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# Unveiling Mexican Perspectives on AI Meets Luxury Marketing in Mexico

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**Abstract**

This study addresses how Artificial Intelligence (AI) redefines luxury marketing by integrating Means-Ends Chain (MEC) theory with Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET)-driven insights. To the best of our knowledge, this study pioneers the identification of specific AI attributes (e.g., Informativeness, Innovation) that drive benefits/means (e.g., Facility, Utility, Safety, Satisfaction, Anxiety) to contribute to the value/ends (e.g., Happiness, Empowerment, Lifestyle). It embeds triangulation to address critiques of ZMET's interpretive subjectivity by grounding metaphors in MEC's structured hierarchy. We provide a structured understanding of consumer decision-making pathways regarding AI in luxury marketing by Hierarchical Value Maps (HVMs). Further, our follow-up study aims to examine gender differences in consumer value mechanisms by leveraging ZMET to reveal subconscious cognitive structures.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence (AI); Luxury Marketing; Means-Ends Chain (MEC); Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET)

## 1. Introduction

Luxury marketing, traditionally defined by exclusivity, hedonism, and status signaling (Han et al., 2010; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004), is undergoing a paradigm shift as Artificial Intelligence (AI) redefines value creation and customer experience (Hoffman & Novak, 2018; Xu & Mehta, 2022). This transformation is particularly salient in Mexico, where collectivism and hierarchical status orientation (Hofstede et al., 2010) intersect with rapid technological adoption. Mexico is positioned as the Latin American country with the highest growth prospects in the luxury sector and is expected to see its luxury market revenue grow from US$3.97 billion in 2023 to an estimated US$5.68 billion by 2032 (LUXONOMY, 2024). According to Allende (2024), Mexico's luxury market grew by 14% in 2023, surpassing US$14 billion in value, fueled by luxury brands' expansion in digital marketing (especially in the mobile channel accounted for 71% of luxury purchases) and demographic trends that 64% of luxury consumers are men over 36 from high-income groups, who prioritize experiences over products, emphasizing the need for experiential marketing. Such growth positions Mexico as a critical locus for examining AI's role in reconciling values with hyper-personalized digital experiences, which this study

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addresses a gap by integrating Means-Ends Chain (MEC) theory (Gutman, 1982) with Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET)-driven insights (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995).

Building on MEC hierarchical value model (attributes, benefits, and higher-order values), we position AI not merely as a functional tool but as a cultural mediator that enhances symbolic exclusivity and value co-creation. The MEC framework (Gutman, 1982) provides a robust theoretical foundation for analyzing how consumers ascribe meaning to AI-driven technologies. However, its application in contemporary AI contexts remains underexplored. Recent research by Gao et al. (2023) emphasizes that AI stimuli, such as interactivity and personalization, play a crucial role in shaping customer engagement and perceived value creation, with personalization failing to directly influence value co-creation but interactivity significantly enhancing it. Further, Swan et al. (2024) demonstrate that AI's role in digital transformation is fundamentally linked to its ability to integrate into consumers' decision-making frameworks, influencing engagement, intention to adopt AI, and value perception. These insights align with the MEC framework, suggesting that AI attributes (e.g., responsiveness, customization) drive intermediate benefits such as utility (e.g., ease of use) and experiential rewards (e.g., enjoyment) (Venkatesh et al., 2003), which ultimately shape higher-order values such as empowerment, self-actualization and consumers' aspirational goals (e.g., status enhancement) (Teh et al., 2021). However, prior studies remain narrowly siloed in physical, non-luxury retail contexts, limiting their generalizability to AI applications in emerging markets like Mexico. The MEC framework offers a critical lens for unpacking AI's dual role as both a utilitarian tool and a symbolic resource.

To the best of our knowledge, this study explores how AI attributes become culturally resonant means to status-driven ends by embedding ZMET (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995) within MEC structure. ZMET is a valuable method for uncovering subconscious consumer emotions and associations using metaphors and imagery (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). Such triangulation addresses critiques of ZMET's interpretive subjectivity by grounding metaphors in MEC structured hierarchy (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). Yoo et al. (2022) demonstrate that ZMET can uncover deep, subconscious motivations in consumer experiences. Hancock and Foster (2020) also show that the application of ZMET in service branding and luxury marketing and ZMET overcomes depth deficits in qualitative service research and enhances emotional insight. Raw data in our study, including interview transcripts, collages, and coded MEC chains, are archived as supplementary materials (Chen & Wen, 2024). In our study, two independent researchers conducted cross-validation of interpretations to ensure objectivity and enhance result credibility (Chen, 2010). Following ZMET guidelines, data interpretation involved constructing Hierarchical Value Maps (HVMs, see Figure 1–5), which provide a structured understanding of consumer decision-making pathways regarding AI in luxury marketing.

Furthermore, in luxury marketing, the precision of AI is used to achieve hyper-personalization (Gao & Liu, 2023; Xu et al., 2021) while mitigating the risk of cultural differences. For example, virtual communities based on the metaverse (Parcerisa, 2025) *suggest* that a balance needs to be struck between ideal individualism and the Mexican spirit of relationships for businesses to benefit from such a combination. Bain and Company (2024) predicts that luxury companies in Latin America will accelerate the adoption of more AI applications, which aligns with localization trends in Mexico. The widespread use of AI in e-commerce has played a vital role, such as through smartphone-optimized interfaces, real-time AI chatbots (Euromonitor International, 2024), and the trust-based reciprocity enhancement in interactions with e-services (Chung et al., 2020). Thus, our follow-up study aims to examine gender differences in consumer value mechanisms by leveraging ZMET to reveal

subconscious cognitive structures. Prior research has shown that gender significantly influences consumer behavior, with men and women attributing different meanings and values to their purchasing decisions (Chen, 2010; Das et al., 2024; Murillo, 2017). Our study seeks to compare these value structures by analyzing the pathways through which different genders associate product attributes with psychological benefits and core values.

To our knowledge, this study is the first to theorize AI in the Mexican luxury market through a MEC-ZMET lens and aims to fill three key gaps: (1) Hierarchical Value Map of AI in luxury marketing, illustrating how AI reconfigures the traditional MEC framework into a fluid, context-aware pathway; (2) Combining ZMET metaphors and MEC laddering analysis, we developed a deep understanding of metaphor patterns in AI luxury customers; and (3) different customer segments' experience of AI applications, constructing a comprehensive framework for understanding gender-specific consumer motivations, and reinforcing the credibility of our ZMET-based data analysis and result presentation. These contributions have actionable relevance for marketers navigating the complexity of AI experiences in emerging markets like Mexico, while also focusing on some of the concerns that our study raises about AI that are specific to this market (e.g., the importance of human luxury sales, and the underlying logics of the gender differences in responses to digital luxury marketing changes). Reviewing the literature and aligning with our research, we realize that in Latin American emerging markets like Mexico, global digital marketing trends intersect with deep-rooted sociocultural logic.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### *2.1 Artificial Intelligence in Luxury Marketing*

AI has evolved from a supplementary technological tool into an essential innovation driver of luxury customer experiences (Song & Bonanni, 2024). Existing literature acknowledges varied AI definitions and applications across various luxury brand management domains. For instance, as shown in the selected literature (see Table 1), AI refers to Natural Language Processing (NLP) and machine learning used to analyze consumer sentiment, emoji usage, and demographics (Oc et al., 2023) as well as to enable chatbots to interact with consumers, thereby enhancing digital customer service (Chung et al., 2020; Zeng et al., 2023). Prior research has mainly examined individual aspects or applications of AI, often focusing on isolated impacts instead of exploring their combined effects. For instance, AI's role in information processing through NLP has enhanced brands' capacity to capture, interpret, and leverage consumer-generated content such as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) to refine branding and better align product offerings with consumer expectations (Zeng et al., 2023). This data-centric approach has enabled luxury brands to strategically position themselves by gaining insights into consumer perceptions, authenticity, and emotional resonance. These insights are crucial for effective luxury brand storytelling, brand loyalty, brand engagement, and ultimately advancing their digital marketing strategies (Cheng & Jiang, 2022; Varsha et al., 2021).

