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Effective Luxury-Brand Advertising: The ES–IF Matching (Entity–Symbolic Versus Incremental–Functional) Model

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    This study draws on the psychological tenets of implicit self-theories, which differentiate between individuals with entity versus incremental orientations, to deepen our understanding about how consumers evaluate luxury-brand advertising appeals. Our findings show that entity theorist consumers are more attracted to the symbolic value appeals of luxury brands, whereas incremental theorists are more attracted to functional value appeals. Furthermore, we show how consumers' implicit self-theories can be purposively primed by managers with the textual elements of a luxury-brand advertising message to increase its effectiveness, which provides useful implications for designing and executing effective luxury advertising.

Over the past three decades, the luxury-brand industry has experienced unprecedented growth: The global market for personal luxury brands was estimated at €224 billion in 2015, delivering a healthy growth of 5% year after year (Bain and Company 2015). As a result, luxury-brand marketing has generated much interest from both academics and practitioners. The emerging literature suggests that consumers demonstrate various motivations for purchasing luxury products and, therefore, may differ in terms of their

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value perceptions toward luxury brands (Tynan, McKechnie, and Chhuon 2010). Specifically, luxury-brand consumption has been linked to a diverse range of motivations, such as the signaling of social status and prestige (Belk 1988; Zhou and Belk 2004; Han, Nunes, and Drèze 2010), supporting and recovering of self-identity (Wiedmann et al. 2009), beliefs about the superior quality of products (Zhan and He 2012), hedonism (Dubois, Czellar, and Laurent 2005), need for social conformity (Batra, Homer, and Kahle 2001), and need for uniqueness (Zhan and He 2012).

Despite this wide range of motivations associated with luxury-brand consumption, it appears that such motivations can be categorized loosely into two distinct types of values that consumers seek to obtain from luxury products: functional and nonfunctional. Functional values appeal to the consumers' perceptions as to whether brands satisfy their practical needs and solve their current and anticipated problems (Roth 1995). In the context of luxury brands, this may include seeking the superior durability and sophisticated design offered by luxury products (Zhan and He 2012). Nonfunctional values include symbolic value perceptions that allow consumers to internalize the meanings of brands to construct and express important aspects of their identities (Belk 1988) and/or experiential value perceptions that gratify their pleasure-seeking needs (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). Many previous studies cite nonfunctional value perceptions as a major motivation for purchasing luxury products, especially among younger consumers (Okonkwo 2007; Dumoulin 2007).

While consumer motivations for purchasing luxury products have received much attention, luxury advertising is a relatively nascent area that remains considerably underdeveloped. In particular, Freire (2014) has recently noted that "the majority of researchers on luxury focus on the

behavior and opinions of consumers and let drop the important role that advertising produces on them" (p. 2666). Extant advertising studies tend to be limited to the discursive and semiotic explorations of luxury imaginaries (Phillips and McQuarrie 2011) and emerging discussions about the nature of narrative experiences that occur as a result of such imaginaries (Freire 2014; Kim, Lloyd, and Cervellon 2016). While these studies are informative, they provide limited insights into how managers can develop more effective communication strategies for targeting luxury-brand consumers. Of particular concern is that little is known about the effects of consumer-level differences on their evaluations of luxury-brand advertising messages.

To address this gap in the literature, we draw on recent research in consumer psychology to shed new light on how differences in the consumers' implicit self-theory (i.e., lay beliefs about the malleability of their personality) may influence their evaluation of different types of appeals in luxury-brand advertising. Specifically, a growing stream of research in consumer psychology shows that consumers possess different implicit beliefs or "theories" regarding the malleability of their personalities (whether they deem personalities to be relatively fixed or malleable), which has considerable impact on how consumers evaluate brands (Park and John 2011). Therefore, it has been argued that implicit self-theories can be used to develop even more effective marketing communication strategies (Yorkston, Nunes, and Matta 2010). On the other hand, as we have discussed, luxury brands can be communicated using functional (e.g., durability) and/or nonfunctional (e.g., prestige) appeals (Tynan, McKechnie, and Chhuon 2010). As such, practitioners may increase the effectiveness of luxury-brand advertising if they can match the content of advertising messages to the consumers' preferred value appeals (i.e., functional versus nonfunctional) and/or if they can identify conditions when luxury consumers will react more positively to one type of value appeal over the other.

In this study, we show that the preference and effectiveness of advertising for luxury brands and products may vary as a factor of the consumers' implicit self-theory orientations. We provide evidence that consumers who believe that their personal traits are relatively fixed (i.e., entity theorists) are more likely to be attracted to the symbolic appeals of luxury brands, whereas those who believe their personal traits are relatively malleable (i.e., incremental theorists) are more likely to prefer functional appeals. Of particular importance, we provide practical implications for advertisers by showing how the consumers' implicit self-theory orientations can be temporarily and purposively primed in either direction (i.e., entity or incremental) within an adverting message itself. Thus, the key purpose of this article is to introduce an essential consumer-level variable that can provide managers with the tools to increase the effectiveness of luxury-brand advertising.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Implicit Self-Theories

The role of implicit self-theories in the interpretation and understanding of consumer information processing and judgment is gaining an increasing prominence among consumer researchers (Yorkston, Nunes, and Matta 2010; Kwon and Nayakankuppam 2015). Implicit self-theory refers to an individual's lay beliefs or theories about the malleability of his or her personal traits (Dweck, Chiu, and Hong 1995; Park and John 2011). Dweck, Chiu, and Hong (1995) identify two distinct implicit self-theories: entity theory and incremental theory. Individuals who endorse entity theory (i.e., entity theorists) believe their personal traits, such as personality, intelligence, and morality, are relatively fixed. Hence, they believe they cannot improve or change their personal traits by their own efforts. In contrast, those who endorse incremental theory (i.e., incremental theorists) believe their personal traits are relatively malleable. Accordingly, these individuals believe they can improve or change their personal traits if they try hard enough (Chiu, Dweck, et al. 1997; Dweck and Leggett 1988). Therefore, at the heart of implicit self-theory, as a variable of consumer-level difference, is a distinction between the individuals who believe personality traits are fixed and those who believe they are malleable and dynamic (Kwon and Nayakankuppam 2015; McConnell 2001).

