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A moderated model of the relationship between consumers' need for uniqueness and purchase intention of luxury fashion brands

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Abstract

This paper investigates how consumers' need for uniqueness—comprising avoidance of similarity, unpopular choice, and creative choice—influences their purchase intentions for fashion clothing brands. It further examines the moderating role of consumers' need for affiliation on these purchase intentions. A convenience sampling method was employed to select participants. Survey questionnaires were administered via mall intercept to actual and potential buyers of luxury fashion brands in major shopping malls across two Palestinian cities (West Bank). From 480 administered questionnaires, 468 usable responses were collected. The data were subsequently analyzed using covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM). All hypotheses were supported. The study found that consumers' need for uniqueness positively influences purchase intentions. Furthermore, it was determined that consumers' need for affiliation moderates the influence of consumers' need for uniqueness on purchase intentions for luxury fashion brands. While extensive prior research has examined the role of consumers' need for uniqueness in purchase intentions, this study addresses a significant gap by empirically investigating how this relationship may be moderated by consumers' need for affiliation. Theoretically and empirically, this research demonstrates that consumers' purchase intention for luxury fashion brands is contingent on their need for affiliation reflecting their cultural specificity.

Keywords Luxury fashion brands, Need for uniqueness, Need for affiliation, Purchase intention, Culture

Introduction

The luxury fashion industry stands out as one of the fastest-growing and most influential sectors globally [18]. Both academics and practitioners have shown substantial interest in luxury fashion consumption in recent years [5]. Globally, the luxury sector continues to experience significant expansion [61]. The broader fashion industry, a multibillion-dollar global enterprise, is projected to reach US$1.79 trillion in worldwide apparel revenue in 2024 and exceed US$2 trillion by 2028. More specifically, the market for luxury fashion is expected to generate US$150.37 billion in 2025, with an anticipated compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 3.09% from 2025 to 2029 [104].

While luxury brands worldwide have successfully penetrated emerging markets [97], this sector remains highly competitive [91]. Recent observations indicate that the Palestinian luxury fashion market in the West Bank is also expanding, prompting marketers to increase the availability of luxury fashion in numerous shopping centers and exclusive stores. However, this market concurrently faces significant challenges, including the widespread presence of counterfeit brands, which violates Palestinian Consumer Protection Law 2005. Examples of such counterfeited brands include Calvin Klein, Nike, Mango, ALDO, Giorgio Armani, Levi's, and Nine West, among others. Despite this observed expansion, the market for genuine luxury fashion brands in Palestine

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remains largely untapped, underscoring the necessity of understanding consumer buying behavior in this specific sector. Thus, the discrepancy between the market's potential and its reality, coupled with the erosion of consumer trust due to the prevalence of counterfeit brands, highlights the significant practical gap that this study aims to address.

Consumers' purchase intentions are driven by numerous factors, which can be broadly categorized as fulfilling either basic or hedonic needs, or both, depending on the situation and other consumption factors such as experiential value, authentic happiness, and experiential satisfaction [95], brand image, and storytelling marketing [22]. Thus, consumers' relationships with luxury fashion brands extend beyond functional attributes to symbolic ones that satisfy their hedonic, social, and self-identity needs. Consequently, consumers purchase luxury fashion brands to display symbolism such as wealth, prosperity, and success, or simply for the enjoyment of superior product quality [77]. They are also motivated by symbolic reasons like prestige and self-expression, allowing them to communicate their personalities, values, and goals through their purchases [28]. That is, luxury fashion brands offer multifaceted benefits, including social status, identity affirmation, and a sense of belonging [63]. However, market segments do not consistently perceive luxury fashion brands due to their subjective nature [92], a subjectivity that reflects each consumer's perceived permissive value [12].

Although luxury value perception is a well-researched yet fragmented domain [4], prior research has investigated purchase intentions for luxury fashion brands from various perspectives, drivers, or attitudes. These include self-esteem [10], brand image, self-concept, and the need for uniqueness [19, 48, 106], purchase intention for controversial luxury garments [105], luxury consumers' attitudes toward sustainability [38], the need for uniqueness [66], exclusivity and rarity [111], social and emotional values of virtual luxury fashion in virtual worlds [72], and topics integrating the information acceptance model, sustainable luxury, and consumer purchase intention [120]. Despite this extensive research on luxury consumption which reassures that the purchase of luxury fashion brands extends beyond functional benefits to serve as shortcuts for self and social reflections, the gap remains in the literature and the research is still needed in luxury fashion consumption as it sometimes has been overlooked [50], while consumers' attitudes toward luxury consumption continue to be a contemporary area of focus, both academically and practically [5], and remain crucial in marketing and research [93].

Furthermore, luxury fashion consumption becomes more challenging to explain when considering that some consumers buy these brands to distinguish themselves from others, while simultaneously desiring consistency with their social group. More specifically, if consumers intend to buy luxury fashion brands to impress others, that intention may decrease if they perceive that their uniqueness will create distance from others. Consequently, their purchase intention might diminish, particularly for consumers with a high need for affiliation living in collectivistic cultures. Therefore, the association between luxury values and consumers' buying intentions remains inconclusive [51]. While this luxury value might take different forms, this study considers the dimensions (creative choice counter-conformity, unpopular choice counter-conformity, and avoidance of similarity) of consumers' need for uniqueness (CNFU) as key drivers for consumers' purchase intentions for luxury fashion brands. CNFU represents an individual's desire to be different from others [57], while purchase intention refers to a consumer's desire and efforts to purchase the product [103]. This study further considers the moderating role of consumers' need for affiliation in that association, as affiliation, or the need to belong, is a core fundamental need that people may try to address through consumption [89].

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to fill these gaps and further the existing literature by exploring the key relationships influencing purchase intentions for luxury fashion brands. Specifically, the study aims to provide a more parsimonious model for purchase intentions for luxury fashion brands by investigating the effect of CNFU and examining how the need for affiliation moderates the relationship between CNFU and purchase intentions. Hence, this study explores how consumers balance their efforts to satisfy both their NFU and need for affiliation simultaneously, a balance largely unaddressed in previous literature.

The study includes the following sections: literature review and hypotheses development, research method, data analysis and results, discussion of the study results, contributions, and marketing implications, and finally, the research limitations and future research suggestions.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Luxury fashion brands: a definitional overview

Despite considerable prior research on luxury branding, no single, widely accepted definition of a "luxury brand" exists [67]. From the customer's perspective, they offer multifaceted benefits, including social status, identity affirmation, and a sense of belonging [63]. They are characterized by premium pricing and the ability to inspire a deep emotional connection with customers [67]. Luxury brands are also associated with four consumption patterns: aspirational, conspicuous, experiential, and

heritage [52]. High-end fashion brands, in particular, are characterized by exceptional craftsmanship and premium materials, which play a significant role in satisfying consumers' desire for durability and superior aesthetics [49]. While the term "luxury fashion" includes a wide range of products—such as ready-to-wear, accessories, watches, and jewelry—this study focuses specifically on apparel (designer clothing and clothing accessories) as a core category within the fashion market.