**Table 1.** Selected AI Applied in Luxury Marketing Articles

| Paper | AI Definition | Luxury Marketing Application | How AI is Applied |
|---|---|---|---|
| Chung et al. (2020) | AI as digital conversational tools (chatbots) enhancing service interactions. | Providing personalized luxury brand experiences via chatbot e-services. | AI chatbots offer interaction, entertainment, trendiness, customization, and problem-solving, improving communication quality and customer satisfaction in luxury fashion brands. |
| Li & Shin (2021) | AI as Natural Language Processing (NLP) and chatbot interaction models enhancing digital customer service. | AI chatbots impact brand perception and status through communication styles. | AI-powered chatbots using emoticons reduce brand status perception for traditional luxury brands but are neutral for masstige brands. |
| Varsha et al. (2021) | AI as a broad data-driven decision-making tool, influencing brand visibility, e-brand experience, and customer behavior analysis. . | AI is applied in branding and consumer insights, impacting brand loyalty, brand engagement, and digital marketing strategies. | AI is used for big data analysis, neural networks, chatbot-brand intimacy, and voice assistant-driven branding strategies |
| Cheng & Jiang (2022) | AI as relationship-building technology, using chatbot marketing efforts (CMEs) to create interactive, personalized consumer engagement. | AI is applied in customer relationship management (CRM) for luxury brands, enhancing brand loyalty and digital engagement. | AI chatbots drive brand-customer relationships through personalized interactions, entertainment, and customization, leading to higher brand trust and loyalty. |
| Joy et al. (2022) | AI as a driver of digital transformation integrated with blockchain, NFTs, and the metaverse to shape brand experiences. | AI is applied in digital fashion, metaverse experiences, and luxury NFTs, creating new avenues for consumer engagement. | AI generates virtual luxury experiences, immersive AI-generated art, and NFT-backed brand exclusivity. |
| Xu & Mehta (2022) | AI as algorithmic creativity used for visual recognition, reasoning, and problem-solving in product design. | AI is applied in luxury product design, affecting brand essence. | AI enhances functional value but diminishes emotional value, leading to negative consumer responses in fashion but neutral or positive effects in automotive brands. |

**(Table 1. continued)**

| Paper | AI Definition | Luxury Marketing Application | How AI is Applied |
|---|---|---|---|
| Oc et al. (2023) | AI as NLP and machine learning used to analyze consumer sentiment, emoji usage, and demographics. | AI is applied to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) marketing to understand consumer engagement across different luxury brand tiers. | AI processes and categorizes textual data to extract insights on consumer perceptions, authenticity, and emotional tone, helping brands refine social media strategies. |
| Zeng et al. (2023) | AI as machine learning and NLP enabling chatbots to interact with consumers. | AI is applied in luxury customer service for interactive marketing and brand engagement. | AI chatbots provide personalized recommendations, brand interaction, and 24/7 support, improving customer satisfaction and loyalty. |
| Sestino (2024) | AI as predictive and automation technology enabling smart retail environments. | AI is applied in luxury retail shopping, influencing brand personality and purchase intentions. | AI powers smart mirrors, voice assistants, and IoT to automate customer interactions and create immersive shopping experiences. |
| Song & Bonanni (2024) | AI as interactive marketing integrating AR, VR, and machine learning algorithms. | Enhancing the luxury shopping experience through virtual try-on and personalization. | AI-driven AR/VR for virtual makeup try-on and personalized skincare recommendations to improve customer satisfaction and innovate luxury business models. |

The literature extensively explores AI as a driver of innovation, notably through advanced design features and immersive technologies, such as augmented reality and virtual reality. These technologies have reshaped consumer-brand interactions by enabling richer product experiences and facilitating greater personalization through AI-powered applications (Gao & Liu, 2023; Song & Bonanni, 2024). For instance, AI is applied in digital fashion, metaverse experiences, and luxury NFTs to generate virtual luxury experiences, immersive AI-generated art, and NFT-backed brand exclusivity (Joy et al., 2022). AI powers smart mirrors, voice assistants, and the Internet of Things to automate customer interactions and create immersive shopping experiences (Sestino, 2024). Conversely, AI's role in luxury product innovation remains contentious, as some studies indicate potential drawbacks; notably, Xu and Mehta (2022) caution that AI-driven product design might dilute luxury's inherent exclusivity and emotional value, particularly within fashion and aesthetic-driven categories. In the same vein, Li and Shin (2021) show that AI-powered chatbots using emoticons can reduce brand status perception for traditional luxury brands but are neutral for masstige brands. However, AI-driven innovation remains

largely positive in areas such as automotive luxury, highlighting the importance of context-specific applications of AI (Xu & Mehta, 2022).

### *2.2 AI Attributes and Consumer Behavior*

Recent studies further explore how specific attributes of AI, including information processing, innovation, experiential enhancement, advanced design, and superior quality, collectively shape luxury consumers' perceptions and behaviors. The attributes of AI technologies, especially interactive systems like chatbots, to process information and provide personalized recommendations have significantly enhanced the quality of consumer-brand interactions in luxury e-services (Chung et al., 2020). These interactions directly contribute to perceived user benefits, including increased convenience, improved decision-making confidence, and reduced purchasing risk, thus boosting overall satisfaction (Cheng & Jiang, 2022; Chung et al., 2020). Further, advanced AI attributes prominently appear in the domain of digital luxury innovations, encompassing blockchain-based NFTs and immersive virtual luxury experiences in the metaverse (Joy et al., 2022). These AI-driven innovations offer authenticity verification, heightened exclusivity, and unique personalized experiences that extend traditional brand storytelling into digital spaces (Gao & Liu, 2023; Oc et al., 2023). Thus, AI-driven design significantly shapes consumer perceptions of brand innovation, exclusivity, and quality (Xu & Mehta, 2022). The superior quality and experiential enhancement attributes of AI technologies significantly influence consumer behavior. AI-enhanced AR and VR experiences bridge the gap between online and physical retail environments, positively impacting consumer engagement and brand perceptions (Sestino, 2024; Song and Bonanni, 2024). Consumers report enhanced aesthetic evaluations and luxury shopping confidence (Xu & Mehta, 2022), resulting in more informed and satisfying purchase decisions, demonstrating AI's role in fulfilling both hedonic and utilitarian goals. However, effective deployment requires careful consideration, such as craftsmanship and emotional appeal, to avoid undermining luxury's core values.

In sum, the existing literature provides insightful yet fragmented analyses of AI's various attributes in luxury marketing. Although attributes such as information processing, innovation, experiential enhancement, advanced design, and superior quality have individually demonstrated significant impacts, an integrated understanding of how these attributes collectively influence consumer-perceived benefits and end-goal values remains limited. Our study addresses this gap by adopting a consolidated approach based on Means-End Chain (MEC) theory (Kumar et al., 2024), aiming to systematically investigate the linkages and interrelationships among AI attributes, perceived consumer benefits, and ultimate consumer values, thereby enriching theoretical and practical understandings of consumer behavior in AI-driven luxury marketing contexts.

### *2.3 Means-End Chain Theory*

Grounded in Laddering Theory, which shows that consumers make choices that benefit them based on their deeper values (Reynolds & Gutman, 2001), MEC theory offers a promising approach for understanding purchase motivation. According to Walker and Olson (1991), values play a fundamental role in driving consumer decisions, suggesting that firms can create strategic offerings by analyzing the consumers' goal structures, which contribute to these goals and values. Prior studies have widely recognized its efficacy in exploring the cognitive structures underlying consumer decision-making processes across diverse contexts. For instance, Giang et al. (2021) employed MEC to identify how prospective students perceive higher education institution attributes and link these perceptions to personal values, such as career advancement and individual growth, suggesting that institutional image

is a critical factor in enrollment decisions. Similarly, Lin (2024) demonstrated MEC's utility in understanding user engagement with online video platforms like TikTok, showing how interface usability and content diversity facilitate consequences including entertainment and social interaction, fulfilling values of community belonging and self-expression. MEC theory explains consumer decisions through a hierarchy of attributes, benefits, and higher-order values, where attributes lead to functional benefits that fulfill personal relevance and meaning for consumers (Choi, 2020). Values represent the "ends" and "constitute an explicit or implicit conception of ideals, characteristic of the individual concerned, which controls the choice of a particular mode, instrument (means), and goal (end) of conduct" (Huber et al., 2004). MEC theory offers valuable insights into consumer interactions with modern technologies, such as AI, although its application in this context remains limited. For example, Rzepka (2019) applied MEC Theory and value-focused thinking to analyze the benefits and costs that users consider when using AI voice assistance. Their findings revealed five fundamental factors, such as efficiency, convenience, ease of use, less cognitive effort, and enjoyment that users evaluated when deciding whether to use AI voice assistance. Sankaran and Chakraborty (2021) utilized MEC to reveal how attributes like convenience and security lead consumers to achieve values related to financial independence and empowerment, emphasizing the role of trust in adoption behaviors. A recent study by Veselinovic et al. (2025) extended the application of MEC theory into a novel context, validating the laddering method to reveal how digital game attributes influence students' learning outcomes and personal values through hierarchical value mapping. Integrating AI with MEC Theory enables a more nuanced analysis of consumer preferences. These studies collectively validate MEC theory as a robust analytical framework for elucidating the hierarchical cognitive pathways—attributes, consequences, and values—guiding consumer choices (Oliveira et al., 2024; Rodrigo et al., 2023). Similarly, Teh et al. (2021) studied AI in offline retail, focusing on personalized recommendations and interactive features. However, these insights are specific to physical store environments and may not extend to broader AI applications. Therefore, we argue that MEC theory provides a compelling lens for examining consumer goals and behaviors concerning AI, offering significant potential for advancing marketing research.

