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Sustainable Innovation and Digitalization in Luxury Brand Management

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ABSTRACT

The luxury industry, historically characterized by opulence and exclusivity, currently finds itself at a pivotal juncture where the incorporation of sustainability may redefine its value proposition and ensure enduring relevance. The increasing consumer focus on environmental, social, and ethical business practices is compelling companies within this sector to reevaluate their operational models. This study explores how luxury brands can transform sustainability from an operational constraint to a strategic and symbolic lever through innovation and digitalization. Through a systematic review of peer-reviewed literature indexed on Scopus, 57 articles were selected and analyzed bibliometrically and qualitatively. The analysis identified seven main thematic clusters, including brand strategy, sustainable innovation, consumer behavior, communication, eco-innovation, cultural dimensions, and digital transformation. The results highlight how sustainability, integrated with digital and cultural innovation, is redefining luxury brand identities, strengthening authenticity, traceability, and consumer engagement. The study represents the first systematic literature review on the intersection of sustainability, innovation and digitization in luxury. It also discusses the practical implications for businesses, from the adoption of alternative consumption models to the enhancement of territories and craftsmanship and outlines future research directions.

L'industria del lusso, storicamente caratterizzata da opulenza ed esclusività, si trova attualmente in un momento cruciale in cui l'incorporazione della sostenibilità può ridefinire la sua proposta di valore e garantire una rilevanza duratura. La crescente attenzione dei consumatori verso le pratiche commerciali ambientali, sociali ed etiche sta spingendo le aziende di questo settore a rivalutare i propri modelli operativi. Questo studio esplora come i marchi di lusso possono trasformare la sostenibilità da un vincolo operativo a una leva strategica e simbolica attraverso l'innovazione e la digitalizzazione. Attraverso una revisione sistematica della letteratura peer-reviewed indicizzata su Scopus, sono stati selezionati 57 articoli e analizzati bibliometricamente e qualitativamente. L'analisi ha identificato sette principali cluster tematici, tra cui la strategia di marca, l'innovazione sostenibile, il comportamento dei consumatori, la comunicazione, l'eco-innovazione, le dimensioni culturali e la trasformazione digitale. I risultati evidenziano come la sostenibilità, integrata con l'innovazione digitale e culturale, stia ridefinendo le identità dei brand del lusso, rafforzando l'autenticità, la tracciabilità e il coinvolgimento dei consumatori. Lo studio rappresenta la prima revisione sistematica della letteratura sull'intersezione tra sostenibilità, innovazione e digitalizzazione nel lusso. Discute

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inoltre le implicazioni pratiche per le imprese, dall'adozione di modelli di consumo alternativi alla valorizzazione dei territori e dell'artigianato, e delinea le direzioni future della ricerca.

Keywords: Sustainable Innovation, Digitalization, Luxury Brands, Sustainability, Systematic Literature Review

1 – Introduction

In recent years, growing environmental, social, and digital pressures have redefined expectations of luxury brands, traditionally associated with values such as exclusivity, craftsmanship, and heritage (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Radclyffe-Thomas N. 2021). Sustainability, once perceived as an external constraint or even antithetical to luxury (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013), has gradually emerged as a strategic lever capable of generating competitive advantages and redefining symbolic relationships between brands and consumers (Kunz *et al.*, 2020; Akrouit & Guercini, 2022). Christodoulides *et al.* (2024) remark as the luxury industry has shown remarkable resilience after the COVID-19 pandemic, and particular resilience to geopolitical conflicts, consequent macroeconomic uncertainty and inflation. In this scenario, sustainable innovation-technological, digital, organizational, and cultural emerges as the key to combining aesthetic excellence, positive impact, and identity narratives (Dominguez & Bhatti, 2022; Franzè *et al.*, 2024).

In addition, the adoption of sustainability as a key objective for developing business strategies, as well as the communication of data regarding results in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is considered of fundamental importance, as highlighted by recent studies (Gazzola, 2012; Gazzola and Mella, 2012; Gazzola *et al.*, 2020a; Pavione *et al.*, 2020).

However, despite increasing attention from the literature, the field is still fragmented: research tends to focus on specific aspects such as sustainable marketing or consumer behavior, neglecting the systemic and transformative dimensions of innovation (Bernardi *et al.*, 2022; Abdelmeguid *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, the apparent tension between sustainability and luxury - understood as abundance, uniqueness, and aesthetic pleasure - is often treated dichotomously, without fully exploring its integrative potential (Dion *et al.*, 2024; Carta & De Kock, 2019). There is a lack of theoretical visions capable of connecting sustainability, innovation, and symbolism, as well as methodological approaches capable of reading these connections in an interdisciplinary and scalable way.

Starting from these considerations, this study aims to address two main *research questions*:

RQ1 *What is the state of the art of the literature on sustainable innovation and digitalization in the luxury sector?*

RQ2 *How can luxury brands transform sustainability from an operational constraint to a strategic and symbolic lever through innovation and digitalization?*

To answer these questions, a systematic review of peer-reviewed literature indexed on Scopus was conducted, selecting 57 articles based on strict inclusion and exclusion criteria. The bibliometric and qualitative analysis identified seven thematic clusters: Luxury Brand Strategy and Sustainable Fashion, Sustainable Innovation in the Textile and Fashion Industry, Consumer Behavior, CSR and Digitalization, Sustainability Communication and Digital Marketing, Green

and Eco-Innovation, Cultural and Social Dimensions of Sustainable Luxury, Global Innovation and Digital Transformation.

The results show that although scholarly production on the topic has increased significantly after 2019, important gaps persist regarding the strategic integration of sustainability into innovation logics and the redefinition of luxury as a symbolic and cultural lever. Our study contributes in three main directions: it highlights how sustainability can be repositioned from a constraint to a narrative and distinctive resource; it proposes an interpretive framework that integrates digital, cultural, and symbolic transformations; and it suggests a transdisciplinary research agenda that can overcome sectoral and atomized approaches.

In addition to its theoretical contribution, the study also has relevant practical and managerial implications. First, it offers operational insights to brands on how to rethink their positioning strategies through sustainability, not as a regulatory or aesthetic fulfillment, but as a distinctive element capable of generating value for increasingly attentive stakeholders. Second, it enables managers to interpret innovation not only as technological adoption, but as a transformative process that touches the brand's narratives, its cultural practices and relationships with communities. Finally, the developed framework can support investment decisions in technologies, organizational models, and partnerships in line with logics of impact and co-creation of meaning.

2 – Research design and data

This research is based on a systematic analysis of existing literature on the intersection between the luxury sector and issues related to sustainability, ESG, CSR, sustainable innovation and digital transformation.

We adopted a systematic approach to identify relevant contributions, using only the Scopus database. The choice to use only Scopus is motivated by its broad coverage of scientific sources, the possibility of carrying out advanced searches, the timeliness in updating contents, and the availability of detailed and comparable bibliometric indicators (Singh *et al.*, 2021; De Giuli *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, the use of a single database ensures coherence and uniformity in the selection and analysis criteria of the sources (Mariani *et al.*, 2023).

The search was conducted in mid-March 2025 and used the following search string based on Boolean operators: "luxury" AND ("sustainability" OR "ESG" OR "CSR" OR "sustainable") AND ("innovation" OR "digital")

The keywords were searched within the title, abstract and keywords of the articles to ensure a broad coverage of potentially relevant contributions, without imposing time limits on the publication period.