Consumers' purchase intentions for luxury fashion brands

Purchase intention is defined as "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand" [103], p. 56). It represents the willingness to buy a product or service, indicating that the higher the purchase intention, the more likely a consumer is inclined to take the action of purchasing that product or service [55]. Therefore, intentions are distinct from attitudes [103], in that attitudes represent consumers' evaluations, while intentions represent the individual's conscious, motivating plan to carry out a behavior [31]. In this sense, it is widely recognized that the likelihood of an actual purchase is positively correlated with purchase intentions [35, 79, 88, 113]. Furthermore, research has specifically demonstrated that purchase intention influences the purchasing behavior of luxury fashion items [8]. However, analyzing such intentions highlights the strong connection between intent and the underlying motivations for the purchase [83]. Numerous studies have supported this link between purchase intention for luxury fashion brands and the reasons driving these purchases (e.g., [72, 114, 119]).

Various factors influencing purchase intentions have been explored, such as brand prominence [64], price, and quality, which vary depending on product type and category (c.f., [75]). Nevertheless, PIs for luxury products must be associated with specific functional, experiential, symbolic, and social drivers [77]. Therefore, drawing on the theories of the NFU and affiliation, the following sections will discuss the CNFU and purchase intentions, in addition to the moderating effect of the need for affiliation.

Consumers' need for uniqueness and purchase intentions for luxury fashion brands

Uniqueness theory [99–101] posits that when individuals perceive their self-image as underestimated, their NFU is not only activated but also becomes more salient, competing with other motives to maintain and strengthen their distinctiveness. The NFU refers to individuals' efforts to differentiate themselves from others, thereby enhancing their self-identities [57]. This need motivates individuals to satisfy it by purchasing, using, and disposing of products believed to enhance their uniqueness [108]. Consequently, individuals with high NFU actively seek to differentiate themselves from others and avoid the unpleasantness that may result from similarity with others [100]. Therefore, the core of the NFU fundamentally hinges on the concept of non-conformity, as individuals with high NFU tend to diverge from mainstream preferences [2]. Thus, luxury fashion can channel several values to consumers, such as distinctiveness and self-indulgent rewards that satisfy their need to be part of a social elite [21, 47, 68].

The concept of NFU was further developed by Tian et al. [108], who identified it as a multi-dimensional construct comprising three types of consumer counter-conformity behavior: 1) avoidance of similarity, 2) unpopular choice, and 3) creative choice.

Avoidance of similarity counter-conformity

Avoidance of similarity refers to "devaluing and avoiding the purchase of products or brands that are perceived to be commonplace" [108], p. 52). As uniqueness theory suggests, individuals strive to maintain self-distinctiveness by seeking to avoid the unpleasantness associated with appearing too similar to others [99, 100]. This counter-conformity behavior reduces individuals' intention to buy popular products [2]. Prior research indicates that avoidance of similarity has a significant impact on consuming luxury brands [29, 83]. Furthermore, the avoidance of similarity is found to be an important driver of brand attachment and brand loyalty [37]. Consequently, consumers employ various strategies to distinguish themselves, such as purchasing products from exclusive boutiques [106].

Unpopular choice counter-conformity

Unpopular choice counter-conformity represents a nonconformist consumption behavior [94]. Such deviant consumption entails a potential risk of social disfavor but can still amplify one's self-concept [108]. This means that choosing unpopular products signifies a deviation from current social and group norms [106]. However, early adopters of unpopular choices might later gain social approval and become distinguished consumers [43], which can further reinforce and stimulate ostentatious luxury consumption [29]. In contrast, some research found that unpopular choice counter-conformity was negatively related to buying intentions for luxury fashion brands [54].

Creative choice counter-conformity

Creative choice counter-conformity involves individuals making choices that are distinct yet simultaneously consistent with others' preferences. That is, they aim to be unique through their product choices while creatively

maintaining a perceived similarity with others [108]. In other words, consumers seek social distinctiveness in a more socially accepted manner [62]. Previous research found that creative choice counter-conformity was positively related to purchase intentions for luxury fashion brands [53, 54].

In conclusion, individuals are inherently motivated to preserve personal distinctiveness, thereby enhancing the positive self-image they aim to project [108]. Consequently, CNFU has long been acknowledged as an important driver of consumer intention and behavior [20]. Thus, it is expected that:

H1

Consumers' avoidance of similarity is positively related to their purchase intention.

H2

Consumers' unpopular choice is positively related to their purchase intention.

H3

Consumers' creative choice is positively related to their purchase intention.

The moderating effect of consumers' need for affiliation

The need for affiliation refers to an individual's inclination to be a member of a group and to form meaningful and strong ties with others [11, 13]. Consumers' motivations for luxury consumption can be categorized into two types: intrinsic motivation (e.g., personal quality and style) and extrinsic motivation (e.g., public image and social influence) [39]. Extrinsic motivations are linked to the need for affiliation [106] and are associated with goals of public display of luxury to confirm and support the status consumers wish to convey to others [87]. However, extrinsic motivation does not always operate in the same direction; it can conversely inhibit consumers from purchasing luxury fashion brands if the aim is solely to be perceived as consistent with their social context. Research has shown that collectivistic consumers purchase products to strengthen their affiliation with their group [58]. Nevertheless, the extent of interdependence and need for affiliation with other group members vary based on cultural type—collectivistic versus individualistic cultures. Consequently, the need for belonging may be elevated in collectivistic cultures, surpassing that in individualistic cultures, because the former values group harmony more than the latter [46]. Therefore, in their pursuit of uniqueness, individuals seek to achieve a reasonable extent of distinctiveness, as they presume that excessive resemblance or difference from the social group can lead to an undesirable social situation [101].

However, consistent with Brewer's [14] Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, which posits that individuals simultaneously desire both similarity and differentiation, individuals strive to balance these needs [102]. Therefore, the three-dimensional constructs of CNFU, as suggested by Tian et al. [108], propose that individuals' pursuit of differentiation is relatively, though not equally, bounded by their need for inclusion. This implies that consumers look for distinct products to be distinctive without being perceived as unusual in social contexts [32, 99]. The three dimensions of CNFU have been observed to have differing relationships with consumers' intention to buy products or brands [69] and varying associations with consumers' willingness to accept or reject social disapproval. A prior research, for example, indicated that when participants viewed their peers' consumption, interdependent people displayed greater purchase intention, whereas independent people exhibited non-significant changes in purchasing behavior [9]. Other research findings indicated that social comparison did not significantly moderate the relationship between the NFU and purchasing intention [1], leaving this association inconclusive.

In conclusion, people simultaneously desire to be unique from and similar to others [74]. Therefore, the NFU may be constrained by the need for social inclusion [15]. Thus, it is hypothesized that the effect of the three dimensions of uniqueness on purchase intentions is moderated by consumers' NA, as follows:

H4a Consumers' need for affiliation will affect the positive relationship between consumers' avoidance of similarity and purchase intention.

