



# Luxury Fashion Brands and Women: A Comparative Analysis Between Brands and Consumers on Instagram

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*This study examines how luxury fashion brands and luxury fashion brand hashtags that consumers use in their posts portray women on Instagram. The study was framed by sexual objectification theory (physical presentation, body display, sexually suggestive poses, and feminine touch) and sexism stereotypes (women in traditional roles such as dependent, caretaker, decorative and sexual object). This study examines 700 Instagram posts, 350 from top luxury fashion brands, and 350*

*from consumers. Young and skinny women's images dominate Instagram posts created by luxury fashion brands, while consumers are older and fit. Unexpected results show that luxury fashion brands feature women less sexually desirable, with less sexually suggestive poses and fewer sexist stereotypes than consumers.*

**Keywords:** luxury brands, women, objectification, sexism stereotypes, Instagram.

The consumer on Instagram is 50.9% women and 18-24 years old (Instagram, 2020). This social media provides young women messages to project an identity of themselves socially and emotionally (Hunt *et al.*, 2014). This identity allows them to belong to a group or a community through the selections of the hashtags (Giannoulakis and Tsapatsoulis, 2016). It is a type of metadata tag used on social networks, they are popular on Instagram because they help other users easily find messages with a specific theme or content (Giannoulakis and Tsapatsoulis, 2016). Indeed, digital advertising strategy is no longer about what the brands are saying to the customers, but how the customers influence what they are saying to each other (Kotler *et al.*, 2016). About 60% of Instagram users

claim to discover new products via other profiles (Instagram, 2020). Actually, when consumers are using the luxury brand hashtags in their post, they help the brand to be more visible. But also, the hashtag has a similar effect of knockoffs and counterfeit products, because they provide an opportunity for non-elite consumers to produce the signs of a luxurious lifestyle (Hietanen *et al.*, 2018).

Studies about gender stereotypes in advertising have been done many times before (Fullerton, 2000; Kitsa and Mudra, 2019; Plakoyiannaki and Zotos, 2009; Plakoyiannaki *et al.*, 2008; Soloaga and Muriel, 2008; Tortajada, Araña, and Martínez, 2013), but there are few studies about women portrayal in luxury brands. Furthermore, to the best of the authors' knowledge, there is not any academic inquiry in comparing how brands portrayed women and how luxury fashion brand's hashtag that consumers use in their post portrayed women on Instagram.

Thus, in the current study, we seek to investigate how luxury fashion brands portray women and how consumers' Instagram users portray women in terms of body-appearance, and stereotypes. It is also important to compare consumers and luxury fashion brands' on their use of sexism stereotypes, because luxury fashion brands have a strong character of identity and belonging, for being conspicuous and cultural desirability (Hung *et al.*, 2011; Pentina, Guilloux, and Micu, 2018).

To that end, we analyzed 700 posts (350 luxury fashion brands' post and 350 luxury fashion brand's hashtags that consumers use in their post) to investigate how luxury fashion brands and their fans portray women in their Instagram posts.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Luxury brands are survivors in recession time, they have existed for decades (Salehzadeh and Pool, 2017). These brands are known for their high quality, luxury goods and upper-class status (Adomaitis and Saiki, 2019). Luxury products are defined as products that are superior to comparable products due to their design, quality, durability, or performance (Ko, Costello, and Taylor, 2017). At the beginning luxury brands were resistant to using social media as a brand strategy because they thought that social media is not exclusive (Lee and Watkins, 2016). However, luxury brands learned that social media offers marketers opportunities to connect with consumers and develop relationships with them, in fact, luxury consumers have twice more followers than normal users (Kusumasondjaja, 2019).









## SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION THEORY: WOMEN'S IDENTITY ON INSTAGRAM

Instagram has transformed into a space of visualization and re-creation of new forms of behavior and lifestyles, and also it is a show window of the body and sexual identity that promotes women's image on society (Hunt, Lin, and Atkin,

2014). Sexual objectification theory posits that when women are portrayed as sexual objects to be looked at, it may result in an increase in their body surveillance, e.g., frequently monitoring their appearance (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). Several studies have found associations between Instagram use with body surveillance among young women (Cohen, Newton-John, and Slater, 2017; Döring, Reif, and Poeschl, 2016). Mu and Lennon (2018) examined sports brands' post, they found that over one-third of Instagram posts used sexualizing characteristics in clothing and objectifying images of women. Therefore, the more consumers, female-male, use Instagram, the more likely they are going to perceive natural women as sexual objects (Cohen, Newton-John, and Slater, 2017; Meier and Gray, 2014; Park and Lee, 2017). In this sense, women are pushed to self-disclose more sexualized self through this interactive force of self-objectification and social media encouragement (Subrahmanyam and Smahel, 2011; Taylor, Peplau, and Sears, 2003).

