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## **Sustainable Luxury Marketing: A Synthesis and Research Agenda**

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## **Sustainable Luxury Marketing: A Synthesis and Research Agenda**

### **Abstract**

Sustainability has become a pervasive issue for the luxury sector, gaining traction with brand managers, scholars, policy-makers, the media, and academia. The purpose of this article is to examine the state of sustainable luxury research in marketing and consumer behaviour by critically reviewing and synthesizing the growing but fragmented body of scholarly work on sustainable-luxury marketing. The article critically assesses where, how, and by whom research on sustainable luxury is being conducted, and it identifies gaps for future investigation. The article reviews research published between 2007 and 2018 within major peer-reviewed English-language scholarly publications in business, marketing, ethics, fashion, food and tourism journals. The research is identified using the keywords sustainable luxury, green luxury, eco-luxury, and organic luxury. Three core themes emerge from this review: (1) consumer concerns and practices; (2) organizational concerns and practices; and (3) international and cross-cultural issues. The review confirms that research on sustainable luxury is significantly under-developed. This article provides the first critical and comprehensive assessment and categorization of the emergent literature streams on sustainable luxury. The authors argue for a broader, deeper, and more critical research agenda on the relationship between sustainability and luxury. Potential avenues for future research on sustainable luxury are proposed, with calls for theoretical and cross-cultural reflections that tackle broader systemic and institutional issues within the field.

**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Environmental, Ethics, Luxury, Sustainability, Sustainable Luxury, Responsible Luxury.

## Introduction

Luxury brands face growing tensions driven by consumer activists critiquing these brands for their lack of supply-chain transparency and accusing them of animal and worker exploitation (Bendell and Kleanthous 2007; Dekhili and Achabou 2016; Henninger *et al.* 2017; Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau 2014). In response, the luxury sector is slowly recognising its responsibilities and opportunities to encourage sustainability in sourcing, manufacturing and marketing. Luxury, compared with non-luxury, is synonymous with superior quality, uniqueness, and going beyond need; it is uncompromisingly extravagant in terms of effort and material. It often exhibits craftsmanship and expertise, and it is enduring (Atwal and Williams 2009; Berry 1994; Heine and Berghaus 2014; Kapferer and Bastien 2009; Poelina and Nordensvard 2018). In some sectors, such as luxury food, refinement in texture, taste, or quality is expected (van der Veen 2010). Sustainability issues are especially important in the luxury sector given its widespread reach, which is reflected in the composition of its goods, services, and experiences: fashion, automobiles, travel, gastronomy, alcohol, fine art, and so on (D'Arpizio *et al.* 2016, 2017; Wiedmann and Hennigs 2013). Additionally, the industry is valued in excess of £700 billion worldwide (Kollewe 2015), highlighting its global status. Despite recent economic and political turmoil, such as Brexit and China's slowing economic growth, luxury sales increased by 5% in 2017 (D'Arpizio *et al.* 2017; Paton 2017). This was fuelled by strong global sales in goods (Bain & Company 2016) and the growing popularity of experiential luxury (Swarbrooke 2018). Moreover, the trickle-down effect from luxury to mainstream highlights the cross-industry significance of luxury (Amatulli *et al.* 2017).

Because of the industry's global significance, sustainable luxury as a concept is gaining traction within luxury firms and academic research. However, there is a lack of clarity about what sustainability means in the luxury context (Dean 2018). Luxury is synonymous with skill, quality, and endurance, which may be easily aligned with sustainability. However, the recent

‘massification’ of luxury has offered entry-level products and services (Kapferer 2017; Silverstein and Fiske 2003), perhaps undermining luxury’s potential compatibility with sustainability. Following Dean’s (2018) lead, we suggest that sustainable luxury entails the scope of design, production, and consumption that is environmentally or ethically conscious (or both) and is oriented toward correcting various perceived wrongs within the luxury industry, including animal cruelty, environmental damage, and human exploitation (Lundblad and Davies 2015). Examples of sustainable luxury do exist (e.g. hybrid high-performance cars, eco-conscious fashion, and Fairtrade jewellery), but promotional activities are limited, partly due to the sector’s secretive nature (Carrigan *et al.* 2013). Only a handful of luxury powerhouses, such as LVMH and Kering widely promote sustainable development and sustainability-oriented innovations as a key strategic priority (Adams *et al.* 2018; Hendriksz 2018). Moreover, the sustainable, eco-friendly product lines developed by such brands as Armani and BMW are often peripheral to core ranges that lack sustainable features, and sustainability is not prominently marketed. Away from the companies themselves, the organisation Positive Luxury (2018) awards the Butterfly Mark to luxury brands that set standards for sustainable sourcing and manufacturing practices. As more luxury organisations appear to be making – or claiming to have made – sustainable choices, greater critical academic inquiry into the integrity of their sustainable business practices is needed.

Work on sustainable luxury in the academic domain has been limited, and research has focused mainly on products (see Davies *et al.* 2012). However, luxury experiences, such as luxury tourism or festival ‘glamping’, are becoming increasingly popular; therefore, this article adopts a broad perspective by considering luxury goods and experiences. This opening up of luxury is reflected by Turunen (2017, p. 85), who emphasises the ‘consumer centred interpretation of luxury’, where luxury is personal: relative to an individual’s own situation rather than comparing it with others. Additionally, from a cross-cultural perspective, much of the extant

research on sustainable luxury demonstrates a clear bias toward consumers from the west, yet practitioner research clearly demonstrates the significance of luxury consumers from the east (D'Arpizio *et al.* 2016, 2017).

In response to the global impact of the luxury industry, its own interest in sustainability, and growing academic interest in this area, we bring together the current work on sustainable-luxury marketing and consumers to critically debate academic endeavours in this area, prompt more reflexive, comprehensive consideration of the sector, and set a future research agenda. Further, we contribute to emergent but increasingly important conversations on 'green' and sustainability issues across management and business research in this journal, such as green supply-chain management (Srivastava 2007), sustainability measurement research (Matteo *et al.* 2018) and green Human Resource Management (HRM) practices (Renwick *et al.* 2013).

We begin by highlighting the problematizing of luxury as sustainable and the discord within academic debates. We then outline the review methodology, before critically analysing academic work in this area on the following three themes: (1) consumer concerns and practices; (2) organisational concerns and practices; and (3) international cross-cultural issues. By contributing a systematic review of the literature and highlighting emergent trends, we also provide a critically informed agenda for structured future research.

## **Background**

### *Sustainability marketing and consumption*

Sustainable consumption is defined as 'the consumption of goods and services that meet basic needs and quality of life without jeopardising the needs of future generations' (OECD 2002). Within marketing and consumer research, it has become a mainstream issue (Henninger *et al.* 2016; Jackson 2005). Despite the efforts of academia, practitioners, and policy-makers to better understand and disrupt unsustainable practices (Smith *et al.* 2010), these practices endure, with

sales of sustainable products remaining a small proportion of overall sales. Critics argue that the hegemony of the dominant social paradigm (DSP) has accelerated the depletion and degradation of resources (Carrington *et al.* 2016; Kilbourne and Carlson 2008) through the complicity of marketers, with extensive environmental damage caused by the constant cycle of consumption, marketing, manufacturing, discarding, and polluting. Our present economic system is geared toward manufacturing items that we buy and quickly discard; to reduce environmental impacts requires us to choose robust products with longer lifespans (Cooper 2016). The present marketing paradigm has proven resistant to change (Peattie 2016), but progress toward sustainable practices requires disrupting these current systems and integrating ethical and environmental values into the development of sustainability marketing (Belz and Peattie 2012). When marketing harnesses responsibility, it can deliver sustainable products, services, innovations, and access to variety (Achrol and Kotler 2012; Wilkie and Moore 2012). It can also encourage recycling (Gilg *et al.* 2005), upcycling (O'Rourke and O'Sullivan 2015), reusing (Assouly 2010; Cooper 2005), buying less, buying 'green', and buying Fairtrade (Scott *et al.* 2014; Ramirez *et al.* 2015), saving energy (Rettie *et al.* 2012), and supporting good causes (Bhattacharya and Sen 2004; Boenigk and Schuchardt 2013; Hagtvedt and Patrick 2016). Alongside marketers, consumers need to consider social responsibility when making purchases (Carrigan and Bosangit 2016). However, like marketers, consumers are accused of being largely self-serving and primarily interested in their own needs (Brinkmann and Peattie 2008). As noted, few studies have sought to understand sustainability within the luxury marketplace (Carrigan *et al.* 2017; Davies *et al.* 2012). As we will discuss in the next section, research reveals tensions and opportunities within the luxury sector and suggests how luxury consumers may be motivated to purchase more sustainably.