### *2.4 Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique*

The ZMET is a valuable method for uncovering subconscious consumer motivations and emotional insights using metaphors and imagery (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). Yoo et al. (2022) demonstrated that ZMET effectively reveals deep-seated psychological and subconscious drivers behind consumer experiences, particularly in pilgrimage tourism. Similarly, Hancock and Foster (2020) highlighted ZMET to overcome depth deficits common in traditional qualitative service research, enhancing understanding of consumers' emotional associations with brands. In financial decision-making contexts, Puspasari and Herwiyanti (2021) showed how image-based elicitation through ZMET uncovers hidden concerns about trust and information asymmetry among bank analysts evaluating SMEs. More recently, Lin and Yeh (2023) applied ZMET to digital and virtual experiences, showing its relevance for understanding cognitive and emotional responses within AI-enhanced environments, highlighting imagination, fantasy, and escapism as critical emotional dimensions. By combining ZMET with MEC theory, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of how AI features resonate with luxury consumers, both emotionally and cognitively. For instance, Wang and Qiu (2024) highlighted the role of transparency in AI applications, showing how it positively affects consumers' perceptions of digital endorsers, and suggested that transparency in AI can influence trust and emotional engagement (Gao et

al., 2023), which is particularly important in the luxury market, where consumer trust and perception of exclusivity are key. In addition, Luri et al. (2024) utilized metaphors to analyze marketplace sentiment, indicating that metaphorical associations with AI technologies could be essential in shaping luxury consumers' emotional responses and purchasing decisions. Jung et al. (2021) explored consumer experiences in virtual reality, particularly in the context of luxury brand fashion shows, and offered insights into how immersive AI-driven technologies affect consumers' emotional and cognitive engagement with luxury brands. The effectiveness of ZMET in mapping consumer responses to human brands indicates its utility in understanding emotional connections with AI-powered brand experiences (Noh et al., 2023). Chen and Wen (2024) further expanded the role of metaphors in advertising, showing how metaphoric communication can influence consumer engagement with brands in hospitality, which can be applied to luxury sectors using AI. A recent study by Das et al. (2024) explored gender differences in visual metaphor interpretation. The literature collectively suggests that combining ZMET metaphors and MEC laddering provides valuable insights into the complex ways that AI influences luxury consumers' decision-making processes, capturing both rational decision pathways and subconscious influences (Chiang et al., 2017; Christensen & Olson, 2002).

## 3. Methodology

This study investigates the interplay between luxury consumption and AI through a qualitative lens, employing the ZMET (Zaltman, 1997, 2008) to uncover latent consumer motivations and cognitive schemas. Grounded in interpretive research traditions (Denzin et al., 2006), ZMET is employed to enhance depth and emotional insight in qualitative data collection, overcoming limitations of conventional qualitative methods (Hancock & Foster, 2020). Participants engage in visual storytelling using selected images to uncover deeper psychological motivations behind their interactions with luxury brands enhanced by AI (Yoo et al., 2022). By adapting the image-based elicitation method successfully used in data analysis and interpretation, we can emphasize consumer cognition and emotional responses. This enables the construction of consensus maps and mental models to systematically visualize participants' subconscious associations with AI-enabled luxury experiences (Puspasari & Herwiyanti, 2021; Lin & Yeh, 2023). In line with previous ZMET and MEC-based studies that emphasize purposive or criterion-based sampling to ensure conceptual richness and experiential relevance (Chen, 2010; Yoo et al., 2022; Hancock & Foster, 2020), this study intentionally recruited participants with lived experience and conceptual familiarity with both luxury consumption and AI applications. Our sample comprises university students and their parents in Mexico, selected based on their digital fluency and exposure to AI-integrated luxury marketing, since these characteristics are essential for engaging meaningfully with visual metaphors and deep metaphor elicitation. This sampling approach ensures alignment between participant experience and the study's conceptual focus, enhancing the interpretative validity of our findings. Participants (N = 42; gender-balanced; aged 16–71, M = 31.3) from diverse Mexican regions (Mexico City, Sinaloa, Toluca, and Villahermosa) were recruited from socioeconomic strata A/B (monthly income $5,000.00 USD), and C+ (household monthly income of $2,058.00 USD to $4,999.99 USD) (AMAI, 2018).

The ZMET procedure consists of several rigorously structured stages, adapted and refined for the context of AI and luxury consumption (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008):

Step 1 - Pre-interview (Image Collection): Participants are instructed to collect 8–12 images that best represent their subconscious thoughts, feelings, and deep emotions regarding AI applications in luxury

brand consumption. Participants have two weeks to gather these images, ensuring thoughtful and introspective selections (Yoo et al., 2022).

Step 2 - Storytelling (Interview Stage 1): In the initial stage of the ZMET interview, respondents share stories about each image, describing their thoughts, feelings, and associations related to AI and luxury brands.

Step 3 - Identifying Missing Images: Participants discuss any images they wished to find but could not, describing these missing images and elaborating on their significance and meaning.

Step 4 - Image Sorting and Reduction: Respondents group images into three to four thematic categories based on similarity, emotional relevance, or conceptual relationships. Subsequently, redundant images with overlapping meanings are collaboratively discarded by the researcher and the respondent.

Step 5 - Construct Elicitation and Thematic Grouping: Respondents classify images into thematic groups, providing deeper explanations of these groups' meanings and significance. Researchers then assist respondents in developing and articulating these constructs, revealing subconscious consumer motivations (Puspasari & Herwiyanti, 2021).

Step 6 - Metaphor Elaboration: Respondents elaborate further by creating metaphors, imaginatively adding new elements to their chosen images. This stage reveals deeper subconscious motivations, enhancing researchers' understanding of consumers' internal values and emotional connections with AI luxury experiences (Lin & Yeh, 2023).

Step 7 - Sensory Associations: Respondents describe their deep thoughts and feelings in sensory terms—such as color, sound, smell, taste, and touch—further enriching understanding of their emotional and subconscious associations.

Step 8 - Vignette Creation: Participants develop a short story (vignette) about their interactions with AI in luxury consumption, fostering deep introspection and further revealing hidden emotional meanings.

Step 9 - Selection of Representative Images: Participants select images representing their strongest and weakest associations, respectively, clarifying the emotional intensity of these constructs.

Step 10 - Consensus Mapping and Mental Map Development: Researchers and participants collaboratively develop individual mental maps to visually represent the relationships among identified constructs, emotions, and values, providing a structured depiction of cognitive associations (Lin & Yeh, 2023).

Step 11 - Collage Creation (Summary Stage): Finally, respondents create a collage summarizing their key constructs and the overarching mental models of their relationship with AI-driven luxury experiences.

This step-by-step approach allows researchers to uncover deep, subconscious consumer insights, linking AI attributes, emotional and cognitive consumer responses, and hierarchical personal values (Gutman, 1982). To enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of this qualitative study, we employed multiple data collection methods and engaged respondents through in-depth interviews, follow-up interviews, and respondent checks. Triangulation was conducted across diverse data sources, including direct interviews, subsequent clarifications, and validation through multiple researchers (Chen, 2010). The structured, metaphor-based ZMET methodology is ideally suited to the complexity and emotional depth required to fully explore AI in luxury marketing (Hancock & Foster, 2020). While MEC effectively identifies rational linkages among AI attributes, perceived benefits, and personal values, integrating ZMET will deepen this analysis by uncovering consumers' subconscious emotional and

symbolic meanings. Through metaphor-based cognitive mapping and storytelling techniques, deep-seated consumer motivations and values have been uncovered (Yoo et al., 2022). This methodological synergy, highlighted by Chiang et al. (2017), allows us to precisely capture not only explicit decision-making processes but also hidden motivations related to trust, exclusivity, anxiety, and empowerment that influence consumer perceptions across gender and generational segments. Furthermore, the MEC laddering analysis employed in this study follows the structured procedures articulated by Reynolds and Gutman (1988), enhanced by ZMET-based visual metaphor elicitation to surface deeper emotional and cognitive linkages (Chaing et al., 2017). The laddering procedure begins by eliciting distinctions, where respondents provide personally meaningful product attributes through open-ended prompts such as brand comparisons. Next, the interviewer engages in iterative upward probing, consistently asking "Why is that important to you?" or "What deeper thoughts do you associate with this?" to progress beyond attributes toward underlying consequences and core values (Wang et al., 2022; Chaing et al., 2017). To ensure contextual relevance, respondents describe real-life scenarios, enriching introspective reflections and authenticity. Subsequently, the interview data are structured into linear sequences termed attribute-consequence-value (A-C-V) ladders (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). These ladders undergo content analysis, where responses are systematically categorized by abstraction levels. A frequency-based implication matrix is then developed to quantify linkages between elements (Christensen & Olson, 2002). Finally, a HVM visually synthesizes these dominant pathways, effectively summarizing collective cognitive orientations and providing profound insights for theory-driven segmentation and strategic marketing applications (Kumar et al., 2024; Reynolds & Gutman, 1988).