H4b Consumers' need for affiliation will negatively affect the positive relationship between consumers' unpopular choice and purchase intention.

H4c Consumers' need for affiliation will negatively affect the positive relationship between consumers' creative choice and purchase intention.

Research model

The hypothesized research model is depicted in Fig. 1. It conceptualizes the relationships between the dimensions of CNFU—avoidance of similarity (AS), unpopular choice (UC), and creative choice (CC)—and purchase

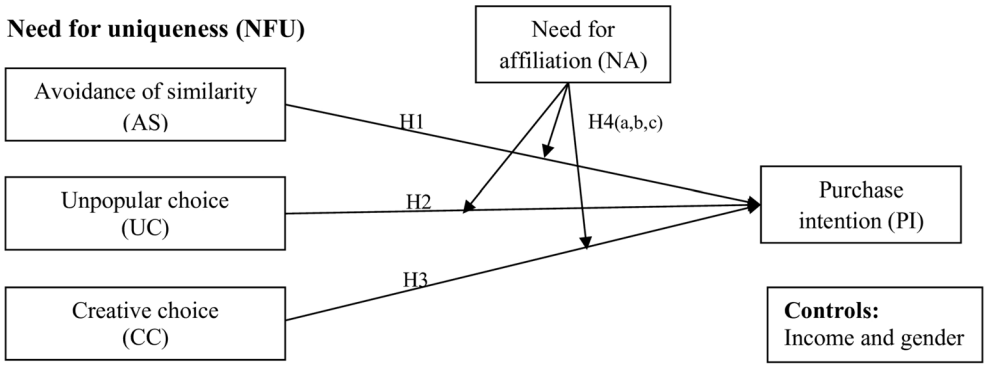

Fig. 1 The hypothesized relationship model. (*Source(s)* Author's own work)

intention (PI) for luxury fashion brands, with these relationships moderated by need for affiliation (NA).

Specifically, the model encompasses:

- Hypotheses *H1*, *H2*, and *H3*, which propose a positive and direct effect of AS, UC, and CC, respectively, on PI.
- Hypotheses *H4a*, *H4b*, and *H4c*, which represent the interaction effects of NA on the relationships between each of the CNFU dimensions (AS, UC, CC) and PI (symbolically represented as PI ← AS × NA, PI ← UC × NA, and PI ← CC × NA).

Furthermore, income and gender are included as control variables in the model to assess any significant confounding effects on the hypothesized relationships.

Research method

The measuring instrument

The self-reported data method was adopted for collecting the research data in this study. This approach was used due to the psychological and perceptual nature of the research constructs, which are abstract and cannot be directly measured, as well as the absence of available timely or historical quantitative data on these constructs. Therefore, a survey questionnaire was used as the measurement instrument and comprised 26 response items, designed to measure the study's five core constructs.

As the respondents' native language is Arabic, the questionnaire underwent a rigorous translation and back-translation process to ensure linguistic equivalence. The instrument was first translated into Arabic to match the respondents' native language and was then translated back into English to verify the accuracy of the instrument.

In addition, a pilot survey of luxury fashion brand buyers was conducted to ensure the questionnaire reliably measures the variables from the consumers' perspective. Their comments and responses were incorporated to further refine the questionnaire and produce the final instrument for the study. The questionnaire was structured into two sections: The first section collected participant demographic profiles, as detailed in Table 1.

As presented in Table 1, the sample was predominantly male (59.4%), with a large majority older than 34 years of age (74.1%). Most participants belonged to the average monthly income category, ranging from 1000 to 1500 JD (39%). These characteristics align logically with the nature of the luxury fashion brands focused on in this study, particularly concerning age and income demographics.

The second section contained the response items for the research constructs (see Appendix 1). Responses were collected using a five-point Likert scale. All scale items were adapted from previous studies, with minor modifications to align with the current research context and objectives. Specifically:

- The dependent variable, PI, was measured using a four-item scale adapted from Chen et al. [23].
- The independent variables, the dimensions of the NFU, were measured using a twelve-item scale adapted from Knight and Kim (2007), encompassing the three-dimensional constructs of CNFU.
- Finally, the moderating variable, consumers' NA, was measured using a ten-item scale adapted from Hawkins [42], Leary et al. [70], and Marin and De Maya (2013).

Sample and procedure

This study targeted actual and potential buyers of luxury fashion brands, which served as the screening criterion for selecting respondents. Data were collected in major shopping malls across two Palestinian cities in the West Bank: Nablus and Ramallah. These locations were

Table 1 Participant profiles. *Source(s)* Author's own work

Sample demographics	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative (%)
Gender			
Male	271	57.9	57.9
Female	197	42.1	100.0
Age			
Under 24 years of age	50	10.7	10.7
25–34 years	96	20.5	31.2
35–49 years	137	29.3	60.5
Over 50 years of age	185	39.5	100.0
Average monthly income			
Less than 500 JD	41	8.8	8.8
500–1000 JD	146	31.2	40.0
1000–1500 JD	192	41.0	81.0
More than1500 JD	89	19.0	100.0
Education			
Below general secondary education	32	6.8	6.8
General secondary education	191	40.8	47.6
Vocational diploma	92	19.7	67.3
Undergraduate education	120	25.6	92.9
Postgraduate education	33	7.1	100.0
Employment			
Senior position	106	22.6	22.6
Worker	152	32.5	55.1
Retiree	67	14.3	69.4
Public servant	70	15.0	84.4
Farmer	50	10.7	95.1
Other	23	4.9	100.0

n = 468

selected as they are known to host stores selling various luxury fashion brands.

A convenience sampling method was employed to select the respondents. The net sample comprised 468 usable participants. This sample size is considered sufficient for data collection and analysis, and it also compensates for potential non-responses, taking into consideration the sample's characteristics [85]. The sample type and size were determined based on previous studies and are consistent with the average sample sizes for this type of research (e.g., [6, 33, 69, 82, 118]).

While the primary method of data collection was personally administered surveys, other techniques were also utilized to reach sample elements, including emails and social media platforms, leveraging short contact lists provided by some store owners.

Out of 480 administered questionnaires, 468 were deemed usable for further analysis. The final number of respondents (468) is considered suitable for studies involving large consumer populations [96] and for conducting structural equation modeling (SEM) [40]. Furthermore, to ensure the representativeness of the sampling units, the questionnaires were administered to consumers in shopping malls on different days of the week and at various times throughout the day.

Data analysis and results

The data for this study were analyzed through two primary stages, each involving several levels of analysis.

The first stage utilized SPSS for data coding, data cleaning (to ensure the absence of missing data or outliers), assessing the normality of data distribution, describing sample characteristics, evaluating scale reliability, and conducting exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to prepare the data for further analysis.

The second stage comprised two phases of analysis using SPSS Amos. The first phase involved confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the overall model fit indices, while the second phase included structural equation modeling (SEM) for hypothesis testing.

