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# Marketing “sustainability” in Japan

“ethical” communication  
for small and medium Italian *haute couture*  
companies

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## 要旨

環境危機や社会的格差の拡大が世界各国に波及する中、社会のあらゆる場面で「サステナブル」な実践が一層求められています。もちろん、それには個人レベルでの活動も必要であるし、政府や非議員団体による活動も必要である。本論文では、後者に焦点を当て、特にイタリアの中小オートクチュール企業を対象としている。イタリアの対日輸出の大部分は繊維製品であり、日本の消費者に製品を紹介しようとするイタリアの企業は増え続けている。これらの新しい企業は、日本の消費者に「サステナブル」な製品と実践をアピールするチャンスがあるが、「エシカル」なマーケティングを実施することは、非常に複雑なプロセスである。マーケティング戦略の立案には、多くの要素を考慮しなければならない。この場合、イタリア企業が日本の顧客に対して「エシカル」なマーケティングメッセージを発信するためには、日本における「サステナビリティ」の経済的、社会的、政治的背景が必要である。

本論文では、日本人の「サステナビリティ」に対する考え方と「エシカル」な消費行動について概観する。同時に、イタリアのオートクチュール企業が、日本をターゲットとしたマーケティング活動において、どのように「サステナビリティ」を実践しているかを実証的に示す。

そのために、日本のいわゆる「持続可能な発展」に関する政治的、経済的、社会的、技術的、法的、環境的な要因を分析する予定である。本論文の第 1 章では、このような観点から、日本市場において企業が戦略的・経営的な選択を行うために、どのような変数を考慮しなければならないかを明らかにしたい。さらに、日本における「サステナビリティ」の概念の背景にある社会的・文化的背景を理解することにも役立つであろう。本章

では、サステナビリティという概念について、その日本における導入と、その意味を形成し変化させてきたグローバルおよびローカルな要因に焦点を当てながら、現代日本の社会的アクターがどのように認識しているかを概観する。次に、現代日本を取り巻く政治的背景と「持続可能な発展」に関する姿勢を明らかにするために、戦後第二期以降に日本政府が行った環境政策や教育政策について調査する。その際、日本政府の調査や学術論文を活用し、日本における「持続可能性」の現状を概観する。

第2章では、本論文で取り上げる企業が属するファッションの一分野であるラグジュアリー・ファッションの世界に踏み込んでいく。ラグジュアリーの現代的な社会的・経済的意味を考察するとともに、この特殊な産業が古くからどのように発展してきたかを通史的に分析する。さらに、ラグジュアリー産業の主要な構成要素であるサプライ・チェーンとマーケティング手法についても簡単に触れ、このビジネスモデルが「非ラグジュアリー」ファッション・ビジネスとどのように異なるかを明らかにする。もちろん、日本の高級ファッション市場についても、戦後第二期以降の発展と、第四次消費社会と呼ばれる消費者の特徴に着目し、調査する予定です。そして、ラグジュアリー産業の「サステナブル」な側面に焦点を当て、そのサプライチェーンやマーケティング戦略がより「サステナブル」であるために採用できる革新的な手法や慣行を挙げる。最後に、日本におけるサステナブル・ファッションを概観し、日本政府が過去数年間に実施した様々な政策と、サステナブル製品に対する日本の消費者行動について考察します。

最終章では、デジタルマーケティングの手法、特にソーシャルメディアが高級ファッションのマーケティングに与える影響について分析する。同時に、ソーシャルメディアが企業の「エシカル」な行為を表明するために利用される場合の機会とリスクについても説明する。まず、ソーシャルメディアである「LINE」の日本での人気の原因を簡単に分析した後、分析に入る。この調査は、日本に進出しているイタリアのオートクチュール企業が投稿したいくつかの「エシカル」な投稿を対象に、LINE 上で行われたものである。この調査の主な目的は、日本における「サステナブル」マーケティングの過去の事例を検証することであり、この作業で言及する企業は、同じ市場セグメントにおいてイタリア企業がどのように「サステナブル」を推進してきたかという実際の証拠を提供されることになるのである。

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## **Introduction**

In March 2022, I have been involved in an exciting project at Ca' Foscari University, the “Active learning lab: Export Manager”.<sup>1</sup> The main aim of this learning laboratory was to create, together with a team of experts, a plan for Italian small and medium enterprises working in the construction, agricultural and tourism sectors. This project aimed at helping these companies to export their products to countries located in Sub-Saharan Africa. The major emphasis was put on the characteristics of the production methods employed: environmentally conscious and respectful of workers' rights.

I was thrilled by the idea that these companies intended to export their products by cooperating with local enterprises and businesses. This approach stressed the importance of cooperating with local markets and by doing so allowed them to fully comprehend the social, economic and political context regarding “sustainable” practices in the countries they were exporting to. These Italian companies avoided the imposition of European concepts and notions upon African audiences disregarding local cultures.<sup>2</sup> Instead, by choosing to adapt and integrate their way of thinking regarding “sustainability” with the local economy, politics and infrastructures they managed to create marketing and export strategies tailor-made for the local markets.<sup>3</sup> These strategies proved to be very effective in increasing both their revenue and their visibility on the

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<sup>1</sup> The Laboratory was conducted during the course of six weeks, from March 28 to May 6.

<sup>2</sup> The non-adapted application of Europe-born concepts to Sub-saharan African cultures could have led these companies to their lack of cultural integration and of economical success. It needs to be specified that the same concept of “environmental”, “social” and “cultural” “sustainability” adopted by the ONU and the European Union is largely Eurocentric.

<sup>3</sup> Here for “tailor-made” we mean marketing specifically targeted for those countries' customers.

digital and “traditional” (e.g., merchandising) platforms. Finally, they aimed to raise awareness, in Italy as well as in the countries they already exported to, regarding the themes aforementioned and be a part of the process of shaping a “sustainable” way of thinking.

Once I completed my laboratory, I was left wondering how I could contribute once more to the diffusion and distribution of “sustainable” products and practices by Italian small and medium enterprises. That was the moment in which Japan came to my mind and, more specifically, Italian companies operating and exporting there. I immediately thought about the vast amount of popularity that Italian *haute couture* has in Japan. According to the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ICCJ), the textile and clothing industry represented 24.5% of the total Italian export in Japan, that is to say over 2.5 billion euros were registered between February 2019 and January 2020.<sup>4 5</sup>

However, the two years of Covid 19 pandemic caused several changes that affected the Japanese fashion market. One of them is the shift in perception by Japanese younger consumers toward Italian fashion goods. According to the ICCJ, Japanese younger generations (e.g, Gen Z, millennials) are more aware about of “sustainability” and gender equality, thus choosing products that reflect these themes.<sup>6</sup> The “traditional values” associated with Italian fashion products are starting to appeal to only the senior age group of Japanese consumers.<sup>7</sup> The ICCJ launched a project in October 2021, called “The New Italian Cool”.<sup>8</sup> It consisted of a showroom of 15 “sustainable” small and medium Italian fashion enterprises for Japanese buyers.<sup>9</sup> This project was created in order to attract young Japanese consumers interested in environmentally and socially “sustainable” practices.<sup>10</sup>

The concept of “sustainability” bears great importance in light of the severe environmental crisis that our world is facing in recent decades. As Fig. 1 shows, globally 2021 was among the

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<sup>4</sup> <https://iccj.or.jp/it/fashion-made-in-italy-focus-su-e-commerce-in-giappone-nel-settore-moda/>

<sup>5</sup> This was made possible by the “EU – Japan Economic Partnership Agreement” <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/it/content/accordo-di-partenariato-economico-ue-giappone>

<sup>6</sup> ICCJ Team. “Moda italiana in Giappone: alla ricerca di soluzioni per un futuro da protagonisti”. *ICCJ - Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan*, 2022, <https://iccj.or.jp/it/moda-italiana-in-giappone-alla-ricerca-di-soluzioni-per-un-futuro-da-protagonisti/>

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem

<sup>8</sup> ICCJ Team. “The New Italian Cool – Fashion Showroom”, *ICCJ - Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan*, 2021, <https://iccj.or.jp/it/the-new-italian-cool-fashion-showroom/>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem

warmest years ever recorded, with the annual average temperature 0.3 °C above the temperature of the 1999-2020 period.<sup>11</sup> As stated by the UN’s 2022 climate impacts report, if nothing will be done to prevent the rise of global temperatures, there will be even more natural disasters (e.g., typhoons, drought) and social ones (e.g., increased poverty, migrations).<sup>12</sup>

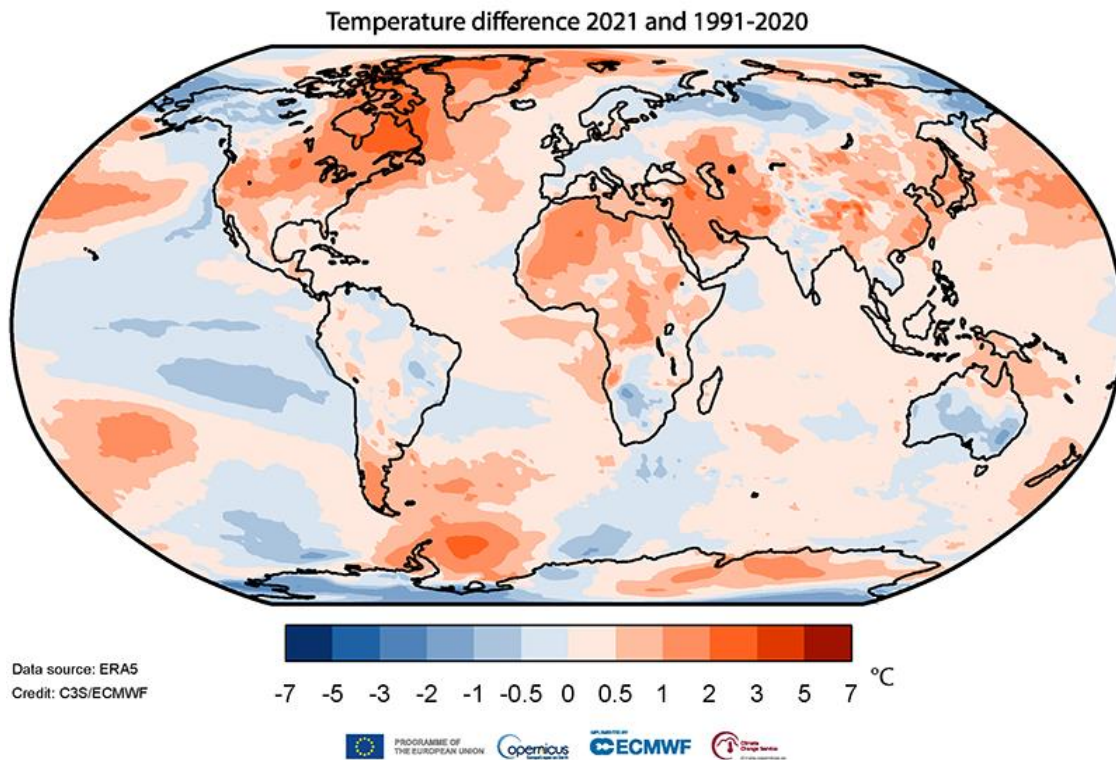


Fig. 1 “Temperature difference 2021 and 1991-2020”<sup>13</sup>

Japan is no exception. As stated by the WWF report, the impacts of climate change on humans and natural systems were many, including increased losses from intense typhoons, negative impacts on

<sup>11</sup> LOPEZ, Nuria. “Copernicus: Globally, the seven hottest years on record were the last seven; carbon dioxide and methane concentrations continue to rise”, *Copernicus: Europe’s eyes on Earth*, 2022, <https://climate.copernicus.eu/copernicus-globally-seven-hottest-years-record-were-last-seven>

<sup>12</sup> GALEY, Patrick. “Five takeaways from the UN’s 2022 climate impacts report”, *Climate Home News*, 2022, <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2022/02/28/five-takeaways-from-the-uns-2022-climate-impacts-report/>.

<sup>13</sup> LOPEZ, Nuria. “Copernicus: Globally, the seven hottest years on record were the last seven; carbon dioxide and methane concentrations continue to rise”, *Copernicus: Europe’s eyes on Earth*, 2022, <https://climate.copernicus.eu/copernicus-globally-seven-hottest-years-record-were-last-seven>



fruit crops and the extinction of several marine species.<sup>14</sup> However, many criticize the Japanese government for not doing enough, despite its efforts to curb climate change.<sup>15</sup> In fact, as of 2017, the country was the 5<sup>th</sup> largest producer of carbon emissions.<sup>16</sup> Throughout our dissertation, we will analyze in detail the implementation of Japan’s environmental policies.

As shown by the data above, a change is needed, in Japan as elsewhere. Improvements must be conducted at all levels of society, and they have to comprise not only infrastructural and legal changes, but also cultural ones. Article 6 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) explains that “increased knowledge and learning about the causes and impacts of climate change affect everyday lives”.<sup>17</sup> Education and training programmes can help foster awareness and create “sustainable” ways of thinking through the acquisition and repetition of intersectional notions regarding climate change.<sup>18</sup> The construction of a “sustainable” conscience is necessary for people to adopt “sustainable” lifestyles and effectively contribute to the well-being of the environment and the societies they live in. More “sustainable-oriented” behaviours could also prove vital in shaping an environmentally-conscious “consumer culture”.<sup>19</sup> “Responsible Consumption and Production” is the 12<sup>th</sup> of the 17 “Sustainable” Development Goals set up in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly and is intended to be achieved by 2030.<sup>20</sup> According to the United Nations, worldwide consumption and production of goods are no longer “sustainable”

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<sup>14</sup> CASE, Michael, TIDWELL, Andrea. “Nippon Changes: Climate Impacts threatening Japan today and tomorrow”, *WWF Japan*, 2008,

[https://www.wwf.or.jp/activities/lib/pdf\\_climate/environment/WWF\\_NipponChanges\\_lores.pdf](https://www.wwf.or.jp/activities/lib/pdf_climate/environment/WWF_NipponChanges_lores.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> KERSEY, Jim. “Japan – Environmental Sustainability and Efforts to Go Green”, *Humblebunny*, 2021, <https://www.humblebunny.com/japan-environmental-sustainability-efforts-go-green/>.

<sup>16</sup> “Annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions”, *Our World in Data*, 2022, <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/annual-co2-emissions-per-country>

<sup>17</sup> UNFCCC, “Education and Training under Article 6”, *United Nations Climate Change*, 2022, <https://unfccc.int/topics/education-and-outreach/workstreams/education-and-training#:~:text=Article%206%20of%20the%20Convention,meet%20the%20climate%20change%20challenge.>

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>19</sup> MILES, Steven. “Consumer Culture”, *Oxford Bibliographies*, 2021, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0135.xml>.

<sup>20</sup> General Assembly of the United Nations. “Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 6 July 2017”, *United Nations*, 2017, p. 1. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N17/207/63/PDF/N1720763.pdf?OpenElement>.

and is taking a severe toll on various natural resources.<sup>21</sup> In order to curb their impact on the environment, consumers are required to adopt a more “sustainable” lifestyle, by, among others, “Being thoughtful” on their purchases and “choosing a “sustainable” option whenever possible”.<sup>22</sup> In short, people need to get involved in “sustainable” practices on a daily basis.

We decided to focus our research on the marketing side of the industry, as the effectiveness of an advertisement is directly proportionate to its ability to best embody and represent the cultural codes shared by the social actors that constitute its target.<sup>23</sup> The constant reiteration and repetition of marketing and advertisement messages can induce the target audience to come to passively and actively learn their content, as proved by the “Social Cognition Theory” (SCT).<sup>24</sup> Understanding the social, economical and political aspects of a country is crucial in creating marketing practices that can respond effectively to the needs of society. Given these considerations, marketing and advertising could represent useful tools for Italian *haute couture* companies to promote their “sustainable” practices and foster awareness among consumers not only in Italy, but also in foreign countries, in this case, Japan. Of course, marketing and advertising are not the only ways that a company can adopt in order to support “sustainable” practices. A company needs to inform not only their customers, but also its employees about “sustainability”. In fact, building a “sustainable workplace”<sup>25</sup> can help the company to achieve its “sustainable” goals and get a better image in the eyes of its consumers, thus contributing to the so-called “brand honesty”.<sup>26</sup>

We began our research feeling optimistic: we were sure we would have found a lot of evidence on Italian fashion brands advertising their involvement in “sustainable” practices in the Japanese market, just as they were doing it in the Italian one. However, the outcome of our research proved to be disappointing, in two ways.

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<sup>21</sup> United Nations, “Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”, *United Nations: Sustainable Development Goals*, 2022, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-consumption-production/>.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>23</sup> PAVAN, Elisabetta. “La cultura attraverso la pubblicità”, *Italica*, 2013, 90, 1, pp. 117-130

<sup>24</sup> MASTRO, Dana E., STERN Susannah R. “Representations of Race in Television Commercials: A Content Analysis of Prime-Time Advertising”, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 2003, 47, 4, pp. 38-647

<sup>25</sup> SAMUL, Joanna. “Spiritual Leadership: Meaning in the Sustainable Workplace”, *Sustainability*, 2020, 12, 267, p. 7

<sup>26</sup> BIGNÉ-ALCAÑIZ, Enrique, CURRÁS-PÉRES, Rafael, SÁNCHEZ-GARCÍA, Isabel. “Brand credibility in cause-related marketing: the moderating role of consumer values”, *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 2009, 18, 6, p. 439

First, we analyzed the Japanese, English and Italian versions of e-commerce and digital merchandising platforms of various Italian *haute couture* multinationals, including their websites and their social media, namely Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. We focused on their web pages and posts that concerned themes like Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and environmental and social “sustainability”.<sup>27</sup> The results were quite unexpected. Some of these multinationals, namely Versace, Ferragamo and Prada, were simply lacking a Japanese-written version of the CSR section of their websites and none of their social media posts were talking about “sustainability”, unlike their English and Italian counterparts. This was not the case for all the companies we analyzed. In fact, some of them, Zegna and Bulgari, actually had a Japanese version of the “sustainability” sections on their digital platforms. However, we noticed that both the vocabulary and the grammar structures employed in the communication of information resembled prominently the ones used in the Italian and English versions of their platforms. Moreover, upon comparing the three different versions of their websites, we found out that entire phrases, if not all the portions of the texts, were not localized. Instead, they were word-for-word translated from English or Italian to Japanese. In short, these companies chose not to employ digital marketing strategies on “sustainable” practices tailor-made for the Japanese audience.<sup>28</sup> This preliminary finding led us to the following questions: are Italian *haute couture* companies unwilling to create “sustainable” marketing strategies for the Japanese market? If so, why is this the case?

Soon after this analysis, we conducted interviews with Italian professionals working for Italian *haute couture* multinationals in Japan. Furthermore, we interviewed the ICCJ in order to explore their already-mentioned initiative and the attitudes of small and medium Italian fashion enterprises toward promoting “sustainable” practices in Japan.

Our aim consisted in finding out whether or not these companies were adopting marketing strategies, digital and physical, specifically made for Japan for their “sustainable” practices.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with three people. The interviewees differed greatly from one another in terms of gender, age and experience in the fashion industry in Japan. Hence, the responses varied accordingly to these differences, especially regarding the perception of “sustainability” among Japanese consumers, as we will see more in detail later in this thesis. The

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<sup>27</sup> The multinationals here analyzed were Benetton, Bulgari, Diesel, Zegna, Gucci, Prada, Salvatore Ferragamo, Versace

<sup>28</sup> This was the case not only with “sustainable” themes, but also for many other aspects of their websites, such as product descriptions. This led us to believe that there was a general lack of attention regarding aspects of localization and translation.

main trend that emerged from these interviews was an unwillingness on behalf of Italian *haute couture* companies to promote their “sustainable” practices in Japan, often motivated by both economic and cultural factors.

Once we completed the interviews and the analysis of the digital platforms, we noticed that the attitude toward promoting “sustainability” in the Japanese market differed between Italian fashion multinationals and small and medium enterprises. It emerged that the formers were uninterested in creating advertisements specifically made for the Japanese market. However, the latter were shown to be willing to promote “sustainability” for Japanese consumers, but they were held back by the lack of knowledge about the Japanese “sustainable” context. Hence, their marketing and advertising strategies were not effective and did not meet the tastes of Japan’s younger generations.

The information acquired served as a starting point in the process of identifying the main theme for this thesis. Once we completed these first two steps in our research, we were left wondering, despite the general disregard of the matter, if a focus on “sustainability” in marketing practices for Italian *haute couture* companies could actually represent an effective strategy, one that could perhaps innovate and revolutionize their brand identity in the Japanese market. We wanted to address the small and medium enterprises that were already exporting in Japan or had the intention of doing so. We chose to focus on this kind of enterprise because, as both my findings and ICCJ suggested, compared to the multinationals, they were more willing to make “sustainability” a main pillar of their marketing and export strategies for Japan.

In this thesis, we will provide an overview of Japanese consumers perspectives on “sustainability” and their “ethical” consumption behaviours. At the same time, we will provide empirical evidence of how other Italian *haute couture* firms are implementing “sustainability” in their marketing practices targeted towards Japan.

In order to do this, we intend to analyze political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors concerning the so-called “sustainable development”<sup>29</sup> of Japan. This overview will be the main topic of the first chapter of this thesis, in which we ultimately want to identify what variables the companies have to consider in order to create strategic and operative choices in the Japanese market. Furthermore, the chapter will also help to fully comprehend the social and cultural context behind the concept of “sustainability” in Japan. In this chapter, we will give an overview of the general perception of the concept of “sustainability” among contemporary

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<sup>29</sup> The terms “sustainability” and “sustainable development” were first employed in the UN’s World Commission, also called “Brundtland Commission”, on Environment and Development report in 1983 (Wynn Kirby, 2010).

Japanese social actors, focusing on its introduction in Japan and the various global and local factors that shaped and changed its meaning through the years. We will then investigate, the reforms and policies, environmental and educational, undertaken by the Japanese government since the second post-war period in order to clarify the political context and attitude regarding the “sustainable development” that surrounds contemporary Japan. I will make use of both Japanese governmental surveys and academic works for drawing a summary of the contemporary picture regarding “sustainability” in Japan.

For the second chapter, we will delve into the world of luxury fashion, a segment of fashion to which the companies we refer in this thesis belong. We will examine luxury’s contemporary social and economic meanings, while providing a diachronic analysis of the development of this particular industry throughout the ages. Moreover, we will briefly touch upon two of the main components of the luxury industry, namely its supply chain and its marketing practices, highlighting the way in which this business model differs from “non-luxury” fashion businesses. Of course, the Japanese luxury fashion market will be investigated, focusing on its development since the second post-war period and the characteristics of its customers, belonging to the so-called “fourth stage consumer society”. We will then focus of “sustainable” aspects of the luxury industry, citing innovative methods and practices that its supply chains and marketing strategies can adopt in order to be more “sustainable”. Finally, we will provide an overview of “sustainable” fashion in Japan, examining the various policies that the Japanese government implemented in these last years, as well as Japanese consumer behaviours toward “sustainable” products.

In the last chapter, we will analyze the impact of digital marketing practices, most notably, social media, in luxury fashion marketing. At the same time, we will explain opportunities and risks that social media can present when used for statements about the “ethical” deeds of companies. After briefly analyzing the causes of the social media “LINE”’s popularity in Japan, we will delve into our analysis. This has been conducted on LINE, and it comprises the examination of several “ethical” posts made by Italian *haute couture* companies already operating in Japan. The main aim of this investigation is to examine past instances of “sustainable” marketing in Japan, so that the companies we refer to in this work will be provided with actual evidence of how “sustainability” has been promoted by Italian companies in the same market segment.

In order to answer our main research questions, we have conducted qualitative research that consisted of the use of various types of sources. This differentiation of sources was necessary in order to give an overview of the cultural, economic and political context regarding “sustainability” and “sustainable” fashion in Japan that was as much as possible exhaustive. First,

the academic sources provided us with a detailed overview of the historical context regarding “sustainability” in Japan, by reporting, for example, various political and economic “sustainable” measures taken by the Japanese government from 1945 to 2010. At the same time, we employed other types of sources, namely interviews with professionals, surveys issued by the Japanese government or by private companies and textual productions on Italian fashion brands’ digital platforms. We did so in order to fully comprehend the contemporary cultural context regarding “sustainability” in Japan and whether or not the aforementioned measures helped in shaping a “sustainable” way of thinking among today’s Japanese social actors.

## **Chapter 1 Sustainability in Japan: an overview**

### **1.1 “Sustainability” and its three main pillars**

The term “sustainable development” first appeared in a report of the “UN’s World Commission on Environment and Development”, also known as the Brundtland Commission, in 1984.<sup>30</sup> The commission was formed by the United Nations in order to propose solutions that could tackle environmental problems that were going to affect the new millennium.<sup>31</sup>

The terms “sustainable development” and “sustainability”<sup>32</sup> gained even greater prominence in light of the 1987 “Our Common Future” report, issued by the aforementioned Brundtland Commission.<sup>33</sup> The report defined “sustainable development” as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.<sup>34</sup> One of its goals consisted in promoting cooperation between nations in order to develop

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<sup>30</sup> KEEBLE, Brian R., “The Brundtland commission: Environment and development to the year 2000”, *Medicine and War*, 1987, 3:4, pp. 3-4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> These terms are often used interchangeably.

<sup>33</sup> Brundtland Commission, Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future, in “Sustainable Development Goals: Knowledge Platform”, 1987, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

strategies and take action against the ever-increasing environmental problems.<sup>35</sup> “Our Common Future” globally influenced visions of “sustainable” projects and prompted other countries to take immediate action against climate change.

In June 1992, the “United Nations Conference on Environment and Development”, also called “the Earth Summit”, took place in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>36</sup> Among other things, this summit proposed Agenda 21, a collection of possible plans that countries around the world were to take in order to foster “sustainable” development.<sup>37</sup>

This programme also introduced, for the first time, an explicit distinction between the so-called “three pillars of sustainability”,<sup>38</sup> namely the economic, social and environmental ones. The definitions of both “environmental” and “social sustainability” were changed over time, to properly fit the problems that the world was facing in particular decades.

Broadly speaking, “environmental sustainability” could be the responsibility of the human race to preserve and protect the natural ecosystems of Earth for the sake of future generations.<sup>39</sup> This includes tackling issues such as pollution, greenhouse effects, desertification, and loss of biodiversity.<sup>40</sup>

There is not, however, a clear definition of “social sustainability”. It is suggested that the term “social” defines the very relationships that the human race has with the environment, constituting an intersection of very different domains that fall under the broad categorization of

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<sup>35</sup> *Idem*

<sup>36</sup> United Nations, United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3-14 June 1992, in “United Nations”, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/rio1992>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>37</sup> United Nations, United Nations Conference on Environment & Development Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3 to 14 June 1992: AGENDA 21, in “Sustainable Development Goals: Knowledge Platform”, 1992, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>38</sup> PURVIS, Ben, MAO, Yong, ROBINSON, Darren, “Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins”, *Sustainability Science*, 14, 2019, p. 682.

<sup>39</sup> United Nations, Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972, in “United Nations: Digital Library”, 1972, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/523249?ln=en>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>40</sup> WINN KIRBY, Peter, *Troubled Natures: Waste, Environment, Japan*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2010, p. 162

“human activities”.<sup>41</sup> In general, according to the SDGs promoted by the 2030 Agenda, a socially “sustainable” society should have, among other things, “no poverty”,<sup>42</sup> “quality education”<sup>43</sup> and “gender equality”.<sup>44</sup>

## 1.2 Japan’s contemporary environmental and social issues

In 2018, Ipsos, a multinational market research and consulting firm, published a report titled “What Worries Japan”.<sup>45</sup> This document showed the results of a survey conducted by Ipsos itself between November 2017 and November 2018 on polls of approximately 1000 Japanese respondents per month of age 16-64.<sup>46</sup> The question posed in the opinion poll was: “which three of the following topics do you find the most worrying in your country?”<sup>47</sup>. The respondents were given the option of choosing between five of Japan’s contemporary issues: “poverty and social inequality”, “maintaining social problems”, “taxes”, “moral decline” and “climate change”.<sup>48</sup>

The majority of the respondents, 36%, chose Japan’s poverty rates and social inequalities as the most worrying issues.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, concern toward climate change declined over time, scoring 24% in November 2018. As we will see later in this chapter, this does not mean that there is a lack of concern on behalf of the Japanese population toward the environment. On the contrary,

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<sup>41</sup> JAMES, Paul, STEGER, Manfred, SCERRI, Andy, MAGEE, Liam, *Urban Sustainability in Theory and Practice: Circles of Sustainability*, London, Routledge, 2015, p. 230.

<sup>42</sup> United Nations, Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, in “United Nations”, 2022, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>43</sup> United Nations, Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, in “United Nations”, 2022, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>44</sup> International Monetary Fund. Asia and Pacific Dept, Japan: Selected Issues, in “IMF eLIBRARY”, 2022, <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/002/2022/100/article-A004-en.xml>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>45</sup> ELSTROM, Deanna, PARSON, Stuart, SHIRAHAMA Fumiya, “What Worries Japan”, 2018, Ipsos, <https://www.ipsos.com/en/what-worries-japan>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>46</sup> *Idem*

<sup>47</sup> *Idem*

<sup>48</sup> *Idem*

<sup>49</sup> *Idem*



this survey represents a starting point to better explore Japanese attitudes not only toward the environment, but also toward climate change and social inequalities and how those changed over time. In order to provide some context, we will briefly explain how the two aforementioned issues addressed by the survey affect contemporary Japan.

