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Luxury, Sustainability and Social Media:
The Importance of Product Material and Message Appeal in
Consumers' Willingness to Re-post on Social Media and the
Mediating Effect of Processing Fluency and Perceived Efficacy

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A tutti coloro che mi hanno aiutato ad essere ogni giorno una persona migliore.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is becoming a key topic in our society. As years pass, population grows, and oceans rise, sustainable development becomes increasingly important, if not vital, for every inhabitant of this earth.

In the past years - mostly due to massive pollution, climate change and the disastrous natural events deriving from it - more and more people started feeling the need for change. And from individuals this movement started scaling up to brands and institutions, to those who have the influence and power to actually change the sadly established paradigm of big polluting industries.

Many industries, indeed, have started taking action against climate change and pollution emergencies, even those which have been enduringly seen as distant from sustainability. One of these industries is luxury.

While luxury and Sustainability have been largely seen as antonyms, there has been a recent change of course and many luxury brands such as Hermes, Prada or Moncler are now beginning to use sustainable materials for their products¹.

The binomium luxury and sustainability has been broadly discussed by previous research, results, however, have produced mixed findings. On the one hand, luxury and sustainability have been largely seen as opposites and the use of sustainable materials for luxury products has been proven to have a negative impact on consumer's evaluation (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Davies et al., 2012; Joy et al. 2012; Achabou and Dekhili 2013; Kapferer and Michaut, 2014, 2020; Torelli et al., 2012; Voyer and Beckham 2014; Kapferer and Micheaut, 2015; Pencarelli et al. 2020); on the other hand a more recent branch of research has showed how luxury brands can be both "Gold and Green" (De Angelis et al., 2017) and how consumer's perception of the brand or product might be enhanced when sustainable materials are used (Steinhard et al. 2013; Janssen et al., 2014; De Angelis et al., 2017; Amatulli et al., 2018; Amatulli et al., 2021).

Against this backdrop, the present thesis explores this contradiction and studies the effect that a communication centered on the use of sustainable materials (vs. non-sustainable) paired with different message appeals (i.e. hedonic vs. utilitarian) in the context of luxury brand's social media publications, impacts consumers' willingness to share the post on their own social media account (herein WTR, willingness to repost). While the phenomenon of Sustainability and Social Media in the context of luxury is assuming an increasingly high relevance in today's landscape, past research has neglected the relationship between these three areas. In this sense, the present thesis bridges the existing research gap and provides useful insights for marketing managers and professionals working in luxury.

As previously introduced, this research takes into account the role of message appeals in luxury and sustainability, a largely neglected theme in previous research. In particular it bridges the current research gap in exploring the function of hedonic appeals (i.e. focused on the promotion of benefits linked to emotions,

¹ Hermes: <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/sustainability/exclusive-hermes-bets-on-mushroom-leather>

Prada: <https://www.pradagroup.com/en/sustainability/environment-csr/prada-re-nylon.html>

Moncler: <https://robbreport.com/style/fashion/moncler-born-to-protect-sustainable-jackets-1234590674/>

fulfillment of hedonic needs or highlighting, for example, the aesthetic value of the product) versus utilitarian appeals (i.e., focused on the functional and tangible benefits of the product, beseeching to consumer logic and rationality) in luxury social media communications directed to promote sustainable versus non-sustainable products, studying their conjoint effect on consumers' WTR. Moreover, it considers two of the possible psychological drivers of consumers' intention to repost on social media, processing fluency (i.e., the ease with which the individual processes the information given) and self-efficacy (i.e., individuals' expectation of their own ability to achieve a desired outcome).

In sum, the present thesis reports the results of one main study investigating the interaction between the use of sustainable materials in luxury - and thus communication focused on sustainability- and message appeal in luxury brands' social media publications; it studies their combined effect on consumers' WTR and, finally, it considers the mediating effect that ease of information processing (i.e., processing fluency) and self-efficacy towards prosocial behavior exert on the relationship between material, appeal and users' WTR. In doing so, this research makes several contributions to marketing literature, especially to the branch focused on understanding consumer's responses to the use of sustainability in luxury.

First, it contributes to the existing debate on the effect that using sustainable materials in luxury has on consumers' perceptions, supporting the idea proposed by De Angelis et al. (2017) that luxury brands can be "Gold and Green".

Second, it sheds light in the under researched area of sustainable luxury and social media communication suggesting how a luxury brand may increase consumers' engagement by enhancing users' WTR the brand's communication on consumers' own social media accounts.

Third, it contributes to previous research on the use of hedonic vs. utilitarian message appeals in luxury and on Sustainability and offers a perspective on the unexplored interaction between hedonic vs. utilitarian appeals in the context of social media marketing in the luxury industry.

Fourth, it studies the effect of psychological drivers such as processing fluency of the message and self-efficacy towards prosocial behavior on consumers' intention to repost on social media, shedding light to an unresearched area in marketing literature.

Finally, the present research offers practical implications for marketing managers working in the luxury industry and aiming at adopting sustainability as a driver for their social media campaigns. Specifically, this thesis demonstrates that the use of sustainable materials in luxury paired with hedonic message appeals in the context of luxury communication via owned social media channels increases consumers' processing fluency and perceived efficacy, which in turn increase consumer's WTR, thereby demonstrating their positive attitude towards the brand and sensibly increasing reach of the brand social media communication and consumer advocacy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

“Sustainability is not simply a trend or fashion that has gained currency because of circumstantial conditions. What gives sustainability its importance is [...] as an ethical concept that can and should guide conduct.” (Bañon Gomis et al., 2011).

2.1 There is no “Planet B”

Earth Overshoot Day 2021 fell on July 29th, from this date on, human consumption has been exceeding the planet’s ability to naturally regenerate, also known as biocapacity, for the rest of the year. In other words, as of July 30 2021, we have exhausted the planet’s natural resources for the the year and we are operating in overshoot, drawing down earth’s natural resource stock and accumulating CO₂ in the atmosphere² (Overshootday.org 2021). In order to maintain the current consumption rate, we are overusing Earth’s biocapacity by 70 percent, meaning that to keep feeding and fueling our current lifestyle, we would need the equivalent of 1.7 Earths worth of natural resources (Overshootday.org 2021).

In the past 60 years Humanity’s Ecological Footprint³ has increased by nearly 173 percent (Lin et al, 2018; Wackernagel et al, 2019; Global footprint network, 2019, 2020), meaning that we are increasingly highthening our demand for natural resources despite the limited planet’s bicapacity. Reportedly, Earth Overshoot Day is falling earlier and earlier every year; while until 1970 humanity’s Ecological Footprint was smaller than Earth’s regeneration rate, in the past decades it has been increasing year by year (Overshootday.org, 2021). Human behavior is becoming increasingly more dangerous for the environment, for biodiversity and, in turn, for the human species itself (WWF et al 2020).

Within the Ecological Footprint Index, Carbon Footprint is defined as the regenerative forest capacity required to sequester human CO₂ emissions that is not absorbed by oceans (Mancini et al., 2015). Carbon Footprint has been steadily increasing in the past decades greatly exceeding World’s biocapacity.

As the CO₂ produced cannot be absorbed by the planet, this greenhouse gas is retained in the atmosphere, contributing to the “greenhouse effect” and warming the globe. Carbon dioxide produced by human activities is, in fact, the largest contributor to global warming.⁴ Fossil fuels combustion has caused CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere to rise by 48 percent compared to its pre-industrial revolution levels (NASA Global Climate Change), this has led to a global temperature increase of 1.1° C compared to the late 19th Century levels (European Commission), with two thirds of the increase registered from 1975 onwards⁵ (NASA Earth Observatory). With the Paris Agreement Governments have started taking action against Climate Change,

² <https://www.footprintnetwork.org/our-work/earth-overshoot-day/>

³ Ecological Footprint accounting measures the biocapacity available (ability of the earth’s ecosystems to regenerate) as well as the demand for natural resources people put on it through all of their activities.

⁴ <https://climate.nasa.gov/causes/>

⁵ The annual global land and ocean temperature has increased at an average rate of 0.07°C per decade since 1880; however, since 1981 the average rate of increase is more than twice that rate +0.18°C, (NCEI, Retrieved 2021)

<https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/news/global-climate-201912> .

nevertheless the limitations imposed and oaths derived from its signatories are highly inadequate to achieve the Agreement targets (WWF et al. 2020). The temperature rise aspirational limit set by the Paris Agreement is of 2°C by 2050-2070; however, without additional actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions we are dangerously headed to broadly surpass this limit, leading towards a Global Temperature increase of 3° to 4° Celsius degrees, which will have devastating effects on biodiversity and human well-being. The effects of Climate Change are already visible: the shrinking of Glaciers, heatwaves and the more frequent natural events such as hurricanes or violent floods are consequences of the temperature rise.

Governments, industries and individuals should take more decisive action in order to change course and avoid the consequences of the above described scenario. In order to do so, Countries, Companies and people should adopt a behavior in line with the previously cited sustainable development concept. Auspiciously, attention towards sustainability and climate change is rising among citizens all around the world (Pew Research Center, 2019) and many consumers report that they are willing to actively change their consumption behavior to reduce their negative impact on the environment (Haller et al., 2020; BCG, 2020).

Consistently, many industries have started taking action against climate change and pollution emergencies, even those which have been enduringly seen as distant from sustainability, one of these is luxury.

2.2 Luxury and Sustainable development

The steady growth of the luxury industry (The BCG, 2019) has been accompanied by an increased attention from the public eye, as well as the imperative of a more attentive attitude towards sustainability. As a matter of fact, many luxury brands started to include sustainability and sustainable development in their business models. Groups like LVMH, Hermès, Armani and Kering - to cite only a few- decided to reduce the environmental impact of their production processes and to finance social projects. Data show that global sustainable and environmentally responsible investment has increased in 2018 by 68 percent compared to 2014, reaching a sum of 30 trillion USD dollars, tenfold the investment of 2004 (GSIA, 2018). Sustainable development has been broadly discussed in many research and economic areas. This discussion has, however, been just recently extended to the luxury sphere. This might be linked to the rather modest dimension of the sector (€217 Billion in 2020⁶), the low frequency of luxury purchases compared to mass-goods ones or to what luxury symbolizes: “the growth of consumption based on other motives than functionality” (Kapferer and Michaut, 2020). Sustainability in fact, intended as the practice of avoiding depletion of natural resources in favor of a more conscious consumption, might be seen as opposite to luxury. The term luxury itself finds its etymology in the Latin word “Luxus”, which stands for excess, extravagance. Luxury is superfluous, defined by Kapferer and Michaut (2015) as “the apex of materialism”. Quite the opposite of the parsimony commonly associated with sustainability. In this sense, there is observably a strong contradiction between luxury and sustainability, largely documented in past research. On the other hand,

⁶ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/266503/value-of-the-personal-luxury-goods-market-worldwide/> Retrieved August 2021

previous literature has found several points of contact between the two spheres. These mixed findings will be more extensively discussed in this paragraph.

To better understand the branch of research which considers luxury and sustainability as antonyms, it might be useful to refer to some of the characteristics of Luxury. For example, Kapferer and Mischeaut (2015) provided a deep analysis of seven common elements which characterize luxury. These factors include: (1) Exceptional Quality - obtained by using premium materials, expert craftsmanship and attention to detail; (2) Hedonism – purchasing and using a luxury product or service is an act that brings pleasure; (3) Rarity and Uniqueness – because luxury requires much effort in its production, and is often a “status symbol”, only a few quantities of them are available on the market and it is an extreme privilege to own part of it; (4) Exclusivity and (5) Selective Distribution, associated with personalized services and tailored experience; (6) Creativity, connected to art, avant-garde and artistic endeavor (Roberts and Armitage, 2015) and (7) High Price. Kapferer and Bastien (2012), propose that these seven factors associated together are all needed to differentiate luxury goods from other types of goods.

Pencarelli et al. (2020), add three more characteristics which are commonly associated with luxury. These are (1) ancestral heritage and personal history – as the authors report, consumers associate luxury with a long history and respect of traditions. (2) Unique and strong brand image and (3) superfluousness or uselessness – since luxury satisfies hedonic needs rather than utilitarian ones, it is not considered as necessary for survival, and thus superfluous. Many of the aforementioned characterizing elements may be seen as opposed to sustainability, which is mostly associated with conscious consumption, modesty and a rather “frugal” lifestyle. As Voyer and Beckham (2014) demonstrated, consumers associate luxury more readily with unsustainability than with sustainability. Moreover, they show how, when discussed generally, luxury and sustainability are often implied to be incompatible. Particularly they stressed how participants of their study appeared to be apprehensive and uncomfortable when discussing the juxtaposition of the two spheres.

