



Cultural values, status signalling and quiet luxury adoption in collectivist emerging markets

Cut Kesuma Pahlufi^{1*}, Muhammad Dharma Tuah Putra Nasution²

¹Universitas Dharmawangsa

²Universitas Sumatera Utara

Corresponding Author: Cut Kesuma Pahlufi cut.pahlufi@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Existing status signalling frameworks, developed within individualistic cultural contexts, cannot predict luxury consumption in collectivist societies, where affluent consumers favour understated expressions despite possessing both the economic means and the social motivation to signal status conspicuously.

Design/methodology/approach: We develop Cultural Signalling Adaptation Theory by integrating status signalling theory, cultural values research, and acculturation mechanisms, illustrated through Indonesia as a collectivist emerging market case study.

Findings: The framework identifies four mechanisms through which cultural values reshape luxury signalling: cultural filtering, which suppresses materialist motivation; identity protection, which generates resistance to culturally incongruent consumption; bicultural competence, which enables navigation between global sophistication
Research limitations/implications: The framework is conceptual and requires empirical validation across diverse collectivist markets. Priority directions include scale development for cultural adaptation strategies, boundary condition testing across Southeast and South Asian contexts, and longitudinal tracking of adaptation patterns.

Practical implications: Luxury brands should emphasise cultural sensitivity, quality craftsmanship, and community-oriented positioning over status symbolism, with segmentation based on cultural adaptation approaches rather than economic capability alone.

Originality/value: This paper extends signalling theory beyond individualistic assumptions by demonstrating cultural moderation of the wealth-status relationship

INTRODUCTION

Global luxury consumption has shifted toward understatement. Where conspicuous display once dominated, "quiet luxury," defined by quality, craftsmanship, and the deliberate suppression of visible brand markers, has gained traction across markets (Thomsen et al., 2020; Amatulli et al., 2018). Post-pandemic shifts in consumer values toward authenticity, mindfulness, and sustainable consumption have deepened this trend (Pantano et al., 2021; Mehrabi et al., 2023), and longitudinal evidence shows these preferences persist rather than cycle (Nguyen et al., 2026). Nunes et al. (2021) add a nuance: consumers' sense of "genuine" luxury is itself culturally conditioned, so the quiet luxury ideal does not translate uniformly across markets. Underlying these changes is a shift in how consumers derive and communicate status: away from material accumulation and conspicuous display, toward experiential depth, craftsmanship, and community-aligned consumption (Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2019; Cristini et al., 2017). Experiential and hedonic dimensions of luxury have grown more central too (Bauer et al., 2022; Holmqvist et al., 2020). Established theory explains luxury choice mainly through wealth-driven status display (Berger and Ward, 2010; Kastanakis and Balabanis, 2012). These shifts challenge that explanation directly.

Status signalling theory accounts for these choices well within individualistic markets (Han et al., 2010; Goor et al., 2021), but cross-cultural research reveals consistent deviations in collectivist environments (Shukla and Purani, 2012; Pino et al., 2019). Stathopoulou and Balabanis (2019) show that cultural value orientations shape luxury consumption propensity, and Shammout (2022) identifies materialism as the mediating mechanism: collectivist values suppress materialism, which dampens status-driven consumption. This body of work has not addressed the strategy through which signalling operates. Existing research shows that cultural values affect how much consumers buy. It does not show how they choose to signal.

The problem is sharpest in emerging markets, where rapid economic development coincides with strong cultural identity preservation (Burgess and Steenkamp, 2006; Sheth, 2011). These are the markets where Western signalling frameworks are most likely to fail: consumers have the wealth to signal conspicuously, the social motivation to do so, and cultural reasons not to. The result is a set of preference patterns that contradicts established theory: quality over logomania, community orientation over individual display, heritage over novelty (Kumar et al., 2020; Athwal et al., 2019).

