

# *Metaverse and Brand Preference: An Empirical Study on Gucci's Digital Marketing Strategy*

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**Abstract.** The rise of the metaverse has provided luxury brands with a brand-new immersive digital marketing approach. However, there are still relatively few empirical studies on the impact of metaverse marketing on consumers' brand preferences for luxury brands, especially a lack of case studies taking Gucci as an example. This study takes Gucci as a case study, focusing on the digital marketing strategies of luxury brands in the context of the metaverse, and explores how the new experiences provided by the metaverse, such as virtual interaction, immersion, and digital scarcity, can integrate with the traditional attractions of luxury goods (such as vanity satisfaction, identity recognition, and aesthetic experience), jointly influencing consumers' brand preferences and loyalty. This study employs quantitative research methods and collects data through structured questionnaires to verify the impact of metaverse digital marketing strategies on Gucci brand preferences. The research results show that the virtual interaction, immersion and digital scarcity in the metaverse digital marketing strategy have significantly enhanced consumers' sense of identity and satisfaction of vanity towards the Gucci brand, thereby increasing brand preference and loyalty.

**Keywords:** Metaverse, Luxury Brand, Digital Marketing Strategy, Brand Preference, Gucci

## **1. Introduction**

In recent years, luxury brands have increasingly leveraged digital innovations to engage younger consumer segments, and the emergence and expansion of metaverse platforms have opened up a new frontier for branding strategies and experiential marketing initiatives (Gucci, in particular, has been a pioneer in this space, launching immersive experiences on platforms like Roblox and experimenting with virtual goods and AR try-on features [1-4]). However, despite the fact that such initiatives are supported by elaborate marketing narratives, there remains a research gap in understanding how consumers actually perceive and respond to these metaverse-based brand endeavors. This study aims to explore the relationship between consumers' metaverse experiences and their preference for Gucci's virtual products. Specifically, it examines how three experiential drivers—immersion, interaction, and identity/expressive motivation—are associated with brand preference and future behavioral intention (e.g., willingness to adopt or follow Gucci's metaverse). Using a survey-based approach, data were collected and analyzed via regression and mediation analyses with both unstandardized and standardized coefficients to ensure interpretability. This

research makes contributions to both theoretical and practical domains. Theoretically, it extends research on luxury branding to the virtual realm by offering empirical evidence on how metaverse experiences affect brand preference. Practically, it provides guidance to luxury marketers, especially Gucci, on which experiential levers to emphasize when designing virtual brand environments. This is particularly significant as brands worldwide experiment with NFTs, virtual goods, and immersive brand worlds.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Luxury consumption and symbolic value

Luxury consumption has historically been linked to symbolic and social value rather than functional necessity. Thorstein Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption highlighted how luxury goods operate as signals of wealth and prestige [5]. Contemporary studies have reaffirmed this symbolic function: Kapferer and Bastien argue that luxury brands embody the attributes of exclusivity, heritage, and cultural capital, and are often consumed to reinforce consumers' social identity [6]. Recent research continues to confirm that symbolic consumption remains central to luxury value creation, particularly as brands adapt to digital and experiential environments [7,8].

In emerging markets, such as China, luxury consumption is strongly tied to symbolic meaning. Younger consumer cohorts, particularly millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z), perceive luxury items as a means of constructing personal identity and fostering a sense of belonging in both digital and offline communities [9]. This aligns with Belk's extended self theory, where possessions serve as a projection of self-concept [10]. Building on this, Bourdieu's theory of cultural and symbolic capital explains how luxury consumption reinforces social hierarchy through the accumulation of symbolic value. In the metaverse, Gucci's community-based experiences—such as limited-edition NFTs—extend this mechanism by transforming digital ownership into new forms of symbolic capital [11]. The digital age has amplified these dynamics. Consumers no longer only signal status in physical spaces but increasingly within digital communities. Gucci's venture into the metaverse—through initiatives such as the Gucci Garden in Roblox and the release of limited-edition NFTs—illustrates how symbolic value is migrating into purely virtual environments [4].