### *Bringing together sustainability and luxury*

Despite the extensive yet discrete bodies of literature on sustainability and luxury consumption, much sustainability research to date focuses not on luxury but on low-involvement and habitual shopping. Far less is known about the contexts of high-involvement consumption, such as luxury purchases. The overarching view is that the ideology of marketing, driven by a mantra of ‘more’ consumption, is contradictory to the goals of sustainability and responsibility (Harper and Peattie 2011).

Given the association of luxury consumption with ostentation, overconsumption (Veblen 1889), overproduction, indulgence, and personal pleasure, the conflicts between luxury and sustainability are evident. Some researchers even state that sustainability is irrelevant for fashion items (Davies and Streit 2013; Henninger *et al.* 2017; Hu *et al.* 2018; Joy *et al.* 2012; Ko and Megehee 2012). They highlight the incompatibility of luxury and sustainability (Dean 2018; Tynan 2017); luxury values are often coupled with personal pleasure, while sustainable consumption is linked to moderation and ethics (Naderi and Strutton 2015). Additionally, Moraes *et al.* (2017) argue that the concept of conspicuous consumption, with ‘the associated normative view that luxury consumption is necessarily unnecessary and thus negative’ (p. 5), may be an unhelpful framework with which to examine sustainable luxury. Because of this ambiguous association, academics seem to be reticent about making parallels between luxury and sustainability (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau 2014). This has inevitably restricted the study of sustainable luxury, something we aim to rectify.

The first mention of sustainable luxury as a separate construct appears in Bendell and Kleanthous’s (2007) World Wildlife Fund (WWF) report. The report envisions moving toward authentic luxury brands that position sustainability at their core, but it offers few pathways to this resolution. Recently, researchers have considered the scarcity of luxury products and



restricted consumption through premium pricing, selective distribution channels, and the production of limited editions (Han *et al.* 2016; Janssen *et al.* 2014). This could contribute to more reasonable and responsible consumption, which would indirectly protect natural resources. Luxury is associated with timelessness (Venkatesh *et al.* 2010); its very essence is not trend-led but durable, which suggests synergies with sustainability and, in particular, endurance through the generations, including the prudent use of resources. Similarities may be drawn with eco-sustainable fashion, which produces longer-lasting products to reduce environmental damage (Godart and Seong 2014). However, a key question here is whether issues concerning animal welfare and natural resources (e.g. animal skins, fur) disrupt this ‘balance’ between sustainability and luxury. Similarly, if sustainable luxury holiday resorts, often incentivised to support conservation efforts (Cowburn *et al.* 2018; De-Miguel-Molina *et al.* 2014), are encouraging excursions to fragile environments, can these firms be truly sustainable?

From a consumer perspective, research suggests that a distinction needs elucidating between luxury consumers who choose to consume less and those who choose to refine their product choices (e.g. recycled or ‘pre-loved’ luxury, vintage, or both) to enact their sustainable credentials (Lynas 2010; Ryding *et al.* 2018; Zamwel *et al.* 2014). The first of these is portrayed as ‘consumer citizenship’ (Gabriel and Lang 2006). This may be motivated by politics (boycotting fur) or elitist aesthetics (bespoke experiences; minimalism), such as an emphasis on materials and craftsmanship, or focused on energy consumption and carbon footprints, as seen in travel resorts in South East Asia (Lynas 2010; McGillick and Kawana 2015). However, friction exists regarding political consumerism’s capacity for good, given the unsustainability of any choice that results in increased consumption (Carrington *et al.* 2016; McDonagh and Prothero 2014). One solution suggests the refinement of consumption choices traditionally linked to frugality, where second-hand luxury goods (including vintage) are the focus. This

pathway allows the experience of luxury to be transferred between owners without negative impacts, and it can result in deeper meanings and closer relationships with purchases (Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015), which may promote sustainability. However, there are still negative externalities, such as the resources needed for transportation, cleaning, or packaging (Leismann *et al.* 2013). To date, no rigorous empirical research has been done on the sustainability benefits derived from vintage luxury goods.

While research examining sustainable luxury exists, current knowledge lacks agreement and structure. To move the debate forward, an independent evaluation of the sustainable luxury field is warranted. This would benefit from scrutinising the marketing and sustainable-consumption literature, which is the focus of the remainder of the article.

## **Methodology**

We define a literature review as ‘a systematic, explicit, and reproducible design for identifying, evaluating, and interpreting the existing body of recorded documents’ (Fink 2005, p. 6). We followed the approach taken by McDonagh and Prothero (2014), and critically assessed the research on sustainable luxury by investigating where, how, and by whom sustainable luxury is being studied.

Based on Mayring’s (1991) ‘Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse’ (qualitative content analysis), Seuring and Müller (2008, p. 1700) propose four key steps to conducting a comprehensive literature synthesis:

- (1) *Material collection*: clear definition and delimitation of the material to be collected, including the unit of analysis.
- (2) *Descriptive analysis*: assessment of the material (e.g. publications per year) providing the background for analysis.

(3) *Category selection*: form major topics of analysis, which are constituted by single analytical categories.

(4) *Material evaluation*: analysis according to structural dimensions, which allows for identification of relevant issues and interpretations of results.

To collect material (step 1), we set clear criteria to delimit our literature search. First, we included only peer-reviewed papers, in English, published in journals focusing on business and marketing, ethics, fashion, tourism, food, and specialist sustainable luxury publications (e.g. *Luxury Research Journal*); thus, we excluded publications in any other language. To provide further context and background, we also reviewed books and industry reports. Papers selected for review had to contain at least one of the following keyword terms: corporate social responsibility (CSR) and luxury; eco-friendly luxury; environmentally friendly luxury; ethical/ethics luxury; green luxury; socially responsible luxury; responsible luxury; and sustainable/sustainability luxury. This reflected that sustainability research encompasses a variety of terms, such as organic, green, and eco (Cervellon and Wernerfelt 2012). While each term differs conceptually, they tend to be used interchangeably (Henninger *et al.* 2016); hence, all were included in the search. We conducted this open search for publications (academic and non-academic) to gain a better understanding of the context and evolution of sustainable luxury, so we did not limit ourselves to specific dates or years. We collated publications matching these criteria using a structured keyword search on major databases, including Science Direct, Emerald, Springer, Wiley, EBSCO, Scopus, Business Source Premier, Research Gate, academia.edu, Google scholar, ABI/INFORM, and the databases of major marketing, fashion, tourism, and food conferences, such as the Association for Consumer Research (ACR), the International Foundation of Fashion Technology Institutes (IFFTI), and the Global Marketing Conference (GAMMA). We created a database of articles and performed an initial check against the criteria above, which determined the articles to include and exclude

and enabled us to remove any duplicates. To reduce potential bias, all researchers were involved in the search and analysis for the literature review. We carefully reviewed any publications identified and investigated secondary references, leading to 46 peer-reviewed journal articles, 11 books, and 13 conference papers utilised for this literature review.

The extensive literature search indicates the scope of academic investigations into the area of sustainable luxury marketing and consumption, which further justifies this research synthesis and future research agenda. Academic interest in sustainable luxury emerged in 2010 and gained attention in 2013 with the publication of a special issue on sustainable luxury in the *Journal of Corporate Citizenship* (No. 52). Although a drop was observed from 2013 to 2014, publications have since steadily increased and received amplified scholarly attention, including two papers in a special issue on luxury marketing in the *Journal of Business Research* in 2016 (Vol. 69, Iss. 1).

