



PALGRAVE ADVANCES IN LUXURY

Sustainable Luxury

An International Perspective

Edited by Claudia E. Henninger
Navdeep K. Athwal

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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.

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*Navdeep—I dedicate this co-edited book to my darling husband
and daughter.*

Claudia—I dedicate this co-edited book to Jutta and Hartmut.

Preface

Navdeep and Claudia met as early career researchers at University of Sheffield Management School in 2015. They immediately connected over their mutual passion to explore the world and love of all things fashion. They had the idea of publishing a co-edited book on sustainable luxury many years ago, although it took them a few years to get round to writing the book proposal as life got in the way. They thank the authors for their valuable contributions to this book, for persevering during the COVID-19 pandemic and for researching in a field that they benefit will raise more awareness of the ecological impact of the luxury sector.

Manchester, UK
Leicester, UK

Claudia E. Henninger
Navdeep K. Athwal

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1

Introduction

Navdeep K. Athwal and Claudia E. Henninger

1.1 What Is Sustainable Luxury?

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to provide some clarification on definitions and the context of this book, before providing an overview of the individual contributions incorporated in this edited collection.

Looking at the title of this edited volume, it contains chapters surrounding sustainability combined with sustainability in the fashion industry. Focusing on luxury first, it originates from the Latin word ‘luxuria’ and literally translates to *extravagance* or *excess*. Turunen (2018) highlights that historically speaking luxury can have both positive and negative connotations. Positive in that luxury is seen as something that may be aspirational and thus could encourage individuals to not only improve themselves but also society. Contrary to this, it has been

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negatively perceived and described as the enemy of virtue (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009).

Independent of the associations one may have, luxury items are commonly those that are ‘additional’ and thus may no longer fulfil a need but rather a want (Li et al., 2012). Yet, herein lies the challenge. Our society has changed dramatically over the centuries and what was previously seen as ‘luxury’ may no longer be the same today. Is luxury something that is unique and imported from different cultures, or is it an item that comes with a high price tag and (ideally) high quality, or is it an experience? (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012; Athwal et al., 2019). The fact is, luxury can be anything depending on the individual and their interpretation, which makes it an exciting topic to investigate (Ryding et al., 2018; Turunen, 2018; Athwal et al., 2019).

To provide a clear understanding however, within this edited volume, luxury and more specifically luxury brands are understood as those that have some or all of the characteristics outlined in Table 1.1.

Now that we have outlined the range of meanings associated with luxury, it is essential to discuss sustainability as it has also been described as a fuzzy concept that can be intuitively understood (Henninger et al., 2016, 2017; Niinimäki, 2018). Sustainability is traditionally portrayed as an overlapping Venn diagram, whereby the intersection of social, environmental, and economic aspects is what is commonly referred to as ‘sustainability’ (e.g., Elkington, 2004). More recently, we see sustainability discussed through Earth Logic (Fletcher & Tham, 2019), which centres on the harmony between people and planet thereby setting out an action plan of six principles: (1) reduce growth, (2) refocus on the local, (3) develop new centres for fashion, (4) learn new competences, (5) showcase

Table 1.1 Characteristics of luxury brands

Characteristics	References
Premium price	Phau and Prendergast (2000), Okonkwo (2007)
High quality	Ryding et al. (2018), Athwal et al. (2019)
Rich history and/or heritage	Turunen (2018)
Scarce, exclusive, unique	Okonkwo (2007), Keller (2009)
Often from designers	Phau and Prendergast (2000), Okonkwo (2007)

a different approach of communication for fashion, and (6) create new ways of organising fashion through governance.

To reiterate, it becomes apparent that sustainability remains an intuitively understood concept that has a variety of definitions and interpretations (e.g., Henninger et al., 2016, 2017; Niinimäki, 2018), some of which are reflected within the contributions of this book. As alluded to, sustainability is however not the only focus of this edited volume, but rather it is contextualised within the luxury fashion sector, where it has become a pervasive issue gaining traction with brand managers, scholars, policy-makers, the media and academia (Athwal et al., 2019; Davies et al., 2020; Wells et al., 2021). The luxury industry is a key market segment that accounted for US \$117,152 million in 2022 (Statista, 2022) and predicted to grow 4.27% annually in the coming years, making it interesting to investigate further. Caïs (2021) further highlights that “the ironic paradox of sustainable luxury brands remains prevalent,” which has also received increased attention within the literature (e.g., Athwal et al., 2019; Brydges et al., 2020; Luo et al., 2021).