Climate change has been affecting Japan for over two decades and became more and more severe as the years passed. Climate-related issues include extreme weather, natural disasters and sea level rise.<sup>50</sup> According to the Japan Meteorological Agency, in 2021, following changes in global temperatures, the sea level was 71 mm higher than normal, namely the highest level ever reached in Japan since 1906.<sup>51</sup> This could result in severe consequences for Japan's coastal regions' inhabitants.

A 2007 OECD environmental report stated, in fact, that more than 10 per cent of the population of the city of Osaka, that is, more than U.S. \$200 billion in economic assets, were considered exposed to coastal flooding.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, it is estimated that, if nothing is done to prevent sea levels from the further rise, approximately 4.1 million people in Japan will be at risk of flooding.<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, extreme weather phenomena have impacted Japan in the last few years. Some of the most severe ones consisted in the heavy rainfalls that hit the western and central part of the country in 2018, causing grave damage to properties and hundreds of deaths.<sup>54</sup>

Effects of global climate change are also visible in regard to the rise in annual Japanese temperatures. The summer of 2018 was, in fact, the hottest ever recorded with 41.1 °C in Kumagaya, near Tokyo, breaking the 2013 41 °C record.<sup>55</sup>

Of course, climate-related consequences are also threatening the country's terrestrial and

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<sup>50</sup> International Monetary Fund. Asia and Pacific Dept, "Japan: Selected Issues", 2022, IMF Staff Country Reports, 22:100, pp.1-76.

<sup>51</sup> *Idem*

<sup>52</sup> NICHOLLS, R.J. et al., "Ranking Port Cities With High Exposure And Vulnerability to Climate Extremes", Economic Consequences of Climate Change, 2008, pp. 1-62.

<sup>53</sup> Union of Concerned Scientists, Climate Hot Map: Osaka, Japan, in "Union of Concerned Scientists", 2010, <https://www.climatehotmap.org/global-warming-locations/osaka-japan.html#end8>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>54</sup> TAYLOR, Alan, Photos: Death Toll Reaches 200 in Devastating Japan Floods, in "The Atlantic", 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2018/07/photos-death-toll-reaches-200-in-devastating-japan-floods/565055/>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>55</sup> BBC, Japan heatwave: Temperature breaks national record, in "BBC", 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-44921834>, February 6, 2023.

marine biodiversity. As stated by the WWF Nippon Changes report, extreme climatic phenomena have disrupted natural ecosystems, forcing a number of animal species to abandon their former habitats and migration pattern.<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, in the last decade, it has been registered a high number of invasive mosquito species, harbingers of diseases, and an increased probability of species extinction.<sup>57</sup>

Japan is also affected by profound inequalities deeply rooted in society. One problem that stands out regards the so-called “gender equality”, the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) promoted by the United Nations.<sup>58</sup> According to the 2019 Gender Inequality Index and the 2020 Global Gender Gap Report, Japan ranked respectively 19<sup>th</sup> and 121<sup>st</sup> of 153 countries.<sup>5960</sup> These are two of the lowest scores for a developed nation. The Japanese gender gap is visible in a myriad of social areas, the most significant ones being education, income and job opportunities. For example, in 2014, 53% of women from age 20 to 65 fell under the “non-regular employer” label.<sup>61</sup> Nationwide, women are still particularly underrepresented in politics and only 20.1% occupy managerial positions.<sup>62</sup> Inequality is also prominent when it comes to addressing LGBTQ+ people’s rights, specifically those concerning same-sex couples.<sup>63</sup> Japan is, in fact, the only country in G7 that does not recognize same-sex marriages and civil unions.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, discrimination based

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<sup>56</sup> TIDWELL, Andrea, CASE, Michael, “Nippon Changes: Climate impacts threatening Japan today and tomorrow”, [https://www.wwf.or.jp/activities/lib/pdf\\_climate/environment/WWF\\_NipponChanges\\_lores.pdf](https://www.wwf.or.jp/activities/lib/pdf_climate/environment/WWF_NipponChanges_lores.pdf), 2008, February 8, 2023.

<sup>57</sup> *Idem*

<sup>58</sup> United Nations, Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, in “United Nations”, 2022, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>59</sup> Human Development Reports, Human Development Report 2020, in “UNDP: Human Development Reports”, 2020, <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/country-insights#/ranks>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>60</sup> World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2020, in “World Economic Forum”, 2020, [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2020.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf), February 6, 2023.

<sup>61</sup> YAMAGUCHI, Kazuo, Japan’s Gender Gap, in “International Monetary Fund”, 2019, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2019/03/gender-equality-in-japan-yamaguchi>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>62</sup> The Asahi Shimbun, Analysis: women across Japan far behind in gender equality, in “The Asahi Shimbun”, 2022, <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14567064>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>63</sup> KING, Jonathan, “LGBTQ+ Rights and Protections: Do Existing Theories Explain Japan's Limited Legislation?”, 2020, Middle Tennessee State University, pp. 62-63.

<sup>64</sup> MCCURRY, Justin, Japan's 'love hotels' accused of anti-gay discrimination, in “The Guardian”, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/30/japans-love-hotels-accused-of-anti-gay-discrimination>, February 6, 2023.

upon gender orientation is a widespread practice in Japan: it originates from the Japanese family registers and it manifests itself, among others, in education and online workplace.<sup>65</sup> This last issue in particular was also cited in one of the interviews we conducted.

The interviewee was a 25/30 years old Italian woman that had been working in Japan for three years for various Italian small and medium fashion companies. At the time of the interview, she was employed as a store coordinator for a Northern Italian fashion company in one of its flagship stores in Japan.

When asked whether diversity and inclusion practices were present in the workplace, she stated that none of these policies were ever been implemented since the time she started working in Japan. Her Japanese coworkers, in fact, kept disregarding them, and none of the companies, both Italian and Japanese, that she had worked for or knew, had ever put into practice these measures. On the contrary, all of her coworkers and friends who belonged to a minority of any kind had been, at least once, discriminated on the workplace.

For example, she stated that when one of her acquaintances, a homosexual person working in a company in Tokyo, reported to Human Resources that he had been harassed on the workplace, he was instead threatened that he could have lost his job only for having created a “scandal” in the company. Of course, racial discrimination was also brought up during the interview, as she personally knew many employees that had experienced racism at least once in their working experience.<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, Japan’s poverty represents another major contemporary social issue. Although Japan has no official poverty line, surveys and reports have been made throughout the years by OECD and other institutional organizations. The highest poverty rate ever registered by the Japanese government was 16% of the entire population in 2013.<sup>67</sup> Poverty also affects Japanese women. The Japan Times reports a study conducted in 2012 by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (NIPSSR), that showed that 1 out of 3 Japanese women aged 20–64

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<sup>65</sup> MAREE, Claire, *Sexual citizenship at the intersections of patriarchy and heteronormativity*, in “Japan's household registration system and citizenship”, 2014, London, Routledge, pp. 87-98.

<sup>66</sup> It is particularly important to note that these are consideration made by one individual according to her particular experiences. They do not, by any means, necessarily constitute an objective depiction of discrimination on the workplace in Japan.

<sup>67</sup> The Economist, *Struggling: Poverty worsens as more Japanese work on non-permanent contracts*, in “The Economist”, 2015, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2015/04/04/struggling>, February 6, 2023.

living alone was living in poverty.<sup>68</sup>

Finally, child poverty in Japan is a severe issue. Nippon Foundation explains that the percentage of children under the age of 18 living in conditions of relative poverty<sup>69</sup> stood at 13.9% in 2015.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, a 2016 UNICEF report on child poverty rates around the world ranked Japan 34<sup>th</sup> out of 41 modernized countries.<sup>71</sup>

It is therefore clear that Japan has experienced, particularly in the last two decades, social inequalities and has been affected by the severe consequences of climate change. However, it remains to be seen what attitudes Japanese people have toward these very issues, how they have changed throughout the years and how they differ according to the intersection of different factors, such as age, gender and social class.

### **1.3 Japanese perceptions on “sustainable development” practices: environmental issues**

The Japanese Governmental Cabinet Office provides a number of opinion polls on environmental issues conducted almost every two years since 1971. A chronological analysis of these surveys could prove to be particularly useful in order to show how the attitudes of Japanese people regarding the environment and global warming have changed throughout the years. All of the surveys were conducted nationwide on samples of 3000 respondents circa, aged at least 18.<sup>72</sup> In order to highlight recent trends, we analyzed surveys from 2007 to 2020, grouping them into three broad subcategories, according to the types of questions they posed to the respondents. These categories consist of polls on interest and efforts towards “global environmental issues”, “garbage, plastic and waste problems and recycling-oriented society”, and “conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity”. In this chapter, we will focus only on the first two, as they are the most related to the

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<sup>68</sup> AZUHO, Mioki, Poverty a growing problem for women, in “The Japan Times”, 2012, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2012/04/19/national/poverty-a-growing-problem-for-women/>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>69</sup> The OECD states that poverty rate is “the ratio of the number of people (in a given age group) whose income falls below the poverty line; taken as half the median household income of the total population.” (OECD, Poverty Rate, In “OECD Data”, 2021, <https://data.oecd.org/inequality/poverty-rate.htm>, February 6, 2023).

<sup>70</sup> The Nippon Foundation, Addressing Child Poverty, in “The Nippon Foundation” 2015, [https://www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/en/what/projects/ending\\_child\\_poverty](https://www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/en/what/projects/ending_child_poverty), February 6, 2023.

<sup>71</sup> MCCURRY, Justin, Japan's rising child poverty exposes true cost of two decades of economic decline, in “The Guardian”, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/17/japans-rising-child-poverty-exposes-truth-behind-two-decades-of-economic-decline>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>72</sup> To form the sample, they all employed the “two stage stratifies random sampling method”, a variant of the Extraction method common among worldwide Governmental surveys.

topic of this thesis.

Most recent surveys of the first group were carried out in the years 2007, 2016 and 2020. Starting with the 2007 one, the results showed an increase in interest, especially compared to previous surveys: 57 were “interested” and 34.7% of them were “somewhat interested”, hence resulting in 92.3% of participants being at least partially interested in global environmental issues (compared to the 87.1% of 2005).<sup>73</sup> However, as is shown in Fig. 2, this positive trend seems to reverse already in 2016, since in 2007 more people from all age groups were “interested” in the environment.

In the 2016 report, as is reported in Fig. 3, less than half of the participants, 40.4%, were “interested” in global warming issues and 46.8% were “somewhat interested” in them, resulting in 87.2% total of participants at least “somewhat” interested.<sup>74</sup>

It is worth noticing that gender seems to influence individual preferences. Examples of it are found in the 2016 survey, where, although the percentages of “somewhat interested” are almost the same between men and women, 46.1% of men are “interested” compared to 35.4% of women.<sup>75</sup> A similar gender gap is found in the 2007 survey for the percentages of “interested” people, with 63% of men and 53% of women being so.<sup>76</sup>

Another factor that should be considered is age. Figures show that the gaps in the “interested” percentages between the age groups diminished over time. For example, whereas in 2007 the gap between the 60-69 and the 70 age groups was 4%, in 2016 it was merely 0.3%. Age groups from 40-49 to 60-69 remained consistently the most interested, and the 18/20-29 group showed the least interest both in 2007 and 2016.

Finally, the 2020 survey (Fig. 4) shows that 88.3% of respondents was at least partially

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<sup>73</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Chikyūkankyōmondai e no kanshin ni tsuite (地球環境問題への関心について, interest in global environmental issue, in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, 2007, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h19/h19-globalwarming/2-1.html>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>74</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Chikyūondankataisaku ni kansuru seronchōsa (地球温暖化対策に関する世論調査, Public Opinion Survey on Global Warming Countermeasures), 2016, in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h28/h28-ondanka/index.html>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>75</sup> *Idem*

<sup>76</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), “Chikyūkankyōmondai...”, 2007

interested in global environmental issues, with 45.6% of them being “interested” and 42.8% being “somewhat interested”.<sup>77</sup> Although men were more interested than women, gender differences are at their lowest in this survey, with a gender gap in the percentage of “interested” men and women of only 5.7% in 2020, which is almost half compared to its previous values: 10.7% in 2016 and 9.9% in 2007.

Age differences in the 2020 survey are more marked.<sup>78</sup> The 18-29 age group remained the least interested and age groups from 40 to 69 followed the same pattern as the previous years. However, two major changes appear to have taken place since 2016. The 30-39 age group is less interested than its 2016 counterpart, this reduces the gap with the 18-29 age group. This shows that the negative trend in the new generations still holds and is becoming more problematic, as, even when people age, they do not seem to care about the environment, as shown by the smaller percentage of people aged 30-39 interested in environmental matters. On the other hand, in the 2020 survey, the 70-age group was significantly more interested in the environment, as 61.1% of it was “interested”, making it the first time that the “interested” respondents had surpassed the “somewhat interested”.<sup>79</sup>

As we can see from these surveys throughout the years, men were consistently more interested in these issues than women. Finally, the age group that showed the least interest was also the youngest one, namely participants between 18 and 29 years of age.

The second group of surveys belongs to the years 2009, 2012 and 2019 and it covers a variety of topics. The 2009 and 2012 ones share similar topics: they asked participants about their interest in the garbage problem and their efforts in reducing their amount of garbage by reusing or

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<sup>77</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Kikō hendō ni kansuru seronchōsa (気候変動に関する世論調査, poll on climate change), 2020, “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/r02/r02-kikohendo/index.html>, February 8, 2023

<sup>78</sup> *Idem*

<sup>79</sup> *Idem*; This appears to be in direct contrast to what is happening in Europe, where young people are far more interested than older people. (European Environmental Bureau (EEB), Pan-European survey – Climate top priority for youth, in “EEB – European Environmental Bureau”, 2021, <https://eeb.org/library/pan-european-survey-climate-to-priority-for-youth/>, February 6, 2023.)

recycling.<sup>80</sup><sup>81</sup> On the other hand, the 2019 survey focused on the plastic waste problem, examining, again, the interest and the behaviours of respondents about the issue.<sup>82</sup>

As mentioned above, the 2009 and 2012 surveys share similar topics, even though their questions are not exactly the same. A case of it can be found in the question of the 2009 survey being “How much are you interested in the problem of garbage?” and in the one from the 2012 survey “Do you think that the problem of garbage is important?”.<sup>83</sup><sup>84</sup> To the former question, 29% of the respondents answered “interested” and 63.5% of them were “somewhat interested”.<sup>85</sup> The difference between “interested” men and women was minimal: 29.5% of the latter, and 28.3% of the formers.<sup>86</sup> As we already discussed for the previous group of surveys, the higher the age, the higher the percentage of “interested” respondents: 40.2% of them were 70 or over, whereas only 15.4% of them belonged to the 20-29 age group, namely the youngest one.<sup>87</sup>

In 2012 81.6% of respondents stated that the problem of garbage was either “important” or “rather important”, this is much lower when compared to the 92.5% of at least “somewhat interested” respondents in 2009.<sup>88</sup> However, in 2012 we witness a stronger gender difference, with

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<sup>80</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Junkangatahakai ni kansuru ishiki ni tsuite (循環型社会に関する意識について, Awareness of Recycling-oriented Society”), in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, 2009, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h21/h21-kankyou/2-1.html>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>81</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Kankyōmondai ni kansuru seronchōsa (環境問題に関する世論調査, Public Opinion Survey on Environmental Issues), 2012, in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/r01/r01-kankyou/index.html>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>82</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Kankyōmondai ni kansuru seronchōsa (環境問題に関する世論調査, Public Opinion Survey on Environmental Issues), in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, 2019, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/r01/r01-kankyou/index.html>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>83</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), “Junkangatahakai...”

<sup>84</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), “Kankyōmondai...”

<sup>85</sup> *Idem*

<sup>86</sup> *Idem*

<sup>87</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), “Junkangatahakai...”; Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), “Kankyōmondai...”

<sup>88</sup> *Idem*

women being the majority of the “important” respondents, 84% against 79.1% of men.<sup>89</sup> The least involved age group was, once again, the youngest one.

Comparing these results to the ones found in the 2019 survey, 33.5% of respondents were “very interested” and 55.5% was “somewhat interested” in plastic waste problems with minimal differences between men and women.<sup>90</sup> Again, younger generations are the least concerned about the plastic waste issue, with only 10.5% between the ages 18-29 being “very interested” in it. On the other hand, the most involved group was the 70 years or older, with 47.4% “very interested” in the topic.<sup>91</sup>

From 2009 to 2012, there has been a declining trend in efforts by Japanese people to reduce waste, including awareness in regard to plastic waste. In fact, the percentage of participants that chose the option “bringing shopping bags or asking the store for simple packaging” went from 62% in 2009 to 59.1% in 2012.<sup>92</sup> In the two surveys, women adopting measures to reduce waste proved to be more than men.<sup>93</sup> The 20-39 age group was, in both cases, the most willing to reduce waste.

There has been, however, an increasing number of people from 2009 and 2012 bought recycled products made from recycled materials (13.3% to 20.7%).<sup>94</sup> This trend is also confirmed by the 2019 plastic waste survey, where 32.3% of participants respond “actively select products made from recycled materials and plastics” to the question “what they would like to do in the future to prevent the plastic waste problem from getting worse”.<sup>95</sup> This is a particularly important finding, since it shows that there is indeed a growing number of potential customers willing to buy recycled products in Japan.

In regards to the profiling of potential customers, the 2019 survey asked, among other

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<sup>89</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), “Kankyōmondai...”

<sup>90</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), “Kankyōmondai ni kansuru...”; Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), “Kankyōmondai...”

<sup>91</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), “Junkangatahakai...”; Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), “Kankyōmondai ni kansuru...”

<sup>92</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), “Junkangatahakai...”; Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), “Kankyōmondai...”

<sup>93</sup> *Idem*

<sup>94</sup> *Idem*

<sup>95</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), “Kankyōmondai ni kansuru...”



questions, what conditions would be acceptable for purchasing an alternative product during regular shopping.<sup>96</sup> As it is shown in Fig. 5, both men and women and almost all of the age groups were more prone to buy a recycled product if its quality and price were the same as the conventional product. Women (39.2%) were considerably more willing than men (31.2%) in choosing this option, so as did people from 50 to 59 years old in comparison to the other age groups (41.4%).<sup>97</sup> Compared to women (11.8%), men were, instead, significantly more prone to purchase recycled products regardless of their quality (15.9%).<sup>98</sup> Although, as already mentioned, most age groups chose the predominant option, the 18-29 age group was the only one that was the most willing to purchase recycled products at the same cost or less than their conventional counterparts, even if they were of a lower quality (40.6%).<sup>99</sup>

In conclusion, as shown by the findings hereby presented, a declining trend can be seen when evaluating the Japanese population's interest in global environmental issues throughout the 2010s decade. At the same time, interest in the garbage and waste problem experienced a major increase in these last years. This has been coupled with ambivalent results concerning ethical consumption and recycling practices. The most recent survey (2012) regarding recycling in Japanese society confirmed, in fact, a decline in the number of persons willing to adopt these kinds of practices. However, when it comes to "sustainable" consumption, a positive trend can be seen throughout the years. Most importantly, the majority of respondents favourable to buying recycled products, albeit in some conditions, were fairly young. This comes as a surprise, since in every survey the youngest generations were also the least interested both in environmental issues and recycling practices. Gender also plays a role, since generally more men than women were involved in these kinds of themes and practices.

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<sup>96</sup> *Idem*

<sup>97</sup> *Idem*

<sup>98</sup> *Idem*

<sup>99</sup> *Idem*

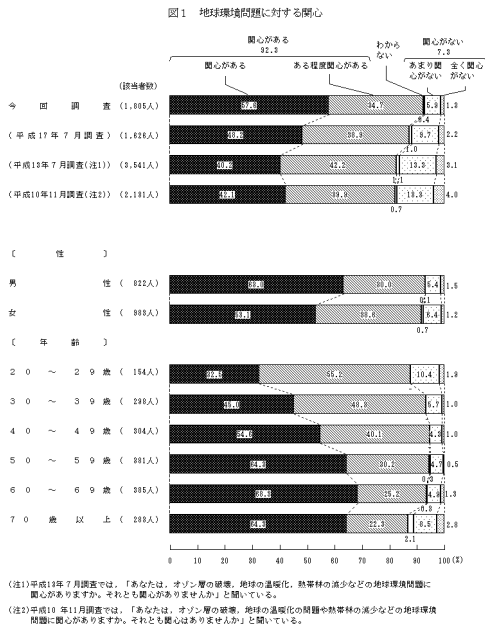


Fig. 2 “Interest in global environmental issues” (地球環境問題に対する関心) 2007<sup>100</sup>

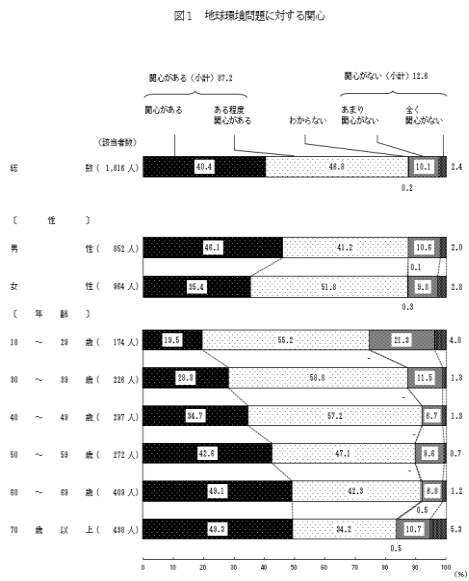


Fig. 3 “Interest in global environmental issues” (地球環境問題に対する関心) 2016<sup>101</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), “Chikyūkankyōmondai...”, 2007

<sup>101</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), “Chikyūondankataisaku...”

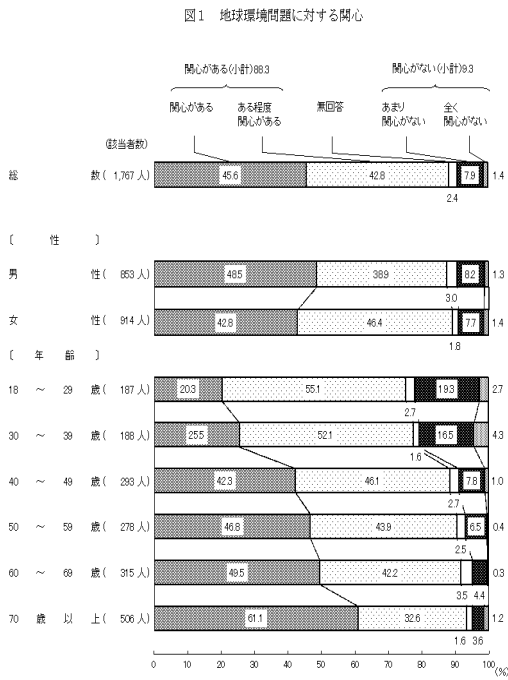


Fig. 4 “Interest in global environmental issues” (地球環境問題に対する関心) 2020<sup>102</sup>

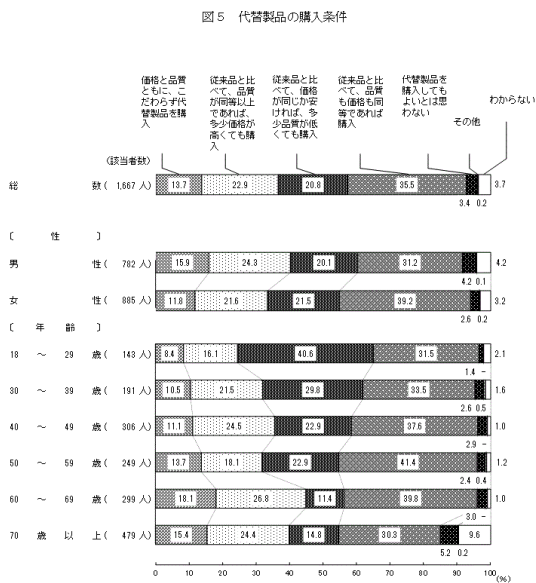


Fig. 5 “Terms of purchase for alternative products” (代替製品の納入条件), 2019<sup>103</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), “Kikō hendō...”

<sup>103</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), “Kankyōmondai ni kansuru...”

#### **1.4 Japanese perceptions on “sustainable development” practices: social issues**

Japanese Cabinet Office has also conducted, since 1992, a number of surveys on “gender-equal society”.<sup>104</sup> The aim of these opinion polls was to understand the awareness of the Japanese

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<sup>104</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll), in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, 2022, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h16/h16-danjo/chuui.html>, February 9, 2023

population toward themes such as “women’s social advancement” and “gender status”.<sup>105106</sup>

We will provide a brief overview of the main trends regarding gender equality and women’s role in contemporary Japanese society, through the analysis of seven surveys, conducted between 2004 and 2019.<sup>107 108</sup> It is important to note that these surveys grew in prominence and scope as the years progressed, as it is testified by the implementation, in 2009, of questions regarding “requests to the government regarding gender equality” and “awareness of violence against women”.<sup>109</sup>

In the years following the 2004 survey (73.9%), there had been a steady decline in the percentage of people that had the perception that men were privileged in Japanese society as a

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<sup>105</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Danjo kyōdō sankaku shakai ni kansuru seronchōsa (男女共同参画社会に関する世論調査, Public Opinion Survey on Gender Equal Society), 2016, in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h28/h28-danjo/index.html>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>106</sup> Since an in-depth analysis of all the social inequalities in Japanese society would require the examination of many interesectional elements of different nature, I decided to focus on gender gap and discriminations, particularly in the workplace, since their adherence to this thesis’s topic.

<sup>107</sup> The surveys were conducted using the stratified two-stage random sampling method. Participants in each surveys were 5000, chosen nationwide over 20 years old.

<sup>108</sup> The 2014 survey’s aim is to understand the general interest behind the promotion of the “active participation of women” (女性の活躍推進), hence it presents findings of a different nature. (Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Josei no katsuyaku suishin ni kansuru seronchōsa (女性の活躍推進に関する世論調査, Public Opinion Survey on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace), in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, 2014, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h26/h26-joseikatsuyaku/index.html>, February 8, 2023.). For this reason, I will analyze it a separate entity from the other five.

<sup>109</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Danjo kyōdō sankaku shakai ni kansuru seronchōsa (男女共同参画社会に関する世論調査, Public Opinion Survey on Gender Equal Society), 2009, in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h21/h21-danjo/index.html>, February 8, 2023.

whole.<sup>110</sup> However, figures peaked in the 2016 and 2019 surveys, where respectively 74.2% and 74.1% of total participants had, at least, awareness of the existence of gender inequalities in society.<sup>111112</sup> More women than men showed this attitude, as it is demonstrated by the number of their responses, which surpass that of men by an average of approximately 6.26% across all surveys. It is also important to note that people from 30 to 59 years old were the most consistent in showing this perception throughout the years. At the same time, people of age 70 or older and from 18 to 29 years old proved to be the most inclined to the idea that there was not any gender gap between men and women.<sup>113</sup>

We will now turn to analyze people's perceptions and awareness of gender inequalities in the workplace. We focus on this particular social environment, and its relevance to the topic of this thesis. The general perception that men are given preferential treatment in the workplace has been the most chosen answer throughout the years.

There has been a steady increase in the number of respondents that chose this option between the 2004 and 2009 surveys (from 59.5% in 2004 to 62.1% in 2009). Since 2009, however, there has been a constantly decreasing trend that resulted, in 2019, in 53.5% of the total respondents

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<sup>110</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Danjo no chii ni kansuru ishiki ni tsuite (男女の地位に関する意識について, Awareness of gender status), in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, 2004, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h16/h16-danjo/2-1.html>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>111</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Danjo kyōdō sankaku shakai ni kansuru gyōsei e no yōbō ni tsuite (男女共同参画社会に関する行政への要望について, Requests to the administration regarding a gender-equal society), in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/r01/r01-danjo/2-5.html>, 2019, February 8, 2023.

<sup>112</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Danjo kyōdō sankaku shakai ni kansuru seronchōsa (男女共同参画社会に関する世論調査, Public Opinion Survey on Gender Equal Society), 2016, in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h28/h28-danjo/index.html>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>113</sup> My hypothesis is that one of the reasons behind lack of awareness toward this issue lie in the fact that these age groups, compared to the others, have little to none experience in a variety of contemporary Japanese social environments.

acknowledging the privileged position of men in the workplace.<sup>114</sup> This percentage is even less than its 2004 counterpart.

At the same time, more and more people throughout the years began to think that men and women had the same opportunities, reaching, in 2019, a percentage of 30.7% against 21.9% in the 2004 survey. There were no particular differences in percentages of men and women that shared this attitude across the surveys.

Interestingly enough, unlike previous years, from 2012 to 2019, as Fig. 6, 7 and 8 show, more respondents from both genders had the perception that women had the same opportunities as men, although the gap between the percentages of the two genders remained minimal.<sup>115</sup> It is particularly important to note that, across all surveys, the 70 years or older age group has consistently been the one that felt the least amount of concern regarding the disadvantage that women face in the workplace.<sup>116</sup>

As already mentioned, surveys from 2009 onwards included a section called “requests to the government regarding gender equal society”.<sup>117</sup> In all the opinion polls, although the general number of responses declined over time, the majority of respondents chose “supporting reemployment of people who have quit their jobs due to child rearing or long-term care”.

