



PALGRAVE ADVANCES IN LUXURY

# Understanding Luxury Fashion

From Emotions to Brand Building

*Edited by* Isabel Cantista · Teresa Sádaba

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# Palgrave Advances in Luxury

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The field of luxury studies increasingly encompasses a variety of perspectives not just limited to marketing and brand management. In recent times, a host of novel and topical issues on luxury such as sustainability, counterfeiting, emulation and consumption trends have gained prominence which draw on the fields of entrepreneurship, sociology, psychology and operations.

Examining international trends from China, Asia, Europe, North America and the MENA region, *Palgrave Advances in Luxury* is the first series dedicated to this complex issue. Including multiple perspectives whilst being very much grounded in business, its aim is to offer an integrated picture of the management environment in which luxury operates. It explores the newer debates relating to luxury consumption such as the signals used in expressing luxury, the socially divisive nature of luxury and the socio-economic segmentation that it brings. Filling a significant gap in our knowledge of this field, the series will help readers comprehend the significant management challenges unique to this construct.

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Isabel Cantista · Teresa Sádaba  
Editors

# Understanding Luxury Fashion

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*To our Students who share with us the passion for a better Fashion  
and a better World.*

*To our families who fill our hearts with Joy. Thank you for being there,  
no matter what.*

# Foreword

*Understanding Luxury Fashion: From Emotions to Brand Building* is not an option in the contemporary world of fashion. It is a necessity due to the outstanding development of luxury products and services in the field of Fashion.

In this book, edited by Isabel Cantista and Teresa Sabada, both teaching at University, the luxury dimension in Fashion is explored through ten chapters, mixing theory and case studies, with an international approach.

What is particularly interesting is the choice made by the editors to highlight the preeminence of the immaterial perspective on material and tangible aspects. This immaterial dimension is key and deals with the “aspirational” needs related to personal values and the “positional” needs, which are more external and social.

This approach leads to a transdisciplinary framework, combining philosophy, psychology, sociology and history, enabling a comprehensive and deep analysis of the phenomenon of luxury fashion.

However, the current challenges are not ignored, when it comes to the impact of digital technologies and sustainability through the whole fashion value chain. The growing importance of China and Chinese consumers in luxury fashion, all over the world, is also underlined.

Dr. Dominique Jacomet  
Professor & Dean  
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# Part I

## Introduction



# 1

## Understanding Luxury Fashion: Origins and Contemporary Issues

Isabel Cantista and Teresa Sádaba

Luxury has been reflected on for more than twenty-five centuries, from Plato to Epicure, from Luther to Mandeville and Veblen, as mentioned by Lipovetsky and Roux (2012). And the allure of luxury has never faded; on the contrary, its appeal has intensified in contemporary society.

On the other hand, the connections between luxury and fashion are profound. In the beginning, fashion coincided with luxury (Belfanti 2011), being available only to some and was the object of detailed regulation through sumptuary laws<sup>1</sup> (Beebe 2010; Belfanti 2009) which

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<sup>1</sup>Beebe (2010, p. 812) defines a “society’s sumptuary code as its system of consumption practices, akin to a language (or at least a set of dialects), by which individuals in the society signal through

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defined who could use certain garments, colours and fabrics in an effort to govern appearances, with the aim that these reflected a defined social order and hierarchy. But in the more modern era, new paths have been forged with fashion becoming more democratic. Yet, the reference to luxury has never been forgotten (Jacomet 2016). And for this reason, it is important to reflect on luxury.

The work of Lipovetsky and Roux (2012) briefly portrays the evolution of luxury and its meaning over the course of time. Luxury begins as a luxury-gift, which distracts man from his natural inclinations towards a sense of ownership or the conservation of what is of immediate utility to him. To give and reciprocate generously is a way of subordinating the individual element to the global scheme of things, ensuring the predominance of relationships between men over the relationship between men and things. In this way, and through the ostentatious donation of presents and their recompense with other presents of comparable value, primitive society makes an effort to consolidate a network of relationships and to establish peace treaties. It can thus be affirmed that primitive magnificence is revealed as being at the service of a superior social rationale: the desire for peace.

Luxury also serves as a means of guaranteeing a relationship of alliance between the living and the dead, between men and gods, a means of attracting the protection and benevolence of the gods or beings and spiritual forces, to men.

And when social organisation becomes more complex—through social, religious and political transformations—gifts then become monuments, grand sculptures, splendid palaces with beautiful decorations, and sumptuousness becomes linked not only to principles of inequality and power relationships, but also to ideas of inalterability and permanence, and to the desire for eternity.