### 2.2. Digital transformation in the luxury industry

Traditionally, luxury brands were reluctant to embrace digital platforms, due to concerns about the potential erosion of exclusivity. However, the shift toward online consumption has made digital transformation unavoidable. Pantano et al. show how immersive technologies such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and social gaming platforms have redefined engagement in luxury retail [12,13]. Examples include Balenciaga's collaboration with Fortnite, Ralph Lauren's integration with Zepeto, and Gucci's partnerships with Roblox and Meta. These collaborations aim to attract digital-native audiences and to redefine luxury as an experiential ecosystem rather than merely a product transaction. High-value digital assets—such as Gucci's Dionysus virtual handbag, which was resold for over \$4,000 on Roblox—illustrate that symbolic consumption can be seamlessly translated into virtual economies.

### 2.3. Psychological drivers of virtual luxury consumption

Consumer psychology remains a central factor in explaining consumers' virtual luxury consumption behavior. Han et al. identified “loud” luxury consumers, who prefer conspicuous logos, and “quiet”

consumers, who derive satisfaction from subtler brand cues. Both categories are visible in the metaverse. Some buyers prioritize visibility for avatars, while others value the private sense of identity alignment with Gucci [14]. Turunen and Laanti conceptualized luxury as a “system of extended meanings.” In virtual contexts, this system is amplified. Digital Gucci handbags or apparel confer not just aesthetics but also a symbolic identity in peer groups. Immersion, interactivity, and identity symbolism emerge as psychological levers driving purchase intentions in digital luxury markets [15].

The literature converges on two insights:

1. Luxury goods are consumed for symbolic value and identity expression.
2. Digital technologies, particularly immersive platforms, extend these dynamics into new environments.

Gucci’s metaverse initiatives represent the fusion of symbolic luxury consumption and digital immersion. However, empirical evidence is needed to assess whether consumers’ willingness to buy virtual luxury goods is driven primarily by brand perception, immersive experience, or symbolic identity.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research design

This study adopted a quantitative research design, utilizing a structured survey distributed via online channels. The research framework was grounded in the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2), which explains user acceptance of digital innovations through experiential and behavioral constructs [16]. Respondents were asked to report their perceptions of Gucci’s metaverse initiatives, immersive experiences, symbolic identity factors, and purchase intentions. Regression analysis was used to test relationships among independent variables (brand perception, immersive experience, identity symbolism, digital adoption) and the dependent variable (purchase intention). Mediation analysis was also conducted to evaluate whether brand preference mediates the effects of immersive experience and identity symbolism on purchase intention.

#### 3.2. Variables and measures

Dependent Variable (DV): Purchase Intention (5-point Likert scale).

Independent Variables (IVs):

Brand Perception (recognition, trust, prestige).

Immersive Experience (enjoyment, presence, interactivity).

Identity Symbolism (status signaling, self-expression).

Digital Adoption (familiarity with metaverse platforms).

Control Variables: Demographics such as gender, age, and income.

All measurement scales were adapted from validated studies [17]. Cronbach’s alpha was applied to ensure internal consistency.

#### 3.3. Data collection

The data were collected through five structured online surveys hosted on the Credamo platform, a professional online research service widely used in academic studies. The surveys targeted young consumers aged 18–35 who are familiar with digital platforms and luxury brands, with purposive sampling adopted to ensure relevance to the study’s objectives. A total of 467 responses were initially collected on Credamo. During the first screening stage, approximately 20% of low-quality

responses were removed directly on the platform. This included incomplete submissions, inconsistent answers, and participants who failed attention check questions designed to verify prior experience with Gucci’s VR or metaverse-related content. To further ensure data authenticity, the questionnaire incorporated six trap questions, which asked participants about the channels where they had encountered Gucci’s VR or metaverse-related experiences. Among the six answer options, three were correct (e.g., Roblox, Meta Horizon, and Gucci’s official website), while three were intentionally incorrect (e.g., TikTok VR, Nike Metaverse, and Microsoft Lounge). Only participants who correctly identified the valid platforms and avoided the false ones were retained for further analysis.

