

# **Sleeping Beauties: The Limited Consumer Appropriation of their Inherited Luxury Products**

## *Short abstract*

In the new era of the circular economy, consumers are encouraged to make the most of their possessions. However, in the present research we show the low appropriation of inherited luxury goods (in comparison with similar purchases or gifts). We explain that this low appropriation occurs because consumers do not feel entitled to modify (e.g., to make the product fit) or even use the products that once belonged to their relatives. In a moderation study, we also show that this effect is stronger with low (vs. high) SES consumers. Three experiments test the theoretical framework.

## *Long abstract*

Part of what makes luxury goods so valuable is that they are deemed eternal and can be passed on from one generation to the next, as illustrated by Patek Philippe's famous slogan: "*You never actually own a Patek Philippe, you merely look after it for the next generation*" (Lacroix & Jolibert, 2017). However, whether and how consumers approach and possibly use inherited luxury legacies remains mostly unknown. Indeed, past research has mainly studied the donators' perspective showing how individuals bequeath products that symbolize their skills, wealth or family traditions (Folkman-Curasi, Price, & Arnould, 2004; Kessous et al., 2017; Price, Arnould, & Folkman-Curasi, 2000). In the present work, we explore recipients' behaviors.

The first question consumers encounter when inheriting a product is how to make it their own (Kessous et al., 2017). Since the product was bought and used to fit someone else's needs, preliminarily investments (e.g., repairs, size adjustment) may be necessary before the product can even be used. In other words, recipients first need to appropriate this heirloom (i.e., making it fit to themselves) (Steils et al., 2019), which can actually be hard to achieve. For example, the recipients may feel overwhelmed by a symbol of accomplishment for which they are not responsible (Grossman & Rahinel, 2021; Kessous et al., 2015). They may also fear to be perceived by others as overprivileged and undeserving (Bradford, 2009; Kessous et al., 2015). For these reasons, we expect that recipients of inherited luxury goods feel less entitled to appropriate these goods (i.e., to modify and frequently use it) than their counterparts who would have for example bought them. More formally:

H1: Consumers are less likely to appropriate a luxury product when inherited than acquired otherwise.

H2: Consumers' low appropriation of inherited (vs. purchased) products is driven by lower (vs. higher) feelings of product entitlement.

Moreover, some consumers naturally feel more entitled to use and appropriate products than others (e.g., Pallant et al., 2020). In particular, high-SES (Socio-Economic Status) individuals tend to feel more entitled than low-SES individuals (Côté et al., 2021). As a result, we expect the effect to be stronger for the latter than the former. More formally:

H3: Consumers' low appropriation of inherited (vs. purchased) products is higher for low-SES than for high-SES consumers.

Three experiments test these hypotheses.

Study 1 compared appropriation from inheritance with the three other main acquisition modes in luxury, namely, first-hand purchasing, second-hand purchasing, and gift-receiving. We assigned 148 student participants (52% female,  $M_{\text{age}} = 20$ ) to one of the four experimental conditions, asking them to imagine owning a Rolex watch (either received from inheritance,

as a gift or bought from a first-hand or second-hand retailer). We then measured the dependent variable, product appropriation, on a four-item scale (e.g., “I would like to modify the watch (e.g., change the watchband)” from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree;  $\alpha = .64$ ).

