Trend Labels and Brand Value
A Survey Study on Quiet Luxury and Clean Girl

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Abstract

Aesthetic labels such as “quiet luxury” and “clean girl” have moved quickly from social media trends to real consequences for how fashion brands are perceived and how they perform. Yet little research has quantified whether associating a brand with such a trend actually changes how consumers perceive and value that brand. This study investigated that question through an online survey experiment. A total of 399 U.S. adults who regularly use social media were randomly assigned to read one of eight brand descriptions, formed by crossing four brands (Loro Piana and Brunello Cucinelli, paired with quiet luxury; Aritzia and Reformation, paired with clean girl) with two conditions: a neutral description (control) and one that explicitly associated the brand with its trend (treatment). Participants then rated the brand on perception, prestige, authenticity, and purchase intent, and reported whether they viewed each trend as a lasting shift or a short-lived microtrend. Trend labeling did not significantly change perceived prestige or authenticity, but it significantly increased purchase intent and recommendation likelihood, indicating that trend association affected brand value more than brand image. The effect depended on the brand: the quiet luxury label raised purchase intent for Loro Piana, whereas the clean girl label lowered perceived quality and prestige for Aritzia. Status consumption did not moderate these effects. Respondents viewed quiet luxury as relatively durable and clean girl as more transient. Associating a brand with a trend thus appears to act as a lever on near-term brand value, benefiting a brand only when the trend fits the brand’s existing position.

Keywords: *Consumer psychology, Social media marketing, Microtrends, Fashion trends, Brand perception, Brand prestige, Brand authenticity, Quiet luxury, Clean girl, Status consumption, Brand equity and dilution*

1. Introduction

1. 1. Background and context

Social media has reshaped the trend dynamics of fashion. Labels such as quiet luxury and clean girl, which began as hashtags and short-form video captions, have become widely recognized categories that influence how consumers evaluate clothing brands. Quiet luxury is an aesthetic of subtle, high-end elegance that avoids flashy logos and communicates through silhouette and premium materials; it emerged in early 2023 amid post-pandemic fatigue with bold, logo-heavy fashion. Clean girl, which began trending on TikTok in late 2021, emphasizes a simple, effortless look built on monotone colors and minimalist items.

The commercial stakes are substantial, and they appear brand-specific rather than market-wide. Brunello Cucinelli, an Italian label seen as embodying quiet luxury, grew revenue by about 12 percent in 2024 (South China Morning Post, 2024; Business of Fashion, 2025), even as the global personal luxury goods market fell roughly 2 percent, one of its weakest years on record (Bain & Company, 2024), and LVMH's Fashion & Leather Goods division was essentially flat (LVMH, 2025). Within this contracting market, performance diverged along the lines of brand positioning: understated, heritage-driven houses outperformed, with Hermès growing about 15 percent (Hermès, 2025), whereas louder, logo-driven and trend-chasing brands contracted, with Gucci down roughly 23 percent and its parent Kering down about 12 percent (Kering, 2025). Because quiet-luxury-aligned brands gained ground while the overall market and trend-heavy brands declined, this pattern separates a brand-specific (idiosyncratic) effect from a market-wide (systematic) one, the same comparison logic the experiment below applies through its control condition. The comparison is observational and cannot establish causation, but it suggests that quiet luxury had genuine, brand-specific commercial relevance.

Such double-digit growth in an aesthetic-driven market makes it important to understand whether and how these labels change the way consumers perceive and wish to purchase brands. Here, brand value refers to how willing consumers are to purchase and recommend a brand.

Brands have long cultivated their identities through consistent visual marketing, messaging, and niche positioning, but the acceleration of social media has pushed brands to align themselves with rapidly shifting aesthetic trends (Kim & Kim, 2020). Research on luxury communication indicates that brands achieve higher engagement when their content emphasizes entertainment, interaction, and trendiness, though consumer-driven customization does not (Liu et al., 2021), and that aesthetic cues carry status meaning; low color saturation, for example, raises perceived value by signaling heritage and continuity (Zhou et al., 2025). How a brand is framed, including its explicit association with a trend, may therefore shape consumers' perception of its value.

Two contemporary trends show this dynamic clearly. Quiet luxury, popularized in part by the television series Succession and amplified on TikTok and Instagram, describes understated, logo-free clothing and subtle status signaling, and is closely associated with two brands studied here, Loro Piana and Brunello Cucinelli (Fortune, 2023); some consumers, described as inconspicuous minimalists, prefer such discreet luxury as subtle acknowledgment among knowledgeable peers (Taylor et al., 2025). Clean girl, which emerged on TikTok in late 2021, describes a minimalist, effortless aesthetic of neutral colors and is associated with more accessibly priced brands, Aritzia and Reformation. Although the two share a minimalist visual language, they operate at markedly different price tiers, making them a useful pair for testing whether trend effects generalize across the luxury spectrum.

