RESEARCH ARTICLE

Consumers' relationship with mass prestige brands and happiness

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Abstract

This study investigates how the relationships consumers establish with prestigious brands can lead to brand happiness. A study of 545 responses covering 19 global brands assessed consumers' perceptions of their relationship with prestigious brands—in both functional and symbolic categories—and brand happiness. Using structural equation modeling and moderation analysis, we show that (1) the prestige associated with brands induces consumers to formulate relationships with those brands and (2) brands' mass prestige (masstige) helps them achieve brand happiness. We show that consumers' attitudes toward luxury brands moderate the masstige–brand happiness relationship. In addition, brand classification (functional vs. symbolic) is an important moderator, with consumers perceiving symbolic brands as more intimate and, thus, as exhibiting more prestige and contributing more to brand happiness than functional brands. The more passionate consumers' relationship with a masstige brand, the happier they are with the brand.

KEYWORDS

brand happiness, consumer–brand relationships, consumer happiness, masstige, new luxury brand relationship, symbolic consumption

INTRODUCTION

Consumption is a source of individual emotions, feelings, pleasure, and images that bring meaning to consumers' lives. This meaning can stem from either functional or symbolic consumption (Fournier, 1998). Symbolic consumption is particularly embedded in subjective and *irrational* personal appeals (Kassarjian, 1971; Leibenstein, 1950). The purchase decision process associated with symbolic consumption is dominated by *feeling* motives[1] (Ratchford, 1987). Consumers use their possessions (e.g., objects and brands) to extend the self, build an identity, perform social roles, and so on (Belk, 1988). Therefore, consumer experiences are also a source of self-esteem and self-consistency (Sirgy, 1982). All these aspects contribute to the rationale behind the concept of consumer–brand relationships (Kaufman, Loureiro, & Manarioti, 2016). Consumers assume the role of partners in a dyadic relationship with brands that resemble their own social relationships (Aggarwal, 2004). Through these meaningful relationships, they develop emotional bonds (Blackston, 1993, 1995) and affection (Kim & Ko, 2012) that can lead to high levels of involvement (Payne et al., 2009), commitment (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004), and even love for the brand (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012). Happiness can generally be achieved by the integration of brand experiences, material possessions of objects and brands, and commercial experiences with "purely psychological experiences" (Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2015a, p. 168) such as spending time with friends and family. Thus, relationships with brands contribute to consumer happiness through brand happiness. Brand happiness derives from moment-based experiences that can result from any brand contact (e.g., product disposal and advertising) (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018) and has the ability to induce high emotional fulfillment through pleasure and life meaning. This article analyzes consumer–brand relationships that lead to brand happiness in the context of mass prestige marketing.

Luxury is a *fluid* concept that is socially constructed (Belk, 1999). Social, economic, and cultural differences affect the perception of luxury (Vickers & Renand, 2003). Brands such as Apple, Starbucks, and Dior fragrances

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[1]According to Ratchford (1987), the purchase decision process develops along a continuum between the two separate dimensions of *think* and *feel*. The *think* dimension dominates the information processing in the purchase decision of products related to functional motivations, and the *feel* dominates the information processing of products linked to symbolic purchase motivations, such as personal gratification, social acceptance, and sensory.

capitalize on such perceptual cultural, social, and economic differences to induce an image of luxury (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Evidence indicates that the image of luxury and prestige can also be associated with non-luxury brands through a *masstige* strategy. *Masstige* represents a marketing strategy that makes luxury and prestige accessible to the mass market, sometimes through regular products, mainstream brands, and *unexpected* forms of luxury consumption (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021). In a masstige strategy, brands targeted to the masses are endowed with prestige by keeping the price relatively high (Paul, 2015). This type of brand is called a *masstige brand*. Brand managers execute a masstige strategy through a downward extension of either luxury brands or born masstige brands. Examples of masstige brands include Apple's iPhone, Louis Vuitton, and Tiffany. Brands use mass prestige (*masstige*) strategies to upgrade their offers and make them more attractive to the market (e.g., Samsung and Fiat 500) (Kumar, Paul, & Unnithan, 2020). Traditional luxury brands engage in mass marketing through their less expensive and not-so-exclusive brand extensions (e.g., Mercedes-Benz A Class and Louis Vuitton's tote bags) (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016). Therefore, masstige and luxury often appear interchangeably. Thus, we argue that masstige is a vehicle for consumer happiness and a source of pleasure by making brands (even regular brands) more attractive, providing consumers with feelings of exclusiveness and well-being. Given the economic importance democratic luxury has assumed in the past two decades in the globalized world (Heine, 2012; Kapferer & Laurent, 2016; Paul, 2015), researchers have an opportunity to investigate the gap in the link between brand happiness and the consumption of mass-consumed luxury brands. Thus, our examination of the singular setting of the democratic luxury market of mass prestige brands, in both functional and symbolic categories, reinforces the novelty of our research.

Luxury consumption is normally associated with expensive, high-quality, and durable products, such as cars, watches, and slow fashion, or items that are consumed occasionally, such as "little luxuries" (e.g., an expensive wine and a celebration in a special restaurant) (Belk, 1999, p. 41). Consumers usually purchase luxury and prestigious brands because of symbolic attachments, self-connection, and/or the intense consumer–brand relationships formed (Nobre & Simões, 2019). Thus, luxury brands represent a suitable context to examine brand happiness and ascertain how it can contribute to consumers' well-being over time. We further argue that consumer–brand relationships and, thus, the emotional connections consumers form with brands may be an antidote to the contradictory feeling of pleasure versus guilt that luxury and, especially, mass prestige consumption can impose on consumers (Amatulli et al., 2020). These feelings are due to the psychological conflicts that arise from ethical reasons (e.g., luxury consumption can be considered unethical, ephemeral, and a waste) and social concerns (e.g., conspicuous consumption associated with a lack of social sensitivity and a selfish person), with the consumption of luxury (prestige brands) exerting an impact on consumers' well-being (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021).

Although the debate about whether money can buy happiness is an old one (Vohs & Baumeister, 2011), how exactly (or through what mechanism) consumers attain happiness through consumption is still largely unknown, despite recent empirical evidence confirming the connection between the relationship with brands and consumer happiness (e.g., Alba & Williams, 2013; Kumar, Paul, & Starčević, 2021; Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). Schnebelen and Bruhn (2018) helped resolve this debate when they conclusively established that the relationships consumers form with brands leads to brand happiness. They further called for researchers to extend their results with different types of brands (hedonic and utilitarian). In particular, the happiness construct remains rather unexplored in the context of masstige brands (Kumar, Paul, & Unnithan, 2020). Kumar, Paul, and Starčević (2021) also called for an understanding of the link between masstige brands and happiness by considering factors that can potentially affect it. We address these calls in our study by exploring masstige and its relationship to brand happiness, considering the concept of the *NewLux* (new luxury) brand relationship (Nobre & Simões, 2019) an important influential factor for functional and symbolic masstige brands.

Classic consumer behavior theory is grounded on the notion that consumption is a response to needs, desires, and aspirations. Thus, relationships with brands, of a functional/utilitarian or psychosocial/emotional order (Fournier, 1998), can contribute to consumer well-being and happiness. In the particular setting of the democratic luxury market, we predict that the stronger a NewLux brand relationship (Nobre & Simões, 2019), the longer consumers will stay happy with the masstige brand. With this study, therefore, we rekindle the debate on how the relationships consumers establish with masstige brands can represent paths to happiness. Consumer–brand relationships represent a theoretical ground for assessing and understanding the subjective meanings, experiences, and identities (Kaufman, Loureiro, & Manarioti, 2016) embedded in symbolic consumption of masstige brands (Nobre & Simões, 2019) that may lead consumers to attain brand happiness.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Brand happiness and consumer relationships with masstige brands

What makes people happy? One part of happiness theory maintains that having goals and attaining them make

people happy (Myers & Diener, 1995). Goal-directed consumption can result in a positive mood and experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). A positive mood further induces people to adopt goals and strive to achieve them (Labroo & Patrick, 2009). As goals and mood form a circle, reaching goals makes people happy (Manusov et al., 1995). From a marketing perspective, brand consumption represents goal-directed consumption. Consumers perceive and interact with brands in complex psychological ways that transmit identity signals and symbolism (Schmitt, 2012). Brands and marketers have attempted to establish brands as vehicles that move consumers closer to their self-concept goals, such as the ideal self (Liao & Wang, 2009), thus winning their admiration (Aaker, Garbinsky, & Vohs, 2012). According to Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006), visualizing the best possible self increases the positive affect. Other perspectives link consumer happiness with aspirations (McBride, 2010). Consumers tap into their aspirations by comparing themselves with others (McBride, 2010) and evaluating them as better. They fulfill their aspirations by achieving their desired identity and self through the use of brands (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Holt, 2002). Feeling unique and different from others can make consumers feel happy (Koydemir, Şimşek, & Demir, 2014), and brands can play a role in this regard.

