Consumer's Functional Values in Luxury Fashion Consumption: A Cross-cultural Comparison between Australia and China

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Abstract

Consumers use functional values to evaluate fashion products, which are influenced by an individual's nationality and cultural background. Although previous cross-cultural studies in luxury consumption determined the similarities and differences between Western and Asian consumers, there is scarce information on the influence of functional value perception between Australian and Chinese millennial consumers in their luxury handbag purchasing. In this study, a consumer's functional values were measured through three specific values: usability, quality, and uniqueness. Usability value refers to an individual's evaluation of a handbag's functions as satisfying their needs, such as size and ease of use. Quality value is a consumer's evaluation of a handbag's physical qualities, such as material quality, craftsmanship, and lifespan. Uniqueness value is a consumer's need to be unique or distinct from others, which is evaluated in terms of a handbag's exclusivity. 49 Australian and 52 Chinese millennial luxury-fashion-brand consumers were invited to a survey that required participants to do a pairwise comparison of the importance of these three values on their purchasing decision of a luxury fashion handbag. This pairwise comparison method and data analysis were based on the analytic hierarchy process (AHP), which is a mathematically based, multi-objective, decision-making tool. The results demonstrate that quality value has the greatest impact on luxury fashion handbag purchasing decisions for both Australian and Chinese millennial consumers, while the uniqueness value has the lowest impact on former and the usability value on latter. This study may assist brands and product developers to better understand the influence of both Australian and Chinese consumers' functional values on their intention to purchase a luxury handbag from a cross-cultural perspective, helping to establish user-centered design criteria for developing luxury fashion handbags.

Keywords: Luxury Handbags; Accessories Design; Consumer Functional Values; Consumer Needs; Cross-cultural Study; Product development

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1 Introduction

Luxury products or services have a strong appeal in almost all countries of the world. The luxury retailing industry in Australia, for instance, has had a steadily growth over the past five years [1]. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry revenue is still entrusted with an expectation to grow at an annualised 2.4 % in the next five years, to total $4.5 billion [1]. This considerable luxury consumption causes many global researchers to study the *luxury consumer behaviour*, which refers to a process that includes consumers satisfying their functional and psychological needs by purchasing and using products, services and experiences [2].

Previous research have determined that consumers purchase luxury goods for psychological satisfaction, such as hedonism and self-satisfaction [3, 4], but other researchers have demonstrated that a consumer's functional needs impact their purchasing decision of a luxury good [2, 5], leading designers and brands to study their consumers' functional needs in the process of product design. Understanding consumers' functional needs requires understanding their *functional value perception* which refers to consumer's evaluation of the physical benefits of luxury goods, such as product's usability, quality, and uniqueness [2].

However, consumers are different and their functional value perceptions are influenced by nationality, culture, and other factors [6]. To further understand the consumers' functional value and enhance its reliability and practicality of theoretical foundations in luxury industry, many recent researchers [7-12] conduct the consumer's luxury value study from a cross-cultural perspective, mainly focusing on comparing Asian and Western consumers' attitudes and purchase intention for a luxury good. The most common discussion, specifically, between Asian and Western consumers is based on individualist and collectivist. Recent research [11], for example, revealed there are different impacts of consumers' functional luxury value on purchase intention between collectivists and individualists. They [11] stated the quality value plays an important role in luxury car purchase intentions among collectivists but not in individualists, and they called for that future research can analyze different product categories to conduct a cross-cultural study.

Thanks to previous cross-cultural studies for consistently filling gaps in the consumer's luxury value field, luxury brands have been offered many implications in enhancing their product and service design, marketing communication, and others. There is scarce information, however, on the influence of functional value perception of luxury handbags in design and product development from a cross-cultural comparison between Australian and Chinese millennial consumers.

Drawing from the conceptual framework of luxury value established by Wiedmann, Hennigs, and Siebels [2], this paper focuses on the cultural differences in the consumption of luxury good, measuring Australian and Chinese millennial consumers' functional value perceptions of a luxury handbag. The researchers used the analytic hierarchy process to analyze the data gathered from study participants and reveal the relevant importance of the luxury value of Australian and Chinese millennial consumers respectively. This study contributes to the literature by comparing the role of usability, quality, and uniqueness in a cross-cultural context and expands previous research by focusing on consumers' purchase intention of luxury fashion handbags. Most importantly, this study enables luxury fashion designers to better perceive the commons and differences between Australian and Chinese consumers' functional evaluation of a luxury product, gaining design-relevant information and improving design criteria for developing luxury fashion handbags.

