

# Controversial fashion, ethical concerns and environmentally significant behaviour

## The case of the leather industry

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper to report on the role of luxury value perceptions and ethical concerns in consumers' environmentally significant behaviour and purchase intent for genuine leather products.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Non-probability sampling was done and 429 South African males and females, aged 26 years and older and who fell in a household income bracket that allowed them to purchase genuine leather products, completed a structured questionnaire during September 2016.

**Findings** – The study determined that South African consumers' strong functional and individual luxury value perceptions drive their above-average purchase intent for genuine leather products. Strong individual value perceptions correlated negatively with their purchase intent. Respondents' expressed strong ethical concerns but almost never participate in environmentally significant behaviour.

**Research limitations/implications** – Findings have implications for the leather industry and retailers and brands who would like to enter the South African luxury leather market. Due to the sampling method, findings can, however, not be generalised to the total population.

**Practical implications** – The leather industry and leather brands should market themselves with the message that the highest pro-environmental and ethical standards have been maintained and that their products should therefore fulfil important individual and functional value perceptions.

**Originality/value** – This study was the first of its kind about the multi-cultural South African leather market's luxury value perceptions, ethical concerns and environmentally significant behaviour.

### 1. Introduction

Worldwide the demand for genuine leather goods is increasing and is predicted to grow at a CAGR of almost 5 per cent in 2021, with bags and accessories the fastest growing category (Deloitte, 2017; Technavio, 2018). The personal leather goods market is segmented on the basis of product type which comprises leather luggage (travel bags, casual bags, etc.) and other leather goods (handbags, belts shoes, etc.). Among the leather goods segment, the handbag segment is anticipated to particularly grow significantly, due to factors such as the rise in the working women population and increasing purchasing power of many consumers. Revenue in the bags and accessories segment now amounts to US\$74,919m, while the number of users is expected to amount to 1,334.3m by 2022 (Statista Market Forecast, 2018).

In South Africa the textiles, clothing, footwear and leather market segment contributes more than 20 per cent to the total retail sales. South African clothing, textile, footwear and leather consumers are also moving towards more natural fibres while many companies are accelerating efforts to reduce the environmental impact of its products and processes (Trade Fact Sheet South Africa, 2016). South Africa is known for its high quality bovine leather, which is a by-product of meat production, but also for its exotic ostrich and crocodile leather which are the main production products and which mainly fall into the luxury goods market.

Genuine leather products provide several advantages such as quality, good craftsmanship and aesthetic appeal. It is expensive and in many cases much more expensive than products made of man-made textiles (Van Gorp et al., 2012). It is not only bought for its functional value (quality, durability, etc.), but also for social, personal and financial value (Kapferer and Michaut, 2015; Shukla et al., 2015).

Fashion consumers are also going through an "ethics era" and are becoming more aware of the ethical implications of the products they buy (Manchiraju and Sadachar, 2014; Pagiaslis and Krontalis, 2014), to the extent that "environmentally friendly" has become a new dimension of the quality of fashion products (Kianpour et al., 2014). Traditionally, luxury, fashion and sustainability were seen as completely different concepts, however, because of the development of sustainable practices and consumers' concerns, the distance between the concepts started to reduce (Kapferer and Michaut, 2015). Recently, the awareness of environmental- as well as social issues has increased significantly, and because of their high visibility and

commitment to quality, fashion products and particularly luxury brands are affected by any sustainability issue (Kapferer and Michaut, 2015). Many companies such as H&M, Levi's and Nike have already incorporated sustainable development into their business models. Stella McCartney is for example a staunch vegan and animal advocate and uses leather substitutes for her clothes and accessories, while the Kering fashion group has positioned itself as a leader in sustainability in the luxury sector. In the same line MATT and NAT, a Montreal-based accessories label, has started to use recycled materials to create their products (Li and Leonas, 2014; Rennick, 2017).

The leather industry has now become the focus of activists and campaigns for environmental-, animal welfare-, as well as human health risk issues (Han et al., 2017), aimed at influencing consumers' value perceptions and attitudes towards products and leading to specific environmentally significant consumer behaviour that has a negative impact on the specific industry. This is not only the case in developed countries, but also in emerging economies with multi-cultural consumer markets.

South Africa's diverse population and the growth of the middle-class consumers, especially the Black Diamonds (upcoming black middle class), make it one of the emerging markets for luxury as well as expensive fashion products. This market had a stable growth of 3 to 4 per cent in 2014, despite the weak local currency (Euromonitor, 2015). The markets for luxury products as well as expensive leather products are still highly dominated by international brands. Very little is, however, known about South African consumers who could afford genuine leather products' value perceptions with regard to leather products, as well as the influence of activists and anti-leather campaigns on these consumers' participation in environmentally significant behaviour and their purchase intent for genuine leather products.

This makes it difficult for new brands to position their products in such a way that they can fulfil the market's value perceptions, while also addressing specific environmental concerns. This study reports on the role of luxury value perceptions and ethical concerns in consumers' environmentally significant behaviour and purchase intent for genuine leather products, and highlights practical implications for fashion brands that aim to enter the multi-cultural South African fashion market.

## 2. Literature

### 2.1 Luxury value perceptions.

Since 2000 luxury consumers have contributed significantly to market growth as they have more than tripled throughout the past 20 years to approximately 330m consumers worldwide (Boston Consulting Group, 2017). Leather brands have been among the most valuable in the luxury industry (Deloitte, 2017). It is therefore of great importance to identify the specific consumers who invest in leather products as well as the factors that influence their purchasing behaviour.

The word "value" is frequently used in various disciplines. In marketing and consumer behaviour it is seen as a key concept in understanding consumer behaviour. Customer or consumer value can be defined as a consumer's preference for, and evaluation of a product's or service's attributes, the performance as well as the perceived consequences (Woodruff, 1997; Tynan et al., 2014). In a global competitive environment, it is important that marketers and retailers understand the reasons why consumers buy products, as well as how their perceptions of luxury value influence their purchasing behaviour.