Sexual objectification is the act of treating a person as an object of sexual desire, reducing her to a mere thing for use, where her individual's humanity is diminished. Following the theory, the sexualization of women's body is focusing on (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997; Widdows, 2018): physical presentation (Kitsa and Mudra, 2019; Salazar, 2007), body display (Döring, Reif, and Poeschl, 2016; Lindner, 2004), sexual suggestive poses (Adomaitis and Saiki, 2019) and feminine touch (Döring, Reif, and Poeschl, 2016; Goffman, 1988). *Physical presentation*, the primary feature of the dominant sexual-beauty ideal is that of thinness (Kitsa and Mudra, 2019; Salazar, 2007; Widdows, 2018). Salazar (2007) quantified advertisements that use messages that contain images of female body and analyzed the models used in ads; based on her results, she warned that female body image has been changing toward thinner exemplifications, favoring serious alterations in eating behavior, such as anorexia and bulimia. *Body display* denotes that in adverts women are wearing revealing, hardly any, or no clothes at all, which is often associated with sexualized images of women (Döring, Reif, and Poeschl, 2016; Kang, 1997; Lindner, 2004). Tortajada, Araüna, and Martínez (2013) found that women upload images of themselves more naked than men. Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2009) argue that sexualization is defined by the degree to which the female body is exposed and idealized. *Sexual suggestive poses* are behaviors that arouse sexual desire (Adomaitis and Saiki, 2019; Döring, Reif, and Poeschl, 2016; Ramsey and Horan, 2018; Tortajada, Araüna, and Martínez, 2013). For example, females display themselves in positions suggesting weakness, subordination, and seduction, while males demonstrate their physical strength (Döring, Reif, and Poeschl, 2016; Ramsey and Horan, 2018). Tortajada, Araüna, and Martínez (2013) found that girls portrayed themselves lying down and in passive and subordinated positions where the focus of the pictures is on their attractiveness, beauty, and seductiveness. Finally, *Feminine touch* involves self-touching own face or hair. Women, more than men, are portrayed using their fingers and hands to touch their face, hair or neck with the idea of increase their seduction and being desirable (Döring, Reif, and Poeschl, 2016; Goffman, 1988). Döring, Reif, and Poeschl (2016) analyzed men and women selfies, they found that females use self-touching 84.8% and men 15.2% (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Sexual objectification categories**

Category	Description	Luxury Fashion Brands	Consumers
Physical presentation	Weight feature (Kitsa and Mudra, 2019; Salazar, 2007; Widdows, 2018).		
Body display	It denotes that in adverts women are wearing revealing, hardly any, or no clothes at all, which is often associated with sexualized images of women (Döring <i>et al.</i> , 2016; Kang, 1997; Lindner, 2004).		
Sexual suggestive poses	Behaviors that arouse sexual desire (Adomaitis and Saiki, 2019; Döring <i>et al.</i> , 2016; Ramsey and Horan, 2018; Tortajada <i>et al.</i> , 2013)		
Feminine Touch	Encoded whether or not the persons are touching themselves (e.g., their face or hair), their clothes or whether they are using their hands tracing an object (Döring <i>et al.</i> , 2016; Goffman, 1988).		

Source: Own elaboration.