This discussion brings us to the concept of brand happiness. Schnebelen and Bruhn (2018, p. 102) define brand happiness as "a consumer's greatest emotional fulfillment, a moment-based experience of pleasant high and low arousal emotions, induced at different brand contact points (e.g., via purchase, consumption, advertisements)." Thus, brand happiness is an emotional state that is subjective and time limited in nature (Mogilner & Norton, 2019) and assumes different degrees of intensity. The reasons to operationalize brand happiness are multiple. First, when we refer to happiness in the context of consumption of brands, we do not consider general measures of happiness such as subjective well-being and satisfaction, as well-being represents general happiness and the role of the brand in it is unknown. Second, constructs such as subjective well-being measure happiness in the long run, whereas brand happiness is about those specific moments when consumers are encountering brands. Therefore, brand happiness is a useful measure that differentiates short- and long-term happiness. Third, just because brand happiness is momentary does not mean that it has no influence on long-term well-being. Research has established that repeated momentary exposures result in long-term happiness (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2011; Wang, John, & Griskevicious, 2021). This makes brand happiness the only available construct that measures happiness derived from consumption activities with an impact on individual long-term well-being. We therefore use brand happiness to operationalize happiness in a brand consumption context in this study.

Happiness appears to be a key motivation for buying expensive items. Paying a premium price for a luxury item may reflect the desire to live a unique experience (Cristini et al., 2017; Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021) or fulfill a personal desire or aspiration (e.g., status, pleasure, and belongingness) (Belk, 1988; Kapferer, 2012; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004), but luxury consumption always represents a rational demand for superior performance and quality (Eastman & Eastman, 2011). Thus, in general, luxury and prestige brands inspire positive feelings in buyers (Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Nobre & Simões, 2019) and therefore constitute promises of happiness. This may be one of the main reasons for the economic success of the new luxury market. A masstige strategy helps brands achieve symbolic value and, consequently, consumer happiness (Kumar, Paul, & Starčević, 2021).

Consumers often form status, inspiration, impulsive, and rewarding relationships with masstige brands (Hanslin & Rindell, 2014). These relationships, which are vehicles for the ideal self as a result of social comparison (Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004), make them relatively happy (Tu & Hsee, 2016). Branding theory empowers masstige brands with all the capabilities of the brand concept. The symbolic, psychological roles brands play for consumers are even more true and relevant for masstige brands and the relationships consumers form with them (Reimann et al., 2012). Sustaining strong positive relationships with brands might be a distant reality for consumers (Alvarez & Fournier, 2016), but brands can serve as momentary influencers through their use of masstige brands. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

> **H1.** The prestige associated with brands leads consumers to form relationships with masstige brands.

According to Schnebelen & Bruhn (2018), brand relationship quality is an important determinant of brand happiness. In support of this idea, Schmitt et al. (2015a, p. 169) argue that brand experience is a "key mediator between consumption and happiness." Thus, masstige marketing represents a means by which to promote unique and rewarding experiences, sometimes with unconventional luxury product categories, such as technology, food, or beverages. The subjective and individual experiences that consumers enjoy from the use of new luxury brands reinforce the experiential dimension of luxury consumption (see Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2015a) and the pleasure that consumers derive from it. This is true even for consumers who do not follow the masses or avoid displaying the status with which masstige is usually associated (Gaston-Breton et al., 2021; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, 2014).

Although consumption is commonly associated with well-being, in general researchers argue that short-term infatuation does not lead to happiness; instead, what really matters is people's long-term overall disposition

(Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2011). Despite the well-being literature's criticism of consumerism, people can save money and wait patiently to buy a special or rare item or an expensive brand to which they aspire or love. Even in the case of non-traditional luxury brands or products, consumer who wish to own them can perceive them as luxury. Given the symbolism and subjective meanings consumers attach to luxury products (goods and services), luxury brands offer room to investigate brand happiness and to ascertain how the happiness consumers derive from the consumption of brands may contribute to their well-being, with an impact on life happiness in the long run.

Research often defines conspicuous consumption as aggressive and selfish (Belk, 1999; Heine, 2012; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Wang, John, & Griskevicious, 2021). Mass marketing, in turn, is associated with waste and unsustainable behaviors, due to environmental consciousness (e.g., waste of water and pollution) or social concerns (e.g., working conditions and low salaries) (Amatulli et al., 2020). Therefore, the proliferation of prestige/premium brand extensions and product lines can increase the perceptions of conspicuousness and ephemerality of luxury products and thereby exacerbate psychological conflicts and feelings of guilt in some consumers. That is, masstige marketing might dilute the associations of rationality, consciousness, and sustainability that durability and high (fair) prices of luxury products and brands instill in consumers, increasing their environmental and social concerns. This can provoke psychological tensions, with a negative impact on their well-being (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021). In this case, we propose that strong consumer–brand relationships can act as an antidote to the contradictory emotions of pleasure versus guilt that the consumption of masstige brands can evoke.

Building on the literature, we suggest that the relationships that consumers form with masstige brands, as captured by Nobre and Simões's (2019) concept of New-Lux brand relationship, act as a mediator in the masstige–brand happiness relationship. The NewLux

brand relationship concept relies on the dimensions of commitment, self-connection, intimacy/loyalty, and passion. Commitment addresses the behavioral intention to use the brand and reflects the efforts a consumer expends to maintain that relationship (Gundlach, Achrol, & Mentzer, 1995). Self-connection represents the congruence between the self and brand image, which evokes symbolism (Fournier, 1998). Thus, the greater the commitment and self-connection, the greater the brand happiness. Intimacy/loyalty transmits feelings of trust and continuity, and passion represents intense feelings of high emotional reward (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004; Fletcher et al., 1999); both these dimensions are symbolic in nature and act together specifically in prestigious brands (Nobre & Simões, 2019). Thus, high scores on these two factors are associated with a high degree of happiness. Therefore, the NewLux brand relationship concept is an expression of the symbolism-in-use (see Merz, Zarantonello, & Grappi, 2018) that a masstige brand represents to consumers. Therefore, we predict that the stronger consumers' relationships are with their masstige brands, the greater their happiness with their masstige brands (see Figure 1):

> **H2.** The NewLux brand relationship mediates the relationship between masstige and brand happiness.

Moderation effects of consumer attitude and product category on the happy–masstige brand relationship

Masstige brands have become mass symbols that incite bandwagon consumption. The *bandwagon effect* occurs when the masses follow peers, celebrities, or social groups they aspire to, belong to, or admire (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, 2014). While these empowered new consumers are eager to improve their self-status and move closer to the upper social classes (Belk, 1999), for
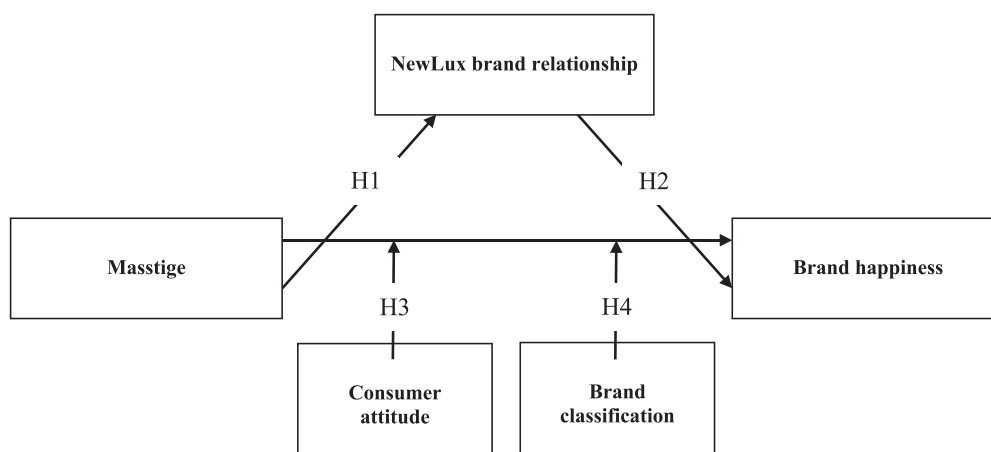

FIGURE 1 Conceptual model: consumers' relationship with masstige brands and happiness

people with a higher-than-average "need for uniqueness" (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, p. 1403), the perceived value of these expensive items, services, and brands is at risk (Heine, 2012; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). The bandwagon effect is more visible in people with low need for uniqueness and, thus, with high levels of social conformity. Therefore, the attractiveness of a masstige brand seems to decrease for consumers with a greater-than-average need for uniqueness, which denotes a kind of snob effect (Leibenstein, 1950; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Moreover, luxury and conspicuous consumption may evoke feelings of shame and guilt in consumers with high social concerns (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021), with a negative impact on their predisposition toward masstige brands.

