

LUISS



Department of Management

Chair of Brand Management

Luxury and Beauty: The Impact of Aesthetics and Design on the Perception and Positioning of Luxury Fashion Brands.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of luxury manages to evoke images of splendor, exclusivity and sophistication; it is a very complex concept that has evolved over the years as society has evolved while still managing to keep its values and hallmarks intact. In fact, over the years luxury has undergone a major metamorphosis, moving from being a symbol of status symbol and exclusivity to a much more fluid phenomenon that is less tied to past values, to the point that today we speak of "new luxury." This thesis goes on to explore this evolution, the trends and events that have been its driving force, such as globalization and the more recent Covid-19 phenomenon, with a specific focus on the luxury fashion industry, which, as evidenced by recent studies represents the most profitable sector. A field that is as complex as it is simple, elegant and timeless. A field in which aesthetics, brand identity and innovation come together to create products that transcend pure materiality, appeal to a global and diverse audience, and whose values manage to be passed down from generation to generation.

The goal of this thesis is to, after a careful general analysis of the luxury industry that helps to understand the phenomenon that has been created over the years, deepen and study the dynamics of the luxury fashion industry through an analysis of values, strategies, and above all, delve into the fundamental role of aesthetics and how its meaning has evolved, through both empirical and field research.

Specifically, this thesis consists of three chapters.

The first chapter will explore the definition of luxury, analyzing its transition from, an exclusive and elitist concept to an increasingly accessible phenomenon with fewer barriers. It will then go on to analyze the new trends that have emerged and how they have led from these to an ever-increasing democratization of luxury that goes to reflect the desires and aspirations of an ever-widening public. Finally, statistical data will be reported that will corroborate the research and claims reported.

In the second chapter we will go into more specifics; in fact, we will proceed with an in-depth analysis of the luxury fashion industry, examining what makes it different from other industries in the sector and examining how brands have been able to respond to the needs of consumers, needs that are constantly evolving. Next, the various marketing and branding strategies implemented by different brands in the industry in order to "survive" and stay ahead of the times will be analyzed. It will then also be analyzed how the increasing attention and importance of trends such as globalization and sustainability are reshaping the needs and expectations of global consumers, especially the younger

generation. This chapter will subsequently also go on to explore the importance of positioning in an industry such as fashion and the strategies implemented by various brands over time in order to keep their image high. Finally, the role of aesthetics, visual aesthetics, and how it is crucial in order to ensure a unique shopping experience that succeeds in increasing desire and engagement in consumers, will then be examined. The various elements that compose it will be analyzed including the importance of design, consistency between design and brand image. All the way to examining the new trend that is taking hold in this industry, which runs counter to what it has been until now: the rise of "ugly luxury," a phenomenon through which consumers voluntarily choose to forgo aesthetics in order to choose garments that allow them to differentiate themselves.

Finally, in the third and final chapter, a research analysis will be carried out in order to deepen the concepts elaborated and described in the first two chapters, going in search of empirical evidence that can corroborate or deny the theses discussed so far. Once the research design and objectives have been established and described, qualitative analyses will be carried out on a sample of people; appropriate conclusions will then be drawn based on the data collected.

In conclusion then, this thesis sets out to offer an in-depth analysis of luxury starting from the past, moving through the present and finally trying, through the research work, to analyze the future, trying to understand both the future strategies that luxury brands can adopt in order to survive in an ever-changing environment and the visions of consumers.

CHAPTER 1: Discovering a timeless business: the luxury sector

1.1 Definition of luxury

The concept of luxury is very broad, varied, and complex because it is sensitive to the various changes that occur at the cultural and temporal levels, so much so that even today, despite numerous efforts by researchers, it is difficult to find a globally agreed definition.

Its origins can be traced back to the days of ancient Rome when a real culture of luxury first began to form.

Over the years, this concept has undergone numerous changes, changes that have gradually reflected the evolution of society.

In fact, we have gone from perceiving luxury exclusively as an element of status symbol, of differentiation between social classes to recent days in which this idea still in a certain way survives in society, but it is much weaker because with the advent of mass production (following the industrial revolution) first and then globalization, luxury goods, services begin to become more accessible, the needs of consumers change and so their way of perceiving luxury changes.

We can say that to this day luxury is something that goes beyond simply owning expensive goods, characterized by high prices, high quality, it is something that allows to create unique experiences, that goes to satisfy needs and desires and, often these desires are never cheap.

Specifically, according to Dubois *et al.* (2001) six factors define and structure the concept of luxury:

- (1) excellent quality;
- (2) high price;
- (3) scarcity and uniqueness;
- (4) aesthetics and polysensuality;
- (5) ancestral heritage and personal history;
- (6) superfluity (Dubois, Laurent, & Czellar, 2001).

Each of these characteristics contributes to the perception and value of luxury in contemporary society. Analyzing them in detail:

- (1) **Excellent quality:** it is the distinctive sign of every luxury product. This is not just a matter of fine materials, but is the result of meticulous craftsmanship, attention to detail, and a constant search for perfection, typical of the luxury industry. This extraordinary

attention to quality not only meets the high expectations of consumers but also goes beyond, offering them a unique and inimitable experience.

Luxury products promise superior durability, ensuring that investing in these goods is not just a mere whim, but a long-term value choice.

The effect of country of origin plays a crucial role in the perceived quality of these products. This phenomenon is based on the idea that the geographic origin of an item significantly influences consumers' opinion of its quality, perceived value, and desire to own it. In fact, some countries are seen as guaranteeing higher quality, tradition and heritage than others and positively influencing consumers' perceptions and, consequently, their purchasing decisions, such as Italy (Made in Italy). The association between country of origin and product quality highlights the key role that the place where a good is produced, designed, and/or marketed plays in the luxury sector and highlights how these two characteristics are directly proportional to each other.

- (2) **High price:** it is another key feature of luxury products, representing a concept that goes beyond the simple idea of cost. In the context of luxury, price takes on a symbolic role, becoming an emblem of exclusivity and social status. The high price of a luxury product not only reflects material value or the cost of production, but also helps to create an aura of exclusivity and desirability around the good itself.

This perception is cultivated by luxury brands, which use price as a tool to distinguish their products from mass-produced ones.

A high price suggests not only superior quality and exceptional craftsmanship, but also signals to the consumer that the purchase of such a product is a unique experience reserved for a small number of individuals. As a result, the high price becomes an integral part of the luxury product's identity, reinforcing its positioning in the highest market segment and fueling consumers' desire to belong to an exclusive elite circle.

In this regard, the economist Thorstein Veblen introduced the idea of "Veblen goods." According to Veblen, unlike ordinary goods, for which demand decreases as price increases, luxury goods (or Veblen's goods) follow an opposite logic: their demand increases precisely in response to the increase in price.

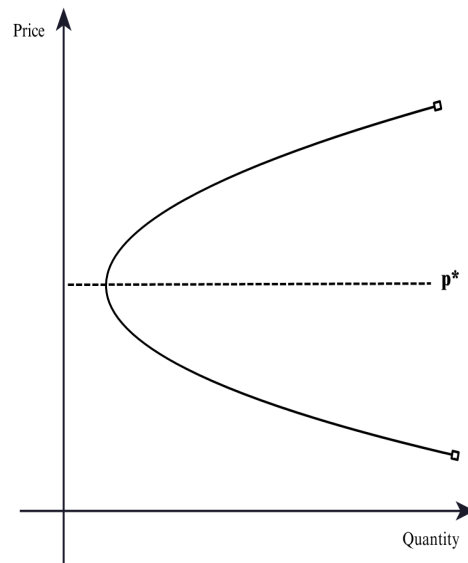


Figure 1: *Veblen's inverted cost curve*

As shown in Figure 1 up to a certain price level (p^*) the good behaves like a normal good, whose demand decreases as the price increases. After a certain point, instead of continuing to fall, it starts to rise. This indicates that, above a certain price level (p^*), the increase in price leads to an increase in the quantity demanded.

The part of the curve that goes up represents the atypical behavior of consumers of luxury goods: the higher the price rises, the more the product is desired, as the high price is perceived as a symbol of exclusivity and status.

(3) **Scarcity and rarity:** Unlike mass products, which are produced in large quantities to meet widespread demand, luxury goods are often produced in limited numbers. This limitation is not arbitrary, but is used to reinforce the exclusive and perceived value of these items. By ensuring that only a few people can own a particular luxury item and brands are able to create a sense of privileged ownership among their customers.

Rarity further distinguishes luxury goods through their unique characteristics. These can range from exceptional craftsmanship to the use of rare materials, or even a special story behind the item (such as being part of a limited edition or the design of a famous artist). Such characteristics make each luxury product stand out as a unique piece of art and

engineering, making it highly desirable to those who seek items that are not just possessions but symbols of status and personal taste.

An example that fully describes this characteristic is Hermès and its "birkin" bags. Being able to purchase such a bag is not as easy as one might think, in fact there are very long waiting lists, even in recent years waiting lists have been created to put oneself on the main waiting list.

The reason lies first in the fact that these bags are handcrafted by artisans who take 18 to 48 hours to process, and then because using such a strategy allows the brand to position itself in the minds of consumers as an object of desire, passed down from generation to generation.

Another example is Ferrari, which builds a limited number of cars each year, usually less than market demand, precisely to maintain the desirability and uniqueness of its products.

- (4) **Aesthetics and polysensuality:** constitute a crucial aspect of the luxury experience, elevating products from mere objects of use to objects of art and desire.

The appeal of luxury goods lies not only in their utility or in the status they confer, but also in the beauty and sensory pleasure they offer. This dimension of luxury involves multiple senses, creating a multisensory experience that strengthens the emotional bond between the consumer and the product.

Together, aesthetics and polysensuality form a powerful combination that defines the luxury experience. They contribute to the creation of products that are not just possessions, but symbols of beauty, craftsmanship, and rich history, making them desirable objects that offer an emotional and sensory experience unmatched by ordinary goods, in fact as argued by Amatulli *et al.* (2017) outside the luxury market, it is difficult to find characteristics such as quality, craftsmanship and true aesthetic beauty in a single product.

- (5) **Superfluity:** It is essential to understand the appeal of luxury products, which can offer something beyond the ordinary.

Indeed, luxury goods, by their very nature, offer added value beyond mere utility. For example, driving a luxury car is often linked to the pleasure derived from its performance, the status it conveys, and the desire inherent in it rather than the mere transport function of a car. This aspect of luxury goods is particularly powerful because it connects with consumers on a deep emotional level, making the purchase of these items a highly personal and often meaningful experience.

In addition, the superfluous nature of luxury goods can also serve as a form of social signaling: the possession or use of these items communicates wealth, status, or membership in a particular social group.

Therefore, for a good to be recognized as luxury, these characteristics must be recognized and perceived by consumers.

In this regard Ko, *et al.* (2019) conducted a literature review which revealed new characteristics that have a strong impact on consumer perception. These new findings go even further to highlight the dynamic nature of luxury, consumer desires and perceptions, and the market. In fact based on what the researchers have highlighted luxury is a concept that goes beyond mere search and the mere association of high quality or high price. In this regard can be found:

- (1) be of high quality;
- (2) offer authentic value through desired benefits, whether functional or emotional;
- (3) have a prestigious image within the market, built on qualities such as craftsmanship, craftsmanship or quality in service;
- (4) be worthy of charging a premium price;
- (5) be able to inspire a deep connection, or resonance, with the consumer (Ko *et al.*, 2019).

Once we have defined all the various characteristics by which a brand or product is defined as luxury, it is important to go and examine how the luxury goods market is characterized. In this regard, from research conducted by Statista (2023), the luxury goods market is characterized by 5 sub-segments:

Luxury Goods market consists of five sub-segments

Overview: Market segmentation

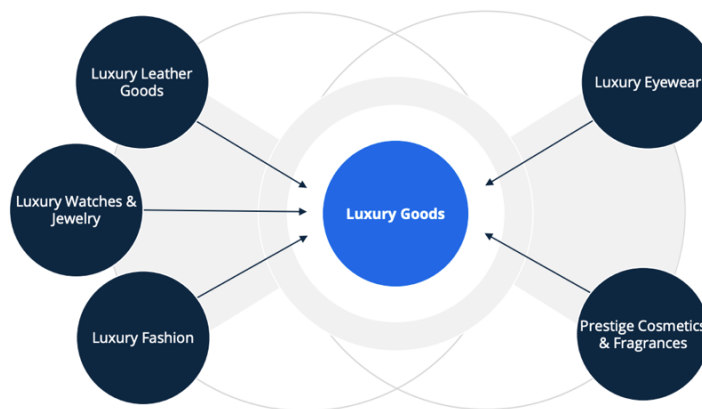


Figure 2: Luxury Goods: market data & analysis: market data & analysis

Source: (Statista Market Insights 2023)¹

Besides these 5 subcategories, it is possible to identify others such as: luxury cars, luxury hospitals, luxury experiences, luxury food and wine, and luxury furniture.

To identify the position of the following elements, we can use the luxury pyramid first identified by Danielle Allères in 1997.

As shown in *Figure 3*, the researcher identified 3 levels of luxury.

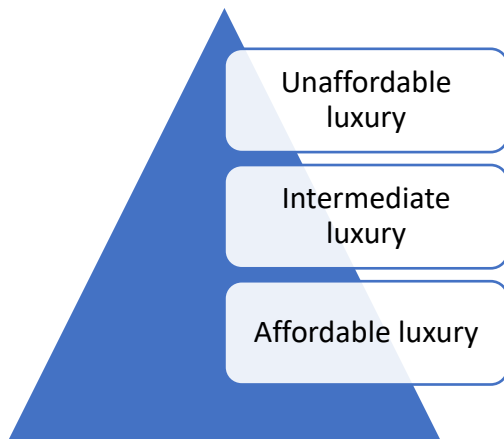


Figure 3: Luxury pyramid,

Source: Allères (1997)

- **Unaffordable luxury:** it includes goods that are the ultimate example of luxury, products are in most cases custom-made and produced in limited quantities. They are characterized by the highest quality, craftsmanship, all giving an uncompromising shopping experience. They are accessible exclusively to those who belong to a very high social class, often also referred to as High Net Worth Individuals. Examples of this category are brands such as Rolex, Cartier, or Patek Philippe.
- **Intermediate luxury:** it includes goods that, as before, are characterized by high quality and prestige, but unlike the previous level they are more affordable but at the same time the prices

¹ <https://www.statista.com/study/55494/luxury-goods-market-data-analysis/>

are still high. They are mass produced to best suit customers' needs and selectively distributed. An example of a brand included in this category might be Prada, Gucci, or Louis Vuitton.

- **Affordable luxury:** can also be called *masstige* (from the union of two words: Mass + Prestige), includes goods that are able to provide a luxury experience to a wider segment of consumers. They represent how consumers can enter the world of luxury and begin to build status. They are aimed at upper-middle class consumers, in which communication and advertising plays a key role. An example of this category are brands such as Marc Jacobs or Coach.

Since the 1990s, there has been a steady and remarkable growth in the number of people buying luxury products. The exclusive luxury sector has held steady over time, but in parallel there has been significant expansion in the more accessible and desirable luxury sectors.

As the variety of products available and the number of consumers have increased, the quest for exclusivity and uniqueness has resulted in an artificial segmentation of the market as noted by Silverstein *et al.* (2003). This segmentation has intensified the competition to attract the average consumers, changing the structure of the luxury pyramid over the past two decades to the point that the top has become narrower and sharper, while the bases of the pyramid, representing mid-level and affordable luxury, have expanded (Silverstein & Fiske, *Trading up: The new American luxury.* , 2003).

1.2 The main trend

As mentioned earlier, luxury is an extremely sensitive industry that changes and adapts according to changes in culture, time, and tradition. In particular, in recent times we can identify a large number of new trends that are influencing and changing this market.

First of all, it can be said that the biggest change in the luxury sector began with **globalization**, which can be defined as "the continuous process of increasing interconnection between cross-border actors, driven by flows of people, ideas, goods and capital." Globalization reduces the relevance of national borders and stimulates the emergence of complex networks that foster the exchange and integration of technologies, economies, governance, communities and culture (Cassimon *et al.*, 2018)".

It has created a world without barriers, an interconnected world, and in some ways, we can say that it has changed the way consumers live, act, and even their wealth. Today we can talk about a globalization of luxury that has created a new way of perceiving and experiencing luxury, in particular

we can talk about the "new luxury". As outlined by Silverstein *et al.*,(2003).In contrast to the traditional defining characteristics of luxury, the new luxury implies that it is no longer overly exclusive or unique, nor is it any longer unobtainable or inaccessible (Silverstein & Fiske, Trading up Penguin Group Portfolio, 2005).

Indeed, there has been a growing appreciation of global luxury brands (e.g., Louis Vuitton and Gucci) by consumers in Asia, BRICs², CIVETS³, and other developing countries (Kapferer, 2012). So the actual luxury customer base is more and more diversified and this create challenge for the different luxury brand that have to satisfy new needs.

In fact, today it is easy to see that luxury products are more accessible to a wider set of consumers, as Cesare Amatulli *et al.* (2017) stated in their paper "Sustainable Luxury Brands" if in the past products such as Chanel perfume number 5 were accessible only to a limited number of people today an increasing number of people routinely can buy premium fragrances.

These changes have been influenced by another major phenomenon: the **advent of the Internet**, which has made luxury products more accessible both in terms of information and purchasing options, thanks to the advent of social media or the creation of apps such as *Scalapay* that allow consumers to purchase products and pay for them monthly or the advent of apps such as *Vestiarie Collective* that allow consumers to purchase secondhand or vintage luxury products.

These trends have also changed the meaning of luxury; in fact, previously luxury consisted of being, sharing and spending money (Cristini H. e., 2017). It also meant visibility, where luxury inherently, as an iconic sign, conveyed status, wealth, and power of its user and owner (Cristini H. *et al.*, 2017). Today things are quite different, because the main purpose of luxury goods is to satisfy customers' dream and expectations.

Both the advent of globalization and the advent of the Internet have led to the emergence of a new market for luxury products, although there are some common and traditional characteristics that consumers look for in luxury brands (Seo *et al.*, 2015). In particular new emerging markets show different luxury consumption styles from more established markets (Shukla, 2012). This happen because, as the researchers noted, from cultural context to cultural context there can be different meanings behind the purchase of the same luxury goods, and even the perception of what is luxury and what is ordinary can vary (Amatulli C. *et al.*, 2017). This is an important trend that luxury brands must first understand and then address.

² the acronym identifies five countries: Brazil, Russia, India and China. Recently five more countries have been added: South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates

³ the acronym identifies four countries: Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, and Turkey.

