



Decoding Consumer Preferences: The Influence of Labels and Brand Image on Buying Interest in the Chinese Luxury Market

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates the impact of labels and brand image on consumer buying interest within the Chinese luxury market. Given the rapid expansion of luxury consumption in China, this research seeks to understand how factors such as perceived social status, cultural relevance, brand heritage, and brand symbolism influence Chinese consumers' interest in luxury goods. A qualitative approach was adopted, involving semi-structured interviews with 20 participants across major Chinese cities. Thematic analysis revealed four key themes: (1) Perceived Social Status, where luxury goods were viewed as symbols of personal success; (2) Cultural Relevance of Brand Image, with a preference for brands incorporating traditional or modern Chinese elements; (3) Importance of Brand Labels and Heritage, which enhanced trust and perception of quality; and (4) Influence of Brand Symbols on Purchasing Behaviour, with logos and packaging playing a significant role in consumer recognition and appeal. These findings underscore the importance for luxury brands to align their strategies with Chinese cultural values, social aspirations, and brand heritage to build consumer loyalty in this market. This study contributes to the literature on consumer behaviour in emerging markets and provides practical insights for luxury brands aiming to adapt and thrive in China's competitive luxury sector.

Keywords: *Brand Heritage; Brand Image; Chinese Luxury Market; Consumer Buying Interest; Cultural Relevance*

Background

The Chinese luxury market has become a significant force in the global luxury goods industry, driven by rapid economic growth, a rising middle class, and a strong cultural demand for high-end products. In China, luxury consumption is closely tied to status, prestige, and cultural refinement (Chang & He, 2024). This shift has not only transformed consumer behavior but also compelled global luxury brands to adopt marketing strategies tailored specifically to Chinese consumers (Chen, 2023). For example, areas like Taikoo Li in Chengdu exemplify how luxury branding has successfully adapted to local consumer preferences (Chadha & Husband, 2010).

China's luxury market has evolved through various stages, including entry, rapid growth, localization, and increasing global influence. These stages mirror the changes in consumer psychology, economic development, and marketing approaches. Luxury handbags, in particular, have become a dominant sector due to strong market penetration and brand-driven innovations in pricing, promotion, and distribution (Chen, 2023). Challenges such as counterfeiting and market segmentation have led brands like LVMH to implement strategies focusing on authenticity, curated retail experiences, and targeted campaigns ("Research on the Development of China's Luxury Goods Industry-based on LVMH," 2024; Ma & Becker, 2017).

Despite disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese luxury market rebounded quickly, fueled by digital transformation and government policies like the Hainan duty-free initiative, which made luxury goods more accessible (Lin, 2023). Such policies helped support domestic consumption and encourage brand loyalty. Shifts in demographics and consumer expectations have added complexity to the market, requiring more sophisticated marketing strategies (Hamdani *et al.*, 2023). Luxury brands have adapted by emphasizing cultural sensitivity, strategic localization, and alignment with consumer values, as seen in Louis Vuitton's tailored campaigns in China (Li, Zhang & Sun, 2015).

Chinese luxury consumers place significant importance on brand reputation, exclusivity, and symbolic value. Luxury goods in China serve as symbols of social mobility and personal success, with brand-self connections influencing consumers' willingness to pay premium prices. These connections are reinforced through positive experiences and strong brand loyalty. Factors such as conspicuous consumption, social influence, and brand image are also powerful motivators for luxury purchases, reflecting the desire for social validation and distinction (Jin *et al.*, 2015). Many luxury brands now strive to blend traditional Chinese values with Western notions of prestige (Chadha & Husband, 2010; Ma, Zhang & Yu, 2021).

Celebrity endorsements that resonate culturally further enhance brand appeal and shape consumer preferences. Authenticity and cultural alignment are key in establishing brand resonance with consumers (Li, Zhang & Sun, 2015). Brand image, built on heritage, symbolism, and global prestige, is one of the most influential factors affecting consumer behavior. For instance, Chanel has cultivated a strong brand narrative that appeals to China's elite by integrating cultural capital and innovation (Naumova, Bilan & Naumova, 2019; Li, 2021). Similarly, Swarovski has successfully targeted younger consumers by creating a compelling brand image that encourages purchase intentions, even as a more accessible luxury brand (Han, Nam & Swanepoel, 2023).

