

SOCIAL MEDIA WORD OF MOUTH AND MASSTIGE PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract

Many individuals enjoy sharing their stories and experiences through social media, which exemplifies social media word-of-mouth (social media WOM). This study examines the role of social media WOM in driving masstige purchase behaviour. This study involves perceptual distance, luxury perception, purchase intention and gender in such an investigation. Masstige refers to providing prestige to the masses, indicating luxury products for a broad audience. A survey of 246 consumers is conducted and structural equation modelling is employed to analyse the data. We find that social media WOM positively influences perceptual distance, luxury perception and purchase intention. Perceptual distance negatively influences purchase intention, while luxury perception positively influences such intention. Purchase intention positively influences purchase behaviour. This study does not find support that gender moderates the relationship between perceptual distance and purchase intention, as well as between luxury perception and purchase intention. The findings suggest that marketers need to identify social media platforms that match the luxury perception of their target audience and present exclusive content to encourage purchase intention and, further, masstige purchases. Masstige purchase behaviour is vital for collectivist countries because it can increase their consumers' social status and prestige.

Implications for Central European audience: Cultural and social homogeneity among Asian people brings the popularity of masstige brands from Western countries (Paul, 2015), especially Central European brands to capitalise on the capabilities they have created (Alić et al., 2022). The findings of this study are crucial as Indonesia and the Visegrád Group (V4) of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have strong business relationships (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019).

Keywords: Social status; masstige marketing; luxury product; consumer behaviour; consumer recommendation

JEL Classification: M3, M31

Introduction

Indonesia is a promising market for Central Europe to consider. An estimated 1,100 European companies are operating in Indonesia, keeping the European Union (EU) as the top non-Asian investor in that country (European External Action Service, 2021). The total export of the EU to Indonesia reached USD 12.31 billion in 2023 (European Commission, 2024). In particular, exports to Indonesia in 2023 from the Czech Republic were USD 188.08 million (Trading Economics, 2024a) and those from Poland were USD 135.75 million (Trading Economics, 2024b). The EU estimates that Indonesia will be the world's fifth-largest economy by 2030 and a high-income country by 2045, and a greater understanding of Indonesian consumers is therefore essential (European External Action Service, 2021).

It is essential to investigate *masstige* products within the Indonesian context. *Masstige* refers to prestige for the masses, and thus, *masstige* products are in the middle between traditional luxury and ordinary products (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). *Masstige* products are consumed primarily by the middle class (Kumar et al., 2021; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). Currently, 45% of the Indonesian population falls into the middle-class category (World Bank, 2022) and this class has become the backbone of the Indonesian economy (Swasono, 2023). Given the high per capita expenditure of the Indonesian people (Rizaty, 2022) and the increasing need for social status (Putri & Burhanudin, 2023), studies on the marketing of *masstige* products on emerging markets are highly recommended (Kumar et al., 2021).

Products that bring prestige are a widespread phenomenon in social media. Social media encompasses online platforms facilitating user interaction, including creating and disseminating information, content and ideas (Creevey et al., 2022). With the prevalence of free social media, people have embraced it as a platform for exchanging stories, a phenomenon known as social media word-of-mouth (social media WOM) (Salem & Alanadoly, 2021). A survey shows that 88% of Southeast Asian consumers place the highest level of trust in word-of-mouth recommendations from acquaintances (Nielsen, 2015). The spread of *masstige* products in social media can provide luxury (Park et al., 2021) and exclusivity for the masses (Bilro et al., 2022). *Masstige* has become a unique buzzword in the industry and helps advance our understanding of *masstige* buying behaviour (Paul, 2019).

The massive use of social media demands understanding the formation of perceptions. Perception, an essential aspect, pertains to consumers' opinions, emotions and beliefs regarding a brand or product (Huong et al., 2022). The first aspect of perception is perceptual distance, which denotes the variance in perceiving something (Gibson et al., 2009). Perceptual distance can influence how consumers perceive and evaluate products or services. Another aspect of perception is luxury perception, characterised by a contextual interpretation of life experiences distinct from the inherent attributes of the offering itself (Creevey et al., 2022). Luxury perception holds significance for consumers as it offers intangible benefits, including status, exclusivity and hedonic rewards, contributing to enhanced self-esteem and recognition from others (MacGregor Pelikánová & MacGregor, 2020; Mahakunajirakul, 2022). Marketers can find out how customers feel about their products and how well they compare favourably against competitors. The relationship between social media WOM, perceptual distance and luxury perception requires further exploration (Creevey et al., 2022).

Encouraging purchase intention among consumers is essential for a marketing programme. Purchase intention indicates consumers' likelihood of purchasing a particular product (Mustafi & Hosain, 2020). Marketing activities that create perceptions, such as perceptions of quality, social, personal and functional value, are intended to create purchase intention (Park et al., 2021). Perceptions can be the basis for consumers' purchase intention because they will shape their motivation towards a product. Consumers' perceptions of the value they will receive from a product can also shape their intention to buy it. The link between perceptual distance, luxury perception and purchase intention should be explored (Park et al., 2021).