Based on the ZMET metaphors and MEC laddering analysis, we developed a Hierarchical Value Map (HVM, shown in Figure 1) that graphically maps cognitive structures systematically. This results in rich hierarchical mental models that highlight both emotional and rational aspects of consumer perceptions regarding AI in luxury marketing (Wang et al., 2022). To ensure the validity and interpretability of the HVM, we systematically constructed HVMs by linking key concepts and findings derived from metaphors, vignettes, personal stories, collages, and images elicited during the in-depth ZMET interviews (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). These visual and narrative data allow researchers to map respondents' unconscious cognitive structures effectively, revealing clear pathways from attributes through consequences to core values (Chaing et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2022). Each node within the HVM represents a specific construct identified during content analysis, categorized according to its abstraction level—A-C-V ladders (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). The strength of the connections between these constructs was determined based on an implication matrix that quantified how frequently respondents associated one construct with another (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). The thickness or intensity of arrows in the HVM directly illustrates the frequency and prominence of each connection, highlighting the shared cognitive orientations and dominant value pathways among respondents (Wang et al., 2022). The analysis identified two core AI attributes, which are Informativeness (tailored recommendations) and innovation (cutting-edge features and exclusive trendy taste). Each of these attributes activated three hierarchical levels of benefits, namely, psychological consequences (e.g., Facility, Utility, Efficiency and Comfort), functional aspects (e.g., Satisfaction, Excitement and Tranquility), and social aspects (e.g., Status, Connection and Belonging). In turn, these benefits fulfilled higher-order values, notably Happiness, Insecurity, Empowerment and Lifestyle (Tarn & Wang, 2023). For instance, Respondent A stated, "It reminds me of the satisfaction and security that certain websites provide due to their reputation for good service, safety, and fast purchasing," which

was coded into constructs such as “satisfaction,” "security," "safety," “comfort” and “efficiency". Respondent B emphasized brand innovation and exclusivity, saying, “It represents how luxury brands innovate to offer new experiences and quality services, maintaining the prestige that characterizes them,” which informed the constructs “innovation,” “exclusive,” "status," "fantasy" and “luxuriousness.” Similarly, metaphorical imagery played a central role in value elicitation, as reflected in Respondent C’s narrative: “This image reflects the emotion of imagining a genie coming out of a magic lamp… with Artificial Intelligence, you never know what to expect,” which contributed to the constructs such as "innovation" and “insecurity.” The emotional and ethical dimensions of AI were also captured, such as in the reflection, “People’s fear of being replaced by machines…” which supported constructs like “technological anxiety” and “job insecurity.” In alignment with ZMET practice, Respondent D used collage composition to express value hierarchies (shown in Appendix Fig. A.1), stating, “I placed the images of emotions in the center of the collage, because, for me, the most important thing about a purchase is the emotions and what you feel when you acquire something you want. Subsequently, I placed all the images that have to do with the process of how AI interferes in the purchasing process, not only for us consumers, but also how it alters the world. At the end of the day, all these technological advances are intended to benefit us as human beings.” These expressions were inductively analyzed and grouped through open coding, and then transformed into construct dyads and triads, following the ZMET-MEC integration framework (Yoo et al., 2022).

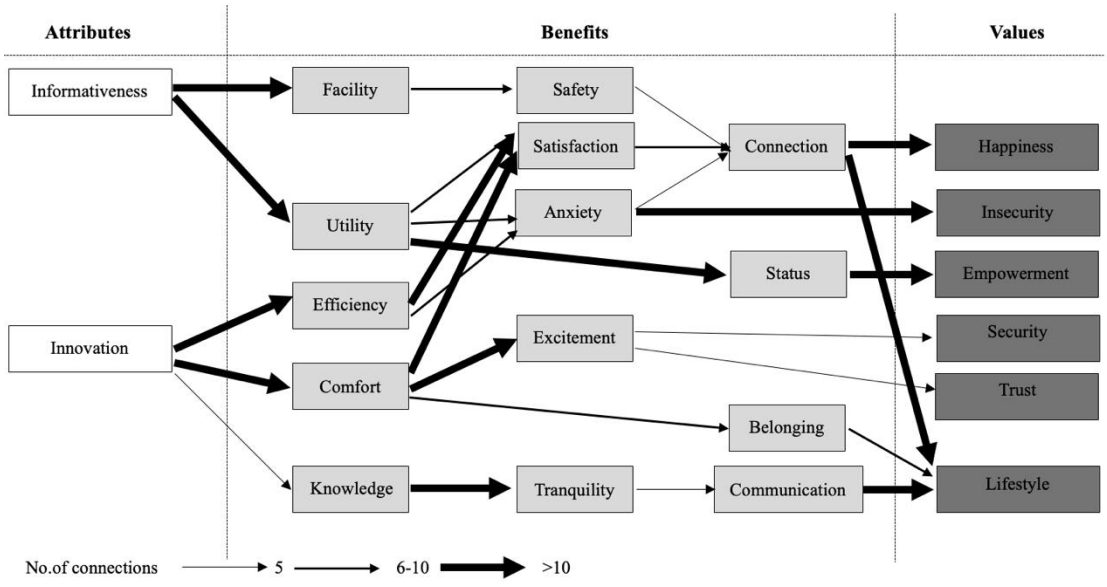


**Figure 1.** Hierarchical Value Map (HVM): AI Attributes, Benefits, and Value

## 4. Main Study Result

### *4.1 Artificial Intelligence Attributes*

Informativeness was the top-mentioned attribute, suggesting that AI is seen primarily as a facilitator, rather than the luxury product itself. Informativeness refers to the richness and quality of product-related knowledge provided by the AI-enabled shopping interfaces (Kang et al., 2020). Informativeness in AI reflects the accuracy, transparency, and credibility of the information provided by corporations, thereby enabling investors to distinguish between authentic AI adoption and

misleading representations (or "AI washing") (Barrios et al., 2024). Zhang et al. (2024) define informativeness as the measure of how effectively a given dataset or specific sample (e.g., image data) provides valuable insights or enhances model interpretability. Prior literature underlines informativeness as a crucial AI attribute linking directly to perceived user benefits (trust, reduced risk, and enhanced decision-making confidence) and ultimate consumer values (satisfaction, informed decision-making, and enhanced shopping experience) (Giang et al., 2025; Kang et al., 2020). This highlights the growing reliance on digital solutions to enhance the luxury shopping experience.

Innovation was another key term, emphasizing the forward-looking nature of AI. The luxury market is often defined by its ability to stay ahead of trends, and AI's integration helps to maintain this cutting edge. Innovation in AI combines novelty, technology-driven efficiencies, and the strategic advantage (Huang et al., 2022), making it especially impactful in complex industry contexts (Al-Haji & Bakar, 2024). Verganti et al. (2020) define AI-driven innovation as transformative, emphasizing iterative processes that use real-time consumer data to create new products and dynamically enhance design processes. AI innovation specifically refers to the integration of AI technologies into new products, enabling firms to leverage AI-based innovations to increase future profitability (Padigar et al., 2022). Adopting AI innovations benefits from improved cost-efficiency, better resource allocation, and superior market responsiveness, thus enhancing consumer perceptions of value (Iwuanyanwu & Igoche, 2021).

### *4.2 Artificial Intelligence Benefits*

#### *4.2.1 Informativeness drives Facility and Utility*

Our data describe the functional aspects of luxury consumption through AI with metaphors centered on Facility and Utility, which reflect the ease and convenience AI brings to luxury consumption through tailored recommendations that save time and effort. Chung et al. (2020) also highlighted that luxury brand AI chatbots deliver accurate, timely, and relevant information to consumers, significantly enhancing communication quality. In other words, the informativeness of AI provides ease of access (facility) and highly relevant product information (utility), which directly reduces consumers' purchase uncertainty and effort in information search, leading to improved decision-making efficiency. These two terms reflect how participants view AI as both a practical tool and facilitator of deeper, more meaningful connections to luxury brands. In line with the prior research, Informativeness in AI substantially enhances user experiences by driving Facility (ease of access, credibility) and Utility (usefulness, informed decision-making), reinforcing its centrality as an AI attribute across contexts. High informativeness of data samples improves AI model transparency, fostering user trust and facilitating easier acceptance of AI-based decisions (Zhang et al., 2024). Kang et al. (2020) also demonstrated that the enhanced informativeness of virtual environments significantly improves consumers' perceived utility, thereby reducing perceived shopping risks and increasing purchase intentions by clearly conveying product attributes through immersive interfaces.

##### *4.2.1.1 Facility and Utility (Informativeness) → Safety, Satisfaction and Anxiety*

Our results show that enhanced Informativeness by AI reduces perceived risk, potentially leading to psychological Safety and Satisfaction. In line with the previous studies, Kang et al. (2020) stated that the risk-reducing effect of informativeness implies an increase in consumer psychological safety. Kumar et al. (2024) illustrate how augmented reality (AR)-driven informativeness can enhance consumers' feeling of safety owing to reduced product-related uncertainties and increased decision

confidence. Chung et al. (2020) emphasize that AI informativeness through chatbots significantly contributes to (Utility) service quality, which leads to customer satisfaction. It should be noted that our respondents mentioned that detailed Informativeness (data collection, surveillance capabilities, and privacy) contributes positively to the consumers' perceived utility in terms of clarity, awareness, and better decision-making, yet simultaneously triggers negative emotional reactions like anxiety, apprehension, and fear due to heightened awareness of AI-related risks and negative implications (Kummer et al., 2017). While informativeness typically improves consumer utility through better decision-making, detailed knowledge about AI's complexity, unpredictability, and lack of transparency can simultaneously increase fears and anxiety due to uncertainty about potential risks (Li & Huang, 2020; Schiavo et al., 2024; Wang & Wang, 2022).

*4.2.1.2 Connection and Status*

Our respondents indicated that Informativeness-driven facility enhances safety, potentially boosting consumer connections. Both studies by Song and Bonanni (2024) and Zimmermann et al. (2023) emphasize that satisfaction derived from the informativeness of AI directly strengthens consumer-brand connections, increasing brand-consumer relationships (loyalty and trust) through credible, personalized communication. In addition, Yim et al. (2024) also highlight that AI agents should be programmed with playful, humorous, and engaging personalities to generate more positive emotional connections with users, making them more likely to trust and rely on the technology. However, it may simultaneously increase anxiety owing to heightened consumer awareness of AI-related risks, indicating the importance of careful management of these AI attributes in building sustainable emotional connections. For instance, Li and Huang (2020) articulated how anxiety induced by detailed knowledge of AI processes (especially concerns related to transparency, privacy, and ethical decisions) might negatively affect consumer connections if not properly managed. Furthermore, our data show that Informativeness-driven Utility can evoke consumers' Status seeking. While the literature suggests a nuanced relationship where consumers primarily oriented toward Utility may not perceive an increase in status from informativeness, consumers focused explicitly on status may find utility-based benefits less impactful. For instance, Li and Shin (2021) indirectly indicate that the informational aspects of AI interactions may shape consumers' perceptions of luxury brand status. Sestino (2024) clarifies that in luxury contexts, utility-driven innovations (such as intelligent shopping environments) typically hold greater appeal to consumers with lower status consumption orientation. By contrast, consumers who mainly seek high-status symbols may view utility-oriented technologies as less relevant or impactful on luxury brand status, as their primary motivation revolves around prestige rather than utility.