Even if masstige no longer offers guarantees of social stratification and separation, as traditional luxury does (Belk, 1988, 1999; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999), it may still offer room for subjective interpretation of consumption through new and creative forms (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021). On the one hand, masstige can help consumers achieve different personal goals, such as a high self-concept, status seeking, and self-status improvement (Belk, 1988, 1999; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999); self-satisfaction through the bandwagon effect of following peers, celebrities, and the masses (Das, Saha, & Roy, 2022; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, 2014); rewarding experiences (Cristini et al., 2017); subjective meanings through new types of consumption (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021); and happiness through material possessions and experience (Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2015a). On the other hand, masstige can pose psychological and social issues for consumers, such as the fear of being a victim of popular consumption culture (e.g., those high in need for uniqueness; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Mansoor & Paul, 2022); the snob effect, which claims uniqueness and rarity (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004); the lack of sophistication, as true luxury should be discrete and rare (Heine, 2012); selfish and indulgent feelings and social constraints (Belk, 1999); feelings of shame and guilt for using expensive items in a society marked by inequality (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021); and self-consciousness (Kumar, Paul, & Starčević, 2021).

We argue that consumers' attitudes toward luxury brands influence the relevance of masstige brands in their lives and the happiness they attain from their consumption. Moreover, consumers pursue diverse goals (e.g., following celebrities or showing off status vs. investing in traveling or spending time with friends or family) and establish different types of relationships with luxury brands and objects, depending on both their own characteristics (e.g., personality traits, occupation, and life-cycle stage) and contextual factors (e.g., occasion of use, self-giving, and private vs. public consumption). With this in mind and given the panoply of different meanings, goals, and motivations that can be involved in

masstige consumption, we considered three groups of consumers in our analysis: luxury brand fans, luxury brand indifferents, and luxury brand avoiders. A luxury brand fan enjoys the luxury attached to the brand (due to the bandwagon effect). For a luxury brand indifferent, a masstige luxury brand makes no difference despite the luxury meaning attached to it (due to the snob effect). A luxury brand avoider shuns brands associated with a luxury image altogether. The reasons for avoiding luxury items and brands can vary, from a complete indifference to all luxury to conflicting feelings of indulgence, selfish behavior, and guilt (Belk, 1999; Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021). Therefore, we posit that the attitudes that consumers form toward luxury brands (fans, indifferents, and avoiders) induce different levels of relationship intensity and happiness with masstige brands (see Figure 1):

> **H3.** As consumers move from being luxury brand avoiders to luxury brand fans, the masstige–brand happiness relationship increases.

Previous empirical research indicates that the product category can influence consumers' relationship with the brand (Casteran, Chrysochou, & Meyer-Waarden, 2019; Nobre & Simões, 2019). The construct of consumer–brand relationship seems to work better in symbolic than utilitarian categories (e.g., supermarket brand and regular mineral water) (Nobre, 2010). Regardless, research finds mixed results on the influence of category on brand relationships (see Dawes, Meyer-Waarden, & Driesener, 2015). Uncles, Wang, and Kwok (2010) find no effect of product category on the consumer–brand relationship in their study, whereas Stern and Hammond (2004) find different degrees of loyalty for different product categories. Fetscherin et al. (2014) report that the product category can affect the intensity of consumers' relationship with brands, whereas in their study on the UK's Big Six electricity providers, Rutter et al. (2018) suggest the importance of using branding tools (e.g., symbolic brand personality traits) to achieve differentiation, fight commoditization, and retain customers in a typical switching behavior consumption sector. This latter case—low-contact services in a commoditized sector—is a good example of utilitarian consumption and one of the more difficult scenarios in which consumers form symbolic ties with a brand. This helps reinforce our view of the influence of brand category and the appeal of symbolism on consumers' attachment to brands.

In this study, we operationalize consumer–brand relationships through both functional and symbolic mass prestige/luxury brands. We expect luxury consumption, given its symbolic nature (Kapferer, 1998), to affect consumer–brand relationships in both *functional/utilitarian* and *psychosocial/emotional* (Fournier, 1998) categories (Nobre & Simões, 2019; Vogel, Cook, &

Watchravesringkan, 2019). Specifically, from a masstige perspective, we argue that symbolism associated with products contributes positively to consumer happiness (Kumar, Paul, & Starčević, 2021). Thus, we posit that the type of product category (functional vs. symbolic) influences the happiness that a masstige brand can evoke in consumers:

> **H4.** Symbolic brands moderate the masstige–brand happiness relationship more positively than functional brands.

METHOD

Data collection

Data collection aimed to collect consumers' self-reported perceptions of the level of masstige they associate with a specific brand, their relationship with the brand, and brand happiness. Consumers were informed about the study and asked for their consent to participate in it. Respondents were invited to choose up to three brands from a set of 19 global masstige brands with which they had some consumption experience. Two items also asked them about their predisposition toward luxury brands measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The scores on these items allowed us to assign respondents to one of the three groups: (1) luxury brand fans, (2) luxury brand indifferents, and or (3) luxury brand avoiders. The respondents then filled out a questionnaire for each chosen luxury brand. The last part of the questionnaire included demographic questions (i.e., age, gender, and occupation).

The individual questionnaires began with a brand familiarity item measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = not familiar at all, 5 = very familiar). For the instrument design, we followed the procedures of Nobre (2010, 2011). Subsequently, we asked respondents about their brand relationships and perceptions of masstige and brand happiness on a set of attitude and behavior items on three scales adapted from the literature. We operationalized the relationship with masstige brands using the NewLux Brand Relationship scale, which includes 16 items (Nobre & Simões, 2019) (Table A1). Nobre and Simões (2019) propose an experience-based definition for mass-consumed luxury under the paradigm of new luxury. First, the NewLux Brand Relationship scale asks respondents about their *commitment* and *self-connection* (e.g., "When thinking about your relationship with NewLux brand …" 1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*). Second, it asks them about the attributes related to *intimacy/loyalty* and *passion* (e.g., "If the NewLux brand were a person, how would you describe your relationship with the brand?" 1 = *least adequate*, 7 = *most adequate*).

To measure the masstige associated with brands (the masstige mean index), we used the only available scale (see Paul, 2015). This scale has 10 items (Table A3), and responses to these items are summed up to obtain the masstige score. The higher the score, the greater the masstige associated with a brand. We assessed the masstige mean index's items on a scale anchored by *least applicable* (1) and *highly applicable* (7). We operationalized the happiness induced from using brands with the Brand Happiness scale (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). The 12 items (Table A2) were also accessed on a scale anchored by *least applicable* (1) and *highly applicable* (7).

We subjected the initial draft of the questionnaire to tests of translation/back-translation from English to Portuguese. A bilingual researcher helped in the translation phase. We conducted a pilot study with 26 respondents (mostly faculty staff) to test their understanding of the adjectives, attributes, and questions overall and to refine the translation process. The final version of the questionnaire met the ethical rules for data collection by the university in Portugal where the study was developed. The questionnaire was released, in April 2020, in institutional form by the official university's communication office. The questionnaire collected data following the convenience sampling technique.