Recent studies suggest that people are likely to extend their implicit theories about the self onto other people's personal traits (for a review, see Dweck 2000) and even to brands and products (Park and John 2011; Yorkston, Nunes, and Matta 2010). For instance, compared to incremental theorists, entity theorists were reported to more easily draw conclusions about other people's personalities, brand images, and product qualities. This is because entity theorists believe that not only are their own personal traits fixed but so too are the traits of other people and brand characteristics (Hong 1994; Kwon and Nayakankuppam 2015). In particular, Yorkston, Nunes, and Matta (2010) show that entity theorists tend to believe brand personalities are fixed, whereas incremental theorists perceive them to be more malleable. Accordingly, entity theorists can form their opinions about brands more easily and quickly than incremental theorists (Kwon and Nayakankuppam 2015), and therefore they are more likely to attach global labels to brands.

The implicit self-theory literature supports the notion that individuals are chronically predisposed to one or the other type of implicit self-theories (i.e., entity or incremental). That is, they generally tend to adhere to one implicit self-theory orientation over the other. However, a growing body of recent research in various fields—including but not limited to social psychology, education, leadership, and consumer behavior (Burnette, Pollack, and Hoyt 2010; Chiu, Dweck, et al. 1997; Dweck 2000; Dweck, Chiu, and Hong 1995; Kwon and Nayakankuppam 2015; Levy, Stroessner, and Dweck 1998;

McConnell 2001; Park and John 2011; Yorkston, Nunes, and Matta 2010)—shows that people can hold both implicit self-theories simultaneously. This is because, although one theory may be dominant for consumers, the other one remains available and can become accessible under specific situational circumstances (Yorkston, Nunes, and Matta 2010). Indeed, previous research has shown that a person's implicit self-theory orientation can be temporarily primed by providing consumers with, for instance, mock scientific articles supporting either implicit self-theory orientation (Chiu, Hong, and Dweck 1997), short video clips from movies and television (Jain, Mathur, and Maheswaran 2009), and short messages in print advertisements (Yorkston, Nunes, and Matta 2010). We adopt this approach herein—that the individual's implicit self-theory orientation can be situationally (at least temporarily) primed—and use the established priming techniques to temporality activate either of the implicit self-theory orientations among participants to establish the causal relationships between our focal variables (i.e., implicit self-theory orientation and luxury advertising messages).

The Impact of Implicit Self-Theories on Consumers' Preferences for Luxury Brands

In a recent study, Park and John (2011) found that entity theorists tend to develop more positive perceptions of themselves based on their perceived personality traits of the brands they use, whereas incremental theorists do not display such an effect. For example, after using Victoria's Secret brand, entity theorists perceived themselves as being more good-looking and feminine, whereas incremental theorists retained the same perception of themselves. Such difference emerges because entity theorists are more likely to use brand meanings as an opportunity to signal aspects of the self. Specifically, because entity theorists believe they cannot enhance their personal traits by their own efforts (because their personal traits are fixed), they look for an alternative way (such as brand experiences) to signal their positive personality to self and/or others. In contrast, incremental theorists are less likely to look for such signaling opportunities, because they believe their personal traits are something that should be improved by their own efforts (i.e., their personal traits are malleable). Thus, this stream of research documents that consumers who endorse entity theory can develop more positive self-perceptions after using brands with appealing brand personalities, whereas those who endorse incremental theory do not connect their sense of self to the appealing brand personalities.

One of the most prevalent reasons for consumer purchases of luxury brands is to communicate aspirational meanings about their identity and social status (Okonkwo 2007; Han, Nunes, and Drèze 2010). As such, it is plausible that, compared to incremental theorists, entity theorists may value luxury products more and prefer them to nonluxury products. This is because entity theorists are more likely to use luxury-brand meanings and experiences "as a self-signal, and in doing so, [...] perceive themselves more positively in line with the appealing personality traits associated with the brand" (Park and John 2011, p. 657). That is, given that luxury brands tend to possess more distinctive and appealing personalities than nonluxury brands (Okonkwo 2007), entity theorists would be more likely to appreciate the opportunity to enhance, at least temporarily, their sense of self through using luxury brands. In contrast, incremental theorists would be less likely to prefer luxury products than entity theorists, because their self-perceptions are less affected by the brands they use. Thus, they may find less incentive to pay a premium price for the signaling function of luxury brands, as "they are unlikely to use these brand experiences as signals of the self, and they are unlikely to have their self-perceptions affected by this type of brand experience" (Park and John, 2011, p. 657). Thus, we hypothesize:

> **H1**: Compared to incremental theorists, entity theorists are more likely to prefer luxury brands over nonluxury brands.

As discussed, one of the key reasons why entity theorists may want to purchase luxury brands is to enhance their perception of the self and/or to signal it to others. Given that it is the symbolic aspects of brands that are used by consumers to communicate their self (Belk 1988), we predict entity theorists are more attracted by the symbolic rather than functional value of luxury products/brands. It is expected that entity theorists are likely to focus more on the symbolic value of luxury products/brands, rather than on the functional value, when they make evaluative judgments about them. Consequently, it is expected that the more symbolic value of the luxury product an advertising highlights (e.g., "It will make you look luxurious"), the more positive attitudes toward the luxury product entity theorists are likely to form.