Normality of data distribution

The normality of data used in structural equation modeling (SEM) is assessed using skewness and kurtosis values [16, 17]. According to common thresholds [17, 40], data are considered to have an acceptable normal distribution if skewness falls between ± 2 and kurtosis falls between ± 7. More lenient criteria are also suggested for SEM, such as skewness between ± 3 and kurtosis between ± 10 [16].

The results of this study show that the skewness values range from -1.873 to 0.045 and kurtosis values range from -1.247 to 4.243. As all observed values fall well within the established acceptable ranges, the normality of the data is confirmed for the purpose of SEM.

Exploratory factor analysis

Prior to performing EFA, data suitability for factor analysis was assessed using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The results demonstrated a KMO value of 0.807, indicating strong sampling adequacy. According to Kaiser [59], a KMO value exceeding 0.6 indicates suitable data quality for meaningfully performing factorial analysis. Furthermore, Bartlett's test yielded a significant result ($\chi 2 = 5367.732$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that the variables are significantly correlated.

EFA was performed to identify and validate the factor structure of the data [40]. Maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) was used with promax rotation, a choice deemed suitable given the substantial sample size (n = 468) and its ability to accommodate correlated factors. MLE was specifically chosen to effectively estimate unique variances among items and correlations between factors, ensuring consistency with the subsequent CFA. Moreover, it provides valuable goodness-of-fit indices for evaluating the underlying factors. Therefore, descriptive statistics of research variables and the final five-factor model derived by maximum likelihood extraction method and promax rotation method, as well as the eigenvalues for scale items, are presented in Table 2.

However, based on the EFA findings, items NA9 and NA10 were subsequently removed from the analysis as they exhibited low communalities (below 0.400), indicating insufficient factor loadings. This study adheres to the recommendations of Hair et al. [40], Henson and Roberts [44], and Truong and McCol [109] that loading values

Table 2 Descriptive statistics and results of FA

Factors	No. of items	Mean	SD	Factor loadings	Eigenvalue	(%) of variance explained
Purchase intentions	4	4.600	0.40874	0.636	4.554	18.977
				0.498		
				0.576		
				0.543		
Avoidance of similarity	4	4.500	0.42736	0.551	4.301	17.921
				0.554		
				0.550		
				0.590		
Unpopular choice	4	4.530	0.485	0.667	2.733	11.389
				0.541		
				0.702		
				0.609		
Creative choice	4	4.516	0.56854	0.882	1.514	6.309
				0.959		
				0.886		
				0.941		
Need for affiliation	8	3.386	0.85578	0.651	1.105	4.605
				0.759		
				0.750		
				0.615		
				0.635		
				0.590		
				0.625		
				0.641		

should be 0.5 or greater. Consequently, after removing these two items, all remaining items demonstrated sufficiently high communalities (exceeding 0.500), confirming adequate correlations among the variables for factor analysis.

Convergent validity is confirmed, as the factor loadings within each factor are high and there is an absence of significant cross-loadings across factors as the percentage of factor loadings exceed 0.50, which is considered a robust threshold for a sample size of 468.

Discriminant validity is also confirmed, as there are no correlations between factors surpass 0.700. This five-factor model explains 50% of the total variance, with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 for all extracted factors. Consequently, the five factors identified through EFA (PI, AS, UC, CC, and NA) are consistent with previous research findings [24, 53], supporting the multi-dimensional nature of luxury fashion brand PI.

Reliability

The reliability of each factor was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The reliability coefficients range from 0.703 to 0.940, demonstrating high reliability for all factors (see Appendix 1). These values are consistent with the minimum acceptable internal consistency of 0.70 [27, 41], suggesting that the factors are reliable measures of their underlying constructs.

Confirmatory factor analysis

Model fit

All constructs exhibited items with significant loadings of at least 0.50. To enhance model fit, modification indices were examined. Consequently, the error terms of items e1-e3, e1-e4, e2-e3, e5-e7, e14-e15, and e19-e21 were covaried. Figure 2 illustrates the final measurement model of the PI for luxury fashion brands. The measurement model exhibits good fit indices ($\chi 2/DF = 1.807$; GFI = 0.927; AGFI = 0.907; NFI = 0.922; CFI = 0.964; RMSEA = 0.042; TLI = 0.957), as all are consistent with the criteria of goodness-of-fit statistics in CFA [17, 40, 56].

Validity and reliability

The convergent validity was assessed by calculating the average variance extracted (AVE). As presented in Table 3, all AVE values ranged between 0.586 and 0.630. This demonstrates an acceptable level of convergent validity, as the threshold AVE value is 0.5, implying that at least 50% of the indicator variance is explained by its latent construct [36].

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell and Larcker [36] criterion, which involves comparing the square root of the AVE with inter-construct correlations.

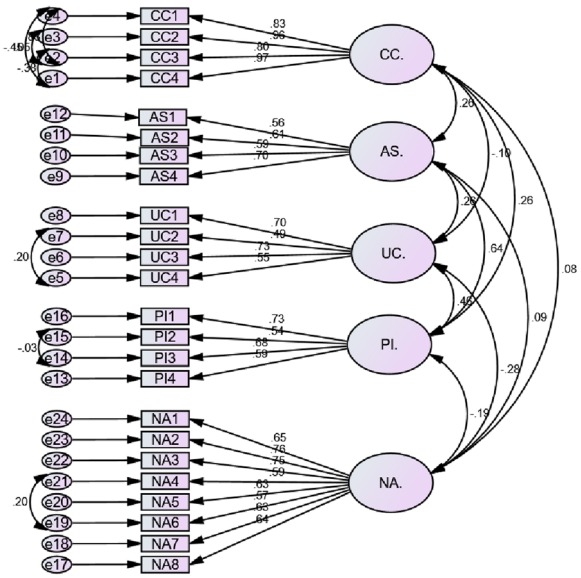

Fig. 2 Measurement model of PIs of luxury fashion brands

As shown in Table 3, the mean shared variances (MSVs) were consistently lower than the corresponding AVEs, supporting the discriminant validity of the research variables [40].

Furthermore, composite reliability (CR) was assessed for each construct. All study constructs demonstrated acceptable reliability, as a CR value greater than 0.70 is considered acceptable [41].

SEM Analysis

Multivariate assumptions in structural equation modeling

Linearity Linearity was assessed for all direct effects within the model using curve estimation regressions. The results confirmed the assumption of linearity, with all p-values for the nonlinear terms exceeding the chosen significance level of 0.05.

Multicollinearity Multicollinearity among exogenous variables was examined using the variance inflation factor (VIF). All exogenous variables exhibited VIF values below 2.0, indicating a low level of multicollinearity and relative independence among these variables.

Model fit of structural model

The standardized parameter estimates of the initial structural model, controlling for gender and income on the dependent variable (DV), are presented in Fig. 3. Covariances were introduced between the error terms of the DV and the control variables to enhance model fit. This adjustment accounts for potential correlations among these variables without increasing the model's theoretical complexity.