We categorised the papers as either empirical or conceptual, and grouped them further according to research methodology: focus groups, experimental design, surveys, interviews, case studies, conceptual papers, ethnography/netnography, and quantitative content analysis. The categorisation of each paper further indicates that only 3 of the 46 journal publications are conceptual (Carrigan *et al.* 2013; Hennings *et al.* 2013; Kapferer 2010) and seek to advance theory in a relatively new field. Overall, there are few peer-reviewed empirical papers in the literature; this is surprising, given the increasing commercial interest in sustainable luxury.

To continue the descriptive analysis section of the review (step 2), we started by examining the timeline of sustainable luxury. Figure 1 provides an extended version of Gardetti and Torres's (2013) timeline, indicating that from 2007 sustainable luxury attracted increased attention, especially from a practitioner's view. This coincides with various industry scandals in 2006 (relating to luxury-fashion brands in particular), which led to public calls for the

implementation of more sustainable measures. Another peak in the evolutionary timeline occurred in 2015, when the Modern Slavery Act was passed in the UK and the COP21 (Conference of Parties) (2015) took place in Paris to tackle issues surrounding climate change (Home Office 2016).

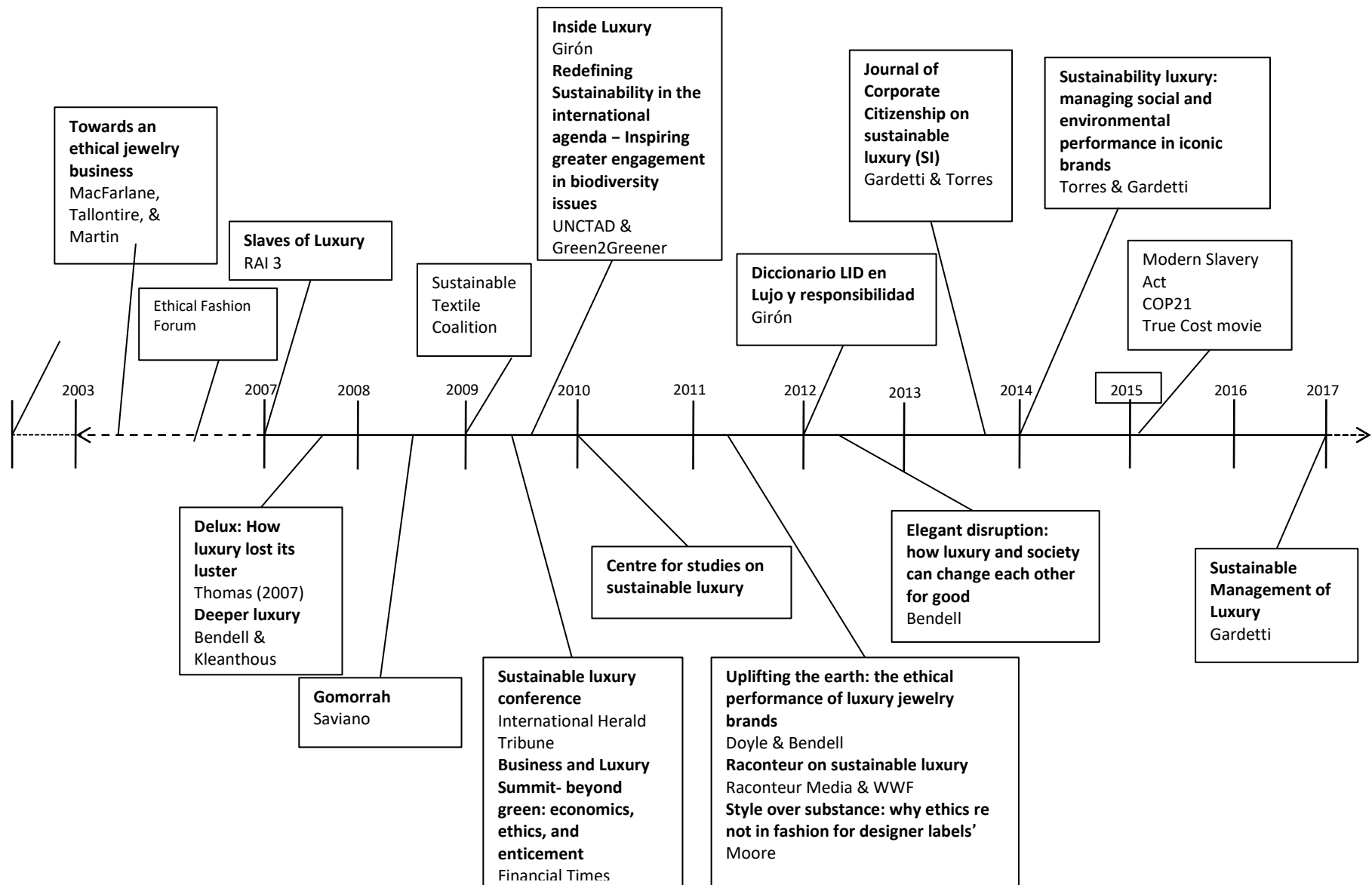


Figure 1. Evolution of sustainable luxury (adapted from Torres and Gardetti 2013)

Examining the papers from an international perspective highlights that Chinese consumers are leading the consumption of luxury (Sun *et al.* 2014), although only one (Fabinyi *et al.* 2011) of the reviewed articles focus explicitly on this consumer segment. This omission represents a critical knowledge gap, which demands further investigation.

Moving on to the category selection stage of the review (step 3), our initial reading and discussion of the papers highlighted three main research streams within the sustainable luxury literature: (1) consumer concerns and practices; (2) organisational concerns and practices; and (3) international and cross-cultural issues. We examine each of these in the next section.

## **Research streams**

### *Consumer concerns and practices*

Several studies have highlighted consumer concerns about, or practices related to, sustainable luxury. First, the review identified studies that provide a general overview of why consumers do (or do not) buy sustainable luxury products (Davies *et al.* 2012; Griskevicius *et al.* 2010). Secondly, some studies focus on a particular element of luxury-marketing strategy (e.g. eco-labels, recycled materials) and analyse consumer reactions (Ho *et al.* 2016; Jin *et al.* 2017). These studies often make direct comparisons with commodity purchases, highlighting the key differences between the contexts. Amatulli *et al.* (2017) compare and contrast sustainability within the mass market and within the luxury sector; they argue that women express more positive attitudes toward luxury products than non-luxury products and favour luxury experiences, while men traditionally seek luxury products. These nuances may also be reflected in purchases of sustainable luxury.

Consumers appear to be adept at compartmentalising their consumption processes for luxury versus commodity goods (Joy *et al.* 2012). When making luxury purchases, they give much less consideration to sustainability than to other features, and the literature offers a number of

explanations. Davies *et al.* (2012) conclude that past-purchase satisfaction, quality, and convenience are important; similarly, Achabou and Dekhili (2013) state that product quality and brand reputation govern choice. Dekhili and Achabou (2016), Joy *et al.* (2012), and Ko and Megehee (2012) found that the consumer's own pleasure takes precedence in luxury consumption, and many consumers (often mistakenly) consider sustainable luxury to be more expensive (Davies *et al.* 2012). Nash *et al.* (2016) suggest that for certain luxury purchases, such as pearls, sustainability is central to the purchasing decision. Similarly, in the context of gourmet seafood in China, individuals are choosing sustainable alternatives to such meats as shark fin (Cowburn *et al.* 2018; Wilk 2002). Fragmented, and contextualised within different markets, these studies are perplexing and contradictory, which confirms how little we know about consumers of sustainable luxury.