The concept of "face" (*mianzi*), rooted in the desire for social recognition, also plays a crucial role in Chinese luxury consumption. Brands that project exclusivity and elevate social standing are highly desirable, with elements like Chinese symbolism in logos or campaigns enhancing both consumer identification and purchase likelihood (Salem & Salem, 2018; Chen, 2023). Cultural sensitivity is essential for establishing long-term consumer relationships in China.

While Western luxury brands still dominate, there has been a shift towards domestic preferences, driven in part by consumer ethnocentrism. The rise of "China Chic," a fusion of traditional Chinese aesthetics with modern luxury appeal, represents a redefinition of luxury in China, with national pride and identity becoming more central to consumer choices. Luxury brands must now craft messages that resonate locally while retaining international appeal, reflecting a changing landscape where consumers actively shape brand meaning (Chen & Zhuang, 2024).

In summary, this study aims to explore how labels and brand image influence consumer preferences, attitudes, and purchasing behaviors in China's luxury market. Understanding how cultural identity, social influence, and economic factors intersect is critical for luxury brands to remain relevant and continue growing in this dynamic market.

Literature Review

The Chinese luxury market has witnessed remarkable growth over the past decade, driven by increasing disposable income, evolving consumer preferences, and digital transformation. Scholars have extensively examined the factors influencing consumers' conducts of ostentatiously purchasing luxuries, with brand image and labelling emerging as pivotal determinants (Da-li, 2013). This literature review synthesises key findings from existing studies to contextualise the role of labels and brand image in shaping purchasing behaviours in China's luxury sector.

Brand image is a critical factor influencing consumer attitudes toward luxury goods. According to Keller (1993), brand image encompasses consumers' perceptions and associations with a brand, shaped by marketing efforts, cultural relevance, and experiential factors (Da-li, 2013). In the Chinese luxury market, brand image is closely linked to social status, identity signalling, and self-expression (Chang & He, 2024; Gaffney & Hogg, 2023). Studies indicate that Chinese consumers exhibit a strong preference for globally recognised luxury brands, often equating them with prestige and superior quality (Chen & Zhuang, 2024). Furthermore, younger generations, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, emphasise authenticity and heritage, preferring brands that align with their personal values and lifestyle aspirations (Farah & Fawaz, 2016).

Labels serve as essential cues that influence consumer purchasing decisions, particularly in the luxury segment. Research highlights the dual role of labels: as indicators of authenticity and as reinforcements of perceived value. In China, where counterfeit luxury goods remain prevalent, labels act as trust signals, ensuring product genuineness. Additionally, luxury brands strategically use labelling—such as limited-edition markers or "Made in France"/"Made in Italy" tags—to enhance exclusivity and desirability (Hann, 2011). Recent studies also suggest that eco-labels and sustainability credentials are gaining importance, with environmentally conscious consumers factoring ethical considerations into their buying decisions.

Consumer interest in luxury goods is deeply rooted in psychological and cultural factors. The concept of conspicuous consumption, as theorised by Jin *et al.* (2015), remains relevant in the Chinese context, where luxury purchases serve as status symbols (Zhang & Wang, 2019). This behaviour is reinforced by Confucian values, which emphasise hierarchy and societal identity (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). Moreover, digital and social media influence brand perception, with platforms such as WeChat, Xiaohongshu, and Weibo shaping purchasing trends through influencer endorsements and peer reviews.

As consumer expectations evolve, luxury brands are adapting by incorporating digital personalisation, augmented reality (AR) experiences, and sustainable practices. The rise of "quiet luxury"—where understated branding appeals to sophisticated buyers—suggests a shift in traditional brand signalling. Additionally, hybrid luxury experiences that blend online and offline touchpoints are gaining traction,

further influencing buying interest. The interplay between labels, brand image, and consumer psychology shapes buying interest in the Chinese luxury market. Existing research underscores the importance of authenticity, status symbolism, and digital influence in consumer decision-making (Wang *et al.*, 2024). Future studies should explore how emerging trends, such as sustainable luxury and digital-first branding, continue to redefine consumer preferences in this dynamic market.

