

Linking sustainability to consumer brand engagement in omnichannel communication of luxury fashion brands

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to investigate how consumer brand engagement may be improved by conveying sustainability in an omnichannel setting.

Design/methodology/approach – This research focuses on luxury fashion brands, presenting a multiple case study of four Italian luxury fashion brands highly committed to sustainability.

Findings – It demonstrates the vital role that omnichannel communication plays in conveying sustainable brand behaviours to increase consumer brand engagement and the beneficial influence on positive word of mouth, a sense of community and helpfulness.

Originality/value – This study identifies strategies in omnichannel sustainability communication to increase consumer engagement with luxury fashion brands.

Keywords Omnichannel communication, Sustainability, Luxury fashion, Customer brand engagement

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The luxury fashion industry occupies a prominent position within the market. Statista (2024) predicts that this industry will experience a compound annual growth rate of 3.25% between 2024 and 2028. The luxury fashion industry is considered highly polluting, despite its economic value, due to the utilisation of rare and exotic materials, a chemical-intensive production process and the generation of textile waste and marine pollution (Bubicz *et al.*, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2024). Due to the adverse consequences, fashion companies have placed a high importance on sustainability, leading to heightened customer consciousness regarding sustainability and a preference for purchasing sustainable products (Kong *et al.*, 2021). One way of raising awareness of different practices enacted is through sustainability communication (Luo *et al.*, 2025). Therefore, marketers have made numerous attempts to communicate with and deliver the value of sustainable products to consumers, successfully encouraging consumers to make sustainable decisions (Rathee, 2024; Whang *et al.*, 2015). This is reflected in the strategy adopted by many luxury fashion brands such as Armani, Cartier, Chanel and Gucci (Kong *et al.*, 2021). Luxury brands are increasingly aware of the manifold benefits of sustainability (Sander *et al.*, 2021).

However, tensions may exist between luxury and sustainability (Osburg *et al.*, 2021). Research indicates that consumers often perceive sustainability and luxury as incompatible (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau, 2017; Streit and Davies, 2017), with some studies suggesting sustainability is irrelevant in luxury fashion decision-making (Henninger *et al.*, 2016; Hu *et al.*, 2019; Joy *et al.*, 2012). While luxury emphasises self-gratification, sustainability entails moderation and concern for others (Harper and Peattie, 2011). At the consumer level, resistance persists: sustainable luxury is often perceived as lower quality (Achabou and Dekhili, 2013) or less desirable when labelled “sustainable” (Beckham and Voyer, 2014). The industry’s secretive nature limits transparency and accountability. When reporting occurs, scepticism remains (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau, 2017; Achabou and Dekhili, 2013), possibly due to luxury consumers not being key drivers

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of ethical or sustainable consumption (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau, 2019).

The literature remains fragmented in its treatment of sustainability communication in luxury fashion. Prior studies have focused largely on single-channel strategies, such as social media (Eastman *et al.*, 2024; Kong *et al.*, 2021; Pangarkar *et al.*, 2023), in-store communication (Arrigo, 2018) or corporate websites and sustainability reports (Luo *et al.*, 2025). However, this siloed approach does not reflect contemporary marketing realities, where consumers interact with brands across multiple online and offline touchpoints (Baxendale *et al.*, 2015). Contemporary trends in communication emphasise channel synergy and message consistency across all touchpoints, a concept known as omnichannel communication (Gao and Huang, 2021; Roggeveen and Sethuraman, 2020). Omnichannel approaches are particularly relevant in sustainability communication, as they can help overcome consumer scepticism, information overload and the perceived ambiguity of sustainability claims (Harris *et al.*, 2016; Henninger *et al.*, 2016). While omnichannel communication has been widely examined particularly in relation to the customer journey (Neslin, 2022), brand experience (Rahman *et al.*, 2022; Yin *et al.*, 2022) and retail strategies aimed at enhancing the shopping experience (Pangarkar *et al.*, 2022; Lawry, 2022), its specific role in sustainability communication within the luxury fashion industry remains underexplored. Given the industry's reliance on rare and resource-intensive materials, its significant contribution to waste and pollution (Bubicz *et al.*, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2024) and concerns over declining product quality and increasingly rapid seasonal turnover (Vogue, 2022), it is necessary to investigate how luxury fashion brands can address these criticisms and use omnichannel strategies to communicate their sustainability efforts.

While existing studies have predominantly examined consumer perceptions of sustainability communication in the luxury sector (Carranza *et al.*, 2023; Kong *et al.*, 2021), relatively little attention has been given to the managerial perspective. This paper shifts the focus to the brand side, addressing a critical gap by exploring how luxury fashion brands strategically approach sustainability communication. Understanding the internal decision-making processes regarding communication content, channels and impact on consumer engagement offers valuable insights into how sustainability messages are crafted and delivered in an omnichannel environment, an area that remains underexplored despite its significance for effective implementation (Dangelico and Pujari, 2010).

Therefore, this paper aims to identify strategies in omnichannel sustainability communication to increase consumer brand engagement with luxury fashion. In particular, the paper aims to understand the content of sustainable communication conveyed by luxury fashion firms, the communication channels used and the resulting impact on consumer brand engagement. These three elements give rise to the study inquiries:

- RQ1. What is the content of sustainable communication by luxury fashion brands across omnichannel platforms?
- RQ2. What communication channels are used by luxury fashion brands?

- RQ3. What is the resulting impact of the omnichannel communication strategy on consumer brand engagement?

The study adopts an exploratory qualitative approach based on a multiple case study methodology (Yin, 2017) to uncover how luxury fashion brands communicate sustainability across omnichannel touchpoints and how such efforts influence consumer brand engagement. The empirical investigation focuses on four Italian luxury brands actively engaged in sustainable practices.

Theoretically, this study advances the literature on the compatibility between luxury branding and sustainability communication strategies. Our findings show that luxury brands communicate their sustainability efforts through content such as craftsmanship, authenticity, quality and durability, which in turn strengthens consumer brand engagement in an omnichannel environment. These results challenge the often-presumed incompatibility between luxury and sustainability, showing that when communicated effectively, sustainability can reinforce rather than undermine luxury brand engagement.

Secondly, this study contributes to the consumer brand engagement literature by revealing that sustainability-related content in the luxury sector stimulates engagement across multiple dimensions.

Thirdly, this study extends the literature on omnichannel communication highlighting the critical role of omnichannel strategies in sustainability communication. Specifically, our findings underscore the importance of delivering coherent and consistent sustainability content across multiple consumer touchpoints which allow luxury fashion brands to maintain brand consistency and narrative integrity across channels.

From a managerial perspective, the findings of this study provide guidance for luxury fashion brands seeking to enhance their sustainability communication strategies. In particular, the results highlight the importance of aligning sustainability content with luxury through craftsmanship, high quality, durability and authenticity, which are especially valued by luxury consumers. Moreover, the study underscores the strategic value of adopting an omnichannel communication approach. In particular, our findings offer useful insights to luxury fashion brands for properly selecting the communication channels for disseminating sustainability messages to increase consumer brand engagement.

The paper is composed as follows: after the introduction, we analyse the literature on omnichannel communication of sustainability in the luxury fashion sector and consumer brand engagement (section 2). Then, we focus on the methodology, including data collection and analysis techniques (section 3). The results and analysis of the case studies are presented in the third section (section 5), and conclusions, limitations and future directions for research are outlined in the last section (section 6 and 7).

