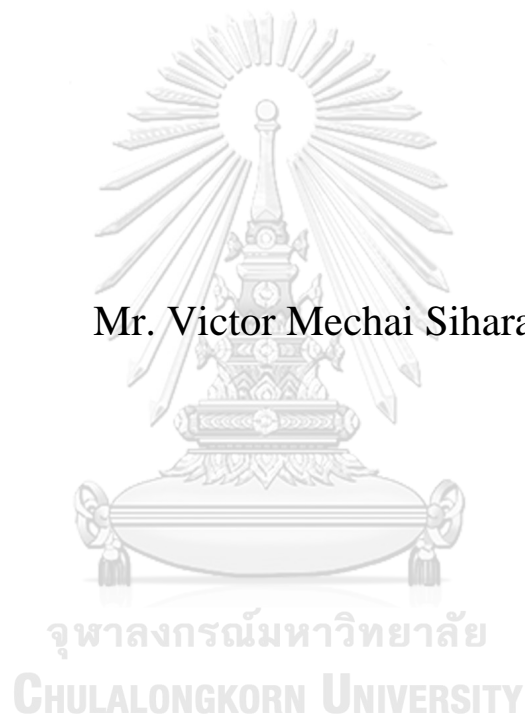


CONSUMERS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES  
TOWARDS  
LOUIS VUITTON AND THEIR BRAND AMBASSADORS

Mr. Victor Mechai Siharath



An Independent Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Communication Arts) in Strategic  
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การรับรู้และทัศนคติของผู้บริโภคที่มีต่อหลุยส์ วิตตอง  
และแบรนด์แอมบาสเตอร์



สารนิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาโท สาขาวิชาการจัดการการสื่อสารเชิงกลยุทธ์ ไม่สังกัดภาควิชา/เทียบเท่า  
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Independent Study Title      CONSUMERS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES  
TOWARDSLOUIS VUITTON AND THEIR BRAND  
AMBASSADORS  
By                                      Mr. Victor Mechai Siharath  
Field of Study                      Strategic Communication Management  
Thesis Advisor                      PAPAPORN CHAIHANCHANCHAI, Ph.D.

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Accepted by the FACULTY OF COMMUNICATION ARTS,  
Chulalongkorn University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Master of  
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วิกเตอร์ มีชัย สีหาราช : การรับรู้และทัศนคติของผู้บริโภคที่มีต่อหลุยส์ วิตตอง และแบรนด์แอมบาสเดอร์. ( CONSUMERS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS LOUIS VUITTON AND THEIR BRAND AMBASSADORS) อ.ที่ปรึกษาหลัก : ดร.ปภากรณ์ ไชยหาญชาญชัย

การศึกษาในครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจการรับรู้และทัศนคติของผู้บริโภคที่มีต่อหลุยส์ วิตตองและแบรนด์แอมบาสเดอร์ซึ่งคือวง BTS การศึกษาในครั้งนี้ใช้วิธีการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพด้วยการสนทนากลุ่ม โดยทำการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลกับผู้ที่เข้าร่วมการวิจัยจำนวน 8 คน และใช้เทคนิคการสุ่มกลุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเฉพาะเจาะจง พร้อมเกณฑ์การคัดเลือกเพื่อความหลากหลายของข้อมูล โดยผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยเป็นผู้บริโภคของหลุยส์ วิตตอง ที่มีอายุระหว่าง 22-28 ปี และทราบว่า BTS เป็นแบรนด์แอมบาส-เดอร์ ของหลุยส์ วิตตอง การศึกษาในครั้งนี้ใช้กรอบแนวคิดเกี่ยวกับการรับรู้คุณค่าที่หรูหรา เพื่อสำรวจการรับรู้ของผู้บริโภคที่มีต่อหลุยส์ วิตตอง และใช้โมเดล VisCAP เพื่อประเมินคุณลักษณะของ BTS ในฐานะแบรนด์แอมบาสเดอร์ของหลุยส์ วิตตอง โดยจากผลการวิจัยพบว่า ผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยรับรู้ว่าคุณค่าของหลุยส์ วิตตองเป็นแบรนด์ที่มีคุณภาพและให้คุณค่าเชิงหน้าที่ได้ดี จึงเหมาะสมกับราคาที่ตั้งไว้สูง อย่างไรก็ตาม ผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยประเมินว่า หลุยส์ วิตตองเป็นแบรนด์สำหรับผู้บริโภคที่มีอายุมาก ทั้งนี้ ผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยที่เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของ BTS อาร์มี ยังให้ความสำคัญกับ วง BTS ในฐานะแบรนด์แอมบาสเดอร์เป็นอย่างมาก ซึ่งตรงกันข้ามกับกลุ่มผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยที่ไม่ใช่แฟนคลับเค-ป๊อปหรืออาร์มี และท้ายสุดผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยประเมินว่า วง BTS มีการปรากฏตัวผ่านสื่อที่ค่อนข้างจำกัดในฐานะแบรนด์แอมบาสเดอร์ของหลุยส์ วิตตอง จึงทำให้อิทธิพลของความเป็นแบรนด์แอมบาสเดอร์ค่อนข้างจำกัดตามไปด้วย นอกจากนี้ ผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยยังประเมินอีกว่า วง BTS เป็นแบรนด์แอมบาสเดอร์ของหลุยส์ วิตตอง ที่ไม่น่าเชื่อถือ ซึ่งอาจเป็นเพราะขาดความสอดคล้องกันระหว่างตราสินค้ากับวง BTS

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สาขาวิชา การจัดการการสื่อสารเชิงกลยุทธ์  
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ลายมือชื่อนิสิต .....  
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Victor Mechai Siharath : CONSUMERS' PERCEPTIONS AND  
 ATTITUDES TOWARDS LOUIS VUITTON AND THEIR BRAND  
 AMBASSADORS. Advisor: PAPAPORN CHAIHANCHAI, Ph.D.

The objective of this study was to explore consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards Louis Vuitton and their brand ambassador, BTS. The study was qualitative in nature. An online focus group discussion was used to collect data from eight participants. The participants were purposively selected and a selection criterion was administered to ensure diversity amongst participants. The participants were consumers of Louis Vuitton, aged between 22-28 years old, and were also aware that BTS are Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. This study employed a discussion guideline as the research instrument. The luxury value perception framework was used to explore consumers' perceptions towards Louis Vuitton and the VisCAP model was used to identify the source characteristics of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. The findings showed that the participants perceived Louis Vuitton to be a brand of good quality and functionality, thus justifying the expensive price of its products. However, participants evaluated Louis Vuitton to be a brand for older consumers. BTS as a brand were perceived to have high significance to participants who were a part of the Army in contrast to participants who were non-Army/K-Pop fans. Lastly, participants evaluated BTS to have limited visibility as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador, thus their power to influence was limited. Furthermore, participants evaluated BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador to be not credible, this may be due to the lack of congruence between the brand and the boyband.



Field of Study:	Strategic Communication Management	Student's Signature .....
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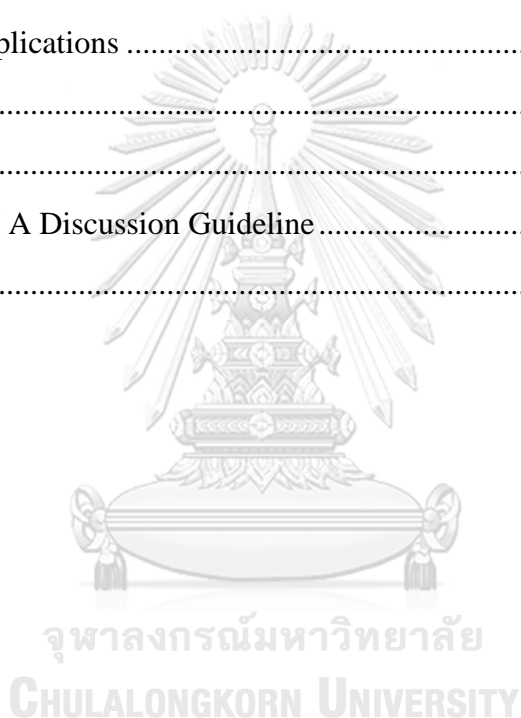
Lastly, to my incredible friends, thank you for your encouragement and motivation throughout this entire endeavor. I cherish all the memories we share and look forward to seeing the amazing things we will experience in the future. I am truly blessed to have met you all.

Victor Mechai Siharath

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
ABSTRACT (THAI) .....	iii
ABSTRACT (ENGLISH).....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES .....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	ix
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Significance of the Study.....	1
1.2 Research Objective .....	4
1.3 Research Question .....	4
1.4 Scope of the Study .....	4
1.5 Operational Definitions .....	5
1.6 Expected Benefits of the Study.....	6
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	8
2.1 Perception .....	8
2.2 Attitude .....	15
2.3 Sources of Communication.....	27
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY .....	37
3.1 Research Sample and Sampling Method .....	37
3.2 Research Instrument .....	38
3.3 Procedures.....	40
3.4 Validity and Reliability.....	41
3.5 Data Collection and Data Analysis.....	42
CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS.....	44
4.1 Demographics of Participants.....	44

4.2 Consumers' Luxury Value Perception Towards Louis Vuitton .....	45
4.3 Consumers' Attitudes Towards Louis Vuitton .....	54
4.4 Consumers' Perceptions Towards BTS .....	56
4.5 Consumers' Attitudes Towards Source Characteristics of BTS .....	59
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION.....	67
5.1 Summary .....	67
5.2 Discussion.....	71
5.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research.....	84
5.4 Practical Implications .....	85
REFERENCES .....	87
APPENDIX.....	100
APPENDIX A Discussion Guideline.....	101
VITA.....	102





## LIST OF TABLES

	Pages
Table 4.1 Luxury Value Perception Thematic Analysis .....	53
Table 4.2 Attitudes Towards Louis Vuitton Thematic Analysis .....	56
Table 4.3 Perception Towards BTS Thematic Analysis .....	59
Table 4.4 Attitudes Towards Source Characteristics of BTS Thematic Analysis .....	65



## LIST OF FIGURES

	Pages
Figure 2.1 Perceptual Process .....	10
Figure 2.2 The Hierarchies of Effect.....	18
Figure 2.3 Key Dimensions of Source Credibility.....	33
Figure 2.4 Key Dimensions of Source Attractiveness .....	34



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Significance of the Study

In the competitive industry of luxury fashion, brands are constantly finding innovative solutions to cultivate potential consumers. One of the most effective marketing strategies for luxury fashion brands is the implementation of a brand ambassador. Companies selectively choose ambassadors to attract consumers to the brand and extend that interest to their products and services (Okatvania, 2020). Brand ambassadors act as a mediator between the brand and the consumers. According to the study by Doss (2011) on key opinion leaders and celebrities, consumers' attitudes towards brands manifest from the opinions and testimonies of brand ambassadors. Information from credible and attractive sources has a higher chance of being processed and believed by consumers. These beliefs will then manifest into attitudes (Yang, 2017).

Brand ambassadors have an impact on consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards brands. The implementation of brand ambassadors is used to stimulate and enhance the perception of a luxury fashion brand (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007). Luxury fashion brands remain "luxurious" due to the luxury value that is perceived by consumers. In other words, consumers' luxury value perception is the essence of how the luxury fashion industry exists (Harris & De Chernatony, 2001). Hence, the use of celebrities as a communication source plays an intricate and impactful role in consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards luxury fashion brands. Luxury fashion brands predominantly cultivate celebrities and public figures to be their ambassadors.

In the early 2000s, Hollywood stars such as Kiera Knightley, George Clooney, and Leonardo DiCaprio were selected by a multitude of luxury brands to endorse their products and become their brand ambassadors. Fast forward 20 years and we are seeing a change of stars. That is, there has been a shift in the selection criteria and demographic profile of celebrities who are chosen to be brand ambassadors. Asian

celebrities and pop stars are now the most sought-after ambassadors for luxury fashion brands. With an impressive lineup of stars already signed to leading luxury fashion houses such as Yaya Urassaya - Thai actress (brand ambassador for Louis Vuitton), Lisa Manoban - Korean pop star (brand ambassador for CELINE & Bulgari), Roseanne Park - Korean pop star (brand ambassador for Yves Saint Laurent), and Jennie Kim - Korean pop star (brand ambassador for CHANEL).

The responsibilities of brand ambassadors encompass appearances on a multitude of media channels, endorsing and testifying brand products, and authenticating the validity of the brand to the greater public (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). Brands are dedicating a large portion of their budget to acquiring multi-talented and all-rounded entertainers as the prime candidate for luxury fashion brand ambassadors (Chitrakorn, 2021).

Louis Vuitton, a French luxury fashion brand founded in 1854. The brand is renowned as one of the leading fashion houses in the international luxury fashion industry (Kasztalska, 2018). Louis Vuitton is an extension of the conglomerate brand LVMH. LVMH has over 75 brands under its label. The luxury goods produced include fashion pieces, leather goods, perfumes, cosmetics, watches, and spirits. The company thrives in the expansion of its consumer portfolio to a global scale through high-quality luxury goods. Louis Vuitton is most famously known for its luxury travel crates and iconic monogram embellished across a multitude of fashion products (Haber, 2005). According to *Forbes*, Louis Vuitton was ranked as the most valuable luxury fashion brand in 2020 with an estimated brand value of US\$47.2B. Louis Vuitton has one of the highest profit margins north of 30% and is renowned as one of the front-runners in the luxury fashion industry (Swant, 2020). In Thailand, Louis Vuitton is considered one of the top luxury brands due to its high brand awareness amongst Thai consumers (Euromonitor International, 2016).

In the latest attempt to cultivate a wider demographic, Louis Vuitton has recently signed BTS to be their global brand ambassador. The decision has generated a widespread discussion amongst consumers of Louis Vuitton and the fans of BTS. To

explore the decision made, we will first look into the history and success of BTS. Bangtan Boys (BTS) is a seven-member Korean boyband that debuted on June 13th, 2013. Since their debut, the boyband rapidly grew in popularity due to their consistent utilization of social media and their member dynamic. Furthermore, their domestic fandom gained momentum due to the musical styles of their songs which were considered new in the k-pop music industry at that time. In 2017, BTS made their first US debut at the American Music Awards, with their hit song, “DNA”. Since then, the boyband has accumulated vast international recognition through receiving a plethora of music awards and appearing on a multitude of talk shows (Parc & Kim, 2020). An article by Aniftos (2017) showed that BTS were the most tweeted celebrities in 2017 globally. Furthermore, *Forbes* listed BTS as the world’s highest-paid boyband in 2019 (Voytko, 2020).

In 2020, BTS released their first English song titled “Dynamite”. The song accumulated a staggering 100 million views within the first 24 hours of release, which broke the YouTube record. In July 2021, BTS were appointed by the president of South Korea, Moon Jae-In, to be the Special Presidential Envoy for Future Generations and Culture. On the 20th of September 2021, the boy band spoke at the 76th UN General Assembly and performed their hit song “Permission To Dance” with over one million viewers watching live online (Vigdor, 2021). The prominence and relevance of BTS as a communication source continues to grow as fans and supporters rally to watch and interact with events enlisting the boy band. Organizations and brands are recognizing the prominence of BTS and are persistently trying to acquire and collaborate with the globally renowned boy band (Parc & Kim, 2020).

BTS joined Louis Vuitton as their global brand ambassador in April 2021. The members of the boyband then modeled in Virgil Abloh’s Fall/Winter 2021 menswear spin-off film shot in Seoul, South Korea. Within the first hour of release, the video gained approximately two million views on Youtube and sparked mass discussion through social media. With the popularity of BTS continuously growing, Louis Vuitton grasped the opportunity to sign the boy band to be its global brand

ambassador. The study has chosen to explore BTS due to the recency and relevance of the boy band as the newly signed global brand ambassador for Louis Vuitton. Furthermore, this phenomenon has generated a widespread discussion through social media about the congruence of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador (Okwodu, 2021). The debate amongst consumers of Louis Vuitton and fans of BTS has contributed to the exploration of this topic.

Therefore, this study aims to explore consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards Louis Vuitton and their brand ambassador, BTS. The shift from traditional brand ambassador selection unveils a scarcity in research and literature pertaining to this particular topic. The study conducted can prove beneficial to communication practitioners, academic researchers, and marketers in the luxury fashion industry.

## **1.2 Research Objective**

1. To explore consumers' luxury value perceptions and their attitudes towards Louis Vuitton
2. To explore consumers' perceptions towards BTS as a brand
3. To explore consumers' attitudes towards BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador

## **1.3 Research Question**

1. How are consumers' luxury value perceptions and their attitudes towards Louis Vuitton?
2. How do consumers perceive BTS as a brand?
3. How are consumers' attitudes towards BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador?

## **1.4 Scope of the Study**

Primary research was conducted by collecting data for the empirical study. The study follows an exploratory research design and is qualitative in nature. To meet the research objectives, a purposive sampling method was used to collect data from eight participants through a focus group discussion (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

Participants pertain to Louis Vuitton's main target consumers who are aged between 18 - 34 years of age (Kitner, 2014). To ensure that participants are qualified to participate in the study, a selection criterion was administered. Data were collected through conducting an online focus group discussion using the Zoom Cloud Meeting platform. The focus group discussion was held on the 1st of November 2021.