1. 2. Problem statement and rationale

The speed at which such trends emerge and fade raises a further question. A microtrend is a short-lived aesthetic that gains and loses popularity quickly, driven by social-media algorithms and ultra-fast fashion. Whereas traditional fashion cycles once trickled down gradually from runways, luxury houses, and magazines, TikTok's algorithmically driven feed now distributes content well beyond follower networks, compressing the cycle from years into months (Burns, 2025; Vladimirova et al., 2024). Fashion is increasingly shaped and democratized by influencers and ordinary users, and consumer-psychology mechanisms such as the bandwagon effect, social proof, and fear of missing out encourage rapid adoption. For brands, microtrends present a strategic tension: a viral trend offers short-term visibility but may dilute long-term identity if it proves ephemeral. Whether quiet luxury and clean girl function as durable shifts or short-lived microtrends remains an open question.

Although media and academic work have described these trends extensively, there is limited experimental evidence isolating the causal effect of trend labeling on perceptions of specific brands, or establishing whether brands are better off for the association; existing work tends to describe trends qualitatively or to analyze aggregate outcomes such as sales and engagement without manipulating exposure directly. The present study addresses this gap with a randomized survey experiment. This method holds the brand description constant and varies only whether the trend is named, so that any difference in consumer response can be attributed to the trend label itself, a causal claim that observational or interview-based designs cannot support.

1. 3. Objectives and significance

This study examines how fashion microtrends influence consumer perception and the resulting brand value. It offers three contributions: it provides experimental rather than descriptive evidence, isolating trend labeling from confounds such as brand familiarity; it tests whether trend effects generalize across the luxury spectrum by comparing two trends at different price tiers; and it offers practical insight into whether aligning a brand with a microtrend builds or erodes long-term value. Three research questions guide the study. RQ1: Does labeling a brand with a trend change how consumers perceive and value it? RQ2: Are brands perceived as better off, that is, more prestigious, desirable, and valuable, when associated with a trend? RQ3: Do consumers regard quiet luxury and clean girl as durable shifts or short-lived microtrends?

Based on the literature and the framework below, the study posits four hypotheses, each with a null (H_0) and alternative (H_a). H1—H_0: trend labeling does not affect brand perception; H_a: it changes brand perception. H2—H_0: trend labeling affects neither perceived prestige nor authenticity; H_a: it raises prestige but lowers authenticity, because trend association can raise desirability while making an established brand feel more trend-driven and less authentic. H3—H_0: status consumption does not moderate the effect; H_a: the effect on prestige and purchase intent is stronger among respondents higher in status consumption. H4 (exploratory)—H_0: respondents are equally likely to see the trends as long-term shifts or microtrends; H_a: a majority classify them as short-lived microtrends or labels for pre-existing aesthetics.

1. 4. Theoretical framework

The study draws on three frameworks. First, status-consumption theory holds that consumers buy certain goods for the prestige they confer and differ measurably in this tendency (Eastman et al., 1999); accordingly, the four-item Status Consumption Scale is used as a moderator capturing how much respondents prioritize social prestige and their openness to new, symbolically charged products. Second, brand-equity and dilution theory holds that a brand's value rests on consistent associations and that inconsistent associations weaken it, supporting the prediction that trend labeling may raise prestige while reducing authentic value. Third, the fashion trend cycle, and its compressed, social-media-driven microtrend form, frames RQ3, which concerns the durability of quiet luxury and clean girl and their associated brands.

1. 5. Limitations and scope

The study is limited to four brands (Loro Piana, Brunello Cucinelli, Aritzia, and Reformation), two trends (quiet luxury and clean girl), and a sample of U.S. adults aged 18 and over who use social media regularly. The manipulation involves a single, brief written exposure, whereas real perceptions form through repeated exposure; the online sample is not specifically representative of luxury consumers; only two trends are examined; and purchase-related measures capture stated intentions rather than actual behavior. These limitations are revisited in the discussion.

2. Methods

2. 1. Participants

The study recruited a target of approximately 400 adults through an online panel, based on an a priori power analysis for a 2 × 4 between-subjects ANOVA on the primary outcome (the prestige composite), assuming a medium effect ($f = .25$), $\alpha = .05$, and power of .80, distributed evenly across the eight cells (about 50 each). Eligible participants were at least 18 years old, resided in the United States, used social media (TikTok, Instagram, or Pinterest) at least weekly, and had purchased clothing or accessories in the past 12 months. Participants who failed an instructed-response attention check or the manipulation check, or finished in under 120 seconds, were excluded.

2. 2. Design

The study used a hybrid design combining a between-subjects manipulation with a within-subjects component. The between-subjects factor comprised eight cells crossing four brands with two conditions: Loro Piana and Brunello Cucinelli were paired with quiet luxury and Aritzia and Reformation with clean girl, each appearing in both control and treatment. Using two brands per trend tested whether effects were brand-specific or generalized, and the two price tiers tested generalization across the luxury spectrum. Each participant was randomly assigned to one cell and read only that brand's description. The within-subjects component, trend-level belief measures completed by all participants, involved no manipulation and so yielded more data per participant without contamination.

2. 3. Materials

The stimulus was a short written brand description. In the control condition it used neutral language about the brand's heritage, materials, craftsmanship, and founding year; in the treatment condition the identical baseline added one sentence explicitly associating the brand with its trend (e.g., that it had "become one of the most iconic brands of the quiet luxury trend on social media"). Because the two descriptions shared an identical baseline, any difference in response could be attributed to the trend label. Brands were selected for their prominence in trade coverage of each trend—Loro Piana and Brunello Cucinelli for quiet luxury (Cultured, 2024; South China Morning Post, 2024), Aritzia and Reformation for clean girl—informed by a structured review of press coverage from 2013 to 2026 that also guided the brand-perception items (Appendix A).