Furthermore, previous research on implicit self-theories has documented significant differences in information-processing strategies between entity and incremental theorists (McConnell 2001). In particular, a stream of research on social judgment finds that entity theorists (versus incremental theorists) are more likely to view a trait of a target as a unit of social understanding. As a result, entity theorists are more likely to draw meaning from such traits compared to incremental theorists (Chiu, Hong, and Dweck 1997; Hong 1994). In addition, extant research in the non-social-judgment context shows that entity theorists make judgments on products/brands in a non-elaborative way, presumably using heuristic cues, whereas incremental theorists seek and elaborately process the information related to the products' functions and the core merit of the products (Kwon and Nayakankuppam 2015). One explanation for this is that entity theorists tend to expect trait-relevant attributes of a target to be consistent across time and situations (Knee et al. 2003), which, in turn, means they are more likely to form their evaluative judgments based on the established heuristic cues, such as the brand's reputation and/or the social status of brand users (i.e., based on the symbolic value of a

brand). In contrast, incremental theorists do not expect the same level of consistency in different situations (Knee et al. 2003) or across different products of the same brand and, therefore, process information related to the performance and functions of each product more elaborately, rather than simply relying on the symbolic meaning of a brand. In other words, the level of cognitive elaboration put forth by entity and incremental theorists differs when they make evaluative judgments about brands and products (Kwon and Nayakankuppam 2015). This leads us to a prediction that consumers with an entity theory are more likely to look for the symbolic value, whereas those with an incremental theory are more likely to focus on the functional value of luxury products. Hence, we predict that the more functional value of the luxury product an advertising highlights (for e.g., "The pen that lasts much longer than other pens"), the more positive attitudes toward the luxury product incremental theorists are likely to form. Taken together, our second hypothesis is as follows:

> **H2**: Entity theorists are more likely to be influenced by the symbolic value appeals of luxury products, whereas incremental theorists are more likely to focus on the functional value of luxury products.

Given that our study aims to establish a causal relationship between psychological constructs and their influence on consumers' evaluative judgments, it was important to conduct studies in a controlled environment to increase the internal validity of our results. Thus, we conducted three studies (Studies 2a, 2b, and 3) in a behavioral lab using student samples. On the other hand, the context of this study is luxury consumption, which required further corroboration of results with nonstudent participants. Hence, two additional studies with nonstudent samples (Studies 1 and 4) were conducted to increase the external validity of our results. Accordingly, in the following sections, we report the findings of five empirical studies supporting our key tenet: that the preference and effectiveness of advertising for luxury brands and products vary as a factor of the consumers' implicit self-theory orientations.

STUDY 1

To provide initial evidence for our first hypothesis, we ran a study measuring the individuals' chronic implicit self-theory orientation and their attitudes toward a luxury product.

Sample and Procedure

A total of 99 (male = 54.55%, M_{age} = 32.86) participants were recruited in a heterogeneous online panel in the United States through Amazon Mechanical Turk. As compensation, a token amount of money was paid. Participants were asked to complete two purportedly unrelated booklets: one designed to evaluate their chronic implicit self-theory orientations and another one designed to assess their attitudes toward a luxury product.

The booklet assessing attitudes toward a luxury product included a mock print ad for a new watch from a luxury brand. Respondents were told that Chanel recently announced a new watch in Europe and plan on launching this watch in the United States. They were told the company designed a preliminary print ad. In this ad, some information about the new watch was provided, along with a picture of the watch that had the Chanel logo on it (see Appendix 1). On the following screen, participants were asked to indicate their attitudes toward the watch on a three-item, traditional 9-point attitude scale: (1) $-4 = Bad$ to $+4 = Good$; (2) $-4 = Negative$ to $+4 = Positive$; and (3) $-4 = Unfavorable$ to $+4 = Favorable$. Responses for all three items were combined into a scale (alpha = .865).

The other booklet assessing participants' chronic implicit self-theory orientations included the Implicit Person Theories Measure developed by Levy, Stroessner, and Dweck (1998). Participants responded to eight statements on 7-point scales (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree), each representative of either entity theory (e.g., "Everyone is a certain kind of person, and there is not much that they can do to really change that") or incremental theory (e.g., "People can change even their most basic qualities") (for more details, see Levy, Stroessner, and Dweck 1998). The four statements capturing the beliefs on incremental theory were reverse-coded, and all eight items were combined into a scale, with higher scores indicating stronger belief in entity theory (alpha = .939). The administration of two booklets was counterbalanced. The order of booklet, however, did not interact with any other measures and thus was collapsed and is not discussed further.

Results

We conducted a regression analysis to investigate whether there is a significant relationship between the individual's implicit self-theory orientation and their attitudes toward the luxury product. We regressed attitude toward the new luxurious watch on implicit self-theory and found a positive relationship ($\beta = .27$, $t(98) = 7.52$, $p = .008$). That is, the more individuals believed that their personal traits were fixed (i.e., believed in entity theory), the more positive attitudes toward the luxury product they reported. During the analysis, we also found a positive relationship between age and the attitudes toward the luxury product ($\beta = -.21$, $t(98) = -2.11$, $p = .026$): the younger an individual was, the more positive attitude he or she was likely to form toward luxury products. We thus regressed attitude toward the new luxurious watch on implicit self-theory with the control variable of age. Still, a significant relationship emerged ($\beta = .16$, $t(98) = 2.30$, $p < .013$).

Discussion

The results provide the initial evidence for our first hypothesis, that entity theorists are more likely to form positive

attitudes toward luxury products than incremental theorists. However, in this study, we used a correlational design to investigate the relationship between implicit self-theory and attitudes toward luxury products. Thus, we were not able to address the question of causality. In Studies 2a and 2b, we extend our analysis by validating the causal relationships between an individual's implicit self-theory orientation and his or her preferences for luxury brands by temporarily priming implicit self-theory orientation using the generalized implicit self-theory manipulation technique developed in social psychology (Chiu, Hong, and Dweck 1997) and extensively employed in various fields, including but not limited to consumer research (Kwon and Nayakankuppam 2015; Park and John 2011; Yorkston, Nunes, and Matta 2010).