Various researchers have studied consumers' luxury customer value and the role of luxury value perceptions in consumers' purchasing behaviour, while others have developed different models that explain the concept of luxury value perception (Shukla et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2016), many of whom have expanded the Luxury Value Perception Model of Wiedmann et al. (2007, 2009), Hennigs et al. (2012), Hennigs, Wiedmann, Behrens and Klarmann (2013) and Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann (2013). This model is widely accepted in the luxury research domain (Godey et al., 2013; Loureiro and de Araújo, 2014) and has been used in cross-cultural and cross-industry studies (Hennigs et al., 2012; Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann, 2013). Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann (2013) proposed four universal consumer luxury value perceptions that drive consumers' luxury purchasing, namely financial, functional, individual and social (Figure 1).

The financial dimension relates to the monetary value of a product and the price paid to obtain the luxury product. It refers to what consumers will sacrifice to obtain the product (Hennigs et al., 2012; Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann, 2013). Choo et al. (2012) confirmed the economic dimension of consumer luxury value perception and reasoned that the financial value of luxury includes "economic investment value owing

to the limited availability of products and the increasing price of such products". Shukla and Purani (2012) and Sun et al. (2016) conceptualised the financial dimension as part of the functional dimension, as a high price signals excellent quality and functionality to the consumer.

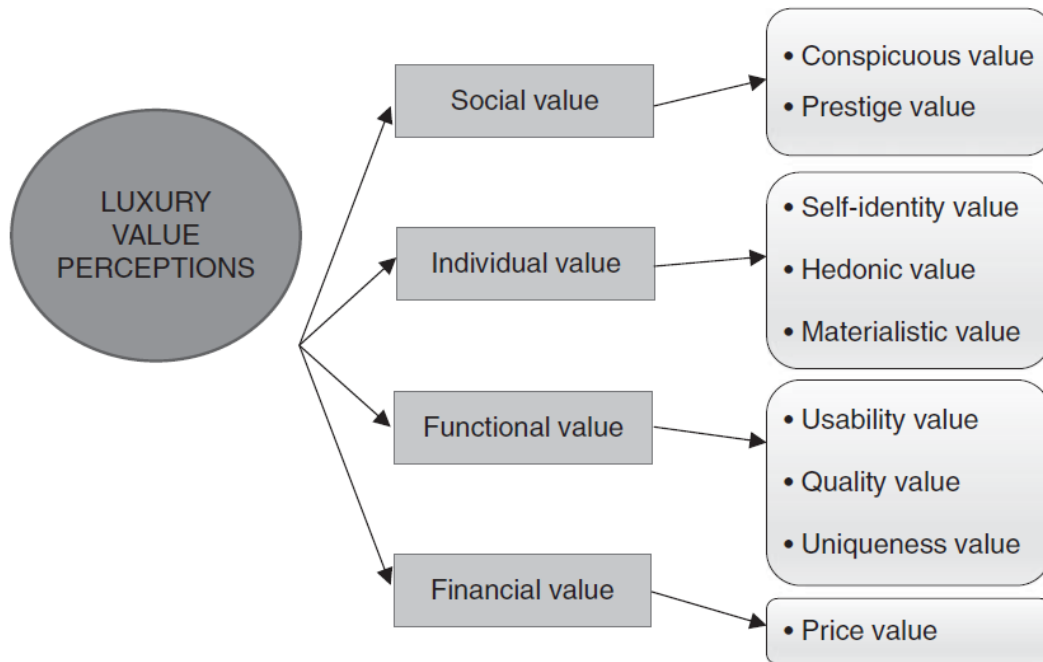


Figure 1. Dimensions of luxury value perception  
Source: Adapted from Hennigs et al. (2012) and Wiedmann et al

The functional dimension, in some cases also referred to as the utilitarian value of luxury (Choo et al., 2012), relates to benefits obtained by purchasing a luxury product, such as quality, usability and uniqueness (Hennigs et al., 2012; Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann, 2013). The usability of a product relates to what the product is designed to do. This is the core benefit of a product and will lead to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Functional value also entails the quality of the product, as luxury goods are expected to offer superior quality related to other products (Shukla et al., 2015). Uniqueness is based on the assumption that the perceived exclusiveness and rareness of a product enhances consumers' desire for it (Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann, 2013; Roux et al., 2017). Chattalas and Shukla (2015) and Sun et al. (2016) confirmed that functional value perceptions strongly drive luxury consumption across nations.

The individual dimension is concerned with the consumer's personal orientation surrounding the consumption of luxury products and includes personal issues such as hedonism, materialism and self-identity (Hennigs et al., 2012; Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann, 2013). The hedonic value antecedent, also conceptualised as experiential (Shukla et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2016), relates to the fact that luxury goods may carry certain emotional value for the consumer, as luxury consumption involves emotional aspects such as aesthetic beauty and sensory pleasure that reward the consumer on a personal level (Loureiro and Araújo, 2014). Materialistic value can be described as the degree to which possessions play a central role in the life of a consumer (Hennigs et al., 2012; Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann, 2013). Velov et al. (2014) noted from their research that materialists boost their status by consuming conspicuous products which then results into personal joy. This has specifically been noted among Asian consumers and emerging economies (Sun et al., 2016). Self-identity value can be defined as the way in which an individual perceives him- or herself (Hennigs et al., 2012; Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann, 2013). Shukla et al. (2015) conceptualised it as self-directed symbolism, where consumers in specifically Western markets use their possessions, such as luxury products, to extend, expand and strengthen their sense of self. Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982) call it self-definition and symbolic self-completion, which can be viewed as a goal-directed activity that supports the human being to become part of society.

Social value relates to the supposed value that consumers obtain by purchasing a luxury product that is socially acceptable and recognised. Such perceived value significantly influence a consumer's willingness

to purchase a specific product or brand (Hennigs et al., 2012; Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann, 2013). The antecedents to social value include conspicuousness value and prestige value. Conspicuous consumption relates to consuming higher priced or status goods in order to convey a message of status and wealth to others (Hennigs et al., 2012; Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann, 2013; Roux et al., 2017), with bandwagon- and snob consumption as the antecedents. Bandwagon consumption occurs when consumers buy luxury products because of their popularity or social approval, while snob consumption occurs when consumers buy luxury products that are scarce and therefore demonstrates superiority (Kastanakis and Balabanis, 2014; Tong et al., 2017). Prestige value encompasses consumers' needs to use luxury goods for their exclusivity (Brun, 2017; Tong et al., 2017).