2. 4. Measures

2. 4. 1. Background and moderator measures

Before assignment, participants reported their interest in fashion, personal style, where they encountered fashion content, and weekly time spent on it; their familiarity with quiet luxury and clean girl and when they first encountered each; and their familiarity with eight brands. They also completed a four-item status-consumption measure adapted from Eastman et al. (1999), used as a moderator, and gave an open-ended description of their to-be-assigned brand as a pre-exposure baseline.

2. 4. 2. Manipulation check

Two items immediately after the stimulus verified processing: which theme the description emphasized, and whether the trend term had been mentioned.

2. 4. 3. Brand perception

Brand perception was measured with a 10-item semantic differential (e.g., trend-driven–timeless, inauthentic–authentic). Prestige and authenticity were each measured with three seven-point agreement items (e.g., "This brand is prestigious"; "This brand feels genuine"). Three single items measured personal desirability, perceived likelihood of feeling outdated within five years, and fit with the participant's own style.

2. 4. 4. Behavioral outcomes

Participants reported the price they would expect to pay for a signature item (with ranges adjusted to each brand's tier) and how the brand's products should be priced relative to comparable brands. Purchase intent was measured with a three-item scale (e.g., "If I had the budget, I would buy from this brand"), and a single item measured recommendation likelihood.

2. 4. 5. Trend beliefs

All participants completed the trend-belief measures. For each trend they classified it as a short-lived microtrend, a long-term shift, a label for an existing aesthetic, or unsure, and forecast how a brand's reputation would change over ten years if strongly associated with it. They also rated an eight-brand by two-trend association matrix.

2. 4. 6. Post-exposure language and demographics

Participants again described the assigned brand in an open-ended item, matched to the pre-exposure description, and then reported gender, race and ethnicity, household income, and education.

2. 4. 7. Procedure

After consent and screening, participants completed the background measures and the pre-exposure description, were randomly assigned to a cell and read the corresponding description, and then completed the manipulation check, brand-perception, behavioral, trend-belief, post-exposure, and demographic items. The survey took about 10–12 minutes.

2. 4. 8. Data analysis

Analyses were conducted in Python (pandas, NumPy, SciPy, statsmodels, and Matplotlib). Because each respondent completed only their assigned cell's block, the eight blocks were combined into one dataset identified by brand and condition, with condition confirmed against the manipulation-check item. The primary analyses used the full sample (attention data were near-perfect and no one finished too quickly), with a robustness check on manipulation-check passers. Each multi-item scale (perception, prestige, authenticity, purchase intent, status consumption) was averaged into a composite after confirming reliability with Cronbach's alpha. Each composite was analyzed with a 2 (condition) × 4 (brand) ANOVA with partial eta-squared, followed by Welch t-tests with Cohen's d; status consumption was tested as a moderator via a condition × status interaction; trend beliefs were summarized descriptively; and price expectations were analyzed within brand only, because the response brackets differed. In all figures, bars are group means and error bars are ±1 standard error.

3. Results

3. 1. Sample

The final analysis sample contained 399 participants, selected based on exclusion criteria (failure of attention check, failure of manipulation check, or 120-seconds-or-less completion). These participants were distributed across eight cells. Cell sizes were between 48 and 52 participants, near the target of 50 participants per cell. The sample was gender-balanced, roughly; participants reported a moderate level of interest in fashion. On average, participants were only modestly familiar with the two trends, reporting a mean familiarity of 2.9 for quiet luxury and 2.7 for clean girl on a 7-point scale.

3. 2. Overview: brand image versus brand value

As shown in Figure 1, trend labeling had no significant effect on the image measurements of brand perception, prestige, and authenticity. This applied across all four brands. Participants who were given trend-labeled descriptions did not rate the brand's image significantly higher or lower than those who read identical descriptions lacking the trend labels. However, in terms of brand value, purchase intent was higher in the treatment condition (M = 3.49) than in the control condition (M = 3.12). Recommendation likelihood was also higher (M = 4.11 in the treatment condition versus M = 3.72 in the control condition). Therefore, participants were more willing to buy and recommend a brand when it was associated with a trend. This did not, however, change their foundational view of the brand's essential image.