Table 3 Reliability and validity in CFA

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	AS	CC	PI	NA	UC
AS	0.872	0.630	0.018	0.874	0.793				
CC	0.893	0.677	0.009	0.912	0.086	0.823			
PI	0.921	0.746	0.013	0.949	−0.115	0.067	0.864		
NA	0.918	0.583	0.069	0.921	−0.092	−0.096	−0.073	0.763	
UC	0.849	0.586	0.069	0.868	0.136	0.074	−0.090	−0.262	0.765

For composite reliability (CR > 0.70); convergent validity (CR > AVE > 0.50); discriminate validity (MSV < AVE); MSV maximum shared variance, ASV average shared variance [40]

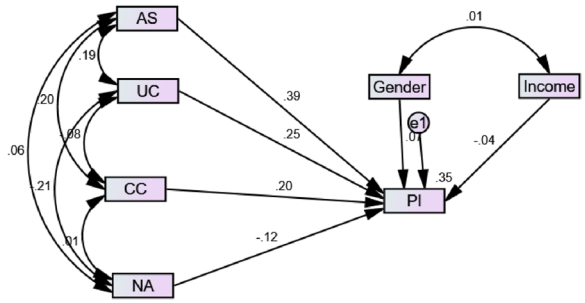

Fig. 3 Initial structural model of PIs of luxury fashion brands

The goodness-of-fit indices for the final structural moderation model are presented in Table 4, and the model was observed to be very good. Furthermore, it was also observed that the control variables did not have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable (PI), as their p-values exceeded the significance level of 0.05 (PI ← Gender: $p = 0.052$; PI ← Income: $p = 0.061$).

Hypotheses testing of the research model

All study hypotheses were examined, incorporating gender and income as control variables. The results of the hypothesis testing (standardized path loadings) are presented in Table 5. It was observed that six hypothesized paths were statistically significant. The path coefficients for the SEM are displayed in Fig. 4.

The results in Table 5 confirm *H1*, demonstrating that AS has a positive effect on PIs ($\beta = 0.371$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that consumers' AS is positively associated with their PIs, thus supporting *H1*.

Data analysis further reveals that consumers' UC is positively associated with PI, with a path coefficient of 0.260 ($p < 0.001$). Therefore, *H2* is supported.

The path coefficient between consumers' CC and PI is 0.254 ($p < 0.001$), indicating a significant positive association between these two constructs. This finding provides strong support for *H3*.

Two-way interaction tests and moderation analysis

Table 5 also presents the results of the two-way interaction tests, conducted using the full dataset. The interaction effects were examined to test the interaction hypotheses, with independent variables (IVs) first standardized and product variables subsequently created. All three interactions were found to be significant and are visually represented in Figs. 5, 6, and 7.

Moderation analysis revealed a significant effect of the NA on the relationships between the dimensions of CNFU and PI. Specifically, it is found that the relationship between AS and PI is significantly moderated by NA, as the unstandardized regression weight (*B*) for the

Table 4 Goodness-of-fit statistics of structural model

Indices	Abbreviation	Observed values	Recommended criteria	References
Chi-square	χ2	23.496	*P*-value > 0.05	Byrne, [17],Hair et al., [40],Jöreskog and Sörbom, [56]
Normed Chi-square	χ2/DF	23.496 / 17 = 1.382	1 < χ2/df < 3	
Goodness-of-fit index	GFI	0.990	> 0.90	
Adjusted GFI	AGFI	0.968	> 0.80	
Normed fit index	NFI	0.951	> 0.90	
Comparative fit index	CFI	0.985	> 0.95	
Root mean square error of approximation	RMESA	0.029	< 0.05 good fit < 0.08 acceptable fit	
Tucker–Lewis index	TLI	0.960	0 < TLI < 1	

Table 5 Results of hypotheses testing

Hypotheses	Estimates of standardized regression weights	Supported?
H1: PI <-- AS	0. 371***	Yes
H2: PI <-- UC	0.260***	Yes
H3: PI <-- CC	0.254***	Yes
Interaction		
H.4 a: PI <-- AS_x_AN Consumers' need for affiliation will affect the positive relationship between consumers' avoidance of similarity and purchase intention	Interaction effect: 0.281***	Yes
H.4 b: PI <-- UC_x_AN Consumers' need for affiliation will negatively affect the positive relationship between consumers' unpopular choice and purchase intention	Interaction effect: −0.149***	Yes
H.4 c: PI <-- CC_x_AN Consumers' need for affiliation will negatively affect the positive relationship between consumers' creative choice and purchase intention	Interaction effect: −0.201***	Yes

*** *p*-value < 0.001

interaction term is 0.117 ($p < 0.001$), thereby supporting Hypothesis *H4a*.

For the purpose of probing interaction effects, a simple-slopes analysis has been conducted using the pick-a-point approach [3] (see Fig. 5). Accordingly, it was observed that when NA is high, a positive relationship emerges between AS and PI. This indicates that NA strengthens the positive relationship between AS and PI.

It was also found that the relationship between UC and PI is significantly moderated by NA ($\beta = -0.149$, $p < 0.001$), which supports Hypothesis *H4b*. Furthermore, it is observed that a high level of NA weakens the positive relationship between UC and PI (see Fig. 6). This suggests that the association between UC and PI is diminished for consumers with high NA. Conversely, consumers with low NA are more positively influenced by UC in their PI than those with high NA.

The results also showed that the relationship between CC and PI is significantly moderated by NA ($\beta = -0.201$, $p < 0.001$), which supports Hypothesis *H4c*. That is, NA weakened the positive relationship between CC and PI (see Fig. 7).

Finally, the model's R-squared (R^2) value for PI was 0.446, indicating that the set of predictors—AS, UC, CC, NA, their interaction terms, gender, and income—collectively explains 44.6% of the variance in consumers' purchase intentions. According to established guidelines for social and behavioral research, this represents a strong effect size [26].

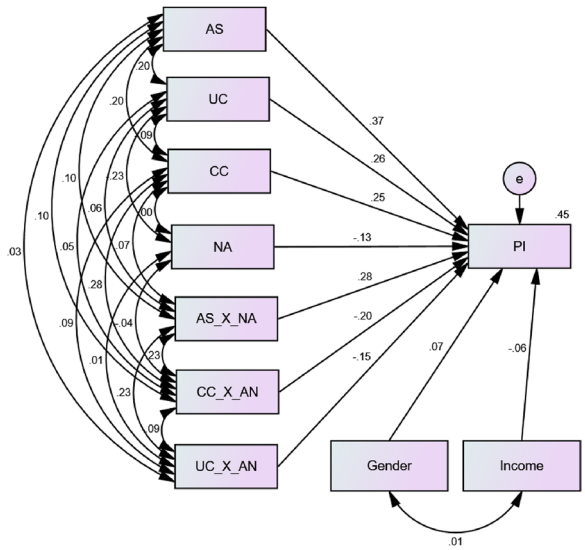

Fig. 4 Structural model test results

Discussion

The study findings contribute to the existing knowledge by incorporating the Theory of Uniqueness [100] to demonstrate that consumers' desire for uniqueness plays a crucial role in their PI of luxury fashion brands within the Palestinian context. This contribution is achieved in several principal ways. The theory proposes that people want to maintain a distinct self-image to differentiate themselves from the rest of society [30], offering insights into how non-conformist tendencies shape product preferences and consumption behavior [1]. Specifically, this research empirically verifies that the three dimensions of CNFU are key drivers of PI in this emerging market.

