2.6 The Myth of the Ethical Consumer (Micro-Level)

Carrigan and Attalla (2001) showed that many shoppers talk passionately about fair labour or green sourcing yet default to familiar brands the moment price, convenience, or social ritual gets in the way. Later studies on ethical luxury reached the same conclusion: stated values often vanish at the checkout counter (Bray, Johns, & Kilburn, 2010). Scholars call this gap the "myth of the ethical consumer," because the market share of fully ethical options rarely matches opinion-poll enthusiasm (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001, p.560). Emotional

branding helps widen that gap by framing high-status goods, like diamonds, designer bags, sports cars as markers of success, thereby pushing moral qualifiers into the background (Kapferer et al., 2014).

Industry data confirm the pattern: Bain reports that global diamond jewellery sales rebounded to USD 84 billion in 2021, even though surveys in the same year showed record awareness of conflict-mining stories (Brilliant under pressure: The Global Diamond Industry 2020–21, 2022). The convenience factor is clear: mainstream jewellers' stock natural stones in every mall, while lab-grown or Fairtrade gems require online research or specialist retailers, raising the cost of acting ethically (Lynch et al., 2022). Price widens the gap too; a G-colour, VS-clarity lab diamond can cost 40 percent less than its mined twin, yet many buyers still pay more for "natural," proving that status cues trump thrift and ethics combined (Lim, Youn, & Eom, 2021).

In many countries, a diamond engagement ring is no longer just tradition; it is the publicly expected proof of commitment, so skipping it can spark social doubt about the relationship (Bray et al., 2010). Even couples who know about Sierra Leone's or Zimbabwe's mines often decide the moment "won't feel the same" without a glittering natural stone, illustrating how social pressure overrides ethical reasoning (Grant & Taylor, 2004). Family voices matter, too: parents or in-laws may insist that a mined diamond shows the groom is "serious," adding elder-generation norms to peer pressure (Osburg et al., 2020). Carrigan and Attalla (2001) argued that such social cues form a hidden cost for acting ethically, because defying ritual risks ridicule or disappointment.

De Beers' current "*When Only Forever Will Do*" ads feature sweeping violin music and slow-motion proposals, broadcasting a cinematic standard that lab-grown brands struggle to match (De Beers, n.d.). Neuroscience research shows that people under emotional arousal rely on quick, feeling-based decisions, sidelining abstract concerns such as supply-chain audits (Kapferer et al., 2014). Because diamond ads are engineered to trigger hope, nostalgia, and joy in less than 30 seconds, they blunt the cognitive space needed to weigh ethical trade-offs (Lim et al., 2021).

Sales staff often lead with Kimberley assurance statements, "These are all conflict-free," satisfying the shopper's surface worry before pivoting to romance language, "Picture her face when she sees this" that seals the sale (Haufler, 2009). Schulte et al. (2020) note that quick reassurance plus strong emotion closes the ethical-intention gap far more effectively than detailed supply-chain data. The myth is visible in statistical difference. A 2020 Nielsen poll found 73 percent of respondents "prefer to buy sustainable products," yet Bain's data

show that lab diamonds hold under 5 percent share of global bridal rings (Brilliant under pressure, 2022). The same year, an academic field test placed ethically certified and standard diamonds side by side; the "conflict-free" stones carried a 15 % surcharge (about $225 extra on a $1,500 gem), yet although most shoppers voiced concern for mining communities, only 14 % paid the ethics markup (Schulte et al., 2020). Carrigan and Attalla (2001) predicted exactly such slippage, arguing that moral self-image is often maintained through "talk" rather than costly action.

2.7 Symbolic Interactionism & Emotional Branding (Micro Level)

Symbolic interactionism proposes that objects only become significant once people agree on shared meanings through everyday talk, media images, and cultural rituals (Bray, Johns, & Kilburn, 2010). Bourdieu (1984) later expanded this idea by arguing that social groups fight to impose their preferred meanings, turning mundane items into markers of taste and status. Diamonds illustrate the process clearly: what begins as compressed carbon gains the label "forever" through countless engagements, Hollywood scenes, and family stories, embedding romance into the stone's very identity (De Beers, n.d.). Because meaning is created in conversation, even overheard comments like "She has a real diamond" reinforce the gem's symbolic power, renewing the social script for the next listener (Osburg et al., 2020).

Recognizing how our minds work can help explain why emotional branding is so powerful in luxury marketing. According to Tversky and Kahneman's dual-system theory, we rely on a fast, automatic "System 1" to make quick judgments, reserving the slower, more deliberate "System 2" for complex decisions (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Luxury advertisers knowingly design their campaigns to speak directly to System 1 by evoking romance, pride, or a sense of empowerment, so that by the time we engage our critical faculties, the emotional connection has already tilted us toward saying "yes" (Kapferer et al., 2014). In practical terms, this means consumers often need a conscious reminder to pause, reflect, and weigh the ethical or rational aspects of a purchase rather than simply following an immediate emotional impulse. Marketers know that once a product carries an emotional charge, facts about its raw material or extraction cost lose attention share (Lim et al., 2021). De Beers' current "*For You, Forever*" campaign is a textbook case: short films show real couples laughing over old photos before the ring reveal, anchoring the diamond to nostalgia and personal storytelling (De Beers, n.d.). The campaign website invites visitors to "create

your forever," encouraging self-made narratives that weave the brand's language into private memories (Brilliant under pressure: The Global Diamond Industry 2020–21, 2022).

Symbolic interactionism predicts that once a community adopts a symbol, displaying it publicly reaffirms both the meaning and group membership (Bourdieu, 1984). Proposal videos posted on Instagram receive congratulatory comments that mention the stone, for example "*Love that sparkle*!" campaign signalling that friends share the symbol's value and cementing its social legitimacy (Journal Terekam Jejak [JTJ], 2024). Emotional branding amplifies these reactions by supplying hashtags like *#OnlyNaturalDiamonds*, nudging users to repeat brand language in their own feeds (Lim et al., 2021). Each repost or heart icon acts as micro validation that the diamond equals love, keeping the symbol alive even for followers who do not buy yet (Osburg et al., 2020).

The meaning of diamonds shifts with social trends, and brands adapt swiftly. In the 1990s, ads featuring independent women buying diamonds "for me" reframed the gem as empowerment, not just romance (Bray et al., 2010). During the 2008 recession, heritage spots showed multigenerational families passing down heirloom rings, recasting the purchase as responsible long-term value rather than lavish spending (Kapferer et al., 2014). Today's sustainability conversation prompts De Beers to highlight its "*Building Forever*" social impact pledges, adding a moral layer so buyers can feel proud, not conflicted (Lynch et al., 2022). Symbolic interactionism notes that such renegotiations happen seamlessly because the community already trusts the diamond as a vessel for meaning; the core symbol stays put while the storylines pivot (Bourdieu, 1984).

Schulte et al. (2020) measured brain responses and discovered ethical warnings lost salience when viewers watched romantic diamond ads immediately afterward, supporting the idea that emotion eclipses information. Symbolic interactionism explains why: shared narratives anchor identity, so contradicting them threatens self-concept and social ties, prompting people to downplay troubling data (Bourdieu, 1984).

3. Research Design and Argumentation

Considering growing ethical consciousness, this chapter describes the research design, methodologies, and analytical techniques used to examine how the diamond industry, and De Beers in particular, utilise emotional branding to shape customer attitudes. A mixed methods approach was chosen because of the dual nature of the research question, examining both industry narratives and consumer opinions. This enabled the study to close the gap between micro-level perspectives (individual consumer attitudes and behaviours) and macro-level analyses (brand and industry communication). A more nuanced understanding of complex social events is made possible by the advantages of integrating the strengths of qualitative and quantitative approaches in mixed methods research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). While a quantitative survey captured how consumers perceive and react to these messages, a qualitative thematic analysis was utilised in this study to investigate how De Beers creates meaning in its most recent advertising campaigns. The overall goal of combining the creation of symbolic meaning with the public's acceptance, negotiation, or rejection of it is supported by this dual approach (Moraes et al., 2017).

Emotional branding storylines from recent De Beers campaigns are the main emphasis of the qualitative component. The ads were specifically chosen because they feature themes that are pertinent to this study, such as romance, authenticity, empowerment, and ethical consumption, and they mirror contemporary advertising strategies. Five campaigns in all were examined, in accordance with the standard recommendations of five to eight ads or visual texts for in-depth analysis (Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication, 2024), which was based on the methodological guidelines for qualitative content analysis in master's research. This number was selected to guarantee data richness while preserving coding and interpretation validity.

About 235 participants answered a structured online survey that was sent through Qualtrics as part of the quantitative component. Using a combination of multiple-choice and Likert-scale items, the survey assessed consumer views of diamonds, ethical awareness, and the influence of branding narratives. These variables were created using the theoretical framework's identified constructs, such as symbolic consumption (Bray, Johns, & Kilburn, 2011), emotional resonance (Kapferer et al., 2014), and cognitive dissonance (Schulte et al., 2020). This survey sheds light on how actual buyers balance the conflict between symbolic desire and ethical considerations while buying diamonds. By combining these two approaches, the study will investigate both production and reception: how De Beers uses symbolic and emotional branding to create meaning, as well as how customers interpret and

respond to these messages. This chapter goes on to describe the precise methodological choices made for every research strand, including procedures for sampling, data collection, operationalisation, and analysis.

3.1 Qualitative Method of Analysis

This study incorporates a qualitative content analysis of a few chosen advertising campaigns to supplement the quantitative survey and investigate the symbolic and narrative functioning of emotional branding tactics. This approach answers the following research question: *How does the diamond industry strategically utilize emotional branding in contemporary advertising to influence consumer perceptions amid growing ethical awareness about diamond sourcing?*

Because qualitative approaches enable the interpretation of cultural symbolism, emotional appeals, and implicit meanings, which are all crucial components of luxury marketing, and they are suitable for analysing branded content (Kapferer et al., 2014). This approach aims to comprehend the symbolic frameworks present in the messaging itself, specifically how diamonds are presented in connection to love, identity, and ethical consumption, as compared to measuring feelings.

3.1.2 Justification for Company Selection: Why De Beers?

De Beers was chosen as the subject of qualitative analysis because of its historical formative role in creating global diamond symbolism, not only because it is a well-known brand. Although Tiffany & Co., Graff and Cartier are clearly significant players in the high-end jewellery market, De Beers played a major role in shaping their messaging around diamonds. De Beers, the company that invented and popularised the slogan "*A Diamond is Forever,"* was the first to emotionally frame diamonds as representations of prosperity, love, and self-worth (De Beers, n.d.). Additionally, De Beers is not only a diamond jewellery retail company, but it is also a rough diamond mining corporation that used to control 80-85% of rough diamond distribution and was considered a monopoly (The symbolic stone, 2003). Its advertisements frequently lead the way in addressing ethical issues, such as the move towards lab-grown stones, blockchain traceability, and sustainability claims. De Beers is therefore a crucial example for comprehending how branding changes in response to shifting consumer values since it not only reflects the industry but also contributes to its definition (Linde et al., 2022; Schulte et al., 2020). On the other hand, companies such as Tiffany & Co. often function at the retail and design level, depending on narratives that De Beers helped create.

Despite being a symbol of wealth, Cartier is not central to discussions about the ethics of the diamond trade, as it is not a mining company but rather a luxury retailer. De Beers is therefore viewed as an archetype of industry-wide emotional and symbolic marketing strategies rather than a case study of a single company (Linde et al., 2022; Schulte et al., 2020).

3.1.3 Sampling and Data Collection

To conduct the analysis, five recent De Beers campaigns were purposefully selected using criterion-based sampling. Identifying a specific criterion of significance, articulating it, and conducting a systematic evaluation and analysis of examples that satisfy the criterion are all steps in the criterion sampling process (*Criterion Sampling | BetterEvaluation*, n.d.). Criterion sampling is used to find significant system flaws that need to be fixed.
Five campaigns were chosen for their thematic relevance in order to answer the question: *What emotional and symbolic narratives dominate recent diamond industry advertising, exemplified by De Beers' contemporary campaigns, and how do these narratives address or divert attention from ethical concerns?*
The final sample includes:

1. Seize the Day (2023)
2. Worth the Wait (2024)
3. Forever Present (2024)
4. The Diamond Route (sustainability initiative)
5. Building Forever

These campaigns were accessed from De Beers' official website and media releases, with supplementary materials gathered from brand channels on Instagram, YouTube, and digital publications. Each campaign was treated as a communication artefact containing textual, visual, and symbolic cues relevant for interpretative analysis.