Interestingly, Kapferer and Michaut (2020), demonstrated how the youngest group of luxury consumers (i.e., Millennials) perceive the contradiction between luxury and sustainability as higher in comparison to luxury consumers from previous generations. Previous empirical research from the same authors (2015), shows that this contradiction is perceived as higher for consumers who define luxury as expensive or rare, while it is lower for those who define exceptional quality as the most salient attribute of luxury. This might lead to confirm the proposition of past research that, when compared with non-sustainable luxury products, sustainable luxury goods are perceived less positively and as less desirable. Achabou and Dekhili (2013), demonstrated a significant negative correlation between the perception of luxury products and the presence of recycled fibers in it. Their findings suggest that emphasizing sustainability may lower consumers’ overall perceived quality of luxury goods. These findings are supported by Voyer and Beckham (2014), who show how a luxury item may be perceived as less luxurious if labelled as sustainable (i.e., made with recycled materials). Additionally, in an empirical study by Joy et al. (2012), brand’s environmental commitment was

considered by respondents as the least important criterion when evaluating the purchase of a luxury item, abundantly surpassed by criteria such as quality, price and brand reputation.

Antithetically, a number of past researches considers luxury and sustainability as two concepts that can harmoniously coexist. Some of the underlying commonalities between the two spheres are described in the following lines. Unlike mass produced goods – associated with low quality and decentralization of labour in low wage countries - luxury is very broadly associated with exceptional quality deriving from premium raw materials and artisanal local production. Because of the characteristic of being mostly hand-made, luxury products require time, patience and attention, as opposed to the mass-consumer goods. In addition, they require a certain know-how, obtained by the preservation of traditions. Due to extreme attention to detail, each item has a long production time, very much like an artwork. All these factors allow the transmission from generation to generation of timeless products, made to last decades. This aspect in particular connects to a reduced amount of waste of natural resources in comparison to mass produced goods, often made to last shortly (Kapferer, 2010; Guercini and Ranfagni, 2013). These associations meet the ones of sustainability. In their paper, De Angelis et al. (2017) demonstrated empirically how luxury brands can be “Gold and Green”, in fact, consumer’s perception towards green luxury products is not necessarily negative. A well-known example of this is the luxury brand Stella McCartney, which was among the first brands to engage in sustainability and embrace it. As stated in their mission, their aim is to “prove that it is possible to create luxurious products without causing unnecessary harm to the planet” (stellamccartney.com, 2021⁷). As a matter of fact, the brand uses sustainable materials (organic cotton, recycled cashmere, nylon and polyester, vegetarian leather etc.) which allows for a reduced amount of CO2 emissions.

Stella McCartney is not the only brand in the luxury industry which has a reduced impact on the environment, indeed many other brands are engaging in sustainability practices, well-known examples are Hermès, which has recently announced the introduction of plant based (i.e. mushroom) leather; Moncler, which launched in 2019 a carbon neutral jacket entirely made from castor beans, or Porsche which launched Tycan, a fully electric car. As Steinhard, et al. (2013) conclude in their research, environmental claims can indeed have a positive impact on consumers’ perceptions of luxury products. Environmental claims not only have a positive impact on consumer’s perceptions, but also on consumer’s willingness to buy. As proposed by Amatulli et al. (2021) consumers show a higher intention to purchase for a luxury product after being exposed to communication messages highlighting that the related brand is engaged in sustainability. Thus, the authors suggest that luxury brands may innovate their communication by leveraging sustainability.

2.3 Luxury and Social Media

Social media usage in 2021 has grown by 71 percent compared to 2020 (Sprout Social Index, 2021) with social media users counting 4.2 Billion worldwide (We Are Social, 2021). For companies it has become an imperative to be present on social media, as it ensures countless benefits from a marketing perspective. The

⁷ <https://www.stellamccartney.com/it/it/sustainability/sustainability.html> Retrieved on April 2021

luxury industry is not exempt from this movement; with the one single exception represented by Bottega Veneta, every luxury brand is in fact now on social media. For luxury marketing managers it becomes thus of pivotal importance to adopt a successful social media strategy, even more so considering the evolution of the luxury approach in recent years. The communication approach of high-end brands was in fact based on the maintenance of a certain distance between the brand and the client in order to preserve an “aura of mystery” (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). By being present on social media, and thus being fruibale by anyone, this distance is in some way reduced. On the other hand, social media not only ensures higher visibility, but may elicit a sentiment of desire in the eyes of those who see the products in their *feed* but cannot have them, thereby enhancing luxury brands “superiority” against the consumer.

Moreover, while in the past luxury brands had the sole purpose of creating a superior, exclusive product to maintain the status quo of the rich upper-class consumer (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009) and generate envy in the eyes of others (Romani et al, 2016), today the situation might have shifted (Forbes, 2021). New-generation luxury consumers have grown up in the internet and social media era, have access to countless pieces of information regarding companies and their policies and are generally more concerned with social and environmental causes (Kulkarni and Lefebvre, 2018; Porter Novelli, 2019; Caïs, 2021). New luxury consumers prefer brands that support their beliefs and align with their values of ethical consumption, truth and transparency (Caïs, 2021). Hence, they will show a more positive attitude to those brands which not only preserve their luxuriousness, but also align with their ethical values. Paired with social media context and consistently with findings from Amatulli et al. (2021), this new consumer audience and attitude suggests that luxury brands may innovate their social media communication and leverage sustainability to elicit positive response in their audience.

While the phenomenon of sustainability and social media in the context of luxury is assuming an increasingly high relevance in today's landscape, past research has neglected the relationship between these three areas. Thus, it becomes of pivotal importance to explain this relationship and understand the drivers of consumers' reactions to luxury social media communication. This thesis aims at bridging the current research gap by analyzing the existing interaction between these three spheres. In particular, as engagement and re-posts represents for marketing managers some of the most important social metrics to track, consumer's willingness to re-post luxury brand social media publications (herein, WTR) will be analyzed as the outcome variable for the presented research model. A consumer sharing a brand's or company's post on social media, demonstrates interest toward the company and increases its reach, visibility, awareness, and positive sentiment towards it. Thus, for marketing managers willing to increase engagement and advocacy of their social media pages it becomes extremely important to understand what drives consumers' willingness to share brand's social media posts on their own social media accounts.

Against this backdrop, given the approach that new luxury consumers have towards sustainability, this research proposes that the use of sustainable materials in luxury, and hence sustainable message framing in the context of social media luxury communication, may elicit a positive reaction in luxury consumers

consisting in an increased intention to re-post the luxury brand's communication and share it with their social media audience.

2.4 Hedonic vs. Utilitarian Message appeals in Sustainable Luxury

Past research has dedicated extensive attention to the binomial hedonic versus utilitarian appeals in marketing. A hedonic appeal is defined as a message highlighting the emotional benefits of the product and that provides a sense of pleasure and satisfaction to customers, insisting on the affective sphere of the recipient and evoking psychological, social or symbolic desires (Hall, 1963; Mason, 1993; Albers-Miller and Stafford, 1999; Bhat and Reddy, 1998; Voss et al., 2003; Kotler and Armstrong, 2010; Millan and Reynolds, 2014; Tynan et al. 2010; ;). On the contrary, an utilitarian appeal is defined as a message attempting to persuade recipients providing logical, tangible and functional details of the product (Deb and Lomo-David 2020) and the functional or tangible benefits a customer gets (Johar and Sirgy, 1991; Bhat and Reddy, 1998), insisting on consumers' rationality and consumer's attitudes about the product's benefit or function (Hall, 1963; Albers-Miller and Stafford, 1999; Kotler and Armstrong, 2010)

Similarly, the hedonic/utilitarian dichotomy has been largely explored in marketing and consumer behavior research to categorize products and services. Precisely, hedonic goods have been defined as products or services that provide experiential consumption, fun, pleasure, and excitement, while utilitarian goods are those which serve instrumental or functional purposes (De Angelis, 2020).

One of the essential characteristics of Luxury is its intrinsic hedonism: everything in luxury relates to the hedonic sphere, from its purchase in opulent stores to its use. A luxury product or service brings pleasure: it fulfils hedonic benefits rather than utilitarian ones. Consumers purchase luxury to feel pleasure and positive emotions, not to fill a functional need; as Kapferer and Bastien (2009) state, "*Luxury is closer to Art than to mere function*". Thus, it comes to no surprise that previous research has demonstrated how hedonic message appeals, in comparison to utilitarian ones, can increase perceived luxuriousness of the product or service, this in turn can increase product attitude and consumers' willingness to buy the product promoted (Amatulli et al., 2020). Similarly, previous research in the luxury hotellerie sector shows that hedonic message appeals enhance customers' perceived luxuriousness, brand love and patronage intention (Deb and Lomo-David, 2020). Based on these findings, luxury communication - fundamental for the positioning in the minds of consumers - should be consistent with its own identity, hedonism.

Notwithstanding the importance sustainability is gaining in the marketing context, to the author's knowledge very little research has been conducted on the use of hedonic versus utilitarian message appeals in the area of sustainable production and consumption of goods and services. Among the current literature on the topic, previous findings confirmed that in marketing sustainable products and services, both emotional and utilitarian messages should be used in synergy in order to make the message as effective as possible, demonstrating that both appeals can increase consumers' trust and satisfaction (Kim et al. 2020).

While past research has broadly analyzed message appeals both in luxury and in sustainability, to the author's best knowledge no research studies have investigated the effect of using a hedonic vs. utilitarian message appeal in the communication of sustainable luxury products in the context of social media. This thesis predicts the use of an hedonic vs. utilitarian message appeal in a luxury brand social media post has significant effect on the relationship between the material of the luxury product being shown (i.e., sustainable vs non-sustainable) and consumer's WTR.

Past research has demonstrated that those appeals focused on emotional benefits enhance perceived hedonic value of the product (Kim et al. 2020) and, in case of luxury products, the perceived luxuriousness of the promoted good or service, thereby increasing consumers' satisfaction (Amatulli et al., 2020; Deb and Lomo-David, 2020). Moreover, as aforementioned, both hedonic and utilitarian appeal seem to be effective in the advertisement of luxury products (Kim et al. 2020).

Drawing on previous findings and given the intrinsic hedonism of luxury products, this research proposes that hedonic (vs. utilitarian) message appeals are predicted to significantly moderate the relationship between use of sustainable materials in luxury, and hence sustainable message framing in the context of social media luxury communication, and consumers' intention to share the post with their social media audience. Formally stated, this thesis proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: The use of hedonic (vs. utilitarian) message appeal in a luxury brand social media post moderates the relationship between the use of sustainable (vs. not sustainable) material in the luxury product being shown and consumer's WTR.

2.5 Processing Fluency

Processing fluency can be defined as the subjective ease with which a stimulus is processed by an individual (Jacoby and Dallas, 1981), or how easy it is for the individual to process the information given. Past research has identified two main levels of processing fluency: perceptual and conceptual. Perceptual fluency can be referred to as the ease with which a person perceives and identifies physical characteristics of a given stimulus and it is known to be enhanced through prior exposures (Jacoby and Dallas 1981). Conceptual Fluency can be defined as the ease with which consumers are able to understand the meaning of the stimulus presented or the ease to which the stimulus comes to consumer's mind (Lee and Labroo, 2004) and it is known to pertain to the processing of meanings (Hamann, 1990).

Previous research by Landwehr and Eckmann (2020) has highlighted how processing fluency is believed to be inherently positive and responsible for triggering mild positive effects in subjects experiencing it. The authors suggest, in fact, that processing fluency is not merely a side product of cognitive processes, but is a critical shaper of individual's judgments and evaluations of the stimulus to which it is referred (Landwehr and Eckmann, 2020). In their research, Winkielman et al., (2003) highlight three main reasons for processing fluency's inherently positivity: first, processing fluency is a trigger of a feeling of familiarity,

which human beings cherish and appreciate; second, processing fluency preempts the successful recognition, and thus interpretation, of a certain stimulus indicating a prosperous cognitive operation, which leads to positive state of being; finally, comprehension of the surrounding, and thus fluency, indicates to the individual that the current situation can be handled and does not represent a challenge to overcome, eliciting a positive feeling. Moreover, the authors underline how fluency is generated and perceived from early stages of stimulus processing and thus constitutes one of the first evaluative indicators when an evaluative appraisal is being assembled (Winkielman et al., 2003).