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Communication of sustainability of luxury fashion brands

Although sustainability and luxury fashion have traditionally been viewed as paradoxical, given that sustainability emphasises harmony with people and the planet (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau, 2017; Streit and Davies, 2017), while

luxury is often linked to extravagance and excess, this perception is evolving (Athwal *et al.*, 2019). Increasingly, luxury fashion brands are embracing sustainability by introducing eco-conscious fashion lines and exploring ways to extend the lifecycle of their garments (Luo *et al.*, 2025). As societal and consumer expectations around sustainability continue to rise, luxury fashion brands face growing pressure to communicate their sustainability efforts in a transparent and effective manner (Lee *et al.*, 2024), with sustainability communication serving as a key tool for raising awareness of the practices they implement (Luo *et al.*, 2025).

Sustainability communication is a broad and multifaceted concept that seeks to enhance awareness and understanding of environmental issues, biodiversity and human development, while also integrating economic, social and environmental values and norms (Fletcher and Tham, 2019).

Sustainability communication can be categorised into three modes: communicating *of*, *about* and *for* sustainability (Fischer *et al.*, 2016; Genç, 2017). Communicating *for* sustainability aims to advocate for sustainable development and drive societal transformation. Communicating *about* sustainability involves debates and discussions – either one-on-one or broadcast to a wider audience – on sustainability within a specific context (Neidhardt, 1993). In contrast, communicating *of* sustainability is one-directional and targeted, such as corporate social responsibility reports conveying a company's sustainability actions (Moser, 2010). In the luxury fashion context, all three modes are often encompassed under the umbrella of sustainability communication (Kunz *et al.*, 2020; Osburg *et al.*, 2021).

However, sustainability communication is challenging (Davies and Doherty, 2019; Tölkes, 2018), especially in fashion partly due to its abstract nature and the erosion of consumer trust (Henninger *et al.*, 2016; Streit and Davies, 2017). Consumers increasingly expect brands not only to improve their sustainability practices but also to communicate these efforts transparently without risking accusations of greenwashing (Henninger *et al.*, 2016). Adding to this challenge is the inherent complexity of sustainability, which encompasses environmental, social and economic dimensions (de Oliveira *et al.*, 2023). This multifaceted nature can overwhelm consumers, making it difficult for them to fully understand the implications of the sustainability initiatives undertaken by luxury brands (Malhotra and Srivastava, 2023).

The literature highlights several channels used for sustainability communication in the luxury sector. Among them, the physical store plays a central role, as most brand-related decisions still occur in-store (Arrigo, 2017; Arrigo, 2018). Stores function as strategic communication touchpoints for building strong customer-brand relationships (Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2015). In particular, flagship stores are frequently examined because they represent the retail format best suited to expressing a luxury fashion brand's identity (Kozinets *et al.*, 2002; Hollenbeck *et al.*, 2008; Nierobisch *et al.*, 2017).

Moreover, the website represents a key channel for sustainability communication. It enables companies to share extensive information quickly and cost-effectively, while offering detailed, constantly updated and customisable content for different stakeholder groups. As the website is often the first

touchpoint between consumers and the brand (Luo *et al.*, 2021), it plays a central role in shaping initial perceptions. A major advantage of web-based communication is that it allows firms to directly publish sustainability information and make it immediately accessible to customers (Da Giau *et al.*, 2016). However, consumers do not automatically notice or process sustainability messages on luxury brand websites; many overlook them or perceive them as background information (Luo *et al.*, 2025). In addition, although most companies maintain a corporate website, these sites are often not designed with sustainability communication as a primary objective (Du *et al.*, 2010). In some cases, firms may even be reluctant to disclose their sustainability efforts online, fearing potential criticism or non-governmental organizations (NGO) backlash despite their genuine commitment to responsible practices (Da Giau *et al.*, 2016).

Sustainability communication increasingly takes place on luxury brands' social media channels. Although luxury brands were initially reluctant to adopt social media due to fears that the openness of these platforms could undermine perceptions of exclusivity and uniqueness (Eastman *et al.*, 2024), social media has become an essential component of their communication strategies (Perez-Vega *et al.*, 2025). As sustainability gains prominence in online discourse (Klaus *et al.*, 2025), luxury brands now use social media to communicate their environmental and social initiatives. However, maintaining high levels of customer engagement remains critical (Eastman *et al.*, 2024) and brands must balance transparency with caution, as explicit sustainability claims may dilute luxury perceptions (Kong *et al.*, 2021). Evidence shows that posts addressing environmental and social sustainability generate the strongest engagement, while content focused on economic sustainability performs significantly less effectively (Perez-Vega *et al.*, 2025).

Although prior studies have examined individual channels such as stores, websites or social media these investigations have largely remained siloed, analysing each channel separately. However, what remains missing is an integrated understanding. In particular, adopting an omnichannel perspective is essential for ensuring narrative coherence, reinforcing brand identity and strengthening consumer trust across channels.

Table 1 summarises the main literature on the way luxury brands communicate about sustainability across different channels.

2.2 Omnichannel communication and consumer brand engagement

Consumer brand engagement is defined as the degree of a customer's interactions and connections with a brand or firm's offerings and/or activities (Vivek *et al.*, 2014). Using an omnichannel communication strategy, characterised by an integration of different channels, brands are able to increase customer engagement in all aspects of their activities creating an ongoing relationship (Gao and Huang, 2021).

Sashi's (2012) engagement cycle positions antecedents of engagement such as connection and interaction as precursors to deeper states of satisfaction, retention and advocacy, while Hollebeek (2011) emphasises engagement as a multidimensional state (cognitive, affective and behavioural) driven by antecedents including trust, authenticity and value. These models show that

Table 1 Literature on luxury brands' channels for sustainability communication

Author	Channel	Objective	Main findings
Arrigo, 2017	Store	Examine luxury flagship stores as communication channels, supported by a case study on Kering's "Smart Sustainable Store" initiative	Sustainable flagship store design reduces operational environmental impact and strengthens stakeholder awareness and brand reputation regarding the company's environmental sustainability commitment
Arrigo, 2018		Examine how flagship stores function as a communication channel for conveying luxury fashion retailers' sustainability	Identify the unique features of sustainability communication in flagship stores and shows that in-store messaging helps luxury retailers raise stakeholder awareness of their sustainability commitments
Luo et al., 2025	Website	Understand how consumers perceive and engage with the information broadcasted on luxury companies' websites	Three distinct layers of sustainability communication with different effects on awareness and action, and offers guidance for luxury fashion brands on effectively managing sustainability messaging on their websites
Luo et al., 2021		Explore the role of corporate websites in communicating material innovations	Terminology strongly influences the accessibility of sustainability information
Da Giau et al., 2016		Examine which environmental and social sustainability practices companies in the Italian fashion industry adopt and how these companies communicate their sustainability commitment through their corporate websites	Links supply-chain sustainability practices with Web-based communication by identifying four approaches used by Italian fashion companies, addressing a gap in the literature
Kong et al., 2021	Social media Social media	Explore sustainability claims on social media to identify cultural, economic, environmental and social sustainability effects on brand attitudes, eWOM and purchase intentions regarding luxury and non-luxury fashion brands	Luxury and non-luxury fashion brand advertisers should carefully consider cultural settings when providing sustainability information
Perez-Vega et al., 2025		Examine luxury market brands' communications related to the sustainable development goals on the social media platform "X," and their impact on online consumer engagement	The study highlights the importance of sustainability communication in branded owned media, while emphasising the role of the brand in shaping the public agenda through the content consumers like and share
Eastman et al., 2024		Identify and compare which configurations of luxury brands' social media posts generate positive consumer affect when communicating environmental versus social sustainability	Reveal distinct sets of post configurations that successfully generate positive consumer affect for environmental and social sustainability messages, measured by the share of comments containing a red heart emoji
Klaus et al., 2025		Analyse the role of sustainability in luxury consumption	Identify what online audiences consider sustainable, show the relevance of these perceptions for different luxury sectors and reveal the emotions triggered by sustainable luxury perceptions
This study	Omnichannel approach	Understand how luxury brands communicate their sustainability initiatives through an omnichannel approach	Highlight the importance of delivering coherent and consistent sustainability content across multiple touchpoints to maintain brand consistency and narrative integrity across channels