Direct Effects of CNFU on PI

First, the finding that consumers' AS is positively associated with their PIs contradicts Ünal et al. [110], who

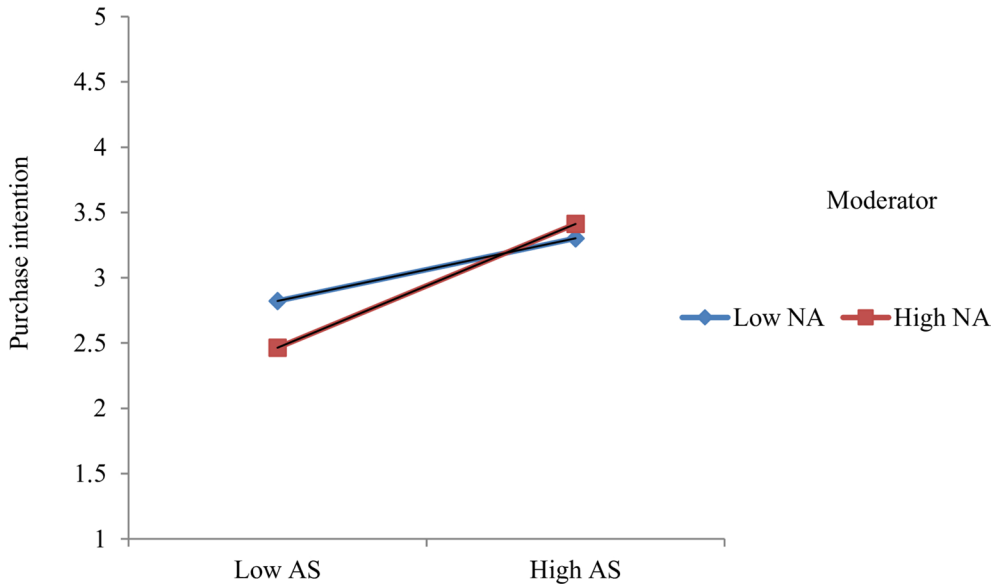

Fig. 5 Interaction between AS and NA

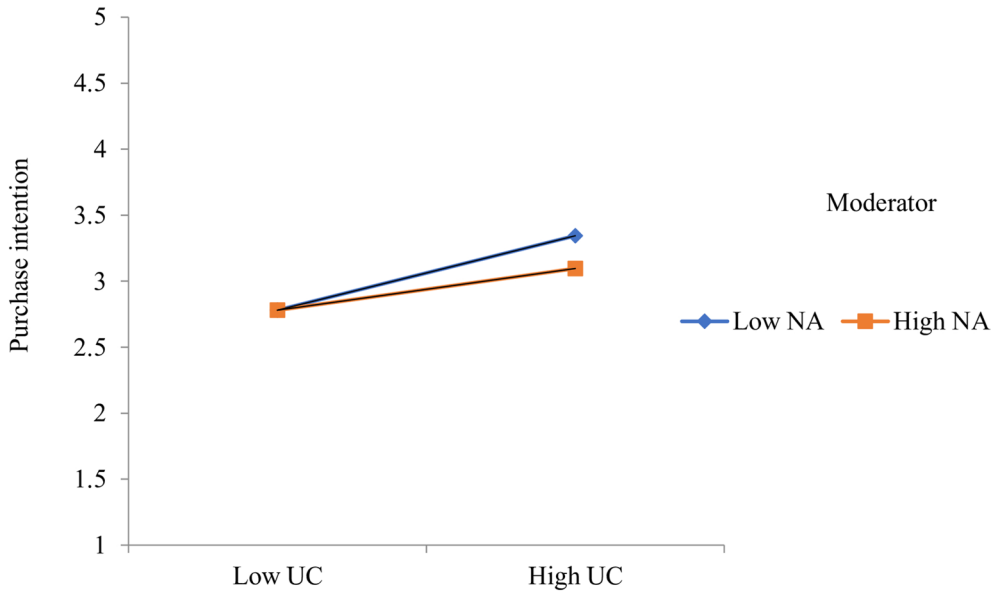

Fig. 6 Interaction between UC and NA

reported that AS does not influence the PIs of luxury fashion brands among young consumers in Turkey. Conversely, this result aligns with Das et al. [29], who found that AS, as a dimension of CNFU, directly affects the PI of snob luxury items in India. This finding is also consistent with Mousa [83], who found that avoidance of similarity has a significant impact on consuming luxury brands.

Second, the finding that consumers' UC is positively associated with PI supports the results of Das et al. [29], Sharma and Shingari [98], and Mousa [83]. These studies found that the intention to purchase inconspicuous luxury apparel is significantly affected by, among other variables, UC. Conversely, this finding contradicts the results of Jeon and Park [54], who reported that UC was

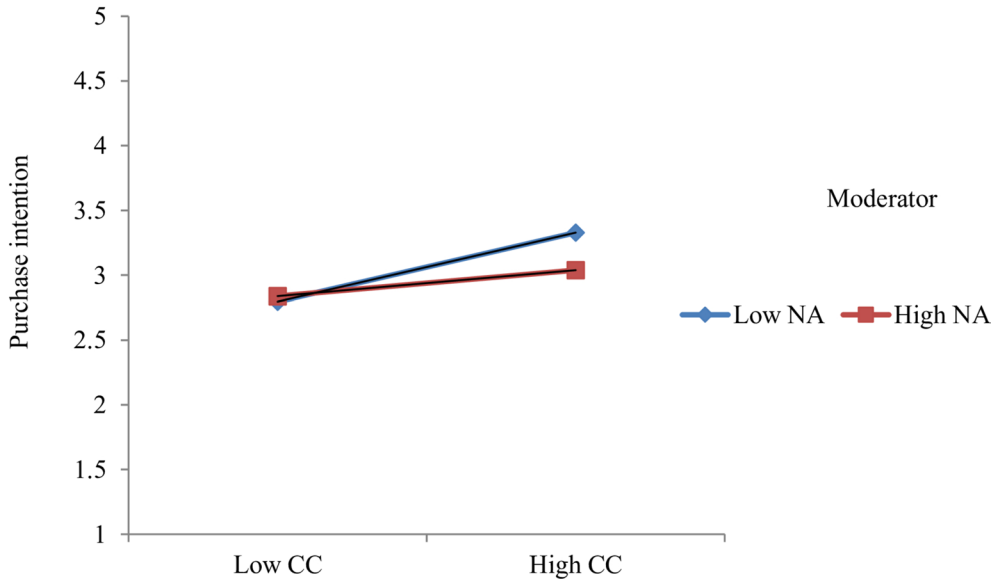

Fig. 7 Interaction between CC and NA

negatively related to PIs for luxury fashion brands in the Seoul metropolitan area.