The widespread use of masstige products in society demands understanding the formation of purchase behaviour. Masstige purchase behaviour is the primary behaviour of the middle class (Singh & Wagner, 2023). Based on desires, aspirations and purchasing power, the growing middle-class segment has changed how people behave (Rosendo-Rios & Shukla, 2023). Masstige purchase behaviour is vital for collectivist countries because it can increase their social status and prestige (Pillai & Nair, 2021). Purchase behaviour is personal behaviour that can be manipulated through information and emotional processes (Ghahtarani et al., 2020). It is crucial to understand consumers' purchase behaviour because of their complex purchasing decisions. Companies can use middle-class purchase behaviour to tailor marketing strategies that suit consumers' needs and preferences.

This study examines the role of social media WOM in driving masstige purchase behaviour. This study involves perceptual distance, luxury perception, purchase intention and gender in such an investigation. Social media WOM is included as consumers may rely on social media product reviews before making purchase decisions (Abdullah et al., 2022; Tsai & Bui, 2021). Perceptual distance and luxury perception are included as the first relates to evaluating products or services (Togawa & Sugitani, 2022) and the second relates to self-esteem, status and reputation (Park et al., 2021). Purchase intention and purchase behaviour are included as the former measures a readily executable decision and the latter measures the executed decision (Ho et al., 2022). Gender is included to address the possible differentiating factor in consumer decision-making (Canguende-Valentim & Vale, 2023; Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2013).

This study holds both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it is critical because it advances our understanding of masstige purchase behaviour. Previous studies on masstige products have focused mainly on purchase intention (Burhanudin, 2024; Purohit & Radia, 2022). Practically, this study helps managers market masstige products in connection with the popularity of social media and respond quickly to changes in perceptions (Park et al., 2021) and issues that arise in social media to encourage purchase behaviour (Abdullah et al., 2022).

1 Literature Review

This section begins with a review of the literature on the variables under investigation. Each variable is defined and the related studies are reviewed. The study then conducts a literature review on the relationship between the variables under investigation and proposes hypotheses.

1.1 Social media WOM

It is crucial to investigate social media WOM within the masstige context. Consumers utilise masstige brands to impress others (Moorlock et al., 2023) and to communicate brand meaning to their peers (Wang & Qiao, 2020). Social media WOM refers to informal communication between a sender and a recipient through social media concerning a brand, product, organisation or service driven by non-commercial motives (Tsai & Bui, 2021). An important issue overlooked in marketing literature is that the theory on masstige currently needs to be more comprehensive (Kumar et al., 2020). In particular, Moorlock et al. (2023) suggested investigating social media within a masstige context to refine, develop and synthesize a robust theoretical framework.

Within the masstige context, previous studies have shown that social media and WOM were investigated separately. With regard to social media, masstige was examined related to volatile social reality (Moorlock et al., 2023), sentiments and attitudes towards the brand (Bilro et al., 2022) and the relationship between a typical user's image and brand preference (Kolańska-Stronka & Krasa, 2023). With regard to WOM, masstige was examined related to word of mouth as the outcome of brand love, co-creation and the need for uniqueness (Rodrigues et al., 2024) and as a critical determinant of customer retention and a prevailing source for attracting customers (Lim et al., 2022). To integrate, we used social media WOM.

1.2 Perceptual distance

It is essential to investigate perceptual distance to advance our understanding of masstige purchase behaviour. Perceptual distance refers to the perceived difficulty of obtaining a desirable product which brings pleasure but is relatively expensive (Hansen & Wänke, 2011; Togawa & Sugitani, 2022). Consumers perceive that brands help manage the image they want to maintain, but the high price of branded goods causes these consumers to compromise (Chatterjee et al., 2023). Perceptual distance within the masstige context helps understand how consumers tackle difficulties managing their image (Chatterjee et al., 2023; Togawa & Sugitani, 2022).

The body of knowledge on perceptual distance within the masstige context is scarce. Studies on perceptual distance within the masstige context are limited to Togawa & Sugitani (2022), who found that perceptual distance makes consumers more sensitive to product values symbolising exclusivity. In other words, the more difficulty the consumer perceives in obtaining the products, the higher the exclusivity of the products. Because capitalising on consumer perceptions of prestige is crucial within the masstige context, it is crucial to investigate perceptual distance, in particular, the determinants and the consequences of such distance within the masstige context (Togawa & Sugitani, 2022).

1.3 Luxury perception

Mass luxury is a new lifestyle that the general public prefers. Luxury is no longer for the affluent classes alone, but rather its audience has expanded to mass segments due to the accelerated aspiration of living a superior life, as well as the availability of luxury items to the majority (Wang et al., 2022). The consumer-perceived luxury as the individual aspect, termed "luxury for oneself", encompasses self-identity values, particularly hedonic benefits (Amatulli et al., 2020). Therefore, the perception of luxury encourages consumers to feel different

individual emotions towards masstige brands (Kowalczyk & Mitchell, 2022) and creates a new lifestyle among a large number of consumers (Wang et al., 2022). This new lifestyle reflects a new personal and unique interpretation of luxury (Thomsen et al., 2020). Luxury perception is defined as consumers' judgment that a product represents social segregation and exclusion (Togawa & Sugitani, 2022).