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their consumption their differences from and similarities to others. Laws that seek to control and preserve this code are sumptuary laws<sup>9</sup>. The sumptuary laws originated in Republican Imperial Rome.

From the end of the Middle Ages, the aristocracy divested of its former military prerogatives, surrounded by the court and dependent on royal power, transformed itself by adopting luxurious lifestyles that were more decorative and sometimes characterised by their superficiality. Nevertheless, the Renaissance was also a period for the flourishing of the arts. Kings and princes wanted to be the protectors of artists and musicians and to surround themselves with works of art, to hear beautiful pieces of music and take care with their presentation. The growing wealth of merchants and bankers leads to the emergence of the bourgeoisie and luxury becomes a sphere accessible to the fortunes amassed through work, talent and merit, a sphere that thus opens to social mobility. The nobility and rich bourgeoisie equally seek to surround themselves by works of art: patronage, collections and the ownership of works of art become instruments of prestige in the world of the social elites. The collective and the sacred are replaced by a more personal and more aesthetic relationship, a more subjective aspiration to a more beautiful life that is more refined and more emotive. Until the sixteenth century (Belfanti 2009, 2011) luxury and fashion coincide. From the sixteenth century onwards, everything changes.

According to Belfanti (2009), the sixteenth century is the “turning point”. Changes in clothing and accessories already start to become more frequent in the fourteenth century, but the expression of one’s own taste in clothing was still to a great extent limited to the narrow circle of the social elite, with the careful strategy of appearance defined precisely by one’s social class.

In this century there was not a generalized increase in purchasing power (Belfanti 2009, p. 272). On the contrary, the price of food increased such that it made the poor even poorer and landowners even wealthier. Meanwhile, there was an increase in the number of middle class and upper-class people whose success originated in the world of work. This increase led to an inflation of sumptuary laws in Europe, with examples of this (Beebe 2010; Belfanti 2009) also to be seen in other parts of the world, from Japan to the United States, in an attempt to maintain the status quo. Anyone who did not dress according to the strict definitions was put on trial and punished.

In the preamble to the proclamation issued in 1588 by the queen of England Elizabeth I, quoted by Belfanti (2009, p. 268), the sovereign deploras “the confusion of degrees of all estates, amongst whom diversity of apparel hath been always a special and laudable mark.”

The comments about the social confusion generated by this, are nevertheless, generalized. Belfanti (2009, p. 269) refers to, among others, comments made in 1583 by the English Puritan Philip Stubbles who wrote “it is verie hard to knowe who is noble, who is worshipfull, who is a gentleman, who is not...this is a great confusion and a general disorder.” But the answer could have been given to him by an anonymous writer who, as early as 1565, wrote to the Governor of Milan saying “if it is said it is decorous for a city the ability to distinguish by dress at first sight the commoners from the nobles and the greater nobles from the others, one might answer that this means nothing (...) if there were not freedom of dress, it would be a good thing to introduce it if for no other reason than that men might have the motivation to be known one as being better than another not for their dress but for their virtuous acts (...) as though nobility depends on clothes, or nobles know no other way of making themselves known”.

The reasons behind the great increase in the sumptuary laws are political and economic and are not limited to a mere strategic game of appearances and, yet, they did not succeed in halting history. It is impossible to erase the ambition of human beings to become greater, and to have more, in what we can express as the extended self as proposed by Belk (1988).

The emergence of Fashion as a typical element of European society can thus be associated with a series of social situations, such as life in the court, the life of the aristocracy, the development of cities and the rise of the bourgeoisie and, namely, the affirmation of the individual to whom freedom of choice is a legitimate and inalienable right.

Nevertheless, we also would like to draw attention to many similarities between the consumption of luxury in the West and the East, with some historians even affirming that fashion was a Chinese invention from the Tang Dynasty (618–907) because of the Empress Yang Kuei-fei, whose style influenced tastes in Europe of the Middle Ages. However, even though fashion might have been born in China, it has to

be recognised that it neither had the social nor economic conditions for this to affirm itself as a system or as a cultural institution of modernity.

According to Belfanti (2011, p. 211) while in India, China and Japan, fashion was identified with luxury and its influence came from a “trickle-down” effect, in Europe, the greater availability of a supply of Fashion products and accessories at more reduced prices led to many examples of a “trickle-up” effect.

In the West, Fashion attracted the attention of intellectuals, promoted the emergence of literature specialised in this area which aided the diffusion of its proposals and created a sophisticated and shared Culture of Fashion.