*4.2.2 Innovation drives Efficiency, Comfort and Knowledge*

Respondents primarily mentioned the Efficiency and Comfort driven by the Innovation attribute of AI. The existing literature validates our findings. Iwuanyanwu and Igoche (2021) define AI innovation by its relative advantage, namely, perceived improvements in operational efficiency, productivity, and reduced complexity in organizational tasks. AI-driven innovations that closely align with organizational and consumer values enhance adoption rates by providing increased convenience and comfort. In addition, Padigar et al. (2022) demonstrate the innovation attribute of AI as a strategic communication tool that not only improves organizational efficiency but also enhances perceived comfort by reducing investment uncertainties associated with new product announcements embedded with AI technologies. Further, recent literature also demonstrates that innovation of AI application in

luxury marketing offers consumers the comfort of accessibility and immersive interactions. This provides consumers with greater comfort by reducing physical and psychological barriers associated with in-store product trials (comfort), and facilitates efficient shopping experiences by reducing the time and effort required for product trials and selection (efficiency) (Joy et al., 2022; Song and Bonanni, 2024). Furthermore, AI-driven innovation in luxury may increase consumers' functional knowledge, which refers to transparency, accuracy of information, and functional product details (Akter et al., 2022). Joy et al. (2022) argue that innovations (AI-powered NFTs and digital fashion experiences) enrich consumer knowledge by offering transparent, authenticated, and detailed product information digitally. Additionally, these innovations positively enhance consumer emotions (feelings) by creating unique, personalized, and emotionally rewarding luxury brand interactions (Chung et al., 2020).

#### *4.2.2.1 Efficiency, Comfort and Knowledge (Innovation) → Satisfaction, Anxiety, Excitement and Tranquility*

Our data indicate that consumers feel pleased and satisfied with the convenience and personalization that AI offers, which are tailored to specific desires and add value to the luxury experience. In line with the previous studies, AI innovation significantly enhances shopping efficiency (saving time, effort, and increasing productivity) and decision comfort (streamlining decision-making), directly leading to consumer satisfaction by improving perceived product fit, reducing uncertainty, and lowering cognitive effort (Kumar et al., 2024; Song and Bonanni, 2024). However, efficient AI systems that reduce consumer control or autonomy may inadvertently increase Anxiety related to the loss of personal control, and transparency concerns. Li and Huang (2020) and Schiavo et al. (2024) suggest that higher efficiency through AI innovation can paradoxically result in anxiety if efficiency highlights potential negative outcomes such as transparency issues or privacy concerns. Anxiety stems from the efficiency of AI innovation, in which AI systems work beyond human comprehension, leading to negative feelings. In other words, AI can enhance decision-making efficiency, but the perceived lack of human judgment, context, and transparency in AI's evaluations creates distress (Lopez & Garza, 2023). Moreover, our data show that Innovation-driven Comfort can strongly lead to Excitement benefit. This is supported by Kumar et al. (2024), who found that decision comfort from innovative shopping experiences promotes emotional benefits, particularly excitement, by facilitating immersive, interactive, and inspiring product exploration. In addition, it should be noted that our respondents significantly mentioned the Tranquility benefit driven by the Knowledge related to the Innovation attribute of AI. In the extended literature, direct explicit evidence specifically connecting Innovation-driven consumer Knowledge by AI with Tranquility is limited. However, tranquility emerges as a positive emotional outcome of the knowledge pursued responsibly and innovatively by Hao (2018), providing a valuable argument for carefully managed AI innovation attributes in luxury marketing.

#### *4.2.2.2 Connection, Belonging and Communication*

Many respondents expressed that both Innovation-driven Efficiency and Comfort strongly lead to Satisfaction, and then link to Connection benefit, while Innovation-driven Efficiency may also lead to Anxiety. This is clearly supported by previous studies that enhance consumer efficiency (through productivity and reduced decision time) and comfort (decision comfort), directly enhancing consumer satisfaction (Kumar et al., 2024; Song and Bonanni, 2024). Specifically, Kumar et al. (2024) further found that consumers experienced improved efficiency through Innovation could reduce anxiety with higher satisfaction. This contributed positively to connection building, and innovation-driven decision comfort positively influences emotional well-being, self-expression, and self-confidence, indirectly

suggesting enhanced consumer belonging and identity alignment with products and brands. In addition, Hao (2018) suggests indirectly that innovation-driven knowledge, when managed responsibly and transparently, fosters calmness and emotional stability (tranquility). In other words, we consider that the tranquility benefit derived from well-managed and moderated knowledge can enhance meaningful interactions and communication (Hao, 2018) This indirectly supports the pathway in our data that Innovation-driven Knowledge leads to Tranquility, which ultimately enhances the Communication benefit.

### *4.3 Perceived Value by Artificial Intelligence*

The first category analyzed was "values" and most of our respondents consistently referred to metaphors of Happiness, Empowerment, and Lifestyle when discussing luxury product consumption through AI. These metaphors suggest that individuals associate AI-driven luxury consumption with feelings of wealth, fulfillment, and security. Happiness emerged as the most frequently mentioned value across both genders. This suggests that the luxury experience, especially when enhanced by AI, generates a sense of joy and satisfaction. The implication here is that AI not only facilitates access to luxury, but also amplifies the emotional satisfaction that consumers derive from it. Prior research shows that social connections formed through digital commerce experiences significantly contribute to emotional fulfillment, leading to happiness (Xu et al., 2021). Empowerment was followed as a prominent metaphor, underscoring the relationship between luxury and economic status. Consumers see AI as a tool that further integrates wealth with status signaling, reinforcing the exclusivity of luxury products (Han et al., 2010). Lifestyle was another key value, namely, social engagement and self-expressive digital experiences that lead to happiness, as well as shape consumer lifestyle choices. Consumers feel a sense of belonging, validation, and joy when engaging in AI-enhanced luxury brand interactions, ultimately reinforcing lifestyle identities that contribute to both personal joy and the expression of individual and social identities (Gao et al., 2023; Javornik et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2021). In addition, brand communication can also foster lifestyle identification, particularly in luxury markets where AI-driven customization and interactive experiences enable consumers to align their purchases with their desired lifestyles (Chernev et al., 2011). Similarly, Ha and Jang (2012) suggested that effective digital communication enhances perceptions of lifestyle integration in high-end retail, where AI-driven customer service allows consumers to curate luxury experiences that match their social and personal aspirations.

While Insecurity was a predominant theme, some participants expressed Anxiety feelings about relying heavily on AI's Informativeness driven Utility (Lopez & Garza, 2023). Concerns about loss of personal agency and over-reliance on algorithms may emerge in future studies. However, AI's precision and data-driven personalization capabilities could counterbalance these fears, as its utility in delivering customized luxury experiences is becoming increasingly valuable (Zimmermann et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the other values mentioned by a few respondents are Security and Trust. Our data show the pathway through which AI Innovations first enhance decision Comfort, leading to an Exciting and immersive shopping experience that ultimately reinforces consumer Security and Trust. This relationship is particularly significant in the luxury sector, where product authenticity, consumer confidence, and trust in brand reputation are critical (Joy et al., 2022). For instance, Kumar et al. (2024) highlighted that consumers who experience excitement in AI-powered AR environments feel reassured about their product decisions, translating into enhanced trust in brands. Xu et al. (2021) found that

cross-border e-commerce customers identified security as the most crucial value derived from AI-driven shopping experiences. This suggests that consumers develop a greater sense of security in their decision-making when they feel more excited by seamless and immersive experiences.

## 5. Follow-up Study

### *5.1 Objective*

Drawing from the studies' insights into gender-based interpretation of metaphors (Chen, 2010; Das et al., 2024; Murillo, 2017), our follow-up study seeks to extend these distinctions in four consumer segments on Hierarchical Value Maps (see Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5) related to AI-driven luxury marketing. For instance, young men perceive AI as an empowerment tool, akin to their practical and financial focus. Young women who associate advertisements with aspirational and emotional themes view AI as a pathway to happiness, self-esteem, and lifestyle enhancement. Similarly, adult men, characterized by both trust issues and financial security concerns, engage with AI as a source of happiness, yet remain untrusting. Meanwhile, older women's responses to AI as a facilitator of happiness and insecurity reflect their broader emotional engagement with marketing stimuli (Gao et al., 2023). This segmentation mirrors the AR marketing framework (Kumar et al., 2024), further reinforcing that consumer engagement with AI is shaped by gendered and generational psychological factors rather than a uniform technological adoption pattern.

### *5.2 Results: AI-Driven Value Perceptions Across Consumer Segments*

#### *5.2.1 Young Men: AI as a Pathway to Empowerment and Economic Considerations*

As Figure 2 shows, innovation, design, and quality are the dominant AI attributes for young men, activating a rational and status-oriented value-seeking process.