Finally, Fig. 9 shows that in 2019, most people did not think, based on their experiences,

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<sup>114</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Danjo kyōdō sankaku shakai ni kansuru gyōsei e no yōbō ni tsuite (男女共同参画社会に関する行政への要望について, Requests to the administration regarding a gender-equal society), in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/r01/r01-danjo/2-5.html>, 2019, February 8, 2023.

<sup>115</sup> However, across the six surveys, consistently more men than women thought that both genders were given the same opportunities.

<sup>116</sup> My hypothesis is that one of the reasons behind lack of awareness toward this issue lie in the fact that this age group, compared to the others, has little to none experience in contemporary Japanese working environments.

<sup>117</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Danjo kyōdō sankaku shakai ni kansuru seronchōsa (男女共同参画社会に関する世論調査, Public Opinion Survey on Gender Equal Society), 2009, in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h21/h21-danjo/index.html>, February 8, 2023.

that Japanese society was a gender equal one.<sup>118</sup> In fact, 56.5% of respondents said that a gender-equal society was either “not much achieved” (46.6%) (or “almost not achieved” (9.9%). This opinion was shared almost equally by both men and women.<sup>119</sup>

However, extreme differences emerged from the comparison of the various age groups. Generally, people from 18 to 29 years old were the most prone to say that Japan had achieved a gender equal society (達成できた) (53.5%). On the contrary, both women from 40 to 50 years old and men from 60 years old responded that the Japanese one was not a society that had achieved gender equality.<sup>120</sup>

In conclusion, surveys show that percentages of people aware of the existence of gender inequalities in Japan have been increasing in recent years. Moreover, according to the findings, women have, in general, the perception that men are given preferential treatment in a variety of social environments. The majority of men, instead, think that both genders are given equal opportunities.

It is particularly important to note that the youngest generations (and the oldest) were the less prone to acknowledge the existence of these inequalities. The youngest and oldest respondent were, in fact, the only two age groups that believed that Japan had already achieved a gender equal society, differing from the highly skeptical rest of respondents.

Finally, encouraging results came from the analysis of Japanese workplaces, with more men and women acknowledging improvements in recent years.

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<sup>118</sup> The 2019 opinion poll is the first that includes the “achievement of gender equal society” section (男女共同参画社会の達成状況) (Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Danjo kyōdō sankaku shakai ni kansuru gyōsei e no yōbō ni tsuite (男女共同参画社会に関する行政への要望について, Requests to the administration regarding a gender-equal society), in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/r01/r01-danjo/2-5.html>, 2019, February 8, 2023)

<sup>119</sup> *Idem*

<sup>120</sup> *Idem*



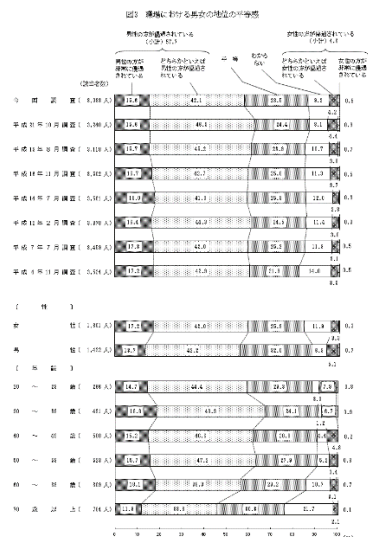


Fig. 6 Equality of gender status in the workplace (職場における男女の地位の平等館) 2012<sup>121</sup>

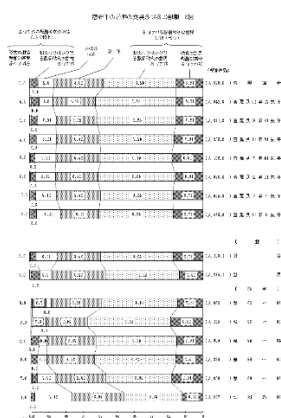


Fig. 7 Equality of gender status in the workplace (職場における男女の地位の平等館) 2016<sup>122</sup>

<sup>121</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Danjo kyōdō sankaku shakai ni kansuru seronchōsa (男女共同参画社会に関する世論調査, Public Opinion Survey on Gender Equal Society), 2012, in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h24/h24-danjo/index.html>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>122</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Danjo kyōdō sankaku shakai ni kansuru seronchōsa (男女共同参画社会に関する世論調査, Public Opinion Survey on Gender Equal Society), 2016, in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h28/h28-danjo/index.html>, February 8, 2023.

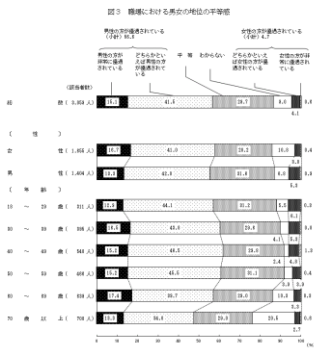


Fig. 8 Equality of gender status in the workplace (職場における男女の地位の平等性) 2019<sup>123</sup>

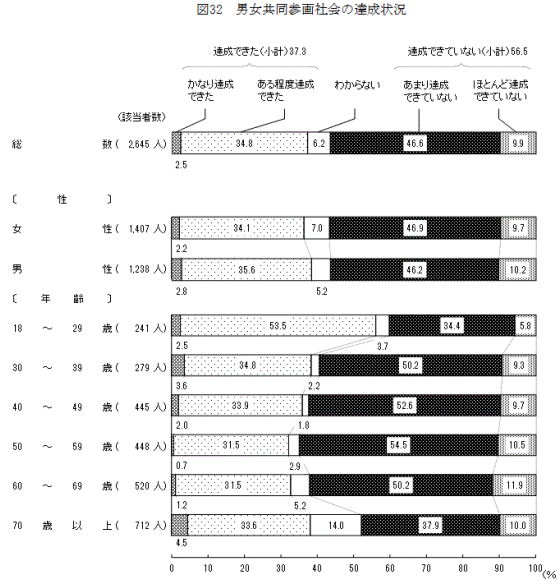


Fig. 9 Achievement of gender equality society (男女共同参画社会の達成状況) 2019<sup>124</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Naikakufu (内閣府, Cabinet Office), Danjo kyōdō sankaku shakai ni kansuru gyōsei e no yōbō ni tsuite (男女共同参画社会に関する行政への要望について, Requests to the administration regarding a gender-equal society), in “Naikakufu: Yoronchōsa (内閣府: 世論調査, Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Poll)”, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/r01/r01-danjo/2-5.html>, 2019, February 8, 2023.

<sup>124</sup> *Idem*

## **1.5 Japan's environmental and social policies**

The previous analysis of the opinion polls brought to light many important elements that could help in shaping a general overview of Japan's attitudes toward the environment and social, particularly gender, inequalities. However, the reasons behind those attitudes are still to be examined and are to be traced back to the history of the implementation of environmental and social policies that have characterized Japan's political and economic landscape since the 1970s. The evaluation of Japan in light of the SDGs presents some critical points. Although the country has implemented policies that theoretically meet the agenda's goals, there is still a considerable amount of work to do, especially when it comes to tackling environmental problems, such as climate change, and social ones, namely consumers' behaviour toward responsible consumption and gender inequalities. In this section, we will analyze past and contemporary top-down and bottom-up policies that belong to the so-called "sustainable development"<sup>125</sup> of Japan, focusing on measures taken to prevent environmental damages, gender, gender orientation and racial inequalities in the workplace.

### **1.5.1 Toward "sustainable" development: Japan's past and contemporary environmental policies**

Japan has been battling with environmental issues since its "boom years" (1955-1985), characterized by a massive industrial expansion that favoured not only impressive economic growth, but also an increase in pollution-related problems that affected the country for many years after.<sup>126</sup>

The 1960s were the years in which public protests against industrial poisoning and injuries began to emerge and prompt the government to take action against industrial expansion and pollution of communities and environments.<sup>127</sup> Policies that effectively regulated industrial pollution were, however, put into practice only one decade later, in the 1970s.<sup>128</sup>

In fact, it is worth noting that, until the late 1960s, interest in environmental damages was scarce on behalf of both the government and the population, with industries free to limitlessly expand their sites of production.<sup>129</sup> As pollution reached its maximum levels between 1965 and

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<sup>125</sup> WINN KIRBY, "Troubled...", p. 169

<sup>126</sup> TOTMAN, Conrad, *Japan: An Environmental History*, London, Tauris Academic Studies, 2016, p.242

<sup>127</sup> TOTMAN, Conrad, "Japan..." p.253

<sup>128</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>129</sup> KARAN, Pradyumna P., *Japan in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Environment, Economy, and Society*, Lexington, University Pressing of Kentucky, 2005, p. 59

1975, public awareness began to grow and, with it, the population's demand for better environmental management by industries and the government.<sup>130</sup>

Mining was the first major source of pollution to be gradually dismantled during the 1970s.<sup>131</sup>

Manufacturing, on the other hand, constituted the most critical source of environmental pollution, affecting both the Japanese and global workforce and ecosystems.<sup>132</sup> In fact, sustained production rhythms generated an increasing trend of industrial pollution, that, among other consequences, culminating in the production of 120 million tons of plastic waste generated in 1975, with 40% of it being tossed in Japan's waters.<sup>133</sup>

Public protests and debates against local environmental problems were swift to arrive, with the "first anti-pollution strike by a labour union" of Minamata bay, in 1970.<sup>134</sup> The Japanese government, after an initial phase of compliance with industries, also started to issue regulations, with the 1967's pollution control laws<sup>135</sup> and the 1970's survey on industrial waste issued by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), with its results finally able to raise awareness among the statesmen.<sup>136</sup>

One major step in addressing pollution and environmental problems was the creation of the Environmental Agency, tasked with monitoring the environment and regulating pollution.<sup>137 138</sup> In 1975, the Agency conducted a survey that showed that the large majority of Japanese people doubted "large-scale development projects".<sup>139</sup> This scepticism among the population served as a catalyst for the adoption of numerous anti-pollution industrial regulations and environmental lawsuits.<sup>140</sup> These measures were effective in curbing manufacturing's main environmental

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<sup>130</sup> KARAN, Pradyumna P., "Japan in..." p. 360

<sup>131</sup> TOTMAN, Conrad, "Japan..." p. 258

<sup>132</sup> TOTMAN, Conrad, "Japan..." p. 261

<sup>133</sup> TOTMAN, Conrad, "Japan..." p. 263

<sup>134</sup> TOTMAN, Conrad, "Japan..." p. 264

<sup>135</sup> KARAN, Pradyumna P., "Japan in..." p. 360

<sup>136</sup> TOTMAN, Conrad, "Japan..." p. 264

<sup>137</sup> KARAN, Pradyumna P., "Japan in..." p. 360

<sup>138</sup> The Environmental Agency was elevated by the Japanese government to the ministry status in 2001, although its importance kept remaining below that of other ministries. (KARAN, Pradyumna P., "Japan in...", 187)

<sup>139</sup> TOTMAN, Conrad, "Japan...", p. 265

<sup>140</sup> *Ibidem.*

problems by the end of the 1980s,<sup>141 142</sup> mainly thanks to their implementation by municipalities, prefectures and citizens, that, in many cases, negotiated with local industries in order to reduce their impact on communities living nearby.<sup>143</sup>

By the time of the 1990s, the speculative bubble that characterized the aforementioned “boom years” burst, drastically changing Japan’s economic situation.<sup>144</sup> Industrial growth turned into stasis, leaving the country to be overly dependent on imports.<sup>145</sup> Moreover, a sweeping range of social issues, although their seeds were already visible in previous decades, began to consistently affect Japan, namely high rates of unemployment, increased polarization of wealth and drastic reduction of educational levels among the poor.<sup>146</sup> Of course, the Japanese government was still trying to pursue economic and social growth, as part of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan’s (LDP) political strategy.<sup>147</sup>

According to Kyrby, a major factor that pushed Japan on the “sustainable development” tracks was the pressure (*gaiatsu*) on environmental solutions that came from the international political context following the drafting of the aforementioned Bruntland report in 1987.<sup>148</sup> “Sustainability-oriented” international declarations and conferences, such as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, also prompted Japan to take active measures in order to align its “sustainable” goals with the rest of the worlds.

Particular efforts were directed at tackling the waste problem, that had been affecting Japan particularly since its era of massive economic growth. In 1991, the government issued the Waste Disposal and Public Cleansing Law, the first step toward the construction of a 3r society.<sup>149 150</sup> Other “anti-waste” policies were made during the years, namely the Basic Environmental Law in

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>142</sup> It is worth noting that, although there had been measures taken in the first half of the 1970s, auto pollution kept maintaining its relevance as an environmental issue. (TOTMAN, Conrad, “Japan...”, p. 266)

<sup>143</sup> KARAN, Pradyumna P., “Japan in...”, p. 362

<sup>144</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>145</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>146</sup> TOTMAN, Conrad, “Japan...”, p. 249

<sup>147</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>148</sup> WINN KIRBY, “Troubled...”, p. 164

<sup>149</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>150</sup> *Ibidem.*

1993 and the first Basic Environmental Plan in 1994,<sup>151</sup> which has kept getting issued in subsequent years with the last one, the fifth, being drafted in 2018.<sup>152</sup>

Awareness toward the environment drastically increased among the Japanese population and government following the 1997 Kyoto Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in which was drafted the Kyoto Protocol.<sup>153</sup> Japan's adherence to the international pacts and local incidents, such as the "Tokorozawa dioxin scare",<sup>154</sup> prompted the country to take measures in order to curb its greenhouse gas emissions. The efforts toward this goal culminated in the 1999 Basic Guidelines of Japan for the Promotion of Measures against Dioxins document.<sup>155</sup> This action plan that had the goal of decreasing by 90% the national emissions by 2002 and reducing construction-related waste.<sup>156</sup>

Many efforts have been made in the last two decades to tackle some of the most urgent issues that had been standing in the Japanese "sustainable development"'s way, starting with the aforementioned promotion of the Environmental Agency to ministry status in 2000.<sup>157</sup> Since, for this thesis, there are far too many policies adopted by Japan since the early 2000s to be analysed in detail, we will give a brief overview of the main ones.

The goals set by the 1997 Kyoto Protocol remained the staple against which last decade's policies have been drafted. In 2007, for example, the Revised Act on Promotion of Global Warming Countermeasure (地球温暖化対策の推進に関する法律), drafted in 1998, passed.<sup>158</sup> The act aimed at controlling greenhouse gas emissions at national and local levels and at adopting other global

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<sup>151</sup> WINN KIRBY, "Troubled...", p. 177

<sup>152</sup> Ministry of the Environment, Environmental Policy, in Ministry of the Environment: Government of Japan, 2022, <https://www.env.go.jp/en/policy/index.html>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>153</sup> United Nations, Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations framework convention on climate change, in "United Nations: Climate Change", 1998, <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/kpeng.pdf>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>154</sup> WINN KIRBY, "Troubled...", p. 179

<sup>155</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>156</sup> WINN KIRBY, "Troubled...", p. 180

<sup>157</sup> PRADYUMNA, Karan P., "Postwar Environmental Changes in Japan", 15:3, Environmental Challenges in Asia, 2010. (<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/ea/archives/postwar-environmental-changes-in-japan/>)

<sup>158</sup> Japanese Government, Japan: Act on Promotion of Global Warming Countermeasures (Act No. 117 of 1998) (2006 Ed.), in "Asia & Pacific Energy", 2006, <https://policy.asiapacificenergy.org/sites/default/files/%20Act%20on%20Promotion%20of%20Global%20Warming%20Countermeasures.pdf>, February 6, 2023.

warming countermeasures.<sup>159</sup>

To the same year also belongs the first announcement of Cool Earth 50 (美しい星 50), a Japan-developed action plan composed of three main goals: a long-term strategy to reduce by half global emissions by 2050, the creation of an international framework in order to find countermeasures to global warming from 2013 and the establishment of a national campaign that ensured that Japan reaches the Kyoto Protocol goals.<sup>160</sup>

Moreover, the 2006 Third Basic Environment Plan and the 2009 New Growth Strategy show the shift in Japan's perception of "sustainable" development from a strictly environment-concerned one, to a vision that encompasses the three pillars of "sustainability", namely "environmental protection, economic growth and social change".<sup>161</sup>

Also, in 2002 both Japan and Sweden proposed to the United Nations General Assembly the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), an Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) initiative that were adopted by countries around the world from 2005 to 2014.<sup>162</sup> This initiative aimed to expand knowledge and foster values regarding "sustainability" through activities and practices at all levels and any kind of education.<sup>163</sup>

As exemplified by the 2009 UNDESD Japan Report, Japan has been conducting domestic and international "sustainable-oriented" educational practices (e.g., environmental, human rights and welfare education) since before the start of the action plan, not only at the school level, but also in Universities, local communities and enterprises.<sup>164</sup> The implementation of the policies was conducted by the Interministerial Meeting, formed by the Japanese Cabinet in 2005 and consisted of eleven ministries and agencies, including the Cabinet Secretariat, the Ministry of the Environment

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<sup>159</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>160</sup> Prime Minister's Office of Japan, Invitation to Cool Earth 50, in "Prime Minister's Office of Japan", 2007, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/policy/ondanka/2007/0524inv/summary.pdf>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>161</sup> Ministry of the Environment, OECD's Environmental Performance Reviews: Japan, in "Ministry of the Environment: Government of Japan", 2007, [https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/oecd2010/poll\\_oecd\\_2010\\_development.html](https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/oecd2010/poll_oecd_2010_development.html), February 6, 2023

<sup>162</sup> United Nations, A/RES/57/254, in "UN Documents", 2002, <http://www.un-documents.net/a57r254.htm>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>163</sup> *Idem*

<sup>164</sup> Ministry of the Environment, Japan Report Establishing Enriched Learning through Participation and Partnership among Diverse Actors, in "Ministry of the Environment: Government of Japan", 2009, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/environment/desd/report0903.pdf>, February 6, 2023.

(MOE) and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT).<sup>165</sup>

As already mentioned, domestic “sustainable” practices were promoted at all levels of education and society. For instance, in primary and secondary education, environmental education was fostered thanks to the “periods of integrated study”, that allowed children to acquire knowledge regarding a number of Japanese society’s aspects, including the environment.<sup>166</sup> Also, Universities served as a hub for environment-related research.<sup>167</sup> At the same time, local organizations and associations promoted activities that aimed at building “sustainable” communities.<sup>168</sup>

The effectiveness of the implementation of these policies has been evaluated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which drafted a report entitled “Environmental Performance Review: Japan 2010”.<sup>169</sup> It emerged from the document that, as of 2010, Japan had only in part reached the goals that it set out to achieve in previous years.

The country was particularly proactive in a number of fields. For example, it showed great interest in cooperating with other countries to promote and support environmental institutions and activities, particularly in the areas of climate change, waste management and biodiversity.<sup>170</sup>

Furthermore, Japan proved to be a world leader in developing and producing eco-conscious technologies, with eco-innovation at the centre of the country’s environmental policies.<sup>171</sup> Finally, extensive progress has been made in the transport sector, where emissions have decreased by 7%

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<sup>165</sup> *Idem*

<sup>166</sup> *Idem*

<sup>167</sup> *Idem*

<sup>168</sup> *Idem*

<sup>169</sup> Ministry of the Environment, OECD's Environmental Performance Reviews: Japan, in “Ministry of the Environment: Government of Japan”, 2010, [https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/poll\\_oecd.html](https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/poll_oecd.html), February 6, 2023.

<sup>170</sup> Ministry of the Environment, OECD's Environmental Performance Reviews: Japan, in “Ministry of the Environment: Government of Japan”, 2010, [https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/oecd2010/poll\\_oecd\\_2010\\_international.html](https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/oecd2010/poll_oecd_2010_international.html), February 6, 2023.

<sup>171</sup> Ministry of the Environment, OECD's Environmental Performance Reviews: Japan, in “Ministry of the Environment: Government of Japan”, 2010, [https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/oecd2010/poll\\_oecd\\_2010\\_greening.html](https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/oecd2010/poll_oecd_2010_greening.html), February 6, 2023.



since 2000,<sup>172</sup> and in waste recycling and disposal, where targets were broadly reached.<sup>173</sup>

However, the report highlighted the critical points for Japanese “sustainable development” as well. In the first place, the country was not doing enough to curb air pollution in urban areas and the outdated legal framework from the 1970s and 1980s was still used to manage the main environmental domains, resulting in ineffective policy implementation.<sup>174</sup> Moreover, further efforts were required when it came to waste management and climate change countermeasures. In fact, Japan did not respect its commitments to the Kyoto Protocol, as shown by the increase of its greenhouse gas emissions by 9% above the 1990 level.<sup>175</sup>

In comparison to other OECD countries, Japan had the lowest level of utilization of renewable energy sources,<sup>176</sup> and the country still lacked a carbon tax that could have helped the reduction of fossil fuels-generated energy and, hence, curb the level of GHG emissions.<sup>177</sup>

The number of resources imported and waste generation from the manufacturing industry continued to grow, taking a toll on the environment.<sup>178</sup> This, combined with a scarce implementation of the 3Rs policy and exports of hazardous waste, contributed to casting shadows on the Japanese environmental picture.<sup>179</sup>

In the last decade, Japan has made commitments in order to achieve, by 2030 and, ultimately, by 2050, a number of goals that, if reached, will greatly improve its impact on the

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<sup>172</sup> Ministry of the Environment, OECD's Environmental Performance Reviews: Japan, in “Ministry of the Environment: Government of Japan”, 2010, [https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/oecd2010/poll\\_oecd\\_2010\\_climate.html](https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/oecd2010/poll_oecd_2010_climate.html), February 6, 2023.

<sup>173</sup> Ministry of the Environment, OECD's Environmental Performance Reviews: Japan, in “Ministry of the Environment: Government of Japan”, 2010, [https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/oecd2010/poll\\_oecd\\_2010\\_waste.html](https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/oecd2010/poll_oecd_2010_waste.html), February 6, 2023.

<sup>174</sup> Ministry of the Environment, OECD's Environmental Performance Reviews: Japan, in “Ministry of the Environment: Government of Japan”, 2010, [https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/oecd2010/poll\\_oecd\\_2010\\_implementation.html](https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/oecd2010/poll_oecd_2010_implementation.html), February 6, 2023.

<sup>175</sup> Ministry of the Environment, OECD's Environmental Performance Reviews: Japan, in “Ministry of the Environment: Government of Japan”, 2010, [https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/oecd2010/poll\\_oecd\\_2010\\_climate.html](https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/oecd2010/poll_oecd_2010_climate.html), February 6, 2023.

<sup>176</sup> Ministry of the Environment, OECD's Environmental Performance Reviews: Japan, in “Ministry of the Environment: Government of Japan”, 2010, [https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/oecd2010/poll\\_oecd\\_2010\\_waste.html](https://www.env.go.jp/en/coop/oecd2010/poll_oecd_2010_waste.html), February 6, 2023.

<sup>177</sup> *Idem*

<sup>178</sup> *Idem*

<sup>179</sup> *Idem*

environment, its economy and society. In fact, the country adhered to the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, both ratified in 2015.<sup>180</sup> The goals set out by these international treaties and initiatives prompted the Japanese government to implement different types of action plans. Two of them consisted in drafting the fourth and the fifth edition of the Basic Environmental Plan of the Ministry of the Environment in 2012<sup>181</sup> and in 2018.<sup>182</sup> The Plan is revised every 6 years and is defined as an “outline of comprehensive long-term measures on environmental conservation”.<sup>183</sup> For instance, the 2018 edition is composed of four parts that comprise the recognition of social, economic and environmental challenges faced by contemporary Japan, the outline of priority strategies and the implementation of policies aimed at tackling those issues.<sup>184</sup> The major emphasis was put on integrating the three main pillars of “sustainability” to create a “Circulating and Ecological Economy”, a model in which each region’s “sustainable” resources are maximized in order to build a decentralized society characterized by the “local production for local consumption” principle.<sup>185</sup> In order to reach this goal, the country had to implement, among others, measures addressing climate change and establishing a more recycle-oriented society. Japanese Cabinet drafted, in October 2021, the “Long-Term Strategy under the Paris Agreement” which comprises a number of sector-by-sector action plans to reduce Japanese GHG emissions by net zero, namely to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.<sup>186</sup> In order to curb greenhouse gas emissions, the Japanese Ministry of Environment has also issued the “2050 Zero Carbon Cities in Japan” plan, by which 702 local governments are demanded to reduce their emissions to the net zero level by 2050.<sup>187</sup> Finally, the METI implemented, in October 2021, the “Basic Energy Plan”, which aims at reducing GHG emissions by 46% from 2013 to 2030 thanks to

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<sup>180</sup> *Idem*

<sup>181</sup> Ministry of the Environment, Greening of Whole Tax System and Carbon Tax in Japan, in “Ministry of the Environment: Government of Japan”, 2017, <https://www.env.go.jp/content/000042354.pdf>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>182</sup> Ministry of the Environment, Outline of the Fifth Basic Environment Plan, in “Ministry of the Environment: Government of Japan”, 2018, <https://www.env.go.jp/content/000042333.pdf>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>183</sup> *Idem*

<sup>184</sup> *Idem*

<sup>185</sup> *Idem*

<sup>186</sup> The Government of Japan, The Long-Term Strategy under the Paris Agreement, in “United Nations: Climate Change”, 2021, [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Japan\\_LTS2021.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Japan_LTS2021.pdf), February 6, 2023.

<sup>187</sup> Ministry of the Environment, 2050 Zero Carbon Cities in Japan, in “Ministry of the Environment: Government of Japan”, 2022, [https://www.env.go.jp/en/earth/cc/2050\\_zero\\_carbon\\_cities\\_in\\_japan.html](https://www.env.go.jp/en/earth/cc/2050_zero_carbon_cities_in_japan.html), February 6, 2023.

the increase of power generation by non-fossil energy sources.<sup>188</sup>

Despite these policies, however, Japan's efforts are deemed to be still insufficient by some critical voices, one of them being the Climate Action Tracker.<sup>189</sup> In fact, according to the organization, Japan's achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 seems improbable, as the country still relies on coal-fired power generation and nuclear power.<sup>190</sup> Moreover, the aforementioned policies and long-term strategies do not provide essential notions regarding their actual effectiveness and Japan's international finance contributions to climate are regarded as "critically insufficient".<sup>191</sup>

Moreover, the effectiveness of the aforementioned environmental education (EE) programmes and initiatives have also raised the scepticism of some academic voices. In fact, many studies have pointed out that, albeit forms of environmental education have been present in Japan since the 1960s, the way in which they were conducted possessed, particularly in recent years, notable limitations.<sup>192</sup> For example, both Iwamura (2017) and Inoue (2020) point out that EE effects have been limited due to a severe lack of understanding of environmental issues and ecological concepts on behalf of the teachers and the government, a phenomenon particularly visible with the national early childhood curricula.<sup>193</sup>

The set of problems that this knowledge gap produces can be found when assessing common EE activities in elementary schools in Japan, such as "eco-friendly activities" and "just keep in mind strategies".<sup>194</sup> Imamura states, in fact, that the superficiality of these activities is highly detrimental to the acquisition of an extended and comprehensive understanding of ecological concepts behalf of students of all ages, from kindergarten to university.<sup>195</sup><sup>196</sup> In general, other

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<sup>188</sup> Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), Outline of Strategic Energy Plan, in "METI: Agency for Natural Resources and Energy", 2021,

[https://www.enecho.meti.go.jp/en/category/others/basic\\_plan/pdf/6th\\_outline.pdf](https://www.enecho.meti.go.jp/en/category/others/basic_plan/pdf/6th_outline.pdf), February 6, 2023.

<sup>189</sup> This is an independent scientific association that evaluates countries in light of the Paris Accords.

<sup>190</sup> Climate Action Tracker, Japan, in "Climate Action Tracker", 2022,

<https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/japan/>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>192</sup> IMAMURA, Mitsuyuki, "Beyond the Limitations of Environmental Education in Japan", *Educational Studies in Japan: International Yearbook*, No. 11, 2017, pp. 3-14.

<sup>193</sup> IMAMURA, "Beyond..."

<sup>194</sup> *Idem*

<sup>195</sup> *Idem*

<sup>196</sup> IMAMURA, "Beyond..."; INOUE, Michiko, "Fostering an Ecological Worldview in Children: Rethinking Children and Nature in Early Childhood Education from a Japanese Perspective", in Amy Cutter-Mackenzie-

studies have also highlighted the necessity to broaden the scope of education for “sustainable” development (ESD) practices. Their so-called “narrow interpretation” prevents them, in fact, from being linked to other subjects, favouring, instead, a necessity of learning ethical concepts prompted only by the need of passing exams, namely a superficial knowledge.<sup>197</sup><sup>198</sup>

### **1.5.2 Toward “sustainable” development: Japan’s past and contemporary social policies**

Gender inequalities were also visible on many levels of Japanese society, and the proportion of women compared to men fell short in most fields, as analyzed by the Japanese Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office (内閣府男女共同参画局). For example, percentages of women in decision-making fields, such as the national parliament, remained still low, especially compared to the aforementioned 2020 goal.<sup>199</sup> Also, percentages of female regular workers decreased significantly over the years, resulting in 46.5% in 2008 compared to 68.1% in 1985.<sup>200</sup>

Regarding gender equality in Japanese society, the majority of domestic efforts have been concentrated in the last two decades.