## 1.5 Operational Definitions

### *Perceptions towards BTS*

Perception is the process in which individuals select, organize and interpret stimuli that are gaged via the five human senses, which consist of sight, taste, smell, sound, and touch (Solomon, 2019). In this study, perceptions towards BTS refer to how consumers interpret and give meaning to BTS as a brand.

### *Luxury Value Perceptions towards Louis Vuitton*

Luxury value perception refers to how consumers interpret and assign meanings to luxury brands, which in this case is Louis Vuitton (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007). In this study, consumers' luxury value perceptions towards Louis Vuitton were explained through four value dimensions.

1. Financial value refers to consumers' interpretation of the monetary aspect of Louis Vuitton in terms of price.
2. Functional value refers to consumers' interpretation of the basic functionality, utility, and core benefits of Louis Vuitton.
3. Individual value refers to consumers' personal orientation on the consumption of Louis Vuitton products, such as self-identity, hedonistic, and materialistic values.
4. Social value refers to consumers' perceived utility acquired by consuming Louis Vuitton products or services pertaining to conspicuousness and prestige value.

### *Attitudes towards Louis Vuitton*

Attitude is defined as the total evaluation of an object, person, group, issue, or concept on a spectrum ranging from negative to positive. It is a cluster of feelings that

derive from specific beliefs, emotions, and past behaviors associated with those objects (American Psychology Association [APA], 2020). In this study, consumers' attitudes were explored through the unidimensional view (Lutz, 1991). Attitude towards Louis Vuitton refers to the overall evaluation of Louis Vuitton, which could be either favorable or unfavorable (APA, 2020; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

#### *Attitude towards BTS*

Attitude towards BTS refers to the favorable or unfavorable evaluation of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador (APA, 2020; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). The VisCAP model by Percy and Rossiter (1980) was used in this study to evaluate BTS in terms of their characteristics through four dimensions.

1. Visibility refers to how much consumers have seen or been exposed to BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador.
2. Credibility refers to how much consumers trust and believe the messages, testimonials, and promotional cues deployed by BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador.
3. Attraction refers to how much consumers are attracted to BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador in terms of their physical appearance, shared qualities and traits, and personality.
4. Power refers to how consumers evaluate BTS' persuasion and influence as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador.

BTS were explored as the holistic boyband and were not separated by members in this study. Thus, the four attributes will pertain to the holistic feelings of consumers towards BTS (APA, 2020; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

#### **1.6 Expected Benefits of the Study**

Academically, the results from this study are expected to expand upon the body of knowledge pertaining to source characteristics of brand ambassadors, consumers' perceptions, and consumers' attitudes. Furthermore, the study is expected to provide academic researchers with information pertaining to Asian brand ambassadors in the luxury fashion industry which has scarcity in research literature.



Professionally, the findings of this study are expected to be beneficial to communication practitioners and marketers in the luxury fashion industry in relation to the selection and use of brand ambassadors. Furthermore, the study is expected to provide insight into the influences that brand ambassadors may have on consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards luxury fashion brands.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The objective of this study is to explore consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards Louis Vuitton and their brand ambassador, BTS. To progress, we must first grasp the variables being explored. Thus, this chapter aims to understand the various concepts associated with the study. The chapter is divided into three concepts, the first pertaining to perception and luxury value perception, the second pertaining to attitude, and the third pertaining to source and brand ambassadors.

#### **2.1 Perception**

Perception is an ever-changing, multitudinous phenomenon that urges marketers and researchers alike to understand and conceptualize the psychological process that urges consumers to respond to a plethora of stimuli such as marketing tactics and sensory cues. The concept of perception allows us to gauge the rapid process of perception from a consumer's perspective. Society has shifted to a sensory-driven marketplace and with new marketing strategies and campaigns being created daily to encourage sales and relationships between brand and consumers, it is essential to understand the fundamentals of perception and the cognitive processes associated with it. Theorists, scholars, and psychologists have identified many concepts which associate with consumer perception. Through the development of time, these concepts have been proven to have shaped the practice of marketing today (Solomon, 2019). The literature review delves into the concept of perception, explores the essence of the concept, and analyses the various stages and aspects associated with perception.

#### ***Definition of Perception***

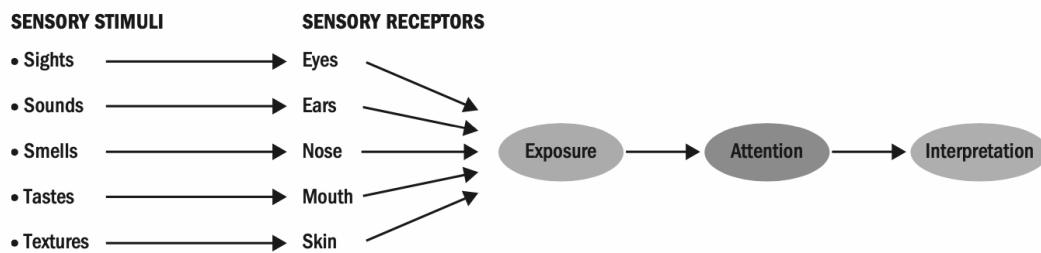
To begin, we must understand the meaning of perception, the word derives from the Latin words perceptio and percipio. The word perception refers to the process or result of becoming aware of objects, relationships, and/or events by means of the senses, which includes such activities as recognizing, observing, and

discriminating. These activities enable organisms to organize and interpret the sensory stimuli received into meaningful knowledge and behave accordingly (APA, 2020). Furthermore, perception is the process in which individuals select, organize and interpret sensations that are gaged via the five human senses, which consist of sight, taste, smell, sound, and touch (Solomon, 2019).

Sensations are the immediate response of the sensory receptors which exist with the human body, these sensations are enacted once the individual comes in contact with a stimulus. Stimulus from a consumer perspective can range from the color, the smell, the taste, the sound, or the feeling of a product, whether it be from the packaging, the advertising, or the actual product itself (Solomon, 2019). Through a plethora of research conducted by communication practitioners, marketers have deduced that sensory marketing is a tactical way to influence consumers' experience with brands, products, and services. Sensory marketing involves deploying stimuli that will trigger the sensory receptors of consumers. These sensory techniques aim to enhance the experience of the customer, as well as generate positive perceptions towards the brand (Ou, 2017).

### ***Stages of Perception***

The perceptual process, as depicted in *Figure 2.1*, illustrates the intricate steps taken by consumers in processing sensory stimuli. Consumers are bombarded by a plethora of stimuli on a daily basis, it is up to the consumer to select, organize and interpret which stimuli to perceive according to the individual's unique needs, biases, and experiences. Once in close proximity with the sensory stimuli the consumers undergo various stages of perception, these consist of exposure, attention, and interpretation. The stages collectively encompass different thought processes in which consumers enact habitually when confronted with stimuli from various marketing techniques (Solomon, 2019).

**Figure 2.1 Perceptual Process**

Source: Solomon, M. (2019). *Consumer behavior: Buying, having, and being*. (13th Edition) p. 99.

The first fundamental stage is *exposure* which is activated once the consumer's sensory threshold has been triggered via their sensory receptors, the sensory threshold refers to the point at which the stimuli penetrate the consumer's consciousness and the individual's awareness is activated. Within this stage, consumers may choose to focus on the single stimuli and ignore others or choose to ignore certain messages, this is known as sensory selection (Solomon, 2019). Consumers select the most important stimuli to attend to first and eliminate the rest (Hamilton, 2013), this then leads to the second stage which pertains to the attention given to the stimulus.

The second stage is *attention* which refers to the consumer devoting their processing activity to a particular stimulus (Madichie, 2012). This stage is often associated with the concept of selective perception which consists of perceptual vigilance and perceptual defense. Perceptual vigilance refers to an individual's likelihood to be aware of stimuli that relate to their current needs, on the contrary, perceptual defense refers to the individual choosing to ignore stimuli even though they have been exposed to them. Furthermore, from a consumer's perspective at this stage stimulus selection factors also have an influence on perception, these factors include the size, color, position, and novelty of the product (Solomon, 2019). This particular stage emphasizes that consumers' attention is selective, advertisers and marketers have adapted traditional methodologies in order to captivate consumers' attention in a highly competitive and dense communication spectrum (Ou, 2017).

The third stage is *interpretation* which refers to the meanings consumers assign to sensory stimuli. There are many factors that influence the way an individual may choose to interpret the meaning of stimuli, many of these meanings are dependent on socialization in society. Meanings assigned to stimulus depend on the consumer's schema which refers to the individual's set of beliefs, these beliefs will then be assigned to the stimulus. Consumers will naturally compare the stimulus to ones that have been encountered before. Marketing decisions must identify and evoke the correct schema in order to stimulate positive consumer evaluation of products, services, and messages (Solomon, 2019). The interpretation bias that formulates from the consumer's schema has been researched and depicted through Gestalt Psychology. The school of thought centralizes the concept that people interpret the meaning as an organized whole rather than an individual stimulus (Koffka, 1935). The Gestalt perspective allows researchers to delve into three principles that pertain to how consumers organize stimuli. These principles include the (i) closure principle that states that people have the ability to perceive an incomplete picture as complete, the gaps are filled in based on the individual's experience. (ii) Similarity principle that pertains to the concept that consumers group together objects that share similar physical characteristics. The (iii) figure-ground principle explains how one part of a stimulus will be prominent whilst the other parts recede into the background (Solomon, 2019). Gestalt's perspective gives an articulate look into the way consumers process and organize stimuli, the three principles divulge into different perspectives of the concept of organizing (Koffka, 1935).

The stages of perception illustrate the various components that consumers process to formulate perceptions about brands, products, and services (Madichie, 2012). As mentioned prior, the stages of perception are activated once a consumer comes in close proximity with sensory stimuli (Solomon, 2019). However, in the realm of luxury brands, not all consumers are exposed to sensory stimuli but are able to develop perceptions about brands. The concept of luxury value perception articulates the dimensions that facilitate the development of consumer perception towards luxury brands and products (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007).

### ***Luxury Value Perception***

Luxury, a term used in an everyday context pertaining to the idea of expensive and limited products, services, and opulent lifestyle. The description may seem simplistic but the concept of luxury is more in-depth than perceived (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007). The key components for the concept of luxury pertain to having a strong element of human involvement, a very limited supply of goods, and the recognition of value by others (Cornell, 2002). Luxury is more than just about having luxury items but the items themselves provide extra pleasure and enhance all senses at once, this particular definition then inspired further research into the perceptual aspect of luxury (Kapferer, 1997).

A notion of luxury perception that is prominent through various works of literature is that luxury brands are not naturally deemed luxurious by themselves, but are perceived to be luxurious by consumers (Hudders, 2012). This ideology emphasizes the importance of consumer perception management for luxury brands. Brand perception consists of three main sources, including (i) direct brand experience, (ii) word-of-mouth communication from others, and (iii) advertising and marketing communication exposure and events. Romaniuk and Huang (2020) contested that amongst the three sources that were stated, direct brand experience is the most powerful form of brand perception. The results obtained via their research indicated that customers of brands are 2-3 times more likely to hold perceptions in comparison to those who are non-customers of brands. This finding supports the notion that direct brand experience influences brand perception (Romaniuk & Huang, 2020).

However, on the contrary to these findings, within the context of luxury brands, it is stated that luxury brand perception is perceived without the need for direct brand experience (Hudders, 2012). It is important to differentiate between brand perception and luxury brand perception, though sharing commonalities, the differentiation derives from the term luxury. As stated prior, to make a luxury brand “luxurious” consumers must perceive it to be. Therefore, consumers will naturally have perceptions towards luxury brands without the necessity of direct experience with the luxury brand (Hudders, 2012; Romaniuk & Huang, 2020). To explain the

perceptions consumers have towards luxury brands, the luxury value perception model will be used to provide an analysis into the various dimensions that facilitate the development of consumer perception.

The luxury value perception developed by Weidmann and Hennigs (2007) seeks to explain the notion of consumer perception towards luxury brands and motives for purchasing luxury products. The model consists of four luxury value dimensions of perception, these include (i) financial dimension of luxury value perception, (ii) functional dimension of luxury value perception, (iii) individual dimension of luxury value perception, and (iv) social dimension of luxury value perception.

First, the financial dimension of luxury value perception refers to the direct monetary aspect of luxury, in terms of price, resale price, discount, investment, etc. The dimension addresses the value of the luxury products in the value of dollars and delves into the idea of what has been sacrificed to obtain a product. The antecedent construct pertains to price value. The price of a product may have a positive influence on the perception of quality, the higher the price equates to higher quality. Furthermore, setting prestige prices (high price point) adds perceptual value to the quality, status, and service of a luxury brand (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007).

Second, the functional dimension of luxury pertains to the basic functionality, utility, and core benefits that stimulate consumer-based luxury. These include the quality, durability, usability, reliability, and uniqueness of the luxury product, three antecedent constructs are related to this dimension, usability value, quality value, and uniqueness value. Usability value refers to the core benefit and usability of the product to satisfy the needs of the consumer. Quality value was found to be a particularly prominent value in the perception of luxury. A study by Gentry, Sanjay, Clifford, and Commuri (2001) discovered that one of the main reasons why consumers purchase luxury brands is due to the superior quality reflected by the brand name. This is due to the perception that luxury products are not mass-produced but are hand-crafted. Uniqueness value derives from the concept of uniqueness, which is

the perceived assumption of exclusivity and rareness of a limited product that enhances the desire of the consumer or preference towards a brand (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007).

Third, the individual dimension of luxury value perception refers to the consumer's personal orientation on luxury consumption, whilst addressing personal matters such as self-identity, hedonistic, and materialistic values. Self-identity value refers to the internal and private facets of one's self in terms of how the individual perceives him/herself. The concept of self-image congruence with luxury products explains the phenomenon of attaching symbolic meanings from products to one's identity. Hedonic values refer to emotional value and intrinsic enjoyment that emerges from using a certain product or service. Research into the concept of luxury has identified a relationship between luxury consumption and emotional responses such as sensory pleasure and gratification (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007). Materialistic value pertains to the concept of materialism which is described as the degree that a person principally finds possessions to have a central role in one's life. The more materialistic a consumer is the more likely he/she is to acquire possessions and give them priority (Belk, 1985).

Lastly, the social dimension of luxury refers to the perceived utility consumers acquire by consuming products or services that are strongly recognized within their social circles, which pertains to conspicuousness and prestige value. These factors significantly affect the evaluation and tendency to purchase and consume luxury brands, conspicuousness value and prestige value are the antecedent constructs. Conspicuousness value refers to the consumption of luxury goods in a conspicuous manner to assert social status and representation, luxury brands become important to individuals who seek to elevate status and conform to certain social groups. Prestige value in the context of social networks refers to the role of status of consumers to conform to social relationships. The value identifies that consumers desire to possess luxury brands to serve as a symbolic sign of group membership (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007).



A recent study by Petravičiūtė, Seinauskiene, Rūtelionė, and Krukowski (2021) used the concept of luxury value perception to explore the dimensions of luxury value in relation to consumers' brand attachment and purchase intention. The results of the study indicate that luxury value perception has a positive effect on purchase intention and brand attachment. Higher levels of perceived luxury value will enforce positive perceptions towards luxury brands (Jansom & Pongsakornrunsilp, 2021). Furthermore, the concept of luxury value perception has proven to correlate with consumers' attitudes towards luxury brands. The luxury value dimensions align with key attitudinal outcomes enacted by consumers (Bachmann, Walsh, & Hammes, 2019).

In conclusion, the luxury value perception developed by Weidmann and Hennigs (2007) provides an analytical framework into the prominent dimensions that pertain to consumer perception towards luxury brands. The conceptual model provides a foundation to analyze and research consumer perception in accordance with the dimensions of luxury value in a global context (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007). Thus, this study uses the luxury value perception model to explore consumers' perceived luxury value towards Louis Vuitton, pertaining to the four dimensions outlined: financial dimension, functional dimension, individual dimension, and social dimension.

## **2.2 Attitude**

### ***Definition of Attitude***

Attitude is defined as a relatively enduring and general evaluation of an object, person, group, issue, or concept on a spectrum ranging from negative to positive. Attitudes provide a summarized evaluation of attitude objects and are assumed to derive from specific beliefs, emotions, and past behaviors associated with those objects (APA, 2020). Attitudes are clusters of feelings, beliefs, and behavioral tendencies directed towards a specific person, idea, object, or group (Baron & Byrne, 1984). Attitudes are learned predispositions that normally pertain to a spectrum ranging from favorable to unfavorable in respect to a given attitude object (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). An individual can have numerous attitudes towards an object,

however, a single attitude type will be prominent. The attitude types include positive, negative, or neutral (Opatow, 1966).

The study of attitudes allows marketers and researchers to predict the behavior enacted by consumers (Ajzen, 2001). Consumers hold thousands of attitudes, each with unique characteristics that stem from the influence of direct and indirect experiences with an attitude object. Attitudes allow consumers to respond instantaneously on how to behave (Ajzen, 1988). Attitudes are formulated through various experiences and interactions; whether direct or indirect (De Houwer, Thomas, & Baeyens, 2001). However, some attitudes can be inherited and be passed down genetically (Olson, Vernon, Harris, & Jang, 2001). Regardless of the source of origin, individuals construct their unique attitudes towards attitude objects through the instigation of various components (Stangor, Jhangiani, & Tarry, 2014).

