

**Louvain School of Management
and Vytautas Magnus University**

MANAGING SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION TO BUILD BRAND REPUTATION IN THE LUXURY FASHION INDUSTRY: THE CASE OF LVMH GROUP

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SUMMARY

In recent years, sustainability has become a defining factor in shaping stakeholder expectations in the luxury fashion industry. Despite significant institutional investment in sustainability governance, consumer trust in luxury sustainability communication remains critically low and a gap with direct consequences for brand reputation.

The problem of the research addressed in this paper is how luxury fashion brands can manage sustainability communication to build their brand reputation. **The object of the paper is** sustainability communication management for building brand reputation in the luxury fashion industry. **The aim of the paper is** based on the theoretical and empirical research results, to provide sustainability communication management solutions for building a good brand reputation in the luxury fashion industry.

Research methods: theoretical literature analysis; qualitative content analysis of brand sustainability communications; expert interviews; standardised online consumer survey. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation in Jamovi.

Results: the empirical research confirmed that consumer scepticism is the dominant orientation toward luxury sustainability. The study identified that consumers consider sustainability reputationally important, yet reject current sustainability communication as failing to deliver a prestige premium. 64.8% of respondents had never heard of LVMH's LIFE 360 programme, confirming that the Group's institutional sustainability communication does not reach consumer audiences.

Conclusions: based on the empirical findings, a two-track model of sustainability communication design was developed for LVMH Group, integrating an Accountability management track - external verification, and honest gap acknowledgement - with a Communication management track covering social-media LIFE 360 campaigns.

This paper is a practical solutions oriented final master thesis.

Key words: brand reputation, luxury fashion, LVMH Group, sustainability communication, sustainable marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Relevance of the topic and level of its scientific research. Nowadays, climate change and overconsumption create major challenges not only for the planet and humankind but also for industries ranging from fashion to automotive and services. As a result, sustainability has become a key factor in responsible purchasing decisions, particularly within the luxury fashion industry (Raninen, 2023). Stakeholders now demand not only premium quality but also ethical practices, transparency, and environmental responsibility (Golob et al., 2023). Faced with such expectations, luxury houses can no longer rely on conventional one-way formats like annual sustainability reports or static CSR sections on corporate websites. A growing number of them are turning instead to interactive, multi-stakeholder communication frameworks that allow for dialogue and shared meaning-making (Weder et al., 2021). Whereas luxury brand storytelling once revolved around exclusivity, heritage, and aspiration alone, sustainability has gradually entered this narrative core: the provenance of raw materials, production conditions, and ecological footprint are now woven into how brands present themselves to the public (Adomßent & Godemann, 2011; Grauel et al., 2025).

The LVMH Group offers an illustrative example. Managing a portfolio of more than 75 maisons, the conglomerate embodies both the difficulties and the possibilities of reconciling sustainability principles with the codes of luxury. This diversity highlights the need to explore how luxury fashion houses use sustainability communication to defend and enhance their reputations in an era of rising consumer awareness, strict regulations, and widespread skepticism.

While sustainability communication has received considerable academic attention in relation to mass-market retail and fast fashion, the luxury segment has been studied noticeably less. Most existing studies focus on either consumer perceptions of green products or reputational risks, such as greenwashing. Comparatively little has been written about the ways in which luxury brands actually construct, organize, and position their sustainability messages, especially when these messages must hold together values that appear to pull in opposite directions, such as exclusivity and accessibility, heritage and innovation, or indulgence and responsibility (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013; Kang & Sung, 2021). At the same time, the regulatory landscape is shifting: instruments like the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD, 2022) are turning what used to be voluntary disclosure into a binding obligation. All of this points to a clear gap and an urgent need for academic work examining how luxury brands can communicate sustainability in ways that both defend and reinforce their brand equity.

The problem of the research addressed in this paper is how luxury fashion brands can manage sustainability communication to build their brand reputation.

The object of the paper is sustainability communication management for building brand reputation in the luxury fashion industry.

The aim of the paper is based on the theoretical and empirical research results, to provide sustainability communication management solutions for building a good brand reputation in the luxury fashion industry.

To reach the aim the following **objectives** were set:

1. To conduct a theoretical analysis of sustainability communication to build a good brand reputation in the luxury fashion industry.
2. To conduct empirical research based on the prepared methodology.
3. To provide sustainability communication design solutions to build a good brand reputation in the luxury fashion industry.

The paper is **structured** in 3 main parts.

In the first part of the paper, there is a theoretical analysis of scientific literature about sustainability communication, brand reputation building, and the use of sustainability communication to build brand reputation in the luxury fashion industry. The key concepts and theoretical frameworks applied in this study are defined and discussed.

The second part presents the methodology of the research, the qualitative analysis of secondary data, including publicly available sustainability communications and reports of LVMH Group, LIFE 360 program, and its selected Maisons; and the empirical analysis of LVMH brand communications through expert interviews and a consumer survey.

The third part provides sustainability communication design solutions to build a good brand reputation in the luxury fashion industry, based on the empirical research results, and presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

Research methods. Literature analysis and synthesis is conducted based on scientific articles and regulatory documentation to define core concepts. Qualitative data was collected through secondary data analysis gathered from brand websites, official sustainability reports, and social media outputs of selected LVMH Maisons, as well as through expert interviews with five professionals from the fashion, sustainability, and luxury industries. Quantitative primary data was obtained using a standardised online consumer survey administered internationally (N = 389). A graphical representation of statistics was used to present the primary data. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, one-sample t-tests, and paired samples t-tests were conducted in Jamovi to test the research hypotheses. Finally, to achieve the goal of the work, a solutions design method was used.

Information sources. Sustainability communication was analysed based on Adomßent and Godemann (2011), Fischer (2021), Golob et al. (2022), and Vuković et al. (2025), as well as Camilleri et al. (2023), Morsing and Schultz (2006), and Cimakauskaite (2026). The development of sustainability concepts and policy context was informed by the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987), European Union directives, and industry analyses including McKinsey & Company (Berg et al., 2020). Special focus was given to luxury fashion and brand communication strategies through Arrigo (2015), Raninen (2023), Grauel et al. (2025), and Pricopoaia et al. (2025). Theoretical perspectives were supported by additional insights from Viciunaite (2020) and Guevarra (2024). Empirical data were collected by analysing social media and official websites of selected luxury fashion brands within the LVMH Group. A full glossary of terms is provided in *Annex 1*.

The usage of generative artificial intelligence and its tools. In preparing of the thesis, several AI tools were used to support research and writing. ChatGPT (OpenAI) listed in Annex 2 was used at the stage of literature search: prompts were formulated requesting relevant academic articles on the key topics of the, as well as the Claude Opus 4.7, listed in Annex 3. NotebookLM (Google), listed in Annex 4, was used to organise and work with collected academic sources: uploaded articles were summarised, key arguments were extracted, and thematic connections between sources were identified to support the theoretical analysis.

1. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION TO BUILD BRAND REPUTATION IN LUXURY FASHION

1.1. Definition of sustainability communication

In academic literature, sustainability communication is a relatively new and evolving concept with multiple definitions. Broadly, it refers to how organizations convey their sustainability values and performance to stakeholders. Early academics frame sustainability communication to advance society's transformation towards sustainable development. For instance, Adomßent and Godemann (2011) define sustainability communication as a form of communication that seeks to drive transformation processes towards more sustainable social practices (Adomßent & Godemann, 2011). In essence, communication has evolved from a narrow public relations perspective to a critical driver of sustainability. Indeed, the industry faces a projected 2.7 trillion tons of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 if no changes are made (Berg et al., 2020), and brands are under unprecedented pressure to account for their environmental and social impact in core business models (Vuković et al., 2025). This transformative perspective underscores the significance of public education and the promotion of critical reflection on environmental and ethical issues as foundational objectives of sustainability communication (Guevarra, 2024).

Other scholars define sustainability communication in a more organizational and strategic context, linking it to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and stakeholder relations. From a corporate perspective, sustainability communication is defined as the integration of sustainability into a company's communication strategy with the objective of informing and engaging stakeholders (customers, employees, investors, and communities) about the firm's environmental and social initiatives. For example, Raninen (2023) notes that the purpose of sustainability communication is typically to inform stakeholders about a business's sustainability agenda, actions, and results (Raninen, 2023). Traditionally, this was done through one-way reporting (e.g., sustainability reports), but over time, companies have moved beyond mere disclosure.

The conceptual underpinnings of sustainability communication trace back to the Brundtland Commission's 1987 report, which defined sustainable development through the three pillars of people, profit, and planet (WCED, 1987). By 2012, this framework had evolved; for example, the emphasis had shifted to people, planet, and prosperity, highlighting that economic growth must coincide with social and environmental well-being (Arrigo, 2015). In luxury fashion, embracing this broadened view of sustainability requires more than a

managerial checklist; it demands what Vuković et al. (2024) call a “moral prism” through which ethical considerations become integral to the brand’s identity. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this paradigm change by spotlighting the industry’s carbon footprint and prompting consumers to adopt more sustainability-oriented habits, thereby forcing brands to reconsider their models in real time (Vuković et al., 2024).

Despite rising awareness, companies still struggle with the so-called “intention–behavior gap” (Camilleri et al., 2023). Consumers profess strong pro-environmental values, yet sustainable products capture only a small fraction (often 3–4%) of market share. Scholars attribute this gap to issues of trust and authenticity - many consumers remain skeptical of brands’ green claims. One way to bridge the gap is to foster perceived sincerity in communications (Vuković et al., 2024). Sincerity is becoming both a marketing ideal and a regulatory necessity. New European directives such as the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (2023) and the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (2024) are effectively enshrining transparency and accountability into law, leaving companies little room for superficial claims (Grauel et al., 2025). In essence, what might once have been a voluntary “PR gesture” is now moving toward mandatory disclosure and verification.

Sustainability communication involves all the ways in which companies show their commitment to environmental and social sustainability to their stakeholders. This can include internal reports, public disclosures, marketing campaigns and interactive dialogue with consumers and communities.

Notably, the literature has been moving away from Kilbourne’s (2004) limited notion of green advertising toward a more integrative approach to sustainability communication. Where early 2000s “green” campaigns often merely added a dash of eco-friendliness to products, contemporary sustainability communication in luxury fashion strives to embed sustainability into the core narrative and operations of the brand. This shift is essential if luxury brands are to be seen as sincere drivers of change rather than as executing superficial 'PR stunts'. In many jurisdictions and markets, deliberative and even transformative communication approaches are increasingly expected, if not formally mandated. The adoption of global frameworks like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) in 2015 further legitimized sustainability as a central theme for business communication (Lim, 2017; United Nations, 2015). Companies are thus challenged to communicate in ways that not only inform but also engage and empower stakeholders toward collective progress on sustainability issues. The key definitions identified in the literature are summarized in *Table 1*.

Table 1*Definitions of sustainability communication*

Author	Concept
Vuković et al. (2025)	A complex, long-term process extending product life through reselling, repairing, or recycling.
Golob et al. (2023)	A global social process consisting of a recursive sequence of contributions and debates for a better ecological and social life.
Camilleri et al. (2023)	A holistic approach based on balancing the Triple Bottom Line (economic, environmental, social) dimensions.
Kilbourne (2004)	Green advertising – a narrow approach focusing only on environmental aspects of marketing communications.

The absence of clear conceptualizations and definitions... is a cause for concern as it creates an ‘empty space’ that suggests a lack of theoretical grounding and coherence of sustainability communication (Wang et al., 2020, as cited in Golob et al., 2023).

In summary, sustainability communication manifests in multiple dimensions, each with distinct tactics and objectives. An effective luxury brand strategy will navigate all three modes: engaging in honest public dialogue, broadcasting its achievements and goals with credibility, and inspiring both internal and external stakeholders to participate in sustainability initiatives. The theoretical categorizations provided by recent scholarship offer a roadmap to doing so, ensuring that the brand’s communication efforts are comprehensive and grounded in a clear conceptual understanding of what sustainability communication entails.

1.2. Strategies for sustainability communication

To communicate sustainability, brands have the possibility to choose from many options, starting from in-store communication and in-person interaction to social media posts and advertising billboards. While some methods may be more effective than others, communication is crucial in raising awareness of the situation in the fashion world. However, when presented in too much detail, it becomes difficult for consumers to understand and process meaningful information, and technical details such as production methods, materials, and substances used are too complex for consumers (Kaner and Baruh, 2022). For this reason, fashion brands must consider what type of communication is best to reach their consumers.

To clarify this broad concept, scholars have delineated multiple dimensions or modes of sustainability communication. Golob et al. (2023) and Weder et al. (2021) synthesize prior research into three primary modes, each reflecting a different communicative purpose and level of stakeholder engagement:

Deliberative communication (communication **about** sustainability) treats sustainability as a topic for public discourse and debate. It is characterized by open, two-way dialogue in which companies and stakeholders collaboratively construct the meaning of sustainability and co-create solutions. For example, a luxury brand might host forums, panel discussions, or interactive campaigns that invite feedback and encourage conversation about environmental and social issues. The goal is not immediate profit but to engage the community and build consensus around sustainable practices. For instance, Dior has implemented panel sessions involving environmental NGOs and artisans to explore responsible sourcing, encouraging stakeholder involvement beyond the brand (Weder et al., 2021).

Instrumental communication (communication **of** sustainability) is a strategic, managerially driven process aimed at achieving specific organizational goals, such as enhancing reputation, influencing consumer behavior, or communicating sustainability initiatives. This communication is designed to enhance brand image or preempt criticism (Fischer et al., 2024). Examples of such reports include sustainability reports, press releases concerning eco-friendly products, and marketing campaigns that emphasise green features. It can raise awareness, but it has been critiqued for focusing on broadcasting a polished message rather than fostering true engagement (Golob et al., 2023). Luxury brands relying solely on this mode risk being perceived as greenwashing if stakeholders detect that the communication is more about self-promotion than substantive change. An example is the LIFE 360 programme by LVMH, which articulates climate, biodiversity, and transparency objectives in annual reports. These structured documents act as proof of architecture for long-term transformation and governance (LVMH, 2021).

Transformative communication (communication **for** sustainability) is a strategic, participatory approach that goes beyond awareness to alter values, beliefs, and behaviors for long-term ecological and social change. It moves from one-way messaging to engaging dialogue, fostering a shared, actionable vision of sustainability rather than simply promoting green initiatives (Sustenuto, 2023). This often involves educational content, advocacy, and calls to action that encourage stakeholders to participate in sustainability initiatives or adopt new norms. In the context of luxury fashion, transformative communication involves campaigns that not only market a product but also advocate broader concepts such as the circular economy, slow fashion, or cultural shifts in consumption. This is consistent with the concept of the moral compass in sustainability communication, where brands proactively advocate for sustainability issues that extend beyond their immediate business interests. Louis Vuitton's recycling awareness campaigns and its educational collaborations with students and design schools align

with transformative intent, promoting cultural shifts around reuse and circular fashion (LVMH, 2024).

These modes are not mutually exclusive; in practice, effective sustainability communication often blends elements of all three. A brand might instrumentally announce a new eco-friendly collection (instrumental mode), while also hosting roundtables with experts and consumers about sustainable fashion (deliberative mode), and partnering with NGOs to campaign for recycling or upcycling (transformative mode). Recognizing these modes helps in understanding how academic perspectives classify sustainability communication efforts.

While modes clarify the overall orientation of sustainability communication, strategy design can be described more precisely using the typology proposed by Fischer et al. (2021). This framework differentiates four strategic types according to the intended outcome and route to change: Behaviour change, Self-empowerment, Systems change, and Constructing sustainable consumption (Fischer et al., 2021). These types are particularly useful for fashion brands because they clarify whether communication aims to change immediate choice behaviour, develop consumer capabilities, influence broader systems, or reshape cultural meanings around sustainability and consumption. The main sustainability communication strategy types, their objectives, tactics, and trust dimensions are summarized in *Table 2*.

Table 2

Sustainability communication strategy types

Strategy Type	Objective	Tactics	Trust Focus
Behaviour change	Steer consumer choices via simple cues	Eco-labels on tags; sustainability slogans on packaging	Competence (clear, factual)
Self-empowerment	Educate and build consumer capability	Clear product lifecycle info; care and repair tutorials	Integrity (transparency)
Systems change	Advocate structural solutions (regulations, etc.)	Industry coalitions; certifications; supply-chain programs	Competence and integrity
Constructing meaning	Shape cultural narrative around sustainability	Storytelling campaigns; influencer collaborations	Benevolence (values-driven)

Note: the table is based on Fischer et al. (2021) and trust mechanisms from Mayer et al. (1995).

Behaviour change strategies aim to influence consumer decisions towards better options by providing low-friction cues and incentives (Fischer et al., 2021). According to Viciunaite (2020) and her application of translation theory, firms must translate their complex sustainable business models into tangible product attributes (e.g. microplastic-free or organic)

to make them easier for consumers to process. In fashion, such strategies typically involve eco-claims, material highlights, simplified impact indicators and price or availability nudges. However, brands must overcome the sustainability liability effect, whereby consumers inherently perceive green products as inferior or less effective (ElHaffar et al., 2023; Turut, 2024). To counter this, behaviour-change messaging must rely on objective pre-launch communication, independent third-party testing and accurate verbal claims (Turut, 2024). The dominant trust cue is often competence (this product performs well and is environmentally friendly), supported by minimal integrity cues through labels. The main risk is that these simplified cues can damage a brand's reputation if they are ambiguous or inconsistent across products, thereby increasing scepticism (Golob et al., 2023). Behaviour-change messaging may also fail to close the attitude–behaviour gap if structural barriers such as price premiums or limited availability prevent action (Fischer et al., 2021).