What do we mean by this paradox and why is this of interest? Especially since the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen a significant focus on sustainability, with various outlets either posing questions, such as “Could the Covid pandemic make fashion more sustainable?” (Marriott, 2020), “Will COVID-19 accelerate the transition to a sustainable fashion industry?” (Ricchetti & De Palma, 2020), or more explicitly highlighting “How Covid turned the spotlight on sustainability” (Fish, 2020). Either way, sustainability has a spotlight position and is increasingly a focal point for consumers, who have been observed to change their behaviour and increasingly demand more sustainability measures (Granskog et al., 2020; Iran et al., 2022).

More broadly, the global fashion industry is one of the most polluting, and is often criticised for unsustainable practices, including, but not limited to, waste creation, use of chemicals, treatment of workers along the supply chain, and burning of unsold goods (Blazquez et al., 2020; Brydges & Hanlon, 2020; Dickson & Warren, 2020). Yet, “luxury brands have an advantage over fast fashion companies—their products are purchased for longevity, rather than being temporary and disposable like their inexpensive counterparts” (Davis, 2020). Whilst disposability is less of an issue in

the luxury fashion industry, and thus, sustainability may have, in the past, not been as much of an issue, its raw materials are—seeing as luxury goods are often made from animal-based raw materials or precious metals (e.g., Henninger et al., 2022). Thus, it may not be surprising that sustainability is increasingly priorities now in the luxury fashion industry (e.g., Athwal et al., 2019). We increasingly see luxury fashion brands advertising vegan alternatives within their fashion lines (e.g., Stella McCartney) or using different production techniques, such as upcycled vintage collections (e.g., Miu Miu) (Bala, 2021; Henninger et al., 2022).

The purpose of this edited book is to examine the state of sustainable luxury research in marketing and consumer behaviour across cultures and geographical regions. The luxury market spans sectors and innately international, while luxury consumers are characteristically a nation's most elite and wealthiest individuals. The reach of luxury markets brings the expectation that research exploring sustainable luxury will reflect multiple national and international markets. This book reflects luxury consumption as it addresses the significant scholarly omission of research by exploring culture and sustainable luxury.

When editing this book, we had an academic audience in mind, particularly as we had seen an emergence in scholarly activity on topic from 2003 (see Athwal et al., 2019). We believe that this book will be a key resource to better understand sustainable luxury and the fashion industry. We welcome scholars and educators to use this book as either a supplementary or core reading as it will provide students with a wealth of information on sustainable luxury and the fashion industry within different country contexts. There is no doubt that this book will also be beneficial to practitioners due to its key business insights. During the peer-review process, the authors were asked to consider the managerial implications from their research findings.

1.2 About This Book

This book brings together a collection of scholars spanning many disciplines such as marketing, management, textiles, fashion, economics, and digital media, as well as ranging in the geographical scope to reflect the

book's international perspective. The diversity of chapters is also reflected in the combination of empirical and conceptual works, while the authors themselves range from emerging scholars to internationally leading academics.

Whilst in the past luxury may have been associated predominantly with new, novel, and unique items, what is luxury has shifted, as was outlined in the introduction. It may not be surprising that we see 'new' ways of how luxury fashion retailers/brands are engaging with the ever-increasing second-hand luxury market (Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015; Turunen et al., 2020; Beauloye, 2021; Rooks, 2021). We also see that our understanding of luxury fashion has changed and may have now a different meaning that it originally had.

Chapter 2 addresses the former aspect, in that it provides more detailed insights into how industry players are dealing with a shift in consumer behaviour, which sees the second-hand movement on the rise. Within Chap. 2, **Linda Lisa Maria Turunen** (Aalto University, Finland) and **Claudia E. Henninger** (The University of Manchester, UK) explore '*The Hidden Value of Second-Hand Luxury: Exploring the Levels of Second-Hand Integration as Part of a Luxury Brand's Strategy.*' The chapter takes on a brand perspective, thereby outlining different options currently available on how they (luxury fashion retailers) can engage with this lucrative market segment, which includes items ranging from handbags to watches, and has an estimated worth of €33 billion/\$37.2 billion (Granskog et al., 2020). Data collection for this chapter is based on secondary resources, which have been carefully analysed and critically evaluated. As a result, the authors provide three strategies of second-hand integration in luxury resale and what the implications may be if these are to be executed.