### ***Components of Attitude***

Within the retrospect of research into attitude, there are contrasting views on the structure. Amongst the plethora of views denoting to attitude structures, two distinct views are highly recognized. These are (i) the tripartite view and (ii) the unidimensional view. Each pertaining to the components of attitude but with varying views on the structure (Samra, 2014).

The tripartite view identifies and directly articulates the three components of attitude which are affect, behavior, and cognition (Ajzen, 2014; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). The tripartite view assumes that attitudes are formulated through the three components, with every attitude having varying degrees. Furthermore, the content under each component is assumed to be the attitude (Smith, 1947). Research by Bagozzi, Tybout, Craig, and Sternthal (1979) used the tripartite view of attitude structure. The research identified that attitudes do consist of different tendencies. These tendencies are explained through the ABC model of attitude. The components of the ABC model pertain to (i) affect, (ii) behavior, and (iii) cognition (Solomon, 2019).

Firstly, affect is defined as feelings, moods, emotions, and sympathetic nervous system activity that individuals experienced in relation to an attitude object (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998). Marketers devise activities that trigger emotional responses as a way to alter consumers' feelings and link products with an affective response. There are three distinctive affective responses, they are evaluation, moods, and emotions. Evaluation is either a positive or negative reaction to an event or object that is not associated with high levels of psychological arousal. Moods are temporary positive or negative affective states that are associated with moderate levels of arousal. Emotions are normally triggered by events and pertain to the levels of intensity to feelings such as happiness, anger, and/or fear (Solomon, 2019).

Next, behavior refers to the actions an individual takes towards an attitude object. Behaviors can be predicted through an individual's attitude (Ajzen, 1991). In other words, behavior is an effect of attitude. Furthermore, behaviors are what consumers intend to do and how they intend to act when confronted with a person, event, or object, whether it is favorable or not (Niosi, 2018).

Finally, the term cognitive refers to the thoughts and beliefs an individual has towards an attitude object. The cognitive component is an evaluation of the entity that constitutes an individual's opinion (belief or disbelief) about an attitude object (Jain, 2014). Furthermore, cognition pertains to a belief that a person deems true about an attitude object. Cognition is considered a cause of attitude (Solomon, 2019).

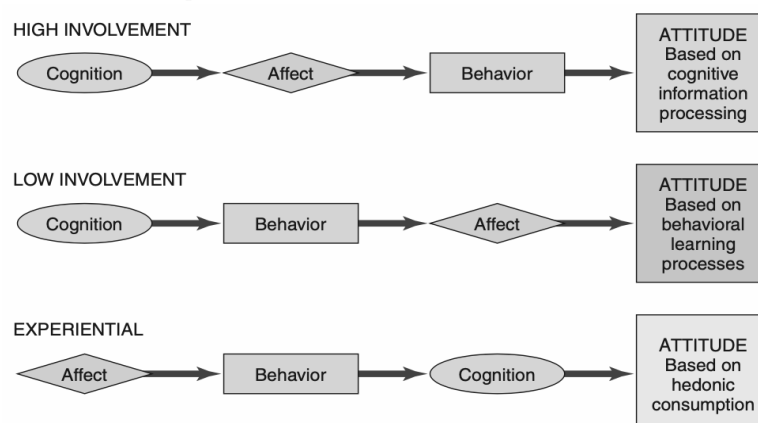
The unidimensional view seeks to evaluate psychological tendencies that are expressed by individuals with varying degrees of favoritism (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Lutz, 1991). This particular view assumes that all information lies on the same evaluative dimension which results in an attitude. The evaluative dimension varies from favorable/positive to unfavorable/negative. Ultimately, an attitude will formulate through the summary and evaluation of the information towards the attitude object (Samra, 2014).

The argument pertaining to which view should be used in evaluating attitude has long been discussed through the social science community. Both the tripartite view and the unidimensional view offer varying insights towards attitude. Thus, both views can be used and can provide valuable information into the evaluation of attitudes (Samra, 2014). It is consensus that the culmination of affect, behavior, and cognition do play pivotal roles in the construction of attitudes (Ostom, 1968). However, from a theoretical standpoint, an attitude is a single evaluative response ranging from favorable to unfavorable. The three components are identified as different classes of information (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Therefore, the unidimensional view of attitude structure is predominantly used in the evaluation of attitudes and was used in this study.

### *The Hierarchies of Effect*

The hierarchies of effects concept explains the sequence that is performed by individuals to form an attitude. The attitudes are formed from the individual's overall evaluation of the three components: cognition, affect, and behavior. As depicted in *Figure 2.2*, the three types of hierarchies of effects pertain to high-involvement hierarchy, low-involvement hierarchy, and experiential hierarchy (Solomon, 2019).

**Figure 2.2 The Hierarchies of Effect**



Source: Solomon, M. (2019). *Consumer behavior: Buying, having, and being* (13th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson, p. 293.

First, the high-involvement hierarchy assumes that an individual approaches a product decision as a problem-solving process. The process that is enacted in the high involvement hierarchy pertains to cognition, affect, then behavior. The process will begin with the consumer accumulating information and knowledge about a product, this is then formed into the consumer's beliefs. These beliefs are regarding the relevant attributes assessed by the individual, the consumer will then evaluate these beliefs and turn them into feelings about the product. After the formulation of feelings, this then perpetuates the relevant action towards the product that encompasses the desired attributes the consumer wants. This hierarchy articulates that consumers are highly involved in the purchasing decision process. The consumer is proactively seeking information and accessing alternatives to make comprehensively thought-out decisions. The attitude that is formed under the high-involvement hierarchy is based on cognitive information processing (Solomon, 2019). The high-involvement process normally pertains to items with high value. For instance, this hierarchy will be used by consumers looking to purchase expensive luxury goods or products that need high monetary and cognitive investment (Niosi, 2018).

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the low-involvement hierarchy assumes that consumers do not have clear preferences for brands and will act based on limited knowledge. The process for the low-involvement hierarchy is cognition, behavior, then affect. As described by the name, low involvement pertains to limited or low cognitive processing prior to the action of purchasing due to the low involvement with the product. The consumer will refrain from formulating product beliefs prior to purchase. After purchasing the consumer will then evaluate the product through behavioral learning such as using the product. Attitude towards the product will formulate during the behavioral learning stage. The experience, whether good or bad, will reinforce the consumer's choice. Low-involvement hierarchy processes will tend to be enacted towards products with low risks that do not possess significant importance to the consumer (Solomon, 2019).

The last hierarchy is the experiential hierarchy. This hierarchy assumes that consumers act on the basis of emotional reaction, or as some might call it, impulses.

The process for the experiential hierarchy is affect, behavior, then cognition. The idea is that consumers formulate attitudes towards products during the process of emotional reaction. Studies have been conducted that supports the notion that the consumer's mood during the time of receiving marketing messages will influence the way they process and remember the information (Solomon, 2019). Consumers tend to make impulsive decisions to purchase if their mood coincides with the marketing stimuli or an emotional reaction occurs when confronted with a product, this then prompts the behavioral action to purchase (Niosi, 2018). Furthermore, the experiential hierarchy highlights the intangible product attributes and hedonic motivations that prompt consumers to formulate attitudes towards products (Solomon, 2019).

The three hierarchies of effect pertain to distinct processes that are enacted according to the level of involvement with an attitude object. These processes are subjective and vary according to the individual (Solomon, 2019). However, there are factors that influence new or pre-existing attitudes. These factors impact the various stages of attitude formulation and can occur at spontaneous and erratic periods of time (Kangal, 2021).

The components of attitude provide a foundation for understanding what an attitude is and the structures that are associated with it. Through the cumulative review of the ABC model, hierarchies of effects, and the two views of attitude structure, we are able to deduce the components of attitude. Furthermore, the research provided insight into the process and structure of attitude development. Next, will be the analysis of the functions of attitude and how consumers use attitudes to behave socially.

### ***Functions of Attitude***

In order to understand how attitudes facilitate social behavior, the function theory of attitude provides insight into understanding why attitudes are held by consumers (Solomon, 2019). The function theory of attitudes was developed by Katz (1960), the theory pertains to four distinct attitude functions; these include (i) utilitarian, (ii) value-expressive, (iii) ego-defensive, and (iv) knowledge function.

First, the utilitarian function refers to the development of attitudes towards attitude objects because they provide pleasure or pain. Attitudes are tools that can lead individuals to greater rewards or avoid punishment (Solomon, 2019). An attitude serves the utilitarian function until it summarises the positive and negative outcomes associated with the attitude object. Thus, the utilitarian function serves as a determinant of approach and avoidance behavior (Shavitt, 1989).

Second, the value-expressive function refers to how attitudes assist in the conformity of individuals to meet social/group expectations. Furthermore, it allows for social interaction to develop and be enacted more efficiently (Smith, Brewster, & White, 1956). To support this statement, the value-expressive function pertains to the consumer's self-concept and/or central values. The function considers consumers' cultivation of certain activities, interests, and opinions as a way to express a specific social identity. The function is enacted as a way to determine what the attitude object says about the individual, attitudes are a way consumers express their self-concept to other people (Solomon, 2019).

Third, the ego-defensive function pertains to the necessity to protect oneself from external threats or internal feelings. An example can be seen in deodorant ads that emphasize the embarrassment of being caught with underarm odor (Solomon, 2019). The function assists in covering up traits and components consumers may not like about themselves, as well as, allowing the consumer to feel better about themselves (Niosi, 2018).

Fourth, the knowledge function is a means for people to formulate attitudes to organize, structure, and summarize a multitudinous amount of information (Grewel, Mehta, & Kardes, 2004). The knowledge function is the way individuals form attitudes as a means to obtain order, structure, or meaning; this is applied when a person is in an ambiguous situation. The ambiguous situation may pertain to when an individual is confronted with a new brand, product, or service (Solomon, 2019).

In conclusion, the function theory of attitudes offers an information-processing paradigm that articulates the cognitive process that occurs when an individual is confronted with stimuli and ultimately formulates an attitude. When consumers come into contact with stimuli, they start to form an attitude that is then stored in their memory. This memory is then used as a means for marketers, advertisers, and researchers to retrieve the attitudinal responses. Consumers are constantly in a state of readiness to respond to a plethora of attitude objects (Argyriou & Melewar, 2011).

### ***Factors Influencing Attitude***

Factors influencing attitudes are beliefs, feelings, and action tendencies. These factors originate from an individual or group of individuals towards an object, idea, and/or other people. Attitudes are entwined with experiences, knowledge, and feelings. Through this notion, Kangal (2021) developed a list of factors that influence attitudes, these factors are described as follows.

First, social factors refer to the notion of conformity, as humans we desire to fit in and reduce the friction of conflict between the people in our social circles and communities. Our attitudes towards attitude objects can be influenced by the need for conformity. Attitudes can facilitate and maintain positive relations with our social environment. Social roles and social norms have a prominent influence on an individual's attitude. Social roles refer to the expectations of behavior in a particular role and social norms are related to the societal rules that deem behaviors appropriate (Kangal, 2021).

The second is family factors. Families are deemed one of the most powerful influences for the formation of attitudes. Due to the prominence that family has in an individual's life, beliefs are passed through parents, siblings, relatives, and spouses. Attitudes developed by individuals, whether negative or positive, have a high degree of influence from family. Furthermore, attitudes influenced by family members have high prominence and are difficult to change (Kangal, 2021).



Third, personal experiences influence our attitudes every day, humans are exposed to a multitude of experiences on a daily basis. These experiences will have varying degrees of emotional prevalence, attitudes are formed easier when personal experience involves emotional factors. Attitudes will have a higher chance of being influenced by personal experience if the situation leaves a strong impression on the individual. Thus, supporting the notion that emotions play an intricate role in attitude development (Kangal, 2021).

Fourth, exposure to media in all forms influences the attitudes of individuals through active or passive consumption. Information received via traditional or digital media has a prominent influence over the shaping of attitudes (Solomon, 2019). Messages deployed through media have a strong influence on the shaping of individuals' opinions and beliefs (Kangal, 2021).

Fifth, direct instruction has varying degrees of influence over an individual's attitude, this is due to the nature of the individual. Individuals with a high degree of conformity may be more inclined to apply direct instructions and develop positive or negative attitudes based on the information received (Kangal, 2021). The concept of authority correlates with the factor of direct instruction. If individuals receive direct instructions from a source of authority, they are more likely to process the information provided. Information processing will be conducted more comprehensively and the information evaluated will formulate and develop into responses. These responses will then instigate changes in actions, beliefs, and attitudes (Esmaili, Mohamadrezai, & Mohamadrezai, 2018).

Sixth, physical factors refer to changes in attitude in response to physical adaptation and being exposed to physical stimulation (Kangal, 2021). The concept of tangible experience, as described in the evaluation of products, influences attitudes attached to attitude objects. Attitudes have a likely chance to change once physical use has been enacted during the evaluation stage of attitude formulation (Solomon, 2019). Physical factors may also pertain to physical adaptation in reference to an individual's health, physicality, or vitality. Individuals may experience a change in

attitude in order to facilitate the necessary behavioral adjustment to achieve better physical health and vitality (Kangal, 2021).

Seventh, prejudices refer to the preconceived ideologies or judgments an individual holds that may develop into an attitude towards the attitude object. These prejudged assumptions are made without the unbiased consideration of evidence (Kangal, 2021). Consumers may have preconceived prejudice towards a product due to influences from external sources, word of mouth, marketing, and advertising stimuli, and/or self-constructed conclusions. These influences, if left unproven, will develop into attitudes towards the product (Waite, 2016).

The eighth factor is economic status and occupation, it is believed that our socio-economic background influences our present and future attitudes. This notion relates to the economic and occupational positions of an individual in contribution to the formulation of attitudes. Attitudes are not simply the evaluation of positive and negative. But rather, encompasses the characteristics of importance, certainty, accessibility, and associated knowledge (Kangal, 2021).

The final factor is educational and religious institutions. These institutions have a prominent influence in shaping attitudes for they are the grounds to obtain knowledge. The potency of their influence derives from the essence of the establishment. Educational and religious institutions lay the foundation for society's foundation of knowledge and moral concepts. Being exposed to messages from highly credible and influential sources allows the process of information retention to become more effective. Once information is processed and turned into beliefs this may manifest into attitudes (Kangal, 2021).

Amongst the nine factors discussed earlier, an underlying concept shared between all factors is persuasion (Kangal, 2021). The factors that influence attitudes can only do so if the factor is persuasive. Though the factor exists, the extent of the influence is subject to the individual and the level of persuasion that factor exudes for that individual (Perloff, 2003). Persuasion in communication is a powerful concept

that influences consumers' attitudes towards brands, products, and services (Solomon, 2019). Persuasion, in a psychological context, is described as an active attempt to change attitude (Solomon, 2019). The concept of persuasion is used in all facets of life. Persuasion can derive from the consumer's inner circles, outer circles, and media consumption. Marketing communication exploits and utilizes the potency and influence of persuasion to change the minds of consumers. Cialdini (2001) devised a list of psychological principles that influence consumers to change their minds and comply with the messages deployed. These include reciprocity, consistency, scarcity, authority, liking, and consensus (Solomon, 2019).

The first principle is reciprocity. The idea revolves around the concept that if individuals receive a gift or favor, they respond by returning in-kind and producing positive feelings towards the giver (Solomon, 2019). Individuals who receive the benefits feel obligated to respond with positive behavior, this sense of obligation in turn is the catalyst of persuasion (Swart, Vlok, & Jooste, 2016). Reciprocity does not only include gifts and favors but encompasses concession. Concession is the agreement of a lesser request. For instance, an individual is approached with a large request, rejects that request but accepts a smaller request instead (Cialdini, 2001).

Second, consistency refers to how individuals remain consistent and refuse to contradict themselves. This pertains to their values, what they say and do about issues (Solomon, 2019). The principle of consistency refers to the inherent want to act consistently with their commitment. This further extends to the consistency of self-image to external factors, this meaning that individuals seek a holistic self-image. This can be achieved through using and buying products and services that represent and symbolize attributes of the consumer's self-image (Swart et. al, 2016).

Third, scarcity refers to the notion that consumers are more drawn to limited and rare products and services (Solomon, 2019). Consumers find items and opportunities more attractive and desirable when they are less available. This form of persuasion is widely used by marketers through the instigation of "limited time only" or "limited edition" promotions (Cialdini, 2001). Scarcity also pertains to information

The more exclusive information is, the greater the persuasive power and value (Swart et. al, 2016).

Fourth, authority refers to the notion that consumers will seek expert advice during times of uncertainty. These experts are deemed authoritative and credible sources due to their extensive knowledge in the area of interest, consumers are more likely to gravitate to credible and attractive sources. Furthermore, professional titles accompanied by uniforms are external indicators of source authority (Swart et. al, 2016). Consumers readily believe authoritative sources more so than non-authoritative sources, information exuded by authoritative sources has a higher chance of being processed and believed (Solomon, 2019).

Fifth, the principle of liking pertains to the notion that individuals are more likely to believe, change and comply with people they like. Liking can stem from physical attractiveness, commitment, and similarity (Swart et. al, 2016). Another way to enhance likeability is through compliments, complimenting stimulates liking (Cialdini, 2001). High levels of liking will increase the potential to induce compliance. Furthermore, consumers are more likely to agree and believe sources that they like or admire (Solomon, 2019).