Third, the significant and positive association between consumers' CC and PI is consistent with Jebarajakirthy and Das [53], who investigated how the effect of CC on luxury consumption is mediated by social comparison. This result is also consistent with Jeon and Park [54] who found that CC was positively related to PIs for luxury fashion brands.

However, these results demonstrate that consumers' PI for luxury fashion brands is driven by symbolic appeals rather than solely by their functional attributes. Collectively, the findings confirm several previous studies that investigated the combined effect of the three dimensions of CNFU on consumers' PI for luxury fashion brands. For instance, Abdrabbo et al. [1] and Tak and Pareek [107] found that CNFU dimensions and fashion consciousness positively affect consumers' attitude toward luxury fashion brands. More specifically, consumers' PIs are influenced by their AS with others, and their inclinations toward making UCs and CCs. This implies that consumers seek to maintain a discernible image that distinguishes them from wider society [30], underscoring the critical roles of both the NFU and social comparison in shaping consumers' motivations to be unique across various life contexts, including luxury consumption [53]. That is, AS reflects an inclination to eschew popular items while expressing distinctiveness [108]. CC signifies the expression of distinctiveness within socially accepted norms, whereas UC denotes the expression of distinctiveness by transgressing those social boundaries [94, 108].

Moderation effects of NA

First, the finding that the relationship between consumers' AS and PI is significantly moderated by NA indicates that this group of consumers simultaneously desires to avoid similarity with others while still needing to belong to their group. This means that consumers may want to buy luxury fashion brands that signal uniqueness (AS) regardless of others' preferences, while still maintaining a sense of belonging to their social group (NA).

This result is consistent with the conclusion of Kang et al. [60] that individuals with a high fear of missing out (FoMO) tend to prioritize luxury items over necessities. This alignment underlines the significance of Festinger's [34] Social Comparison Theory in this context, which posits that people have an innate drive to evaluate themselves, often in comparison to others. That is, the fear of exclusion or the desire to belong (NA) can intensify uniqueness-driven behavior [1].

Conversely, this finding is inconsistent with the results of Baek and Choo [9], who concluded that peer consumption enhanced the purchase intention of interdependents (who place a low value on AS), whereas the absence of peer consumption enhanced the purchase intention of independents (who place a high value on AS).

Second, the significantly moderated relationship between UC and PI by NA, as well as the significantly

moderated relationship between CC and PI by NA, align with the conclusions of Kauppinen-Räisänen et al. [62], who asserted that social norms influence luxury brand choices. Specifically, the finding regarding the CC tendency is consistent with Das et al. [29], in that the CC dimension indirectly enhances the PI of bandwagon luxury items via social comparison, while psychological entitlement strengthens this indirect effect. This contrasts with the UC tendency, which Das et al. [29] found to have a significant direct effect on snob luxury consumption.

Additionally, the results are conceptually supported by Chopik et al. [25], who studied changes in people's NFU. Their conclusion—that people simultaneously desire self-expression and uniqueness while also seeking to belong and fit in—provides a conceptual framework for the observed discrepant and moderated results in the current study.

However, this study further enriches the existing literature on the PIs of luxury fashion brands by proposing and integrating consumers' NA as a moderating variable within the research model. This incorporation aids in explaining how the fundamental associations between CNFU and PI are moderated. That is, while the NFU propels consumers toward non-conformist choices, the FoMO can paradoxically pressure them to conform to luxury consumption [1]. This study's distinctive conceptualization of these associations reveals how consumers reconcile this apparent paradox.

Specifically, consumers' PIs may vary among individuals based on the relative strength of each CNFU dimension, as well as their individual level of NA. Consequently, the positive association between consumers' AS and their PI was increased for consumers with a high NA. Conversely, the positive association with consumers' UC and CC was dampened by a high NA, leading these consumers to exhibit lower PIs for luxury fashion brands compared to those with a low NA, as they seem to trade off uniqueness for feelings of belonging. In essence, for these individuals, their NA is stronger than their NFU. While the tension between these motivations remains underexplored, representing a gap in the literature [1], the current study filled this gap.

Moreover, this discussion should not be oversimplified; it must be considered from a cultural perspective, distinguishing between collectivistic and individualistic cultures. In collectivistic cultures, individuals perceive themselves as "a part of whole" [117], p. 107), prioritizing group harmony, social relationships, group approval, and collective well-being [45]. While they desire to feel part of their group or society, this does not imply a complete sacrifice of their NFU; rather, they prioritize belonging over absolute uniqueness. That is, consumers wish to be unique but not at the expense of their group affiliation. They actively seek products that allow them to stand out within their community, rather than becoming entirely indistinguishable. A similar conclusion can be drawn for individualistic cultures: CNFU is merely prioritized differently for group affiliation but is not eradicated. Nevertheless, consumers in some collectivistic cultures, such as China, reconcile this discrepancy differently, often purchasing luxury goods for social approval and status signaling, influenced by an interdependent self-concept [112].

The final contribution is closely tied to the preceding point. This study provides insights into where the balance between these two apparently competing needs—the NFU and the NA—can be found. Satisfying both needs simultaneously is indeed possible and not only enhances brand identification and group identification but also strengthens brand loyalty within a brand-focused community [73]. This has significant marketing implications, which will be discussed in the subsequent section.

Marketing implications

Several marketing implications can be drawn for luxury fashion brand marketers. Since these brands primarily compete on symbolic attributes (e.g., high quality, exceptional design, and prestige) rather than price, they aim to build brand trust and loyalty. Consistent with the study results, which confirmed the dimensions of CNFU on consumers' PI, this calls for marketers to continue and expand strategies that go beyond simply selling a product to create a sense of exclusivity, social status, and emotional connection. That is, luxury brands need to establish distinctive and appealing brand personality traits that connect with their target audience [7].

This can be achieved by designing marketing programs that communicate the brand's value proposition, including perceived brand scarcity and exclusivity, which stimulates consumers' desire for what is not easily obtainable. Further strategies include making the product truly bespoke to the buyer by allowing them to add their initials or a personal message to the product, as is the case with brands like Louis Vuitton. Other marketing practices include cooperation with artists and designers to create unique products, thereby adding to the brand's uniqueness. Personalization and customization directly address the consumer's desire for a product that is uniquely their own, allowing them to express their individual identity. However, it is important that marketers simultaneously focus on the authenticity of a brand to influence consumers' brand preference [71].

Addressing the moderating effect of need for affiliation (NA)

It is noteworthy that the moderating effect of the NA on the relationship between CNFU and PIs does not diminish

the market attractiveness of this segment. This presents an opportunity for manufacturers and marketers to enhance brand loyalty and achieve marketing success if they consider that consumers in collectivistic cultures desire uniqueness without losing their sense of belonging to their group, and may even seek to strengthen that sense.