*Identity and fit.* Another suggested barrier to choosing sustainable products is that goods are core to consumer identity (Antonetti and Maklan 2016); this is especially important when their role as a differentiator is appealing (Belk 2013), which is the case in the context of luxury. Significant psychological benefits stem from purchasing and owning luxury products: consumers are seeking to create a personal brand identity, feel good about themselves (self-identity), or impress others (peer identity) (Davies *et al.* 2012). This peer identity is linked to norms and shared understanding (Moraes *et al.* 2017). Some studies suggest that the ethical or sustainable aspects of luxury products are not aligned to the identity that consumers are seeking (Jin *et al.* 2017), and may even be 'distanced and opposed' (De Pierro Bruno and Barki 2017, p. 88; Stehlau 2017). This is crucial in clothing, where consumers buy predominantly to enhance their identity (Niinimäki 2010). An emerging theme in the literature shows that luxury-brand values are associated with status and feeding one's ego (Cervellon and Shamma 2013), while environmental values pertain to altruism (Griskevicius *et al.* 2010); this paradox is presented as 'pro-self' (luxury) versus pro-social (sustainable). However, for consumers who



seek a conspicuous ethical identity, some luxury purchases could offer that platform (Davies *et al.* 2012). Indeed, Cervellon and Shammass (2013) note that some consumers want their contribution to societal welfare to be noticed through their luxury purchases. Further, Hennings *et al.* (2013) suggest that consumers are evaluating brands that cause social or environmental damage as no longer best in class. While it is clear that the identity aspects of sustainable luxury are important, the current research does not give us a deep understanding of this phenomenon.

Bandwagon and trickle-down effects (in addition to trickle-up and trickle-across diffusions; Atik and Firat 2013), where elite consumers integrate a particular element into their luxury purchase that filters down to less affluent users (Cervellon and Wernerfelt 2012), are also important. If sustainability is successfully incorporated into luxury products then it could be powerful in normalising the consumption of sustainable luxury, as consumers seek to identify themselves with social groups of status or differentiate themselves from others who are not highly esteemed (Ivanova *et al.* 2013; Solomon 2004).

Identity is also linked to the fit, or lack thereof, that consumers perceive between sustainability and luxury. Several studies suggest that consumers either struggle to see the fit between sustainability and luxury (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau 2014) or more readily associate luxury with a lack of sustainability. Beckham and Voyer (2014) note that luxury items may appear less desirable and luxurious when they are labelled 'sustainable', and that sustainable fashion, where aesthetics are key, is considered to be unattractive (Joergens 2006). Additionally, travellers seeking luxury hotels and experiences will perceive trade-offs between sustainability and luxury. However, Line and Hanks (2016) note that this is more the case for urban hotels than for nature-based locations – essentially, consumers perceive a lower level of luxury in green urban hotels. People may see a closer fit between luxury and sustainability in cosmetics, but the term 'eco-fashion' conjures up the hippie movement, where fashion often meant shapeless recycled clothing (Henninger *et al.* 2016; Joy *et al.* 2012). For food, there

appears to be a growing appetite for products that are sustainable and authentic (Hartmann *et al.* 2016, 2017). However, as noted by Hartmann *et al.* (2016), hedonism and prestige are also important features of luxury food and experiences, as is likely to be the case for tourist experiences. The authors do not discuss whether these could be compatible with sustainability, an issue that requires further investigation.

Researchers suggest that some features can affect the relative fit between sustainability and luxury. For example, De Angelis *et al.* (2017) and Janssen *et al.* (2014) found that a scarce luxury product that is perceived as more enduring than ephemeral would also be perceived as more responsible, provoking positive attitudes. They suggest that luxury products consumers associate with longevity – such as jewellery or cars – are perceived to be more sustainable than less enduring purchases. These two studies were based on single countries and specific luxury goods, which may not be representative (e.g. De Angelis *et al.* 2017 focused on sunglasses), and they used selection criteria that drew from those merely ‘interested’ in luxury items or recruited via panels. Moraes *et al.* (2017) recruited UK consumers of fine jewellery, but discovered that sustainability was not a priority in their purchase criteria. These contradictions suggest that we cannot assume these findings are indicative of the attitudes of luxury consumers across markets or sectors.

There are also inconsistencies in research on the fit between hedonism and sustainable luxury. Steinhart *et al.* (2013) propose that any lack of fit exists because consumers see sustainability as utilitarian and luxury as hedonic. In contrast, Cervellon and Shamma (2013) suggest that hedonism is part of sustainable luxury and a major added value of sustainable products. However, they also signal that participants reported reduced pleasure when using sustainable luxury goods, suggesting that sustainability may weaken perceptions of luxury. Meanwhile, Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau (2015) argue that when consumers define luxury in terms of exceptional quality, they overlook the contradiction between luxury and sustainability.

Additionally, Amatulli *et al.* (2017) and Nash *et al.* (2016) have observed an alignment between the luxury values of quality, uniqueness, and sustainability. With only limited investigations, the discord within debates around hedonism and sustainable luxury remain unresolved.

*The fallacy of clean luxuries.* Evidence shows that consumers fail to seek out sustainable luxury products, often assuming that luxury goods have few significant negative impacts and do not come from exploited workforces (Davies *et al.* 2012; Janssen *et al.*, 2012; Moraes *et al.* 2017). By focusing on heritage and quality, luxury industries do not conjure up images of pollution, dwindling resources, and global warming (Joy *et al.* 2012). Respondents do not associate production exploitation with manufacture in creative industries (Banks and Hesmondalgh 2009; Eisenberg *et al.* 2016) such as small-scale ateliers in Milan and Paris; nor do they associate sourcing with any negative environmental consequences. Certain luxury goods, such as Harris Tweed, appeal because of their heritage and rarity, and the safeguarding of local crafts and jobs (Bastien and Kapferer 2013; Carrigan *et al.* 2013). However, Dekhili and Achabou (2016) note that these rationalisations are flawed, with Davies *et al.* (2012, p. 41) describing them as ‘the fallacy of clean luxuries’. The raw materials contained in luxury goods (e.g. angora, gold, diamonds) are often under threat or produced by unsustainable and unethical processes. For example, PETA exposed the suffering of crocodiles in the production of Louis Vuitton bags (PETA 2017). Cherny-Scanlon (2017) questions whether nature can continue to sustain the luxury industry, noting how the scarcity of wildlife as a resource for luxury production remains an overlooked issue.

*Engagement with sustainability.* A lack of information, availability of goods/services, and the irregularity of the purchase are cited as reasons luxury consumers do not seek sustainability (Davies *et al.* 2012). Even self-identified ethical consumers do not think it is worth spending the time and money needed to ensure that luxury goods are sustainable (Moraes *et al.* 2017), which is also referred to as resource-acquisition fatigue. Consumers further exhibit scepticism

about sustainability claims made by luxury brands, and Hennings *et al.* (2013) note that organisations must show that they are paying more than ‘lip service’ to sustainability issues. Thus, although empirical investigation is lacking, the implicit belief that luxury consumers ‘need not worry about anything’ seems to be deluded (Carrigan *et al.* 2017; Winston 2016, p. 4).

While most of the studies investigate why consumers do not engage with sustainable luxury, a handful highlight reasons consumers do engage. Roper *et al.* (2013) suggest that some consumers see luxury as restrained consumption, replacing quantity with quality. Cervellon and Shammass (2013) and Steinhart *et al.* (2013) note that philanthropic actions by luxury organisations legitimise consumers’ guilt-free enjoyment. Further, Cervellon and Shammass (2013) state that consumers equate sustainable luxury with health benefits, especially in the case of fashion and cosmetics. Similarly, Steinhart *et al.* (2013) found that consumers evaluate products more favourably when an environmental claim emphasises personal social benefits rather than global benefits. Additionally, Loureiro’s (2017) analysis of attitudes to luxury-fashion brands in Generation Y (born 1978–2000) suggests that these consumers care about improving business and society, with an emphasis on transparent procedures, environmental issues, and labour practices. While few in number, these studies mainly indicate a self- rather than other-serving theme in the literature on consumers of sustainable luxury, which warrants further exploration.

*Marketing strategies.* Regarding specific marketing strategies, Achabou and Dekhili (2013) found that including recycled elements negatively affected consumer preferences. They argue that an incompatibility exists between recycling and certain categories of luxury products, citing the perceived problematic fit between luxury and sustainability. However, work has not examined consumer perceptions of sustainable marketing strategies beyond the very narrow realm of recycling.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that consumer concerns regarding the sustainability of luxury goods are intertwined with the ethics of consumption and moral complexities around the issues of sustainable consumption. Consumption is not intrinsically bad or good, but rather morally complex (Wilk 2001), with different ethics conflicting with one another when consumers shop, and connecting in subtle and multifaceted ways. Luxury consumption is not about consistent attitudes and behaviour; it is about the practices of people who operate within an inconsistent world, heavily influenced by context and social conventions (Evans 2011; Han *et al.* 2016). Without a supportive context, consumers are unlikely to make sustainable choices; as Fahlquist (2009) argues, governments, trade organisations, and luxury businesses must help create systems and incentives that support individual agency to effect change.