It is generally accepted that culture plays an important role in consumers' attitudes and purchasing behaviour (Hofstede, 2001). Although consumers from different countries may share some basic luxury value perceptions, they differ with regard to the importance of these value perceptions as well as their reasons for buying luxury products (Hennigs et al., 2012; Shukla et al., 2015; Stepień et al., 2016). The luxury goods market can therefore not be treated as a single market. In an emerging economy and multi-cultural country such as South Africa, it is important for new luxury product brands who want to enter the market, to understand consumers' luxury value perceptions and the role that these perceptions play in consumers' purchasing behaviour.

The question for this research was: which luxury value perceptions drive the multi-cultural South African luxury consumer market's purchase intent for genuine leather products, which could also be classified as controversial products (Xu, 2000; Summers and Belleau, 2006), and where consumers' ethical values also may play a role?

## 2.2 Ethical consumers

Today's consumers are changing their purchasing behaviour as they are becoming more aware of the ethical implications of the products they buy. They take into account the impacts that their purchasing decisions have on themselves and the environment (Manchiraju and Sadachar, 2014; Yadar and Pathak, 2016). Recently, the awareness of environmental- as well as social issues has increased significantly, and the protection of the environment has become of great importance among people, to the extent that environmentally friendly can now be conceptualised as an important dimension of product quality (Belz and Peattie, 2012; Kianpour et al., 2014; Amatulli et al., 2016). The luxury market has not escaped this drive towards sustainability, and environmental-, social- and animal-cruelty concerns of top Brands have now become a major challenge for the luxury industry (Kapferer and Michaut, 2015; Winston, 2016), who is perceived to lag behind other industries in terms of environmental and social sustainability (Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann, 2013). The fashion industry is faced with additional challenges in pursue for eco-sustainability, in that fashion changes constantly. It therefore contributes to the global waste problem as well as to environmental abuse (Achabou and Dekhili, 2013; Beckham and Voyer, 2014; Henninger et al., 2016; Karaosman et al., 2017). Godart and Seong (2014) suggest a slow fashion approach where the focus is on stylish designs and lasting appeal. The practice should be to produce less, locally and with better techniques. Another scenario is to optimise the use of green materials that are biodegradable and recyclable, produced with natural and toxic free components, are not harmful for the environment, have not been tested on animals and where packaging is eco-friendly. An example of a brand that it really making the difference in this field is Tiffany & Co. which is using packaging materials that are 100 per cent certified by the Forest Stewardship Council and 83 per cent of them come from post-consumers recycled sources.

The leather industry is aware of consumers' and brands' concerns and has made major strides in reducing its impact on the environment and treating animals in a humanly way. The International Standards Organisation and the standards body of the different countries that manufacture leather products are in a process of ratifying and adopting the standards and test methods developed for leather by the International Union of Leather Technicians and Chemists, while there are many national and voluntary schemes for eco-labelling of leather products. The Indian Government has for example already implemented the Leather Developing Programme, aiming at the development of the leather industry. In South Africa the Department of Trade and Industry supports the Foot and Leather Industry Cluster as well as the Exotic Leather South Africa cluster. Both clusters are developing standards with the aim to reducing the leather industries' environmental impact as well as any animal cruelty practices (Tewari and Pillai, 2005). Activists and pro-environmental groups, however, often use certain tactics and strategies targeting the above mentioned issues to either improve industry practises, or completely delegitimize them (Bloomfield, 2016) and even to

influence consumers' decision-making to an extent where they no longer support the industry (Ergen et al., 2014).

There are many factors that influence consumers' environmental- and animal cruelty concerns and not all consumers' pro-environmental behaviour and purchasing intent for specific products are to the same extent influenced by such concerns (Paco and Rodrigues, 2016). Personal values (specifically egoistic, altruistic, biospheric and hedonic values) (Manchiraju and Sadachar, 2014; Paco and Rodrigues, 2016) and many socio-demographics (gender, age, income, etc.) play a role in consumers' environmental concerns (Cervellon and Shammass, 2013; Yadar and Pathak, 2016).

### 2.3 Ethical luxury

It has been found in previous studies that ethical considerations are of significantly less importance in the decision-making for the purchase of luxury- and specifically fashion luxury goods (Davies et al., 2012; Streit and Davies 2013; Han et al., 2017), to the extent that the question can be asked whether luxury consumers in any case care about ethical issues and whether ethical consumption is compatible with luxury value perceptions. Davies et al. (2012) found that consumers' propensity to consider ethics is significantly lower in luxury purchases when compared to commoditized purchases, and that consumers in essence believe that luxury goods have few significant social and environmental impacts, based on the assumption that they are prestige, high value products. The fact is that consumers tend to think more about price and image and less about ethical issues when purchasing luxury products (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Joergens, 2006). Lack of information was another reason with consumers indicating that there is more information available about ethical commodity products. The research of Phau et al. (2015) confirms the importance of available information. They found that consumers who were aware of negative impacts tended not to buy luxury clothing that was made in sweatshops. Consumers further indicated that they do not buy luxury products regularly and find it too much effort to find information. Davies et al. (2012) and Steinhart et al. (2013) noted that, for ethical luxury to work, it would need to enhance (and not destroy) the self-pleasure and hedonic aspects of luxury consumption.

Kapferer and Michaut (2015) found that, for most consumers, luxury and ethics, and specific sustainability, are somewhat contradictory, while Achabou and Dekhili (2013) concluded from their research that product quality and brand reputation are still the main decisive selection criteria in the case of luxury products. These criteria are, for many consumers in many cases just not compatible with sustainability practices. They found that the presence of recycled material in luxury products is perceived negatively by most consumers, who do not associate the notions of prestige and rarity which characterize luxury products, with the use of recycled materials.