The construction of a political framework necessary to implement an effective system of policies began with the creation of the “Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality” within the Cabinet in 1994.<sup>201</sup> Subsequent steps resulted in the creation of a “Basic Act for Gender

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Knowles, Karen Malone, Elisabeth Barratt Hacking (edited by), *Research Handbook on Childhoodnature: Assemblages of Childhood and Nature Research*, London, Routledge, 2020, pp. 996-1019.

<sup>197</sup> GLACKIN, Melissa, GREER, Kate, “Environmental Education-related Policy Enactment in Japanese High Schools”, *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development*, No. 15, 2021, pp. 165-185.

<sup>198</sup> IMAMURA, “Beyond...”

<sup>199</sup> Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, Share of Women in Leadership Positions in Various Fields “Target of increasing the share of women in leadership positions to at least 30% by 2020”, in “Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office”, 2009, [https://www.gender.go.jp/english\\_contents/pr\\_act/pub/pamphlet/women-and-men10/pdf/1-2.pdf](https://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/pr_act/pub/pamphlet/women-and-men10/pdf/1-2.pdf), February 6, 2023.

<sup>200</sup> Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, Breakdown of the Female Population of 15 Years Old or Over (proportion) (1955-2008), in “Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office”, 2008, [https://www.gender.go.jp/english\\_contents/pr\\_act/pub/pamphlet/women-and-men10/pdf/1-3.pdf](https://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/pr_act/pub/pamphlet/women-and-men10/pdf/1-3.pdf), February 6, 2023.

<sup>201</sup> Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, Progress of the Government for Realizing a Gender-Equal Society, in “Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office”, 2010, [https://www.gender.go.jp/english\\_contents/about\\_danjo/toward/progress/index.html](https://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/about_danjo/toward/progress/index.html), February 6, 2023.

Equality” in 1999 and, starting from 2000, five “Basic Plans for Gender Equality”, the last one of them being drafted in 2021.<sup>202</sup> The Act established a basic outline for the implementation of policies that aimed at building gender equality at all levels of society, addressing domestic political organs, such as municipalities and prefectures, and promoting international cooperation.<sup>203</sup> The first three Plans (the last one of them being redacted in 2010), as the ones that followed them, intended to not only recognize the issues that women face in Japanese society, but provide the government with practical pieces of advice on how to include in a more prominent way women inside Japanese economy, expanding their role and their importance.<sup>204</sup> Most importantly, the 2010 Basic Plan set a number of goals for Japan to reach by 2015 and 2020, by which the proportions of women were to increase in a number of different types of workplaces.<sup>205</sup> Among them, the percentages of women working in the various organs of the national parliament were expected to grow and reach 30% in 2020.<sup>206</sup>

These numbers were not only not reached, but also decreased even below the early 2000s levels. Gender Equality Bureau has issued other two Basic Plans for Gender equality, the fourth one in 2015<sup>207</sup> and the fifth one in 2021.<sup>208</sup> The two Plans encompass all the areas and fields of those which preceded them, being all of them based on the aforementioned 1994 Basic Act. The fifth one, in particular, promotes a number of initiatives to reach, by the early 2020s, the “30% proportion of

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<sup>202</sup> Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, Gender Equality Policy in Japan, in “Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office”, 2017, [https://www.gender.go.jp/international/int\\_kaigi/int\\_csw/pdf/beijing25\\_12.pdf](https://www.gender.go.jp/international/int_kaigi/int_csw/pdf/beijing25_12.pdf), February 6, 2023.

<sup>203</sup> Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, Basic Act for Gender Equal Society (Act No. 78 of 1999), in “Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office”, 1999, [https://www.gender.go.jp/english\\_contents/about\\_danjo/toward/progress/index.html#:~:text=The%20Basic%20Act%20for%20Gender,citizens'%20measures%20pertaining%20to%20formation](https://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/about_danjo/toward/progress/index.html#:~:text=The%20Basic%20Act%20for%20Gender,citizens'%20measures%20pertaining%20to%20formation), February 6, 2023.

<sup>204</sup> Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, Summary of Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality (Approved by the Cabinet in December 2010), in “Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office”, 2010, [https://www.gender.go.jp/english\\_contents/about\\_danjo/lbp/basic/index.html](https://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/about_danjo/lbp/basic/index.html), February 6, 2023.

<sup>205</sup> *Idem*

<sup>206</sup> *Idem*

<sup>207</sup> Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, The Fourth Basic Plan for Gender Equality, in “Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office”, 2017, [https://www.gender.go.jp/english\\_contents/pr\\_act/pub/pamphlet/women-and-men16/pdf/2-4.pdf](https://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/pr_act/pub/pamphlet/women-and-men16/pdf/2-4.pdf), February 6, 2023.

<sup>208</sup> The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, The Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality “Toward a Reiwa Society Where All Women and Girls Can Thrive and Achieve Their Full Potential”, in “The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training”, 2021, <https://www.jil.go.jp/english/jli/documents/2021/033-02.pdf> February 6, 2023 <https://www.jil.go.jp/english/jli/documents/2021/033-02.pdf>

women in leadership positions” goal, formulated in the 2003 Plan but never reached.<sup>209</sup>

Japan has been also involved in international debates and initiatives surrounding the promotion of the role of women in societies. For example, in 2016 the World Assembly for Women (WAW!) has been held in Tokyo and the late Prime Minister Shinzō Abe was chosen by the UN Women as one of the 10 leaders to promote gender equality in the international framework.<sup>210</sup>

Despite these policies, the SDGs report states that, although reduced gender inequalities are visible in education and workforce participation, gap between genders’ wages and women’s seats in the national parliament remain two of the most underlooked aspects of the problems that will probably fail to be entirely resolved by 2030.<sup>211</sup> According to the OECD, in 2021 the disparity between men’s and women’s income was of 22.1%,<sup>212</sup> with Japanese women earning 77.8% of what men do in 2022.<sup>213</sup> In the same way, in 2021 only 10% of women were actually members of the parliament,<sup>214</sup> and there are no major policies or reforms that seem to improve this score in the next years.<sup>215</sup> Women’s underdeveloped role in Japan’s politics and economy was also reflected in the World Economic Forum “Global Gender Gap Report 2021”, where Japan ranked 147<sup>th</sup> for “Political empowerment” and 117<sup>th</sup> for “Economic Participation and Opportunity” for women out of 156 countries.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Idem

<sup>210</sup> [https://www.gender.go.jp/international/int\\_kaigi/int\\_acw3/pdf/contry\\_presentation\\_japan\\_09.pdf](https://www.gender.go.jp/international/int_kaigi/int_acw3/pdf/contry_presentation_japan_09.pdf)

<sup>211</sup> idem

<sup>212</sup> Idem

<sup>213</sup> TAKEO, Yuko, Japan Set to Make Companies Disclose Gender Pay Gap This Year, in “Bloomberg”, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-31/japan-set-to-make-companies-disclose-gender-pay-gap-this-year>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>214</sup> The World Bank, Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%), in “The World Bank”, 1998, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>, February 6, 2023.

<sup>215</sup> Sustainable Development Report, Japan, in “Sustainable Development Report”, 2022, <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/japan>, February 7, 2023.

<sup>216</sup> Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, Current Status and Challenges of Gender Equality in Japan, in “Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office”, 2022,

[https://www.gender.go.jp/english\\_contents/pr\\_act/pub/status\\_challenges/pdf/202205.pdf](https://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/pr_act/pub/status_challenges/pdf/202205.pdf)

, February 7, 2023. [https://www.gender.go.jp/english\\_contents/pr\\_act/pub/status\\_challenges/pdf/202205.pdf](https://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/pr_act/pub/status_challenges/pdf/202205.pdf)

## 1.6 Conclusions

We began the chapter with a brief dissertation regarding the development meanings of the terms “sustainability” and “sustainable development”. It emerged that their origins lie in the 1980s Euroamerican political context and, since their implementation with the Bruntland Report in 1987, they have been promoted through a number of worldwide initiatives and conventions. At the same time, we identified three main pillars of “sustainability”, the social, the ecological and the economic one, focusing on the first two since their relevance to the topic of this thesis.

Next, we briefly analyzed the main social and ecological issues that Japan is facing in its contemporaneity, identifying them as, for example, extreme weather phenomena, destruction of ecosystems, severe social inequalities and poverty. This served as an introduction for one of the two main sections of the chapters, namely Japanese population’s attitudes towards ecological and social issues.

We compared an extended number of surveys drafted by the Japanese Governmental Cabinet Office (内閣府) throughout the last two decades, starting with 2007. We broadly divided these surveys into two separate categories, one concerned with ecological issues and the other with social issues. The ecological category included surveys that examined themes such as the interest of Japanese people in global environmental issues, practices of recycling and attitudes towards buying a recycled product. The social opinion polls instead were focused on the role of women in Japanese society; hence they presented an overview of the opinions of Japanese people towards the possibility that gender inequalities were present in Japanese workplaces and in society as a whole.

A declining trend could be seen when evaluating Japanese population’s interest in global environmental issues throughout 2010s decade. At the same time, interest in the garbage and waste problem experienced a major increase in these last years. This has been coupled with ambivalent results concerning ethical consumption and recycling practices. The most recent survey (2012) regarding recycling in Japanese society confirmed, in fact, a decline in the number of persons willing to adopt these kind of practices. However, when it comes to “sustainable” consumption, a positive trend can be seen throughout the years. Most importantly, the majority of respondents in favor of buying recycled products, albeit at some conditions, were fairly young. This came as a surprise, since in every survey the youngest generations were also the least interested both in environmental issues and recycling practices. Gender also played a role, since generally more men than women were involved in these kinds of themes and practices.

Regarding social issues, surveys show that percentages of people aware of the existence of gender inequalities in Japan have been increasing in recent years. Moreover, according to the

findings, women had, in general, the perception that men are given preferential treatment in a variety of social environments. The majority of men, instead, thought that both genders were given equal opportunities. It is particularly important to note that the youngest generations (and the oldest) were the less prone to acknowledge the existence of these inequalities. The youngest and oldest respondent were, in fact, the only two age groups that believed that Japan had already achieved a gender equal society, differing from the highly sceptical rest of the respondents. Finally, more encouraging results came from the analysis of Japanese workplaces, with more men and women acknowledging improvements in recent years.

The second section of the chapter comprised a diachronic analysis of the main policies adopted by the Japanese government and of initiatives of Japanese people to address Japan's ecological and social issues. This was done to explain previous findings on Japanese people's attitudes regarding ethical themes. We split the section into two subgroups, that, similarly to the previous ones, concerned respectively environmental and social issues. We began the first subsection by providing an overview of the main policies that the Japanese government adopted for the first time in the 1970s in response to the outcry of communities afflicted by pollution's consequences. We followed the most important steps done by Japan in order to achieve the completion of its "sustainable development", considering the year 2010 as the first benchmark for the country. Here it emerged an ambivalent picture that saw Japan both as a promoter of eco-conscious technologies and one of the main emitters of greenhouse gases in the world. Then, we analyzed last decade's policies, mainly made in response to the Paris Agreement. Although these policies marked Japan's pledges to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030, critical voices deemed the country's efforts as being too little.

Finally, we reviewed Japan's efforts in order to curb gender inequalities, starting with the drafting of the first "Basic Plan for Gender Equality" on behalf of the Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality located in the Japanese Cabinet. Although the Cabinet has drafted multiple versions of these plans throughout the years, notable work remains in achieving gender equality in Japanese society, according to a survey done by both local and international organizations.



## Chapter 2 Luxury, “Sustainability” and Japan

### 2.1 What is luxury?

Fashion is one of the industries that most have an impact on global economics, environment and society. According to Fashion United, as of 2021, its global value amounted to three trillion dollars, namely 2 per cent of the world’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with a labour force of 3,384.1 million.<sup>217</sup> Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy (LVMH) is currently the biggest fashion company in the world, with a revenue of 64.2 billion euros in 2021.<sup>218</sup> The other two major players are the US athleisure company Nike and the Spanish giant Inditex (which comprises brands such as Zara and Pull&Bear), with revenue of respectively 44.5 and 27.72 billion dollars in 2021.<sup>219</sup><sup>220</sup>

According to McKinsey’s “The state of fashion 2022” report, global fashion sales will reach 103 to 108 per cent of 2019 levels in 2022.<sup>221</sup><sup>222</sup> Although the severe crisis generated by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic has led some companies operating in the fashion sector to struggle to create value, others have thrived and outperformed in 2020 and 2021.<sup>223</sup> Among these, most notably, there are those belonging to three categories: sportswear, luxury and Chinese homegrown brands.<sup>224</sup> Luxury and premium, in particular, are the segments that experienced a sustained growth since at least 2018 and proved to be the strongest in the fashion industry, generating \$281 billions in

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<sup>217</sup> Fashion United, Global Fashion Industry Statistics, in “Fashion United”, 2022, <https://fashionunited.com/global-fashion-industry-statistics>, February 7, 2023.

<sup>218</sup> LVMH, New records for LVMH in 2021, in “LVMH”, <https://www.lvmh.it/notizie-documenti/comunicati-stampa/new-records-for-lvmh-in-2021/>, February 7, 2023.

<sup>219</sup> NIKE, INVESTOR NEWS DETAILS; NIKE, INC. REPORTS FISCAL 2021 FOURTH QUARTER AND FULL YEAR RESULTS, in “NIKE”, 2021, <https://investors.nike.com/investors/news-events-and-reports/investor-news/investor-news-details/2021/NIKE-Inc.-Reports-Fiscal-2021-Fourth-Quarter-and-Full-Year-Results/default.aspx>, February 7, 2023.

<sup>220</sup> INDITEX, Inditex Annual Report 2021, in “INDITEX”, 2021, [https://static.inditex.com/annual\\_report\\_2021/en.html](https://static.inditex.com/annual_report_2021/en.html), February 7, 2023.

<sup>221</sup> McKinsey & Company, “The State of Fashion 2022”, The Business of Fashion, 2022. p. 10.

<sup>222</sup> It is crucial to note that this growth will be distributed unevenly across the world, with the US and China as the leading countries and a noteworthy lag on behalf of Europe.

<sup>223</sup> McKinsey & Company, “The State...”, p.10

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

2019.<sup>225226</sup>

A clear distinction between different types of fashion is vital to better understand the market positioning of the enterprises we refer to in this thesis. Fig. 10 provides a comprehensive overview of the main fashion business models that constitute the so-called “fashion sector pyramid”.<sup>227</sup> Borders and differentiations between these segments have become blurred in relatively recent times, due, in part, to the “democratization of luxury”.<sup>228</sup> This is a phenomenon that originated in the global economic growth that occurred in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when modern production methods allowed the creation of mass-produced goods that threatened the “exclusivity” status of “real luxury goods”.<sup>229</sup> The advent of fast-fashion business models, pioneered by H&M, and the ever-increasing digitalization of global markets concurred with an even more pronounced democratization of luxury goods.<sup>230231</sup> This gave birth to new types of marketing tactics and brands, such as the “masstige” and the “new luxury brands”, the luxury for the masses, that gave lower-income people the opportunity to buy luxury brands’ goods, through, for example, collaborations between famous stylists and fast-fashion brands.<sup>232</sup> The palatability of these brands’ offers resides, of course, in the

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<sup>225</sup> Bain & Company, Personal luxury goods market grew by 4 percent in 2019 to reach €281 billion, in “Bain & Company”, 2019, <https://www.bain.com/about/media-center/press-releases/2019/fall-luxury-report/>, February 7, 2023.

<sup>226</sup> As already mentioned, the pandemic has affected the luxury industry, although less prominently than other sectors. For example, the personal goods’ segment lost 25% of its value due to the 2020 contraction (DONZÉ, Pierre-Yves, POUILLARD, Véronique (edited by), *The Oxford Handbook of Luxury Business*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022, p. 11). However, the consultancy firm Bain & Company estimated that the overall luxury market had been experiencing a positive trend in 2021 and, in particular, the personal goods’ segment, that are expected even to exceed the 2019 levels by 1%. (Bain & Company, *From Surging Recovery to Elegant Advance: The Evolving Future of Luxury*, in “Bain & Company”, 2021, <https://www.bain.com/insights/from-surging-recovery-to-elegant-advance-the-evolving-future-of-luxury/>, February 7, 2023).

<sup>227</sup> SANMIGUEL, Patricia, SADABA, Teresa, “Digital User Behavior in Fashion E-Commerce. A Business Model Comparative Study”, in *HCI in Business, Government and Organizations*, 2020, Springer, Berlin, p. 523.

<sup>228</sup> DONZÉ, Pierre-Yves, “Luxury as an industry”, in DONZÉ, Pierre-Yves, POUILLARD, Véronique (edited by), *The Oxford handbook of luxury business*, 2022, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 59-78.

<sup>229</sup> DONZÉ, “Luxury...”, p. 68.

<sup>230</sup> ANGUELOV, Nikolay, “The Sustainable Fashion Quest: Innovations in Business and Policy”, 2021, Routledge, London, p. 1

<sup>231</sup> BLACK, Sandy, “Digital Luxury: Towards a Sustainable Future?”, in *The Oxford handbook of luxury business*, 2022, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 609

<sup>232</sup> DONZÉ, “Luxury...”, p. 61.

affordable prices of their products, which particularly attract younger (e.g millennials and Generation Z) middle-class consumers.<sup>233</sup> This expansion to broader markets is actually pursued by luxury brands themselves, in an attempt to reconcile their ideals of “exclusiveness” and “rarity” with the need of making more sales, pushed by the fast pace of production on behalf of their competition, represented more often than not by fast-fashion and mass consumption brands.<sup>234</sup>

In light of these contemporary trends then, answers to the question of what distinguishes these luxury brands from the rest are necessary. In order to do this, a better clarification of what stands for words such as “fashion” and “luxury” is needed.<sup>235</sup> Explanations of these concepts are far from fixed as there is no clear explanation of the boundaries between different levels or types of luxury. For this reason, definitions given in this work do not constitute universal truths, since they are opinions and interpretations belonging to different scholars and drafted at different times.

The meaning of the word “fashion” has been a matter of debate for many decades and its meaning has shifted according to the intersections of many factors that constituted the social actors that forged it. One of the most notable interpretations of the concept, from a sociological standpoint, was given by Barthes, that defined fashion as a “system of signifiers”.<sup>236</sup> Also, Bourdieu defined it as a way to express social and gender identity.<sup>237</sup> Marketing and management scholars, in an attempt to differentiate “fashion” from “premium” and “luxury”, stated that fashion “relies on the seduction of customers in a short-term perspective as it is based on constant change”.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> BRUN, Alessandro, KARAOSMAN, Hakan, “Luxury Supply Chain Management”, DONZÉ, Pierre-Yves, POUILLARD, Véronique (edited by), *The Oxford handbook of luxury business*, 2022, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 127-150.

<sup>234</sup> BLACK, Sandy, “Digital Luxury: Towards a Sustainable Future?”, in DONZÉ, Pierre-Yves, POUILLARD, Véronique (edited by), *The Oxford handbook of luxury business*, 2022, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 591-614.

<sup>235</sup> As already mentioned, in this thesis major attention is given to the luxury industry, to which the companies analyzed belong.

<sup>236</sup> BARTHES, Roland, *The Fashion System*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992 (*Système de la Mode*, 1967).

<sup>237</sup> BOURDIEAU, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Oxford, Taylor & Francis Group, 2010 (*La Distinction: critique sociale du jugement*, 1979).

<sup>238</sup> DONZÉ, “Luxury...”, p. 63.

These definitions are mirrored in the graphic shown in Fig. 11.<sup>239</sup> This represents another effort in trying to draw a line between these business models. The graphic is based on the original made by Kapferer and Bastien, in which every concept corresponds to a precise market positioning and different relationships with customers.<sup>240241</sup> Hence, according to this “purist approach”, luxury will be characterized by its ability to make potential customers dream, whereas the purchase of premium products will be based on rational factors, determined by their ability to serve the practical need of the consumers.<sup>242243</sup> The two scholars further developed this clear differentiation by highlighting the role of marketing in sponsoring these products. Luxury marketing follows, in fact, radically different paths from its other counterparts, in that favours the exclusiveness of its products over anything else, in spite of as-usual marketing practices (e.g not considering clients in process of product development and not selling through advertisements).<sup>244</sup> According to this view, luxury is, rather than a triple-layers concept, a continuum between different levels, where even a single luxury brand can differentiate its offer and produce goods that are either accessible, intermediary or even inaccessible.<sup>245246</sup> As we will see later in this chapter, each of the aforementioned types of goods has its own characteristics and specificities regarding its key market positioning and marketing practices.

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<sup>239</sup> WÖLK, Linda, How Luxury Brands Can Use Social Media For Exclusivity Part 1, in “Brand Ba.Se”, 2015, <http://www.brandba.se/blog/2015/11/13/how-luxury-brands-can-use-social-media-for-exclusivity-part-1>, February 7, 2023.

<sup>240</sup> DONZÉ, “Luxury...”, p. 72.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>244</sup> DONZÉ, “Luxury...”, p. 73.

<sup>245</sup> Allèrès, Danielle, “Spécificités et stratégies marketing des différents univers du luxe”, *Revue française du marketing*, 132, 1991, pp. 71–96.

<sup>246</sup> DONZÉ, “Luxury...”, p. 73.

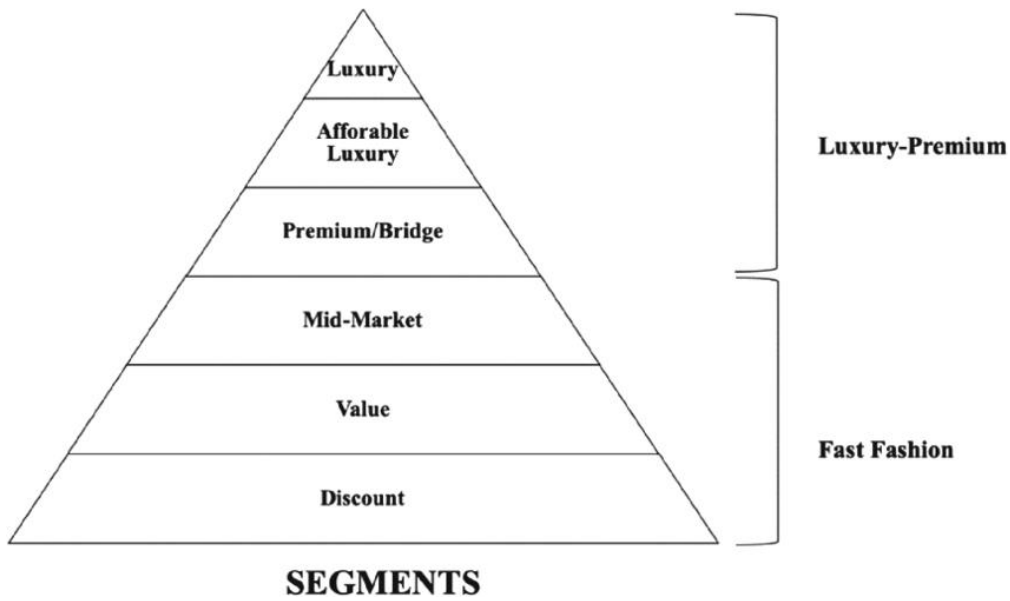


Fig. 10 Differentiation of fashion business models <sup>247</sup>

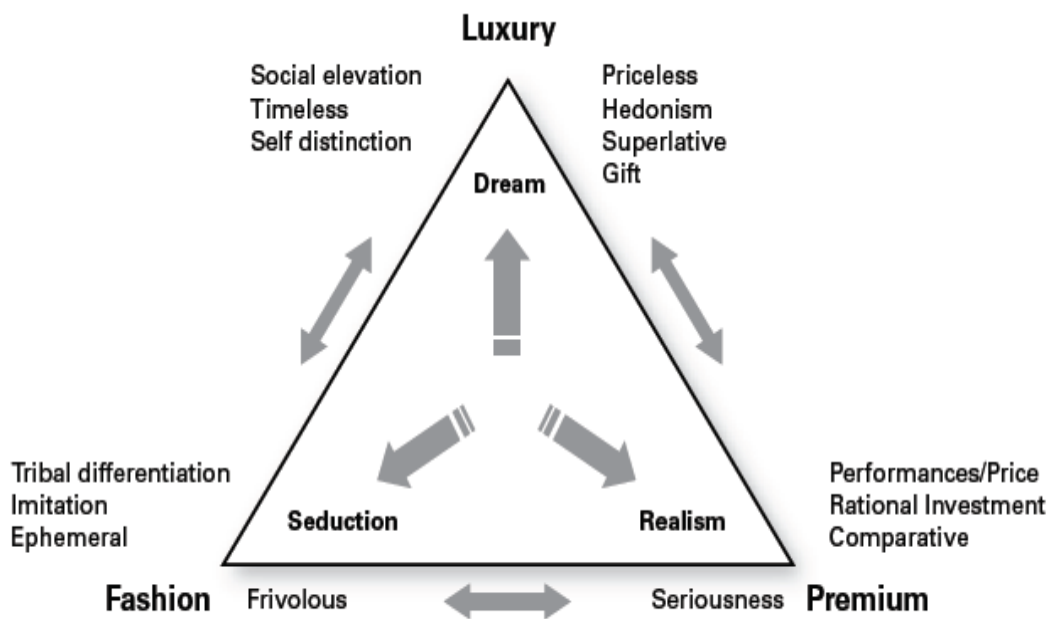


Fig. 11 Differentiation between Fashion, Premium and Luxury meanings. <sup>248</sup>

<sup>247</sup> SANMIGUEL, "DIGITAL...", p. 523.

<sup>248</sup> WÖLK, Linda, "How Luxury...", <http://www.brandba.se/blog/2015/11/13/how-luxury-brands-can-use-social-media-for-exclusivity-part-1>, February 7, 2023.

## 2.2 History of Euro-American Luxury

Luxury has been existing since the beginning of human history, albeit disguised under different manifestations that varied over the centuries.<sup>249</sup> Turunen asserts that luxury objects have always been a part of societies, signalling power and status with which the higher social classes differentiated themselves from the poorer levels of the population.<sup>250</sup> Therefore, luxury has constituted, albeit in different ways throughout history, a symbol for social and economic inequalities underlying social hierarchizations.<sup>251</sup> It is worth noting, however, that the different meanings attached to the word “luxury” always possessed both meliorative and pejorative attributes, that differed according to the cultural values in which they were embedded.

Although the exact historical origins of the concept are almost impossible to trace back, the same word “luxury” has in itself quite ancient roots. The primary source is, in fact, the Latin word *luxuria*, which in turn comes from *luxus*, which counts among its meanings those of “lasciviousness”, “lust”, and “excess”.<sup>252</sup> Around the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D., this word became part of the Old French language as *luxury*, retaining its pejorative attributes, as it was used to refer to “unrestrained sexual pursuits”.<sup>253</sup> The association with other not-so-flattering words, such as “debauchery” and “perversity”, remained unaltered as the word “luxury” joined the English dictionary by the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D and did not leave it until far later, namely in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>254 255 256</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> TURUNEN, Linda Lisa Maria, *Interpretations of Luxury: Exploring the Consumer Perspective*, 2017, Berlin, Springer, p. 13.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>251</sup> TURUNEN, “Concept...”, p.14.

<sup>252</sup> Future Learn, *A History of Luxury*, in “Future Learn”, 2021, <https://www.futurelearn.com/info/courses/luxury-industry-customers-experiences/0/steps/302423#:~:text=The%20origins%20of%20the%20word,conveyed%20the%20meaning%20of%20lust>, February 7, 2023.

<sup>253</sup> Merriam Webster, 'Luxury' Originally Meant 'Lust': From 'lechery' to 'something that is expensive and not necessary', in “Merriam Webster”, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/origin-of-luxury>, February 7, 2023.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>256</sup> It is particularly important to note that the Japanese word for “luxury”, *zeitaku* (贅沢), shares almost the same meanings associated with its “Western” counterpart. Among them are, for example, “extravagance”, “wasteful”, “excessive”.

Through the centuries, social actors have continued to shape the dichotomies underlying the concept of “luxury”. The term has had many interpretations, from that of during Medieval times to that of a means of “creating wealth for all” in the Enlightenment era.<sup>257</sup> Kapferer and Bastien explain how this debate on whether luxury is detrimental to the society as a whole is present even today, at least in Euro-American societies.<sup>258</sup> According to Turunen, in fact, one way of viewing luxury consists in considering it as the “right to produce, but not all right to buy”, highlighting its ambivalent connotation, as both a symbol of social inequality and a trustful employer.<sup>259</sup>

As already mentioned, gradual variations in the meaning of “luxury” in the Euro-American world started to occur from the mid-1600s and continued during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when many scholars theorized that major economic changes led the word to acquire drastically different connotations. Those were, in fact, the years in which took place the Industrial revolution, which introduced new manufacturing processes and prompted notable economic and social changes.<sup>260</sup> Particularly in Northern Europe, the economy grew and international trade developed at fast pace.<sup>261</sup> This, together with the so-called “industrious revolution”, as theorized by De Vries in 1994, led to the development of the middle class and a growth in consumption, “an expression of social distinction based both on imitation and distinction”<sup>262263</sup>.