Luxury perception in the context of masstige products is largely unexplored. The value of luxury perception in recent research has focused on luxury goods rather than mass prestige ones (Kowalczyk & Mitchell, 2022; Loranger & Roeraas, 2023). The perception of luxury in other contexts has been studied and relates to luxury value perceptions across different generations in China (Jiang & Shan, 2018) as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina (Alić et al., 2022). Additionally, luxury perception has also been investigated to examine the interactive effects of envy and pride on luxury perceptions and brand attitudes (Sung & Phau, 2019). These studies highlight the lack of exploration of luxury perception in the context of masstige products.

1.4 Purchase intention

Many consumers consider various factors before deciding to buy a masstige product. Important characteristics considered by consumers include price, product interactions and seasonal effects, among others (Doniec et al., 2020), as well as consumer emotions, status and pride (Chatterjee et al., 2023). An increase in purchase intention indicates an increase in potential purchase opportunities (Mustafi & Hosain, 2020). Purchase intention refers to consumers' behavioural inclination towards purchasing (Ho et al., 2022). Marketers of masstige products must encourage consumers to convert purchase intention into actual purchase decisions.

Purchase intention has been extensively studied in prior research. Research has examined purchase intention on the relationship between normative influence and masstige purchase intention (Gupta et al., 2023). Purchase intention has also been used to investigate masstige marketing (Chatterjee et al., 2023). Research has explored the use of purchase intention in the context of masstige products in India (Purohit & Radia, 2022) and Indonesia (Burhanudin, 2024). However, purchase intention within the Indonesian context is limited to services (Burhanudin, 2024). The present study addresses masstige relating to goods.

1.5 Purchase behaviour

Masstige purchase behaviour has changed how consumers behave. Consumers tend to pursue the mass prestige market (Park et al., 2022) compared to the luxury brand market (Ishaq et al., 2023). Purohit and Radia (2022) stated that consumers' purchase behaviour towards products varies over time. Purchase behaviour is defined as consumers' power to decide to buy products and services available on the market (Ishak et al., 2020). The frequency of consumer purchases can indicate the success of purchase behaviour (Peña-García et al., 2020).

Purchase behaviour has received attention in previous studies. They include studies related to marketing luxury services in India (Lim et al., 2022) and to purchase behaviour in an online context using a cross-cultural approach in Colombia and Spain (Peña-García et al., 2020).

Research has explored the use of purchase behaviour in the context of masstige consumption values and its effect on consumer behaviour in South Korea (Park et al., 2022). However, an investigation on masstige purchase behaviour within the Indonesian context has not been the focus of previous studies, despite consumers in that country showing a high willingness to purchase masstige products (Burhanudin, 2024).

1.6 Social media WOM and perceptual distance

Investigating the influence of social media WOM on perceptual distance is crucial. Reynaldy et al. (2023) stated that marketing communications, consumer experiences and social consequences play an essential role in how consumers perceive a brand. Strong relationships between consumers and WOM providers can lead to consumer perceptions, attitudes and behaviour (Yang, 2022). However, previous research has only examined the relationship between social media and consumers' psychological distance (Creevey et al., 2022; Park et al., 2020), not perceptual distance itself and not in the context of masstige. Consumers' perceptions of the product may suffer if perceptual distance is not maintained and brands are seen as too approachable. Therefore, it is critical to address this problem (Creevey et al., 2022).

We argue that social media WOM positively influences perceptual distance. Previous studies have shown that social media marketing and online word-of-mouth can create a gap in consumers' perceptions if it affects their emotions (Reynaldy et al., 2023; Samosir et al., 2023). When consumers talk about a brand frequently in social media, it suggests a luxury that can create a distance for consumers to own (Youn & Cho, 2022). In particular, perceptual distance can influence consumer perceptions of luxury brands in social media (Park et al., 2020). Thus, the experiences and opinions that consumers express through social media can boost individual perceptions of a brand (Reynaldy et al., 2023). Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: Social media WOM has a positive influence on perceptual distance.

1.7 Social media WOM and luxury perception

It is crucial to investigate the relationship between social media WOM and luxury perception. Social media WOM shapes consumer decision-making processes, such as how consumers perceive the luxury of a product (Park et al., 2020). However, investigation into that relationship has not been the focus of the previous studies on either social media WOM (Feng et al., 2021; Salem & Alanadoly, 2021; Tsai & Bui, 2021) or luxury perception (Alić et al., 2022; Jiang & Shan, 2018; Sung & Phau, 2019). Addressing this issue is essential because social media marketing largely relies on consumer communication (Park et al., 2020). Thus, luxury brand companies can easily convey their desired image and perception to consumers worldwide (Togawa & Sugitani, 2022).

We argue that social media WOM leads to luxury perception. An inherent and important goal of luxury branding is to establish, maintain and leverage luxury perception (Sung & Phau, 2019). Unmistakably, social media has become an indispensable platform for such perceptions (Feng et al., 2021). The increasing use of social media has led to the growth of consumer perceptions of luxury brands (Wong, 2023). Social media WOM regarding luxury consumption can easily trigger envy in others (Feng et al., 2021) and make them feel the

exclusivity of what is shared in social media. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H2: Social media WOM has a positive influence on luxury perception.

