

9 March 2023

Appealing to consumers' desire for unique products could overcome resistance to sustainable luxury goods - new research.

Rather than appealing to their environmental consciences, luxury goods companies need to focus on consumers' sense of self-expression if they are to increase sales of eco-friendly products, according to a new study from an international team, co-authored by ESSCA School of Management.

The luxury goods industry, characterised by brands such as Gucci, Dior, Chanel and Louis Vuitton, is estimated to be worth €353bn annually. Despite the war in Ukraine and rising prices, a recent forecast by Bain expected it to grow by 6-8 per cent in 2023.

But according to the research, published in *Psychology & Marketing*, luxury consumers are less sensitive to ecological issues when it comes to purchasing decisions and some actively reject sustainable goods. The researchers also found that luxury consumers focus more on attributes such as the superior quality and the design of items, rather than how sustainable they are ¹.

“Previous research has suggested that luxury attitudes are not always compatible with sustainable behaviour, which makes selling eco-luxury goods more challenging,” says co-author, Professor Sihem Dekhili of ESSCA School of Management, an expert in responsible consumption and ethical fashion. “We wanted to explore whether there were other ways to help eco-luxury acceptance and consumption.”

Data was collected from a panel of 359 American respondents, sampled to match US ethnic makeup and aiming to capture a broad range of luxury attitudes.

The results suggest that sustainability could be driven by other concerns beyond altruistic ones. The research also suggested that how consumers saw themselves in terms of being socially responsible influences the relationship between luxury attitudes and desire for unique products.

“Positive sustainability behaviours may increase if consumers see it helps project their personality and meets their desire for unique products,” says Professor Dekhili.

“For brands aiming to increase the uptake of eco-luxury goods, the key could be to emphasise product uniqueness and how it aids people with expressing their own uniqueness as sustainable consumers. This is well-illustrated by Stella McCartney who presents eco-

materials, such as vegetarian leather (vs. animal leather) as luxurious, unique, and resulting from a considerable innovative work.”

The researchers conclude that the luxury sector has a key role to play in terms of improving sustainability and acting as an example to other enterprises.

“The luxury sector faces many ecological challenges ranging from use of rare materials to animal welfare, so it is of great importance to move to a more sustainable future. Our findings show that luxury is compatible with sustainability.”

-ENDS-

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Notes to Editors:

About the research:

The study, “Can Luxury Attitudes Impact Sustainability? The Role of Desire for Unique Products, Culture, and Brand Self-Congruence” was written by Prof. Sihem Dekhili of ESSCA School of Management, Prof. Jacqueline K. Eastman of Florida Gulf Coast University, and Prof. Rajesh Iyer of Bradley University, Illinois. It was first published in the academic journal, **Psychology & Marketing**.

Footnote:

¹. Dekhili S et al. (2019). Could sustainability improve the promotion of luxury products? *European Business Review*, Vol. 31, n° 4, p. 488-511, <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-04-2018-0083>. Also, Achabou M.A, Dekhili S. (2013). Luxury and sustainable development: is there a match? *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 66 (février 2013), p.1896-1903.

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