## SEXISM: WOMEN'S STEREOTYPES IN LUXURY FASHION BRANDS








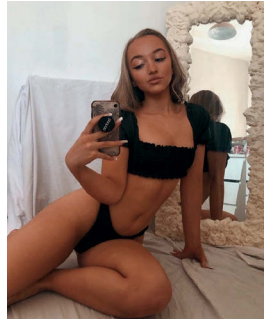
Sexism is prejudice or discrimination based on a person's sex or gender (Widdows, 2018). In advertising, sexism is manifested when women are presented in traditional roles: dependent, caretaker, decorative and sexual object (Plakoyiannaki *et al.*, 2008; Tsihla and Zotos, 2016). According to Fullerton (2000), women are more likely than men to be portrayed in a sexist manner, showing them to be helpful in domestic settings, dependents, without authority, and as man's properties (see Table 2). These gender stereotypes are a strategy that advertising use in order to create pictures and messages which are easy to decode and evaluated by the recipients, such as female models that can be recognized as a typical and attractive at first glance (Döring, Reif, and Poeschl, 2016; Wu, Wei-Hung, and Chih-Hung, 2015). Unfortunately, these stereotypes portray women in a sexist way, modeling them as inferior to men in advertisements (Lysonski, 1985). Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009) analyzed the historical context of stereotypes in advertising, concluding that women have been represented for a long time as sexual objects. Also, Plakoyiannaki *et al.* (2008) examined female images in online advertisements and their findings indicated that women are mainly portrayed in traditional roles, concluding that sexism in digital advertising is recurrent. Their findings are consistent with Gustansson and Czarniawska (2004) who analyze female web virtual animations concluding that the Internet perpetuates gender discrimination through attractive and sexy virtual women.

Luxury brands and gender have been studied from the perceptions of motives for consumption. Roux, Tafani, and Vigneron (2017) analyzed the differences in men's and women's luxury values, they found that women give more importance to refinement, while men give more importance to exclusivity and elitism. Wang and Griskevicius (2014) found that men use conspicuous luxury products to attract mates, women use such products to deter female rivals who pose threats to their romantic relationships. Following these results, Lai and Prendergast (2018) explored how men interpret the signals sent by women displaying luxury brands, the findings show that men see women using luxury brands with superior financial stability and high social status. About luxury brands and sexism, Adomaitis and Saiki (2019) studied the different levels of sexuality in photographs of models in advertisements for luxury fashion brands. The results revealed that the degree of sexuality in the advertisements impacted brand perceptions. The greater the degree of sexuality in the advertisement, the more the brand was considered less conscientious and responsible. Soloaga and Muriel (2008) analyzed how women were portrayed in the luxury brand's advertisement's magazines, they established that brands promoted a woman's image with their sexual attractiveness, seduction, and pleasure.

Base on the above literature review, this study raised the following three research questions:

- RQ1: How luxury fashion brands portray women in their Instagram posts in terms of sexual objectification (physical presentation, body display, sexually suggestive poses and feminine touch) and sexism stereotypes (dependent, caretaker, decorative and sexual object)?

**Table 2. Women in sexism stereotypes (Plakoyiannaki and Zotos, 2009; Plakoyiannaki *et al.*, 2008; Tsihla and Zotos, 2016)**

Category	Description	Luxury Fashion Brands	Consumers
Dependent	<p>Woman is dependent on the man. She appears passive and someone who serves him. Man shows his power by protecting and having authority over the woman.</p>		
Caretaker	<p>Mother and caretaker. Women perform activities at home (cooking, cleaning, ironing, washing floors...). This category includes women caring for their family or her loved ones.</p>		
Decorative Object	<p>Woman as a decorative object means that she is associated with an object rather than a person. Her intellectual skill is not important, but her body is.</p>		
Sexual Object	<p>Woman is used purely to sell products. She is an object of desire; her physical attractiveness is emphasized. Her body is fragmented in different parts (lips, hair, mouth, legs...) becoming a consumer object, devoid of personhood.</p>		

Source: Own elaboration.

- RQ2: How consumers portray women with a luxury fashion brand's hashtag in Instagram in terms of sexual objectification (physical presentation, body display, sexually suggestive poses and feminine touch) and sexism stereotypes (dependent, caretaker, decorative and sexual object)?
- RQ3: How do luxury fashion brands and consumers differ in how they portray women in their Instagram posts in terms of sexual objectification (physical presentation, body display, sexually suggestive poses and feminine touch) and sexism stereotypes (dependent, caretaker, decorative and sexual object)?