1.8 Social media WOM and purchase intention

Gaining a deeper understanding of the impact of social media WOM on purchase intention is crucial. Social media WOM gives consumers the opportunity to benefit from the experiences of others for their purchasing decisions (Moran et al., 2014; Pavlović-Höck, 2022). Nevertheless, the impact of social media WOM and purchase intention remains unclear (Park et al., 2021; Tsai & Bui, 2021), particularly within the masstige context (Christodoulides & Wiedmann, 2022). Previous research examines information in WOM, not social media WOM directly (Indrawati et al., 2023; Leong et al., 2022). Addressing this issue is essential because the increasing number of consumers sharing their thoughts in social media gives WOM the ability to influence consumer purchase intention.

We posit that social media WOM positively influences purchase intention. According to Park et al. (2021), social media WOM, such as positive brand messages and discussions on social media platforms, can affect purchase intention. Furthermore, consumers who adopt WOM information are more likely to have purchase intention (Indrawati et al., 2023; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). In particular, consumers' involvement in creating and sharing information with other social media users has become important in influencing purchase intention (Park et al., 2021). In addition, WOM communication in social media can strongly affect purchase intention (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H3: Social media WOM has a positive influence on purchase intention.

1.9 Perceptual distance and purchase intention

It is important for marketers to investigate the effect of perceptual distance on purchase intention. Perceptual distance plays an important role in perceiving the luxury of a product (Togawa & Sugitani, 2022). Decreasing the perceptual distance to a product will reduce the perception of exclusivity and make consumers unwilling to buy the product (Togawa & Sugitani, 2022). However, the effect of perceptual distance on purchase intention in the context of masstige products has not been the focus of previous studies (Burhanudin, 2024; Togawa & Sugitani, 2022). Addressing this issue is very important because consumers' purchase intention is highly dependent on the extent of consumer distance in perceiving a product (Yang, 2022).

We argue that perceptual distance has a negative influence on purchase intention. Purchase intention arises because of the distance that consumers feel towards the product (Togawa & Sugitani, 2022), where consumers use information from outsiders to evaluate (Reynaldy et al., 2023). Moreover, before predicting the extent of purchase intention, it is necessary to consider consumers' judgments between them and the product (Peña-García et al., 2020). In other words, preferences that consumers gain will, in turn, influence their decision to buy. In addition, perceptual distance drives purchase intention (Mustafi & Hosain, 2020). Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H4: Perceptual distance has a negative influence on purchase intention.

1.10 Luxury perception and purchase intention

It is essential to investigate the effect of luxury perception on purchase intention. Consumers purchase luxury goods for their inherent symbolic, experiential and functional reasons (Shukla et al., 2022). Due to prestige being made for a large number of consumers in the masstige context, it is crucial to examine the strength of luxury perception in driving purchase intention (Lee & Cho, 2023). However, previous research has focused on the context of fashion brand collaboration rather than the smartphone industry (Lee & Cho, 2023). Addressing this issue is very important because most of the reasons why consumers develop the intention to buy an item is to present their image in the public eye (Khan et al., 2022).

We argue that luxury perception has a positive influence on purchase intention. Luxury perception is an important factor in shaping consumer decision-making (Park et al., 2021). Enhancing consumers' luxury perception can drive their purchase intention (Togawa & Sugitani, 2022), especially in relation to masstige brands (Lee & Cho, 2023). Thus, luxury perception brings conspicuousness, uniqueness, quality, hedonism and extended self-value to consumers (Jiang & Shan, 2018; Vijaranakorn & Shannon, 2017). Furthermore, luxury perception can create a positive association with the luxury brand, leading to a higher likelihood of purchase (Jain, 2019). Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H5: Luxury perception has a positive influence on purchase intention.

1.11 Purchase intention and purchase behaviour

It is essential to investigate the effect of purchase intention on purchase behaviour. Zhong et al. (2020) stated that purchase intention is part of the consumer decision-making process. The stronger an intention to engage in a particular behaviour, the more likely a person will perform the decision (Huang & Ge, 2019). However, investigating the purchase intention-behaviour relationship in a masstige context has not been the focus of previous research (Huang & Ge, 2019; Ishak et al., 2020; Peña-García et al., 2020; Zhong et al., 2020). Addressing this issue is essential because purchase intention plays an important role in shaping consumer purchase behaviour (Ishak et al., 2020).

We argue that purchase intention has a positive influence on purchase behaviour. Peña-García et al. (2020) stated that purchase intention can measure the extent to which consumers are willing to perform certain behaviour. Consumer intention is an important indicator that can lead to actual consumer purchases (Huang & Ge, 2019; Peña-García et al., 2020). According to Purohit and Radia (2022), consumer purchasing behaviour evolves. Thus, investigating the effect of purchase intention on purchase behaviour helps explain the process. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H6: Purchase intention has a positive influence on purchase behaviour.

1.12 Moderating effect of gender on the relationship between perceptual distance and purchase intention

Gender may moderate the relationship between perceptual distance and purchase intention. Gender roles are still pervasive in society and can determine consumer responses to luxury brands, including perception and purchase intention (Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2013).