The first step led to the identification of 247 documents. Subsequently, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to refine the sample (Figure 1). Only articles in English and published in peer-reviewed scientific journals were selected. The exclusion of contributions in other languages is motivated by the aim of ensuring comparability between the selected studies and adhering to the prevalent vehicular language in the international scientific community (Singh *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, the exclusion of conference papers, books, and chapters is justified by the intent to focus on peer-reviewed works, considered more solid in terms of methodological rigor and theoretical contribution. Through this selection process, the final sample was reduced to 57 articles, which constitute the basis for the analysis. The bibliometric

data relating to each document (author, journal, year of publication, citations, etc.) were automatically extracted from the Scopus platform.

Finally, we proceeded with the qualitative analysis of the 57 selected articles. For each article included in the final sample, bibliometric and content data were collected, including: year of publication, journal, authors, number of citations, as well as information relating to the aim of the study, the theoretical framework, the methodology used, the type of innovation covered, the approach to sustainability and the role of digital. The analysis was conducted iteratively, with discussions among the authors aimed at ensuring interpretative coherence and reliability of the results.

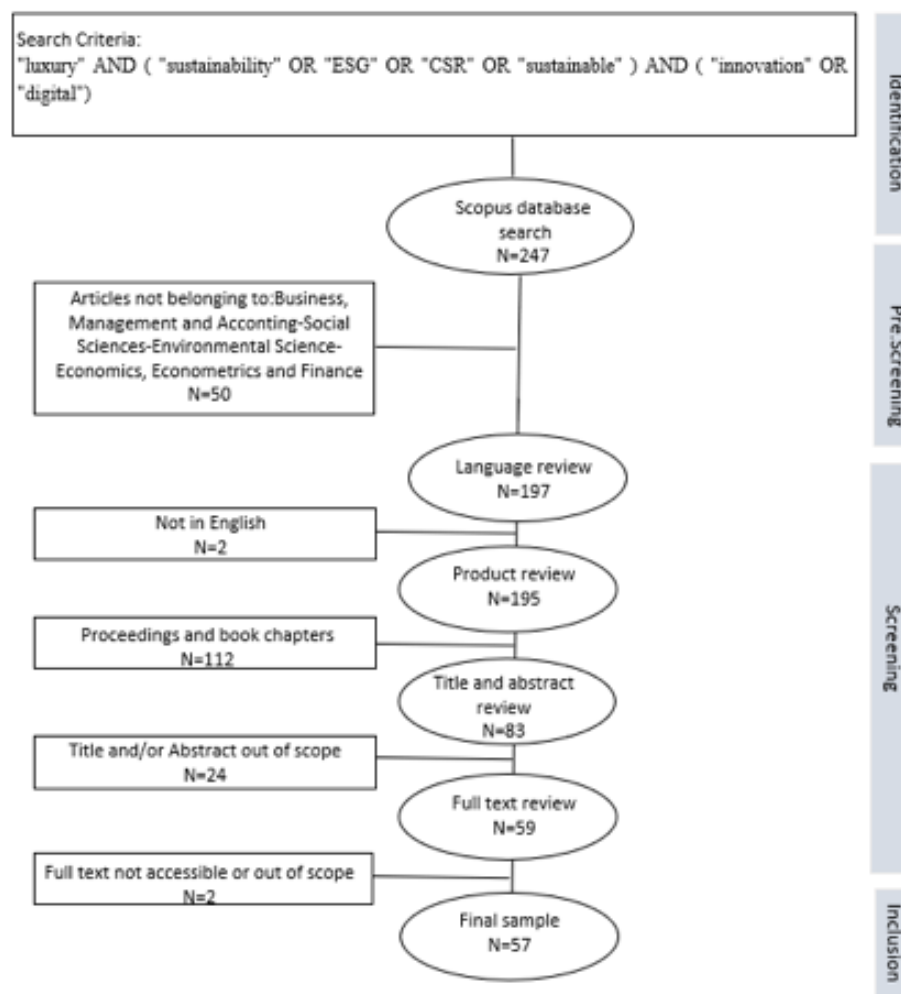


Fig. 1 – Articles Selection Process

3 – Bibliometric analyses

The temporal distribution of scientific production on sustainable luxury and related themes (Figure 2) shows a clear upward trend, particularly after 2019. Between 2005 and 2018, scholarly output remained relatively low and sporadic, with fewer than five publications per year and occasional fluctuations. This period reflects an emergent stage of academic interest, during which sustainability and luxury were likely treated as separate or marginally intersecting topics.

Starting in 2019, however, there is a noticeable and sustained growth in publication volume, peaking in 2024 with nearly 20 documents. This sharp increase suggests that the topic has gained substantial relevance in the academic community, likely driven by growing global awareness of environmental issues, consumer demand for responsible practices, and the digital transformation of the luxury sector.

The apparent drop in 2025 is not indicative of a decline in scholarly interest but is instead due to the bibliometric data being collected in March 2025. Overall, the graph points out the transition from a niche to a consolidated research area

Documents by year

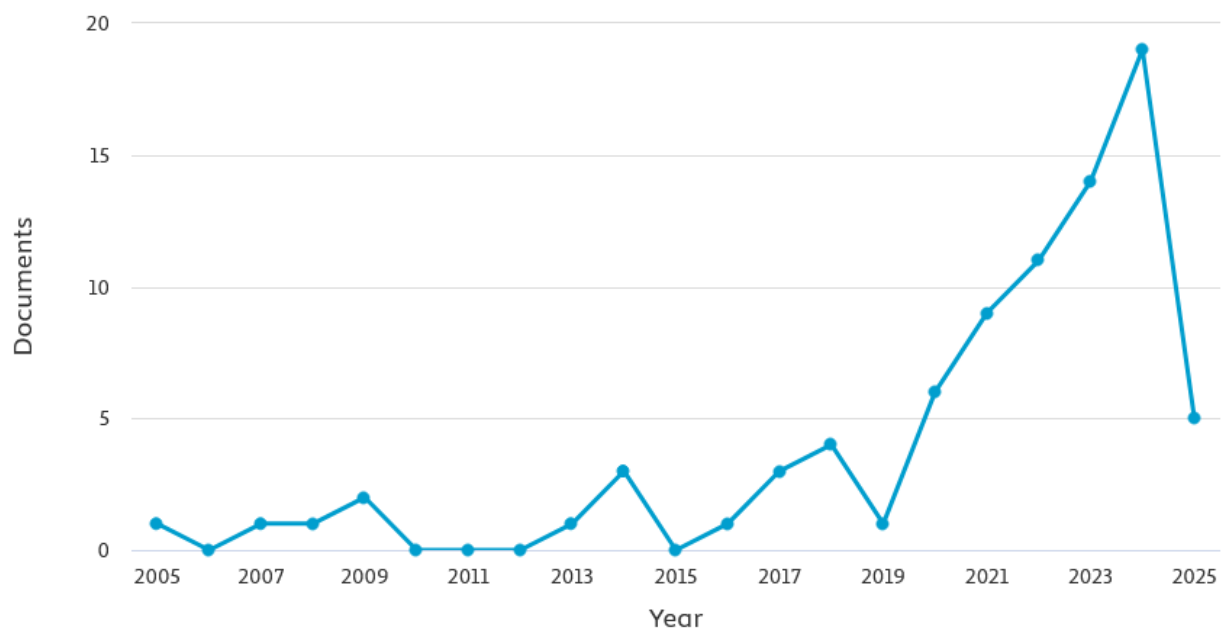


Fig. 2 – Temporal distribution of the scientific production

Analyzing the most influential articles (Table 1), we observed that the article by Lavuri *et al.* (2022) appears to be the most cited with 117 citations. Other articles have also achieved many citations, as Septianto *et al.* (2021) with 75 citations. In line with what we described above, about the growing importance of the topic in recent years, the most influential articles are distributed between 2020 and 2024, with the sole exception of Rayna and Striukova's 2009 article.