2 Conceptual Background

2.1 Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour is a process that involves individuals or groups satisfying their needs and desires by selecting, purchasing, using and disposing of products, services and experiences [13]. Many previous consumer behaviour studies were based on consumer buying behaviour, demonstrating that consumer buying behaviour was affected by many characteristics, such as culture, social factors, economic situation, motivation, and perception and others [14-17]. From the business perspective, it is necessary for a firm to understand the factors that influence consumer behaviour, to set, adjust, and grow its business. Szmigin and Piacentini [18] created and organized a framework for approaching consumer behaviour, highlighting the *micro-view*, which refers to elements of the individual that impact consumption such as individual decision-making, learning, personality and motivation, and perception [18]. As a result, consumer's value perception was discussed by many previous researchers from both human psychology's and a business's perspective, pointing out the importance of consumer's value perception in the study of consumer behaviour.

2.2 Consumer's Luxury Value Perception

Perception is a concept that people select, organize, and interpret information to create a meaningful experience of the world [14]. *Consumer's luxury value* refers to an evaluation of the benefits of luxury goods or services by consumer's perception [2]. In the early of the luxury value perceptions framework, Vigneron and Johnson [5] proposed two main dimensions, personal perceptions and non-personal perception. The former involves hedonic and extended self-values, and the latter includes conspicuousness, uniqueness and quality values [5]. This study has potential values for researchers in measuring the consumer's luxury perceptions to understand their decision-making process, but its theory framework has limitations in consumer values, which was following elaborated to four dimensions by Wiedmann, Hennigs & Siebels [2], which are financial value (price value), functional value (usability, quality and uniqueness value), individual value (self-identity, hedonic and materialistic value) and social value (conspicuous and prestige value) [2]. These previous researchers established luxury value frameworks, but they failed to conduct the empirical tests the consumer value perception frameworks to prove the reliability of theoretical foundations. Wiedmann, Hennigs & Siebels [9] called for using sophisticated multivariate methods to study the luxury value framework they established to further develop the theory of consumer's luxury value perception.

2.3 Cross-cultural Studies on Luxury Consumption

A cross-cultural study on luxury consumption is usually conducted on the differences and similarities in consumers' value perception across borders [19] and has shown that its theoretical and managerial values for international businesses. Many previous cross-cultural studies comprise two different nationalities of consumers groups that come from Asian and Western societies, such as Germany and China [12], South Korea and the USA [19], China and the U.S. [7], British and India [8] and others. Following by the nationalities, most cross-cultural studies also use individualism

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and collectivism to explain and determine the reason why Western and Asian consumers are different, and they may have different motivations when purchasing the same products or services, [20]. For example, one of the differences between individualism and collectivism in Aliyev & Wagner's [11] luxury functional value research is that the quality is highly related to luxury purchase intentions for Asian groups but has less impact on Western groups. By contrast, Faschan et. al., [12] stated that the functionality of a luxury product, such as its quality, is not valued by emerging adults whoever it is individualistic and collectivistic consumer. These previous cross-cultural studies demonstrated the process of how to measure the differences and similarities of consumer's luxury value, and proved that evaluating the functional benefits of a luxury good is influenced by consumers' nationalities and their cultural backgrounds. Hence, this study uses the functional values of theoretical framework established by Wiedmann, Hennigs, and Siebels [2], to conduct a cross-cultural study between Australian and Chinese consumers, offering a further understanding of both their functional values when purchasing a luxury good.

2.4 Study Theoretical Model

The multidimensional luxury framework established by Wiedmann, Hennigs, and Siebels [2] specifies the dimensions of consumers' orientations toward luxury-brand consumption. This luxury framework was widely used in previous research that measured consumer luxury value perception. For example, a recent study [21] adjusted the individual and social value of this luxury framework to study the factors that impact Chinese millennials' luxury consumption.