3.1.4 Operationalisation and Coding Strategy

For the qualitative part, this study uses a thematic analysis that is structured using the open, axial, and selective coding methods influenced by grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). By adapting this method within an applied thematic analysis framework, the research facilitates interpretation by integrating sensitizing concepts from existing theories with inductive code development (Guest et al., 2019). The codebook is shown in Appendix K. Employing an abductive approach, this thesis allows themes to emerge from the data while

iteratively referencing theoretical frameworks to support a more comprehensive analysis (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Three significant stages formed the coding process:

Open coding: To separate the data into distinct concepts and labels, every campaign text line by line during the first cycle needs to be open coded. This required carefully reading the marketing material and campaign transcripts, then giving a code to any section that effectively expressed a concept or image. By using grounded theory methodologies, this paper avoided imposing predetermined groups and instead stayed attentive to anything that might be significant in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p.12). For instance, codes like "eternal commitment," "romantic ritual," and "promise as forever" were applied to sentences that emphasised the eternal nature of diamond-symbolized love in the "*Forever Present*" (2024) ad text. Terms like "ethical promise," "community empowerment," and "sustainable luxury" were first used to classify language indicating protecting the environment or community activities in the "*Building Forever*" sustainability reports. To "open up" the data and find as many relevant concepts as possible was the aim of open coding (Delve, 2022). Original interpretations, emerging patterns, and questions during this process were captured in reflective memos in Atlas.ti (e.g., marking everytime a campaign included the phrase "forever," what context it came in, and how it made the diamond a symbol of either love or everlasting responsibility). These notes made sure that early discoveries were kept and later assisted in tracking the development of the understanding (Delve, 2022).

Axial coding: The open codes were sorted into higher-order thematic groups in the second phase after being analysed for relationships. Axial coding required organising initial codes into more abstract categories that are connected to the research topics and theoretical framework by clustering them around axes of meaning (Guest et al., 2019). Codes were continuously compared from many campaigns in an effort to find recurring themes or narratives (Guest et al., 2019). A number of axial categories started to appear. For example, several open codes from advertising campaigns ("eternal commitment," "indestructible love," "once-in-a-lifetime gift") all belong to the broader category of "Diamonds as Eternal Symbols of Love." Codes such as "exclusivity," "luxury status," and "heirloom" were grouped under the theme of "Diamonds and Social Status." Similarly, codes from CSR-focused material ("ethical sourcing," "community development," "wildlife conservation") created a category called "Ethical and Sustainable Narratives." At this point, the analysis became more interpretive, asking how these categories relate to one another and to other notions. This thesis uses Atlas.ti (network view) to visualise relationships, such as connecting "Diamonds as Eternal Love" with "social ritual" and specific marketing slogans, to illustrate how the

campaigns promote the concept of timeless emotional value. Following that, the categories began to merge with theoretical frameworks: for example, the "Diamonds and Social Status" theme resonated with Bourdieu's notion of distinction (diamonds portrayed as markers of elite taste), whereas the "Ethical Narratives" theme could be examined through the lens of the theory of planned behaviour (addressing consumers' moral concerns to influence their intentions).

Selective coding: During the final coding process, the analysis was reduced down to a few fundamental themes that comprise the heart of De Beers' narrative strategy throughout all campaigns. Selective coding involved identifying recurring fundamental themes and relating them to all other sub-themes in a logical explanation (Guest et al., 2019). The axial categories were revised and chosen based on their relevance to the research aims, ensuring that each core theme was well-supported by several examples in the data.

Three overarching themes were identified: (a) "Forever" as Cultural Symbol referring to the use of "forever" and associated imagery to construct cultural meanings around eternal love and commitment; (b) "Luxury and Distinction" highlighting how diamonds are portrayed as symbols of status, prestige, and exclusivity; and (c) "Ethics and Responsibility in Branding" reflecting how ethical concerns are integrated into brand narratives and marketing strategies. To ensure saturation, the data was analysed again, and selective coding was performed, marking any remaining uncoded or recoded segments that clearly exhibited these fundamental themes. During selective coding, the codes were updated with definitions to ensure consistency and created integrative notes explaining how each key theme answered our study questions. At this point, the theoretical frameworks had been fully integrated, with each main theme interpreted through at least one theoretical lens to provide analytical depth.

3.2 Quantitative Method of Analysis

The research aims to investigate the ways in which emotional and ethical considerations influence consumer choice, especially in situations where ethical ambiguity and symbolic meaning coexist. Based on a research question "*How does the diamond industry strategically utilize emotional branding in contemporary advertising to influence consumer perceptions amid growing ethical awareness about diamond sourcing?"*, theoretical viewpoints from dual-process decision-making models, symbolic interactionism, and critical ethical consumption literature, the study puts forth four hypotheses that capture important psychological processes in diamond buying behaviour. These theories were founded on

previous empirical research as well as theoretical frameworks, and they were tested quantitatively utilising scenario-based outcome measures and factor-derived variables.

- Hypothesis 1 (H1): Respondents who assign greater importance to emotional factors, such as love, tradition, and social status will report a higher likelihood of purchasing diamond jewelry, even in the presence of ethical concerns. This hypothesis examines the extent to which emotional symbolism can override ethical dissonance in decision-making.
- Hypothesis 2 (H2): Ethical concerns, such as those related to conflict-free sourcing or environmental impact are expected to be negatively associated with purchase intention when not accompanied by strong emotional appeal. This hypothesis explores the potential suppressive effect of emotional symbolism on ethical preferences in purchase scenarios involving a trade-off between cost and certification.
- Hypothesis 3 (H3): Belief in the credibility of sustainability claims (e.g., "conflict-free", "traceable origin") will positively predict trust in the diamond industry and increase the likelihood of choosing ethically certified diamond products. This hypothesis evaluates the role of certification messaging and perceived legitimacy in promoting ethical consumption.
- Hypothesis 4 (H4): Consumers who place high value on emotional factors will be more likely to rationalize or downplay ethical concerns in their purchase decisions. This hypothesis addresses the cognitive mechanisms by which emotionally framed advertising may facilitate ethical disengagement or justification strategies.

3.2.2 Sample analysis

The survey used a non-probability purposive sampling technique to find respondents who had relevant diamond-consuming experience. People who had bought or considered buying diamond jewellery in the previous five years were specifically targeted because they may provide insight into real-world diamond decision-making. In addition to email outreach and social media, Qualtrics' online panel services were used to recruit participants. The Qualtrics platform guaranteed a participant pool that met the study's requirements and made eligibility screening possible (e.g., verifying recent diamond consideration). The final sample size comprised N = 235 participants. The survey questionary is provided in Appendix A

Participants in the sample were predominantly from Western nations, such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Germany, where diamond consumption is well-established and integrated in the local culture. With 33.2% of the population aged 18–24,

38.7% aged 25–34, and 14.5% aged 35–44, the age distribution leaned towards younger to middle-aged individuals. Only 6.1% of the population was 45 years of age or older. A demographic that is especially particularly relevant to diamond purchases like engagements, marriages, and gift-giving customs is represented by that focus in early adulthood.
The gender distribution of the responses was 36.9% male and 60.4% female, with 0.9% preferring not to reveal their gender and 1.8% identifying as third or non-binary. This combination covers a variety of views relevant to emotional and ethical consumption, providing insightful information from both the main buyers (usually males) and wearers (usually women) of diamond jewellery.

Furthermore, the participants had a decent level of education. With 50.7% of the sample having a bachelor's degree, 35.0% having a master's degree, and 2.8% having a doctorate, more than 85% had earned a bachelor's degree or above. The percentage of participants with less than a bachelor's degree was just 11.5%. This is consistent with findings in the literature on consumer ethics and points to a sample that is probably more conscious of the symbolic and ethical aspects of consuming than the ordinary person.
Non-consent about eligibility to participate in the survey resulted in missing data for about 7.7% of participants. The further analysis did not take these responders into account. N = 217 is the total number of participants in the quantitative analysis.
Overall, the sample reflects a highly educated, predominantly young and female, Western consumer population, which is well-aligned with the demographics of global diamond consumption markets but somewhat limited in representativeness for older, less educated, or non-Western groups. These limitations are further acknowledged in the relevant section. The frequencies sample analysis results are provided in Appendix B

3.2.3 Survey Design and Operationalization of Constructs

A systematic online survey was created using Qualtrics to operationalise important topics discovered in the literature. The survey instrument included closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items that transform abstract concepts into quantitative variables. Awareness of ethical issues is the construct that indicates the participant's understanding of or concern about difficulties in the diamond supply chain (for example, conflict or "blood" diamonds, labour exploitation, and environmental damage) (Schulte et al., 2020). Items were adapted from ethical consumerism literature (e.g., Schulte et al., 2020) and tailored to the content. For instance, respondents agreed with items such as "I am familiar with the term 'conflict diamonds' and its implications" and "I consider labour and environmental practices when

choosing a diamond." Higher Likert ratings indicate more ethical consciousness. These products were inspired by research that revealed that many consumers are only vaguely aware of business exploitation, emphasising the importance of assessing knowledge gaps (*The symbolic stone, 2003*).

To assess trust in industry protections and in certification schemes, the study asked participants about their confidence in diamond certification and ethical claims. One question asked, "How confident are you in diamond jewellery brands' claims about sustainability and ethical sourcing?" on a 5-point scale from "no confidence" to "high confidence." Another item mentioned the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS), a well-known effort that certifies diamonds as conflict-free, by asking participants if they believe a "Kimberley Process" certificate indicates that a diamond is ethically sourced. These items were guided by literature highlighting the limitations and critiques of the KPCS, which may damage customer trust (Schulte at el., 2020). Their findings show that the KPCS title is more of a psychological shortcut, providing emotional relief while discouraging deeper ethical scrutiny. Although the study does not include typical measures of reliability or validity found in quantitative research, its methodological strength is the thematic consistency and triangulated insights gained from interviews with industry professionals. This gives the study interpretative validity by demonstrating how certification methods influence customer attitudes through trust signals rather than total ethical transparency. Citing sources such as Winetroub (2013) and Howard (2016), this research acknowledges that the Kimberley Process's limited reach leaves some ethical issues unresolved, therefore consumer trust in such initiatives is a vital component to consider.

Diamonds are well-known for their emotional and symbolic value. Building on previous consumer culture research (Falls, 2014; Holyfield et al., 2003), this paper operationalised this construct with measures that assess the personal significance and feelings associated with diamonds. For example, participants agreed with the lines "Diamonds hold personal symbolic meaning for me (e.g., love, commitment, tradition)" and "Giving a diamond to someone is a special expression of love." Another item explored the tension between emotion and ethics: "I am willing to overlook ethical concerns if a diamond has emotional or symbolic significance." These measurements assess the extent to which emotional symbolism may overcome moral considerations (*The symbolic stone, 2003*). All of these items used a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Higher scores indicate a greater emotional or symbolic relationship to diamonds. By basing numerous statements on well-established cultural narratives (for example, "A diamond is forever"

marketing), the survey draws upon the emotional branding that drives customer preferences (*The symbolic stone, 2003*).

Using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), the survey evaluated consumers' perceived control over ethical outcomes as well as the impact of branding on their decisions. Perceived behavioural control (PBC) was measured using questions such "How much impact do you believe your individual diamond purchase has on broader ethical sourcing practices?" (ranked somewhere from "no impact" right up to "very significant impact") or "I feel I can make a difference by choosing ethically sourced diamonds." These statements assess the participant's sense of agency or effectiveness in making ethical decisions, a component of PBC that can influence intentions to act (Ajzen, 1991). Brand influence was assessed using statements such as "Brand reputation strongly influences which diamond jewellery I purchase" and "I trust well-known diamond brands to be ethically sourced." Such concerns highlight the role of marketing and brand trust as external influences that may influence attitudes or perceived norms. The presence of branding is significant since the diamond industry has strongly branded narratives (De Beers and other businesses), and brand trust may overlap with perceived control. All items in this section had a Likert agreement scale, with the exception of the perceived impact question, which used an ordinal impact scale. Scale components were altered from existing TPB surveys and branding studies to include diamond-specific context (e.g., ethical source labels, brand promises) for clarity and relevance.

3.3 Reliability and Validity of the Research Design

This study takes a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative content analysis of De Beers' advertising campaigns with quantitative survey data to investigate how emotional branding and ethical messages impact customer perceptions and behaviour.
The validity and reliability of both methodological strands are critical to the rigour of the research. In qualitative research, reliability is defined as the consistency and transparency of interpretative techniques rather than replicability in the statistical sense (Golafshani, 2003).

According to Golafshani (2003), qualitative reliability is linked to methodological trustworthiness, namely how effectively the research process allows others to comprehend, follow, and potentially replicate the logic of interpretation. To this purpose, the qualitative component of the study adopts a structured, data-driven thematic analysis utilising Atlas.ti, which is based on the open, axial, and selective coding technique (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The research seeks to improve reliability and comparability with previous studies by defining

narrative patterns and rhetorical strategies, such as appeals to "forever," "real love," "self-gift," and "conflict-free" before reaching results (Moraes et al., 2017). In qualitative research, validity refers to the truthfulness and appropriateness of interpretations for the given setting (Golafshani, 2003). By emphasising topic saturation, closely examining campaign content, and consulting academic research on luxury branding and ethical consumption, this study's validity is strengthened. Qualitative research aims to shed light on circumstances that may appear “enigmatic or confusing” at first (p. 58), as Eisner (1991) points out, such as the coexistence of luxury with ethical concern in the diamond business.