Table 1 – The ten most relevant articles (*Source:* Authors' elaboration from Scopus data).

Author and Year	Aim	Findings	TC
Lavuri <i>et al.</i> , 2022	To measure the role of LOHAS consumption tendency and perceived consumer effectiveness on purchase intention for luxury organic beauty products.	Green ads positively influence consumers' attitudes toward luxury organic beauty products.	117

Septianto <i>et al.</i>, 2021	To synthesize evolutionary psychology, emotional appeals, and viral advertising for promoting sustainable luxury brands on social media.	Pride appeals increase eWOM intentions by enhancing the luxury dimension of sustainable luxury brands. Gratitude appeals boost eWOM intentions by emphasizing the sustainability dimension of sustainable luxury brands .	75
Ki <i>et al.</i>, 2024	To investigate attitudes and key purchase determinants of online second-hand luxury (OSHL) consumption among Chinese consumers.	The study identifies three attitude dimensions toward online second-hand luxury (OSHL) consumption: wise, conspicuous, and sustainable. Income is not a significant factor in wise consumption. Higher education levels correlate with evaluating OSHL consumption.	24
Jain <i>et al.</i>, 2023	To provide a systematic literature review of luxury hospitality research across various fields like hospitality, leisure, and tourism.	The study identifies six clusters in luxury hospitality research: digital interactions, brand attributes, status consumption, service quality, sustainable practices, and workforce traits.	23
Hemonnet-Goujot <i>et al.</i>, 2022	To explore substitution innovations in the luxury sector and their impact on consumer-brand relationships.	Specialness and environmentalism are psychological antecedents of demand for substitution product innovations (SPI) in luxury brands.	20
Dang-Vang <i>et al.</i>, 2023	To investigate how green practices build consumer brand identification for luxury hotel companies.	Green hotel practices positively influence consumer brand identification for luxury hotel companies.	19
Macgregor <i>et al.</i>, 2020	To investigate the general CSR attitude of top luxury fashion businesses and low-level management's attitude towards marketing and innovation	The study reveals a disconnect between luxury fashion businesses' CSR commitments and low-level management's marketing and innovation practices.	17
Rayna and Striukova, 2009	To investigate non-technological innovation in the holiday resort industry and to examine the factors behind the Excellence group's business model and sustainability.	The Excellence group demonstrates that non-technological innovation can achieve competitiveness through product differentiation and cost leadership.	17
Bernardi <i>et al.</i>, 2022	To identify key success factors for sustainable innovation in textile and fashion companies.	Companies can achieve competitive advantage through sustainability and innovation, supported by strong corporate values.	16
Zhang <i>et al.</i>, 2023	To explore the results, paradoxes, and potentialities of sustainability in fashion and luxury marketing.	Generation Z shows a stronger inclination towards sustainability, impacting their purchasing intentions for sustainable apparel. Sustainable marketing can provide competitive advantages and foster consumer trust.	14

The documents distribution by country (Figure 3) shows a strong European engagement in research on sustainable luxury, with the United Kingdom (18 documents) and Italy (17 documents) leading the scholarly production. France follows closely with 10 publications, demonstrating a significant research interest on this topic within Western Europe. These results highlight the central role of European countries in advancing academic discourse on the intersection of luxury, sustainability, and innovation, role that is likely reflecting the historical connection of this geographical area to the luxury industry and its early adoption of sustainability agendas.

China (8 documents) and the United States (7 documents) also demonstrate notable contributions, indicating growing engagement from major global economies.

Australia, India, and South Africa appear in the mid-range, each contributing between 3 and 5 documents. This may signal an expanding academic interest in sustainability and ethical consumption within these regions, although still in a developmental phase compared to Europe.

Finally, countries such as Bangladesh and Canada (2 documents each) are at the lower end of the spectrum. In the case of Bangladesh, the limited output contrasts with the country's relevance in global textile supply chains and the expansion of green-certified manufacturing facilities across the country, potentially indicating a gap between production realities and academic attention.

Documents by country or territory

Compare the document counts for up to 15 countries/territories.

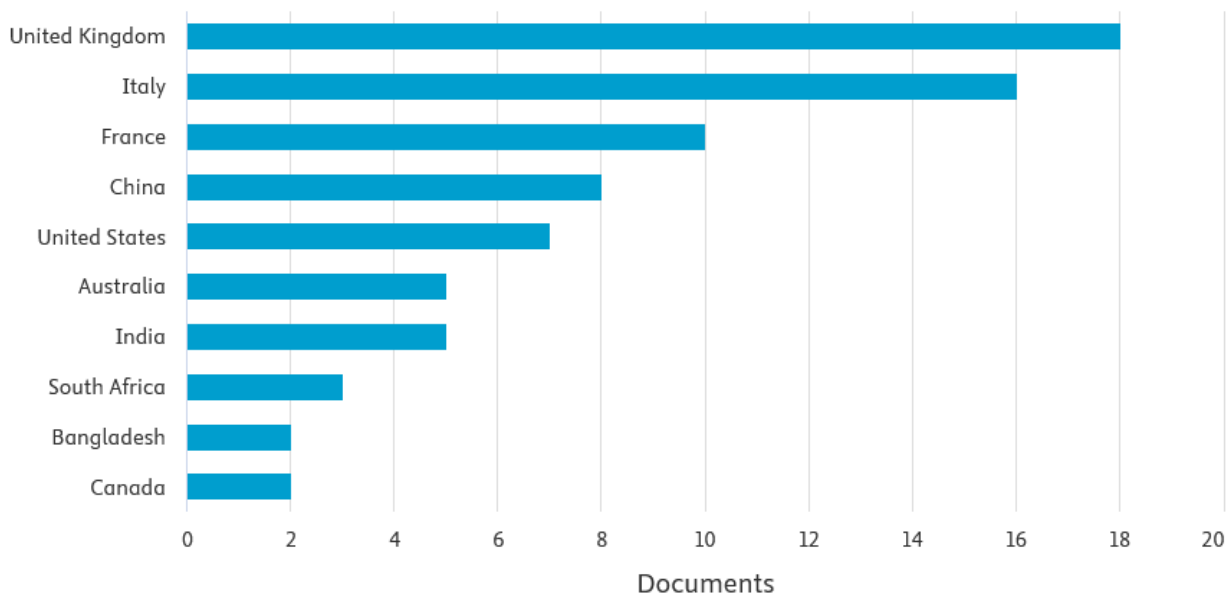


Fig. 3 – Documents distribution by country

The co-authorship map (Figure 4) illustrates the network of collaborations among institutions engaged in research on sustainable luxury, fashion, and innovation. Out of a total of 146 organizations identified in the bibliometric dataset, only 8 institutions are interconnected through co-authored publications, revealing a fragmented and weakly cohesive research network at the institutional level.