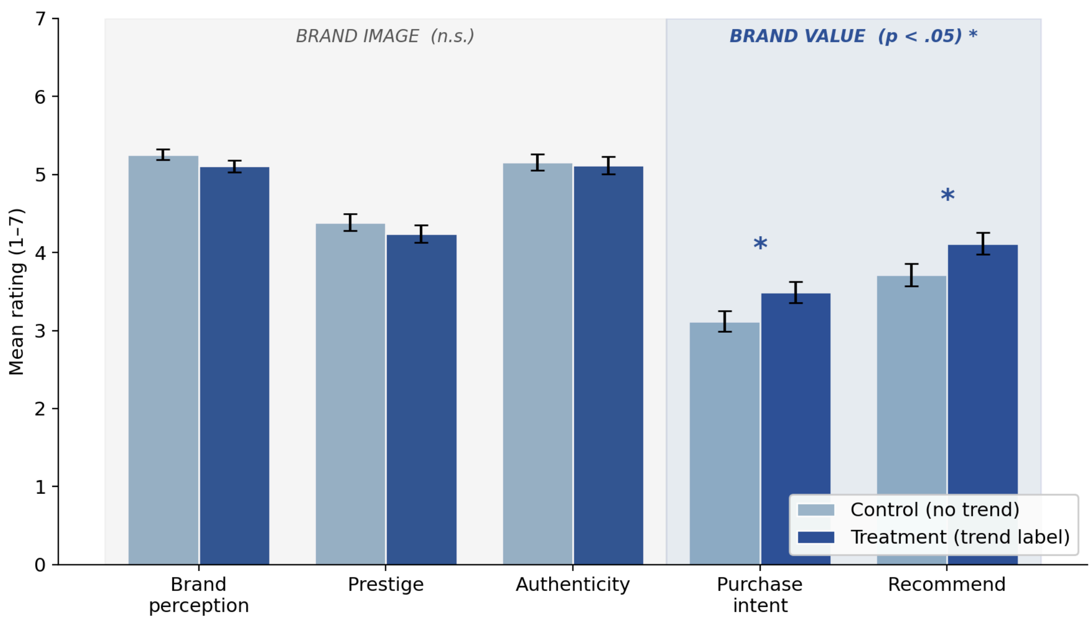

Figure 1. Mean ratings (on a scale of 1–7) for measurement of brand image (brand perception, prestige, and authenticity) and brand value (purchase intent and recommendation likelihood) in the control condition (no trend label) and treatment condition (trend label added), averaged across all four brands. Error bars represent ±1 standard error. Asterisks (*) represent significant differences ($p < .05$) between conditions.

Table 1. Composite means (and standard deviations) by brand and condition

Brand	Cond.	n	Perception	Prestige	Authenticity	Purch. intent	Recommend
Loro Piana	Cont	50	5.67 (0.84)	4.71 (1.3)	5.53 (1.3)	3.03 (1.8)	3.74 (2.15)

Brand	Cond.	n	Perception	Prestige	Authenticity	Purch. intent	Recommend
Loro Piana	Trea	52	5.75 (0.96)	4.96 (1.63)	5.67 (1.55)	3.83 (2.11)	4.31 (2.21)
Brunello Cucinelli	Cont	48	5.6 (0.85)	4.99 (1.32)	5.39 (1.43)	2.71 (1.8)	3.73 (1.94)
Brunello Cucinelli	Trea	51	5.28 (0.87)	4.56 (1.44)	5.27 (1.44)	3.24 (1.98)	3.98 (1.87)
Aritzia	Cont	49	5.07 (0.85)	4.25 (1.51)	5.16 (1.38)	3.58 (1.93)	3.73 (2.02)
Aritzia	Trea	51	4.49 (0.96)	3.67 (1.2)	4.77 (1.52)	3.23 (1.72)	4.06 (1.88)
Reformation	Cont	50	4.7 (1.06)	3.63 (1.71)	4.57 (1.6)	3.14 (1.82)	3.66 (1.86)
Reformation	Trea	48	4.89 (1.07)	3.73 (1.71)	4.72 (1.69)	3.67 (1.89)	4.1 (1.97)

Note. All measures on a 1–7 scale. Cond. = condition (Cont. = control, Trea. = treatment).

3. 3. RQ1: Trend labeling and brand perception

For each of the five outcome measures, a 2 (condition: control versus treatment) x 4 (brand: Loro Piana, Brunello Cucinelli, Aritzia, Reformation) between-subjects ANOVA was conducted, summarized in Table 2. For brand perception, the effect of condition was not significant: the trend label did not raise or lower overall brand perception averaged across all four brands. The condition and brand, however, was significant $F(3, 391) = 3.68$, $p = .012$, partial eta-squared = .027, indicating that the effect of the trend label on perception was not the same for every brand.

Figure 2 displays brand perception scores by brand and condition. For three of the four brands (Loro Piana, Brunello Cucinelli, and Reformation) perception scores were similar in control and treatment conditions. However, for Aritzia, the Clean Girl trend label corresponded with a meaningful drop in perception, a drop from 5.07 in the control condition to 4.49 in the treatment condition; $t = 3.13$, $p = .002$, $d = -0.64$. The same pattern appeared for prestige: under the Clean Girl label, Aritzia's prestige also dropped significantly (from 4.25 to 3.67; $p = .035$, $d = -0.43$), whereas the other three brands showed no significant change. Prestige means for every brand and condition are reported in Table 1, and the prestige ANOVA is included in Table 2.