Research conducted by *Statista* (2023) on 6 different markets (the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, France and China) highlighted these issues, showing the different attitudes of consumers from different cultural backgrounds toward luxury products.

Attitudes towards luxury products

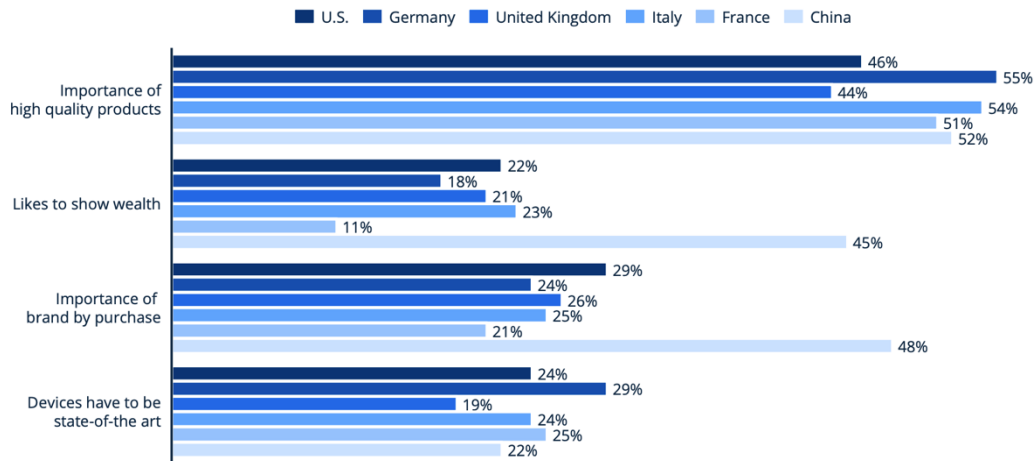


Figure 4: Luxury goods: market data & data analysis

Source: (Statista Market Insights 2023)

It is easy to see that while American and European luxury consumers associate luxury primarily with quality and style, Chinese consumers place a higher value on exclusivity and extravagance than their American and European counterparts (Statista, 2023).

On this basis, it's possible to talk about a **democratization** of luxury, because luxury brands have broadened their customer base, which now includes people with modest incomes. This phenomenon has a double face, because on the one hand it has been caused by the increase in disposable income among less affluent consumers and on the other hand by the emergence of new luxury brands that offer high-quality products at more affordable prices, making luxury accessible to a wider range of consumers. Therefore, the consumption of luxury brands is not only culturally diverse, but also ranges across different social segments. (Seo *et.al*, 12 Jan 2015).

In particular, three social categories of luxury consumers can be distinguished:

- 1) In the highest position we can find the High-Net-Worth Individuals (HNWI), so people with investible assets of more \$1 million (including residential property), who usually buy luxury and exclusive products (Statista, 2023). They represent a very important sector for the growth

of the luxury industry, and according to research conducted by Statista (2023), the number of HNWIs is growing year by year;

- 2) In the intermediate position we find the regular luxury customer, who very often buys luxury products (not as HNWI), and who has investible assets exceeding \$100,000;
- 3) And finally, there are the luxury "nibblers," consumers who do not have very high investible assets, usually young people who do not have a lot of money but whose income is expected to grow, who buy luxury products rarely (Chadha, 2006).

Another trend that has made a significant change in this area is **COVID-19**, some researchers have noted how the pandemic has altered consumers' daily and shopping habits and changed the way consumers perceive luxury. In particular, amid the pandemic, increased environmental, ethical and social awareness has been observed among luxury consumers. (Sharma, 2022) (D'Arpizio C. F., 2021) (Kumar, 20 Jan 2023,).

This new way of thinking about luxury includes ideas such as thoughtful and meaningful consumption, self-care, empathy for others, making luxury more accessible, and sharing knowledge about luxury goods. Luxury thus becomes an important tool for contributing to the well-being of society and giving meaning to the lives of others. In addition, the pandemic forced consumers to stay at home and, as a result, to revise their shopping experiences, so the Internet and virtual spaces became the new meeting and reference points for millions of consumers, so during the pandemic (and still today), the use of "phygital"⁴ experiences became essential for the well-being and social connectedness of luxury consumers. This means that through technology, such as virtual interactions with friends and colleagues, people can still maintain meaningful social connections and find emotional support. Finally, another trend that emerged during the pandemic and that luxury brands should not underestimate is the growing trend of consumers toward more sensible and experience-based consumption rather than simply buying goods; this further highlights the notion that somehow the concept and idea of ownership is being lost.

In fact, luxury consumers are increasingly opting to reuse and resell luxury goods, as well as purchase luxury goods second-hand or even rent luxury goods only for special situations.

As consumers are more community-oriented and more conscious, they expect luxury brands to help them transform and reduce the guilt of unnecessary and unwanted purchase of luxury goods and, consequently, the waste of resources. Therefore, they expect luxury brands to adopt

⁴ Refers to an approach that combines physical and digital experiences to create an integrated and engaging experience for users.

transformative business approaches (e.g., related to sustainability and phygital) and serve as revolutionary opinion leaders on contemporary luxury consumption issues that can transform their lives (Kumar, 20 Jan 2023,).

Considering the advent and introduction of several new technologies that have radically changed the way we live, it would be impossible today not to consider the impact they are having, one of the main examples being **AI**. Although the luxury industry has been from the beginning of this phenomenon somewhat reluctant to incorporate these new changes into its business, today it is becoming impossible not to adopt these new trends, because if you want to maintain a competitive position in the market you need to adapt and begin to understand them. This is why the luxury products industry is undergoing a paradigm shift, with significant changes impacting both the supply and demand sides (Xu,*et al.*, 2021)⁵. On the supply side, more and more companies have begun to use AI for both the design and production phases, but they have also begun to use tools such as Chatbots (powered by AI) to provide efficient service and a complete experience to consumers.

From the demand side, as written earlier consumers want to buy an experience rather than just a product, the use of AI tools such as AR and Chatbots could create new and unique experiences and could in a way strengthen the relationship between consumers and the company. At the same time, it is important to say that the main essence of luxury brands is based on their emotional value, so the use of AI as a source of design creates the perception that the brand is losing its essence, negatively affecting brand attitude and purchase (Xu, *et al.*, 2021).

In this sense, luxury brands need to strike a good balance between the past roots on which their value is based and the new roots that are emerging.

Finally, a final trend that is affecting the luxury industry is **the growing importance of sustainability**, although the concept of luxury and sustainability has been seen as a separate concept for years, because luxury has always been associated with excellence, high quality, sophistication and opulence, while sustainability is synonymous with moderate or responsible consumption of our resources to ensure that our future generation is able to meet their needs on Earth (Lo, *et al.*, 13 may 2018). In recent times, these two concepts have been coming closer and closer together, on the one hand because of increasing consumer attention to the practices that companies use to design, produce, and market their products, and on the other because of luxury

⁵ Xu, L., Mehta, R. Technology devalues luxury? Exploring consumer responses to AI-designed luxury products. *J. of the Acad. Mark. Sci.* 50, 1135–1152 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-022-00854-x>

brands promote an approach to production and consumption that might be considered sustainable by definition (Amatulli C. *et al.*, 2017). In fact, one of the main characteristics of luxury brands are: durability and timelessness. Perfect examples of this are brands such as Rolex, Chanel, and Ferrari, whose products are passed down from generation to generation and maintain a very high value (both emotional and market), because the main purpose of these brands is to design collections not only for today, but with the goal of being timeless in the future (Ortelli, 2023). Research conducted by Statista (2023) on consumers across different countries (U.S, Germany, UK, Italy, France and China) has shown that the characteristic of sustainability is one of the key element during the decision making stage (*Figure 5*).

Premium/luxury products have to be sustainable

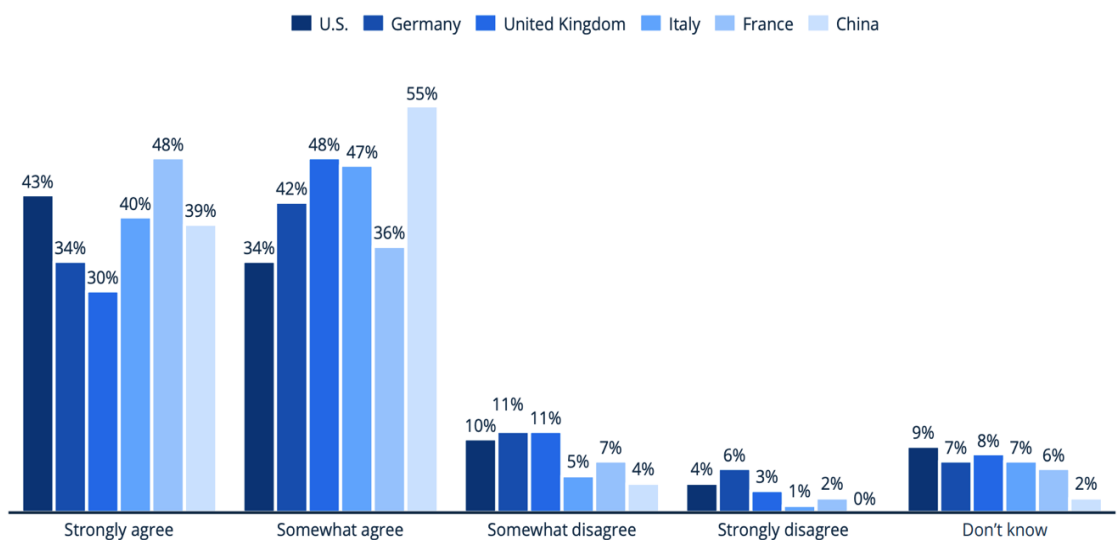


Figure 5: Luxury Goods: market data & analysis

Source: (Statista, 2023)

1.3 The new dimensions of luxury

As mentioned earlier today we are witnessing a transformation of the luxury industry, the various trends enunciated above have led today to what is considered a democratization of luxury.

Therefore, speak of traditional luxury is no longer suitable with the characteristics of today's society, so as mentioned above a new concept has emerged defined as the "new luxury".

According to Atkinson, *et al.* (25 Mar 2022) it is an object or experience that is not centered around conspicuousness but provides consumers with freedom and meaning as intrinsic experiential values and enrichment and well-being in the form of both personal fulfillment and sustainability at the societal level on those consumers' own terms (Atkinson *et al.*, 25 Mar 2022).

Starting from this concept, the luxury industry, and with it, its brands are embarking internally on a transformation in order to adapt to an increasingly complex landscape characterized by changing and increasingly specific needs, which is why it is possible to identify new dimensions of luxury today: Experiential, Sustainable, Digital and Shared.

Experiential Luxury: this concept is rooted in the definition of "Experiential Marketing" first formulated by Pine II *et al* (1998). within their work on the economics of experience, according to which experiential marketing consists of taking the essence of a product and amplifying it into a set of tangibles, physical and interactive experiences that reinforce the offering.

This new approach has fundamentally changed the perspective of the luxury industry. Rather than focusing exclusively on the exchange of high-value material goods, the focus has shifted to creating engaging and meaningful experiences for consumers. This means that luxury brands no longer simply sell products but strive to offer unforgettable moments that go beyond simply owning luxury items. In other words, the focus is now on creating an emotional connection with consumers, making luxury experiences more personal, authentic, and relevant to their lives. Brands in this perspective have had to adapt, abandoning their old strategies (based on finding rare products and ingredients) and adopting strategies defined as "abundant rarity," this has consequently brought a shift in focus, from production to creating experiences (Kapferer *et al.*, 18 Apr 2016).

According to Pine *et al.* (1998), there exist 4 types of experiences:

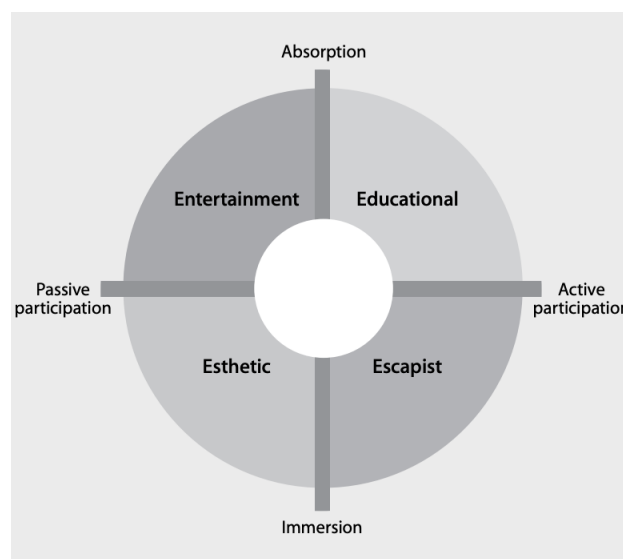


Figure 6: The Four Realms Of an Experience

Source: (Pine II et al., 1998)⁶

- **Entertainment experience:** these are characterized by consumers' participation in leisure and entertainment activities. They may include theatrical performances, musical concerts, the goal is to provide consumers with moments of distraction and entertainment.
- **Educational experiences:** aim to provide consumers with new knowledge, skills or perspectives. They may include museum visits, workshops, training courses, and cooking class and culinary tour. The goal is to stimulate participants' learning and personal growth, providing them with new opportunities for development and enrichment.
- **Aesthetic experiences:** engage the senses and focus on the appreciation of beauty, art and creativity. They may include visits to art galleries, dance performances; the goal is to elicit positive emotions in consumers through visual, auditory, and sensory stimuli.
- **Existential experiences:** relate to a sense of belonging, meaning and connection to something greater than oneself. They may include spiritual journeys, meditation retreats, cultural events, and rituals. The goal is to offer consumers a sense of inner depth and satisfaction, helping them find meaning and purpose in their lives.

According to a global market research conducted by Osservatorio Altagamma in 2023 consumer spending on experiences is back to an all-time high, driven by an upswing in social interactions and travel, the luxury market in 2023 reached 1.5 billion euros, a growth of 8-10% from 2022 (Altagamma, 2023).

As data also show in the post-modern world in which consumers find themselves living, the search for experiences has become a priority for an increasing number of consumers, especially since the advent of Covid-19 that has forced the global population to have to do without their social life and routines. Thanks in part to new technologies, experiential luxury has become a lifeline for many, offering a chance to escape the monotony of routine and social distancing through engaging and rewarding experiences.

⁶ <https://enlillebid.dk/mmd/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Welcome-to-the-Experience-Economy-Pine-and-Gilmore.pdf>

Thus, experiential luxury is associated with positive emotions such as joy, excitement, escape from routine, gratification and success as having the opportunity to participate in certain experiences is an expression of a specific social status.

Sustainable Luxury: it unites two concepts that until not long ago were regarded as distant and opposite, the one of luxury and the one of sustainability. Numerous studies have been conducted on this subject, from these it has emerged how these two concepts present increasingly common characteristics, which in some ways intersect with each other as *Figure 7* shows.

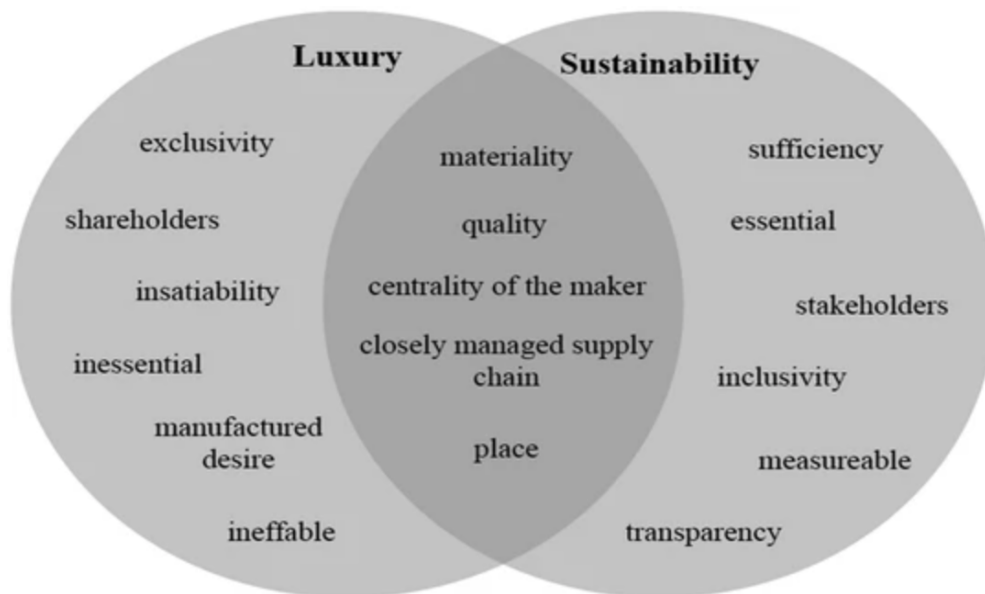


Figure 7: Intersecting discursive domains of luxury and sustainability.

Source: (Jones & Jones, 2018)

The focus today on this concept is increasing, as consumers are becoming more informed and attentive to what they are buying, and especially in recent years have shown greater sensitivity and attention for the collectivity, thus directing their actions in a way that can bring social benefits.

Has emerged how these behaviors are more evident among luxury consumers, who expect greater effort and attention from brands, to the point that it has been shown how consumers may feel more guilt when they discover that a luxury product they purchase is unsustainable than a mass market product. This effect stems precisely from their higher expectations about the sustainability of luxury products (Amatulli C. e., 2020).

In this regard, Moscardo *et al.* (2010) stated that sustainable luxury is "scarce, experiential, authentic, and reflects the consumer's desire to have a quality experience for the benefit of others", from this

definition, we can observe a transformation in the way luxury is perceived. Historically, luxury has been associated with social status and the establishment of a self-image through the purchase of prestige goods. However, increasing attention and interest in sustainable products has led to a shift in perspective. Today, the purchase of sustainable goods not only provides personal gratification, but also helps to forge a positive image of the individual within the community. Numerous studies have shown that people are increasingly likely to adopt sustainable consumption behaviors to enhance their social reputation and to demonstrate a commitment to environmental and social responsibility (V.Griskevicius *et al.*, 2010).

Finally, a study conducted by Amatulli, et al. (2021) highlighted another very important aspect of sustainable luxury, this one concerns the fact that consumers are more willing to purchase sustainable luxury products when that product is promoted as sustainable rather than simply excellent, this is the consequence of what the researchers above refer to as "Atypicality in Sustainable Luxury," consumers perceive sustainability-focused communication as more atypical for a luxury product, with perceived atypicality triggering feelings of uniqueness (Amatulli C. *et al.*, 2021).