After this preliminary filtering, the remaining dataset underwent a second-stage screening to remove outliers and ensure internal consistency across variables. Following this two-step cleaning process, 240 valid responses were retained for analysis, representing an effective response rate of 51.4%. This comprehensive procedure ensured that the final dataset was both reliable and representative of digitally active luxury consumers.

Descriptive Statistics: Means and standard deviations for all key variables.

Reliability Analysis: Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  values  $>0.7$  confirmed scale reliability.

Multiple Regression: Tested predictive relationships between IVs and DV.

Mediation Analysis: Examined whether brand preference mediates the effect of immersion and identity on purchase intention.

Residual Plots: Evaluated model assumptions of normality and homoscedasticity.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Descriptive statistics and reliability analysis

The descriptive results show generally high evaluations:

Brand Perception:  $M = 4.2$ ,  $SD = 0.6$ . Immersive Experience:  $M = 3.8$ ,  $SD = 0.7$ . Identity Symbolism:  $M = 3.7$ ,  $SD = 0.8$ . Purchase Intention:  $M = 3.9$ ,  $SD = 0.8$ .

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	SD
Brand Perception	4.2	0.6
Immersive Experience	3.8	0.7
Identity Symbolism	3.7	0.8
Purchase Intention	3.9	0.8

Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  values ranged between 0.78 and 0.85 across constructs, indicating acceptable reliability (see Table 2).

Table 2. Reliability analysis of measurement constructs

Construct	Cronbach's a
Brand Perception	0.82
Immersive Experience	0.78
Identity Symbolism	0.8
Purchase Intention	0.85

## 4.2. Regression findings

The regression model explained 46% of the variance in purchase intention ( $R^2 = 0.46$ ,  $F(4, 235) = 49.3$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating a strong model fit.

Key predictors:

Brand Perception:  $\beta = 0.42$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Immersive Experience:  $\beta = 0.31$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Identity Symbolism:  $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $p < 0.10$ .

Digital Adoption: non-significant.

Table 3. Regression coefficients predicting purchase intention

Predictor	Beta	p-value
Brand Perception	0.42	<0.01
Immersive Experience	0.31	<0.05
Identity Symbolism	0.19	<0.10
Digital Adoption	0.05	n. s

Note.  $\beta$  = standardized regression coefficient;  $p < 0.05$  indicates statistical significance.

Brand perception emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that positive evaluations of Gucci's innovation, trustworthiness, and prestige substantially enhance consumers' purchase intentions toward virtual luxury products. Immersive experience also exerted a significant positive effect on purchase intention, showing that higher levels of engagement, interactivity, and presence in metaverse environments lead to stronger emotional attachment and willingness to purchase. Identity symbolism was marginally significant, implying that consumers partially express their self-concept and social identity through digital luxury possessions.

In contrast, digital adoption showed no significant impact, suggesting that familiarity with metaverse platforms alone does not drive consumers' purchase intention in the absence of meaningful brand engagement.

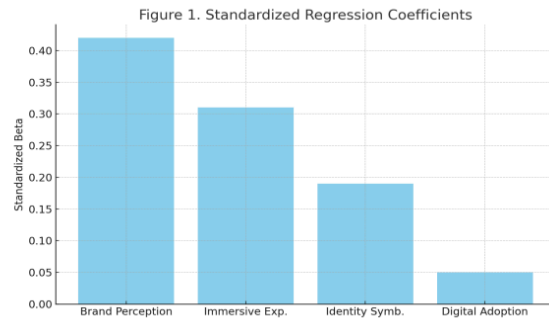


Figure 1. Standardized regression coefficients predicting purchase intention

To further clarify the causal pathways, a structural causal model integrating regression coefficients and explained variance is presented (see Figure 4). This visualization not only illustrates the direct effects of brand perception, immersive experience, and identity symbolism on purchase intention, but also highlights the relative strength of each pathway, thereby laying the groundwork for the subsequent mediation analysis.

### 4.3. Mediation analysis and residual diagnostics

Mediation tests revealed that brand preference mediates the relationship between immersive experience and purchase intention. Immersion indirectly increased intention via stronger brand preference (see Figure 2). Similarly, identity symbolism exerted partial mediation effects.