We propose Cultural Signalling Adaptation Theory, an integrated framework explaining how cultural values moderate luxury signalling strategy selection in collectivist emerging markets. The theory draws on cultural consumption research (Cleveland et al., 2022; Strizhakova and Coulter, 2019), acculturation theory (Nasution et al., 2023; Sam and Berry, 2010), and luxury status signalling research (Fuentes et al., 2023; Cho et al., 2025) to generate predictions that existing frameworks do not accommodate.

Three questions structure the investigation: how collectivist cultural values moderate the wealth-status signalling relationship; what psychological and social mechanisms explain why some consumers prefer quiet over conspicuous luxury expressions; and how consumers in collectivist markets develop adaptive strategies that let them participate in global luxury culture while preserving local cultural authenticity.

Indonesia anchors the empirical illustration: a market where the theory's predictions are sharpest because cultural cohesion and economic aspiration coexist at scale (Shahid et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2022). Section 2 reviews the theoretical foundations. Section 3 develops the integrated framework and its predictions. Section 4 presents five testable propositions. Section 5 discusses theoretical contributions, managerial implications, and future research directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Development

Status Signalling Theory: Foundations and Cultural Limitations

Status signalling theory grounds the dominant account of luxury consumption behaviour, explaining consumer choices as strategic communications of social position and group membership (Fuentes et al., 2023). Its most influential application is Han et al.'s (2010) brand prominence taxonomy, which predicts signalling strategy from two consumer characteristics: wealth level and desire for status.

Wealthy consumers with low status needs gravitate toward "quiet" goods that signal sophistication within a knowledgeable reference group while remaining invisible to wider audiences. Those with high status needs favour "loud" luxury: prominently branded products that communicate wealth across social distance. Between these poles, consumers calibrate brand visibility to match their signalling objectives.

The framework has held up well empirically within Western contexts (Berger and Ward, 2010; Goor et al., 2021), and Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) extend it usefully by showing how conformity motivation shapes brand preference within luxury categories.

Outside that context, the framework breaks down. Collectivist consumers show reduced preference for conspicuous signalling even after controlling for wealth and status need (Shukla and Purani, 2012; Pino et al., 2019; Batra et al., 2024), a pattern the brand prominence model does not predict. Power distance complicates the picture further: Aw et al. (2021) find that high power distance belief strengthens preference for prominently branded luxury, while Wu et al. (2017) show that Chinese consumers, high on both collectivism and power distance, favour inconspicuous luxury for reasons of refined taste rather than modesty, a motivation absent from Western signalling accounts.

The root of these deviations is an assumption baked into signalling theory: that the desire to maximise individual status is a universal human motivation. It is not. Collectivist values, centred on group harmony, social cohesion, and relational obligation, can override individual status drives in ways the framework has no mechanism to represent (Wang et al., 2022; Bakir et al., 2020). Multi-country evidence confirms that cultural value orientations moderate materialism and its downstream effects on consumption (Schwartz, 2022; Cleveland et al., 2022).

Cultural Values and Luxury Consumption Moderation

This is more than an empirical anomaly. Signalling frameworks are not missing a variable; they are built on a cultural premise that does not travel. Cross-cultural consumer research now treats cultural values as a systematic moderator of consumption behaviour rather than a background condition (Cleveland et al., 2022; Stathopoulou and Balabanis, 2019). Cultural orientation shapes how much consumers spend on luxury goods and which dimensions of luxury value they weight most: whether a product reads as a status signal, a social bond, or an expression of personal refinement.

Stathopoulou and Balabanis (2019) identify collectivism as the primary cultural dimension at work, operating through two channels: it suppresses individual status differentiation and elevates group harmony above personal distinction. Across multiple countries, collectivist consumers show lower propensity for status-signalling luxury. Western frameworks register this as noise, but it is a predictable cultural effect. Shammout (2022) traces the psychological mechanism: collectivist values suppress materialism, and reduced materialism dampens status-driven consumption. The buying itself does not shrink. It gets redirected, from status display toward quality appreciation, functional emphasis, and community-aligned expression.