Past research has empirically demonstrated the inherent positivity of perceived processing fluency. For example, products which have a more fluent design are considered more appealing (Mayer and Landwehr, 2018), the author of an article that can be easily read is considered to be more intelligent (Oppenheimer, 2006) and a person whose name is easily pronounceable tends to be more liked (Laham et al., 2012). In the context of sustainability, previous research demonstrated that when presented with a message for a recycling campaign in a frame that fits with their mindset, consumers easily process the information given and perceive as easier to engage in the promoted behavior, which in turn leads to a higher likelihood to engage in the recycling behavior (White et al., 2011). This concept extends to pre-consumption evaluations: a consistent part of past research suggests that consumers do not base their product evaluation and brand-choice decisions only on information they have, but also on how easily they are able to process such information (Reber et al., 1998; Seamon et al. 1995; Lee 2002; Nedungadi 1990; Shapiro et al. 1997, Lee and Labroo, 2004).

Previous research by Wang et al. (2019) showed how participant's perceived value of a marketing message on social media significantly influences their intention to re-post it and share it with their social media audience. The authors propose that, in the context of social media marketing, the user's intention to repost a marketing message on social media is a cognitive decision, thus a greater perceived value of the message encourages participants' intention to share it with their friends. As aforesaid, when presented with a fluent message, people tend to have positive reactions and thus perceived value of the message is enhanced.

Along these lines, this thesis suggests that processing fluency may have a significant role in consumers' willingness to share a brand's post on their own social media. Following this line of thought the present research argues that, given the positive reaction an individual has when presented with a fluent stimulus and given previous findings by Wang et al. (2019), processing fluency will increase users' WTR, acting as a mediator of the relationship between the material of the Luxury product being shown (sustainable vs non-sustainable), and thus the framing of a luxury brand's social media message, and consumers' WTR. In particular, a positive mediating effect on the relationship is predicted. Moreover, recent studies in the context of tourism show how the communication of sustainability features on social media is mostly inefficient due to the general perceived difficulty of information processing in sustainability communication (Tölkes, 2020). As previously stated luxury - even if sustainable - is intrinsically hedonic, thus, an hedonic message appeal will facilitate consumer's understanding of the message. Hence, when presented with a luxury product, consumer's

perceptual fluency will be enhanced if the message contains a hedonic appeal. Formally the present thesis hypothesizes that

H2: Given the intrinsic hedonism of luxury products, an hedonic (vs. utilitarian) message appeal paired with a sustainable luxury product enhances message processing fluency, which in turn leads to a positive WTR

2.6 Self Efficacy in Pro-Social Behavior

Self-efficacy is a concept first coined by Canadian-American psychologist Albert Bandura in 1977 and refers to an individual's belief in their own capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance accomplishments (Bandura, 1977). In Bandura's words, self efficacy is a personal judgment of "*how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations*" (Bandura, 1977). Thus, individuals who have a higher level of self-efficacy have a greater confidence in their capabilities. The American Psychological Association suggests that self-efficacy is the reflection of one's confidence in their ability to control their self-determination, behavior, and social environment⁸. These cognitive self-evaluations, in fact, can influence goals and aspirations, the amount of energy expended to achieve them and the likelihood of reaching specific behavioral performances (Carey and Forsyth, 2009). Thus, having a higher self-efficacy will lead individuals to be more confident in the outcome of their actions as a result of their behavior, leading them to convey their efforts to reach the desired end results. For example, past research in the healthcare sector has demonstrated that self-efficacy is a significant predictor of smoking cessation (Berndt et al., 2013; Stead et al., 2015; Williams and Rhoads, 2016) or weight loss (Baldwin et al., 2006; Nezami et al., 2017). In the domain of prosocial and pro-environmental behavior, a respectable body of research has demonstrated that high levels of self-efficacy facilitate conservation behaviors such as recycling (Tang et al., 2011; Taberner and Hernandez, 2011), electrical energy conservation (Thøgersen and Grønhøj, 2010), and participation in pro-environmental causes (Kim and Jang, 2018). Moreover, past research has demonstrated that awareness of the consequence of a certain behavior may lead individuals to recognize their responsibility in its possible unwanted outcomes and to undertake actions to blunt the impact of such behavior (Stern et al., 1999). These findings can be applied to pro-social behavior as well: the more an individual perceives his or her actions to be effective in mitigating undesired outcomes of a non-sustainable behavior, the greater the possibility that he or she will undertake pro-environmental action (Snelgar, 2006). Perceiving that one can proactively make a difference in environmental protection will lead people to behave in order to make the difference (Snelgar, 2006).

Against this backdrop, the present thesis proposes that when presented with a brand social media post representing a sustainable luxury item using hedonic appeals (because of the inherent hedonism of luxury), consumers' perceived self-efficacy towards prosocial behavior increases, leading to a higher willingness to

⁸ <https://www.apa.org/pi/aids/resources/education/self-efficacy> Retrieved on August 2021

share the post on their own social media page, thereby enlarging the reach of the message directed towards sustainability. Formally:

H3: Self-efficacy towards a prosocial-behavior predicts a positive consumer's WTR when the individual is exposed to a luxury brand social media post depicting a sustainable product and using a hedonic message appeal.

The overall conceptual model of this thesis has been reported in figure 1.

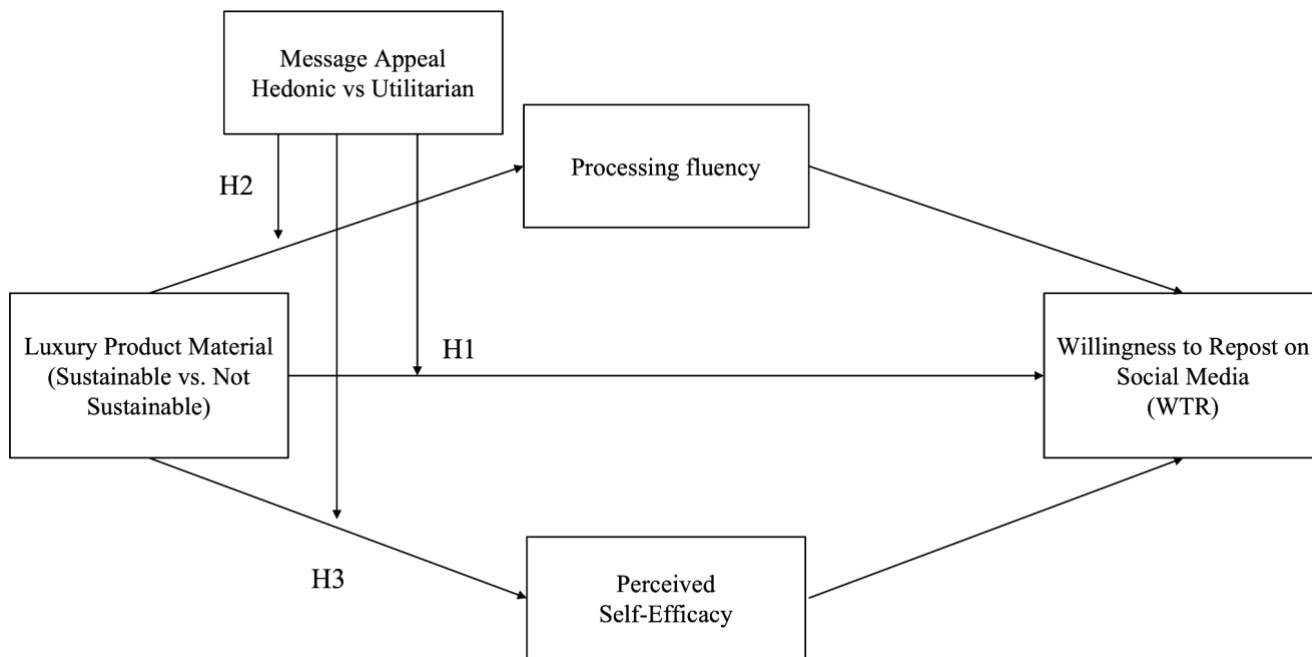


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Variables in the Study

CHAPTER 3 - Methodology and Procedure

3.1 Method

In order to test the hypotheses presented, one main study consisting in an online experiment was conducted. The study examines consumer's WTR after being presented with a fictitious social media post from an imaginary luxury brand. The study accounts for the moderating effect of appeal used (hedonic vs. utilitarian) and for the mediating effects of processing fluency and perceived self-efficacy

The first step of this research was the creation of a questionnaire through the Qualtrics Online Platform. Subsequently the questionnaire was distributed to a random sample through the publication of the survey on Whatsapp messaging platform and on Facebook Social Media. Respondents accessed the questionnaire via anonymous link and anonymity of the responses was guaranteed.

In order to ensure accessibility of the survey to a broader sample of respondents, the survey was available in two languages: Italian and English.

The survey required on average less than 3 minutes to complete.

No incentives were given upon the completion of the survey.

3.2 Participants

A total of 300 respondents completed the survey; 26 respondents did not pass the manipulation check, therefore their answers were eliminated from the database. The final sample analyzed was of 274 respondents (59.5% Female, 39.4% Male, 1.1% prefer not to say/third gender) aged between 16 and 74 years old ($M_{age}=34.81$ years, $SD=15.93$ years). The nationality of the respondents is mainly Italian (82.8%), with small minorities from Denmark (4.7%), France (2.7%) and other countries.

3.3 Procedure

The study was conducted with a 2 (Sustainable Luxury Product, i.e. Mushroom Leather Computer Bag vs Not Sustainable Luxury Product, i.e. Animal Leather Computer Bag) x 2 (Utilitarian Message Appeal vs Hedonic Message Appeal) between subject design.

Respondents were randomly assigned one of the four conditions of the study. The stimuli presented consisted in the picture of a fictitious social media post from an imaginary luxury brand depicting a leather computer bag. The caption of the post subsisted with a message describing the product as either sustainable (i.e. made of mushroom leather) or non sustainable (i.e. made of animal leather) and with a hedonic vs utilitarian appeal. In order to avoid bias in judgement, the computer bag was not branded and the brand's name was fictitious. Participants have been evenly assigned to each condition.

Before being presented with the stimulus, participants were informed that they were about to see a social media post from a luxury brand. No additional information was provided. The name of the social media was

not specified, from the graphic of the stimuli, however, it might have been reconstructed to an Instagram post. The stimuli used for the study can be found in the appendix of this research.

Following the presentation of the image, respondents were asked to visualize the image and carefully read its caption.

After being shown the stimulus, participants were asked to indicate perceived processing fluency on four items ranked on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) (Chae and Joegg, 2013; Lee and Aaker, 2004; Kim and Jang, 2018). Subsequently, respondents were asked to indicate their perceived self-efficacy on a three-item questionnaire on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) (White et al., 2011; Kim and Jang, 2018).

Participants were then asked to express their WTR by responding to the question “Would you like to share the post you were shown at the beginning of the survey on your Social Media Profile?”. The two options available for respondents were “Share; Do not Share”. For this study the name of the Social Media object of analysis was not explicitly specified.

Lastly, participants provided demographic information (i.e., gender, age and country of residence).

Chapter 4 - Results

4.1 Reliability of the Scales

Before testing the hypotheses presented, data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Software.

After eliminating from the database the answers of those respondents who did not pass the manipulation check, a total of 274 responses was analyzed. Descriptive Statistics showed that the majority of the sample was female (Female=59.5%) and that mean age was of 34.85 years old ($SD=15.93$ years).

Two dummy variables, “Material” (1=Mushroom Leather; 2=Animal Leather) and “Appeal” (1=Utilitarian; 2=Hedonic), were created in order to identify to which condition each participant was assigned.

After being shown the stimulus, respondents were asked to indicate perceived processing fluency on four items scale and their perceived self efficacy on a three item questionnaire. In order to ensure reliability of the scales, the items of which each of the two was composed were examined using Cronbach’s Alpha.