Digital luxury: the advent of new technologies has radically revolutionized the shopping experience landscape, offering consumers a wide range of options and services available at the click of a button. With the explosion of the Internet, e-commerce, and social media, consumers now have the ability to fulfill their luxury desires quickly and conveniently, without having to deal with the restrictions of store hours or geographic limitations. Today, shopping experiences are increasingly digital, and consumers have become adept at interacting with brands through a multiplicity of channels, both physical and online. This new paradigm, known as omnichannel reality, requires brands to adapt and deliver consistent and engaging experiences across all channels of contact.

However, luxury brands were initially reluctant to fully embrace these new technologies. Many brands, such as Chanel until the recent 2020s, had resisted the creation of e-commerce platforms or social media pages, fearing that this would compromise their exclusivity and prestige. This reluctance reflects the unique nature of luxury brands, which often rely on exclusivity, craftsmanship, and the physical shopping experience to differentiate themselves from the ordinary goods in the market.

Whenever consumers purchase a luxury good they are sending clear signals of their status, the fear of brands toward an openness to new technologies was that, these signals lose their meaning if a luxury good becomes widely available (Kapferer *et al.*, 2012). Because what characterizes luxury brands is exclusivity, limited access, instead the internet is marked by opposite characteristics such as unlimited access and democracy, in this sense that therefore luxury brands must juggle to find the

right balance in order to stay in step with the times and meet the new needs of consumers. So they can and should use the Internet to create a sense of desirability through engaging content and maintain their exclusivity through selective distribution of their products. In this way, luxury brands can attract new customers and maintain their exclusivity status while offering selective online services to their loyal customers (Hennigs N *et al.*, 2012).

To date, luxury brands have begun to move away from their initial wariness and are increasingly embracing these new technologies, going to take advantage of the benefits they can offer.

For example, more and more brands are integrating virtual assistants into their online stores that can make the customer feel accompanied throughout the purchase process. Interacting with a chatbot can be uncomfortable for customers who prefer the warmth of human interaction. To alleviate these concerns, luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton, Burberry, Tommy Hilfiger, Dior, and Estée Lauder offer virtual consultants as a first point of contact to meet simpler needs, and then there are living consultants are reserved for more complex needs, since human interaction is itself a luxury good (Joy, Annamma, *et al.*, 2022). This can be seen as a prime example of how luxury brands are creating the right balance between exclusivity and the ability to keep up with the times, attracting a wider range of customers.

However, not only the use of chatbots, but the industry is also adopting other technologies such as AR to recreate the physical shopping experience in the online shop, influencer marketing, the use of CGI to evoke strong emotions and recreate an immersive experience early on in the customer journey. So these practices show that the key dimensions of luxury brand value are a useful basis for developing complementary offline and online strategies that create a true luxury experience (Hennigs N. *et al.*, 2012).

Shared Luxury: around the 2000s with the rise of internet platforms that facilitated the sharing of resources, such as Airbnb for housing and Uber for transportation the term "sharing economy" (SE) became increasingly common usage. It is an economic model based on the sharing of goods, services, data and skills through a community of users, often facilitated by online platforms or digital technologies. This model allows people to access resources without necessarily owning them, promoting their more efficient and sustainable use.

Accordingly to George Christodoulides, *et al.* (2021) This has inevitably led to new forms of consumption, and specifically new patterns of luxury consumption as shown in *Figure 8*.

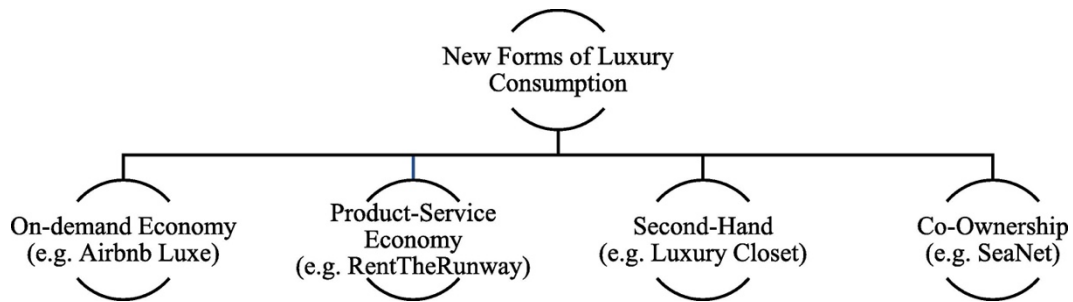


Figure 8: : Examples of new forms of luxury consumption

Source: (Christodoulides *et al.*, 2021)

Specifically:

- **on-demand economy:** provides temporary access to third-party tangible or intangible resources without transfer of ownership (Lawson, 2016);
- **product-service economy:** is based on the idea that consumers rent goods directly from companies, which retain ownership of them;
- **second-hand consumption:** goods pass directly from one consumer to another, providing permanent, rather than temporary, access to these goods;
- **co-ownership:** occurs when multiple consumers share ownership of a good, differing from secondhand consumption in that it offers shared, permanent access to the good in question.

According then to research published by Bain & Company in 2019 by D'Arpizio *et al.*, the shared luxury market has experienced significant growth, demonstrating a growing appetite for alternative consumption models that allow users to access luxury goods without necessarily owning them. This trend is supported by factors such as the growing importance of sustainable practices, the desire for authentic and personalized luxury experiences, rather than the mere accumulation of material objects and the dematerialization of the concept of ownership (D'Arpizio *et al.*, 2019).

The increased focus on shared luxury practices, however, does not exclude that there are still situations where luxury is experienced in a more private and exclusive way, where elements such as privacy and uniqueness of experience are present.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that digitization has played a key role in this context, facilitating the sharing of luxury experiences through online platforms that offer subscription, rental or exchange services for high-quality goods. Digital services make it possible to personalize the consumer experience, meeting the needs of an increasingly demanding public seeking solutions that combine exclusivity with flexibility and sustainability.

These new dimensions are indicative of a profound transformation in the luxury industry as companies and consumers move toward more sustainable, digital and experience-oriented practices. This evolution represents not only a response to changing consumer needs but also an opportunity for luxury brands to innovate and extend their influence.

1.4 Inside the luxury market

The luxury market has experienced rapid growth in recent years, especially the most surprising fact is that this market has fully recovered after the long and severe global crisis due to Covid-19.

In particular the luxury goods market ended 2023 with sales of \$354.80 billion; these results are expected to increase annually by 3.38% (Statista, 2023).

Figure 9 clearly shows how from 2018 until 2028 this market has experienced strong growth, consider that it is expected to reach US\$418.93 billion in 2028 (Statista, 2023).

Worldwide Luxury Goods revenue will reach US\$418.93 billion by 2028

Market size: Worldwide (1/3)

Revenue in billion US\$

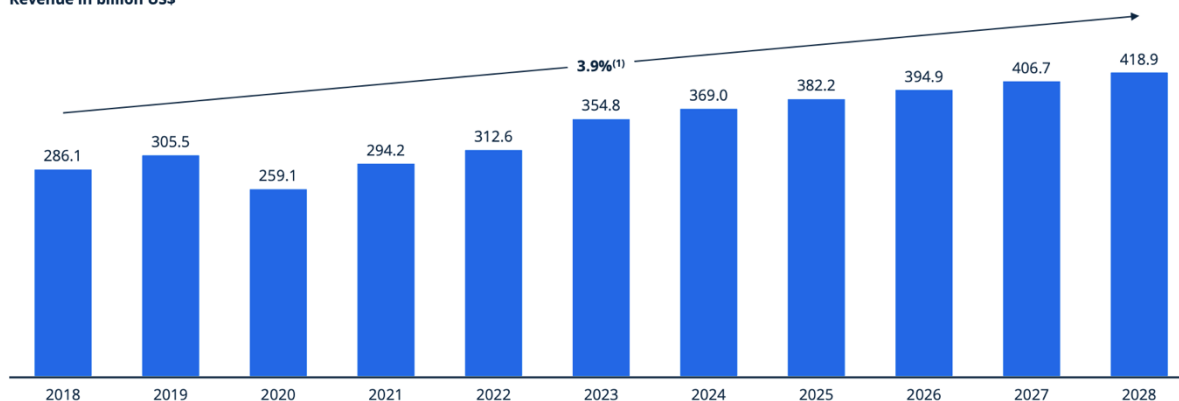


Figure 9: Luxury Goods: market data & analysis

Source: (Statista, 2023)

The strongest and most profitable market segment among luxury goods is confirmed to be fashion, according to an analysis conducted by Deloitte in 2023, the LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE group and Kering SA are positioned as leading giants from a sales perspective (Deloitte, Global Powers of Luxury Goods 2023 - Game changing steps in luxury, 2023).

In comparison with a global analysis, the majority of income is generated by U.S. consumers, although there is increasing demand among Asian consumers at an accelerating rate, particularly there has been an increase in demand in markets such as China, India, and the Middle East (Ko *et al.*, 2019). The reason for this very strong growth lies in several socio-economic factors. In recent years, the continent has experienced an economic boom that has led to the emergence of a new social class consisting of wealthy consumers. These “new rich” see luxury not only as a symbol of their economic success but also as a means of asserting their social status, a perspective that is in line with the strong cultural emphasis on prestige and recognition in these countries, where the possession of luxury goods, is intrinsically linked to the notion of personal success and social affirmation.

In addition, there is another important cultural tradition that influences demand in the luxury market: the gift-giving tradition, giving expensive gifts is a very widespread and culturally important practice. Together, these factors explain the motivations that are driving up demand for luxury items and making Asia a key focus for the global luxury market.

Among the countries earlier mentioned, according to research conducted by Altagamma Consumer & Retail Insight in 2023, the Middle East stands as a frontier rich in potential for the luxury goods sector, with forecasts indicating a doubling of the personal luxury market by 2030 from 15 billion euros in 2023 to 30-35 billion euros in 2030. The two driving markets for this exponential growth are the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the reasons for which lie mainly in an increase in local demand, the strong expansion of luxury tourism and the launching of initiatives such as Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which aims to diversify the economy and increase household spending on cultural and entertainment offerings, including luxury goods (Altagamma, True Luxury Global Consumer Insight 2023, 2023).

Based then on research conducted by Statista in 2023, the number of High Net Worth Individuals (HNWIs) is set to grow significantly in 2028, Asia will be a major player in this growth. In addition, most purchases of luxury goods take place during foreign trips, in this regard it was found how by 2028 Asia will come to surpass Europe as a tourist destination (Statista, 2023).

Moreover, as highlighted by research conducted by Statista in 2023, 13.9% of total luxury goods sales in 2023 will come from online channels (Statista, 2023). This figure has a double meaning, because

on the one hand it can be seen as reflecting the change in consumer buying behavior, and on the other hand it also represents the strategic adaptation of luxury brands to the digital age.

The increase in online sales in luxury can be attributed to several factors. First and foremost, technological evolution has improved the online shopping experience, making it more intuitive, secure, and satisfying, even for high-end products. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the transition to e-commerce, with consumers becoming more familiar and confident with purchasing luxury goods via digital platforms.

Luxury brands have responded to this trend by expanding their online presence, enhancing the user experience through more sophisticated and personalized websites, and integrating technologies such as augmented reality and AI in order to provide consumers with a unique and integrated shopping experience throughout the customer experience.

In addition, e-commerce has offered luxury brands the opportunity to reach a wider audience, including emerging markets and consumers who reside far from traditional boutiques.

Looking ahead, it is likely that the share of online sales will continue to grow, driven by technological innovation and a new generation of digitally native luxury consumers who seek convenience, exclusivity, and personalization in their online shopping experiences.

Taking a look precisely at the younger generation, Altagamma (2023) pointed out that in 2022 the value of total spending made by Millennials and Gen Z was more than 200 billion euros; this figure is expected to increase significantly, one can say double by 2026 (Altagamma, 2023).

This trend reflects not only the increasing spending capacity of these demographics but also their growing interest in luxury and their need to stand out and communicate their status.

It is important for brands to understand that Millennials and Generation Z are digital natives, which means that most of their interactions (both daily and in the context of shopping experiences) take place online.

Particularly in the area of shopping experiences, they leverage online channels not only for buying but also for researching and discovering new products and trends, influencing the marketing and sales strategies of luxury brands. These generations value authentic experiences and seek personalization, sustainability, and inclusiveness; these are key characteristics that brands need to understand and then base their future strategies on.

In addition, these consumer groups are influenced by social media, now invaded by influencers and celebrities who often serve as ambassadors for luxury brands. Promotion through these public figures increases the visibility and desire for luxury products among their peers.

To address this new trend, luxury brands are already adopting influencer-targeted marketing campaigns and are already introducing sustainable initiatives to align with the values of these generations.

Finally, the rise of Millennials and Gen Z has coincided with economic growth in several regions of the world, especially in emerging markets where a new middle class is emerging with access to and interest in luxury goods. This development promises to further expand the luxury customer base and drive consumption growth in the sector.

Therefore, the projected doubling of spending by 2026 is not just a possibility but a forecast based on current consumption trends, changing demographics, and the growing cultural and economic influence of these younger generations.

With this in mind, the ability of brands to adapt and innovate will be crucial to capitalize on the growth potential offered by younger consumers and new luxury consumers in general.

CHAPTER 2: A diamond in luxury: evolution, trends and the importance of aesthetics within the luxury fashion industry

2.1 Luxury fashion industry: What are the differences?

The luxury fashion industry represents a benchmark for the entire industry, being one of the most profitable areas. It also represents a sophisticated and complex sector to manage, due to its intrinsic characteristics. It is evident that today the luxury fashion embodies the essence of luxury as the whole industry is based on high quality, symbolic value, craftsmanship and experience (Amatulli et al., 2017). Fashion has always been a symbol of the evolution of society, in fact, high fashion became established around 1860 where the incomes of the population began to increase and consequently increased the number of people belonging to an upper-middle class. This phenomenon caused consumers to become increasingly discerning and demand for luxury goods began to proliferate. For this reason, the following years saw the birth of what can today be called some of the icons par excellence of luxury fashion : Burberry in 1856, Cartier in 1857, Chanel in 1910 , Dior in 1947, Gucci in 1921, Hermes in 1837, and Prada in 1913 (Quan, 2017) .

From that time on, wealthier consumers began to purchase luxury clothing and accessories as a symbol of differentiation, to show society their status. This trend is soon associated to the idea of exclusivity, through which the purchase and possession of a luxury good transcends its materiality and becomes a tool to communicate identity and success. Indeed, these are the characteristics that precisely distinguish the strength of a luxury brand.

Based on this perspective, it is possible to identify a double meaning that luxury fashion brands take on, because on the one hand they were used by consumers to send a message to society about who they were and which social class they belong to, and on the other hand they were used by them as a tool to fit into a particular group of people with similar tastes and social status (Lahtinen, 2017).

The luxury fashion industry is, by definition, the one that is most affected by cultural changes. In fact, another major transformation occurred around the second half of the twentieth century, where there was the emergence of a new form of luxury, the so-called “New Luxury”, which led to its progressive democratization and the emergence of an increasingly accessible luxury (Cabigiosu, 2020). This new phenomenon made luxury increasingly accessible by breaking down the sharp social stratification in the past associated with the idea of luxury. In other word, as also stated by Gucci CEO Marco Bizzarri, from the stage at the 2018 Milan Triennale as guest speaker at the Next Design Perspectives

conference, is becoming increasingly inclusive to the point that more and more people belonging to the middle class can access these products today.

Recently, a new phenomenon has emerged: the trading-up described by Silverstein *et al* (2008), reflects consumers' willingness to spend more on products that offer higher aesthetic and quality value than other goods of the same type. In this context, people are willing to invest more in certain categories of products and brands that they consider important (trading-up), while saving on other less relevant ones (trading-down), to allocate it to the purchase of luxury goods (Silverstein *et al*, 2003). For example, many brands, such as Prada, Gucci, and Balenciaga, are embracing this challenge, as they are trying to bring to market products with high aesthetic value, high technological impact, and cutting-edge characteristics (Cabigiosu, 2020).

In addition, the current ever-changing digital and global environment places companies in a need for advanced skills and broader resources to maintain their competitiveness. It has been estimated that to thrive as an independent global entity in the luxury fashion industry, a company must reach a minimum threshold of 1 billion euros (Cabigiosu, 2020). Smaller companies face primarily local competition, which may limit their success in key markets such as China and Asia or reduce their effectiveness in using e-commerce. As a result, the beginning of the new millennium has seen an increase in mergers and acquisitions (M&As), with large conglomerates such as LVMH⁷ and Kering⁸ incorporating numerous luxury fashion brands, leading to increased concentration in the industry. In contrast, small family businesses are finding it difficult to stay afloat. Since the 1980s, many companies in the luxury field have intensified investment in M&A to stimulate fast growth and strengthen their competitive position. This trend has gradually increased concentration in the luxury fashion market, particularly in Europe, where many of these small family businesses are located. Although brands such as Gucci or Fendi enjoy strong brand appeal, a solid reputation, and a clear value proposition, they often find themselves short of the resources needed to navigate the challenges and seize the opportunities associated with expanding into new markets and adopting innovative technologies. Among the most recent M&As that generated a lot of hype around, it was the one carried

⁷ Stands for Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE, is a French multinational corporation and conglomerate based in Paris. It owns more than seventy brands divided into haute couture companies such as Christian Dior, Fendi, and Louis Vuitton, watches such as TAG Heuer, jewelry such as Tiffany & Co. and Bulgari, of wines and spirits such as Moët & Chandon, Veuve Clicquot, and Hennessy, of publishing such as Les Échos and Le Parisien, of distribution such as Sephora and Le Bon Marché, and of luxury hotels.

⁸ It is an international luxury group based in Paris. It owns brands such as Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent, Balenciaga, Alexander McQueen, Bottega Veneta, Boucheron, Brioni, Pomellato.

out by the Micheal Kors group where for 1.83 billion euros in 2018 it acquired the iconic Made in Italy brand Versace (Cabigiosu, 2020).

From the evidence then of further research on consumers, particularly one conducted by Zheng J *et al.* (2012), it is also possible to distinguish luxury fashion consumers into two categories: fashion leaders and fashion followers who interact and influence each other (Zheng J *et al.*, 2012). In the first category it is possible to identify consumers who have a strong knowledge of the industry, and their goal is to stand out within society. They also often make very bold and particular style choices, so they are recognized as having the ability to influence other consumers. In the category of followers, on the other hand, we find those who despite being fashion enthusiasts tend to be more conservative in their choices, often allowing themselves to be influenced by leaders in their purchases.

The interaction between these two groups creates a dynamic ecosystem in the world of fashion, updating it to today's modern, digital world it is possible to identify influencers such as Hailey Bieber who introduce new styles and trends within society as leaders and ordinary consumers as followers. Once an item is seen on influencers or celebrities, followers will start looking for that piece of clothing or accessory, thus making it a must-have.