STUDY 2A

Study 2a was designed to provide evidence for the causal relationship between consumers' implicit self-theory orientations and their preferences for luxury products. Hence, successful priming, at least temporarily, of the implicit self-theory orientations was critical. We temporarily activated either of the implicit self-theory orientations by showing one of two mock scientific articles supporting either entity theory or incremental theory (Chiu, Hong, and Dweck 1997). During the experiments, participants were told the purpose of the study was to examine the factors that contribute to clarity in writing. Participants were instructed to carefully read the scientific article to answer some of the questions that would appear at the end of the article. What follows are the critical excerpts in the two articles (for more details, see Chiu, Hong, and Dweck 1997):

> In his talk at the American Psychological Association's annual convention held at Washington D.C. in August, Dr. George Medin argued that "in most of us, by the age of ten, our character has set like plaster and will never soften again." He reported numerous large longitudinal studies showing that people "age and develop, but they do so on the foundation of enduring dispositions." He also reported research findings showing that people's personality characteristics are fixed and cannot be changed. [Entity theory]

> In his talk at the American Psychological Association's annual convention held at Washington D.C. in August, Dr. George Medin argued that "no one's character is as 'hard as a rock' so that it cannot be changed. Only for some, greater effort and determination are needed to effect changes." He reported numerous large longitudinal studies showing that people can mature and change their character. He also reported research findings showing that people's personality characteristics can change, even in their late sixties. [Incremental theory]

Sample and Procedure

In this study, 168 undergraduate students (male = 61.45%, M_{age} = 21.31) at a large public university in the United States were invited to an experimental lab and were randomly assigned to a 2 (implicit self-theory orientation: entity versus incremental theory) × 2 (brand: luxury brand [Chanel] versus nonluxury brand [Swatch]) between-subjects design. Upon arrival, each participant read one of the two mock scientific articles supporting either entity theory or incremental theory. Following this, participants were asked to respond to filler questions about the articles, and then to complete the eight-item Implicit Person Theories Measure used in Study 1. To ensure the articles successfully primed the appropriate implicit theories, we ran a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the combined scale of implicit self-theory (alpha = .951), with higher scores indicating a stronger belief in entity theory, which yielded a significant main effect of the manipulation (M_{Entity} = 4.40 versus $M_{Incremental}$ = 3.19; F (1, 165) = 45.14, p < .001). Thus, the manipulation worked as intended in creating a temporary state associated with either entity or incremental orientation.

Next, each participant was given only one of the two catalog pages for a watch. Both pages provided the same product information but varied in terms of the brand name of the watch: Chanel (luxury) versus Swatch (nonluxury). Participants were asked to indicate their attitudes toward the watch on the three-item traditional attitude scale used in Study 1. Responses for all three questions were combined into a scale (alpha = .90). Next, participants indicated how likely they were to purchase the watch (i.e., purchase intention) on a 1 to 7 (*Very unlikely* to *Very likely*) scale and to indicate what is the highest amount they would be willing to pay for the watch (i.e., maximum willingness to pay, log-transformed for analyses). Finally, the participants were debriefed, thanked, and dismissed.

Results

A 2 (implicit self-theory: entity versus incremental) × 2 (brand: luxury versus nonluxury) ANOVA on attitude yielded both significant main effects. Participants formed more favorable attitudes toward the luxury than nonluxury watch (M_{Lux} = 1.94, M_{Nonlux} = 1.50, F (1, 165) = 4.79, p = .030). In addition, participants primed with entity theory reported more favorable attitudes than those primed with incremental theory (M_{Ent} = 1.95, M_{Inc} = 1.50, F (1, 165) = 4.56, p = .034).

More importantly, these main effects were qualified by a two-way interaction (F (1, 165) = 6.44, p = .012). Planned comparisons revealed that only those primed with entity theory formed more favorable attitudes toward the luxury-brand than the nonluxury-brand watch ($M_{Ent\ \&\ Lux}$ = 2.34, $M_{Ent\ \&\ Nonlux}$ = 1.46, F (1, 165) = 14.15, p < .001), whereas those primed with incremental theory formed nonsignificantly different attitudes between the luxury-brand and nonluxury-brand watches ($M_{Inc\ \&\ Lux}$ = 1.47, $M_{Inc\ \&\ Nonlux}$ = 1.54, F (1, 165) = .050, n.s.; see Figure 1). These results support our first hypothesis: that compared to incremental theorists, entity theorists are more likely to prefer luxury over nonluxury products.
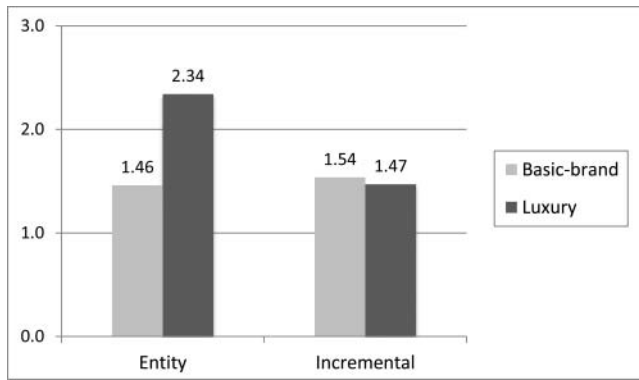
FIG. 1.   Study 2a results: Attitude.

We found similar patterns in the data for the purchase intention and for the maximum willingness to pay. A 2 (implicit self-theory) × 2 (brand) ANOVA on purchase intention yielded a significant interaction ($F(1, 165) = 7.08$, $p = .001$). Planned comparisons revealed that only the participants primed with entity theory reported greater purchase intentions in respect to the luxury-brand compared to the nonluxury-brand watches ($M_{Ent\ \&\ Lux} = 4.34$, $M_{Ent\ \&\ Nonlux} = 3.39$, $F(1, 165) = 6.07$, $p = .016$), whereas those primed with incremental theory reported nonsignificantly different purchase intentions between the luxury-brand and nonluxury-brand watch ($M_{Inc\ \&\ Lux} = 3.26$, $M_{Inc\ \&\ Nonlux} = 3.65$, $F(1, 165) = 1.56$, n.s.).