These new trends in consumption also affected the status that luxury possessed in those societies at that time. Although, as we already noted, until that moment, social classes who were not part of the elite considered “luxury” a symbol of social elitism, by 1780 the concept came to be viewed as “something choice or comfortable beyond life's necessities”.<sup>264</sup> Hence, luxury was not considered a symbol of social differentiation anymore. Instead, this “half luxury” became a model

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<sup>257</sup> TURUNEN, “Concept...”, p.15

<sup>258</sup> KAPFERER, J. N., & BASTIEN, V., *The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands*, 2009, UK: Kogan Page, London.

<sup>259</sup> TURUNEN, “Concept...”, p.15

<sup>260</sup> HORN, Jeff, SMITH, Merritt Roe, ROSEN BAND, Leonard N., *Reconceptualizing the Industrial Revolution*, 2010, MIT Press, London.

<sup>261</sup> DONZÉ, “Luxury...”, p. 65

<sup>262</sup> Jan DE VRIES, 1994. “The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution.” *The Journal of Economic History* 54, no. 2, pp. 249–270.

<sup>263</sup> DONZÉ, “Luxury...”, p. 66

<sup>264</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary, Luxury, in “Online Etymology Dictionary”, 2022, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/luxury>, February 9, 2023.

by which the middle classes adapted their tastes, in an effort to imitate the upper classes.<sup>265266267</sup> The increasing demand for luxury goods led to the foundation of a number of luxury companies, still renowned to this day (e.g Luis Vuitton), that developed in order to meet the growing needs of the new customers.<sup>268</sup>

The expression “democratization of luxury” has been used by scholars to define the outcomes of the aforementioned practice of imitation of upper classes that are possible to see particularly throughout the industrialisation (1850-1945) and the early globalization (1945-1980) periods, and, ultimately, contemporary times.<sup>269270</sup>

First, by the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, major economic growth prompted new luxury enterprises to be founded, with their production levels increasing exponentially by the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>271</sup> The scholarly debate regarding whether new technologies and enlargement of production were detrimental to the image of “exclusive luxury” is still ongoing.<sup>272</sup>

Boundaries on what defines “luxury” became even more blurrier in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this period of time emerges what we will call “luxury industry”. The global expansion of European luxury goods toward non-Euro-American markets (e.g China, Japan and India) prompted enterprises to produce more affordable accessories that could meet the needs of those countries’ middle classes.<sup>273</sup> This differentiation of offers and the transformation of luxury fashion items into branded goods through the licensing system contributed to an ever-increasing prominence of democratization in the luxury industry.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Verley, Patrick. 2006. “Marchés des produits de luxe et division internationale du travail (XIXe–XXe siècles).” *Revue de synthèse* 127, no. 2, pp. 359–378.

<sup>266</sup> DONZÉ, “Luxury...”, p. 66

<sup>267</sup> Based on subsequent findings, we believe that this could have been a “proto” democratization of luxury.

<sup>268</sup> DONZÉ, “Luxury...”, p. 67

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> DONZÉ, “Luxury...”, p. 68.

<sup>273</sup> OKAWA, Tomoko, “Licensing and the Mass Production of Luxury Goods”, in DONZÉ, Pierre-Yves, POUILLARD, Véronique (edited by), *The Oxford handbook of luxury business*, 2022, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 173-193.

<sup>274</sup> WIEDMANN, Klaus-Peter, “Consumer’s Perceptions and Evaluations of Luxury and Luxury Brands”, in DONZÉ, Pierre-Yves, POUILLARD, Véronique (edited by), *The Oxford handbook of luxury business*, 2022, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 287-308.



Finally, the 1980s saw the rise of luxury global business, characterized by the financialization of the luxury industry via the practice of listing in stock exchanges.<sup>275</sup> The adoption of this new business model transformed many “family-run” small and medium luxury enterprises into big conglomerates, with consequences visible at different levels.<sup>276</sup> First, the brand management became centralized, in order to assure that the main headquarters had strong control over brand identity and marketing practices.<sup>277278</sup> In order to maintain control and preserve the integrity of their brand’s image, these conglomerates started cancelling licensing agreements previously drafted to assure their presence in foreign markets.<sup>279</sup> Also, these businesses, pushed by the need of increasing profits, relied heavily on the production of accessories to diversify their offer’s capacity and reach a much broader audience.<sup>280</sup> This, of course, contributed to the rise of a whole new “democratization” of luxury, characterized by a dichotomy in the nature of the products sold by these companies: both “traditional” luxury representing the core of the brand and accessories from less wealthy customers.<sup>281282</sup>

### **2.3 Supply chain in luxury and fashion**

Due to the trends that have characterized the global industry since the 1980s, such as the increasing demand for products, internationalization and the offshoring of production activities, the importance of Supply Chain Management (SCM) has notably increased.<sup>283</sup> The global development of these businesses contributed to a major shift in the perception of industries, no more regarded as stand-alone, monodimensional entities, but as the sum of different parts and processes, with their

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<sup>275</sup> BONIN, Hubert, “Luxury, Banking and Finance”, in DONZÉ, Pierre-Yves, POUILLARD, Véronique (edited by), *The Oxford handbook of luxury business*, 2022, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 79-105.

<sup>276</sup> DONZÉ, “Luxury...”,

<sup>277</sup> DONZÉ, “Luxury...”, p. 72

<sup>278</sup> This centralizing practice also emerged from one of the interview I conducted, where the professional I spoke to mentioned that marketing strategies were first prepared and organized in the headquarters and later transmitted to the other markets, in order to preserve the integrity of the brand’s identity.

<sup>279</sup> DONZÉ, “Luxury...”, p. 72

<sup>280</sup> DONZÉ, “Luxury...”, p. 70

<sup>281</sup> DONZÉ, “Luxury...”, p. 72

<sup>282</sup> To “traditional luxury” we refer to the pre-industrialization luxury.

<sup>283</sup> BRUN, KARAOSMAN, “Luxury Supply Chain Management”, in DONZÉ, Pierre-Yves, POUILLARD, Véronique (edited by), *The Oxford handbook of luxury business*, 2022, Oxford University Press, New York, pp.127-149.

interconnection able to deliver the final product.<sup>284</sup>

It remains to be assessed, however, what one does mean by “supply chain”. These processes have been addressed many times during past decades, with an early definition belonging to the Supply Chain Council in 1997, which stated that “the Supply Chain [...] encompasses every effort involved in producing and delivering a final product, from the supplier’s supplier to the customer’s customer”.<sup>285</sup> Hence, broadly speaking, the supply chain comprises all of the stages that follow a product from its ideation to its distribution to the customer, “from the raw-materials stage through to the end user”.<sup>286</sup> Some of these steps are, for example, sourcing and procurement of raw materials, production scheduling and all the way over to transportation, warehousing and customer service.<sup>287</sup>

A number of actors constitute the backbone of any typical supply chain. The first of them is the suppliers, from whom the buyers acquire raw materials and unfinished sources.<sup>288</sup> Then it is the turn of manufacturers, that supervise and ensure the completion of goods’ production.<sup>289</sup> Distributors come next, and, as the name suggests, are responsible for the distribution of goods in the main docking ports and retail stores.<sup>290</sup> The fourth group is represented by the retailers, which are the stores that buy the products.<sup>291</sup> Lastly, there are the consumers, namely the people that buy the products both through “traditional” and online channels.<sup>292</sup>

Although companies, in general, happen to share this basic SC structure, there are a number of peculiarities specific to each type of industry. Since the companies we address in this work belong to the broad categorization of “luxury fashion small and medium enterprises”, we will give a brief overview of the characteristics unique to both the fashion and the luxury industry supply chains.

The typical fashion SC comprises the following stages, similar to the ones we have previously outlined: design, sample-making, selection, manufacturing, and distribution. Of course,

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<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>285</sup> LUMMUS, Rhonda R., VOKURKA, Robert J., “Defining supply chain management: a historical perspective and practical guidelines”, *Industrial Management & Data Systems*; Wembley, Vol. 99, Fasc. 1, 1999, pp. 11-17.

<sup>286</sup> QUINN, Francis J., “What’s the Buzz?”, *Logistics Management*, 36, no. 2, 1997, pp. 43–47.

<sup>287</sup> BRUN, KARAOSMAN, “Luxury...”, pp. 127-149

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

each stage is characterized by different activities that go from, for example, designing the collection to shipping garments to retailers.<sup>293</sup>

Differences between different types of fashion industries are visible across these stages. For example, smaller fashion companies, due to the offshoring and the quality check before production, can produce samples quickly.<sup>294</sup> In this kind of companies is also common that the designer takes responsibility for the entire design process, leading and supervising its development.<sup>295</sup>

There are a number of different SCs in the luxury industry that mirror the variety of companies that characterize the luxury panorama, each with their own production and distribution methods. In the early 2000s, Politecnico di Milano conducted a study that aimed at classifying and categorizing different luxury companies' subtypes, considering factors such as their selling volumes per year and revenue.<sup>296</sup>

Three groups emerged from the analysis, each, of course, with its unique SC. The first one comprises the aforementioned global conglomerates, large companies with a worldwide famous brand image, selling large volumes of products.<sup>297</sup> Belonging to the second group are the niche brands, that place emphasis on the high quality of their products, created in low or extremely low volumes.<sup>298</sup> This type of company is particularly relevant, since it also comprises the enterprises to which we refer in this thesis.<sup>299</sup> The last group is characterized by large firms that sell "beyond fashion" goods (e.g home-décor, furniture), they follow a "make-to-order" approach and sell extremely low volumes of products.<sup>300</sup>

The aforementioned second group of companies, the niche brands, position themselves more as "traditional luxury"<sup>301</sup> than the large conglomerates. Attention to costs is, in fact, higher and their reputation tends to come from the premium quality of their products rather than the intrinsic

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<sup>293</sup> WILT, Alison, *A Practical Guide to Sustainable Fashion*, 2020, Bloomsbury, London.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>296</sup> CANIATO et al., "Supply Chain Management in the Luxury Industry: A First Classification of Companies and Their Strategies.", *International Journal of Production Economics*, 133, no. 2, 2011, pp. 622–633.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>299</sup> For this reason, I chose to focus on this particularly type of companies rather than give a detailed overview of all the aforementioned groups.

<sup>300</sup> BRUN, KARAOSMAN, "Luxury...", p. 141.

<sup>301</sup> BERGHAUS, Benjamin, "Luxury Branding", in DONZÉ, Pierre-Yves, POUILLARD, Véronique (edited by), *The Oxford handbook of luxury business*, 2022, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 219-248. p.228

value of their brand images.<sup>302</sup> These companies are also able to build a loyal base of customers, leveraging on factors such as the country of origin and craftsmanship.<sup>303304</sup> For this reason, these brands tend to outsource inshore and they emphasize the fact that all the production phases took place in the country in which the brand has been founded, hence justifying the higher price.<sup>305306</sup>

From a distribution standpoint, these companies do not have access to extremely high financial resources, hence resulting in limited marketing power and an absence of mono brands stores.<sup>307</sup> They instead prefer to rely on luxury retailers and official resellers both inside the country of origin and abroad.<sup>308</sup> These niche brands often tend to carefully select their suppliers, which are chosen on the basis of different criteria (e.g quality, cost vs service-level ratio, past experiences with other luxury brands and unique expertise with different materials).<sup>309</sup>

Finally, according to the 2019 CB Insights analysis, different contemporary trends are affecting all stages of luxury supply chains. One of the most prominent concerns attitudes and needs of customers, due to factors such as demographics and cultural changes, is that they are progressively becoming more interested in the quality, price and social and environmental “sustainability” of the products they purchase (especially younger generations).<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> BRUN, KARAOSMAN, “Luxury...”, pp. 127-149.

<sup>303</sup> BRUN, KARAOSMAN, “Luxury...”, p. 140

<sup>304</sup> BRUN, KARAOSMAN, “Luxury...”, pp. 127-149.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>309</sup> CANIATO et al., “Supply...”, pp. 622–633.

<sup>310</sup> CBS Insights, *The Future Of Luxury: 7 Trends Reshaping The Luxury Industry*, in “CBS Insights”, 2018, <https://www.cbinsights.com/research/future-luxury-trends/>, February 7, 2023.

## 2.4 Luxury Fashion Marketing and Brand Management

“Marketing” is a broad term that encompasses a large number of practices, such as advertising, packaging and, most importantly, brand management. Once every three years, the American Marketing Association (AMA) updates its definitions of marketing practices and strategies. The latest available on its website defines marketing as:

“The activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.”<sup>311</sup>

Another notable definition belongs to the “guru in management”<sup>312</sup> Philip Kotler, that in 2018 described marketing as “the process by which companies engage customers, build strong customer relationships, and create customer value in order to capture value from customers in return”.<sup>313</sup> Broadly speaking, marketing is a process that involves the use of a number of disciplines in order to reach its goals. Among them are, for example, economics, anthropology, psychology and sociology.<sup>314</sup> Since an extensive depiction of marketing would go beyond the scope of this thesis, we will focus on its key concepts and practices.

The Scottish economist and philosopher Adam Smith was the first to introduce, in 1776, the so-called “marketing concept, by which firms, by analyzing their customers’ previous needs, should anticipate their future ones, in order to satisfy them better than competitors.”<sup>315</sup> Given these notions, it can be said that marketing is based on three concepts: the needs, wants and demands of the customers.<sup>316</sup> For example, marketing research is crucial to satisfy the so-called “unmet needs”, through the acquisition of data and informations regarding customers’ behaviours and products’

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<sup>311</sup> American Marketing Association (AMA), Definitions of Marketing, in “American Marketing Association (AMA)”, 2020, <https://www.ama.org/the-definition-of-marketing-what-is-marketing/>, February 7, 2023.

<sup>312</sup> Philip Kotler, Awards, in “Philip Kotler”, 2022, <https://www.pkotler.org/awards>, February 7, 2023.

<sup>313</sup> KOTLER, Philip, ARMSTRONG, Gary. Principles of Marketing, Hoboken: Pearson Higher Education, London, 2018, p. 32

<sup>314</sup> ZHOU, Julie, The Science Of Marketing, in “Forbes”, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/women2/2012/06/05/the-science-of-marketing/?sh=2a6f91567a0a>, 2012, February 7, 2023.

<sup>315</sup> NetMBA, The Marketing Concept, in “NetMBA”, <http://www.netmba.com/marketing/concept/>, 2010, February 7, 2023.

<sup>316</sup> Richard R., WEEKS, William J., MARX, “The Marketing Concept: Problems and Promises”, in *Business & Society*, vol.: 9 issue: 1, pp. 39-42.

performances.<sup>317318</sup>

Marketing is made up of two main segments: business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) marketing.<sup>319</sup> The main difference between them is that while the former's main goal is to sell products and services to other organizations and businesses, the latter is interested in selling them to individual customers.<sup>320</sup>

Finally, the marketing mix represents the most important tool used by marketers to sell products.<sup>321</sup> Its traditional version comprises the so-called "4p", namely product, price, place and promotion.<sup>322</sup> The concepts represent the key facets of products, and, once analysed, permit to effective and efficient strategies to market and sell them.

As already mentioned, brand management is comprised of the many practices that marketing encompasses. First, what does one intend with "brand"? Among the innumerable definitions, AMA defines a brand as "a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or service as distinct from those of other sellers."<sup>323</sup> Hence, according to Kapferer and Keller brand management is fulfilment of customer expectations and consistent customer satisfaction.<sup>324</sup> This process has also been defined as "a function of marketing that uses techniques to increase the perceived value of a product line or brand over time".<sup>325</sup>

Brand management is tasked with analyzing how one firm's brand is perceived in the market and managing both its tangible (e.g lettering format and colours, packaging) and intangible

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<sup>317</sup> HAGUE, Nick, HAGUE, Paul, MORGAN, Carole-Ann, *Market Research in Practice: How to Get Greater Insight from Your Market*, Kogan Page Ltd, London, 2013.

<sup>318</sup> AMA, "Definitions...", <https://www.ama.org/the-definition-of-marketing-what-is-marketing/>, February 7, 2023.

<sup>319</sup> HAGUE et al., "Market...".

<sup>320</sup> AMA, "Definitions..." <https://www.ama.org/the-definition-of-marketing-what-is-marketing/>, February 7, 2023.

<sup>321</sup> Christian GRÖNROOS, "From Marketing Mix to Relationship Marketing", *Management Decision*, Vol. 32 Iss 2 1994, pp. 4 – 20.

<sup>322</sup> MCCARTHY, Jerome, *Basic Marketing - A Managerial Approach*, 1960, Richard D. Irwin Inc. Homewood.

<sup>323</sup> AMA, "Definitions..." <https://www.ama.org/the-definition-of-marketing-what-is-marketing/>, February 7, 2023.

<sup>324</sup> SUMAIRA, Shamoon, and TEHSEEN, Saiqa, *Brand Management: What Next? Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business* 2.12, 2011: 435–441.

<sup>325</sup> GRANT, Mitchell, *What Is Brand Management? Requirements, How It Works, and Example*, in "Investopedia", 2022, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/brand-management.asp>, February 7, 2023.

(consumer's perception of the brand) aspects.<sup>326</sup> This is in order to build a strong brand image and achieve the so-called "brand equity", the social value that makes one brand stand out among others in the eyes of the consumer.<sup>327</sup> In short, an effective brand management, by reflecting the core values of the brand to the market, will contribute to building brand credibility and brand loyalty, that in return will greatly improve a firm's revenue.<sup>328329</sup>

Once that general definitions have been defined, we can now turn to marketing and brand management practices specifically associated with luxury business, that, in most cases, differ greatly from the physical ones.

Kapferer and Bastien are the main advocates of this conception of luxury marketing (the "luxury strategy") that, according to them, has to stick to its own rules since luxury goods possess a unique sociological dimension that sets them apart from the rest of the market.<sup>330331</sup> Broadly speaking, luxury marketing must adhere to and reflect the culture that surrounds luxury, and its meanings in contemporary society.

The advent of industrialization first and globalization then created a "classless society"<sup>332</sup>, meaning that the distinction between classes became more and more blurred, although still present. In this society, the sweeping away of an aristocratic social distinction made room for the advent of meritocracy, where all people could succeed through work.<sup>333334</sup> By no means, however, luxury has ceased to exist, because people still feel the need to distance themselves from others, to own a unique spot in surrounding society.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>327</sup> AILAWADI, Kusum L., LEHMANN, Donald R.; NESLIN, Scott A., "Revenue Premium as an Outcome Measure of Brand Equity". *Journal of Marketing*. 67 (4), 2003, 1–17.

<sup>328</sup> Brand Management would be a reflection of already existing values, that come from the identity, the mission of the firm.

<sup>329</sup> GRANT, "What...", <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/brand-management.asp>, February 7, 2023

<sup>330</sup> KAPFERER, Jean-Noël, BASTIEN, Vincent. 2009. *The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands*. London: Kogan Page.

<sup>331</sup> KAPFERER, Jean-Noel, BASTIEN, Vincent, "The Specificity of Luxury Management: Turning Marketing Upside Down", in KAPFERER, Jean-Noel, KERNSTOCK, Joachim, BREXENDORF, Tim Oliver, POWELL, Shaun M. (edited by), 2017, *Advances in Luxury Brand Management*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 65-84.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>334</sup> For the sake of brevity, I do not delve into the scholarly debates surrounding these assumptions.

<sup>335</sup> FRANK, Robert H., *Luxury fever: Weighing the Cost of Excess*, 2000, New York, Princeton University Press.

Hence, luxury comes to represent an emblem of contemporary social distinction,<sup>336</sup> craved by people willing to differentiate themselves from the majority and to belong to the highest societal levels.<sup>337</sup> As a consequence, luxury must embody the aforementioned sense of “exclusiveness”,<sup>338</sup> it has to be unreachable, not common for the masses: it has to be superior and not easily accessible to the customers in order to maintain its aura of rarity.<sup>339</sup>

Luxury marketing should reflect these qualities, adopting strategies that elevate these brands to higher market levels. Luxury brands should avoid any comparison with other brands, focusing on making their identity unique and inimitable, with effective storytelling, the most important tool to create brand authenticity.<sup>340</sup>

Luxury brands should also relate in a distinct way with their customers by, among others, resisting their demands if not part of the brand’s identity and acting as guides and not as friends to them.<sup>341 342</sup>

Also, when it comes to advertising, luxury defies “traditional” rules: it prefers to fuel the “dream” that sustains the industry and to refer to audiences that go beyond its target groups, in order to spread brand awareness, and be more recognizable by the majority of people.<sup>343</sup>

Finally, according to Kapferer and Bastien (2009), luxury brands should not base their appeal on reasonable prices, instead going for the superlative ones, producing, at the same time, a more affordable line of products.<sup>344</sup>

Kapferer also offered an overview of the main behaviours that are needed when managing luxury brands. Of course, many of the aforementioned traits (e.g exclusivity) play an important part in creating strategies that can contribute to building a strong brand image. These management practices involve all levels of distribution, pricing and marketing and are, in fact, focused on

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<sup>336</sup> BOURDIEAU, “Distinction...”

<sup>337</sup> KAPFERER, BASTIEN, “The...”,

<sup>338</sup> WIEDMANN et al., “Luxury Consumption in the Trade-Off Between Genuine and Counterfeit Goods: What Are the Consumers’ Underlying Motives and Value-Based Drivers?”, in *Advances in Luxury Brand Management*, 2017, pp. 85-122.

<sup>339</sup> KAPFERER, BASTIEN, “The...”,

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>341</sup> CHADHA, R., HUSBAND, P., *The cult of the luxury brand*, 2006, Boston, Nicholas Brealey International.

<sup>342</sup> CAILLEUX, H., MIGNOT, C., KAPFERER, J. N., *Is CRM for luxury?* *Journal of Brand Management Special issue on luxury*, 16(5–6), pp. 406–412

<sup>343</sup> KAPFERER, BASTIEN, “The...”,

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*



making these brands “rare”, “desired by all but consumed only by the happy few.”<sup>345</sup>

According to Kapferer, a luxury brand needs to control its penetration in the market to preserve its aura of rarity and, at the same time, increase its brand awareness and separate those who are willing to buy a product and those only interested in it.<sup>346</sup> In short, a luxury good needs to be democratised, since every person can dream about buying it, but not commoditised, since every person cannot have the real ability to buy it.<sup>347</sup>

## 2.5 Japanese Luxury Fashion Market

Japanese luxury market has been for decades, and continues to be, one of the largest ones in the world. As of 2020, in fact, according to a 2021 Bain&Company survey, the value of the Japanese personal luxury goods market amounted to 18 billion euros, the third largest behind the United States, with 55 billion, and China, 44 billion, which, since 2000 has began to take over the Japanese luxury market.<sup>348</sup>

However, a declining trend can be noted, as in 2021 the luxury fashion segment of the total luxury market amounted to 10 billion dollars (9.8 billion euros circa), certainly due to the coronavirus-related crisis that has been affecting, among others, global markets.<sup>349</sup>

The pandemic has certainly exposed one of Achille’s heels in of Japanese luxury market, namely the absence of a well-structured presence of e-commerce channels, given the strong preference of Japanese consumers for department stores.<sup>350</sup> In fact, although total online luxury sales have grown from 7% in 2017 to 20% in 2021, these figures are still not enough to significantly impact the

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<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>348</sup> In recent years, China has known an impressive growth in its luxury goods market, probably due to President Xi Jinping’s national campaign “common prosperity” (TOH, Michelle, President Xi Jinping’s pledge to redistribute wealth brings back bad memories for luxury brands in China, in “CNN Business”, 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/10/29/business/china-xi-jinping-luxury-market-common-prosperity-intl-hnk/index.html>, February 7, 2023.)

<sup>349</sup> SHAW, Jack, How is the Japanese Luxury Fashion Market Being Impacted by Digital Marketing Trends, in “HumbleBunny”, 2022, <https://www.humblebunny.com/how-japanese-luxury-fashion-market-being-impacted-digital-marketing-trends/>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>350</sup> COUMAU, Jean-Baptiste, DURAND-SERVOIGNT, Benjamin, KIM, Aimee, YAMAKAWA, Naomi, Changing the channels landscape to satisfy Japanese luxury consumers’ appetite for novelty, in “McKinsey & Company”, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/changing-channels-landscape-to-satisfy-japanese-luxury-consumers-appetite-for-novelty>, February 8, 2023.

market.<sup>351352353</sup> Recent trends are, however, slowly coming to be part of the market, driven by new, young audiences (e.g Millennials), who are showing drastically different consumer behaviours than their past counterparts. An overview of the history and development of the Japanese luxury market and, more in general, of the so-called Japanese “consumer society” and economy, is needed in order to better understand these contemporary trends in Japan’s luxury consumption.

Japan’s luxury market is characterized by four distinct phases, the first of them taking place in the 1970s and the last one is still ongoing today.<sup>354</sup> Donzè exemplifies these phases by showing the variations in number of French export of leather goods, that stand for the European luxury industry exports, through the years.<sup>355</sup> These exports grew from 2% in the 1960s to 20.6% in 1979, making the 1970s Japanese luxury market as the seventh largest in the world.<sup>356</sup> The market became the second largest between the years 1980 and 1987 and became the largest one in the 1990s and the early 2000s, with an average share of 30.5% in 1997-2002.<sup>357</sup> Starting from 2005, Japanese luxury market has been subjected to constant fluctuations, being the seventh market in 2017, with export of French leather goods of 4.1%, and, as we already mentioned, the third market in 2020.<sup>358359</sup>

It must be noted, however, that each of these phases is located in precise stages of what Miura calls “consumer society”, in which Japan’s economical developments and changes through the years come to define different consumer behaviours that, in turn, impact levels of luxury expenditures.<sup>360</sup> The first three phases previously identified by Donzè took place during the “third stage consumer society” (1975-2004), the “low-growth era”, characterised, among others, by the rise and fall of the

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<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>352</sup> SHAW, Jack, “How...”

<sup>353</sup> It must be noted, however, that the 2021 figure is expected to be almost one third by 2025. (SHAW, Jack, “How...”)

<sup>354</sup> DONZÉ, Pierre-Yves, “Luxury Business in Japan”, in DONZÉ, Pierre-Yves, POUILLARD, Véronique (edited by), *The Oxford handbook of luxury business*, 2022, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 445-460.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>359</sup> CARTER, Dominic, “Japan...”

<sup>360</sup> MIURA, Atsushi, *The Rise of Sharing: Fourth-Stage Consumer Society in Japan*, Tokyo, LTCB Library Trust/ International House of Japan, 2014 (MIURA, Atsushi, *Daiyon no shōhi: tsunagari o umidasu shakai (第四の消費: つながりを生み出す社会へ*, 2014)).

1980s bubble economy.<sup>361</sup> The shift from the “traditional” nuclear family structure to the single individual resulted in an increasing plethora of “parasite singles”( パラサイトシングル), as they were defined by the media.<sup>362</sup> These were 20 and 30 years old young middle-class adults, still living with their parents, that shared a high disposable income and a powerful inclination to individual consumption and materialism.<sup>363364</sup> These people were part of the so-called *shinjinrui* (新人類) generation, born in the big cities between 1963 to 1969, mostly apolitical and highly materialistic.<sup>365</sup> These were inherited by consumer behaviours originated in the second half of the “second stage consumer society”, in which the mentality by which “buying things makes one happy” was preponderant.<sup>366</sup> The strong inclination toward individualistic and hedonistic material consumption was the main reason behind the sudden growth, in 1970s and 1980s, of luxury expenditures, especially bags from brands such as Chanel and Louis Vuitton.<sup>367</sup> This type of consumers, eschewed mass-produced goods, in favour of a highly customized product experience.<sup>368</sup> Marketers succeeded, through the 1990s, in sponsoring a diverse array of products, with luxury being the most prominent one, to the *shinjinrui* generation, by creating the “from quantity to quality” slogan.<sup>369</sup> This philosophy, was well received by consumers, always willing to express their “unique” identity through likewise “unique” goods.<sup>370</sup>

The early 2000s saw the birth of the fourth stage of consumer society, with characteristics that set it apart from the previous one. One of the main differences was the emergence of non-materialistic consumerism, focused on the importance of abstract connections that individuals shared as part of a community.<sup>371</sup>

This emphasis on “spiritual” bonds and relationships was driven by catastrophic events, such as the 2008 financial crisis and the 3.11 disaster, and prompted a new way of consumption, the so-called

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<sup>361</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>362</sup> CHADAH, HUSBAND, “The...”

<sup>363</sup> MIURA, “The Rise...”

<sup>364</sup> DONZÉ, “Japan...”

<sup>365</sup> MIURA, “The Rise...”

<sup>366</sup> MIURA, “The Rise...”

<sup>367</sup> DONZÉ, “Japan...”

<sup>368</sup> MIURA, “The Rise...”