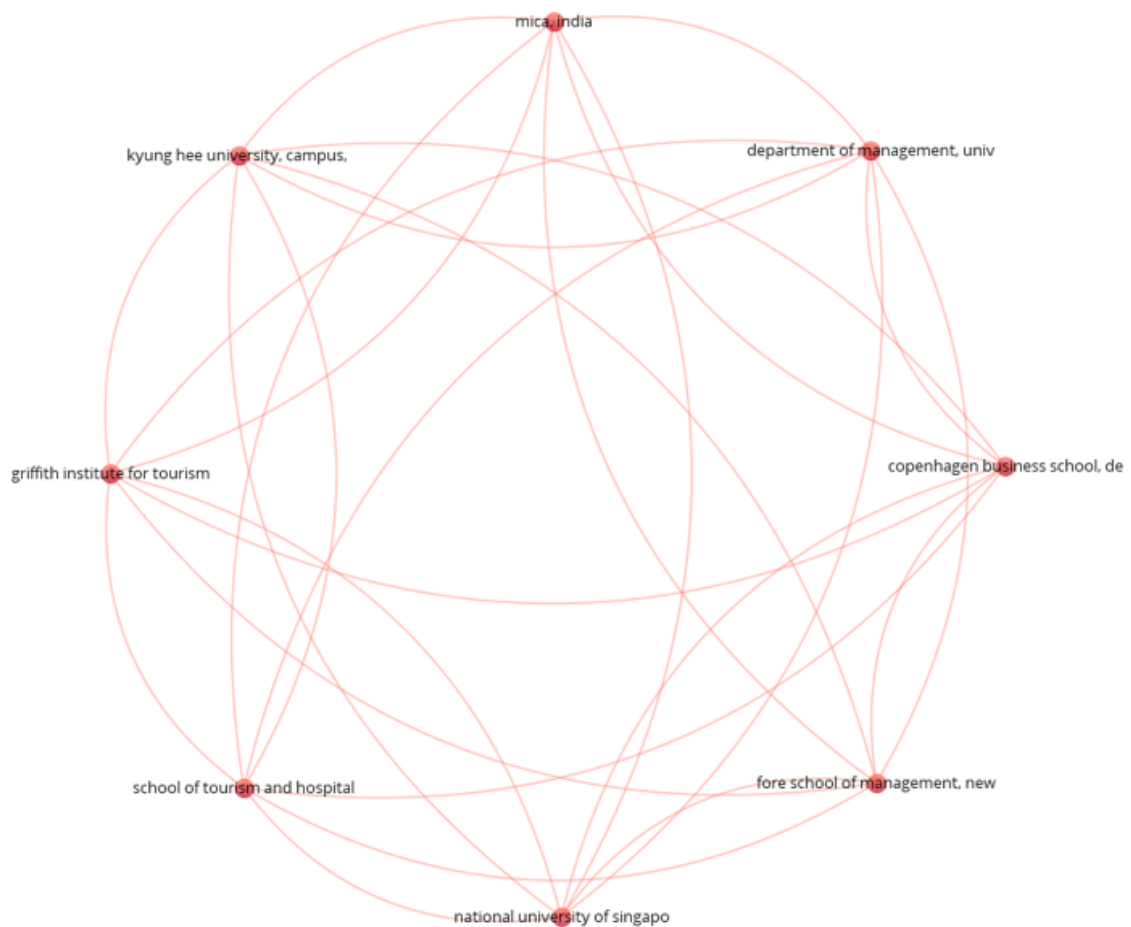


Fig. 4 – Network of collaborations among institutions

The most central nodes in the network include MIC India, Copenhagen Business School (Denmark), and Kyung Hee University (South Korea), all of which act as bridging institutions between otherwise isolated academic entities. The presence of globally dispersed institutions such as the National University of Singapore, Griffith Institute for Tourism (Australia), and the Fore School of Management (India) further highlights the geographic diversity of contributors to the field.

However, the limited density and low connectivity suggest that collaborative research across institutions remains underdeveloped, potentially hindering the formation of a more unified and interdisciplinary research agenda. Strengthening institutional collaboration—especially between Global North and Global South institutions—could enhance knowledge exchange, foster innovation, and contribute to more holistic perspectives on sustainability in luxury and fashion contexts.

The keywords analysis (Figure 5) points out a structured network of seven clusters encompassing the main topics addressed by the literature on sustainable innovation and digitalization in luxury brand management.

The “Luxury Brand Strategy and Sustainable Fashion” cluster (red cluster) explores how luxury brands are strategically integrating sustainability into their core identity and business models while maintaining traditional values such as exclusivity, craftsmanship, and heritage. It

also examines how the luxury and textile industries are adapting to increasing environmental and social expectations, positioning sustainability as a competitive advantage.

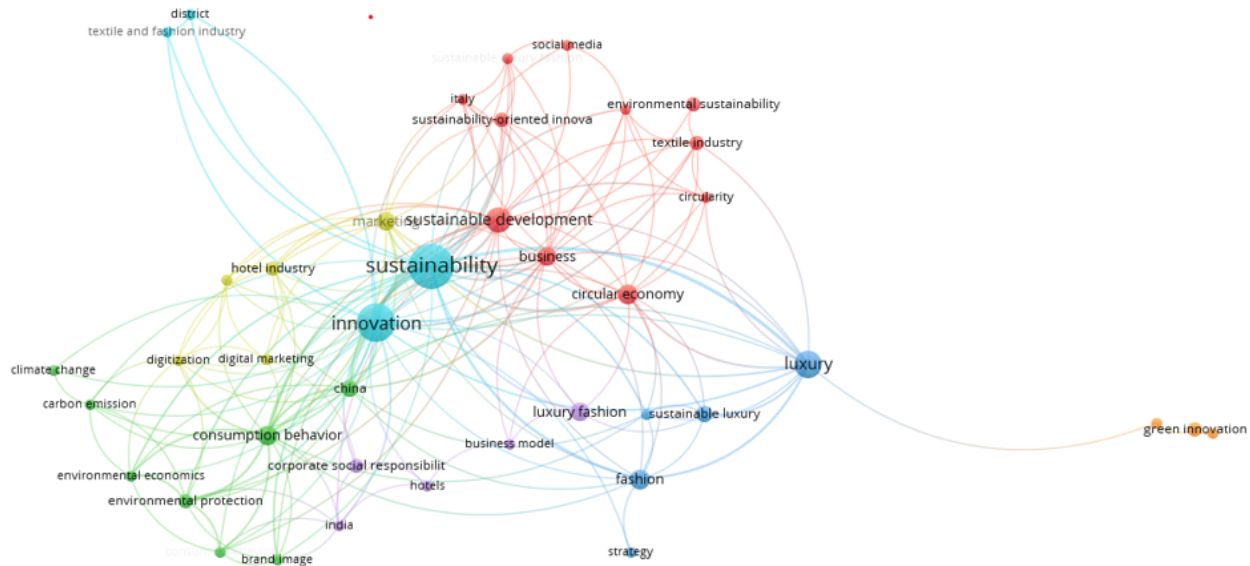


Fig. 5 – Keywords co-occurrence network

The “Sustainable Innovation in the Textile and Fashion Industry” cluster (green cluster) focuses on technological, material, and process innovations aimed at reducing the environmental impact of the textile and fashion sectors. It includes studies on circular design, reuse of resources, eco-friendly production systems, and sustainability-driven business models.

The “Consumer Behavior and CSR in the Digital Age” cluster (blue cluster) investigates the relationship between sustainability, consumer perceptions, and brand image. It analyzes how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and environmental concerns (e.g., climate change) influence purchasing behavior and consumer loyalty in the luxury sector.

The “Sustainability Communication and Digital Marketing” cluster (yellow cluster) addresses how digital communication tools and platforms are used to convey sustainability commitments in luxury contexts. It particularly highlights the hospitality industry and examines strategies such as emotional storytelling, user-generated content, and transparency in marketing to enhance brand engagement.

The “Green and Eco-Innovation” (purple cluster) cluster includes research on ecological solutions and green technologies as enablers of sustainable transformation. Topics include the development of eco-compatible materials, energy-efficient production, and systemic innovations aimed at reducing environmental impact across industries, including fashion and real estate.

The “Cultural and Social Dimensions of Sustainable Luxury” cluster (orange cluster) explores how cultural, social, and geographical contexts influence the emergence and perception of sustainable luxury. It includes analyses of social media’s role, the influence of local heritage (e.g., the Italian textile district), and the symbolic narratives that shape ethical

consumption practices. The “Global Innovation and Digital Transformation” cluster (brown cluster) examines how global digital transformation processes are reshaping sustainability strategies across emerging markets. It highlights the role of innovation ecosystems in countries such as China and India, and investigates how digital technologies facilitate inclusive, scalable, and efficient sustainability practices across sectors.