Similarly, we found a significant interaction in respect to maximum willingness-to-pay data ($F(1, 165) = 3.17$, $p = .008$). Planned analyses showed that only those primed with entity theory reported significantly higher willingness to pay for the luxury-brand than the nonluxury-brand watches ($M_{Ent\ \&\ Lux} = \$402.30$, $M_{Ent\ \&\ Nonlux} = \$111.54$, $F(1, 165) = 8.22$, $p < .001$), whereas those primed with incremental theory showed a non-significant difference between the luxury-brand and the nonluxury-brand watch ($M_{Inc\ \&\ Lux} = \$156.73$, $M_{Inc\ \&\ Nonlux} = \$116.77$, $F(1, 165) = 1.64$, n.s.).

Discussion

The results of Study 2a support our prediction that, compared to incremental theorists, entity theorists are more likely to prefer luxury products over nonluxury products. This is evident in more favorable attitudes toward, greater purchase intention in respect to, and a higher willingness-to-pay amount for the luxury watch than the nonluxury watch among the participants primed with entity theory only. However, even though the three sets of data converge toward our prediction, these patterns of data alone cannot guarantee that entity theorists are more likely to choose a luxury product over a nonluxury product when they are faced with a situation in which they should choose between two products. Specifically, researchers of the attitude–behavior relationship (for a review,

see Eagly and Chaiken 1993) may argue that entity theorists' favorable judgments do not necessarily lead to their choosing luxury products over nonluxury products. That is, entity theorists may *report* more favorable attitudes and greater purchase intentions when asked to evaluate luxury products, but they would not *behave* in favor of luxury products when confronted with a situation of needing to choose between luxury-brand and nonluxury-brand products. Thus, in the next study, we extend the spectrum of our findings in Study 1 and 2a and test whether we can find similar results in the context where consumers are given a choice task between a luxury and nonluxury product.

STUDY 2B

Study 2b extends Study 2a by incorporating a situation in which consumers have a choice between luxury-brand and nonluxury-brand products. Also in this study, we attempt to extend our analysis by examining the influence of situational-buying context. That is, we explore whether, when consumers are purchasing either for themselves or for someone else (as a gift), their choice between luxury brands and nonluxury brands may be influenced.

Previous research suggests that people extend their implicit self-theories to their perceptions of other people's personal traits (Erdley and Dweck 1993; Dweck 2000; Hong 1994). In other words, entity (incremental) theorists believe that not only are their personal traits fixed (malleable), but so are the traits of others. Thus, it is plausible that if entity theorists prefer luxury items to nonluxury items when they are choosing a product for themselves, they would do the same when they are choosing a gift for others. Thus, we predict that only the main effect of implicit self-theory will emerge, but no interaction between implicit self-theory and buying context will be found. In other words, we expect that entity theorists will prefer luxury products no matter whether the product choice is for themselves or for someone else as a gift.

Sample and Procedure

In this study 213 undergraduate students at the same university (male = 63.4%, $M_{age} = 21.34$) were randomly assigned to a 2 (implicit self-theory: entity versus incremental) × 2 (buying context: for oneself versus a gift) between-subjects design. Participants were first primed with either entity theory or incremental theory using the same technique as in Study 2a. A one-way ANOVA on the implicit self-theory scale, with higher scores indicating a stronger belief in entity theory, confirmed that the implicit self-theory manipulation had worked as intended ($M_{Ent} = 4.39$ versus $M_{Inc} = 3.15$; $F(1, 212) = 54.06$, $p < .001$). Next, participants were shown advertisements for two different fountain pens with information that included the brand name (Pentel versus Mont Blanc), price ($49 versus $199), material (ruthenium-plated), and consumer

rating (4.7 out of 5.0). Thus, both pens received the same consumer rating and were made of the same material, but they had different brand names and prices. Participants assigned to the gift condition learned that they were considering whether to buy one of these pens for their father as a holiday gift. The other group was informed that they were considering buying one of the pens for themselves. Participants were then asked to choose between the Pentel or the Mont Blanc, or neither of them (i.e., no choice; this was added in order *not* to force participants to randomly choose one, when they did not have a clear preference between the two products).

Results

For the purposes of this study, "no choice" responses were excluded from further analysis. Thus, among 213 participants 166 responses were analyzed (male = 62.7%, M_{age} = 21.20). A binary logit was employed using implicit self-theory, buying context, and the interaction between the two in relation to this product choice. Only the main effect of implicit self-theory was significant (z = 1.13, p < .05), which is consistent with the findings of Study 1a. The participants primed with entity theory were more likely to choose the luxury product than were those primed with incremental theory (choose luxury: entity = 28% versus incremental = 11%; χ^2 (1) = 8.16, p < .001). There was neither a significant main effect of the buying context (z = −.36, p > .10, n.s.) nor an interaction effect between implicit self-theory and buying context on product choice (Choose Luxury$_{Ent \& Self}$ = 12%, Choose Luxury$_{Ent \& Gift}$ = 16%, Choose Luxury$_{Int \& Self}$ = 4%, Choose Luxury$_{Int \& Gift}$ = 7%; z = −.001, p > .10, n.s.).

Discussion

Two main implications can be derived from Study 2b. First, we show that implicit self-theory exerts the same effect on luxury-brand consumption in the context of choice setting as has been observed in the context of evaluative judgment. Specifically, when compared to those primed with incremental theory, those primed with entity theory were more likely to choose the luxury pen over the nonluxury pen. Accordingly, we provide further support for our first hypothesis by extending the findings from Study 2a. Second, as expected, we found that the effect of implicit self-theory would not vary across situational-buying contexts (buying for self versus buying a gift for someone); compared to incremental theorists, entity theorists preferred luxury products, no matter whether the product choice was for themselves or for someone else.