Chapter 3 addresses the latter aspect in that it critically examines the meaning of luxury and illustrates that there is indeed a shift in what we as consumers see to be luxury. **Kirsi Niinimäki** (Aalto University, Finland) investigates '*Sustainable Eco-luxury in the Scandinavian Context.*' The chapter is based on the hypothesis that luxury in the Scandinavian context is connected to sustainable values, eco-appreciation, natural-based alternatives, and good 'everyday' design. Conducting both a consumer study and a company analysis, findings outline a key finding that may be more surprising: consumers expected luxury garments to be more

sustainable, have a more transparent production process, and that the companies behind luxury products are more responsible than the average fashion company. Key theoretical contributions and managerial implications conclude this chapter.

Staying within the remit of culture and coming back to a paradox highlighted in the introduction, Chap. 4, authored by **Stephanie Volcon, Marian Makkar, Diane M. Martin, and Francis Farrelly** (RMIT University, Australia), focuses on '*Sustainable Luxury: A Framework for Meaning Through Value Congruence*.' Through a case study approach the chapter hones in on aspects of language, symbols, and artefacts used within a sustainable luxury brand and outlines how the cues can be utilised to attract sustainably conscious consumers. The chapter takes on a conceptual approach and concludes with areas of future research.

Chapter 5 follows on nicely from the conceptual layout in Chap. 4, in that it investigates '*Sustainability, Saudi Arabia and Luxury Fashion Context: An Oxymoron or a New Way*.' **Sarah Ibrahim Alosaimi** (Princess Nourah Bint Abdul Rahman University, Saudi Arabia) provides a data-driven chapter, outlining issues surrounding sustainability in a country that more recently made quite dramatic changes in fostering sustainability. The chapter highlights that there is a challenge not only with sustainability and luxury but also with how luxury is interpreted within different cultures. As such, this chapter provides yet another perspective on sustainable luxury, within a country context that currently lacks research.

Staying within the context of Saudi Arabia, Chap. 6 provides insights '*Towards Circular Luxury Entrepreneurship: A Saudi Female Entrepreneur Perspective*, authored by **Rana Alblowi**, (Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia; The University of Manchester, UK) and **Claudia E. Henninger, Rachel Parker-Strak, and Marta Blazquez** (The University of Manchester, UK). This qualitative enquiry illustrates the complexities involved in moving towards a more sustainable luxury fashion industry. Aside from terminological issues that have been identified in the previous chapters, the authors highlight that education can be a key barrier to fully capitalise on new opportunities. Moreover, culture is seen as both a barrier and an enabler, with especially younger generations wanting to support sustainable processes, the new generation of fashion luxury entrepreneurs focuses on innovative ways to make this a reality.

In moving continents to an African setting, Chap. 7 is entitled ‘*Sustainable Supply Chain Process of the Luxury Kente Textile: Introducing Heritage into the Sustainability Framework*’ written by **Sharon Nunoo** (The University of Manchester, UK). This chapter focuses on expanding what we mean by sustainability and how this is reflected within the luxury phenomenon. In line with cultural traditions that have been observed in the previous chapters, the author focuses on the Kente cloth—a type of silk and cotton fabric made of interwoven cloth strips in Ghana, Africa. The author outlines that considering the past is vital in fully understanding what sustainability means. Through in-depth content analysis of secondary resources ranging from website articles and news articles, this chapter documents the textile production process and considers its sustainability with heritage and tradition in mind.

In staying with the theme of jewellery and supply chain, Chap. 8 explores ‘*Canadian Ethical Diamonds and Identity Obsession: How Consumers of Ethical Jewellery in Italy Understand Traceability*,’ written by **Linda Armano** and **Annamma Joy** (Faculty of Management, The University of British Columbia, Canada). Through an ethnographic survey of Italian ethical jewellers and representative customers, this study focuses on how the topic of traceability in the Canadian diamond industry is communicated and negotiated within two representative Italian ethical jewellery stores in Milan and Bologna. A key focus of the chapter is on traceability in an often heavily debated area, namely diamonds. The authors argue that narratives of virtue through consumption can lead consumers to feel they have the ability to buy what they believe in, that opening their wallet is in and of itself an act of power.