Brand-level evidence reinforces this picture. Collectivist consumers prefer luxury brands associated with heritage, craftsmanship, and quality over those associated with status symbolism, even controlling for economic capability and personal status need (Wang et al., 2020). Aspirational motivations do not disappear in collectivist contexts. They point elsewhere. Emerging market consumers want sophistication, but cultural values determine what sophistication looks like, tilting preference toward the subtle over the conspicuous (Kumar and Paul, 2018).

The cross-cultural record supports this pattern. Collectivist national identity attenuates the materialism-promoting effects of global consumer culture exposure, a direct implication for luxury signalling in markets where cultural identity remains strong (Cleveland et al., 2022). Collective materialism differs structurally from its individual counterpart and drives consumption through mechanisms Western frameworks have not theorised (Batra et al., 2024). Culture and materialism jointly moderate status motivation among Malaysian Generation Y consumers (Zakaria et al., 2021), and collectivist consumers assign higher weight to the social and functional dimensions of luxury value and lower weight to the hedonic and conspicuous (Wong et al., 2023).

The digital environment adds another layer. Social media platforms have become spaces for cultural negotiation in luxury consumption, where collectivist consumers develop strategies for maintaining cultural authenticity while engaging with global luxury brands (Liu et al., 2022). Younger consumers in emerging markets co-create culturally adapted luxury meanings online, reinterpreting global trends against local identity requirements rather than absorbing them wholesale (Singh and Kumar, 2023). This evidence reframes cultural values: less a constraint on luxury consumption, more a filter determining which elements of global luxury culture get adopted and how they get expressed.

Cultural Adaptation and Acculturation Mechanisms

Local adaptation of global luxury trends is not automatic. Consumers exposed to new cultural practices do not adopt or reject them outright. They negotiate, selectively integrate, and reframe them depending on how strongly they identify with their original culture. A useful framework for this process identifies four consumer adaptation strategies: integration (maintaining the original culture while selectively adopting new elements), assimilation (relinquishing the original culture for the new), separation (rejecting the new culture while retaining the original), and marginalisation (rejecting both cultures). Nasution et al. (2023) apply this framework to marketing directly, showing how Indonesian Muslim consumers deploy each strategy in response to the Korean Wave. Different acculturation modes produce measurably different patterns of global product acceptance, and religious and cultural values are the primary moderating factors.

Within luxury consumption contexts, this four-mode framework suggests that integration represents the most sustainable adaptation strategy: it allows consumers to participate in global luxury culture without requiring them to abandon the cultural values that shape what counts as appropriate consumption (Sam and Berry, 2010; Nguyen and Benet-Martínez, 2013).

Bicultural competence is central to how this integration works (LaFromboise et al., 1993; Benet-Martínez and Haritatos, 2005). Biculturally competent consumers move between cultural systems, drawing on whichever repertoire a situation demands: demonstrating global brand awareness among cosmopolitan peers while maintaining cultural appropriateness in family or community contexts.

Makkar and Yap (2018) trace this process empirically, showing how consumers construct emotional experiences around inconspicuous luxury that satisfy both global sophistication needs and personal authenticity requirements. Quiet luxury preferences reflect successful integration of global trends with personal value systems, not simple rejection of status signalling. Cho et al. (2025) extend this finding by identifying social connectedness as the mediating mechanism: consumers favour understated luxury not to avoid ostentation but because subtle signals reinforce bonds with discerning in-group members, an insight relevant for collectivist contexts where relational belonging takes precedence over individual differentiation.

Digital platforms have reshaped this process. Younger consumers use social media to navigate cultural tensions in luxury consumption, experimenting with hybrid signalling forms that satisfy both global trend participation and local cultural norms (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021). Platforms expose consumers to diverse cultural expressions and enable peer validation of adaptation choices, letting bicultural competence develop without physical cultural immersion (Chen and Yang, 2019; Dey et al., 2020). AI-driven recommendation systems reinforce cultural boundaries or facilitate cross-cultural exploration depending on engagement patterns (Zhang and Li, 2024), and augmented reality opens new possibilities for experiencing luxury culture across geographic boundaries (Nakamura et al., 2023). Collectivist consumers use luxury brand platforms differently from individualist consumers, prioritising community building and value alignment over individual status display, even when the brand's own communication assumes otherwise (Pentina et al., 2018).