Functional value is defined as the individual evaluation of the physical benefits of luxury goods. Functional value [2] (Fig. 1) encompasses a product's usability, quality, and uniqueness.
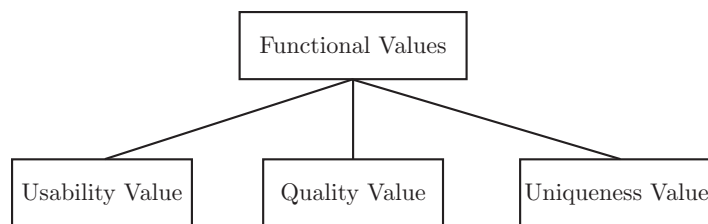

Fig. 1: The luxury functional values framework

2.4.1 Usability Value

Every product, luxury goods included, is designed to perform specific functions [22], and usability is defined as a benefit of a product that satisfies consumer needs [2]. This benefit is often seen as the material value of luxury goods and is one of the motivations for consumers to purchase said goods [23]. In this study, usability value refers to a consumer's evaluation of whether a handbag's functions satisfy their needs. These functions include size and ease of use.

2.4.2 Quality Value

Quality is a factor used by consumers to evaluate the value of a product [6]. Quality value is a consumer's subjective perception of a luxury product as offering superior quality and performance

[2]. Previous researches show that consumers believe luxury brands offer better quality than non-luxury brands due to their craftsmanship and material components [8, 12]. In this study, quality value is defined as the consumer's evaluation of the physical characteristics of a handbag's quality, such as material quality, craftsmanship, and product lifespan.

2.4.3   Uniqueness Value

Uniqueness is often associated with exclusivity, which stimulates consumers' desire to possess a rare or limited product [2]. Consumers use luxury goods to distinguish themselves from others because a luxury product is by definition not affordable to and owned by everybody [5]. Luxury-good consumers often avoid similar consumption as others to highlight their uniqueness and enhance their self-image and social image [24]. In this study, uniqueness value is an individual's evaluation of whether a handbag satisfies their need to appear distinct from others.

3   Methodology

3.1   Research Methods

A RMIT Qualtrics survey questionnaire was offered to participants. The participants completed the survey on an iPad device the researchers provided. The researchers offered face-to-face assistance if a participant had any concerns or confusion about a survey question. The researchers obtained ethics approval from the Design and Social Context College Human Ethics Advisory Network, a subcommittee of the RMIT University Human Research Ethics Committee.

3.2   Participants

The participants were Australian and Chinese millennials born between 1981 and 1995. Both millennials occupy over a quarter of the total population of luxury consumers and encompass the largest share of the luxury market in their countries respectively [25-26]. Furthermore, they are considered as the most spending potential consumers in luxury business for the next coming years. Chinese millennials consumers, for example, contribute to almost half of the luxury consumption in China. By contrast, while the main target market of the Australian luxury industry is wealthy middle-aged consumers, younger consumers have become increasingly willing to splurge on luxury items [1].

3.3   Procedure

A questionnaire was prepared and saved in the software Qualtrics (Qualtrics, Provo, UT, version 2020). The questions were designed based on the functional values determined in the luxury functional values framework. This survey asked participants to conduct a pairwise comparison of usability, quality, and uniqueness values for luxury handbag purchasing to determine which value was most important in determining their purchasing intention. The survey was anonymous, and no personal information, such as name, phone number, and address, was retained. The

questionnaire was offered in two languages, English and Mandarin. The survey was completed during a 3-month period, from October to December 2021.

Researchers went to Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, to recruit participants since this location was the site of many luxury fashion stores, and many of these stores' customers matched the participant criteria of this study. The researchers approached potential participants and invited them to participate in the survey. Potential participants were identified as individuals holding luxury shopping bags, such as Gucci, Chanel, Dior, LV, and others. Only the data of Australian and Chinese millennials who had luxury fashion shopping experiences at least once in the last six months were selected for analysis.

The researchers used the analytic hierarchy process (AHP) to do the data analysis in this study. The main calculations were carried out in Microsoft Excel.

3.4 Analytic Hierarchy Process

The AHP is a nonlinear framework for carrying out both deductive and inductive research considering several factors to arrive at a conclusion [27]. The main method used in the AHP is pairwise comparison, which can help researchers measure intangibles in relative terms, such as people perception [28]. Other researchers have successfully used the AHP to measure consumer values—for instance, measuring consumer values of luxury handbags [29], and luxury car selection [30], and measuring consumer values in traveling products shopping [31].

This study each part of the AHP process [32]:

3.4.1 Determine a Goal

In this study, the goal was to determine which functional values had the greatest and least impact on the luxury fashion handbag purchasing intention of participants.

3.4.2 Identify the Criteria or Subcriteria to Structure the Hierarchy

In this study, the criteria consisted of three main consumer functional values: usability, quality, and uniqueness values (Fig. 2).