Design leads to utility, contributing to Status, ultimately driving Empowerment value.

Quality enhances Brand Awareness and Cost Consciousness, triggering Tranquility, which directly contributes to Economic value.

Innovation leads to Comfort, fostering Belonging, which is ultimately linked to Lifestyle value.

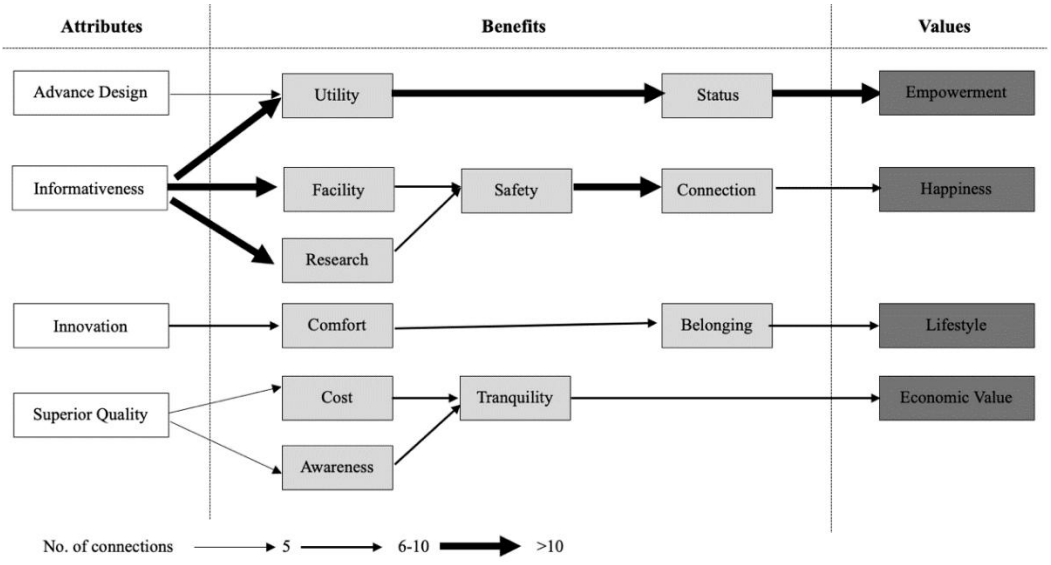


**Figure 2.** Hierarchical Value Map (HVM): Young Men´s Concentration

These findings are consistent with prior MEC research (Rzepka, 2019), which highlights that young male consumers emphasize AI's Utilitarian and Empowerment tools in luxury marketing experiences (Rosenswig, 2012). Furthermore, Kovačević and Demić (2024) demonstrated that men self-reported a greater interest in AI than women, suggesting a stronger inclination toward technology-driven solutions. In line with Ahn et al. (2022), the study found that participants responded more positively to AI recommendations when a male AI agent suggested a utilitarian product rather than a hedonic one, reinforcing the perception that men prioritize functionality and efficiency in decision-making. In Mexico, young male consumers show a stronger preference for a materialistic and utilitarian approach, similar to how economic factors historically shaped societal roles, emphasizing efficiency, informativeness, and credibility (Felix et al., 2013; Murillo, 2017; Rosenswig, 2012). Thus, prior research validates that the segmentation of young men perceives AI through a lens of competence and control rather than emotional or lifestyle-oriented benefits.

"The image represents how easy, fast, and practical online shopping is, although one purchase will lead to thousands more, precisely because it is so easy and practical." Interview 2 (Male, 25-year-old)

*5.2.2 Young Women: AI as a Source of Happiness, Self-Esteem, and Lifestyle*

As Figure 3 shows, unlike young men, young women exhibit a more emotional and social value-seeking processes. AI attributes such as innovation, uniqueness, and knowledge drive self-perception and identity-related benefits.

Uniqueness leads to Exclusivity and Luxuriousness, which, in turn, results in Fantasy as a second-level benefit, eventually linking to Belonging and Status at the third level benefit.

Status is strongly connected to Self-esteem value, whereas Belonging primarily leads to Happiness.

Interestingly, Knowledge fosters Tranquility and Communication, ultimately contributing to Lifestyle value.

Efficiency, rather than Comfort, is the dominant first-level benefit for young women, driving Anxiety, which paradoxically transforms into Connection and then leads to Empowerment value at the highest level.

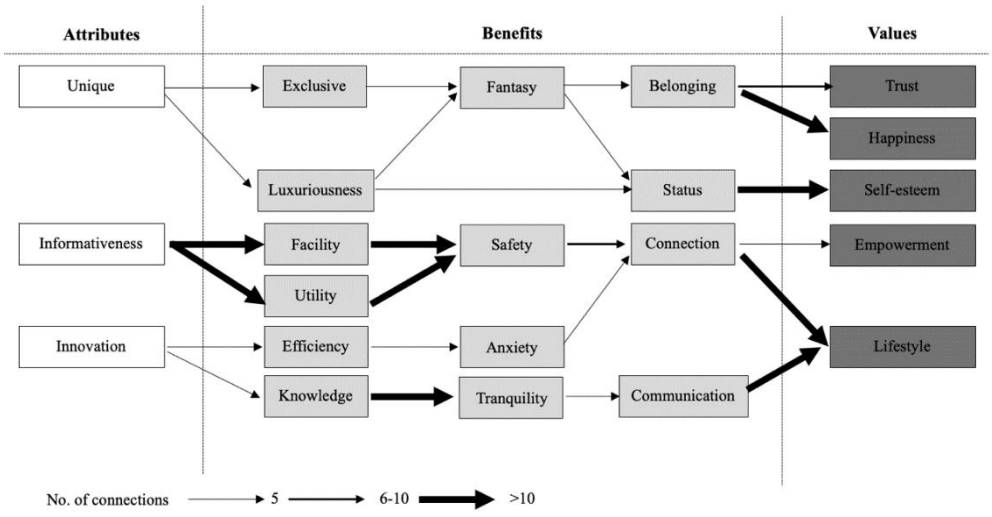


**Figure 3.** Hierarchical Value Map (HVM): Young Women´s Concentration

This unique pattern reflects how young women use AI to balance anxiety with empowerment and work-life balance (Luri et al., 2024; Meharunisa et al., 2024). Additionally, prior studies suggest that younger women who experience a blend of social connection, support and belonging (e.g., participating in exclusive groups or brand digital communities) are more likely to perceive AI as a lifestyle enhancer rather than as a mere functional tool (Mejía Trejo, 2021; Salinas-Quiroz et al., 2022). This perspective aligns with fantasy benefits, which are emotionally driven and often involve imaginative or escapist experiences, allowing consumers to temporarily transcend everyday life, adopt aspirational identities, and acquire personal rewards and fulfillment through luxury consumption (Holmqvist et al., 2020; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Furthermore, Mejía Trejo (2021) highlights Generation Z's strong digital engagement and information-seeking behavior, supporting the idea that knowledge acquisition is crucial to their lifestyle and well-being. On the contrary, young male consumers tend to exhibit higher materialistic values than girls, with materialism often linked to self-esteem and social identity formation during adolescence (Felix et al., 2013; Shi et al., 2024). It also suggests that luxury brands should position AI as an enabler of self-expression and identity for young female consumers (Salinas-Quiroz et al., 2022).

"You can see how, using AI, a person can try on different clothing items without physically putting them on, changing, or going out—all from the comfort of their home." Interview 11 (Female, 20-year-old)

*5.2.3 Adult Men: AI as a Source of Happiness, Distrust and Lifestyle*

As shown in Figure 4, adult men associate AI mostly with Informativeness and Innovation, viewing it as a facilitator of Happiness and Lifestyle.

Innovation fosters Comfort, which leads to Excitement and ultimately results in Security and Trust values.

Informativeness triggers Anxiety, which contributes to the Distrust value.

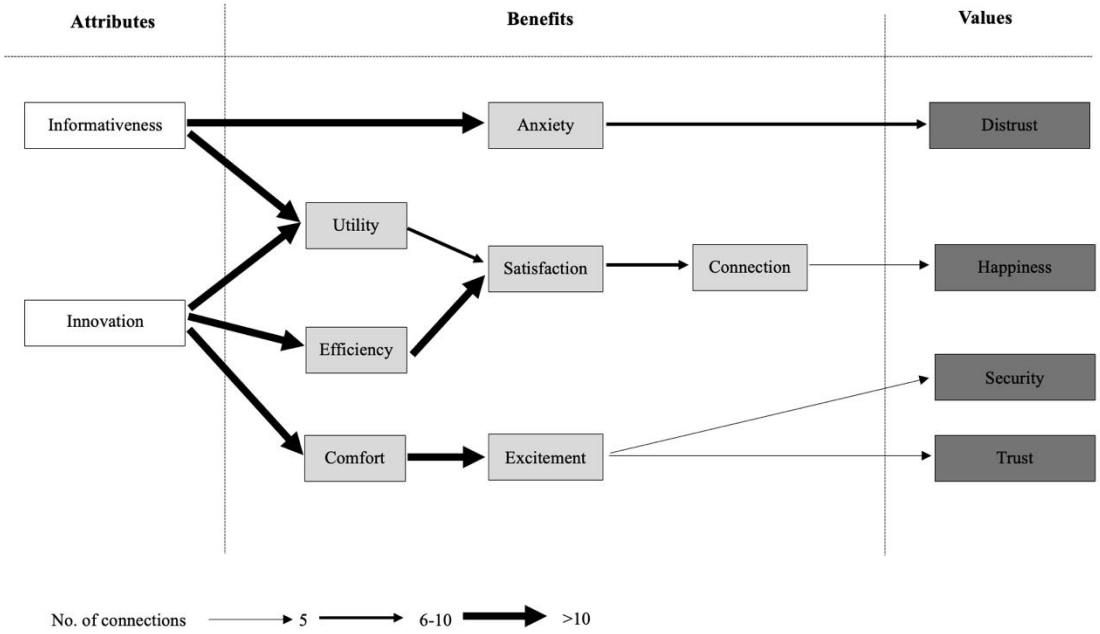


**Figure 4.** Hierarchical Value Map (HVM): Adult Men´s Concentration

This finding is consistent with prior studies on AI skepticism among older male consumers (Noh et al., 2023). In Mexico, older men see AI as a tool for happiness and lifestyle convenience, while their trust in AI remains limited, possibly due to early attachment experiences and later skepticism toward external influences, including technological adoption (Salinas-Quiroz et al., 2022). Additionally, various studies have indicated that older adults tend to have less positive evaluations of the use and adoption of new technologies (Magsamen-Conrad & Dillon, 2020). It also highlights that trust-building strategies are crucial when marketing AI-driven luxury experiences to this demographic.