Various researchers (Achabou and Dekhili, 2013; Roper et al., 2013; Moraes et al., 2015) determined that consumers of luxury goods present their own moral framework for their luxury consumption, where luxury is seen as a form of restraint in consumption – a trade-off of quantity for quality. Davies et al. (2012) termed it "the Fallacy of Clean-Luxury" (p. 41), where luxury products that are scarce and durable are perceived as more socially responsible than widely available ones, which then suggests an ethical purchase. In essence, consumers who purchase luxury products therefore believe that luxury goods have few significant social and environmental impacts. They base this perception on the assumption that luxury products are quality, durable, prestige and high value products.

The question for this study was whether the multi-cultural South African consumer market holds strong ethical (environmental and animal cruelty) concerns, and whether these concerns influence their purchasing intent for genuine leather products.

### 2.4 Environmental behaviour

The growing importance of environmentalism has resulted in a rise in environmentally friendly consumers who are not only willing to change their purchasing behaviour to reflect their positive attitudes towards environmentalism, but who are willing to become more involved in environmental behaviour, spanning from environmental group membership to environmental activism. The concept of environmental behaviour has been extensively researched and many definitions have been formalized.

The work of Seguin et al. (1998) is still widely acknowledged in environmental research (Ergen et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2014; Paco and Rodrigues, 2016). They conceptualised environmental activism as particular environmental behaviour related to activism, namely, participation in events organised by ecological groups, financial support of an environmental group, circulation of environmental petitions, participation in protest actions, voting for specific environmental policies and writing letters to protest against harmful products.

Stern's (2000) conceptualization of environmental behaviour is also widely acknowledged (Ergen et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2014; Bissing-Olson et al., 2016; Paco and Rodrigues, 2016). Stern (2000) developed a typology of environmental behaviour and classified it as non-environmental behaviour and environmentally significant behaviour. The latter can be classified into four categories which include environmental activism where individuals are actively involved in environmental organisations and demonstrations, or use the internet and specifically social media as a platform for activism (Valenzuela, 2013; Gerbaudo and Trerè, 2015; Poell and van Dijck, 2015). It further includes non-activist behaviours in the public sphere such as the stated approval of environmental policies and an individual's willingness to pay higher taxes, private-sphere environmentalism which involves an individual's purchasing- and green-consumption behaviour, and other significant behaviours which includes behaviours in certain organisations. Activist campaigns focus on environmentally significant behaviour by aiming at influencing consumers' value perceptions and attitudes towards products, leading to specific environmentally significant consumer behaviour (Portwood-Stacer, 2012; Louis et al., 2016; Paco and Rodrigues, 2016).

With regard to environmental behaviour the question for this research was whether consumers with very specific luxury value perceptions would be willing to partake in environmentally significant behaviour.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Sampling

The units of analysis were male and female South African consumers, aged 26 years and older who fell in a household income bracket that allowed them to purchase genuine leather products. Non-probability sampling was done by a survey company who made use of their extensive consumer data base to identify respondents that met the above criteria. Four hundred and twenty nine respondents (n 429) took part in the survey, of whom 62 per cent were male and 38 per cent were female. The majority of the respondents (86 per cent) were Caucasian, while 14 per cent were African. Most of the respondents (66.4 per cent) were between 36 and 65 years old.

#### 3.2 Measuring instrument

A structured on-line self-administered questionnaire was used as data-collection instrument. It consisted of the following sections:

Section A: this section included demographic questions such as age, gender, ethnicity and income.

Section B: luxury genuine leather value perceptions were tested with a four-point Likert scale, based on the Wiedmann et al. (2007, 2009), Hennigs et al. (2012), Hennigs, Wiedmann, Behrens and Klarmann (2013) and Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann (2013) Luxury Value Perception Scale. This scale was previously tested in ten countries and has shown to have good internal validity (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  above 0.5). It comprised of 22 statements and required participants to indicate their level of agreement from "strongly agree" (1) to "strongly disagree" (4).

Section C: this section measured the respondents' environmentally significant behaviour with regards to leather with a four-point Likert scale, based on the Environmentally Significant Behaviour Scale of Seguin et al. (1998). The scale comprised of six statements and required participants to indicate previous environmental activism activities from "never" (1) to "very often" (4). In the original scale Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.80.

Section D: in this section, it was measured how strongly respondents perceive the influences of activists and their campaigns seem to be on their participation in anti-leather behaviour. This was done using a self-developed four-point Likert scale. Participants had to indicate the perceived influence from activists from "very strongly" (1) to "not at all" (4).

Section E: this section measured respondents' environmental concerns with a four-point Likert scale based on the social responsible consumption behaviour scale of Antil (1984). The scale comprised of 12 statements and participants had to indicate their degree of agreement from "strongly agree" (1) to "strongly disagree" (4).

Section F: this section measured the respondents' purchasing intent for genuine leather products, with the use of Spears and Singh's (2004) Purchase Intent Scale, which is a five-point Likert scale, shown to have high internal validity (original Cronbach's  $\alpha$  0.97). Participants had to indicate their purchase intent from "never" (1) to "definitely" (4).

### 3.3 Data collection

Data collection was done in September 2016. Online questionnaires were distributed by a survey company. This online method of participation ensured a high degree of anonymity (Dainesi and Goldbaum, 2012; Alam et al., 2014), was less expensive and less time consuming, thereby contributing to better participation and feedback.

### 3.4 Data analysis

Data analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistics. Exploratory factor analysis was used to analyse the data relating to the scales in Sections B, C and E. Principal axis factoring served as the extraction method with Obliman rotation and Kaiser normalisation. Spearman's correlation test was done to determine correlations between concepts.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Luxury genuine leather value perceptions

Table I shows the results of the factor analysis. Factor loadings equal or greater than 0.50 are generally considered practically significant. Some of the items had lower than 0.50 loadings. These factors were then subjected to further reliability testing and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and the percentage variance were determined when after the decision was taken to keep all remaining items and to accept the four-factor scale. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values of 0.52, 0.80, 0.90 and 0.87 indicated internal consistency with 59.56 per cent variance explained. The item, "Purchasing luxury leather products or clothes make me feel good", loaded on two of the factors, and was removed for further analyses.