engagement is not a static condition but a process that develops through ongoing interactions between a brand and a consumer ([Brodie et al., 2011](#)). In luxury fashion, sustainability communication may function as an antecedent of engagement ([Iglesias et al., 2019](#)). In this case, omnichannel communication strategies act as engagement enablers across touchpoints. Consistency in sustainability content across touchpoints ensures that consumers encounter aligned messages, which may strengthen cognitive and affective engagement states ([Hollebeek et al., 2019](#)). Prior studies highlight that inconsistent signals increase scepticism and disengagement ([Delmas and Burbano, 2011](#); [Nyilasy et al., 2014](#)). Coherent omnichannel communication may enhance satisfaction and trust, advancing consumers through the cycle of engagement ([Sashi, 2012](#)). Thus, omnichannel coherence may act as a theoretical mechanism that explains how sustainability content translates into positive consumer brand engagement outcomes that can evolve into loyalty, trust and advocacy ([Calder et al., 2016](#)).

However, due to the large number of channels, communication has appeared to lack consistency with respect to message delivery and interpretation ([Bell et al., 2014](#); [Schultz and Peltier, 2013](#)) with a consequent requirement to seamlessly integrate messaging strategies across multiple channels ([Neslin and Shankar, 2009](#); [Ots and Nyilasy, 2015](#)).

In applying omnichannel principles to brand communication, omnichannel requires communication synergies that enhance customer engagement by creating a unified brand experience ([Hansen and Sia, 2015](#)) and links the total collection of available tools into a single-choice environment ([Cummins et al., 2016](#)). Channel synergy refers to the degree to which different communication channels complement and reinforce each other, thereby enhancing the overall impact of brand messages ([Wu et al., 2025](#)). Recent studies on omnichannel communication highlight the importance of channel synergy. For example, [Wiese \(2024\)](#) showed how seamless integration and information visibility

across channels drive satisfaction, which in turn encourages experience sharing on social media. [Massi et al. \(2025\)](#) extended this perspective to luxury fashion, where phygital and Direct-to-Avatar strategies enhance perceptions of seamlessness and unify brand narratives across physical, digital and virtual touchpoints. Finally, [Akter et al. \(2024\)](#) showed in a business-to-business international context that content management (information consistency, trustworthiness and endorsement) and concerns management (privacy, security and recovery) capabilities generate positive word of mouth, which mediates through customer engagement to strengthen customer equity. In that unified brand experience context, marketers are challenged to deliver aligned messages to consumers via two or more synchronised channels ([Rangaswamy and van Bruggen, 2005](#)) while maintaining consistency across the entire organisation ([Porcu et al., 2012](#)).

In an omnichannel environment digital channels are crucial as they provide luxury brands with the chance to effectively handle connections with clients, distribute brand content and deliver superior levels of service ([Liu et al., 2019](#)). Hence, the omnichannel environment presents luxury brands with numerous avenues to communicate and interact with customers. Given the escalating demand for sustainability within the luxury segment, the study aims to scrutinise the sustainability communication strategies developed by luxury fashion brands in an omnichannel environment to bolster consumer brand engagement.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative method, developing a comparative exploratory case study focused on four sustainable luxury fashion brands: LuisaViaRoma (LVR), 10 Corso Como, Rifò and La Milanese. Within the fashion sector, LVR, 10 Corso Como, Rifò and La Milanese have the necessary characteristics to be the subjects of this study:

- 1 They are fashion brands that possess the features of the luxury segment.
- 2 All four brands are dedicated to sustainability and communicate their efforts to consumers.

- 3 The brands use omnichannel communication strategies.
- 4 Finally, the selected brands are territorially available for primary data collection.

Comparative exploratory case study allows comparison and replication of the findings, with consequently more compelling evidence and greater robustness of the study ([Yin, 2017](#)) across multiple cases ([Lewis-Beck et al., 2003](#)). To answer our research questions and provide luxury brands with useful insights to increase consumer brand engagement through omnichannel sustainable communication, we conducted qualitative exploratory research via a series of semi-structured interviews ([Dasmì et al., 2024](#)). Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to gather relevant data through probing questions ([Adams, 2015](#)). Moreover, semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity for researchers to keep the conversation within chosen themes but leave room for participants to share their own opinions and ideas ([Kvale, 1996](#)). To ensure the selection of the most informative participants in our study, we recruited a sample that matched the “positive valence” ([Hollebeek et al., 2014](#), p. 154) of the research questions. Therefore, given the research objective, we interviewed managers who carry out brand communication activities; managers who are familiar with the brand’s sustainable practices; and managers who have at least one year of experience working for the brand. Three managers were initially contacted through the authors’ personal network. This convenience sampling approach was appropriate for our case study design, as the goal was to generate rich, context-specific insights rather than broad generalisation ([Eisenhardt, 1989](#); [Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007](#)). To extend the sample, we applied snowball sampling, whereby initial participants referred additional informants who met the same criteria. This method is particularly effective in qualitative research for identifying knowledgeable and information-rich participants within niche or closed communities ([Noy, 2008](#)). In total, we interviewed two CEOs, two sustainability managers, one customer service manager and two communication managers. [Table 2](#) provides details of the participating managers.

Afterwards, we conducted interviews with 19 customers of the brands analysed. We selected consumers of LVR, 10 Corso

Table 2 Managers’ profiles

ID	Position	Main functions	Years	Sustainability communication focus
M1	CEO	Brand strategy, production oversight, market expansion	8	Communication focused on circular fashion using recycled fibres
M2	CEO	Creative direction, product design, social entrepreneurship	6	Communication focused on recycled materials and women’s empowerment
M3	Sustainability manager	Strategy implementation, certifications, impact reduction	11	Communication focused on inspiring conscious consumption through education
M4	Sustainability manager	B-Corp alignment, supplier coordination for sustainable sourcing	3	Communication focused on transparency via product impact data (life cycle assessment)
M5	Ops and production planning lead	Customer service, logistics, production planning	3	Communication focused on operational transparency
M6	Marketing and comm. director	Brand strategy, cultural events, PR	10	Communication focused on sustainability in brand storytelling and stakeholder engagement
M7	Marketing and comm. specialist	Content creation, campaign planning, team collaboration	5	Communication focused on engaging consumers and fostering a sustainability-driven community

Source(s): Personal authorship

Como, Rifò and La Milanese according to two screening criteria:

- 1 owning more than one luxury fashion item from the brands and using them regularly; and
- 2 following at least one of the brands on Instagram.

Participants were identified through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. They were recruited via Instagram brand pages, personal networks and referrals. We used purposeful sampling to select consumers actively engaged with the selected luxury fashion brands – owning multiple items and following them on social media. This helped ensure meaningful exposure to their communication (Perry, 1998). To broaden the sample, we applied snowball sampling, gaining access to niche consumer communities through participant referrals, which are often hard to reach via conventional methods (Chen *et al.*, 2013; Noy, 2008). There were no financial incentives associated with participation in the interviews. Before conducting the interviews, the participants reviewed and signed the consent form. Interviews occurred at times that were the most convenient for participants. The final sample thus consisted of 19 respondents. The interviews were reviewed for themes following each session. We focused on achieving richness and depth of data, meaningful variation in participant experiences and alignment with our analytic goals, consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2021a) guidance on sample-size rationale for reflexive thematic analysis. After 19 interviews, we determined that our data set provided sufficient depth and nuance to support a robust thematic analysis.