However, the moderating effect of gender can also be insignificant in the relationship between perceptual distance and purchase intention (Morris et al., 2005; Shinnar et al., 2012). Moreover, previous research that discusses the role of gender as a moderating variable in the relationship between perceptual distance and purchase intention is lacking (Togawa & Sugitani, 2022). Thus, we address this issue.

We argue that gender moderates the relationship between luxury perception and purchase intention. The different life orientations of males and females affect their perceptions and decision-making processes (Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2013). In particular, female consumers tend to have a far perceptual distance towards luxury brands (Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2013). In other words, the relationship between perceptual distance and purchase intention is stronger among females than males. Thus, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H7: Gender moderates the relationship between perceptual distance and purchase intention.

1.13 Moderating effect of gender on the relationship between luxury perception and purchase intention

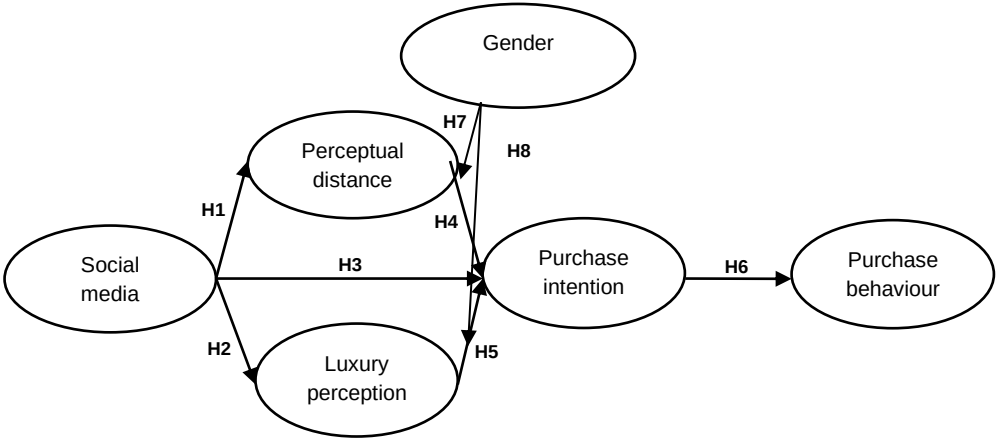
Gender can play an important role in advancing our understanding on consumer decision-making. Gender is often identified as a variable representing different consumption styles and personal goals (Wiedmann et al., 2009). However, gender needs further investigation as the most relevant and important differentiating factor in marketing research (Morris et al., 2005; Shinnar et al., 2012). Previous research has included gender in investigating the value of luxury products but not the perception of luxury itself (Canguende-Valentim & Vale, 2023; Park et al., 2021).

We argue that gender moderates the relationship between luxury perception and purchase intention. Rialti et al. (2017) stated that there are differences between males and females in terms of the selection of information needed to make decisions. In particular, females show greater levels of excitement and impulsivity when making purchases compared to males. In other words, the relationship between luxury perception and purchase intention is higher among females than males. Previous research has examined this moderating relationship, but not in the context of *masstige* (Canguende-Valentim & Vale, 2023; Park et al., 2021), whereas marketers require this information as a key input to create specific consumer segments (Rialti et al., 2017). Thus, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H8: Gender moderates the relationship between luxury perception and purchase intention.

Based on the above hypotheses, the proposed research model is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1 | Proposed conceptual framework



Source: Authors

2 Methodology

2.1 Participants

The participants of this study were iPhone buyers. To ascertain that the iPhone is a masstige brand, we conducted a masstige brand survey as recommended by Paul (2015). In this regard, we used ten items of the Masstige Mean Score (MMS) (Paul, 2015), with the sample item “I like the iPhone because of the mass prestige associated with it”. A survey of 122 Indonesian consumers revealed that the MMS is 51.38, indicating that the iPhone is a masstige brand (Paul, 2015). According to Paul (2015), an MMS between 10 and 30 signifies an inadequate effort to establish mass prestige on the markets; between 40 and 50 signifies a potential short-term failure to do so but success in the long run; between 50 and 60 signifies achievement in the realm of mass prestige establishment on the markets; and above 60 signifies success in maintaining a prominent position in the minds of consumers about mass prestige establishment.

We were not able to obtain a list of iPhone buyers; therefore, we employed a non-probability sampling. In particular, we employed a purposive sampling technique. While this sampling technique has been used in the qualitative study of luxury products (Quach & Thaichon, 2017), it has been recommended in the quantitative study of masstige products (Das et al., 2022). According to Das et al. (2022), using the purposing sampling technique allows the study of masstige to fit the sample with the aim of the study. Because masstige brands are the territory of the middle class (Kumar et al., 2021), we approached Indonesian middle-income consumers, defined as those with daily expenditure between US\$7.75-38 per person per day (World Bank, 2020) and ever having purchased an iPhone.