Results showed a negative Cronbach’s Alpha for the scale used to measure consumer’s Processing Fluency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = -0.367$). This indicated the possible presence of a negative covariance between the elements of the scale. In order to identify such elements, a factor analysis was run which showed negative scores for two of the four items of the scale (Processing_Fluency_1 = -0.597; Processing_Fluency_2 = 0.841; Processing_Fluency_3 = -0.537; Processing_Fluency_4 = 0.910). This indicated that the items might have been reversed, so before going further with the analysis, the items were reversed. After re-coding the elements, a new reliability test was run. The test yielded a high positive Cronbach’s Alpha (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.817$), thus the scale was fully reliable. In order to check whether the four items of which the scale was composed could be grouped into one single factor a new factor analysis was run. Results showed that the four items could be analyzed as a single factor (Reverse_Processing_Fluency_1 = 0.584; Processing_Fluency_2 = 0.836; Reverse_Processing_Fluency_3 = 0.523; Processing_Fluency_4 = 0.909), hence a new variable was created as the mean of the four items.

The same process was conducted also for the perceived self-efficacy scale, composed by a three-item questionnaire. The analysis produced a positive high Cronbach’s alpha (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.892$), assessing the full reliability of the scale. In order to confirm that the three items of which the scale was composed could be grouped under a single factor, a factor analysis was performed. Results confirmed the possibility to group the items into a single variable (Self_Efficacy_1 = 0.898; Self_Efficacy_2 = 0.973; Self_Efficacy_3 = 0.708), thus a new variable was created as the mean of the three items.

4.2 Regression Analysis Results

To test the hypotheses presented, a moderated mediation regression analysis has been conducted using the Software PROCESS macro SPSS (model 8) (Hayes, 2017).

Respondent’s WTS (1=Do Not Share; 2= Share) was used as the Dependent Variable and Product Material (1=Mushroom Leather; 2=Animal Leather) was used as the Independent Variable of the model. Appeal

(1=Utilitarian; 2=Hedonic) served as Moderating Variable, while the variables Processing Fluency and Perceived Self Efficacy served as the two parallel Mediating Variables of the model.

4.2.1 The moderating effect of Appeal

The results of the regression analysis confirmed, as expected, a significant interaction effect between Material (Sustainable vs. Not Sustainable) and Appeal (Hedonic vs. Utilitarian) on consumer's WTR ($b=1.43$; $p=.039 < .05$). Particularly, while Utilitarian appeals do not significantly moderate the relationship ($p=.45 > p=.05$), Hedonic Appeals significantly moderate the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable ($b=1.11$; $p=.045 < .05$). The present findings fully support H1.

4.2.2 The mediating effect of Processing Fluency

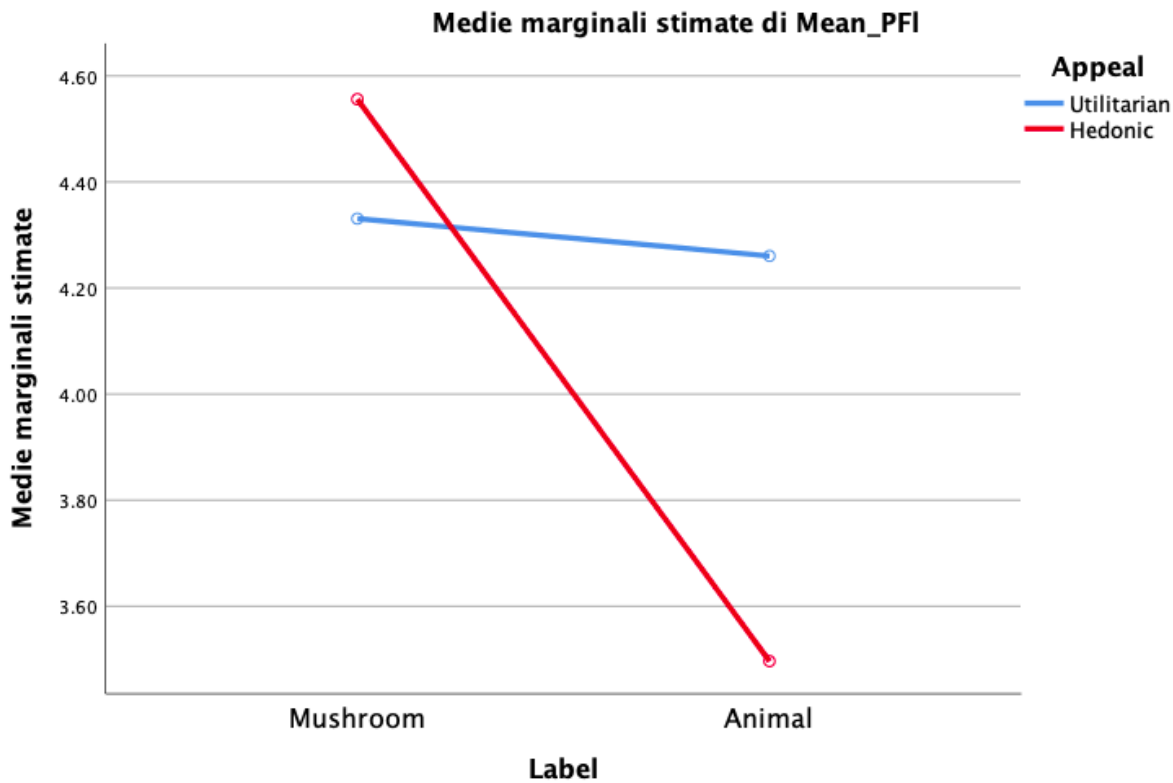
To assess the effect of Appeal on perceived processing fluency and respondent's WTR after being exposed to a Sustainable vs. Not Sustainable Product, a regression analysis was conducted via PROCESS macro SPSS (Model 8) (Hayes, 2017).

Results from the moderated mediation analysis performed show that Appeal has a significant positive effect on respondents' processing fluency ($b=1.21$; $p=.019 < .05$). Moreover, results showed a significant interaction effect between Material and Appeal on Processing Fluency ($b=-.9892$; $p=.002 < .05$). In particular, while the conditional effect of Hedonic Appeals is significant ($b=-1.059$; $p=.000 < .05$), the conditional effect of Utilitarian Appeals is not significant ($p=.75 > p=.05$), suggestion that utilitarian appeal does not impact on Processing Fluency (see Graph 1 below for a visual representation).

Thus, when paired with a hedonic appeal, non-sustainable material (i.e. Animal Leather) lowers processing fluency, while sustainable material (i.e. mushroom leather) foster's ease of comprehension of the message. In other words, while for hedonic appeals the type of material used influences consumer's ease of processing, ensuring higher level of processing fluency when the material used is sustainable, for rational appeal the type of leather does not impact consumers' processing easiness.

The mediation analysis shows a significant positive effect of Processing Fluency ($b = 0.533$; $p=.0008 < .05$) on WTR (1=Share; 2=Do not Share). Moreover, there is a completely significant moderated indirect effect through Processing Fluency ($b= -.5273$; LCI = -1.1435 ; UCI = -0.1439). In particular, results show that the indirect effect is not significant when the appeal used is Utilitarian, indicating that Utilitarian Appeal does not significantly moderate the mediation. On the other hand, the indirect effect is significant for Hedonic Appeal ($b=-0.5648$; LCI= -1.098 ; UCI= -0.2238).

Results from the analysis show that, when presented with a non sustainable material, consumers process the message less readily, on the contrary if the material presented is sustainable, consumers' processing fluency increases. Higher levels of processing fluency lead to a more positive attitude towards sharing of the message, or an increased WTR. The present findings fully support H2



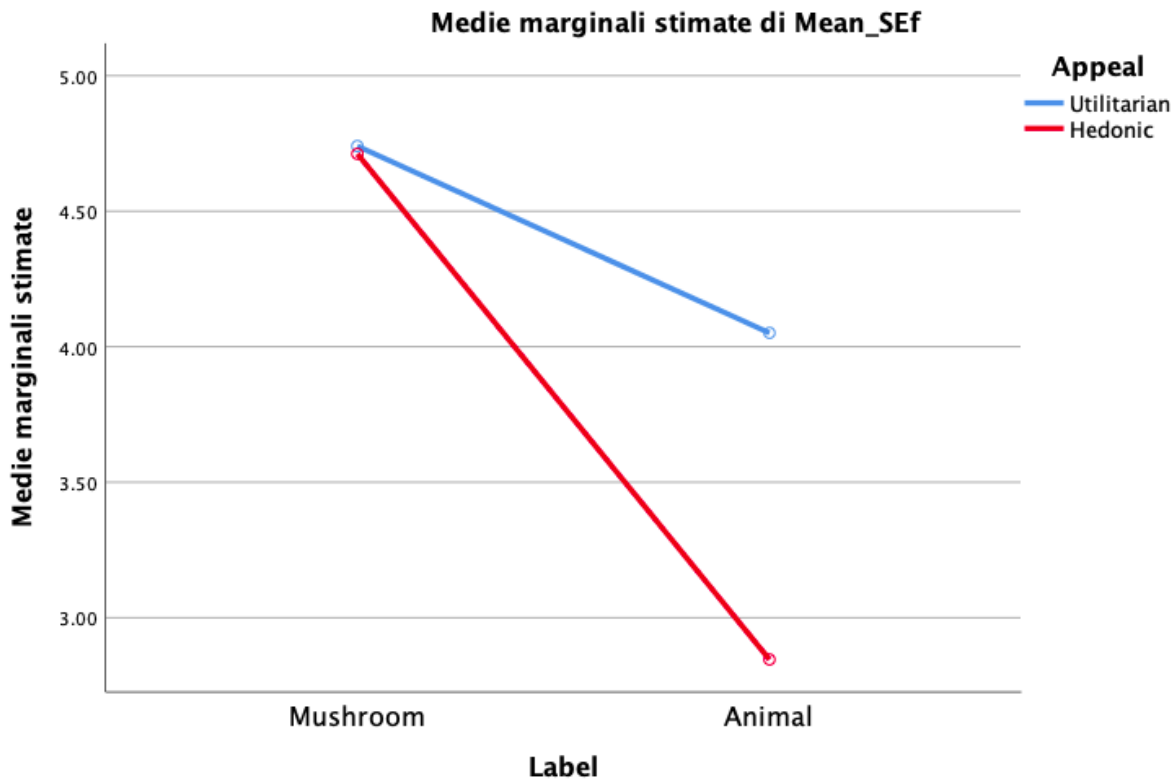
Graph 1 - Interactive Effect of Material and Appeal on Processing Fluency

4.2.3 The mediating effect of Perceived Self Efficacy

The regression analysis conducted via PROCESS macro SPSS (Model 8) (Hayes, 2017) served as a mean to verify not only the aforementioned moderated mediation, but also to verify the effect of appeal on perceived Self-Efficacy towards prosocial behavior and respondent's WTR after being exposed to a Sustainable vs. Non Sustainable Product.

Results from the moderated mediation analysis performed show that the variable Appeal has a significant positive effect on respondents' Self Efficacy towards a pro social behavior ($b=1.14$; $p=.041 < .05$). In addition, there is a significant interaction effect between Material and Appeal on Perceived Self Efficacy ($b=-1.176$; $p=.0009 < .05$). In particular both the conditional effect of Hedonic Appeal ($b=-1.865$; $p=.00$) and Utilitarian Appeal are significant ($b=-0.689$; $p=.005 < .05$), suggesting that both appeals similarly impact on perceived Self Efficacy when paired with a Sustainable vs Non Sustainable Material.

It is possible to state that when paired with material, hedonic appeal, compared to utilitarian appeal, impacts on self efficacy with a higher magnitude. Particularly, when exposed to a non-sustainable (i.e. animal leather) material, self efficacy towards a prosocial behavior decreases more steeply if the appeal used is hedonic rather than utilitarian, while it increases more sharply if the user is exposed to a sustainable material (i.e. mushroom leather) and a hedonic message, suggesting that hedonic appeals tend to be more effective. For a visual representation of the aforementioned results, the reader could refer to Graph 2 reported below.



Graph 2 - Interactive Effect of Material and Appeal on Self Efficacy towards a prosocial behavior

Results from the mediation analysis performed show a significant positive effect of Self-Efficacy towards a prosocial behavior on respondents' WTR ($b=0.858$; $p=.000 < .05$). The analysis showed a completely significant moderated indirect effect through Self-Efficacy ($b= -1.009$; LCI = -1.88 ; UCI = -0.3821). In particular, results show that both the indirect effect of Utilitarian ($b= -0.591$; LCI = -1.08 ; UCI = -0.20) and Hedonic Appeal are significant ($b= -1.601$; LCI = -2.50 ; UCI = -0.986), with a higher effect of Hedonic Appeals compared to Utilitarian Appeals.