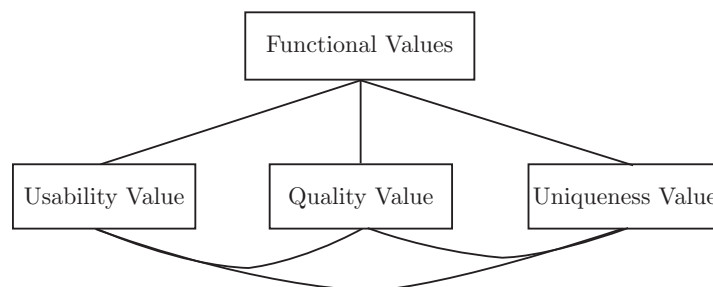Fig. 2: Pairwise comparison of usability, quality, and uniqueness values

3.4.3 Survey Design

The questionnaire required participants to do a pairwise comparison of the three functional values (Table 1). Participants were asked the question, "Which value is more important for you when you consider purchasing a luxury fashion handbag?" Participants ranked each value on a scale from 1 to 9, where 1 = equally important, 3 = slightly more important, 5 = more important, 7 = much more important and 9 = absolutely important [32].

Table 1: The pairwise comparison of the values

Values	9	7	5	3	1	3	5	7	9	Values
Usability										Quality
Usability										Uniqueness
Quality										Uniqueness

Take one participant's response (Table 2) as an example. The participant believes the usability is more important than the quality, so the participant ticks the left box of the form (Usability, 5 points). Similarly, participant can tick the box with number 1 in the middle between the usability and uniqueness when they believe the usability is equally important as the uniqueness. And the tick on the right box on the form (Uniqueness, 3 points) means the participant thinks the uniqueness is slightly more important than the quality.

Table 2: The example of participant's response

Values	9	7	5	3	1	3	5	7	9	Values
Usability			$\checkmark$							Quality
Usability					$\checkmark$					Uniqueness
Quality						$\checkmark$				Uniqueness

3.4.4 Multiple Participant Data

Since the data came from a group rather than an individual, the researchers found the geometric mean of participant results to aggregate individual judgments (Fig. 3).

$$w = \sqrt[n]{w_1 \cdot w_2 \cdots \cdots w_n}$$

Fig. 3: The formula of geometric mean

3.4.5 Construct a Set of Pairwise Comparison Matrices

The researchers placed the pairwise comparisons in the matrix below (Fig. 4).

Then, the researchers calculated the eigenvalue and the eigenvector (Fig. 5).

In this formula, n is the number of judgments; w1, w2, $\cdots$, wn reflects the recorded value weights on the objectives. W is the eigenvector; and λmax is the largest eigenvalue of the pairwise comparison matrix.

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & a_{12} & \cdots & a_{1n} \\ \frac{1}{a_{12}} & 1 & \cdots & a_{2n} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \cdots & \vdots \\ \frac{1}{a_{1n}} & \frac{1}{a_{2n}} & \cdots & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

Fig. 4: The pairwise comparisons matrix

$$W = \begin{bmatrix} w_1 \\ w_2 \\ \vdots \\ w_n \end{bmatrix},$$

$$W' = A \times W = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & a_{12} & \cdots & a_{1n} \\ \frac{1}{a_{12}} & 1 & \cdots & a_{2n} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \cdots & \vdots \\ \frac{1}{a_{1n}} & \frac{1}{a_{2n}} & \cdots & 1 \end{bmatrix} \times \begin{bmatrix} W_1 \\ W_2 \\ \vdots \\ W_n \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} W_1 \\ W_2 \\ \vdots \\ W_n \end{bmatrix},$$

$$\lambda \max = \tfrac{1}{2}\left(\frac{W_1}{W_1} + \frac{W_2}{W_2} + \frac{W_3}{W_3} + \cdots + \frac{W_n}{W_n}\right),$$

Fig. 5: The formula for eigenvalue and eigenvector

The reason why the principal eigenvalue λmax of matrix W and its normalized eigenvector has been calculated is that the AHP derives priorities by using the eigenvalue method [33].

3.4.6   Calculate the Consistency Ratio (CR)

It is required to calculate the consistency ratio (CR) per Saaty [32] (Figure 6). This ratio demonstrates the consistency of subjective perception and the accuracy of the comparative weights if the value is 0.1 or less.

$$CI = (\lambda_{\max} - n)/(n - 1) \quad \text{and} \quad CR = CI/RI$$

Fig. 6: The CR and CI formula

CI is the consistency index.