#### *Organizational concerns and practices*

The challenges luxury organisations face are well documented in scholarly research (Bendell and Thomas 2013; Gardetti and Torres 2013; Guercini and Ranfagni 2013; Ho *et al.* 2016) and in the media (Parveen 2014; PETA 2017). These include widespread counterfeiting in the luxury sector, counteracting the activities of the global black and grey markets, and accusations of contributing to social inequalities (Poehlman *et al.* 2011). These challenges are strategic priorities for luxury organisations, because they bring fear of brand dilution, negative brand associations, and potential detrimental impact on profits, and they may explain why sustainability activities are overlooked while luxury organisations focus on issues they consider to be more pressing (De Angelis *et al.* 2017; Ömen Kale and Öztürk 2016; Wong and Dhanesh 2017). However, some luxury sectors display indulgent practices as part of their decadent brand image (e.g. tourism, which is often energy- and water-intensive), providing constant challenges to sustainability (Ryan and Stewart 2009; Low 2010; Stephenson and Ali-Knight 2017; Tekken and Kropp 2015). Additionally, high-profile unethical practices have emerged: allegations of Gucci's use of sweatshops and maltreatment of its employees (Jacob 2011), Dolce &

Gabbana's employee exploitation (Wilkinson 2008), and the collapse of Rana Plaza in Bangladesh, in which thousands lost their lives (Parveen 2014). These examples of day-to-day challenges and the negative publicity engendered by the discovery of unscrupulous practices highlight why luxury organizations must address sustainability issues.

*Communications and reporting.* For any industry, it is important that sustainability efforts avoid being perceived as self-serving. Luxury 'green-washing' is a risk if organisations engage in the proliferation of unsubstantiated ethical and sustainability claims, leading to increased consumer cynicism and mistrust (Jahdi and Acikdilli 2009). This requires brand managers to create deeper value to distinguish 'the green from the green-washing' (Sauers 2010). Inevitably, some luxury offerings lend themselves to more sustainability practices than others. This echoes McDonagh and Prothero's (2014) argument that the meaning of sustainability is multifaceted and sustainability practices vary across sectors.

The negative publicity stemming from unethical practices in fashion (Carrigan *et al.* 2013) has led many organisations to consider social and environmental issues across the supply chain (Guercini and Ranfagni 2013; Iwanow *et al.* 2005; Perry and Towers 2009). For example, luxury conglomerates LVMH and Kering document numerous sustainable initiatives at group level: across their brands, product lines, and supply chains. Rahman and Yadlapalli (2015) studied nine luxury brands exhibiting eco-credentials, categorising them into 'greening Goliaths' and 'emerging Davids' based on their sustainable practices and social reporting characteristics. Although such initiatives are featured in luxury organisations' annual CSR and sustainability reports, independent auditing and measures of whether these initiatives are making a difference are scant (Athwal *et al.* 2017; Heo *et al.* 2014; Loureiro 2017). We understand that there is no scholarly research into how luxury organisations communicate about their sustainability practices'. Furthermore, the rationale for engaging in a particular sustainable practice is often unproven.

*Luxury trends and innovation.* Trends show that the luxury industry is perceived to lag behind other sectors in its commitment to sustainability (Cervellon and Shammass 2013; Hennings *et al.* 2013). Bendell and Thomas (2013) advocate moving sustainable luxury forward through using ‘disruptive luxury’ and innovation, as demonstrated by companies like Tesla. By manufacturing a limited number of luxury electric (and, thus, potentially more environmentally friendly) vehicles, they retain the exclusivity and high demand that is integral to the luxury sector, while re-coding the image of electric vehicles. Kapferer and Bastien (2009) are less enthusiastic about the wholesale move to greater sustainability, as they consider it to be in conflict with the ethos of luxury goods. Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau (2015) argue that information on sustainability could ‘contaminate’ the dream that luxury brands are selling. This certainly appears to be a concern for practitioners in the luxury tourism industry, who highlight conflicts between green building practices and the expectations and satisfaction levels of hotel guests (Ahn and Pearce 2013). In contrast, industry evidence shows that the luxury brand Stella McCartney is prospering by putting sustainability, vegetarianism, and eco-friendly garments at the core of the brand (Stella McCartney 2017). However, it could be highlighted that the brand still encourages consumerism and may not be fully sustainable: the garments are produced from virgin materials, which can have a negative environmental impact. In line with such a ‘sustainable’ philosophy, in a study of fashion entrepreneurs in sustainable development Gardetti and Torres (2013, p. 58) found that luxury is becoming less exclusive and less wasteful, and ‘more about helping people to express their deepest values’.

*Supply chains and transparency.* Carrigan *et al.*’s (2013) study of the responsibilities of luxury-fashion businesses used Polonsky *et al.*’s (2003) ‘harm chain’ framework to highlight challenges in the supply chain. Similarly, Hennings *et al.* (2013) conclude that it is necessary to transform supply chains to address environmental concerns and to deliver excellence beyond ‘shallow glamour’. In highlighting the positives that can come from understanding the impacts

of the supply chain, several studies suggest that links between local agriculture (producing food) and luxury hotels can provide significant benefits for stakeholders, may have positive social impacts, and can be a basis for ‘pro-poor’ local economic development (economic development aimed at poverty reduction) (Rogerson 2012; Thomas-Francois *et al.* 2017). Both Carcano (2013) and Ivanova *et al.* (2013) have attempted to present the successful implementation of strategies that focus on sustainability. However, both works are based on readily available information and lack insider information, which would have significantly increased the rigour of the research. Due to their high visibility and iconic status, there are significant reputational risks to luxury brands if they act in unsustainable ways (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau 2015). The need to report on CSR and sustainability, along with more calls for transparency, has been noted in research (e.g. Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau 2015). Adopting a transparent approach to CSR (such as the one taken by Kering, which promotes and shares best practice) may enhance consumer awareness of companies’ CSR activities (Athwal *et al.* 2017; Pomeroy and Dolnicar 2009), but little research has examined the potential effect of this type of strategy. Bray *et al.* (2011) suggest that providing relevant CSR information could not only increase consumer awareness but also carry more weight in luxury buying decisions (Ho *et al.* 2016; Öberseder *et al.* 2011). Indeed, in the luxury lodging sector in India, Rishi *et al.* (2015) note that environmental certifications, sustainability reports, and details of investment in sustainability have a positive impact on consumers’ sustainability preferences. However, a counterargument suggests that the very act of disclosing CSR activities may give consumers the perception that something is ‘not right’, leading to lower brand evaluations (Torelli *et al.* 2012). For organisations like Kering, proposing social responsibility and sustainability is becoming common practice. They have evidenced this by developing a ‘environmental profit and loss’ methodology and opting to share their methodology with other industry players. Torelli *et al.* (2012) and Wong and Dhanesh (2017)



propose that luxury-brand managers need to better understand how to achieve successful CSR strategies, and further academic research is required to fully understand the implications of this.

Janssen *et al.* (2015, 2017) support the previous argument by asserting that it would be better to whisper than shout about sustainability credentials in this market. That is, sustainability could increase consumers' positive evaluations of such luxury products (Jin *et al.* 2017; Steinhart *et al.* 2013; Sthapita *et al.* 2017), but only if they are incorporated quietly (van der Laan and Velthuis 2016). Research also suggests that, to a certain extent, engaging in sustainable practices has become a measure of quality that is expected by luxury consumers (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau 2015). Despite the initial expected contradictions between luxury and sustainability highlighted in this growing body of work, Hennings *et al.* (2013) contend that luxury products focused on high standards of quality with an emphasis on craftsmanship can provide a solid basis for environmentally responsible messaging.