It can be stated that the use of hedonic appeal paired with sustainable material in a social media post from a luxury brand increases respondents' perceived efficacy towards prosocial behavior, which in turn increases their WTR. H3 is thus fully supported.

Chapter 5 - General Discussion, Theoretical Contributions, Managerial Implications and Future Research

5.1 General Discussion

The study conducted in this research explored consumers' responses to different types of marketing stimuli in the context of luxury sustainability and social media. In particular, the object of this research was to investigate the role of product material (i.e., sustainable vs. non sustainable) and message appeal (i.e., hedonic vs utilitarian) in the context of brand social media publications on consumer's willingness to repost on their own social media profiles (i.e. WTR). The present research took into account the mediating effects of perceived efficacy and processing fluency on consumer's WTR, as well as the moderating effect of appeal on the two mediators.

The results obtained from the analyses suggest that the use of hedonic appeals significantly moderates the relationship between type of material shown and consumer's WTR, confirming that, given the intrinsic hedonism of luxury products, a communication centered on hedonic appeals elicits more positive reactions in consumers. Moreover, results show that the use of sustainable materials paired with hedonic appeals significantly increases consumer's processing fluency, or ease of comprehension of the message presented, which in turn increases their intention to repost on social media. The same findings are applicable to the joint effect of sustainable materials and hedonic message framing which significantly increases consumers' self efficacy towards a prosocial behavior, this in turn increases their WTR.

These findings contribute to the understanding of how product materials and message appeal influence consumers' perceptions and reactions towards the stimulus presented. In particular, they highlight the importance of promoting sustainable luxury products with hedonic message appeals in the context of social media marketing via owned channels, as this will significantly increase consumer's willingness to repost the message thereby increasing reach and consumer advocacy.

5.2 Theoretical Contribution

While previous research has yielded mixed findings on the theme of luxury and sustainability, the present thesis explores the contradiction between the two spheres and studies the effect that a communication centered on the use of sustainable materials (vs. not sustainable) paired with different message appeals (i.e.hedonic vs. utilitarian) in the context of Luxury Brand's social media publications impacts consumers' WTR on their own social media account.

Despite the phenomenon of sustainability and social media in the luxury industry is assuming a remarkably high relevance in today's landscape, past research has neglected the relationship between these three areas. From this perspective, the present thesis bridges the existing research gap and provides useful insights for marketing managers and professionals working in Luxury. In this sense, this research makes

several contributions to marketing literature, especially to the branch focused on understanding consumer's responses to the use of sustainability in luxury.

First, it contributes to the existing debate on the effect that sustainable materials in luxury products has on consumers' perceptions. Particularly, findings from the research conducted support the idea that luxury and sustainability not only can coexist, but that sustainability in the context of luxury can elevate consumers' perceptions towards luxury products and brands (Steinhard et al. 2013; Janssen et al., 2014; De Angelis et al., 2017; Amatulli et al., 2018; Amatulli et al., 2021), giving credit to the idea proposed by De Angelis et al. (2017) that Luxury brands can be "Gold and Green". Consumers' perception, partly expressed through their willingness to share on social media, are indeed more positive when the communication message on social media refers to sustainable products. One possible explanation for these results is the general rising awareness towards environmental issues (Pew Research Center, 2019), which leads consumers to a more sustainable consumption (Haller et al., 2020; BCG, 2020), even in these sectors that have been long lastingly seen as distant from sustainability.

Second, it brings light to the under-researched area of sustainable luxury and social media communication explaining which factors contribute to advocacy via social media for eco-friendly luxury brands. Particularly, the study clarifies the role of message appeals and consumers' cognitive reactions (i.e. processing fluency and self efficacy) in subsequent willingness to share a brand social media post.

Third, the present thesis contributes to previous research on the use of Hedonic vs. Utilitarian message appeals in marketing. Particularly, it explores their role in the context of marketing sustainable luxury products on social media. Consistently with prior research by Amatulli et al. (2020) and Deb and Lomo David (2020), this thesis confirms the effectiveness of hedonic appeals in sustainable luxury communication adding the social media element to the analysis. Results from the main study demonstrate that hedonic appeals are effective in moderating the relationship between the material of products being shown on owned social media luxury channels (i.e. sustainable vs. non sustainable) and consumer's WTR. Moreover, adding up to prior research in marketing and psychology, this thesis empirically demonstrates the positive mediating role of hedonic appeals between luxury product material and processing fluency (i.e. ease of comprehension) of the message on the one hand and self efficacy (i.e. individual's confidence to succeed in their actions) towards prosocial behavior.

Finally, in line with the author's predictions, the present research shows how both processing fluency and self efficacy act as positive mediators between material of products being shown and consumers' WTR, suggesting that social media communications which are easier to comprehend and which make recipients feel able to achieve positive results will lead social media users to more favorably repost them on their social media profiles, thereby increasing brand's post reach beyond the brand's capacity.

5.3 Managerial Implications

Social media usage is constantly on the rise, increasing solely between 2020 and 2021 by 71 percent (Sprout Social Index, 2021) and reaching 4.2 Billion users worldwide (We Are Social, 2021). Social media advertising expenditures in the U.S. are projected to reach \$56.85 Billion in 2022 (Statista, 2020) with a high percentage of digital marketing budget focused at reaching consumers via social media. For companies it has become an imperative not only to be present on Social Media, but also to communicate their value proposition in the most effective way possible in order to successfully break through the advertising clutter. The luxury industry is not an exception, with the majority of luxury brands being present on social media, for luxury marketing managers it becomes of pivotal importance to adopt a successful social media strategy, not only to increase positive sentiment from consumers, but also not to lose the image consumers have of them, nor their majestic positioning. Luxury brands have long lastingly maintained an “aura of mystery” (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009), even if being present on social media may reduce the perceived distance between the brand and the consumer, it may also generate in social media users hedonic desires of owning the products shown. A consumer seeing a luxury product on their social media *feed* or in between *stories* may perceive a feeling of need or want, a flaming desire to own the product and the simple fact they cannot have it will further enhance the luxury brands “superiority” against the consumer. A consumer sharing on their social media account a post from a luxury brand, besides demonstrating mostly positive feelings towards the brand, will also increase the post reach, possibly generating in others the same positive feelings.

For luxury marketing managers it becomes thus of crucial importance to understand and own the drivers of consumers' willingness to repost on social media; this thesis aims at offering central insights to these professionals.

Parallely, sustainability is increasingly becoming a broadly discussed theme on every platform. Only on Instagram, keywords such as “sustainability”, “eco-friendly” or “sustainable consumption” have reached since January 2021 a total of 36.700 publications, more than 6.5 Billion impressions and 141M interactions⁹ (Campaign Software, 2021), demonstrating a great awareness about the topic.

Meanwhile consumers from all over the world are progressively becoming more aware of their ecological footprint and of their impact on environmental pollution (Pew Research Center, 2019) and many of them are willing to proactively change their consumption behavior to reduce their harmful impact on the planet (Haller et al., 2020; BCG, 2020).

No industry is exempt from this discussion, even the luxury one, which has been long lastingly seen as distant from this topic. Even if a part of past research suggests that luxury products may represent an exception to sustainable consumption, as they are the emblem of indulgence (Kapferer and Bastien, 2015; Pencarelli et al. 2020), many studies confirm a positive attitude towards sustainable luxury

⁹ Data collected from campaign software and referring to the period intercurrent from Jan 1st 2021 to Sept 20th 2021. Keywords searched: Sustainable, sustainability, ecofriendly
Retrieved on Sept 2021 from: <https://campaign.com>

products (Steinhard et al. 2013; Janssen et al., 2014; De Angelis et al., 2017; Amatulli et al., 2018; Amatulli et al., 2021).

Consumers from the youngest generations (particularly Gen-Zers and Millennials¹⁰) are increasingly more interested in sustainability (Pencarelli et. al, 2020; Kulkarni and Lefebvre, 2018; BCG.com, 2021; Haller et al., 2020) and younger luxury consumers favor those brands that align with their beliefs and values of ethical consumption, truth and transparency (Caïs, 2021). This cohort of consumers will show a more positive attitude to brands which not only preserve their luxuriousness, but also align with their ethical values. Drawing on these insights, this thesis, bridging the current research gap, studied how sustainability in luxury may lead to a more favorable attitude towards Luxury brands, expressed as consumer's willingness to share on social media. Particularly, consistently with findings from Amatulli et al. (2021), results from the main study suggest luxury brands should innovate their communication and leverage on the use of sustainable materials in the production of their goods, as this, paired with hedonic message appeals, elicits positive response in the audience through an increased message comprehension (i.e. processing fluency) and an higher self efficacy towards prosocial behavior. This suggests that marketers should not only insist on the use of sustainable products, but also, given the inherent hedonism of luxury products, insist on hedonic appeals to facilitate the comprehension of the message which leads to an increased engagement and advocacy on consumer's side. Moreover, consistently with previous study in prosocial behavior, this thesis suggests that making consumers perceive their actions can make a change towards environmental protection (i.e. enhancing their self-efficacy) will increase their willingness to engage in that particular behavior, indicating that communication of sustainability should involve consumers and lead them to believe they have the power to take action and be effective.

In sum, this study offers important practical implications for Social Media Managers working in the luxury industry and aiming at adopting sustainability as a driver for their social media campaigns. We live in an increasingly social media savvy world, where sustainable products and actions aimed at reducing CO2 represent the future of consumption and production; it becomes thus of pivotal importance for any industry, specifically the luxury one, often seen as distant from sustainability, to understand the relationship between social media and sustainability and understand the drivers of consumers' reactions to luxury social media communication. From this perspective, the present research represents a document of central importance as it not only demonstrates that sustainable luxury products presented with hedonic appeals tend to elicit more positive reactions in consumers, but also shows that when promoting a product on social media both clarity of the message and users' perception of effectiveness play a fundamental role in consumers' willingness to re-share brand's posts. Luxury Managers willing to increase positive sentiment towards their brands and consumers' re-shares via social media should thus (1) Leverage sustainability by posting about products manufactured using sustainable materials, for example an eco-leather made out of mushrooms, pairing the

¹⁰ GenY -or Millennials- refers to those born between 1981 and 1996
GenZ,- Gen Zers, Zoomers- refers to people born between 1996 and 2010

image with hedonic message appeals in order not to detach from the essence of luxury, its hedonism; (2) Express the message as clearly as possible, particularly by pairing sustainable products with hedonic appeals, as increased processing fluency is demonstrated to increase consumers' WTR and finally (3) engage consumers by making them perceive their efforts in buying or sharing the product will have a positive impact on the environment, as self efficacy towards prosocial behavior after being exposed to a sustainable product significantly increases users' WTR.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This thesis, as any other paper previously written, presents some limitations which can be a source of inspiration for future research.

First, it has to be noted that the study was conducted on a relatively small sample and that participants did not pertain to a single age group nor to a specific social class (no data about income nor occupation were collected), thus results might be subject to change when modifying the sample. Future research may replicate this study on a broader sample or focusing on a specific age group or on a specific income level consumers.

Second, the study did not focus on a specific social media while it may be interesting to understand the difference in consumers responses across different social platforms, for example given the growing popularity of social media like TikTok, especially among young consumers, a new study might be conducted on this social media.

Third, the stimulus presented consisted in a static image, given the latest trends in Social Media which see short videos as the protagonist of consumers' feeds (e.g. Instagram Reels or publications on TikTok), it may be interesting to test whether results of the study are different when the promotion of products via owned Social Media Channels is posted in the form of short video depicting the product.

Finally, the image proposed represents a plain, non-branded computer bag, future research might replicate this study using a different kind of product (e.g., backpack, sneakers, wallet etc.) and investigate the role of branding or brand attitudes in consumers' reactions.

Chapter 6 - Appendix

6.1 Stimuli

Stimulus 1



Sustainable – Utilitarian
“Mushroom Leather Bag, lowers Maelen’s Greenhouse Emissions by 20%”

Stimulus 2



Not Sustainable – Utilitarian
“Animal Leather bag, 5% of profits will be reinvested in lowering Maelen’s Greenhouse emissions by 20%”

Stimulus 3



Sustainable – Hedonic
“Mushroom Leather Bag, refined luxury good for the environment”

Stimulus 4



Not Sustainable – Hedonic
“Animal Leather bag, refined luxury timeless fashion”

6.2 Descriptive Statistics

Statistiche descrittive

	N	Minimo	Massimo	Media	Deviazione std.
How old are you?	274	16	74	34.81	15.916
Numero di casi validi (listwise)	274				

In which gender do you identify the most?