Items V5, V11, V15 and V19 loaded as the Financial factor as in the original scale. Items V9, V14, V18 and V21 assembled as in the original scale as factor two for this study and was named Functional. However, V6 and V20 from the original scale's individual factor loaded in this study on the Functional factor. From a theoretical and previous research point of view, this could however be explained. Brown and Rice (2014) define quality or functionality as "the totality of characteristics of an entity that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs" – in other words, what the product should do for the person, which can also include "pleasure" (V20) and "satisfaction" (V6). De Klerk and Lubbe (2004) concluded from their qualitative study that the female consumer considers emotional pleasure as an important dimension of the totality of "what the product should do for me". It was therefore decided to accept V6 and V20 for this study as part of the Functional factor. The third factor is the Individual factor which included V13, V23 and V25. V10, which originally loaded on the Individual factor, loaded on the Social factor for this study together with items V7, V8, V12, V16, V22, V24 and V26 as was the case in the original scale. It was therefore decided to accept V10 as part of the social factor.

Respondents reported important Financial (M 2.07), Functional (M 2.25) and individual (M 2.84) value perceptions. The social factor had a mean of 3.18 which is considered a weak value perception (Table I).

Statement	Financial	Functional	Individual	Social
(V5) Luxury leather products or clothes cannot be sold in supermarkets	0.258			
(V11) Few people own true luxury leather products or clothes (V15) Luxury leather products and clothes are inevitably very expensive	0.283			
(V19) Truly luxury leather products and clothes cannot be mass-produced	0.357			
(V6) I derive self-satisfaction from buying luxury leather products or clothes		0.611		
(V9) The superior quality is my major reason for buying luxury leather products or clothes		0.662		
(V14) I am inclined to evaluate the substantive attributes and performance of luxury leather products or clothes rather than listening to the opinions of others		0.573		
(V18) I place emphasis on quality assurance over prestige when considering the purchase of luxury leather products or clothes		0.599		
(V20) Wearing luxury leather clothing will give me a lot of pleasure (V21) A luxury leather brand that is preferred by many people but that does not meet my quality standards will never enter into my purchase consideration		0.612		
(V13) I view luxury leather purchases as gifts for myself to celebrate an occasion that I believe is significant to me			0.809	
(V23) I view luxury leather purchases as gifts for myself to celebrate something that I do and feel excited about			0.833	
(V25) As a whole, I may regard luxury leather products and clothes as gifts that I buy to treat myself			0.783	
(V7) I like to know what luxury leather items make good impressions on others				0.689
(V8) It is important that others have a high opinion of my luxury leather items or clothes				0.709
(V10) When I am in a bad mood, I may buy luxury leather products or clothes as gifts for myself to alleviate my emotional burden				0.432
(V12) I pay attention to what types of people buy certain luxury leather products or clothes				0.667
(V16) If I were to buy an expensive leather product or clothing item, I would worry about what others would think of me				0.308
(V22) I am interested in determining what luxury leather products or clothes I should buy to make good impressions on others				0.745
(V24) To me, my friends' perceptions of different luxury leather brands or products are important				0.737
(V26) It is important to know what others think of people who use certain luxury leather brands or products				0.704
Mean	2.07	2.25	2.84	3.18
SD	0.72	0.86	0.88	0.75
% Variance Explained (Total: 59.563)	8.314	10.643	4.683	35.923
Cronbach's $\alpha$	0.524	0.802	0.903	0.870
Note: $n = 429$				

Table I. Luxury genuine leather value perceptions

## 4.2 Ethical concerns

Results for this scale (Table II) show two factors instead of one as in the original scale.

The first factor was named "Anticipated behaviour concern" which includes items V35, V36, V39, V40, V41, V42, V45 and V46. The second factor was named "Actual behaviour concern" and includes items V37, V38 and V44. One item V43 "I have often thought that if we could just get by with a little less, there would be more left for future generations" did not load on any factor, and was removed from further analysis. Furthermore, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values of 0.895 and 0.709 indicate internal consistence within the two factors, with 61.04 per cent variance explained.

Respondents had a strong concern regarding environmental issues in the leather industry; stronger for actual behavioural concerns (M 2.05) than for anticipated behavioural concerns (M 2.29) (Table II). They had, however, a weaker concern when it comes to actions that could have a direct negative impact on themselves, with only 43.8 per cent (M  $\frac{1}{4}$  3.27) who agreed that everybody should stop increasing their consumption of genuine leather products (V35) and only 50.3 per cent (M 2.54) who agreed that they would donate a day's pay to a foundation to help improve the environment (V44).



Statement	anticipated behaviour concern	behaviour concern
(V35) Everybody should stop increasing their consumption of genuine leather products or clothes so that our resources will last longer	0.639	
(V36) Pollution which results from production and use are more important than the benefits of genuine leather products or clothes	0.601	
(V39) Natural resources must be preserved even if people must do without genuine leather products	0.716	
(V40) All consumers should be interested in the environmental consequences of the genuine leather products and clothes they purchase	0.737	
(V41) Consumers should be made to pay higher prices for the genuine leather products and clothes which pollute the environment	0.690	
(V42) I would be willing to sign a petition or demonstrate for an environmental cause	0.634	
(V45) Manufacturers should be forced to use recycled materials in their leather manufacturing and processing operations	0.633	
(V46) People should urge their friends to limit their use of genuine leather products made from scarce resources	0.771	
(V37) I do not think we are doing enough to encourage manufacturers to use recyclable packages		0.582
(V38) I think we are just not doing enough to save scarce natural resources from being used up		0.638
(V44) I would donate a day's pay to a foundation to help improve the environment		0.396
Mean	2.29	2.05
SD	0.82	0.76
% variance explained (total: 61.041)	52.340	8.701
Cronbach's $\alpha$	0.895	0.709
Note: $n \frac{1}{4}$ 429		

#### 4.3 Environmentally significant behaviour

Table III indicates only one factor for this scale, as is the case in the original scale. A Cronbach  $\alpha$  of 0.897 shows internal consistence within the factor, with 69.73 per cent variance explained.

A mean of 1.14 for this factor indicates that respondents almost never participated in environmentally significant behaviour with regard to leather products.