4. Literature Review

The main topics addressed by the literature on sustainable innovation and digitalization in luxury brand management are analyzed in the following subparagraphs.

4.1 – *Luxury Brand Strategy and Sustainable Fashion*

Traditionally associated with values such as exclusivity, craftsmanship, and desirability, luxury has had to address the growing expectations of consumers and stakeholders for responsible and transparent practices. These have prompted a reconfiguration of brand strategies from a sustainable perspective (Akrouit & Guercini, 2022). The value of luxury, considered by users as a special object/element/service that is difficult to obtain, is the basis of many business strategies (Sepe and Pitt, 2017). Recent literature highlights how luxury brands are integrating sustainability into their business models while maintaining the distinctive features of the industry - such as quality, rarity, and heritage - and transforming it into a strategic lever of competitive differentiation (Abdelmeguid *et al.*, 2024; Bernardi *et al.*, 2022; 2021). The Triple Bottom Line approach - which integrates economic performance, social and environmental responsibility - (Elkington, 1997) and CSR practices are spreading in high-end brands, including the adoption of remanufactured materials, supply chain transparency, environmental reporting, and stakeholder focus (Grigorescu & Ion, 2022; Macgregor *et al.*, 2020).

However, the literature points to identity and strategic tensions because on the one hand luxury is anchored in exceptionality and desire, and on the other hand sustainability requires sobriety, durability, and sober accessibility. This “sustainable oxymoron” (Hasbullah *et al.*, 2020) prompts some authors to propose syncretic visions in which sustainability itself becomes an attribute of luxury, reinforcing its authenticity and value coherence (Ki *et al.*, 2024, Al-Mamun & Zaman, 2023). Within this framework, many brands embrace the principles of slow fashion - limited production, slower creative cycles, enhancement of craftsmanship - to preserve uniqueness and reduce waste (Abdelmeguid *et al.*, 2024; Dion *et al.*, 2024). Heritage and local ties emerge as key strategic levers as there is evidence of how Italian companies have built sustainable competitive advantages through the enhancement of local culture and fiduciary relationships in the supply chain (Bernardi *et al.*, 2022; de Albuquerque *et al.*, 2023, Conti, 2024).

Sustainable innovation also manifests itself in the use of eco-friendly materials and production processes with low environmental impact (Brun & Ciccullo, 2022; Franzè *et al.*, 2024). The creative reuse and enhancement of heritage design in textile districts (Pasquinelli *et al.*, 2024) demonstrate how sustainability can be integrated into the luxury narrative through regenerative aesthetics (Lerma *et al.*, 2017). On the other hand, the adoption of more affordable materials can erode the perception of exclusivity, global supply chains are complex to reorganize, and circular models are still in their infancy (Brun & Ciccullo, 2022; Dominguez & Bhatti, 2022; Abdelmeguid *et al.*, 2024).

Finally, digitalization proves to be an enabler in consumer communication and engagement as value storytelling, user-generated content, resale platforms, and content marketing are key

tools for credibly conveying sustainable engagement, especially to younger generations (Arrigo, 2023; Ki *et al.*, 2024; Hasbullah *et al.*, 2020). However, as Abdelmeguid *et al.* (2024) point out, only a minority of brands systematically communicate their sustainable practices, signaling the need for more coherent and structured narrative strategies.

4.2 – Sustainable Innovation in the Textile and Fashion Industry

Sustainable innovation in the textile and fashion industry is a key strategic lever for addressing the environmental, social and economic challenges of a notoriously high-impact industry. It is commonly understood as the introduction of new products, processes or business models capable of generating concrete benefits in terms of environmental sustainability, social equity, and economic performance. Recent studies show that many companies in the industry are adopting gradual and integrated strategies to introduce sustainable innovations, often starting with internal processes and then extending to products, materials and supply chains (Franzè *et al.*, 2024). Specifically, in the B2B context, the adoption of sustainable solutions is fostered by visionary leadership, widespread experimentation, and a learning-by-doing culture. In parallel, the enhancement of territory, cultural heritage and relational capital prove to be key assets for the success of sustainable innovation, as demonstrated by the cases of the Italian brands Zegna and Reda (Bernardi *et al.*, 2022). The relational component is also crucial at the supply chain level as the effectiveness of sustainable practices depends on the quality of collaborative relationships and trust between actors, discouraging top-down coercive approaches (Brun and Ciccullo, 2022). The implementation of sustainable innovations is additionally interpreted as an opportunity to increase corporate credibility and reputation, that together with value creation strategy and aggressive financial goals, might support companies to achieve growth and increase profitability (Carp, 2020).

On the technical and production level, many innovations focus on the use of alternative materials and circularity. Torrisi *et al.* (2023) analyze the case of Orange Fiber, which produces sustainable textiles from citrus by-products, proposing a model of industrial symbiosis. Shamsuzzaman *et al.* (2025), studying Bangladesh, show how the reuse of waste textiles can reduce waste by up to 95 percent, while also generating economic and employment value. LCA analysis by de Albuquerque *et al.* (2023) also confirms that targeted interventions on logistics and materials can lead to substantial emission reductions in an Italian slow fashion brand.

Hemonnet-Goujot *et al.* (2022) highlight how practices such as recycling and upcycling, while they may appear at odds with the traditional values of luxury, help to reinforce its authenticity, provided they are communicated transparently and coherently. Innovation is thus also reinterpreted from a symbolic and cultural perspective, as in the case of the evolutionary design and biomimetic approaches proposed by Aversa *et al.* (2016), which integrate functionality, ecology, and aesthetics under a systemic perspective. On the other hand, Grigorescu and Ion (2022) point out that the full integration of sustainability and innovation requires a deep rethinking of the product experience and its symbolic value, which is not yet fully realized at the systemic level.

4.3 – Consumer Behavior, CSR and Digitalization

Digitalization and evolving consumer ethical expectations have profoundly transformed luxury buying behavior and the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies adopted by companies in the sector. Through social media, the public actively shares experiences and

opinions, generating global electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) that profoundly affects the reputation of luxury brands (Oguntegbe *et al.*, 2023). This digital engagement fuels intrinsic motivations, such as personal ethical values and sense of community, and extrinsic motivations, such as status and social image, in preferring luxury brands committed to sustainability (Hasbullah *et al.*, 2020). In parallel, the rise of influencers as new opinion leaders amplifies the impact of online communications, and content promoted by these figures can both strengthen or undermine public trust in brands (Ki *et al.*, 2024; Singh, 2024). In the digital ecosystem, greenwashing practices are quickly unmasked, undermining the perceived trustworthiness of companies and forcing brands to pursue authentic and consistent sustainable communication (Macgregor *et al.*, 2020, Akrouit & Guercini, 2022). With this in mind, luxury companies also adopt emotional marketing strategies to connect ethical values to the consumer's experiential sphere, and well-calibrated emotional appeals have proven effective in boosting engagement and incentivizing positive word-of-mouth towards sustainable brands (Septianto *et al.*, 2021). On the strategic level, integrating sustainability into the essence of the brand has become crucial, and responsible luxury relies on innovation and traceability to increase consumer trust and perceived value, both on a utilitarian and hedonistic level (Abdelmeguid *et al.*, 2024; Dang-Dang-Van *et al.*, 2023). In addition, the expansion of alternative consumption patterns such as second-hand luxury and temporary access to high-end goods through product rentals signals a trend toward more conscious consumption that aims to reduce waste without sacrificing exclusivity (Uludag *et al.*, 2024). There is evidence, however, that reactions toward these digital and sustainable practices in luxury are impacted by the socio-cultural context, therefore CSR strategies should be modulated according to the context (Wang *et al.*, 2024). Digitalization and the growing emphasis on ethics are pushing luxury companies to redefine their value proposition by merging exclusive experience with genuine ethical and sustainable engagement (Singh & Bauman, 2025).