## METHOD

To answer the research questions, we conducted a content analysis of posts in luxury fashion brands and posts with the hashtag of the luxury fashion brand that consumers use in their posts on Instagram. Content analysis is widely used in studies investigating gender stereotypes in advertising (e.g., Deng, Eeachai, and Grow, 2020; Döring, Reif, and Poeschl, 2016; Soloaga and Muriel, 2008). The fashion industry dominates Instagram with 35.5 million global followers in 2019 (Ramakrishnan, 2019). Among the top 20 brands with the most Instagram followers, seven are luxury fashion brands: Chanel, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Dior, Dolce & Gabbana, Prada, and Versace (Ramakrishnan, 2019). After carefully reviewing the seven fashion brands' official Instagram accounts, they are deemed appropriate for this study. Specifically, all brands have substantial follower bases, and they engage with their fans with rich images and captivating videos almost on a daily basis (see Table 3). Most of their image posts feature women characters (please refer to Table 1 and 2).

**Table 3. Seven top luxury fashion brands' Instagram accounts and their summary Instagram activities (June 2020)**

Brand	Instagram Hashtag	Followers (million)	Posts
Channel	#chanelofficial	40.0	2,695
Gucci	#gucci	40.4	6,917
Louis Vuitton	#louisvuitton	38.3	4,294
Dior	#dior	31.2	6,589
Dolce & Gabbana	#dolcegabbana	23.9	10,329
Prada	#prada	23.5	5,678
Versace	#versace	21.5	5,745

Source: Own elaboration.

## SAMPLE SELECTION

Instagram posts of the seven brands and their consumers were used in this study. Data collection was conducted from April to May 2020. In order to get the most recent data, we sorted the posts by new and selected the newest posts that fit the following criteria: (1) image posts must have at least one female character; (2) the first image is selected in posts with multiple images; (3) the first post is selected when there are multiple posts about the same function/setting; (4) brand posts must be created by the official Instagram account, i.e., not reposts; (5) consumers posts must contain the official hashtag, and are not reposts; (6) all the posts have to be in color, black and white posts were not allowed because it is difficult to identify the race. Any posts that failed to meet any one of the above criteria were discarded from analysis.

A total of 700 most recent image posts were collected, of which 350 were from the seven luxury fashion brands (Chanel, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Dior, Dolce & Gabbana, Prada, and Versace) and 350 were from consumers posts that contained the luxury fashion brand's hashtags (#Chanel, #Gucci, #Louis Vuitton, #Dior, #Dolce & Gabbana, #Prada, and #Versace). Thus, for each brand, 50 posts were collected from the official Instagram account, 50 were from consumers. About 89% of all the consumer posts ( $M = 608.3$ ,  $SD = 5176.2$ , median = 20) received less than 300 likes, while 100% of the brands' posts ( $M = 99497.6$ ,  $SD = 84231.3$ , median = 78914) got more than 10,000 likes. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that most of the consumers in the study sample were in fact not influencers or celebrities, but regular Instagram users.

## CODING PROCEDURE

We use individual Instagram image post as the unit of analysis. In case where there are multiple characters in the image post, only the primary character was counted. The primary character was identified as having the main focus in the image in terms of the space they take up, their position in the image, and whether they are holding the branded product. The result showed that almost 95% of the brands' posts and almost all of the consumer posts contain only one character.

Based on prior studies on sexual objectification and sexism stereotypes, the current study adopted gender role categories used in previous research (Deng, Eeachai, and Grow, 2020; Döring, Reif, and Poeschl, 2016; Plakoyiannaki and Zotos, 2009; Plakoyiannaki *et al.*, 2008; Tschla and Zotos, 2016). Specifically, the posts were coded for seven major variables: (1) race, (2) age, (3) physical presentation, (4) body display, (5) sexual suggestive poses, (6) feminine touch, (7) sexism stereotypes (see Table 4).



**Table 4. Coding categories of study variables**

Variable	Coding Categories
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Younger: Age child 12 years old</li> <li>• Adolescent: 13-19 years old</li> <li>• Younger Adult: 20-29 years old</li> <li>• Older Adult: 30-39 years old</li> <li>• Mature adult: 40-64 years old</li> <li>• Elderly: 65 years old or older</li> <li>• Unable to determinate</li> </ul>
Race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asian</li> <li>• Black</li> <li>• Hispanic</li> <li>• White</li> <li>• Multiracial</li> </ul>
Physical Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skinny</li> <li>• Fit</li> <li>• Full-figured</li> <li>• Obese</li> </ul>
Body Display	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fully clothed</li> <li>• Suggestive clothed</li> <li>• Partially clothed</li> <li>• Nude</li> </ul>
Sexual Suggestive Poses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Unable to determine</li> </ul>
Feminine Touch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Unable to determine</li> </ul>
Sexism Stereotypes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decorative Object</li> <li>• Sexual Object</li> <li>• Dependent</li> <li>• Caretaker</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>

Source: Own elaboration.