2.2 Instruments

We used several items to measure the investigated variables. Social media WOM was measured using three items from Park et al. (2021). Perceptual distance was measured using one item and luxury perception was measured using three items; both were taken from Togawa and Sugitani (2022). Purchase intention was measured using two items from Park et al. (2021). Purchase behaviour was measured using one item, as suggested by Petrescu (2013). We used a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 for totally disagree and 7 for totally agree (social media WOM, luxury perception and purchase intention) and from 1 for far and 7 for close (perceptual distance). A seven-point Likert scale was used as it optimally captures respondents' opinions (Preston & Colman, 2000). In measuring purchase behaviour, we asked respondents to report the number of iPhone purchases they had made. The items measuring the variables are shown in the Appendix.

2.3 Procedure

We approached the Indonesian participants in person in several public places in Surabaya, Indonesia, such as coffee shops. Other potential participants were asked to complete the questionnaire online, allowing them to fill it in at their convenience. For this reason, we also approached the potential participants through social media and instant messaging services. Those who agreed to participate in the study then received a questionnaire to complete. To reduce common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), the questionnaire started with information that participation in the study is voluntary and that they can stop completing it at any stage. The questionnaire also informed the respondents that the study would record their responses anonymously (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Among 300 questionnaires distributed, 246 were returned and feasible for further analysis. Thus, the response rate was 82%, which is above the minimum of 60% (Fincham, 2008).

3 Results

3.1 Descriptive analysis

The respondents have some characteristics. Regarding gender, females (54.5%) outnumber males (45.5%). Regarding age, the majority of respondents (34.1 per cent) are between the ages of 21 and 25, followed by the following groups: 16-20 years (22.4%), 26-30 years (13%), 31-35 years (11.4%), over 35 years (9.8%) and 10-15 years (9.3%). Regarding education, the majority of the respondents (56.1%) are pursuing a bachelor programme, followed by a master programme (17.1%), an associate programme (10.2%), senior high school (13.4%) and finally, a doctoral programme (3.3%). Regarding purchased iPhones, the majority of respondents have purchased one iPhone (28%), followed by two iPhones (26.8%), three iPhones (24.4%), four iPhones (12.2%), five iPhones (6.5%), six iPhones (1.6%) and finally seven iPhones (0.4%). Among the iPhone models purchased by the participants were the iPhone XS Max, iPhone XR and iPhone 14 Promax.

3.2 Measurement model evaluation

We evaluated the measurement model in four steps. Firstly, factor loadings should be 0.708 or above to indicate item reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Following this criterion, an item (LP2, see Appendix) was removed. Table 1 shows that all the factor loadings exhibit item reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Secondly, the average variance extracted (AVE) values should be 0.50 or higher to indicate convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). Table 1 shows that all the AVE values exhibit convergent validity for all the constructs. Thirdly, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability should be 0.7 or higher to indicate satisfactory internal consistency and reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Table 1 shows that Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability exhibit satisfactory reliability.

Table 1 | Convergent validity and reliability

Construct	Code	Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
Social media WOM (SMW)	SW1	0.833	0.727	0.846	0.646
	SW2	0.782			
	SW3	0.796			
Perceptual distance (PD)	PD1	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Luxury perception (LP)	LP1	0.809	0.711	0.839	0.634
	LP3	0.750			
	LP4	0.828			
Purchase intention (PI)	PI1	0.849	0.705	0.870	0.770
	PI2	0.906			
Purchase behaviour (PB)	PB1	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000

Source: Authors

Fourthly, discriminant validity was evaluated. Discriminant validity assessment measures the degree to which a construct is empirically distinct from other constructs in the structural model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This assessment should demonstrate that the square root of each average variance extracted (AVE) is greater than the correlation between the variable and other variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 2 shows that the values meet the criteria and thus exhibit discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2 | Discriminant validity

Construct	1	2	3	4	5
1 Luxury perception	0.796				
2 Perceptual distance	0.235	1.000			
3 Purchase behaviour	0.158	0.176	1.000		
4 Purchase intention	0.556	0.089	0.133	0.878	
5 Social media WOM	0.573	0.336	0.285	0.565	0.804

Note: The bold diagonal shows the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE).

Source: Authors

The next step involves evaluating the structural model to test the hypotheses. The results of the structural model evaluation are depicted in Figure 2 and are presented in Table 3. The