All identities of consumers interviewed were anonymised to protect their privacy and reduce desirability bias that may occur when consumers discuss their sustainable behaviour (Juvan and Dolnicar, 2016). Each interview lasted for approximately 53 min and took place either in-person or online. Each interview was recorded and transcribed (Voss *et al.*, 2002) with the permission of the participants.

The interview guide with the managers of the brands addressed three main topics: the content of their sustainability communication, the channels used for the communication of sustainability and the outcomes for consumer brand engagement. The first part of our interviews aimed to explore the content of the brands' sustainable communication. Specifically, we first focused on the integration of sustainability within brand identity. We sought to determine how brands incorporate sustainability into their core values and operational strategies. Particular attention was given to identifying whether brands emphasise social, environmental or both dimensions of sustainability in their communication. The second part of the interview focused on examining the communication channels used by brands to convey their sustainability initiatives. We investigated the utilisation of various communication channels, distinguishing between offline media, such as physical stores, and online platforms, including websites and social media. Then, we asked about the perceived strengths and limitations associated with each channel. In addition, we explored whether the sustainability message remained consistent across the different channels or if adaptations were made to suit the specific medium. The last part of the interview addressed the impact of sustainability communication on consumer brand engagement. Specifically, we examined how brands leverage

sustainability narratives to foster engagement and whether different channels elicit varying levels or types of consumer interaction. Finally, researchers asked about observable behavioural changes in consumers that could be attributed to increased engagement with the brand's sustainability efforts.

The interview guide with the consumers addressed the same three main topics with a focus on consumers' perceptions and willingness to engage with a fashion brand. The first part addressed the content of communication. Specifically, participants were asked to describe their awareness of the brand's sustainable communication and to explain the content of it. The second part of the interview focused on the channels through which the brand communicates its sustainability initiatives. Consumers were asked to identify which communication channels they associate with the brand's sustainability messages. Furthermore, we explored which channels participants prefer for receiving information about sustainability and the reasons for their preferences. We also asked about the perceived strengths and weaknesses of each channel. The final part of the interview examined consumer brand engagement through sustainability communication. Specifically, participants were asked whether they felt more inclined to purchase products from the brand following exposure to its sustainability communications. In addition, we explored their willingness to participate in online campaigns promoting sustainability, such as engaging with live stories and providing feedback. The data analysis process was developed around thematic analysis. This form of analysis involves identifying and interpreting key codes that arise within the data and then sorting these into code categories and overarching themes (Terry *et al.*, 2017). Specifically, we implemented reflexive thematic analysis to understand our findings (Braun and Clarke, 2021b; Braun and Clarke, 2021c). This is a six-phase process for data engagement, coding and theme development (Braun and Clarke, 2021b). Firstly, we familiarised ourselves with the data by writing down notes related to the three main topics discussed in our interviews (the content of their sustainability communication, the channels used for the communication of sustainability and the outcomes for consumer brand engagement). We proceeded with systematic data coding. To enhance inter-coder reliability, we applied collaborative coding (Richards and Hemphill, 2018): team members coded independently, then met to compare interpretations, resolve discrepancies and minimise bias. For example, we identified four categories related to the sustainability content emphasised by luxury brands in their sustainable communication. Specifically, our analysis identified these categories: craftsmanship, quality, authenticity and durability. Thirdly, we generated initial themes from coded and collated data. Fourthly, we developed and reviewed themes. We continued by refining, defining and naming themes. Finally, we wrote the report of our findings. Table 3 illustrates some examples of how the data were elaborated from raw data to themes. The material generated was checked for accuracy by all researchers (Pera *et al.*, 2020), with no significant problems identified. The analysis identified 74 codes, 15 categories and 3 themes, summarised in Figure 1 that helped us organise and manage the large amount of data (Cloutier and Ravasi, 2021).

Table 3 Sampling coding table

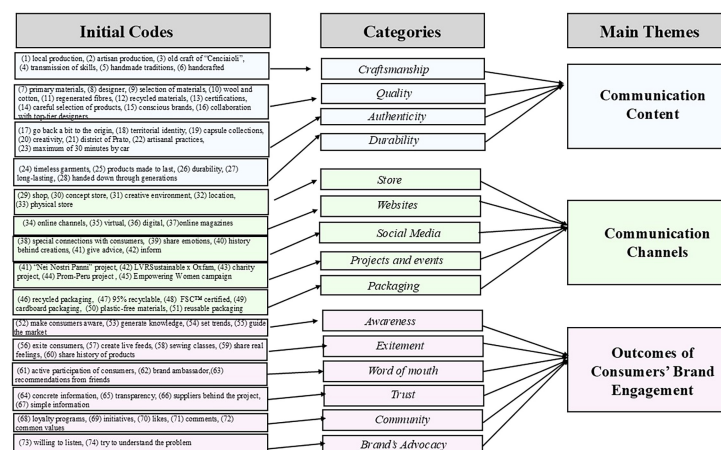
Raw data	Initial codes	Category	Main theme
"The sustainability of our products is emphasised by a local and artisan production. . . recovering the old craft of Cencioli." (Rifò founder)	Local, artisan production, old craft of Cencioli	Craftsmanship	Communication content
"Rifò products are characterised by quality and by the respect for the environment and the community." (Consumer, Rifò)	Quality, respect for environment	Quality	Communication content
"All production takes place in the district of Prato, Pistoia and Florence and a maximum of 30 minutes by car." (Operations specialist, Rifò)	Territorial identity, local production, maximum of 30 min by car	Authenticity	Communication content
"We pay attention to the durability of our products. Our collaboration with Giorgio Armani supports the idea of durability 'capi senza tempo' (timeless garments)." (Head of communication, 10CC)	Durability, timeless garments	Durability	Communication content
"10CC is not just a shop but more of a concept store or a creative environment." (Head of communication, 10CC)	Concept store, creative environment	Store	Communication channels
"Social media allow me to create special relationships with consumers and really make myself understood." (Founder, La Milanese)	Social media, relationships with consumers, make myself understood	Social media	Communication channels
"Our hoped-for objective is to be able to make people aware of what is going on in this sector." (Communication specialist, Rifò)	Make people aware	Awareness	Impact on consumer brand engagement

4. Cases selection

The histories of Rifò and La Milanese case studies underscore sustainability as the central element of each brand's inception. Rifò emerged in 2017 when Niccolò Cipriani, its founder, returned from Vietnam, where he witnessed the detrimental effects of overproduction and overconsumption in the fashion industry. Motivated to counteract this trend, Niccolò established Rifò as a sustainable fashion brand. Returning to Prato (Italy), a pivotal hub for Italian textile manufacturing, he embarked on revitalising the "Cencioli" artisans' method – a traditional technique for regenerating old garments into new yarn. Hence, the brand name "Rifò", derived from the verb "remake", embodies its mission to revive a fading craft. Similarly, sustainability is intrinsic to the origins of La Milanese. While environmental concerns spurred Rifò's creation, La Milanese's genesis is tied to social sustainability. As Cinzia Macchi, the founder and creative designer, articulates, the brand was conceived to "follow one's own nature to help others". Each collection is dedicated

to a charitable cause, such as supporting women victims of violence and abuse through the association "Fare Per Bene Onlus" (Doing Good Only), which supports, promotes and protects the inviolable rights of individuals. In contrast to the previous cases, 10 Corso Como (10CC) and LVR operate as luxury fashion retailers rather than manufacturers. However, both entities demonstrate significant involvement in sustainable practices through careful brand selection and sustainable initiatives. LVR has its own dedicated sustainability team committed to enhancing the brand's sustainability efforts, as highlighted by Fernanda Hernandez, LVR's Head of Sustainability. Similarly, 10CC actively promotes sustainability through various projects and events. For instance, Stefania Arcari, the brand's Head of Communication, mentions the Prom-Peru project, which involves an exclusive collection crafted by Peruvian designers for 10 Corso Como. This collection celebrates local traditions, handmade production methods and cultural significance, exemplifying 10CC's dedication to sustainability.