The last principle is consensus, also known as social validation or social proof. Consensus refers to the fundamental way individuals decide what to do in a situation, and that is to look at what others are doing and what has been done before (Cialdini, 2001). Individuals tend to consider what others do before they themselves do it (Solomon, 2019). Consumers are more likely to conform in times of uncertainty as a reference for decision-making. Consensus also influences the attitudes of individuals to conform with the majority (Swart et. al, 2016).

The concept of persuasion and the seven psychological principles by Cialdini (2001) provide an understanding of the various factors that influence attitudes which are defined as the overall evaluation of feeling towards an attitude object in this study (APA, 2020). In addition, the concept of persuasion identifies two interesting

principles: authority and liking. These two principles are related to the source's credibility and likability. The more credible and likable a source is, the higher the chance of persuading the receiver; thus, increasing the likeliness of attitude change (Niosi, 2018). The concepts pertaining to source credibility and source likeability will be discussed in the following literature review.

### **2.3 Sources of Communication**

A source is defined as an entity, human or non-human, that sends messages through channels. This entity may choose to communicate through various verbal and non-verbal cues that pertain to the message that is being delivered. A source can be a singular entity or pertain to multiple, the context of a communication source is derivative of the phenomenon (Gozzi, 2004). Within the context of communication and marketing, there are various types of sources that brands use to communicate their messages to the desired target audience (Solomon, 2019).

#### ***Types of Sources***

There are two distinct categories of sources, these are *non-human* and *human* sources (Solomon, 2019). Non-human sources or spokes characters are purposely created by marketers to deliver the marketing message. These sources include cartoon characters, animations, and mascots. The purpose of creating these non-human sources is to allow full control over the attitude, personality, appearance, and behavior of these characters. Furthermore, this particular type of source reduces the chances of human error and prevents the emergence of scandals, misbehavior, and misconduct (Wasserman, 2020). Human sources come in various types, these include a spokesperson, a consumer, an expert, an advocate, and/or a celebrity. Consumers will listen and believe a human source if they encompass the traits of being likable and trustworthy. These are the results of the source characteristics of credibility and attractiveness (Solomon, 2019). For this study, we will be looking into celebrities as the specific type of human source. This is because Louis Vuitton uses celebrities as their human sources for endorsement and brand ambassadorship (Tungate, 2011).

Celebrity endorsers are defined as individuals who enjoy public recognition and who use this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement (McCracken, 1989). The role of celebrity endorsers in the current context of marketing communication has now surpassed the initial definition. The concept of celebrity endorsement is not a new phenomenon. But has been used in the realm of marketing communication as a powerful promotional tool worldwide for decades (Doss, 2011). Today, celebrity endorsers appear in a multitude of communication platforms, ranging from traditional to digital media. Companies and brands are dedicating a large proportion of their budget to accumulate influential celebrity endorsers. Nike in 2003 spent approximately \$1.44 billion on celebrity endorsement. In the hopes that the celebrities signed will promote the brand and be an influential spokesperson to raise awareness and persuade consumers to buy their products (Ding, Molchanov, & Stork, 2011).

Research by Spry, Pappu, and Bettina-Cornwell (2011) into celebrity endorsement discovered that effective use of celebrity endorsers accompanied by a comprehensive marketing strategy can influence advertising effectiveness. Furthermore, the effectiveness can transcend to brand attitude, brand recognition, brand recall, product evaluation, and purchase intention and behavior (Spry et. al, 2011). It was proposed by Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) that the definition of celebrity endorsement should encompass the factor of agreement between the celebrity and the brand. They proposed a new definition that described celebrity endorsement as an agreement between an individual who enjoys public recognition (a celebrity) and an entity (a brand) to use the celebrity for the purpose of promoting the entity. The definition was adopted as a progression in the contractual stipulation of a celebrity endorsement agreement. The celebrity gives the brand/entity permission to use their name and physical appearance in a certain way as a promotional tool for the entity (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016).

As with all marketing communication tools, the use of celebrity endorsement has both benefits and risks. Communication practitioners are continuously researching the influence of celebrity endorsers in an ever-changing consumer landscape. Benefits

that can be achieved through the implementation of celebrity endorsement includes an increase in favorable perceptions and attitudes towards brands and their product and services (Spry et. al, 2011). Furthermore, the use of celebrity endorsement can lead to higher purchase intentions of consumers and enhance the overall sales of products and services of a company or brand (Malike & Gupta, 2014). As well as, establishing stronger emotional ties between the consumer and the brand endorsed (Doss, 2011).

Celebrity endorsement, though overflowing with a multitude of benefits, is also associated with a plethora of potential risks and hazards. Celebrities being human are also victims of mistakes and misdemeanors. Celebrities may experience fluctuating popularity throughout their contractual term; celebrities may also become involved with public controversies and/or scandals (Erdogan, 1999). Previous studies by Erdogan (1999) have suggested that negative information and perception of a celebrity endorser can result in negative perceptions towards the endorsed brand. Furthermore, decreasing sales and reducing purchase intentions of target consumers. A study by Knittel and Stango (2014) supports this claim after the study showed a substantial plummet in the market value of Tiger Woods' sponsors after the news release about his sex scandal broke out to the public.

The vampire effect was a term coined by Erdogan and Baker (2000), this particular phenomenon occurs when a celebrity image does not match that of the endorsed product or endorsed brand. The result of the vampire effect is that consumers struggle to associate the celebrity with the meaning of the product/brand or vice versa. In consequence, the consumer will focus their attention on the celebrity rather than the endorsed product/brand. Poor celebrity endorser selection will overshadow the endorsed brand. Thus, impairing the consumer's ability to recall the brand after being subjected to the advertisement (Erdogan & Baker, 2000).

A factor that sits on the precipice of beneficial and risky is the concept of exposure and exclusivity. With more brands than influential celebrities, certain brands may need to share celebrity endorsers. This factor is heavily reliant on the contractual agreement a brand has with a celebrity. It has been stated that the more famous a

celebrity is, the more likely that person will endorse many brands of different product categories. Overexposure of a celebrity across brands and product categories can increase their visibility but will reduce the sense of exclusivity that a celebrity has for a specific brand. Furthermore, the impact of the celebrity endorsement on each product/brand could potentially weaken due to the association with the product/brand is no longer significant or unique (Mowen & Brown, 1981).

The debate on the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement has been discussed by marketing researchers and communication practitioners over many decades and the results are still inconclusive. The benefits of celebrity endorsement would be advantageous to any brand. However, consideration towards potential risks and instilling risk management would be beneficial to a brand that considers the adoption of a celebrity endorser (Erdogan, 1999).

### ***Brand Ambassadors***

Celebrities are used in various forms by brands. As discussed prior, celebrities can endorse products, testify brand's authenticity, and be the human source to communicate the marketing message of a campaign (Ding, Molchanov, & Stork, 2011). However, when celebrities encompass the qualities and source characteristics that reflect the ethos of a brand, that brand may choose to sign the celebrity to be a brand ambassador (Lazarevic, 2011). Brand ambassadors are described as credible sources and key opinion leaders who authenticate the validity of products and brands through testimonials and stimulating the word-of-mouth effect. Brand ambassadors influence those who are in their network and relationships. An ambassador has the potential to reach and influence certain target groups that a product/brand would normally be unable to (Andersson & Ekman, 2009).

Similar to celebrity endorsers, brand ambassadors enhance brand awareness and brand exposure, strengthen and distinguish brand image, as well as, allowing brands to differentiate themselves from their competitors (Westberg, Stavros, & Wilson, 2010). Brands often use celebrities and public figures to be their brand ambassadors. These individuals will then be contracted to associate, wear, promote,



and testify the brand through various communication platforms (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). Brand ambassadors allow consumers to attach personality traits and personify the brand through the identifiable and relatable characteristics of the ambassador. This allows consumers to easily identify with the brand. Brand campaigns will often use a brand ambassador to encompass and enrich the message and essence of the campaign. Criteria for brand ambassador selection are subjective and can vary according to the requirement and nature of the brand (Lazarevic, 2011).

The selection of brand ambassadors is essential to ensure a cohesive and effective collaboration. The ambassadors will establish strong partnerships with the brand by becoming a highly influential and relevant advocate that delivers the essence of the brand to a loyal following (Kanner, 2013). When a celebrity becomes an ambassador for a brand, the behavior, performance, and reputation of the ambassador will be reflected in the brand. That brand will instantly receive the attached perceptions and attitudes consumers have towards that specific celebrity (Klopper & North, 2011). Negligent ambassador selection and ambassador management will result in the potential risk of damaging the brand. It is essential that brand ambassadors fit with the brand to ensure maximum benefit. Brands are unique, with personalities unseen by the eyes of the consumer. Thus, the image of the brand ambassador must conform with the product/service (Lazarevic, 2011).

### ***Source Effect***

The source effect, one of the earliest communication phenomena which proposed the idea that the source of the message or the message vessel, plays a pivotal role in the acquisition and effectiveness of the message. Source characteristics can enhance or detract from the potential of a message to instigate a change in attitude or belief. The source characteristics pertain to internal and external qualities which the source possesses (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993). The source effect under a theoretical framework consists of three psychological modes that the characteristics of a source can lead to a change in attitude. The modes include (i) internalization, (ii) identification, and (iii) compliance (Kelman, 1961).

First, internalization refers to the acceptance of the message by a target audience. The audience member is exposed to a message by a credible source (Kelman, 1961). Source communication credibility is derivative of expertise, reliability, and goodwill. Thus, this mode proposes that source credibility in congruence with the message receiver's value system will lead to a change in attitude. As long as the source possesses qualities of expertise, reliability, and goodwill (Giffin, 1967).

Second, identification pertains to the process of influence instigated by variations in source attractiveness. The term attractiveness refers to two particular dimensions (i) physical attractiveness and (ii) ideological similarities. The source effect framework suggests that the physical attributes of a source (appearance) and similarities in values between the source and the target audience will enhance the effectiveness of the message. Thus, the culmination will most likely instigate a change in attitude (Kelman, 1961).

Third, compliance refers to the message source having the power to punish or reward the target audience according to the level of compliance to a change in attitude. However, the mode of compliance has since been excluded from further research due to the limited grounds of research (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993).

The source effect framework in reference to the mode of internalization and identification provided a solid foundation for the emergence of two source models that further analyze the role and effectiveness of communication sources. The two models include *the source credibility model* and *the source attractiveness model*. Both models reference celebrities as a message source and further support the notion that communication sources play an important role in message receptivity (Yang, 2017).

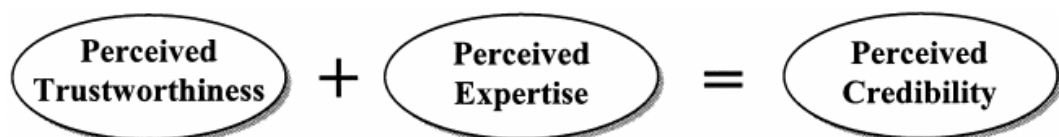
### ***The Source Credibility Model***

The source credibility model suggests that messages from a source that has the expertise, objectivity, and trustworthiness will impact consumers' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Dholakia & Strenthal, 1977; Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953;

Solomon, 2019). The term *credibility* is defined as the extent to which a source is perceived as possessing expertise that is relevant to the communication topic and can be trusted to give an objective opinion on the subject (Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000). The definition correlates with the concept of internalization, which was discussed in the source effect framework. It can be assumed that the credibility of the source can directly influence the beliefs and attitudes of consumers.

A key term under the concept of credibility is *trustworthiness*. This term refers to the honesty, integrity, and believability of the source. Brands will select sources that are perceived to be trustworthy in order to transcend their messages to a receptive audience (Erdogan, 1999). Trustworthiness accompanied by likability are the key determinants of source credibility, the culmination of the two attributes equate to consumer trust (Friedman & Friedman, 1978). *Expertise* is another term that is associated with the concept of credibility. Expertise is defined as the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of a valid assertion. This refers to the knowledge, experience, or skill possessed by the source (Erdogan, 1999). Research conducted by Aaker and Myers (1987) indicated that if the source is a celebrity, it will spark more interest and the message will become more persuasive in comparison to a source who is not a celebrity. The level of expertise and trustworthiness of a source, whether a celebrity or not, is dependent on the perception of the target audience (Aaker & Myers, 1987). Therefore, it can be assumed that source credibility is the result of the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of a source, as depicted in *Figure 2.3*.

**Figure 2.3 Key Dimensions of Source Credibility**

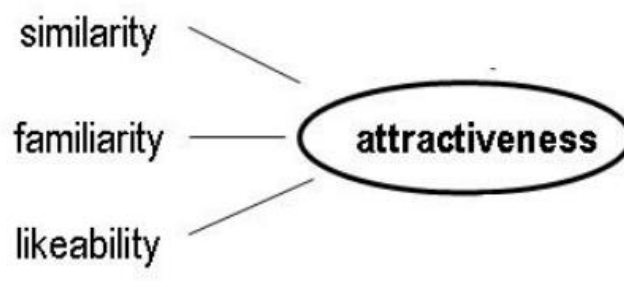


Source: Yoo, K. H. & Gretzel, U. (2008). The Influence of Perceived Credibility on Preferences for Recommender Systems as Sources of Advice. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 10, p. 137.

### ***The Source Attractiveness Model***

The source attractiveness model pertains to the social values consumers attribute to the source. These values refer to the sources' physical appearance, social status, personality, and similarity to the target audience (Solomon, 2019). The effectiveness of a message is dependent on the (i) similarity, (ii) familiarity, and (iii) likeability of the source. These three factors can contribute to the concept of attractiveness. *Similarity* refers to the perceived resemblance between the source and receiver of the message. *Familiarity* is the perceived knowledge about the source through exposure. *Likeability* is the affection for the source as a response to the sources' physical appearance and behavior (McGuire, 1985). Attractiveness is more than just physical attractiveness but includes a plethora of virtuous characteristics that consumers may perceive in sources. These characteristics include intellectual skill, personality properties, lifestyle, and/or athleticism (Erdogan, 1999).

**Figure 2.4 Key Dimensions of Source Attractiveness**



Source: Canning, L. E. & West, D. (2006). Celebrity Endorsement in Business Markets. In: Proceedings of 22nd Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group Conference. *IMP Group*, Milan, Italy, p. 9.

The source attractiveness model is still used to this day as a selection criterion for sources. Many brands and companies focus on source attractiveness more so than credibility. Sources in the modern communication landscape mainly consist of celebrities. These celebrities are selected to endorse, testify, promote, and advocate products/services through various landscapes and platforms (Erdogan & Baker, 2000).

### *The VisCAP Model*

The VisCAP model is an evaluation criterion for source characteristics congruence with brands. The model pertains to four attributes that are used in the selection of a brand ambassador and/or celebrity endorser. These attributes are visibility, credibility, attractiveness, and power (Royan, 2005).

First, visibility pertains to the exposure a celebrity has through the retrospect of endorsement and popularity. The visibility of a celebrity is the accumulation of how much the individual is seen. Selecting a celebrity that is endorsed by various brands could be unfavorable due to the overexposure of that individual. Furthermore, the association with the brand that the celebrity is currently endorsing will significantly reduce in the consumer's mind. Underexposure can result in exclusivity but low visibility. Therefore, the effectiveness of the brand ambassadorship could be potentially hindered. Visibility also refers to the fandom of the celebrity. Those following the celebrity will naturally gravitate to the endorsed brand and have favorable perceptions and attitudes towards it (Royan, 2005).

Second, a celebrity's credibility is an important factor to consider. Credibility influences if the messages, testimonials, promotional cues will be received and believed by the consumers. There are three key components that influence a celebrity's credibility, these include (i) expertise, (ii) objectivity, and (iii) trustworthiness. The celebrity selected to be a brand ambassador must have adequate expertise or sufficient knowledge in relation to the brand and product category. The ambassador must be trustworthy to both the brand and the consumer, and provide objective information (Royan, 2005).

Third, the concept of attraction is subjective and varies from one consumer to another. However, the VisCAP model proposes three components of attractiveness. The components are (i) physical likeability which refers to the celebrity's physical appearance. (ii) Non-physical likeability refers to the qualities that are non-physical i.e personality. (iii) Similarity pertains to the idea that consumers have qualities or

traits similar to the brand ambassador. In culmination, each component results in the perceived attractiveness of a brand ambassador (Royan, 2005).

Lastly, the power of the brand ambassador refers to the charisma of the individual. Brand ambassadors must have charisma in order to persuade and influence consumers to buy the product or use the service. The objective for brand ambassadors is to convert, attract, and influence consumers to invest physically and mentally into a specific brand. Factors such as popularity, public opinion, and personal affiliation may fluctuate the power of varying brand ambassadors (Royan, 2005).

The VisCAP model represents a criterion for celebrity selection for brand ambassadorship and celebrity endorsement. Furthermore, the model is able to articulate the functions of brand ambassadors, identify source characteristics, and distinguish the components of evaluation from the consumers (Royan, 2005). The VisCAP model was used in this study as a guideline in understanding and evaluating consumers' perceived source characteristics of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study follows an exploratory research design and is qualitative in nature. The study aims to explore consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards Louis Vuitton and their brand ambassador, BTS. Data were collected via a focus group discussion as it allowed for high-quality data extraction from participants in a social context (Patton, 2002). Focus group discussions provide a natural experience for participants in comparison to individual interviews. This is due to the environment that prompts participants to influence and be influenced by others, similarly to a real-life context (Casey & Krueger, 2000). Furthermore, focus groups stimulate discussions that provide insight into participants' viewpoints about a specific problem (Khan & Manderson, 1992). This chapter delves into the research sample and sampling method, the research instrument used, the procedures that were enacted during each phase, the method of data collection and analysis, and the validity and reliability of this study.