Self-empowerment strategies emphasise education, transparency and capability building (Fischer et al., 2021). These strategies are closely aligned with the concept of communication about sustainability (CaS), which involves shifting from one-way broadcasting to a deliberative, two-way dialogue designed for shared meaning-making (Newig et al., 2013; Weder et al., 2021). Typical tactics include 'how it's made' explanations, repair and care tutorials, transparent supplier narratives, and accessible reporting summaries. In the luxury context, Arrigo (2018) notes that this capability building extends to physical touchpoints, where trained personnel in flagship stores act as vital educators in sustainability. Furthermore, the incorporation of detailed third-party reviews and the utilisation of green influencers provides consumers with authentic, practical information that actively empowers them (Turut, 2024). Trust primarily develops here through integrity (clarity, substantiation and openness) and benevolence (helping consumers to act more sustainably) (Mayer et al., 1995). The main limitation is operational: sustained communication resources and organisational alignment are required for empowerment, and contradictions or omissions can be rapidly brought to light by stakeholders, especially on social media.

Systems change strategies target broader networks rather than individual choices, through methods such as forming alliances, setting standards, creating circular infrastructures and implementing traceability systems (Fischer et al., 2021). In this context, communication often becomes part of institutional coordination and building legitimacy. To manage the high level of public scrutiny associated with systemic claims, brands must implement rigorous legitimisation strategies, adopting a neutral and transparent communication approach regarding both past performance and future goals to avoid accusations of greenwashing (García-Sánchez et al., 2020). Comprehensive corporate websites and detailed Environmental, Social and

Governance (ESG) reporting are identified as the primary channels for effectively communicating these complex infrastructural shifts to a wide stakeholder network (Luo et al., 2021). Trust is created through competence (evidence of governance and infrastructure) and integrity (external validation and consistent reporting) (Mayer et al., 1995). However, systems change claims attract higher scrutiny, and it is more difficult to attribute outcomes; therefore, brands must avoid overstating their impact and demonstrate continuity between their claims and operations (Golob et al., 2023).

The construction of sustainable communication strategies reshapes the cultural meaning of sustainability and consumption. For example, luxury is reframed as longevity, care, and stewardship (Fischer et al., 2021). Adopting a communication approach for sustainability (CfS), this transformative strategy actively challenges existing consumption paradigms, establishing new sustainable norms (Newig et al., 2013; Weder et al., 2021). In the luxury fashion sector, this involves closing the gap between attitude and behaviour by reframing eco-friendly luxury as an elevated altruistic status symbol and a new form of social signalling, rather than as a potential functional compromise (Grauel et al., 2025). Furthermore, Viciunaite (2020) suggests that brands can achieve this cultural shift by demonstrating the positive consequences of their actions for society, animal welfare, and the environment, thereby redefining what consumers consider valuable. While these strategies can create strong affective alignment and brand differentiation by primarily activating benevolence (values) and integrity (narrative coherence), they require a 'proof layer' to avoid being interpreted as symbolic communication without substance (Golob et al., 2023).

To sum up, strategies for sustainability communication represent a multidimensional and evolving field shaped by increasing stakeholder expectations, technological innovation, and the inherent complexity of environmental data. Academic literature consolidates these strategies into several interrelated frameworks, such as the foundational modes (communication of, about, and for sustainability) and the strategic typology (behavioural, self-empowerment, systems change, and meaning-construction approaches).

Each strategy fulfils different communicative goals, from informing and persuading to educating, empowering and effecting cultural change. Luxury fashion brands within the LVMH Group, such as Louis Vuitton and Dior, have started implementing combinations of these strategies. However, the effectiveness of these approaches depends not only on the strategic model adopted, but also on the clarity, authenticity and consistency of communication. For instance, instrumental strategies may be perceived as insincere or opportunistic if they are not based on credible practices, whereas transformative strategies require sustained investment in co-creation and stakeholder engagement to gain legitimacy.

1.3. Brand reputation building process

In order to properly analyze the brand reputation building process, at first, it is important to define what brand reputation is by itself. Brand reputation can be described as a complex, multidimensional social evaluation based on stakeholders' aggregated perceptions of a brand's past performance, values, and expected future behavior (Molinillo, Japutra, & Ekinici, 2022). It can represent the value that consumers associate with a brand, which reflects the long-term perception of it (Chen, He, & Jung, 2024). Specifically, Brammer and Pavelin (2004) conceptualize reputation as a perceptual representation of a company's past actions and future prospects that describes the firm's overall appeal to all its key constituents (Muhammad et al., 2024). For this reason, brand reputation can be maintained as a core variable in improving the company's attractiveness and its capacity for the retention of both clients and investors (van den Heever, 2018; Açıkgöz et al., 2024).

The reputation of the brand can be a competitive advantage during crises, since it is intangible and difficult for competitors to imitate (Chen et al., 2024). By effectively using marketing and communication tools, reputation creates a specific image in the minds of stakeholders and, in the long term, establishes the brand reputation.

Brand reputation can be positive, or it can be affected by a negative image; fundamentally, reputation is a set of values that a brand has in the eyes of consumers, customers, and investors. In today's complex and often inauthentic world, consumers and other stakeholders, such as partner organizations, increasingly seek brand authenticity to determine their engagement and loyalty to brands (Guévremont, 2018).

For fashion brands to maintain their brand DNA, it is imperative for the brands' core values to be maintained as an integral aspect of authenticity (Carnie et al., 2023). While much research has explored the authenticity of brands, relatively little has been done to understand how authenticity can be maintained during dynamic corporate shifts or rebranding. Customers are increasingly demanding more sustainable and responsible brand practices, including greater sustainability and transparency in supply chains (Brindley & Oxborrow, 2014). In response to this shift, many modern companies and business-to-business (B2B) startups have embedded sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) firmly into their brand DNA (Carnie et al., 2023).

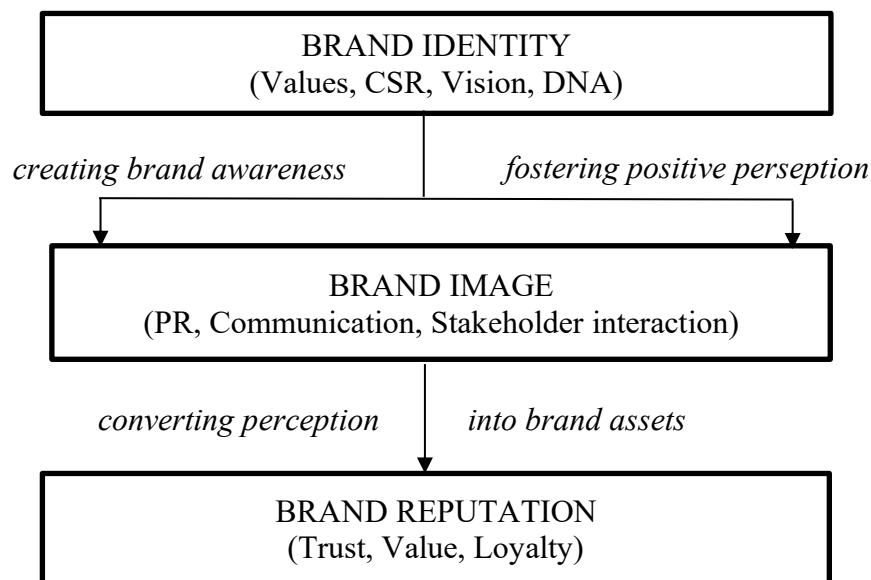
The modern brand reputation-building process involves three interacting dimensions: creating awareness, fostering positive perceptions, and converting these into brand assets (Pakura & Rudeloff, 2020). Firstly, generating awareness creates perceptions among

employees, customers and the general public, thereby stabilising interactions between a firm and its stakeholders. Second, this awareness must be developed into positive assessments to increase the probability that stakeholders will interact with the brand (Pakura & Rudeloff, 2020). Finally, consumer trust is vital in transforming these assessments into a reputational asset. Brand characteristics such as competence and predictability help to develop consumer trust, as buyers base their trust on a brand's reliability, perceived capabilities and market value (Afzal, Khan, Ur Rehman, Ali & Wajahat, 2010).

By combining these dimensions with the brand's fundamental elements, we can visualise the process of brand reputation building process as it is provided in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1

Brand reputation building process



Source: adapted from Šontaitė & Kristensen (2009); Pakura & Rudeloff (2020); Carnie et al. (2023).

In order to understand how organisations build resilient corporate assets, it is necessary to deconstruct the three-stage brand-building framework. Effective branding strategies are critical for global brands, as they can result in increased brand equity, improved market positioning, enhanced customer loyalty and sustainable financial success. From a consumer perspective, premium brands symbolise much more than functional utility; they symbolise personal identity and self-expression. Therefore, examining consumer behaviour and strategic communication in these markets sheds light on the psychological mechanisms that drive the transition from internal brand identity to external brand reputation.

Stage 1: The reputation-building process begins at the core of the organization: its brand identity. Brand identity is defined as the unique value perception established by the integration of brand positioning, brand culture, and brand presentation (Jin et al., 2019; Ward et al., 2020). Different from brand image, which often focuses on short-term results and immediate impressions, brand identity represents the highest level of the consumer-brand relationship and is deeply strategic (Jin et al., 2019). A strong brand identity is achieved by integrating core values, such as sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR), directly into the brand's DNA. Brand identity communicates the brand's personality and uniqueness to consumers, ultimately gaining their recognition and long-term support (Barros et al., 2020). Clearly defining what the brand stands for enables the company to initiate a psychological connection with its target audience (Alvarado-Karste & Guzmán, 2020). When an organisation successfully aligns its core values with those of its target audience, consumers establish a deep psychological connection with the brand. This powerful connection is known as consumer-brand identity; it is the state in which consumers perceive, feel and value a sense of belonging to a brand (So et al., 2017).

A good example of this can be taken from the LVMH group and its Stella McCartney brand. Long before environmentalism became a mainstream industry trend, the brand integrated sustainability and cruelty-free principles into its core brand identity. By fundamentally linking its identity to ethical sourcing and material innovation, the brand has established a clear and unique perception of its values. This authentic DNA enables the company to forge a profound consumer-brand identity and attract stakeholders who share these values.

Stage 2: While brand identity is the internal reality of what the organization is, the brand image represents stakeholders' instantaneous impression of the brand (Šontaitė & Kristensen, 2009). Cantá Honores and Barcellos-Paula (2024) emphasize that brand image is not only a reflection of a company's functional characteristics but a symbolic representation of its attitudes and ethics, which influences consumers' cognitive evaluations.

One component of building a brand image is strategic marketing communication. According to Viciunaite (2022), the process of projecting business models to the public can be viewed through the lens of translation theory. Firms must actively translate their complex internal corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and core DNA into framed messages that are relevant and meaningful to the target audience (Viciunaite, 2022).

Furthermore, Repova, Lendelova, and Lendel (2024) argue that the traditional framework of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has shifted from one-way broadcasting (e.g., television, print) to a highly data-driven, personalized approach utilizing digital channels. To shape a positive image, brands must deliver a cohesive message across all

platforms. However, this communication must remain strictly authentic. Al Homssi, Ali, and Hashoush (2023) warn that consumers' responses to marketing campaigns are extremely skeptical. If a company's communication artificially amplifies positive information while downplaying negative data, it enters the territory of greenwashing. Vollero and Siano (2024) state that greenwashing behaviours provoke intense consumer skepticism and critically damage the brand's credibility. Therefore, transparent and authentic communication is the primary shield against skepticism during the image-building stage.

Public Relations (PR) acts as the central managerial mechanism for generating broad awareness and fostering positive public assessments. Pakura and Rudeloff (2020) state that modern PR practices for successful organizations have shifted away from purely persuasive or asymmetrical models toward an "understanding-oriented PR" model. This approach focuses on achieving mutual understanding between the organization and its publics rather than merely disseminating promotional material. A key element of understanding-oriented PR is environmental scanning, which allows PR practitioners to continuously monitor stakeholder interests and integrate those views directly into the organization's practices (Pakura & Rudeloff, 2020). Strauß and Šimunović (2025) and Vollero and Siano (2024) highlight that strategic PR involves complex processes of "sense-making" and "sense-giving." Through these processes, organizations interpret their own internal actions (sense-making) and communicate them in a way that shapes public perception and external organizational identity (sense-giving). By carefully managing these narratives, PR professionals ensure that the external image remains a true and accurate reflection of the brand's internal DNA.

Repova et al. (2024) emphasize that digital tools and social media platforms allow brands to actively seek customer feedback, assess satisfaction levels, and respond to consumer requirements. This active stakeholder interaction is a highly effective, low-cost method to build trust that traditional advertising cannot match. When brands successfully interact with their audience, they stimulate positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Kong, Witmaier, and Ko (2021) demonstrate that transparent and socially responsible interactions on social media strongly affect consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions, encouraging users to share positive eWOM across their own networks. By openly engaging in related debates and addressing customer concerns, the brand image is validated and reinforced by the public itself.

Stage 3: Brand reputation is accumulated by consumers' trust and credibility. Afzal et al. (2010) emphasize that consumer trust in a brand is built upon three foundational pillars: brand reputation, brand competence, and brand predictability. Consistency generates brand credibility, which refers to the extent to which an individual believes in a brand's trustworthiness and expertise (Molinillo, Japutra, & Ekinci, 2022). Furthermore, Liu, Kim, and

Lee (2024) assert that trust is a fundamental factor in shaping long-term purchasing patterns and in protecting the brand from consumer skepticism.

Adewole (2024) emphasizes how corporate social responsibility and consistent stakeholder interactions transform a reputable brand into tangible brand equity. Brand equity reflects the added value and strength of the brand based on consumers' subjective opinions and collective perceptions (Canta Honores & Barcellos-Paula, 2024). It is the financial and non-financial return that an organization gains from its positive reputation. A highly reputable brand generates an intangible shield against market crises and significantly increases consumers' willingness to pay a premium for the brand's products, thus maximizing the overall profitability and market value of the company (Chen, He, & Jung, 2024; Canta Honores & Barcellos-Paula, 2024).

The ultimate goal for any brand is to achieve lasting brand loyalty. According to contemporary marketing literature, true loyalty is not just behavioural (i.e. repeated purchases), but also deeply attitudinal (Canta Honores & Barcellos-Paula, 2024). When consumers develop a strong emotional bond and brand resonance, they perceive the brand as a reflection of their own personal and social values (Chen et al., 2024). This intense emotional attachment leads to brand advocacy. Loyal consumers not only repeatedly choose the brand over its competitors but also actively recommend it to others, spread positive word-of-mouth, and enthusiastically defend the organization in the marketplace (Molinillo et al., 2022; Açıkgöz, Kayakuş, Zăbavă, & Kabas, 2024). Consequently, brand reputation secures a loyal customer base that guarantees long-term, sustainable success.

To sum up, the brand reputation-building process is a highly strategic mechanism that requires organizational alignment. As demonstrated, reputation cannot be built overnight. It requires an organization to first formulate an authentic internal *Brand Identity*, deeply grounded in its corporate DNA, vision, and core values. The company must then project this identity outward through transparent strategic communication, understanding-oriented PR, stakeholder engagement to form a favorable *Brand Image*. Finally, by demonstrating market competence, fulfilling social promises, and validating consumer expectations over a prolonged period, these evolve into a lasting *Brand Reputation*. By successfully navigating this three-stage process, brands can transform their internal values into profound consumer trust, maximized brand equity, and unwavering attitudinal loyalty, ultimately providing the organization with a resilient and sustainable competitive advantage.

1.4. The use of sustainability communication to build brand reputation in luxury fashion

Luxury and sustainability are often seen as opposed concepts. In contemporary scholarship, luxury is traditionally associated with prestige, exclusivity, premium pricing, hedonism, and high-quality aesthetics (Mosca et al., 2025). From a consumer perspective, luxury brands symbolize much more than functional utility; they are profound indicators of social status, personal identity, and self-expression. As Xi et al. (2022) summarize, consumers purchase luxury goods because the symbolic value of these brands increases their self-esteem and directly answers the psychological need of who they want to be. In contrast, sustainability emphasises meeting basic needs through conservation and ethical practices.

However, introducing sustainability into the luxury sector creates significant theoretical and practical paradoxes. Luxury is often associated with superficiality, ostentation and heavy resource consumption, while sustainability is closely linked to altruism, frugality, resource conservation and ethical moderation (Grauel, Burmann & Schade, 2025; Kong, Witmaier & Ko, 2021).

Despite this inherent contradiction, recent studies demonstrate that luxury fashion firms are embracing sustainability strategies to mitigate environmental damage, enhance their brand image, and secure a long-term competitive advantage (Neokleous & Elmarzouky, 2025; Gárgoles Saes, Grilec, & Sejdini, 2022).

As brand engagement with green strategies continues to rise, the fashion industry has researched the alignment between the projected brand image and the actual corporate impact. Recent evaluations demonstrate that progress toward sustainability in the luxury sector remains slow. Earlier assessments, such as the 2017 Fashion Transparency Index, revealed that luxury brands achieved an average score of just 19.6% for corporate and supply chain transparency (Jovanovic, Rudd & Uanhoro, 2020). However, updated data show that this figure has increased only slightly to 26%, with many major brands still failing to disclose essential supply chain information or to commit to reducing new production (Lobanova, 2025). To navigate intense public scrutiny, luxury fashion firms are increasingly employing sophisticated impression management (IMP) tactics in their corporate reporting. However, without substantive action, these strategies are quickly identified as greenwashing, provoking severe consumer scepticism (Neokleous & Elmarzouky, 2025).