This phenomenon is typical in the fashion world, whereby brands adopt clear marketing strategies involving both groups of consumers with the goal of keeping the desire for the brands alive.

Speaking of the peculiarities of the fashion industry compared to other industries also belonging to the luxury category, it is possible to identify other elements that go to enhance this gap even more, such as:

- products are affected by **seasonality**, this makes it difficult and complex for brands to manage. It in a sense forces designers to launch new collections not only with respect to the change of seasons (Fall/Winter, Summer/Spring), but also with respect to changes in consumer tastes and new trends emerging in the market, in order to ensure that consumers have a wide set of choices and among them find the one that best meets their needs (Saviolo, 2014). This seasonality, however, is a factor whose repercussions are not only on the production side but also on the logistics, inventory and marketing side. Especially the latter, is very complex and at the same time important to manage, as brands must be able to predict demand in order to avoid overproduction or product shortages. Both scenarios have negative repercussions on costs, company image, and the environment. In addition. launching new collections is a very delicate process that the luxury fashion industry has to manage from time to time, as it requires a high degree of coordination among various departments within the company. On the

marketing side, the launch of new collections will inevitably require the launch of new marketing campaign that are able to stay true to the brand values, while at the same time communicating the novelty;

- **the commercialization of products**, in this regard a key element lies in the variety and quantity of products offered, which greatly exceed those of other luxury sectors. This diversity requires more complex operational management and specifically tailored marketing strategies. In addition, luxury fashion companies tend to maintain direct control over the distribution of their products. However, this strategic choice, aimed at preserving the brand's image of exclusivity and quality, results in increased operational and logistical costs. Managing retail in person means investing in physical stores located in prestigious locations, interior design, and a high-quality shopping experience, factors that contribute to significantly elevating overall costs. It has been observed that these expenses, together with the complexity of marketing operations required to effectively promote these luxury goods, exceed those incurred by other luxury product categories. This difference underscores the uniqueness of the luxury fashion industry, where brand and product management require a level of attention, precision and investment unparalleled in the broader luxury market (Fionda *et al.*, 2009);
- as stated by Fionda *et al.* (2009) the **branding process** in the luxury goods sector is particularly complex, especially, as mentioned earlier, because of the rapidity with which trends in this area evolve and the importance that this process assumes (Fionda *et al.*, 2009). Unlike other industries, where market dynamics may be more stable and predictable, luxury fashion is characterized by a constant stream of innovations and style changes. This continuous transformation requires luxury brands to be responsive, not only in renewing their collections but also in adapting branding strategies to remain relevant in the eyes of consumers. Departing from the importance of branding in this context (it is from branding that different fashion houses build their promise to consumers), the complexity of branding lies in its ability to adapt and respond promptly to new trends without ever losing sight of brand identity and consistency. Successful companies are those that manage to interpret market evolutions and turn them into opportunities to strengthen their positioning, innovate their products and communication strategies, while always maintaining an open and engaging dialogue with their customers.
- the growing role of **digitization**. This can be seen as the impetus that is moving the transformation of the entire industry with respect to how brands are interacting with their

luxury customers. We are gradually seeing a shift by brands to new, more connected and interactive channels such as e-commerce platforms and social media. These platforms quickly enable them to reach a large number of visitors in all parts of the world, offering them a unique and personalized shopping experience thanks in part to the integration of AI, especially tools such as chatbots, virtual assistants, virtual store visits, virtual try-ons, but not only that the use of AI also enables them to offer product customization services and improve services to improve the efficiency of backend operations, such as inventory management and supply chain optimization. All this has led, according to research done by Deloitte (2022), to an increase in website traffic, it is estimated that in 2022 alone this increased by 20 percent compared to 2022, foreign consumers almost tripled and it is estimated that this luxury fashion market in 2025 could reach about \$1.1 trillion (Deloitte,2022). The groups most affected by this change, and who most benefit from it and are the driving force behind it, are obviously Gen Z and Gen Y, to the point that as can be seen in the *figure 10* by 2025 about 70 percent of luxury fashion purchases will be made by them.



Figure 10 : *Luxury fashion market forecasts.*

Source: Bain & Company / Luxe Digital 2022

2.2 An in-depth look at the role of branding

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), a brand is a “name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). It is very important for both consumers and companies because it simplifies their decision-making process, helps them identify the source of products, reduces the risk of making bad decisions, and reduces research costs. For companies, on the other hand, because it allows them to differentiate their product from that of competitors, protects unique product features, is a source of competitive advantage, and acts as a promise to consumers. (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020)

It's then important to distinguish between product and brand, in fact a product is any item that a company manages to bring to market for the purpose of being purchased, used and consumed. It can be a physical product, a service, a store, but even a place or an idea. While a brand is, therefore, more than a product, because it can have dimensions that differentiate it in some way from other products designed to satisfy the same need (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020).

The concept of brand is becoming increasingly important in recent years after the advent of globalization caused and increased competition. This especially takes on great significance in the luxury industry, particularly in the luxury fashion industry. In this exclusive landscape, brand takes on a central role, serving as a pillar for the construction of a company's identity and as a key to its market positioning. In this context, looking at current events, the brand goes far beyond the logo or name; it becomes a complex system of values, promises that are intertwined with perceptions the emotions and expectations of a unique consumer experience.

In particular, luxury brands become a tool for communicating one's image and status. According to Lui *et al* (2012). for a brand to be considered luxury, it must possess five values: conspicuous value, unique value, social value, hedonic value, and quality value (Liu,*et al.*, 2012) (Esmaeilpour, 2015).

More specifically:

- **conspicuous value:** indicates the ability that a luxury product must have to be instantly recognizable, and to make the wearer in turn recognizable. It is not simply ostentation but the ability of a brand to communicate membership in a particular social group;
- **unique value:** refers to the uniqueness of the product that comes from features such as unique design, brand history. This goes to increase the desire around a brand and the willingness to identify with it;

- **social value:** luxury brands act as tools of belonging to certain social categories, acting as a link between individuals who share the same tastes, interests and, above all, social status;
- **hedonic value:** is seen as the sensory, emotional and experiential experience that a luxury brand manages to offer its consumers. Thus, this value is not limited to aesthetic beauty alone but refers more generally to the pleasure derived from the purchase experience and subsequent ownership of an exclusive item;
- **quality value:** is one of the fundamental pillars on which the reputation and image of a luxury brand is built. It is a symbol of assurance that each product is not only beautiful to look at but is endowed with excellent quality, craftsmanship, attention to detail, and above all durability.

These five values together help create a distinctive and desirable brand identity in the minds of consumers (Liu, *et. al*, 2012).

In fact, as Homer (2008) said, brands predominantly exist in the minds of consumers, and it is a matter of companies' abilities to build a strong brand, with meaningful value, strong personality, and unique positioning, which in turn drive customer loyalty, and the ability to charge higher prices.

The concept of value creation and of the development of a strong personality through the brand is indeed important especially in the luxury fashion industry where these two elements become the main key to understanding a consumer's decision-making process. In that throughout the customer journey the consumer in their choices will be influenced by brand likeability and the ability to mirror themselves in the values disseminated by the brand, as much as brands, particularly luxury fashion brands, possess qualities and characteristics that can be perceived as similar to human personal ones. This allows consumers to associate certain brands with their own values, aspirations, and personalities. When a brand reflects or complements an individual's self-image, or that to which he or she aspires, this can generate a strong affinity and liking toward the brand.

In this regard, the theory of self-congruence has been developed in the field of social psychology and marketing, according to which consumers tend to prefer those products that they see as congruent with their self-image (Esmailpour, 2015).

A context then as highly competitive and exclusive as that of luxury fashion requires additional effort from brands in that they do not differentiate themselves only by the type of product offered in the market for this reason it is important for brands to be able to build a strong personality around them. It can be built through targeted advertising, unique and exclusive packaging, immersive shopping experiences, efficient customer service, or other unique experiences that the brand is able to offer its customers to stand out, in order to impose its own voice and persona. (Nguyen, *et al.*, 2017).

All these elements together are crucial because they become a powerful engine of brand loyalty and advocacy, thus enabling the brand to strengthen its market positioning and obviously its relationships, highlighting the strong role that the brand takes on in this context.

Several scholars suggest that building these strong relationships with customers is critical to prevent them from abandoning the brand for a competitor. In this regard alongside what has been stated so far is another key element: brand experience (Amer, *et al.*, 2023).

The first authors to theorize this concept were Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), it was then reformulated by several authors, taking the definition of Brakus *et al.* (2009), today, brand experience can be defined as the set of " subjective and internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions), as well as behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of design and identity, packaging, communications, and brand environments". It begins when a consumer starts looking for a particular product (in physical stores or online), then comes into contact with the product, buys it and consumes it. In this regard Brakus *et al.* (2009) have identified four dimensions of brand experience : sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral. Each of these dimension is evoked with different intensities by brands and at the same time each of being plays a fundamental role throughout the customer's decision-making process. These four dimensions, and more generally the concept of brand experience then has a direct impact on a brand's brand equity. In that when a brand is able to give consumers positive experiences, it not only strengthens the bond it has with the customer itself but also goes on to increase the customer's perception of the brand's value and thus consequently strengthens its brand equity.

Establishing oneself in the market, in this case in the luxury fashion market with strong brand equity is essential for various brands as they begin to be perceived as unique and indispensable, and the likelihood that consumers will "betray" the brand will inevitably tend to decrease.

A positive brand experience then has a direct and proportional impact on brand recall, recognition, and brand image. In this way, the brand is not only directly and easily recalled in the minds of consumers, but its image will also be positively reinforced, contributing to a perception of superior quality, exclusivity and uniqueness. Such perceptions, in turn, fuel brand equity, creating a virtuous cycle of brand value growth.

These concepts explain once again and with even greater intensity the importance of the role of the brand in the luxury fashion arena. Because in such an environment that can be called "saturated", implementing strategic branding strategies that improve brand perception, enable consumers to recall a brand and recognize it in different situations and contexts is crucial, making

brands in luxury fashion particularly resilient and desirable, further solidifying their position in the market.

Based on research conducted by Lyst (2023), a premium fashion app used by more than 200 million users worldwide, it is possible to identify which brands have managed to amass value over time and build an aura of desirability and strength around them.

Every quarter, Lyst compiles a ranking "the Lyst Index" to highlight the hottest brands and products of the moment.

Taking the last quarter of 2023 as a reference, in the top positions we find : Miu Miu, Loewe, Prada and Bottega Veneta.

This ranking is very important because it not only opens a glance at what are the most resonant brands of the moment but at the same time highlights how vulnerable the world of luxury fashion is, and how brands alongside the construction of values, personality and strong image must manage to keep up with the times. In fact in the current landscape new elements are to be taken into account such as the power of the internet and influencers over consumers.

In fact, making a comparison between the first (Q1) and third quarter (Q3) 2023, in Q1 the first position was occupied by Prada, Loewe and Bottega Veneta occupied the fifth and sixth position respectively, it is surprising to see how in such a short time the situation has changed.

The rapid evolution of this ranking, demonstrates the importance of agile marketing strategies and the ability to seize new trends and cultural influences, the power wielded by the internet and influencers assume particular prominence in this perspective.

Ultimately, then, in an industry characterized by the constant search for novelty and exclusivity, branding assumes a key role. A brand must be able to continually adapt to the changing needs of consumers and at the same time be ever-present within society while managing to become a point of reference, always maintaining its essence and personality.

For this reason that current branding strategies must be flexible and responsive to new trends emerging in the market. These must then in turn include adopting sustainable practices, embracing digital practices, opening up to e-commerce, and interacting with online communities through influencers and social campaigns. In addition, personalized experiences offered to consumers can strengthen the emotional bond with the brand, increasing loyalty and perceived value.

The Lyst ranking and its constant evolution are a perfect reflection of this intricate process.

It is for all these reasons that the role of the brand in the luxury fashion industry is now more crucial and dynamic than ever, requiring constant efforts in order to build compelling stories around the brand

and in order to create unique experiences that satisfy consumers' desires and aspirations. This combined with a solid base of values and identity forms the foundation for maintaining a leadership position in a market that is as competitive as it is endlessly ephemeral.

2.3 The importance of positioning to achieve success

In the luxury fashion market, strong positioning takes on a key role for the purpose of ensuring soundness and profitability of the business. It is usually seen as a combination of craftsmanship, high quality and innovation. These are all elements that luxury brands try over time to keep as alive and up-to-date as possible since it is through these values that the brand is able to cultivate its market positioning and impose its image as synonymous with style and elegance. Alongside these elements that form the basis of these brands' competitive advantage is then their ability to be able to find the perfect balance between timeless craftsmanship (tradition) and contemporary aesthetics (modernity). Today, brands are increasingly investing in strategies that enable them to build a competitive advantage that can position them as market leaders. As Porter also argued, these strategies based on differentiation are crucial because by doing so the brand will go to market with products on which consumers perceive added value, for which they will be willing to pay an extra price (Riaz, 2023). These strategies then take on particular relevance in an industry such as luxury because, as has been shown by research conducted by Romaniuk & Huang (2020), in this context consumer perception takes on particular importance. Indeed as also stated by Hudders (2012), luxury brands must be perceived as such by consumers.

Recently and with increasing frequency, brands are implementing co-branding strategies or extending their range of products.

Beginning by examining brand extensions, today this strategic approach is gaining popularity among luxury brands as it allows them to strengthen brand equity, brand image, and satisfy an increasingly wide range of needs. It refers to the process through which a well-established brand is leveraged to enter new market categories (Aaker & Keller, 1990).

In this way, the main brand, or also referred to in this case as the "parent brand," exploits the images, connections and values associated with the purchase of a luxury good (as found in recent research by Albrecht *et al.* (2013), these values can be distinguished into : functional, hedonistic/experiential, and symbolic), so that they will then be transferred onto the new product extensions. In particular research has examined that when a consumer is already very attached to a particular brand (a phenomenon

that happens regularly in the luxury world) ,this attachment will be taken up and become an integral part in the evaluation of the new line extension (Boisvert & Ashill, 2022). Moreover when evaluating product extensions by customers, it is also important to refer to the brand concept consistency theory developed by Park *et al.* (1991) according to which extensions can be viewed very positively by customers but it is important that they are not only in line with the brand image but there must also be consistency with the brand concept.

There are several examples of brands that can be taken as a benchmark, as they have implemented such a strategy that has allowed them to greatly expand their success such as Jimmy Choo, which initially started as a brand that produced shoes, has now also entered the market for handbags, accessories such as sunglasses. Or another case of enormous success is Armani, which from its original core business that is clothing today has greatly expanded its product range by entering the market of accessories, beauty, perfumes to the hotel market. The common trait of these two success cases is that both of them while expanding their product range have managed to consolidate and not dilute the solid image of success and excellence long built.

It is important to note that when a brand decides to enter a new market it is faced with a multitude of very delicate decisions to make, first and foremost the brand must assess whether it has the resources and expertise to be able to deal with this process internally and the risks associated with the consequences on the brand's current activities. Once all the assumptions have been evaluated the brand will have to decide whether to implement this process internally, or whether for example to license its brand in exchange for a steady stream of royalties as in the case of Burberry, or whether instead to enter new markets through collaborations as in the case of Jimmy Choo whose success has been fostered by collaborations with two non-luxury brands such as Hunters and H&M (Stankeviciute & Hoffmann, 2010). In any case, it is very important for the brand to be forward-looking in closely monitoring the entry into the new market and plan the strategy effectively.

It is very important to design these strategies carefully as, especially in luxury fashion the risk of weakening status and diluting its desirability and uniqueness is just around the corner. This is because as also mentioned earlier the management of a luxury brand, especially a luxury fashion brand requires different attention than a non-luxury brand.

A case of a brand where extensions instead of reinforcing weakened its positioning is Calvin Klein, its problem was that it had extended its product range so much and this overexposure greatly weakened its uniqueness, going on to create a sense of confusion among consumers who no longer

recognized a consistency in the brand. This led to damage in its positioning in that instead of succeeding it demoted itself by exiting the luxury market.

To date the brand is trying to re-enter the luxury market but the process is very long since just as it is difficult to build a solid luxury image in the same way it is difficult to rebuild it once it is lost.

The cases illustrated show how the use of brand extensions can play a key role by strengthening the position of fashion brands as providers of excellence and sophistication. At the same time, however, since this is a very insidious industry, meticulous strategy management is required; the case of Calvin Klein is a clear example of what must and what must not be done in order not to lose market position. It is crucial in this context to seek a balance between innovation and maintaining the essence of the brand, to avoid dilution of status and desire. Through clear vision, and through creating meaningful connections with consumers, luxury fashion brands can successfully address the complexities of brand extensions, which will consequently enable them to strengthen their leading position in the global fashion landscape.

Another strategy that is gaining more and more relevance among luxury fashion brands is co-branding. In recent years there has been an increase in these collaborations, the main reason being that as widely discussed above the global landscape has changed, today luxury is no longer exclusive only to a very wealthy social class but, more and more people occasionally can afford to fulfill their luxurious desires. In doing so, luxury fashion brands by implementing this strategy go to work on positioning their brand identity by going to integrate contemporary inspiration into the brand culture, with the goal of attracting this new and diverse consumer base (Yu *et al.*, 2021).

When referring to a co-branding strategy, it means as defined by Park *et al* (1996) the combination of two or more constituent brands to form a separate composite brand or a unique product.

In the fashion world, these strategies take different forms such as:

- ingredient co-branding: the brand of the manufacturer supplying the ingredient is visible within the brand of the final manufacturer. An example is YKK zippers⁹;
- joint ventures co-branding: includes a partnership between two companies, two brands aimed at launching a co-brand. An example in this area is the collaboration between Gucci and the Swiss watchmaking giant The swatch group, the collaboration of which resulted in the watch line "Gucci Timepieces";

⁹ YKK is a Japanese company that is a leading manufacturer of zippers. Its high-quality products have been and still are selected by numerous luxury brands to be included in their products.

- intra-company co-branding: it is implemented between two brands of the same company. For example, many fashion groups have several brands within them that are also at different levels from the point of view of market positioning. One example is the Uniqlo group, which internally owns the fast fashion brand Uniqlo and the luxury design brand Theory. The group in this case could initiate a collaboration among these two (Shen, *et. al*, 2017).

It has also been observed that brands that undertake these collaborations benefit from another type of effect, the "spillover effect." Simonin and Ruth (1998) argue that consumers' positive attitudes toward the co-brand will spill over positively into the comparisons that consumers will make in the future toward the brands involved in the partnership (Shen *et. al*, 2017).