The recommended random index (RI) values appear in Table 3 [32].

Table 3: The example of participant's response

N	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
RI	0	0.52	0.89	1.11	1.25	1.35	1.40	1.45	1.49

3.5 Results

Researchers acquired a total of 149 responses, but only the 101 participant responses met the selection criteria and were used in this study. Of these participants, 49 were Australian who consisted of 29 females and 20 males, other 52 were Chinese including 28 females and 23 males. Participants' age ranged between 25 and 39 years. All participants had luxury fashion brand shopping experiences at least once within three months. After the data was analyzed, the researchers proceeded with the AHP, first by calculating the geometric mean for each functional value per Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4: The number calculated by the geometric mean method (Australian)

Usability: Quality	0.958
Usability: Uniqueness	1.513
Quality: Uniqueness	2.240

Table 5: The number calculated by the geometric mean method (Chinese)

Usability: Quality	0.362
Usability: Uniqueness	0.391
Quality: Uniqueness	1.809

Second, the researchers created a matrix of pairwise comparisons (Table 6 & 7).

Table 6: The matrix of pairwise comparisons (Australian)

	Usability	Quality	Uniqueness
Usability	1	0.958	1.513
Quality	1.044	1	2.240
Uniqueness	0.661	0.446	1

Table 7: The matrix of pairwise comparisons (Chinese)

	Usability	Quality	Uniqueness
Usability	1	0.362	0.391
Quality	2.761	1	1.809
Uniqueness	2.558	0.553	1

Then, the researchers calculated the eigenvalue and the eigenvector based on the formulas in Figure 5. The results appear in Table 8 & 9.

Finally, the researchers calculated the consistency ratio (CR) to evaluate whether the results could be considered acceptable. The Table 10 & 11 show the result of the consistency index (CI) and CR calculations.

Table 8: The result of the eigenvalue and eigenvector (Australian)

	Usability	Quality	Uniqueness	Weight
Usability	0.370	0.398	0.318	0.362
Quality	0.386	0.416	0.471	0.424
Uniqueness	0.244	0.186	0.210	0.213

Table 9: The result of the eigenvalue and eigenvector (Chinese)

	Usability	Quality	Uniqueness	Weight
Usability	0.158	0.189	0.122	0.157
Quality	0.437	0.522	0.565	0.508
Uniqueness	0.405	0.289	0.313	0.335

Table 10: The result of consistency index and consistency ratio (Australian)

CI	0.007	
CR	0.013	< 0.10

Table 11: The result of consistency index and consistency ratio (Chinese)

CI	0.015	
CR	0.029	< 0.10

For Australian participants, the normalized weights of usability, quality, and uniqueness values were 0.362, 0.424, and 0.213, respectively. This CR was considered acceptable as the CR was 0.013, which is less than 0.10. On the other hand, the normalized weights of Chinese participants' usability, quality, and uniqueness values were 0.157, 0.508, and 0.335, respectively. This CR was also considered acceptable because the CR was 0.029, that is less than 0.10.

These results show that quality was the most important value for both Australian and Chinese participants. For Australian participants, the second highest value was usability. For Chinese participants, however, the second most important value was uniqueness instead of usability. Lastly, the uniqueness value had the least impact on Australian participants purchasing intentions of a luxury handbag, and the usability value on Chinese participants.

3.6 Discussion

This study determined the luxury value perceptions in a cross-cultural context and used the pairwise comparison to analyse the relative importance of several luxury values (usability, quality, and uniqueness). The results of this study reveal the relative importance of these luxury values and their similarities and differences between Australian and Chinese consumers' purchase intention of luxury handbags.

This study confirms the importance of quality value for both Australian and Chinese millennial

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consumers. Previous researchers shared different viewpoints on the role of quality value in luxury consumption, for example, Aliyev & Wagner [11] believe that high quality has positively impacted luxury purchase intentions for collectivists but not for individualists, but another study [19] stated that the perceived quality value has a more powerful influence on individualists' purchase intention compared with that of collectivists. In this study, however, the results showed that both Australian and Chinese millennial consumers value the quality when purchasing a luxury handbag, but the need for quality of Chinese is higher than Australian millennial consumers. This result is similar to a study that determined Australian consumers believe the premium quality is more associated with the characteristics of luxury products [34]. This result also confirms the importance of quality value recognized by previous researchers [35-37]. The results further indicate that Chinese millennial consumers put greater emphasis on quality value than other functional values when determining purchasing intentions for luxury fashion goods. For instance, Chinese consumers value craftsmanship and excellent materials [37]. These findings, hence, have a practical implication for the luxury fashion product developers to pay more attention to the quality of a luxury handbag when targeting the Australian and Chinese millennial consumers. Although there are wide arguments in the luxury consumptions preference in individualism and collectivism from the previous research, quality, as an important factor in consumer's functional values, is still maintained at the core value of luxury handbag purchasing for both Australian and Chinese millennial consumers.