The study's validity is further reinforced by the quantitative component, which uses statistical analysis and methodical data collecting. A survey was created using both novel materials specifically designed for the diamond business and well-established constructions in the literature on consumer ethics (e.g., Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Osburg et al., 2020). 150 respondents, mostly from Western populations, who had bought or considered buying diamond jewellery in the previous five years make up the sample. In order to test theories about emotional branding, ethical perception, and purchase intent, data were examined using SPSS, with a particular emphasis on descriptive statistics and regression analysis. Internal consistency checks and transparent operationalisation of important factors such as perceived trustworthiness of sustainability promises and psychological rationalisation for getting diamonds contribute to maintaining quantitative reliability. Survey conceptions are validated by connecting them with theoretical frameworks like the Theory of Planned Behaviour and the Myth of the Ethical Consumer.

Finally, combining the qualitative and quantitative strands improves the study's explanatory ability. The research attempts to provide a better understanding of the symbolic, ethical, and psychological components of diamond consumption by comparing how brand messages are generated in De Beers campaigns to how consumers interpret and respond to those messages in real-world purchase scenarios.

4. Results

4.1 Qualitative Thematic Analysis

4.1.1 Theme 1: Timeliness as Cultural and Emotional Imperative – Seize the Day (2023)

This campaign demonstrates how De Beers intentionally uses emotional branding to elevate diamonds from passive luxury objects to active, contemporary cultural statements. The most prominent motif is urgency, which is the concept that purchasing a diamond is more than simply a romantic gesture; it must be done right away. The message emphasises not just the diamond's symbol power, but also its timing: a diamond is depicted as the appropriate answer to an emotionally charged event. The return of the slogan *Seize the Day*, which came from De Beers' 1990s branding portfolio, represents a purposeful move from timeless romanticism to time-sensitive action. The campaign relies largely on emotionally charged one-liners like, "*Do you like it when she fakes it?*" and "*Make her scream, 'Yes, yes, yes.'"* These sentences intentionally combine erotic humour with the attraction of surprise gifting. Other phrases like "*Say goodbye to your silent nights"* and "*Nature's mic drop"* combine metaphor and exaggeration to indicate that giving a diamond will bring life, intimacy, and celebration into a relationship. These emotionally weighted sentences serve as affective signals. They skip cognitive thinking and instead provoke emotional feelings such as desire, joy, pride, and excitement. In doing so, the ad strongly matches with emotional branding tactics (Kapferer et al., 2014), which actively provoke emotions in order to develop deep brand connection rather than depending exclusively on product characteristics.

This emotional shortcut reinforces Tversky and Kahneman's (1974) idea of System 1 thinking, in which people make judgements swiftly and instinctively rather than using critical, deliberate decision-making. The message is clear: *"Don't overthink—act now."* According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), this campaign places a strong emphasis on the effect of subjective norms, such as what people perceive others expect of them. De Beers targets a wealthy audience while also reinforcing a cultural script by publishing these strong themes in elite newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *GQ*. Purchasing a diamond becomes anticipated, if not needed, during crucial times such as engagements, holidays, and anniversaries. The marketing conveys the impression that one must engage in this ritual in order to retain social membership, particularly among peers and love partners.

However, while the emotional story is clearly obvious, ethical issues are completely lacking. There is no discussion of the Kimberley Process, traceability, or laboratory-grown alternatives. The absence is unlikely to be an accident. Rather, it exemplifies a type of

selective framing in which the emotional dimension is exaggerated to overwhelm ethical consideration (Arango-Kure & Garz, 2025). As Carrigan and Attalla (2001) argue in their definition of the "myth of the ethical consumer," many customers may claim to be concerned about ethical concerns, but when confronted with emotionally compelling marketing, their actual conduct tends to prioritise affective appeal above moral consistency.

From a symbolic interactionist perspective (Blumer, 1969), the diamond in this ad becomes a shared cultural emblem rather than just a product. Giving a diamond shows care, achievement, and emotional engagement, which contributes to one's social identity. The diamond serves as a vehicle for creating and reinforcing meaning through social interactions. It is not only about love, but also about how love is interpreted in the society in which the campaign is situated. Meanwhile, Bourdieu's (1984) theory of distinction contributes to the understanding of the campaign's underlying social purpose. The diamond remains a symbol of taste, refinement, and exclusivity. Phrases like *"The real thing deserves the real thing"* emphasise that diamonds are more than just gorgeous; they are authentic. Authenticity becomes a hallmark of cultural capital, which is the symbolic status that comes with understanding what is socially acceptable and having the means to acquire it. De Beers tightens its control on ritualised consumer behaviour by linking this symbolic capital to a precise point in time. These aren't just presents; they're social acts that help people preserve and advance their positions in cultural hierarchies.

Finally, the *Seize the Day* (2023) campaign demonstrates how the diamond company utilises strategic emotional and symbolic storytelling to establish not only a product but also a societal norm. The campaign's impact stems from how it portrays diamond gifting as a crucial emotional requirement. Love, in this scenario, is not just lasting; it is also urgent. This subject is closely related to the research question; namely how emotional branding reshapes consumer perspective in the face of increased ethical awareness. Rather than tackling ethical issues front on, the advertising drives attention away from them completely, instead emphasising emotion, performance, and societal expectations. It illustrates how branding can silence ethics by just not opposing them, but by making them unimportant at the time of purchase.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Becoming Worthy of Love – Worth the Wait (2024)

The *Worth the Wait* (2024) campaign marks an important shift from the high-intensity urgency of Seize the Day. Rather than encouraging impulsive behaviour, it positions diamond purchases as the peak of a personal journey, like a symbolic reward for emotional strength

and progress. This campaign is based on a calmer, more introspective style of emotional branding. The phrase "*Love starts with self-worth*" implies that diamonds are more than just romantic gifts; they are proof of inner preparedness. In this story, the diamond is not merely a gift, but also a reflection of one's emotional maturity. The campaign's visual and narrative style follows young adults as they face symbolic self-improvement challenges. Lines like *"So we put in the work to grow more and shape into the people we want to be,"* and *"By being pressure-tested at every turn. By walking through the fire…"* symbolises the natural production of diamonds, highlighting the connection between geological change and personal growth. The metaphor has two purposes: first, to normalise the consumer's emotional experience; and second, provide the product with symbolic legitimacy (Kapferer et al., 2014). This supports the function of brand mythologising, as defined by Kapferer et al. (2014), a technique in which product meaning is expanded through metaphor and storytelling rather than features.

This campaign, using the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), tackles the factor of attitude. Unlike campaigns that depend heavily on external pressure, *Worth the Wait* (2024) contends that internal qualities, such as self-worth, resilience, and authenticity are the most essential foundations for action. In this setting, the decision to buy a diamond is portrayed as a personal affirmation: I have done the work, and this gesture demonstrates my emotional readiness. This matching of inner principles and external appearance strengthens purpose through psychological resonance. However, the campaign is far from apolitical. By emphasising personal progress and natural authenticity, it avoids external accountability.

Like *Seize the Day* (2023), *Worth the Wait* (2024) makes no mention of ethical sourcing, conflict-free certifications, or lab-grown alternatives. Instead, the word "natural" is often used as a moral stand-in, indicating ethical purity without providing evidence. This is consistent with what Carrigan and Attalla (2001) refer to as the myth of the ethical consumer, in which emotional and aesthetic values frequently dominate the ethical consideration. Consumers might claim to be concerned about sustainability, but when given with compelling emotional storylines, they are more likely to prioritise resonance over responsibility (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001). Here, emotional branding is not just persuasive but also performative. It enables De Beers to trigger ethical implications like authenticity, caring, and value without directly addressing the structural issues underlying diamond extraction. From a critical standpoint, this confirms Schulte et al. (2020) finding that ethical

narratives are frequently disconnected from corporate openness, instead depending on consumer opinion as a proxy for action.

Symbolically, the advertising is rich with interactionist meaning-making. Blumer (1969) and then Bourdieu (1984) suggest that objects obtain value through social interpretation. In *Worth the Wait* (2024), the diamond is transformed into a reflection of identity rather than just a luxury item. Phrases like *"The diamond you choose should match your journey, patience…and resilience"* emphasise that the diamond is more than just a rare stone, but also a reflection of the buyer. This strengthens symbolic interactionism's basic insight: meaning is derived from lived experience, social context, and internalised narratives.

The ad also uses social norms in more subtle ways than Seize the Day. While the tone is introspective, the statistical points mentioned that *"50% of Zillennials will get engaged in the next 12 months"*, which serves as norm-setting standards. This takes advantage of TPB's social pressure aspect by gently pushing the consumer: this is more than just your journey; it is your generation's milestone. Finally, the use of legacy storytelling, which references De Beers' long history of emotional marketing, ties the personal growth narrative to a larger societal history. The advertising encourages customers to perceive their personal progress as part of a greater cultural heritage, mirroring symbolic interactionism's central notion that meaning is not individual but socially placed.

4.1.3. Theme 3: Emotional Presence and Generational Continuity - Forever Present (2024)

The *Forever Present* (2024) campaign is an iconic case in De Beers' emotional branding approach. Moving beyond the romantic duet that has historically been essential to diamond advertising, this campaign expands its symbolic reach over a larger emotional spectrum, including self-love, friendship, familial relationships, and intergenerational continuity. This thematic extension addresses changing consumer ideals, in which identity and meaning are increasingly shaped by different, nonlinear kinds of interaction. The ad combines the famous phrase "*A Diamond Is Forever*" with a new mantra: "*Natural connections deserve natural diamonds.*" The phrase alone represents an overlapping strategy: reaffirming the brand's cultural past while also adapting it to a generation that values authenticity and emotional inclusion. Narratively, the campaign is told through a series of short, cinematic episodes. We see a woman give herself a diamond bracelet with the confident statement, "*Forever me, myself, and I.*" In another scene, two closest friends exchange gifts in front of a holiday tree, and a new mother is given jewellery by her spouse. A same-sex relationship and multigenerational families are also depicted, demonstrating the

brand's ambition to broaden its emotional register. These scenes together demonstrate emotional branding approaches, particularly emotional appeal and romantic narrative, while also expanding emotional representation beyond typical pairings.

The fundamental symbolic theme is one of emotional preservation. As stated in the slogan, "*Natural diamonds are a store of emotional value that enable precious memories to remain 'forever present,*'" the campaign promotes diamonds as emotional vessels rather than inert luxury products. This is strongly related to symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), in which things get meaning through social experience and shared cultural narratives. Here, the diamond is viewed as a memory keeper, which is a physical anchor for emotionally charged life events.

This symbolic anchoring supports Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital. De Beers portrays diamonds as signifiers of difference by investing in their legacy, emotion, and multigenerational relevance, and not just through wealth, but also through emotional literacy and social continuity. The incorporation of several gifting events also serves as examples of TPB's (Ajzen, 1991) social norms component. Gifting becomes a social script that applies to friends, family, and oneself as well as lovers. This contributes to diamonds' status as universally important symbols, anticipated throughout a variety of life stages and relationships.

Despite this increased inclusion, the advertising remains noticeably silent on problems of ethical sourcing. There are no mentions of conflict-free certification, traceability systems like Tracr, or the Kimberley Process. Instead, "natural diamonds" is frequently employed as a semantic shorthand indicating authenticity and worth. This replacement exemplifies CSR absence code, meaning the campaign exploits emotional closeness while avoiding corporate accountability (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). In doing so, it represents the long-standing contradiction indicated in the research question: how emotional branding may replace ethical concern by meeting affective demands. This selective narrative promotes the "myth of the ethical consumer", the idea that, while customers profess to value sustainability, their actions are frequently affected by emotional resonance and symbolic meaning (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Bray et al., 2011).

De Beers does not reject ethical problems in *Forever Present* (2024), rather, it drowns them out with emotional narrative. Significant presence of cultural capital indicates purposeful absence of ethical problems and allows buyers to feel good through emotion while avoiding the ethical challenges of diamond sourcing. Furthermore, the campaign uses heritage storytelling (SN_HeritageStorytelling) to maintain brand identity in the face of

cultural change. What separates *Forever Present* (2024) from previous campaigns is the shift from transactional to transgenerational marketing. It alters the diamond not as a purchase, but as a symbolic object, which is a gift that strengthens emotional relationships over time.

4.1.4 Theme 4: Conservation as Corporate Legacy – The Diamond Route (Sustainability Initiative)

The Diamond Route initiative differs significantly from De Beers' consumer-facing commercials, which include emotionally rich narratives. Unlike *Seize the Day* (2023) and *Forever Present* (2024), which focus mainly on emotional appeals to love, intimacy, and personal development, *The Diamond Route* takes a performative ethical stance. Rather than influencing customers with feeling, this project establishes De Beers' environmental legitimacy via concrete conservation initiatives and institutional durability. It is not a normal commercial, but rather a strategic identity effort.

