

LJMS LABUAN E-JOURNAL OF MUAMALAT AND SOCIETY

SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE LUXURY SUPPLY CHAINS: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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Received 2 October 2023: Revised 2 December 2023: Accepted 26 June 2024

ABSTRACT

The luxury supply chains are called to realign their focus from a sustainability point of view. Affluent consumers are called for product visibility to ensure transparency is mainly on social inclusion. However, on-going debates are known in sustainability initiatives due to the complexity and uncertainty of standard guidelines and what counts as a successful or excellent implementation. Since luxury is a much visible industry that attracts public attraction on their association with the increase of social inequality between the richest and the poorest in the country - hence, this paper offers both a conceptual review and a research agenda – towards advancing this field of study and bridging the gap between existing research and future research. In conclusion, we propose three areas of future research on: (i) enablers and challenges, (ii) the role of stakeholders and (iii) how luxury organisations cope with institutional complexities of implementing social sustainability.

KEYWORDS: SUSTAINABILITY, SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT, LUXURY SUPPLY CHAINS

ABSTRAK

Rantain bekal mewah dipanggil untuk menyelaraskan semula fokus mereka dari sudut pandangan kemampuan. Pengguna mewah menyeru keterlihatan produk untuk memastikan ketelusan khusus pada kemasukan sosial. Walau bagaimanapun, perbincangan yang berterusan diiktiraf dalam inisiatif kemampuan disebabkan oleh kerumitan dan ketidakpastian garis panduan standard dan apa yang dikira sebagai pelaksanaan yang berjaya atau cemerlang. Memandangkan kemewahan adalah industri yang sangat ketara yang menarik tarikan orang ramai terhadap perkaitan mereka dengan peningkatan ketidaksamaan sosial antara yang terkaya dan termiskin di negara ini - oleh itu, kertas kerja ini menawarkan kajian semula konseptual dan agenda penyelidikan - ke arah memajukan bidang pengajian ini. dan merapatkan jurang antara penyelidikan sedia ada dan penyelidikan masa depan. Kesimpulannya, kami mencadangkan tiga bidang penyelidikan masa depan tentang: (i) pemboleh dan cabaran, (ii) peranan pihak berkepentingan dan (iii) bagaimana organisasi mewah menghadapi kerumitan institusi dalam melaksanakan kelestarian sosial.

KATA KUNCI: KEMAMAPANAN, PENGURUSAN RANTAI BEKALAN MAPAN, RANTAI BEKALAN MEWAH

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1. INTRODUCTION

Luxury brands have long been linked with exclusivity, workmanship, and high-quality materials, but there is rising understanding that sustainability is also an important component of the luxury sector (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2013). Luxury consumers are growing more environmentally conscious and interested in the sustainability practises of luxury firms (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2013). This shift in consumer tastes has encouraged luxury businesses to implement sustainable supply chain practises (Yang *et al.*, 2017). Circular economy solutions are being pursued to manage sustainability in the luxury industry. By designing products for durability, repairability, and recyclability, circular economy principles strive to minimise waste and maximise resource efficiency (Shashi *et al.*, 2020).

Luxury brands are developing and managing circular supply chain practises, such as creating traceability systems and utilising recycled materials (Shashi *et al.*, 2020; Brando *et al.*, 2021). Logistics and supply chain management are critical to the sustainability efforts of the luxury business. By optimising transportation, decreasing waste, and boosting efficiency, effective supply chain management can help to achieve sustainability goals (Shen *et al.*, 2020). Collaboration and coordination across supply chain partners are critical for implementing sustainable practises and mainstreaming sustainability (Waller *et al.*, 2015).

Luxury brands must incorporate sustainability into their brand management strategies in addition to supply chain management. Sustainability is becoming increasingly significant in luxury brand management, with luxury brands including sustainability through ethos, commitment along the supply chain, and the development of eco-collections (Kale & Oztürk, 2016). However, there is a need to address the possibility that sustainable luxury brands are of poorer quality than traditional luxury brands (Kim & Park, 2022; Kim & Park, 2020). Overall, the luxury industry recognises the importance of sustainability and is working to integrate it into its supply chains. Adopting circular economy strategies, investigating blockchain technology for traceability, and collaborating with supply chain partners are all part of this. Luxury brands can meet the growing demand for sustainable luxury goods while maintaining their exclusivity and desirability by incorporating sustainability into their brand management strategies. Subsequently, this paper seeks to explore the extant literature of sustainable luxury supply chains, followed by future directions for this field of study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Media Attention on Socially Sustainable Issues

Media attention plays a crucial role in shaping public awareness and concern for socially sustainable issues. The use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube has been identified as an effective mechanism for engaging stakeholders in sustainability reporting (Manetti & Bellucci, 2016). As media attention increases, organizations may perceive their legitimacy to be threatened, leading them to implement remedial strategies to address social and environmental issues (Coetzee & Staden, 2011). Furthermore, there is a need to reconnect research on the production, content, and social implications of environmental communication, emphasizing the impact of media and public communication on public understanding and action regarding the environment (Hansen, 2011).

Sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) research has gained interest from both scholars and practitioners as a way forward in addressing significant sustainability issues in the supply chain. In comparison to economic and environmental sustainability issues, social sustainability issues are only beginning to gain more attention. Yet, there is a clear need to address this key aspect of the triple bottom line, with social sustainability issues such as Modern Slavery currently receiving much media attention (See The Guardian, 2019). The luxury industry and its distinguished supply chains

has not been an industry traditionally associated with sustainable impacts, however, are now required to improve their social initiatives (Winston, 2016). In their editorial notes, sustainability in 2020 is predicted to focus more on the cost of luxury specifically on poorly paid labours, realigning the values of organisations to provide an ethically safe supply chains which produces products for affluent consumers today (Gagan, 2019; Beauloye, 2020).

Environmental media portrayal has been studied, with findings showing a focus on environmental crises such as floods, whereas environmental organisations prioritise sustainable living efforts (Saleh & Heinrichs, 2020). Furthermore, past research has focused on identifying hot topics and contentious issues, emphasising the need of paying attention to social sustainability (Huang *et al.*, 2020). According to the agenda-setting theory, the media can prioritise and bring attention to social problems, hence affecting public opinion formation and consequences (Lee, 2016). Social media has been identified as a legitimation tool for sustainability reporting, with a focus on positive social problems such as community support, gender equality, and diversity (Lodhia *et al.*, 2020). The issue-attention cycle, which characterises the fluctuation of media attention on social problems, has been investigated using theoretical models, with a focus on the impact of media coverage and external events on public interest in issues (Boykoff, 2009; Henry & Gordon, 2001).

Furthermore, consumer awareness of the possible detrimental impact of social and environmental crises has been related to the impact of business strategies on online sustainability disclosures, pushing firms to focus attention on sustainability disclosure (Amran *et al.*, 2013). The issue-attention cycle has been noted in relation to social media, where false material regarding treatments and preventative measures was widely disseminated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (Leng *et al.*, 2021). It has been observed that activists still struggle to draw public attention to structural problems and issues, even with social media's participatory affordances (Poell, 2019). Finally, media attention, particularly social media attention, has a substantial impact on stakeholder participation, public awareness, and the prioritisation of socially sustainable issues. Understanding the dynamics of media coverage and its impact on public attention is critical for dealing with social and environmental issues.

Sustainable Luxury

Sustainable luxury is a complicated and growing notion that has gained popularity in recent years. For organisations and customers alike, the convergence of sustainability and luxury brings both problems and opportunity. While scholarly work on sustainable luxury is rising, it is clear that luxury firms have been sluggish to embrace sustainability, with only a handful taking a proactive stance in sustainable development (Olšanová *et al.*, 2018). This reluctance may stem from a perceived conceptual incompatibility between luxury and sustainability, as luxury is frequently associated with exclusivity, conformity, and hedonism, which can make generating favourable consumer responses towards sustainable luxury products difficult (Park *et al.*, 2022; Wang *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, luxury brands are frequently cautious to communicate their commitment to sustainability. The connection between luxury attitudes and sustainability is also of importance. Studies on the impact of value-expressive and socially adaptive luxury attitudes on sustainable behaviours have revealed that luxury attitudes can influence environmentally conscientious and socially responsible consumer behaviour (Eastman *et al.*, 2021).

Furthermore, customer expectations for the manufacturing and quality of luxury goods have risen, with sustainability viewed as a requirement for luxury products (Henninger *et al.*, 2017; Colella *et al.*, 2022). According to Csaba and Skjold (2018), the concept of "deeper luxury" highlights the significance of sustainable methods in the creation and use of luxury products, implying that genuine luxury ought to be in harmony with sustainability. The luxury sector, however, encounters resistance and difficulties when attempting to incorporate sustainability, suggesting that there are complications in the relationship between luxury and sustainability (Ertekin, 2019). However, there are instances of effective integration, including the creation of luxury textiles from repurposed

materials that are sustainable and serve as a paradigm for sustainable practises in the luxury sector (Keith & Silies, 2015). Kapferer (2010) categorises three types of luxury namely: (i) irrational luxury, (ii) excessive luxury and (iii) inequality luxury. These associations are known to historically with luxury which serves the rich and able – which makes purchasing luxury products seem irrational, excessive and unfair for poor families or countries.