The aim of this study is to investigate the influence of labels and brand image on consumer buying interest within the Chinese luxury market. Specifically, it seeks to understand how brand perception, reputation, and labelling impact consumer preferences and purchasing decisions. By identifying the factors that drive consumer interest in luxury goods, this research aims to provide valuable insights that will help luxury brands develop tailored marketing strategies that align with the preferences and values of this lucrative market (Chen, 2023). This study also seeks to contribute to the broader literature on consumer behaviour in emerging markets, particularly within the context of luxury branding and the nuanced cultural influences that shape consumer choices (Cavender, Der Arslanian & Chan, 2014; Chen *et al.*, 2022).

Methods

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the impact of labels and brand image on consumer buying interest within the Chinese luxury market. A qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of consumer perspectives, uncovering nuanced insights into how brand perception and labelling influence purchasing intentions. Through semi-structured interviews, the study aimed to capture participants' personal experiences and interpretations, shedding light on the cultural and psychological factors that shape consumer preferences.

The target population consisted of adult Chinese consumers (aged 18 and above) with prior experience purchasing or interest in luxury goods (Jap, 2010). Purposeful sampling was employed to select participants who represented diverse backgrounds in terms of age, gender, and socioeconomic status, ensuring a wide range of viewpoints within the luxury market. A total of 20 participants were recruited from major metropolitan areas in China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Chengdu, as these cities are prominent centres for luxury consumption and represent a broad spectrum of consumer behaviours in this market (Kuo, Huang & Huang, 2023; Li, Ghaffari & Su, 2020).

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted either face-to-face or via video conferencing, depending on participant availability and preference. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participant's consent. The interview guide was developed based on key themes identified in the literature review, including brand image, label significance, and purchase motivation. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to express their thoughts freely, allowing the exploration of underlying motives, perceptions, and cultural influences.

The interview guide was structured to cover the following topics:

1. **Consumer Background:** Participants were asked to share their general views on luxury goods and discuss past purchasing experiences.
2. **Perceptions of Brand Image:** Questions focused on participants' interpretations of brand reputation, quality, and symbolic value, aiming to reveal how these perceptions influence their interest in particular luxury brands.
3. **Label Significance:** Participants were asked about the importance of brand labels, including heritage, origin, and logo design, and how these factors affected their perceptions and preferences.

4. Buying Interest: Participants reflected on the relationship between their perceptions of brand image and labels and their intentions to purchase luxury goods, providing insights into the factors that drive or deter their buying interest.

To enhance the reliability and validity of the findings, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary themes with a subset of participants to ensure accuracy in interpreting their responses. Triangulation was achieved by cross-referencing interview findings with existing literature on Chinese luxury consumer behaviour and brand perception (Siu, Kwan & Zeng, 2016). Additionally, researcher reflexivity was maintained throughout the study to minimise potential biases, ensuring an objective approach to data interpretation.

Results and Discussion

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview data. After transcription, the data were systematically coded to identify recurring themes and patterns. NVivo software was employed to facilitate the organisation and analysis of codes, enabling a deeper understanding of consumer attitudes toward brand image and labels. Themes were refined through multiple rounds of coding, and key patterns were identified, such as the role of social status, cultural identity, and brand symbolism in shaping consumer behaviour (Gaffney & Hogg, 2023). Thematic findings were then compared across participant responses to highlight commonalities and divergences in consumer attitudes.