STUDY 3

In Study 3, we tested our second hypothesis—that entity (versus incremental) theorists are more likely to focus on the symbolic (versus the functional) value of luxury products in

advertising. We prepared two different versions of print advertisements for a luxury product (Prada sunglasses). Keeping the product and everything else in the ads the same, the two versions varied only in their messages: One print ad said, "PRADA. The Luxury. The shades that will make you look luxurious" (highlighting the symbolic value). The other ad said, "PRADA. Extremely Durable. The shades that last for years" (highlighting the functional value; see Appendix 2).

Sample and Procedure

In total, 102 undergraduate students (male = 57.84%, M_{age} = 21.05) in a large public university in the United States were invited and randomly assigned into a 2 (implicit self-theory: entity versus incremental) × 2 (highlighted message: symbolic versus functional) between-subjects design. Before they proceeded to the study, they were told they were to complete two purportedly unrelated studies. The procedures for priming either of the implicit self-theory orientations were the same as in the previous studies. They were told the purpose of the first study was to examine the factors that contribute to clarity in writing and asked to read one of the mock scientific articles used in Study 2a and 2b. A one-way ANOVA on the combined implicit self-theory scale (alpha = .95) yielded a significant main effect of the implicit self-theory manipulation (M_{Ent} = 4.44 versus M_{Inc} = 3.13, F (1,101) = 30.84, p < .001), demonstrating that the manipulation worked as intended.

Next, as a cover story for the purportedly second study, participants were told that Prada was planning on running print advertisements in some media and that they were going to see a mock-up advertisement being prepared to give an impression of how the final print would look. They were given only one version of the two print ads and asked to report their attitudes, purchase intention, and maximum willingness-to-pay amount. The procedures for measuring these variables were identical to those in Study 2a. Finally, they were debriefed about the mock-scientific articles, thanked for their participation, and dismissed.

Results

A 2 (implicit self-theory) × 2 (message highlighted in the ad: symbolic versus functional) ANOVA on attitude yielded a significant interaction (F (1, 101) = 8.62, p = .004), along with a main effect of implicit self-theory (M_{Ent} = 2.13, M_{Inc} = 1.51, F (1, 101) = 5.00, p = .028; see Figure 2).

Preplanned analyses revealed that the participants primed with entity theory formed more favorable attitudes toward the luxury product when the message highlighted the symbolic value than when the message conveyed a functional value ($M_{Ent \& Symblc}$ = 2.38, $M_{Ent \& Functnl}$ = 1.80, F (1, 101) = 4.05, p = .050). In contrast, those primed with incremental theory showed the opposite patterns: They formed less favorable attitudes with the message of symbolic value than with that of
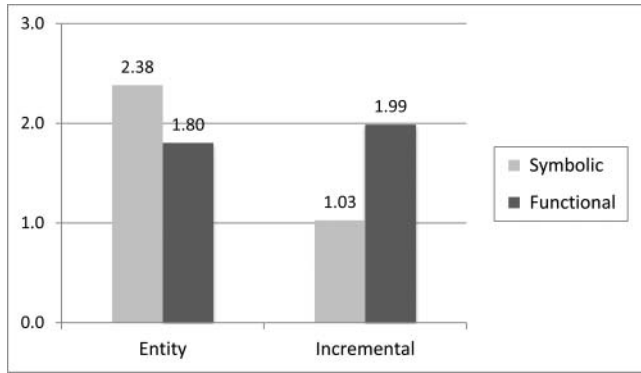
FIG. 2.   Study 3 results: Attitude.

functional value ($M_{\text{Inc \& Symblc}} = 1.03$, $M_{\text{Inc \& Functnl}} = 1.99$, $F(1, 101) = 4.94$, $p = .031$).

We found the same patterns of data for purchase intention and for maximum willingness-to-pay amount. We found the significant two-way interactions for both purchase intention ($M_{\text{Ent \& Symblc}} = 4.21$, $M_{\text{Ent \& Functnl}} = 3.41$, $M_{\text{Inc \& Symblc}} = 2.31$, $M_{\text{Inc \& Functnl}} = 3.88$, $F(1, 101) = 14.89$, $p < .001$) and for the maximum willingness-to-pay amount ($M_{\text{Ent \& Symblc}} = \$192.18$, $M_{\text{Ent \& Functnl}} = \$96.64$, $M_{\text{Inc \& Symblc}} = \$72.65$, $M_{\text{Inc \& Functnl}} = \$142.12$, $F(1, 101) = 13.29$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

Study 3 reveals that entity and incremental theorists are likely to be attracted to different types of value perceptions in luxury-brand advertising: entity theorists are more attracted to the symbolic value than the functional value of luxury products, whereas incremental theorists are more attracted to the functional value. This was evident from the results that participants primed with entity theory formed more favorable attitudes, showed greater purchase intention, and reported higher willingness-to-pay amounts when they were exposed to the print ad highlighting the symbolic value, whereas those primed with incremental theory did so when they were exposed to the ad that highlighted the functional value of the luxury product.

Although the findings from Study 3 provide important insights into advertising strategies for luxury products/brands by showing that the effectiveness of luxury advertising can be increased by matching the content of a promotional message to the consumers' implicit self-theory orientations (i.e., targeting entity theorists with more symbolic appeals and incremental theorists with more functional appeals), it might not always be possible to identify the appropriate implicit self-theory orientations of targeted consumer groups in practice. Therefore, in Study 4, informed by recent developments in the consumer behavior literature which suggest implicit self-theories can be purposively activated among consumers by managerial efforts (Yorkston, Nunes, and Matta 2010), we extend the results of Study 3 by demonstrating how the elements of an advertising message can be used to situationally activate consumers'

implicit self-theory orientations. In doing so, we show that understanding the relationship between implicit self-theories and luxury value appeals can be useful in advertising practice, even without identifying the chronic orientation that consumers possess toward their implicit self-theories and/or modifying the value appeals of an existing advertising message.