The passion for luxury and, as a consequence, for luxury fashion, is profoundly connected to the perspective of the other. In his reflections, Lipovetsky and Roux (2012, p. 63) refers to the desire to be admired, to be recognised by the other. He even affirms that in a time of unbridled individualism, luxury fashion contributes to the affirmation of individuality, expressing a need to stand out from the masses, to be different from the others, to feel like an exceptional being while simultaneously being immersed in the medium of others, with this distinction being justified precisely because of this immersion. In these times of relentless mass production, giant cities and globalisation, luxury fashion fulfils this function in an exemplary way.

In economic terms GDP per capita has reached levels never before witnessed in the world<sup>2</sup>; there have never been so many billionaires in the world, while the luxury segment can be divided into at least 16 sub-segments.<sup>3</sup> Because of this all, luxury products and services have multiplied in the world of Fashion. Luxury is everywhere and for its impact on many lives, not only the lives of consumers, but also the many lives dedicated to the production and selling of products and services of luxury fashion in the world, it deserves attention.

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<sup>2</sup>The Conference Board Total Economy Database: McKinsey Global Institute analysis, 2016.

<sup>3</sup>Armando Branchini, “True Luxury Global Consumer Segmentation”, Porto Luxury Brands Summit, Porto, 8 May 2015.

This book has an international approach, seeking to contribute to a deeper and richer understanding of the phenomenon of luxury fashion and brings together texts from different areas of study.

From all those perspectives, we want to focus luxury fashion in its human essence. And this is too the essence of the book: to approach luxury studies from a human, spiritual perspective more than a material one.

The structure of the book thus follows a logic that considers first, the framework for this analysis with a more philosophical approach and then, it goes through two main aspects in the relationship between luxury and the human being.

On the one hand, the emotional perspective: the aspirational sense and inclinations towards being more. On the other hand, the social perspective, our need of others, for belonging. And in both aspects detaining ourselves into contemporary expressions of luxury fashion.

Then, the book finishes with three chapters on different case studies, where those previous aspects are confirmed.

In this sense, the reader of this book is invited to discover luxury in a very distinctive manner; contributions in the book make us think about a comprehensive concept of luxury, exceeding limited tangible, material approaches. Contemporary material expressions are analysed starting from the aspects referred to above.

In this project we focussed on aspects which define as their horizon a future involving sustainable values, the presence and impact of digital technology and the growing importance of China in the world. And we did this with the aim of contributing to a debate that will shape the future.

The framework for the book is established in the chapter by Marta Mendonça and from a philosophical perspective, the origin of luxury and its relationship with human beings is explored. It is referred to by various authors, among them Voltaire, who questions “why luxury is a necessity in the lives of humans”. And it is explained how culture, the “human world”, provides the conditions so that the dynamics of tastes and desires materialise in different ways and thus furnishes humans with the realisation of their aspirations to luxury.

With regard to emotions, Ambrogia Cereda invites us to discover the transformation of consumer culture through the lens of “glamour”, as defined by Gundle and Castelli (2006) the search for an enchanting and dreamlike experience with goods and services. This auratic dimension attached to places and things is understood in terms of luxuriousness, exists in the mind of the consumers and is linked to their interpretation of the symbolic world attached to the wide range of luxury goods.

Virginie de Barnier and Elyette Roux present a comparative study of values and emotions between Chinese and Brazilian consumers of luxury. This study, connecting psychology with consumerism, explores the existence of negative sentiments associated with the consumption of luxury goods, namely the phenomenon of shame and guilt. By comparatively analysing Chinese and Brazilian consumers, there is an identification of a greater degree of feelings of shame among Chinese consumers and a greater degree of guilt among their Brazilian counterparts. It also throws light on compensation phenomena that emerge and which lead to a sense of the need to recompense society, from their own considerable wealth, in a rebalancing of emotion and reason.

This study is not only interesting in the sense of helping understand the market and consumer feelings, but also by way of what it can offer in terms of encouraging brands to contribute to the creation of more positive emotions in this market.

In the chapter written by Kirsten Scott, the Barkcloth Research Network is presented. This network of researchers was created in 2016 and has the objective of analysing the potential of the Ugandan barkcloth a non-woven, fibrous textile produced from the wild fig tree since at least the thirteenth century. Through artisanal productions processes, the potential of this fabric has been explored, taking on contemporary approaches to design, with its durability figuring importantly among its various qualities. They link this production with well-being, progressing from a material analysis to a deeper, more emotional one.

In the next section of the book—considering luxury as a social element—the first chapter is the proposal of Donato, De Angelis and Amatulli. They examined the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of four Italian luxury fashion companies: Brunello Cuccinelli, Giorgio Armani, Prada and Fendi. The study illustrates how the values