#### 4.4 Consumers' perceptions of the influence that pro-environmental-and anti-animal cruelty groups had on their environmentally significant behaviour

Respondents perceived the influence of anti-animal cruelty groups on their participation in environmentally significant behaviour as strong (M  $\bar{x}$  2.94) and the influence of pro- environmental groups as mild (M  $\bar{x}$  3.27). The average perceived influence of activist groups was, however, only mild (M  $\bar{x}$  3.11) (Table IV ).

#### 4.5 Purchase intent

Respondents had an above average intent for purchasing luxury genuine leather products (M 3.21), although the standard deviations were high. (Table V). Only 10.5 per cent indicated that they will never buy genuine leather products while almost one third (35.4 per cent) indicated that they will probably buy genuine leather products in the future.

Statement	Factor
(V27) I have previously participated in events organised by anti-leather groups	0.730
(V28) I have previously given financial support to anti-leather groups	0.778
(V29) I have previously signed petitions for better policies with regards to the use of leather products	0.795
(V30) I have previously participated in protests against the use of genuine leather for products or clothes	0.746
(V31) I have previously voted for better policies regarding the use of genuine leather	0.783
(V32) I have previously written letters to firms that manufacture genuine leather products	0.692
Mean	1.14
SD	0.47
% variance explained (total: 69.726)	69.726
Cronbach's $\alpha$	0.897

Note:  $n = 429$

Table III.

Factor analysis of respondents' participation in environmentally significant behaviour

Question	1 Very strongly (%)	2 Strongly (%)	3 Mildly (%)	4 Not at all (%)	Mean	SD
How strongly has your behaviour been influenced by Pro-environmental groups?	4.0	13.5	34.0	48.5	3.27	0.841
How strongly has your behaviour been influenced by Anti-animal cruelty groups?	10.0	23.3	28.9	37.8	2.94	1.005
Average					3.11	

Note:  $n = 429$

#### 4.6 Correlation between South African consumers' important value perceptions and their environmentally significant behaviour, environmental concerns and purchase intent for genuine leather products

Spearman's correlation coefficient was used to determine correlations and was interpreted as follows:

- Correlation coefficient (r): Strength.
- 0.0 or 0.19: Very weak.
- 0.20 or 0.39: Weak.
- 0.40 or 0.59: Moderate.
- 0.60 or 0.79: Strong.
- 0.80 or 1.0: Very strong.

Table VI reports correlations that were statistically significant.

Question	1 Never (%)	2 Maybe (%)	3 Not sure (%)	4 Probably (%)	5 Definitely (%)	Mean	SD
I will purchase a genuine leather luxury product or clothing item	10.5	22.8	9.8	35.4	21.4	3.34	1.321

I will have the intention to buy a genuine leather luxury product or clothing item	14.7	24.7	13.5	27.7	19.3	3.12	1.369
I will have a purchase interest for a genuine leather luxury product or clothing item	15.4	23.3	13.1	26.6	21.7	3.16	1.400
Average						3.21	
Note: n = 429							

Table V.  
Purchase intent for I will have a purchase interest for a genuine leather luxury product or clothing item

	Environmentally significant behaviour	Anticipated behaviour concern	Actual behaviour concern	Purchase intent
<i>Social</i>		-0.133	-0.126	0.323
Sig. (two-tailed)		0.006**	0.009**	0.000**
n		429	429	429
<i>Functionality</i>	-	-0.276	-	0.651
Sig. (two-tailed)		0.000**		0.000**
n		429		429
<i>Financial</i>	0.175	0.280	0.138	-0.141
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000**	0.000**	0.004**	0.004**
n	429	429	429	429
<i>Individual</i>	-	-0.197	-0.095	0.474
Sig. (two-tailed)		0.000**	0.048*	0.000**
n		429	429	429

Notes: n = 429. \*p ≤ 0.05; \*\*p ≤ 0.01

Table VI.  
Statistically significant correlations between luxury value perceptions and environmentally significant behaviour, environmental concerns and purchase intent

There was a statistically highly significant ( $p \leq 0.01$ ) moderate positive correlation between the important individual value perception and respondents' purchase intent ( $r = 0.474$ ,  $n = 429$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), and a statistically highly significant strong positive correlation between the important functional value perception and respondents' purchase intent ( $r = 0.651$ ,  $n = 429$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The correlation between the important financial value perception and respondents' purchase intent was, although statistically highly significant, only weak and negative ( $r = -0.141$ ,  $n = 429$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). All other significant correlations were only very weak and weak. It is, however, interesting to notice that there was a highly significant negative correlation (although very weak) between the important individual value perception and respondents' environmental concerns, indicating that a stronger concern for individual pleasure might have a negative impact on the respondents' concern for environmentally negative behaviour.

#### 4.7 Correlations between environmentally significant behaviour, environmental concerns and purchase intent

Table VII reports correlations that were statistically significant.

There was a statistically highly significant moderate, but negative correlation between the respondents' purchase intent and their environmental anticipated behaviour concern ( $r = -0.495$ ,  $n = 429$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), as well as their environmental actual behaviour concern ( $r = -0.483$ ,  $n = 429$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This indicates that a stronger environmental concern might impact negatively on the respondents' purchase intent for genuine leather products. There was, although weak, a statistically highly significant positive correlation between respondents' environmentally significant behaviour and their environmental anticipated behaviour concern ( $r = 0.329$ ,  $n = 429$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) as well as between their environmentally significant behaviour and their actual

behaviour concern ( $r$  0.314,  $n$  429,  $p$  0.000). This indicates that a stronger environmental concern might trigger stronger environmentally significant behaviour. The correlation between environmentally significant behaviour and purchase intent was, although statistically significant only very weak and negative ( $r$  -0.116,  $n$  429,  $p$  0.016) indicating that a stronger purchase intent might therefore affect respondents' inclination to engage in environmentally significant behaviour negatively.