#### **3.1 Research Sample and Sampling Method**

Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants are qualified to partake in the focus group discussion. The sample size for qualitative research using a focus group discussion is between 6 - 12 participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). For this study, a total of 8 participants were selected. 8 participants are considered the optimal number of participants for non-commercial focus group research (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). Prior to participant selection, a prerequisite screening was conducted (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). In this study, potential participants must be consumers of Louis Vuitton and are the main target segment aged between 18 - 34 years of age (Kitner, 2014). Furthermore, participants must be aware that BTS are Louis Vuitton's global brand ambassador. Therefore, potential participants must have met the following selection criteria.

1. Participants must be between the ages of 18 - 34 years old.
2. Participants must have consumed Louis Vuitton products or used their services within the last 6 months.
3. Participants must be aware that BTS are Louis Vuitton's global brand ambassadors.

Participants who met the requirements were then added to a pool of potential participants. The researcher then used their professional judgment to select individuals who suit the topic of study (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). To ensure the data collected is rich and diverse, the researcher selected participants according to the following criteria.

1. Two participants are a part of BTS' fandom group (Army).
2. Two participants are loyal Louis Vuitton consumers.
3. Two participants know of BTS and are consumers of Louis Vuitton, aged between 18 - 25 years old.
4. Two participants know of BTS and are consumers of Louis Vuitton, aged between 26 - 34 years old.

Selected participants were then notified of the date and time for the focus group discussion.

### **3.2 Research Instrument**

The study used a discussion guideline (see Appendix A) as the research instrument. The discussion guideline consisted of sets of questions based on existing works of literature that pertain to the VisCAP model for BTS' characteristics, luxury value perception, perception, and attitude. The discussion guideline was separated into five sections, each section covered a variable pertaining to either BTS or Louis Vuitton.

The first section entailed participant introductions to obtain demographic data, as well as, acting as an ice breaker for fellow participants. Opening with simple



questions for participants to begin speaking will be advantages for the proceeding of the focus group discussion (Krueger, 2002).

Section two pertained to consumers' luxury value perception towards Louis Vuitton. In this section, participants were asked in regards to the four values; financial value, functional value, individual value, and social value. Furthermore, the questions delved into the antecedents of each value. For this section, the questions were adapted from research by Liang (2018). The previous research used both qualitative and quantitative questions. Hence, the questions have been adapted to suit the focus group discussions.

Section three pertained to consumers' attitudes towards Louis Vuitton. As mentioned in the literature review, this study looks at attitude through the unidimensional view (Lutz, 1991). Therefore, the questions pertained to the overall evaluative response towards the attitude object, which is Louis Vuitton (APA, 2020; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). The questions used for this study have been adapted from research by Rose, OBrien, and Rose (2007). Adaptations were made in order to fit with the context of the study.

Section four delved into consumers' perceptions towards BTS as a brand. The questions used for this section were adapted from research by Bergkvist and Rossiter (2007) and Bakker (2018). Questions were adapted to suit the research method.

Finally, section five pertains to consumers' attitudes towards BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. Similar to section three, the questions for attitude follow the unidimensional view of attitude structure, which asks participants about how they evaluate BTS in terms of their characteristics. The VisCAP model by Percy and Rossiter (1980) was used to analyze the source characteristics of BTS. The questions were adapted from research by Bergkvist and Rossiter (2007) and Bergkvist, Hjalmarson, and Mägi (2016).

### 3.3 Procedures

This section outlines the procedures that were enacted by the researcher prior to the focus group discussion, during the focus group discussion, and after the focus group discussion. Outlining procedures allow the researcher to reflect and keep track of his/her progress during the various phases of research (Noble & Smith, 2015).

#### *Pre focus group discussion*

1. Identified potential participants for the focus group discussion via the researcher's personal network.
2. Screened potential participants using the selection criteria and recorded their contact details.
3. Contacted selected participants to check availability and arranged focus group discussion for the 1st of November 2021.
4. Contacted participants a day prior to the appointment to confirm participation and asked them to download the Zoom Cloud Meetings platform.
5. Pre-tested the Zoom Cloud Meetings platform and prepared necessary equipment for focus group discussion including a notebook, a pen, and a MacBook charger.
6. Reviewed the discussion guideline to familiarize and have a clear understanding of the discussion questions that were used in the focus group.

#### *During focus group discussion*

1. The researcher began by introducing himself and explained the objectives of the study.
2. Explained the focus group setting, moderator's role, the topic for discussion, and rules for participants (Malhotra, 2019).
3. The researcher asked for participants' consent to record the focus group discussion.
4. Throughout the discussion, the researcher stimulated a relaxed atmosphere to ensure participants were comfortable.
5. Notes were recorded during the discussion, the notes pertained to key statements and nonverbal cues expressed by participants.

6. The researcher closed the focus group discussion and thanked the participants.

#### *Post focus group discussion*

1. Immediately after the completion of the focus group discussion, the researcher recorded preliminary insight and impressions from the study conducted.
2. Data obtained were thoroughly transcribed and carefully checked.

### **3.4 Validity and Reliability**

Validity is defined as the integrity and operations of methods enacted through precision to accumulate findings that reflect the data. Whilst, reliability refers to the consistency of analytical procedures enacted (Long & Johnson, 2000). Qualitative research is often scrutinized for lack of scientific rigor and justification for the methods used. Due to the lack of transparency during the analytical procedure, findings often pertain to personal opinions subject to research bias (Rolfe, 2006).

However, to enhance rigor and credibility in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed an alternative criteria. The terminology used in conjunction with validity is *true value* and reliability is *consistency*. True value acknowledges that a plethora of realities exist. The researcher must accurately and clearly transcribe the participant's views and perspectives. The data recorded must exclude personal view and experience bias. Consistency, in the context of reliability, pertains to the concept of trustworthiness. The researcher must remain transparent and the decisions made must be clear of any subjectivity and bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Qualitative research can incorporate methodological strategies that can further enhance the trustworthiness of research findings. The strategies applied to this study pertain to research by Noble and Smith (2015). The strategies used for this study include:

- Account for any personal biases that may arise to influence findings.
- Comprehensively and thoroughly record data obtained by participants.
- Interpret findings consistently and transparently.

- Engage with other researchers and research advisors to approve question guidelines and reduce research bias.

Through the implementation of these strategies in culmination with the discussion guide adapted from earlier pieces of research, assisted in enhancing the validity and reliability of this study.

### **3.5 Data Collection and Data Analysis**

The focus group discussion was conducted via the Zoom Cloud Meetings platform. The focus group discussion was held on the 1st of November 2021. The focus group duration was 120 minutes for maximum efficiency (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). Data were collected during the process of the focus group discussion in the form of notes and were recorded to allow further comprehension by the researcher (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). After the focus group discussion session, data analysis was conducted immediately. This was to ensure that the information and the insight obtained are still clear in the researcher's memory (Anderson, 1990).

The researcher conducted data analysis following thematic analysis which derives from the grounded theory approach. Thematic analysis is a method that identifies, analyses, and reports themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Similar to the grounded theory, the thematic analysis consists of two coding stages; (i) open coding and (ii) axial coding. Open coding is the primary stage of qualitative data analysis. It is an interpretive process that breaks down data analytically. The process entails the labeling of raw data and coding them. The purpose is to stimulate theoretical possibilities and preliminarily categorize raw data that has been obtained. Axial coding is the process of formulating connections between the codes labeled in open coding. The codes will be grouped into conceptual categories which will become the axis of the codes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Following the thematic analysis method, the conceptual categories will pertain to themes. Themes culminate important data that relate to the research questions, a theme represents patterned responses or meanings within a data set. Once themes were identified, the researcher then

proceeded to thoroughly review the findings and transcribe the narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2006).



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

The results of the study, gathered via the focus group discussion, are described in this chapter in terms of the perceptions and attitudes towards Louis Vuitton and BTS. This chapter is divided into sections in accordance with the research objectives. The first section pertains to the demographic profile of participants, the second section delves into the participants' luxury value perceptions towards Louis Vuitton. The third section pertains to the participants' attitudes towards Louis Vuitton, the fourth section explores the participants' perceptions towards BTS as a brand. Finally, the last section pertains to the participant's attitudes towards the source characteristics of BTS as a brand ambassador for Louis Vuitton.

#### **4.1 Demographics of Participants**

As stated in the methodology, participants for the focus group discussion must be between 18-34 years of age. Furthermore, participants must have consumed Louis Vuitton's products or services within the last six months and are aware that BTS are Louis Vuitton's global brand ambassador. The eight participants that were selected to partake in the research were aged between 22-28 years of age, six participants were female and two were male. All participants consumed Louis Vuitton products within the last 6 months, two of the participants were a part of the BTS Army. In terms of occupation, three participants were Master's degree students, one was a recent bachelor's degree graduate, one was a marketing researcher for a beverage company and a former sales assistant for Louis Vuitton. One was the country manager for the Wish Rewards Program, another was a sales marketer for an industrial company. To enhance the richness and diversity of data, the researcher selected participants according to the following profiles.

1. *Participant 1*: 23 years old, marketing researcher, and loyal Louis Vuitton customer.
2. *Participant 2*: 25 years old, master's degree student, and part of BTS' fandom group (Army).
3. *Participant 3*: 22 years old, bachelor's degree graduate, and part of BTS' fandom group (Army).
4. *Participant 4*: 22 years old, country manager, and loyal Louis Vuitton customer.
5. *Participant 5*: 26 years old, master's degree student, knows of BTS, and is a consumer of Louis Vuitton.
6. *Participant 6*: 25 years old, master's degree student, knows of BTS, and is a consumer of Louis Vuitton.
7. *Participant 7*: 23 years old, master's degree student, knows of BTS, and is a consumer of Louis Vuitton.
8. *Participant 8*: 28 years old, sales marketer, knows of BTS, and is a consumer of Louis Vuitton.

As an introduction to the focus group discussion, participants were asked what Louis Vuitton products they owned. The products that the participants owned included shoes, wallets, bags, belts, and jewelry.

#### **4.2 Consumers' Luxury Value Perception Towards Louis Vuitton**

The findings for consumers' luxury value perception towards Louis Vuitton are reported in this section of the study. The findings are divided into four sections in relation with the four dimensions of luxury value perception. The four dimensions explored towards Louis Vuitton pertained to the financial dimension, function dimension, individual dimension, and social dimension. The financial dimension was discussed in reference to the price of Louis Vuitton, function dimension pertained to the usability and durability of Louis Vuitton products. Individual dimension explored how the participants felt when consuming Louis Vuitton and social dimension referred to social status and prestige (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007). Findings were

obtained through thematic analysis post focus group discussion, the findings under each value are outlined as follows.

### ***Financial Dimension***

The financial dimension of luxury value perception was explored in reference to the direct monetary aspect of Louis Vuitton. The dimension addresses the value of the luxury products in the value of dollars and delves into the idea of what has been sacrificed to obtain a product (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007). Participants were asked how they perceived Louis Vuitton as a holistic brand, with certain denotations to their products. The findings for the financial dimension are separated into two themes.

#### Theme 1: Worth the price

The first theme identified from the findings pertains to the price of Louis Vuitton products. The general consensus amongst the participants deemed Louis Vuitton products expensive, however, they interject that the price is reasonable considering the brand's history.

*“Their monogram bags and perfume use good quality stuff, I would say the price is worth it”*

*(Participant 1)*

*“LV is expensive, but I think the products are equal to the price. When I buy other brands I don't always feel like it is worth it”*

*(Participant 6)*

*“I feel like their price is still quite reasonable, as per the history of the brand and how long they have been around”*

*(Participant 7)*

#### Theme 2: Expensive, but luxury

The second theme pertains to how the price of Louis Vuitton products contributes to its luxury status. The participants agreed that the price of Louis Vuitton



products was according to the luxury fashion brand standard, meaning that other brands in the category would have similar pricing. Furthermore, the participants denoted that the price of Louis Vuitton products contributed to making it a luxury brand.

*“Working in luxury for a while, the price of Louis Vuitton is considered standard”*

*(Participant 1)*

*“The material they use on their belts is great, it feels expensive”*

*(Participant 2)*

*“The ingredients they use in their perfumes, I think it is oud, is really good quality. Oud is expensive”*

*(Participant 7)*

*“Expensive but it is what you expect from luxury brands”*

*(Participant 8)*

The participants expressed positive perceptions towards the brand and the quality of products in conjunction with the price value of Louis Vuitton, though some deemed the price higher than the purchasing power of the individual. However, the high price point was deemed acceptable in accordance with luxury brand standards. In conclusion, the participants' perceptions towards the financial dimension were predominantly positive.

### ***Functional Dimension***

The functional dimension was explored in reference to the basic functionality, utility, and core benefits that stimulate consumer-based luxury. These include the quality, durability, usability, reliability, and uniqueness of Louis Vuitton's products (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007). The findings for the functional dimension are separated into two themes.

Theme 1: Good quality, especially the stitching

The first theme identified in this section refers to quality. Five participants complimented Louis Vuitton about the quality of their products, specifically, the quality of materials used and the stitching on various products.

*“Overall the quality is good”*

*(Participant 1)*

*“In terms of quality, I think it is really good”*

*(Participant 3)*

*“The quality is really good, the stitching on LV is better than CHANEL”*

*(Participant 6)*

*“The stitching and straps are still in good quality after all these years”*

*(Participant 7)*

*“I agree, the quality is good”*

*(Participant 8)*

Theme 2: Louis Vuitton products are durable

The second theme denotes the durability of Louis Vuitton products. Participants noted that Louis Vuitton products are durable and can stand the test of time. *Participant 7* explained that they used the “*Never-full LV bag*” continuously for many years and after storing it in her wardrobe for several months she took it out again, the quality of the bag was still in premium condition.

*“Only the color on the leather changed a little due to oxidization, but everything else was still in good shape”*

*(Participant 7)*

*“Louis Vuitton products are durable”*

*(Participant 8)*

*Participant 1* also mentioned the quality of post-purchase service is good. He explained that after purchasing a Louis Vuitton product customers can bring in the product at any time to get it fixed if there are any damages or defects, the sales assistant will assess the damage and fix it without costs.

The majority of participants expressed positive perceptions towards the quality and durability of Louis Vuitton products and services. It can be deduced that the function value of Louis Vuitton products is prominently positive. Quality and durability stem from the quality value antecedent of the functional dimension of luxury value perception (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007).

### ***Individual Dimension***

The individual dimension of luxury value perception was explored through the participant’s personal orientation on the consumption of Louis Vuitton. Participants were asked to discuss in relation to personal matters such as self-identity, hedonistic, and materialistic values that were perceived from using Louis Vuitton’s products or services (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007). The findings for the individual dimension are divided into three themes.

#### **Theme 1: Indifferent/ No personal feelings**

For this discussion, participants took their time before discussing. The majority of participants echoed the notion that they do not consciously pay attention to how they feel when using Louis Vuitton products.

*“I don’t really think about how I feel when I use LV”*

*(Participant 6)*

*“I feel nothing when using it”*

*(Participant 8)*

### Theme 2: Louis Vuitton is a brand for older consumers

The second theme pertains to the concept that Louis Vuitton is a brand for older consumers. The participants shared stories about comments that were given to them when wearing and using Louis Vuitton products. *Participant 1* was told that he was too young to wear a suit from Louis Vuitton. He then further expressed that he felt mature when wearing the suit and began to perceive Louis Vuitton as an “older” brand. *Participant 7* agreed with the notion and further pressed that the monogram and the brown leather add to the feeling of “old”. She then continued by stating that she would rather wear YSL or Balenciaga. *Participant 4* then agreed and expressed that when she wears Louis Vuitton, she doesn’t feel as trendy as when she wears Balenciaga.

### Theme 3: Counterfeits make Louis Vuitton products perceived as cheap

The third theme denotes how the increase in counterfeit products has changed the perception of Louis Vuitton’s value. *Participant 6* added that one of the reasons why she doesn’t use certain Louis Vuitton products anymore is because of the insurgence of counterfeit which makes the brand look “cheap”.

*“I use to feel that Louis Vuitton was an expensive brand, but after I see counterfeit wallets and belts in markets it made the brand look cheap”*

*(Participant 6)*

The general consensus, derivative from the responses, indicates that participants do not pay attention to feelings whilst using Louis Vuitton products. Many participants ignored the hedonic and materialistic values of Louis Vuitton. Furthermore, the self-identity value was not evaluated from the participants' self but rather from external comments expressed to them whilst using and wearing Louis Vuitton products.

### ***Social Dimension***

The social dimension of luxury value perception was discussed under the perceived utility participants acquire when consuming products and services from Louis Vuitton. These perceptions may have been equated from the participants' social circles and may pertain to conspicuousness and prestige value.

#### **Theme 1: Social status is not considered**

The first theme pertains to considerations of social status. The consensus amongst the participants was that the participants did not think of social status when consuming Louis Vuitton.

*“I really don't think too much into it, my friends don't really care”*

*(Participant 7)*

*“Louis Vuitton doesn't do anything to my social status”*

*(Participant 8)*

*Participant 7* then added that she doesn't really notice the difference in social status because her Louis Vuitton products are not “*statement pieces*”.