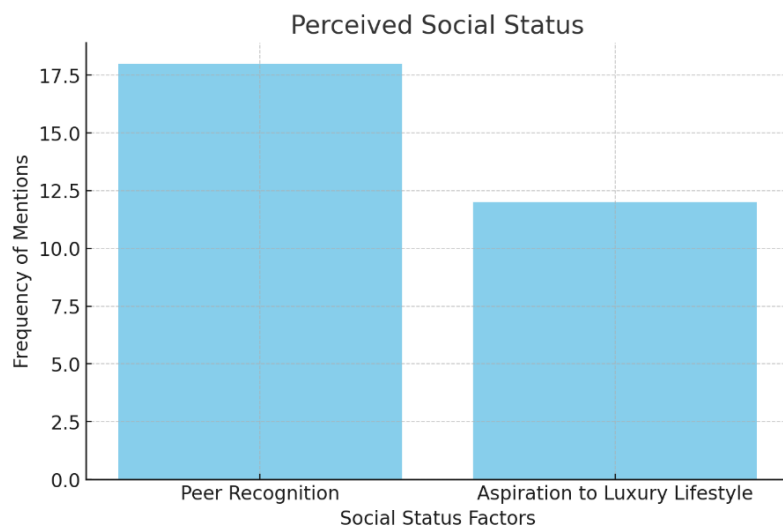
Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed four primary themes regarding the impact of labels and brand image on consumer buying interest within the Chinese luxury market: Perceived Social Status, Cultural Relevance of Brand Image, Importance of Brand Labels and Heritage, and Influence of Brand Symbols on Purchasing Behaviour. Each theme captures unique aspects of consumer attitudes and perceptions, highlighting the complex interplay of cultural and social factors that drive buying interest (Siu, Kwan & Zeng, 2016).

Theme 1: Perceived Social Status

Many participants expressed that purchasing luxury goods was often associated with enhancing their social status. The perceived social value of owning luxury brands added significant appeal, as it symbolised personal achievement and high social standing.

Example Quote:

- "When people see that you own a famous brand, they think of you as successful, like you have a certain lifestyle and status."



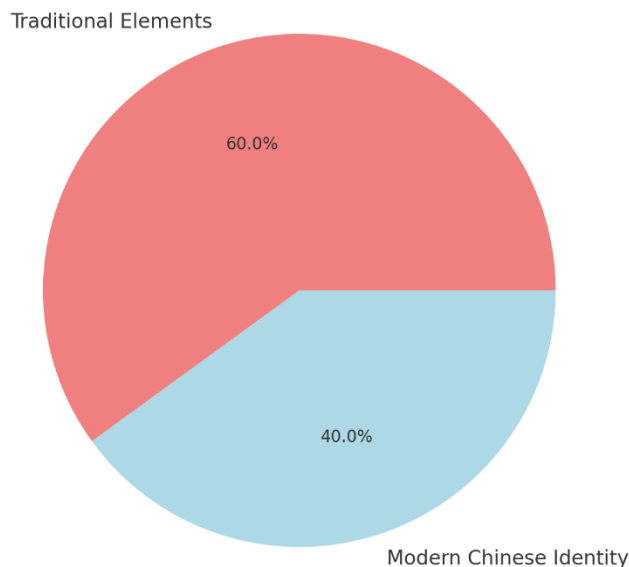
Theme 2: Cultural Relevance of Brand Image

Participants indicated that brand image that aligns with cultural values and identity played an essential role in shaping their interest in luxury goods. Luxury brands that resonate with traditional or contemporary Chinese aesthetics were viewed more favourably, as they reinforced a sense of national pride.

Example Quote:

- "I feel more connected to a brand if it has some connection to my culture. It feels more meaningful, more personal."

Cultural Relevance of Brand Image

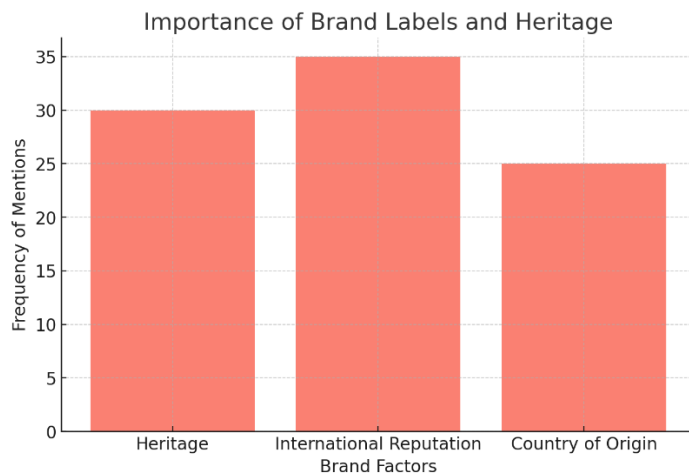


Theme 3: Importance of Brand Labels and Heritage

The significance of brand labels, including heritage, origin, and reputation, was frequently mentioned by participants. They valued the legacy and story behind luxury brands, as these elements contributed to their perceptions of quality and exclusivity.