The campaign revolves around a bold quantitative claim: "*For every acre mined, six are set aside for conservation.*" This form of terminology is consistent with CSR ethical framing, as it provides real, quantifiable proof of sustainability rather than abstract moral positions. Such a message seeks to move De Beers' ethical posture from compliance to leadership, linking the corporation with global environmental issues while reducing the reputational risks associated with the extractive sectors. The marketing also focuses heavily on heritage storytelling. By declaring that "*De Beers has been managing nature reserves for over 120 years,*" the corporation establishes a historical foundation for its environmental efforts.

This is more than just a public relations strategy; it intentionally integrates conservation into the company's institutional character, changing sustainability from a reactive responsibility to a legacy-driven philosophy. In doing so, the project adds symbolic depth, portraying De Beers not just as a business corporation, but also as a protector of natural heritage. This transformation, viewed through the viewpoint of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), represents an important reframing of the diamond's meaning. The diamond is promoted in this context as a metaphor for durability, protection, and intergenerational care, rather than a sign of romantic love or emotional fulfilment.

In this setting, De Beers creates a novel type of symbolic capital: ethical superiority. De Beers presents itself as part of a new class of ethical elites by claiming moral leadership in biodiversity conservation. This transition allows the organisation to retain its symbolic

significance even as customer expectations shift. Ethical consumerism emerges as a new point of differentiation, in which elites consume responsibility rather than rare items.

However, a deeper look exposes an intentional omission: there is no obvious channel for customer engagement in this sustainability story. Unlike *Building Forever* (2020-2023), which emphasises traceability technologies such as Tracr, *The Diamond Route* does not include methods for ethical consumer interaction. There are no personalised certificates, interactive platforms, or consumer incentives associated with these environmental initiatives. This absence undermines the TPB perceived control component (Ajzen, 1991). While customers may respect the idea, they are not given the authority to behave ethically through their purchases in a real or measurable way.

According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour, societal norms impact consumer intention even in the absence of direct control mechanisms (Ajzen, 1991). By demonstrating large-scale conservation and ecological stewardship, De Beers communicates to stakeholders, consumers, rivals, and policymakers that such commitments are not just desired, but also expected in the diamond business. This is consistent with TPB social pressure, which positions ethical leadership as a normative industrial benchmark. As a result, even if customers are not directly involved, they are encouraged to link environmental responsibility to brand reliability.

From a critical viewpoint, the ad demonstrates the complexity of emotional branding in an age of ethical challenges. While *The Diamond Route* lacks the expressive vocabulary of romantic connection, it nevertheless touches on affective registers, this time via curiosity, respect, and concern for environment. In this way, it reflects a more abstract emotional branding technique that appeals to collective responsibility and heritage, rather than individual enthusiasm. However, this emotional register is essentially elitist: only companies with the scale, money, and legacy of De Beers can legitimately claim such planetary guardianship. Importantly, the campaign relates to the key research question, which is about how emotional branding is used in the face of increased ethical awareness. *The Diamond Route* indicates that ethical narratives may serve as emotional tactics in and of themselves, rather than simply as compliance checklists. They inspire trust, admiration, and aspirational alignment, but they fall short of promoting ethical agency. In doing so, the initiative contributes to a larger brand mythology in which ecological virtue becomes a component of the luxury promise.

4.1.5 Theme 5: Building Forever (2020–2023) – Integrating Ethics into the Brand Core

Building Forever (2020–2023), of every campaign examined, demonstrates the most ambitious and systematic incorporation of social responsibility into De Beers' corporate identity. Unlike emotional, consumer-facing advertising that rely on romantic imagery and personal stories, *Building Forever (2020–2023)* takes a planned institutional approach, converting ethical purpose into organised, reportable results. This campaign shifts away from emotional branding as feeling and towards branding as moral infrastructure, an attempt to incorporate sustainability into the very fabric of the company's operations and image.

Building Forever (2020–2023) is founded on four strategic pillars: promoting ethical practices, protecting the natural world, collaborating with thriving communities, and accelerating equal opportunity. These are not abstract ideas, but concrete goals that are in line with global standards like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Each pillar contains tangible goals, such as biodiversity pledges and gender parity in STEM, indicating that the corporation is striving to quantify its moral imprint. This shift from emotional persuasion to institutional legitimacy does not mean abandoning branding entirely; rather, it redirects it. The launch of Tracr, a blockchain-based traceability tool, shows this progression. According to De Beers' (2023) sustainability report, "*Tracr enables participants to provide an immutable record of a natural diamond's journey from its source*." In 2023, more than two million diamonds had been registered on Tracr, and De Beers committed to recording the majority of its annual production on the platform by 2030 (Building Forever, 2023, p.3). De Beers converts ethical sourcing into a digitally mediated promise, supporting perceived behavioural control in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Consumers that care about provenance are no longer required to believe businesses; instead, they are given data-backed transparency, which lowers the psychological barrier to ethical purchasing.

De Beers promotes itself as the leader in ethical luxury by integrating sustainability into its operations and promoting it through high-level institutional discourse. For example, it is visible in phrases like "*We reached our target of engaging 5,000 women and girls in STEM… two years ahead of schedule*." , or "*We agreed to establish a flagship Diamonds for Development Fund in Botswana with an initial pledge of one billion Pula (~US $75 million).*", and "*We protect biodiversity by conserving six times the amount of land we mine.*" So, in this case corporation is no longer selling diamonds, but aspirational virtue. This marks a change in the realm of symbolic capital, with ethical leadership emerging as the new frontier of elite identity, reflecting trends in what some academics refer to as "conspicuous consumption of morality" (Moraes et al., 2017).

Importantly, this framework incorporates symbolic interactionism. The statement "*Natural diamonds are precious—to those who wear them and those who make their discovery possible*" contributes to the common narrative of value creation. It allows customers to engage not just in a beautiful piece, but also in a larger story that acknowledges the work, landscapes, and legacies associated with diamond extraction. The diamond is reframed in this context as a sign of global responsibility rather than a private gesture of devotion.

In *Building Forever*, De Beers cultivates structural societal pressure rather than immediately appealing to consumer emotions. By establishing itself as a standard-setter, through commitments such as biodiversity offsets, equity investing in Botswana, and STEM outreach, the corporation signals that ethical excellence is no longer optional but required. These cues are targeted not just at consumers, but also at governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and competitors, creating a sort of institutional peer pressure that promotes sectoral alignment (Ajzen, 1991; Schulte et al., 2020).

While the emotional tone is more subdued than in *Seize the Day* (2023) or *Forever Present* (2024), it remains just in a different key. Rather than romance, the emotional tone is one of legacy, responsibility, and trust. According to the report: "*Our mission is making life brilliant… where communities thrive and the environment is protected*." This statement of purpose frames the company as a moral actor, appealing to consumers' need not only to show affection, but also to make a meaningful contribution via their purchase decisions. Crucially, Building Forever explicitly answers your research question: *How does the diamond industry strategically utilize emotional branding to influence consumer perceptions amid growing ethical awareness?* This ad demonstrates that emotional branding may not necessarily appear emotive. It may also work in the language of measurements, transparency, and strategic vision, as long as they can convey moral credibility and aspirational congruence. Furthermore, the campaign challenges the "myth of the ethical consumer" (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001) by advocating system-level alternatives rather than depending exclusively on individual moral behaviour. De Beers is seeking to bridge the gap between attitude and conduct by improving traceability, incorporating CSR aims, and providing institutional validation, which is a gap that has long plagued ethical consumerism research (Bray et al., 2011) See also Appendix K for details on associations between codes and RQs.

4.2 Quantitative Method of Analysis

4.2.1 Factor analysis

To explore the underlying dimensions of survey items related to consumer attitudes toward emotional branding and ethical decision-making in the diamond industry, a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was conducted using direct oblimin rotation, with components extracted based on eigenvalues greater than 1.00. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .84, exceeding the recommended threshold of .60 (Kaiser, 1970), and indicating that the sample was suitable for factor analysis. In addition, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(136) = 1047.21$, $p < .001$), confirming that correlations between items were sufficiently strong to justify PCA (Bartlett, 1954).

The analysis extracted a three-factor solution based on eigenvalues greater than 1.00, collectively explaining 61.8% of the total variance in consumer attitudes. Items expressing consumer concerns about sustainability in purchasing decisions, ethical sourcing, and the impact of certification message were included in the first factor, *Ethical Awareness and Responsibility*, which explained 28.7% of the variation. Items that represented consumer's readiness to disregard or minimise ethical concerns in favour of emotional or symbolic value were included in the second component, *Ethical Rationalization*, which accounted for 19.2% of the variation. The third factor, *Emotional Symbolism and Status Orientation*, accounted for 13.9% of the variance and comprised items related to the symbolic, emotional, and social meanings attached to diamond jewellery, such as love, recognition, and tradition.
These three factors are meaningful and robust to be used as composite predictor variables and dependent variables in the subsequent multiple regression analyses to assess influence on ethical purchase intentions and rationalization behavior. To evaluate the internal consistency of each factor, Cronbach's alpha was calculated. The reliability of *Ethical Awareness and Responsibility* was acceptable ($\alpha = .79$), as well as *Emotional Symbolism and Status Orientation* also demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .76$). *Ethical Rationalization* also showed a good reliability ($\alpha = .70$), indicating acceptable consistency for research purposes (Nunnally, 1978). The results of factor analysis are presented in Appendix C. The reliability analysis is presented in Appendix D, E and Appendix F. Full factor loadings and reliability coefficients are presented in Table 1.

*Table 1. Factor loadings, explained variance and reliability of factors found (*N = 217*)*

Item	Ethical Awareness	Rationalization	Emotional symbolism

I sometimes feel conflicted about ethical concerns when buying diamonds.	.883		
I consider sustainability more when the diamond is intended for a gift or symbolic purpose.	.725		
I am more likely to choose a diamond if the seller clearly promotes sustainability and ethical sourcing.	.478	-.400	
Advertisements highlighting ethical and sustainable practices influence my decision to buy diamonds.	.455	-.385	
How much impact do you believe your individual diamond purchase has on broader ethical sourcing practices?	.439		
While ethical concerns matter to me, other factors such as emotional value or design often weight more in my diamond purchase decisions		.772	
I am willing to overlook ethical concerns if a diamond has emotional or symbolic significance.		.747	
Some concerns about the ethics of diamond sourcing are overstated.		.643	
If two diamonds cost the same, I am more likely to choose the one with sustainability certification.	.323	-.426	
Owning diamonds is a symbol of status and prestige that affects my purchasing decisions.			-.823
Wearing diamonds makes me feel socially recognised and admired, which affects my decision to purchase them.			-.797
Diamonds hold personal symbolic meaning for me (e.g., love, commitment, tradition)			-.642

I believe that diamonds with sustainability certifications (e.g., Kimberley Process) benefit the environment or society.		-.408	-.546
The investment value and long-term worth of diamonds influence my decision to buy them.			-.491
How confident are you in diamond jewellery brands' claims about sustainability and ethical sourcing?	.334		
R^2	24,83	19,53	7,45
Cronbach's α	0,77	0,7	0,73

In order to assess how ethical awareness and emotional branding affect consumer decision-making, three dependent variables were chosen to be used in the regression analysis. In order to ensure compliance with the hypotheses and the conceptual framework of the study, these variables were derived using a combination of theoretical reasoning and empirical evidence from the factor analysis. The third dependent variable was derived as a composite score based on the findings of the component analysis, while the other two were taken from particular single-item survey measures that were selected for their direct expression of theoretical concepts.

The first dependent variable measured the likelihood of purchasing a diamond despite ethical concerns, provided it held emotional significance. A dependent variable was defined using the survey question "*If a diamond ring has emotional significance for your partner, how likely are you to still purchase it even if you have concerns about its ethical sourcing?*" Although it was not part of the factor analysis, this item was based on symbolic interactionist theory and directly represents the construct that is analyzed in Hypothesis 1.

The second dependent variable represented the preference for ethical purchases in a situation involving an emotionally charged trade-off: "*You find two diamond rings you love: one is slightly more expensive but ethically certified, the other is cheaper but uncertified. How likely are you to choose the certified one?*" This item, also outside the factor analysis, is relevant to Hypotheses 2 and 3.

The third dependent variable, used for Hypothesis 4, was derived from the Ethical Rationalization factor identified through PCA. It combined three items relating to justifying or downplaying ethical concerns in emotionally driven purchase contexts. These items demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .70$), supporting their use as a single composite measure.

Higher values of each dependent variable indicated greater support for the underlying concept. This ensured consistency in interpreting regression outputs and aligned with recommended standards for quantitative reporting.