#### **Theme 2: Better treatment by external entities**

*Participant 7* stated that though she doesn't think about her social status when she wears Louis Vuitton to shopping malls she gets “*better treatment by the workers*”. This then prompted *Participant 1* to agree and further state that he also receives better treatment at “*bars and clubs*” as well. *Participant 3* also agreed to the notion of “*better treatment*” and stated that even if someone was wearing pajamas but carrying a Louis Vuitton bag will still have a social impact.

*“I feel like when I wear LV or any luxury brand I get better treatment by the workers in the mall”*

*(Participant 7)*

*“Yeah I agree, it happens in bars and clubs as well”*

*(Participant 1)*

### Theme 3: Enhanced credibility

*Participant 1* stated that wearing Louis Vuitton helps with his credibility in certain scenarios, he gave the example of someone who may work in real estate.

*“It depends on the occasion, If someone was working in real estate and wore Louis Vuitton it would make them look more credible”*

*(Participant 1)*

*“I feel like people trust me more when I wear LV, it’s as if I become more reliable”*

*(Participant 7)*

The general consensus amongst the participants denoted the idea that they didn’t feel that Louis Vuitton contributed to their social status amongst their social circles, but rather with external entities (e.g. sales assistants and bartenders). Furthermore, wearing Louis Vuitton may also contribute to adding credibility to an individual through the eyes of others.

Themes pertaining to consumers’ luxury value perception towards Louis Vuitton were formulated through thematic analysis. As depicted in *Table 4.1*, patterns amongst keywords and phrases originating from participants’ responses were summarised into themes.

**Table 4.1 Luxury Value Perception Thematic Analysis**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Keywords &amp; Phrases</b>
Financial	1) Worth the price	1) “reasonable”, “history of the brand” and “I would say the price is worth it”
	2) Expensive, but luxury	2) “expect from luxury brand”, “standard”, “belts is great, it feels expensive” and “oud is expensive”
Functional	1) Good quality, especially the stitching	1) “good quality” and “stitching”
	2) Louis Vuitton products are durable	2) “durable” and “good shape”
Individual	1) Indifferent/ No personal feelings	1) “don’t really think about how I feel” and “I feel nothing”
	2) Louis Vuitton is a brand for older consumers	2) “old”, “older” and “I would rather wear Balenciaga, it’s more trendy”
	3) Counterfeits make Louis Vuitton perceived as cheap	3) “counterfeit” and “cheap”
Social	1) Social status is not considered	1) “don’t think too much into it”, “don’t really care” and “doesn’t do anything”
	2) Better treatment by external entities	2) “better treatment” and “by the workers in the mall”
	3) Enhanced credibility	3) “would make them look more credible” and “become more reliable”

### 4.3 Consumers' Attitudes Towards Louis Vuitton

The findings for consumers' attitudes towards Louis Vuitton are reported in this section of the study. The discussion question pertaining to this section was adapted from a study by Rose, OBrien, and Rose (2007). The responses acquired from the participants are evaluated through the unidimensional view of attitude (Lutz, 1991). The findings for this section are divided into two key themes.

#### Theme 1: Louis Vuitton is a brand for older consumers

A prominent theme that arose from this section during the focus group discussion was the notion that Louis Vuitton is a brand for older consumers. The term "old" was described as the brand being suited more so for an older consumer. The notion started when *Participant 5* began sharing his thoughts on the monogram, patterns, and logo on Louis Vuitton products. The notion was supported by *Participants 1, 6, 7, and 8*.

*"In my opinion, Louis Vuitton is an older brand because of the design on the products, the monogram, and patterns. The logo to me looks boring if in comparison to other brands like Fendi"*

(Participant 5)

*"The consumers I see in the stores are mostly my mother's generation, I sometimes think if I am in the wrong store"*

(Participant 6)

*"I would purchase more LV products in my late 30's"*

(Participant 7)

*"LV is old fashion"*

(Participant 8)



Amongst the notion that Louis Vuitton is a brand for older consumers, *Participant 4* also added that the brand itself “*gets better with age*”. In their explanation, they noted that the brand’s history and how long the brand has been around contributed to the luxury and appeal of Louis Vuitton as a brand.

*“I feel like with Louis Vuitton it’s something that gets better with age. As long as it’s LV it will always be associated with being luxurious because of its history and how long it has been there. It will always be a high-end brand”*

*(Participant 4)*

### Theme 2: Louis Vuitton as a first luxury brand

The second theme that was explored in this section was the idea that Louis Vuitton is the first luxury brand for many people. The theme derived from the notion that participants received Louis Vuitton products as gifts or hand-me-downs, many of the participants received Louis Vuitton as their first luxury product/brand.

*“I was given my first ever luxury product as a gift from my parents, it was my LV belt. In the Chinese community, the brand is considered a staple gift to give to others”*

*(Participant 5)*

*“I see in TikTok, that a lot of content creators buy Louis Vuitton as their first luxury brand, or like their first designer bag”*

*(Participant 6)*

*“I grew up with mum and dad wearing LV so I naturally got them as gifts or hand-me-downs”*

*(Participant 7)*

*“I also got my first Louis Vuitton bag from my mum, if it’s LV it will be the first brand that gets passed on to me... The bag from my mum was my first luxury product, I guess that makes Louis Vuitton my first luxury brand”*

*(Participant 8)*

In conclusion, the majority of participants agreed that the brand is for an older consumer and that the consumption of Louis Vuitton products originates from gifts and hand-me-downs. Furthermore, their attitudes towards Louis Vuitton predominantly pertain to the concept that they consume Louis Vuitton because the brand circulates within their families and affiliations.

Themes pertaining to consumers' attitudes towards Louis Vuitton were formulated through thematic analysis, showing two directions as favorable and unfavorable. As depicted in *Table 4.2*, patterns amongst keywords and phrases originating from participants' responses were summarised into themes.

**Table 4.2 Attitudes Towards Louis Vuitton Thematic Analysis**

<b>Attitude</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Keywords &amp; Phrases</b>
Unfavorable	1) Louis Vuitton is a brand for older consumers	1) "Louis Vuitton is an older brand", "mostly my mother's generation", "I would purchase more LV products in my late 30's" and "old fashion"
Favorable	2) Louis Vuitton as a first luxury brand	2) "first designer bag", "my first luxury product", "Louis Vuitton bag from my mum", "the brand is considered a staple gift", "passed on" and "got them as gifts or hand-me-downs"

#### **4.4 Consumers' Perceptions Towards BTS**

The findings for consumers' perception towards BTS are reported in this section of the study. The discussion question pertaining to this section was adapted from past studies by Bergkvist and Rossiter (2007) and Bakker (2018). The discussion question

dives into the participants' perceptions towards BTS as a brand, points of discussion included their history, success, and past works. The findings for consumers' perceptions towards BTS as a brand will be divided into two themes.

### Theme 1: No significant meaning

From the beginning of this section, the majority of participants seemed reluctant and reserved to discuss their perception towards BTS. However, *Participant 2* expressed enthusiasm and seemed eager to discuss the topic. *Participant 6* was the first to voice their perception towards BTS, she stated that she knew BTS was a boyband and that's the extent of her knowledge. Following her response, *Participant 5* voiced similar feelings and *Participant 6* concurred. *Participant 1* then voiced his perception about BTS in the same theme, stating that he only knew the boyband from James Corden's Carpool Karaoke.

*"I don't really know them, I know they're a boyband. Honestly, if anyone were to ask me about BTS I would think of the sky train"*

(Participant 5)

*"I do not know BTS that well. I too, know that they are a boyband and that they had a song with Halsey"*

(Participant 6)

*"I don't know them that well, I just see them a lot on social media"*

(Participant 7)

### Theme 2: Kings of K-Pop

The majority of participants had limited knowledge and involvement with BTS as a boy band. However, *Participant 2* and *Participant 3* seem eager to share their knowledge about the BTS. *Participant 2* began by stating that she was an Army (BTS fandom) since 2013, which was the second wave of fan fluctuation with only 800 active fans. She shared with the group the names of the seven members, the origin of the band, and how the name BTS came to be. Her enthusiasm denoted her

dedication to the boyband. *Participant 3* then stated that she too awaits the band's new music and "comeback" performances, however, she further notes that she is a fan but may not be to the extent of *Participant 2*. *Participant 4* then expressed her perception about BTS but didn't favor the band in particular, but appreciated the meaning and messages of their songs.

*"BTS literally means the world to me, they are amazing men who bring light into my life. They are so attractive, talented, and just one of the most amazing performers"*

*(Participant 2)*

*"I like about 90%, actually 95% of their songs, I always wait for their comeback performance. For those who don't know, comebacks are like... When bands have new music they do a special performance"*

*(Participant 3)*

*"I perceive BTS as the Kings of K-Pop, but I don't stan them. I think their music is really good, like the meaning of their songs are interesting and touching"*

*(Participant 4)*

When asked if there were any last thoughts about the participants' perceptions towards BTS, *Participant 8* stated that she wasn't a K-pop fan but had friends who belonged to the BTS Army. She concluded by saying that she doesn't understand the craze of fandom. Five of the eight participants had very limited knowledge about BTS, with this it can be assumed that BTS as a brand did not have significant meaning to those participants. However, *Participants 2, 3, and 4*, had positive perceptions towards the boyband. The three participants were active fans and listeners of the K-pop genre, though they stated that they had other bands that they were obsessed with; BTS was one of their favorites.

Themes pertaining to consumers' perceptions towards BTS as a brand were formulated through thematic analysis. As depicted in *Table 4.3*, patterns amongst

keywords and phrases originating from participants' responses were summarised into themes.

**Table 4.3 Perception Towards BTS Thematic Analysis**

<b>Perception</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Keywords &amp; Phrases</b>
BTS as a brand	1) No significant meaning	1) "do not know", "I would think of the sky train" and "I just see them a lot on social media"
	2) Kings of K-Pop	2) "mean the world to me", "they are amazing men", "bring light into my life", "I like", "Kings of K-pop", and "music is really good"

#### **4.5 Consumers' Attitudes Towards Source Characteristics of BTS**

The findings for consumers' attitudes towards source characteristics of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador are reported in this section of the study. The discussion questions pertaining to this section were adapted from past studies by Bergkvist and Rossiter (2007) and Bergkvist, Hjalmarson, and Mägi (2016). The findings for this section are divided into four attributes according to the VisCAP model by Percy and Rossiter (1980). The four sections pertain to visibility, credibility, attractiveness, and power. The model was used to analyze the source characteristics of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador through the unidimensional view of attitude.

##### ***Visibility***

The first attribute, visibility, was explored in reference to the exposure of BTS through the retrospect of endorsement and popularity. The visibility of BTS equates to how often the boyband was seen as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador according to the participants (Royan, 2005). Furthermore, participants were encouraged to discuss their attitudes towards BTS' visibility as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador in an open

context, with references made to fandom. The findings for the visibility of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador will be divided into two themes.

### Theme 1: Limited exposure

To begin, four participants stated that they haven't seen BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. The participants explained that they have never seen BTS in Louis Vuitton clothing or wearing their products. Furthermore, participants stated that the exposure of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador is very limited, especially on social media.

*"I have never seen BTS wearing LV clothes"*

(Participant 4)

*"I often see BTS on social media but I have never seen them wearing Louis Vuitton products"*

(Participant 7)

*"Now come to think of it I've never seen BTS in LV"*

(Participant 8)

Participant 1 stated that he has seen BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador from Virgil Abloh's menswear Fall/Winter collection fashion show online. He raised a very interesting point stating that the visibility of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador will increase brand awareness amongst a younger demographic and BTS fans. However, he believes this will not increase the purchasing intention of consumers and revenue of Louis Vuitton.

*"I think that LV did this so that they can target younger consumers and they know that BTS has many fans worldwide. I think it will increase brand awareness but I don't think it will have much impact on purchasing intention and the revenue of LV. To be honest, I don't think BTS suits luxury fashion brands"*

(Participant 1)

## Theme 2: Constant exposure

*Participant 2* and *Participant 3* rebutted the statement by *Participant 1*, both sharing the feeling that BTS will make fans purchase Louis Vuitton if seen wearing their clothes. *Participant 2* stated that she constantly sees BTS wearing Louis Vuitton clothing and products during public events and appearances.

*“I constantly see BTS wearing LV during events, like public events and appearances. Have you seen them in a suit? They look sublime”*

*(Participant 2)*

*“I have to disagree, I think BTS’ visibility will contribute to sales from fans. It is crazy what fans will do for their idols, we spend so much money”*

*(Participant 3)*

Amongst the participants, there were varied evaluations on the visibility of BTS as Louis Vuitton’s brand ambassador. Four participants never saw BTS as Louis Vuitton’s brand ambassador and one participant said that they have frequently seen BTS wearing Louis Vuitton clothing. However, the general attitude towards the visibility of BTS as Louis Vuitton’s brand ambassador is limited exposure.

### ***Credibility***

BTS’ credibility was explored through three key components, these included expertise, objectivity, and trustworthiness (Royan, 2005). Participants were asked to evaluate the credibility of BTS as Louis Vuitton’s brand ambassador, the key components were used as probes to stimulate discussion. The discussion amongst the participants perpetuated one key theme.

## Theme 1: BTS are not credible as Louis Vuitton’s brand ambassador

The notion began when *Participant 5* stated that he doesn’t believe that BTS are credible as Louis Vuitton’s brand ambassador. This notion was then supported and acknowledged by the majority of participants.

*“I honestly don’t think BTS are credible, I think they are just doing their job”*

*(Participant 5)*

*“I don't think BTS are suitable. I mean their representation just doesn't click, I wouldn't believe in their credibility”*

*(Participant 6)*

*“I wouldn't say they are credible either”*

*(Participant 4)*

*“I wouldn't believe what they say. I don't know. I just don't think they are that trustworthy”*

*(Participant 7)*

The general evaluation amongst the participants towards BTS' credibility as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador was prominently negative. The moderator asked participants to raise their hands if they believed that BTS are not credible as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador, six out of eight participants raised their hands. Thus, the general consensus believed that BTS are not credible as a brand ambassador for Louis Vuitton.

### ***Attractiveness***

The attractiveness of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador was explored in reference to the three components of attractiveness which are physical likeability, non-physical likeability, and similarity (Royan, 2005). The findings for the attractiveness of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador identified one prominent theme.



Theme 1: BTS is attractive as Louis Vuitton’s brand ambassador

*Participant 2* and *Participant 3* were eager to be the first to discuss the attractiveness of BTS as Louis Vuitton’s brand ambassador. Both expressed their intense love and admiration for the boyband, with specific comments directed towards BTS wearing Louis Vuitton suits.

*“They look so good in LV black suit, like honestly, they make everything looks so good”*

*(Participant 2)*

*“Jungkook in a suit looks amazing, totally fangirled over that”*

*(Participant 3)*

Five out of eight participants deemed BTS to be physically attractive. Thus, the general consensus amongst the participants indicated that they evaluated BTS as Louis Vuitton’s brand ambassador as attractive.

***Power***

The last attribute, power, was explored in reference to the influence and charisma of BTS as Louis Vuitton’s brand ambassador. Factors discussed in this section pertain to popularity, social media presence, and personal affiliation (Royan, 2005). The participants were asked to evaluate the power of BTS under the context of influence, whether it be to purchase or to become aware of Louis Vuitton. The findings for this section pertain to one prominent theme.

Theme 1: Visibility impacts power

The participants discussed the notion that visibility impacts power. The discussion began when *Participant 6* made references to Lisa as CELINE’s brand ambassador and the impact her ambassadorship had on the brand. The discussion then ventured into how BTS’ limited exposure hindered the power of their ambassadorship with Louis Vuitton. Participants then furthered the notion, by stating that if BTS as

Louis Vuitton’s brand ambassador had more visibility, the power of the ambassadorship could potentially be more influential.

*“I feel like the power that Lisa has with CELINE is much more than the weight BTS has on Louis Vuitton in terms of social media, especially in Thailand. People like CELINE a lot more because of Lisa”*

*(Participant 6)*

*“Everyone saw Lisa using CELINE, she made me want to use CELINE as well”*

*(Participant 5)*

*“I feel like if there were more social media exposure from BTS themselves and Louis Vuitton, there could have been the potential that they are as known as Lisa. Because I think their fandom has that power”*

*(Participant 4)*

*“I was really surprised looking at their IG page and not seeing them wear or referencing Louis Vuitton. I think if people saw more of BTS wearing LV they will be more influenced by them”*

*(Participant 7)*

After *Participant 7* made her statement, the moderator then asked the participants to raise their hands if they agreed with the notion that visibility impacts power. All eight participants raised their hands.

Themes pertaining to consumers’ attitudes towards source characteristics of BTS as Louis Vuitton’s brand ambassador were formulated through thematic analysis. As depicted in *Table 4.4*, patterns amongst keywords and phrases originating from participants’ responses were summarised into themes.