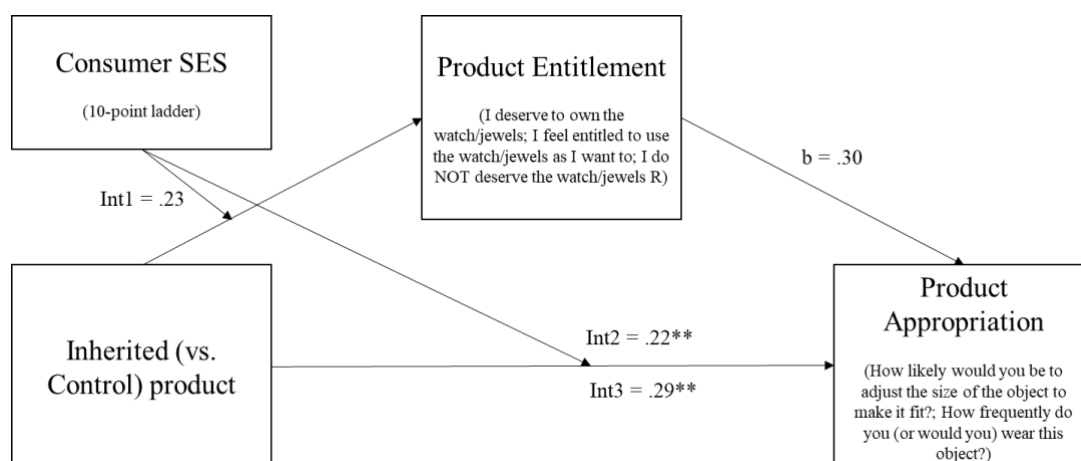
An ANOVA revealed a main effect of acquisition modes on product appropriation ( $F(3, 144) = 10.20, p < .001$ ), with participants less likely to appropriate the watch in the inheritance condition ( $M = 2.58, SD = 1.15$ ) than in the first-hand purchase ( $M = 3.91, SD = .82; t(144) = -5.50, p < .001$ ), second-hand purchase ( $M = 3.19, SD = .97; t(144) = -2.51, p = .01$ ) and gift-receiving conditions ( $M = 3.33, SD = 1.18; t(144) = -3.10, p = .002$ ). Study 1 supported H1.

In Study 2, we tested the mediating effect of product entitlement. In this study, 329 MTurk users (41% female,  $M_{age} = 41$ ) were assigned to one of the three conditions (inherited from a close relative, inherited from a distant acquaintance, non-inherited). To test whether the proximity between the person giving and receiving the inheritance had an effect, we created two different conditions, but found no difference between these conditions. The procedure was similar to Study 1 except that participants saw a picture of the Rolex watch (to keep the appearance of the product constant across conditions), and later rated their feeling of entitlement toward the watch on a three-item scale (e.g., “I feel entitled to use the watch as I want to”, from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree;  $\alpha = .75$ ).

We replicated the result of Study 1 ( $F(2, 326) = 35.87, p < .001$ ). The product appropriation was lower in both inheritance conditions ( $M_{close} = 3.63, SD = 1.62; M_{distant} = 3.54, SD = 1.50$ ) than in the non-inheritance condition ( $M = 5.12; SD = 1.30; t(326) = -8.45, p < .001$ ). This effect was mediated by product appropriation (Process Model 4; Indirect effect =  $-1.34, SE = .19, 95\% CI = [-1.71, -.98]$ ). Study 2 corroborated both H1 and H2.

In Study 3, 300 Mturk users (44% female,  $M_{age} = 39$ ) took part in the 2 (inherited vs. non-inherited product) cells design study. We used a different procedure, asking participants to recall a watch (/jewels) that they own(ed) (either from inheritance vs. other). Only participants who had no such experience relied on a fictional scenario (26%). We later measured participants’ SES on a 10-point scale (i.e., ladder; Adler et al. 2000). Replicating prior results, product appropriation was lower in the inheritance ( $M = 3.20, SD = 1.97$ ) than in the control condition ( $M = 4.97, SD = 1.58; F(1, 298) = 73.55, p < .001$ ). This main effect was moderated by SES (Interaction =  $.29, t(296) = 2.72, p = .01$ ), and did not hold for high-SES participants ( $SES > 8.27$ ). A moderated mediation supported the whole model and the three hypotheses (Process, Model 8; Index of moderated mediation =  $.07, 95\% CI = [.01, .15]$ , cf. figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Study 3: Moderated Mediation Model.



Note. Process Model 8 (Hayes and Preacher 2013). Int1: Consumer SES  $\times$  Inherited (vs. Control) Product on Product Entitlement; Int2: Direct effect of Consumer SES  $\times$  Inherited (vs. Control) Product on Product Appropriation; Int3: Total effect of Consumer SES  $\times$  Inherited (vs. Control) Product on Product Appropriation. The effects hold after controlling for the product category and whether participants relied on an experience (vs. a scenario).

To conclude, this first exploration of consumers' attitudes and usage of inherited luxury goods reveals that lack of product appropriation stemming from low feelings of entitlement can turn customers away from luxury goods. Further experiments examine how to foster the consumer appropriation of their inherited possessions.