4.4 – Sustainability Communication and Digital Marketing

Sustainability communication and digital marketing are becoming strategic levers for positioning luxury brands, creating value, and directing consumer behavior toward more responsible choices. For instance, research by Lavuri *et al.* (2022) shows that green advertisements, eco-brand image, and consumers' perceived efficacy positively influence consumers' attitude toward luxury organic beauty products; and that consumers' attitude mediates consumers' intention to purchase luxury organic beauty products.

In broad terms, sustainability communication allows luxury brands to disseminate innovations in materials through multiple channels, currently mainly through official websites (Luo *et al.*, 2021).

The evolution of digital platforms allows companies to amplify their CSR and environmental messages in a more authentic, interactive, and traceable way, thereby strengthening perceptions of transparency and ethical engagement (Oguntegbe *et al.*, 2023; Uludag *et al.*, 2024). In particular, user-generated content emerges as a powerful tool to stimulate sustainable consumption in luxury, and there is evidence that intrinsic motivations such as authenticity and belonging, and extrinsic motivations such as visibility and recognition positively influence purchase intentions (Hasbullah *et al.*, 2020). The emotional component of communication assumes great relevance and emotions such as pride and gratitude triggered by

sustainable campaigns generate distinct modes of online sharing - broadcasting vs. narrowcasting - reinforcing eWOM and brand identification (Septianto *et al.*, 2021).

In the context of luxury hospitality, Uludag *et al.* (2024) point out that digital marketing attributes such as ubiquity, interactivity, and credibility enhance green engagement and consumer loyalty. Singh and Bauman (2025) go further, analyzing the use of virtual influencers to promote environmental and social values, while pointing out risks of artificiality and communicative incoherence. These risks, also already discussed by Akrouit and Guercini (2022), are linked to the problem of greenwashing. Communication that lacks authenticity can damage brand trust and reputation, making it essential to adopt consistent, multichannel narrative strategies supported by verifiable data. In this sense, blockchain emerges as an enabling technological tool to demonstrate traceability and ethics in the value chain (Oguntegbe *et al.*, 2023).

In fashion, Zhang *et al.* (2023) show how digital fashion can represent an innovative paradigm of sustainability, combining dematerialization, digital aesthetics and environmental awareness. On the other hand, Abdelmeguid *et al.* (2024) note that although themes such as sustainability and circular economy are present in corporate discourse, only a minority of brands make them an active communicative lever, highlighting a still unexpressed potential. From a B2C perspective, Arrigo (2023) documents how fashion rental, promoted through digital channels, responds to new forms of conscious consumption, shifting the focus from possession to access and reducing the pressure toward purchase. However, the literature also points to the lack of shared communication standards and a certain discontinuity in messages, which hinder the effectiveness of sustainable marketing strategies (Oguntegbe *et al.*, 2023; Singh & Bauman, 2025).

4.5 – Green and Eco-Innovation

Green and eco-innovations are emerging as key strategies for promoting sustainable development and competitive renewal in high-impact sectors, particularly in fashion, hospitality, real estate, and luxury yachting. Such innovations, which integrate environmental, social, and economic dimensions, are conceived not only as responses to regulatory pressures but as true catalysts for systemic and identity transformations (Bernardi *et al.*, 2022). The adoption of green innovation requires the activation of new dynamic capabilities and experimental business models, and Franzè *et al.* (2024) point out that sustainable innovation develops progressively along product, process, and supply chain dimensions, supported by visionary leadership, organizational learning, and a “learning by doing” culture. In addition, Heo (2024) investigated how the luxury industry can transform its current linear business models into a circular business model while preserving its value proposition and equity.

In the field of sustainable design, one of the most investigated approaches is the creative reuse of waste materials (Shamsuzzaman *et al.*, 2025; Torrisi *et al.*, 2023; Dominguez and Bhatti, 2022). The environmental validity of these approaches is confirmed by the LCA analysis conducted by de Albuquerque *et al.* (2023), which highlights how mitigation strategies focused on logistics, materials, and consumer behavior can reduce the emissions of an Italian slow fashion brand by 25%. The literature also highlights the importance of collaborative relationships in the supply chain for the success of sustainable innovation, pointing out that green practices spread more effectively in the presence of trust and cooperation between actors, avoiding top-down approaches (Brun and Ciccullo, 2022). In adjacent areas, such as luxury

yachting and real estate, the push for sustainable design translates into solutions oriented towards green design and energy efficiency, although limitations remain linked to the scarcity of reliable metrics (Seraphin & Maingi, 2023; Gabelaia & Boyce, 2025).

In the hospitality sector, several studies (Aslam *et al.*, 2024; Janjua *et al.*, 2025) converge in attributing a crucial role to green transformational leadership and green inclusive leadership in activating eco-innovation processes. From a management perspective, organizational leadership plays a key role in embedding sustainability through innovation practices, especially in hospitality and fashion, where alignment between strategy and practice can activate employee engagement and environmental performance (Dam *et al.*, 2023). Green practices implemented by hotels can strengthen brand identification, particularly when linked to perceived value and innovation (Dang-Van *et al.*, 2023). In this field the implementation of innovation translates into increasing the diversity of services, but also improving their quality (Rayna and Striukova, 2009). For instance, Ferasso *et al.* (2017), highlight how Montblanc has positioned its products - luxury goods and jewelry - by introducing luxury appeals to them as well as new production process to guarantee greater quality and an increasing care to sustainable innovations for their fountain pens. These innovation strategies have resulted in long-term competitive differentiation. These innovation strategies have enabled the company to achieve long-term competitive differentiation. The theoretical approach of the Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV) proves useful in explaining how sustainability can become a source of lasting competitive advantage. At a conceptual level, Aversa *et al.* (2016) propose a systemic model of eco-innovation based on the integration of biomimicry, aesthetics, and ecology, offering a regenerative vision of product design. Finally, Zhang *et al.* (2021) broaden the perspective on digital consumption, underlining how technologies can enable low-emission consumption practices while warning about the risk of increasing social inequalities if not accompanied by inclusive strategies.

4.6 – Cultural and Social Dimensions of Sustainable Luxury

The cultural and social dimensions of sustainable luxury are crucial for understanding how values, identities, traditions, and community relations influence the adoption and perception of sustainable practices. Sustainability, in this context, is not only an environmental response but a real symbolic act rooted in identity narratives, shared aesthetic codes, and local heritage. Akrouit and Guercini (2022) propose a reading of sustainability as a transformation of marketing narratives and the relationship with the consumer, who increasingly becomes an ethical and participatory actor. In this perspective, the tensions between exclusivity and inclusiveness, between tradition and innovation, are managed through storytelling and co-creation processes. Numerous studies illustrate how sustainability in luxury is deeply intertwined with territorial and cultural specificities. Bernardi *et al.* (2022) show that sustainable innovation in Italian luxury textiles is rooted in family values and territorial heritage, while Pasquinelli *et al.* (2024) analyze the case of the Prato district, where territorial branding and the reinterpretation of local heritage by companies such as Rifò allow the development of distinctive and coherent strategies. Similarly, Singh (2024) highlights how African family businesses in the ethnic fashion sector use intergenerational artisanal knowledge and traditional fabrics to promote a sustainable luxury model that is culturally authentic and capable of global expansion.