Brands selected

Brand selection followed the procedures Nobre and Simões (2019) used in their study, which also focuses on the Portuguese market. Thus, the stimuli included different brand personalities and product categories, ranging from functional to symbolic consumption. We classified the brands into two groups according to the respective product category. The functional brands included iPhone, Samsung, Miele, Bang & Olufsen, Nespresso, Apple (Mac), Sony, and Canon. The symbolic brands included Louis Vuitton, Chanel, BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Porsche, Cartier, Burberry, Gucci, Prada, Hugo Boss, and Carolina Herrera. Interbrand (2020) and Business Insider (Davis, 2020) report guided the selection of brands. We classified brands as functional versus symbolic following Aaker (1997). Aaker, however, notices that some product categories like automobiles can be considered in both functional and symbolic groups, depending on the consumer or purchase motivations. We assume that the same can happen with brands associated with technology like iPhone, Samsung or Apple (Mac). Thus, we classified brands in a continuum, as suggested by Ratchford (1987), between two extreme points: functional purchase motivations (i.e., cognitive information processing dominates the purchase decision) and symbolic purchase motivations (i.e., affective information processing dominates the purchase decision), respectively. Therefore, we assigned the brands relatively more associated with functional purchase motivations to the

functional group, and the brands relatively more linked to affective and sensory aspects to the symbolic group. As the primary market of our sample was Portugal, we also considered information from the trade industry on the Portuguese automobile market (Cofina Media, 2020). The final brand sample comprised global masstige brands, which increases the probability of the generalization/scope of this study to a global audience. To capture the consumption experience with luxury brands of the upper-middle class in a developed economy, as well as to gain generalizability of the results, we opened the questionnaire to a range of product lines and brand extensions under the prestige/luxury label, such as smaller automobile models from prestige brands (e.g., Mercedes-Benz, BMW) and sunglasses, accessories, and fragrances from fashion luxury brands (see Nobre & Simões, 2019).

Sample profile

The singular setting under study (i.e., mass prestige/accessible luxury brands) and the need to obtain respondents familiar and experienced with the selected brands created some difficulty in terms of the sample profile of a small European country (Portugal) that still has one of the lowest minimum national wages in Europe. Thus, we collected a non-random sample, using the Portuguese university communication services for convenience and to guarantee rigor in the application of ethical data collection procedures. The data collection resulted in 585 complete questionnaires. Each questionnaire corresponded to a consumer–brand relationship (the unit of analysis). We ensured that the respondents were familiar with and had experience with at least one of the 19 masstige brands under study. For the methodology, respondents needed to rate their familiarity with the brand on a one-item scale at the beginning of each questionnaire. We rejected 40 questionnaires in which the familiarity with the brands was less than 3 on the 5-point scale. Therefore, we used 545 responses for analysis. The sample entailed 391 respondents representing 545 valid brand relationships. The sample contained respondents of all age groups, ranging from younger consumers (millennials) to older consumers (third age), with an age range of 18 to 75 years.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

We checked the three constructs (masstige, NewLux brand relationship, and brand happiness) for reliability at the beginning of analysis. Cronbach's alpha value for the 16 items of the NewLux Brand Relationship scale was 0.941 and 0.91 and 0.97 for the masstige and brand happiness scales, respectively. Thus, all scales used in the study are quite robust in reliability. Before analysis, we

checked the data for common method bias. We adopted the most frequently used method of common method bias in business research (Fuller et al., 2016)—Harman's single-factor test. We took all the items in the study covering all the constructs and subjected them to factor analysis by restricting the number of factors to one. As a result, a single factor explained 52% of the variance, a percentage well within the acceptable range in business research (e.g., Fuller et al., 2016[2]). We calculated scores for the masstige scale only as suggested by Paul (2015); for the other scales, we used the mean values in analysis. Therefore, we subjected the NewLux Brand Relationship and Brand Happiness scales to factor analysis with principal component analysis as the extraction method and with varimax as the rotation method. The Brand Happiness scale gave a one-factor solution; we calculated the score of brand happiness by taking the gross mean of its questions. The NewLux Brand Relationship scale gave a three-factor solution; here, we retained two of the original factors of Nobre and Simões's (2019) model: intimacy/loyalty and passion. We combined the rest of the factors into a new dimension that we termed *faithfulness*. The reliability values are 0.93 for faithfulness, 0.83 for intimacy/loyalty, and 0.85 for passion. The NewLux Brand Relationship scale was the only scale with multiple dimensions, so we tested it for validity by building a measurement model in AMOS. The scale's measurement model indicated good fit (CMIN/df = 2.94, CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.05). The composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) values for faithfulness, intimacy/loyalty, and passion are above 0.85 (see Table 1). The square roots of the AVE for all three dimensions of NewLux brand relationship are less than the correlations among them, thus indicating strong reliability and validity of the NewLux Brand Relationship scale and its dimensions. We calculated the score of masstige following the scoring instructions of the scale (Paul, 2015). Finally, we took the gross mean of the three dimensions of the NewLux Brand Relationship scale (see Table 2).

To address the question whether masstige leads to brand relationships (see Figure 1), we used structural equation modeling and ran a hybrid structural model in AMOS, with masstige as the independent variable and the NewLux brand relationship dimensions as the dependent variables. After adjusting for some modification indices, we achieved good model fit (CMIN/df = 2.83, CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.06). The relationships between masstige and all three dimensions of the NewLux brand relationship construct were significant. All the standardized regression estimates were greater than 0.75 (masstige → faithfulness [0.93], masstige → intimacy/loyalty [0.78], masstige → passion [0.75]).

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[2]In their study, Fuller et al. (2016) use Monte Carlo simulation to address common method bias. They note that common method variance "would need to be on the order of 70% or more before substantial concern about inflated relationships would arise" (p. 3197); this percentage is much higher than what we obtained in our study (52%).

TABLE 1   Reliability and validity of NewLux dimensions

Constructs	CR	AVE	Faithfulness	Intimacy/loyalty	Passion
Faithfulness	0.868	0.623	0.789[a]	–	–
Intimacy/loyalty	0.922	0.570	0.686	0.755[a]	–
Passion	0.861	0.675	0.735	0.691	0.821[a]

[a]Square root of the AVE.

TABLE 2   Masstige and brand happiness scores

Brands	Masstige score	Brand happiness mean value
iPhone	30.47	2.45
Samsung	26.10	1.94
Miele	35.00	2.63
Smeg	26.33	2.42
Bang & Olufsen	31.50	1.96
Nespresso	29.12	2.29
Apple (Mac)	32.37	2.61
Sony	25.82	1.88
Carolina Herrera	39.80	3.95
Louis Vuitton	36.25	3.27
Chanel	39.00	3.98
BMW	35.05	3.04
Mercedes-Benz	37.65	3.17
Porsche	45.33	4.39
Cartier	44.33	4.17
Burberry	36.38	3.17
Gucci	34.25	2.50
Prada	37.75	3.54
Hugo Boss	30.08	2.97

The highly significant standardized estimates are an indication that prestige associated with brands helps consumers form relationships with these brands. The higher the value of prestige associated with a brand, the greater the intensity of commitment a consumer shows to the brand and the greater the perceived self-connection with and faithfulness to the masstige brand. Analysis also revealed that consumers have passionate and intimate relationships with masstige brands. These results provide support for H1.

Mediation analysis

To test whether the NewLux brand relationship mediates the masstige–brand happiness relationship, we ran a hybrid structural model in AMOS. The hybrid model achieved good model fit (CMIN/df = 2.98, CFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.06). To check the mediation, we first assessed the masstige–brand happiness relationship without the mediator in the AMOS hybrid model. We then examined the masstige–brand happiness relationship in the presence of the NewLux brand relationship. As the NewLux scale has three dimensions, we also ran a Sobel test to check the mediation. We examined the results of both mediation analyses together to discern mediation. Given the three dimensions of the mediator in the study, we ran three mediation analyses on a hybrid structural model. For each analysis, we used estimands in AMOS to report the indirect effects for each of the mediator dimensions and calculated separate indirect effects for each of the dimension of the NewLux brand relationship. Table 3 reports the results of the analysis.

