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Systematic Literature Review of Evolution of Sustainable Luxury Marketing: A Comparative Analysis of Baby Boomers and Gen Z

Vendra BilvaRaja Nilaya, Suparna Ghosal

MBA Student, CMS Business School, Faculty of Management Studies, JAIN (Deemed to be University),
Bengaluru, India

Professor, CMS Business School, Faculty of Management Studies, JAIN (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru, India

ABSTRACT:

Purpose:

This study explores the evolution of sustainable luxury marketing and examines how consumer perceptions and purchasing behaviour differ between Generation Z and Baby Boomers. It aims to understand how sustainability has transformed luxury branding and how generational differences influence attitudes toward eco-friendly luxury consumption.

Design/methodology/approach:

A systematic literature review (SLR) approach was adopted using PRISMA guidelines. Secondary data were collected from academic sources such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate. A total of 21 relevant studies were selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The study applies thematic and chronological analysis to interpret trends.

Findings:

The findings indicate that sustainable luxury has evolved from being perceived as contradictory to becoming a strategic necessity. Generation Z shows stronger alignment with sustainability values, while Baby Boomers prioritize quality and brand legacy. However, sustainability influences perception more than actual purchase decisions.

Originality/value:

This study contributes by integrating generational comparison into sustainable luxury research and identifying key research gaps, especially in emerging markets like India.

KEYWORDS: Sustainable luxury, consumer behaviour, Gen Z, Baby Boomers, luxury marketing, sustainability

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of luxury has undergone a significant transformation over time. Traditionally, luxury was associated with exclusivity, superior craftsmanship, and status. However, increasing global concerns regarding environmental sustainability and ethical practices have reshaped consumer expectations and brand strategies.

In recent years, sustainability has become an essential component of luxury branding. Luxury companies are no longer evaluated solely based on product quality and prestige but also on their environmental and social responsibility. Practices such as ethical sourcing, transparent supply chains, and circular production models are becoming increasingly important.

Consumer preferences are also shifting. Generation Z, in particular, values transparency, ethical practices, and brand authenticity. In contrast, Baby Boomers tend to focus more on durability, quality, and brand heritage. These differences highlight the importance of understanding generational perspectives in sustainable luxury marketing.

Despite growing research, gaps remain in understanding how sustainability influences consumer behaviour across generations. This study aims to bridge that gap through a systematic review of existing literature.



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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between luxury and sustainability was historically considered contradictory. Luxury emphasized exclusivity and indulgence, while sustainability focused on moderation and responsibility. However, recent studies suggest that sustainability can enhance luxury value when aligned with quality and authenticity.

Research indicates that sustainability positively influences brand perception and consumer trust. However, its impact on purchase intention remains inconsistent. Factors such as price, brand image, and perceived quality often play a more dominant role.

A key concept identified in literature is the attitude behaviour gap, where consumers express positive attitudes toward sustainable products but do not always translate them into actual purchases.

Generational differences further complicate this relationship. Generation Z demonstrates higher environmental awareness and preference for ethical brands but is also price sensitive. Baby Boomers, on the other hand, prioritize traditional luxury attributes such as quality, durability, and brand reputation.

Overall, while sustainability is gaining importance, its influence varies across consumer segments and contexts.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a **systematic literature review (SLR)** approach to analyse the evolution of sustainable luxury marketing and generational differences.

Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative research design based on secondary data to examine the evolution of sustainable luxury marketing. A structured and transparent approach guided by the PRISMA methodology was followed to ensure systematic selection and analysis of relevant literature. This approach enabled the identification of key patterns, trends, and research gaps in the existing body of knowledge.

Data Sources

Data for the study were collected from multiple reliable academic sources, including Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and peer-reviewed journals. The use of diverse databases ensured a comprehensive and balanced collection of relevant studies, reducing the risk of bias.

Search Strategy

A well-defined search strategy was implemented using specific keywords such as “sustainable luxury marketing,” “Gen Z consumer behaviour,” “Baby Boomers luxury consumption,” and “ethical branding.” Boolean operators such as AND and OR were used to refine the search process and improve the accuracy and relevance of the selected studies.

Inclusion Criteria

To maintain the quality and relevance of the research, specific inclusion criteria were applied. The study included research articles published after 2010, peer-reviewed academic papers, and studies directly related to sustainability and luxury marketing.

Exclusion Criteria

Certain studies were excluded to ensure consistency and reliability. Non-academic sources, duplicate entries, and research that was not directly relevant to the topic were removed during the screening process.

Final Sample

After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria and conducting a thorough screening process, a final sample of 21 research papers was selected for detailed analysis. This ensured that the study was grounded in reliable, relevant, and high-quality academic literature.



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IV. CHRONOLOGICAL EVOLUTION OF SUSTAINABLE LUXURY

Pre 2013: Limited Focus

Sustainability was largely absent in luxury research. Luxury was primarily associated with status and exclusivity.

2013–2016: Contradiction Phase

Sustainability and luxury were viewed as conflicting concepts. Researchers questioned whether eco-friendly practices could dilute luxury value.

2017–2018: Transition Phase

Brands began integrating sustainability through CSR initiatives and ethical sourcing. Consumer acceptance gradually increased.

2019–2021: Growth Phase

Sustainable luxury gained significant attention. Digital platforms played a key role in promoting transparency and ethical practices.

Post 2021: Strategic Integration

Sustainability became a core component of luxury branding, influencing long term strategies and brand identity.

V. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

1. Evolution of Marketing

Luxury marketing has shifted from product centric to value driven strategies focusing on brand purpose and storytelling.

2. Dimensions of Sustainability

Key dimensions include:

- Ethical sourcing
- Circular economy practices
- Corporate social responsibility
- Digital transparency

3. Consumer Behaviour

Sustainability influences perception more than purchase decisions. Trust and authenticity play critical roles.

VI. GENERATIONAL ANALYSIS

Generation Z

- Highly sustainability driven
- Influenced by social media
- Prefers ethical and transparent brands
- Open to resale and rental models

Baby Boomers

- Value quality and durability
- Strong brand loyalty
- Prefer offline shopping
- Sustainability seen as secondary

Comparison



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Factor	Baby Boomers	Gen Z
Motivation	Quality, legacy	Values, identity
Channel	Offline	Digital
Loyalty	High	Low
Luxury Meaning	Ownership	Experience

VII. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Several gaps exist in current research:

- Overemphasis on Gen Z
- Limited focus on emerging markets like India
- Lack of real behavioural data
- Weak financial evidence linking sustainability to profitability

The gap between stated preferences and actual behaviour remains a major challenge.

VIII. RESEARCH GAPS

- Limited comparative generational studies
- Lack of research in developing economies
- Need for longitudinal studies
- Insufficient understanding of digital influence
- Absence of measurable sustainability performance indicators

IX. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study proposes that:

- Sustainability initiatives → influence consumer perception
- Perception → shapes attitude
- Attitude → drives purchase intention
- Generation → moderate's relationships

X. CONCLUSION

Sustainable luxury marketing has evolved significantly, moving from contradiction to strategic integration. While sustainability enhances brand perception, it does not always translate into purchase behaviour.

Generational differences play a critical role, with Gen Z showing stronger sustainability orientation and Baby Boomers focusing on traditional luxury values.

For luxury brands, balancing sustainability with core attributes such as quality and exclusivity is essential for long term success.

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