4.2.2 Multiple linear regression analysis

Multiple linear regression analyses were used to assess the assumptions put out regarding consumer decision-making in scenarios involving the ethical conflicted purchase of diamonds. The models evaluated how three predictors: trust in ethical certification, ethical awareness, and emotional symbolism affect three different behavioural outcomes that were obtained from survey items. The dependent variables were derived from individual or aggregated survey questions as specified in the methodology section, whereas all independent variables were component scores derived using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and taken as a mean value of survey results.

Hypothesis 1 (H1) predicted that emotional symbolism would positively influence consumer's willingness to purchase a diamond ring despite ethical concerns, if it held emotional significance for a partner. A simple linear regression verified this relationship, with the model reaching significance, $F(1, 215) = 13.28$, $p < .001$, and explaining 5.8% of the variance ($R^2 = .058$). Emotional symbolism significantly predicted purchase likelihood ($b = 0.241$, $t = 3.64$, $p < .001$), suggesting that stronger emotional associations increase the likelihood of overlooking ethical concerns in emotionally salient contexts. The results of the analysis are presented in Appendix G.

To test Hypothesis 2 (H2), a hierarchical regression was conducted. Emotional Symbolism was used for the analysis, followed by Ethical Awareness variables. Emotional Symbolism did not significantly predict ethical preference, $R^2 = .009$, $F(1, 215) = 1.52$, $p = .219$. When ethical awareness was added, the model improved significantly, $\Delta R^2 = .320$, $\Delta F(1, 214) = 102.2$, $p < .001$, bringing the total variance explained to 32.9% ($R^2 = .329$). Ethical awareness was a strong positive predictor ($\beta = .591$, $p < .001$), while emotional symbolism remained non-significant ($\beta = –.096$, $p = .101$). H2 is therefore only partially supported: ethical awareness improved prediction of ethical purchasing behavior, but

emotional symbolism did not suppress this effect. The results of the analysis are presented in Appendix I.

In order to test Hypothesis 3 (H3), a separate regression model of ethical awareness was tested. This model was also significant, $F(1, 215) = 101.17$, $p < .001$, with ethical awareness explaining 32.0% of the variance ($R^2 = .320$). The regression coefficient was significant and positive ($b = 0.566$, $t = 10.05$, $p < .001$), confirming that consumers with higher ethical awareness are substantially more likely to choose ethically certified options, even when more costly. The results of the analysis are presented in Appendix J.

Lastly, Hypothesis 4 predicted that emotional symbolism would lead to greater rationalization of ethically questionable purchases. The regression model was significant, $F(1, 215) = 35.77$, $p < .001$, accounting for 14.3% of the variance in rationalization scores ($R^2 = .143$). Emotional symbolism was a strong and significant positive predictor ($b = 0.378$, $t = 5.98$, $p < .001$), indicating that participants who valued emotional or symbolic aspects of diamonds were more inclined to justify disregarding ethical concerns. The results of the analysis are presented in Appendix N.

These results show that ethical awareness substantially predicts ethical behaviour when not overpowered by emotional motives, and that emotional symbolism plays a quantifiable role in ethical disengagement.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Emotional Value as a Buffer Against Ethical Tension

One of the core findings from this study is that emotional value serves not only as a stimulus for diamond purchases, but also as a psychological buffer, which is a mechanism for consumers to manage or avoid the ethical dilemmas that arise throughout the consuming process. This finding was consistent across both the qualitative and quantitative components of the study, and it is especially relevant in an era when ethical awareness of sourcing practices has become widespread but frequently fails to translate into ethical consumption behaviour (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Szmigin et al., 2004). According to the qualitative thematic analysis De Beers creates emotionally charged narratives that strategically emphasise love, spontaneity, memory, and symbolic permanence, while minimising or completely omitting discussions of sourcing ethics, traceability, or sustainability. This deliberate emotional strategy enables the business to frame diamond purchasing as culturally important and emotionally inevitable, particularly during socially coded life events like engagements, holidays, and maternity (Kapferer et al., 2014). In this environment, emotional appeal serves as a distraction mechanism, allowing consumers to avoid ethical thinking in favour of sentimental moments. This perspective is reinforced by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), notably in terms of subjective standards and perceived behavioural control. Social pressure manifests itself in marketing as subtle reinforcement rather than overt force: diamond gifting is portrayed as "what one does" when love is genuine or a milestone needs to be marked.

Emotional symbolism strongly predicts readiness for buying a diamond despite ethical concerns ($\beta = .241$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, the TPB's third component, attitudinal evaluation, is overridden not by ignorance, but by rationalisation mechanisms, as proven by survey data. Emotional importance was found to positively predict ethical rationalisation behaviour ($\beta = .378$, $p < .001$), such as downplaying concerns or reinterpreting them in favour of symbolic worth. This implies that for many consumers, emotional meaning provides moral justification for morally questionable decisions, particularly when those choices seem socially recognised or personally meaningful.

Bourdieu's (1984) theory of distinction sheds more light on this buffering role. In situations like diamond consumption, emotional worth is more than just private emotions; it is cultural capital. Purchasing a diamond is more than simply a romantic gesture; it is also an assertion of taste, elegance, and status. In this perspective, emotional branding may be

viewed as an elite moral currency, the one that redefines spending as meaningful and dignified, even when it avoids the ethical examination that other luxury categories face (Beckett & Nayak, 2008).

Similarly, symbolic interactionism provides a lens through which to interpret this act as identity performance (Goffman, 1959). Consumers are not simply purchasing an item; they are also assuming responsibilities as loving lovers, effective providers, and emotionally established people. Thus, the conflict between ethics and emotion is both cognitive and symbolic. Ethical tensions are absorbed or neutralised when emotional actions help to maintain one's social identity and strengthen group affiliation. In this view, emotional worth not only imbues diamonds with symbolic meaning, but also shields that meaning from moral scepticism.

5.1.2 Rationalisation as Identity Work

The study found that rationalisation plays a significant role in helping customers navigate ethical problems when purchasing diamonds, in addition to emotional motivation. Rather from being merely cognitive or passive, these rationalisations operate as active identity work, being strategic, sometimes unconscious, attempts to maintain a coherent sense of self in circumstances when actions and values may be in conflict (Festinger, 1957; Giddens, 1991).

The quantitative survey results show that emotional symbolism strongly predicts rationalisation behaviours ($\beta = .378$, $p < .001$). Participants who strongly supported diamonds' emotional or symbolic value were more likely to agree with statements like "*I am willing to overlook ethical concerns if a diamond has emotional or symbolic significance,*" and "*Some concerns about the ethics of diamond sourcing are overstated.*" These statements point to a pattern of cognitive and moral reframing, in which emotional reasons are utilised to minimise or reinterpret ethical difficulties. This type of rationalisation is more than simply convenient; it is a form of symbolic self-preservation.

Based on symbolic interactionism, customers participate in role-based performances that connect their purchase behaviour with societal expectations and personal identities (Blumer, 1969). A person who considers themselves as a caring spouse or emotionally sensitive person may justify an ethically problematic purchase not to deceive others, but to stay true to their own identity narrative (Gregory-Smith et al., 2013). In this environment, rationalisation functions as a self-consistent process, allowing customers to "be who they are" in a morally complicated marketplace (Goffman, 1959).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) provides more insight into how rationalisation interacts with psychological tension and perceived behavioural control. Consumers may recognise the need for ethical sourcing while also identifying a lack of possible alternatives, poor information, or social expectations that "override" their concerns. Rationalisation thus becomes a means of reducing this perceived dissonance, which is an internal struggle between wanting to do the "right" thing and feeling forced to do what is socially or emotionally required.

Qualitative data from the *Worth the Wait* (2023) and *Forever Present* (2024) ads demonstrate how De Beers leverages this relationship. By incorporating relevant narratives, such as self-worth, generational love, and everlasting memory into the symbolic significance of diamonds, the commercials effectively provide a moral justification for purchasing. The lack of ethical communication in these advertising is not unintentional; rather, it encourages customers to fill the moral gap with emotional reasoning. Emotional empowerment is therefore incorporated into a consuming logic that defines the act of purchase as individually and socially "right," regardless of ethical implications (Kapferer et al., 2014; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). According to Bourdieu (1984) and Holt (1998), rationalisation is a cultural activity that contributes to the luxury market's economics of distinction.

5.1.3 Implications for Ethical Branding and Consumer Trust

The Ethical Branding Paradox: Emotion Over Ethics

The findings of this study reveal a persistent structural disconnect in the luxury jewellery sector: while companies such as De Beers articulate strong ethical commitments through CSR initiatives, their emotionally charged consumer advertising frequently neglects, dilutes, or completely ignores ethical concerns. This generates an ethical branding dilemma, in which increased emotional resonance might undermine ethical examination (Thompson & Malaviya, 2013).

Campaigns such as *Seize the Day* (2023) and *Forever Present* (2024) highlight emotional symbolism through themes of love, memory, and heritage, but do not mention sustainability frameworks, traceability systems, or diamond origins. This silence is not an accident; it represents a marketing strategy that prioritises emotional immersion over critical thinking (Moraes et al., 2017). Such approaches may increase short-term brand connection, but they risk losing customer trust in the long run, particularly in markets that are becoming more transparent and accountable.

The Attitude-Behaviour Gap and Reputational Risk

This contradiction is notably evident in the "attitude-behaviour gap" (Carrington et al., 2014): customers express ethical concerns while prioritising emotionally significant purchases. This study's regression results show that emotional symbolism significantly predicts purchase intention in ethically challenging situations ($\beta = .241$, $p < .001$) and ethical rationalisation ($\beta = .378$, $p < .001$). In other words, emotional branding not only motivates behaviour, but also legitimises it after the fact, protecting the customer from moral discomfort.

This difference is more than simply a psychological contradiction; it also creates a genuine reputational danger. As Brunk (2012) points out, an ethical disconnect between brand promise and customer expectation damages brand authenticity. In businesses such as jewellery, where purchasing rationale is closely linked to personal identity and values, failing to express genuine ethical commitments may lead to dissatisfaction particularly among ethically sensitive populations (Hult et al., 2011).

Restoring Trust Through Traceability and Institutional Integrity

Despite these challenges, the study suggests approaches to regain confidence through institutional authenticity. Initiatives such as *Building Forever* provide a blueprint. Rather than depending primarily on emotional storytelling, this campaign incorporates measurable goals for sustainability, traceability through blockchain technology (such as Tracr), and community development collaborations.

These institutional processes are consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), namely the component of perceived behavioural control. When customers are provided tools to check origin, such as third-party certifications or digital provenance platforms, they are more likely to make ethical purchases (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). Here, ethical branding is actionable rather than aspirational.

However, transparency alone is insufficient. Brands must match their emotional storylines to their ethical claims. According to Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2006), brand trust is dependent on message coherence, or the alignment between what a brand says emotionally and what it delivers institutionally. If De Beers' emotional advertising continues hiding ethical discourse, they risk developing scepticism (Festinger, 1957), undermining both symbolic resonance and brand trust.

From Ethical Posturing to Ethical Integration

Finally, this study recommends a transition from ethical posturing, where CSR exists alongside marketing to ethical integration, in which sustainability is integrated into the emotional and symbolic fabric of the brand (Banerjee, 2008). For leading companies like De Beers, this entails not just demonstrating ethical actions to stakeholders but also incorporating them into consumer-facing narratives (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006). This would require reviewing long held cliches (such as "*A diamond is forever*") in order to represent not only emotional persistence but also ethical durability. In a saturated market when emotional distinctiveness is no longer sufficient, ethical coherence might emerge as a new type of brand differentiation (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). Consumers want more than simply to feel good; they want to feel right. Brands that successfully cross the emotional-ethical divide may acquire not only loyalty, but also cultural credibility in a morally sensitive society (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001).

5.2 Conclusion

This thesis aimed to answer the fundamental research question: *How does the diamond industry strategically utilize emotional branding in contemporary advertising to influence consumer perceptions amid growing ethical awareness about diamond sourcing?* This paper used a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative thematic analysis of five recent De Beers campaigns with a quantitative survey of 235 consumers. It discovered a complex and, at times, contradictory relationship between emotional appeal and ethical consideration in luxury marketing.

The qualitative thematic analysis found that De Beers has expertly designed advertisements that use an emotional narrative, symbolic signs, and socio-cultural rituals to embed diamonds into the fabric of everyday meaning-making. Campaigns such as *Seize the Day* (2023) and *Forever Present* (2024) use emotional storytelling to present diamonds as urgent expressions of love, commitment, and intergenerational connections. These messages serve not just as marketing tools, but also as cultural scripts that stimulate emotionally driven consumption during socially important times such as proposals, holidays, and rites of passage. This answers Sub-question 1: *What emotional and symbolic narratives dominate recent diamond industry advertising, exemplified by De Beers' contemporary campaigns, and how do these narratives address or divert attention from ethical concerns?* These advertisements do not explicitly address ethical concerns; rather, they create symbolic meaning via love, empowerment, or identity. The lack of explicit sustainability messaging in these emotional narratives reflects a deliberate decision to prioritise affect over transparency.