It is for these reasons that different kinds of collaborations between brands are being seen in the fashion market with increasing frequency. In fact, in recent years there have been collaborations between luxury brands of the caliber of, for example, Fendi and Versace, which created Fendace (in this case it is referred to as a co-branding joint venture) in 2021 (later commercialized in 2022). This collaboration has been enormously successful, the merit was in the ability of the two brands to be able to find the right balance between the characteristic traits of the two brands. Also in order to avoid a cannibalization effect, the sale of products was well segmented, in fact Fendi's line, which, accounted for 71 percent of the assortment, was focused on menswear, while Versace's line, which accounted for 39 percent of the assortment, included a wider range of garments. Another very important element to consider is then the choice of price as a positioning element, as can be seen from the figure 10 comparing the prices between the "Fendace" and "Versace" items, the two brands decided to sell the items at a higher price by taking advantage of the strong impact and desire that these products would achieve (Muret, 2022).

Price Per Category Analysis						Retviews 2022
	Accessories	Leather Goods	Tops	Outerwear	Dresses & Skirts	
Versace by Fendi	\$ 1.148	\$ 2.158	\$ 1.571	\$ 5.386	\$ 7.351	
Versace	\$ 476	\$ 1.007	\$ 818	\$ 2.467	\$ 2.392	

Figure 11: Price per Category analysis Source: (Fashion Network, 2022)

In the luxury fashion market, however, we are not only witnessing collaborations between luxury brands, increasingly in fact luxury brands of the caliber of Stella Mc Cartney, Off White and Jacquemeus have collaborated with niche sports brands such as Adidas and Nike, respectively. Finally, other very frequent collaborations are between luxury brands and fast-fashion brands, one of the fast fashion brands that over the years, as we can see from Figure 11, has undertaken numerous collaborations with luxury brands is H&M. These collaborations usually have a common trait that is to launch limited-edition products, this will go to increase the desire and "rush" of consumers to have that specific product. Thus, these collaborations are strategic for both parties involved, allowing them to mutually leverage each other's expertise, reputations, and target customer base with the goal of creating unique products that can generate desire and WOM (Word Of Mouth) around them. These partnerships bring significant benefits, in terms of: increased consumer loyalty, increased brand visibility, and strengthened market positioning.

Designer	Collaborative brand	Mother company (merging year)	Co-branding year	Co-brand name
Karl Lagerfeld	Karl Lagerfeld	APAX partners (2006)	2004	Karl Lagerfeld×H&M
Stella McCartney	Stella McCartney	Stella McCartney (Kering 2001)	2005	Stella McCartney×H&M
Viktor & Rolf	Viktor &Rolf	DIESEL (2008)	2006	Viktor & Rolf×H&M
Roberto Cavalli	Roberto Cavalli	Clessidra S.P.A. (2015)	2007	Roberto Cavalli×H&M
Rei Kawakubo	Comme des Garcons	Comme des Garcons	2008	Comme des Garcons×H&M
Matthew Williamson	Matthew Williamson	Matthew Williamson	2009	Matthew Williamson for H&M
Jimmy Choo	Jimmy Choo	Labelux (2013)	2009	Jimmy Choo×H&M
Sonia Rykiel	Sonia Rykiel	Li&Fung Group (2012)	2009	Sonia Rykiel×H&M
Alber Elbaz (2001–2015)	Lanvin	Lanvin	2010	Lanvin for H&M
Donatella Versace (1997–now)	Versace	Gianni Versace S.p.A	2011	Versace for H&M
Consuelo Castiglioni	Marni	OTB S.P.A (2015)	2012	Marni×H&M
Maison Martin Margiela	Maison Martin Margiela	OTB S.P.A (2002)	2012	Maison Martin Margiela×H&M
Isabel Marant	Isabel Marant	Isabel Marant	2013	Isabel Marant POUR×H&M
Alexander Wang	Alexander Wang	Alexander Wang	2014	Alexander Wang×H&M
Pierre Balmain	BALMAIN	BALMAIN	2015	BALMAIN×H&M

Figure 12: Collaborated designers/designer luxury labels with H&M.

Source: (Shen *et al.*, 2017)

Of course, again, these kinds of strategies do not only have positive effects for brands, but they may have negative effects such as:

- **the spillover effect:** this effect can have not only positive effects but also negative effects. In fact if the partnership between the two brands is not adequate this will have negative effects on the brands involved, and again if one of the brands is perceived not in a positive way this feeling like a boomerang effect will fall anche on the value and perception of the other brand (Shen *et. al*, 2017);
- **plagiarism:** if one of the parties involved does not respect the intellectual property rights or imitates what are distinctive elements of the other trademark;
- **confusion among consumers:** if the alliance is not managed clearly and consistently with the identity of each of the brands involved in the alliance. The direct consequence of this would be a weakening of consumer trust, and this will also undermine long-term relationship building;
- **conflict of interest:** if the parties do not have the same goals, have different visio i on the marketing strategies to be adopted conflicts of interest may arise that will inevitably undermine the success of the partnership.

So it is very important to plan all the steps in detail so that this type of strategy allows the brand to elevate its image (and not dilute it) and strengthen its positioning, so that it is able to expand its customer base, consumer trust and go on to build solid and lasting relationships.

2.4 The role of aesthetic

In the world of luxury fashion, one feature then that cannot be overlooked is aesthetics. It is a very broad concept that not only includes the visual aspect but, plays a crucial role in attracting the attention of consumers and creating a unique shopping experience. Alongside this then allows the brand to gain a competitive advantage in the market and differentiate itself. The concept of aesthetics was initially treated by Jean-Marie Floch in 1990 and then redefined in 2012 by Mazzalovo, who described it as a "composition of stable and specific elements that characterize its 'sensory approach,' e.g., everything that is perceptible by the senses," going more specifically in the context of brand aesthetics this has been staat defined as " consisting of the sensory treatments characteristic of brand manifestations. Specifically, brand aesthetics is established through the integration of consistent qualities and design elements of existing products, which promotes brand association and differentiation" (Seifert *et. al*, 2019). Particularly in the luxury fashion arena, these concepts take on special importance as brand aesthetics become an indispensable tool for creating a unique shopping

experience and increasing the level of desire among consumers. It is established through the integration of consistent qualities and design elements of the brand's existing products. In this regard Goh, *et. al* (2013) have introduced the concept of brand design consistency (BDC), according to which the moment there is consistency between the aesthetics and design of a brand, the chances of having a recognizable and successful brand will be higher. Based on what was stated in a study by Ranscombe *et al.* (2011) aesthetics can be defined as that feature that first of all allows for product/brand recognition among consumers, which is why reconnecting to the discussion above, it is very important that there is consistency between brand aesthetics and design (Seifert, Cui, & Chattaraman, 2019). To provide theoretical support for this concept, it is possible to mention the theory of aesthetics and psychobiology developed by Berlyne (1971). He elaborated the so-called Wundt curves that relate arousal to aesthetic judgments, as can be seen from the *figure 12* it is possible to reach increasing levels of arousal but up to an optimal threshold, beyond that threshold the level of arousal will begin to decrease. This can also be related to product design, in fact a design consistent with brand identity will cause high levels of arousal, until an optimal level is reached to maximize consumer enjoyment and, this theory ties in with BDC theory (Seifert, Cui, & Chattaraman, 2019).

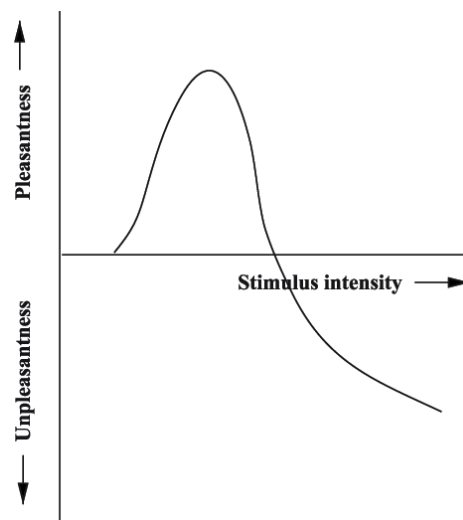


Figure 13: *The Wundt curve*

Source: (Wu & Miao, 2013)

These theories, however, in the context of luxury fashion tend to weaken, as other researchers have pointed out, that luxury fashion brands enjoy an effect called the "alone effect." The basis of this effect is that the presence of a strong brand (such as Louis Vuitton, Tiffany) positively affects the evaluations that will be made by consumers even if the design is not fully in line with the brand's traditional aesthetic. This effect also enjoys the influence of other factors such as: country of origin, brand history, quality of products, and that is why fashion brands will go to enjoy a positive alone effect (Seifert, Cui, & Chattaraman, 2019). In support then there are numerous researches that suggest that very often products that are introduced to the market with atypical design succeed in arousing more interest in consumers. In this regard, Silvia (2005) (2008) elaborated the theory of emotions, according to which "it is not the design of the product itself that stimulates interest, but the consumers' evaluation of the design as interesting". One element that should not be overlooked, however, is the fact that while having an atypical design, it is important that it does not deviate too much from the essence of the brand, otherwise the reverse effect would happen (Schnurr, The impact of atypical product design on consumer product and brand perception, 2017). Reflecting on the evaluative theory of emotions, we can introduce a concept that is gaining much momentum in the field of luxury fashion: ugly luxury. In fact, luxury differs from the rest of the fields in that it has always been synonymous with excellence, exclusivity and status, recently, however, we are witnessing a transformation of the concept of luxury itself, in fact, we are progressively witnessing a dilution of the concept of the traditional status symbol, to the point that conventional consumption based solely and exclusively on aesthetics and thus beauty is gradually losing value, to the point of being seen synonymous with inauthenticity. If, as Veblen (1899) stated, luxury products succeed in gratifying the sense of beauty because they are characterized by extreme beauty, elegance, and refinement, in recent years we have witnessed a decline of this concept and this is because consumers today are looking for new distinctive signs to express their status and one of them is ugly luxury (Bellezza, 2023). Consumers therefore deliberately and consciously choose ugly products by forgoing aesthetics and attractiveness. In particular, luxury fashion products are chosen mainly for two characteristics: aesthetics and/or branding, in this case therefore consumers voluntarily give up aesthetics in favor of another element that can produce a greater advantage, this other element is therefore branding. This choice will then become synonymous with differentiation in that the signaling ability of an ugly product will be greater than that of a beautiful product (Cesareo, *et.al*, 2023). Miuccia Prada was the first to introduce products of questionable beauty to the market, in fact she herself said "my job is to

make the ugly attractive." Today there are numerous ugly products produced by major luxury brands that, have won the hearts of consumers, such as Balenciaga's Triple S , Gucci's multi-patterned tiger emblazoned sweaters or Birkenstocks. Speaking of Birkenstocks they have been so successful that today the brand has been bought by the LVMH group (Bellezza, 2023). Finally, another element that it is important to pay attention to is the centrality of visual aesthetics (CVA), as in the luxury fashion arena it will directly affect how consumers interact with products, where it is located, and the promotions offered in the marketplace (Sample *et. al*, 2020). As defined by Bloch *et. al* (2003) the CVA is "the level of meaning that visual aesthetics have for a particular consumer in his or her relationship with products," it is very important because it provides insight into the level of consumer engagement with a particular product. It includes 3 dimensions: the value consumers place on a superior product design, the subjective ability of consumers to appreciate the product design, and the level of consumer response to a superior product design (Schnurr & Stokburger-Sauer, 2016). In recent years, there has been an increase in the use of images and visual elements in online marketing, this is as a result of the tendency of consumers to prefer ads aracterized by visual images rather than verbal ones, as they are more immediate and easier to understand, which is why that brands need to pay particolre attention to visual aesthetics and also to the visual perception of consumers. In the context of marketing when we talk about visual perception we refer to the way consumers process, assimilate stimuli, understanding its various facets, especially in the context of fashion luxury, is crucial in order to create effective communications that positively influence consumer perception. From findings that have emerged from some research, visual perception is composed of three elements:

- fragmentary perception: refers to the ways in which consumers perceive the physical aspects of an object or visual stimulus. In this case, consumers also notice small details, which can influence their perception of the image;
- visual processing: focuses on how consumers process visual information and stimuli by analyzing their visual system and how these stimuli are processed in their minds;
- visual understanding: refers to how consumers evaluate these stimuli, involving all visual aspects in the evaluation in order to arrive at the formation of comprehensive and even complex aesthetic judgments and evaluations. For example, from an aesthetic point of view, product design is judged by consistency with the brand, consistency with other products in the same category. This highlights the complexity of the final judgment that relates all aspects of the product and also the market in which it is related.

Hence, visual perception plays a key role in a consumer's decision-making process, and understanding the mechanism and its various parts is critical to creating unique and engaging experiences (Sample *et. al*, 2020). Within the visual aesthetics of luxury fashion, another aspect that influences consumer perceptions concerns the place where products are sold, as location plays a key role in the creation of a unique experience. To best understand how atmosphere influences consumers' purchase intentions, one can use the S.O.R model, first developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). S.O.R stands for:

- Stimuli: refers to all environmental and sensory stimuli, such as lighting, colors, product layout, to which consumers are exposed within a store ;
- Organism: refers to the emotions (positive or negative) aroused by the preceding environmental and sensory stimuli;
- Response: refers to consumers' responses based on the two elements listed above, in fact if consumers evaluate the stimuli positively and manage to have positive emotions from the atmosphere they will be inclined to buy the products vice versa if they do not have positive feelings (Kim *et. al*, 2020).

Understanding these elements in the context of luxury fashion is very important, as consumers are increasingly looking for experiences, so they evaluate not only the aesthetics of the individual product but aesthetics in general. This is why understanding these dynamics is important because it allows brands to design visual merchandising strategies that foster positive feelings. This model can be implemented obviously in physical stores but also in online stores, given the growing trend of online shopping experiences.

In conclusion, aesthetics plays a key role within luxury fashion, as it includes not only visual appeal, but also the creation of engaging and unique shopping experiences. Therefore, carefully analyzing all its parts reveals its complexity, and the need to manage it in the best possible way. As of today, trends as mentioned earlier are evolving, the concept of beauty is gradually being diluted, and brands need to make sure that they stay in step with the times. Implementing the right marketing strategies for luxury fashion brands, taking into account the principles of visual aesthetics and visual perception is vital to ensure high engagement and pleasant and engaging experiences at all times. This involves not only taking care of the design and visual elements of products, but also creating engaging atmospheres in physical and online stores. So in definitiva based on what has just been said understanding and applying the principles of aesthetics and visual perception will enable brands to gain a competitive advantage and create stable and lasting relationships with their customers.

CHAPTER 3: Analysis and collection of qualitative data in the context of luxury fashion

3.1 Research design

In order to implement the research phase, after a careful analysis and thorough literature review the research objective was defined. Indeed, the review allowed us to deepen and highlight gaps in current research, as there is not enough work on the role of aesthetics and especially the role of design (symmetrical and asymmetrical). Specifically there is not much research on how these two aspects drive consumers' perceptions of brands and their purchasing decisions. Accordingly, we developed a survey in order to better explore consumers' conscious and unconscious reactions to different aesthetic design of luxury fashion products.

3.2 Research goal

As extensively discussed during the literature review phase, the luxury industry, particularly luxury fashion, is a very complicated industry as it is in continuous evolution, which over the years has had to adapt to the many changes and numerous trends that have emerged in society. The goal of the research is to understand on the one hand the perceptions of consumers towards this industry, in particular their perceptions regarding new trends that are shaping this industry first and foremost the use of sustainable practices. Also as discussed in the previous chapters when talking about luxury it's impossible to don't think about aesthetics. Luxury has always been synonymous with beauty, with a design that is unique and consistent with brand identity. In recent years, however, also considering the increasing desire of luxury consumers to differentiate themselves, the concept of "ugly luxury" has become very popular. For this reason, that the research in addition to investigating the characteristics of luxury and how they are perceived by consumers also aims to investigate how aesthetics and in particular design affects their purchase considerations, this being a vital element, because it is the first visual contact the consumer has with the brand.

3.3 Methodology

Once the objectives of the research had been defined, we moved on to establish the methods through which the data would be collected, the reference sample and its numerosity. It is necessary to specify that from the consumers' side, the objective is to analyze their purchasing perceptions regarding luxury fashion, how they perceive sustainability and especially their sensitivity regarding design (symmetrical or asymmetrical), so it is not a necessary condition to have as consumers only people who habitually buy luxury. This would result in an exclusion of a section of people who although they are not regular consumers of luxury could provide us with interesting insights for research purposes. For this reason, that all those of legal age were considered eligible to be part of the sample. Usually as also emerged from several existing research the samples used for this type of research are mostly college students. In this case also college students (both males and females) were chosen as the reference sample because they are the group directly involved in this evolutionary context, which is marking the transition to a new era of luxury, which therefore best succeeds in giving new insights to the research. Specifically, the sample consisted of 30 consumers about 18–30-year-olds, including 13 males and 17 females. An interview was conducted with each of them, a total of 7 questions were asked, the first questions were about their attitude towards luxury, then a question was asked about the characteristics associated with luxury and whether sustainability was among them, until they got more specific and addressed the topic of design. Most of the interviews were conducted in Italian, so the questions were translated into Italian and the answers after each interview from Italian were translated into English.

Each respondent in fact was shown two photos (*Figure 14* and *Figure 15*) that included a total of 7 items (including clothes and accessories), in the first photo (*Figure 14*) these were characterized by a symmetrical design, in the second (*Figure 15*) by an asymmetrical design, they were asked to think that these products were made by a luxury brand. Photos of items with symmetrical designs were shown first, and each respondent was asked whether, holding in their mind that these products were made by a luxury brand, if they had purchased them, and how long the life cycle of these products would last for them. The same process was also carried out later after showing the photo depicting items with an asymmetrical design. Finally, they were asked to give a preference, i.e., which type of design they were more oriented toward and to give a personal judgment to understand what people like more in one design

than in another and the perception in relation to sustainability, in order to understand whether the type of design influences the perception of sustainability of a product.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured, one-to-one form, online. Moreover, participants were asked for consent to record their responses, and they were assured of the anonymity of their personal data. During the interview, respondents were allowed to respond freely without any interference from the interviewer, so as to ensure maximum authenticity of the responses. At the end of each interview, the interview was listened to and then the questions were transcribed. The transcription method chosen will be that of intelligent transcription, as this type of transcription will allow the words of the interviewees to be faithfully reported but at the same time eliminate any kind of repetition, uncertainty in order to ensure easier reading and understanding of the final data.