Figure 1 Coding process



5. Data analysis and findings

5.1 Research question 1 “What is the content of omnichannel sustainability communication of luxury fashion brands?”

The first question revolved around the content of sustainability communication. The goal was to understand the content related to sustainability that is communicated by luxury brands to increase engagement with their customers. Through thematic analysis, we identified four key types of content related to sustainability that are communicated by luxury brands.

Firstly, by emphasising the *craftsmanship* of their sustainable products, brands can increase consumer brand engagement. The founder of Rifò affirms that the sustainability of their products is emphasised by “a local and artisan production”. Specifically, Rifò seeks to recover the old craft of “Cenciaioli”, “an artisans’ method of textile regeneration typical of the Tuscan territory” (Rifò founder). In fact, the luxury sector is characterised by the transmission of ancestral skills (Ahabou and Dekhili, 2013) and handmade traditions (Kapferer and Michaut, 2015). Also, La Milanese sustainable bags and accessories are characterised by craftsmanship. All products are created in Italy by artisans. Also 10 Corso Como highlights the craftsmanship of their sustainable products. In particular as mentioned by the head of communication: “The designers with whom 10 Corso Como collaborates enhance the craftsmanship of their products such as Salvatore Ferragamo which has predominately handcrafted productions”.

Secondly, respondents highlighted the *quality* of sustainable products. Contrary to what is often perceived by many consumers – who tend to associate sustainability attributes with lower product quality (Skard *et al.*, 2021) – the interviewees emphasised the high quality of the products offered by the luxury brands. For instance, as stated by one customer of Rifò “Rifò products are characterised by quality and by respect for the environment and the community”. The high quality of sustainable products is underlined by a careful selection of materials and processing methods to reduce the environmental impact. Rifò products are made with regenerated fibres, mainly certified by the Global Recycled Standard. Rifò’s mission is to create a line of quality clothing and accessories produced entirely in Prato and the surrounding area with 100% regenerated and regenerable fibres. Moreover, interviews highlighted the high quality of the brands’ products, which was further evidenced by the conscious choice to avoid widely polluting materials. This was evidenced also by the founder and designer of La Milanese who reports “the decision not to use leather and plastic, because they are very polluting materials”. Therefore, the brand uses natural materials such as wool and cotton or recycled materials. In addition, the brand also uses an innovative material, Gomau, which derives from plastic and pressed cardboard. The high quality of products is achieved also by a careful selection of sustainable products to offer the market. LVR, for example, has launched LVR Sustainable, within their online website, the section of LVR dedicated to offering a curated selection of the best conscious brands and items: “Every item in LVR Sustainable is selected not only for its environmental credentials but also for uncompromising quality, because in luxury the two must go hand in hand” (the sustainability manager at LVR). Also 10 Corso Como,

collaborates with environmentally friendly brands and a range of young designers specialising in sustainable fashion.

Thirdly, the brands analysed emphasised the *authenticity* of their sustainable products as a way to increase consumer brand engagement. Such authenticity is linked to the manifestation of territorial identity from which natural resources come (Bandyopadhyay and Ray, 2020; Guercini and Ranfagni, 2013; Woodside and Fine, 2019). For example, Rifò products and production are made in the Prato district, Italy. Specifically, as stated by the operation specialist of the brand “all production takes place in the district of Prato, Pistoia and Florence and a maximum of 30 minutes by car”. The authenticity of Prato-made goods stems from centuries of expertise in textile production and a legacy of artisanal practices. Since the Middle Ages, fabrics and yarns have been the main products of the Prato area (Vogue Business, 2021). Similarly, the head of communication at 10 Corso Como remarked: “Our strength lies in collaborating with Italian designers whose work reflects the traditions of their regions”. Authenticity in sustainability communication of luxury brands is viewed as conducting an act with sincere consideration for others, not out of duty or responsibility (Lee *et al.*, 2023). Authenticity is a critical factor when consumers evaluate communication about brand’s good cause activities (Beckman *et al.*, 2009). La Milanese’s CEO and designer highlights authenticity of their brand: “We want to go back to the origin, using primary materials such as wool and cotton or using recycled materials such as wool from jumpers that are discarded or from scraps of fabrics that are normally thrown away”.

Finally, brands can increase consumers’ engagement by emphasising the concept of *durability* in their sustainability communication. While quality refers to the use of carefully selected, innovative and environmentally friendly materials that ensure superior performance and responsibility, durability highlights how products are designed to withstand wear, remain functional and retain aesthetic appeal over time. In other words, quality ensures that a product meets high production and material standards in the present, whereas durability reassures consumers of its long-term reliability and timelessness. For Rifò, durability is a key value, as the brand highlights that their sustainable products are “made to last”. Similarly, the head of communication of 10CC stated: “We pay attention to the durability of our products. Our collaboration with Giorgio Armani supports the idea of durability ‘capi senza tempo’ (timeless garments)”. Likewise, a manager at La Milanese explained: “Durability means our bags are not seasonal—they are designed to be used for years and to resist the cycle of fast-fashion obsolescence”. Thus, durability reinforces the notion that sustainable luxury goods are long-lasting, resistant to fast-fashion obsolescence and often passed down from generation to generation (Hennigs *et al.*, 2013). By emphasising durability, luxury brands highlight the importance of extending product lifecycles, reducing the need for frequent replacement and therefore helping to fight overconsumption (Sun *et al.*, 2021).

5.2 Research question 2: “What communication channels are used by luxury fashion brands?”

After identifying the key sustainability content used by brands to enhance consumer brand engagement – specifically,

craftsmanship, quality, authenticity and durability – the interviews then explored the communication channels through which these messages are conveyed to further foster consumer brand engagement. The challenge for luxury fashion brands is to manage all touchpoints and guarantee a unique brand experience consistent with the brand's values (Aiolfi and Sabbadin, 2019) to meet evolving customer needs and expectations (Cocco and De-Juan-Vigaray, 2022).

The *store* emerges as the primary channel for effectively delivering sustainability communication and enhancing consumer brand engagement. This is particularly relevant for 10CC that considers its store not merely as a retail space, but also as a venue for artistic purposes: “10CC is not just a shop but more of a concept store or a creative environment. Its visual identity is highly distinctive and supported by a 30-year heritage, it stands out from other market players”; “10CC is a concept store, a unique place where elegance and style reign supreme” (10CC head of communication). The concept of 10 Corso Como, along with its layout, location within the city and events, has always served as the primary means of communicating the brand's sustainable philosophy to stakeholders and customers. This demonstrates that, despite the rise of digital channels, physical stores remain a vital component of how customers engage with brands (Aiolfi and Sabbadin, 2019).

Secondly, *websites* are a pivotal platform for communicating sustainability and fostering consumer brand engagement. Luxury fashion brands can broaden their consumer base, especially among younger demographics, by leveraging online channels to remain competitive in an increasingly digital environment (Godey *et al.*, 2016; Kim and Ko, 2012). LVR began as a physical storefront but has since transformed into a virtual storefront that sells and promotes its products via digital channels. “LVR Sustainable” is a section of the LVR website devoted to a selection of the most eco-friendly brands that uphold the most steadfast brand principles, including but not limited to vegan production, ethical trade, women's empowerment and gender equality. Furthermore, LVR uses its online magazine “LVR Magazine” to actively involve its clientele by featuring sustainable fashion designers and environmentally conscious fashion trends and promoting green consumerism. As the head of sustainability at LVR remarked: “Our website is the cornerstone of our sustainability communication, it works together with our magazine, newsletters, and social media”.