STUDY 4

Recent research on implicit self-theory shows that, unlike many other individual difference characteristics, which rely on managers identifying appropriate segments in targeting appropriate consumers based on their differences, implicit self-theories enable managers to use the consumers' mind-set as an additional controllable variable (Yorkston, Nunes, and Matta 2010). That is, managers can temporally prime the implicit self-theory orientation by modifying the content of their advertising messages to increase advertising effectiveness. In Study 4, we attempt to situationally activate either of the implicit self-theory orientations using advertising copy and, thus, try to demonstrate the practical significance of the current research.

We used the same two print ads for Prada sunglasses used in Study 3 (highlighting symbolic versus functional value) However, in each version, we also added one of the two blocks of the ad copy discussing the malleability of the brand to situationally activate either entity theory or incremental theory. The ad copies were based on those developed by Yorkston, Nunes, and Matta (2010). The entity theory prime ad copy said, "At Prada, we are committed to consistency and unwavering steadfastness. Ask yourself how our stability can fit your lifestyle. Your personality and ideals stay the same and Prada stays there with you." The incremental theory prime ad copy said, "At Prada, we are evolving. We ask ourselves how we can adapt to fit your lifestyle. You change and Prada is changing with you." Hence, Study 4 used four different versions of ads for the Prada sunglasses differing on the two between-subjects factors: 2 (highlighted message: symbolic versus functional) × 2 (block of ad copy: entity versus incremental).

Sample and Procedure

For Study 4, 102 participants (male = 47.31%, $M_{\text{age}} = 35.41$) were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk. Before proceeding to the study, they were informed that they would be completing two purportedly unrelated studies, which would take about 10 minutes to complete in total. After their agreement, in the purportedly first study, participants were randomly given only one version of the four print ads, based on a 2 (highlighted message: symbolic versus functional) × 2 (block of ad copy: entity versus incremental) experimental design. After reviewing the print ad given, participants were asked to report their attitudes toward the sunglasses and their purchase intention. The procedures for measuring these variables were identical to those in Study 3. Next, as a purportedly second

study, participants were asked to complete the eight-item Implicit Person Theories Measure (Cronbach's alpha = .920). To ensure that the blocks of ad copies successfully primed the appropriate implicit theories, we ran a one-way ANOVA on the combined scale. A significant main effect of the ad copies emerged (M_{Ent} = 4.19 versus M_{Inc} = 3.66; F (1, 166) = 7.64, p = .006). That is, each block of advertisement copies worked as intended in creating a temporary mind-set associated with either entity or incremental orientation. As the compensation for this short survey, a token amount of money was paid.

Results

A 2 (block of ad copy: entity versus incremental) × 2 (highlighted message: symbolic versus functional) ANOVA on attitude yielded a significant interaction (F (1, 163) = 9.17, p = .003), along with a main effect of the ad copy (M_{Ent} = 1.90, M_{Inc} = 1.22, F (1, 163) = 9.05, p = .003). This interaction effect is illustrated in Figure 3. Preplanned comparisons revealed that those who were given advertising messages with the block of ad copies designed to induce entity theory formed more favorable attitudes toward the luxury product when the ad highlighted the symbolic value ($M_{Ent\ \&\ Symblc}$ = 2.19, $M_{Ent\ \&\ Functnl}$ = 1.60, F (1, 163) = 4.92, p = .029). In contrast, those who were given the advertising messages inducing incremental theory showed the opposite patterns: they formed more favorable attitudes when the ad highlighted the functional value ($M_{Inc\ \&\ Symblc}$ = .89, $M_{Inc\ \&\ Functnl}$ = 1.61, F (1, 163) = 4.47, p = .038).

We found the same patterns for the purchase intention data. There was a significant two-way interaction for both purchase intentions ($M_{Ent\ \&\ Symblc}$ = 4.05, $M_{Ent\ \&\ Functnl}$ = 3.46, $M_{Inc\ \&\ Symblc}$ = 2.78, $M_{Inc\ \&\ Functnl}$ = 3.56, F (1, 163) = 7.67, p = .006).

Discussion

Study 4 was designed to situationally activate the consumers' implicit self-theory orientations using a more practical

FIG. 3.   Study 4 results: Attitude.

priming technique (short advertising copy), rather than the manipulation technique used in Studies 2 and 3 (mock scientific articles), while also replicating the results of Study 3—that is, entity-theory-primed consumers would respond more favorably toward the symbolic value than functional value in luxury advertising messages, whereas incremental-theory-primed consumers would prefer functional value. The results provide managers with an insight about how they can situationally activate consumers' implicit self-theory orientations at the time of exposure to an advertising message, such that their luxury-brand advertisements can attract and persuade consumers in a more effective manner. Specifically, we show that, by offering information about how malleable the brand is at the time of an advertising exposure, managers can successfully prime either of the implicit self-theories. In doing so, they can effectively communicate with their potential consumers even in situations in which they cannot modify their brand positioning and/or when they are not aware of their consumers' chronic implicit self-theory orientations. In other words, managers can purposively activate the appropriate implicit self-theory orientation of the consumer to make the existing message more effective (Yorkston, Nunes, and Matta 2010).

CONCLUSION

Luxury-brand advertising is an emerging area of research. Our study draws on implicit self-theories (Dweck, Chiu, and Hong 1995; Park and John 2011) to develop a novel approach to increase the effectiveness of luxury-brand advertising by appealing to consumers' salient value perceptions of luxury products and brands, which we found is dependent on the consumers' implicit self-theory orientations. Specifically, we show that entity theorists are more appreciative of luxury brands than incremental theorists. More importantly, among luxury consumers, those who endorse entity theory would respond better to the symbolic appeals of luxury brands. In contrast, the consumers who endorse incremental theory are more likely to value the functional benefits derived from luxury brands. Finally, we show how consumers' implicit self-theory orientations can be temporarily and purposively induced during the exposure to an advertising message to increase its effectiveness.