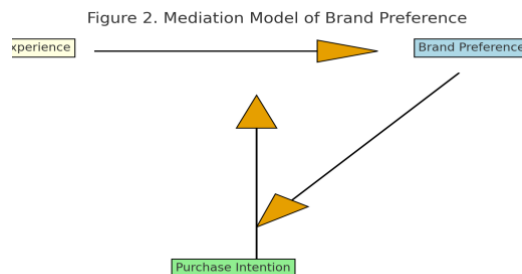


Figure 2. Mediation model of brand preference

Residual diagnostics were conducted to assess the assumptions of linearity, normality, and homoscedasticity in the regression model. As shown in Figure 3, the standardized residuals are randomly scattered around the zero line with no visible trend or curvature, indicating that the relationship between predictors and purchase intention is approximately linear. The spread of residuals remains relatively constant across predicted values, confirming homoscedasticity. Furthermore, the residuals appear to be symmetrically distributed around zero, suggesting that the normality assumption is reasonably satisfied. No significant outliers or influential observations were detected, as all standardized residuals fall within acceptable limits. Overall, the residual plot supports the validity and reliability of the regression model used in this study.

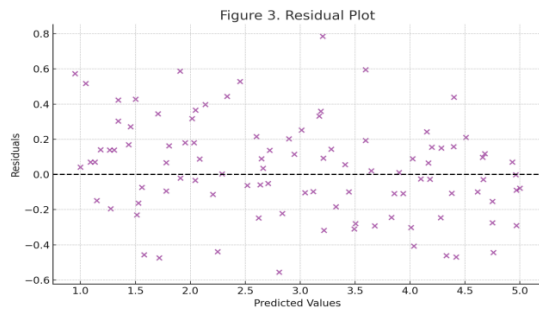


Figure 3. Residual plot for regression diagnostics

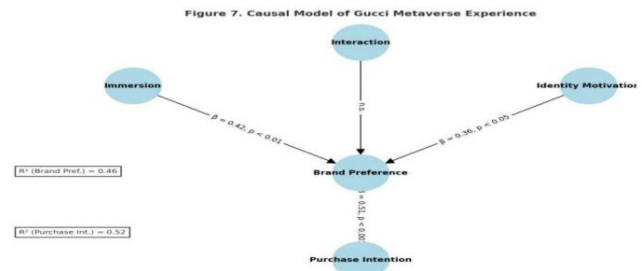


Figure 4. Causal model of gucci metaverse experience

## 5. Discussion

This study extends existing theories of luxury consumption to virtual contexts. Findings confirm that symbolic value persists in the metaverse, consistent with Veblen’s and Kapferer and Bastien’s frameworks. Additionally, immersive experience emerges as a distinct driver of virtual luxury consumption, highlighting a new dimension—post-conspicuous consumption—in which status is derived not only from the possession of luxury goods but also from the experience within digital worlds [1,5].

1. Invest in High-Fidelity Immersion: Gucci should deepen investment in VR/AR and gaming partnerships to enhance immersion.
2. Identity Expression: Virtual goods should prioritize customization and scarcity to reinforce symbolic signaling.
3. Cross-Platform Integration: Aligning metaverse strategies with Instagram and TikTok ensures visibility across both virtual and social channels.
4. Pricing: Premium pricing models for virtual products can leverage symbolic and experiential value.

## 6. Conclusion

Regression and mediation analyses reveal that immersion and identity motivation are strong predictors of brand preference; interaction contributes but is less central once preference is accounted for. Preference, in turn, mediates the influence of experiential drivers on intention, indicating that successful metaverse strategies for luxury brands should first focus on building favorable brand perceptions. From a managerial perspective, luxury brands engaging in virtual worlds must invest in creating high-fidelity immersive environments and avatar/virtual-goods systems that foster identity expression. Focusing only on social features or interactivity may yield diminishing returns without reinforcing brand perception. Brands should also monitor overlaps among experiential dimensions and refine which levers are unique. This study has several limitations: first, it relies on self-reported cross-sectional data; second, the sample is skewed toward digitally savvy users. Future studies can employ longitudinal designs, compare across multiple luxury brands, or integrate behavioral data from metaverse platforms.

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