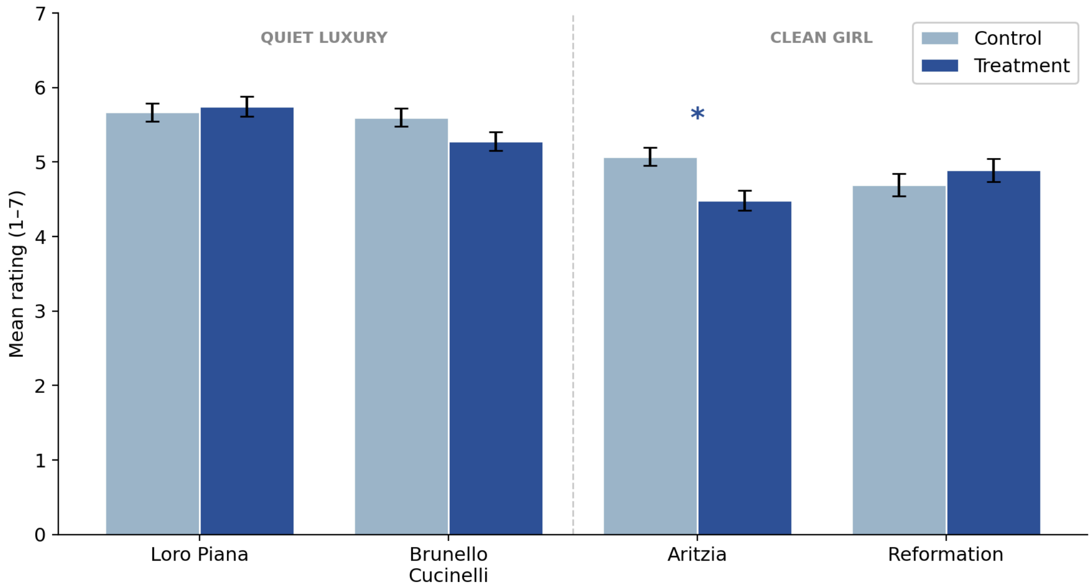

Figure 2. Mean brand perception rating (1–7 scale) for each of the four brands in the control (no trend label) and treatment (trend label) conditions. Error bars represent ±1 standard error. Asterisk (*) represents significant differences (p <.05) between conditions.

Table 2. 2 (condition) × 4 (brand) ANOVA summary

Outcome	Effect	F	df	p	$\eta^2 p$
Brand perception	Condition	2.8	1, 391	0.095	0.007
	Brand	25.25	3, 391	< .001	0.162
	Cond. × Brand	3.68	3, 391	0.012	0.027
Prestige	Condition	1.2	1, 391	0.274	0.003
	Brand	15.23	3, 391	< .001	0.105
	Cond. × Brand	1.83	3, 391	0.141	0.014
Authenticity	Condition	0.12	1, 391	0.725	0
	Brand	7.94	3, 391	< .001	0.057
	Cond. × Brand	0.73	3, 391	0.534	0.006
Purchase intent	Condition	4.06	1, 391	0.045	0.01
	Brand	1.33	3, 391	0.263	0.01
	Cond. × Brand	1.78	3, 391	0.151	0.013
Recommend	Condition	3.98	1, 391	0.047	0.01

Outcome	Effect	F	df	p	η²p
	Brand	0.15	3, 391	0.930	0.001
	Cond. × Brand	0.12	3, 391	0.947	0.001

Note. Significant condition effects appear for purchase intent and recommend; a significant condition × brand interaction appears for perception. Brand main effects are large for the image measures.

3. 4. RQ2: Brand values

Even though the trend label did not consistently improve brand image, it did increase purchase intent. Figure 3 shows purchase intent by brand and condition. Loro Piana had the largest individual brand effect: purchase intent for Loro Piana increased by 0.80 points (from 3.03 to 3.83; $p = .042$, $d = 0.41$) on the 7-point mean scale when the Quiet Luxury label was present. Brunello Cucinelli showed a positive but less significant increase in purchase intent with the same Quiet Luxury trend label present. For the Clean Girl trend, Reformation showed a positive purchase intent effect while Aritzia showed a decline in purchase intent (this effect was not statistically significant).

Recommendation likelihood increased for all four brands when the trend label was present. Treatment-minus-control differences for each brand can be seen in Table 3. They show that the change was positive for every brand on recommendation, even though the image measures had mixed results.