Ethical considerations are explicitly addressed only in *The Diamond Route* and *Building Forever* initiatives, which remain largely detached from mainstream consumer campaigns. These initiatives prioritise conservation, technology traceability (e.g., Tracr), and social development, demonstrating institutional accountability. This reflects a strategic logic: emotion drives desire, ethics protects reputation. It directly addresses Sub-question 3: *To what extent do consumers perceive sustainability certifications and ethical claims made by diamond brands as credible, and how do these claims influence their purchase decisions?* The reason is that, while De Beers makes strong ethical claims institutionally, they are under-communicated in emotionally charged consumer advertising, leaving ethical credibility ignored at the time of sale.

The qualitative themes showed how emotional narratives dominate meaning making, while the survey data revealed how these narratives shape behavior and ethical rationalization in statistically significant ways. The factor analysis revealed a clear and interpretable three-factor structure that supports the theoretical foundation of the study. These included: (1) Ethical Awareness and Responsibility, which captured concern for sourcing, sustainability, and consumer ethics; (2) Ethical Rationalization, reflecting cognitive strategies to minimize ethical dissonance; and (3) Emotional Symbolism and Status Orientation, encompassing emotional attachment, social meaning, and prestige. These constructs were statistically distinct and demonstrated adequate internal reliability, justifying their use as predictors and outcome variables in the hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis 1 was confirmed by a significant regression model, indicating that individuals who assign strong emotional and symbolic value to diamonds were more likely to proceed with a purchase even in the presence of ethical concerns. These findings reaffirm the persuasive power of emotional branding in sustaining demand despite growing public awareness over sourcing practices.

Hypothesis 2 received only partial support, thus not confirmed. Ethical awareness was a significant positive predictor of certified purchasing behavior, while emotional symbolism had a non-significant but negative association with ethical choice. Though not statistically conclusive, the direction of the emotional predictor suggests that symbolic appeal may, under certain conditions, reduce ethical prioritization. This aligns with the notion of the "ethical purchasing gap" (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001), where consumers' stated concerns do not always translate into consistent behavior.

Hypothesis 3, on the contrary, was strongly supported. Ethical awareness, including belief in certification schemes and concern for sourcing practices emerged as the strongest

single predictor of ethical purchasing behavior. Participants who trusted sustainability labels were more likely to choose certified diamonds even when cost was a trade-off. This reinforces literature suggesting that third-party certifications operate both as governance tools and psychological reassurance mechanisms (Haufler, 2009; Schulte et al., 2020), supporting consumer decisions by restoring moral confidence in otherwise contested markets. Hypothesis 4 was also supported. Emotional symbolism significantly predicted higher rationalization scores, indicating that symbolic and emotional framing can facilitate cognitive disengagement from ethical concerns. This lends empirical support to dual-process theories of decision-making (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974), where emotionally salient cues activate intuitive responses (System 1) that can override more deliberate ethical reasoning (System 2). It also aligns with qualitative findings in this thesis, which highlight the role of symbolic narratives in justifying consumption decisions despite ethical tensions.

Together these findings show that emotional branding and ethical awareness are not independent forces but rather fight for consumer attention in distinct cognitive and affective registers. Emotional appeals rely on intuitive, affect-driven decision-making as defined by Tversky and Kahneman (1974), whereas ethical messages require slower, deliberate cognition. When emotional cues are strong and sensitive, they tend to take priority, causing consumers to act first and think later. Finally, in answering the main research question, this thesis discovers that the diamond industry, exemplified by De Beers, employs emotional branding not only to influence consumer perception, but also to frame diamond purchasing as an emotionally necessary and culturally sanctioned act, even in ethically ambiguous contexts. Emotional branding therefore serves as both a stimulus and a cushion, stimulating the impulse to buy while protecting the customer from moral struggle. This dual purpose emphasises its strategic importance in luxury marketing while also revealing the difficulties of integrating an ethical responsibility into a domain so heavily influenced by feeling, ritual, and symbolism.

5.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study provided essential insights into how the diamond business, as demonstrated by De Beers, deliberately uses emotional branding to influence customer behaviour in light of rising ethical concerns. Nonetheless, certain limitations must be addressed in order to fully contextualise the findings and identify future research directions. First, the quantitative component of this study used a non-probability, purposeful sampling technique that largely targeted a Western, well educated, and relatively youthful group. While

this group represents a very active diamond consumer market, such as for engagements, weddings, and symbolic giving, the results' generalisability across age, cultural, and socioeconomic barriers is limited. Emotional symbolism and ethical awareness are culturally contextual conceptions (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), and their relevance varies between locations with different cultural, religious, or political components of luxury consumption. For example, non-Western markets may react differently to ethical branding or place a higher value on familial values than on sustainability. Future study might use a comparative cross-cultural design to investigate how consumers in various global contexts understand emotional appeals and respond to ethical claims.

Second, while the qualitative study provided depth by focussing on five current De Beers programs, this approach is necessarily limited. De Beers has a long history in the business, and its branding methods are not necessarily reflective of other jewellery companies like Tiffany & Co., Cartier, or more recent disruptors like Brilliant Earth or Pandora. Additional study might involve comparative evaluations of heritage and newcomer brands to see how emotional and ethical narratives change across market categories.

Furthermore, the thematic coding procedure, while meticulously constructed and theoretically sound, was ultimately interpretative. Because qualitative research necessarily includes the researcher's analytical lens, theme discoveries, while informed by theory and reinforced by memo writing, cannot be completely detached from subjectivity (Eisner, 1991). Although efforts were made to assure validity via transparency and reflexivity, a larger research team or triangulation with audience reception studies might strengthen future topic enquiries.

While this thesis was theoretically based on symbolic interactionism, Bourdieu's (1984) theory of distinction, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), and critiques of ethical consumerism (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001), it remained focused on the intersection of symbolic branding and consumer psychology. Other important frameworks, such as postcolonial critiques of extractive industries, critical political economy, and performative ethics theories, were acknowledged but not fully integrated. As Banerjee (2008) and Crane (2021) explain, ethical branding is frequently embedded in wider systems of global injustice, greenwashing, and corporate legitimacy construction. Future research might take a more critical approach, questioning how emotional branding not only influences consumption but also obscures larger mechanisms of environmental and social damage.

In terms of methodological proposals, numerous possibilities arise. First, a qualitative follow-up using in-depth interviews or ethnographies might reveal how consumers actively

justify or resist emotionally compelling branding in the face of ethical concerns. Such research might go deeper into how consumers engage in identity work and moral bargaining throughout their daily luxury purchase activities.

Second, experimental or longitudinal designs might investigate how repeated exposure to ethical versus emotional advertising affects customer attitudes and conduct over time, particularly in a market saturated with sustainability promises. Furthermore, as luxury consumption shifts to digital and social platforms, future research should focus on user-generated content and influencer collaborations. Analysing how emotional branding is co-produced, contested, or reinterpreted online provides a more dynamic picture of brand-consumer interactions in the digital age.

Finally, this study demonstrates the gap between consumer-facing emotional narratives and institutional ethical activities. De Beers' separation of emotive advertising from CSR messaging demonstrates a discursive gap that requires additional examination. Future research might look into how integrated, or fragmented, ethical storytelling is across luxury industries, and how this influences customer trust and brand loyalty. In conclusion, while this thesis adds to the growing part of research on ethical branding, symbolic consumption, and emotional impact, it also emphasises the significance of continuing to investigate the affective and cultural mechanisms through which brands mediate moral conflict. Future research can give a fuller and more comprehensive knowledge of how consumers manage the paradox of luxury in an ethically conscious era by increasing methodological variety, incorporating more diverse demographic groups, and delving deeper into critical theory. Ultimately, understanding how brands emotionally frame ethical complexity remains essential to ensuring trust, accountability, and integrity in luxury consumption.

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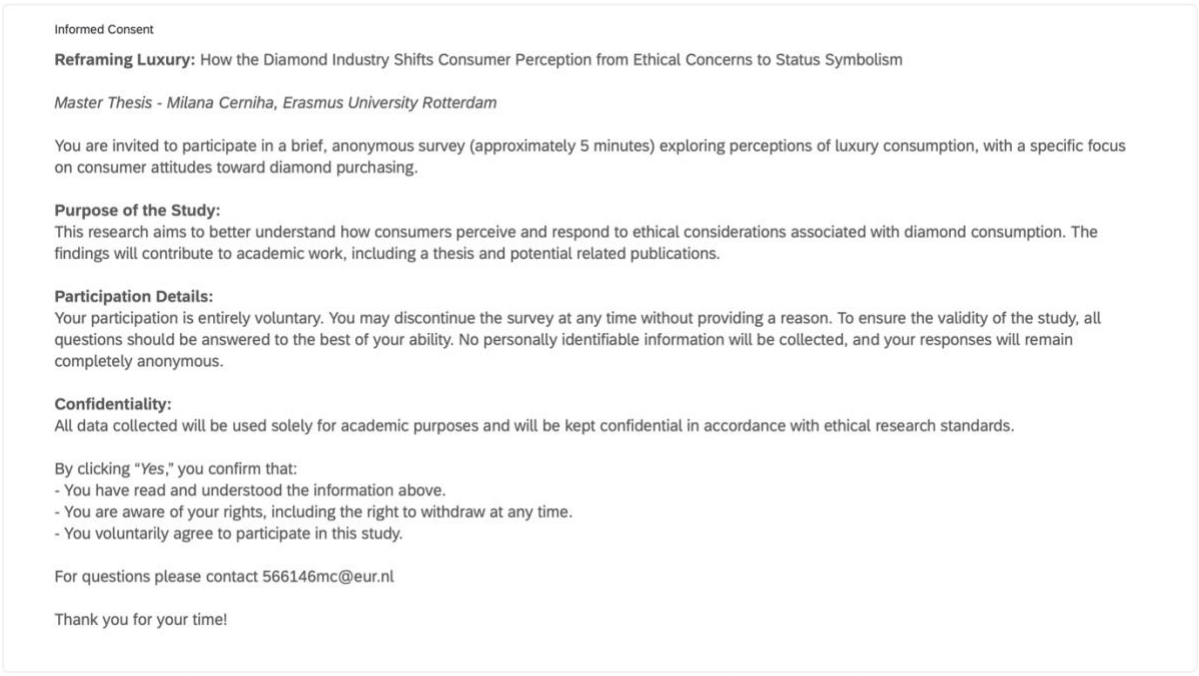
Appendices

Appendix A — Online survey

A.1 Introduction and informed consent


Informed Consent

Reframing Luxury: How the Diamond Industry Shifts Consumer Perception from Ethical Concerns to Status Symbolism

Master Thesis - Milana Cerniha, Erasmus University Rotterdam

You are invited to participate in a brief, anonymous survey (approximately 5 minutes) exploring perceptions of luxury consumption, with a specific focus on consumer attitudes toward diamond purchasing.

Purpose of the Study:
This research aims to better understand how consumers perceive and respond to ethical considerations associated with diamond consumption. The findings will contribute to academic work, including a thesis and potential related publications.

Participation Details:
Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may discontinue the survey at any time without providing a reason. To ensure the validity of the study, all questions should be answered to the best of your ability. No personally identifiable information will be collected, and your responses will remain completely anonymous.

Confidentiality:
All data collected will be used solely for academic purposes and will be kept confidential in accordance with ethical research standards.

By clicking "*Yes*," you confirm that:
- You have read and understood the information above.
- You are aware of your rights, including the right to withdraw at any time.
- You voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

For questions please contact 566146mc@eur.nl

Thank you for your time!

Figure A.1.1 – Screenshot of introduction and informed consent

A.2 Eligibility consent


Eligibility *

Before proceeding, please confirm the following:
- I confirm that I am 18 years of age or older.
- I have considered purchasing, or have purchased, a diamond jewellery within the past five years.

Yes No

Figure A.2.1 – Screenshot of eligibility consent

A.3 Survey questions measuring dependent variables

Q1 *

I am aware of ethical concerns (such as conflict diamonds, labor exploitation, environmental harm) associated with natural diamond mining.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q2 *

I am familiar with organizations that provide sustainability certifications for diamonds (e.g., the Kimberley Process).

The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) is the mechanism to prevent the trade of conflict diamonds by certifying the diamond origin.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q3 *

I believe that diamonds with sustainability certifications (e.g., Kimberley Process) benefit the environment or society.

Kimberley Process ensures that diamonds are sourced ethically and are free from links to violence and human rights abuses.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q4 *

How confident are you in diamond jewellery brands' claims about sustainability and ethical sourcing*?

No child labor or forced labor was involved, no environmental harm was done during the mining

- Highly confident
- Confident
- Neutral
- Not confident
- Highly unconfident

Q5 *

I am more likely to choose a diamond if the seller clearly promotes sustainability and ethical sourcing*.