		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	Male	108	39.4	39.4	39.4
	Female	163	59.5	59.5	98.9
	Prefer not to say	3	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Totale	274	100.0	100.0	

In which Country do you live?

		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	Belgium	2	.7	.7	.7
	Denmark	13	4.7	4.7	5.5
	Denmark/Spain/Estonia	1	.4	.4	5.8
	France	7	2.6	2.6	8.4
	Germany	2	.7	.7	9.1
	Italia	227	82.8	82.8	92.0
	Mexico	3	1.1	1.1	93.1
	Netherlands	3	1.1	1.1	94.2
	Portugallo	1	.4	.4	94.5
	Russia	2	.7	.7	95.3
	Spain	4	1.5	1.5	96.7
	Sweden	2	.7	.7	97.4
	Switzerland	2	.7	.7	98.2
	UAE	1	.4	.4	98.5
	United Kingdom	4	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Totale	274	100.0	100.0	

6.3 Reliability of the Scales

6.3.1 Processing Fluency

Processing Fluency before Factor Rotation

Statistiche di affidabilità

Alpha di Cronbach	Alpha di Cronbach basata su elementi standardizzati	N. di elementi
.367	.369	4

Matrice dei fattori

	Fattore 1
Processing Fluency 1	-.597
Processing Fluency 2	.841
Processing Fluency 3	-.537
Processing Fluency 4	.910

Processing Fluency after Rotating Item 1 and 3

Statistiche di affidabilità

Alpha di Cronbach	Alpha di Cronbach basata su elementi standardizzati	N. di elementi
.817	.818	4

Matrice dei fattori

	Fattore 1
Processing Fluency 1	.584
Processing Fluency 2	.836
Processing Fluency 3	.523
Processing Fluency 4	.909

Matrice dei fattori ruotati

- a. È stato estratto un solo fattore. Non è possibile eseguire la rotazione della soluzione

6.3.2 Perceived Efficacy towards prosocial behavior

Statistiche di affidabilità

Alpha di Cronbach	Alpha di Cronbach basata su elementi standardizzati	N. di elementi
.892	.892	3

Varianza totale spiegata

Fattore	Totale	Autovalori iniziali		Caricamenti somme dei quadrati di estrazione		
		% di varianza	% cumulativa	Totale	% di varianza	% cumulativa
1	2.470	82.346	82.346	2.254	75.135	75.135
2	.407	13.566	95.912			
3	.123	4.088	100.000			

Matrice dei fattori

	Fattore 1
Perceived Efficacy 1	.898
Perceived Efficacy 2	.973
Perceived Efficacy 3	.708

Matrice dei fattori ruotati

- a. È stato estratto un solo fattore. Non è possibile eseguire la rotazione della soluzione

6.4 Process Macro SPSS Output

Run MATRIX procedure:

***** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.0 *****

Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D. www.afhayes.com
 Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

Model : 8
 Y : WTR_DV
 X : Material
 M1 : Mean_SEf
 M2 : Mean_PFl
 W : Appeal

Sample
 Size: 274

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Mean_SEf

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.4657	.2169	2.1191	24.9246	3.0000	270.0000	.0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	4.2818	.8801	4.8654	.0000	2.5492	6.0145
Material	.4871	.5528	.8811	.3790	-.6013	1.5756
Appeal	1.1476	.5588	2.0539	.0410	.0475	2.2478
Int_1	-1.1764	.3519	-3.3427	.0009	-1.8693	-.4835

Product terms key:

Int_1 : Material x Appeal

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0324	11.1739	1.0000	270.0000	.0009

Focal predict: Material (X)
 Mod var: Appeal (W)

Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s):

Appeal	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
1.0000	-.6893	.2462	-2.8001	.0055	-1.1739	-.2046
2.0000	-1.8657	.2515	-7.4179	.0000	-2.3608	-1.3705

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

Mean_PFl

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.2826	.0798	1.8237	7.8101	3.0000	270.0000	.0001

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.1870	.8164	3.9037	.0001	1.5797	4.7944
Material	.9188	.5129	1.7914	.0743	-.0910	1.9285
Appeal	1.2143	.5184	2.3426	.0199	.1938	2.2349
Int_1	-.9892	.3265	-3.0300	.0027	-1.6320	-.3465

Product terms key:

Int_1 : Material x Appeal

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0313	9.1811	1.0000	270.0000	.0027

Focal predict: Material (X)
Mod var: Appeal (W)

Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s):

Appeal	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
1.0000	-.0705	.2284	-.3086	.7579	-.5201	.3791
2.0000	-1.0597	.2333	-4.5418	.0000	-1.5191	-.6003

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

WTR_DV

Coding of binary Y for logistic regression analysis:

WTR_DV	Analysis
1.00	.00
2.00	1.00

Model Summary

-2LL	ModelLL	df	p	McFadden	CoxSnell	Nagelkrk
234.2056	100.2084	5.0000	.0000	.2997	.3063	.4345

Model

	coeff	se	Z	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	-4.0000	1.6685	-2.3973	.0165	-7.2703	-.7297
Material	-1.7513	1.0053	-1.7422	.0815	-3.7216	.2189
Mean_Sef	.8582	.1510	5.6840	.0000	.5623	1.1542
Mean_PFl	.5330	.1591	3.3506	.0008	.2212	.8448
Appeal	-2.4852	1.0415	-2.3861	.0170	-4.5266	-.4439
Int_1	1.4317	.6941	2.0626	.0391	.0713	2.7921

These results are expressed in a log-odds metric.

Product terms key:
 Int_1 : Material x Appeal

Likelihood ratio test(s) of highest order unconditional interactions(s):

	Chi-sq	df	p
X*W	4.3374	1.0000	.0373

Focal predict: Material (X)
 Mod var: Appeal (W)

Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s):

Appeal	Effect	se	Z	p	LLCI	ULCI
1.0000	-.3196	.4253	-.7516	.4523	-1.1531	.5139
2.0000	1.1121	.5610	1.9823	.0475	.0125	2.2116

***** DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y *****

Conditional direct effect(s) of X on Y:

Appeal	Effect	se	Z	p	LLCI	ULCI
1.0000	-.3196	.4253	-.7516	.4523	-1.1531	.5139
2.0000	1.1121	.5610	1.9823	.0475	.0125	2.2116

Conditional indirect effects of X on Y:

INDIRECT EFFECT:

Material -> Mean_SEf -> WTR_DV

Appeal	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
1.0000	-.5916	.2218	-1.0808	-.2059
2.0000	-1.6012	.3928	-2.5069	-.9864

Index of moderated mediation (difference between conditional indirect effects):

Appeal	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
1.0000	-1.0096	.3838	-1.8883	-.3821

INDIRECT EFFECT:

Material -> Mean_PF1 -> WTR_DV

Appeal	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
1.0000	-.0376	.1227	-.2787	.2122
2.0000	-.5648	.2232	-1.0986	-.2238

Index of moderated mediation (difference between conditional indirect effects):

Appeal	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
1.0000	-.5273	.2581	-1.1435	-.1439

***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:

95.0000

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals:

5000

NOTE: Direct and indirect effects of X on Y are on a log-odds metric.

----- END MATRIX -----

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THESIS SUMMARY

1. Introduction - There is No “Planet B”

Sustainability is becoming a key topic in our society. As years pass, population grows, and oceans rise, sustainable development becomes increasingly important, if not vital, for every inhabitant of this earth.

In the past years more and more people started feeling the need for change. And from people this movement started scaling up to brands and institutions, to those who have the influence and power to actually change the sadly established paradigm of big polluting industries.

Many industries, indeed, have started taking action against climate change and pollution emergencies, even those which have been enduringly seen as distant from sustainability. One of these industries is luxury. While luxury and sustainability have been largely seen as antonyms, there has been a recent change of course and many luxury brands such as Hermes, Prada or Moncler are now beginning to use sustainable materials for their products¹¹ and Groups like LVMH, Hermès, Armani and Kering - to cite only a few- decided to reduce the environmental impact of their production processes and to finance social projects. Data show that global sustainable and environmentally responsible investment has increased in 2018 by 68 percent compared to 2014, reaching a of 30 trillion USD dollars, tenfold the investment of 2004 (GSIA, 2018).

With the world progressively moving towards a more sustainable consumption it becomes of pivotal importance for luxury managers to understand if and how sustainability can be applied to their industry and what are the consequences of such adoption from the consumers’ standpoint. The objective of the present research is to analyze luxury in the context of sustainability and to provide key practical insights for Luxury Marketing Managers by assessing the effect of product material (i.e., sustainable vs non sustainable) and message appeals (i.e., hedonic vs. utilitarian) in the context of luxury social media communication on consumers’ willingness to repost on social media (herein WTR). Moreover, this thesis aims at highlighting the role of psychological drivers such as self-efficacy and processing fluency on consumers’ WTR and the effect the interaction of material and appeal have on them.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Luxury and Sustainability

The binomium luxury and sustainability has been broadly discussed by previous research, however the discussion has produced mixed findings. On the one hand, Luxury and Sustainability have been largely seen as antonyms and the use of sustainable materials for luxury products has been proven to have an negative impact on consumer’s evaluation (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Davies et al., 2012; Joy et al. 2012; Achabou and Dekhili 2013; Kapferer and Michaut, 2014, 2020; Torelli et al., 2012; Voyer and Beckham 2014; Kapferer and Micheaut, 2015; Pencarelli et al. 2020); on the other hand a more recent branch of research has showed

¹¹ Hermes: <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/sustainability/exclusive-hermes-bets-on-mushroom-leather>
Prada: <https://www.pradagroup.com/en/sustainability/environment-csr/prada-re-nylon.html>
Moncler: <https://robbreport.com/style/fashion/moncler-born-to-protect-sustainable-jackets-1234590674/>

how luxury brands can be both “Gold and Green” (De Angelis et al., 2017) and how consumer’s perception of the brand or product might be enhanced when sustainable materials are used (Steinhard et al. 2013; Janssen et al., 2014; De Angelis et al., 2017; Amatulli et al., 2018; Amatulli et al., 2021).

A well-known example of this harmony is the luxury brand Stella McCartney, which was among the first brands to engage in sustainability and embrace it. As stated in their mission, their aim is to “*prove that it is possible to create luxurious products without causing unnecessary harm to the planet*” (stellamccartney.com, 2021¹²). As Steinhard, et al. (2013) conclude in their research, environmental claims can indeed have a positive impact on consumers’ perceptions of luxury products. Claims focused on environmental sustainability not only have a positive effect on consumer’s perceptions, but also on consumer’s willingness to buy. As proposed by Amatulli et al. (2021) consumers show a higher intention to purchase for a luxury product after being exposed to communication messages highlighting that the related brand is engaged in sustainability, suggesting that luxury brands may innovate their communication by leveraging sustainability.

2.2 Luxury and Social Media

Social media usage in 2021 has grown by 71 percent compared to 2020 (Sprout Social Index, 2021) with social media users counting 4.2 Billion worldwide (We Are Social, 2021). For companies it has become an imperative to be present on Social Media, as it ensures countless benefits from a marketing perspective. The Luxury industry is not exempt from this movement; with the one single exception represented by Bottega Veneta, every Luxury Brand is in fact now on Social Media. For luxury marketing managers it becomes thus of pivotal importance to adopt a successful social media strategy. In the present thesis, the role of social media in Luxury will be analyzed using social media as the key background for the present analysis.

While the phenomenon of sustainability and social media in the context of luxury is assuming an increasingly high relevance in today's landscape, past research has neglected the relationship between these three areas; the present thesis bridges the current research gap by exploring these areas and their interconnections providing useful insights for marketing managers and professionals working in Luxury.

In particular, as engagement and re-posts represents for marketing managers some of the most important social metrics, consumer's willingness to re-post luxury brand social media publications (herein, WTR) will be analyzed as the outcome variable for the presented research model. A consumer sharing a brand’s or company’s post on social media, demonstrates interest toward the company and increases its reach, visibility, awareness, and positive sentiment towards it. Thus, for marketing managers willing to increase engagement and advocacy of their social media pages it becomes extremely important to understand what drives consumers' willingness to share brand’s social media posts on their own social media accounts.