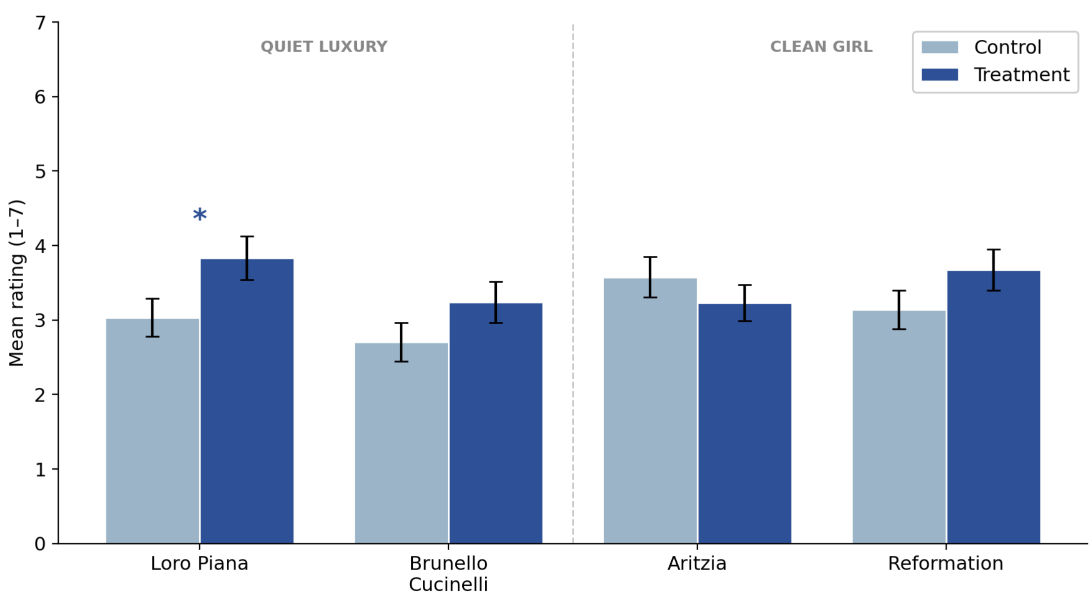

Figure 3. Mean purchase intent ratings (1–7 scale) for each of the four brands by condition. Higher rating indicates stronger intent to purchase from the brand given the condition. Error bars represent ±1 standard error. Asterisk (*) indicates significant differences ($p < .05$) between conditions.

Table 3. Treatment-minus-control differences within each brand

Brand	Perception	Prestige	Purch. intent	Recommend
Loro Piana	+0.08	+0.25	+0.80*	+0.57
Brunello Cucinelli	−0.32†	−0.42	+0.53	+0.25
Aritzia	−0.58**	−0.58*	−0.35	+0.32
Reformation	+0.20	+0.10	+0.53	+0.44

Values are treatment mean minus control mean (1–7 scale). ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, † $p < .10$.
Positive = trend label raised the rating.

3. 5. H3: Status consumption

H3 predicted that the effect of the trend label on prestige and purchase intent would be stronger among participants who scored higher on the status consumption scale (those who placed greater emphasis on the social prestige of their purchases. This prediction was not supported. The condition × status-consumption interaction was not significant for prestige ($b = -0.01$, $p = .95$) or for purchase intent ($b = 0.11$, $p = .25$), indicating that the effect of trend labeling was similar regardless of how much a respondent valued status in their purchases.

3. 6. RQ3: Durability of trends

Figure 5 reports how all 399 respondents categorized each trend. For Quiet Luxury, the most common categorization was a “label for an existing aesthetic” (210 of 399 respondents). The second most common categorization for that trend was a “long-term shift in fashion” (103). Only 42 participants (10.5% of the sample) categorized Quiet Luxury as a short-lived microtrend, with a similar number of participants stating “not sure” (44). For Clean Girl, 135 of respondents categorized it as a short-lived microtrend, 149 as a label for an existing aesthetic, and 49 as a long-term shift; 66 indicated not being sure. Since respondents viewed Quiet Luxury as a more long-term trend than Clean Girl, this suggests that Clean Girl is seen as a more transient trend, in line with respondents labeling it a short-lived microtrend.

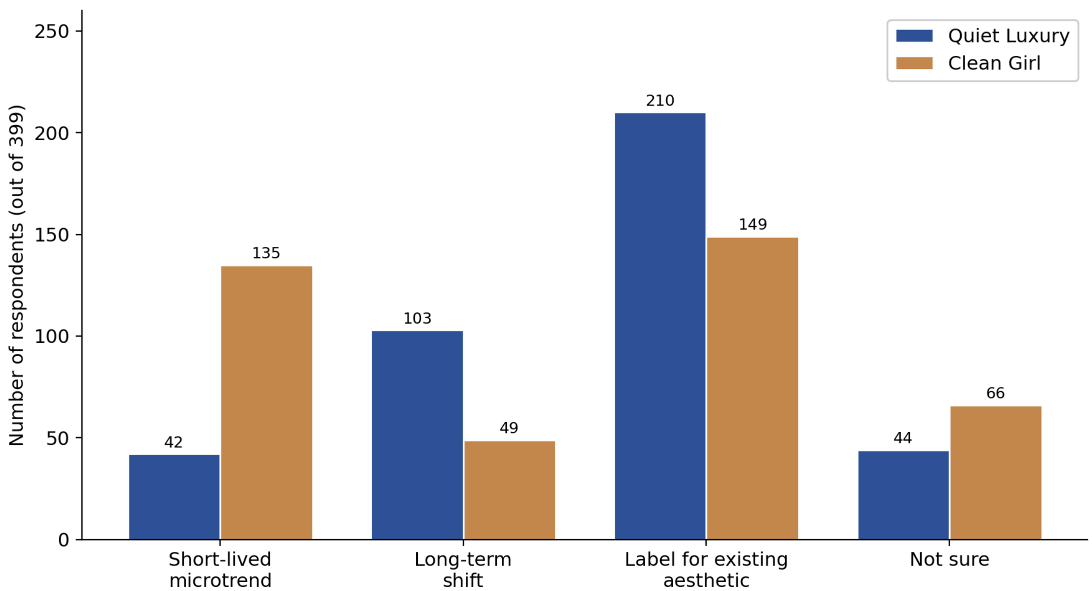

Figure 4. Number of respondents who categorized Quiet Luxury (dark blue) and Clean Girl (gold) into each of four categories: short-lived microtrend, long-term shift in fashion, a label for an existing aesthetic, and not sure. Responses were collected from all 399 participants regardless of experimental condition assignment.