## INTERCODER RELIABILITY

Two coders (coder A and coder B) independently coded each half of the posts from the seven luxury fashion brands. To ensure initial intercoder reliability, the two coders analyzed a subsample of the Instagram posts from one of the luxury brands' official Instagram account and consumers accounts. Codes were entered in Microsoft Excel sheets and reliability coefficients were determined by using Krippendorff's alpha test in IBM SPSS with 10,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes and Krippendorff, 2007). The initial average coding reliability was above

70%. Initial discrepancies in the coding were discussed among the two coders and were re-assessed until the coders reached 100% agreement in all coding categories. To establish final intercoder reliability, 210 posts (30% of the pool) originally coded by coder A were re-coded by coder B. Results showed that all of the coding categories have high reliability ( $\alpha > .85$ ). For each study variables, frequencies, percentages were calculated to reveal descriptive results. Chi-square and crosstabulation tests were performed in IBM SPSS to determine statistically significant differences between brands' posts and consumers posts.

## RESULTS

To answer the three research questions, we report the descriptive results by variables between brands and consumers (see Table 5).

**Table 5. Differences between brand (B) and consumers (C) posts across the luxury fashion brands**

	Chanel		Gucci		LV		Dior		D&G		Prada		Versace		All brands	
	B%	C%	B%	C%	B%	C%	B%	C%	B%	C%	B%	C%	B%	C%	B%	C%
<b>Age (N)</b>	(100)		(100)		(100)		(100)		(93)		(88)		(95)		(676)	
Younger adult (20-29)	0	0	46	4	2	0	0	0	18	30	46	29	55	8	23	9
Older adult (30-39)	84	84	42	88	88	78	76	76	78	34	50	36	32	77	65	69
Mature adult (40-64)	12	16	10	6	6	18	16	24	4	32	2	17	2	15	8	18
Elderly (>65)	4	0	2	2	4	4	8	0	0	5	2	19	11	0	4	4
$\chi^2$	2.29		26.28***		4.3		4.8		21.50***		13.93**		34.93***		35.31***	
<b>Race (N)</b>	(100)		(100)		(100)		(100)		(92)		(88)		(94)		(674)	
Asian	18	2	4	2	10	20	8	8	4	2	20	7	2	2	9	9
Black	8	4	6	12	6	6	14	14	16	2	15	0	13	2	11	6
Hispanic	0	0	4	6	0	6	0	12	0	5	0	10	13	19	2	8
White	66	76	82	78	82	68	72	66	76	88	65	81	72	51	74	72
Multiracial	8	18	4	2	2	0	6	0	4	2	0	2	0	26	3	5
$\chi^2$	6.02		1.92		6.32		9.13		7.49		15.10**		17.90**		17.37**	
<b>Physical Presentation (N)</b>	(100)		(100)		(100)		(100)		(100)		(100)		(100)		(700)	
Skinny	4	8	32	40	22	8	10	6	62	30	80	58	88	20	43	24