Hence, because it leads to the increase of gap and coexistence between the extremely poor (peasants) and extremely rich (urbans) makes the nature luxury purchasing appears to be the opposite of the aims of SD. On the other hand, activists of SD seek to promote the possibility of sustainable luxury. In the example presented by Kapferer (2010), Tiffany promotes SD through their moral obligation views of protecting both places and communities. Instead, other efforts such as promoting to engage in more society development, labour empowerment, health and safety of labours are encouraged. In the end, luxury will have to be sustainable in all three forms of the triple bottom line (i.e. environmental, social and economic). To reduce social tension, the luxury industry should take up the challenge to strategize on capitalising on closing the gap between economic focus and social equity. In conclusion, a wide range of subjects are covered in the discussion of sustainable luxury, such as the creation of luxury items, brand attitudes, and consumer behaviour. Although it can be difficult to balance luxury and sustainability, there are signs of development and hope that the luxury sector would adopt sustainable practises.

Socially Sustainable Luxury Supply Chains

Sustainable supply chain management is a critical aspect of modern business operations, particularly in industries such as luxury fashion. The integration of sustainable practices in supply chains has become increasingly prevalent, with luxury groups adopting sustainable approaches in various supply chain activities, including sourcing, manufacturing, logistics, distribution, and waste management (Yang *et al.*, 2017). The concept of sustainable supply chain management involves the integration of triple bottom line objectives (environmental, social, and economic) to enhance the long-term economic performance of individual enterprises and chains for sustainable development (Mursidah & Fauzi, 2022). Furthermore, the importance of sustainability in luxury fashion supply chains has been emphasized, highlighting the need for traceability to ensure environmental and legal conformity, thereby supporting efforts to make supply chains more sustainable (Brandão *et al.*, 2021).

Supply chains' adaptability and resilience are essential elements of sustainable supply chain management, especially when dealing with risks and unforeseen disruptions (Mari *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, supply chain collaborative innovation has been shown to have an impact on sustainable development; in fact, sustainable supply chain development is thought to provide sustainable supply chain performance (Shan *et al.*, 2020). However, there are still gaps in our knowledge of how luxury companies create and oversee circular economy-based sustainable supply chains, which highlights the need for more study in this field (Shashi *et al.*, 2020). Assuring the provenance and traceability of luxury goods through the use of blockchain technology has been shown to improve supply chain management in the luxury market and support sustainability initiatives (Boissieu *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, the necessity of incorporating a value chain perspective to obtain competitive advantage while keeping brand exclusivity has been emphasised, underscoring the significance of a focused supply chain strategy for luxury fashion management (Brun *et al.*, 2017).

The buzzword of the twenty-first century is "sustainable luxury" (Kapferer, 2020). Internal and external stakeholders are urging luxury firms who are lagging in their sustainable development strategies to catch up. Global supply chains and CSR can be defined as "business's ongoing commitment to act ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families, as well as the local community and society at large" (WBCSD, 1999, p.3). Given the ongoing attempts to address climate change and/or environmental

issues, social inclusion is on the rise. Calls for social fairness compel luxury companies to address current inequity, discrimination, and other oppressive social concerns in their supply chains. Beauloye (2020) predicted scrutiny will come upon luxury organisations – this will begin from their social inclusion right up to their transparent supply chains.

Sustainability, circular economy concepts, and responsible management practises are becoming increasingly important in luxury supply chains. The luxury business is addressing sustainability issues and attempting to take responsibility for its actions, notably in the context of European brand strategy and French consumer expectations (Jaegler & Goessling, 2020). Designing circular business models and solutions to address environmental, financial, and social concerns is part of this (Shashi *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, the application of blockchain technology to improve traceability and transparency in luxury supply chains is being investigated, which will contribute to sustainability initiatives (Oguntegebe *et al.*, 2022; Boissieu *et al.*, 2021). The process of sustainable value generation in the luxury fashion sector has been studied, with rising adoption of sustainable supply chain practises (Yang *et al.*, 2017).