No child labor or forced labor was involved, no environmental harm was done during the mining

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Page Break

Q6 *

Diamonds hold personal symbolic meaning for me (e.g., love, commitment, tradition)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q7 *

I am willing to overlook ethical concerns if a diamond has emotional or symbolic significance.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q8 *

How much impact do you believe your individual diamond purchase has on broader ethical sourcing practices?

- Very significant impact
- Significant impact
- Moderate impact
- Little impact
- No impact

Q9 *

While ethical concerns matter to me, other factors such as emotional value or design often weight more in my diamond purchase decisions

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q10 *

I sometimes feel conflicted about ethical concerns when buying diamonds.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q11 *

Some concerns about the ethics of diamond sourcing are overstated.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Page Break

Q12 *

Advertisements highlighting ethical and sustainable practices influence my decision to buy diamonds.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q13 *

If two diamonds cost the same, I am more likely to choose the one with sustainability certification.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q14 *

I consider sustainability more when the diamond is intended for a gift or symbolic purpose.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

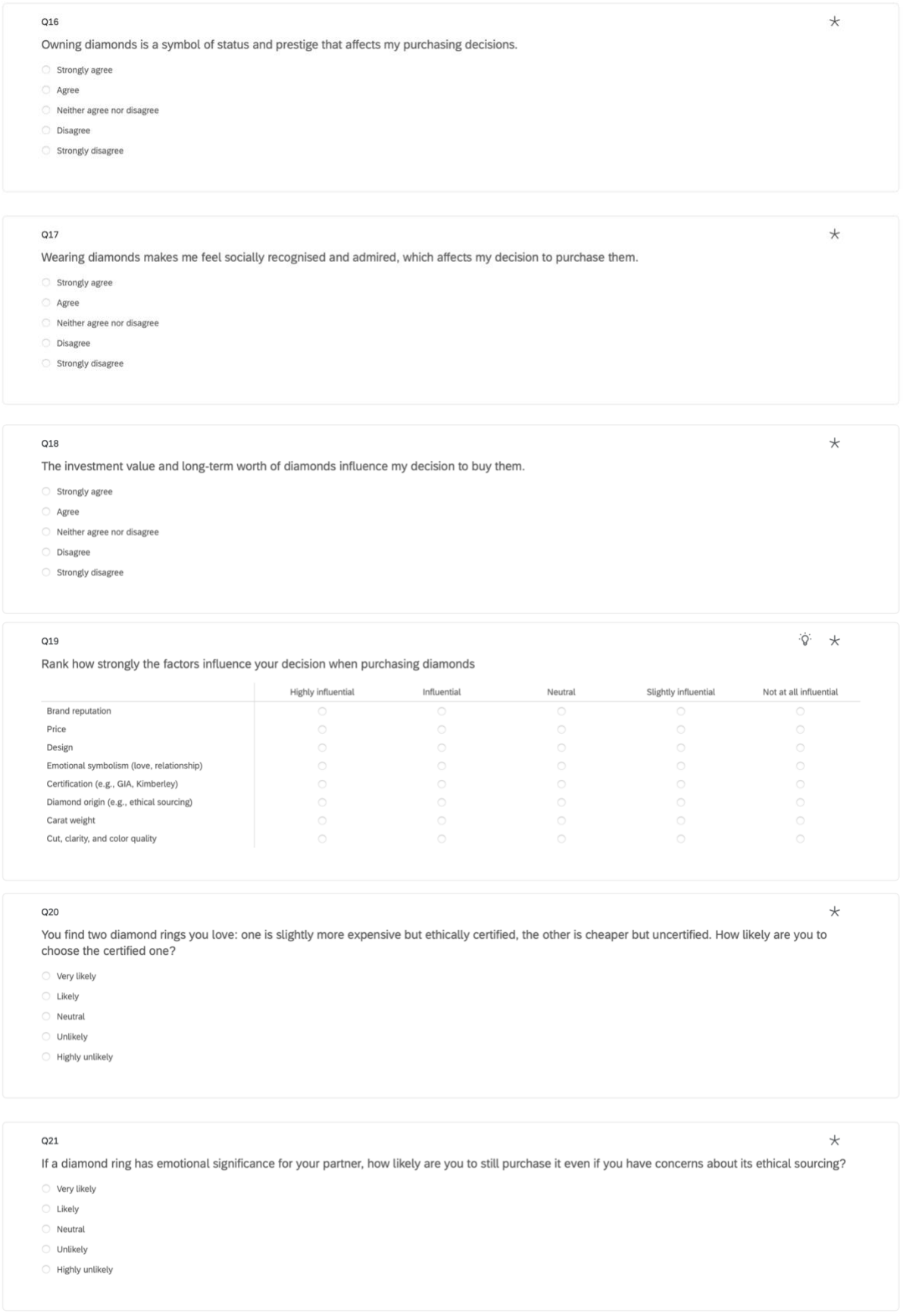


Figure A.3.1 – Screenshot of survey questions

A.4 Manipulation check question

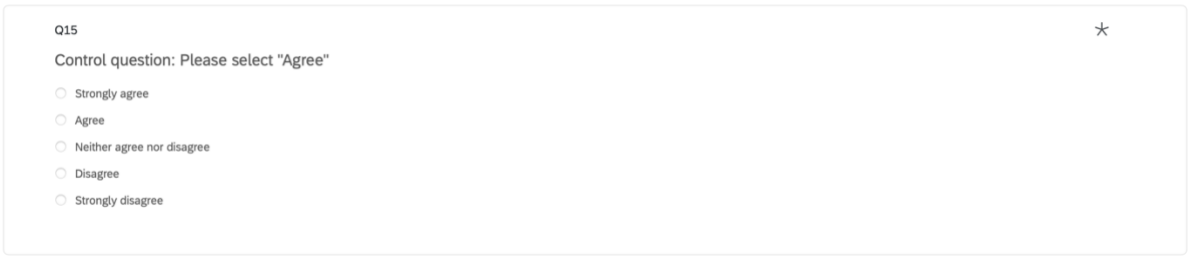


Figure A.4.1 – Screenshot of manipulation question

A.5 Demographic questions

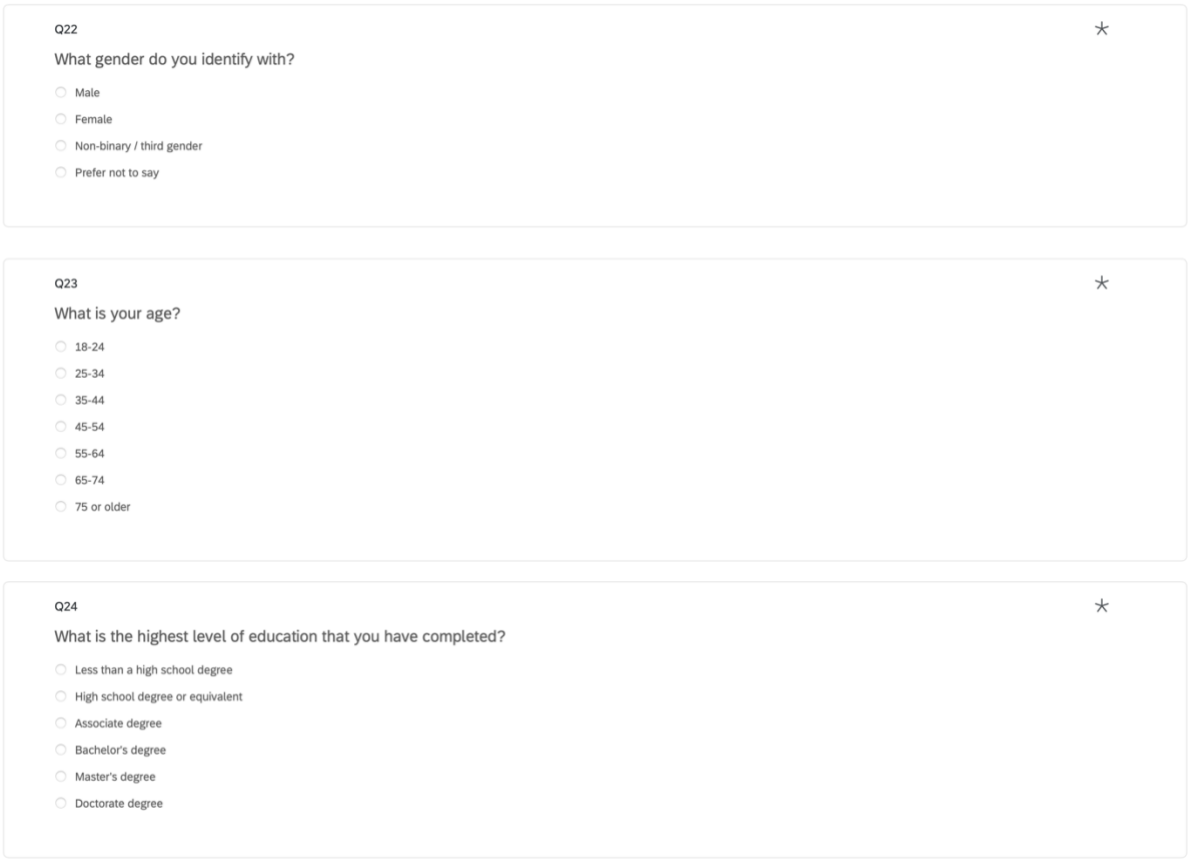


Figure A.5.1 – Screenshot of dempgraphic questions

Appendix B — Sample data analysis

Frequency Table

What gender do you identify with?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	80	34.0	36.9	36.9
	Female	131	55.7	60.4	97.2
	Non-binary / third gender	4	1.7	1.8	99.1
	Prefer not to say	2	.9	.9	100.0
	Total	217	92.3	100.0	
Missing	System	18	7.7		
Total		235	100.0		

What is your age?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-24	78	33.2	35.9	35.9
	25-34	91	38.7	41.9	77.9
	35-44	34	14.5	15.7	93.5
	45-54	11	4.7	5.1	98.6
	55-64	3	1.3	1.4	100.0
	Total	217	92.3	100.0	
Missing	System	18	7.7		
Total		235	100.0		

What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than a high school degree	1	.4	.5	.5
	High school degree or equivalent	12	5.1	5.5	6.0
	Associate degree	12	5.1	5.5	11.5
	Bachelor's degree	110	46.8	50.7	62.2
	Master's degree	76	32.3	35.0	97.2
	Doctorate degree	6	2.6	2.8	100.0
	Total	217	92.3	100.0	
Missing	System	18	7.7		
Total		235	100.0		

Figure B.1 – Screenshot of frequency tables of demographic data

Appendix C — Factor analysis

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.784
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	947.756
	df	105
	Sig.	<.001

Figure C.1 – Screenshot of KMO and Bartlett's Test

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings[a]
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	3.725	24.831	24.831	3.725	24.831	24.831	2.933
2	2.927	19.513	44.344	2.927	19.513	44.344	2.729
3	1.162	7.745	52.089	1.162	7.745	52.089	3.130
4	.996	6.643	58.731				
5	.905	6.036	64.768				
6	.848	5.652	70.420				
7	.713	4.752	75.172				
8	.661	4.404	79.576				
9	.603	4.021	83.597				
10	.528	3.520	87.116				
11	.494	3.293	90.409				
12	.442	2.948	93.358				
13	.411	2.741	96.099				
14	.328	2.187	98.286				
15	.257	1.714	100.000				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.

Figure C.2 – Screenshot of total variance explained

Component Matrix[a]

	Component		
	1	2	3
I am more likely to choose a diamond if the seller clearly promotes sustainability and ethical sourcing*. No child labor or forced labor was involved, no environmental harm was done during the mining	.713		
Advertisements highlighting ethical and sustainable practices influence my decision to buy diamonds.	.681		
I believe that diamonds with sustainability certifications (e.g., Kimberley Process) benefit the environment or society. Kimberley Process ensures that diamonds are sourced ethically and are free from links to violence and human rights abuses.	.655		
How much impact do you believe your individual diamond purchase has on broader ethical sourcing practices?	.636		
How confident are you in diamond jewellery brands' claims about sustainability and ethical sourcing*? No child labor or forced labor was involved, no environmental harm was done during the mining	.623		
I consider sustainability more when the diamond is intended for a gift or symbolic purpose.	.581		.410
If two diamonds cost the same, I am more likely to choose the one with sustainability certification.	.531	-.317	
The investment value and long-term worth of diamonds influence my decision to buy them.	.424	.412	
While ethical concerns matter to me, other factors such as emotional value or design often weight more in my diamond purchase decisions		.735	
I am willing to overlook ethical concerns if a diamond has emotional or symbolic significance.		.720	
Owning diamonds is a symbol of status and prestige that affects my purchasing decisions.	.362	.652	-.328
Wearing diamonds makes me feel socially recognised and admired, which affects my decision to purchase them.	.354	.626	-.320
Some concerns about the ethics of diamond sourcing are overstated.		.565	.309
Diamonds hold personal symbolic meaning for me (e.g., love, commitment, tradition)	.445	.499	
I sometimes feel conflicted about ethical concerns when buying diamonds.	.479		.648

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 3 components extracted.