To overcome these perception barriers and consumer skepticism, luxury brands actively rely on strategic sustainability communication across digital platforms. In the digital age, communication is no longer a one-way broadcast; it requires active Digital Customer

Engagement (DCE). Social media provides a low-cost, dialogic channel that facilitates direct stakeholder interaction and helps build brand trust (Ashiq & Carnie, 2025; Řepová, Lendelová, & Lendel, 2024). According to Viciunaite (2022), brands must act as translators, carefully converting complex internal Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives into meaningful, framed messages for their audiences. When effectively executed, transparent communication stimulates positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which significantly elevates Green Perceived Value (GPV) and overall brand equity (Liu, Kim, & Lee, 2024; Kong et al., 2021). Furthermore, appealing to Generation Z and Millennials requires brands to align their narratives with authentic social activism and environmental stewardship (Canta Honores & Barcellos-Paula, 2024; Akdemir, 2024). Golob, Podnar, and Zabkar (2023) emphasize in their systematic reviews that sustainability communication must transcend traditional promotional tactics and adopt an interdisciplinary, transparent approach to resonate with modern stakeholders.

As part of their communication and operational strategies, luxury conglomerates are increasingly embracing the circular economy through resale, vintage collections, and innovative material sourcing. The global resale market is experiencing unprecedented growth, projected to reach \$82 billion by 2026, heavily driven by younger demographics on digital platforms (L'Officiel, 2024). This shift promotes a "buy less, buy better" mentality that aligns sustainability with luxury's inherent durability and heritage (Korovnikova, 2023; Turunen & Henninger, 2022). Studies on international markets, such as the Chinese second-hand luxury sector, reveal that eWOM and social media peer reviews act as the primary risk-relievers for consumers concerned with product authenticity and hygiene (Boardman, Zhou, & Guo, 2022). Additionally, the rise of virtual representation of fashion (VRF) and digital eco-labels are becoming pivotal tools in demonstrating a brand's commitment to net-zero targets and sustainable innovations without compromising physical resources (Strauß & Šimunović, 2025; Camilleri et al., 2023). By employing these new business models, luxury brands can communicate a narrative of historical preservation, similar to the sustainability frameworks observed in traditional artisan crafts, which allows consumers to enjoy products carrying deep cultural meanings (Nunoo, 2022; Lobanova, 2025).

Despite these strategic advancements, the risk of greenwashing remains a critical threat to corporate reputation. If sustainability claims are vague, lack verifiable evidence, or rely heavily on superficial Impression Management (IMP) tactics in annual corporate reports, highly trusting consumers quickly become deeply skeptical (Neokleous & Elmarzouky, 2025; Vollero & Siano, 2024). Such deceptive strategic communication provokes severe consumer backlash, damages brand credibility, and undermines the psychological attachment built between the brand and its stakeholders (Molinillo, Japutra, & Ekinici, 2022; Al Homssi, Ali, & Hashoush,

2023). As Kong et al. (2021) demonstrate, for luxury brands specifically, explicit environmental claims can cause cognitive dissonance; therefore, implicit, highly verifiable strategies are recommended to protect the brand's prestigious image.

To successfully translate sustainability efforts into a resilient corporate reputation and tangible brand equity, luxury fashion brands must integrate genuine ethical practices into their core business operations (Adewole, 2024; Açıkgöz, Kayakuş, Zăbavă & Kabas, 2024). This can be achieved by ensuring absolute supply chain traceability, fostering authentic dialogue on social networks and maintaining strict consistency between corporate actions and public narratives. By doing so, brands can successfully navigate the paradox of sustainable luxury, securing long-term loyalty and a sustainable competitive advantage.

1.5. Concluding notes on theoretical analysis

The conducted theoretical analysis reflected that sustainability communication is a highly complex, interdisciplinary process that aims to convey an organization's environmental, social, and economic initiatives to various stakeholders. It operates as a vital strategic tool that goes far beyond traditional promotional advertising. Its primary goal is not only to achieve marketing objectives but also to raise awareness, foster stakeholder dialogue, and drive sustainable consumption behaviors. Sustainability communication cannot be determined by simple marketing techniques alone; rather, companies must act as "translators" who convert complex corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives into meaningful narratives. Such communication can be classified into different strategic approaches and delivery patterns – ranging from formal sustainability reporting and explicit environmental claims to implicit, aesthetic messaging and active Digital Customer Engagement (DCE) on social media platforms. Each approach can be combined with various public relations activities to successfully reach the target audience.

Also, sustainability communication strategies must be carefully designed to avoid customers' skepticism. Companies' preference to utilize superficial Impression Management (IMP) tactics or exaggerate positive environmental actions while downplaying negative supply chain data frequently leads to the campaign being accepted as greenwashing. This deceptive communication critically damages brand credibility. To minimize negative impacts, organizations must embed genuine sustainability policies into their core code of conduct and ensure absolute transparency and verifiable data. Furthermore, companies need to identify their main stakeholders' socio-cultural and demographical characteristics and act accordingly, as

awareness and responses to sustainability initiatives vary significantly across different cultural contexts.

Corporate reputation can be formed and managed not only by organizational identity and projected image – Influence control, stakeholder interaction, transparent dialogue on digital platforms, ensuring high-quality services, and corporate governance improvement fundamentally contribute to it. Corporate reputation is a collective evaluation of an organization's ability to consistently meet social expectations over time. Comprehensive measurement frameworks, such as the RepTrak system, alongside authentic corporate social responsibility tailored to the organization's specific industry and size, serve as essential mechanisms to analyze and manage this intangible asset.

Finally, the use of sustainability communication to build a good corporate reputation in the luxury fashion industry is defined by a precise strategic alignment that carefully navigates the inherent paradox between luxury's exclusivity and sustainability's frugality. It was identified that for luxury brands, explicit environmental claims can cause cognitive dissonance and dilute brand prestige; therefore, implicit strategies, third-party certifications (e.g., B Corp), and the promotion of circular economy initiatives are much more effective. Because corporate reputation is a timely mature construct, sustainability communication needs to be rather long-term oriented to achieve not only an instant image improvement but a lasting, resilient reputation. Luxury brands need to clarify their authentic actions to avoid the "attitude-behaviour gap" and consumer dissatisfaction, which may severely damage their prestige. Consistent and transparent communication, which generates Green Perceived Value (GPV) and positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) through active digital engagement, is highly likely to increase trust, foster loyalty, and successfully build a superior corporate reputation.

2. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON THE LVMH GROUP APPLICATION OF SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION TO BUILD BRAND REPUTATION

The second part of this paper presents the empirical research conducted to investigate how sustainability communication strategies employed by luxury fashion brands impact consumer perceptions of brand reputation. The chapter is structured as follows. Section 2.1 presents the research methodology. Section 2.2 presents a discussion of similar research results found in the existing literature. Section 2.3 presents the empirical research results, organised into three subsections: qualitative analysis of sustainability communication of LVMH group; interview results; and survey results. The chapter concludes with Section 2.4, which synthesises the key findings across all methods and draws preliminary conclusions for Part 3.

2.1 Presentation of the research object

LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton is the world's largest luxury conglomerate, headquartered in Paris, France. The group was formed in 1987 through the merger of fashion house Louis Vuitton with the drinks group Moët Hennessy, and has since grown into a global empire spanning more than 75 prestigious brands across six business divisions: fashion and leather goods, perfumes and cosmetics, wines and spirits, watches and jewelry, selective retailing, and other activities (LVMH, 2024). The group is led by Bernard Arnault, who serves as Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, and recorded revenues of €80.8 billion in 2023, making it one of the most valuable companies internationally and a defining force in the global luxury market.

LVMH operates across more than 81 countries and employs approximately 213,000 people worldwide. Its portfolio includes some of the most iconic names in luxury: Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior, Céline, Givenchy, Fendi, Bulgari, TAG Heuer, Sephora, and many others. Each brand within the group operates with a significant degree of creative and operational autonomy, meaning that while group-level governance frameworks apply to all houses, individual brands are responsible for their own product development, communication, and, increasingly, their own sustainability practices.

LVMH is controlled by the Arnault family through the holding company Groupe Arnault and its subsidiary Christian Dior SE, which together hold a majority of voting rights. This concentrated, family ownership model gives LVMH an unusually long-term strategic horizon compared to other listed multinationals, allowing the group to invest in heritage preservation over decades rather than quarters.

LVMH's organisational model is often described as a "federation of Maisons". The group's headquarters in Paris, however, day-to-day brand management remains the responsibility of each individual Maison. This decentralised structure is widely regarded as a key competitive advantage, as it preserves the distinctive identity and heritage of each brand while still allowing the group to benefit from shared resources, distribution networks, and negotiating power.

From the early 2010s onwards, a convergence of external pressures changed the sustainability agenda for luxury groups. Regulatory pressure increased significantly: the introduction of the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) established due diligence obligations for large companies operating in European markets. Consumer pressure intensified with the rise of Generation Z and Millennial consumers, who have been shown to factor sustainability into brand evaluations more actively than previous generations (Kapferer & Michaut, 2015; France, 2020).

Sustainability is formally embedded in LVMH's corporate strategy through the LIFE 360 (LVMH Initiatives For the Environment) programme. LIFE 360 sets group-wide targets across four pillars - creative circularity, biodiversity, climate, and transparency - with milestones for 2023, 2026, and 2030. All 75 Maisons are required to align their environmental roadmaps with these targets.

Global scale, portfolio diversity, decentralised brand governance, family-controlled ownership - make LVMH a uniquely suitable empirical object for the present research. The group is simultaneously a market leader and a transparent reporting entity.

2.2 Research methodology and application value

Sustainability communication in the luxury fashion industry has never been more important than it is right now. In the last ten years, sustainability has gone from being a small part of marketing to a key part of strategy for brands in all market segments. As prominent scholars note, conveying sustainability is no longer a competitive edge; it has evolved into a fundamental business standard and necessity for luxury leaders (McCormick & Ram, 2022). The need for this change is urgent: the climate crisis is worsening, consumer values are changing in a big way, and new laws that tighten corporate disclosure rules are changing how companies must disclose information. Figuring out how luxury brands deal with these forces through communication and what their chosen strategies mean.

Sustainability has evolved from a niche marketing into a defining strategic imperative for brands operating across all market segments. Luxury brands have a unique set of rules that make it both more important and strategically difficult to communicate about sustainability than in any other market segment. On one hand, consumers are becoming more aware of the environment, and the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD, 2022) requires companies to be open about their environmental and social performance. This means that even the most heritage-driven luxury brands can no longer ignore these issues.

As leading scholars observe, communicating sustainability is no longer merely a competitive advantage or a philanthropic aspiration, it has become a fundamental norm and requirement for luxury leaders (McCormick & Ram, 2022). The exponential growth of academic interest in sustainability communication, which saw a massive peak in scientific publications between 2020 and 2023, reflects this profound paradigm shift (Golob, Podnar, & Zabkar, 2023).

The luxury fashion industry is having a hard time implementing and reporting transparently, even though more people want to buy luxury goods and more people are using digital communication. The 2023 Fashion Transparency Index says that 52% of big fashion brands shared their first-tier supplier lists. However, the average score for supply chain tracking is still very low, at only 23% overall (Lobanova, 2025). Also, almost half (45%) of big fashion brands don't say a lot regarding how their products affect the environment (Lobanova, 2025). Because of this lack of transparency and the introduction of mandatory legal frameworks like the EU CSRD, there is a big risk of "greenwashing".

Research shows that when people think sustainability claims are false, they don't just change their minds about buying the product. They also hurt the brand's reputation by spreading negative word-of-mouth and social media comments, which are the channels luxury brands spend the most money on (Vollero & Siano, 2024; Molinillo, Japutra, & Ekinici, 2022). This means that for luxury brands, a poorly planned sustainability communication strategy poses a greater reputational risk than not communicating at all. This is why studying communication strategy choices and their effects on brand reputation is an important area of applied research.

The problem of the research is how LVMH Group can manage sustainability communication to build their brand reputation.

The object of the paper is sustainability communication management for building brand reputation in the LVMH Group.

The aim of the paper is based on the theoretical and empirical research results, to provide sustainability communication management solutions for building a good brand reputation in the LVMH Group.

To reach the aim the following **objectives** were set:

1. To prepare research methodology integrating qualitative data analysis, expert interviews, and consumer surveys for examining sustainability communication in the LVMH Group.
2. To conduct empirical research using the prepared research methods.
3. To analyze the collected data and results across all three methods and formulate the propositions applicable to luxury fashion brands like LVMH to build a good brand reputation.

In the theoretical part, sustainability communication strategies, brand reputation building, and their relationship in the luxury fashion industry were analyzed. Based on the previous information, the following hypotheses were derived:

H1: Consumers who are more interested in luxury fashion are more likely to consider sustainability when choosing which brands to support or follow.

H2: Transparency and the use of concrete, measurable data in luxury brand sustainability communication positively influence consumer trust in the brand.

H3: Consumers who are sceptical of luxury brands' sustainability communication are more likely to perceive it as primarily marketing rather than genuine action.

H4: Perceived greenwashing in luxury brand sustainability communication negatively affects the brand's perceived reputation and prestige.

The empirical research uses a mixed-methods design, integrating qualitative and quantitative data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Three methods were used: qualitative secondary data analysis of brand sustainability communications, interviews with industry professionals, and a standardised questionnaire survey. This design is suitable as the research problem involves both the analysis of brand communication strategies and the assessment of consumer perceptions, demanding complementary methodological frameworks aspects.

Qualitative secondary data analysis. The first method involved a systematic qualitative analysis of publicly available sustainability communication outputs of the LVMH Group and its selected brand portfolio. Primary data sources included the LVMH Group's official sustainability reporting, including the LIFE 360 programme documentation, which sets out the group's environmental and social commitments across four pillars: creative circularity, biodiversity, climate, and traceability. The LIFE 360 programme includes specific measurable targets and timelines – for example, achieving 100% renewable energy across all sites, zero deforestation in supply chains, and science-based emissions reduction targets validated by the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi), providing a structured basis for evaluating the group's stated sustainability ambitions against its documented progress (LVMH, 2024). In addition, the

analysis draws on third-party assessments including the Good On You rating platform and the Fashion Transparency Index, which provide independent evaluations of brand-level sustainability performance and communication credibility.

Three brands within the LVMH portfolio were selected for closer examination: Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior, and Céline. These brands were chosen as the most successful and globally recognised houses within the group; and because they represent three distinctly different approaches to sustainability communication within the same corporate structure: data-led transparency, heritage-based emotional storytelling, and strategic communicative silence respectively.

Expert interviews. The second method comprised expert interviews with four professionals to gain deeper insight into how sustainability communication affects brand reputation in the luxury fashion industry. Three of the four respondents have direct professional experience in the luxury fashion sector. Eliza Getman has a background in fashion media and communication – she worked as an editor at Vogue Germany and L'Officiel, and currently works as a stylist and content creator at Vestiaire Collective, a sustainable luxury resale platform. Mariia Bakieva is a fashion and luxury consultant with previous experience in brand management at L'Oréal, focusing on consumer behaviour and brand strategy. The third respondent works in business development at Christian Dior in Paris and has prior experience in luxury cosmetics and jewelry; this respondent preferred to remain anonymous. The fourth respondent brings a more academic perspective. Antoine Cordier is a PhD student and research and teaching assistant in strategy and organisation at the Louvain School of Management, where he specialises in corporate sustainability and sustainability reporting.

Additionally, the interviews applied 11 open-ended questions to obtain the participants' direct professional experiences (Nathan, Newman, & Lancaster, 2018). Boeije (2010) posits that open-ended questions are not formulated to elicit specific, limited responses; instead, they assist respondents in expressing detailed strategic processes and unique viewpoints in their own terminology.

It is important to note that not all four respondents participated in the same format. Two interviews were conducted live online via Microsoft Teams between April 1st and April 21st, 2026, lasting approximately 25 to 30 minutes each; the remaining two respondents provided their answers in written form.

For those who replied online, the guide was applied with high flexibility. The questions were naturally adapted to the flow of the conversation, and the strict order was not always followed, as respondents frequently addressed subsequent topics while elaborating on earlier ones. This approach allowed the interviewer to go into a variety of subjects relating to

sustainable luxury, such as the variables that customers consider when assessing environmental claims, the reliability and authenticity of sustainability messages, and the hidden obstacles organizations face in effectively avoiding greenwashing.

The remaining two respondents provided their answers in written form, submitting responses to the interview questions independently. This format offered a different type of data: while it eliminated the possibility of real-time probing or adaptation of questions, it produced more considered, polished written responses. Both formats are legitimate and complementary data collection approaches within qualitative research, and the difference in data acquisition method is acknowledged as a relevant limitation in the interpretation of findings.

The full interview guide is presented in *Annex 5*. The rationale for the interview questionnaire is presented in *Table 3*.