"This image reflects the emotion of imagining a genie coming out of a magic lamp to solve all your problems and fulfill each of your wishes. The opportunities would seem limitless, and life could be transformed in the blink of an eye. With artificial intelligence, you never know what to expect." Interview 14 (Male, 46-year-old)

*5.2.4 Adult Women: AI as a Facilitator of Happiness and Insecurity*

As shown in Figure 5, adult women's perceptions of AI in luxury brands diverge significantly from those of older men. While they also associate Innovation with Comfort, the subsequent benefits diverge—comfort leads to Satisfaction instead of Excitement, eventually resulting in the Happiness value rather than Security and Trust.

For both adult men and women, Informativeness is a crucial AI attribute that initially enhances Utility. However, for older women, instead of leading to Satisfaction, it triggers Frustration and Anxiety, ultimately reinforcing the value of Insecurity.

Experience is a unique AI attribute identified by older women, linked to Facility, Excitement, and Connection, ultimately fostering Trust value.

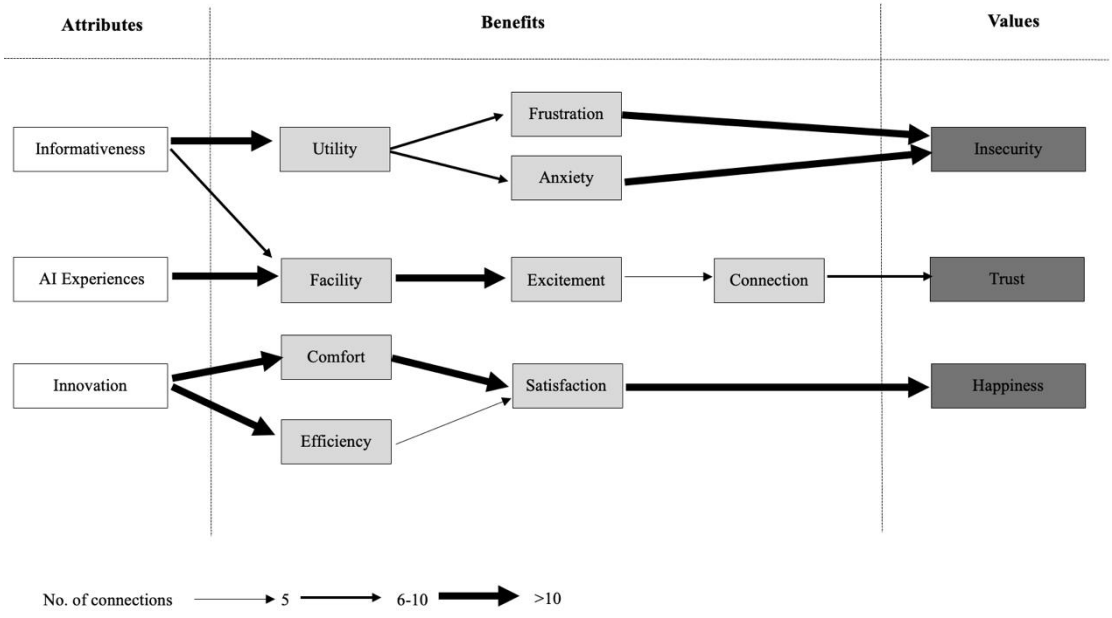


**Figure 5.** Hierarchical Value Map (HVM): Adult Women´s Concentration

This suggests that older female consumers require experiential engagement to build trust in AI-driven luxury brand experiences (Das et al., 2024). In line with a recent study by Yim et al. (2024),

consumers who perceive their AI agents as cute (round shapes, big eyes, soft voices, etc.) are more likely to find them user-friendly and easy to interact with, which enhances a more exciting user experience and encourages more frequent use. Frank (2021) further indicates that women tend to be more risk-averse than men, making them more insecure about signals of trustworthiness in their purchasing decisions. Older adults may face challenges adapting to AI products, which can result in emotional responses like frustration and anxiety, due to difficulties in understanding and using new technologies, potentially reinforcing feelings of insecurity (Magsamen-Conrad & Dillon, 2020; Shandilya & Fan, 2022). In Mexico, the association of AI with happiness and insecurity in adult women is consistent with Shi et al. (2024), suggesting that materialistic values, when intertwined with emotional vulnerabilities, can lead to lower satisfaction and increased anxiety.

"In this image, we can see a woman enjoying shopping online without having someone…The image represents the different types of concerns that can arise with technology, such as a calculator that makes calculations, symbolizing not having errors when entering data, the fear that what you ordered won't arrive, and security, meaning being careful with the websites you visit." Interview 30 (Female, 51-year-old)

## 6. Discussion

One of the key objectives of this study was to examine, through the ZMET methodology and within the MEC framework, the HVM (attributes of AI, benefits, and values) generated by luxury consumers. Our results illustrate a nuanced interplay of consumer values and psychological mechanisms, highlighting notable gendered contrasts. Consistent with prior literature (Xu et al., 2021; Javornik et al., 2021), we confirm that AI significantly enhances emotional satisfaction (Happiness), personal agency (Empowerment), and social identity alignment (Lifestyle). However, our findings notably diverge by uncovering deeper psychological distinctions across the four consumer segments in our follow-up study. For instance, young men perceive AI mainly as an empowerment tool, emphasizing high-performance, status driven features consistent with the literature (Song & Bonanni, 2024). By contrast, younger women engage with AI for emotional fulfillment, aligning with social aspirations through personalized luxury experiences. This finding supports existing research on gendered consumer expectations (Chung et al., 2020; Verdugo & Ponce, 2020) yet notably extends it by articulating a clear functional versus emotional value dichotomy between genders. Further, our findings provide novel insights into older consumers, a group less discussed in the prior AI-luxury literature. Adult men associate AI with happiness but express considerable skepticism, revealing anxiety related to transparency, privacy, and loss of personal control—a nuanced psychological mechanism complementing Schiavo et al. (2024). Interestingly, adult women view AI experiences with excitement and insecurity simultaneously, indicating a critical need for experiential engagement that emphasizes emotional reassurance (Swan et al., 2024). This generational contrast significantly broadens our understanding beyond the predominant narrative of AI's functional benefits (Joy et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2024).

Notably, our results pertain to the tranquility driven by Innovation of AI, which emerged distinctively among young luxury consumers discussing AI adoption, which is rarely discussed in the literature (Hao, 2018). It should be noted that significant gender differences appeared regarding how tranquility is derived and how it subsequently shapes luxury consumption behaviors. For young men, tranquility arises principally from increased awareness of cost efficiencies and perceptions of superior product quality offered by AI-driven features. This relationship indirectly aligns with previous

literature suggesting that economic reassurance and product-quality confidence delivered through technology can significantly reduce anxiety and enhance overall consumer tranquility, thus reinforcing economic-oriented luxury behaviors (Song & Bonanni, 2024; Kumar et al., 2024). However, for young women, tranquility is predominantly associated with the knowledge they gain from innovative AI attributes such as augmented reality (AR) and AI-powered personalization (Zimmermann et al., 2023). This insight builds upon the findings of Javornik et al. (2021) and Kumar et al. (2024), who demonstrate that increased product knowledge through immersive technological experiences can significantly reduce consumer uncertainty, enhancing emotional stability and comfort. Our results further extend this argument by illustrating how, for women, this tranquility significantly boosts their communication confidence, subsequently facilitating richer social interactions and enabling deeper alignment with their desired lifestyle choices. Such an indirect pathway—knowledge driving tranquility, tranquility boosting communication, and finally, communication influencing lifestyle—adds a critical nuance to the literature by highlighting gender-specific psychological mechanisms through which AI-driven innovation impacts luxury consumption. In sum, our findings indicate a critical divergence from existing literature in that AI's attributes in luxury contexts do not solely enhance functional or informational benefits but profoundly influence emotional and psychological dimensions. Future research should further explore these intriguing cultural and psychological complexities in diverse contexts.