#### *International and cross-cultural issues*

The luxury market is innately international, and luxury consumers are characteristically a nation's most elite and wealthiest individuals. Luxury brands are also global, representing some of the finest craftsmanship and products of the countries from which they originate (Godey *et al.* 2013; McGillick and Kawana 2015). The reach of luxury markets brings the expectation that research exploring sustainable luxury will reflect multiple national and international markets, but our review suggests otherwise: while some cross-cultural research has taken place, this is the exception. There are two key imperatives to this expectation: first, the context in which research on sustainable luxury is situated is methodologically significant; and secondly, research should reflect the rich diversity of luxury consumers' motivations, identities, and behaviour within different nations and regions.

*The global luxury market.* Traditionally, luxury research has been conducted in Europe and North America (Monkhouse *et al.* 2012), but there is an increasing body of work in emerging markets (Commuri 2009; Eng and Bogaert 2010; McGillick and Kawana 2015; Park and Reisinger 2009; Strehlau 2017; Sun *et al.* 2014). In particular, the growing consumer appetite for Western branded luxury goods has attracted significant research interest in South East Asia (Monkhouse *et al.* 2012; Tay 2008) and the Middle East (Teimourpour and Hanzae 2011). For example, Rovai (2014) touches on sustainable luxury in the context of branding among Chinese luxury consumers when studying the evolving Chinese luxury market for both home and overseas items. Drivers such as a traditional Confucian culture position luxury not as something superfluous or frivolous, but as something that is celebrated as embedded in the character and essence of each Chinese consumer. However, such studies remain relatively scarce, despite the importance and prominence of Eastern markets for the luxury sector (Shukla 2012; Yau and Davies 2014). In a study of European and American consumers, Belk *et al.* (2003) suggest that materialistic values are spreading globally. However, when studying high-end wine consumption among Canadian consumers, Rojas-Méndez *et al.* (2015) associate luxury with the concepts of sustainability and health-consciousness, moving away from materialism. Similarly, while materialism may be slowing down in Western markets, a trend that may aid the development of sustainable luxury, Sharma (2010) found that it is growing in emerging Eastern markets; this signals potential tensions for efforts toward sustainable luxury.

A significant omission from the extant work is explorations into culture and sustainable luxury, especially in work on luxury food and gastronomy. According to van der Veen (2003), there are no specific foods that are universally considered to be a luxury; rather, it depends on place, time, and society. For instance, in certain Asian countries, large banquets signal prestige (Hartmann *et al.* 2017), whereas in others, such as Japan, small food portions and rare provenance are associated with exclusivity. Similarly, sustainable practices around food and

luxury (such as attitudes to food waste and abundance) may differ significantly across cultures, society, and social class.

*Research context.* Breaking down the distribution of papers by investigated country further highlights the cultural and country bias in research on sustainable luxury. As research contexts, the UK and France – recognised countries of origin for luxury products (de Barnier *et al.* 2006) – have received the most scholarly attention. Researcher nationality, country base, and language skills are possible explanations for this limited geographical scope, as local studies reduce costs and inconvenience. But to concentrate research in a few markets and on a limited population of luxury consumers and organisations in the Global North represents a research bias. Additionally, trends in the country distribution of articles within the sustainable luxury literature are not a true reflection of luxury consumption. According to Bain & Company (2016), East Asia is currently the biggest market for luxury brands from the West, with the largest portion of global purchases (31%); this is followed by America (24%) and Europe (18%). Yet, there are few studies of the potential for sustainable luxury behaviours within these nations, leaving a clear and important gap in our understanding.

Most of the papers reviewed focus on a single site or country. Only a few studies are multi-site or multi-country, or compare the behaviours of consumers and organisations based on cultural issues. For example, Bendell and Thomas (2013) report case studies from the USA, UK, Philippines, and South Africa that profile sustainable-luxury entrepreneurs. However, the paper is based on what they term ‘appreciative inquiry’ and industry engagement, and no specific, rigorous, empirical methodology is reported. Other papers (e.g. Hennings *et al.* 2013; Kapferer 2010; Carrigan *et al.* 2013) offer conceptual frameworks or, in the case of Kapferer (2010), are commentary rather than empirical pieces.

One empirical study offering a multi-country comparison was conducted by Cervellon and Shammam (2013). They studied a convenience sample of consumers across France, Italy, the UK, and Canada. Their findings show that luxury values are enhanced through sustainable luxury (durable, quality, and conspicuousness), but these have nuanced meanings and different centrality among different cultural groups. Specifically, individual drivers to purchase are stronger in Southern Europe, while collective environmental and social drivers prevail in Canada and the UK. However, this study was focused on Global North consumers, again ignoring the significant and growing luxury markets elsewhere. One study seeking to overcome this was conducted by Joy *et al.* (2012), who employed a multi-site approach to data collection by investigating the role of luxury-fashion artisans in fostering the values of quality and sustainability in Canada and Hong Kong. Although Joy *et al.* (2012) explore the inherent dissonance of fast-fashion consumers and their environmental concerns, the methodology does not compare these two aspects of the data. With so few studies undertaken, further cross-cultural comparisons are needed to offer robust insights into the potential differences between cultures and consumers' motives, behaviours, and attitudes toward sustainable luxury.

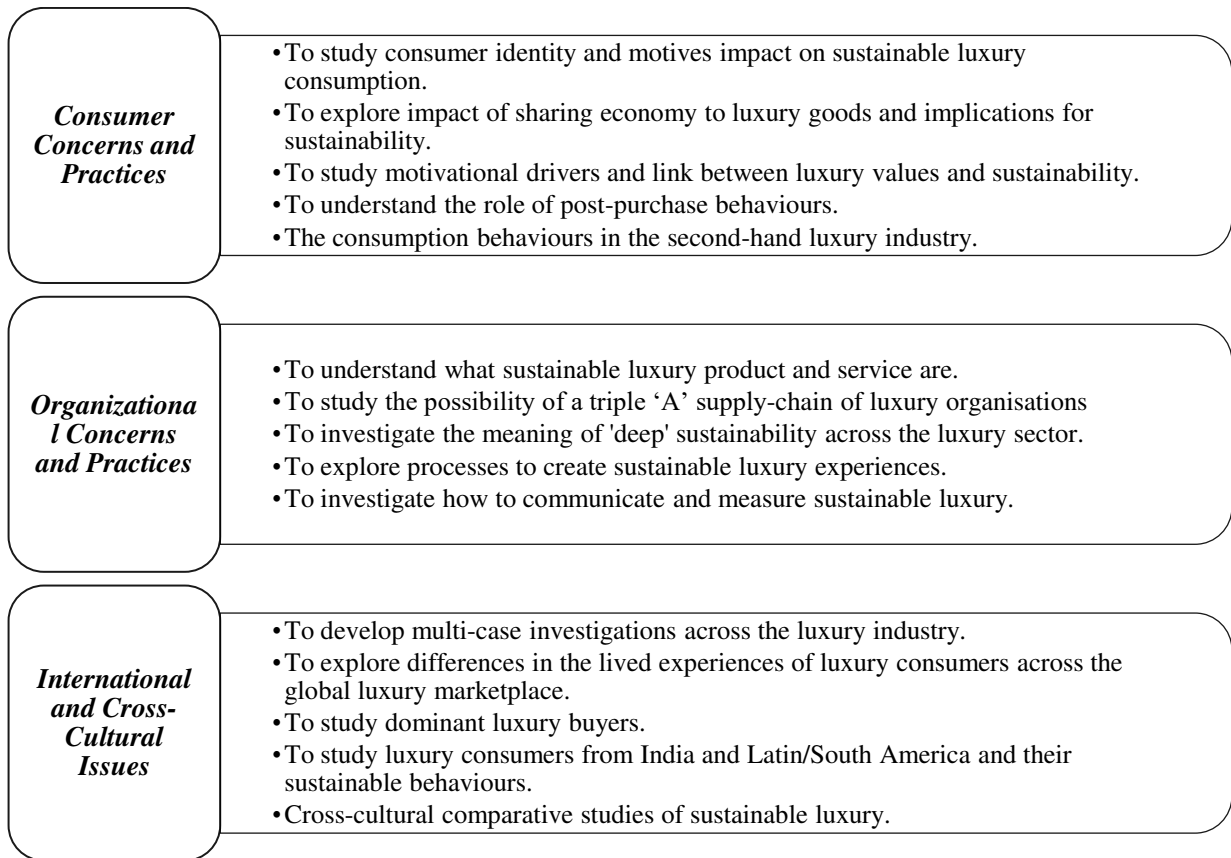
Following the category selection aspect of the review (step 3) described above, and after identifying the three main research streams within the sustainable luxury literature, we undertook the material evaluation stage (step 4). This involved the further analysis and identification of the relevant issues, and the interpretation of the findings. These are presented in the next section, which is followed by the discussion and conclusions.