This research proposes that the use of sustainable materials in luxury, and hence sustainable message framing in the context of social media luxury communication, may elicit a positive reaction in luxury

¹² <https://www.stellamccartney.com/it/it/sustainability/sustainability.html> Retrieved on April 2021

consumers consisting in an increased intention to re-post the luxury brand's communication and share it with their social media audience.

2.3 Hedonic versus Utilitarian Appeals in Luxury

Past research has dedicated a great amount of attention to the use of message appeals in marketing communications, particularly to the binomial relationship between hedonic appeals (i.e., focused on the promotion of benefits linked to emotions, fulfillment of hedonic needs or highlighting, for example, the aesthetic value of the product) and utilitarian appeals (i.e. focused on the functional and tangible benefits of the product, beseeching to consumer logic and rationality). However, past research has neglected the interaction between appeals, luxury, sustainability and social media. This research, in contrast, considers the role of message appeals in luxury and sustainability, a largely neglected theme in previous research. In particular it bridges the current research gap in exploring the function of hedonic versus utilitarian appeals in luxury communication on brand's owned social media directed to promote sustainable versus non-sustainable products.

Past research has demonstrated that those appeals focused on emotional benefits enhance perceived hedonic value of the product (Kim et al. 2020) and, in case of luxury products, the perceived luxuriousness of the promoted good or service, thereby increasing consumers' satisfaction (Amatulli et al., 2020; Deb and Lomo-David, 2020). Drawing on previous findings and given the intrinsic hedonism of luxury products, this research proposes that hedonic (vs. utilitarian) message appeals are predicted to significantly moderate the relationship between use of sustainable materials in luxury, and hence sustainable message framing in the context of social media luxury communication, and consumers' intention to share the post with their social media audience.

2.4 Processing Fluency

Processing fluency can be defined as the subjective ease with which a stimulus is processed by an individual (Jacoby and Dallas, 1981), or how easy it is for the individual to process the information given.

Past research has empirically demonstrated the inherent positivity of perceived processing fluency. For example, products which have a more fluent design are considered more appealing (Mayer and Landwehr, 2018) and authors of an article that can be easily read are considered to be more intelligent (Oppenheimer, 2006). In the context of sustainability, previous research demonstrated that when presented with a message for a recycling campaign in a frame that fits with their mindset, consumers easily processed the information given and perceive as easier to engage in the promoted behavior, which in turn leads to a higher likelihood to engage in the recycling behavior (White et al., 2011).

Previous research pairing sustainability and social media has demonstrated that consumer's perceived value of a marketing message on social media significantly influences their intention to re-post it and share it with their social media audience (Wang et al., 2019). In the context of social media marketing, the user's

intention to repost a marketing message on social media is a cognitive decision, thus a greater perceived value of the message encourages participants' intention to share it with their friends (Wang et al., 2019). As aforesaid, when presented with a fluent message, consumers tend to have positive reactions and thus perceived value of the message is enhanced. Along these lines, this thesis suggests that processing fluency may have a significant role in consumers' WTR. Following this line of thought the present research argues that processing fluency will increase the WTR luxury brand's Social media post, acting as a mediator of the relationship between the material of the Luxury product being shown (sustainable vs not sustainable), and thus the framing of a luxury brand's social media message, and consumer's WTR on their own social media. In particular, a positive mediating effect on the relationship is predicted.

Recent studies in the context of tourism show how the communication of sustainability features on social media is mostly inefficient due to the general perceived difficulty of information processing in sustainability communication (Tölkes, 2020). As previously stated luxury - even if sustainable - is intrinsically hedonic, thus, an hedonic message appeal will facilitate consumer's understanding of the message. Hence, when presented with a Luxury product, consumer's perceptual fluency will be enhanced if the message contains a hedonic appeal.

2.5 Self-Efficacy Towards Pro-Social Behavior

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their own capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance accomplishments (Bandura, 1977). Having a higher self-efficacy will lead individuals to be more confident in the outcome of their actions as a result of their behavior, leading them to convey their efforts to reach the desired end results. For example, past research in the healthcare sector has demonstrated that self-efficacy is a significant predictor of smoking cessation (Berndt et al., 2013; Stead et al., 2015; Williams and Rhoads, 2016) or weight loss (Baldwin et al., 2006; Nezami et al, 2017). In the domain of prosocial and pro-environmental behavior, past research has demonstrated that high levels of self-efficacy facilitate conservation behaviors such as recycling (Tang et al., 2011; Taberner and Hernandez, 2011), electrical energy conservation (Thøgersen and Grønhøj, 2010), and participation in pro-environmental causes (Kim and Jang, 2018). Moreover, past research has demonstrated that awareness of the consequence of a certain behavior may lead individuals to recognise their responsibility in its possible unwanted outcomes and to undertake actions to blunt the impact of such behavior (Stern et al., 1999). Thus, the more individuals perceive their actions to be effective in mitigating undesired outcomes of a non-sustainable behavior, the greater the possibility that they will undertake pro-environmental action (Snelgar, 2006). Perceiving that one can proactively make a difference in environmental protection will lead people to behave in order to make the difference (Snelgar, 2006). Against this backdrop, the present thesis proposes that when presented with a brand social media post representing a sustainable luxury item using hedonic appeals (because of luxury's inherent hedonism), consumers' perceived self-efficacy towards prosocial behavior increases, leading to a higher WTR, thereby enlarging the reach of the message directed towards sustainability.

2.6 Formal Hypotheses

The present thesis reports the results of one main study investigating the interaction between the use of sustainable materials in luxury, and thus sustainable communication, and message appeal in Luxury brands social communication, their conjoint effect on consumer's WTR and the mediating effect that processing fluency (i.e., the ease with which the individual processes the information given) and self-efficacy (i.e. individuals' expectation of their own ability to achieve a desired outcome) exert on this relationship. Specifically, this research hypothesizes that:

H1: The use of hedonic (vs. utilitarian) message appeal in a luxury brand social media post moderates the relationship between the use of sustainable (vs. non sustainable) material in the luxury product being shown and consumer's WTR.

H2: Given the intrinsic hedonism of luxury products, an hedonic (vs. utilitarian) message appeal paired with a sustainable luxury product enhances message processing fluency, which in turn leads to a positive WTR

H3: Self-efficacy towards a prosocial-behavior predicts a positive consumer's WTR when the individual is exposed to a luxury brand social media post depicting a sustainable product and using a hedonic message appeal.

The overall conceptual model of this thesis has been reported in figure 1.

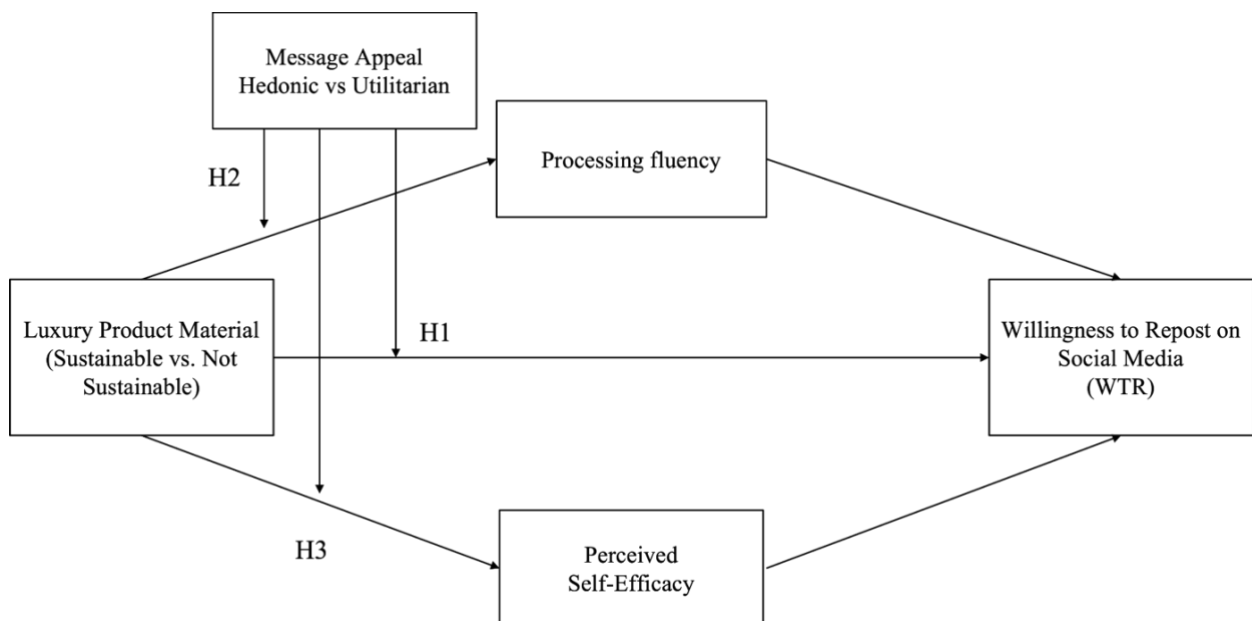


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Variables in the Study

3. Main Study: Participants and Procedure

In order to test the hypotheses presented, one main study consisting in an online experiment was conducted. The study examines consumer's WTR after being presented with a fictitious social media post from an

imaginary luxury brand. The study accounts for the moderating effect of Appeal used (hedonic vs. Utilitarian) and for the mediating effects of Processing Fluency and Perceived Self-Efficacy

The final sample analyzed after data cleaning was of 274 respondents (59.5% Female, $M_{age}=34.81$ years, $SD=15.93$ years).

The study was conducted with a 2 (Sustainable Luxury Product vs Non Sustainable Luxury Product) x 2 (Utilitarian Message Appeal vs Hedonic Message Appeal) between subject design. Respondents were randomly assigned one of the four conditions of the study. The stimuli presented consisted in the picture of a fictitious social media post from an imaginary luxury brand depicting a leather computer bag. The caption of the post subsisted with a message describing the product as either sustainable (i.e. made of mushroom leather) or not sustainable (i.e. made of animal leather) and with a hedonic vs utilitarian appeal. In order to avoid bias in judgement, the computer bag was not branded and the brand's name was fictitious. Participants have been evenly assigned to each condition.

Before being presented with the stimulus, participants were informed that they were about to see a social media post from a luxury brand. The name of the social media was not specified, from the graphic of the stimuli, however, it might have been reconducted to an Instagram post.

Following the presentation of the image, respondents were asked to visualize the image and carefully read its caption. After being shown the stimulus, participants were asked to indicate perceived processing fluency on four items (Chae and Joegg, 2013; Lee and Aaker, 2004; Kim and Jang, 2018). Subsequently, respondents were asked to indicate their perceived self-efficacy on a three-item questionnaire (White et al., 2011; Kim and Jang, 2018) Both scales were ranked on a 7 point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Participants were then asked to express their WTR.

Lastly, participants provided demographic information (i.e., gender, age and country of residence).

4. Results

To test the hypotheses presented, a moderated mediation regression analysis has been conducted using the Software PROCESS macro SPSS (model 8) (Hayes, 2017).

Respondent's WTS (1=Do Not Share; 2= Share) was used as the Dependent Variable and Product Material (1=Mushroom Leather; 2=Animal Leather) was used as the Independent Variable of the model. Appeal (1=Utilitarian; 2=Hedonic) served as Moderating Variable, while the variables Processing Fluency and Perceived Self Efficacy served as the two parallel Mediating Variables of the model.

4.1 The moderating Effect of Appeal

The results of the regression analysis confirmed, as expected, a significant interaction effect between Material (Sustainable vs. Not Sustainable) and Appeal (Hedonic vs. Utilitarian) on consumer's WTR ($b=1.43$; $p=.039 < .05$). Particularly, while Utilitarian appeals do not significantly moderate the relationship ($p=.45 > p=.05$),

Hedonic Appeals significantly moderate the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable ($b=1.11$; $p=.045 < .05$). The present findings fully support H1.

