The Revival of Made-to-Order Luxury: Exploring Consumer Attitudes

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Introduction. In 2025, the global luxury goods market is projected to reach US$495.16 billion. This is led by the US$166.44 billion watches and jewelry segment, with China generating the highest revenue at US$110 billion (Luxury Goods Worldwide, n.d.). However, luxury value creation is expected to decline for the first time since 2016, excluding 2020, signaling potential challenges for the industry (Balchandani et al., 2025). A more diverse consumer base is pushing brands to meet the needs of younger audiences without distancing older ones (Amed et al., 2025). Today's luxury consumers expect more from brands, particularly in areas such as personalization and the use of technology at scale (Ewen, 2024). At its core, luxury is emotional, and personalization strengthens the bond between consumers and brands, turning occasional buyers into loyal advocates (Cunningham, 2019). This conceptual study explores how made-to-order luxury products influence consumer attitudes, shape brand perception, and affect purchase intentions. The following sections outline the study's rationale and significance, theoretical framework and conceptual model, methodology and possible implications.

Rationale and Significance of the Study. In today's luxury market, where relationships are essential, retailers must cultivate personal connections to establish long-term consumer loyalty and sustain sales (Luxury Retail Trends, 2024). Made-to-order (MTO) is one such tool that can enable luxury retailers to tap into this evolving market. MTO offers a personalized designer experience, reminiscent of 1930s haute couture, by fostering one-on-one connections and insights into a consumer's lifestyle (Cunningham, 2019). MTO, or made-to-order, is a production strategy that allows consumers to purchase products customized to their personal preferences or specifications (Hayes, 2024), and in the luxury market, this process typically begins once the consumer places an order. MTO goes beyond simply satisfying consumer demands; it also supports environmental sustainability by ensuring that brands produce only what is ordered, thereby reducing waste and overproduction—major factors contributing to the fashion industry's negative environmental impact (Anastasiou, 2022). Furthermore, MTO may also offer a solution to the current linear supply chain model, which lacks the flexibility to adapt to rapidly shifting consumer demand (Jiang, n.d.). Hence, given the increasing importance of building strong consumer relationships in the luxury market, exploring MTO as a strategic tool is timely especially since MTO enables luxury retailers to offer personalized experiences while tackling sustainability and supply chain challenges.

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Current research streams in the luxury market mainly focus on customization of products (Moreau et. al., 2020; Choi et. al., 2022; Borstrock, 2018), however, none of them examined MTO. It is important to note the differences between MTO and customization. Customization only allows consumers to modify certain aspects of a product (e.g., colors, materials, adding personal monograms) whereas MTO allows for a truly personalized experience, creating garments that fit the consumer's measurements and style preferences precisely. Thus, this proposed research will examine the impact of MTO on consumer's attitudes and eventual purchase intention.

Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Model. This study will draw on two theoretical frameworks: Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) and Signaling Theory. Oliver (1981) introduced the expectancy disconfirmation model, which explains that customer satisfaction results from comparing prior expectations to actual experiences, in this case the make to order service offered by a luxury retailer. Satisfaction is shaped by the degree and direction of this comparison, known as subjective disconfirmation, which can lead to positive, negative, or neutral outcomes. EDT has been widely applied in studies of consumer behavior in the luxury hospitality settings (i.e., Oh, 1999; Abrate et al., 2021), making it a suitable framework for this research. Additionally, EDT is relevant here as it highlights how MTO businesses can better understand and manage customer satisfaction by aligning or exceeding customer expectations.

Signaling theory is applied across disciplines to explore how decisions are made when one party (i.e. the luxury brand) has more information than the other (Spence, 1973). The way a sender delivers a signal significantly influences how the receiver understands and reacts to it (Connelly et al., 2011). This theory is relevant to the proposed study as it helps identify credible signs of quality, reliability, and capability, which can reduce customer uncertainty within the MTO business model. This theory has been effectively applied to the luxury clothing context (Yu et al., 2021) and hence is appropriate for the current study. The research model is presented below. All variables used in this study are drawn from well-established literature, including disconfirmation (Oliver, 1980), attitude (MacKenzie & Spreng, 1992), and purchase intention (Ajzen, 1991), among others.

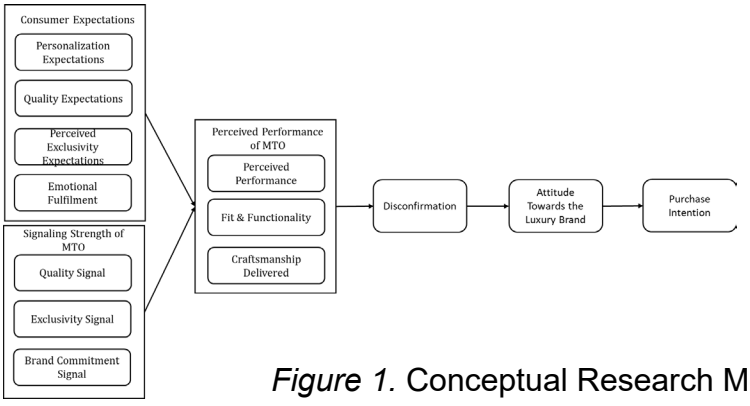

Figure 1. Conceptual Research Model

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Methodology. Data will be collected through an online survey incorporating established and validated measurement scales. Participants will be recruited via a survey panel provider, such as Centiment. To ensure the relevance of the sample, respondents will be screened based on self-reported luxury spending. Specifically, participants must have spent a minimum of US$500 on luxury items within the past six months. This threshold aligns with industry benchmarks for entry-level luxury goods, which report an average online order value of approximately US$304.27 for luxury apparel (Chevalier, 2024). It is important to note that MTO luxury items typically involve higher price points; thus, a higher spending threshold is appropriate for this study. The data will be analyzed using SPSS and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Implications of this Proposed Study. This study is one of the first to explore the impact of MTO on consumer purchase intentions in the luxury industry. Furthermore, this is the first study that will utilize Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory and Signaling Theory, to assess how well MTO meets luxury consumers' expectations. The findings will contribute to research on personalization in luxury marketing and offer a basis for future studies on consumer attitudes and brand perception. Additionally, the results are expected to offer practical insights for luxury brands by illustrating how MTO shapes consumer attitudes and purchase intentions.

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