Thirdly, *social media* represents another important channel for communicate sustainability and increase consumer brand engagement. Social media are among the most widely used sources of information for consumers (Sharma *et al.*, 2023). For La Milanese in particular, social media serve as essential communication channels, enabling the brand to cultivate a meaningful and personalised relationship with its audience. As stated by the designer of the brand “social media allow us to create special relationships with consumers and particularly Instagram is the most direct channel that allows me to get everywhere and really make myself understood”. Through social media, the founder and designer of La Milanese can share her emotions and the history behind her creations. Also, Rifò uses social media to give advice on how to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle and consumption habits. Moreover, social

media allow luxury fashion brands to inform consumers of new sustainability projects. For example, LVR uses these channels to inform consumers about new initiatives and collaborations such as the collaboration with Oxfam, an international NGO, to help disadvantaged populations in Third World Countries.

Fourthly, luxury brands can enhance consumer brand engagement through *projects and events* that foster cultural connection and experiential value. In this regard, 10CC places particular emphasis on inclusion and cultural diversity by collaborating with international designers and incorporating elements of different cultural traditions into its collections. Rifò emphasises social empowerment through its project “Nei Nostri Panni,” a training school for “cenciaioli” aimed at supporting local migrants. The initiative seeks to “provide vulnerable youth with opportunities for social reintegration and job training” (Rifò founder). Similarly, LVR engages in social development efforts in emerging economies, notably through campaigns like *LVR Sustainable x Oxfam*, which focuses on “providing clean water to women and their families in developing countries” (head of sustainability at LVR). La Milanese, on the other hand, prioritises initiatives that combat discrimination and violence. As part of this commitment, “each collection is linked to a charitable project aimed at raising awareness and fighting against all forms of discrimination, including gender-based violence” (founder and designer of La Milanese).

Finally, *packaging* serves as an important channel through which luxury brands can enhance consumer brand engagement. The design elements of packaging can significantly influence consumer responses due to their persuasive impact and ability to capture attention (Granato *et al.*, 2022). However, the fashion industry creates large amounts of packaging waste which filter through the entire value chain (Jestratić *et al.*, 2022). In this perspective, Rifò and LVR have created recycled packaging for their products. LVR changed its packaging to be “95% recyclable and FSCTM certified” (head of sustainability at LVR) while Rifò uses “cardboard packaging and plastic-free materials, 100% recyclable and made in Italy” (Rifò operations specialist). Moreover, Rifò offers its consumers the option of Repack, a durable and reusable packaging solution for e-commerce.

5.3 Research question 3: “What are the outcomes of consumer brand engagement?”

This section examines the outcomes of consumer engagement with luxury fashion brands' sustainability communication. Specifically, we discovered that increased consumer brand engagement leads to six primary outcomes: awareness, excitement, word of mouth, brand trust, brand community and brand advocacy.

The first outcome of consumers' brand engagement is the creation of sustainability *awareness*. The creation of dedicated sustainable capsule collections, sustainable projects and special events such as those created by LVR and 10CC are effective tools to increase consumer awareness of sustainability issues. Also, Rifò's objective is to increase consumers' awareness: “our hoped-for objective is to be able to make people with different purchasing habits aware of what is actually going on in this sector” (communication specialist of Rifò). Consumers affirm that luxury fashion brands can act as influencers, explaining the

importance of sustainability to their customers and encouraging customers to transmit this knowledge to others. Thus, according to this view, fashion brands generate sustainability knowledge among consumers (Kong *et al.*, 2016). Luxury brands can set trends for mass market brands towards more environmentally friendly production and the creation of sustainable products. In this way, they can lower amounts of harmful waste and reduce of excessive consumerism. As stated by consumers of 10CC, “If luxury brands say that it’s now necessary to be sustainable, other brands like Zara immediately start to copy this strategy. I think it’s good for the industry in general and for the planet”. Therefore, luxury fashion brands have a very important role in the market as they represent a guide for the entire industry (Campos Franco *et al.*, 2020).

Secondly, consumers’ engagement is reflected in increased consumer *excitement*. In particular, the designer of La Milanese affirms that the goal is to always try to create something exciting for consumers. To achieve this, La Milanese hosts live sessions on Instagram showcasing women crafting handmade bags, organises sewing classes and streams live feeds that share the history behind specific bag designs. Moreover, the designer of the brand tries to share her real feelings and state of mind, and this is highly appreciated by consumers: “If I am sad at a certain moment, I try to communicate these feelings, and this is very much appreciated... This generates a lot of consumer involvement: I receive a lot of emails from people, because through this type of communication they feel involved and start talking to me about their problems and things” (La Milanese’s founder and designer).

Thirdly, the positive engagement with the brand generates positive *word of mouth*, as reported by the head of sustainability of LVR: “the positive engagement with our brand is evidenced by the positive word-of-mouth spread by consumers, active participation of consumers on social media who support the campaigns created by the brand”. Also, the communication specialist of Rifò, explains that sustainable communication creates brand ambassadors who in return spread a positive word of mouth among other consumers. This positive word of mouth generates positive outcomes as it can attract new clients: “Many people who come to our store tell us that they met us on social media or heard positive word of mouth from friends” (operation specialist of Rifò).

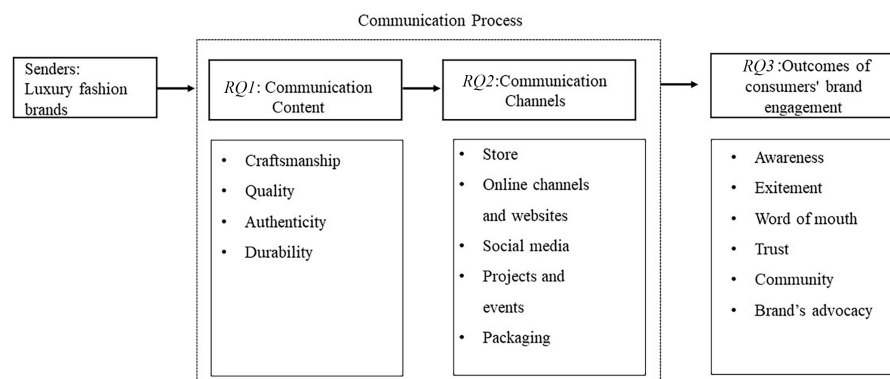
Another outcome of consumers’ engagement is increased *trust* in the brand. This increased trust is due to the delivery of visible and concrete product information by luxury brands. As stated by consumers of Rifò, “Rifò’s projects emphasise sustainability linked to its territory, sustainable techniques originating in the Prato area, and they also highlight the suppliers behind their projects”. Trust in the luxury brand and its sustainability communication is also fostered through straightforward and transparent messaging. As one interviewed consumer expressed: “I don’t understand anything about certificates, so they can write anything, and I will not know if it’s true or false”. As LVR consumers noted, “if something is written in clear language like ‘these shoes are made from plastic bottles’ I will pay attention and I will like it”.

Fifthly, customer engagement allows luxury fashion brands to create a *community* around the brand (Kumar and Kumar, 2020). Rifò tries to grow its community by developing loyalty programmes and organising many parallel initiatives. The intention of brands to support vulnerable populations and help disadvantaged social groups evokes a significant response which brings consumers together. Instagram posts about the brand’s charitable campaigns receive many likes and positive comments triggering group discussions. As one customer of Rifò said: “I like, share, and report their posts because it feels like I’m helping their community—and helping the brand too”.