Furthermore, there is proof that high-end companies are putting China-specific programmes into place to address the problem of an integrated and sustainable global supply chain (Galli & Bassanini, 2020). The luxury sector presents logistics and supply chain management with difficulties because of supply chain complexity, consumer aspirations for sustainability, and global compliance (Shen *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, the effects of the luxury market on society and the environment have an impact on how well operations function, highlighting how important sustainability is to the luxury supply chain (Karaosman *et al.*, 2017). In general, new theories and frameworks for sustainable supply chain management that integrate dynamic capabilities for innovation and competitive advantages are being adopted by the luxury industry (Carter & Rogers, 2008; Caniato *et al.*, 2013).

The complexity, uncertainty, and lead time in the supply chain have all hampered or impeded the implementation of sustainability. Because of the industry's historical nature, luxury products were exclusively available to wealthy cultures. Luxury items, the excellence in their quality, and the scarcity of their raw materials make sustainability difficult and complex, leading to the industry's early resistance. According to Kapferer (2010), some of the causes are a lack of communication and a lack of enforcement for public policies, laws, rules, and law related. Zhang *et al.* (2017) accept the limitations of expanding their CSR practises due to the expenses of time, education, and suppliers are only taking measures to meet the fundamental criteria of their codes of conduct, which impedes long-term development of their sustainable practises (Huq *et al.* 2016). Winston (2016) said that slavery is a continuing challenge because organisations are unsure of the actions of their supply chains higher upstream. According to a recent study by Karaosman *et al.* (2017), SMEs as supply chain providers face insecurity due to the bargaining power of their consumers in the luxury business. Due to the ambiguity and complexity of sustainability rules and frameworks, bold efforts must be done to eradicate the repercussions of unsustainable values or activities in the supply chain (Stindt, 2017; Yang *et al.* 2017). As a result, luxury brands can no longer disregard sustainability and must act (Winston, 2016).

The luxury business is only now starting to venture into "green pastures," and they should delve deeper and begin delivering their messages to their clients. Customers are also expressing themselves and wishing to be represented by the things they buy (Beauloye, 2020; Yang, Han, and Lee, 2017; Towers *et al.*, 2013). Auditing bodies increasingly need traceability and visibility, and further development is essential to improve transparency and involvement with supply chain vendors (Karaosman *et al.* 2018). Customers want visibility of management commitment and aggressive leadership abilities as part of their sustainable projects. Continuous efforts to strengthen supplier involvement and partnerships are required across the supply chain's different layers (Karaosman *et al.* 2018; Liu *et al.* 2016). Furthermore, luxury businesses are expected to engage in unexpected supply chain collaboration to meet their sustainability aims (Beauloye, 2020). Governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and consumers are urged to collaborate and

inform essential demands for sustainable imperatives, while supply chain actors are encouraged to participate in producing sustainability knowledge and sharing value throughout the supply chain. Labour difficulties are now starting to emerge, with working conditions and employee well-being becoming audit requirements (Towers *et al.* 2013).

Empowerment is required for both suppliers and consumers, which might be carried out through various sustainability projects to boost affluence on responsible consumptions. Supplier connections are equally important, and organisations rely on one another because of the long-term trust built over time. Current CSR accreditation focuses on or promotes free association, anti-discrimination, the environment, health and safety, working hours, and company integrity (Towers *et al.* 2013). Furthermore, blockchains would be expected to improve the traceability of their products in terms of visibility. Now is the time for luxury businesses to realign and refocus in order to ensure that their products remain timeless and outstanding value (Beauloye, 2020). The creation of value in the supply chain has also become significant for luxury brands in engaging and communicating with their stakeholders about sustainable efforts that should be undertaken (Yang *et al.* 2017). These references emphasise the growing focus on sustainability in luxury supply chains, with a particular emphasis on circular economy methods, responsible management, and the adoption of sustainable practises. To address environmental and social impact, improve traceability, and respond to consumer expectations, the luxury industry is rapidly recognising the significance of integrating sustainability into supply chain management.

This study seeks to fill a research gap by investigating the facilitators and obstacles, stakeholder demands, and institutional complexity related with implementing socially SSCM. Using a multi-case study approach, this study aims to focus on the many layers of the premium brand supply chain, as well as the stakeholders involved. As a result, the following section proposes future directions for the study.

3. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Integrating responsible management practises, sustainability, and ethics throughout the supply chain strata is central to the concept of socially sustainable luxury supply chains (Oguntegbe *et al.*, 2022). Traceability is critical to establishing sustainability in the luxury supply chain since it provides information on environmental and legal compliance (Brando *et al.*, 2021). However, more research is needed to determine how luxury companies may develop and manage sustainable supply chain practises based on circular economy ideas (Shashi *et al.*, 2020). Luxury organisations must incorporate sustainability principles into their supply chain strategy in order to develop truly sustainable supply chains (Kunz *et al.*, 2020). To address the difficulty of an integrated and sustainable global supply chain, some prominent luxury corporations have already undertaken China-specific efforts (Galli & Bassanini, 2020). Vertical integration upstream can also help with environmental sustainability in the luxury apparel business (Arcuri & Giolli, 2022).

Sustainable value generation is a major mechanism in the luxury apparel business, and many luxury organisations have implemented sustainable supply chain practises (Yang *et al.*, 2017). Luxury brands are progressively connecting themselves with sustainability through a variety of measures, including eco-brands, supply chain commitment, and the development of eco-collections (Kale & Oztürk, 2016). The adoption of blockchain technology in the luxury business can improve supply chain transparency and traceability while addressing counterfeit, grey market, and imitation items (Boissieu *et al.*, 2021). Systems thinking and supply chain collaboration are critical for mainstreaming sustainability in the luxury industry (Waller *et al.*, 2015). Finally, socially sustainable luxury supply chains necessitate the integration of responsible management practises, sustainability concepts, and ethics across the supply chain. Traceability, upstream vertical integration, and the usage of blockchain technology can all help the luxury supply chain achieve sustainability. Furthermore, the adoption of circular economy ideas, as well as collaboration between luxury brands and supply chain partners, are critical for producing long-term value and mainstreaming sustainability in the luxury business.

Hence, future studies for social sustainability in luxury supply chains should concentrate on a few critical issues.

- i. For starters, theoretical and cross-cultural thoughts on broader structural and institutional concerns in the field of sustainable luxury marketing are required (Athwal *et al.*, 2019). By building a holistic framework for circular supply chains and providing a complete review of the problem, this research can contribute to the continued growth of sustainability in luxury (Shashi *et al.*, 2020);
- ii. The role of blockchain technology in the luxury fashion supply chain can also be investigated. By offering transparency and traceability, blockchain can enable responsible management practises and improve sustainability (Oguntegbe *et al.*, 2022). It can also help to accelerate the transition to a circular economy by restructuring supply networks and improving supply chain digitization and agility (Nandi *et al.*, 2021). The adoption and impact of blockchain technology in luxury supply chains, including disintermediation, traceability, and transparency, can be studied (Boissieu *et al.*, 2021);
- iii. The reporting of sustainability practises in the luxury industry is another key topic of inquiry. Investigating luxury firms' sustainability reporting practises can provide insights into their commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility (Galli & Bassanini, 2020). Furthermore, the influence of corporate social responsibility in the luxury environment can be investigated to better understand its relevance and efficacy (Broccardo *et al.*, 2022); and
- iv. Finally, study can look into the mechanism of long-term wealth development in the luxury clothes business. This includes investigating sustainable supply chain practises such as sourcing, manufacturing, shipping, distribution, servicing, and waste management (Yang *et al.*, 2017). Understanding how sustainable value is formed might reveal solutions and practises that contribute to social sustainability in luxury supply chains.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, future research for social sustainability in luxury supply chains should focus on theoretical reflections, cross-cultural comparisons, the role of blockchain technology, sustainability reporting, corporate social responsibility, and the mechanism of sustainable value creation. By addressing these areas, researchers can contribute to the development of sustainable practices in the luxury industry and provide insights for companies to enhance their social sustainability efforts. Given the nature of this topic, an exploratory strategy is suggested. Qualitative research is an appropriate strategy for investigating new and complex phenomena that are difficult to explain using existing ideas (Cresswell, 2018). The case study approach will be utilised to investigate the various organisations in the supply chain (Voss, 2016), and given the circumstances, future studies should aim to investigate a global supply chain, providing both views of a developed country buyer and a developing country supplier. Every year, the Global Slavery Index spotlights slaves in emerging economies, which are frequently contributors to the global supply chain. As a result, the inclusion of a global supply chain perspective is important for understanding and studying the techniques utilised by luxury supply chains to conduct socially sustainable initiatives with these questions in mind:

- a. How can a better understanding of the enablers and challenges from the perspective of global supply chains aid in the implementation of social sustainability?
- b. How do the stakeholders seek to influence the implementation of social sustainability and aid in improving social inclusion in their organisational strategy?
- c. How do organisations cope with institutional complexity and improve the implementation of social sustainability?

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