Table 3

Rationale for the interview questionnaire

Group (elements to be investigated)	What do we want to find out?	Question No.
Part I Professional context evolution of sustainability communication	To contextualise each respondent's perspective through their professional role and direct experience with sustainability communication in the luxury sector, and to identify how sustainability has evolved as a reputational factor from a practitioner viewpoint.	1 – 4
Part II Communication strategies, brand reputation and consumer trust	To explore how different sustainability communication approaches (data-led transparency, heritage storytelling), affect brand reputation, consumer trust, and brand image. To identify the conditions under which sustainability communication genuinely builds or damages brand reputation.	5 – 8
Part III Greenwashing risk, consumer behaviour and recommendations	To investigate the attitude-behaviour gap, the signals of greenwashing versus authentic communication, and what practical improvements practitioners would recommend for LVMH's sustainability communication and brand reputation strategy.	9 – 11

Survey. The third method involved a standardised questionnaire survey administered internationally to measure consumer perceptions of sustainability communication credibility, brand trust, and brand reputation across LVMH group. The survey was distributed digitally via Google Forms through academic and social networks between April 11th and April 21st, 2026. Respondents were not required to be current buyers of the study brands, but asked to pick the

most relevant response choice for each question (the full survey questionnaire is presented in *Annex 6*. For the following reasons, this survey approach was chosen:

1. Using online surveys is a rapid and efficient technique to obtain the necessary quantity of data in a short length of time.
2. Questionnaires are confidential and anonymous, so respondents are completely free to answer questions and express their personal opinions or experiences.

Since LVMH operates across 81 countries, the target population was defined as adults worldwide. The minimum required sample size was calculated using the standard formula for large populations with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, yielding a minimum of 385 respondents (calculator.net, 2024). The survey covered 389 completed responses in total.

The survey instrument comprised 18 numbered questions and two unnumbered Likert-scale attitude tables. In total, the questionnaire included 13 closed single-choice questions, 1 Likert-scale question (Q7), 20 Likert-scale attitude items across two tables (12 items and 8 items respectively), and 1 multiple-choice question (Q18). The rationale for the survey questionnaire is presented in *Table 4*.

Table 4

Rationale for the survey questionnaire

Group (elements to be investigated)	What do we want to find out?	Question No.
Part I Respondent profile	Finding out the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, including their age, gender, education, employment status, and personal income, to establish the sample baseline.	1 – 6
Part II Luxury fashion and sustainability awareness	Finding out respondents' interest in luxury fashion, purchase habits and aspirations, awareness of LVMH and the LIFE 360 programme, and the role of sustainability in brand choices.	7 – 14
Part III General attitudes toward luxury and sustainability	Investigating baseline trust in luxury brands, perceptions of greenwashing, transparency expectations, and the behavioural and reputational consequences of sustainability practices.	Likert table (12 items)
Part IV Luxury desirability and sustainability paradox	Examining whether sustainability makes luxury more aspirational, whether it contradicts the luxury concept, and how it affects brand prestige and respondents' self-image as future luxury consumers.	15-16 + Likert table (8 items)

Group (elements to be investigated)	What do we want to find out?	Question No.
Part V Communication trust and channels	Determining whether extensive sustainability communication increases consumer trust and identifying preferred channels for engaging with brand sustainability content.	17 – 18

They were given as examples in the questionnaire to help people better understand how the topic works in real life. The main goal of showing these vignettes was to see which communication style users connect with best and to find out how different levels of openness and emotional framing affect consumer trust and perceived credibility. The primary goal of incorporating these cases was to systematically examine how differing levels of transparency and emotional framing directly impact consumer trust and perceived brand credibility. Ultimately, the data collected from these evaluations will be analysed to provide empirical findings and practical recommendations in direct alignment with the research objectives and hypotheses.

The collected data will be analysed to provide empirical findings and recommendations based on the research objectives and hypotheses.

2.3. Discussion of similar research results

While sustainability communication and its effect on consumer behaviour have been widely studied in the context of mass-market products, the luxury fashion sector has received comparatively less academic attention. Luxury fashion is a distinct product category with unique characteristics that may shape consumer responses differently. Although prior research has explored the role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) across various industries, more focused research on how sustainability communication specifically affects luxury brand reputation is still needed. The main findings are summarized in *Table 5*.

Table 5

Previous studies on sustainability communication and luxury brand reputation

Authors	Research aim	Methodology	Findings
Vuković, Grmuša, and Unterwegs (2025)	To analyse communication about the sustainability of fashion brands and explore whether it	Quantitative research: online survey of 836 respondents. Data analysed using	Transparent and honest communication is the key for fashion brands to win and keep consumer trust. Sustainability communication shapes positive

Authors	Research aim	Methodology	Findings
	represents a true desire for change in the fashion industry.	structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM).	customer attitudes when brands demonstrate.
Luo, Henninger, Le Normand, and Blazquez (2022)	To explore how Generation Y engage with sustainability communicated on luxury fashion websites.	Qualitative research: 25 semi-structured interviews with late Gen Y luxury consumers. Thematic analysis.	Positive sustainability communication on brand websites has a favourable influence on consumer trust and brand loyalty.
France (2020)	To explore how Generation Z perceives the CSR communication implemented by luxury brands and the values promoted in their advertising.	Qualitative research: 8 in-depth interviews with Gen Z luxury consumers combined with material probes (nine advertising campaigns). Thematic analysis.	The paradox between luxury and sustainability can be overcome if brands focus communication on transparent production processes and provide technical, verifiable information. Consumers expect concrete commitments translated into figures or reports to reduce scepticism.
Zamfir (2022)	To investigate how Millennial and Gen Z consumers perceive the relevance of sustainability communication in the luxury sector, and how luxury brands should communicate to build reputation.	Qualitative research: 16 participants across four focus groups. Thematic coding; focus on the attitude-behaviour gap.	A positive outlook on luxury and sustainability does not always translate into purchase behaviour due to affordability barriers. Luxury brands need more transparent sustainability communication to align personal and corporate values and increase brand credibility.
Feliciani and Borio (2017)	To investigate how millennial consumers develop a perception of legitimacy and credibility towards sustainable luxury brands, and which communication factors positively affect this process.	Qualitative case study analysis of Stella McCartney and Vivienne Westwood combined with semi-structured interviews with millennial luxury consumers. Legitimacy theory framework (Suchman, 1995).	Legitimacy is built through consistent alignment between brand values and communication content, transparency about production, and authentic activism. Emotional storytelling alone is insufficient without substantive action. Millennials are highly sceptical of sustainability claims not supported by evidence.

Source: composed by author based on Vuković, Grmuša, and Unterwegs (2025); Luo, Henninger, Le Normand, and Blazquez (2022); France (2020); Zamfir (2022); Feliciani and Borio (2017).

The five studies examined shed light on the influence of sustainability communication on luxury brand reputation across various national and generational contexts. Authentic

sustainability communication has a favourable influence on consumers' brand evaluations, and this effect is amplified when initiatives are perceived as legitimate and transparent. Furthermore, the inherent paradox of luxury moderates the relationship between sustainability communication and consumer trust: exaggerated, vague, or primarily symbolic claims lead to scepticism and accusations of greenwashing, while communication grounded in verifiable data and consistent brand identity builds credibility. Younger consumer segments - Generation Z and Millennials - demonstrate particularly high critical awareness, are more likely to identify performative communication, and place greater value on concrete evidence than on emotional heritage narratives.

While the studies examined provide valuable insights into the impact of sustainability communication on luxury brand reputation, several important gaps remain that the present study directly addresses. None of the reviewed studies employ a comparative methodology that tests consumer reactions to three structurally different communication strategies - data-led transparency, heritage-based storytelling, and deliberate communicative silence - within a single conglomerate. The specific effect of communicative silence on brand reputation, as practised by Céline, has received no empirical attention in prior research. Additionally, the reviewed studies predominantly rely on qualitative methods with small purposive samples, limiting the generalisability of their findings. The present study contributes a quantitative survey component with a European sample of 384 respondents, providing a broader empirical base for testing the derived hypotheses and for understanding how sustainability communication strategies affect luxury brand reputation at scale.

2.4. Empirical research results

The analysis is structured to address the research questions progressively - first examining the Group's corporate-level communication framework, and then assessing how individual Maisons translate, adapt, or diverge from that framework in their own brand-level communication.

This structure reflects the theoretical understanding of sustainability communication developed in Section 1.1, which distinguishes between communication *of*, *about*, and *for* sustainability (Golob et al., 2023; Weder et al., 2021). The LIFE 360 framework operates primarily in the *instrumental* mode – communicating sustainability to stakeholders through structured reporting, press materials, and programmatic documentation. Brand-level analysis then reveals the degree to which individual Maisons supplement or replace this instrumental

mode with deliberative or transformative communication, and the implications this variation carries for brand credibility and consumer trust.

2.3.1 Qualitative analysis of sustainability communication in selected LVMH brands

LVMH launched its first group-level environmental initiative - LIFE (LVMH Initiatives For the Environment) - in 2012, initially focused on reducing environmental impact across production sites and supply chains. In 2021, the programme was substantially rebranded as LIFE 360, with a new target horizon to 2030 and a more ambitious, holistic scope. LIFE 360 is structured around four strategic pillars, each with specific measurable targets and publicly reported progress indicators (LVMH, 2024). As shown in *Table 6* LVMH has made significant progress across all four pillars.

Table 6

LIFE 360 programme

Pillar	Key 2030 targets	Reported progress
Creative circularity	100% sustainably designed products; eliminate fossil-based plastics	97% of new circular services implemented vs. 2019; 43% recycled packaging; 41% of materials from recycling (2025)
Biodiversity	Restore 5 million ha; zero deforestation by 2025	3+ million ha preserved (2023); 3.8 million ha (2025); UNESCO Man and the Biosphere partnership
Climate	50% Scope 1 and 2 reduction by 2026; 55% Scope 3 reduction by 2030 (SBTi validated)	Scope 1 and 2: -37% vs. 2019 (2025); Scope 3 industrial: -16% vs. 2023; 63% renewable energy
Traceability and transparency	Full supply chain traceability for all strategic raw materials by 2030	96% leather, 99.9% exotic leather, 88% wool traced to country of origin; 30,000+ products with environmental QR codes

Note. Compiled by the author from LVMH (2023, 2024, 2025), Arnault (2025), Fashion Revolution (2024).

In 2025, Antoine Arnault, reporting to shareholders at the Annual General Meeting, stated that 41% of materials used by LVMH Houses now come from recycling processes, that Scope 1 and 2 emissions had fallen by 37%, and that Scope 3 industrial process emissions had declined by 16% compared to 2023 (Arnault, 2025).

These achievements are institutionally staged for maximum communicative impact. The December 2023 LIFE 360 Summit at UNESCO headquarters brought together government

officials, including Christophe Béchu (French Minister of Ecological Transition) and Virginijus Sinkevičius (EU Commissioner for the Environment), alongside industry partners and Maison leaders. At this Summit, a fully upcycled fashion show, *Prélude*, produced using unsold inventory and material remnants from internal circularity platforms Nona Source and Weturn, was presented as the first such show in the luxury industry (LVMH, 2023). The staging is analytically significant: by combining measurable milestone disclosure with aesthetic spectacle staged within a UNESCO venue, LVMH positions its sustainability programme simultaneously within the registers of data-driven accountability and cultural authority.

According to López, Fernández, and Rangel-Pérez (2025), who examined LVMH's efficiency in reducing its carbon footprint across multiple reporting years, the group has made measurable progress in reducing CO2 outputs per revenue unit, broadly consistent with IPCC sector benchmarks. However, the authors note that progress remains uneven across the group's individual brands, and that consolidated group-level reporting can obscure significant variation in brand-level performance and communication practice. This observation directly motivates the brand-level analysis that follows.

At the Group level, LIFE 360's dominant communicative mode is *instrumental* in Golob et al.'s (2023) taxonomy: it is a strategically managed, broadcast-oriented form of sustainability communication designed to demonstrate organisational accountability, manage reputational risk, and signal environmental leadership to investors, regulators, and consumers. This is supplemented by periodic moments of *transformative* communication, notably the *Prélude* upcycled fashion show and the UNESCO partnership, all of which attempt to go beyond reporting to advocate for systemic change in how luxury production is conceived and valued.

This ambition must, however, be read against independent third-party evaluations. The Fashion Transparency Index (Fashion Revolution, 2024) rates the LVMH Group at 32% of total possible disclosure points - a figure that reflects persistent gaps in supply chain labour practice disclosure, aggregate material breakdown publication, and Scope 3 emissions transparency at the brand level. This score places the Group in the lower-middle tier of the index, substantially below best-practice benchmarks. Pistone (2024), in a multi-brand analysis of LVMH Maisons conducted at LUISS Guido Carli, similarly notes that while the Group's LIFE 360 programme "adheres to rigorous environmental standards and sets new benchmarks for sustainability in the luxury industry," the effectiveness of its commitments ultimately depends on whether progress is verifiable through continuous and detailed performance metrics, and whether independent audits are systematically used (Pistone, 2024).

Neokleous and Elmarzouky (2025) identify this pattern as Impression Management, where sustainability communication outpaces verifiable accountability. Antoine Arnault

acknowledged at the 2023 Global Fashion Summit that LVMH is not on track to meet all of its stated targets (Business of Fashion, 2023). This raises the question of whether the group's sustainability communication reflects genuine transformation or strategic reputation management. Thus, while the LIFE 360 programme represents a serious governance commitment, its credibility depends on whether stated ambitions are matched by independently verified outcomes.

It is important to note that while all LVMH brands are subject to the group's LIFE 360 targets and to the disclosure obligations of the CSRD, individual brands are not uniformly required to publish separate, brand-level sustainability reports. This creates a situation in which brands within the same group can differ in how much they communicate about sustainability ranging from data-rich annual reports to communicative silence.

Three brands within the LVMH portfolio were selected for closer examination in this study: Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior, and Céline. These brands were chosen for two reasons. First, they are among the most commercially prominent and globally recognised houses within the group, ensuring that the analysis focuses on brands with significant public visibility. Second, they represent three structurally different approaches to sustainability communication within the same corporate architecture, making them ideal subjects for a comparative analysis of how communication strategy affects consumer-perceived brand reputation.

Louis Vuitton today operates one of the most structured and publicly visible brand-level sustainability communication programmes in the luxury industry. Louis Vuitton's primary sustainability communication vehicle is its annual Environmental and Social Responsibility (ESR) Report, published publicly under the title 'Our Committed Journey'. The 2023 edition frames the brand's ambition to become the world's first regenerative luxury brand and provides specific quantitative performance data: 600,000 products repaired per year through the brand's global repair network; 78% of raw materials sourced with certified sustainability standards; a 12% reduction in product carbon footprint compared to the 2018 baseline; and a 43% reduction in single-use plastic packaging compared to 2019 (Louis Vuitton, 2024). These figures are communicated not only in the annual report but also through a dedicated sustainability editorial on the brand's official website, accessible to both trade and consumer audiences. A notable communication initiative linked to this strategy is the brand's 'Aura Blockchain' traceability platform, which allows consumers to trace the lifecycle of selected products, and the expansion of 'Louis Vuitton Experts', a global repair and alteration service network.

Applying the Fischer et al. (2021) typology, Louis Vuitton's communication predominantly aligns with the instrumental mode, structured and data-driven, building competence-based trust through verifiable evidence (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995).

However, as Joy et al. (2023) demonstrate through their narrative analysis of LVMH's corporate reports, even data-rich sustainability communication at the group level employs a 'fairy tale' narrative structure in which the corporation positions itself as a heroic protagonist confronting the climate crisis - a framing that can emotionally resonate while simultaneously managing stakeholder expectations. This tension between data transparency and narrative management characterises Louis Vuitton's communication approach and is directly relevant to the credibility perceptions measured in the survey component of this study.

Christian Dior operates its sustainability strategy under the 'Dream in Green' programme, communicated primarily through a dedicated section of the brand's official website. Key quantitative data for 2024 includes: 82% of energy at Dior sites from renewable sources; 97% of leathers sourced from Leather Working Group (LWG) certified tanneries; 76% of cotton from organic or recycled supply chains; and 71% of wool purchases certified as organic or from responsible sources (Dior, 2025). A publicly documented case of sustainable product innovation is the 'Dior Denim' permanent collection, launched in 2023 and made entirely from regenerative cotton grown through Dior's partnership with regenerative agriculture pioneer Lauffenweiler. The brand's communication around this initiative combines visual storytelling, including campaign imagery shot in the fields of Normandy, with technical sourcing information, exemplifying the meaning-construction strategy (Fischer et al., 2021) that characterises Dior's broader approach.

Dior's communication, while supported by meaningful quantitative data, prioritises narrative resonance over comprehensive data disclosure, anchoring environmental commitments within the brand's historic identity of beauty, nature, and the relationship between craft and the living world. This activates benevolence-based trust, trust built through perceived shared values, rather than competence-based trust derived from audited evidence (Mayer et al., 1995). Good On You (2025) notes that while Dior has made progress in specific material categories, no aggregate material breakdown is published and no comprehensive independent sustainability audit is available at the brand level, creating an asymmetry between the emotional richness of its narrative and the limited granularity of disclosed performance data.

Céline occupies the most distinctive position: the brand publishes no standalone sustainability report, discloses no brand-specific environmental performance targets, and makes no explicit environmental claims on its official website. What is publicly documented is indirect: Céline is subject to LVMH LIFE 360 targets and EU CSRD obligations through group-level reporting, and its US website contains a Supply Chain Transparency Act disclosure as legally required by California state law. Good On You (2025) rates Céline as 'It's a Start', noting some recycled packaging and science-based targets through the LVMH framework, but no

independent supply chain certifications and no evidence of meeting individual climate targets. The brand's public identity under creative director Hedi Slimane is built entirely around timeless design, minimalism, and product longevity, implicitly positioning craftsmanship and durability as an alternative to disposable fashion without making any sustainability claims that could be externally scrutinised.