4.2 The mediating effect of Processing Fluency

Results from the moderated mediation analysis performed show that Appeal has a significant positive effect on respondents' processing fluency ($b=1.21$; $p=.019 < .05$). Moreover, results showed a significant interaction effect between Material and Appeal on processing fluency ($b=-.9892$; $p=.002 < .05$). In particular, while the conditional effect of Hedonic Appeals is significant ($b=-1.059$; $p=.000 < .05$), the conditional effect of utilitarian appeals is not significant ($p=.75 > p=.05$), suggesting that utilitarian appeal does not impact on processing fluency (see Graph 1 below for a visual representation). Thus, when paired with a hedonic appeal, non-sustainable material (i.e. Animal Leather) lowers processing fluency, while sustainable material (i.e. mushroom leather) fosters ease of comprehension of the message. In other words, while for hedonic appeals the type of material used influences consumer's ease of processing, ensuring higher level of processing fluency when the material used is sustainable, for rational appeal the type of leather does not impact consumers' processing easiness.

The mediation analysis shows a significant positive effect of processing fluency ($b = 0.533$; $p=.0008 < .05$) on WTR (1=Share; 2=Do not Share). Moreover, there is a completely significant moderated indirect effect through processing fluency ($b = -.5273$; LCI = -1.1435 ; UCI = -0.1439). In particular, results show that the indirect effect is not significant when the appeal used is utilitarian, indicating that utilitarian appeal does not significantly moderate the mediation. On the other hand, the indirect effect is significant for hedonic appeal ($b=-0.5648$; LCI= -1.098 ; UCI= -0.2238).

Results from the analysis show that, when presented with a non sustainable material, consumers process the message less readily, on the contrary if the material presented is sustainable, consumers' processing fluency increases. Higher levels of processing fluency lead to a more positive attitude towards sharing of the message, or an increased WTR. The present findings fully support H2

4.3 The mediating effect of Perceived Self Efficacy

Results from the moderated mediation analysis performed show that the variable Appeal has a significant positive effect on respondents' self efficacy towards a pro social behavior ($b=1.14$; $p=.041 < .05$). In addition, there is a significant interaction effect between Material and Appeal on perceived self efficacy ($b=-1.176$; $p=.0009 < .05$). In particular both the conditional effect of hedonic appeal ($b=-1.865$; $p=.00$) and utilitarian appeal are significant ($b=-0.689$; $p=.005 < .05$), suggesting that both appeals similarly impact on perceived self efficacy when paired with a sustainable vs not sustainable material. It is possible to state that when paired with material, hedonic appeal, compared to utilitarian appeal, impacts on self efficacy with a higher magnitude. Particularly, when exposed to a non-sustainable (i.e. animal leather) material, self efficacy towards a prosocial behavior decreases more steeply if the appeal used is hedonic rather than utilitarian, while it

increases more sharply if the user is exposed to a sustainable material (i.e. mushroom leather) and a hedonic message, suggesting that hedonic appeals tend to be more effective.

Results from the mediation analysis performed show a significant positive effect of Self-Efficacy towards a prosocial behavior on respondents' WTR ($b=0.858$; $p=.000 < .05$). The analysis showed a completely significant moderated indirect effect through self-efficacy ($b= -1.009$; LCI = -1.88 ; UCI = -0.3821). In particular, results show that both the indirect effect of utilitarian ($b= -0.591$; LCI = -1.08 ; UCI = -0.20) and hedonic appeal are significant ($b= -1.601$; LCI = -2.50 ; UCI = -0.986), with a higher effect of hedonic appeals compared to utilitarian appeals. It can be stated that the use of hedonic appeal paired with sustainable material in a social media post from a luxury brand increases respondents' perceived efficacy towards prosocial behavior, which in turn increases their WTR. H3 is thus fully supported.

5. General Discussion

The study conducted in this research explored consumers' responses to different types of marketing stimuli in the context of luxury sustainability and social media. In particular, the object of this research was to investigate the role of product material (i.e. sustainable vs. non sustainable) and message appeal (i.e. hedonic vs utilitarian) in the context of brand social media publications on consumer's willingness to repost on their own social media profiles (i.e., WTR). The present research took into account the mediating effects of perceived efficacy and processing fluency (i.e., ease of comprehension of the message presented) on consumer's WTR, as well as the moderating effect of appeal on the two mediators.

The results obtained from the analyses suggest that the use of hedonic appeals significantly moderates the relationship between type of material shown and consumer's WTS, confirming that a communication centered on hedonic appeals elicits more positive reactions in consumers. Moreover, results show that the use of sustainable materials paired with hedonic appeals significantly increases consumer's processing fluency, which in turn increases their intention to repost on social media. The same findings are applicable to the joint effect of sustainable materials and hedonic message framing which significantly increases consumers' self efficacy towards a prosocial behavior, this in turn increases their WTR.

These findings contribute to the understanding of how product materials and message appeal influence consumers' reactions towards the stimulus presented. In particular, they highlight the importance of promoting sustainable luxury products with hedonic message appeals in the context of Social media marketing via owned channels, as this will significantly increase consumer's willingness to repost the message thereby increasing reach and consumer advocacy.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

Despite the phenomenon of Sustainability and Social Media in the luxury industry is assuming a remarkably high relevance in today's landscape, past research has neglected the relationship between these three areas. From this perspective, the present thesis bridges the existing research gap and provides useful insights for

marketing managers and professionals working in Luxury. In this sense, this research makes several contributions to marketing literature, especially to the branch focused on understanding consumer's responses to the use of sustainability in Luxury.

First, it contributes to the debate on the effect that using sustainable material in the Luxury industry has on consumers' perceptions, supporting the idea proposed by De Angelis et al. (2017) that Luxury brands can be "Gold and Green". Consumers' perception, partly expressed through their WTR on social media, are indeed more positive when the communication message on social media refers to sustainable products. One possible explanation for these results is the general rising awareness towards environmental issues (Pew Research Center, 2019), which leads consumers to a more sustainable consumption (Haller et al., 2020; BCG, 2020), even in these sectors that have been long lastingly seen as distant from sustainability.

Second, it sheds light in the under researched area of Sustainable Luxury and Social media Communication suggesting how a Luxury brand may increase consumers' engagement by enhancing consumers' WTR brand's communication on their own social media accounts. Particularly, the study clarifies the role of message appeals and consumers' cognitive reactions (i.e. processing fluency and self efficacy) in subsequent consumer's WTR.

Third, it contributes to previous research on the use of hedonic vs. utilitarian message appeals in luxury and on sustainability and offers a perspective on the unexplored interaction between hedonic vs. utilitarian appeals in the context of social media marketing in the luxury industry. Consistently with prior research by Amatulli et al. (2020) and Deb and Lomo David (2020) this thesis confirms the effectiveness of hedonic appeals in sustainable luxury communication adding the social media element to the analysis. Results from the main study demonstrate that hedonic appeals are effective in moderating the relationship between the material of products being shown on owned social media luxury channels (i.e. sustainable vs. non sustainable) and consumer's WTR.

Moreover, adding up to prior research in marketing and psychology, this thesis empirically demonstrates the positive moderating role of hedonic appeals between luxury product material and processing fluency of the message on the one hand and Self efficacy towards prosocial behavior.

Finally, in line with the author's predictions, the present research shows how both processing fluency and self efficacy act as positive mediators between material of products being shown and consumers' WTR, suggesting that social media communications which are easier to comprehend and which make recipients feel able to achieve positive results will lead social media users to more favorably repost them on their social media profiles, thereby increasing brand's post reach beyond the brand's capacity.

5.2 Managerial Implications

For companies it has become an imperative not only to be present on Social Media, but also to communicate their value proposition in the most effective way possible in order to successfully break through the advertising clutter. The luxury industry is not an exception and for luxury marketing managers it becomes of

pivotal importance to adopt a successful social media strategy, not only to increase positive sentiment from consumers, but also not to lose the image consumers have of them, nor their majestic positioning. Luxury brands have long lastingly maintained an “aura of mystery” (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009), even if being present on social media may reduce the perceived distance between the brand and the consumer, it may also generate in social media users hedonic desires of owning the products shown. A consumer seeing a luxury product on their social media *feed* or in between *stories* may perceive a feeling of need or want, a flaming desire to own the product and the simple fact they cannot have it will further enhance the luxury brands “superiority” against the consumer. A consumer sharing on their social media account a post from a luxury brand, besides demonstrating mostly positive feelings towards the brand, will also increase the post reach, possibly generating in others the same positive feelings. For luxury marketing managers it becomes thus of crucial importance to understand and own the drivers of consumers' willingness to repost on social media; this thesis aims at offering central insights to these professionals.

Parallely, sustainability is increasingly becoming a broadly discussed theme on every platform and consumers from all over the world are progressively becoming more aware of their ecological footprint and of their impact on environmental pollution (Pew Research Center, 2019) and many of them are willing to proactively change their consumption behavior to reduce their impact on the planet (Haller et al., 2020; BCG, 2020).

No industry is exempt from this discussion, even the Luxury one, which has been long lastingly seen as distant from this topic. Even if a part of past research suggests that luxury products may represent an exception to sustainable consumption, many studies confirm a positive attitude towards sustainable luxury products (Steinhard et al. 2013; Janssen et al., 2014; De Angelis et al., 2017; Amatulli et al., 2018; Amatulli et al., 2021). Consumers from the youngest generations are increasingly more interested in sustainability (Pencarelli et. al, 2020; Kulkarni and Lefebvre, 2018; BCG.com, 2021; Haller et al., 2020) and younger luxury consumers favor those brands that align with their beliefs and values of ethical consumption, truth and transparency (Caïs, 2021). Younger luxury consumers will show a more positive attitude to brands which not only preserve their luxuriousness, but also align with their ethical values. Drawing on these insights, this thesis, bridging the current research gap, studied how sustainability in luxury may lead to a more favorable attitude towards Luxury brands, expressed as consumer's willingness to share on social media. Particularly, consistently with findings from Amatulli et al. (2021), results from the main study suggest luxury brands should innovate their communication and leverage on the use of sustainable materials in the production of their goods, as this, paired with hedonic message appeals, elicits positive response in the audience through an increased message comprehension (i.e. processing fluency) and an higher self efficacy towards prosocial behavior. This suggests that marketers should not only insist on the use of sustainable products, but also, given the inherent hedonism of luxury products, insist on hedonic appeals to facilitate the comprehension of the message which leads to an increased engagement and advocacy on consumer's side. Moreover, consistently with previous study in prosocial behavior, this thesis suggests that making consumers perceive

their actions can make a change towards environmental protection (i.e. enhancing their self-efficacy) will increase their willingness to engage in that particular behavior.

In sum, this study offers important practical implications for Social Media Managers working in the luxury industry and aiming at adopting sustainability as a driver for their social media campaigns. We live in an increasingly social media savvy world, where our future depends on sustainable consumption and production; it becomes thus of pivotal importance for any industry to understand the relationship between Social Media and Sustainability and understand the drivers of consumers' reactions to Luxury Social Media communication. From this perspective, the present research represents a document of central importance as it not only demonstrates that sustainable luxury products presented with hedonic appeals tend to elicit more positive reactions in consumers, but also shows that when promoting a product on social media both clarity of the message and users' perception of effectiveness play a fundamental role in consumers' WTR brand's posts. Luxury Managers willing to increase positive sentiment towards their brands and consumers' reshares via social media should thus (1) Leverage sustainability by posting about products produced with sustainable materials pairing the image with hedonic message appeals in order not to detach from the essence of luxury, its hedonism; (2) Express the message as clearly as possible, particularly by pairing sustainable products with hedonic appeals, as increased processing fluency is demonstrated to increase consumers' WTR and finally (3) engage consumers by making them perceive their efforts in buying or sharing the product will have a positive impact on the environment, as self efficacy towards prosocial behavior after being exposed to a sustainable product significantly increases users' WTR.

Limitations and Future Research

This thesis presents some limitations which can be a source of inspiration for future research.

First, it has to be noted that the study was conducted on a relatively small sample and that participants did not pertain to a single age group nor to a specific income category, thus results might be subject to change when modifying the sample. Future research may replicate this study on a broader sample or focusing on a specific age group or on a specific income level consumers.

Second, the study did not focus on a specific social media while it may be interesting to understand the difference in consumers responses across different social platforms.

Third, the stimulus presented consisted in a static image, given the latest trends in Social Media which see short videos as the protagonist of consumers' feeds, it may be interesting to test whether results of the study are different when the promotion of products via owned Social Media Channels is posted in the form of short video depicting the product.

Finally, the image proposed represents a plain, non-branded computer bag, future research might replicate this study using a different kind of product and investigate the role of branding or brand attitudes in consumers' reactions.