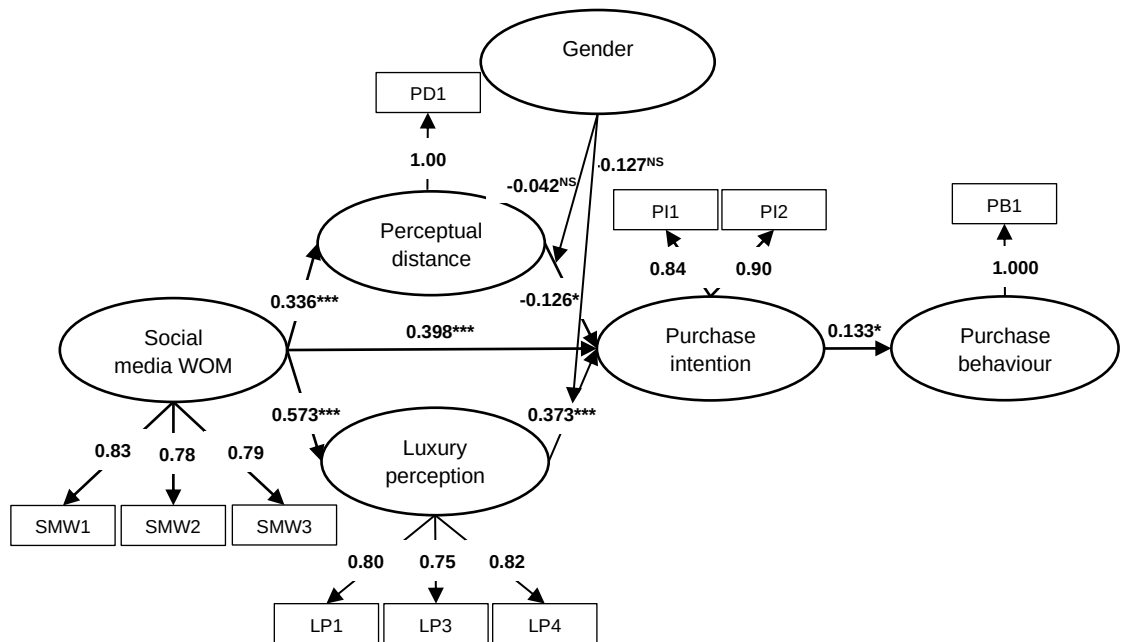
results show that two out of eight hypotheses are not supported. Social media WOM affects perceptual distance (0.336, $p \leq 0.001$), luxury perception (0.573, $p \leq 0.001$) and purchase intention (0.398, $p \leq 0.001$); thus, H1, H2 and H3 are supported. Perceptual distance (-0.126, $p \leq 0.05$) and luxury perception (0.373, $p \leq 0.001$) affect purchase intention; thus, H4 and H5 are supported. Purchase intention affects purchase behaviour (0.133, $p \leq 0.05$); thus, H6 is supported. Gender does not moderate the relationship between luxury perception and purchase intention (-0.042, $p > 0.05$) as well as between perceptual distance and purchase intention (-0.127, $p > 0.05$); thus, H7 and H8 are not supported.

Table 3 | Hypothesis test results

	Hypothesis	Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Conclusion
H1	Social media WOM → Perceptual distance	0.336	4.630	0.000	Supported
H2	Social media WOM → Luxury perception	0.573	8.487	0.000	Supported
H3	Social media WOM → Purchase intention	0.398	4.317	0.000	Supported
H4	Perceptual distance → Purchase intention	-0.126	1.964	0.050	Supported
H5	Luxury perception → Purchase intention	0.373	4.737	0.000	Supported
H6	Purchase intention → Purchase behaviour	0.133	2.206	0.027	Supported
H7	Moderating effect 1 → Purchase intention	-0.042	0.736	0.462	Not supported
H8	Moderating effect 2 → Purchase intention	-0.127	1.590	0.112	Not supported

Source: Authors

Figure 2 | Structural model evaluation results



Note: *** means significant at $p \leq 0.001$; * means significant at $p \leq 0.05$; NS means not significant at $p > 0.05$.

Source: Authors

4 Discussion and Conclusion

Social media WOM can create perceptual distance. The rise of consumers using social media is inseparable from creating their perceptions (Wong, 2024). However, research into perceptual distance is still unclear because previous research is limited to examining the relationship between social media and perceptual distance (Creevey et al., 2022; Park et al., 2020), not social media WOM and perceptual distance (Togawa & Sugitani, 2022). Thus, the findings of this study are critical in advancing the marketing literature related to masstige goods (Kumar et al., 2020). The explanation behind this relationship is that something which is communicated in social media tends to be luxury (Bao et al., 2024; Leban et al., 2020) and, thus, drives the perception that the product is hard to obtain (Hansen & Wänke, 2011; Togawa & Sugitani, 2022).

Social media WOM can evoke a luxury perception among consumers. While social media WOM can raise a luxury perception, the examination of these variables is still studied separately for social media WOM (Feng et al., 2021; Salem & Alanadoly, 2021; Tsai & Bui, 2021) and luxury perception (Alić et al., 2022; Jiang & Shan, 2018; Sung & Phau, 2019). Thus, our findings are critical in advancing the literature on the masstige context in the smartphone industry. The explanation behind the finding is that the experiences shared by consumers in social media evoke a meaningful sense of prestige (Alić et al., 2022; Feng et al., 2021).

Social media WOM can drive consumer purchase intention. Nevertheless, studies on the massive use of social media and its relationship with purchase intention are limited (Park et al., 2021; Tsai & Bui, 2021). Previous research has only discussed information on word of mouth, not the broader social media WOM (Indrawati et al., 2023; Leong et al., 2022). Thus, the findings of this study are crucial in advancing the literature on the masstige context (Burhanudin, 2024). The explanation behind this relationship is that products largely communicated in social media tend to be perceived as essential in a social context, thus evoking the intention to buy the product (Park et al., 2021; Tsai & Bui, 2021).

Perceptual distance can lead to purchase intention. Consumers who are distant from the product will feel more likely to own the product (Peña-García et al., 2020; Yang, 2022). However, previous studies that examined this relationship only focused on the zoom effect of product videos, which is not specific to the masstige context (Togawa & Sugitani, 2022). Moreover, if marketers cannot control the consumers' perceived distance from the product, it will cause the product to fail on the market (Peña-García et al., 2020). The explanation behind the relationship is that being distant from a product suggests that consumers have an interest in the product but it is difficult to obtain, and thus, they expect to be able to purchase it in the future (Peña-García et al., 2020; Yang, 2022).