Turut (2024) argues that for ultra-luxury brands, explicit green claims risk cognitive dissonance with prestige values, and that deliberate silence may be a rational, credibility-enhancing strategy, avoiding the reputational risk of claims that could later be challenged as greenwashing. Kong, Witmaier, and Ko (2021) demonstrate empirically that explicit environmental claims from luxury brands can paradoxically reduce perceived brand prestige among core luxury consumers, suggesting that silence may serve a brand identity protection function.

In summary, the qualitative analysis reveals three key findings. First, while LVMH's LIFE 360 programme represents a structurally serious governance framework with measurable progress across all four pillars, independent assessments consistently identify a gap between self-reported achievements and externally verified performance (Neokleous & Elmarzouky, 2025; Joy et al., 2023). Second, within the same conglomerate and subject to identical governance obligations, Louis Vuitton, Dior, and Céline pursue markedly different communication strategies - instrumental, meaning-construction, and silence respectively - demonstrating that brand-level choices reflect deliberate decisions about identity and reputational risk rather than group-level governance alone. Third, each strategy carries distinct credibility trade-offs, which provide the empirical foundation for the expert interview and survey analyses that follow.

2.3.2 Expert interview results

To deepen the understanding of how sustainability communication from luxury fashion brands is being perceived, five expert interviews were conducted as part of the empirical research. The full interview questionnaire is provided in Annex 6, and the complete transcripts and written responses, as primary research data, are submitted in a separate PDF file.

The expert interviewees were identified through networking on LinkedIn and personal connections. All five agreed to participate voluntarily. The two live interviews, with Eliza Getman and Antoine Cordier, were conducted as scheduled video calls on Microsoft Teams and lasted between 30 and 40 minutes each. The three written interviews, with Mariia Bakieva, the anonymous business development assistant at Christian Dior, and Eva Dojáčková, were

conducted by sending the question guide via message and receiving written responses asynchronously. The combination of formats was not originally planned but proved analytically advantageous, providing both reflexive and deliberative perspectives on the same research questions.

The expert interview questionnaire consisted of eleven questions moving from broader observations about sustainability in luxury to specific assessments of LVMH, Louis Vuitton, Dior, and Céline. The full set of responses is available in the primary research data file.

The five experts represent complementary professional backgrounds: Eliza Getman (Vestiaire Collective with interest in circularity and conscious consumption); Mariia Bakieva (fashion and luxury consultant, prior brand management at L'Oréal); the anonymous Dior business development assistant (insider commercial perspective); Eva Dojáčková (Master's at London College of Fashion, with interest in the digital sustainability communication); and Antoine Cordier (PhD candidate at the Louvain School of Management interested in corporate sustainability reporting).

All five experts agreed that sustainability communication has significantly shifted public perception of luxury brands. Getman characterised it as a structural necessity: communication is *“not an option anymore”* because Gen Z consumers *“start judging”* brands that remain silent. Dojáčková identified that pre-owned and vintage pieces are now positioned as *“trophy vintage”* - shifting consumer attention towards materials, sourcing, and production transparency. Bakieva pointed to a credibility deficit following years of unfulfilled promises and greenwashing, arguing that *“just communication is not enough”* anymore. Cordier observed that sustainability enters corporate communications as marginal additions and questioned whether this reflects core values or merely regulatory and financial pressure.

When asked whether luxury sustainability communication reflects genuine commitment or strategic reputation management, most experts expressed scepticism. Getman described it as *“a response to public trends”* - arguing that under current economic conditions it is *“impossible to be a fully sustainable brand right now”*. Bakieva broadly agreed, noting that non-sustainable brands are *“less valuable in the eyes of the public”*, which makes sustainability statements a competitive necessity rather than a value commitment, with Stella McCartney as an exception. Cordier proposed a behavioural test: *“The real intentions of organisations appear when it is not financially interesting for them”* - citing Patagonia as the canonical example and observing that most corporations retreat from sustainability obligations once the financial incentive disappears. Dojáčková located credibility in business model alignment: brands focused on resale or circular fashion feel more credible because sustainability is *“something the brand is genuinely built around”*. The anonymous Dior expert added a risk-management dimension to

authenticity: *“Fashion brands have realised how damaging it can be to have unsustainable practices revealed, especially if they promoted sustainability quite loudly”*. This reputational liability argument connects directly to the discussion in Section 1.4 of greenwashing risk and Impression Management (Neokleous & Elmarzouky, 2025).

On the compatibility of luxury and sustainability, experts converged on the view that the two can coexist for different reasons. Mariia Bakieva grounded her affirmation in the material logic of luxury: *“Luxury seems a perfect industry to be sustainable, since hand-crafted items are durable, last for decades, high quality, and have a huge potential for repairs and resales”*. She immediately qualified this, however, noting that *“the only problem I see is the desire to increase profits by decreasing losses”* and citing recent scandals at Dior and Loro Piana as evidence that this tension is real. Antoine Cordier made an economic argument: with higher margins, luxury brands have *“more freedom of action to pay people more and produce locally, instead of relying on low labour costs in places with weak worker protections”*. Eva Dojáčková pointed to scarcity as the mechanism that aligns luxury and sustainability: *“When looking at archival or vintage luxury, sustainability is naturally linked to scarcity. These pieces are often rare and not easily replaceable, which creates a sense of urgency for the consumer without the brand having to artificially construct it”*. The Dior expert grounded the coexistence in material dependency: *“A lot of the materials needed to produce luxury items are coming from nature - leather, gem stones, cotton, wool - and the quality depends on the state of our planet”*.

The fifth question asked what would make experts personally distrust a luxury brand’s sustainability communication and which signals feel like greenwashing rather than real action, which map closely onto the theoretical greenwashing risk typology developed in this study.

Four signals emerged. First, vague unverifiable language: Eva Dojáčková stated she would distrust communication that is using terms like *“eco-friendly”* without clear explanation or data. Second, token initiatives without systemic change: Mariia Bakieva noted she does not trust *“when brands do small actions like creating a small collection made from recycled materials - it feels like they do it just to show that they are sustainable, just trying to do less and making loud statements”*. Third, incoherence between communication and observable practice: the anonymous Dior professional stated that *“if a brand is communicating that their materials are sustainable and then independent investigations find out that this is not the case at all, my trust in this brand would be shattered”*. Eliza Getman illustrated this with two concrete examples from her live interview: the Stella McCartney and H&M collaboration, which she found contradictory for a brand positioned as a sustainability leader, and partial

material disclosure: *“if you say the shirt is 50% organic cotton but the other 50% is polyester, I don’t care about the 50% organic cotton if the rest is trash”*.

Responses to the question explored whether younger consumers genuinely factor sustainability into their luxury brand perceptions or whether it is a stated value that does not translate into practice - reflecting the attitude-behaviour gap. Dojáčková was clear that sustainability *“shapes perception and can enhance credibility, but it usually works more as a supporting factor rather than the main driver of consumer behaviour”* - aesthetics, brand image, and desirability remain decisive. The Dior professional observed that social media creates additional pressure among younger consumers: *“Most people showcase their fashion and might not want to be associated with a brand that has a negative reputation when it comes to sustainability”*. Mariia Bakieva placed sustainability lower in the hierarchy of luxury purchase drivers: *“I think sustainability is just an additional factor building brand love. I’d say status signalling and design are way more important”*.

On heritage versus sustainability and the future of luxury brand identity, all experts positioned heritage as the primary reputational foundation, with sustainability as a necessary supporting dimension. The Dior expert offered the clearest formulation: *“Right now the biggest thing affecting a brand’s reputation is still heritage ... However, ethical communication is necessary to uphold and convey that heritage to the customer”*. Looking ahead, Dojáčková framed sustainability as a baseline expectation rather than a differentiator, and Bakieva similarly described it as a minimum threshold that *“will never replace the role of design, heritage, craftsmanship, or exclusivity, but brands won’t be trusted if they fail to meet basic consumer expectations, such as fair working conditions, durable high-quality materials, and responsible production practices”*.

The question of whether LIFE 360 enhances individual brand credibility produced divided responses. Eva Dojáčková found it broadly credibility-enhancing: *“Being part of a group like LVMH suggests there’s a structured, long-term approach to sustainability, as well as significant resources and investment behind it”*. She added, however, that *“it’s not always clear how deeply those commitments are embedded within each individual brand”*, meaning group membership raises expectations rather than automatically fulfilling them. The anonymous Dior professional was the most positive, arguing that brands are *“held accountable twice - once by the group’s initiatives and then also by the demands towards the brand itself”* and that the two programmes might target different sustainability areas. Mariia Bakieva disagreed, arguing that group affiliation makes claims less credible because brands appear to be *“relying on a conglomerate reputation”* rather than developing brand-specific practices.

On data versus narrative, experts strongly preferred data, though most argued for a combination. Eliza Getman was unequivocal: *“Data for sure. Heritage is a story, like a fairy tale”*. Mariia Bakieva applied the same position directly to the LVMH case: *“For me only real data can reflect the real situation happening in the company. Dior is a very good example of how emotional storytelling can hide all the controversies happening inside. The case with their scandal on bad working conditions is a good example that loud words sometimes don’t prove themselves”*. Dojáčková preferred data but argued for a combination with storytelling, which remains essential in luxury. The Dior expert offered the most developed argument for combination: *“Publishing detailed data and reports is a great way of holding yourself accountable. At the same time, the majority of customers will not read those detailed reports before making a purchase decision. The purchase of luxury products is highly emotional”*. She concluded: *“I cannot choose one approach over the other, but I would argue that both are needed”*. Antoine Cordier added that neither mode resolves the core credibility question: whether commitments hold under financial pressure.

The final question asked what LVMH should do differently to make its sustainability communication more credible and genuinely strengthen individual brand reputations. Eliza, drawing on her PR background, emphasised: *“I think it’s better to focus on the work and behind-the-scenes videos that build credibility and transparency within the company. Better to not scream about being sustainable than being caught lying”*. Antoine Cordier challenged the premise that more communication is the answer: *“People are tired of greenwashing, increasing communication, reports, ads, programs, but with nothing behind it. If companies dedicate more resources, it should be to actual efforts rather than communication of efforts”*. Mariia Bakieva called for brand-level specificity and honesty about limitations: *“it’s better to be not perfect and be transparent with that than to make consumers false general promises”*. The Dior professional recommended: *“a video format, what brands are doing and having that be narrated by concrete numbers. What could also be interesting is having brands communicate about what they have achieved but also about the goals they still want to achieve and what they are planning to do about it”*. Eva focused on brand-level integration and reporting: *“Brands could more clearly show how sustainability is integrated into their own product development, sourcing decisions, or even design processes. It could also strengthen credibility if communication focused more on long-term progress rather than individual initiatives - showing year-on-year improvements or clear targets rather than isolated campaigns”*.

In summary, the expert interviews revealed broad agreement on several key points. Sustainability communication has become a structural expectation rather than a differentiator; most luxury sustainability communication is perceived as primarily strategic rather than values-

driven; data and verifiable evidence are considered more credible than heritage-based storytelling alone, though the most convincing approach combines both; and group-level programmes like LIFE 360 increase credibility at the institutional level but raise expectations for brand-specific evidence. The recommendations from all five experts converge on brand-level specificity, honest disclosure of gaps, and investment in substantive action over communicative sophistication.

2.3.3 Customer survey results

The survey covered 389 respondents with an interest towards luxury fashion. Women make up 43.7% of the total (n = 170), men 45.0% (n = 175), and 7.5% identified as non-binary or third gender (n = 29). The dominant age group was 18 - 24 year-olds with 44.7%, followed by 25 - 34 year-olds with 32.9%. Together, Millennials and Generation Z (mostly students) account for 77.6% of the sample, which is appropriate given the study's focus on younger consumer perceptions of luxury sustainability communication. The most commonly reported monthly income was in the €1,500 - €4,000 range at 39.1%, followed by €500 - €1,500 at 27.5%. In terms of sustainability familiarity, 42.2% described themselves as very familiar with fashion industry sustainability issues and actively following the topic, and 43.7% as somewhat familiar, indicating a sustainability-aware sample overall. The full demographic distribution is reported in *Annex 7, Figure 1*.

Two awareness questions established the institutional context. When asked whether they knew that Louis Vuitton, Dior, and Céline all belong to LVMH Group, 58.9% confirmed this, 30.1% had a vague idea, and only 11.1% were unaware. In contrast, awareness of LVMH's LIFE 360 programme was substantially lower: 64.8% had never heard of it before the survey, 24.9% had heard of it but knew little detail, and only 10.3% knew it well *Annex 7, Table 1*. This finding aligns with Eliza Getman's expert observation that even as a professional engaged in sustainable fashion, she was not familiar with LIFE 360 by name. The convergence between expert and consumer data confirms that LVMH's institutional sustainability communication reaches investor and institutional audiences far more effectively than the general consumer.

The survey included 20 Likert-scale statements rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Full frequency distributions for each statement are reported in *Annex 7, Tables 2-15*. The statements are organised below in four logical groups corresponding to the four hypotheses tested.

The first group of statements established baseline attitudes towards luxury and sustainability *Annex 7, Tables 2-5*. Baseline trust in luxury brands is ambivalent: only 29.6%

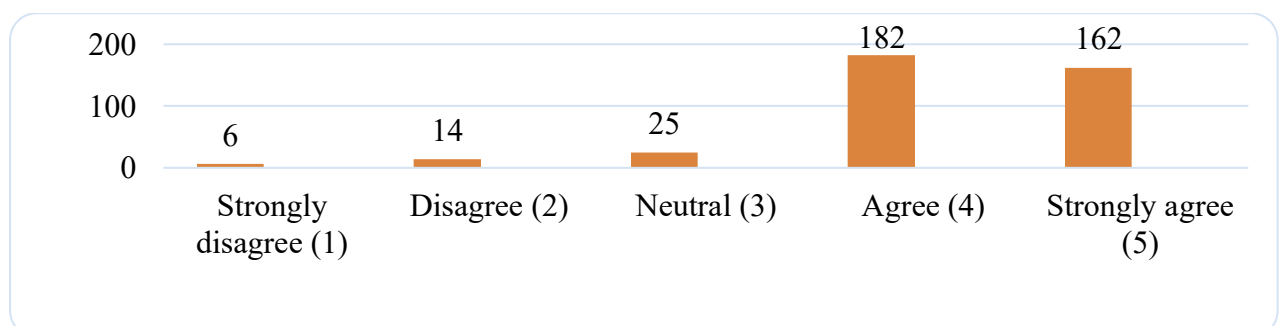
express general trust, while 48.1% remain neutral ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.10$), confirming that sustainability communication must earn rather than assume trust. The remaining three baseline statements show that consumers embrace sustainability as a legitimate dimension of luxury identity: 80.7% agree that luxury brands should be more transparent about their environmental impact ($M = 4.01$); 77.9% see sustainability as compatible with the luxury business model ($M = 4.04$); and 69.2% reject the idea that sustainability undermines glamour ($M = 2.03$). These results dissolve the theoretical luxury-sustainability paradox at the consumer level.

Hypothesis 1 stated that consumers more interested in luxury fashion are more likely to consider sustainability when choosing brands to support. The Pearson correlation yielded $r = 0.045$, $p = 0.373$; as the p-value exceeds 0.05, the correlation is not statistically significant and H1 is not confirmed. The analytically meaningful interpretation is that sustainability consideration is uniformly distributed across the sample regardless of luxury interest level, indicating that sustainability has become a cross-cutting baseline expectation rather than a niche concern of highly engaged consumers.

The second group addressed Hypothesis 2, which proposed that transparency and concrete data influence consumer trust more than emotional storytelling *Annex 7, Tables 6-8*. The results are unambiguous and illustrated in *Figure 2*: 88.4% of respondents agree that they trust brands more when concrete sustainability data is provided ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.84$ - the lowest dispersion in the survey, indicating the strongest consensus). 86.6% trust brands less when communication relies primarily on storytelling and emotional narratives ($M = 4.24$ - the highest mean in the survey). 68.1% support mandatory external auditing of sustainability claims ($M = 3.84$). A paired-samples t-test ($t(388) = -0.13$, $p = .899$), which is provided in *Annex 7, Table 15*, confirmed that data preference and storytelling distrust are held at equally strong levels, indicating that they are two inseparable sides of the same consumer expectation. H2 is confirmed.

Figure 2

Frequencies of “I trust brands more when they provide measurable sustainability data”



Note. Author's compilation based on survey data (N = 389)

This result has direct implications for the brand-level findings of *Section 2.3.1*: Dior's heritage-based “Dream in Green” storytelling and Céline's communicative silence both align with the modes consumers report trusting least, while Louis Vuitton's instrumental, data-rich “Our Committed Journey” report aligns with the mode consumers explicitly prefer. The survey also triangulates with the expert interviews: Bakieva stated that “*only real data can reflect the real situation*”, and all five experts independently preferred data-led communication over heritage narrative.

The third group addressed Hypothesis 3, which stated that sceptical consumers are more likely to perceive sustainability communication as primarily a marketing strategy (*Annex 7, Tables 9-12*). The scepticism cluster shows the most consistent results in the survey. Only 14.4% believe luxury brands communicate sustainability honestly ($M = 2.44$ - the lowest mean in the survey, with 53.2% disagreeing). 78.9% consider luxury sustainability communication often exaggerated ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.93$). 58.6% perceive most claims as primarily marketing-driven ($M = 3.62$). 73.5% believe luxury brands use sustainability as a marketing trick to attract buyers “*like me*” ($M = 3.90$). One-sample t-tests confirmed that all four scepticism items diverge significantly from the neutral midpoint (all $p < .001$). H3 is confirmed.