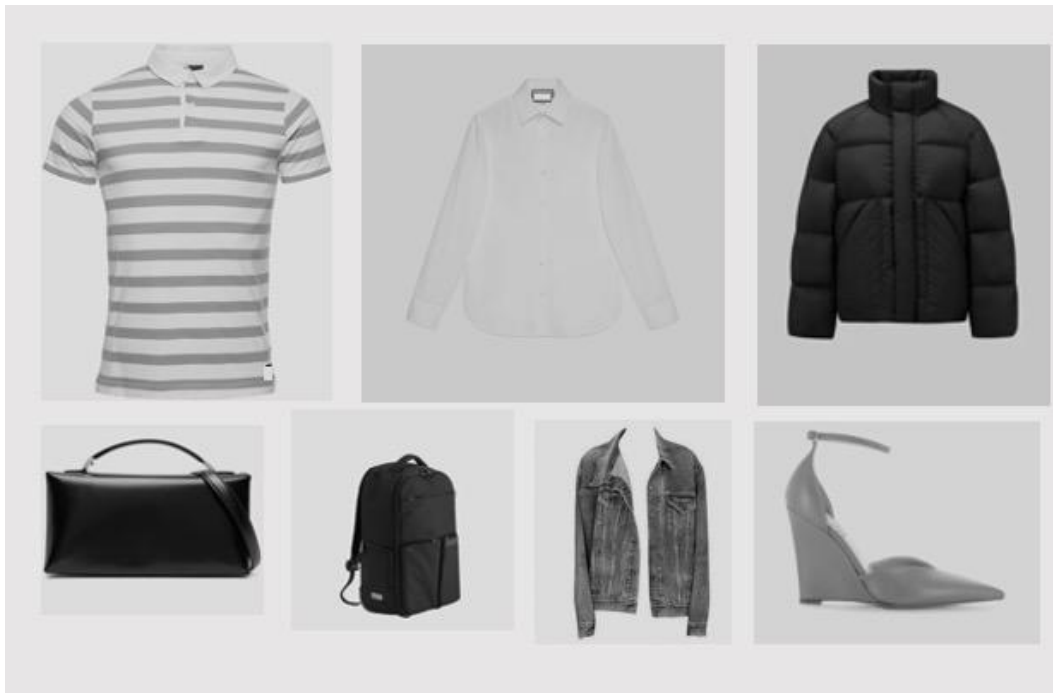


Figure 14: Products with symmetrical design.

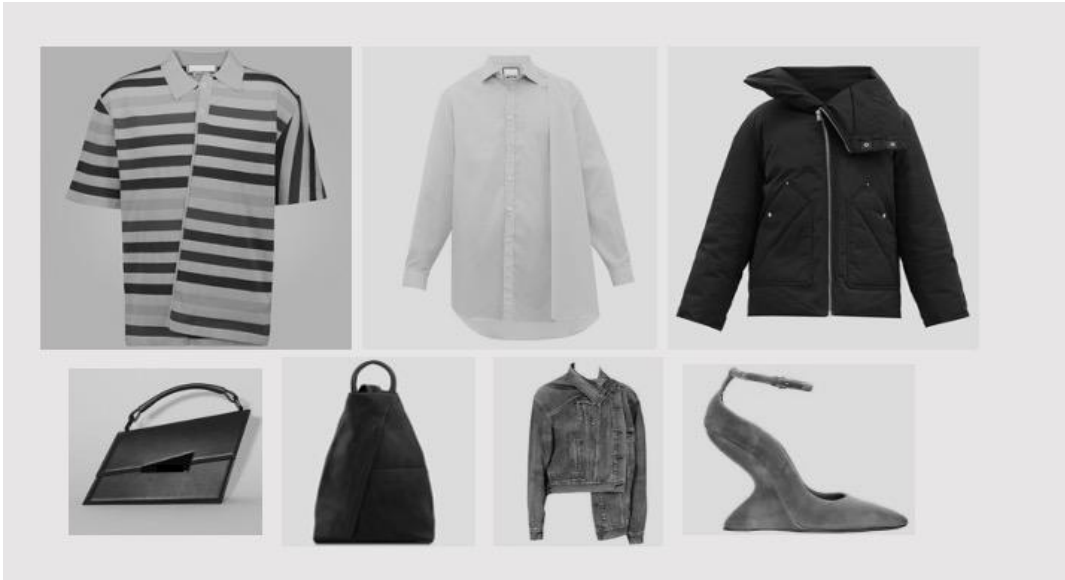


Figure 15: Products with asymmetrical design.

3.4 Analysis and discussion of findings

As mentioned earlier, the goal of this paper is to better understand the role of aesthetics for luxury fashion brands, focusing particularly on design. The reason for this choice was derived after careful analysis of previous studies, which underlined a gap here, particularly as revealed by Schnurr (2017) research to date has placed little attention on the role of design, particularly design symmetry and asymmetry and their perception (Schnurr, 2017). The research sample included people between the ages of 18-30, with varied incomes, were chosen as the target audience, precisely to assess different perceptions of luxury. In fact, to the first question regarding the purchase of luxury products, there was no unambiguous answer on yes, but some answered yes, some no but would like a lot, some occasionally, as it's possible to see in *Table 1*.

Respondents	Age	Gender	Luxury consumers
N= 30	18=1; 19=1 20=4; 22= 3 23= 1; 24= 5 25= 4; 26= 1 27= 2; 28= 4 29=2; 30= 2	Male= 13 Female = 17	Yes, always= 6 Yes, often= 8 Yes occasionally= 5 Would like= 6 No= 5

Table 1: Respondents information

The common characteristic of these responses lies in the willingness and desire to purchase such products because they are recognized as having superior quality, unique aesthetics and design, and they are often perceived as a long-term investment. However, there were also respondents who showed their disinterest in luxury purchases because they consider them too expensive and prefer to allocate their money toward other types of experiences, in this regard a consumer textually said", I do not buy luxury products because I prefer to spend my money on experiences, travel, and activities that enrich my life in different ways". Nevertheless, they recognized the unique characteristics that distinguish luxury from other types of conventional goods. All of these elements can be further explored in *Table 2*, which includes verbatim quotes from consumers that serve as support for what has been stated so far.

Therefore, even if one is not a regular consumer, and even if does not prefer or make luxury purchases, the essence of luxury is uniformly perceived in the minds of consumers. So, the image that the industry has been building over the years, despite the changes and evolutions that have taken place, has not weakened rather it has strengthened, embracing even new nuances.

Unique characteristics of luxury products	
Luxury customers	<p>“The reason is because of the superior quality and unique design. For me, buying the purchase of luxury garments represents an investment, so it is not just a purchase but something that determines my style over time and will allow me to distinguish myself”</p> <p>“Yes, I buy them regularly. The reason lies in the fact that I like, especially at work, to give an elegant and well-groomed image of myself, but not only for that of course. I love the fact that they last a long time and therefore I can use them more frequently, and from my point of view the higher cost is justified by all these features including a unique design”</p>
Non-luxury customers	<p>“I have never bought luxury products. Because I don't have adequate economic income I can't afford it. I would like to do it because I think they have better quality”</p> <p>“I don't buy luxury items regularly because I prefer to allocate that large part of my budget into education-type investments. However, I do not rule out that I would like to purchase them from time to time, because I recognize their timeless quality and value”</p>

Table 2: Unique characteristics of luxury products

Subsequently, getting more specific, an attempt was made to understand consumers' perception of luxury fashion with respect to sustainability. What emerged is that although all respondents associate luxury products with characteristics such as superior quality, timeless style, and design that stands out, characteristics that also cause them to desire and, in some cases, then make luxury purchases, sustainability is not immediately perceived. In fact, some respondents said that if they think of luxury among the features that come to mind is not sustainability, as for example “When I think of the characteristics of luxury fashion, I think of features such as high price, exclusivity, but sustainability is not the first thing that comes to mind. Because at first glance I don't associate sustainable products with the characteristics of luxury products”, “Actually if I think of luxury, I think

of features such as high price, products that can create desire but sustainability is not a feature that comes to mind”. At the same time, it emerged that, especially among those who shop more frequently, consumers are increasingly aware of the efforts that brands are making in this direction. To the point that many consumers are more likely to choose and support brands that take concrete action for the environment as shown in *Table 3*, this has been observed to occur both in the case of luxury consumers and the opposite case. This aspect, turned out, that in luxury brands is also more immediate because their products being perceived as more durable and of higher quality than fast fashion products, so consumers are also more predisposed and have more trust. This data is very important and at the same time encouraging for luxury brands, as the efforts they are making are recognized.

Perceptions of luxury and sustainability	
Luxury consumers	<p>“Unlike fast fashion, the luxury sector adopts sustainable strategies not only from a production process or supply chain perspective, but also from a social and value perspective. This justifies the fact that many people are willing to pay a premium price for a sustainable product belonging to a luxury brand”</p> <p>“Until some time ago of I would have said no, to today I say yes, because the efforts of brands to be sustainable are more and more evident. An example that immediately come to my mind is Gucci and its new green shopping bags.”</p>
Non-luxury consumers	<p>“ from my point of view this sector has not distinguished itself over the years for its concern for the environment, despite that I believe that to this day it is complying with standards and regulations in this regard, this is because we consumers are becoming more and more aware.”</p> <p>“, it is not the first attribute I associate with luxury fashion, however it is an increasingly decisive factor in my</p>

	purchasing choices. In fact, I would prefer to support brands that are actively working for the planet.”
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Table 3: Perception of luxury and sustainability

In addition, the search engine "KeywordsPeopleUse¹⁰" was used to further test the growing focus on sustainability even among luxury consumers. By entering the keyword "fashion luxury and sustainability", as can be seen from the *figure 15*, numerous questions were discovered from consumers showing their growing interest in this topic such as: are Prada, Louis Vuitton, Gucci really sustainable? What is sustainability in luxury?, Is sustainability the future of fashion?



Figure 16: Search on the keywords: fashion luxury and sustainability.

Source: <https://keywordspeopleuse.com/>

¹⁰ <https://keywordspeopleuse.com/>

Coming then to the main focus of the research, some very interesting data and insights emerged.

Consumers almost unanimously upon seeing images of products with symmetrical designs stated that these products are synonymous with the timeless elegance typical of luxury, and refinement. Many consumers, responded that these products with symmetrical designs lend clarity and balance to their outfits, helping them stand out in formal situations. Symmetrical design then can be interpreted as the typical product image consumers think of when asked to think about a luxury fashion product. Also, because it turned out that the majority of consumers see these products as durable, from the responses we can estimate that they could be used for at least 5 years.

On the other hand, there is the asymmetrical designs, the sample chosen is divided in this case in that there is a part that would never buy it, some other stated they would buy only some items such as the bag or shoes, admitting that they have also already made similar purchases and finally a part of the sample that finds these purchases interesting. This is because asymmetric design fashion is seen as breaking the mold, as an expression of creativity. In particular, it is important to note that among respondents aged 18-23/24 this is seen as an expression of style and a way of standing out, while among respondents aged 25-30 this takes on another role and meaning, becoming in fact an opportunity to break out of the formality and routine of daily life and work environment. In spite of this, however, the majority of the sample sees these products as very tied to seasonality, in fact the majority would not wear them for more than one season. This aspect is very important, in fact luxury fashion brand should draw positive insights for future marketing campaigns of this product. Because it is not enough to create an out-of-the-box product and advertise it as such, it is also necessary to make consumers perceive that it is a product that has no seasonality, that as a luxury product it should be perceived as timeless. At the same time, it is important for brands to emphasize how these products are the marriage of atypical design and typical luxury features. This shows the enormous impact that design takes on product perception. When asked which design is more inclined to their tastes out of 30 consumers, 24 answered symmetrical, 2 said they were neutral, and the rest (N=4) chose asymmetrical. Finally, it was found that most consumers tend to perceive symmetrical fashion as more sustainable. The reason lies in the associations consumers make in their minds: in fact, they tend to associate the durability and thus the longer life cycle of

products with symmetrical design as an implicit feature of sustainability, and at the same time the perception of higher quality is associated with the perception of products made with excellent raw materials and thus sustainable. In addition, from the careful analysis of the responses, it was found that consumers who see an association between sustainability and symmetrical (but also asymmetrical) design are those in the largest number of cases who responded positively to the second question about the perception about sustainability during the purchase phase. This is an insight that brands need to pay close attention to as it means that those who are more inclined toward a certain feature will be able to perceive it more easily than those who have no particular interest in it. This is why that brands must clearly and transparently communicate their actions, to engage not only that part of consumers interested in these practices but also those more reluctant. Therefore, brands should leverage design and these brand associations to show their efforts in terms of sustainability, and to also steer consumers toward more sustainable purchase without sacrificing aesthetics, quality, and elegance. On the other hand, fashion with asymmetrical design even though it is perceived as innovative, creative and outside the rules, it is hardly associated, by the majority of respondents, with sustainability. There are several reasons for this, in the view of some consumers this cannot be associated with sustainability, like for example because it is not bought by many people and for this reason many products remain unsold, and this attitude cannot be considered green. Moreover, according to others, the materials used are not sustainable, and others argue that precisely because of their originality they are less practical and therefore less suitable for a sustainable wardrobe. However, it is interesting to note what has emerged from the responses of a small section of consumers, which runs counter to what has been said so far. It turned out that these products being seen as new, innovative and against the schemes by their definition are also sustainable, as to date sustainability and acting respecting the planet means being countercurrent, going to break bad rules to create new ones. The latter is a very interesting perspective, from which brands could and should take cues. *Table 4* synthetize the main associations that emerged from the interviews, comparing symmetric and asymmetric design, also providing some quotas to support these associations.

Symmetric Design	Asymmetric Design
<p>ASSOCIATIONS: “timeless products”, “versatility”, “long-term investment”, “elegance”,</p> <p>SUPPORTING QUOTES:</p>	<p>ASSOCIATIONS: “unique”, “unconventional”, “creative”, “innovative”, “intriguing “</p> <p>SUPPORTING QUOTES:</p>
<p>“I like them for their elegance and simplicity. They represent something that is not only beautiful, but also a classic over time. These are products that I can wear for years without them going out of style.”</p>	<p>“In this case I think it appeals because it is out of the ordinary, I think it meets more the tastes of people with extroverted personalities.”</p>
<p>“Symmetrical design is liked because it represents the essence of luxury, the essence of timeless style that never goes out of style”</p>	<p>“I love products with asymmetrical design because I like to be daring, especially with my style. Asymmetrical design embodies my passion for trends.”</p>
<p>“Symmetrical fashion is valued for its ability to convey a sense of sophistication.”</p>	<p>“It manages to capture attention because of its distinctiveness, I think it is attractive especially to boys of my generation, as we are constantly seeking to express our uniqueness through our outfits. “</p>

Table 4: Main associations for symmetric and asymmetric design

3.5 Contribution, limitations and future research directions

The present research has been conducted with a sample of young adults, from Italian culture, of different social classes and age, which allowed to reveal different views and interesting insights about how consumers perceive the aesthetic design of luxury fashion products.

First, it shows us that the perception of luxury fashion and the associations that consumers have in their minds are roughly unambiguous and uniform, showing that either that the branding strategies put in place are paying off, as well as the documented resilience of the luxury industry itself (e.g., Altagamma, 2024).

Next, it emerged how sustainability is gaining more and more ground in consumer choices and expectations even though it cannot yet be considered a decisive criterion influencing the consumer's purchase decision.

Moreover, the in-depth interviews allowed to confirm the strong power of aesthetic design (namely, symmetrical or asymmetrical) in influencing consumers' final choices. Symmetrical design has been recognized as trustworthy and durable, as the choice that one is unlikely to regret. On the contrary, asymmetrical design products are seen as new, as an element of differentiation, but at the same time more daring and also less related to the concept of sustainability. However, this study is not free from limitations, which can work as a stimulus for future research efforts:

- *research methodology*: this work draws on a qualitative research methodology. Indeed, one-to-one in-depth interviews were adopted. It is important to recognize one of the main biases of in-depth interviews, which is the fact that respondents are aware of being interviewed, and thus they could show a more favorable attitude toward the object of investigation. Moreover, even though qualitative research allows to better explore the underlying motivation of a specific behavior or perception, compared to quantitative analysis, qualitative research outputs cannot be generalized to a larger population. Future research, should consider a multi-method approach as research method, which could ensure data triangulation and more robust results;

- *sample*: reaching out through interviews to consumers is not very easy, for reasons of time and consumer availability this work managed to collect a total of 30 interviews between men and women. It would be interesting if future research could aim to collect a much larger number of interviews. In addition, consumers aged 18-30 was chosen as the sample because they represent a relevant consumer group for luxury consumers, as they are the main target of actual strategies. However, it would be equally interesting to broaden this target group to also find out the perspectives of the so-called Gen X and seniors;

- *cultural influence*: the present work did not pay special attention to the cultural factors that might actually influence the perception of aesthetics and sustainability of luxury products. In the future, a comparative analysis between different cultures could provide a completer and more detailed picture of the global dynamics of luxury fashion;
- *temporality of the data*: considering the continuous evolution of an industry like fashion, these data could only represent a snapshot of the current situation. Therefore, it would be important to give continuity to this study to better explore the evolution of aesthetic preference over time