Figure C.3 – Screenshot of component matrix

Pattern Matrix[a]

	Component		
	1	2	3
I sometimes feel conflicted about ethical concerns when buying diamonds.	.883		
I consider sustainability more when the diamond is intended for a gift or symbolic purpose.	.725		
I am more likely to choose a diamond if the seller clearly promotes sustainability and ethical sourcing*. No child labor or forced labor was involved, no environmental harm was done during the mining	.478	-.400	
Advertisements highlighting ethical and sustainable practices influence my decision to buy diamonds.	.455	-.385	
How much impact do you believe your individual diamond purchase has on broader ethical sourcing practices?	.439		
While ethical concerns matter to me, other factors such as emotional value or design often weight more in my diamond purchase decisions		.772	
I am willing to overlook ethical concerns if a diamond has emotional or symbolic significance.		.747	
Some concerns about the ethics of diamond sourcing are overstated.		.643	
If two diamonds cost the same, I am more likely to choose the one with sustainability certification.	.323	-.426	
Owning diamonds is a symbol of status and prestige that affects my purchasing decisions.			-.823
Wearing diamonds makes me feel socially recognised and admired, which affects my decision to purchase them.			-.797
Diamonds hold personal symbolic meaning for me (e.g., love, commitment, tradition)			-.642
I believe that diamonds with sustainability certifications (e.g., Kimberley Process) benefit the environment or society. Kimberley Process ensures that diamonds are sourced ethically and are free from links to violence and human rights abuses.		-.408	-.546
The investment value and long-term worth of diamonds influence my decision to buy them.			-.491
How confident are you in diamond jewellery brands' claims about sustainability and ethical sourcing*? No child labor or forced labor was involved, no environmental harm was done during the mining	.334		-.466

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 26 iterations.

Figure C.4 – Screenshot of pattern matrix

Appendix D — Reliability statistics for "Ethical Awareness"

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.769	7

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I sometimes feel conflicted about ethical concerns when buying diamonds.	14.76	15.954	.456	.748
I consider sustainability more when the diamond is intended for a gift or symbolic purpose.	15.20	15.669	.495	.740
I am more likely to choose a diamond if the seller clearly promotes sustainability and ethical sourcing*. No child labor or forced labor was involved, no environmental harm was done during the mining	15.72	15.249	.607	.716
Advertisements highlighting ethical and sustainable practices influence my decision to buy diamonds.	15.22	15.349	.569	.724
How much impact do you believe your individual diamond purchase has on broader ethical sourcing practices?	14.80	15.743	.485	.742
If two diamonds cost the same, I am more likely to choose the one with sustainability certification.	16.12	17.352	.427	.753
How confident are you in diamond jewellery brands' claims about sustainability and ethical sourcing*? No child labor or forced labor was involved, no environmental harm was done during the mining	14.72	16.738	.398	.759

Figure D.1 – Screenshot of reliability statistics result

Appendix E — Reliability statistics for "Rationalization"

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.698	3

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
While ethical concerns matter to me, other factors such as emotional value or design often weight more in my diamond purchase decisions	6.11	3.271	.601	.490
I am willing to overlook ethical concerns if a diamond has emotional or symbolic significance.	5.62	3.245	.583	.514
Some concerns about the ethics of diamond sourcing are overstated.	5.68	4.375	.375	.763

Figure E.1 – Screenshot of reliability statistics results

Appendix F — Reliability statistics for "Emotional symbolism"

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.729	4

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Owning diamonds is a symbol of status and prestige that affects my purchasing decisions.	7.10	5.856	.664	.578
Wearing diamonds makes me feel socially recognised and admired, which affects my decision to purchase them.	6.73	5.928	.594	.622
Diamonds hold personal symbolic meaning for me (e.g., love, commitment, tradition)	7.40	7.149	.435	.715
The investment value and long-term worth of diamonds influence my decision to buy them.	7.32	7.394	.398	.734

Figure F.1 – Screenshot of reliability statistics results

Appendix G — Regression analysis for emotional symbolism

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics			
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.241[a]	.058	.054	1.011	.058	13.278	1	215	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), EMOTIONAL_SYMBOLISM

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	13.583	1	13.583	13.278	<.001[b]
	Residual	219.947	215	1.023		
	Total	233.530	216			

a. Dependent Variable: If a diamond ring has emotional significance for your partner, how likely are you to still purchase it even if you have concerns about its ethical sourcing?

b. Predictors: (Constant), EMOTIONAL_SYMBOLISM

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.714	.211		8.109	<.001
	EMOTIONAL_SYMBOLISM	.306	.084	.241	3.644	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: If a diamond ring has emotional significance for your partner, how likely are you to still purchase it even if you have concerns about its ethical sourcing?

Figure G.1 – Screenshot of regression analysis results

Appendix H — Regression analysis for ethical awareness

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics			
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.573[a]	.329	.322	.868	.329	52.349	2	214	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), ETHICAL_AWARENESS, EMOTIONAL_SYMBOLISM

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	78.884	2	39.442	52.349	<.001[b]
	Residual	161.236	214	.753		
	Total	240.120	216			

a. Dependent Variable: You find two diamond rings you love: one is slightly more expensive but ethically certified, the other is cheaper but uncertified. How likely are you to choose the certified one?

b. Predictors: (Constant), ETHICAL_AWARENESS, EMOTIONAL_SYMBOLISM

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	-.006	.263		-.023	.981
	EMOTIONAL_SYMBOLISM	-.123	.075	-.096	-1.649	.101
	ETHICAL_AWARENESS	.952	.094	.591	10.178	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: You find two diamond rings you love: one is slightly more expensive but ethically certified, the other is cheaper but uncertified. How likely are you to choose the certified one?

Figure H.1 – Screenshot of regression analysis results

Appendix I — Regression analysis for trust in ethical certification

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics			
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.566[a]	.320	.317	.871	.320	101.172	1	215	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), ETHICAL_AWARENESS

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	76.836	1	76.836	101.172	<.001[b]
	Residual	163.284	215	.759		
	Total	240.120	216			

a. Dependent Variable: You find two diamond rings you love: one is slightly more expensive but ethically certified, the other is cheaper but uncertified. How likely are you to choose the certified one?

b. Predictors: (Constant), ETHICAL_AWARENESS

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.197	.237		-.829	.408
	ETHICAL_AWARENESS	.911	.091	.566	10.058	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: You find two diamond rings you love: one is slightly more expensive but ethically certified, the other is cheaper but uncertified. How likely are you to choose the certified one?

Figure I.1 – Screenshot of regression analysis results

Appendix J — Regression analysis of rationalization for ethical concerns

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.649[a]	.421	.416	.66456

a. Predictors: (Constant), EMOTIONAL_SYMBOLISM

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	42.014	1	42.014	95.130	<.001[b]
	Residual	57.856	131	.442		
	Total	99.870	132			

a. Dependent Variable: RATIONALIZATION_SCORE

b. Predictors: (Constant), EMOTIONAL_SYMBOLISM

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.072	.188		5.708	<.001
	EMOTIONAL_SYMBOLISM	.688	.071	.649	9.753	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: RATIONALIZATION_SCORE

Figure J.1 – Screenshot of regression analysis results

Appendix K — Codebook

Group	Code ID	Code	Definition	Inclusion Criteria	Example (Campaign)	RQ Link
1. Emotional Branding	1.1	EB_EmotionalAppeal	Attempts to evoke strong emotions (love, nostalgia, empowerment) via language, music, or imagery	Visuals/text explicitly aiming for an emotional response	Close-up of a couple's embrace with swelling score + "Forever Begins Today." (*Forever Present*)	RQ1
	1.2	EB_RomanticNarrative	Storylines centered on love, relationships, or proposals	Ads or copy framing diamonds as the culmination of romantic ritual	"She said yes—his diamond made the moment eternal." (*I Do. Forever*)	RQ1
	1.3	EB_SelfEmpowerment	Messaging that positions purchase as an act of self-love or personal achievement	"Treat yourself," "You deserve," self-celebration language	"Because sometimes, saying 'I do' isn't enough—it's time to say it to yourself." (*For You, Forever*)	RQ1
2. Symbolic Narratives	2.1	SN_HeritageStorytelling	References to brand history, legacy, or iconic slogans	Mentions of "since…," archival footage, revival of "A Diamond Is Forever"	"For over 80 years, De Beers has crafted the world's most enduring symbols of love." (*Forever Present*)	RQ1
	2.2	SN_SocialStatus	Framing diamonds as markers of prestige, exclusivity, or elite taste	Imagery of VIP settings or copy emphasizing rarity	Black-tie gala where only a handful wear diamond chokers—"Not for everyone, only for you." (*Forever Present*)	RQ1

	2.3	SN_SymbolicMeaning	Explicit linking of diamonds to abstract concepts (e.g., purity, eternity, legacy)	Phrases like "symbol of…," "represents…"	"This solitaire isn't just a ring—it's a promise of forever." (*I Do. Forever*)	RQ1
3. CSR Strategies	3.1	CSR_EthicalFraming	Direct mention of ethics, sourcing, sustainability, or community	References to conflict-free, traceability, conservation, fair labour	"Our diamonds are 100% traceable from mine to market." (*Building Forever*)	SQ1 / RQ1
	3.2	CSR_Diversion_Technique	Acknowledge ethics briefly, then immediately shift focus back to emotion or status	"Yes, but…" disclaimers followed by emotional or luxury messaging	"Conflict-free certified—but because love deserves no compromise." (*Forever Present*)	SQ1 / RQ1
	3.3	CSR_Absence	Omission of any ethical or sustainability reference where expected	Campaigns/spots with zero mention of sourcing or ethics	Valentine's ad showing proposals with zero reference to "certified" or "ethical." (*For You, Forever*)	SQ1 / RQ1
4. Governance Cues	4.1	KPCS_CertificationCue	Visual/textual cues to Kimberley Process or similar certification schemes	Logos, seals, or direct mention of certification	KPCS logo stamped on packaging alongside "Conflict-Free." (*Building Forever*)	SQ1 / RQ1
5. TPB Constructs	5.1	TPB_SocialPressure	Indications that norms or traditions compel diamond purchase	"Everyone does it," "As tradition demands"	"In every proposal, the ring is tradition—don't let love fall short." (*I Do. Forever*)	SQ1 / RQ1
	5.2	TPB_PerceivedControl_Ethical	Statements about consumer ability (or inability) to make ethical diamond choices	Mentions of availability, affordability, or knowledge of ethical options	"Now with lab-grown alternatives, you have more choices than ever." (*Building Forever*)	SQ1 / RQ1

Appendix L — Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Course Assignments

Student Information
Name: Milana Cerniha
Student ID: 566146
Course Name: Master Thesis Project
Instructor Name: Dr. Annet Toornstra
Assignment Title: Master Thesis
Date: 25/06/2025

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)
- Writing improvements, including grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL)
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding, 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 [ChatGPT], in the process of creating parts or components of my course assignment. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of the assignment.

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

Signature: [digital signature]
Date of Signature: [Date of Submission]

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 assignment 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: Milana Cerniha
Date of Signature: 25/06/2025

Appendix M — AI prompts

Chapter 1.2:

1. Prompt: *"What is greenwashing and how does it relate to diamond branding?"*
2. Prompt: *"What are examples of ethical paradox in consumer luxury choices?"*

Chapter 2.1:

1. Prompt: *"Can you explain the theory of planned behavior and how it applies to ethical consumption?"*

Chapter 2.2:

1. Prompt: *"Explain Bourdieu's theory of distinction and how it applies to symbolic luxury goods like diamonds."*
2. Prompt: *"Can you clarify the difference between emotional branding and symbolic interactionism in consumer research?"*

Chapter 2.4:

1. Prompt: *"What are common critiques of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme?"*
2. Prompt: "Is the Kimberley Process an example of effective global governance? Why or why not?"

Chapter 2.5:

1. Prompt: *"Can you explain the theory of planned behavior and how it applies to ethical consumption?"*
2. Prompt: *"What variables are central in TPB, and how could they predict diamond purchasing behavior?"*

Chapter 2.6:

1.Prompt: *"What psychological mechanisms explain why consumers often ignore ethics in purchasing decisions?"*

Chapter 2.7:

1. Prompt: *"What does symbolic interactionism say about identity performance in consumer behavior?"*

Chapter 5.1.1:

1. Prompt: *"Explain how emotional symbolism might override ethical concerns in consumer behaviour"*

Chapter 5.1.2:

1. Prompt*: "How does symbolic interactionism explain rationalisation of ethically problematic purchases in luxury markets?"*
2. Prompt: *"What does it mean when consumers justify unethical purchases to maintain identity?"*

Chapter 5.1.3:

1. Prompt: *"Explain the ethical branding paradox where CSR is promoted separately from emotionally charged ads."*