<sup>369</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>370</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>371</sup> *Idem.*

*kyōhi* (共費), “shared consumption”.<sup>372</sup> According to Miura, purchases are not made anymore to only satisfy individual needs, but to share emotions and experiences with others.<sup>373</sup> As of now, the focus is on the exchanging and sharing of informations that leave social actors with a more permanent sense of pleasure than that of a purchase: informations are slowly replacing the need to buy material goods.<sup>374</sup> These contemporary trends are prerogative of a new type of consumer, namely the Millennials, born at the end of the 1990s and radically different from the previous *shinjinrui*. These young adults avoid buying any goods at all and they prefer to save money, showing a frugality that is reminiscent of the post second world war Japan.<sup>375</sup>

Most importantly, they tend to go beyond the simple purchase of a good, buying technology products that allow them to share informations and search for an experience that can be lived together with others.<sup>376</sup> The 2017 McKinsey report shows important findings that confirm these trends in the luxury market. In fact, department stores, anchored to an outdated business model, are in an ever-increasing struggle, with a consistent decline in sales between 2010 and 2016 and an 8% drop in department store frequentation in 2017, that interested particularly the luxury fashion segment.<sup>377</sup> Select shops and fashion buildings are, instead, more and more popular among Millennials, for a variety of reasons.

First, they offer a wide array of affordable and new fashion collections.<sup>378</sup> Second, they adopted an experiential way to do shopping in their building, where consumers can go and find cafés, restaurants or hair saloons.<sup>379</sup>

The 2017 report drafted a list of “Six Codes of Japanese Fashion and Luxury”, the first of them highlighting the great emphasis that Japanese consumers tend to put on the location, that has to be

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<sup>372</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>373</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>374</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>375</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>376</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>377</sup> COUMAU, Jean-Baptiste, DURAND-SERVOIGNT, Benjamin, KIM, Aimee, YAMAKAWA, Naomi, Changing the channels landscape to satisfy Japanese luxury consumers’ appetite for novelty, in “McKinsey & Company”, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/changing-channels-landscape-to-satisfy-japanese-luxury-consumers-appetite-for-novelty>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>378</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>379</sup> *Idem.*

unique and stylish, in which ultimately will happen the purchase.<sup>380</sup>

Once examined these consumer behaviours that impacted luxury consumption in Japan, it remains to be assessed how European luxury firms entered the Japanese market. According to Donzé, Japanese luxury markets were difficult for these firms to approach, since, until the 1990s, there was a complex distribution system and, until the 1980s, there was not a complete liberalisation of investments in Japan.<sup>381</sup> Starting from the 1960s, there were usually two ways for luxury firms to enter Japan: “license agreements for production in Japan and import contracts with a general trading company”.<sup>382</sup> Department stores functioned as both partners for production and retailers, and, until the 1990s, the only place where Japanese customers could buy luxury goods.<sup>383</sup> These stores were also responsible for the sharp increase in luxury goods sales that lasted for forty years until the early 2000s crisis.<sup>384</sup>

The opening of mono-brand stores was a direct consequence of the strict control that these firms began to exert on their brands after the liberalization of the Japanese economy during the 1990s.<sup>385</sup> It can be said that the democratization of luxury began in Japan in the 1970s and 1980s decades, since these companies made Japan their testing ground for their expansion in global markets and democratization of consumption.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> *Idem*

<sup>381</sup> DONZÉ, “Japan...”

<sup>382</sup> DONZÉ, “Japan...” p. 448

<sup>383</sup> DONZÉ, “Japan...”

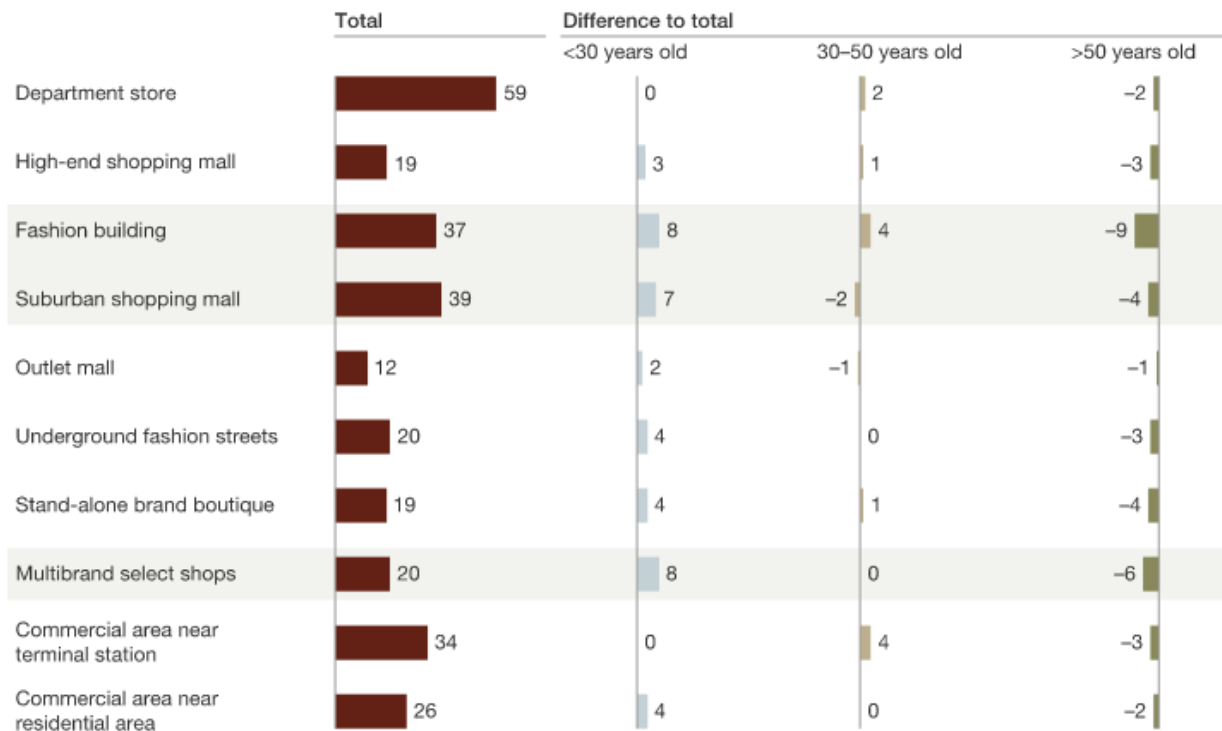
<sup>384</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>385</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>386</sup> *Idem.*

## Preferred channels by age groups

Exposure by channel, %



McKinsey&Company | Source: McKinsey Japan luxury consumer survey 2017 (n = 554)

Fig. 12 “Preferred Channels by Age Group”<sup>387</sup>

<sup>387</sup> COUMAU, “Changing...”, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/changing-channels-landscape-to-satisfy-japanese-luxury-consumers-appetite-for-novelty>, February 8, 2023.

## 2.6 “Sustainability” in Luxury Fashion Business

Environmental and social “sustainability” represent recurring themes in all segments of the fashion industry, including the luxury one. This has been, in recent years, increasingly subjected to harsh criticisms regarding the lack of transparency in all levels of its supply chains and practices of “green-washing”<sup>388</sup> in communicating its “sustainable efforts”.<sup>389390</sup> In response to these critiques, luxury firms have begun establishing countermeasures to “sustainability-related” issues, albeit with ambivalent results that vary accordingly to different firms.

In assessing the toll that the fashion industry as a whole exerts on the environment and society, some critical points emerge. As of 2022, fashion is, in fact, responsible for approximately 10 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions, and, according to the 2011 Carbon Trust report, a simple t-shirt’s life cycle accounted for 50% of use phase emissions.<sup>391</sup> Moreover, the global textile and apparel industry is held responsible for practices of deforestation, animal endangering, pollution and waste of water and waste that occur at every stage of the product’s lifecycle, “from cradle to cradle”.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Green-washing is “a term used to describe the false or overexaggerated environmental claims of a company or product. It is often associated with advertising, promotion or marketing.” (GWILT, Alison, *A Practical Guide to Sustainable Fashion*, London, Bloomsbury, 2020, p. 15.

<sup>389</sup> LO, Chris K. Y., HA-BROOKSHIRE, Jung, “Opening: Sustainability and Luxury Brands”, in LO, Chris K. Y., HA-BROOKSHIRE, Jung (edited by), *Sustainability in Luxury Fashion Business*, New York, Springer, 2018, pp. 1-9.

<sup>390</sup> DEKHILI, Sihem, ACHABOU, Mohamed Akli, “Is It Beneficial for Luxury Brands to Embrace CSR Practices?”, in KIM, Kacy K. (edited by), *Celebrating America’s Pastimes: Baseball, Hot Dogs, Apple Pie and Marketing?* New York, Springer, 2016, pp. 3-18.

<sup>391</sup> DOTTLER, Rachel, GU, Jackie, *The Global Glut of Clothing is an Environmental Crisis*, in “Bloomberg”, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2022-fashion-industry-environmental-impact/>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>392</sup> GWILT, “A Practical...”, p. 158

Global material flows for clothing in 2015

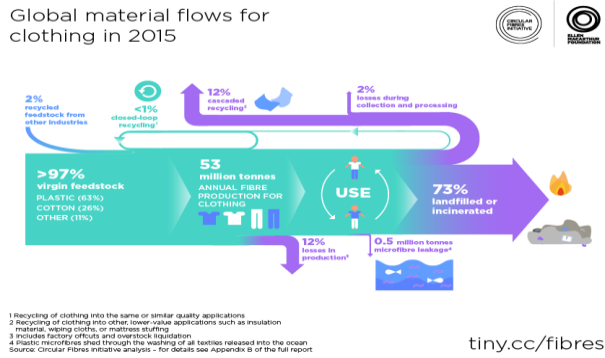


Fig. 13 Global material flows clothing in 2015<sup>393</sup>

Luxury, and the fashion industry in general, contributes to a number of social issues as well, such as inequalities, discrimination practices and risks in the workplace. Disasters such as the Rana Plaza one in Bangladesh and trends such as the drastic reduction of Italian factory workers wages only confirm that the fashion industry has a long way to go in regard of the working conditions and the safety of its employees.<sup>394</sup>

As already mentioned, recently luxury and “sustainability” have become growingly intertwined, although these firms’ efforts are still welcomed with a conceivable amount of scepticism by some academics.<sup>395</sup> This ignites a debate that is still ongoing among scholars, on whether “sustainability” can be compatible with luxury and fashion in general.<sup>396397</sup> Advocates of their incompatibility claim, for example, that, in the eye of the consumer, luxury evokes values, such as personal pleasure, that conflict with the “sustainability” ones (ethics and moderation).<sup>398</sup> In general, it is

<sup>393</sup> World Economic Forum, Fashion has a huge waste problem. Here's how it can change, in “World Economic Forum”, 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/02/how-the-circular-economy-is-redesigning-fashion-future/>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>394</sup> International Labour Organization, The Rana Plaza Accident and its aftermath, in “International Labour Organization”, 2018, [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/geip/WCMS\\_614394/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/geip/WCMS_614394/lang--en/index.htm), February 8, 2023.

<sup>395</sup> JOY, Annamma, SHERRY, John F., VENKATESH, Alladi, WANG, Jeff, CHAN, Ricky, “Fast Fashion, Sustainability, and the Ethical Appeal of Luxury Brands”, *Fashion Theory*, Volume 16, Issue 3, pp. 273-296.

<sup>396</sup> LUNDBLAD, Louise, DAVIES, Iain, A., The values and motivations behind sustainable fashion consumption, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 15:2, 2016, pp. 149-162.

<sup>397</sup> DAVIES, Iain, STREIT, Carla-Marie, “Sustainability in Fashion and Textiles: Values, Design, Production and Consumption”, in GARDETTI, Miguel Angel, TORRES, Ana Laura, *Sustainability in Fashion and Textiles: Values, Design, Production and Consumption*, London, Routledge, 2017, pp. 208-222

<sup>398</sup> NADERI, Iman, STRUTTON, David H., “I Support Sustainability But Only When Doing So Reflects Fabulously on Me”, 2013, *Journal of Macromarketing*, 35:1, pp. 70-83



asserted that the “overconsumption” and “ostentation” often associated with the luxury and fashion industry do not go well together with the responsible goals of “sustainability”.<sup>399</sup>

There is, however, a recently growing school of thought that considers the potential fruitfulness of a collaboration between the two worlds. Bendell and Kleanthous’s 2007 World Wildlife Fund (WWF) report was the first study to positively associate “sustainability” and luxury.<sup>400</sup> Some characteristics intrinsic to the very essence of luxury are being considered promoters of “sustainable” consumption. In fact, traits such as timelessness, durability and quality can well synergize with “sustainable” consumption.<sup>401</sup> Challenges remain, however, when it comes to addressing to issues such as animal endangering and waste of natural resources that affect luxury and fashion industries.<sup>402</sup> <sup>403</sup> Much recent literature has explored various ways in which the luxury industry can be more “sustainable”, from changing consumer perceptions through more effective brand communication to improving each stage of the supply chain.<sup>404</sup>

According to Karaosman et al., “social and environmental management needs to be enhanced in globally dispersed Fashion Supply Chains.”<sup>405</sup> The second tier SC is where the majority of environmental and social issues take place, where suppliers, due to their limited size and the ever stricter FSC’s demands, fail to employ “sustainable” solutions.<sup>406</sup> Accordingly, a much closer connection between SCs and all of their partners is needed in order to integrate “sustainable”

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<sup>399</sup> HARPER, Gavin D. J., PEATTIE, Ken, “Tracking the influence of the first special journal issue on 'Green Marketing': A citation network analysis”, *Social Business* 1(3), 2011, pp. 239-261, DOI:10.1362/204440811X13210328296540

<sup>400</sup> ATHWAL, Navdeep, WELLS, Victoria K., CARRIGAN, Marylyn, HENNINGER, Claudia E., “Sustainable Luxury Marketing: A Synthesis and Research Agenda”, *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 21, 405–426

<sup>401</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>402</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>403</sup> It is particularly important to note that interest in environmentally conscious fashion consumption dates back to the 1960s and has evolved through time, growing in scope as international steps toward sustainable development were made. (GWILT, “A Practical...”)

<sup>404</sup> For this thesis, we will focus on sustainable luxury supply chains and marketing (with a particular emphasis on brand management).

<sup>405</sup> KARAOSMAN, Hakan, BRUN, Alessandro, MORALES-ALONSO, Gustavo, “Vogue or Vague: Sustainability Performance Appraisal in Luxury Fashion Supply Chains”, in GARDETTI, Miguel, Angel, (edited by), *Sustainable Management of Luxury*, New York, Springer, 2017, p. 310

<sup>406</sup> TACHIZAWA, Elcio Mendonça, WONG, Chee, Yew, “Towards a theory of multi-tier sustainable supply chains: A systematic literature review”, 2014, *Supply Chain Management* 19(5/6), pp. 643-663

initiatives and management.<sup>407</sup> The “sustainable” supply chain management here described is vital to the improvement of a firm’s “sustainable” performance, together with the so-called “stakeholder pressure”.<sup>408</sup> Following the “stakeholder theory”, scholars have recently put emphasis on the importance of a firm’s responsibilities to stakeholders, which could “influence companies to improve “sustainability” practices and the integration of “sustainability” throughout the entire value chain”.<sup>409</sup> “Sustainability” initiatives and behaviours must be integrated at each level of SC, adopting a holistic approach that allows their effective monitoring and coordination.<sup>410</sup> To this end, the “360 Degrees Performance Appraisal” model has been created, with the goal of facilitating the firms’ employment of “sustainable” initiatives, so that they can respect their responsibilities in light of the UN Global Compact pact.<sup>411</sup> This model addresses all stages of the FSC. First, an assessment of both the positive and the negative impact is needed, as the quantification of waste production and carbon footprint can be vital in detecting and improving harmful activities.<sup>412</sup> This monitoring is crucial in transforming these impactful practices into value-generating opportunities (e.g recycling waste), that can be disclosed to the public, further enhancing the transparency and credibility of the brand.<sup>413</sup> The model constitutes valid proof of the effectiveness of implementing “sustainability-oriented” practices, that can generate value at every stage of the FSC.<sup>414</sup> Other room for improvement could be constituted by the so-called “brand communication”, an aspect part of the broader discipline of the already mentioned brand management.<sup>415</sup> Cavender identifies “sustainable luxury brand communication” (SLBC) as:

the strategic dissemination of SD information by luxury brands across channels [...] to **experientially** engage with and inform luxury consumers about a company’s internal SD and CSR initiatives, external collaborations and partnerships, and the environmental impact of the apparel industry.<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> KARAOSMAN, “Vogue...”

<sup>408</sup> ATHWAL, “Sustainable...”, p. 417

<sup>409</sup> KARAOSMAN, “Vogue...”, p. 311

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>412</sup> Springer 2017

<sup>413</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>414</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>415</sup> WIJAYA, Bambang Sukma, Dimensions of Brand Image: A Conceptual Review from the Perspective of Brand Communication, *European Journal of Business and Management*, 5:31, 2013.

<sup>416</sup> CAVENDER, RayeCarol, “The Marketing of Sustainability and CSR Initiatives by Luxury

This particular direction of brand management is part of a wider set of marketing strategies oriented towards storytelling practices that narrate the brand's dream value and its involvement in "sustainable" initiatives.<sup>417</sup> The keyword of SLBC, as highlighted in the quote, is experience. According to Hennings et al., every management decision needs to be taken while having in mind the values and meanings that consumers give to a luxury product.<sup>418</sup> This in order to create effective marketing strategies that integrate "sustainability" in each value that is comprised within luxury products' attributes.<sup>419</sup> Among these, the individual and social ones have been shown to have notable compatibility with "sustainability" values.<sup>420</sup> In particular, the experiential value, by its nature, can be considered a powerful ally in building marketing strategies that deepen and increase consumer awareness regarding ethical production and consumption.<sup>421</sup> Experiential marketing has been introduced by Pine and Gilmore in 1998 and, according to Atwal and Williams, is reinforcing the offer by broadening the very nature of a product into a series of interactive and physical experiences.<sup>422</sup> Consumers do not only buy a product, but are offered a set of tangible experiences with which they can define and holistically share the value of a product.<sup>423</sup> Luxury products are inherently experiential, and luxury firms can employ this type of marketing to effectively transmit CSR and eco-conscious values to consumers, fostering a more "sustainable" kind of consumption. Following Schmitt's categorization, ethical behaviours can be promoted in

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Brands: Cultural Indicators, Call to Action, and Framework", in LO, Chris K. Y., HA-BROOKSHIRE, Jung (edited by), *Sustainability in Luxury Fashion Business*, New York, Springer, 2018, p. 31. Emphasis mine

<sup>417</sup> KAPFERER, Jean-Noel, MICHAUT, Anne, "Luxury and sustainability: a common future? The match depends on how consumers define luxury", 2015, *Luxury Research J* 1(1), p. 3,

<sup>418</sup> HENNINGS, N., WIEDMANN, K.P., KLARMANN, C. and BEHRENS, S, "Sustainability as part of the luxury essence: delivering value through social and environmental excellence", 2013, *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, 52, pp.25–35.

<sup>419</sup> CAVENDER, "The Marketing..."

<sup>420</sup> *Idem*; The social value dimension "refers to the social collective and the symbolic value that a luxury brand signals to others" (CAVENDER, "The Marketing...", p. 34), and also comprises a form of experiential value derived from consumption's connection to broader social groups and trends, such as eco-conscious luxury consumers. (CAVENDER, "The Marketing...", p. 34)

<sup>421</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>422</sup> ATWAL, Glyn, WILLIAMS, Alistair, "Luxury Brand Marketing – The Experience Is Everything!", in KAPFERER, Jean-Noel, KERNSTOCK, Joachim, BREXENDORF, Tim Oliver, POWELL, Shaun M. (edited by), 2017, *Advances in Luxury Brand Management*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, p. 43-57.

<sup>423</sup> TSAI, Shuh-Pei, "Impact of Personal Orientation on Luxury-Brand Purchase Value: An International Investigation", *International Journal of Market Research*, 47:4, 2005, pp. 427-452.

each type of experiential marketing.<sup>424</sup> For example, sensory experiences, appealing to consumers' senses to add value, can employ "sustainable" values to make the environment part of the consumers' dream.<sup>425</sup> Moreover, through creative cognitive experiences, consumers can be informed about firms' environmental impact and innovative solutions, in order to spread awareness that can help customers develop ethical consumption habits.<sup>426</sup>

Finally, according to Cavender, effective, "sustainable" brand communication should follow specific guidelines. First of all, it should reflect the most recent ethical consumption trends that characterize the market, such as the slow design paradigm.<sup>427</sup> Secondly, it should adjust to the contemporary consumer's needs and necessities.<sup>428</sup> According to Solomon, 45% of the global personal luxury goods market will be made of Millennial and Generation Z consumers by 2025.<sup>429</sup> As it also emerged from Miura's analysis of the Japanese market, these young consumers assign value to experiences over things, deciding not to merely buy a product, but to express their values through emotional engagements with brands.<sup>430</sup> Also, according to the Boston Consulting Group, these consumers are also increasingly aware of social and environmental issues that permeate the fashion industry, and actively seek ethical brands that communicate their efforts in a transparent and clear way.<sup>431</sup> Finally, luxury firms should educate their customers on their ethical initiatives (through, for example, storytelling) in order to promote "sustainable development (SD)" as a key component of the luxury industry.<sup>432</sup> This need emerges as academic findings demonstrated that, in the eye of the consumer, fashion items are considered less compatible with "sustainability" than, for example, jewellery.<sup>433</sup> Moreover, younger consumers in particular are more sceptical toward brands' attempts at promoting "sustainability", perceiving a stark contradiction between

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<sup>424</sup> CAVENDER, "The Marketing..."

<sup>425</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>426</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>427</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>428</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>429</sup> SOLOMON, Michael, How Millennials Will Reshape the Luxury Market, in "Forbes", 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/msolomon/2017/06/20/how-millennials-will-reshape-the-luxury-goods-market-bain-luxury-report-2017/?sh=1fb17e4c2f86>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>430</sup> CAVENDER, "The Marketing..."

<sup>431</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>432</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>433</sup> *Idem.*

“sustainability” and luxury than older audiences.<sup>434</sup> Hence, promoting SD initiatives could ultimately spread knowledge regarding “sustainable” practices and strengthen the image and credibility of the brand. According to Kapferer and Michaut, the values of luxury, to be perceived by the customers as not superficial, must reflect those of “sustainability”.<sup>435</sup>

## 2.7 Japan, fashion and “sustainability”

As we already came to understand, fashion is considered by many to be the second most polluting industry in the world, behind only oil. Of course, the Japanese fashion industry is no exception, in that it greatly contributes to the global fashion industry’s pollution outputs. In fact, according to Japan’s Ministry of Environment, in 2021 the production process of a single piece of clothing entailed a conspicuous and “unsustainable” use of resources, mainly water (25.5 litres), and the emission of 25.5kg of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.<sup>436</sup> The same data also confirmed that, for clothes sold in Japan, 95 million tonnes of carbon dioxide were emitted each year (4.5% of the worldwide fashion industry’s total emissions), with the use of 8.4 billion cubic metres of water (9% of the total fashion industry).<sup>437</sup> Moreover, each year only 34% per cent of total clothing waste was reused or recycled, with 480,000 tonnes of it incinerated or buried in landfills.<sup>438</sup> Many Japanese fashion companies are also not up to date with recent global developments in terms of “sustainable” production and distribution. In fact, since the expense derived from employing recycled materials can potentially lead to an increase in product prices, these companies choose not to use them, fearing a loss of customers.<sup>439</sup> However, in recent years changes are occurring nationwide, in line with Japan’s plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.<sup>440</sup> An ever increasing number of multinationals and small and medium enterprises, such as Offen, Fast Retailing, Takashimaya and

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<sup>434</sup> *Idem*

<sup>435</sup> KAPFERER, Jean-Noel, MICHAUT, Anne, “Is luxury compatible with sustainability? Luxury consumers’ viewpoint”, 2014, *Journal of Brand Management*, 21:1, pp. 3-17,

<sup>436</sup> IMAHASHI, Rurika, Japan fashion industry gets set for green makeover, in “Nikkei Asia”, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Business-trends/Japan-fashion-industry-gets-set-for-green-makeover>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>437</sup> *Idem*

<sup>438</sup> *Idem*

<sup>439</sup> SIM, Walter, Japan's fashion industry gets a green makeover, in “The Straits Times”, 2022, C.

<sup>440</sup> SIM, Walter, Japan's net-zero carbon pledge hailed, but questions remain over coal, in “The Straits Times”, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/japans-net-zero-carbon-pledge-cheered-but-questions-remain-over-coal>, February 8, 2023.

Re:ne, are promoters of change within the industry.<sup>441</sup> <sup>442</sup>Most of the efforts are targeted at using “sustainable” materials and reducing the amount of water employed. Other notable initiatives are Japan’s first “sustainable” Fashion Expo in October 2021 and the formation of the Japan Sustainable Fashion Alliance (JSFA) in August 2021.<sup>443</sup><sup>444</sup> The latter represents a particularly notable achievement, since, for the first time, 28 Japanese fashion companies, such as Asics and Goldwin, have united to “promote the transition to a “sustainable” fashion industry, with the goal of becoming “carbon neutral”.”<sup>445</sup><sup>446</sup> Moreover, Uniqlo owner Fast Retailing has committed itself to the production of clothing with 50% of recycled materials by 2030 and pledged to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.<sup>447</sup>

However, these initiatives risk being ineffective if not coupled with sufficient interest on behalf of Japanese consumers toward “sustainability” and ethical consumption.

As we already saw in the previous chapter, the levels of interest of Japanese people toward environmental and social issues are influenced by the intersection of different elements, such as age, gender and social class. The surveys presented in the first chapter, however, did not deeply explore consumers’ perspectives on “sustainability”. An analysis of which factors drive (or not) consumers’

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<sup>441</sup> Àla.Hausse, How Japanese designers are building a more sustainable fashion industry, in “ÀLA.HAUSSE”, 2021,

<https://alahausse.ca/how-japanese-designers-are-building-a-more-sustainable-fashion-industry/>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>442</sup> ICCJ Team, Il Giappone cerca il green e la sostenibilità attraverso il settore fashion, in “Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan”, 2020, <https://iccj.or.jp/it/il-giappone-cerca-il-green-e-la-sostenibilita-attraverso-il-settore-fashion/>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>443</sup> Itochu fashion system co. Ltd, Japan Sustainable Fashion Alliance, in “Itochu fashion system co. Ltd”, <https://www.ifs.co.jp/case/japan-sustainable-fashion-alliance>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>444</sup> Fashion World Tokyo, Sustainable Fashion Expo, in “Fashion World Tokyo”, 2023, <https://www.fashion-tokyo.jp/autumn/en-gb/about/sus.html>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>445</sup> Itochu fashion system “Japan...”, <https://www.ifs.co.jp/case/japan-sustainable-fashion-alliance>, February 8, 2023

<sup>446</sup> The Expo was held by Okayama University and its partner, un. deux Co., Ltd, in order to contribute to “the achievement of the SDGs through joint research and human resource development focused on ethical fashion.” (Okayama University, Promoting Ethical Fashion at Japan’s First Sustainable Fashion Expo as a Means of Advancing the SDGs, in “Okayama University”, [https://www.okayama-u.ac.jp/eng/news/index\\_id10687.html](https://www.okayama-u.ac.jp/eng/news/index_id10687.html), February 8, 2023.)

<sup>447</sup> IMAHASHI, “Japan...”, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Business-trends/Japan-fashion-industry-gets-set-for-green-makeover>; SIM, “Japan’s Fashion...”, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Business-trends/Japan-fashion-industry-gets-set-for-green-makeover>

choice toward buying ethical products is needed. This, is in order to provide accurate profiling and find out who could constitute a potential customer for the enterprises to which we refer in this work.<sup>448</sup>

From Miura's analysis of Japanese consumer society, we gathered that its fourth stage was characterized by a shift in focus from buying a product for oneself to sharing its consumption with others, searching for the abstract experience rather than the physical good.

Hence, contemporary expenditures in apparel consumption reflect these societal changes, as shown in various surveys on Consumer Affairs drafted in 2017 by the Japanese Consumer Affairs Agency. In one of the opinion polls, participants were asked to define how did they spend their money. As we can see from Fig. 14, "Fashion" and "Beauty/how to dress appropriately" were two of the most chosen options by people from their late 10s to their 30s.

This is a testament to the fact that the apparel and personal goods industry still remains one of the most profitable in the Japanese market. However, the reality is not as simple as it would seem. 1990's bubble burst, the 2008 global financial crisis and, more recently, the Tōhōku disaster all led to a drastic decrease in Japan's gross domestic product (GDP) and consumer price index (CPI) and, at the same time, a radical increase in the irregular employment ratio.<sup>449</sup>

All of this drove general consumption levels to consistently decrease through the last decades until contemporaneity, as shown by Fig.15. These changes, combined with the already mentioned behaviours from fourth-generation consumers, impacted levels of apparel and clothing consumption, especially among single men and women under 30 years old (Fig. 16). According to the Consumer Affairs Agency, the majority of younger consumers are not only frugal in their consumption behaviour, but also mindful of a product's quality, functions and future.<sup>450</sup>

It remains to be assessed, however, if Japanese consumers, especially the young ones, are also aware of "sustainability" and how much they care about buying ethical products. The debate is, however, still ongoing, as there are contradictory findings on the matter.

A survey drafted in 2021 by the consulting agency Fabric revealed that, although the majority of Japanese people were worried about the environment, only 30% of the respondents were aware of

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<sup>448</sup> Academic literature regarding Japanese consumer behaviour toward sustainable luxury is limited. Hence, I will report here also academic papers and surveys that explored consumers' attitudes toward sustainability in the apparel industry in general.