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis set out from the beginning to provide a detailed analysis of the luxury industry. Starting with a general exploration of this industry that is as complex as it is fascinating, its evolution was explored, the evolution of the role of luxury within society, and the luxury fashion industry, a sector to date, as statistical analysis has shown, to be the most profitable of the entire industry, was explored in detail. In particular of the world of luxury fashion, all its facets, all its dynamics, both internal to the company and external to consumers, were examined. This made it possible to make assessments of current trends, and the following field research also made it possible to make predictions about the future of luxury fashion. Starting from the general analysis, it emerged how the concept of luxury today is totally different from the perception of it around the 19th century. In fact, luxury was a prerogative for a few, for only those who belonged to the noble class, for everyone else certain products remained a mere desire. As has been extensively documented, however, with the advent of globalization something begins to change, we gradually witness what is called the democratization of luxury, which will lead to the birth of a new concept of luxury the "new luxury." A form of luxury now that is no longer just exclusive to the few, but gradually begins to break down some social barriers, so that, thanks in part to a gradual increase in wealth among the population, luxury now begins to transform for many from mere desire to something more concrete and attainable. Brands have had to adapt to this new dimension, creating apposite and new marketing strategies, now directed not only to the nobility but also to the middle class. Along with this new phenomenon, new trends have undoubtedly emerged, the most important of which is that of sustainability, of therefore increasing concern for the planet. Brands are implementing numerous strategies to highlight their efforts and push people toward this new reality. Studies carried out on consumers have shown how these efforts are not proving to be in vain; on the contrary, they are proving to be increasingly aware, attentive to this reality, and above all conscious of the gap between luxury and fast fashion. Numerous research has shown that within the luxury industry, the most profitable segment, with revenue of 15 trillion euros in 2023, is the fashion industry. This sector continues to grow inexorably, unaffected even by the post-Covid-19 crisis, to the point that it has emerged that by 2030 its revenues will double. From the study subsequently on the luxury fashion industry, many important data emerged, which subsequently resulted in an in-depth field survey. First among

them can be found the key role played by branding in the luxury fashion industry. The reason for this lies in the fact that a luxury brand, especially a luxury fashion brand, is not merely an identifier of products, but represents a set of values, promises and perceptions that create an emotional bond with consumers. To the point that the product purchase phase becomes a real experience (today we talk about experiential luxury) unique that does not stop at the purchase phase but continues after it. Moreover, it has been observed that for centuries these brands have carried many values such as excellent quality, uniqueness, social value, hedonism, and durability, all of which together contribute to building a distinctive and desirable identity that is essential to attracting and retaining a loyal customer base. All these strategies, it turns out, are essential in order to ensure strong brand positioning, alongside these brands are implementing others in order to remain competitive in the marketplace, enlarge their customer base, and diversify their offerings, these include, for example, brand extensions and co-branding strategies. It is important for brands to be aware that these strategies need to be managed very carefully to avoid the risk of diluting the brand image, as has happened to some brands that as a result of misguided strategies went from being luxury brands to being perceived as premium brands, now re-establishing the past image is far from easy. This thesis therefore offers an important cue to companies in the industry in this regard. Brands are also implementing various strategies to adapt to the new dynamics of the modern marketplace, particularly to meet the challenges of digitization and sustainability. The former is totally shaping the current luxury and fashion landscape, shopping is shifting more and more to online, the stores of the future may be e-commerce sites, which need to be as interactive as possible and able to provide a shopping experience similar to what might happen in the physical store. Alongside this, there is also social media have made luxury products more accessible, allowing brands to interact with a global audience, thanks to the ease with which consumers can be reached and also thanks to the emergence of a new figure, that of influencers. On the other hand, the growing focus on sustainability has led luxury brands to review their production practices, integrating values of environmental and social responsibility into their offerings. Sustainability is not just a trend, but a necessity that brands must embrace to meet the expectations of modern consumers. Finally, we came to study the primary objective of this thesis namely aesthetics, understanding its role and consumer perception. This thesis aimed from the outset to provide a detailed analysis of the luxury industry. Beginning with a general exploration of this industry that is as complex as it is fascinating, its evolution was explored, particularly the evolution of the role of luxury within

society, and the luxury fashion industry, an industry that to date, as statistical analysis has shown, is the most profitable in the entire segment, was explored in detail. Specifically of the world of luxury fashion, all its facets, all its dynamics, both internal to the company and external to consumers, were examined. This enabled assessments to be made of current trends, and subsequent field research also enabled predictions to be made about the future of luxury fashion. Starting from the general analysis, it emerged how the concept of luxury today is totally different from the perception of it around the 19th century. Indeed, in the beginning, luxury was a prerogative for a few, only for those who belonged to the noble class, for everyone else certain products remained a mere desire. As has been widely documented, however, with the advent of globalization something begins to change, we gradually witness what is called the democratization of luxury, which will lead to the emergence of a new concept of luxury, the "new luxury." A form of luxury that is no longer just the exclusive preserve of the few, but gradually begins to break down certain social barriers, so that, thanks in part to the gradual increase in wealth among the population, luxury begins to transform for many from a mere desire to something more concrete and attainable. Brands had to adapt to this new dimension, creating apposite and new marketing strategies, now aimed not only at the nobility but also at the middle class. Along with this new phenomenon, new trends have undoubtedly emerged, the most important of which is that of sustainability, hence the growing concern for the planet. Brands are implementing numerous strategies to highlight their efforts and push people toward this new reality. Consumer studies have shown how these efforts are not proving to be in vain; on the contrary, they are proving to be increasingly aware, attentive to this reality, and especially aware of the gap between luxury and fast fashion. Numerous research has shown that within the luxury industry, the most profitable segment, with a turnover of 15 trillion euros in 2023, is fashion. This industry continues to grow relentlessly, unaffected by the post Covid-19 crisis, to the point that it has been found that by 2030 its revenues will double. From the follow-up study on the luxury fashion industry, many important data emerged, which then resulted in an in-depth field survey. The first of these is the key role played by branding in the luxury fashion industry. The reason for this lies in the fact that a luxury brand, particularly a luxury fashion brand, is not simply a product identifier, but represents a set of values, promises and perceptions that create an emotional bond with consumers. To the point that the product purchase phase becomes a real and unique experience (today we talk about experiential luxury) that does not stop at the purchase phase but continues afterwards. Moreover, it has been observed that for centuries these brands

have carried many values, such as excellent quality, uniqueness, social value, hedonism, and durability, which together help build a distinctive and desirable identity that is essential to attracting and retaining a loyal customer base. All these strategies are apparently essential to ensure strong brand positioning; alongside these, brands implement others to remain competitive in the marketplace, expand their customer base, and diversify their offerings; these include, for example, brand extensions and co-branding strategies. It is important for brands to be aware that these strategies need to be managed very carefully to avoid the risk of diluting the brand image, as has happened to some brands that, because of misguided strategies, have gone from being luxury brands to being perceived as premium brands, and now re-establishing the past image is far from easy. Thus, this thesis offers an important cue to companies in the industry in this regard. Brands are also implementing different strategies to adapt to the new dynamics of the modern market, particularly to meet the challenges of digitization and sustainability. The former is totally shaping the current luxury and fashion landscape, shopping is shifting more and more to online, the stores of the future might be e-commerce sites, which need to be as interactive as possible and able to provide a shopping experience similar to what might happen in the physical store. In addition to this, social media has also made luxury products more accessible, allowing brands to interact with a global audience, thanks to the ease with which consumers can be reached and also thanks to the emergence of a new figure, that of influencers. On the other hand, the growing focus on sustainability has led luxury brands to review their production practices, integrating values of environmental and social responsibility into their offerings. Sustainability is not just a trend, but a necessity that brands must embrace to meet the expectations of modern consumers. Finally, we came to study the primary focus of this thesis, which is aesthetics, understanding its role and consumer perception. It has been shown, with the support of empirical evidence, that for the purposes of maintaining high degrees of brand recognition, a good deal of consistency between design and aesthetics must also be coupled with the theories described above, as also underscored by the theory of brand design consistency (BDC). Specifically, design consistency, aesthetic innovation, halo effect, and sustainability integration are all factors that contribute to building a distinctive and desirable luxury brand. Finally, recent studies have shown that in recent years there has been a growing interest on the part of both brands and consumers in atypical, asymmetrical designs, which has led to the emergence of what is now called "ugly luxury." In order to study in depth the dynamics revolving around aesthetics, design and fashion, a qualitative analysis was conducted. This analysis highlighted the important role that design plays

in consumer purchasing decisions, in fact, products with a symmetrical design push consumers more to buy, because in them the true essence of luxury is seen, and in some cases even the characteristic of sustainability. While for products with asymmetrical design still the road is more uphill as, while on the one hand they are seen as innovative, creative and unique products they still have the characteristic of seasonality anchored on them. This comes slightly into conflict with the essence of luxury. Finally, we came to study the primary objective of this thesis, namely aesthetics, aiming to understand its role and consumer perception. This study succeeded in highlighting the fundamental role of aesthetics in the world of luxury fashion, because it not only draws consumers' attention and interest to the brand, but also succeeds in creating shopping experiences that go beyond that, involving all the senses. Strategies that are flexible, targeted, innovative, that can integrate digital experiences, sustainability-related experiences, and that are tailored to individual needs. Therefore, only through a careful strategic brand management, a focus on aesthetics and sustainability can luxury fashion brands continue to defend and strengthen their position in the market.

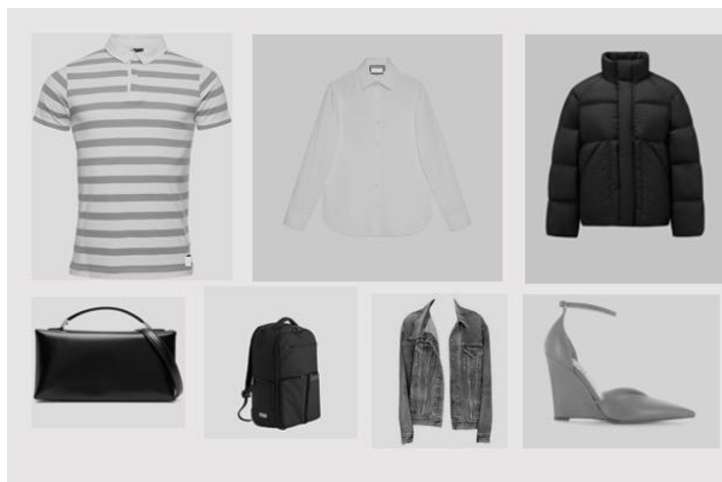
APPENDIX I

Consumer interview questions

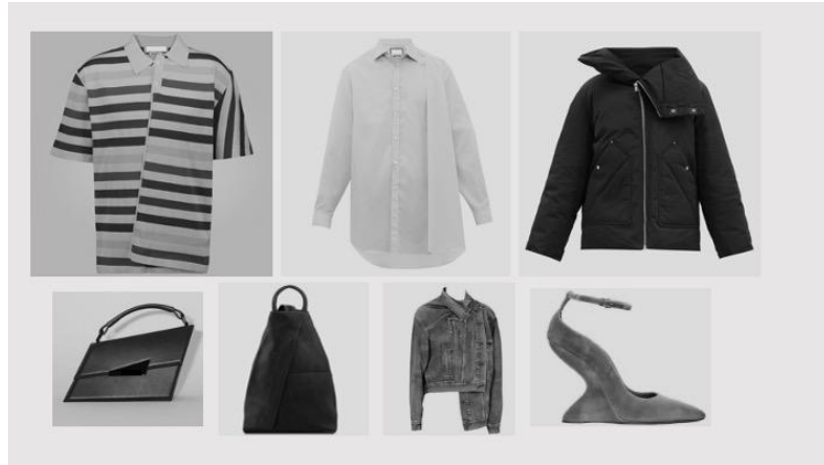
1) Have you ever bought, or do you often buy luxury products? If yes, what makes you prefer these products over others? If not, why not? Would you like to do that?

2) If I asked you to think of some characteristics to associate with luxury fashion, would sustainability be among them? Why?

3) Hereafter you will see some examples of products with **Symmetric design** produced by luxury brands. Would you buy them? How long would you plan on wearing these kinds of products before you no longer want them?



4) Hereafter you will see some examples of products with **Asymmetric design** produced by luxury brands. Would you buy them? How long would you plan on wearing these kinds of products before you no longer want them?



5) Which design do you like more?

(a) Symmetric

(b) Asymmetric

6) According to you, what do people like about symmetric fashion? Do you think it is sustainable (green) design?

7) According to you, what do people like about asymmetric fashion? Do you think it is a sustainable (green) design?

APPENDIX II

Interview transcripts

INTERVIEW 1

Consumer 1 – 24-year-old girl

- 1) Yes, I buy luxury products because I really like the aesthetics and I think they are products that last, so very often but not always it's worth it to make the investment.
- 2) No, sustainability is not the first feature I can think of to associate with even though I am aware that all luxury brands are working a lot on this factor.
- 3) Yes I would probably buy them for several years
- 4) I would only purchase the bag on the left and the jacket on the right. They are more sought-after products so yes I would wear them but no in everyday wear
- 5) A-Symmetrical
- 6) It's a linear type of design that looks good on everything and therefore allows the consumer to use the product more frequently, so yes I think it's sustainable
- 7) Asymmetrical fashion appeals to people because it is unconventional so it can be associated with the concept of uniqueness. I don't think it is a sustainable design because I think people are less likely to buy asymmetrical products so there would be a lot of unsold products.

INTERVIEW 2

Consumers 2 – 24-year-old girl

- 1) Unfortunately, because of the high cost I don't buy many luxury products, but I would like to do so very often if I had the chance.
- 2) Actually if I think of luxury I think of features such as high price, products that can create desire but sustainability is not a feature that comes to mind.
- 3) Yes, products with this kind of design really appeal to me and I would buy them. I think I would use them for a really long time as especially because they are produced by luxury brands, I see them as timeless products that never go out of style.
- 4) No, products with this design I would not buy, although I think they are unique, I can think of products made by brand partnerships for example, however, not if I were to go into a store or website my choice would not fall on them. If I were to buy them however I wouldn't use them for a long time because unlike the ones before I see them as products that go out of fashion easily .

5) A- symmetrical design.

6) In my opinion as I also said before the thing, I like the most is its being classic but at the same time always fashionable. But no, I don't think it is a sustainable design.

7) I think it is an original fashion, more difficult to understand. Again, I don't think it is a sustainable design.

INTERVIEW 3

Consumer 3 – 23-year-old girl

1) I have happened to buy luxury products and have done so driven by the better quality and durability of these products compared to low-cost alternatives. In general, I am more satisfied if a product has these characteristics.

2) Yes because, unlike fast fashion, the luxury sector adopts sustainable strategies not only from a production process or supply chain perspective, but also from a social and value perspective. This justifies the fact that many people are willing to pay a premium price for a sustainable product belonging to a luxury brand.

3) Yes, I would buy these products because I could wear them for a long time; I believe they are timeless in that they are suitable for every period and occasion.

4) No, I would not buy them as I think they are aesthetically pleasing. If I were to buy them, I would only be able to wear them once.

5)A- symmetrical.

6) Symmetrical garments positively affect people are visually more pleasing and never go out of fashion. In this sense they can be called more sustainable because they do not cause people to buy another garment after a short time.

7) In my opinion, people are more likely to choose symmetrical fashion because they do not find asymmetrical fashion beautiful according to traditional aesthetic standards. As a result, I do not think the design is sustainable in the long run since, even if chosen on special occasions, it could be changed very often.

INTERVIEW 4

Consumer 4 – 20-year-old boy

- 1) Yes, I buy luxury products really often. The reason is because of the superior quality and unique design. For me the purchase of luxury garments represents an investment, so it is not just a purchase but something that determines my style over time and will allow me to distinguish myself.

- 2) No, honestly, I would not in the immediate term associate luxury fashion with sustainability, despite that, I think it is to date very important that luxury brands begin to adopt more sustainable practices. The fashion industry can be very polluting so luxury brands, given their role, should be leaders in promoting positive changes.
- 3) Yes, I would buy them because I tend to see them as timeless and classic products. I could wear them for several years before I could get tired of them.
- 4) Yes, I would buy them because I am attracted to them because of their distinctiveness. Compared to the previous ones, however, perhaps, I would wear them for a shorter period of time, maximum one season, because their distinctiveness in the long run might tire me faster.
- 5) A – Symmetrical.
- 6) I believe that symmetrical fashion cannot also be perceived as sustainable, at least not by me. However, there is the factor of the durability of these products to consider, which, indeed may make them more sustainable.
- 7) Asymmetric fashion being particular, very much related to experimentation could be seen as closer to the concept of sustainability, because it is seen as more open to the use of new practices or new materials or production methods.

INTERVIEW 5

Consumer 5 – 22-year-old girl

- 1) No, I rarely bought them, because of my lifestyle I cannot indulge in too many luxury purchases. However, I am sure that in the future when I have a different economic stability I would love to be able to buy them, frequently too.
- 2) No, because from my point of view this sector has not distinguished itself over the years for its concern for the environment, despite that I believe that to this day it is complying with standards and regulations in this regard, this is because we consumers are becoming more and more aware.
- 3) I would definitely buy all the products pictured, however, I do not rule out that I might lose interest within a couple of years.
- 4) No, I would definitely not buy any of them, because they are too distant from me and I would feel uncomfortable wearing them.
- 5) A-Symmetrical.
- 6) I think they like these products because they bring together the tastes of most consumers, especially those who are less extroverted and more classic. However, I do not think that the choice of whether

or not to buy these products depends on the influence of sustainability criteria, everything is influenced by design.

7) In this case I think it appeals because it is out of the ordinary, I think it meets more the tastes of people with extroverted personalities, however. Again, I don't think that they are more sustainable or that sustainability can influence their decisions.

INTERVIEW 6

Consumer 6 – 28-year-old boy

1) Yes, I buy them occasionally, particularly in the case of special collaborations or limited editions. I like to go in search of the latest items that can add an original touch to my style.

2) While I recognize that sustainability is becoming increasingly important, it is not the first aspect I consider or that comes to mind. In any case, especially lately I give it much more importance.

3) When I need garments or accessories that are stylish and whose quality is easily perceived, yes I like products with asymmetrical designs. Usually, speaking also based on the products I have already bought I use them for several years, even 4-5.

4) Yes, I like them when I want to assert my personality, when I don't want to go unnoticed. These products in my closet have a shorter duration, just 1-2 years.

5) Both.

6) As also mentioned earlier, I don't necessarily associate it with sustainability, but I recognize that symmetrical garments are less subject to seasonality and therefore have a longer life cycle, and also higher quality materials.

7) Again, the same answer applies, however, it's all up to the brands, because if they start using green practices, materials versus even the final product will be perceived as such.

INTERVIEW 7

Consumer 7- 25-year-old girl

1) No, I have never purchased luxury products, and I would not like to do so, because I do not feel the need or the mere pleasure of it, on the contrary I adore fashion and all that surrounds it immensely, but the purchase of certain items with the related, and in my opinion also exaggerated, prices attached to them have never prompted me to perform such an act.

2) Yes, because the consumer of luxury products is willing to pay a higher price, which would go to provide a focus on environmental sustainability and respect for the workers involved in the life cycle of a fashion product to improve their working conditions.

3) Yes, I really like the symmetrical design. I would probably never get tired of it.

4) No I would not buy them. I do not desire these products regardless.

5) A-symmetric.

6) I find that it creates balance, harmony and in our mind, it generates order and completeness. No, I don't think the latter is a sustainable design, just because it is symmetrical.

7) In my opinion, many people like it because they find it extravagant and unconventional. No, I don't think the latter is sustainable design, just because it is asymmetrical.

INTERVIEW 8

Consumer 8 – 20-year-old boy

1) Yes, I purchased luxury products specifically because of their superior quality and durability. By lasting so long these products in my opinion offer a complete shopping experience that totally justifies their price.

2) Yes, it is a factor that I consider and that also drives me to purchase luxury. In my opinion, unlike the fast fashion industry the luxury industry is making a real commitment to the environment, and to society in general.

3) Yes, I would buy them for their timeless elegance and style. In fact I can wear them for very long years, however their quality is not altered and neither is their beauty.

4) Although some at first glance may attract my attention, I would not purchase them. If I ever did, I would use them only in special cases.