The final group addressed Hypothesis 4, which proposed that perceived greenwashing negatively affects brand reputation (*Annex 7, Tables 13-14*). 72.8% of respondents agree that a brand's sustainability practices are an important part of how they perceive its reputation ($M = 3.86$). 73.0% agree that a brand caught greenwashing would lose its reputation “permanently” ($M = 3.89$; one-sample $t(388) = 18.15$, $p < .001$). However, the third statement in this group produces the most analytically important result of the survey, presented in *Table 7* below.

Table 7

Frequencies of statement “Sustainability communication makes a luxury fashion brand appear more prestigious and trustworthy”

Response option	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Strongly disagree (1)	183	47.0 %	47.0 %
Disagree (2)	97	24.9 %	71.9 %
Neutral (3)	52	13.4 %	85.3 %
Agree (4)	44	11.3 %	96.6 %
Strongly agree (5)	13	3.3 %	100.0 %
Mean = 1.99	Median = 2	SD = 1.17	N = 389

Note. Author's compilation based on survey data (N = 389)

A total of 71.9% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed ($n = 280$) that current sustainability communication makes luxury brands more prestigious or trustworthy. Only 14.6% agreed or strongly agreed. The mean of 1.99 is the second lowest in the entire survey, and a one-sample t-test confirmed this is significantly below the neutral midpoint ($t(388) = -17.08, p < .001$).

This result reveals the central paradox of the study. On one hand, 72.8% confirm that sustainability practices matter for brand reputation and 73.0% confirm that greenwashing causes permanent damage. On the other hand, 71.9% simultaneously reject the idea that current sustainability communication delivers a prestige or trust premium. A Pearson correlation between the greenwashing damage statement and the reputation importance statement yielded $r = -0.039, p = 0.447$, confirming that these are held as distinct attitudinal dimensions. H4 is therefore only partially confirmed: the attitudinal evidence strongly supports the hypothesis on the risk side (greenwashing = permanent damage), but the prestige-trust statement shows that the reputational opportunity identified by the hypothesis is not currently realised in practice.

Analysis of the respondents' responses has produced a coherent and internally consistent picture of consumer attitudes toward luxury brand sustainability communication. The findings from all four statement groups, taken together, confirm three overarching patterns that run through both the consumer survey and the expert interview data.

The prestige paradox defines the core strategic challenge for LVMH and its Maisons: the reputational opportunity is real and substantial, but it is accessible only through substantively credible communication, not through the volume or sophistication of sustainability messaging alone.

2.3.4 Summary of research results

The empirical research combined three complementary methods: a qualitative content analysis of sustainability communication at the LVMH group level and at three Maisons: Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior, and Céline (*Section 2.3.1*); five semi-structured expert interviews (*Section 2.3.2*); and a quantitative consumer survey of 389 respondents (*Section 2.3.3*). Triangulating these three perspectives - how communication is produced by brands, evaluated by professionals, and received by consumers - yields a coherent and internally consistent set of findings. Five findings in *Table 8* - converging across all three methods, strengthening their validity; one finding emerges only from the survey and constitutes the study's primary original contribution.

Table 8

Triangulation of findings across the three empirical methods

Finding	Content analysis (2.3.1)	Expert interviews (2.3.2)	Consumer survey (2.3.3)
Credibility deficit	Fashion Transparency Index rates LVMH at 32%; Impression Management pattern	All five experts described communication as strategic, not values-driven	Only 14.4% believe brands communicate honestly (M = 2.44, lowest in survey)
Data preferred over narrative	Louis Vuitton (data-led) strongest; Dior (narrative) and Céline (silence) carry risk	Unanimous expert preference for data; narrative only as supplement	Data trust M = 4.23, storytelling distrust M = 4.24 - two highest means (t = -0.13, p = .899)
Group vs brand communication	LIFE 360 strong at group level, unevenly translated to Maisons	Divided views on whether group affiliation enhances or dilutes credibility	64.8% had never heard of LIFE 360 - programme does not reach consumers
Greenwashing as permanent risk	Claims-versus-verification gap across all three Maisons	Four converging greenwashing signals identified	73.0% say greenwashing damage is permanent (t(388) = 18.15, p < .001)
Prestige paradox (original contribution)	Not observable from communication content	Not articulated by any expert	71.9% reject that communication builds prestige (M = 1.99), despite valuing sustainability for reputation

Note. Compiled by the author from Sections 2.3.1–2.3.3.

The first and most robustly supported finding is the credibility deficit. The content analysis locates it at the institutional level, in the gap between LVMH's self-reported LIFE 360 achievements and the 32% score awarded by the independent Fashion Transparency Index. The expert interviews confirm it at the professional level: all five interviewees independently characterised luxury sustainability communication as primarily strategic rather than values-driven. The survey confirms it at scale: the statement that luxury brands communicate sustainability honestly received the lowest mean score in the entire survey (M = 2.44), with 53.2% of respondents disagreeing. Because three methodologically independent perspectives

converge on the same conclusion, the credibility deficit can be regarded as a structural rather than a perceptual feature of the field.

The second finding is the consumer preference for data over narrative. The content analysis identifies Louis Vuitton's instrumental, data-rich reporting as the strongest brand-level model within LVMH, in contrast to Dior's heritage-narrative approach and Céline's communicative silence. All five experts independently preferred verifiable data to storytelling as a trust-building mechanism. The survey confirms this statistically: the two highest mean scores in the entire survey were the data-trust statement ($M = 4.23$) and the storytelling-distrust statement ($M = 4.24$), and a paired-samples t-test confirmed the two are held at equal strength ($t(388) = -0.13$, $p = .899$). Consumers therefore do not merely favour data - they actively penalise narrative-only communication, which has direct implications for Dior and Céline, both of which currently operate in the communicative modes consumers trust least.

The third finding concerns the limited consumer reach of group-level programmes. The content analysis shows LIFE 360 to be institutionally robust but unevenly translated to the brand level; the expert interviews divided on whether group affiliation strengthens or dilutes individual brand credibility; and the survey resolves the question in practical terms, with 64.8% of respondents reporting that they had never heard of LIFE 360 before completing the survey. Whatever institutional credibility the programme generates with investors and regulators, it does not currently reach the general consumer, confirming that group-level reporting cannot substitute for brand-level engagement.

The fourth finding is the perception of greenwashing as a permanent reputational risk. The content analysis identifies the claims-versus-verification gap across all three Maisons; the expert interviews produced four convergent greenwashing signals (vague language, token initiatives, incoherence between communication and practice, and partial disclosure); and the survey confirms the severity of consumer reaction, with 73.0% agreeing that a brand caught greenwashing would lose its reputation permanently ($t(388) = 18.15$, $p < .001$). Greenwashing is therefore not a recoverable short-term reputational shock but a long-term threat to brand equity.

The fifth and most distinctive finding is the prestige paradox, which emerges only from the survey. Neither the content analysis nor the expert interviews could detect it, because it is a property of consumer perception rather than of brand communication or professional judgement. While 72.8% of respondents agree that sustainability practices matter for brand reputation and 73.0% agree that greenwashing causes permanent damage, 71.9% simultaneously reject the idea that current sustainability communication makes luxury brands appear more prestigious or trustworthy ($M = 1.99$). The non-significant correlation between

reputation importance and greenwashing damage ($r = -0.039$, $p = .447$) confirms that consumers hold these as independent attitudinal dimensions. The paradox is reinforced by the finding that 70.7% of respondents would become more interested in luxury brands demonstrating genuine sustainability commitment: the reputational opportunity is real and substantial, but it remains unrealised, because it is accessible only through substantively credible, brand-specific, and externally verified communication - not through the volume or sophistication of messaging.

Taken together, the three methods produce a single coherent diagnosis. LVMH and its Maisons operate in an environment where consumers expect substantive sustainability commitment, penalise narrative unsupported by evidence, treat greenwashing as a permanent reputational risk, do not currently perceive luxury sustainability communication as honest, yet would reward credible commitment with greater brand engagement. The credibility deficit, the data preference, the brand-level reach gap, and the greenwashing penalty jointly define the operational environment, while the prestige paradox defines the central strategic challenge. The practical implications of this diagnosis for the three examined Maisons are developed in the following chapter.

III. PRACTICAL PROPOSITIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION DESIGN TO BUILD BRAND REPUTATION IN THE LUXURY FASHION INDUSTRY

In this part of the work, the problem areas of LVMH Group's sustainability communication are identified based on the results of the empirical research and the review of theoretical problem-solving methods. A model of formulated problem area solutions is provided with specific actions to implement. At the end of the part, the possibilities and benefits of applying the formulated solutions are indicated, followed by the overall conclusions of the study.

3.1. Problematic areas of sustainability communication to build brand reputation

Although the empirical analysis of LVMH Group's sustainability communication reflected that the LIFE 360 programme contributes to genuine institutional commitment and can benefit the Group in various ways, it still has correctable areas that decrease credibility and undermine efficiency. The sustainability communication process is complex and consists of different elements which might affect possible outcomes and influence stakeholder behaviour and attitudes. Improperly implemented sustainability communication may impact credibility decrease, difficulty in achieving the desired reputational results, and damage to brand reputation. For these reasons, the application of sustainability communication must be well-planned, structured, and consistent. Based on the theoretical analysis, the qualitative content analysis of secondary data, the expert interviews, and the consumer survey, the following six problematic areas of LVMH Group's sustainability communication are identified and summarised in *Table 9*.

Table 9

Summary of identified problematic areas and their empirical basis

Problematic area	Description	Primary evidence source
1. Accountability gap	No minimum brand-level disclosure standard across Maisons; three brands under one framework communicate in fundamentally different ways	Content analysis
2. Consumer awareness gap	64.8% never heard of LIFE 360; communication reaches investors, not consumers, where reputation is formed	Survey

Problematic area	Description	Primary evidence source
3. Credibility deficit	Lowest survey mean (M = 2.44) for honest communication; 73.5% see it as a marketing trick; all five experts call it strategic	Survey + interviews
4. Narrative substitution risk	86.6% trust brands less when communication relies on storytelling alone — the highest agreement of any survey item	Survey + interviews
5. Absence of independent verification	67.1% trust only externally verified claims; Fashion Transparency Index rates LVMH at 32%; Good On You rates all three Maisons insufficient	Content analysis + survey
6. Prestige paradox	72.8% value sustainability for reputation, yet 72.0% reject that current communication builds prestige (M = 1.99)	Survey

Note. Compiled by the author from Sections 2.3.1–2.3.4.

1. *Accountability gap*: despite LVMH Group's investment in the LIFE 360 programme, there is no minimum brand-level disclosure standard mandated across all Maisons. The result is that three brands under the same governance framework communicate sustainability in fundamentally different ways - Louis Vuitton publishes structured KPI reports, Christian Dior relies on heritage narrative, and Céline communicates nothing at all to consumers. This inconsistency undermines the credibility of the Group's institutional sustainability investment and leaves individual Maisons exposed to distinct communicative risks: selective transparency, narrative substitution, and accountability vacuum respectively.

2. *Consumer awareness gap*: the survey confirmed that 64.8% of respondents had never heard of LIFE 360 before the survey, and only 10.3% knew it well. LVMH's sustainability communication effectively reaches professional and investor audiences through summits, awards, and annual reports, but fails to penetrate consumer-level awareness, where brand reputation is ultimately formed. Group-level institutional communication, however ambitious, does not substitute for brand-level consumer-facing disclosure.

3. *Credibility deficit*: the statement of honest luxury brands communicating sustainability received the lowest mean score in the survey (M = 2.44), with 53.2% of respondents disagreeing. All five expert interviewees independently characterised luxury sustainability communication as primarily strategic rather than genuine. Consumer scepticism is the dominant orientation: 73.5% believe sustainability is used as a marketing trick, and 78.9% consider sustainability claims exaggerated. Antoine Cordier identified the most reliable greenwashing signal: organisations that retreat from sustainability commitments when it is not financially convenient to maintain them.

4. *Narrative substitution risk*: 86.6% of survey respondents trust brands less when sustainability is communicated through storytelling and emotional narratives alone, the highest agreement level of any item in the survey. This directly challenges the communicative approach most commonly associated with luxury brand identity, and as Mariia Bakieva stated in the expert interviews: „Dior is a very good example of how emotional storytelling can hide all the controversies happening inside“.

5. *Absence of independent verification*: 67.1% of respondents would only trust sustainability communication backed by concrete, independently verified data. Good On You's 'Not Good Enough' rating for all three examined Maisons reflects the persistent gap between self-reported progress and externally assessed disclosure depth. The Fashion Transparency Index scores LVMH at 32%, indicating that significant information asymmetry remains between what the Group communicates and what independent assessors can verify.

6. *Prestige paradox*: 72.8% of respondents consider sustainability practices important for brand reputation, yet 72.0% simultaneously reject the idea that current sustainability communication makes luxury brands more prestigious or trustworthy (M = 1.99, the second lowest score in the survey). This paradox reveals that the reputational opportunity is real but currently unrealised: the gap between consumer expectation and perceived communicative delivery is the central practical challenge identified by this study.

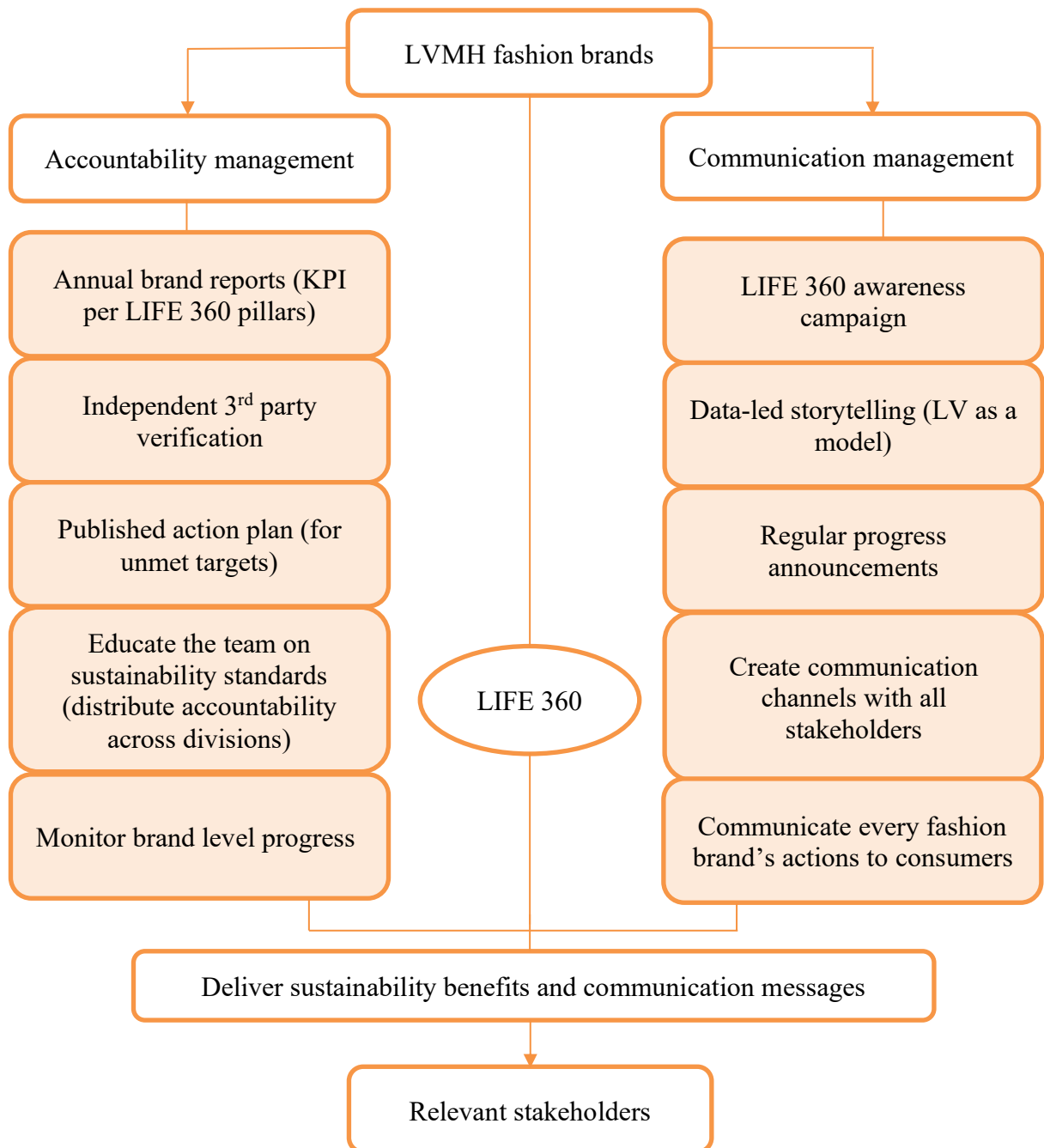
To sum up, LVMH Group's sustainability communication must be better planned, structured, and consistent across both the accountability and communication dimensions in order to avoid adverse consumer perceptions, manage greenwashing risk, and realise the reputational opportunity that 70.4% of consumers confirm is available to genuinely committed luxury brands. The solutions to these problematic areas are presented in the model below.

3.2. Model of sustainability communication design to build brand reputation for LVMH fashion brands

After identifying the problematic areas of LVMH Group's sustainability communication, the following solutions are presented. *Figure 12* presents the model of sustainability communication design to build brand reputation for LVMH fashion brands. According to the logic of *Figure 3*, the problematic areas were grouped into two parallel tracks - *Accountability management* and *Communication management*, which connect through the central element of the LIFE 360 programme and converge toward a shared outcome: increased consumer trust and strengthened brand reputation.