<sup>449</sup> Consumer Affairs Agency, Consumer behavior of the youth, in Consumer Affairs Agency, 2014, [https://www.caa.go.jp/en/publication/annual\\_report/2017/white\\_paper\\_summary\\_07.html](https://www.caa.go.jp/en/publication/annual_report/2017/white_paper_summary_07.html), February 8, 2023.

<sup>450</sup> *Idem*

the meaning and the existence of SDGs.<sup>451</sup> Moreover, most consumers did not associate “sustainability” with either economic growth or gender equality, two of the most important SDGs.<sup>452</sup> According to Fabric, the absence of a holistic view regarding “sustainability” is one of the reasons why Japanese consumers do not actively integrate ethical parameters into their consumption habits.<sup>453</sup> Moreover, the study demonstrates how 65% of the total respondents were little engaged with “sustainability”.<sup>454</sup> Most importantly, consumers between 18 and 39 years old showed the least engagement among all of the age groups.<sup>455</sup> Similar findings also emerged from the study conducted by Yamane and Kaneko.<sup>456</sup> Although they demonstrated that younger people live more “sustainable” lives than the older generations, they also showed that young generations are not more environmentally conscious, thus not contributing to “eco-friendly practices”.<sup>457</sup> In fact, only 30.1% of respondents claimed that they pay a surplus for “sustainable” products and only 14.2% of them chose a good or service that belonged to a company that made contributions to the SDGs. Similarly to the Fabric survey, it emerged that one of the main reasons behind this little involvement was the lack of awareness and knowledge among Millennials and Gen Z generations about SDGs.<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Fabric, The State of Sustainability in Japan 2021, in “Fabric”, 2021, <https://fbrc.co/en/case-study/sustainability>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>452</sup> *Idem*

<sup>453</sup> *Idem*

<sup>454</sup> *Idem*

<sup>455</sup> *Idem*

<sup>456</sup> YAMANE, Tomomi, KANEKO, Shinji, “Is the younger generation a driving force toward achieving the sustainable development goals? Survey experiments”, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 2021, 292, pp. 1-142.

<sup>457</sup> *Idem*

<sup>458</sup> *Idem*



Figure 1-2-2-3 How you spend your money

① Things people are currently spending money on (%)

|   | Late 10s                                     | 20s                                    | 30s                                   | 40s                                   | 50s  | 60s                                    | 70 years & over                        |
|---|--|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 1 | Eating 69.1                                  | Eating 71.2                            | Eating 73.8                           | Eating 69.8                           | Eating 69.2                                    | Eating 68.1                            | Eating 69.2                            |
| 2 | Fashion 50.2                                 | Fashion 52.1                           | Fashion 39.3                          | Education (children's education) 47.7 | Social activities 27.4                         | Medical care 36.1                      | Medical care 49.3                      |
| 3 | Watching sports, movies, concerts, etc. 34.6 | Social activities 45.2                 | Education (children's education) 34.8 | Home-related expenses 28.4            | Home-related expenses 25.8                     | Travel 31.8                            | Social activities 27.8                 |
| 4 | Beauty/how to dress appropriately 33.9       | Beauty/how to dress appropriately 41.7 | Home-related expenses 31.2            | Fashion 26.5                          | Communication (telephone, Internet, etc.) 25.4 | Social activities 29.1                 | Beauty/how to dress appropriately 27.4 |
| 5 | Savings 27.9                                 | Savings 34.4                           | Savings 30.2                          | Beauty/dress appropriately 25.8       | Beauty/how to dress appropriately 25.0         | Beauty/how to dress appropriately 26.5 | Travel 26.2                            |
|   | M.T.=332.9                                   | M.T.=456.4                             | M.T.=440.0                            | M.T.=422.1                            | M.T.=419.6                                     | M.T.=405.1                             | M.T.=363.0                             |

(Notes) 1. Consumer Affairs Agency, "Basic Survey on Consumer Life" (FY2016).  
 2. Answers to the question, "Which of the followings are you currently spending money on?" (multiple answers accepted)  
 3. No. of respondents: late 10s = 301, 20s = 482, 30s = 810, 40s = 1,028, 50s = 983, 60s = 1,199, 70 years & over = 1,206

Fig. 14 "How you spend your money" <sup>459</sup>

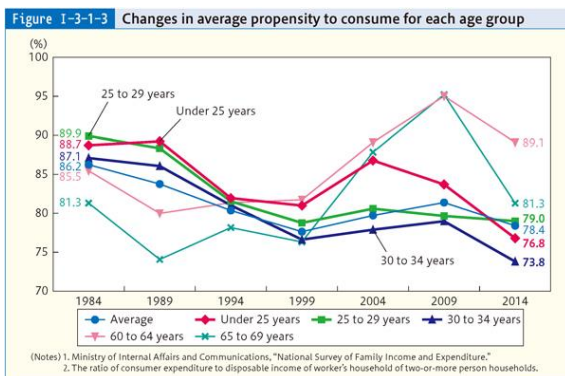


Fig. 15 Changes in average propensity to consume for each age group <sup>460</sup>

<sup>459</sup> Consumer Affairs Agency, Consumers' attitude and behavior, in Consumer Affairs Agency, 2016 [https://www.caa.go.jp/en/publication/annual\\_report/2017/white\\_paper\\_summary\\_06.html](https://www.caa.go.jp/en/publication/annual_report/2017/white_paper_summary_06.html), February 8, 2023.

<sup>460</sup> Consumer Affairs Agency, Consumer behavior of the youth, in Consumer Affairs Agency, 2014, [https://www.caa.go.jp/en/publication/annual\\_report/2017/white\\_paper\\_summary\\_07.html](https://www.caa.go.jp/en/publication/annual_report/2017/white_paper_summary_07.html), February 8, 2023.

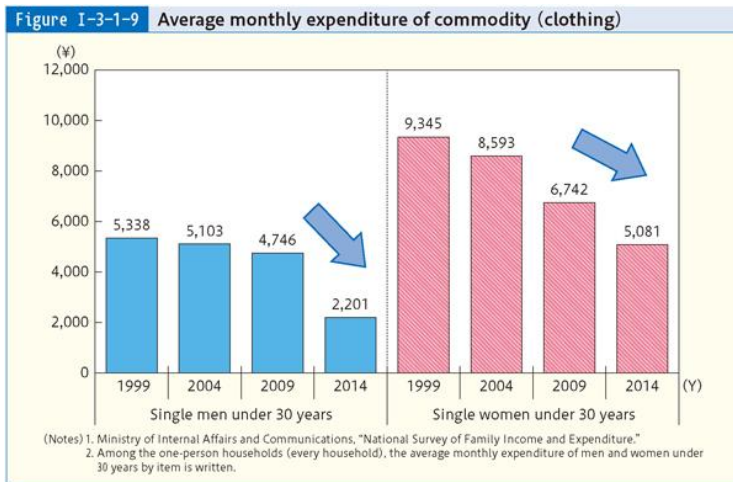


Fig. 16 Average monthly expenditure of commodity (clothing)<sup>461</sup>

## 2.8 Conclusions

The chapter began with a multifaceted analysis of the luxury fashion industry, encompassing several factors, crucial to understand its contemporary sociological and economic meaning. First, we tried to define how the fashion industry is divided and articulated according to the various business models depicted in Fig. 10. It emerged that the distinction between these fashion market segments (fashion, premium and luxury) has become increasingly blurred, thanks to the recent exponential development of the so-called “democratization of luxury”.<sup>462</sup> According to this process, luxury brands have sought to differentiate their product offer in order to satisfy a larger consumer base and keep up with the intense production pace of fast-fashion brands. This trend is, however, leading to a loss of “exclusiveness” and “rarity” of the very term “luxury”, that risk becoming almost indistinguishable from other sectors of the fashion industry. Hence, we reported various scholarly efforts directed toward creating a distinction between three main levels: fashion, premium and luxury. In short, while fashion, based on constant change, relies on the immediacy of the satisfaction of customers, premium products as based on rational factors, determined by their ability to serve the practical need of the consumers. At the same time, luxury has the ability to ensare its consumers by making them feel experiences that resemble dreams.

Next, we provided an overview of the chronological evolution of luxury goods’ production, identifying its roots since the beginning of human history. Moreover, we semantically analyzed the very word “luxury”, identifying its origins in the Latin word *luxuria* and the change of its meanings throughout Euroamerican history. It emerged that “luxury” has always borne ambivalent meanings,

<sup>461</sup> *Idem*

<sup>462</sup> DONZÉ, “Luxury Business...”, p. 451.

since it kept evoking “rarity” and “exclusivity” as well as “lasciviousness” and “waste”. In order to provide an explanation of the advancements faced by the luxury industry throughout its history, we followed Donzè’s method of analyzing the industry by different time periods. In this sense, we followed the luxury industry’s developments from the first Industrial Revolution to the birth of a multinational fashion conglomerate in the 1980s. We could see how the basis for the diffusion of the aforementioned democratization process was already in place since the 1650s. This is a turning point in the history of luxury: technological advancements gave birth to the middle class which began to acquire the newly “massified” luxury goods in an attempt to imitate the ruling classes. Our dissertation continued with the analysis of two of the main players in luxury (as well as any other type of industry) production: the supply chain and the marketing practices. For the former, we gave a brief overview of its main stages, from the design to the distribution of the product. Particular relevance was given to specificities belonging to the supply chain of the so-called “niche brands”, that place emphasis on the high quality of their products, created in low or extremely low volumes. These brands are, in fact, similar to the ones we refer to in this work. It emerged that these small companies place great attention on quality and reputation, being able to build a restrained albeit loyal customer base. They also locate all their production phases in their country of origin and have limited penetration in foreign markets, since they do not have the necessary financial resources to assure their presence through, for example, mono-brand stores.

On the other hand, we gave different definitions of marketing, all of which reflected its main attributes of it: to communicate a brand’s values and image in order to engage with the customer base and meet their so-called “unmet need”. We also identified brand management as a sub practice of marketing, that, through the analysis of tangible and intangible aspects of a brand, contribute to its loyalty and customer reception. We mentioned various key concepts of marketing, such as B2B, B2C, the 4ps and the marketing mix, focusing however on luxury business. In this sense, we reported Kapferer and Bastien’s works, which distinguished luxury marketing practices from traditional ones.

Next, we gave an overview of the Japanese luxury market, the third one in the world as of 2021. We made use of both Donzè’s and Miura’s works to identify different stages that the market underwent from the 1970s to the present day. Although luxury in Japan has grown exponentially up until the early years, there has been a consistent decline in sales, resulting in a number of factors that Miura recognizes as part of the so-called “fourth stage consumer society”. The decades prior to the 2000s saw Japan’s massive economic growth, which led to the formation of a new social class, namely the *shinjinrui* generation, people born between 1963 and 1969. The majority of these 20- and 30-years

old consumers were single, with a conspicuous disposable income and highly materialistic. They were, in fact, responsible for the major increase in luxury's popularity in Japan. However, with the advent of catastrophic events, such as the bubble burst, the 2008 economic crisis and the Tōhoku earthquake, consumer behaviours began to change. These new customers began to value experiences rather than products, searching for ways to share them with their friends: from individualistic to shared consumption. It emerged that brands, to stay relevant, need to integrate into their distribution strategy unique retail experiences, in that consumers will evaluate more the emotions felt during the purchase of a product than the purchase itself.

We then moved to present the various solutions that luxury business's supply chains and marketing can adopt in order to become more "sustainable". Fashion and luxury industries still greatly contribute to polluting the environment, endangering marine and terrestrial ecosystems and sharpening social inequalities. The debate is still open, however, on how can "sustainability" be compatible with luxury. Some sceptical voices claim that values such as "ostentation" and "overconsumption", traditionally attributed to luxury and still relevant to the consumers, do not allow any association with ethical values. Other works, however, point out that luxury is by nature "durable" and of "high quality", attributes that can go very well hand in hand with "sustainable" ones. Among these optimistic voices, Karaosman et al. adopt the "360 Degree Appraisal Model" to suggest a holistic view of luxury supply chains, that allows for better control and a quantification of waste production at each of its stages, from design to production. Similarly, Cavender asserts that brand management and, more broadly, marketing practices can be effectively used to communicate luxury brands' "sustainable" practices, through, for example, experiential marketing strategies. Finally, we provided an overview of the main trends of "sustainability" within the Japanese fashion industry, mentioning both its impact on the environment and recent initiatives aimed at achieving, by 2050, carbon neutrality (JSFA in 2021). Most notably, we reported a number of studies conducted in recent years that leave open the debate on whether Japanese younger consumers are more aware of "sustainability" and ethical issues than their predecessors. Moreover, we reported governmental surveys that showed how consumption levels have decreased through the years.

## Chapter 3 Social Media in “sustainable” luxury fashion marketing: an analysis

### 3.1 Social media and the role of digitalization in luxury fashion marketing

The rapid rise of digitalization processes around the globe has been affecting both businesses and consumers, including those concerned with the high-end fashion sector. In fact, pushed by the heated competition, companies found themselves changing their whole business model and marketing practices to adapt themselves to the shift to the digital age.<sup>463</sup>

At the same time, consumers had grown more savvy, seeking informations about a product, feedback and advice from their peers before actually entering a store and buying the goods.<sup>464</sup> The luxury fashion sector needed to accommodate these new trends, and it managed to do so by adopting the so-called “Luxury 4.0” model, a new set of strategies charged with the task of improving customer relationships and experiences with luxury firms.<sup>465</sup>

Hence, starting with the introduction of these technologies approximately one decade ago, high fashion brands have digitalized their way of, among others, selling their products and communicating with their audiences. Accordingly, since the start of this new era has been registered an exponential growth of e-commerce practices, including the adoption of social media.<sup>466</sup> The latter are particularly relevant to our dissertation, since they constitute the main platform on which we will conduct our analysis.

Social media are defined by Nair as “online tools where content, opinions, perspectives, insights, and media can be shared ... (and) at its core social media is about relationships and connections between people and organizations.”<sup>467</sup> Compared to traditional media, these digital marketing tools allow companies to a much closer interaction with their stakeholders, directly

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<sup>463</sup> GUERCINI, Simone, MILANESI, Matilda, MIR, Pedro, RUNFOLA, Andrea, “Surfing the Waves of New Marketing in Luxury Fashion: The Case of Online Multi-brand Retailers”, in Martinez-Lopez Francisco J., D’Alessandro Steven (edited by), *Advances in Digital Marketing and eCommerce*, 2020, New York, Springer, pp. 203-210

<sup>464</sup> *Idem*

<sup>465</sup> *Idem*

<sup>466</sup> *Idem*

<sup>467</sup> GAUTAM, Vikas, SHARMA, Vikram, “The Mediating Role of Customer Relationship on the Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention Relationship with Special Reference to Luxury Fashion Brands”, 2017, *Journal of Promotion Management* 23:6, pp. 872-888

involved in two-way, symmetric communication with the brands.<sup>468469470</sup> In fact, according to Lyon and Montgomery, this kind of communication makes “the sender and the receiver jointly create an understanding and assessment of their relationship”.<sup>471</sup>

Furthermore, social media allow companies to gather large portions of data on their consumers’ behaviours and patterns that help marketers to, among others, improve their marketing design and build more effective relationships with their stakeholders, all for relatively little cost.<sup>472</sup>

The popularity and importance of social media has been found to lie in a phenomenon that characterizes the already mentioned “fourth consumer society”, namely the possibility on behalf of the consumer to quickly and easily share informations and their experiences.<sup>473</sup> As already pointed out by the work of Lyon and Montgomery, this constant interactivity between consumers and brands is constitutive of the so-called “relationship” type of marketing, defined by Morgan and Hunt as “all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges”.<sup>474</sup>

Further studies have identified intimacy and trust as key components of effective brand-customer relationship.<sup>475</sup> The former has been defined as “a feeling of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness” felt by the customer in regard to a certain brand due to the accumulation of knowledge over time.<sup>476</sup> Intimacy ultimately leads to trust, namely “a degree of tendency to believe in a certain brand’s ability to perform a promised function”.<sup>477</sup> These two factors together contribute

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<sup>468</sup> LYON, Thomas P., MONTGOMERY, A. Wren, “Tweetjacked: The Impact of Social Media on Corporate Greenwash”, 2013, *J Bus Ethics*, 118, pp. 747–757.

<sup>469</sup> KIM, Angella Jiyoung, KO, Eunju, “Impacts of Luxury Fashion Brand’s Social Media Marketing on Customer Relationship and Purchase Intention”, *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 1:3, pp. 164-171.

<sup>470</sup> This is the case with social networking platforms such as Facebook, instead of websites and blogs, that prefer an asymmetric communication; traditional media, on the contrary, view the stakeholders as passive, enhancing a hierarchical type of communication with the brands in a privileged position (LYON, “Tweetjacked...”).

<sup>471</sup> LYON, MONTGOMERY “Tweetjacked...”

<sup>472</sup> GAUTAM, SHARMA “The Mediating...”

<sup>473</sup> *Idem*

<sup>474</sup> *Idem*; MORGAN, Robert M., HUNT, Shelby D., “The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing”, *Journal of Marketing*, 58:3, pp. 20-38.

<sup>475</sup> KIM, KO, “Impacts...”; GAUTAM, SHARMA, “The Mediating...”

<sup>476</sup> KIM, KO, “Impacts...”; GAUTAM, SHARMA, “The Mediating...”

<sup>477</sup> CHAUDHURI, Arjun, HOLBROOK, Morris B., “The Chain of Effects From Brand Trust and Brand Affect to Brand Performance: The Role of Brand Loyalty”, 2001, *Journal of Marketing*, 65:2, pp. 81-93.

to increasing brand equity and purchase intentions on behalf of the customers.<sup>478</sup>

Kim and Ko (2012) have identified five factors that help measure how social media marketing practices can increase consumer equity: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and WOM (Word-Of-Mouth).<sup>479</sup> Among these, entertainment has been found to be the factor that most influenced customer relationships and purchase intention for luxury fashion brands.<sup>480</sup>

Entertainment has been defined, in fact, as the “result of fun and play emerging from the social media experience”, and is considered to be one of the main drivers behind social media consumption, with customers seeking to be entertained throughout the whole social media experience, from watching contents to sharing information with their peers.<sup>481</sup>

Interaction, on the other hand, refers to social media’s ability to make customers directly interact with their peers and with brands.<sup>482</sup> This creates a digital, social environment in which customers can both share their experiences with other customers and request assistance from the brands.<sup>483</sup> Moreover, throughout the same environment, brands can listen more effectively to their customers to be more helpful and build unique contents tailor-made for their audiences.<sup>484</sup>

Next, we have trendiness, namely the act of disseminating information and notions about the latest luxury fashion trends.<sup>485</sup> Thanks to social media, customers can, in fact, acquire an extensive amount of information regarding a product, from influencer’s reviews to threads, before the actual purchase.<sup>486</sup> Hence, they observe and remain updated on new trends and acquire knowledge that

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<sup>478</sup> KIM, KO, “Impacts...”; Customer equity, as defined by Fripp, is “is the total combined customer lifetime values of all of the company's customers” (Customer Lifetime Value, “Relationship between CLV and Brand Equity”, in “Customer Lifetime Value”, 2020, <https://www.clv-calculator.com/clv/relationship-clv-brand-equity/>, February 8, 2023)

<sup>479</sup> PARK, Jina, KO, Eunju, KIM, Sookhyun, “Consumer Behavior in Green Marketing for Luxury Brand: A Cross-Cultural Study of US, Japan and Korea”, 2010, *Journal of Global Academy of Marketing*, 20:4, pp. 319-333.

<sup>480</sup> KIM, KO, “Impacts...”

<sup>481</sup> KIM, KO, “Impacts...”; GODEY, Bruno, MANTHIOU, Aikaterini, PEDERZOLI, Daniele, ROKKA, Joonas, AIELLO, Gaetano, DONVITO, Raffaele, SINGH, Rahul, “Social media marketing efforts of luxury brands: Influence on brand equity and consumer behavior”, 2015, *Journal of Business Research* 69, pp. 5833–5841

<sup>482</sup> GODEY et al. “Social Media...”

<sup>483</sup> *Idem*

<sup>484</sup> *Idem*

<sup>485</sup> *Idem*

<sup>486</sup> *Idem*

ultimately can serve as a source of inspiration to them.<sup>487</sup>

With customization, instead, we refer to the ability of brands to express their individuality on their social media accounts through the creation of unique content that aims at targeting specific individuals or audiences.<sup>488</sup> By customizing their online presence, brands can in fact build more personalized relationships with their audiences, that develop with them bonds of loyalty and affinity.<sup>489</sup>

Finally, social media can greatly enhance and facilitate the sharing of informations about products between consumers, thus contributing to the so-called eWOM (Electronic Word-of-Mouth).<sup>490</sup> It has been found, in fact, that eWOM represents an essential tool for building brand credibility and relevance since consumers tend to trust their peers' opinions rather than informations crafted by the brands themselves.<sup>491</sup>

An important distinction that is in order here, since the scope of our thesis, is to be made between image and non-image-based social media. Milanesi et al. (2022) state that a shift toward visual images has happened in the social media world, with the rise of platforms such as Instagram and Youtube.<sup>492</sup> This shift has been part of a broader social media transformation, the latters becoming multimodal in their implementation of language and paralinguage communications that expanded the initial offer limited to written texts to emoji, videos and pictures.<sup>493</sup> Images are more immediate and direct than written messages at communicating human emotions and experiences, making them the perfect candidate for social media communication.<sup>494</sup> Their implementation, in fact, has significantly raised the engagement rate with all kinds of brands.<sup>495</sup> Visuals' power lies in their ability to evoke emotions and cultural meanings, and to influence digital consumers in their decision-making process.<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> *Idem*

<sup>488</sup> *Idem*

<sup>489</sup> *Idem*

<sup>490</sup> *Idem*

<sup>491</sup> *Idem*

<sup>492</sup> MILANESI, Matilde, KYRDODA Yuliia, RUNFOLA, Andrea, "How do you depict sustainability? An analysis of images posted on Instagram by sustainable fashion companies", 2022, Journal of Global Fashion Marketing, 13:2, pp. 101-115.

<sup>493</sup> *Idem*

<sup>494</sup> *Idem*

<sup>495</sup> *Idem*

<sup>496</sup> *Idem*



### 3.2 Opportunities and risks of social media in “sustainable” luxury fashion marketing

Social media (and, in general, all sorts of digital media) prove to be a very effective tool even when used for external communications regarding corporate social responsibility (CSR) and “sustainability-related” domains. In fact, in 2020, four-fifth of publicly-traded companies worldwide drafted and shared with their stakeholders a CSR report, and, in the same year, 96% of total world leaders company have shared information regarding their environmental and social initiatives.<sup>497</sup> As we will see later, this extensive use of CSR slogans inside advertisement posts can, in some cases, turn out to be having greenwashing properties, with this phenomenon being defined as “selective disclosure of positive information about a company’s environmental or social performance, while withholding negative information on these dimensions”.<sup>498</sup> It has been proved that these practices can evoke feelings of distrust and complaints by customers and activists toward companies which adopt them throughout their communication activities.<sup>499</sup> There are multiple reasons why a company adopts external CSR communication. It could be that “sustainability” is part of a brand’s values, or a company can choose to share its CSR reports in order to improve its commitment to “sustainable” practices.<sup>500</sup> However, one of the most important reasons behind this choice is that of strengthening its reputation.<sup>501</sup> In fact, by accommodating stakeholders’ need for transparency and CSR activities, and hence enhancing its relationship with both its investors and customers, a company can build a powerful brand image that helps it gain an advantage over its competitors.<sup>502</sup>

Luxury fashion brands make no exceptions, albeit with some differences that make high-end fashion a *unicum* in the industry. An ever-increasing number of high fashion brands are, in fact, employing digital marketing tools, such as storytelling and brand content, in order to communicate

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<sup>497</sup> AKROUT, Houcine, GUERCINI, Simone, “Sustainability in fashion and luxury marketing: Results, paradoxes and potentialities”, 2022, *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 13:2, pp. 91-100.

<sup>498</sup> LYON, MONTGOMERY “Tweetjacked...”

<sup>499</sup> REILLY, Anne H., LARYA, Naznin, *External Communication About Sustainability: Corporate Social Responsibility Reports and Social Media Activity*, 2018, *Environmental Communication*, 12:5, pp. 621-637.

<sup>500</sup> *Idem*

<sup>501</sup> *Idem*

<sup>502</sup> KONG MIN, Hyun, WITMAIER, Alexander, KO, Eunju, “Sustainability and social media communication: How consumers respond to marketing efforts of luxury and non-luxury fashion brands”, *Journal of Business Research*, 131, pp. 640-651.

their CSR activities.<sup>503</sup> Peculiarities emerge when analysing luxury brands' marketing practices, such as social media one. Some brands prefer, in fact, to maintain a low-profile approach in opening their accounts to the masses, choosing instead to be more selective, in order to maintain an aura of mystery.<sup>504</sup> Sustainability can be used by these brands as “instrumental”, capable of increasing the perceived value and the exclusivity of a brand and thus enhancing its image and reputation.<sup>505</sup> At the same time, CSR can be the source of luxury itself: a capsule collection made from recycled materials can generate value by being original and exclusive.<sup>506</sup> However, luxury firms may face a certain degree of challenge when marketing their “sustainable” initiatives. The first set of difficulties comes from their very consumers, who do not always share a vision in which “sustainability” and luxury present antithetical connotations that prevent them from merging and going well together. A rather large number of studies have actually proved, in fact, that luxury consumers are generally more interested in quality rather than “sustainability”, preferring the enjoyment of the act of the purchase itself without being disturbed by “green” claims and messages.<sup>507</sup> Here we can assist with the major influence and importance that meanings associated with “luxury” and “sustainability” play in consumer behaviours.

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, according to the “pessimistic” school of thought, the two terms are rather incompatible, with “luxury” evoking feelings of “ostentation” and “pleasure” and “sustainability” images of “altruism” and “ethics”.<sup>508</sup> Therefore, consumers feel as if there is a contradiction in “sustainable” luxury, sometimes fuelled by their unawareness of the existence of “sustainable” luxury brands or by perceptions of greenwashing perpetrated by high fashion firms.<sup>509</sup>

Given this antithetical relationship between the concepts of “sustainability” and “luxury”, companies in the luxury sector face a significant challenge when confronted with the need of

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<sup>503</sup> AKROUT, GUERCINI, “Sustainability...”

<sup>504</sup> REILLY, LARYA, “External...”

<sup>505</sup> FARAONI, Monica, “Building a Sustainable Brand Image in Luxury Fashion Companies”, in OZUEM, W., RANFAGNI, S., *The Art of Digital Marketing for Fashion and Luxury Brands*, Basel, Springer Nature Switzerland, pp. 273-296.

<sup>506</sup> *Idem*; This follows the principle of “companies should concentrate on promoting through social media their greenest products”, since, according to Lyon and Montgomery, even if the products are not entirely “green”, is less likely for them to be attacked for practices of greenwashing (LYON, MONTGOMERY, “Tweetjacked...”)

<sup>507</sup> FARAONI, “Building...”

<sup>508</sup> KONG et al., “Sustainability...”

<sup>509</sup> FARAONI, “Building...”

building a “sustainable” brand image. Of course, a key factor is to enhance consumer brand knowledge regarding ethical themes.<sup>510</sup> This can be achieved by employing communication methods “able to build the right brand associations in terms of attributes, benefits and attitudes”.<sup>511</sup> These brand associations, extensively developed by this form of communication, will help build the core of the brand identity, with its own message and promises to the customers, ultimately leading to increased brand equity.<sup>512</sup>

Companies can make use of the unique properties of social media, such as the aforementioned two-way type of communication, to acquire credibility and build a trustful relationship with their audiences based on transparent CSR policy communication. This will not only help disseminate brand’s ethical efforts more than any government or advertisement campaign, but will also create economic value for the brands themselves by, for example, transforming consumers’ needs for ethical practices into viable demands.<sup>513</sup>

In their study, Lyon and Montgomery talk about the possibility of social media to reduce the phenomenon of corporate greenwash in comparison with the traditional media.<sup>514</sup> By nature, social media can be easily accessed by consumers and environmental activists, allow for the viral spread of information among stakeholders and, through the “two-way communication”, consent customers to judge the authenticity of the informations by themselves.<sup>515</sup> All of these elements put social media apart from the more traditional hierarchical model represented by the traditional media, these being more costly, channel-specific and, ultimately, “elite controlled”.<sup>516</sup>

Brands on social media face more scrutiny by stakeholders who, provided with increased information about companies’ “ethical” deeds, can easily spot whether the firm is choosing not to disclose its whole environmental performance.<sup>517</sup> Moreover, social media decrease the cost of corporate behaviour, thus allowing stakeholders to mobilize opposition in response to greenwash corporate communication.<sup>518</sup> The risk of being punished by their own customers will make the companies less eager to adopt forms of selective disclosure of information in the future, thus

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<sup>510</sup> *Idem*

<sup>511</sup> *Idem*

<sup>512</sup> *Idem*

<sup>513</sup> MILANESI et al. “How...”; AKROUT, GUERCINI, “Sustainability in fashion...”