**Table 4.4 Attitudes Towards Source Characteristics of BTS Thematic Analysis**

<b>Attributes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Keywords &amp; Phrases</b>
Visibility	1) Limited exposure	1) “I have never seen them” and “never seen BTS in LV”
	2) Constant exposure	2) “constantly see” and “BTS wearing LV during events”
Credibility	1) BTS are not credible as Louis Vuitton’s brand ambassador	1) “I honestly don’t think BTS are credible”, “I wouldn’t believe in their credibility”, “I wouldn’t say they are credible either”, “I wouldn’t believe what they say” and “I just don’t think they are that trustworthy”

**Table 4.4 (Continued)**

Attractiveness	1) BTS is attractive as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador	1) "they look so good in LV black suit", "everything looks so good", "Jungkook in a suit looks amazing" and "totally fangirled over that"
Power	1) Visibility impacts power	1) "I feel like the power that Lisa has with CELINE is much more than the weight BTS has on Louis Vuitton in terms of social media", "everyone saw Lisa using CELINE, she made me want to use CELINE as well", "more social media exposure", "BTS wearing LV they will be more influenced by them"

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

This chapter entails a comprehensive summary of the research findings, subsequently followed by a discussion in reference to the research objectives. The summary and discussions pertain to consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards Louis Vuitton and their brand ambassador, BTS. Limitations of the current study are explained and directions for future research are outlined. Finally, this chapter will close with the practical implications of the study.

#### **5.1 Summary**

Data for the qualitative research were collected on the 1st of November 2021. Eight participants were selected to participate in a focus group discussion in the attempt to understand consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards Louis Vuitton and their brand ambassador. The focus group discussion was divided into five distinct sections, with the first pertaining to the participants' demographic profile. The second section delved into consumers' luxury value perception towards Louis Vuitton, the third section explored consumers' attitudes towards Louis Vuitton. The fourth section pertained to consumers' perceptions towards BTS as a brand, and finally, the fifth section explored consumers' attitudes towards source characteristics of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. The summary of the findings under each section is outlined as follows.

#### ***Consumers' Luxury Value Perceptions Towards Louis Vuitton***

Participants were asked to discuss their luxury value perceptions towards Louis Vuitton through four dimensions. These four dimensions pertained to the luxury value dimensions by Weidmann and Hennigs (2007), the dimensions were financial, functional, individual, and social. Under each dimension, participants were asked to discuss how they perceived that particular value in the context of Louis Vuitton.

Under the *financial dimension*, participants expressed that Louis Vuitton products are worth the price. This was due to the quality of materials, ingredients, and the brand's history. Furthermore, the participants deemed Louis Vuitton expensive, however, the price was a justification for the brand being luxurious. Overall the participants expressed positive perceptions towards the financial dimension. Through thematic analysis, two prominent themes arose from the findings which were (i) worth the price and (ii) expensive, but luxury.

Under the *functional dimension*, the consensus amongst the participants denoted that Louis Vuitton products are of good quality, especially the stitching on various products across the Louis Vuitton brand. Participants also discussed the durability of Louis Vuitton products and how they can stand the test of use and time. It was unanimous amongst the participants that the function dimension had positive perceptions. From the findings, two themes were deduced which included (i) good quality, especially the stitching, and (ii) Louis Vuitton products are durable.

Under the *individual dimension*, participants expressed that they did not think about how they felt whilst using Louis Vuitton products. The majority of participants echoed this notion, with some saying that they felt nothing when using the brand. However, as the discussion progressed, participants expressed how the brand has an older feel. This was due to the comments that were given to the participants whilst they were wearing Louis Vuitton products. Furthermore, a participant mentioned how she felt that Louis Vuitton used to be an expensive brand. However, after seeing a plethora of counterfeit products she now perceives the brand to be cheap. The findings from the individual dimension pertain to three themes, (i) indifferent/ no personal feelings, (ii) Louis Vuitton is a brand for older consumers, and (iii) counterfeits make Louis Vuitton perceived cheap.

Under the *social dimension*, participants expressed a consensus that social status is not considered when using or consuming Louis Vuitton products. However, participants noted that when wearing or using Louis Vuitton products in public areas such as shopping malls, bars, and clubs, they tend to get better treatment from staff or

workers. This notion was amplified further by expressing the notion that Louis Vuitton can enhance one's credibility if worn or used in a particular scenario. An example given by a participant stated that wearing a Louis Vuitton suit whilst working in real estate can enhance that person's credibility. Findings from the social dimension solidified three prominent themes, (i) social status is not considered, (ii) better treatment by external entities, and (iii) enhanced credibility.

### ***Consumers' Attitudes Towards Louis Vuitton***

Participants were asked to discuss their general feelings towards Louis Vuitton, the discussion question was adapted from a study by Rose, OBrien, and Rose (2007). The participants began the discussion with the notion that Louis Vuitton is an older brand. The participants explained that Louis Vuitton is more suited for older consumers, this notion was supported by the majority of participants. Participants then shifted to the notion that Louis Vuitton is a staple brand for gifts, especially in the Chinese community. Furthermore, the majority of participants receive Louis Vuitton products as hand-me-downs from their parents and family. This then led to the discussion that Louis Vuitton is a brand that many first-time luxury buyers will purchase or receive as a gift. From these findings, the evaluation of attitude towards Louis Vuitton was both unfavorable and favorable. Two themes emerged which were (i) Louis Vuitton is a brand for older consumers and (ii) Louis Vuitton as a first luxury brand.

### ***Consumers' Perception Towards BTS***

In this section, participants were asked to discuss their perceptions towards BTS as a brand. The discussion question seeks to explore what BTS means to the participants. Five out of the eight participants expressed the notion that they had very limited knowledge about BTS. They stated that they have heard about the boyband but do not know how many members are in the group. However, the participants that knew of BTS fondly or were members of the BTS Army expressed enthusiastic responses towards the discussion question. Three participants noted that they enjoy BTS' music and performances, with one participant stating that BTS are the "*Kings of K-Pop*". When asked what BTS meant to them, one participant stated that they meant

the world to her and that they bring light to her life. Through thematic analysis, two themes emerged from the findings, these include (i) no significant meaning and (ii) Kings of K-Pop.

### ***Consumers' Attitudes Towards Source Characteristics of BTS***

In the final section, participants were asked to discuss their attitudes towards the source characteristics of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. The participants were guided through four attributes of the VisCAP model by Percy and Rossiter (1980). The four attributes pertained to visibility, credibility, attractiveness, and power. Under each attribute, participants were asked to discuss BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador.

Under the *visibility* attribute, participants prominently discussed the exposure of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. The consensus amongst the participants was divided in half, with four participants never being exposed to BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador and the other four having been exposed. The participants that have not been exposed knew that BTS was Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador, however, they stated that they never saw any social media posts or news pertaining to the ambassadorship. On the contrary, participants who have been exposed to BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador stated that they have seen pictures and events, however, exposure is still quite limited. From the findings, two themes emerged from this attribute, which were (i) limited exposure and (ii) constant exposure.

Under the *credibility* attribute, the general evaluation amongst the participants towards the credibility of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador was predominantly negative. The majority of participants stated that they did not find BTS credible as a brand ambassador for Louis Vuitton. However, a secondary notion that was also consensus was that brand ambassadors in luxury fashion do not have to be credible. Participants noted that it is more important how the brand ambassador wears the products, more so than what they say about it. From these findings, one prominent theme emerged which was (i) BTS are not credible as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador.



Under the *attractiveness* attribute, the majority of participants deemed BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador attractive, five out of eight participants shared this notion. Participants predominantly denoted BTS' physical attractiveness, with reference to the boyband wearing Louis Vuitton suits and looking attractive. From the findings pertaining to the attractiveness attribute, one prominent theme emerged which was (i) BTS are attractive as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador.

Under the *power* attribute, participants expressed that due to the boyband's global popularity, the influential power that BTS has as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador has great potential. However, due to the limited exposure and social media presence, many participants expressed that BTS' power as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador has been hindered because of this notion. This then stemmed to a prominent theme indicating that the participants view visibility to have an impact on power. This notion was unanimous and all participants agreed that if BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador had more exposure, the boyband may have been as influential as Lisa for CELINE. From the findings pertaining to the power attribute, one prominent theme was uncovered which was (i) visibility impacts power.

## 5.2 Discussion

The following section discusses the findings of the study. The first section discusses consumers' luxury value perception towards Louis Vuitton under four dimensions, the second section discusses consumers' attitudes towards Louis Vuitton. The third section discusses consumers' perceptions towards BTS as a brand, and the final section discusses consumers' attitudes towards source characteristics of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador.

### *Consumers' Luxury Value Perceptions Towards Louis Vuitton*

The luxury value perception developed by Weidmann and Hennigs (2007) was employed as a framework to explore the notion of consumer perception towards luxury brands and the motive for purchasing luxury products. As mentioned prior, the luxury values are divided into four dimensions which are financial, functional, individual, and social. Research findings in culmination with previous studies allowed

for further comprehension of luxury value perception. The findings of luxury value perceptions towards Louis Vuitton are discussed below.

### *Financial Dimension*

For the financial dimension, two themes emerged which were (i) worth the price and (ii) expensive, but luxury. These two themes share a common meaning in terms of price. This could be because of the pricing strategy of Louis Vuitton as a luxury brand. That is, luxury brands are priced higher to be perceived as having greater value (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007). Consumers then have to quantify and justify that perceived added value (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Such values are quality, prestige, exclusivity, uniqueness, and heritage (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2016). Louis Vuitton was founded in 1854 and has been a front-runner in the luxury fashion industry since its establishment (Kasztalska, 2018). Louis Vuitton is considered a classic high-end brand that has dominated the global luxury market, the brand's quality and prestige have been portrayed through various media. A-List celebrities such as Scarlett Johansson, Sophie Turner, Charlize Theron, and Lupita Nyong'o have worn Louis Vuitton to various red carpet events (LeWinter, 2020). Louis Vuitton was also named the most valuable luxury fashion brand in 2020, the brand had an estimated brand value of US\$47.2B. Furthermore, Louis Vuitton has one of the highest profit margins amongst luxury fashion brands and is renowned as a leader in the industry (Swant, 2020). Thus, even though Louis Vuitton is expensive to consumers, consumers perceive the added values the brand offers as worth the price. This finding is consistent with a study by Weidmann and Hennigs (2007) which suggested that the price of a product may have a positive influence on the perception of quality, the higher the price the better the quality.

In addition, Louis Vuitton is also perceived as expensive, but luxurious. A plausible explanation is the brand image of Louis Vuitton. Louis Vuitton is positioned at the top of the high luxury segment, with its primary targets denoting wealthy society (Kitner, 2014). The luxury image of Louis Vuitton is depicted through its brand identity, marketing communication campaigns, and price. Louis Vuitton's products encapsulate elegance and sophistication through the design and color palette

used. Louis Vuitton uses brown, black, and gold which are colors that denote luxury, opulence, and power (Solomon, 2019). Furthermore, Louis Vuitton has approximately five hundred retail stores across the globe, located in prime locations (Thomas, 2021). Each store uses mood lighting to articulate elegance whilst creating a comfortable ambiance for customers to peruse, use of art installations and decorations further enhances the artistic image of Louis Vuitton and its products (Subramanian, 2021). In reference to their advertisements and campaigns, Louis Vuitton depicts famous celebrities adorned in the latest collection of products. Such celebrities include Angelina Jolie, Jennifer Lopez, and Pharrell Williams. Furthermore, Louis Vuitton does not reduce the price of products, give discounts, or have any outlet stores. Louis Vuitton products can only be purchased through official offline and online channels, and prices derive from the value-based pricing strategy (Thomas, 2021). Thus, consumers including the participants perceived that Louis Vuitton is expensive, but luxurious.

#### *Functional Dimension*

For the functional dimension, two themes emerged which were (i) good quality, especially the stitching, and (ii) Louis Vuitton products are durable. The two themes are centralized around two prominent antecedents which are quality value and usability value. This may be due to Louis Vuitton's dedication to maintaining superior craftsman quality throughout the years. Louis Vuitton suitcases are created with 30 year old poplar which has been dried for four years, each suitcase takes approximately 60 hours to be handcrafted. Furthermore, each Louis Vuitton bag takes approximately 15 hours to craft, products are carefully examined prior to distribution (Som, 2005). Thus, the use of exotic materials and superior craftsmanship contribute to consumers' perceived quality value of a luxury brand (Gentry et al., 2001). This is true in the case of Louis Vuitton because the majority of the participants stated that the quality of materials, ingredients, and craftsmanship (i.e. stitching) in Louis Vuitton products are good. According to Weidmann and Hennigs (2007), quality value is a pivotal factor in luxury consumption, consumers purchase luxury brands due to the superior quality reflected by the brand name.

In addition, usability value pertains to satisfaction when using a luxury product. Participants expressed their perception towards the durability of Louis Vuitton products, the general consensus indicates that the durability of Louis Vuitton products is good and allows for a longer duration of usage. A plausible explanation is a notion that durability is the result of delicate manufacturing and high-quality material usage (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007). Furthermore, luxury brands produce limited numbers of products purposely to manufacture pieces with the highest quality (Kunz, May, & Schmidt, 2020). In addition, Louis Vuitton products are crafted under strict quality control, whereby products must be thoroughly evaluated prior to distribution. Louis Vuitton does not outsource external companies to ensure full control over the manufacturing process (Som & Blackaert, 2015). This makes consumers satisfied with the usability and durability of Louis Vuitton products (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007). A study by Vigneron and Johnson (2004) further supports the notion by explaining that consumers choose to purchase luxury products due to the prolonged benefits they provide in comparison to non-luxury products. Furthermore, the physical and service attributes of luxury products provide psychological reassurance for consumers' consumption.

#### *Individual Dimension*

For the individual dimension, three themes emerged which were (i) indifferent/ no personal feelings, (ii) Louis Vuitton is a brand for older consumers, and (iii) counterfeits make Louis Vuitton products perceived as cheap. The reason that the majority of participants were indifferent when using Louis Vuitton products could be because Louis Vuitton is more accessible than it used to be. Research by Chandon, Laurent, and Valette-Florence (2016) suggests that luxury was once inaccessible to a large proportion of consumers. However, since luxury brands are now becoming more accessible, the consumption of luxury brand products has become a norm. Thus, consumers may not perpetuate any feelings or perceptions in reference to luxury product consumption. In other words, consumers may feel no superiority or prestige when using luxury goods. Another plausible explanation could be that the participants are Generation Z who may not associate or resonate with Louis Vuitton; they perceived Louis Vuitton to be for older generations. According to Jain, Vatsa, and

Jagani (2014), Generation Z are prone to consuming luxury products that are trendy, stylish, and exclusive. Such brand name mentioned during the focus group discussion was Balenciaga. Thus, using Louis Vuitton products may not perpetuate feelings because the brand or product does not have perceptual significance to them (Bachmann, Walsh, & Hammes, 2019).

With reference to Louis Vuitton being perceived as a brand for older generations, it stemmed from the discussion pertaining to how certain Louis Vuitton products are discordant with participants' self-image. The notion came into fruition when one of the participants recounted an experience when he was told that his Louis Vuitton suit looked old. Thus, he began to perceive Louis Vuitton as being a brand for older consumers. This might be because consumers who purchase luxury brands tend to acquire products from brands that represent their self-image (Ye, Liu, & Shi, 2015). This is also the case for this study, the participants made reference to Balenciaga being a brand that represents their self-image. Research by Wee (2004) explained that brand personality congruity is a prominent motive in brand consumption. Brand personality congruity is the consumers' perception of a brand's personality, in reference to their own. Consumers will actively consume products which they perceive represent them. In general, Generation Z have the image of being independent, unique, expressive, and trendy. They seek brands that encapsulate their individuality and achievements. Louis Vuitton is a brand that has heritage and possesses the image of sophistication and elegance (Thomas, 2021). Thus, this could be the reason why the participants perceived Louis Vuitton as a brand for older generations. Furthermore, this reflects that most of the participants did not interact with the symbolic meaning of Louis Vuitton (Solomon, 2019).

### *Social Dimension*

For the social dimension, three themes emerged which were (i) social status is not considered, (ii) better treatment by external entities, and (iii) enhanced credibility. The social dimension pertains to the perceived utility consumers may acquire when consuming luxury products or services that are recognized amongst their social circles (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007). When asked to discuss about Louis Vuitton in

contribution to social status, the participants expressed that social status is not considered when consuming Louis Vuitton. Furthermore, Louis Vuitton was not consumed as a means to elevate social status or conform to social groups. A plausible explanation is that the social circle of the participant may not perceive Louis Vuitton as being a label of conspicuous consumption (Neilssen & Meijers, 2011).

Conspicuous consumption denotes the purchasing and using of luxury products for the specific purpose of showing one's wealth and status (Memushi, 2013). Consumers have varying brands that they perceive to have conspicuous value and enhance social elevation, however, not all brands perpetuate these perceptions (Weidmann & Hennigs, 2007).

In addition, consuming Louis Vuitton products may infer better treatment from external entities such as sales assistance, bartenders, and waiters, and enhance credibility in certain scenarios. A plausible explanation is that luxury products act as a symbolic reflection of the owner, the product may reference the person's wealth and social status (Hudders, Pandalere, & Vyncke, 2013). In Thai society, social status is considered important, there is a clear differentiation between high society and low society. As denoted by Porath (2018), it is prominent that those with wealth and high social status receive better treatment from those lower on the hierarchy. Similarly, using Louis Vuitton can enhance the credibility of the owner. Louis Vuitton has been a front-runner in the luxury fashion sector for the past 20 years, thus, the brand encompasses prestige and heritage (Davis, 2020) which can help increase the owner's credibility. Research by Nelissen and Meijers (2011) identified that people who wear brand-labeled clothing are more likely to be perceived as trustworthy. In their experiment, two women applying for a job as a lab assistant were compared, the woman wearing a Tommy Hilfiger blouse was perceived to be more capable for the position than the woman wearing a blouse from a non-label brand. Thus, it can be assumed that luxury brand products can enhance one's credibility.