Figure 3

Model of sustainability communication design to build brand reputation for LVMH Maisons



Both tracks must be active independently of any specific campaign, as the accountability infrastructure and the communication strategy reinforce each other: accountability without communication does not reach consumers, and communication without accountability does not achieve credibility. The model reflects the core finding of the empirical research, that 88.4% of consumers trust brands more when concrete data is provided, and that 86.6% trust brands less when only storytelling is used, by placing verified, data-led accountability as the structural foundation of all communication activity.

Implementation begins at the top with LVMH Group (fashion brands). The Group sets the shared sustainability framework, LIFE 360, that all Maisons must follow. From the Group standard, the model splits into two tracks that must be developed at the same time.

Accountability Management. The left track addresses the structural foundation that must be in place before any communication campaign can be credible. As the credibility of any sustainability communication ultimately depends on what a brand actually does and discloses, it is essential to have proper accountability management in place before any consumer-facing campaign can be effective. The survey confirmed that 67.1% of respondents only trust sustainability communication backed by independently verified data, which means that without this structural foundation, communication investment alone cannot build trust. Although accountability management must work independently of communication campaigns, it directly determines how credible those campaigns will be perceived. As several problematic areas of LVMH's current accountability were identified, the following proposals are presented:

Annual brand-level sustainability reports with KPIs per LIFE 360 pillar. At present, there is no minimum standard requiring all LVMH Maisons to publish brand-specific sustainability data. Establishing such a requirement means that each brand - Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior, Céline, and all others - must publish annually its own sustainability summary showing performance against the four LIFE 360 pillars: creative circularity, biodiversity, climate, and traceability. This is the structural starting point without which consistent communication across the Group is impossible.

Progress against group targets, including honest acknowledgement of gaps. Publishing what has been achieved is not sufficient if it is done selectively. As Mariia Bakieva noted in the expert interviews, 'it is better to be not perfect and be transparent with that than to make consumers false general promises' (personal communication, 2026). Each brand's annual report must therefore include not only achievements but also targets that have not been met, the reasons for those gaps, and the action plans in place to address them. The survey confirmed that 78.9% of respondents consider current sustainability claims exaggerated, honest gap acknowledgement directly counters this perception.

External verification of sustainability claims. Claims that are only self-reported carry lower credibility than claims that an outside party has assessed. 67.1% of respondents in the survey stated they would only trust sustainability communication backed by independently verified data. Expanding external assessment from store-level certification - which LVMH already applies in certain contexts - to brand-level sustainability communications broadly would provide the verified evidence foundation that consumers require.

Educate the team on sustainability standards and distribute accountability across divisions. Accountability cannot remain the responsibility of a single sustainability department. It is essential that all teams within each Maisons, from product development to retail operations to marketing, understand the brand's sustainability targets and their role in meeting them. This ensures that no communication touchpoint contradicts the brand's disclosed sustainability position, and that the data reported annually reflects the full scope of the brand's activities.

Monitor brand-level progress annually and adjust targets. Effective accountability requires a structured internal review process that tracks whether each brand is on course to meet its LIFE 360 targets. Monitoring at the brand level, rather than only at the Group level, makes it possible to identify early which brands are falling behind and to course-correct before annual reporting.

Communication Management. The right track, with communication playing a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions of sustainability commitment, it is essential to implement proper communication management that translates the accountability work into consumer-facing content. Although the communication track must work in parallel with, not as a substitute for, the accountability track, it cannot be denied that without strong communication, even the most credible sustainability performance will remain invisible to consumers. The survey confirmed that 64.8% of respondents had never heard of LIFE 360, meaning that the Group's sustainability communication has so far not reached the consumer audience. As several problematic areas of LVMH's communication management were identified, the following proposals are presented:

LIFE 360 awareness campaigns on social media. The most immediate communication priority is making LIFE 360 known to consumers. 77.4% of respondents engage with luxury sustainability communication primarily through social media, yet LVMH's primary communication investment remains in annual reports and institutional events that consumers never see. Developing a regular social media presence for LIFE 360, across Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube, with content that explains what the programme is, what each brand is doing within it, and what the data shows, would directly address the 64.8% awareness gap identified in the survey.

Data-led storytelling, using Louis Vuitton as the best practice model within the Group. The survey confirmed that 86.6% of respondents trust brands less when sustainability relies mainly on storytelling alone (M = 4.24, the highest score in the survey, survey data, 2026). This does not mean that narrative has no place, it means that narrative must be anchored in data. Louis Vuitton's existing approach, linking sustainability claims to specific product initiatives like Re-Source and to traceable supply chain evidence, demonstrates how data and story can be

combined effectively. Other Maisons should adapt this approach to their own brand identity, rather than relying on heritage narrative alone.

Regular progress announcements, not only annual reports. Annual sustainability reports reach professional and institutional audiences. Consumers need more frequent, accessible updates that feel relevant to them personally. Regular announcements, monthly or quarterly, showing specific progress milestones, new targets reached, or honest updates on ongoing challenges, would establish the consistency and transparency that currently drives scepticism.

Create bilateral communication channels with stakeholders. Effective sustainability communication is not one-directional. Consumers, media, and institutional audiences should have accessible ways to ask questions about a brand's sustainability claims and receive specific, evidence-based answers. This could take the form of dedicated FAQ content on brand websites, regular Q&A sessions on social media, or a consumer-facing sustainability contact point. This step directly addresses the credibility gap: brands that welcome scrutiny are perceived as more trustworthy than brands that only broadcast.

Communicate every Maison's specific actions to consumers, not just the Group position. One of the most significant communication problems identified in the content analysis is that consumers who engage with LVMH's sustainability communication encounter Group-level messaging that does not connect to the specific brands they follow. A consumer who follows Céline on social media has no way of finding out what Céline is doing on sustainability, because Céline communicates nothing. Each Maison must communicate its own actions, adapted to its brand identity and audience, rather than leaving that responsibility entirely to Group-level reporting.

Accountability Management proposals address the structural foundation required for credible communication: brand-level disclosure, external verification, honest gap acknowledgement, internal education, and annual progress monitoring. Communication Management proposals address how that foundation reaches consumers: LIFE 360 awareness campaigns, data-led content, regular announcements, bilateral channels, and Maison-specific communication. Both tracks are connected through LIFE 360 and are designed to work as a continuous cycle, not a one-time effort. The model can serve not only LVMH but as a practical guideline for any luxury conglomerate seeking to align institutional sustainability governance with consumer-level communicative credibility.

Each proposal in the model is grounded in convergent empirical evidence gathered across the three methodological strands of this study. The accountability gap and need for brand-level KPI disclosure was identified by the case analysis (*Section 2.3.1*), which revealed

the absence of any minimum disclosure standard across Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior, and Céline. The requirement for independent verification and honest gap reporting was confirmed by the expert interviews (*Section 2.3.2*): all five professionals independently stated that self-reported claims alone are insufficient to achieve credibility, and that regulatory pressure toward third-party verification is already underway. The consumer awareness gap, the primacy of data over narrative, and the prestige paradox were all identified and quantified by the consumer survey (*Section 2.3.3*), which provides the empirical scale validation for each communication management proposal.

3.3. Benefits and possibilities of the constructed model

After presenting the model, it is important to highlight the possible benefits of applying the proposed solutions. It is important to note that not all suggestions need to be applied at once — every Maison may prioritise differently based on its current situation and brand identity.

Consumers become aware of what LIFE 360 is. The most direct benefit of the Communication management track is closing the awareness gap. Social media campaigns, regular updates, and data-led content would change this. Once consumers understand what the programme represents and what each brand is doing within it, LIFE 360 can start building the reputational value it was designed to deliver.

Consumer trust increases because claims can be verified. The Accountability management track directly responds to what consumers say they need. 88.4% trust brands more when concrete data is provided, and 67.1% would only trust sustainability communication backed by independent verification. Expanding disclosure and external assessment of sustainability claims converts the programme's institutional credibility into consumer-level trust, which the study confirms is currently missing. As Bakieva noted, *“only real data can reflect the real situation happening in the company”*.

Greenwashing risk is reduced. Honest acknowledgement of gaps, documented evidence behind all claims, and consistent progress reporting significantly reduce the risk of greenwashing accusations. This matters because 73.0% of respondents confirmed they would permanently downgrade a brand caught greenwashing. As Cordier observed, *“people are tired of greenwashing - increasing communication, reports, ads, programs, but with nothing behind it”*. The model addresses this by making verified accountability the structural prerequisite for all communication activity.

The prestige paradox is resolved. The survey identified a central paradox: 72.8% of respondents consider sustainability practices important for brand reputation, yet 72.0%

disagreed that current sustainability communication makes luxury brands more prestigious. The model resolves this by shifting sustainability communication away from aspirational storytelling toward verified, consistent, honest disclosure. When that shift happens, the reputational premium that 70.4% of consumers confirmed they are ready to assign to genuinely committed brands becomes achievable.

To sum up, the model provides benefits across consumer awareness, trust, greenwashing risk reduction, and brand reputation. The principle underlying all benefits is the same: credibility, not the volume of communication, not the sophistication of the narrative, determines whether sustainability communication builds or damages brand reputation (Fischer, 2021; Golob et al., 2022).

3.3.1 Discussion of the reality and practical feasibility of the proposed solutions

While the model is grounded in both theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, it is important to consider to what extent the proposed solutions are realistically implementable within the operational and strategic context of LVMH and its Maisons.

The Accountability Management track proposals are technically feasible within the existing LIFE 360 governance infrastructure. LVMH already publishes group-level KPI progress annually and has implemented LIFE 360 in Stores certification across a number of its retail sites. Mandating brand-level disclosure summaries would require an expansion of internal reporting systems and, critically, a top-down policy decision from Group leadership to enforce minimum standards across all Maisons. This is realistic given that LVMH operates a centralised governance model for sustainability, as evidenced by the shared LIFE 360 pillars applied uniformly across the portfolio. The internal education component, distributing sustainability accountability across divisions rather than concentrating it in a single department, is likewise achievable through existing training and onboarding mechanisms. The case analysis of the three examined Maisons (*Section 2.3.1*) revealed that Louis Vuitton already operates at a level of internal disclosure sophistication that could serve as the practical model for the Group's minimum standard: its structured KPI reporting across creative circularity, biodiversity, climate, and traceability pillars demonstrates that the operational infrastructure for brand-level accountability already exists and can be replicated.

The independent third-party verification proposal faces a greater practical challenge: external certification and assessment is resource-intensive, and smaller Maisons with lower revenue contribution to the Group may resist the cost implication. However, expert interviews (*Section 2.3.2*) confirm that this is increasingly a regulatory rather than a voluntary question.

Mariia Bakieva and Antoine Cordier both noted that European regulatory pressure, notably CSRD and the EU Green Claims Directive - is moving in the direction of mandatory third-party verification regardless of organisational preference.

The Communication Management track proposals are realistically implementable in the short term. LVMH and its Maisons already maintain active social media presences with large audiences on Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn. Developing LIFE 360-specific content within those existing channels requires editorial investment but not structural development. The consumer survey (*Section 2.3.3*) confirms that 77.4% of respondents engage with luxury sustainability content primarily through social media, which directly validates social-media-native content as the correct channel strategy. Resistance may arise from brand identity concerns: Christian Dior and Céline, in particular, have historically avoided direct sustainability claims in their consumer communication in order to preserve the aspirational prestige framing central to their brand identities. However, the survey data confirms that this resistance is commercially counterproductive: 72.0% of respondents reject the idea that current sustainability communication makes luxury brands more prestigious, meaning that silence and aspirational framing are already failing to deliver the intended reputational result. The cost of adaptation is lower than the cost of continued inaction.

3.3.2 Adaptability of the model to other organisations

Although the model was developed in direct response to the problematic areas identified in LVMH's sustainability communication, its structural logic, parallel Accountability and Communication management tracks converging toward consumer trust, is applicable to any large luxury conglomerate operating multiple brands under a shared sustainability governance framework.

Kering, the second major luxury conglomerate, provides the most directly analogous case. Like LVMH, Kering operates a portfolio of Maisons : including Gucci, Saint Laurent, and Balenciaga, under a shared sustainability programme (the Kering Standards and EP&L framework). The same structural problems identified in this study - inconsistency of brand-level disclosure, consumer unawareness of the group's sustainability programme, and a gap between institutional ambition and consumer-facing content - are plausibly present in Kering's portfolio as well, given that they reflect industry-wide conditions rather than LVMH-specific failures. The Accountability Management track proposals - mandatory KPI disclosure per brand, third-party verification, and honest gap acknowledgement, are directly transferable to any conglomerate operating a similar governance model. The Communication Management

track proposals, awareness campaigns, data-led storytelling, regular announcements, and Maison-specific communication, require adaptation to each group's programme branding and communication architecture, but the underlying logic applies universally.

The model also has applicability beyond the multi-brand conglomerate context. Single-brand luxury houses, those not operating under a group umbrella, would use a simplified version of the same dual-track logic: internal accountability infrastructure plus consumer-facing communication anchored in verified data. The core insight that credibility, rather than communication volume, determines reputational outcome is relevant regardless of organisational scale. A brand like Hermès, which operates independently and already communicates sustainability through its artisanal narrative, could use the model's accountability track to convert that narrative into verifiable claims, thereby addressing the consumer scepticism that the survey (*Section 2.3.3*) confirms is the dominant reception mode even for brands perceived as authentically craft-driven.

Outside luxury fashion specifically, the model's logic can be adapted to premium or aspirational segments of other industries, high-end automotive, fine jewellery, or premium hospitality, where the same tension between brand prestige and sustainability credibility exists. In each of these contexts, the accountability-first, communication-second sequencing, which is the central structural principle of the model, addresses the same underlying problem: sustainability claims that outpace accountability infrastructure produce scepticism rather than trust. The survey finding that 67.1% of respondents only trust claims backed by independently verified data (*Section 2.3.3*) is not luxury-fashion-specific; it reflects a general consumer trust mechanism that is transferable across premium sectors.

3.3.3 Possible directions for further research and development of this work

The findings and model proposed in this study open several directions for future research that would deepen, extend, or empirically test the conclusions reached here.

First, a longitudinal study tracking changes in consumer scepticism and brand reputation following the implementation of data-led sustainability communication would allow for direct measurement of the model's effectiveness. The present study captures a cross-sectional snapshot of consumer perceptions at one point in time. A before-and-after design, applied to a Maison that undertakes the shift from narrative-based to data-led communication, would provide empirical validation, or falsification, of the model's central claim that credibility-based communication drives reputational benefit. Such a study would also quantify

the timeline over which the reputational benefit materialises, which the present research is not designed to measure.

Second, the consumer survey conducted in this study (*Section 2.3.3*) was not geographically stratified: respondents were drawn without regional control, which means the findings may not uniformly represent luxury consumers in key markets such as China, Japan, or the Gulf states, where luxury consumption patterns and cultural attitudes toward sustainability differ from those observed in primarily Western European and North American contexts. Future research could replicate the survey instrument across these markets to determine whether the primacy of data-led communication as a trust mechanism, the study's most operationally clear finding, is culturally universal or regionally variable.

Third, the expert interview sample (*Section 2.3.2*), while purposively selected for expertise and diversity of perspective, consisted of five participants. Expanding the interview sample to include sustainability officers working inside LVMH Maisons, rather than only external professionals and academics, would provide an internal perspective on the structural and political barriers to implementing the model's proposals. The case analysis (*Section 2.3.1*) identified significant variation in sustainability communication across Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior, and Céline, but could not access internal decision-making rationales. In-depth interviews with brand-level sustainability managers would fill this gap.

Fourth, the model presented in Section 3.2 was developed as a normative proposition rather than tested in an applied setting. A case study of a luxury brand that has recently undertaken a structured transition toward data-led sustainability communication, for example, Stella McCartney, which has positioned itself as a sustainability-first luxury brand and provides detailed environmental impact disclosures, could be used to assess whether the model's proposed sequence of accountability-first, communication-second produces the reputational outcomes the model predicts. Such a comparative case study would bridge the present work's normative propositions and applied organisational practice.

Fifth, the regulatory dimension identified in the expert interviews (*Section 2.3.2*), and particularly the pending full enforcement of CSRD and the EU Green Claims Directive, represents an important external variable that was beyond the scope of this study to analyse in depth. Future research could specifically examine how LVMH's compliance trajectory with these regulatory instruments affects the feasibility timeline of the model's proposals, and whether regulatory pressure accelerates or complicates the voluntary accountability commitments that the model recommends. The legal and reputational risks associated with greenwashing litigation, referenced by multiple expert interviewees, constitute a separate but

related research area that would benefit from interdisciplinary treatment combining communication studies, legal analysis, and brand management.