Example Quote:

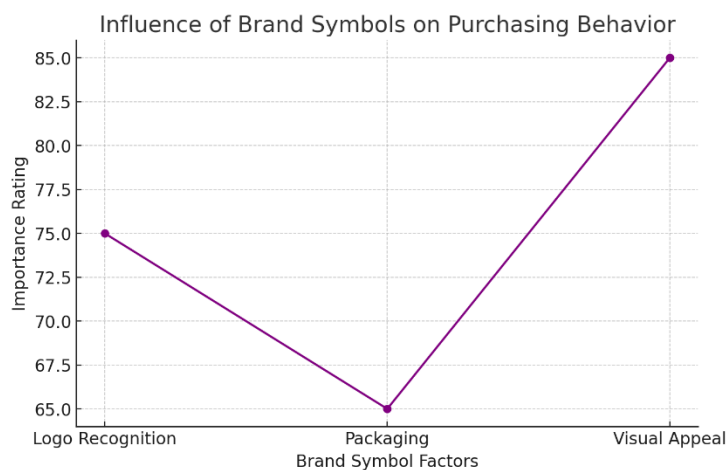
- "If a brand has a long history or is known internationally, I trust it more. It feels like I'm buying something valuable."

**Theme 4: Influence of Brand Symbols on Purchasing Behaviour**

Participants often pointed to visual symbols, such as logos and packaging, as significant factors that influenced their interest in luxury brands. Recognisable symbols added to the desirability and exclusivity associated with the brand.

Example Quote:

- "When I see a luxury brand's logo, it's like an instant mark of quality. It's what sets it apart from others."



The analysis revealed that luxury brands appealing to Chinese consumers often blend strong brand heritage with elements of cultural relevance and recognisable symbols. Social status enhancement emerged as a key motivator, reinforcing the importance of targeted brand positioning in the Chinese luxury market.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer valuable insights into the complex ways that labels and brand image influence consumer buying interest in the Chinese luxury market (Perry, Barnes & Ye, 2020). By examining factors such as perceived social status, cultural relevance, brand heritage, and brand symbolism, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the motivations and perceptions driving luxury consumption in China (Kuo, Huang & Huang, 2023). The discussion interprets these findings in the context of existing literature, highlights implications for luxury brand strategy, and suggests avenues for future research.

Perceived Social Status as a Driver of Luxury Consumption

Consistent with previous research, this study underscores the significant role of social status in shaping Chinese consumers' interest in luxury brands (Jap, 2010). The findings suggest that luxury goods are often viewed as markers of personal success and social elevation, reflecting the importance of maintaining social prestige and respect in Chinese culture. The desire for "face" (mianzi) is a culturally rooted factor that appears to influence luxury brand preference, as many participants associated luxury brands with enhanced social standing and personal achievement. This finding supports the notion that in collectivist societies like China, where social perception is highly valued, and luxury goods serve as an instrument for social validation and status affirmation (Hann, 2011).

For luxury brands, these findings highlight the need to position their products in ways that appeal to consumers' social aspirations. Marketing campaigns that emphasise the prestige, exclusivity, and respect associated with luxury brands may resonate strongly with Chinese consumers. Additionally, incorporating social media and influencer partnerships could further enhance brands' status appeal, aligning with consumers' desire for social recognition and status validation.

Cultural Relevance of Brand Image in Consumer Attraction

The results reveal that cultural relevance plays a substantial role in attracting Chinese consumers to luxury brands. Participants demonstrated a preference for brands that integrate traditional or modern Chinese elements into their image, suggesting that brand cultural alignment can make luxury goods more meaningful and appealing. This finding aligns with research indicating that Chinese consumers are increasingly drawn to brands that resonate with their cultural identity, creating a sense of national pride and personal connection (Langner & Wiedmann, 2015).