4. Discussions

4. 1. Summary of findings

This study asked whether explicitly labeling a brand with a social-media fashion trend changes how consumers perceive and value that brand, whether brands are better off for the association, and whether consumers regard the trends as durable or fleeting. The answers form a consistent pattern. Trend labeling did not shift brand image on average, as perceived prestige and authenticity were statistically unchanged, but it did shift brand value, significantly raising purchase intent and recommendation likelihood. The effect on image was not uniform, however: it depended on the brand, significantly lowering perceptions and prestige of the mass-market brand Aritzia while leaving the luxury brands intact. Finally, consumers did not treat either trend as a disposable fad; quiet luxury in particular was seen as a durable, reputation-safe aesthetic, and clean girl as somewhat more transient.

Read against the study's hypotheses, the results are informative even where predictions were not confirmed. H1, that trend labeling changes brand perception, was supported only in a qualified form: labeling produced no uniform main effect on perception but did produce a brand-dependent one. H2, which predicted that labeling would raise prestige while lowering authenticity, was not supported; neither dimension moved reliably, indicating that the anticipated divergence did not occur and that brand image was more resistant to a single trend cue than expected. H3, that status-conscious consumers would respond more strongly, was also not supported, suggesting that the value effect was broad rather than confined to status-driven shoppers. H4 was supported: a majority of respondents classified both trends as short-lived microtrends or as labels for pre-existing aesthetics rather than as genuine long-term shifts, although the microtrend reading was more common for clean girl than for quiet luxury.

4. 2. Trend labeling works on brand value, not brand image

The central result reframes the question the study began with. We set out to ask whether trends change brand perception, but the data point more clearly to brand value. Associating a brand with a trend did not make consumers judge it as more prestigious or more authentic; those judgments appear anchored to the brand itself and were difficult to move with a single sentence. What responded instead were the outcomes closest to behavior, namely whether people said they would buy the brand and recommend it to others.

This split is theoretically meaningful. Brand image, in the terms of brand-equity theory, reflects a large store of associations accumulated over years of exposure, positioning, and use, and such stored knowledge is not easily rewritten by a brief, one-time cue. Behavioral intentions, by contrast, are more context-sensitive and responsive to immediate signals of relevance and desirability. A trend label appears to function as exactly such a signal: it marks the brand as culturally current and worth engaging with now, which is consistent with evidence that emphasizing trendiness in luxury communication increases consumer engagement (Liu et al., 2021). In this reading, trend association operates less on what a brand means and more on how much a consumer wants it in the moment.

Two qualifications follow. First, purchase intent is a stated intention rather than a completed purchase; although intentions predict behavior imperfectly, the parallel movement of both purchase intent and recommendation strengthens confidence that a genuine shift in behavioral disposition occurred. Second, status-consumption theory would predict that any value gain should concentrate among consumers who prize the social prestige of their purchases (Eastman et al., 1999), yet status consumption did not moderate the effect. That the value gain appeared regardless of status motivation suggests that trend labeling works through broad cultural relevance rather than through status signaling alone.

4. 3. Why the effect depends on the brand

Although trend labeling raised value on average, its effect on brand image ran in opposite directions for different brands. The clearest negative result was for Aritzia, where the clean girl label significantly lowered both perceived quality and distinctiveness and prestige. The clearest positive result was for Loro Piana, where the quiet luxury label produced the largest gain in purchase intent in the study.

A fit-and-tier account explains this divergence. Quiet luxury is itself a status-coded, heritage-coded idea, so attaching it to an established luxury house reinforces what that house already claims to be. This is consistent with research showing that subtle, logo-free signaling appeals to consumers who wish to be recognized by knowledgeable peers (Taylor et al., 2025) and that cues of heritage and continuity confer status on luxury brands (Zhou et al., 2025). For a brand such as Loro Piana, the quiet luxury label is not new information but an amplification of an existing identity, and it nudges consumers toward wanting it.

The opposite occurred for Aritzia. Labeling a mid-priced, mass-market brand with a fast-moving social-media aesthetic can signal that the brand is chasing a passing look rather than expressing a stable identity, which may read as trying too hard and can undercut perceived quality and distinctiveness. This is consistent with brand-dilution theory, which holds that associations inconsistent with a brand's core identity weaken it. In short, a trend label helps when the trend reinforces the brand's existing position and can hurt when it implies the brand is merely following fashion.

Notably, the effects were concentrated in the two brands most strongly tied to their trend's price tier, Loro Piana at the high end and Aritzia in the mid-market, while Brunello Cucinelli and Reformation moved less. This suggests the effect is strongest where the brand-trend relationship is most salient to consumers. It also underscores that the effect of trend labeling is idiosyncratic, operating at the level of an individual brand's fit with the trend, rather than a systematic force that lifts or lowers all brands alike.