Emerging Market Dynamics and Cultural Resistance

Emerging markets complicate the picture further. Rapid economic development, strong cultural identity, and exposure to global trends coexist in ways that do not map cleanly onto either conspicuous or inconspicuous preference (Sheth, 2011; Burgess and Steenkamp, 2006).

Pino et al. (2019) illustrate this directly: Indian consumers with high status consumption tendencies prefer prominently branded luxury over subtle alternatives at rates not observed among comparable U.S. consumers. Cultural resistance to quiet luxury is not uniform. Some markets generate it, others suppress it. Kumar et al. (2020) explain why: in many emerging markets, luxury serves several functions at once, including status signalling, cultural identity expression, aspirational communication, and social mobility demonstration, none reducible to a simple conspicuous-versus-inconspicuous axis.

Sustainability adds another dimension. Emerging market consumers increasingly favour brands that demonstrate social responsibility, cultural sensitivity, and environmental consciousness, criteria that extend well beyond status signalling (Athwal et al., 2019). This orientation has intensified since the pandemic: conscious consumption has become a primary purchase driver among younger emerging market consumers (Rosendo-Ríos et al., 2022), and brands incorporating circular economy principles and local cultural heritage outperform traditional status-oriented brands on brand equity and loyalty in collectivist markets (Wei and Zhao, 2024).

For global luxury brands, culturally cohesive markets present a specific challenge: consumer ethnocentrism is stronger where cultural identity is stronger (Kinawy, 2025), and resistance to culturally incongruent consumption is not irrational friction but a coherent identity-preservation strategy (Małecka et al., 2025). Cultural identity strength predicts selectivity in global trend adoption across Southeast Asian markets. Consumers in high-identity markets favour brands that demonstrate cultural sensitivity over those that import Western luxury codes wholesale (Tan et al., 2022). Indonesia is the clearest case: religious values, modesty norms, and relational identity are the primary moderators of inconspicuous luxury preference (Mores et al., 2025). Even within Asia,

Confucian-influenced societies differ in luxury attitude, which makes disaggregated analysis necessary rather than optional (Lu et al., 2022).

Cross-generational studies in emerging markets reveal additional complexity. Younger consumers demonstrate higher bicultural competence and greater comfort with hybrid consumption expressions, while older consumers maintain stronger preferences for culturally traditional patterns (Sobol et al., 2018; Rodas and Torelli, 2021). These generational differences create segmentation opportunities grounded in cultural adaptation capability rather than simple demographic characteristics. Rahman and Ahmed (2023), tracking luxury consumption across three generations in South Asian markets, find accelerating adoption of quiet luxury principles among digital natives, with a substantial majority of Gen Z consumers preferring subtle sophistication over conspicuous branding.

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Integration and Framework Development

Cultural Signalling Adaptation Theory

Cultural Signalling Adaptation Theory synthesises the evidence reviewed above into a unified account of how cultural values moderate luxury signalling strategy in collectivist emerging markets. It draws together status signalling mechanisms (Han et al., 2010), cultural values moderation research (Stathopoulou and Balabanis, 2019; Shammout, 2022), and acculturation processes (Nasution et al., 2023; Sam and Berry, 2010).

The integration operates through four interconnected mechanisms that together explain how cultural context reshapes the logic of luxury signalling. The cultural filtering mechanism holds that collectivist values create a systematic preference for luxury expressions that preserve social harmony over individual distinction, operating through the materialism reduction pathway identified by Shammout (2022) and validated across cultural contexts (Wang et al., 2020; Kumar and Paul, 2018). The filtering mechanism explains which luxury expressions gain cultural traction. The identity protection mechanism explains why culturally incongruent alternatives get resisted: strong cultural identity generates active resistance to consumption patterns that conflict with traditional values, sustaining culturally congruent preferences regardless of changes in economic capability (Kinawy, 2025; Malecka et al., 2025). This resistance reflects a coherent identity-preservation logic grounded in ethnocentrism and brand perception research, not irrationality (Ewing et al., 2024; Shimp and Sharma, 1987).