Analysis reveals that the relationship between masstige and brand happiness without the mediator is strong (regression estimate: 0.93). When we add the mediator to the model, the relationship is still significant, but its weight marginally decreases (regression estimate: 0.88). Indirect effects are not significant for the faithfulness dimension. The Sobel test for faithfulness is also not significant. Both analyses reveal that faithfulness does not mediate the masstige–brand happiness relationship (Table 3). For intimacy/loyalty and passion, the indirect effects are significant. A Sobel test on both dimensions also shows significant results, indicating that intimacy/loyalty and passion both mediate the masstige–brand happiness relationship. Of note, intimacy/loyalty has a negative indirect effect and passion a positive indirect effect. To understand this, the regression estimates for masstige–intimacy/loyalty (regression estimate: 0.58) and intimacy/loyalty–brand happiness (regression estimate: −0.27) show that the greater the intimacy/loyalty to the masstige brand, the lesser is the happiness, whereas the greater the masstige of the brand, the greater the intimacy/loyalty. Overall, we show that an intimate relationship with a masstige brand negatively mediates the positive relationship between masstige and brand happiness. Intimacy/loyalty has a slightly higher indirect effect than passion (Sobel test). The mediation of the passion dimension of the NewLux brand relationship indicates that the happiness induced by the use of masstige brands is routed through passion associated with the brand. Thus, the NewLux brand relationship mediates the masstige–brand happiness relationship only through two of the three dimensions of the NewLux brand relationship construct. These results provide partial support for H2.

TABLE 3 Mediation analysis for masstige–brand happiness relationship (with NewLux brand relationship as mediator)

NewLux dimensions	Without mediator	With mediator	Indirect effects		
	Masstige–brand happiness	Masstige–brand happiness	Masstige–NewLux brand relationship → brand happiness	Sobel test	Does mediation exist?
Faithfulness	0.93***	0.88***	0.07	0.57	No
Intimacy/ loyalty			−0.16***	−4.38***	Yes
Passion			0.12**	4.12***	Yes

*p < 0.10. **p < 0.05. ***p < 0.01.

Moderation analysis

To check the moderation of the masstige–brand happiness relationship to consumer attitude toward luxury brands and brand type, we first classified consumers into three categories depending on their responses to prestige and luxury. We used the responses on two items: CC1 ("I am a fan of expensive/luxury brands") and CC2 ("I avoid buying brands associated with a luxury image"). The mean values of these two items were as follows: (1) if the mean value → CC1 is greater than or equal to 4 and the mean value → CC2 is less than or equal to 2, the consumer is a luxury brand fan; (2) if the mean value → CC1 and the mean value → CC2 are less than or equal to 3, the consumer is a luxury brand indifferent; and (3) if the mean value → CC1 is less than or equal to 2 and the mean value → CC2 is greater than or equal to 4, the consumer is a luxury brand avoider. For the moderation on brand types, we categorized the 19 brands in the study into functional and symbolic categories. We began with consumer attitudes as moderators and operationalized the moderation by using group differences with critical ratios in our hybrid model in AMOS. As we had three categories, we made three combinations by grouping two categories at a time to check the moderation using group differences with critical ratio criteria. The three combinations are luxury brand fan and luxury brand indifferent, luxury brand fan and luxury brand avoider, and luxury brand indifferent and luxury brand avoider. In the moderation analysis, for the luxury brand fan and luxury brand indifferent group, we first checked the masstige–brand happiness relationship for luxury brand fans and examined its significance and regression estimates. Similarly, we checked the relationship's significance and regression estimate for consumers who were luxury brand indifferent. Thereafter, we examined the differences in the significance and estimates of the two groups using critical ratios. If the groups' estimates and significance are significantly different, moderation is confirmed. We did this for all three groups. For the brand types (functional vs. symbolic), we followed the same criteria. In addition to the masstige–brand happiness relationship, we checked the moderation for other relationships (masstige–faithfulness, masstige–intimacy/loyalty, masstige–passion, faithfulness–brand happiness, intimacy/loyalty–

brand happiness, and passion–brand happiness) to gain a detailed understanding (see Table 4).

The results of the moderation analysis indicate that for the masstige–brand happiness relationship, luxury brand fans feel happier due to the use of masstige brands. Thus, H3 is supported. The moderation occurs for the luxury brand fan and luxury brand indifferent group. The standardized regression estimate for the luxury brand fan group (0.66) is higher than that for the luxury brand indifferent group (0.54). Thus, those who are fans of luxury brands, if they use masstige brands, their happiness will increase more than that of indifferents toward luxury brands. Similarly, moderation exists in the masstige–faithfulness relationship for all group combinations. Standardized regression shows that luxury brand fans are more faithful to masstige brands than those who are indifferent, but those who avoid luxury brands are more committed to and self-connected (faithful) with the masstige brand than luxury brand fans and luxury brand indifferents. We also find moderation in the faithfulness–brand happiness relationship for the luxury brand fan and luxury brand indifferent group. As already reported, luxury brand fans form faithful relationships with masstige brands, and this faithfulness leads to happiness only for this group when compared with indifferents. We find no significant differences for avoiders.

Regarding the type of brand (functional vs. symbolic), no moderation exists for the masstige–brand happiness relationship. That is, regardless of whether the masstige brand is functional or symbolic in nature, the happiness evoked from its usage will not differ. Thus, the results do not provide support for H4. With regard to the moderation for the other relationships in the hybrid model, we find that moderation exist for the masstige–intimacy/loyalty relationship. Standardized regression estimates show that an intimate relationship is stronger for symbolic than functional brands.

DISCUSSION

Symbolic and functional masstige brands

In this study, the commitment and self-connection factors from the original model of Nobre and Simões

TABLE 4 Moderation analysis

Relationship	Consumer attitudes toward luxury brands		Moderation analysis: Group difference tests using critical ratios					Standardized regression weights if moderation exists	
	A	B	Estimate (A)	P (A)	Estimate (B)	P (B)	Z score	A	B
Masstige–brand happiness	**Functional**	**Symbolic**	**0.923**	**0.000**	**0.557**	**0.021**	**−1.171**	**NM**	**NM**
	Fan	Indifferent	0.249	0.433	1.433	0.000	2.9442***	0.66***	0.54***
	Fan	Avoider	0.249	0.433	6.097	0.588	0.520	NM	NM
	Indifferent	Avoider	1.433	0.000	6.097	0.588	0.415	NM	NM
Masstige–faithfulness	**Functional**	**Symbolic**	**0.838**	**0.000**	**0.901**	**0.000**	**0.496**	**NM**	**NM**
	Fan	Indifferent	0.584	0.000	0.957	0.000	2.8781***	0.95***	0.90***
	Fan	Avoider	0.584	0.000	1.507	0.000	3.4963***	0.95***	0.98***
	Indifferent	Avoider	0.957	0.000	1.507	0.000	2.1065**	0.90***	0.98***
Masstige– intimacy/loyalty	**Functional**	**Symbolic**	**0.550**	**0.000**	**0.745**	**0.000**	**2.051****	**0.74*****	**0.86*****
	Fan	Indifferent	0.528	0.000	0.674	0.000	1.428	NM	NM
	Fan	Avoider	0.528	0.000	0.812	0.000	1.616	NM	NM
	Indifferent	Avoider	0.674	0.000	0.812	0.000	0.830	NM	NM
Masstige–passion	**Functional**	**Symbolic**	**0.699**	**0.000**	**0.699**	**0.000**	**0.000**	**NM**	**NM**
	Fan	Indifferent	0.691	0.000	0.691	0.000	0.000	NM	NM
	Fan	Avoider	0.691	0.000	0.691	0.000	0.000	NM	NM
	Indifferent	Avoider	0.691	0.000	0.691	0.000	0.000	NM	NM
Faithfulness–brand happiness	**Functional**	**Symbolic**	**0.048**	**0.809**	**0.161**	**0.359**	**0.429**	**NM**	**NM**
	Fan	Indifferent	1.003	0.045	−0.179	0.347	−2.213**	0.68**	−0.14
	Fan	Avoider	1.003	0.045	−3.254	0.656	−0.582	NM	NM
	Indifferent	Avoider	−0.179	0.347	−3.254	0.656	−0.422	NM	NM
Intimacy/loyalty–brand happiness	**Functional**	**Symbolic**	**−0.267**	**0.000**	**−0.321**	**0.010**	**−0.367**	**NM**	**NM**
	Fan	Indifferent	−0.290	0.055	−0.392	0.000	−0.566	NM	NM
	Fan	Avoider	−0.290	0.055	−0.300	0.011	−0.050	NM	NM
	Indifferent	Avoider	−0.392	0.000	−0.300	0.011	−0.603	NM	NM
Passion–brand happiness	**Functional**	**Symbolic**	**0.205**	**0.000**	**0.205**	**0.000**	**0.000**	**NM**	**NM**
	Fan	Indifferent	0.187	0.000	0.187	0.000	0.000	NM	NM
	Fan	Avoider	0.187	0.000	0.187	0.000	0.000	NM	NM
	Indifferent	Avoider	0.187	0.000	0.187	0.000	0.000	NM	NM

Abbreviation: NM, no moderation.