Luxury perception enhances purchase intention. For most people, the essence of a luxury purchase is a special treat that is out of the ordinary (Hansen & Wänke, 2011). However, previous studies that examined this relationship were limited to the context of fashion brand collaborators (Lee & Cho, 2023). Thus, this study adds to the marketing literature in the smartphone industry (Lee & Cho, 2023). The explanation behind this relationship is that the luxury valuation of a product makes the product always desirable (Khan et al., 2022).

Purchase intention boosts purchase behaviour. Consumers' positive desires and intentions lead them to take concrete steps to realise these desires (Huang & Ge, 2019). Nevertheless, the investigation between these two relationships in previous studies is limited to electric vehicle development (Huang & Ge, 2019), halal cosmetics (Ishak et al., 2020), e-commerce (Peña-García et al., 2020) and robot hotel service (Zhong et al., 2020), but not in the context of masstige (Burhanudin, 2024). Thus, this research can be a crucial aspect in the future, especially for marketers of masstige products (Burhanudin, 2024; Purohit & Radia, 2022). The explanation behind this relationship is that a strong intention to engage in a transaction can edge to actual consumer purchases (Peña-García et al., 2020; Zhong et al., 2020).

The moderating effect of gender on the relationship between perceptual distance and purchase intention is not significant. A possible explanation is that gender roles in consumer decision-making are still vague (Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2013). Since the previous study within the masstige context examining this relationship did not include gender as a moderator (Togawa & Sugitani, 2022), the finding of this study contributes to the marketing literature on the insignificant role of gender in that relationship (Yang, 2022). In addition, the explanation behind this relationship is that male and female opinions are considered equal and not dominant in making decisions in the masstige context in particular (Morris et al., 2005; Shinnar et al., 2012).

The moderating effect of gender on the relationship between luxury perception and purchase intention is also not significant. Our finding important for the marketing literature is that not all moderating effects of gender can be generalised to other contexts, such as masstige (Morris et al., 2005; Shinnar et al., 2012). The explanation behind this relationship is that male and female opinions are valued equally, especially in the same country, because they have the same stress level and rule orientation (Shinnar et al., 2012).

4.1 Limitations

We acknowledge limitations. Firstly, we employed a type of non-probability sampling (i.e., purposive sampling). Although nonprobability sampling can “efficiently estimate the characteristics of a large population based on measurements of a small subset of the population” (Cornesse et al., 2020, p. 7), caution should be applied in generalising the findings of the present study. Secondly, we employed a non-experimental approach in examining the relationships between the investigated variables. While the non-experimental approach can explain causation, the experimental approach allows researchers to observe changes in the dependent variables due to changes in the independent variables (Antonakis et al., 2010). Therefore, this study demands careful interpretation of the relationships among the variables.

Thirdly, we investigated the variables using a quantitative approach rather than a qualitative one in the Indonesian context. Cultural issues may arise in the study of masstige brands. A quantitative study of masstige brands can address cultural issues (Das et al., 2022) and a qualitative study can do so (Shahid et al., 2024). Furthermore, we focused on consumers in one city in Indonesia (i.e., Surabaya). With such limitations, there is a need for caution in interpreting the results due to cultural context. Fourthly, we used single-source data (i.e., participants’ self-reports). We did not explore the opinions of other people around the participants. For example, we did not explore whether certain types of iPhones that the participants perceive as bringing luxury work as intended in a social context. Therefore, this study has limitations in triangulation. Careful interpretation of the findings should be kept in mind in this regard.

4.2 Conclusion

Purchasing decisions occur at several stages. Consumers who share their experiences and perceptions of brands in social media are crucial in their purchase decision-making stages. Consumers are increasingly dependent on social media, so they rely on reviews and personal judgment from others before purchasing products. Social media can facilitate users’ dissemination of information on products that stick in their minds. Social media WOM can help companies assess how close or far consumers are from the product, which can also determine their luxury perception. These stages are important for influencing consumer purchasing decisions.

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Appendix | Research instruments

Construct	Code	Item
Social media WOM (SMW)	SMW1	I tend to post statuses/photos/comments about the iPhone I own on my social networks.
	SMW2	I would recommend iPhone to my friends and relatives.
	SMW3	If my friends are looking for a smartphone, I would tell them to try the iPhone that I have been using.
Perceptual distance (PD)	PD1	How far (or close) am I from (or to) the iPhone product?
Luxury perception (LP)	LP1	An iPhone shows luxury.
	LP2	An iPhone shows prestige.
	LP3	An iPhone is attractive.
	LP4	An iPhone shows high class.
Purchase intention (PI)	PI1	I have a high likelihood of buying an iPhone.
	PI2	I tend to buy an iPhone.
Purchase behaviour (PB)	PB1	How many iPhones have you purchased?

Source: Park et al. (2021), Togawa and Sugitani (2022),; Petrescu (2013)

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