<sup>514</sup> LYON, MONTGOMERY, “Tweetjacked...”

<sup>515</sup> *Idem*

<sup>516</sup> *Idem*

<sup>517</sup> *Idem*

<sup>518</sup> *Idem*

leading to a reduction in corporate greenwash practices.<sup>519</sup>

As mentioned before, in the case of image-based social media, visual communication is a useful tool in assessing firms' commitment and action towards "ethical" issues, although images can also be used as part of the greenwashing marketing strategy.<sup>520</sup> Milanese et al. (2022) argue that the presence of "nature-evoking" images not connected to the company on fashion firms' image-based social media accounts (similar to LINE) could be interpreted as a greenwashing practice.<sup>521</sup> According to Faraoni (2021), to avoid this risk, companies should focus on posting images related to the production processes and supply chains of their company, giving equal space to environmental, economical and social dimensions of "sustainability".<sup>522</sup> Creating this type of content could lead to a highly strategized social media campaign that generates strong levels of interaction with the audience and creates awareness regarding the firm's values and practices.<sup>523</sup>

### 3.3 Social media in Japan: the case of LINE

Social media appeared and spread in Japan thanks to the popularization of smartphones, a process that began with the introduction of the iPhone 3G, in 2008.<sup>524</sup> The Institute for Information and Communications Policy (IICP) estimates that, in 2013, 52,8% of the entire population was using a smartphone, with 87.9% of them being people in their 20s, followed by 30-year-old people and so on.<sup>525</sup> In comparison with the *keitai* (Japanese word for "mobile phone"), the *sumaho*, ("smartphone"), possessed inherent features, such as the high degree of customization of its functions, that made it more popular amongst the younger generations. The spread of this electronic device resulted in an increase in Internet and, most importantly, social media, that started appearing in Japan around 2004, such as mixi, GREE and Mobage.<sup>526</sup>

LINE is the most-used messenger app in Japan, with over 84 million Japanese users

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<sup>519</sup> *Idem*

<sup>520</sup> MILANESI et al., "How..."

<sup>521</sup> *Idem*

<sup>522</sup> *Idem*

<sup>523</sup> *Idem*

<sup>524</sup> BYFORD, Sam, How the iPhone won over Japan and gave the world emoji, in "The Verge", 2017, <https://www.theverge.com/2017/6/29/15892640/iphone-anniversary-japan-success-emoji-history>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>525</sup> *Idem*

<sup>526</sup> OHASHI, Kana, KATO, Fumitoshi, HJORTH, Larissa, "Digital Genealogies: Understanding Social Mobile Media LINE in the Role of Japanese Families", *Social Media + Society*, 2017, pp. 1-12.

as of 2020 and more than 150 million users worldwide, the most of them being, apart from Japan, in Thailand, Taiwan and Indonesia.<sup>527</sup> The communication app (Messenger APP) represents the main offer of the company, with various functions, such as the “sticker” and “emoji” creator, that allow users for greater customization.<sup>528</sup> One of these features is LINE Voom, a video-focused platform where users can post their videos and watch visual content (both videos and images) from a wide array of content creators and accounts.<sup>529</sup> This platform also employs an algorithm that presents to the users personalized content based on their viewing history, so that they will receive suggestions of content related to their tastes.<sup>530</sup> The content later analyzed has been posted on LINE Voom by a series of Italian luxury fashion companies.

The popularity of LINE has been traced back by Ohashi et al. (2017) to the triple disaster of Tōhōku, which hit Japan on March 2011. In the period immediately after the disaster, social media played a key role for users in allowing them to acquire information regarding the most recent political and social changes. Moreover, in the wake of the catastrophe, people found in social media a hub that could allow them to keep in contact with their loved ones, this being the main reason for the establishment of LINE as a messaging app.<sup>531</sup> Takahashi (2014) identifies three main reasons for the app’s popularity, which has grown exponentially after the disaster. First, LINE is free of charge since it uses the Internet rather than phone lines, making it accessible to the younger generations.<sup>532</sup> The app operates also as a “closed space”, meaning that users can communicate freely and with security about their values, interests and beliefs in virtual groups that exist as isolated entities.<sup>533</sup> This eliminates the risk of social spaces being invaded by people that come from the outside, the *soto*.<sup>534</sup> Lastly, the app has a special code of communication that involves the use of the aforementioned “stickers” and *emoji*, which allows users to express their feelings in a much

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<sup>527</sup> DMFA, Why LINE is the most popular social media app in Japan and how to use it for online ad campaigns, in DMFA, 2021, <https://www.digitalmarketingforasia.com/why-line-is-the-most-popular-social-media-app-in-japan/>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>528</sup> LINE, Life on LINE, in “LINE”, 2023, <https://line.me/en/>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>529</sup> LINE, Announcing LINE Voom, a new platform for posting and watching videos, in “LINE”, 2014, <https://linecorp.com/en/pr/news/en/2021/4014>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>530</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>531</sup> OHASHI et al. “Digital Genealogies...”; HJORTH, Larissa, KIM, Kyoung-hwa Yonnie, “Good grief: the role of social mobile media in the 3.11 earthquake disaster in Japan”, *Digital Creativity* 22(3), 2011, pp. 187-199.

<sup>532</sup> TAKAHASHI, Toshie, “Youth, social media and connectivity in Japan”, in SEARGEANT, P. et al., *The Language of Social Media*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 186-207.

<sup>533</sup> *Idem*

<sup>534</sup> *Idem*

more immediate way than with simply written texts.<sup>535</sup> According to Ohashi (2017), these stickers convey a set of meanings associated with the so-called *kawaii* culture, that helps users to build personalized messaging experience that consents to create emotional ties upon digital encounters.<sup>536</sup> In short, this communication style allows users to go beyond words and be more sensitive to the virtual social context in which they are immersed.<sup>537</sup>

## 3.4 Analysis

### 3.4.1 Method

A number of Italian *haute couture* companies already operate in Japan, marketing their products through both offline and online channels. The latter comprise the companies' websites, blogs and social media accounts, such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and, of course, LINE. Companies' online activities throughout these platforms are dictated, in most cases, by a "copy and paste" approach towards the content posted or uploaded. The creation of content, comprising both visuals and written texts, is made primarily for the country of origin of the firms. This means that every choice of specific images or words in the digital marketing campaign follows Eurocentric cultural dimensions and visual imagery. In most cases, this content is then translated into other languages without being adapted to those cultural dimensions. Hence, visual cues remain the same as their Italian counterpart, with the exclusion of models' ethnicities that differ from the monolithic "black/white" dichotomy. Written texts are translated having the original Italian version as a blueprint as well, employing a literal translation that affects both the structure and the choice of words in the language of arrival. Of course, this one-to-one translation involves also posts and official communications about the company's "ethical" deeds. This process was also explained during the interviews that I conducted. One interviewee was a young woman who had been working in Tokyo for three years as a Sales Assistant and then Store Coordinator for two Italian *haute couture* multinationals. She revealed to me that, according to her experience, Italian fashion companies produced the majority, if not all their marketing strategies and content for Japan in their headquarters in Italy. This was confirmed also by another participant, who was working for an Italian *haute couture* multinational. These contents were later transmitted to their foreign branches, where an employee was tasked with creating a word-for-word translation of them. Also, these

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<sup>535</sup> *Idem*

<sup>536</sup> OHASHI et al. "Digital Genealogies..."

<sup>537</sup> *Idem*

companies did not emphasize having a fully developed press office located in Japan, which usually consisted of one or two employees or, in some cases, was lacking completely. According to the aforementioned participant, the reason behind these decisions was a lack of trust by these companies in leaving creative control to Japanese marketing agencies. They were concerned that their brand image, associated with cultural constructs such as “authenticity” and “Italianness”, could suffer from the absence of their direct creative control over marketing strategies and practices.

Moreover, more often than not, investing in a press office dedicated entirely to Japan was not financially “sustainable” for them. However, the interviewee expressed some doubts about this *modus operandi*, which she considered to be affected by a sense of so-called “provincialism”. She told me that the brands she had worked for were adamant about using certain social media, namely Instagram, for their digital advertisement, albeit these were not the preferential digital marketing channels for the Japanese market. As a result, this lack of adaptation to local culture and practices could have ended up in a loss of effectiveness of several marketing strategies.

Other information emerged from the interview I conducted with ICCJ. Particular emphasis was put on the difficulties that small and medium Italian fashion brands faced when it came to communicating their “sustainable” practices in the Japanese market. The interviewee mentioned that, although these companies had a rich history of adopting “sustainable” practices for the creation of their products, they could not promote effectively their efforts in Japan. One of the reasons was the lack on their behalf of comprehensive knowledge of the cultural context surrounding “sustainability” in Japan, thus resulting in their inability to adapt their products to the Japanese younger generations’ needs.

Our opinion is that these advertising messages, when translated into other languages, lose effectiveness since they keep employing several cultural references and meanings that are not immediately comprehensible to members of a non-Euroamerican culture. This phenomenon appears to be most prevalent within the companies’ websites, as well as social media that are used by audiences worldwide, such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. However, this seems not to be the case with LINE. In our analysis, we encountered several posts of Italian *haute couture* companies that employed advertising messages specifically targeted toward a Japanese audience. This could be seen by the implementation of both Japanese personalities and models of east-Asian descent, and written messages that employed Japanese-specific idiomatic expressions. Moreover, almost the entirety of the digital content on LINE was not present on the other social media accounts owned by the companies, meaning that it was created specifically for the Japanese platform. That is why we made LINE the platform of choice for our dissertation.

Our main purpose was to investigate the quantity and quality of “ethical” LINE posts on behalf of several Italian *haute couture* companies that already operate in Japan. This in to show to our audiences pre-existing examples of “ethical” digital communication specifically targeted towards Japanese customers. Examining how these marketing strategies are being conducted, we can provide examples of best and worst practices toward communication regarding “sustainable” deeds. These past cases can prove to be useful for Italian *haute couture* companies that intend to build a digital marketing campaign in Japan.

We began by looking for all kinds of Italian fashion companies that did possess social media accounts and website localized in Japanese. Our search identified 22 Italian brands, that spanned from multinational companies, like Gucci and Prada, to large-sized companies, such as Brunello Cucinelli and Santoni.<sup>538</sup> Then, we refined our search, identifying and focusing only on the firms that possessed a LINE account, resulting in a list of 12 companies. These firms are: Zegna, Giorgio Armani, Valentino, Gucci, Diesel, Salvatore Ferragamo, Prada, D&G, MIU MIU, Gianni Versace, Benetton and Tod’s. We then selected for examination only the posts, from each account, that were involved with “sustainable” practices, from both a social and environmental point of view. We conducted a quantitative and qualitative analysis of “sustainable” posts comprised in a period between August 2020 and August 2022. We counted how many of these posts were compared to the total number of posts in that period, analyzing them at the same time their content.

We examined the written texts, evaluating how “sustainable” practices were being presented. However, a limitation occurred when confronted with the task of evaluating “socially sustainable” posts. Since the so-called “social washing” is still a field in development among academicians, there is still no available framework with which we can effectively assess whether or not the posts here presented are complying with acceptable “socially sustainable” standards.<sup>539</sup> Hence, only a quantitative analysis will be conducted regarding these posts. On the other hand, to assess the degree of potential greenwashing of the “environmentally sustainable” posts analyzed, we made use of the “integrated framework of greenwashing” developed by Nemes et al. (2022). This is a science-based assessment tool that incorporates existing greenwashing frameworks, created to assess

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<sup>538</sup> The list comprises: Gucci, Benetton, Diesel, Zegna, Prada, Ferragamo, Versace, Brunello Cucinelli, Tod’s, Santoni, Golden Goose, Slowear, Missoni, MIU MIU, D&G, Valentino, Herno, Cerruti, Pucci, Max Mara, Moncler, Naracamicie.

<sup>539</sup> BEARE, Catherine, ‘Social Washing’ - the new Greenwashing, in “Intertek”, 2022, <https://assuranceinaction.intertek.com/post/102hvw6/social-washing-the-new-greenwashing>, February 8, 2023.



greenwash practices done by actors of governmental and non-institutional nature.<sup>540</sup> The framework is composed of a list of indicator questions, against which the person doing the analysis has to check the claims he/she wants to evaluate. The framework is divided into three main sections: impact, alignment, and communication. The first two sections go beyond the scope of this dissertation since they require an evaluation of the companies' "sustainability" reports and official statements released outside the LINE platform. The third section is, instead, quite useful for our analysis, since it focuses on the nature of the message itself, evaluating its choice of words and design according to a number of criteria.

They are seven in total, organized into four macro-categories. The first one is "No proof", comprising claims that "cannot be substantiated by easily accessible supporting information".<sup>541</sup> Three main questions are associated with this group: is the claim not based on robust evidence? Does the claim not specify whether it refers to the whole product/packaging/service or only to a part of it? Does the claim present ambiguous language about the environmental impact of the product?<sup>542</sup>

The second category is "Vagueness", namely a claim that "poorly defined/broad so its real meaning is misunderstood".<sup>543</sup> The questions here are: When making a net-zero claim, does the company not regularly publish its emissions, not have a clear strategy for the implementation of the claim, and not publish a long-term plan to reduce emissions? Are the methodologies on which the claim is based unclear and unreliable?<sup>544</sup>

The third category is "Misleading symbols", which claims that use "visuals and symbols that induce a false perception of the organisation's greenness".<sup>545</sup> The question here associated is: does the presentation of the claim evoke environmental meanings that do not represent the real environmental efforts of the company?<sup>546</sup>

Finally, the last category is "Jargon", with claims that use "jargon/information that

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<sup>540</sup> NEMES et al., An Integrated Framework to Assess Greenwashing, in "MDPI", 2022, <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/8/4431>, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14084431>, February 8, 2023.

<sup>541</sup> *Idem*

<sup>542</sup> *Idem*/ Ambiguous language can comprise, according to Nemes et al. (2022), words such as "sustainably sourced", "environmentally friendly" or "biodegradable", (*Idem*)

<sup>543</sup> *Idem*

<sup>544</sup> *Idem*

<sup>545</sup> *Idem*

<sup>546</sup> *Idem*

consumers cannot understand/verify”.<sup>547</sup> The question: is the degree of complex jargon high enough that impairs the understandability of the claim by the general audience?<sup>548</sup>

To each question, four possible answers are possible: “no” (no greenwash), “yes” (obvious greenwash), “likely greenwash” and “unknown”.<sup>549</sup> Among these answers, “unknown” can be chosen when the information required is publicly unavailable, and “likely greenwash” to highlight areas where a straightforward answer cannot be given, with the requirement of further analysis.<sup>550</sup>

### 3.4.2 Findings

From our quantitative analysis, it emerged that the social media accounts presented “ethical” posts equal to approximately 7% of the total number of posts posted between August 2020 and August 2022:

| <b>Brands</b>       | <b>“Sustainable” Posts</b> | <b>Total Posts</b> |
|---------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| Giorgio Armani      | 78                         | 280                |
| Zegna               | 30                         | 225                |
| Valentino           | 13                         | 230                |
| Gucci               | 13                         | 210                |
| Diesel              | 7                          | 159                |
| Prada               | 5                          | 120                |
| Salvatore Ferragamo | 5                          | 302                |
| Dolce & Gabbana     | 4                          | 141                |
| MIU MIU             | 1                          | 199                |
| Gianni Versace      | 1                          | 147                |
| Benetton            | 0                          | 20                 |
| Tod’s               | 0                          | 184                |
| <b>Total</b>        | 157                        | 2,217              |

Fig. 18 Number of “sustainable” over total posts

Among these posts, a distinction has to be made between those concerned with “social sustainability” and “environmental sustainability”:

<sup>547</sup> *Idem*

<sup>548</sup> *Idem*

<sup>549</sup> *Idem*

<sup>550</sup> *Idem*

| <b>Brands</b>       | <b>“Socially Sustainable” Posts</b> | <b>“Environmentally Sustainable” Posts</b> |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Giorgio Armani      | 67                                  | 11   |
| Zegna               | 2                                   | 28   |
| Valentino           | 5                                   | 8  |
| Gucci               | 3                                   | 10   |
| Diesel              | 3                                   | 4  |
| Salvatore Ferragamo | 3                                   | 2  |
| Prada               | 1                                   | 4  |
| Dolce & Gabbana     | 4                                   | 1  |
| MIU MIU             | 1                                   | //   |
| Gianni Versace      | 1                                   | //   |
| Benetton            | //                                  | //   |
| Tod’s               | //                                  | //   |
| <b>Total</b>        | 91                                  | 67   |

Fig. 19 Number of environmentally and socially “sustainable” posts

As Fig. 19 shows, among the total “sustainable” posts, nearly 58% of them are concerned with inclusivity and diversity. Giorgio Armani is the account that focuses the most on this kind of content. The company has an entire section of its LINE account dedicated to the empowerment of women, called Giorgio Armani Crossroads, where female personalities share their stories. On the environmental side, Zegna is the most concerned with letting the audiences know about its brand traditions and active involvement towards “sustainable” production methods. Firms tend to slightly prefer posting content about “environmental” and “sustainability”.

In general, Giorgio Armani represents a *unicum* among the companies analyzed. In fact, while its “sustainable” posts represent approximately 27% of all its posts between August 2020 and August 2022, the same cannot be said for the other companies. While Zegna’s “sustainable” posts amount to 13.13% of its total posts, the percentage of the rest of the other companies’ “sustainable” posts combined amount to approximately 2.21% of the total posts of all firms.

Regarding our qualitative analysis of the posts strictly concerned with “environmentally sustainable” themes, the following results emerged:<sup>551</sup>

| Brands              | No greenwash | Obvious greenwash | Likely greenwash |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Giorgio Armani      | 4            | 6                 | 1                |
| Zegna               | 23           | //                | 5                |
| Valentino           | 6            | //                | 2                |
| Gucci               | 8            | 1                 | 1                |
| Diesel              | 1            | 3                 | //               |
| Salvatore Ferragamo | 2            | //                | //               |
| Prada               | 3            | //                | 1                |
| Dolce & Gabbana     | 1            | //                | //               |

Fig. 20 Number of greenwashing/no greenwashing posts

As shown in Fig. 20, the “no greenwash” posts outnumber those in the “obvious greenwash” and “likely greenwash” categories. The majority of “obvious greenwash” posts comprised content explaining the latest “sustainable” collections and initiatives. However, the language used in the short-written texts associated with each post was ambiguous and rather vague. Expressions like *kankyō ni yasashii risaikuru sozai* (環境に優しいリサイクル素材), “eco-friendly recycled materials”, *sasutenaburuna seisan hōhō* (サステナブル生産方法), “sustainable production methods”, *jizoku kanōna sozai* (持続可能な素材), “sustainable materials” were prevalent. At the same time, these posts did not explain what these materials and method were, leaving the reader with no knowledge of these companies’ “sustainable” deeds.

Our hypothesis is that, as a general trend, “sustainability” is adopted by these companies as something that has to be treated separately from the rest of their products and production processes. Their LINE campaign is, in fact, often divided into two sections, one featuring “sustainable” products and the other “normal” products. This can be seen by the fact that, apart from rare claims regarding “ethical” deeds of the companies, “sustainability” seems to only exist as relegated to specific collections, rather than permeating the marketing campaign as a whole. We think that this can generate mistrust among those audiences that care about these themes, since this

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<sup>551</sup> Note that, according to the greenwashing framework that we are using, a post that will score even once as “obvious greenwash” will be considered greenwashed, no matter how it did for the other questions.

communication strategy can heavily imply that, except for the “eco-friendly” products, these firms are selling clothing made in a non-responsible way. This is in fact shown by the absence of words like “sustainable” and “environmentally friendly” in the so-called “normal” posts, that make up the vast majority of the posts analyzed here.

### **3.5 Conclusions**

In this chapter, we learned about the growing popularity of social media in marketing practices and the role of digitalization in luxury fashion marketing. Pushed by the ever-growing competition, luxury brands have found themselves with no choice but to adopt e-commerce practices in their business models. This phenomenon, also called Luxury 4.0, consists of the adoption by luxury companies of a number of digital tools, such as social media, that help them be more in tune with contemporary customers. Social media have been found to be extremely important, allowing companies to develop “two-way interactive communication” with their customers, in line with the trend of the “fourth consumer society”. Customers will feel more connected with the brands and will develop feelings of trust towards them, all thanks to the interactivity and, sometimes, transparency that social media can give. Finally, a distinction between “traditional” and “image-based” social media was introduced, with the latter being the most popular nowadays. Their ability to combine visual clues and written texts makes them far more engaging than “traditional” ones since they elicit an emotional response in the customer that is more direct and immediate.

We then discussed how social media can be employed to make CSR statements, highlighting risks and opportunities. To the formers belongs the “greenwashing” risk, namely the selective disclosure of the company’s environmental and social deeds. We then examined how luxury firms are adopting CSR disclosure through their social media accounts, albeit not without some attritions with their public. There is, in fact, no consensus on whether the terms “sustainability” and “luxury” are actually compatible. Some argue, in fact, that the customer themselves perceive luxury as untouched by “green” properties, that, if possessed, would otherwise “ruin” the very nature of “luxury” items. On the other hand, it has been argued that the inherent nature of luxury as scarce can be connected to the principles of “sustainability” of restrained production quantities and zero waste of materials. Of course, luxury brands can employ social media to overcome these difficulties by, for example, informing and educating their customers regarding their “sustainable” practices. This process is relatively eased by the very nature of social media, that, as already said, allows for a more interactive and engaging communication.

Next, we explained why LINE is extremely popular in Japan due to a number of factors, including its unique features (stickers) and its ease of use.

Finally, we delved into the analysis conducted on the LINE platform regarding LINE accounts of Italian luxury fashion companies already operating in Japan. We first discussed the methods and then we presented the findings. It emerged that these companies engage with “sustainability” on a limited basis, since “non-ethical” posts between August 2020 and August 2022 far outweighed the “sustainable” posts, with them being only 7% of the total posts collected. Qualitative analysis also showed that, although the number of “obvious greenwash” posts was outweighed by the “no greenwash” posts, it still remained work to do regarding the engagement of these companies with sustainability.

## Conclusions

We began our thesis by introducing general concepts of “sustainability” and “sustainable development”. We noted that their origin was rooted in the 1980s Euroamerican political context, and we highlighted the three main dimensions of “sustainability”: economic, social and environmental. We then delved into what constitutes “sustainability” in Japan, starting with its population’s perceptions towards it. After a recollection of environmentally disastrous events that hit Japan in this last decade, we analysed several Japanese governmental surveys, issued between 2007 and 2020. These polls were useful in performing a diachronic analysis of Japanese people’s sentiments and awareness towards environmental issues and eco-friendly practices. It appeared that Japanese people’s interest towards global environmental issues has been declining since 2007. At the same time, awareness towards waste problems continued to increase, not followed, however, by the same willingness to adopt recycling practices. On the other hand, Japanese consumers, especially the young ones, were increasingly eager, throughout the years, to buy recycled products. This was, however, the only time young generations proved to be the most engaged in “eco-friendly” practices. In fact, it is remarkable how the youngest people were also the most detached from the “sustainable” discourse. According to our surveys, they were the age group least interested in global environmental issues. It was also found that the level of engagement of men outweighed that of women in all the polls examined.

Next, we turned to Japanese social problems regarding gender inequality, analyzing governmental social surveys concerning these same themes. Here, improvements regarding women’s opportunities in Japanese workplaces were noted over years. Likewise, all respondents were, in general, increasingly more aware of gender inequalities and unequal job opportunities between genders. Once again, younger respondents were the least concerned with these problems, being one of the only two age groups, together with the elderly, not thinking that Japan had a gender inequality problem.

We then moved to a diachronic analysis of the main policies adopted by the Japanese government and of initiatives of Japanese people to address Japan’s ecological and social issues. It emerged that, although Japan has introduced a series of “eco-conscious” technologies for its “sustainable development”, it was also, until 2010, one of the main emitters of greenhouse gases in the world. We also focused on Japan’s efforts to curb gender inequalities, although also in this field notable work remains to be done.

We then turned our attention to the fashion industry, in particular luxury, since its relevance to the main aim of our thesis. We started our discussion by providing an analysis of the various

definitions comprised within the fashion segments. It emerged that the concept of luxury, one of these segments, is becoming increasingly blurred in contemporary industry. It is losing, in fact, its aura of mystery, and exclusiveness, in favour of a more pronounced democratization that is happening thanks to contemporary communication media.

After examining the nature and the origin of the word “luxury”, we traced its development throughout human history, noting that the idea of luxury has always borne ambivalent meanings, namely those of “exclusivity” and “lasciviousness”. At the same time, from a historical analysis of the luxury industry, we reported that the rising of the middle class and technological advancements in the 1800s across Europe represented turning points. They allowed, in fact, mass production of luxury goods, leading to their popularization among the general public.

In order to understand how “sustainable” methods could be implemented in the fashion industry, a brief analysis of both supply chain and marketing practices was conducted. We gave brief definitions of the main stages of a typical fashion supply chain, highlighting the specificities of the so-called “niche brands”, similar to the ones we refer to in this work. At the same time, we briefly examined marketing practices, giving a general definition of its main attributes and highlighting those factors that sets luxury marketing practices aside from the others.

Next, we provided an overview of the Japanese luxury market, identifying its declining trend as a symptom of Miura’s “fourth-stage consumer society”. It emerged that, since the 2008 economical crisis and the Tōhōku earthquake, experiences, rather than the purchase of the product itself, are being valued by Japanese customers, especially young ones. We then examined how the luxury industry can make its marketing and supply chains more “sustainable”, citing the debate, still open, of its compatibility with “sustainability”. Although some sceptical voices exist, we reported concrete evidence that luxury supply chains and brand management can be tools for the implementation of “sustainable” practices in luxury businesses.

Then, we moved to investigate Japanese consumers’ perspectives toward “sustainable” consumption, including fashion, constituting a natural prosecution of our previously conducted surveys’ analysis. Especially for younger generations, it emerged that, although apparel’s levels of consumption have greatly decreased throughout the years, consumers’ awareness and engagement regarding SDGs was extremely limited.

Finally, we analyzed the impact of digital marketing practices, mainly social media, in luxury fashion marketing. We found that social media, thanks to their inherent qualities, have been adopted by the majority of firms for their marketing campaigns, and also for promoting their CSR statements. We highlighted the risks and opportunities of promoting “sustainability” on social



media, citing, as a challenge for luxury companies, the still open debate of the compatibility of “luxury” “sustainability”. After providing a brief recollection of the causes that made LINE so popular in Japan, we delved into the findings of our analysis, conducted on a number of LINE posts of Italian luxury fashion companies already operating in Japan. It emerged that the number of “sustainable” posts was far outweighed by the “non-sustainable” ones. Moreover, among the “sustainable” posts, we found some instances of “greenwashing” ones, meaning that in some cases these companies were not clear regarding how “sustainable” methods were implemented in their production processes.

We consider our dissertation to be a starting point for future discussions about “sustainability” and “sustainable” luxury fashion in Japan. We examined top-down “sustainable” policies made by the Japanese government throughout these years in response to the implementation of Bruntland guidelines in 1987. Their effectiveness, however, is still the object of debate, and discussions regarding the “sustainable development” landscape are still limited among Japanese people. Their response to the adoption of “sustainable” practices and behaviours somewhat eschewed a simple categorization, being multifaceted and depending on various intersectional factors. Our study has shown that the youngest generations (people between 19 and 28 years old) are the least involved in any “sustainable” practice. This disinterest can be seen throughout all of the surveys analyzed, and is reflected in certain consumer behaviours. Albeit young people have been shown to consume less than their older counterparts, they engage in this frugality because of reasons that have nothing in common with “sustainability”.

Our hypothesis is that companies are aware of this lack of engagement, and do not make “sustainability” a focus in their marketing strategies. Proof of this could be the findings of our LINE analysis. All of the firms posted a relatively small amount of content regarding their “ethical” practices, displaying, at times, instances of “greenwashing” among the ways in which this content was presented.

The usefulness of this analysis could stem from the fact that provides readers with an overview of Japanese people’s perspectives on “sustainability” and their “ethical” consumption behaviours. At the same time, it provides empirical evidence of how other Italian *haute couture* firms are implementing “sustainability” in their marketing practices targeted towards Japan. In this thesis, we were able to answer our main questions, stated at the beginning of this work. These were “are Italian haute couture companies unwilling to create “sustainable” marketing strategies for the Japanese market? If so, why is this the case?”. However, we were not able to further investigate how these companies should conduct their “sustainable” marketing operations

targeted towards Japan in the future. Further research should be conducted on giving these companies concrete guidelines and advice that could help them build “sustainable” marketing strategies. The limits

We were not able to directly gather data from Japanese individuals, since there were no opportunities neither travelling to Japan or interviewing Japanese people. Moreover, surveys regarding Japanese people’s attitudes toward “sustainable” fashion consumption were limited. Also, we were not able to properly assess whether or not the “socially sustainable” posts found within the analysis were the source of “greenwashing” since a proper framework does not exist as of now. Finally, our LINE analysis lacked further interpretations that could have been given by Japanese informants regarding how they perceived the posts, as “greenwash” or not. This constitutes a limit, since having Japanese people’s opinions on the matter could have given us a more detailed picture that could have gone beyond the Eurocentric interpretation presented in this thesis.

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