	Environmentally significant behaviour	Anticipated behaviour concern	Actual behaviour concern	Purchase intent
<i>Environmentally significant behaviour</i>				
<i>r</i>	1.000	0.329	0.314	-0.116
Sig. (two-tailed)		0.000**	0.000**	0.016*
<i>n</i>	429	429	429	429
<i>Anticipated behaviour concern</i>				
<i>r</i>	0.329	1.000	-	-0.495
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000**			0.000**
<i>n</i>	429	429		429
<i>Actual behaviour concern</i>				
<i>r</i>	0.314	-	1.000	-0.483
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000**			0.000**
<i>n</i>	429		429	429
<i>Purchase intent</i>				
<i>r</i>	-0.116	-0.495	-0.483	1.000
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.016*	0.000**	0.000**	
<i>n</i>	429	429	429	429

Notes:  $n = 429$ . \* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.01$

Table VII.

Statistically significant correlations between environmentally significant behaviour, anticipated- and actual behaviour concern and purchase intent

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

Figure 2 shows a summary of the most important significant results.

Three luxury value perceptions were identified as important for the South African genuine leather consumer, namely the financial, functional and individual value perceptions. Functional and individual value perceptions were the most important, indicating that these consumers focus on the functional benefits that are obtained from the product that they purchase, which include aspects such as quality and durability. They furthermore place great emphasis on the personal benefits that can be obtained from the product, specifically the personal emotional pleasure that they can derive from owning a genuine leather product. South African consumers have an above average purchase intent for genuine leather products with only a small percentage claiming that they would never purchase genuine leather products. Consumer values are defined as relatively stable conditions as well as beliefs that have a strong motivational impact on consumers' buying behaviour (Hofstede, 2001). These values are strongly influenced by the social and cultural environment that the consumer belongs to (Hennigs et al., 2012; Shukla et al., 2015; Stepień et al., 2016).

Consumers therefore choose particular products because of their attributes that will provide for them certain consequences, which then assist them in achieving their personal value perceptions. Strong positive correlations were found between the important functional and individual value perceptions and respondents' purchase intent for genuine leather products. This indicates that the more functional and individual/personal benefits a genuine leather product provides, such as quality and emotional pleasure, the stronger the consumer's intent for purchasing the product will be. According to the Trade Fact Sheet (2016) South African clothing and textile consumers not only like to choose from a variety of styles, colours and textiles, but also demand quality and are moving towards more natural fabrics and fibres. Even though the above is true, there might be other influences that impact on consumers'

purchase intent for genuine leather products. With increased concerns surrounding the environment, as well as the actions of anti-animal cruelty- and pro-environmental groups, consumers might decide that their concerns about environmental issues are of more importance than achieving their personal luxury value perceptions. Respondents expressed strong concerns regarding environmental issues in the leather industry (stronger for actual behavioural concerns than for anticipated behavioural concerns), and weaker concerns when it comes to actions that could have a direct negative impact on themselves, for example that everybody should stop increasing their consumption of genuine leather. This confirms previous findings that luxury consumers are in many cases less influenced by ethical considerations when such concerns impact negatively on the fulfilment of the need to possess luxury products. This was further confirmed by a significant negative correlation (although very weak) between the important individual value perception and respondents' environmental concerns, indicating that a stronger concern for individual pleasure might have a negative impact on the respondents' concern for environmentally negative behaviour. This correlates with the research of Steinhart et al. (2013), who noted that ethical luxury consumption is only possible if the ethical luxury product is positioned as enhancing personal over global benefits. A highly significant moderate negative correlation between the respondents' purchase intent and their environmental anticipated behaviour concern as well as their environmental actual behaviour concern was found. This indicates that a stronger environmental concern might impact negatively on the respondents' purchase intent for genuine leather products. The inter-relationships between the consumers' important value perceptions (specifically the individual value perception), environmental concerns and purchase intent are clear and have definite implications for the leather industry when marketing their products to these consumers.