In addition, this strong relationship and engagement between the brand and consumers, generate *brand advocacy*. Brand advocacy refers to a strong relationship in which the consumer defends the brand against critics (Aksoy and Yazici, 2023). It involves persuading, giving reasons and openly defending (Wilk *et al.*, 2018). The relationship between brand and consumer is so strong that the consumer tends to defend and excuse the brand in case of any negative behaviour: “the consumer is more willing to listen and try to understand the problems, for example, if there is a delay in production, perhaps a normal consumer would request to return the goods, whereas a consumer who is attentive to these issues is more willing to understand” (operation specialist of Rifò).

Below, Figure 2 summarises our findings. It represents the content of sustainability communication, the channels used by luxury fashion brands and the outcomes of consumer brand engagement.

Figure 2 Strategies in omnichannel sustainability communication to increase consumer engagement



6. Discussion and contributions

This exploratory qualitative research identifies strategies in omnichannel sustainability communication to increase consumer engagement with luxury fashion brands. The study investigates the sustainability elements communicated by the four selected luxury brands, the communication channels they use and the resulting outcomes regarding consumer brand engagement.

This study contributes to the advancement of the literature by identifying and analysing the specific content related to sustainability addressed by luxury brands in their communications. By examining how luxury brands incorporate sustainability into their messaging, this research enhances understanding of the intersection between luxury branding and sustainable practices (Athwal *et al.*, 2019; Eastman *et al.*, 2024; Kang and Sung, 2022). Our study contributes to the literature on the compatibility between luxury and sustainability by providing empirical evidence that challenges the traditional view of their incompatibility (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau, 2017; Streit and Davies, 2017). Specifically, our study reveals that all four luxury fashion brands emphasise sustainability content such as craftsmanship, authenticity, quality and durability in their omnichannel communication efforts to elevate consumer brand engagement. The interviewed brands describe craftsmanship in two dimensions:

- 1 the preservation of old and traditional production techniques passed down over centuries; and
- 2 artisanal production, characterised by craftspeople possessing unique skills and expertise.

The findings confirm and extend the research on the essence of craftsmanship in the luxury fashion industry (Amatulli *et al.*, 2017; Tarquini *et al.*, 2022). Quality in sustainable luxury fashion is communicated as the use of innovative recyclable and regenerated fibres or innovative environmentally friendly materials such as Goma. This result differs from previous research on luxury, which often emphasises premium quality, prestige or rarity of certain materials (Wang *et al.*, 2024). The authenticity conveyed by luxury fashion brands is articulated in two dimensions. Firstly, the dimension of territorial identity in luxury fashion involves sourcing materials and crafting garments in locales steeped in history, heritage and expertise. A second dimension of authenticity pertains to sincerity in a brand's intent towards sustainability, prioritising the common good over personal gain. This finding expands the definition of authenticity in the realm of luxury by incorporating essential prerequisites for genuine sustainability (Athwal *et al.*, 2019; Cervellon and Shammas, 2013; Lee *et al.*, 2023). Finally, the concept of durability is communicated by the interviewed luxury brands as the use of materials that do not deteriorate with time and as timeless garments that do not go out of style. It is consistent with existing literature, which recognises both the functional and stylistic elements of durability (Levinthal and Purohit, 1989; Sun *et al.*, 2021).

These findings extend consumer brand engagement research by showing that sustainability content in luxury (craftsmanship, authenticity, quality and durability) stimulates engagement on multiple levels. Particularly, such narratives may stimulate cognitive engagement by encouraging consumers to devote attention and mental effort to interpreting messages that link

luxury to heritage, cultural identity and environmental responsibility (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Hollebeek, 2011). The results of this study indicate that sustainable communication strategies used by luxury brands effectively engage consumers by heightening their awareness of sustainability issues. Particularly, the dissemination of information regarding sustainable initiatives and projects enables consumers to better comprehend environmental and social challenges, facilitating understanding of the efforts undertaken by luxury brands to reduce their impact and enhance their responsibility. This outcome highlights the pivotal role of luxury brands in leading the dissemination of sustainability knowledge and in influencing the adoption of eco-friendly practices. Omnichannel sustainability communication can enhance affective engagement, evoking emotions of pride, trust and attachment by reconciling luxury with values of responsibility and long-term care (Thomson *et al.*, 2005; Pansari and Kumar, 2017). In addition, the findings highlight moral and ethical dimensions of engagement, as sustainability communication invites consumers to perceive their relationship with luxury brands as a form of ethical consumption and collective responsibility (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019). Through authenticity of their message and tangible commitment, luxury brands can effectively shape consumer behaviours and set standards for environmental and social responsibility (Kong *et al.*, 2016). Positive engagement with sustainable luxury brands creates brand ambassadors and motivates consumers to form green fashion communities around the brand. This finding extends research on the relationships between eco-friendly behaviour and environmental consciousness through the impact of word of mouth related to sustainability (Kautish and Khare, 2022; Salem and Alanadoly, 2021).

Secondly, this research provides valuable insights into the role of omnichannel communication in conveying sustainability messages, particularly in the luxury industry. While much current research on sustainability communication focuses on single-channel approaches (Arrigo, 2018; Luo *et al.*, 2025; Pangarkar *et al.*, 2023), this study sheds light on the importance of delivering consistent and coherent sustainability messages across multiple touchpoints. Omnichannel strategies provide fertile ground for interactive engagement that emphasises the co-creation of meaning between consumers and brands (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019). Our findings show that on digital platforms, such as Instagram, smaller brands like La Milanese cultivate direct connections and Rifò leverages social media to raise awareness and educate consumers about sustainability. These interactions transform consumers from passive recipients into active participants in brand storytelling (Calder *et al.*, 2016; Dolan *et al.*, 2019). In physical settings, brands like 10 Corso Como emphasise the concept-store experience and LVR develops immersive flagship environments, enabling consumers to engage with sustainability narratives through embodied experiences. These touchpoints allow consumers to validate sustainability content related to craftsmanship, durability and authenticity (Verhoef *et al.*, 2009; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

In addition, our findings can be theorised through the lens of signalling theory (Spence, 1973; Connelly *et al.*, 2011). A central challenge in luxury is the paradox between luxury and sustainability, where exclusivity and status contradict

environmental and social responsibility (Athwal *et al.*, 2019). This paradox creates consumer scepticism, particularly when luxury brands communicate sustainability in fragmented or inconsistent ways (Delmas and Burbano, 2011; Nyilasy *et al.*, 2014). In accordance with signalling theory, consistent sustainability messages across digital platforms, physical stores, packaging and events, can help luxury brands reduce information asymmetry and provide credible cues of authenticity and commitment (Connelly *et al.*, 2011; Kirmani and Rao, 2000). Omnichannel coherence functions as a signal of reliability that reassures consumers that sustainability claims are not opportunistic but embedded in brand identity. Prior research has shown that consistency in signals reduces consumer scepticism and builds trust (Erdem and Swait, 1998). In our study, omnichannel tactics collectively act as reinforcing signals that strengthen brands' sustainability-related efforts.

From a managerial standpoint, the findings of this study offer strategic guidance for luxury brands on the key sustainability content to incorporate into their communication strategies. By aligning their messaging with consumer expectations and demonstrating a genuine commitment to sustainability, brands can foster deeper engagement and strengthen their market position. Specifically, as highlighted by interviewed managers, luxury brands should prioritise transparent and clear communication regarding their sustainability efforts, encompassing the entire process from raw material sourcing to the final product. This approach enhances engagement levels, as interviewed consumers reported, even among those who are less attuned to sustainability issues. By openly sharing detailed information about their supply chains and production practices, luxury brands can empower consumers to make informed choices, strengthening brand loyalty and advocacy.