5) A-Symmetric

6) People like symmetrical fashion because it is attractive and traditional, this makes the garments easier to match and suitable for different occasions. Their durability and adaptability make them more sustainable.

7) Asymmetric fashion can be seen as innovative and unique, but it deviates too much from traditional aesthetic standards. I don't think it is sustainable because the life cycle of products is very short and this creates a lot of pollution.

INTERVIEW 9

Consumer 9 – 28-year-old boy

1) Yes, I buy them regularly. The reason lies in the fact that I like, especially at work, to give an elegant and well-groomed image of myself, but not only for that of course. I love the fact that they last a long time and therefore I can use them more frequently, and from my point of view the higher cost is justified by all these features including a unique design.

2) Absolutely yes, I think especially today you cannot separate fashion and sustainability, where sustainability implies a high degree of corporate social responsibility. I for one prefer to support brands that are really working towards that because that reflects my morality.

3) Yes, of course, I would and often do buy products with symmetrical design because they flatly reflect my idea of luxury. I often put them back until they really become unusable

4) I am not a big fan of these products. I definitely would not wear them at work, I would only buy them to go to some special event where a creative outfit is required, and I would only use them on a few occasions.

5) A-Symmetric.

6) Symmetrical fashion is appreciated because it is seen as a long-term investment. Yes of course for me it is also sustainable.

7) I don't think it is sustainable, but it is liked because it represents novelty.

INTERVIEW 10

Consumer 10 – 26-year-old girl

1) Yes, I buy them regularly, because I love fashion and everything beautiful. Luxury products for me represent the true essence of fashion, so I can't do without them.

2) Yes, I associate it with luxury fashion. I also really appreciate when brands do special collections or special campaign to promote sustainable collections, it's a powerful tool for raising awareness.

3) As a fashion enthusiast, I can't help but be attracted to symmetrical designs. I usually use these products for 4-5 years, combining them with elements from the new seasons.

4) I love products with asymmetrical design because I like to be daring, especially with my style. Asymmetrical design embodies my passion for trends. I would use them for longer, however definitely never in comparison to the previous ones.

5) B-Asymmetric.

6) People appreciate symmetrical fashion for its cleanliness and simplicity, offering a sense of order and elegance. Symmetry is often seen as more professional and appropriate for formal or office situations.

7) Asymmetric fashion is valued for its ability to attract attention and break with the norm. It is often chosen by those who want to express individuality and originality. Personally, I find asymmetrical design exciting and dynamic, perfect for showing my creative and fashionable side.

INTERVIEW 11

Consumer 11 – 24-year-old boy

- 1) I don't regularly buy luxury products, yet I really enjoy doing so because I am driven by the fact that it is a product that will always have value.
- 2) When I think of the characteristics of luxury fashion, I think of features such as high price, exclusivity, but sustainability is not the first thing that comes to mind. Because at first glance I don't associate sustainable products with the characteristics of luxury products.
- 3) Yes, I would buy them and I think I would wear them for a long time
- 4) I would only buy a few like the shirt or the bag, because I find them interesting and special. I think I would wear them for a limited time.
- 5) A- symmetrical.
- 6) I think they are more liking to consumers' tastes so they are easier to accept. I don't get to associate them with sustainability.
- 7) Asymmetrical fashion gives people the feeling that they are wearing a unique garment that allows them to differentiate themselves. Yes, I would come to associate it with sustainability in that they are particular, new products and therefore I would also come to say sustainable.

INTERVIEW 12

Consumer 12 – 19-year-old girl

- 1) Yes, I occasionally buy luxury products. When I do it is because of their story and what the brand communicates to society.
- 2) No, I don't think about sustainability when I make these kinds of purchases. But since it is a very important value, especially for my generation, I think it is important to give it the right importance.
- 3) Yes, I am usually inclined to buy accessories and clothing with symmetrical designs. Because they offer the versatility to suit different occasions and I would keep them for several years
- 4) Asymmetrical designs are intriguing. I would only buy them if I was really impressed, but I usually really enjoy looking at them but then that hardly translates into a purchase. I would not wear them for a long time.
- 5) A – Symmetrical.
- 6) I think people like symmetrical fashion because of its visual consistency and the ease with which it can be combined with other garments. It is not necessarily more sustainable, but brands that incorporate green practices have my appreciation.
- 7) Asymmetric fashion is popular with young people because of its bold and innovative nature. It is often not considered sustainable, but if brands adopted recycled materials, it could become so.

INTERVIEW 13

Consumer 13 – 30-year-old girl

- 1) No, I don't buy luxury items regularly because I prefer to allocate that large part of my budget into education-type investments. However, I do not rule out that I would like to purchase them from time to time, because I recognize their timeless quality and value.
- 2) No, it is not the first attribute I associate with luxury fashion, however it is an increasingly decisive factor in my purchasing choices. In fact, I would prefer to support brands that are actively working for the planet.
- 3) Yes, I would buy them as I consider them attractive, of a high quality that justifies the price. I would keep and use them for many years.
- 4) Yes, I would buy them because they intrigue me, have in my opinion, a very strong personality. However, they might not last long in my closet.
- 5) A- Asymmetrical .
- 6) I think it is particularly appreciated for its ability to convey harmony ,balance and a refined image. Yes, in my opinion it can easily be associated with sustainability.
- 7) It manages to capture attention because of its distinctiveness, I think it is attractive especially to boys of my generation, as we are constantly seeking to express our uniqueness through our outfits.

INTERVIEW 14

Consumer 14 – 28-year-old boy

- 1) I don't buy them very often, when I do it is because I am looking for something new and special that will last, as in the case of handbags or shoes.
- 2) No, I honestly do not link sustainability to luxury fashion, however, I would like there to be more attention and especially more transparency, avoiding greenwashing practices.
- 3) Yes, I am attracted by their linearity and cleanliness. I see them as a long-term investment, so I would keep them for several long years.
- 4) They are interesting, but only if you need something special for a special occasion. I would keep them less because of their specialness I think I could get sick of them more easily.
- 5) A-Symmetric.
- 6) I think it is liked a lot because it is neat and balanced. I am not sure if it is also more sustainable.
- 7) Asymmetrical fashion is attractive because it is bold, because it provides a new and original way to express oneself. Regarding the sustainability aspect, it depends on how it is produced.

INTERVIEW 15

Consumer 15 – 24-year-old girl

- 1) No, and I would not like that because luxury fashion is anyway one of the reasons why the textile industry is more polluting, since from that and the condition of world economic crisis comes fast fashion and all the damage it creates.
- 2) Partially, because precisely the rise in demand by the rich deciles has led to the increase in collections, thus an exponential increase in reproductions and dupes purchased by the lower ranks of society; perhaps it is more sustainable than fast fashion in terms of the durability of the products and the workmanship of the products but at the same time it is "indirectly unsustainable".
- 3) For the most part, I would not buy them because they do not meet my tastes .
- 4) No, they are uncomfortable and look good for a short time, so they are even less sustainable products.
- 5) A – symmetrical.
- 6) The fact that they are mostly 'wild card' garments that can be readjusted to various occasions and fashion changes, especially for those who cannot afford to buy new garments often. definitely more sustainable these products than asymmetrical ones
- 7) Of asymmetric fashion definitely dislike the fact that it is peculiar in lines and disharmonious. as mentioned, it is extremely unsustainable.

INTERVIEW 16

Consumer 16 – 27-year-old boy

- 1) No, I have never bought luxury products. Because I don't have adequate economic income I can't afford it. I would like to do it because I think they have better quality.
- 2) Luxury fashion: quality, brand and style. Sustainability is a consequence of quality, as clothes last longer, which leads to less purchase of fast fashion products.
- 3) Yes I would buy them. Although they are very basic they look very casual and everyday, so I think I would use them for a long time (5/8 years).
- 4) Asymmetric design less because I see them more difficult to be able to keep a long time in the closet, I could get tired easily.
- 5) A-Symmetrical.
- 6) Yes absolutely, I think it is a more durable design over time.
- 7) The fact that it is distinctive. I don't see it being very green.

INTERVIEW 17

Consumer 17 – 25-year-old girl

- 1) Not much, because I am at the beginning of my career so I still have a limited budget.
- 2) It is not the first thought that comes to my mind when I make such purchases. I am becoming more and more mindful of these practices, though, so I am starting to give more weight to that.
- 3) Yes, I like them and prefer them because of their particular simplicity. They are very versatile and suitable for different occasions. I would use them for a very long time.
- 4) They are undoubtedly very original, however less versatile, for example I do not consider them suitable for a work environment. I would wear them very rarely and not for many times.
- 5) A-Symmetric.
- 6) People Likes them for all the features I mentioned above. This does not mean that it is more sustainable.
- 7) I think it likes it because of the total break from traditionality. Again, this does not mean that it is more or less sustainable.

INTERVIEW 18

Consumer 18 – 18-year-old boy

- 1) No, but I would love to. Especially buying those garments that I see worn by my idols.
- 2) So far I haven't thought much about sustainability in luxury fashion. But we have started a university project on the environment, this is making me more and more aware.
- 3) I like them very much and that is why I would buy them. I would definitely keep them for more than 3 years.
- 4) These patterns reflect my style, I like them very much. If the design is very extreme I would get tired very soon and very easily, otherwise I would keep them for a few seasons.
- 5) B – Asymmetric.
- 6) Symmetrical fashion is liked because it is cleaner and neater, managing to ensure a perfect look every time. I'm not sure if it's more sustainable, but it would be nice if it were.
- 7) Asymmetric fashion, on the other hand, is liked because it is different. Regarding sustainability, it would be interesting if brands could combine innovative designs with eco-friendly materials.

INTERVIEW 19

Consumer 19 – 20-year-old girl

- 1) Yes, I buy them very often because I am charmed every time by the exclusivity and superior quality of these products. Not also because they allow me to communicate a certain social image.
- 2) Sustainability has become a priority for me, so yes it is an aspect that I hold in high regard. I think it is important to raise awareness among people who buy luxury to make responsible purchases

3) I like them for their elegance and simplicity. They represent something that is not only beautiful, but also a classic over time. These are products that I can wear for years without them going out of style.

4) I am occasionally tempted to buy asymmetrical patterns. When I do it is because I want to give my look a new twist. I get tired of them very quickly, though.

5) A-Symmetrical.

6) It is admired because it never goes out of style, I think it is also sustainable because of this characteristic.

7) It impresses by being exciting and creative. Sustainability in this case I perceive it but with more difficulty.

INTERVIEW 20

Consumer 20 – 24-year-old girl

1) Yes, I happened to buy luxury products. I prefer them especially when I have to give gifts because they have a different value.

2) Until some time ago of I would have said no, to today I say yes, because the efforts of brands to be sustainable are more and more evident. An example that immediately come to my mind is Gucci and its new green shopping bags.

3) Yes, I would buy them. I think minimum 3 years I would wear them.

4) Yes, I wouldn't mind buying them. I see them as seasonal products, so I would only use them for one season.

5) A- Symmetrical.

6) Symmetrical design is liked because it represents the essence of luxury, the essence of timeless style that never goes out of style. Yes, I think to this day it is sustainable.

7) Asymmetrical design is liked because it is distinctive, it represents novelty. As said before I think this is also sustainable. To date, I believe that the whole of luxury fashion is making a transition to a sustainable fashion model.

INTERVIEW 21

Consumer 21 – 22-year-old boy

1) Yes, I like to buy them from time to time. In particular I invest in shoes, handbags and watches, items that can elevate my style.

2) Yes, sustainability would be among them because I am increasingly aware of the environmental impact of the fashion industry.

- 3) Symmetrical patterns appeal to me because of their clarity. They are pieces that I expect to wear for a long time, as they never go out of style. I see them as a long-term investment.
- 4) Asymmetrical patterns are distinctive; I like to buy them for special occasions. However, I tend to get tired of these garments more quickly.
- 5) A – Symmetrical.
- 6) Symmetrical fashion is appreciated for its ability to convey order and professionalism, ideal for formal settings or situations where I want to appear more elegant. It is not necessarily also sustainable, but it cannot be ruled out as feature.
- 7) Asymmetrical fashion is different, which is why people like it. Sustainability will depend on a whole range of factors, such as materials, production policies.

INTERVIEW 22

Consumer 22 – 25-year-old girl

- 1) I like to buy what is beautiful and respects my taste, and I also often buy luxury products because I like to treat myself well.
- 2) No, it is not the first characteristic I think of associating with luxury. Because it is not an immediate thing, because when I buy or see luxury products I think of other features.
- 3) Yes, I would buy them, as has already happened. I would use them for a long time
- 4) Actually yes, I would buy them. For example, I recently bought a bag very similar to the one in the picture and I think I would use it for a year or maybe even two.
- 5) A – symmetrical.
- 6) Symmetrical design is easier to wear, more versatile. No, I don't think there is necessarily a connection with sustainability.
- 7) Asymmetrical design is for people who like to stand out, who like bold combinations. No, I don't think it's eco-friendly.

INTERVIEW 23

Consumer 23 – 29-year-old boy

- 1) Yes, I buy them regularly, because I appreciate the superiority of the design and the quality of the materials.
- 2) No, because sustainability is not a priority of mine when making such purchases.
- 3) I like symmetrical designs because they are classic but modern at the same time. It never goes out of style, and I invest in pieces that I can keep over time.

4) Yes, I like them too because they are very original. I couldn't really tell you how long I would wear them for.

5) Both.

6) It is seen as a safe long-term investment that you are unlikely to regret. I don't know if they are also eco-friendly.

7) It allows you to be daring, this is very important. Again I don't know if there is a correlation with sustainability.

INTERVIEW 24

Consumer 24 – 30-year-old girl

1) Yes, I often buy luxury products because they make me feel more confident and appreciated in my work environment.

2) No, however, I appreciate brands that are committed to it.

3) I like them a lot and buy them all the time. There are garments that I have been wearing for about 4 years.

4) I have bought them very few times, only when I wanted to give a creative twist to my very often very formal look. They had a very short life, I though.

5) A – Symmetrical.

6) It is a safe choice that communicates order and precision. No, I do not associate it with sustainability.

7) Asymmetric fashion is inspiring because of its originality and boldness. Again, I do not associate it with sustainability.

INTERVIEW 25

Consumer 25 – 19-year-old boy

1) Yes I buy them but only when I can afford it because they make me feel special and fashionable.

2) Sustainability is not my main priority when I think about luxury fashion. I am more focused on design and branding. But I obviously appreciate brands that are making an effort in this sense.

3) Yes, I like them although sometimes I find them too formal for my style. That's why I don't know how much I would use them.

4) I like them a lot because they reflect my style, I use them often and for a long time.

5) B-Asymmetrical.

6) I like it because it is never out of the box. I don't associate it with sustainability because I tend to see it as something grounded in classical values.

7) Asymmetric fashion is unique, never mundane. For these characteristics, yes, I would say it is also sustainable.

INTERVIEW 26

Consumer 26 – 27-year-old girl

- 1) I buy them from time to time because of what they offer.
- 2) Sustainability is important to me, but it is not always the deciding factor in my luxury purchases.
- 3) I really like symmetrical designs and would buy them. They are always current and have no "expiration date."
- 4) I like them, however only for certain contexts, for example I would hardly wear them at work. I think they get tired sooner.
- 5) A – Symmetrical.
- 6) Likes them because of their simplicity and versatility. Although I don't think it is increasingly sustainable. In any case I appreciate brands that combine classic design with responsible practices.
- 7) Asymmetric fashion is innovative. Sustainability depends on the brand's practices, but it is definitely a plus if the asymmetrical design is also eco-friendly.

INTERVIEW 27

Consumer 27 – 22-year-old girl

- 1) Yes, I do it mostly to celebrate my achievements.
- 2) Sustainability is important, but it is not always my first thought when buying luxury products.
- 3) I like symmetrical designs for their elegance and versatility. I see them as a long-term investment.
- 4) Yes, I like them too, but I see them as less versatile. That's why I would use them for a short term.
- 5) A- Symmetrical.
- 6) Symmetrical fashion is valued for its ability to convey a sense of sophistication. I don't think it is always more sustainable.
- 7) Asymmetrical fashion is beautiful because it allows you to express your personality. I also don't think it is sustainable.

INTERVIEW 28

Consumer 28 – 25-year-old boy

- 1) Yes, because they make me feel part of a group.
- 2) Although I appreciate brands' efforts to adopt sustainable practices, sustainability is not among the first features I give weight to when buying luxury.

- 3) I find symmetrical designs very elegant and suitable for different occasions, especially formal or professional ones. I would wear them for a long time.
- 4) I definitely find them interesting, but I would not buy them because I find them too extravagant compared to my style.
- 5) A – Symmetrical.
- 6) Symmetrical fashion has always been liked and so it continues to be. This does not mean that it is synonymous with sustainability.
- 7) Asymmetrical fashion is appreciated for its ability to produce something outside the rules. I do not think this makes it more sustainable.

INTERVIEW 29

Consumer 29 – 25-year-old girl

- 1) No, I do not buy luxury products because I prefer to spend my money on experiences, travel, and activities that enrich my life in different ways.
- 2) Yes, sustainability has become a key aspect of my purchases. So if I were to purchase a luxury product surely sustainability would be among the first features I would think about.
- 3) Yes, I find them simple and elegant. If I were to purchase them I think I would wear them for 3/4 years.
- 4) I find asymmetrical designs very interesting and creative, but they are not something I would buy regularly. I like the idea of having a few unique and bold pieces in my wardrobe, but I would rather find these items in more affordable stores than spend a fortune.
- 5) A.Symmetrical.
- 6) Symmetrical fashion appeals because thanks to it you are able with ease to create a look that is simple but elegant at the same time. Yes, especially because it lasts a long time I think it can be associated with sustainability.
- 7) Asymmetrical fashion in my opinion likes it because it is creative and never obvious. I don't know if I would also associate it with sustainability.

INTERVIEW 30

Consumer 30 – 20-year-old boy

- 1) I do not frequently buy luxury products because unfortunately I am a student and have to look after my expenses however I would like to.
- 2) Sustainability is important, but it is not my main purchasing criteria. When I think about luxury fashion, I focus more on design and quality.

- 3) I like symmetrical designs because of their cleanliness and elegance. They can be worn on different occasions and for a long time.
- 4) I find them fascinating and unique and believe that they too can be used in different situations however perhaps for a shorter period.
- 5) B- Asymmetrical.
- 6) Symmetrical fashion is ideal for situations where I want to look elegant and professional. Although it is not always my everyday style, I understand why it is appreciated for its ability to convey a sense of order and reliability. That is why precisely because of this sense of reliability I would also associate it with sustainability.
- 7) Asymmetrical fashion is exciting and bold. It is perfect for those who, like me, want to express their creativity and break with convention I do not tend to associate it with sustainability.

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