The link between culture and sustainability is also strengthened by reflections on design, communication, and consumer behavior. Grigorescu and Ion (2022) underline the need to

integrate sustainability and strategic innovation, while Seraphin and Maingi (2023) show how, in the nautical sector, practices of “green activism” can strengthen the ethical positioning of the brand. The analysis by Xu *et al.* (2024) on the Chinese luxury food market highlights a growing willingness of urban consumers to pay a premium for certified sustainable products, showing how the culture of consumption is being redefined in an ethical key.

Other contributions further broaden the perspective. Conti (2024) highlights the continuity of Made in Italy with the principles of sustainability, while Dion *et al.* (2024) introduce the concept of enrichment economy, in which luxury goods take on symbolic and financial value within curatorial and narrative logics, while raising ethical questions about exclusivity and inequalities.

The symbolic and identity experience also extends to the digital world where the perception of sustainability, ethics, and belonging can happen without a physical object, but through online interactions and content. There is evidence that the purchase intention also in digital fashion is influenced by environmental and social factors (Zhang *et al.*, 2023). Nevertheless, Singh and Bauman (2025) raise doubts about authenticity and ethical representation when sustainability messages are conveyed by virtual influencers. The risk is that communication appears artificial, compromising trust. Blancheton (2021) also describes an ethical evolution of the French textile industry post-COVID, with a new industrial responsibility based on quality and innovation.

4.7 – Global Innovation and Digital Transformation

Digital transformation and innovation on a global scale are profoundly redefining competitive and sustainable dynamics in the luxury, fashion, hospitality, and real estate sectors. These interconnected and progressive processes involve not only the technological dimension but also cultural, social, and environmental aspects, promoting an alignment between creativity, responsibility, and performance. The adoption of digital technologies-such as artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, augmented reality, and digital fashion-is emerging as a strategic lever to enable circular business models, improve supply chain traceability, and deliver personalized, low-impact experiences (Zhang *et al.*, 2023; Oguntegbe *et al.*, 2023; Singh & Bauman, 2025).

In the fashion industry, digital fashion dematerialized and integrated into NFT logics represents a new paradigm of sustainable consumption, valued for its symbolic value and perceived environmental engagement (Zhang *et al.*, 2023). However, as Zhang *et al.* (2021) note, the adoption of digital technologies may accentuate socio-territorial inequalities, creating a gap between users in digitized urban settings and those in rural areas. Similarly, in the hospitality sector, Chin *et al.* (2024) and Aslam *et al.* (2024) show that the use of AI and digital HRM practices improves operational sustainability, provided it is accompanied by visionary leadership and a digital culture conducive to innovation. Janjua *et al.* (2025), through the Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV) approach, emphasize that effective digital transformation requires the activation of dynamic sustainability-oriented capabilities.

The Triple Bottom Line paradigm is increasingly mediated by digital technologies, which improve reporting and accountability to global stakeholders (Mok *et al.*, 2022). However, Abdelmeguid *et al.* (2024), analyzing corporate communication on LinkedIn, point out that only a limited proportion of luxury companies fully integrate sustainability into their digital discourses, showing a lag in adopting truly transformative strategies. From a strategic point of view, Franzè *et al.* (2024) reiterate the importance of a holistic and incremental vision of

sustainable innovation, which starts from internal processes and expands along the supply chain to products, with a strong emphasis on experimentation and human resources involvement.

Contiguous sectors such as boating and luxury real estate are also adapting to digital transformation with eco-innovative approaches. Seraphin and Maingi (2023) analyze the sustainable design of yachts, while Gabelaia and Boyce (2025) explore the potential of smart cities and high-end green building while denouncing the lack of standardized metrics. Luxury hospitality represents a prime context to explore these dynamics, as it combines exclusivity with a growing emphasis on sustainability and consumer experience (Jain *et al.*, 2023).

5 – Discussion

In the context of luxury, sustainability is undergoing a semantic and strategic reconfiguration, as it progressively shifts from being a regulatory or reputational constraint to becoming a symbolic and cultural lever for competitive differentiation (Akrouit & Guercini, 2022). This transition fits into a broader evolution of luxury management, in which innovation is no longer limited to technology or production but extends to the very language and meaning attributed to luxury—thus becoming identity-based and narrative-driven innovation. Luxury is no longer solely about status or exclusivity, but also about sustainability, inclusion, and responsibility, and it is redefining the vocabulary of its own narrative (Dion *et al.*, 2024; Zhang *et al.*, 2023).

Recent literature shows that luxury brands are adopting integrated strategies that combine digital innovation, cultural heritage, and new forms of consumer engagement to build an image of sustainability that is coherent, authentic, and distinctive (Bernardi *et al.*, 2022; Dion *et al.*, 2024). This process goes beyond the adoption of green technologies or the reduction of environmental impact; it involves a redefinition of luxury itself as an ethical, aesthetic, and transformative experience.

Cultural innovation — understood as the brand's ability to reinterpret its identity in light of contemporary values such as inclusivity, regeneration, and social responsibility — becomes a key component in this transformation. Sustainability is thus integrated with heritage, enhancing artisanal knowledge, local supply chains, and territorial narratives, as illustrated by emblematic cases such as Orange Fiber or Rifò (Torrìsi *et al.*, 2023; Pasquinelli *et al.*, 2024). This approach allows brands to construct a brand discourse that not only legitimizes their environmental practices, but also strengthens their perceived authenticity, generating a culturally distinctive market position (Akrouit & Guercini, 2022).

From a technological perspective, digital innovation acts as both an accelerator and an amplifier of this transformation. The use of blockchain for supply chain traceability (Oguntegebe *et al.*, 2023), immersive platforms, and the spread of user-generated content (Hasbullah *et al.*, 2020) enable not only more transparent communication but also a participatory dialogue with consumers. The increasing digitalization of luxury spaces — from showrooms to virtual boutiques — reveals how perception and symbolic value are progressively abstracted, enhancing sustainability through dematerialization (Carta & De Kock, 2019). Digital fashion, in particular, emerges as an ideal space for experimenting with new forms of dematerialized and symbolic consumption, as in the case of the “Gucci Virtual 25” or the collaborations between Balenciaga and Fortnite (Zhang *et al.*, 2023; Ye & Kim, 2023). In this scenario, consumption shifts from ownership to meaning, and value is created through relationship, narrative, and the aesthetics of sustainability.

At the operational level, adopting sustainability requires a profound reorganization of business processes, involving both internal cultural change and a systemic approach to innovation. Pioneer brands are embracing incremental and holistic models that integrate regenerated materials, circular design, and transparent supply chains into a framework aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (Franzè *et al.*, 2024; Dominguez & Bhatti, 2022). Far from being merely tactical choices, these practices shape a new aesthetic of luxury products, in which imperfection, traceability, and conscious use of resources become integral parts of perceived value (Hemonnet-Goujot *et al.*, 2022; Grigorescu & Ion, 2022).

Nevertheless, this transformation involves addressing several challenges, such as ensuring consistent communication to avoid greenwashing (Akrouit & Guercini, 2022), managing the complexity of global supply chains (Brun & Ciccullo, 2022), and developing new cross-functional competences within organizations (Aslam *et al.*, 2024). In this regard, inclusive and visionary leadership becomes a key enabler of sustainable transformation, as does the active involvement of consumers in the co-construction of brand meaning (Janjua *et al.*, 2025).