	Chanel		Gucci		LV		Dior		D&G		Prada		Versace		All brands	
Fit	94	78	54	46	76	64	86	82	18	46	8	32	10	62	49	59
Full-figured	2	12	14	14	2	28	4	12	8	22	12	8	2	18	6	16
Obese	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	2	0	2	0	0	2	1
$\chi^2$	5.98		0.76		15.05**		2.55		18.53***		10.35*		46.59***		36.72***	
<b>Body Display (N)</b>	(95)		(100)		(99)		(95)		(100)		(100)		(100)		(689)	
Fully clothed	89	39	82	68	78	63	70	65	50	82	96	56	46	22	73	56
Suggestive clothed	7	57	16	22	20	31	24	35	30	10	4	36	54	46	22	34
Partially clothed	4	2	2	10	2	4	7	0	20	4	0	8	0	32	5	9
Nude	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	1
$\chi^2$	31.36***		3.8		3.24		6.09		16.21**		22.06***		20.56***		24.89***	
<b>Sexually Suggestive Poses (N)</b>	(100)		(100)		(100)		(100)		(99)		(100)		(99)		(689)	
Yes	4	20	4	50	6	8	6	8	60	39	6	40	35	60	17	32
No	96	80	96	50	94	92	94	92	40	61	94	60	65	40	83	68
$\chi^2$	6.06*		26.84***		0.18		0.15		5.47		16.32***		7.37*		21.07***	
<b>Feminine Touch (N)</b>	(100)		(100)		(100)		(100)		(99)		(99)		(99)		(700)	
Yes	20	16	4	10	8	16	12	22	4	18	12	12	6	16	9	16
No	80	84	96	90	92	84	88	78	96	82	88	88	94	84	91	84
$\chi^2$	0.27		1.38		1.52		1.77		6.18*		1.01		3.46		6.56*	
<b>Sexism Stereotypes (N)</b>	(100)		(100)		(100)		(100)		(100)		(100)		(100)		(700)	
Decorative Object	60	50	4	30	60	50	60	62	48	26	12	40	40	52	39	42
Sexual Object	8	48	10	22	8	48	6	16	10	10	4	8	10	26	7	22
Dependent	0	0	8	2	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	2	0	2	1
Caretaker	0	0	2	2	0	0	4	0	2	4	0	0	0	0	1	1
No	32	2	76	44	32	2	30	22	36	60	84	52	48	22	50	34
$\chi^2$	27.28***		18.26**		13.40**		4.91		8.60		11.97**		10.17*		41.66***	

Note \*\*\* p < .001, \*\* p < .01, \* p < .05

Source: Own elaboration.

## AGE

When averaged across all luxury fashion brands, older adult (30-39) is the most frequent category featured in both brands' posts (65%) and consumers' posts (69%). However, Gucci and Versace featured mostly younger adults (20-29) in their official posts, at 46% and 55% respectively.

Chi-square test showed that on average, the luxury fashion brands used more younger adults in their official posts than consumers while they used more older adults ( $\chi^2(3) = 35.3, p < .001, N = 676$ ). This is most apparent for Gucci, Prada and Versace, who featured more younger adults than consumers (see Table 5).

## RACE

Consistently across all brands (74%) and consumers (72%), White is the most featured race category among the Instagram posts. Black is the second largest category featured in the brands' posts at 11%, while for the consumers' posts, Asian is the second largest at 9%.

Comparing between brands' posts and consumers' post, the brands used significantly more White people in their posts than the consumers ( $\chi^2(4) = 17.37, p < .001, N = 674$ ). This is especially true for Versace ( $\chi^2(4) = 17.90, p < .001, N = 94$ ).

## PHYSICAL PRESENTATION

On average, the luxury fashion brands featured mostly fit women in their posts, at 49% followed by skinny at 43%. Among the consumers, most of the posts featured fit women, at 59%. However, among the seven brands, Dolce & Gabbana, Prada and Versace used mostly skinny models (63%, 80% and 88% respectively) while Prada's Hashtag also posted mostly skinny images (58%).

Chi-square test showed that the luxury fashion brands posted significantly more skinny women images than consumers ( $\chi^2(3) = 36.72, p < .001, N = 700$ ). This is mainly due to the high number of skinny images used in Dolce & Gabbana, Prada and Versace's posts when compared to consumers' posts, as Chi-square tests returned statistically significant results (see Table 5).

## BODY DISPLAY

Across all posts, fully clothed women dominated all categories (73% for brands' posts, 56% for consumers' posts). However, Versace is the only brand that showed mostly suggestive clothed women in their brands' posts (54%) and consumers' posts (46%). Chanel's Hashtag also used mostly suggestive clothed images, at 57%.

It is clear that fashion the luxury brands featured more fully clothed women than consumers, and they showed more suggestive clothed images than the brands ( $\chi^2(3) = 24.89, p < .001, N = 689$ ). This is most apparent for Chanel and Prada, with Dolce & Gabbana and Versace being the exceptions (see Table 5).

## SEXUALLY SUGGESTIVE POSES

For both brands and consumers, most of the women showed in the images do not use sexually suggestive poses (83% for brands and 68% for consumers). With the exception being Gucci's Hashtag' posts (50% used sexually suggestive poses), Dolce & Gabbana's official posts (60% used sexually suggestive poses) and Versace's Hashtag' posts (60% used sexually suggestive poses).