#### *Reframing sustainable luxury: a future research agenda*

To move the luxury sector toward a more sustainable future requires reframing sustainable-luxury marketing and consumer behaviour, and further study of the many tensions and perceived contradictions that exist in these aspects, as introduced above. The three themes

outlined – consumer, organisation, and international – require broader, critical investigation to better understand the motives, behaviours, and characteristics of consumers of sustainable luxury, how organisations should most effectively create and market their sustainable luxury products, and how a diverse range of international consumers are likely to respond to these offerings (summarised in figure 2 and discussed in this section). Currently, due to the small number of investigations, we cannot provide conclusive findings in any of these areas.

*Figure 2. Avenues for future research*



*Consumers.* From the consumer literature, we seem to know more about why luxury consumers do not value sustainability than we do about what appeals to a consumer of sustainable luxury. This represents an important future research direction. Taking the studies of Achabou and Dekhili (2013) and Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau (2014) together, they suggest that between 30% and 40% of luxury consumers may be considered sustainable luxury consumers (consumers who view sustainability as an important dimension in their purchases). Research needs to examine these consumers further by comparing them with consumers for whom sustainability is irrelevant; this will help us understand the key characteristics of a sustainable luxury consumer. The review has also identified that no two luxury sectors are the same, so we need to identify where sustainable luxury may have most traction. For example, Hartmann *et al.* (2017) call for research into consumers of luxury food and the motives behind the consumption of sustainable luxury food, while Swarbrooke (2018) suggests closer examination of what luxury means for hospitality, events, and tourism. This information will be crucial to the success of any marketing strategy for sustainable luxury.

In addition to understanding the attitudes and behaviours of sustainable-luxury consumers, we must understand the contexts, institutional frameworks, and collective practices within which they consume. Even with this knowledge, it is likely that sustainable luxury consumers will prove to be diverse and fragmented; we call for future scholarly research to account for and fully examine this diversity.

We also need to consider beyond the purchase and cogitate on the role of post-purchase behaviour. Recent work highlights that the disposal of products linked with identity (of which luxury is one) will differ from that of those which are not identity-linked (Trudel *et al.* 2016). Those which are linked to identity are much more likely to be recycled than thrown away. Research suggests that there is a lively second-hand market for luxury (Ryding *et al.* 2018; Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2015), and those goods may even hold deeper meaning for

their new owners. Indeed, Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen's (2015) work on the growing market for 'pre-loved' luxury and vintage items suggests that second-hand consumption is challenging the traditional luxury markets. This demands a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, particularly an analysis of the extended whole lifecycle of luxury products.

Catulli *et al.* (2015) explore the relationship between the decline in consumers' desire for product ownership and the lifetimes of products. They suggest that promoting product service systems, such as renting products, led to considerable environmental benefits, where smaller stocks of products are needed and product lifetimes are better managed. Bardhi *et al.* (2012) explore the changing relationship between material products and consumers, concluding that consumers exhibit a liquid (loose) relationship with possessions. Recent work by Iran and Schrader (2017) and Toni *et al.* (2018) investigates the link between the collaborative economy and sustainable behaviour. They highlight and define collaborative fashion consumption (CFC) and the potential new opportunities offered by information and communications technology (ICT). They present a typology of CFC that incorporates gifting, sharing, lending, second-hand purchasing, renting, and leasing, and they highlight the resource and waste efficiency of collaborative consumption. However, it is clear that further work is needed in the specific context of luxury. These new ways of consuming, such as sharing, the ideas of 'liquid consumption' (Bardhi *et al.* 2012; Gardetti and Muthu 2018), and the shared economy are also fruitful directions for research within the context of sustainable luxury.

*Organisations.* From an organisational perspective, we need to better understand what the characteristics of a sustainable luxury product, service, or experience are. This requires research into the upstream and downstream supply chain. When studying sustainable supply-chain management, Wolf (2014) found that stakeholder pressure and sustainable supply-chain management both contribute to an organisation's sustainability performance. Lee (2004) proposes a triple 'A' supply chain (agility, alignment, and adaptability) to assist organisations



with cutting costs and improving speed, which can lead to a more sustainable approach. However, unlike organisations in the mass market, luxury organisations may be relatively niche and small, offer product customisation, offer few product variants, and be associated with low sales volumes to maintain exclusivity (Caniato *et al.* 2011). Thus, existing supply-chain principles may not be transferable to a luxury context. Future research needs to determine if this is the case.

Polonsky *et al.*'s (2003) 'harm chain' approach offers a holistic way of examining the luxury sector, and can highlight relevant pinch points of unsustainable behaviours from the throughput of pre-production, production, consumption, and post-consumption activities. Carrigan *et al.* (2013, 2017) draw on harm chains to examine outcomes linked to the luxury fashion and jewellery sectors. Both studies conclude that luxury organisations' levels of transparency and monitoring of social responsibility in the supply chain are lower than those of mid-market fashion companies in the fashion and jewellery industries. However, further research is needed to understand how organisations across the diverse luxury sector can perform 'deep' sustainable practices.

There are also opportunities for luxury manufacturers to engage in sustainability practices in the retail environment. Existing research into the luxury retailing experience urges luxury organisations to create an atmosphere of uniqueness and reverence (Dion and Arnould 2011), with brand experiences being important in connecting customers on an emotional and hedonic level. Engaging in sustainable retail environments may be one way of differentiating luxury stores and engaging with consumers more deeply about sustainability. To our knowledge, despite ample research into luxury retail environments and strategies (Dion and Arnould 2011; Klein *et al.* 2016; Lassus and Freire 2014), there is no research on how luxury retailing can incorporate sustainability into the brand experience: a significant research gap. Further, despite the rise in popularity of luxury experiences, such as travel (Ahn and Pearce 2013) and

gastronomy (Hartmann *et al.* 2016), limited research has been conducted into its relationship with sustainability. Future research could explore specific processes, such as resource efficiency and building design, required to create sustainable luxury experiences without affecting the consumer's perceived experience.

Additionally, how sustainable luxury might be publicised requires further work; the current minor work provides little clarity about this issue. This may be the communication of sustainable characteristics via standard advertising and marketing communications or more detailed sustainability reporting. When studying sustainability reports, which may be read by any stakeholder and are available on brand websites, Kolk (2010) found that the title and scope of such reports vary; they are referred to as social reports, corporate social responsibility reports, social and community reports, sustainability reports, and environmental reports. Additionally, Maas *et al.* (2016) found that the role of sustainability performance and measurement is wide-ranging and there is no 'one size fits all' approach. Future research could examine how luxury-brand marketers can balance sustainability credentials and communications while maintaining their exclusive allure, particularly since research suggests that consumers may not regard luxury and responsibility as compatible (Davies *et al.* 2012; Gardetti 2017; Gardetti and Muthu 2015; Janssen *et al.* 2014). The conversation about sustainable luxury must urgently shift focus to exploring suitable modes of communication and the dissemination of such practices. For example, research could examine the appeal of terminology and positioning in sustainable luxury. Joy *et al.* (2012) suggest that 'slow fashion' may resonate more than sustainable or eco-products. Similar to the 'slow food' movement and luxury travel experiences (Cowburn *et al.* 2018; Poelina and Nordensvard 2018), the philosophy is associated with the mindfulness approach and aims to respect local communities and eco-systems.