*p < 0.10. **p < 0.05. ***p < 0.01.

(2019) merged into a new factor we termed *faithfulness*. This outcome might be due to the predominance of consumer relationships with functional (82%) rather than symbolic (18%) brands in the final sample, as previous findings (e.g., Nobre, 2010) reveal that the consumer–brand relationship, a construct theoretically related to the brand personality concept, works better with symbolic than functional product categories. We used five functional categories (smartphones, household appliances, personal computers, televisions, and sound systems) and two symbolic categories (fashion product brands and automobiles). Our sample is quite different from the original sample Nobre and Simões used to develop the NewLux Brand Relationship scale. They built the NewLux model with a sample of relationships with mass-luxury brands in mostly symbolic product categories (e.g., Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and Mercedes-Benz) mostly associated with old luxury (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). Thus, the characteristics of our sample might be a reason for the convergence of the two attitudinal constructs, commitment and self-connection, into one.

Masstige induces symbolic consumption that usually involves high involvement and affective ties (Belk, 1988). Thus, attitudinal loyalty is a better measure of masstige brands than behavioral loyalty (Rundle-Thiele & Bennett, 2001). Attitudinal loyalty measures include commitment, intention to purchase, verbal

probability (as partly reflected in the items of the commitment scale used in this study), attitude toward the brand, and brand preference (as the self-connection scale seems to indicate). These are better predictors of future behavior and are more suitable to assess loyalty than behavioral measures (e.g., frequency of and actual purchase) (Rundle-Thiele & Bennett, 2001; Rundle-Thiele & Mackay, 2001). Attitudinal loyalty is also associated with a will "to remain faithful" (Rundle-Thiele & Bennett, 2001, p. 37). As noted, faithfulness, together with intimacy/loyalty and passion, encompasses the third NewLux brand relationship in this study.

Masstigeness of brands

The stimuli used in this study capture the perceptions of masstige that consumers form from their brands and products. However, the masstige scores were low for the majority of the brands in the study (see Table 2). The respondents only seem to associate some masstige with Porsche (45.33) and Cartier (44.33). According to Paul (2018), masstige scores between 40 and 50 indicate that a firm has not yet succeeded in brand building based on masstige marketing. The masstige scores for Carolina Herrera (39.80) and Chanel (39.00) are on the borderline of brands with the potential for masstige marketing. As the sample of the symbolic brands in the study is small, we analyzed the results at the aggregate level rather than by individual brand because it normally offers better consistency in results (Brown, 1985; Dall'Olmo Riley et al., 1997; Rundle-Thiele & Mackay, 2001). That is, when calculating masstige scores at the aggregate level for functional and symbolic brands, none of the categories achieve the masstige mark. For functional brands, the masstige score average is 28.91, while for symbolic brands, it is 36.41. It seems that respondents generally associate more prestige with the symbolic brands in the sample.

Regarding the functional brands, while respondents may attribute status to them (e.g., iPhone), they do not seem to view them as luxury or masstige. This result may have two explanations. First, respondents might not have associated masstige with their possessions. Second, they might have been constrained by the conflicting meanings that luxury can represent to them (see Amatulli et al., 2020; Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021). This might also be the reason for the generally low masstige scores that respondent attributed to brands in the study. As noted, study respondents belong to Portugal's well-educated middle/upper-middle class. On the one hand, they might not have wanted to associate masstige with the brands they purchase. The respondents likely try not to follow the masses, be associated with popular consumption culture, or be a victim of the bandwagon effect (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, 2014). On the other hand, they might view the consumption of conspicuous luxuries as selfish, indulgent, and socially unacceptable (Belk, 1999). According to Manika et al. (2021, p. 252), "people want to hold consistent attitudes with their knowledge"; thus, the more people factually know (objective knowledge) and the more they perceive they know (subjective knowledge) about a subject,[3] the more favorable their attitudes will be toward the social norms that conform to their knowledge.

The classification of the respondents ($n = 545$) into the three categories of luxury brand fans ($n = 92$), luxury brand indifferents ($n = 284$), and luxury brand avoiders ($n = 115$) indicates that there are as many as 54 relationships (our unit of analysis) that are not falling in any of these categories. We call this category 4. Consumers in category 4 rated high on both items "I am a fan of expensive/luxury brands" and "I avoid to buy brands associated with a luxury image." The results indicate that 16.9% (92) of consumers are luxury brand fans, 52.1% (284) are luxury brand indifferents, 21.10% (115) are luxury brand avoiders, and 9% (54) are undefined. We conclude that 376 respondents (92 luxury brand fans and 284 luxury brand indifferents) clearly do not seem to be concerned about whether to buy a luxury item, and 92 inclusively enjoy doing so. However, 169 respondents (115 luxury brand avoiders and 54 undefined—category 4) avoid brands linked with luxury, do not have a consistent or definitive opinion about it, or do not want to be associated with it.

Diffused happiness and relationship from masstige brands

Our results corroborate the findings of Kumar, Paul, and Unnithan (2020) that masstige is a source of happiness. Nevertheless, the scores for happiness were also low (see Table 2). For the scores for masstige, respondents seem to associate happiness only with Porsche (4.39), Cartier (4.17), Chanel (3.98), and Carolina Herrera (3.95). Again, we aggregated the data to compare functional and symbolic brands. Regarding the differences in happiness scores for functional (2.25) and symbolic (3.23) brands, consumers seem happier with the latter. Luxury consumption is symbolic and subjective in nature (Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009) and, thus, experiential (Nobre & Simões, 2019). In line with these notions, we assume that consumers' experiences with their brands help define how they perceive luxury or masstige. Moreover, it is the symbolism and experiences that make consumers happy with their masstige brands (Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2015a, 2015b). Consider museums, for example. Museums, a particular set

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[3]According to Manika et al. (2021), (1) objective knowledge refers to the knowledge, whether correct or not, that consumers hold in memory, and (2) subjective knowledge corresponds to what consumers think they know. Both objective and subjective knowledge have a positive effect on attitudes, with subjective knowledge having a greater impact on behavior change.

of cultural organizations, offer many scenarios for the development of individual and subjective experiences; yet they can also be a source of status, social recognition, uniqueness, and exclusiveness for visitors and people in their membership programs (e.g., Ebbers, Leeders, & Augustijn, 2021). In their study, Ebbers, Leeders, and Augustijn (2021) conclude that perceived prestige of the museum leverages value co-creation activities with an impact on members' perceived benefits, thus improving their perceived social status and the museum's prestige. Moreover, visiting museums and taking part in their offerings (e.g., stores and restaurant) can help enhance visitors' social image.

The relationships between masstige and all three dimensions of the NewLux brand relationship were significant. This finding evidences that prestige associated with brands can influence consumers to form relationships with these brands. Thus, the results confirm that the NewLux brand relationship is a mediator in the masstige–brand happiness relationship. However, the NewLux brand relationship only partially mediates the path between masstige and happiness, through the intimacy/loyalty and passion dimensions. The indirect effect for faithfulness is not significant, which may be due to two reasons. First, commitment can relate to a pragmatic or opportunistic behavioral intention to stay with a brand because it is expensive and durable (e.g., "I am likely to be using Mercedes one year from now" one of the items of the commitment scale). This can also happen with the other brands in the study; note, however, that we did not include beverages, hospitality services, or other consumable goods or services (Rundle-Thiele & Bennett, 2001) in the sample. Second, consumers might be loyal to Apple, for example, because its system is compatible with their iPhone and not because it gives them happiness. For self-connection, some of the scale items may evoke psychological and social conflicts (e.g., "The Mercedes brand says a lot about the kind of person I would like to be" and "The Mercedes brand makes a statement about what is important to me in life"), such as feelings of inauthenticity driven by undue privilege or an antisocial or selfish image induced by the use of expensive brands (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021). Again, these conflicts have nothing to do with happiness.