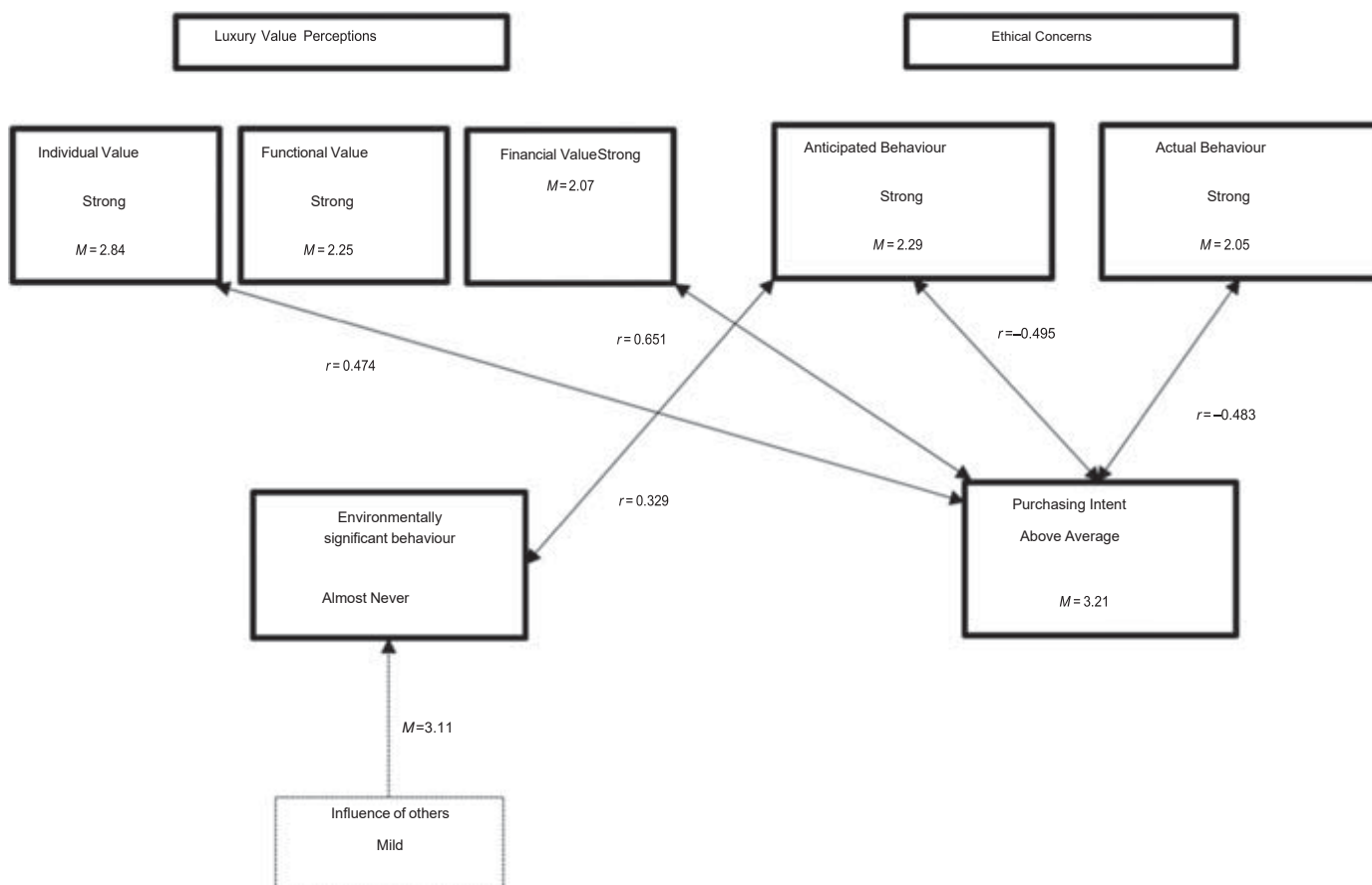


Figure 2. Summary of most important significant results

Previous studies found a positive correlation between environmental concerns and consumers' inclination to participate in environmentally significant behaviour, such as participating in activist activities (Stern, 2000). Although consumers in this study expressed strong concerns for environmental issues, they almost never participated in environmentally significant behaviour and perceived the influence of activist groups on average as mild, although stronger for anti-animal cruelty groups than for pro-environmental groups. Participants in this study, in general, were most probably not well-informed about leather production and processes that impact negatively on the environment, such as water wastage and the emission of caustic gases. Hill and Lee (2012) found that consumers prioritise different product categories, such as food, in terms of actively seeking for "sustainable" solutions. No strong significant correlation could be found between the consumers' value perceptions and their environmentally significant behaviour. Although the consumers expressed strong environmental concerns, only a weak but positive correlation was found between the consumers' environmental concerns and their environmentally significant behaviour, indicating, that even their strong environmental concerns might only weakly motivate the consumers to participate in environmentally significant behaviour.

This study did not test for causality, but only for correlations. However, if one accepts the theory that consumers' luxury purchasing behaviour is driven by strong luxury value perceptions, the important role of specifically strong individual value perceptions in South African consumers' purchasing intent as well as their environmental concerns becomes clear. Strong individual value perceptions that correlate positively with their purchase intent, could therefore impact their purchase intent positively, while lowering their concerns for environmental issues, which might then again impact positively on their purchasing intent. Keeping in mind that these consumers' environmental concerns do not seem to have an even moderate impact on their environmentally significant behaviour, that they seldom participate in environmentally significant behaviour and do not perceive activists' influence as of major importance, it becomes clear that the leather industry should not be that much concerned about the role of activist groups, but rather capitalise on these consumers' important value perceptions while sending out the message that ethical environmental practices are followed throughout the leather supply chain.

## 6. Implications for industry

Results and conclusions have specific implications for the leather industry and new brands that would like to enter a market that is not yet as established as various other leather producing first-world countries. Although one cannot generalise, it seems from results of this study that many consumers may not have negative feelings with regard to buying genuine leather products, and that many of them are not sure if they will definitely in future buy a genuine leather product. The leather industry should capitalise on this uncertainty by focussing on the high quality of leather products and by marketing genuine leather products in such a way that consumers can realise that such a product will meet their important value perceptions – in the case of leather products, that it will be of excellent quality, durable and reliable, and that they will have many years of emotional pleasure while using the product. Manufacturers and retailers of leather products should therefore not move towards cheaper lower-grade leather products just to be able to compete with lower-priced products made from man-made textiles. A higher price should also not be justified as due to the product being manufactured in a sustainable and environmentally friendly manner. High quality and the ability to ensure personal pleasure should justify the price.

The leather industry should further realise that many consumers may have strong environmental concerns (specifically with regard to animal cruelty) and although they, in many cases, do not seem to be strongly influenced by activist groups and do not seem to actively partake in anti-leather behaviour, their environmental concerns might trigger environmentally significant behaviour while impacting negatively on their purchase intent. Brands should inform consumers about their pro-environmental and ethical standards and the measures that are in place to ensure and maintain these standards. Sustainability messages alone are generally not strong enough to convince a customer to buy a specific product or brand. Brands should rather attract customers with product features such as high quality, craftsmanship and the ability to provide personal pleasure and not with warnings about future environmental hazards due to the consumption of competitive products. Rather create a preference for the specific product or brand because of its own attributes.

## 7. Limitations and recommendations

Within this study, a few limitations were evident, which mostly involves the sample. This study made use of a non-probability sampling method which means that the results cannot be generalised to the broader population. The sample consisted of only South Africans. Results can therefore also not be generalised to other first-world countries. Also, more males than female and more Caucasian than African respondents took part in the study. There is, however, no evidence from previous research that this might have influenced the results.

For future research it is recommended to use a sample that equally represents males and females, as well as all cultural groups residing in South Africa. This would enable future researchers to differentiate between males and females as well as between cultural groups. Future research could also explore consumers' luxury value perceptions with regard to faux-leather vs genuine leather products, as consumers from more affordable luxury segments might hold the same value perceptions with regard to faux-leather products from well-known affordable brands. This might specifically be the case in developing countries such as South Africa where only a small percentage of the population can be considered as ultra-high net worth consumers.

Although the Hennigs et al. (2012), Hennigs, Wiedmann, Behrens and Klarmann (2013), Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann (2013) luxury value perception scale that was used in this research was previously widely tested, the factor analysis in this study indicated that future research among South African consumers could benefit from adapting specifically the statements that test for financial value perceptions, as Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for these statements in this study was exceptionally low.

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