The first two mechanisms operate mainly as constraining forces: filtering and protecting against cultural incongruence. The latter two describe how consumers navigate these constraints. The bicultural competence mechanism explains how experienced consumers develop the capacity to move between global luxury sophistication and local cultural authenticity through selective adoption strategies (Benet-Martínez and Haritatos, 2005; LaFromboise et al., 1993), enabling integration rather than assimilation or rejection. The digital mediation mechanism describes how contemporary platforms extend and accelerate this process by enabling new forms of culturally appropriate signalling

and peer validation of hybrid consumption expressions (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021; Chen and Yang, 2019). Digital environments are testing grounds where consumers experiment with cultural adaptation strategies while staying anchored to both global trends and local cultural communities.

Predictions from the Framework

The framework's central prediction is the cultural override hypothesis: collectivist values can reverse the signalling relationships that Han et al.'s (2010) brand prominence model predicts.

Wealthy consumers with high status needs in collectivist cultures may nonetheless prefer quiet luxury when cultural values prioritise group harmony over individual distinction (Stathopoulou and Balabanis, 2019; Wang et al., 2022). This goes beyond a minor qualification of the brand prominence model: it predicts that the model's core wealth $\times$ status-need interaction produces opposite outcomes under collectivist cultural conditions. Goor et al.'s (2021) "status pivoting" research is instructive here: signalling behaviour is more audience-sensitive and context-contingent than the original framework assumed, which creates room for the cultural moderation proposed here. Zhang et al. (2026) add that self-continuity and cultural self-concept independently predict preference for inconspicuous luxury, factors that are psychologically prior to wealth or status need.

The adaptation strategy differentiation hypothesis predicts that consumers' acculturation mode systematically shapes their signalling preferences: integration strategies tend to produce quiet luxury adoption, while assimilation strategies are more likely to generate conspicuous signalling (Nasution et al., 2023; Nguyen and Benet-Martínez, 2013). This offers a culturally grounded basis for market segmentation that goes beyond income or demographics.

The generational bicultural competence hypothesis predicts that younger consumers will show greater capacity to hold global luxury sophistication and local cultural authenticity in productive tension, expressed through experiential and digitally mediated quiet luxury choices rather than conspicuous display (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021; Makkar and Yap, 2018).

Indonesian Case Study Context

Indonesia is a natural context for empirical testing. As the world's fourth most populous nation with a strong collectivist orientation, it is a market where religious values, social harmony, and family solidarity moderate individual consumption behaviour (Ratnasari et al., 2023; Mores and Pradipto, 2025; Elgeka, 2025). It also has a rapidly expanding affluent consumer segment and a luxury market growing fast enough to generate meaningful variance in adaptation strategies (Shahid et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2022). That combination is what makes the theory's predictions testable.

The distinction between inherited wealth (old money) and achieved wealth (new money) offers particular insight into how wealth source shapes adaptation strategy (Shaikh et al., 2026; Reed et al., 2012). Established wealth families typically favour quiet luxury: understated quality, sophisticated simplicity, because their cultural identity is already secured. New money segments, by contrast, face simultaneous pressure to communicate economic

arrival and maintain cultural belonging, a tension that conspicuous signalling can resolve in ways quiet luxury cannot.

Generational differences within Indonesian society add theoretical traction. Younger cohorts show higher global cultural exposure and digital engagement while maintaining strong cultural identity connections (Sobol et al., 2018; Pentina et al., 2018), conditions that favour the development of bicultural competence rather than assimilation or separation, and that make digital platform engagement a plausible mediator of quiet luxury adoption. Indonesia does more than illustrate the theory. It stress-tests it, offering a market where Cultural Signalling Adaptation Theory's predictions are most likely to diverge from Western-derived frameworks, and where empirical confirmation would carry the greatest theoretical weight.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Propositions

Five testable propositions follow from the framework:

P1 (Cultural Override Mechanism): In collectivist cultural contexts, cultural value orientation will moderate the traditional wealth-status signalling relationship, such that consumers with strong collectivist values will prefer quiet luxury signalling even when they possess both high wealth and high status needs.