According to Belk (1999, p. 42), "the closer an item is to being regarded as a necessity, the less likelihood that any opprobrium (or prestige) will attach to its use." This may be a reason for the low scores of masstige and happiness in our study. One aspect of relevance here is the finding that 81.8% of the responses in the final sample have relationships with functional brands (e.g., iPhone, Samsung, and Sony) versus 18.2% with symbolic brands (e.g., Louis Vuitton, Chanel, and Prada). Although functional brands can bring meaning to consumers' lives (Fournier, 1998), they are associated more with stability and reliability. These are typical characteristics of intimacy/loyalty relationships and less associated with the intense emotions and excitement that a passionate relationship provokes. Prior research suggests that, beyond a certain point, loyalty begins decreasing, which may result in less happiness (Aksoy et al., 2015). Our results lend support to this idea, as the score of the intimacy/loyalty dimension was the highest (4.05) among the three dimensions on the NewLux Brand Relationship scale, and respondents with intimacy/loyalty relationships seem to be the least happy with their masstige brands. The symbolic consumption of luxury is embedded in superfluousness and glamor (Kapferer, 1998) and therefore is associated more with passion and brand happiness (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). In Fletcher et al.'s (1999) *ideals of intimate inter-personal relationships*, intimacy/loyalty and passion are the two dimensions of a bifactorial model developed to explain close inter-personal relationships that somehow act as opposite dimensions. Similarly, our results indicate that intimacy/loyalty has a negative indirect effect on the masstige–brand happiness relationship and passion has a positive indirect effect. Thus, the stronger the consumer–brand relationship of passion with the masstige brand, the happier a consumer with that masstige brand. By contrast, the more a consumer has an intimate and loyal relationship with a masstige brand, the less happy he or she is. This negative intimacy/loyalty effect is a notable finding that needs further intervention from scholars.

Luxury fan versus indifferent versus avoider

Consumer attitude toward luxury brands moderates the masstige–brand happiness relationship. However, the moderation only exists for the luxury brand fan and luxury brand indifferent group. These consumers do not avoid buying luxury items, in contrast with luxury brand avoiders or people who experience social costs for buying expensive brands that others cannot afford (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021). These fans seem to experience more happiness as result of using masstige brands than the indifferent group; however, no differences exist between fans and luxury brand avoiders for this relationship. Similarly, moderation exists in the masstige–faithfulness relationship for all group combinations. The results suggest that those who avoid luxury brands are more committed to and self-connected with the masstige brand than luxury brand fans and luxury brand indifferents. This result is logical for masstige avoiders, as using a masstige brand might provide them with superior value. Moreover, the more a consumer is a luxury brand fan, the more happiness he or she attains from being faithful to masstige brands, when compared with indifferents, though not avoiders. Therefore, luxury brand indifferents (the *snobs*) are less happy with masstige brands, and they also have less faithful relationships with these brands than luxury brand fans and avoiders. This result confirms Kumar et al.'s (2021, p. 6) finding that "self-consciousness [dampens] the relationship between

masstige and brand-induced happiness." A possible explanation for this result is that those who are indifferent or avoid luxury/prestige brands use masstige brands only because of the value those brands confer.

We found no moderation effects, however, for the type of brand (functional vs. symbolic) in the masstige–brand happiness relationship. Thus, our results confirm previous research that masstige is an antecedent of happiness and can be highly profitable and beneficial to brands (Kumar, Paul, & Unnithan, 2020). Regarding the path from masstige to the NewLux brand relationship, the type of brand was only a moderator in the case of the intimacy/loyalty relationship dimension. It seems that intimate relationships are stronger for symbolic than functional brands. This partial moderation confirms previous research (Nobre, 2010) that shows that brand relationships work better when symbolic brands are involved.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Consumers engage in various activities and use brands to gain happiness, such as sharing brand purchases on social media (Duan & Dholakia, 2017), engaging in gamified experiences with brands (Nobre & Ferreira, 2017), and participating in brand communities (Hook, Baxter, & Kulczynski, 2018). For example, consumers buy Apple products for social exposure and happiness (Arruda-Filho, Cabusas, & Dholakia, 2010), which in turn leads to customer loyalty (Chen & Ann, 2016). Overall, brands can provide consumers with extraordinary experiences (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014) and meet their emotional and psychological needs. These relationships also give consumers satisfaction, bringing meaning to their lives (Fournier, 1998) and, consequently, triggering happiness (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). Thus, brand managers need to be cognizant of the importance of fostering strong relationships with consumers, with the aim to increase their general satisfaction. In particular, the subjectivity and symbolism involved in the consumption of masstige brands (Nobre & Simões, 2019) can be a source of rich life experiences, which in turn can enhance consumer well-being in the long run (Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2015a). In addition, managers need to put in practice the right marketing strategies that can improve the masstige scores of their brands (Paul, 2015).

Our results indicate that the more passionate a New-Lux brand relationship is, the more happiness a consumer associates with the brand, and this result is indifferent to the type of brand category (functional or symbolic). Although we found that luxury fans are the happiest with their masstige brands (as expected), luxury brands avoiders form the strongest faithful relationships with masstige brands. Thus, consumer attitude toward luxury brands is a moderator of the masstige–brand happiness relationship. Given this result, we encourage managers to foster strong NewLux brand relationships as these can

represent important sources of profit for the company, whether because they make luxury fans happy or because they become special to avoiders. This indicates that a masstige strategy can bolster subjective and emotional attachments to the brand. This is especially true for indifferents, who make use of their masstige brands in creative and unique ways, similar to those with a higher-than-average need for uniqueness (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012).

Luxury is no longer for the elite; instead, under the new luxury paradigm, purchasing, using, or owning masstige brands engenders meaningful experiences for many more consumers. Marketers can creatively encourage brand experiences (e.g., through social media; Kim & Ko, 2012) to influence consumer preferences, relationship quality, and purchase intention toward the brand (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Kim & Ko, 2012) and, in turn, foster brand happiness (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). A masstige strategy can be extended to categories such as services, food, beverages, and other *little luxuries* (Belk, 1999); to products typically associated with functional and utilitarian characteristics; and, finally, to eudemonic versus hedonic consumer's consumption experiences (e.g., enjoying an Italian gelato or studying in a prestigious university; Cristini et al., 2017). Thus, managers can explore masstige as ground for the creation of experiences that can be subjectively perceived and conceived by consumers in the use of their products and brands.

Brand managers could also use a masstige strategy for ethical and sustainable products, which tend to be pricier and more exclusive, reflecting a certain lifestyle and income. In doing so, they can attract different targets, especially those opposed to consumerism (e.g., out of concerns related to human or animal welfare). A premium price usually corresponds to superior quality (Eastman & Eastman, 2011), which might also contribute to more sustainable, less wasteful, and more ethical consumption. In this way, a new luxury brand positioning could help dilute the psychological conflicts and social tensions associated with luxury consumption (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021) and thus contribute to consumer well-being (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2011). This line of thought constitutes a direction for future research.

In summary, masstigeness leads to consumer–brand relationships and brand happiness. Thus, we propose a three-dimensional strategy. First, brands with a low masstige score should invest effort in improving the masstigeness associated with their images in consumers' minds. If consumers begin perceiving these brands as masstige brands, their relationships with these brands will be enhanced, as our results show. Second, managers can work to boost symbolism in the positioning of their brands, as consumers form better relationships with symbolic brands. Third, managers can promote experiences as part of the package. Symbolic associations stem from lifestyle aspirations, ethical concerns, a sustainable way of life, luxury sensations, and upscale experiences.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This research is a novel attempt to understand consumer happiness in masstige brands context. The study's operationalization of the consumer–brand relationship and brand happiness constructs is unique. This study also advances the literature on branding, in general, and research on masstige marketing, in particular, which is still an understudied field. As such, additional research in this area is required to substantiate the generalization of our results. Further research could replicate our study in different regions with different brands and consumer types and adopt different methodology (e.g., experiential design). For example, masstige is a function of price, which is also tied to income from a consumer perspective. Therefore, income might play an important role in masstige consumption behavior; its impact, however, might vary depending on consumers' identity culture or country. Consumer behavior is embedded in a wide social context that exerts control over individuals' actions and behaviors, and the degree of social influence depends on the extent to which individual behavior is influenced by "role differentiation" (Patel, 2017, p. 90). Consumer behavior, therefore, represents a trade-off between individuals' preference for their cultural *grid-group* and the larger social context in which they are embedded. Thus, the role of income in masstige consumption and its interaction with consumers' cultural identity represent a worthwhile direction for future study. Moreover, demographics such as age, education, and gender, as determinants of individual behavior, might affect masstige consumption differently. This question also merits further research.

We explored the relationship between masstige and brand happiness in light of NewLux brand relationships. This raises important questions that future studies could address: Are luxury seekers more concerned with the product's aura of luxury and less so with the specific masstige brand name? Do *indifferents* aspire for more luxury that only exclusive lines can give them? Do they always avoid the masses and seek exclusive and elitist brands? How consumer–brand relationships can enhance brands scoring low on masstige is beyond the scope of our study.