*The international perspective.* Existing studies show that luxury consumers' choices are bound up in complex tensions and constraints within a discourse of 'glocal' storylines, shaped by cultural pluralism, care, identity, aspiration, and contextual and knowledge barriers. Luxury consumers of the Global North differ from those of the Global South (Li *et al.* 2012; Wong and Ahuvia 1998), so research should explore the significant differences in the lived experiences of consumers across and within the global luxury marketplace. Cross-cultural research needs to examine how sustainable luxury consumption decisions differ (Teimourpour and Hanzae 2011; Tynan *et al.* 2009) and how the negative effects of consumerist lifestyles are perceived (Yau and Davies 2014). Increasingly, researchers are cautioning that merely 'explaining social behaviour of consumers in one culture based on another culture' is inadequate (Shukla 2012). For example, despite the acknowledged cultural pluralities of many consumers (Sankaran and Demangeot 2011), those of the Global North tell different sustainability stories from those in the Global South (Monkhouse *et al.* 2012), where prevailing standards of appropriate conduct in social practices are not necessarily conducive to the pursuit of sustainable consumption (Cherrier and Belk 2015; McEwan *et al.* 2015). Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen (2015) note that consumers' need for uniqueness in luxury purchasing is particularly characteristic of individualistic Global North cultures and lends itself to a thriving second-hand luxury market; whether similar results would be found for more collectivist Global South cultures is undetermined. Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen (2015) also highlight the growing trend for online shopping for second-hand luxury goods across geographical borders, yet there is little empirical research on this.

Social pressure constructs, such as face-saving and group orientation, influence attitudes and behaviour, including perceptions of sustainability (Henninger *et al.* 2017; Monkhouse *et al.* 2012). Studies are needed among the growing number of Chinese, Japanese, Singaporean, and Vietnamese luxury consumers, who represent a significant proportion of luxury buyers and

respond in different ways from other nationalities (Monkhouse *et al.* 2012). Exploring the differences and similarities between collectivist (such as China and Japan) and individualist (such as the USA and Western Europe) cultures could reveal further complexities in attitudes toward sustainable luxury. A new wave of luxury consumers from India and Latin America, may also provide a fruitful context to study sustainability behaviours. The motives, attitudes, and behaviours of luxury consumers are complex and varied depending on cultural background, but they remain under-investigated in the sustainable-luxury context.

*Systems and opportunities.* The complex networks of influence between luxury consumers, producers, and other stakeholders demands investigation. Fahlquist (2009) argues that governments and organisations must help create systems, opportunities, and incentives that support individual agency to effect change. The pivotal role of governments and legal processes to protect vulnerable eco-systems and restrict visitor penetration of natural spaces are highlighted in the luxury tourism sector (Ryan and Stewart 2009; Scheyvens 2011; Thomas-Francois *et al.* 2017). However, when providers of products and experiences are unlikely to make more sustainable offerings without consumer demand, this creates an impasse. The pioneering nature of the luxury sector, which is evident in styles, trends, and preferences that begin as luxury innovations, often gains traction from mainstream markets on the high street. This reflects the concept of the trickle-down effect (Atik and Firat 2013), where perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours filter ‘down’ through society. How this acts within sustainable luxury needs to be examined and effectively researched, because producers, manufacturers, and retailers have the ability to make an eco-conscious ethos the norm.

*Materialism and sustainability.* The tension between materialism and sustainability deserves empirical investigation within the context of sustainable luxury. Scott *et al.* (2014) argue that traditional materialism is a barrier to achieving sustainable production and consumption. They note the difficulty of moving society toward sustainable modes of production and consumption,

given consumers are embedded in the DSP and rooted within ‘largely unquestioned cultural values, symbols, practices and infrastructures, as well as policies and privileged economic positions’ (Scott *et al.* 2014, p. 282). The moralistic overtones of asking luxury consumers to be ‘less materialistic’ also demands that they reject often hard-won lifestyles, or navigate the obstacles created by the DSP that supports and encourages materialism (whether conspicuous or inconspicuous). Scott *et al.* (2014) suggest researching a more conscious materialism that avoids the narrow disciplinary perspectives of the past, and better understands the social worlds of consumers and the business realities of marketers. The structural elements that shape and constrain unsustainable luxury consumption choices (such as the influence and power of designers, retailers, and brands) represent considerable challenges (Carrington *et al.* 2016). However, luxury consumers are better placed than most to take responsibility for the consumption choices they make (Carrigan *et al.* 2013) and understand the social and environmental impact of those choices. Future research can ask what would help the luxury market to engage with the ‘less is more’ philosophy (Cherrier *et al.* 2011; McDonagh and Prothero 2014), since to encourage more luxury consumption that is sustainable simply reinforces the conventional consumption values of the DSP, without challenging the system itself (Carrington *et al.* 2016).

*Methods.* Finally, we consider the methodological challenges and priorities of future research. While current studies in sustainable luxury use a range of methods (qualitative, quantitative, visual methods, practice theory, and experiments), several limitations need to be overcome in future research. The review shows that the secretive nature of the luxury sector makes accessing elite luxury-marketing executives and consumers difficult, and research challenging (Cervellon and Coudriet 2013), yet these stakeholders are core to the industry’s sustainability practices. The use of fictitious brands and student samples are also problematic, particularly in consumer studies. Genuine luxury products come imbued with years of communications and detailed

branding; therefore, fictitious brands encountered in experiments do not produce a realistic response from consumers. While some students may purchase luxury products, they do not reliably represent the luxury consumer marketplace. Previous studies on how luxury is defined, and the products used as proxies, are problematic. In some cases, consumers were asked to define luxury themselves and often presented with luxury goods that only narrowly represent the range of luxury sectors. Future research should look to examine a broader range of luxury products, services, and experiences. Past research also tends to use self-reported behaviour, which has bias limitations (Armitage and Conner 2001); therefore, future research should more reliably capture actual (sustainable) luxury purchasing.

Overall, this review shows how little we know about sustainable luxury and highlights the wide range of future research needed to truly understand the potential of and problems related to sustainable luxury. As others acknowledge, a first remedying step would be to do more qualitative, exploratory research (Janssen *et al.* 2014; Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau 2014) to offer further insights into sustainability in luxury goods. Access is challenging, as luxury consumers are becoming more inconspicuous and luxury brands have acknowledged their secrecy (Carrigan *et al.* 2013; Kapferer 2010), but future research must overcome this problem. Communications, business reports, and online presence (sustainability reporting) give an indication of current sustainable luxury strategy and offer potential access solutions. However, this approach still only captures CSR communications, rather than action. Additionally, therefore, we call for future research to assess the organisational integration of CSR into daily practices and distinguish between CSR ‘talk’ and CSR ‘walk’ (Baumann-Pault *et al.* 2013).

Finally, given that in luxury fashion comparisons are often made with commodity fashion and products, where sustainable brands have gradually taken hold and gained consumer acceptance, a historical analysis of how commodity sustainable brands developed may provide strategies to further develop sustainable luxury.

## Discussion and conclusions

This review shows considerable scope exists to develop the concept of sustainable luxury and explore the marketing and consumption behaviours of the luxury industry and its consumers. The tensions at play are noted, and this expanded agenda shows that further research is needed to help the luxury sector to develop sustainably. As yet, a clear sense of what sustainable luxury looks like is elusive, and effective strategies for future sustainable-luxury marketing remain obscure. As the review has demonstrated, the luxury sector has much to lose and gain from more sustainable practices, and any sustainability strategy must align with the fundamental luxury characteristics of heritage, quality, longevity, and timelessness. Further, associating luxury only with economic and status motives fails to understand the more subjective, personal, and contestable nature of luxury consumption. Roper *et al.* (2013) suggest that the impact of the global financial crisis and the fluidity of demand for luxury in the West and emerging markets appear to have ‘thrown the meaning of luxury into flux’. This has opened up the potential for alternative perspectives (Schembri 2006) as the luxury landscape evolves. Researchers suggest that the ‘elegant disruption’ (Bendell and Thomas 2013) of sustainable luxury may find traction in this context (Winston 2016), and we hope that this fuels rigorous, empirical academic work in this area.

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