P1 extends Han et al.'s (2010) brand prominence model by introducing cultural value orientation as a moderator of the wealth $\times$ status-need interaction. The mechanism runs through materialism: collectivist values suppress materialism (Shammout, 2022), and reduced materialism redirects signalling motivation away from status competition and toward cultural alignment, producing quiet preference even among consumers who have both the means and the motivation to signal loudly (Stathopoulou and Balabanis, 2019).

P2 (Wealth Source Identity Effects): Wealth source will moderate cultural adaptation of luxury signalling, such that inherited wealth (old money) segments will demonstrate stronger cultural alignment and greater preference for quiet luxury compared to achieved wealth (new money) segments.

Inherited wealth is typically accompanied by secure cultural identity and long-established community standing, conditions that favour integration adaptation strategies and the understated signalling associated with them (Han et al., 2023; Reed et al., 2012). Achieved wealth, by contrast, requires active identity negotiation: new money consumers face pressure to signal both economic arrival and cultural belonging, creating conditions where conspicuous signalling serves a function that quiet luxury cannot (Nasution et al., 2023).

P3 (Generational Bicultural Competence): Younger consumers will demonstrate higher bicultural competence in luxury consumption, expressed as greater ability to navigate between global sophistication and local cultural authenticity through experiential and digitally mediated choices.

The rationale lies in accumulated digital exposure: younger cohorts have developed the cultural code-switching capacity to hold global and local luxury identities simultaneously rather than choosing between them (Sobol et al., 2018; Rodas and Torelli, 2021; Benet-Martínez and Haritatos, 2005). Digital platforms are the arena in which this competence is both exercised and reinforced (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021).

P4 (Digital Cultural Transmission): Digital engagement intensity will mediate the relationship between generational cohort and quiet luxury preference, operating through facilitation of culturally adapted signalling norm transmission and reference group identification.

The mechanism is norm transmission: digital engagement exposes consumers to culturally adapted signalling repertoires and provides the peer validation that stabilises them as reference group norms (Dey et al., 2020; Chen and Yang, 2019). Platform-mediated social influence amplifies this effect, with collectivist consumers particularly responsive to community-oriented value signals over individual status cues (Wang et al., 2022; Pentina et al., 2018). Older cohorts with lower digital engagement intensity have less access to these adapted norms and therefore show weaker quiet luxury preference independent of income or cultural identity strength.

P5 (Cultural Identity Protection): Cultural identity strength will protect against incongruent consumption patterns, moderating the relationship between economic capability and luxury signalling such that strong cultural identity maintains culturally appropriate signalling preferences regardless of changes in economic status.

Here, cultural identity governs consumption. It is not merely a preference. Ewing et al.'s (2024) evidence that ethnic and global identity strength systematically shapes brand perception and evaluation, applied through Malecka et al.'s (2025) consumer resistance model and Kinawy's (2025) ethnocentrism evidence, predicts that consumers with strong cultural identification will resist incongruent consumption even when economic constraints are absent, making identity strength, rather than income, the binding constraint on signalling choice (Shimp and Sharma, 1987).

Theoretical Contributions and Implications

Theoretical Contributions

Three contributions stand out. The first extends signalling theory directly: introducing cultural value orientation as a moderator of the wealth $\times$ status-need interaction shows that the preference reversals documented in collectivist markets are not anomalies but predictions, outcomes that follow once the theory's individualistic premise is replaced with a culturally contingent one (Han et al., 2010; Berger and Ward, 2010). Cultural values research and materialism mediation provide the empirical grounding for this moderation (Stathopoulou and Balabanis, 2019; Shammout, 2022).