Another possible direction for future research is to ascertain the nature of consumers who do not fall into any of the three categories (i.e., luxury brand fans, indifferents, and avoiders). Consumers in category 4 seem to be inconsistent in their position, as they rated high as both luxury brand fans and luxury brand avoiders. This might be due to financial constraints (e.g., lack of resources), psychological conflicts (e.g., shame and guilt; Belk, 1999; Amatulli et al., 2020), the *impostor syndrome* (i.e., psychological tension related to feelings of inauthenticity in luxury consumption; Goor et al., 2020), or social tensions (e.g., social conformity; Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2021) associated with luxury consumption.

A criticism of consumerism in the literature on well-being is based on the argument that consumption provides consumers with momentary positive feelings but does not lead to an overall happy life (Ahuvia, 2017). Our study evidences that consumer–brand relationships with a masstige brand contribute to brand happiness, and we suspect that this happiness tends to be longer when luxury brands are repetitively used, contributing to consumers' long-term well-being (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2011; Wang, John, & Griskevicious, 2021). This issue deserves further investigation.

We also call attention to the finding that happiness did not differ whether the masstige brand was functional or symbolic. One possible explanation for this result could be the difficulty in objectively ascertaining the functional versus symbolic motivations underlined in the purchase decision process of some products, such as smartphones and computers. As referred before, we classified brands as relatively more utilitarian or relatively more symbolic, according to a continuum, ranging between functional purchase motivations dominance and symbolic purchase motivations dominance (Ratchford, 1987). However, some of the product categories in the study can be considered either functional or symbolic, depending on the consumer and his/her purchase motivations (Aaker, 1997; Ratchford, 1987) (e.g., iPhone, Samsung, and App). Thus, the categorization of brands into two distinct groups (functional vs. symbolic) could be somewhat forced. We consider this one of the limitations of the study that deserves further inquiry. Another possible explanation for this result can steam from the nature of the happiness under consideration. Thus, future research could explore whether this holds true when evaluating happiness from different perspectives (e.g., hedonic vs. eudemonic) and across different categories (e.g., tourism and hospitality services). We suspect, however, that eudemonic happiness is more difficult to capture in a context of consumption. This is because people often do not associate consumerism and marketing activities (or, at least, the negative connotation that marketing may have to them) with psychological experiences, even when those experiences involve products, services, or brands (e.g., cultural products and services). This question also deserves further investigation.

CONCLUSION

This study represents one of the first attempts to analyze how consumer's relationships with masstige brands play a role in their happiness. We conclude that the use of masstige brands makes consumers happy. The study also establishes that consumers form relationships with masstige brands, which partially mediates the relationship between masstige and brand happiness. The findings

indicate that consumers who have intimate and loyal relationships with masstige brands are less likely to feel happy than consumers who form more intense and passionate relationships with these brands. The happiness experienced from masstige brands is indifferent to the type of brand (functional vs. symbolic), while consumer attitude toward luxury brands is a moderator in the masstige–brand happiness relationship. We find that luxury brand fans attain (1) more happiness from using masstige brands and (2) more happiness from their faithful relationships with masstige brands than indifferents but not avoiders. However, avoiders form the strongest faithful relationships with masstige brands.

The more passionate the consumer–brand relationship, the happier consumers will be with their masstige brand. We predict that this happiness might enhance consumers' overall disposition, contributing to their long-term well-being.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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APPENDIX: CONSTRUCTS AND ITEMS NAMES

T A B L E A 1   NewLux Brand Relationship scale.

Measure	Items Original English items names (Nobre & Simões, 2019)	Items Portuguese version of the items for the present study
Commitment	• "I am very loyal to **MasstigeBrand**."	• "Sou muito leal à **MasstigeBrand**"
	• "I am willing to make small sacrifices in order to keep using **MasstigeBrand**."	• "Estou na disposição de fazer pequenos sacrifícios de forma a poder continuar a utilizar/consumir a **MasstigeBrand**"
	• "I am so happy with **MasstigeBrand** that I no longer feel the need to watch out for other alternatives."	• "Estou tão contente com a **MasstigeBrand** que não sinto necessidade de estar atento a outras alternativas"
	• "I am likely to be using **MasstigeBrand** one year from now."	• "Provavelmente, vou continuar a ser utilizador/consumidor da **MasstigeBrand** num futuro próximo"
Self-connection	• "The **MasstigeBrand** brand connects with the part of me that really makes me tick."	• "A **MasstigeBrand** associa-se a uma parte da minha pessoa que realmente me toca"
	• "The **MasstigeBrand** brand fits well my current stage of life."	• "A **MasstigeBrand** corresponde bem à minha atual fase de vida"
	• "The **MasstigeBrand** brand says a lot about the kind of person I would like to be."	• "A **MasstigeBrand** tem muito a ver com a pessoa que eu gostaria de ser"
	• "Using **MasstigeBrand** lets me be a part of a shared community of like-minded consumers."	• "Ser utilizador/consumidor da **MasstigeBrand** faz-me pertencer a uma comunidade partilhada por consumidores com interesses parecidos"
	• "The **MasstigeBrand** brand makes a statement about what is important to me in life."	• "A **MasstigeBrand** exprime aquilo que é importante para mim na vida"
Intimacy/ loyalty	• Honest	• Honesta
	• Respect	• De respeito
	• Trusting	• De confiança
	• Support	• Que dá apoio
Passion	• Passionate	• Apaixonada
	• Excitement	• Entusiasmante
	• Challenging	• Estimulante/desafiante

T A B L E A 2   Brand Happiness scale (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018)

Items	Items
Original English version (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018)	Portuguese version of the items for the present study
1. "Glad"	1. "Contente"
2. "Cheerful"	2. "Alegre"
3. "Joyful"	3. "Feliz"
4. "Lively"	4. "Animado"
5. "Peppy"	5. "Esfuziante"
6. "Vigorous"	6. "Enérgico"
7. "Proud"	7. "Vaidoso"
8. "Superior"	8. "Importante"
9. "Worthy"	9. "Merecedor"
10. "Relaxed"	10. "Descontraído"
11. "At ease"	11. "Tranquilo"
12. "Comfortable"	12. "Sentir-se bem"

T A B L E   A 3   Masstige scale (Paul, 2015)

Items **Original English version (Paul, 2015)**	Items **Portuguese version of the items for the present study**
1. "I like **MasstigeBrand** because of the mass prestige associated with it."	1. "Eu gosto da **MasstigeBrand** por causa do prestígio associado à marca"
2. "I feel like to buy **MasstigeBrand** because of mass prestige."	2. "Apetece-me comprar a **MasstigeBrand** por causa do prestígio"
3. "I tend to pay high price for **MasstigeBrand** for status quo."	3. "Eu estou disposto a pagar um preço elevado pela **MasstigeBrand** devido ao seu status quo"
4. "I consider **MasstigeBrand** as a "top of mind" brand in my country."	4. "Eu considero a **MasstigeBrand** como sendo uma marca "top of mind" no meu país"
5. "I would like to recommend **MasstigeBrand** to friends and relatives."	5. "Eu recomendaria a marca **MasstigeBrand** aos meus amigos e familiares"
6. "Nothing is more exciting than **MasstigeBrand**."	6. "Não há nada mais entusiasmante do que a **MasstigeBrand**"
7. "I believe **MasstigeBrand** is known for high quality."	7. "Eu considero que a **MasstigeBrand** é conhecida pela sua elevada qualidade"
8. "I believe **MasstigeBrand** is of international standard."	8. "Eu considero a **MasstigeBrand** como detendo um padrão de nível internacional"
9. "I love to buy **MasstigeBrand** regardeless of the price."	9. "Eu adoro comprar a marca **MasstigeBrand** independentemente do seu preço"
10. "I believe that people in my country consider **MasstigeBrand** as a synonym of prestige."	10. "Eu acho que os portugueses consideram a **MasstigeBrand** como um sinónimo de prestígio"

Note: MasstigeBrand refers to one of the following mass prestige/luxury brands: iPhone, Samsung, Miele, Bang & Olufsen, Nespresso, Apple (Mac), Sony, Canon, Louis Vuitton, Chanel, BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Porsche, Cartier, Burberry, Gucci, Prada, Hugo Boss, and Carolina Herrera.