4. 4. The durability of trends

Respondents largely rejected the idea that these trends are throwaway fads, but they distinguished clearly between the two. Quiet luxury was most often described as a label for an existing aesthetic or as a long-term shift in fashion, with only about one in ten respondents calling it a short-lived microtrend, and its ten-year reputation forecasts were correspondingly higher. Clean girl was seen as more transient, drawing far more microtrend classifications and lower long-term forecasts.

The difference is intelligible in terms of what each trend is attached to. Quiet luxury is bound to enduring values such as craftsmanship, heritage, and restraint that predate its social-media label, so consumers read it less as a fad than as a new name for a timeless aesthetic. Clean girl, by contrast, is tied to a specific, easily replicated look propagated through short-form video, which fits the profile of the algorithm-driven microtrend whose life cycle rises and falls within months (Burns, 2025; Vladimirova et al., 2024).

This perceived durability maps directly onto the brand-level results and speaks to the study's question of whether brands are better off for a trend association. Trends that consumers regard as enduring and status-bearing appear safer for brands to adopt than trends seen as fast-moving and surface-level: the quiet luxury label, viewed as durable, helped its brands, whereas the clean girl label, viewed as more fleeting, coincided with dilution for Aritzia. Durability perception, in other words, is not merely a descriptive fact about a trend but a signal of the reputational risk a brand takes on by embracing it.

4. 5. Managerial implications

For brand managers, the findings translate into several concrete considerations. First, trend association is best understood as a lever on near-term demand rather than as a tool for building long-term brand image. Because trend labeling raised purchase intent and recommendation without changing prestige or authenticity, brands can use trend alignment to generate short-term interest and word-of-mouth through campaigns, collaborations, or timely product framing, without expecting it to reposition the brand in consumers' minds.

Second, fit matters more than visibility. A luxury house whose identity already aligns with a status-coded trend can lean into it and gain, whereas a mid-market brand risks dilution by attaching itself to a fast-moving aesthetic that implies trend-chasing. Managers should therefore assess whether a prospective trend reinforces or contradicts the brand's established tier and heritage before adopting it, rather than pursuing trends simply because they are visible or popular.

Third, managers should watch for a volume-versus-margin tension. Trend association raised purchase intent but slightly lowered price expectations for two brands, implying that a trend can broaden a brand's appeal while simultaneously making it feel more accessible and less exclusive. For premium brands in particular, the additional interest a trend generates may come at some cost to perceived exclusivity, a tradeoff worth managing deliberately.

Finally, the resistance of brand image to a single trend cue is itself reassuring for managers, because a brand's core reputation is unlikely to be rewritten by one trend, which gives brands latitude to experiment. That latitude is not unlimited, however, as repeated or ill-fitting trend-chasing could accumulate into the very dilution that a single exposure did not produce. Trend alignment is therefore best treated as a deliberate, fit-sensitive tactic rather than a default response to every viral aesthetic.

4. 6. Limitations

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. Most fundamentally, the manipulation was a single, brief written description, whereas real brand perceptions form through repeated, multi-sensory exposure over time; the modest effect sizes observed here may understate what sustained trend association would produce, and the controlled setting limits ecological validity. Relatedly, the outcome measures captured stated intentions rather than actual purchasing behavior, so the value effects should be confirmed with behavioral or market data before strong practical conclusions are drawn.

The sample and design also bound the findings. Respondents were drawn from an online panel of U.S. adults and are not specifically representative of luxury buyers, and reported familiarity with both trends was only moderate, which may attenuate effects that would be stronger among more engaged consumers. The study examined four brands and two trends at two price tiers; although this design allowed a test of generalization across brands, the fit-and-tier pattern should be replicated with additional brands, trends, and product categories before it is treated as general. The cross-sectional design cannot capture how trend effects evolve as a trend rises and fades, and the observational market comparison used to motivate the study, while suggestive, cannot by itself establish that the quiet luxury trend caused the commercial outperformance of its brands.

Finally, some caution is warranted about measurement. Excluding participants who failed the manipulation check strengthens internal validity but may make the analyzed sample somewhat more attentive than the general population, and self-reported perceptions can be subject to demand characteristics. Future research could address these limitations by tracking the same brands longitudinally, incorporating behavioral or sales outcomes, testing a wider range of trends and product categories, and analyzing the open-ended brand descriptions collected here to examine how trend labeling changes the specific language consumers use to describe a brand.

5. Conclusion

Naming a trend changed what consumers were willing to do with a brand more than what they thought of it. Trend labeling raised purchase intent and recommendation without raising prestige or authenticity, and it helped or hurt individual brands depending on whether the trend fit the brand's existing position. The central contribution of this study is therefore a distinction that is easy to overlook: the effect of a social-media trend on a brand operates more on brand value, meaning consumers' willingness to buy and recommend, than on brand image, and it is conditional on fit rather than uniform.

As social media continues to accelerate the pace at which aesthetic trends emerge and fade, brands face a recurring decision about whether to associate themselves with the latest look. The evidence here suggests that this decision should be made deliberately and with attention to fit: a trend can be a powerful lever on near-term demand when it aligns with a brand's identity and a source of dilution when it does not. Understanding trends as levers on value rather than on image, and as brand-specific rather than market-wide forces, offers both a practical guide for managers and a foundation for future research on how social media reshapes the meaning and worth of brands.

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