Secondly, the research provides actionable guidance on crafting sustainability communication that resonates with a high-end consumer base. Because luxury consumers often seek authenticity and exclusivity, it is crucial for luxury brands to communicate sustainability through a focus on craftsmanship, high quality, durability and authenticity. As highlighted by luxury managers in the interviews, they communicate their sustainability efforts by sharing content that emphasises craftsmanship and local artisan production, the high quality of products achieved through responsible selection of raw materials and designers, the long life and durability of products that help reduce overconsumption and the authenticity of locally made products that support territorial identity.

Furthermore, this research offers useful insights for luxury brands for properly selecting communication channels to disseminate sustainability messages, thereby fostering increased consumer brand engagement. Specifically, the interviews with managers highlight the importance of leveraging both traditional and digital platforms to effectively reach and resonate with target audiences. By adopting an omnichannel approach, luxury brands can ensure broader visibility and a more profound impact for their sustainability initiatives.

This study highlights how sustainability communication enhances consumer brand engagement, generating key outcomes such as awareness, trust, positive word of mouth, community building and brand advocacy.

Firstly, the results highlight the important role of luxury brands in raising sustainability awareness. By launching dedicated sustainable capsule collections, organising themed events and socially driven projects luxury fashion brands can act as educators and influencers in the sustainability space. Managers should recognise that their brands can set industry-wide trends, inspiring more sustainable practices even in the mass market.

Secondly, consumer engagement is significantly strengthened when brands create emotionally resonant and interactive experiences. As demonstrated by our results, initiatives such as live social media content, behind-the-scenes storytelling and sharing personal emotions can foster emotional intimacy and humanise the brand. Managers should leverage these tactics to create more authentic and relatable communication, which contributes to higher levels of consumer excitement and emotional connection with the brand.

Thirdly, positive engagement leads to advocacy behaviours, such as word-of-mouth promotion and active consumer participation in brand campaigns. Managers should thus view consumers not only as buyers but as potential ambassadors who can amplify the brand's sustainability messaging through social media and personal networks.

The findings also underscore the importance of building consumer trust through transparent and accessible sustainability communication. For luxury brands, trust is generated through the provision of clear, visible and concrete product information. Consumers respond positively when brands highlight the specific processes, people and places involved in sustainable production. Moreover, the use of simple and direct language is critical in communicating sustainability effectively. Luxury fashion brands are therefore encouraged to develop communication strategies that combine storytelling, localisation and clarity, across all channels, to reinforce authenticity and build long-term trust.

Luxury brands can enhance consumer brand engagement by cultivating a brand community. As demonstrated by our results, engaging consumers in causes that align with social responsibility and inclusivity creates a sense of shared purpose. Therefore, managers should view community engagement as a key aspect of their brand strategy, enabling them to go beyond transactional relationships and build emotional, value-based connections with their audience.

Finally, the development of a strong brand community contributes to the emergence of brand advocacy. Consumers who feel emotionally connected to the brand are more likely to defend it in the face of criticism. To harness this potential, managers should design communication strategies and brand experiences that are transparent, value-driven and inclusive, fostering an environment in which consumers feel personally connected to the brand's mission.

Table 4 presents each key finding alongside a specific omnichannel tactic, thus offering actionable guidance for decision-makers in luxury brand management.

7. Limitations and future research

This study acknowledges several limitations that provide avenues for future research. Firstly, the research focuses on

Table 4 Omnichannel tactics for sustainability communication

Finding's theme	Managerial implication	Examples of omnichannel tactic
Craftsmanship	Highlight heritage skills and artisanship to enhance engagement and explain sustainable effort Craftsmanship demonstrates sustainability through the preservation of traditional techniques, reduced reliance on mass production and support for local communities	- Feature videos of artisans at work, behind-the-scenes storytelling on resource-efficient production on the website, social media or online magazines - Showcase artisan tools, live demonstrations, “Meet the Maker” events with sustainability messaging in the store - Short reels on artisanal processes framed as both cultural preservation and sustainable alternatives to industrial mass production can be created on social media
Quality	Counter consumer scepticism that sustainability means lower quality by emphasising material excellence and certifications	- Display certifications (GRS, FSC), material sourcing info on website product pages - Printed QR codes linking to supply chain transparency pages on packaging - Information cards highlighting material innovation (e.g. Gomaù, regenerated fibers) in the store
Authenticity	Reinforce authenticity through local roots of the brand and transparent narratives	- Maps of local sourcing and production sites on the website, on social media, through packaging - Founder/designer stories emphasising sincerity and values on personal social media profiles - Collaborations with local NGOs or cultural institutions to underline community ties
Durability	Encourage slower consumption cycles and fight overconsumption by positioning products as long-lasting and timeless	- Care guides via email/newsletters (repair, upcycling, styling longevity) in the post-purchase communication phase - Dedicated “Timeless” collection highlighting seasonless pieces on the website - Messaging on “buy once, wear forever” and garment care workshops in the store

only four luxury fashion brands, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Moreover, the selected brands differ significantly in size. For instance, LVR and 10 Corso Como are internationally recognised luxury fashion retailers with an established market presence, whereas La Milanese and Rifò are smaller local luxury brands with limited coverage and recognition. Future studies could expand the sample by considering established and emerging players separately to provide a more comprehensive understanding of sustainability communication practices across different market segments. This would allow scholars to explore, for example: “Do established global brands and smaller emerging labels emphasise different sustainability themes?” and “How does brand size affect the perceived credibility of messages about sustainability?”

Secondly, craftsmanship was communicated as both the preservation of ancestral skills and artisanal, handmade production. While these dimensions were valued by Italian stakeholders, future studies could test how consumers in different cultural contexts perceive and evaluate craftsmanship. Questions include: “Does local artisanal production resonate equally well in non-European markets?” and “Is craftsmanship interpreted as sustainability, or primarily as luxury exclusivity, in consumer evaluations?”

Thirdly, quality was communicated in terms of innovative and recycled materials (e.g. regenerated fibres, FSC-certified packaging). This differs from traditional luxury definitions of quality as rarity or prestige (Wang *et al.*, 2024). Future research could investigate consumer responses to these newer quality signals. For example: “Do consumers perceive garments made with regenerated fibres as equally ‘luxurious’ as those made with rare natural materials?” and “Does the framing of quality as ‘responsible’ influence willingness to pay or brand trust?”

Fourthly, durability was consistently communicated as timelessness and resistance to fast-fashion obsolescence. Future studies could test how consumers balance durability with the desire for trendiness in luxury consumption. Relevant questions include: “Does emphasising durability reduce purchase frequency but increase loyalty and advocacy?” and “Do younger consumers perceive durability as a sustainability value or as a barrier to fashion experimentation?”

Finally, in our study craftsmanship, quality, authenticity and durability emerged as antecedents of consumer brand engagement, while engagement generated outcomes such as awareness, trust, positive word of mouth, community building and advocacy. Future research could empirically test these relationships using quantitative designs. For instance, experimental studies could manipulate sustainability content on a brand’s website (e.g. highlighting craftsmanship versus durability) to examine their differential effects on engagement intentions and subsequent behavioural intentions such as advocacy or willingness to pay. Moreover, future studies could integrate these insights into an omnichannel experimental design, where messages are delivered consistently across multiple touchpoints (e.g. website, social media and packaging) to assess the added value of message congruence. Finally, field studies conducted in real retail settings would provide ecological validity.

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