Implication 1: Leveraging Avoidance of Similarity (AS)

Firstly, for the segment of consumers whose NA positively moderated the relationship between their AS and their PI, the most important marketing implication is to focus on the social attractiveness of the brands. Marketers should emphasize the brand's social appeals that convey that the brand increases the consumer's attractiveness to the group he or she belongs to. This is because the brand makes the consumer feel more distinctive while not only avoiding the FoMO but also increasing their sense of belonging. This strategy can be applied by fostering exclusive digital and physical communities, such as providing a virtual brand community for consumers to interact and socialize around the brand, thereby fostering a sense of belonging.

Implication 2: reconciling UC and CC with NA

Secondly, marketers could develop tailored strategies to enhance PIs and foster actual purchases and loyalty, particularly for consumers with a high NA; this is the segment whose NA negatively moderated the relationship between their NFU (UC and CC) dimensions) and their PI. In this sense, marketers should endeavor to simultaneously satisfy consumers' seemingly competing needs—the NA and the NFU. The NA, in particular, can be primarily addressed through the consumer-brand relationship [73].

Building and strengthening this relationship should be achieved through social rather than individual identification. This necessitates developing promotional activities that present the brand within a social context, thereby either fostering consumers' perceived group inclusion or mitigating their perceived risk of group alienation if they choose to use the brand. In essence, social identification with the brand will empower the consumer to feel distinguished without compromising their sense of group belonging. This can be practically achieved by moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach and focusing on more socially acceptable product designs. By doing so, marketers can effectively reduce the tension resulting from the need for uniqueness and the need to affiliate. This strategy entails designing brands that honor a consumer's group from others more than the consumer's uniqueness to the group and ultimately enhancing both purchase intention and loyalty.

Cultural specificity and digital strategy

Thirdly, as the factors driving luxury brand purchase behavior among consumers in individualistic versus collectivist cultures differ considerably [12], there is a consensus that marketing strategies designed for Western markets may not be directly applicable to Eastern cultures, especially for promoting luxury fashion brands [115]. Therefore, the manufacturing and marketing of fashion brands should be culturally specific. This approach must consider the social and cultural nuances of the target markets, recognizing that consumers desire to express their uniqueness while maintaining consistency with their reference groups. Moreover, recent studies indicate that several garment retailers have incorporated customization into their online presence [80], and many luxury firms have successfully adopted online sales, with online sales growth having outperformed offline sales growth [84]. As prior research has shown that social network sites marketing affects consumers' orientation toward luxury brands [76], luxury fashion brands need to expand their customization approach to include digital communication channels and aspects of consumers' cultural identity, beyond merely product-specific characteristics.

Consumers generally seek to feel like members of their group or society at large, but this does not necessitate sacrificing their NFU; rather, they prioritize their sense of belonging over absolute uniqueness. This means they do not entirely forgo their desire for uniqueness. Consumers wish to be unique but not at the expense of their group affiliation, actively looking for brands that allow them to be distinctive within their community without becoming completely indistinguishable. This principle extends to individualistic cultures as well, where the NFU is prioritized alongside group affiliation, rather than being eliminated.

However, for both aforementioned implications, sole reliance on traditional marketing tools, such as communications based on conventional luxury symbols, does not guarantee success in this competitive and expanding market [65]. Managers need to devise novel strategies to build and maintain long-term relationships with their customers and foster co-creation activities [81, 90]. This necessitates an insightful grasp of the connections customers develop with the brands [86]. Therefore, aspects related to the social-oriented value of a brand, and the influence that consumers can achieve via brands should be the focal point for luxury brand marketers [116].

Limitations and future research

This study contributes significantly to the understanding and practices within the field of luxury fashion consumption and marketing. However, it also has certain limitations, which inform the following recommendations for future research.

First, the data were collected via self-reported survey questionnaires. While this method is common, future research could benefit from using unobtrusive data collection methods, such as analyzing online buyer behaviors and social media interactions. This approach might reduce self-report bias, though it could introduce new challenges regarding measurement validity and data accessibility.

Second, the study utilized a convenience sample drawn from a limited geographic area in Palestine. This inherently restricts the generalizability of the findings. Future research should prioritize adopting probability sampling strategies across a broader and more diverse geographic area to improve the external validity of the research findings.

Third, the study's focus on luxury fashion brands as a broad category might not have elicited the most precise responses. Collecting data on specific subcategories of luxury fashion (e.g., haute couture, ready-to-wear, accessories) could provide more nuanced insights into consumer behavior, particularly concerning the varying roles of uniqueness dimensions across different product types.

Table 6 Scale response items and reliability test. *Source(s)* Author's own work

Variables	Measures	Adapted from
Purchase intentions $\alpha = 0.724$	1. I have a strong possibility of purchasing this luxury fashion brand 2. I intend to buy this luxury fashion brand 3. I have the intention to purchase this luxury fashion brand 4. I am willing to recommend the luxury fashion brand I intend to buy to others	[23]
Avoidance of similarity $\alpha = 0.703$	1. When a product I own becomes popular among the general population, I begin to use it less	[78]
	2. I often try to avoid products or brands that I know are bought by the general population	
	3. As a rule, I dislike products or brands that are widely bought	
	4. The more commonplace a product or brand is among the general population, the less interested I am in buying it	
Unpopular choice $\alpha = 0.730$	1. When it comes to the products I buy and the situations in which I use them, I have broken the related social norms	
	2. I have often violated the social norms related to what to I buy or own	
	3. I have often don't care about when and how certain products are properly used	
	4. I enjoy challenging the prevailing taste of people I know by buying something they would not seem to accept	
Creative choice $\alpha = 0.940$	I often combine possessions in such a way that I create a personal image that cannot be duplicated	
	I often try to find a more interesting version of commonplace products because I enjoy being original	
	I actively seek to develop my distinctiveness by buying special products or brands	
	Having an eye for unique products assists me in establishing a distinctive image	
Need for affiliation $\alpha = 0.860$	1. I think being close to others, listening to them, and relating to them is one of my favorite and most satisfying relaxing and entertaining ways to spend time	(Marin and De Maya, 2013)
	2. I would be delighted to form new friendships with whomever I liked	
	3. Just interacting with others is one of the most interesting things I can think of doing	
	4. I try hard not to do things that will make other people shun me	[42, 70]
	5. I need to feel that there are people I can depend on	
	6. I want other people to accept me	
	7. I do not like being alone	
	8. I have a strong need to belong	
	9. It bothers me a great deal when I am excluded or ignored by others	
	10. My feelings are easily hurt when I feel like an outsider	

Appendix

See Table 6

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Author contribution
Kindly, I am the sole author of this manuscript.

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Data availability
Most of the research data are included in the article, while other raw data sets from the survey are available in Excel and SPSS files. The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declarations

Ethical approval and consent to participate
This study was conducted in accordance with ethical and legal research guidelines that protect the personal data and privacy of individuals during information collection. Therefore, informed consent was obtained from all participants before they completed the questionnaires. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

Consent for publication
Participants were explicitly informed that data were collected for the purpose of scientific publication of the findings in an academic journal. Therefore, their consent to publish anonymized and aggregated responses was obtained before the data collection.

Competing interests
The authors declare no competing interests.

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