Chi-square test showed that the luxury fashion brands showed significantly less sexually suggestive poses in their posts than the consumers' posts ( $\chi^2(1) = 21.07, p < .001, N = 689$ ). This is mainly contributed by Chanel, Gucci, Prada and Versace (see Table 5 for the results).

## FEMININE TOUCH

Consistently among all brands' and consumers' posts, most of the women do not use feminine touch in the images (91% of brands' posts and 84% for consumers posts).

Results from Chi-square test showed that the brands did use less feminine touch in their posts than consumers ( $\chi^2(1) = 6.56, p < .05, N = 700$ ). This is especially true for Dolce & Gabbana ( $\chi^2(1) = 6.18, p < .05, N = 99$ ).

## SEXISM STEREOTYPES

Averaged across all brands, 50% of official posts featured no female sexism stereotypes while only 34% of the consumers' posts feature no sexism stereotypes. Over 39% of the official posts feature women as decorative objects, but the percentage reached 42% for the consumers' posts making it the majority category among all consumers posts. Furthermore, about 22% of the consumers' posts described women as sexual objects while for the brands' post, the percentage is only 7%.

Chanel, Louis Vuitton and Dior have 60% of their posts used women as decorative objects while Gucci and Prada used mostly no female stereotypes (76% and 84% respectively). It is interesting to note that Chanel, Louis Vuitton and Dior hashtags mirrored their brands in using mostly decorative objects stereotypes in their posts (50%, 50% and 62% respectively), while Gucci and Prada hashtags used mostly no stereotypes (44% and 52% respectively).

The difference between luxury fashion brands and consumers in the use of sexism stereotypes is clear in that the brands used significantly less sexism stereotypes in their posts compared to consumers ( $\chi^2(4) = 41.66, p < .001, N = 700$ ). Not only did the consumers use more images describing women as decorative objects, but also sexual objects. For Chanel and Louis Vuitton Hashtag, an astonishing 48% of their posts showed women as sexual objects while only 8% of the two brands' official posts did the same.

## DISCUSSION

This study examines how luxury fashion brands and how luxury fashion brand's hashtag that consumers use in their posts portray women in terms of sexual objectification and sexism stereotypes. The White race is the most featured category in luxury fashion brands (74%) and consumers (72%) while Black in luxury fashion brands are 11% and consumers 6%, Hispanic in luxury fashion brands are 2% and consumers 8%, and Asian in luxury fashion brands are 9% and consumers 9%. The problem of the dominant White people in ads is its power of invisibilizing the other races. White hegemonic is real according to Hall (1996), specifically among luxury fashion brand ads (Cirucci, 2017; Goldberg, 2009; Thomas *et al.*, 2018). Whiteness typifies a location of social and economic privilege, while the other races—Black, Hispanic, and Asian—represent a position of marginalization (Wilkes, 2015). Sadly, this is found true in the current study.

Furthermore, advertising promotes an unattainable ideal of beauty, pushing women to reach a perfect body and eternal youth (Birkeland *et al.*, 2005; Furnham, 1999; Hargreaves and Tiggemann, 2004; Plakoyiannaki *et al.*, 2008; Tschla and Zotos, 2016). A prominent tendency we found in this study is that young women's images dominate Instagram posts created by luxury fashion brands. On average, luxury fashion brands featured women models between 20 and 29 years olds, while consumers were in the range of 30-39 years old. This gap may be explained by a number of factors. First, younger models are typically slimmer and more fit and thus create the ideal association brands try to project into consumers' minds. Second, luxury fashion brands can promote eternal youth, but consumers get old over time, they can not stop the time machine between 20-29 years. Nevertheless, the focus on younger models is a problematic trend in advertising, as Fardouly, Willburger, and Vartanian (2018) argued that the more consumers looked at models on Instagram, the more likely they were to be unhappy with their own bodies and youth.