Our study contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, our findings have extended the luxury-branding literature. In particular, previous studies have largely focused on understanding what constitutes luxury products and motivates consumers to purchase them at the premium price. In addition to these considerations, we show that the consumer-level differences are an important factor in determining the success for luxury brands. In particular, through Studies 1, 2a, and 2b, we demonstrate that the preference for luxury brands is a function of the consumers' implicit self-theory orientation. Our main contribution, however, is to the emerging literature on luxury-brand advertising (Freire 2014; Kim, Lloyd, and
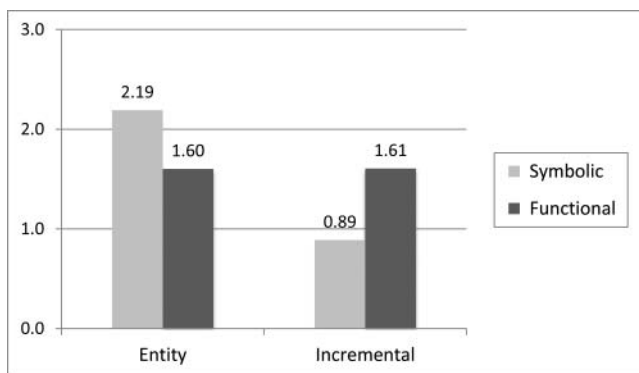
Cervellon 2016). Specifically, our research contributes to the development of a "contextualized" advertising theory (Laczniak 2015) by offering insights into the association between luxury market characteristics and consumers' psychological traits. Contextual advertising theory has gained recent attention as an important future direction for advertising practitioners and researchers (Laczniak 2015). In this endeavor, we show that the consumers' evaluative judgment of functional and symbolic appeals in luxury-brand advertising is dependent on whether they believe that their own personalities are relatively fixed or malleable (Study 3).

Furthermore, in Study 4 we provide evidence that managers can purposively prime either of the desired implicit self-theory orientations to make the existing messages in luxury-brand advertising more effective. In particular, we showed how providing a description about the malleability of a brand at the time of advertising exposure can prime consumers to be temporally oriented more toward entity or incremental theory, which, in turn, can make the given message more effective. Thus, our findings are consistent with recent studies in consumer behavior that argue, unlike many other individual difference variables which rely on managers identifying appropriate segments, implicit self-theories offer managers an additional controllable variable that can increase the effectiveness of marketing communications (Yorkston, Nunes, and Matta 2010).

Our study offers a platform for fruitful future research in exploring how luxury brands can target consumers with different value perceptions more successfully. Although we demonstrated how priming can be used to induce the desired implicit self-theory orientation, developing alternative ways of identifying distinct consumer groups with divergent chronic implicit self-theory orientations could also be beneficial for successful positioning strategies of luxury brands. In particular, people develop lay theories to interpret or control their social environments (Lickel, Hamilton, and Sherman 2001), and demographics (such as age, gender, education, or household income) are important indicators for understanding consumers' social worlds. Hence, future research investigating a possible relationship between implicit self-theory orientation and demographic characteristics will be important, because such data are more freely available for luxury-brand managers to use in their marketing practice. Further research is also needed to explore whether there are particular types of luxury consumers who are more likely to adopt entity or incremental theories. For instance, it would be of interest to explore whether implicit self-theories have differential impact across different cultures or product categories. In short, we suggest it will be useful for both practitioners and researchers to find demographic variables, or any other easily identifiable variables, that correlate with implicit self-theory orientations.

Despite these important contributions, however, several limitations of our study should be acknowledged. First, in Studies 3 and 4 we utilized two versions of print ads that highlighted either functional or symbolic value only to determine how entity and incremental theorists are different in terms of their preferences for luxury-brand advertising. In future research, it would be a fruitful next step if our theoretical findings are extended to more practical settings where functional and symbolic appeals are both present in luxury-brand advertising. Specifically, researchers can design an experiment in which there are three experimental conditions—a luxury brand with a functional appeal only, a luxury brand with a symbolic appeal only, and a luxury brand that portrays both appeals equally—and test whether there is a significant difference among these conditions. Because one of the implications of current research is that one type of appeal in luxury-brand advertising is insufficient to attract all consumers, one could query as to whether combining appeals is likely to maximize the effectiveness of luxury-brand advertising. Exploring and clarifying this issue would be a fruitful and interesting next step.

Moreover, we acknowledge that the participants in our studies may not represent typical luxury-brand consumers, which somewhat limits the external validity of our findings. In particular, we used student samples in Studies 2a, 2b, and 3. However, it should be also noted that, in these studies, an experimental design was adopted where participants were randomly assigned, and where the implicit self-theory orientations and/or the advertising messages were manipulated. Thus, our studies benefited from homogeneous groups design (i.e., the undergraduate students from the same college) and internal validity in testing our focal hypotheses, and documenting the causal effect of implicit self-theory on preferences in luxury-brand advertising. In addition, our student-sample experiments were further validated by nonstudent participants in Studies 1 and 4. Nevertheless, future research may use sample populations from typical luxury-product consumer groups and replicate the findings of the current research.

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APPENDIX 1

ADVERTISING STIMULI FOR STUDY 1 AND STUDY 2A

(1) Luxury-brand conditions, used both in Study 1 and Study 2a.

(2) Nonluxurious brand conditions, used only in Study 2a.

APPENDIX 2

ADVERTISING STIMULI FOR STUDY 3

(1) Symbolic appeal conditions.

(2) Functional appeal conditions.