Furthermore, this study reveals the different uniqueness value perception between Australian and Chinese millennial consumers. Researchers [24, 38] have highlighted that the uniqueness value of a luxury good is an important factor that distinguishes luxury goods from non-luxury goods, offering psychological satisfaction. But the results of this study demonstrated the need for a handbag's quality is higher than its uniqueness for both Australian and Chinese millennial consumers. For Australian millennial consumers, the uniqueness has the least impact, which is partly aligned with a previous study in luxury fashion haute couture consumption that pointed out the avoidance of similarity consumption does not have a significantly positive relationship with Australian millennials' purchase intentions [26]. By contrast, Kim, Hsu, and Yuen [21] indicated that the need for uniqueness values influenced Chinese millennial's desire for status consumption, which eventually impacted their purchase intention of luxury fashion goods. However, this study demonstrated the uniqueness of a luxury handbag is attractive but not the most important functional value for Chinese millennial consumers. On the other hand, by comparing with the uniqueness value between individualists and collectivists, some researchers [8, 11] claim that the value of uniqueness has more influence on luxury purchase intentions among individualists, but the result in this study agree with those [7, 39] who believe that Chinese consumers, as collectivism of the cultural context, have higher similarity avoidance than western consumers in luxury consumption. As a result, the findings regarding the uniqueness value offer luxury handbag designers a further understanding of the different attitudes toward a handbag's unique characteristics between Australian and Chinese millennial consumers, which could be practiced in adjusting or improving the criteria of a product design.

This study also finds that Australian and Chinese millennial consumers have a contrasting view on the usability of luxury consumption. The usability as the second highest in Australian participants' value priority confirms a previous study that [9] stated that individualistic markets are significantly influenced by functional value as Western consumers are looking for luxury goods to be increasingly practical. By contrast, previous researcher [40] states that usability of a product can be considered one of the most important purchasing factors, and a previous cross-cultural

study in luxury fashion consumption stated that young Chinese consumers pay more attention to the functional and practical dimensions of the luxury object and its functional appeal [12]. The findings in this study, however, showed that the usability of a luxury handbag experienced less interest for Chinese millennial consumers. This maybe is caused by Chinese consumers' other purpose of using a luxury handbag, such as the state consumption [41]. Chinese consumers use a luxury handbag to gain acknowledgment of social status and esteem from others instead of the functional practices, such as carrying things. Therefore, a designer and brand can emphasize the usability of a luxury handbag to positively influence Australian millennial consumers' purchase intention, but for Chinese millennials, highlighting the usability might not intrigue them to purchase luxury handbags.

4   Conclusion and Future research

Functional values such as usability, quality, and uniqueness influence the consumer's luxury product purchase intention, and the consumer's cultural background impacts the prioritization of those values. The current cross-cultural study determined, through the use of the analytic hierarchy process, the influence of functional values on Australian and Chinese millennial consumers' purchasing intention of a luxury handbag. The results of this study showed that quality value has the greatest impact on both Australian and Chinese millennials' luxury fashion handbag purchasing decisions, while the uniqueness value has the lowest impact on former and the usability value on latter. Australians, furthermore, experience a relevant higher interest in the usability of a luxury handbag than Chinese millennial consumers. This information not only offers a better understanding of Australian and Chinese millennial consumers' functional values but also can be used by luxury brands and their designers to improve design criteria for developing luxury fashion handbags.

The study had some limitations as the total number of participants was relevant low, and all participants were located in Australia. Chinese millennial consumers in the mainland of China may have different priorities of the functional values. Furthermore, only three values (usability, quality, and uniqueness) were investigated in this study, and more values, such as financial, individual, and social values [2], could be studied to further analyse the similarities and differences between Australian and Chinese millennials' luxury handbag purchasing behaviour [2]. In addition, future research can investigate purchase behaviour of different nationalities, as well as other product categories.

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