Moreover, the current study found that Instagram posts by luxury fashion brands featured more skinny and fit women than consumers (brands: 43% were skinny, consumers: 24%; brands: 49% with a fit physical presentation, consumers: 59%). This is in line with Salazar (2007), who detected that advertising increasingly uses thin models. Advocates of using skinny and fit models in advertising may claim that women's contemporary beauty requires a perfect body with thinness and firmness (Frevort and Slateri-Walker, 2014; Widdows, 2018). However, it is also widely acknowledged that exposure to ultra-thin media models increased body image concerns among women (Halliwell *et al.*, 2005). Perhaps the clear divergence between the luxury fashion brands and consumers found in this study can serve as a warning sign for brands to act more responsibly and align with the interest of their consumer base.

In an unexpected turn of events, this study found that luxury fashion brands featured more fully clothed women than their consumers. As Fardouly *et al.* (2015) claimed that looking sexy is crucial in a visual current culture, beautiful is highly influenced by what is sexually desirable. Advertising has been using sex appeal for a very long time (Mueller, 2011), this trend is not going to stop

on social media. However, the current findings coincide with the studies that found women display undress images in their posts (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro, 2009; Tortajada, Araña, and Martínez, 2013). This is true as sexual objectification theory predicts a positive link between social media use and sexualized self-disclosure (Subrahmanyam and Smahel, 2011; Taylor, Peplau, and Sears, 2003). In the case of Instagram, the more embedded the consumer is on this platform, the more likely they objectify themselves (Cohen, Newton-John, and Slater, 2017; Meier and Gray, 2014; Park and Lee, 2017), even more so than the luxury fashion brands. In fact, our finding suggested that luxury brands showed significantly less sexually suggestive poses (17%) on Instagram than the consumers (32%). This type of poses intensify the arouse sexual desire where the focus of the women's image is in their attractiveness, beauty, and seductiveness (Adomaitis and Saiki, 2019; Döring, Reif, and Poeschl, 2016; Ramsey and Horan, 2018). Finally, feminine touch was not a frequently feature neither among luxury brands nor consumers. However, our finding showed that consumers (16%) applied feminine touch significantly more frequent than luxury brands (9%) on Instagram. Consumers portray women self-touching their face or hair to intensify their feminine appeals (Döring, Reif, and Poeschl, 2016).

Similar pattern can be seen in sexism stereotypes, as our findings showed that luxury fashion brands used significantly less sexism stereotypes in their Instagram posts than the consumers. They (42%) are more likely to portray themselves as decorative object than luxury fashion brands (39%), this was followed by sexual objects, where consumers sexualize women more (22%) than brands (7%). According to gender theories, sexual objectification is connected to a binary of domination and subordination —those who are submissive are viewed as an object and treated functionally for the satisfaction of others (Wirtz, Sparks, and Zimbres, 2018). Objectifying another person, regarding her as an object, is a failure to treat the person as an end in herself and it involves seriously harming a person's humanity (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). In being reduced to a mere thing for use, the objectified individual's humanity is diminished (Vargas-Bianchi and Mensa, 2020; Widdows, 2018). Despite this worrying trend among consumers, luxury fashion brands have moved away from simple exploitation of women's body and instead marketed themselves as part of the recent body-positive movement (Cwynar-Horta, 2016). The body-positive movement stresses the luxury fashion brands have learned some hard lessons on racism and sexism because of some recent high-profile scandals that invoked widespread outcries. Such include Dolce & Gabbana's Asian woman chopsticks ad (NPR, 2018), Dior's *Sauvage* ad, Givenchy, Versace, and Coach's "Taipei, Taiwan" T-shirt, and Gucci's "blackface" sweater (Cerini, 2019). Some brands are starting to reexamine their advertising strategy and hopefully adopt a gentler approach. However, there is still a long way to go.

If brands are learning to be more respectful for women, why consumers can not? This question requires serious attention from scholars and practitioners. The academia is responsible not only for teaching our students to raise awareness about this phenomenon, but also providing practical advice for advertising professionals.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY

The current study is limited in some ways. Firstly, the study sample was pulled from only top luxury fashion brands in the market. There are, however, many other luxury brands in other product categories for scholars to explore. Secondly, the Instagram posts were pulled during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although we did not find many posts specifically about COVID-19, this global phenomenon can be potentially impactful in interpreting the study result in ways unknown to the authors. Thirdly, future studies should examine a larger number of posts from both brands and consumers to analyze more collection between different variables, such as engagement (number of likes, comments and shares) and engagement sentiment (textual analysis of the comments). Further, posts that contains video are also good venues for content analysis under the current topic.

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