The second is mechanistic. Existing cross-cultural research has established that cultural values affect how much luxury consumers buy (Cleveland et al., 2022; Batra et al., 2024). Missing is an account of how that influence reaches signalling strategy. The four mechanisms (materialism mediation, identity protection, bicultural competence, and digital transmission) supply that account, each specifying a distinct psychological or social pathway from cultural value to consumption choice (Wang et al., 2020; Kumar and Paul, 2018).

The third challenges a convergence assumption running implicitly through much of the emerging market luxury literature: that as markets develop economically, they develop culturally toward Western individualism. The framework predicts the opposite. Cultural identity is not a transitional condition on the way to conspicuous consumption. It is a systematic moderator that generates its own stable preference structure (Burgess and Steenkamp, 2006; Sheth, 2011).

Managerial Implications

For luxury brands operating in collectivist emerging markets, the framework points to three practical reorientations.

Cultural positioning strategies should emphasise quality, craftsmanship, heritage, and cultural sensitivity rather than status symbolism or conspicuous display (Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2019; Cristini et al., 2017). Marketing communications should foreground community-oriented luxury experiences and family-centred consumption narratives rather than individualistic status expression or competitive positioning.

Segmentation approaches should differentiate between consumer segments based on cultural adaptation strategies and identity strength rather than on economic capability or demographic characteristics alone (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2019; Benet-Martínez and Haritatos, 2005). Old money segments require subtle quality recognition and cultural heritage emphasis, while new money segments benefit from balanced approaches that acknowledge achievement while maintaining cultural appropriateness and social harmony.

Digital strategies should prioritise community building and value alignment over status display, reflecting how collectivist consumers use luxury brand platforms (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021; Pentina et al., 2018). Digital and physical touchpoints need to tell the same story: cultural sensitivity communicated online that disappears in-store reads as performance rather than commitment.

Future Research Directions

Three research directions follow directly from the framework's limitations.

Comparative multi-market testing is the most urgent need. The propositions generate specific predictions about which collectivist markets will show preference reversals and how large those reversals will be relative to cultural identity strength and global exposure (Cleveland et al., 2022; Batra et al., 2024). Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and India offer natural comparison points because they differ systematically on both dimensions.

Measurement development is the methodological priority. The four mechanisms (materialism mediation, identity protection, bicultural competence, digital transmission) each require validated scales adapted to luxury consumption contexts. Existing acculturation instruments (Sam and Berry, 2010; Nguyen and Benet-Martínez, 2013) provide a starting point, but luxury-specific items are needed to capture the cultural negotiation processes the framework theorises.

Longitudinal tracking would address the framework's implicit temporal assumption: that cultural identity is stable enough to sustain consistent preference patterns as markets mature. Whether adaptation strategies shift with generational replacement, increased global exposure, or rising income is an empirical question the current framework cannot answer (Sobol et al., 2018; Rodas and Torelli, 2021).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Signalling theory predicts that wealth and status need determine luxury signalling strategy. This paper has argued that cultural context can override both. In collectivist markets, consumers with the means and motivation to signal conspicuously may choose not to, not despite their cultural values but because of them. That preference is not noise or transitional behaviour. It is a predictable outcome of a moderation process that existing frameworks have no mechanism to represent.

Cultural Signalling Adaptation Theory addresses this by specifying four mechanisms (materialism mediation, identity protection, bicultural competence, and digital transmission) that translate cultural values into signalling strategy. Together they generate five testable propositions, each predicting a direction of effect that runs counter to what standard brand prominence theory would expect. The theory does not replace signalling theory. It establishes the boundary conditions under which the original theory's predictions hold.

The practical implication follows directly: cultural identity is not a market characteristic that brands can treat as background context. In Indonesia and markets like it, it is the primary determinant of what luxury means and how it should be displayed. Brands that position against cultural values face resistance regardless of product quality or price point. Those that position with them, emphasising heritage, community, and understated quality, hold a structural advantage that conspicuous competitors cannot easily replicate.

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