Chapter 9, ‘*Sustainability Claims in the Luxury Beauty Industry: An Exploratory Study of Consumers’ Perceptions and Behaviour*,’ by **Panayiota J. Alevisou** (The University of Sheffield, UK) broadens our understanding of the ‘luxury fashion industry’ and focuses its attention on the beauty industry, which is often overlooked. Following on from Chap. 8, the author picks up on the theme of traceability by honing in on communication strategies that are often used by luxury retailers/brands, namely eco-labelling. The author provides interesting consumer insights into a topic that has received increased attention, not least due to having been highlighted as a solution to inform conscious consumers about products

that are more 'sustainable' than others in the same product category. As a result five behavioural patterns were identified that encapsulate consumers' relationship with their luxury beauty and its sustainability signals.

Chapter 10, '*What Do You Think? Investigating How Consumers Perceive Luxury Fashion Brand's Eco-labelling Strategy*,' by **Shuchan Luo**, **Aurelie Le Normand**, **Claudia E. Henninger**, and **Marta Blazquez** (The University of Manchester, UK) stays within the remit of eco-labelling by exploring Gen Y consumers' perceptions of them within the luxury fashion industry. The findings are surprising in that there is an interesting dynamic emerging between when consumers accept and reject eco-labels and how they unconsciously impact them. The authors outline that whether consumers are aware of eco-labels used almost plays a secondary role; what is more impactful is whether consumers trust the brand. Thus, if a luxury brand is trusted, consumers automatically perceive the eco-label as positive and are convinced this brand is doing their bid for sustainability.

Chapter 11, '*"Take a Stand" the Importance of Social Sustainability and Its Effect on Generation Z Consumption of Luxury Fashion Brands*,' by **Helen McCormick** (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK) and **Pratibha Ram** (The University of Manchester, UK) takes on a more daring tone and moves away from an environmental to a social sustainability focus. The chapter moves us towards the digital age and analyses the importance of 'Taking a Stand' to communicate social sustainability regarding societal issues and its effect on Generation Z consumption of luxury fashion brands.

Chapter 12, '*Exploring Chinese Consumer Attitudes Towards Second-Hand Luxury Fashion and How Social Media eWoM Affects the Decision-Making Process*,' by **Rosy Boardman**, **Yuping Zhou**, and **Yunshi Guo** (The University of Manchester, UK) provides a nice link between Chaps. 8–11 in that it focuses on issues concerning traceability, whilst at the same time provides insights into social media, and thus is connected with our increasingly digital age. The authors focus on the Chinese consumer context and thus provide a further perspective on second-hand luxury, which has not previously emerged in this edited book. The chapter carefully interlinks the impact eWoM has on the decision-making process when purchasing second-hand luxury fashion. The authors provide some

interesting conclusions in regard to wariness of the credibility of eWoM. It was highlighted that the likelihood of impulse purchasing diminished the more eWoM there was. This suggests there may be regional and cultural differences regarding attitudes towards second-hand luxury fashion with more fears about counterfeiting amongst Chinese consumers.

Last, but certainly not least, Chap. 13, ‘*The Rise of Virtual Representation of Fashion in Marketing Practices: How It Can Encourage Sustainable Luxury Fashion Consumption*,’ by **Shuang Zhou, Eunsoo Baek, and Juyeun Jang** (The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, HK) provides a conceptual framework addressing key issues emerging with increased digitalisation. The authors highlight that the luxury fashion industry has undertaken initiatives to increase sustainability by employing digital technologies to virtually represent fashion in marketing activities. Within the chapter the authors propose that virtual representation of fashion (VRF) could be used to encourage sustainable luxury fashion consumption (SLFC). This chapter concludes with providing key areas of research and practical implication.

1.3 Final Words

What probably becomes apparent from the content of the edited volume is that that sustainable luxury is a fascinating context that can be explored from a variety of different angles. Seeing as digitalisation brings forward changes in the environment, it will be interesting to see how the future of sustainable luxury will shape.

Finally, we want to say **Thank you!** to all our authors and contributors to this edited book. As outlined in the preface, this edited volume is rather special, as it was in the making for a very long time and has finally materialised. Yet, this would not have happened if it was not for all our wonderful authors, who have dedicated a lot of time!

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