This study's findings highlight the importance of localisation in brand strategy, suggesting that luxury brands aiming to succeed in China should consider incorporating Chinese aesthetics or cultural symbols into their products, logos, and marketing materials. This approach not only enhances brand appeal but also addresses the growing trend of "China Chic", where Chinese consumers seek brands that reflect their heritage and values alongside modern aesthetics (Chen & Zhuang, 2024). Such culturally sensitive branding could enhance loyalty and foster positive consumer-brand relationships.

Brand Labels and Heritage as Indicators of Trust and Quality

Another key finding is the importance of brand heritage, origin, and reputation as factors that influence consumer trust and buying interest. Participants expressed a preference for brands with an established history and strong international reputation, associating these attributes with quality, authenticity, and exclusivity. This result is consistent with previous studies that have shown the importance of brand heritage in luxury markets, where consumers perceive long-standing brands as reliable and high-quality.

For luxury brands, these insights underscore the value of emphasising brand heritage and origin in their communications with Chinese consumers. Highlighting aspects such as a brand's history, craftsmanship,

and global influence could build consumer trust and reinforce perceptions of authenticity and exclusivity. Additionally, heritage-based storytelling in advertising can help create emotional connections with consumers, deepening brand loyalty in a highly competitive market.

Symbolism in Brand Identity and Consumer Recognition

Finally, brand symbols, particularly logos and packaging, were found to play a critical role in fostering consumer interest and enhancing brand recognition. Participants frequently mentioned that recognisable logos and appealing packaging helped distinguish luxury brands and reinforced perceptions of exclusivity and quality. This finding supports prior research that suggests symbolic brand elements are powerful tools for consumer engagement, as they create a sense of belonging and recognition.

These findings highlight the importance for luxury brands to maintain consistent and visually striking brand symbols that communicate exclusivity. Brands could benefit from investing in distinctive logos, premium packaging, and other symbolic cues that reflect their value proposition. Moreover, since the visual appeal of packaging and logos is crucial for purchase motivation, brands should continue to innovate in their product design to remain memorable and desirable to Chinese consumers.

This study provides theoretical insights into consumer behaviour in emerging luxury markets, especially within culturally rich and socially driven societies like China. By examining the interplay of cultural, social, and symbolic factors, this research expands our understanding of how brand image and labels influence consumer interest in luxury goods. Practically, these findings highlight the importance of cultural sensitivity, social influence, and brand heritage for luxury brands seeking to penetrate or expand their reach within China. As competition in the Chinese luxury market intensifies, brands that strategically integrate these elements are more likely to foster consumer loyalty and positive brand perceptions.

Conclusion

While this study offers valuable insights, it also has limitations. The sample size was relatively small, focusing on urban consumers, which may not fully capture the diversity of Chinese luxury consumers across different regions and demographics. Future studies could expand the sample size and include rural or emerging market consumers to gain a broader understanding of brand image influences. Additionally, further research could explore the impact of evolving digital trends, such as virtual influencers and digital luxury experiences, on consumer buying interest, as digital engagement continues to reshape consumer-brand interactions in China. In summary, this study highlights the multifaceted role of labels and brand image in influencing consumer interest in luxury goods within the Chinese market. Perceived social status, cultural relevance, brand heritage, and brand symbolism emerged as critical drivers, illustrating the importance of aligning brand strategies with Chinese cultural values and social aspirations. By integrating these insights into their branding approaches, luxury brands have the opportunity to strengthen their position in China's lucrative and culturally dynamic luxury market.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate: Prior to participation, all interviewees were informed about the study's purpose and provided with consent forms outlining their rights, including confidentiality and the option to withdraw at any time. No personal identifying information was included in the transcriptions or final analysis. All audio recordings and transcriptions were securely stored and were used strictly for research purposes.

Conflicts of Interest: There is no conflict of interest in the author's byline.

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