### ***Consumers' Attitudes Towards Louis Vuitton***

Under consumers' attitudes towards Louis Vuitton, two themes emerged which were (i) Louis Vuitton is a brand for older consumers and (ii) Louis Vuitton as

a first luxury brand. A prominent theme that derived amongst the participants, was the attitude that Louis Vuitton is old. This term was used to describe the brand itself and also the consumers of Louis Vuitton. The participants believed that the brand is more suited for older people due to the design of the products, the experience in-store, and preconceived notions. A plausible explanation is that the participants' attitude towards Louis Vuitton may have derived from various factors. Factors that have influenced their attitudes may have pertained to personal experience factors and social factors (Kangal, 2021). That is, one of the participants recalled their experience in-store at Louis Vuitton and stated that the consumers in the store were mostly her mother's age. Personal experiences have a higher chance of changing an individual's attitude if they leave a strong impression. Thus, it can be assumed that the experience in-store left a strong impression on the participant (Kangal, 2021).

Another plausible influence pertains to social factors. Social factors are derivative from social interaction, when two or more individuals begin to communicate, their messages begin to influence each other. Social influences affect the responses expressed by individuals, this notion can pertain to the focus group discussion in this study (Hollander, 2004). Due to the nature of focus group discussions, participants are able to share thoughts and project ideas with other participants. Many participants likely came to agree with the notion that Louis Vuitton is old due to the influence of other participants.

Furthermore, it could be because of Louis Vuitton's brand elements; the patterns, color scheme, and logo of Louis Vuitton may contribute to the attitude of the brand being for an older consumer. This is because the traditional monogram print, the Louis Vuitton logo, and the brown colored leather are Louis Vuitton's signature features used since 1854 and have been preserved to be reinterpreted in various collections (Yotka, 2019). Thus, participants may perceive the design of Louis Vuitton products to be old, though it is the intention of the brand to preserve the iconic features.

In addition, another prominent theme that derived from the findings is the attitude that Louis Vuitton is the brand for first-time luxury buyers and owners. This theme stemmed from the idea that Louis Vuitton products are staple gifts and hand-me-downs. The majority of the participants did not buy their own Louis Vuitton products, but rather, received them as gifts or items that have been passed down through the family. A plausible explanation is family factors; family is deemed one of the most powerful influences in the formation of attitudes. In this case, the family members pass down Louis Vuitton products to later generations as gifts. Such gifts can have an emotional and psychological attachment which then leads to positive attitudes towards the brand (Solomon, 2019). Research by Wong and Ahuvia (1998) stated that luxury gifting is prominent in collectivistic societies, luxury goods are deemed appropriate gifts due to the societal symbolism and reflection of the recipient and the giver's self.

#### ***Consumers' Perception Towards BTS***

In this study, perception towards BTS refers to how participants interpret and give meaning to BTS as a brand. The findings for consumers' perception towards BTS uncovered two themes which were (i) no significant meaning and (ii) Kings of K-Pop. These themes identified a clear divide amongst non-K-Pop fans and K-Pop fans/Army members. The first theme derived from the consensus that BTS as a brand had no significant meaning to five out of the eight participants. A plausible explanation could pertain to the participants' perceptual process. It can be said that all the participants have been exposed to BTS either through sight or sound. However, during the attention process, the participants may have chosen to ignore the stimuli through a process of perceptual defense. This could result from disliking K-pop music or not being familiar with BTS, the attention towards the stimuli from BTS was ignored. Another scenario could be that the participant negatively interpreted the stimuli, thus the perception towards BTS as a brand has no significant meaning (Solomon, 2019). To fortify this notion, research by Winchester and Romaniuk (2008) stated that negative brand perceptions may originate from never encountering or using the brand. Consumers tend to weigh both positive and negative perceptions towards a brand. However, when users do not have personal experience with the brand or



limited knowledge, they will choose to perceive the brand based on no user experience. In the context of BTS as a brand, participants may have responded that BTS has no significant meaning due to the limited knowledge and lack of attachment they had with the boyband.

In contrast, the second theme denotes the perception of BTS being the Kings of K-Pop. Three participants had thorough knowledge about BTS as a brand, they knew of the boyband's members, history, success, works, and achievements. Two of the participants belonged to the BTS Army and the other participant was an advert K-Pop listener. The participants expressed their admiration and appreciation for the boyband, stating that BTS are the "*Kings of K-Pop*" and that they meant the world to the individual. It can be deduced that the three participants have positive perceptions towards BTS. A plausible explanation is that fandom perpetuates positive perceptions. Fans of K-Pop are dedicated to their favorite bands or bias, regardless of the action, fans will perceive their bias positively. This is due to the psychological outcomes that perpetuate by favoring and supporting an idol or group, the psychological outcomes pertain to happiness, self-esteem, and social connectedness (Laffan, 2020).

Furthermore, it can also be assumed that positive perceptions are developed through the perceptual process mentioned prior. Being fans of BTS and K-Pop increases the opportunity of being exposed to a plethora of sensory stimuli. Through listening to their music, watching them perform, or purchasing their products, are all stimuli that equate to the overall experience gained by BTS (Solomon, 2019). In addition, positive perceptions may have been perpetuated due to the popularity of BTS as a brand and the prominence they have in the K-Pop industry. BTS' success in the K-Pop industry is a culmination of various accolades, the boyband is the first South Korean artist to have ever debuted an album ranked first in the US Billboard charts (Romano, 2021). Also, they were selected to be the first K-Pop ambassadors for the 76th UN General Assembly (Vigdor, 2021). Amongst many other accolades, this may have contributed towards the perception that BTS are the Kings of K-Pop.

### ***Consumers' Attitudes Towards Source Characteristics of BTS***

The last discussion pertains to consumers' attitudes towards the source characteristics of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. Discussions for this section will be divided according to the four attributes of the VisCAP model by Percy and Rossiter (1980) which are visibility, credibility, attractiveness, and power.

#### *Visibility*

Visibility pertains to the exposure of a celebrity, which in this study is BTS. Under the visibility attribute, two contrasting themes emerged which were (i) limited exposure and (ii) constant exposure. The general consensus identified that BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador has limited exposure. The majority of participants have never seen BTS wearing or endorsing Louis Vuitton products, or appearing as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. Therefore, the participants deemed the visibility of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador as underexposed (Royan, 2005). A plausible explanation could be the lack of strong ties between BTS and Louis Vuitton. That is, BTS as a K-Pop boyband has a high social media presence, whereas BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador has a low social media presence. Mudrick, Miller, and Atkin (2016) state that if social media posts by celebrities do not clearly express or label the brand that is being endorsed, consumers may simply assume that the celebrity is wearing clothes from other brands or no brand at all. Thus, the visibility of the brand endorsement is hindered.

In contrast, the theme pertaining to constant exposure derived from the two participants who are BTS Army members. It can be assumed that due to their ongoing engagement and dedication to the boyband, they were constantly exposed to BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. K-Pop fans actively seek information regarding their favorite brands and biases to participate in fandom-related tasks. Fans of K-Pop celebrities must be equipped with the latest information as a means to stay relevant within the fan base (Groene & Hettinger, 2016). Thus, the two participants as a BTS Army were constantly exposed to BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador.

### *Credibility*

Under the credibility attribute, one prominent theme derived from the findings was (i) BTS are not credible as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. The majority of participants believe that BTS are not credible as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. A plausible explanation could be that BTS endorse a plethora of brands. Research by Mowen and Brown (1981) notes that overexposure of a celebrity across various brands and product categories could weaken the association with a specific brand. By which, consumers may question if the celebrity indeed advocates and uses the brand/product. Being suspicious about brand ambassadors is shown in this study too. The participants felt that BTS are just doing their job as an ambassador. They did not believe BTS actually use and advocate for Louis Vuitton products, despite the fact that BTS have worn Louis Vuitton clothing to various events, performances, and has posted on their social media profiles. Occasions that BTS wore Louis Vuitton products include at the airport amidst traveling, performing on Saturday Night Live, at a photoshoot for PAPER magazine, and at the 2021 Grammy Awards (Donbavand, 2021).

In addition, another explanation to why participants may have felt that BTS are not credible as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador could be due to brand and endorser congruency. Celebrity congruence with a brand is vital in establishing credibility for both brand and brand ambassadors (Min, Chang, Jai, & Ziegler, 2019). The participants' attitudes towards Louis Vuitton is that the brand is old, whereas, BTS' members are aged between 23-28 years old (Field, 2021). Thus, it may be viable to assume that the participants felt that the image of BTS is not congruent with Louis Vuitton. Hence, BTS is believed to not be credible as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. Research by Knittel and Stango (2014), used the example of Tiger Woods as a brand endorser. Tiger Woods' image in congruence with sporting goods was highly accepted, however, once his image shifted, his credibility as an endorser was tarnished. In addition, these findings reflect the vampire effect coined by Erdogan and Baker (2000). It explains the phenomenon occurs when a celebrity's image is not congruent with the endorsed brand, the result is that consumers struggle to construct meanings between the brand and the celebrity.

### *Attractiveness*

Under the attractiveness attribute, one prominent theme emerged from the findings which was (i) BTS are attractive as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. The findings pertained to the physical attractiveness of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. A plausible explanation is that BTS is considered physically attractive. The physical attractiveness of celebrities enhances products or brands. Research by Kamins (1990) stated that consumers predominantly focus on the physical attractiveness of celebrities when viewing advertisements.

In addition, research by Bok-rae (2015) explained the phenomenon known as Hallyu. Hallyu, or more commonly known as the Korean wave, refers to the global popularity of South Korean culture pertaining to pop culture, music, and TV drama. Under the Hallyu concept denoting attractiveness, it is assumed that the Korean aesthetic or Korean beauty has transcended across the globe. The phenomenon may be a plausible explanation of the participants' attitudes towards BTS' attractiveness as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. Whereby, five participants out of eight participants deemed the boyband attractive.

### *Power*

The final discussion pertains to the power of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. Under the power attribute, one prominent theme emerged from the findings which was (i) visibility impacts power. According to the participants in the study, they deemed BTS as having limited power as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. This may be due to their visibility as a brand ambassador for Louis Vuitton, many of the participants were not exposed to BTS wearing or using Louis Vuitton products. However, the participants were exposed to BTS as a famous boyband, this implies that the power of BTS as a boyband overshadows BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador (Erdogan & Baker, 2000). Brand ambassadors have power through their influence, their influence is derivative of the messages that are communicated through the ambassador's channels. Due to the limited messages communicated by BTS in regards to being Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador, the power of influence is only extended to fans of the boyband or the Army (Smith &

Wright, 2018). Though BTS are popular as a boyband, as a brand ambassador for Louis Vuitton they seem to have limited power in comparison to other brand ambassadors such as Lisa for CELINE; as stated by the participants.

In conclusion, based on the findings from this study, it can be deduced that participants had positive perceptions towards the price value and functional value of Louis Vuitton products as they perceived that Louis Vuitton is worth the price and delivered high-quality products. However, participants did not perceive the individual value and social value of the brand, this may be due to the lack of conspicuousness of Louis Vuitton amongst Generation Z consumers. Thus, the luxury value perception of the participants was both positive and negative. In regards to participants' attitudes towards Louis Vuitton, the findings deduced that the participants had both favorable and unfavorable attitudes towards the brand. The favorable attitude denotes Louis Vuitton as a brand that many first-time luxury buyers/owners will consume. Whereas, the unfavorable attitude refers to the participants evaluating Louis Vuitton as being a brand for older consumers due to its product design, personal experience factors, and social factors.

The findings pertaining to participants' perceptions towards BTS deduced that participants who are fans of BTS/K-Pop had positive perceptions towards BTS. Whereas, BTS had no significant meaning for non-BTS/K-Pop fans.

Finally, in relation to participants' attitudes towards the source characteristics of BTS, participants had favorable attitudes towards the attractiveness attribute of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador, denoting their physical attractiveness. Fans of BTS had favorable attitudes towards the visibility attribute, whereas non-BTS fans had unfavorable attitudes. In addition, the consensus amongst the participants in regards to BTS' credibility and power as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador was unfavorable. This reflected that though BTS were selected by Louis Vuitton to attract a younger demographic, the findings indicated that the ambassadorship was somewhat unsuccessful.

### 5.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

In terms of limitations, the age range of participants for the focus group discussion was between 22-27 years of age. However, Louis Vuitton also has a secondary target segment who are an older demographic of consumers aged between 35-54 years of age (Kitner, 2014). Including this age range as selection criteria for the focus group discussion can be deemed interesting and may allow for rich and diverse research findings. Thus, for future research, selected participants should consist of a wider age range encompassing both target segments to enhance a wider spectrum of findings and results.

The second limitation pertains to studying only one of Louis Vuitton's brand ambassadors. Louis Vuitton has a plethora of brand ambassadors both regional and global, the list of celebrities and public figures who ambassador Louis Vuitton include Emma Stone, Naomi Osaka, and the latest to join is Jung Ho-Yeon (Sng, 2021). For future research, to further enhance the findings pertaining to consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards Louis Vuitton and their brand ambassadors, studying additional brand ambassadors under Louis Vuitton could provide further understanding. Furthermore, exploring other brand ambassadors in contrast to BTS may also provide compelling insight for future research.

The third limitation is that perceptions towards BTS as a brand didn't provide the details in terms of branding BTS. Therefore, future research can explore how BTS is perceived as a brand including the branding of BTS.

For future research, researchers may choose to conduct more than one focus group discussion. From the researcher's experience, participants tend to agree and conform with the general opinion of the group. Participants would tend to passively agree more so than to debate contrasting ideas, this then induced limited diversity in responses and findings. Thus, conducting an additional focus group discussion may allow for richer and more diverse findings from separate discussion groups.

#### 5.4 Practical Implications

Based on the findings from the study, the participants have positive luxury value perceptions towards the price, quality, and functionality of Louis Vuitton products. Furthermore, using, wearing, or carrying Louis Vuitton products can enhance credibility and induce special treatment in particular scenarios. Therefore, marketers for luxury fashion brands should highlight the quality and durability of luxury products through consistently communicating and showcasing the product quality through marketing strategies. This will ultimately enhance the justification for high price points for the luxury brand and appeal to the consumers.

The findings suggest that the attitudes towards Louis Vuitton denote to “old”. It can be assumed that Louis Vuitton utilizes BTS as a brand ambassador to attract a younger demographic and generate a younger aesthetic for the brand. However, the findings from this study suggest that the implementation was unexpected. It can be assumed that the participants did not associate BTS’ image as a young, famous K-Pop boyband with the attitude they had towards Louis Vuitton. Thus, to change consumers’ attitudes towards Louis Vuitton, the brand might consider using different strategies. For example, creating a new product line that can serve the needs of young consumers, or collaborating with in-trend brands to produce products that will appeal to the younger demographic. Such collaborations could be similar to Louis Vuitton x Supreme. Furthermore, to obtain insight into the younger segment, Louis Vuitton should conduct interviews and discussions with younger consumers to obtain information about their wants and needs.

The findings pertaining to attitudes towards source characteristics of BTS as Louis Vuitton’s brand ambassador indicate that visibility plays a pivotal role. BTS as a boyband has the power and the potential to influence consumers, however, BTS as Louis Vuitton’s brand ambassadors has limited power. This is due to the lack of visibility and exposure through various media channels, particularly social media. Therefore, marketers should increase visibility for brand ambassadors through offline and online media. Furthermore, specific attention to social media may be advantageous depending on the target demographic. The findings from this study

suggest that visibility can be related to the power of a brand ambassador. Thus, exposure and consistent distribution of media pertaining to the brand ambassador will utilize the implementation of ambassadorship more effectively.

Lastly, the findings from this study also indicate the prominence of brand ambassador selection. The participants in this study did not deem BTS credible as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador. Therefore, marketers must select brand ambassadors carefully for luxury fashion brands. Attention to the congruency between potential ambassadors and the brand is vital in making consumers trust the credibility of the brand ambassador.





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**APPENDIX**

จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย  
**CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY**

## APPENDIX A

### Discussion Guideline

#### Section 1: Demographics and general questions

1. Name
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Occupation
5. What are products that you have purchased from Louis Vuitton?
6. Are you a part of the BTS Army? Why or why not.

#### Section 2: Consumer's luxury value perception towards Louis Vuitton

1. How do you perceive the price of Louis Vuitton products?  
Probe: Financial and price.
2. How do you perceive the function of Louis Vuitton products?  
Probe: Usability, quality, and uniqueness.
3. How do you feel when you use Louis Vuitton products?  
Probe: Self-identity, hedonic, and materialistic.
4. How does Louis Vuitton contribute to your social status?  
Probe: Conspicuous and prestigious.

#### Section 3: Consumer's attitude towards Louis Vuitton

1. What are your general feelings towards Louis Vuitton?  
Probe: Product, services, and store ambiance.

#### Section 4: Consumer's perception towards BTS (as a brand)

1. What does BTS mean to you?  
Probe: Success, performance, and competence.

#### Section 5: Consumer's attitude towards source characteristics of BTS (as a brand ambassador for Louis Vuitton)

1. How do you evaluate the visibility of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador?
2. How do you evaluate the credibility of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador?
3. How do you evaluate the attractiveness of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador?
4. How do you evaluate the power of BTS as Louis Vuitton's brand ambassador?

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