Ultimately, sustainability in the luxury sector is increasingly emerging as a shared cultural paradigm, capable of capturing the evolution of social values and translating them into consumption experiences. This shift is particularly evident among Generation Z, whose consumption choices are strongly influenced by ethical, environmental, and social considerations. A recent study confirms that Gen Z consumers expect fashion brands to actively contribute to sustainability, showing awareness of issues such as fair wages, circular economy, and animal welfare (Gazzola *et al.*, 2020b). The concept of the enrichment economy, as proposed by Dion *et al.* (2024), provides a useful framework for understanding how luxury can become a vehicle for social and cultural enrichment, generating positive impact through the promotion of beauty, justice, and sustainability. From this perspective, sustainability is not merely a tool of differentiation, but a symbolic grammar through which luxury renegotiates its role in contemporary society.

6 – Conclusion

Through a systematic literature review, this study reconstructs the state of the literature on innovation and digitalization in luxury brand management and investigates how luxury brands can transform sustainability from a simple operational constraint into a strategic and symbolic lever, leveraging innovation. The literature review has highlighted a significant evolution in the role attributed to sustainability in the context of luxury, which is no longer seen solely as a response to regulatory or reputational pressures, but as a founding element of the new narrative of value (Akrouit & Guercini, 2022; Dion *et al.*, 2024).

Sustainability, integrated with digital and cultural innovation, allows luxury brands to redefine their identities in a way that is consistent with sustainability values. On the one hand, digital innovation allows greater transparency, traceability and interaction with consumers through tools such as blockchain, digital fashion, and immersive platforms (Oguntegbe *et al.*, 2023; Zhang *et al.*, 2023). On the other hand, cultural innovation allows us to reinterpret tradition, heritage and artisanal values in the light of new social sensibilities, enhancing the symbolic and relational dimension of luxury (Pasquinelli *et al.*, 2024; Bernardi *et al.*, 2022).

In doing so, brands not only respond to consumer expectations but also co-produce cultural meanings capable of generating authenticity and competitive differentiation. Sustainability thus

becomes a language and not just a practice, a symbolic grammar capable of regenerating the aesthetics and ethics of luxury.

This study contributes to the literature on luxury and sustainability in four main directions. First, it provides a systematic reconstruction of the debate on sustainable luxury through an integrated analysis of 57 articles, identifying seven distinct but interconnected thematic clusters. Second, it highlights the conceptual role of sustainability from a constraint to an identity and cultural lever, strengthening the dialogue between the resource-based view and the symbolic approach to consumption (Dion *et al.*, 2024; Elkington, 1997). Third, it highlights the role of digitalization not only in a technical but also communicative and narrative key, with particular attention to the emotional, participatory, and relational dimension of sustainability in luxury. Fourth, it suggests promising avenues for future research.

This study presents important practical implications for firms operating in the luxury industry and their stakeholders. It has managerial implications as it highlights the need to adopt integrated sustainability strategies that combine technological innovation and narrative coherence, suggests investing in sustainable digitalization, exploiting traceability tools, authentic storytelling, and user-generated content. It also highlights the importance of enhancing cultural and territorial heritage as a strategic asset to make sustainability not only visible, but "credible" and the opportunity to promote alternative consumption models such as rental, resale, digital fashion that reconcile exclusivity and ethics (Arrigo, 2023; Uludag *et al.*, 2024).

The study has implications for consumers who are no longer mere buyers, but active players and co-creators of value in the process of sustainable luxury transformation. Through their choices and online participation, they directly influence brands' reputations and strategies. This implies that every purchase choice or digital interaction can contribute to rewarding or penalizing corporate behavior from an ethical and sustainability perspective.

The Pérez-Bou and Cantista (2023) study suggests that policy initiative is decisive in guiding companies in their sustainability strategies and collaborative activities with other companies.

The results of this study encourage investment choices and partnerships along the supply chain that value traceability, circular economy and territorial rootedness. This has implications for internal stakeholders such as employees, artisans, designers, and external stakeholders such as suppliers, local communities, and certifying bodies as it stimulates collaborative practices, cultural synergies, and distributed innovati

The systematic analysis of the literature has highlighted that despite the growing academic attention towards the relationship between sustainability and luxury, there are still important areas of research that are poorly explored, that are outlined below.

Emerging technologies are redefining the logic of transparency and traceability in the luxury sector. Artificial intelligence is already used in the management of human resources and production processes to optimize environmental performance (Chin *et al.*, 2024; Nazir & Islam, 2020), while blockchain is configured as a strategic tool to guarantee authenticity and accountability in sustainability communication (Abdelmeguid *et al.*, 2024; Oguntegebe *et al.*, 2023). However, the transformative impact of these technologies in reducing the gap between declared and acted sustainability remains underestimated by academic literature (Bernardi *et al.*, 2022; Pasquinelli *et al.*, 2024). Recent studies also show how digital fashion, and immersive technologies represent an opportunity to combine creativity, exclusivity and reduction of

environmental impact, opening up new scenarios of dematerialized sustainability (Zhang *et al.*, 2023).

RQ1: *How can AI and metaverse, blockchain strengthen the coherence between sustainability communicated and practiced in luxury?*

The shift from an elitist to a more inclusive model represents a crucial challenge for sustainable luxury. Circular fashion practices, such as fashion rental or resale of second-hand items, question the traditional idea of exclusivity (Arrigo, 2023; Ki *et al.*, 2024). Some studies highlight how these models, while democratizing access, can preserve the symbolic value of the brand through digital selection and authentication mechanisms (Dominguez & Bhatti, 2022; Marsh *et al.*, 2022). The most recent evidence suggests that second-hand consumption, especially in emerging markets, is strongly influenced by cultural and social factors related to the perception of the value and reputation of the brand (Wang *et al.*, 2024; Singh, 2024). However, it remains to be clarified whether and how these hybrid approaches manage to maintain the balance between desirability, sustainability and elite positioning (Mok *et al.*, 2022).

RQ2: *How are tensions between exclusivity and inclusiveness articulated in sustainable consumption patterns?*

The valorization of local roots and artisanal skills is a key factor to strengthen the perceived authenticity of sustainable luxury. Numerous Italian experiences demonstrate how the integration between cultural heritage and sustainable innovation represents a distinctive competitive advantage (Bernardi *et al.*, 2022; Akrouit & Guercini, 2022; Pasquinelli *et al.*, 2024). In this perspective, the territorial brand becomes a strategic asset in the construction of a sustainable offer consistent with local values (Lopes *et al.*, 2023). The Orange Fiber case (Torrise *et al.*, 2023) clearly shows how the adoption of industrial symbiosis models can combine sustainability, territorial valorization and positioning in the luxury market. However, the global expansion of brands imposes challenges of coherence between local narratives and international identity (Dion *et al.*, 2024; Papaioannou *et al.*, 2024).

RQ3: *What is the role of local cultures and territorial specificities in building sustainable and authentic luxury?*

Literature highlights a growing sensitivity of younger generations — especially Millennials and Gen Z — towards issues of sustainability, authenticity and ethical coherence (Abdelmeguid *et al.*, 2024; Hemonnet-Goujot *et al.*, 2022). However, consumers' emotional and value-based response is strongly influenced by their cultural context, the symbolic capital attributed to the brand and the differentiated use of digital platforms (Dang-Van *et al.*, 2023; Jokinen *et al.*, 2023). Recent studies show how Gen Z consumers attribute high relevance to the experiential and shareable identity of luxury, with a preference for sustainable and immersive forms of digital participation (Ye & Kim, 2023; Zhang *et al.*, 2023). This opens up new questions on the role of generational segmentation and social identity in building meaningful relationships between consumers and brands.

RQ4: *To what extent does the perception of authenticity in a brand's sustainability depend on the generational identity and socio-cultural context of consumers?*

From the methodological point of view, we suggest the development of longitudinal studies and comparative analyses across different geographical contexts and generations of consumers to capture the evolution of sustainability strategies in luxury over time and understand how

cultural, social and generational variables influence the perception, adoption and legitimacy of sustainable practices in high-end brands.

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