## 7. Contributions

### *7.1 Theoretical Contribution*

First, this study extends the Means-Ends Chain (MEC) model (Gutman, 1982) to examine how AI technologies reconfigure the interplay between values, socio-psychological consequences, functional attributes, and AI-specific features in luxury customer experiences. Building on prior research positioning technology as a driver of consumer value hierarchies (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004), we conceptualize AI as a dual facilitator of exclusivity and emotional resonance, anchoring the role to terminal values such as happiness, trust, and wealth. Our results align with Hoffman and Novak's (2018) call to integrate technology more deeply into consumer experience models, demonstrating that AI functions not only as an operational enabler but also as a psychological mediator of luxury value. However, our findings diverge from the overly optimistic portrayals of AI's impact on consumer trust. As Li and Shin (2021) and Xu and Mehta (2022) suggest, concerns regarding data commodification, algorithmic opacity, and over-reliance on automation persist. These tensions are particularly pronounced in the luxury domain, where informed exclusivity and human-centric curation remain vital for brand authenticity (Joy et al., 2022). Thus, while AI enhances informativeness and innovation, attributes traditionally associated with utilitarian value, it simultaneously introduces ambivalence, creating a dialectic between trust and distrust, and between personalization and perceived loss of control.

Second, by combining the MEC theoretical framework with the ZMET, our study extends the previous understandings of AI adoption by deeply exploring consumer mental models and emotional pathways in luxury marketing. Prior literature on AI mainly focuses on mass marketing or mainstream contexts (Teh et al., 2021), emphasizing utilitarian outcomes such as convenience and functional efficiency. In contrast, our findings specifically illuminate how luxury consumers associate AI attributes with more profound psychological values, such as happiness, empowerment, and lifestyle alignment. These values underscore the role of AI in enhancing emotional satisfaction, excitement,

social status, and belonging in luxury consumption (Xu et al., 2021; Javornik et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2024). These findings support the growing consensus that AI can facilitate not only functional but also emotional and identity-driven value creation. However, our study highlights a unique, culturally nuanced dimension that even though consumers recognize AI's informative benefits, heightened awareness and understanding of AI functionalities occasionally foster anxiety, notably around privacy concerns and perceived loss of control. This aligns with prior research by Schiavo et al. (2024) and Wang and Wang (2022), who demonstrated increased anxiety resulting from the informativeness of AI functionalities. Notably, our research diverges from studies by Joy et al. (2022) and Kumar et al. (2024), which emphasize AI-driven comfort and utility as straightforward alleviators of consumer anxiety. Instead, we identify a more complex emotional trajectory, namely, while the efficiency and utility of AI can indeed elicit excitement, security and trust, it may simultaneously evoke insecurity in luxury contexts, where control, curation, and privacy are paramount. In sum, by extending MEC theory through the metaphor-based elicitation of ZMET, our findings contribute a more layered understanding of how AI is cognitively and emotionally encoded by consumers in the luxury domain, highlighting both the value-enhancing and value-contesting aspects of AI adoption.

Third, unlike prior studies that mainly examine AI adoption within general retail contexts (Teh et al., 2021), our follow-up study distinctly highlights how gendered dynamics shape consumer responses to AI within luxury markets. For example, our findings show that young men tend to view AI through a utilitarian and empowerment-focused lens, arranging attributes like informativeness and innovation for their capacity to boost control, efficiency, and rational decision-making (Mehta, 2020). These predilections align with classic gender socialization theories that individuals learn and internalize behaviors associated with the gender influenced by various agents such as family, peers and media (Kretchmar, 2011; Rondán-Cataluña et al.2017). This suggests that men are goal-driven and cognitively oriented toward performance-based outcomes (Mehta, 2020; Hoffman, 2020), making product-specific information particularly important for young men (Kanwal et al., 2022). In line with the previous research, female consumers in the merging market displayed stronger fashion-oriented behavior, whereas males were more price sensitive in their purchase decisions (Siraj et al., 2024). This consumer segment relates AI to status and empowerment, treating AI as a tool that boosts their economic and decision-making power. However, a noteworthy result is the emergence of anxiety among some participants, notably young women, related specifically to AI's highly informative utility, driven by concerns over privacy, autonomy, and potential over-reliance on technology. Nevertheless, aligning with recent insights from Kumar et al. (2024), our findings suggest that the anxiety generated by AI's informativeness can be counterbalanced by AI-driven innovation attributes. These AI innovation attributes provide decision comfort and emotional excitement, not only mitigating psychological concerns but also paradoxically fostering deeper and more meaningful consumer-brand connections. Furthermore, while previous research typically portrays anxiety as a barrier to technology adoption (Teh et al., 2021; Schiavo et al., 2024), our study identifies a distinctive pathway, indicating that young women perceive anxiety triggered by innovation driven efficiency as paradoxically enhances consumer connection, motivating active brand-consumer engagement and reinforcing perceptions of luxury lifestyle. This finding extends prior research by Wang and Qiu (2024), who suggested anxiety could catalyze proactive consumer behaviors. Our study specifically contextualizes this phenomenon within luxury marketing, underscoring anxiety as not merely a negative emotional state, but as a catalyst for aspirational and deeper engagement with AI-enhanced luxury experiences. As also observed by Chen et al. (2012), gender differences manifest uniquely across product categories

and cultural contexts, which supports our exploration of how male and female consumers in Mexico interpret AI-enhanced luxury experiences differently, reinforcing the importance of gender-based analysis in value mechanism research.

Last but not least, the interplay between tranquility, AI attributes, and consumer perspectives offers a novel contribution to the marketing literature, particularly within the context of luxury consumption. Previous studies have conceptualized tranquility as an outcome of external environmental stimuli, such as soundscapes and physical settings (Purves & Wartmann, 2023), or as a response to low-stimulation environments in natural or architectural contexts (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). By contrast, our findings suggest that tranquility in luxury experiences is actively constructed through cognitive and emotional engagement with AI-driven features, offering a new lens through which to understand this psychological state. In our study, tranquility emerged from young male respondents' awareness of AI-enabled cost efficiency and superior product quality, reinforcing their orientation toward economic value and functional predictability. This finding aligns with prior research linking tranquility to efficiency, security, and the mitigation of uncertainty in decision making (Kankal & Yüksek, 2012; Purves & Wartmann, 2023). However, our study diverges by showing that such tranquility is not environmentally induced, but rather arises from perceived algorithmic reliability and rational benefits associated with AI-enhanced luxury products. For example, young female respondents in our data associate tranquility with the knowledge and understanding gained from interacting with AI's innovative features. This cognitive pathway leads to increased communication confidence, deeper social engagement, and ultimately greater lifestyle integration, which is in line with Swan et al. (2024), who identify cognitive stimulation and user interactivity as essential components of digital well-being. This perspective supports Purves and Wartmann's (2023) claim that tranquility can result from psychological clarity and control by emphasizing knowledge acquisition and self-efficacy, which are emphasized less in traditional tranquility research. Thus, our findings converge with the prior literature in acknowledging tranquility as a desirable affective outcome linked to security, stability, and engagement. However, our findings diverge by repositioning tranquility as a cognitive-emotional state mediated by AI-enabled interactions rather than a byproduct of passive environmental conditions. In this vein, we argue that AI functions not only as a technological enabler, but also as a psychological agent shaping consumer perceptions of calm, control, and connectedness within the luxury space.

### *7.2 Managerial Implications*

This study offers strategic managerial insights for integrating AI into luxury marketing, particularly within the underexplored but rapidly growing Mexican market. Our findings underscore the necessity for demographically segmented AI positioning strategies that account for nuanced consumer expectations shaped by gender, age, and cultural values. Our results clearly highlight the need for tailored AI positioning strategies across demographic segments. For younger male consumers, marketers should emphasize AI's capacity to enhance personal empowerment, economic value, and social status through features like superior product quality, exclusive designs, and precise cost management (Zimmermann et al., 2023). Younger female consumers respond strongly to AI-enhanced knowledge and personalization, particularly through innovations and tailored recommendations, fostering self-expression and deeper lifestyle alignment (Javornik et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2024). For adult male consumers, enhanced emphasis on security, transparency, and trustworthiness in AI applications is crucial, such as robust AI-driven fraud protection and clear data privacy policies that directly address desires for control and risk reduction (Murillo, 2017). By contrast, adult female

consumers place considerable value on immersive experiential engagement; thus, luxury marketers should leverage emotionally rich and immersive AI experiences to significantly enhance joy, satisfaction, and emotional connections (Joy et al., 2022).

Importantly, our findings show that core luxury values such as happiness, wealth, and trust remain central but are now refracted through the lens of AI-enhanced personalization. These findings not only echo established luxury marketing frameworks but also reveal new strategic opportunities to differentiate AI applications along emotional and symbolic dimensions. Given Mexico's culturally rooted gender issues (Felix et al., 2013; Mensa & Grow, 2019), marketers must balance AI's functional utility with emotional richness, recognizing that men often prioritize efficiency and exclusivity, whereas women place higher value on affective engagement, tailored experiences, and social validation (Sanz-Blas et al., 2014).

Finally, to fully leverage AI's potential in luxury branding, firms must address prevailing anxieties about privacy, intrusiveness, and algorithmic control. We recommend transparent communication, humanized AI design, and credibility-enhancing cues as critical mechanisms to foster consumer trust, control, and tranquility in AI-integrated luxury experiences.

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## Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

## Ethics Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## Appendix


**Figure A1.** Example of Collage Composition by Respondent D

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