To conclude, the proposed model is realistic, grounded in both the empirical evidence gathered across three methodological approaches and the operational realities of large luxury conglomerates. Its implementation at LVMH would require top-down governance decisions, moderate investment in communication infrastructure, and a strategic reframing of sustainability from a reputational risk to be managed toward a reputational opportunity to be pursued. The model's adaptability to other organisations - from rival conglomerates to single-brand luxury houses and beyond, reflects the generalisability of its central finding: that the credibility gap between institutional sustainability ambition and consumer-level perception is a structural feature of the field, not a problem unique to LVMH, and that closing it requires the same sequence of verified accountability followed by transparent communication regardless of organisational context. The directions for further research outlined above would allow future scholarship to test, refine, and extend the model's propositions in new empirical, geographical, and organisational settings.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After conducting theoretical analysis about sustainability communication to build brand reputation in the luxury fashion industry, the following main conclusions are presented:

- Sustainability communication is a strategic process encompassing multiple modes: instrumental, deliberative, and transformative, and cannot be reduced to advertising or reporting alone. Effective sustainability communication requires deliberate strategy selection aligned with consumer trust mechanisms: competence-based trust requires verifiable data; benevolence-based trust requires consistent value alignment; and integrity-based trust requires honest acknowledgement of limitations. The theoretical analysis confirmed that the luxury-sustainability paradox is not perceived as a genuine contradiction by the majority of consumers agree sustainability is compatible with the luxury business model.

- Brand reputation in luxury fashion is built through three interacting dimensions: brand identity, brand image, and accumulated trust and credibility. Sustainability communication functions as a reputational lever at all three stages, but its effectiveness is conditional on credibility. Communication that is perceived as exaggerated or unverifiable does not translate into reputational benefit, and greenwashing actively damages all three dimensions simultaneously.

The empirical analysis aimed at determining how LVMH, LIFE 360 sustainability program, and its selected Maisons apply sustainability communication to build brand reputation provides the following conclusions:

- LVMH's LIFE 360 programme constitutes a formally sophisticated sustainability governance framework with measurable targets across four pillars, but it operates primarily at the institutional level and has not achieved meaningful consumer awareness: 64.8% of surveyed consumers had never heard of LIFE 360. Group-level communication, however ambitious, does not substitute for brand-level consumer-facing disclosure.

- The three selected Maisons deploy fundamentally different sustainability communication strategies under the same governance framework, carrying distinct credibility risks. Louis Vuitton's data-led transparency approach (selective transparency risk) most closely aligns with consumer expectations. Christian Dior's heritage storytelling (narrative substitution risk) corresponds to the communicative mode that consumers report trusting least. Céline's total silence (accountability vacuum risk) is incompatible with both consumer expectations and the CSRD regulatory trajectory.

- Consumer scepticism is the dominant orientation toward luxury sustainability communication, confirmed across all four scepticism items in the survey (H3 confirmed). Only

14.4% of respondents believe luxury brands communicate sustainability honestly. This result was independently corroborated by all five expert interviewees.

- Concrete data is the primary consumer trust mechanism, confirmed as the most operationally clear finding of the study. 88.4% of respondents trust brands more when concrete data is provided ($M = 4.23$), and 86.6% trust brands less when only storytelling is used ($M = 4.24$ - the highest mean score in the survey). Hypothesis H2 is confirmed. The non-confirmation of Hypothesis H1 revealed that sustainability consideration is uniformly distributed regardless of luxury interest level, indicating that sustainability has become a baseline expectation rather than a niche consumer value.

- Perceived greenwashing carries permanent reputational consequences according to 73.0% of respondents (H4 partially confirmed). The prestige paradox - 72.0% reject the idea that current sustainability communication makes brands more prestigious ($M = 1.99$) - reveals that the reputational opportunity of sustainability is real but unrealised due to the credibility gap. 70.4% of respondents would become more interested in luxury brands with genuine sustainability commitment. All the empirical conclusions by the research method can be found in *Table 9*.

Table 9

Empirical conclusions by research method

Finding	Content analysis (2.3.1)	Expert interviews (2.3.2)	Consumer survey (2.3.3)
LIFE 360 awareness gap	Institutional communication only in annual reports and investor channels; no brand-level consumer-facing content identified	Not directly addressed	64.8% had never heard of LIFE 360; only 10.3% knew it well
Three Maisons, three divergent strategies (LV: data-led; Dior: heritage narrative; Céline: silence)	Comparative analysis confirmed three distinct communication approaches and their credibility risk profiles	Bakieva: Dior's storytelling "hides controversies"; all experts noted LV as stronger model	86.6% trust brands less when relying on storytelling alone ($M = 4.24$, highest in survey)
Consumer scepticism as dominant orientation	Fashion Transparency Index 32%; Good On You "Not Good Enough" for all three Maisons	All five experts independently described communication as primarily strategic, not values-driven	Only 14.4% believe brands communicate honestly ($M = 2.44$, lowest); 78.9% consider claims exaggerated; H3 confirmed

Continuation of Table 9

Finding	Content analysis (2.3.1)	Expert interviews (2.3.2)	Consumer survey (2.3.3)
Concrete data as primary trust mechanism (H2 confirmed)	LV's KPI-linked Re-Source and LV Diamonds blockchain align with consumer trust preferences; Dior's heritage narrative does not	All five experts preferred data-led communication; Bakieva: "only real data can reflect the real situation"	88.4% trust brands more with concrete data (M = 4.23); 86.6% trust less with storytelling only; H1 not confirmed — sustainability is a baseline expectation regardless of luxury interest level
Greenwashing consequences and prestige paradox	Independent assessments (FTI, Good On You) confirm gap between self-reported and externally verified performance	Cordier: "people are tired of greenwashing — increasing communication with nothing behind it"	73.0% would permanently downgrade a brand caught greenwashing (H4 partially confirmed); 72.0% reject that current communication makes brands more prestigious (M = 1.99); 70.4% would engage more with genuinely committed brands

Note. Compiled by the author from Sections 2.3.1–2.3.3.

Taking into account the results of the theoretical analysis and the empirical research, the following main practical solutions were formulated to overcome the identified problematic areas:

- To close the accountability gap and establish a structural foundation for credible communication, it is recommended that LVMH mandates a minimum brand-level disclosure standard for all Maisons under LIFE 360. Each Maison should publish annual KPI summaries with progress against Group targets, honest acknowledgement of gaps, and independently verified evidence. Independent third-party verification should be expanded from store-level

auditing to brand-level communications broadly.

- To close the consumer awareness gap and make LIFE 360 visible at the consumer level, it is recommended that LVMH develops social-media-native LIFE 360 content in data-led campaign formats. Short-form video anchored in concrete numbers, regular progress announcements, and consistent channel presence would convert institutional sustainability investment into consumer-level brand awareness. Louis Vuitton's existing Re-Source initiative and LV Diamonds blockchain provide the best practice model within the Group.

- Each brand should adapt the general framework to its specific brand identity and communicative risk profile. Louis Vuitton should extend its KPI disclosure to cover living wage and animal welfare gaps. Christian Dior should anchor its heritage narrative in independently verified data through the dual-register format. Céline should develop a minimal craft-based transparency layer using its already-achieved LIFE 360 in Stores Awards as its communicative foundation.

- Sustainability communication must be treated as a long-term continuous activity rather than episodic campaign investment. Year-on-year progress reporting, consistent independent verification, and honest acknowledgement of limitations ensure that the reputational benefit of sustainability communication is lasting rather than temporary.

The novelty of this work lies in its triangulated empirical approach - combining qualitative content analysis, expert interviews, and a consumer survey - applied to a within-conglomerate comparative analysis of three brands operating under the same governance framework but deploying fundamentally different communication strategies. The identification of the prestige paradox - where consumers simultaneously consider sustainability reputationally important and reject the idea that current sustainability communication delivers a prestige premium - represents the study's primary original empirical contribution.

The analysis was conducted exclusively on publicly available brand communication materials, which may not capture sustainability communication that occurs in restricted or private channels. The consumer survey sample, while internationally diverse, overrepresents Lithuania and Belgium due to the researcher's personal networks, which may introduce geographic and cultural biases into the attitudinal findings.

Further research on sustainability communication to build brand reputation in luxury fashion requires longitudinal research tracking how consumer perceptions of specific brand communication strategies shift over time as regulatory requirements under the CSRD take full effect. Comparative research extending beyond LVMH to other luxury conglomerates, particularly Kering and Richemont, would allow the within-group heterogeneity finding to be tested against different corporate governance models.

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APPENDIXES

THE GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Brand identity – the unique value perception established by the integration of brand positioning, brand culture, and brand presentation. It represents the highest level of the consumer–brand relationship and is deeply strategic (Jin et al., 2019).

Brand image – stakeholders’ instantaneous impression of the brand — a symbolic representation of its attitudes and ethics that influences consumers’ cognitive evaluations. It is shaped through strategic marketing communication, PR, and stakeholder interaction (Šontaitė & Kristensen, 2009).

Brand reputation – a complex, multidimensional social evaluation based on stakeholders’ aggregated perceptions of a brand’s past performance, values, and expected future behavior. It reflects the long-term perception of a brand and represents the value that consumers associate with it (Molinillo, Japutra & Ekinci, 2022).

Circular economy – an economic model aimed at eliminating waste and the continual use of resources through reselling, repairing, and recycling products. In luxury fashion, it is applied through vintage collections, resale markets, and innovative material sourcing (Vuković et al., 2025).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) – a management concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns into their business operations and stakeholder interactions. In luxury fashion, CSR is embedded into brand DNA and communicated through transparency, ethical sourcing, and sustainability reporting (Viciunaite, 2022).

Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) – a European Union regulatory framework (2022/2024) requiring companies to report on their environmental, social, and governance (ESG) impacts, risks, and opportunities. It transforms sustainability from a voluntary commitment into a compliance-driven necessity, reshaping how luxury brands communicate their sustainability performance (Grauel et al., 2025).

Sustainability Communication – a form of strategic, dialogue-oriented communication through which organisations convey their environmental and social values, practices, and performance to internal and external stakeholders, in order to advance transformation processes toward more sustainable practices (Adomßent & Godemann, 2011; Raninen, 2023; Golob, Podnar & Zabkar, 2023).

Continuation of Appendix 1

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) – consumer-generated content shared digitally about a brand's products, services, or sustainability efforts. Transparent and socially responsible brand interactions on social media stimulate positive eWOM, enhancing brand image and consumer trust (Kong, Witmaier & Ko, 2021).

Green Perceived Value (GPV) – a consumer's overall assessment of a product's net benefit based on its environmental performance relative to what is given up. Transparent sustainability communication positively influences GPV and, consequently, consumer purchasing decisions (Liu, Kim & Lee, 2024).

Greenwashing – a deceptive communication practice in which a company exaggerates or fabricates its environmental or social performance, creating a misleadingly positive image without substantive action. Greenwashing provokes consumer skepticism and critically damages brand credibility (Vollero & Siano, 2024).

Instrumental communication – a strategic, managerially driven mode of sustainability communication aimed at achieving specific organizational goals such as enhancing reputation or influencing consumer behavior (Golob et al., 2023).

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) – a strategic communication approach that ensures all messaging and channels are unified to deliver a consistent brand message. Modern IMC has shifted from one-way broadcasting to data-driven, personalized digital engagement (Repova et al., 2024).

Intention–Behavior Gap – the discrepancy between consumers' stated pro-environmental values and their actual purchasing behavior. Despite professing strong sustainability attitudes, consumers often fail to act accordingly, partly due to skepticism about brands' green claims (Camilleri et al., 2023).

LVMH Group – Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton – the world's largest luxury goods conglomerate, overseeing more than 75 brands including Louis Vuitton, Dior, and Stella McCartney. It serves as the primary case study of this thesis on sustainability communication in luxury fashion

Luxury fashion – a segment of the fashion industry distinguished by exclusivity, heritage, craftsmanship, and aspirational positioning, in which products carry symbolic and cultural meaning beyond their functional purpose. Luxury fashion brands operate under a structural tension between traditional codes of prestige and the contemporary demand for ethical, transparent, and environmentally responsible conduct (Arrigo, 2015; Grauel, Burmann & Schade, 2025; Kong, Witmaier & Ko, 2021).

Declaration on the usage of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) and GAI-based tools (GAI tools)

11.05.2026

Daria Chevychalova

MANAGING SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION TO BUILD BRAND

REPUTATION IN THE LUXURY FASHION INDUSTRY: THE CASE OF LVMH GROUP

☐ **I confirm that NO GAI tools were used in the preparation of this work.**

☒ **I confirm that the GAI tools listed and described below were used in the preparation of this work :**

GAI tool: ChatGPT version 4.0

Company that developed the GAI tool: OpenAI

GAI tool web address: <https://openai.com/chatgpt/>

Date of content/output creation: 20.11.2025 – 30.01.2026

Purpose of using the GAI tool: academic literature, sources, and scientific articles collection, ; clarification of terminology and glossary of terms.

Specific location (section/page) where the GAI tool was used: Chapter 1

Declaration on the usage of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) and GAI-based tools (GAI tools)

11.05.2026

Daria Chevychalova

MANAGING SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION TO BUILD BRAND

REPUTATION IN THE LUXURY FASHION INDUSTRY: THE CASE OF LVMH GROUP

☐ I confirm that NO GAI tools were used in the preparation of this work.

☒ I confirm that the GAI tools listed and described below were used in the preparation of this work :

GAI tool: Claude Opus 4.7

Company that developed the GAI tool: Anthropic

GAI tool web address: <https://claude.ai/>

Date of content/output creation: 15.02.2026 – 01.05.2026

Purpose of using the GAI tool: structuring the theoretical framework of the research and formulating possible solutions and recommendations for the LVMH case study.

Specific location (section/page) where the GAI tool was used: Chapter 3

Declaration on the usage of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) and GAI-based tools (GAI tools)

11.05.2026

Daria Chevychalova

MANAGING SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION TO BUILD BRAND

REPUTATION IN THE LUXURY FASHION INDUSTRY: THE CASE OF LVMH GROUP

☐ I confirm that NO GAI tools were used in the preparation of this work.

☒ I confirm that the GAI tools listed and described below were used in the preparation of this work :

GAI tool: NotebookLM

Company that developed the GAI tool: Google

GAI tool web address: <https://notebooklm.google.com/>

Date of content/output creation: 04.01.2026 – 10.04.2026

Purpose of using the GAI tool: systematising collected sources and research notes; navigating large volumes of academic articles, LVMH annual reports, and media materials.

Specific location (section/page) where the GAI tool was used: Chapter 2

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Could you briefly introduce yourself and describe your general interest or background in fashion, sustainability, or consumer behavior?
2. From your personal observation, how do you think sustainability communication has changed the way luxury fashion brands are perceived by the public in recent years?
3. In your view, does sustainability communication from luxury fashion brands feel like a genuine commitment or more like a response to public pressure and trends?
4. Do you think sustainability and luxury can genuinely coexist, or does sustainability communication risk weakening what makes a luxury brand feel exclusive and desirable?
5. What would make you personally distrust a luxury brand's sustainability communication - what signals feel like greenwashing rather than real action?
6. Do you think younger consumers genuinely factor sustainability into how they perceive luxury brands, or is it more of a stated value that does not really affect brand reputation in practice?
7. In your opinion, which matters more for a luxury fashion brand's reputation today - its heritage and product quality, or its sustainability practices and ethical communication?
8. Looking ahead, do you think sustainability will become a non-negotiable core element of luxury brand identity, or will it remain a secondary marketing focus?
9. When you hear that a brand like Louis Vuitton, Dior, or Céline is part of a large group like LVMH with a shared sustainability program (such as LIFE 360), does that make their individual sustainability claims feel more or less credible to you?
10. These LVMH brands communicate sustainability in different ways: some publish detailed data and reports, while others focus on emotional storytelling and heritage narratives. Which approach do you find more convincing as an outside observer, and why?
11. Based on your observations of conglomerates like LVMH, what do you think they should do differently to make their sustainability communication more credible and genuinely strengthen their individual brands' reputations?

Survey questionnaire

Dear Participant,

This survey is part of a Master's thesis at Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania) exploring how sustainability communication influences brand reputation in the luxury fashion industry.

The survey takes approximately 5 minutes. All responses are completely anonymous and used for academic research.

You do not need to be a customer of these brands to participate. The perspective of students and young observers is especially valuable to this research.

LVMH is the world's largest luxury conglomerate, headquartered in Paris, France. It was formed in 1987 through the merger of fashion house Louis Vuitton with drinks group Moët Hennessy. Today, LVMH oversees more than 75 prestigious brands across six business divisions. The group is led by Bernard Arnault, with recorded revenues of €80.8 billion in 2025, making it one of the most valuable companies in the World.

1. What is your age group?
 - ☐ Under 18
 - ☐ 18 - 24
 - ☐ 25 - 34
 - ☐ 35 - 44
 - ☐ 45 or older
2. What is your gender?
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Non-binary / third gender
 - ☐ Prefer not to say
3. What is your country of residence?
4. What is your current status?
 - ☐ Full-time student
 - ☐ Student + part-time job
 - ☐ Recently graduated (within last 2 years)
 - ☐ Employed full-time
 - ☐ Retired

Continuation of Appendix 6

5. What is your highest level of completed (or in-progress) education?
- ☐ Secondary / High school
 - ☐ Bachelor's degree (in progress or completed)
 - ☐ Master's degree
 - ☐ PhD or higher
 - ☐ Other
6. What is your approximate monthly personal income (your own earnings or allowance)?
- ☐ Under €500
 - ☐ €500 - €1,500
 - ☐ €1,500 - €4,000
 - ☐ Over €4,000
 - ☐ Prefer not to say
7. How important is a luxury fashion brand's reputation when you consider supporting or following?
(Not important at all) 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 (Extremely important)
8. How interested are you in luxury fashion (e.g. Louis Vuitton, Dior, Céline, etc)?
(Not at all interested) 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 (Extremely interested)
9. How often do you pay attention to luxury fashion brands (e.g. following on social media, noticing ads, reading about them, watching runway shows)?
- ☐ Very often (I follow them actively)
 - ☐ Occasionally (I notice them from time to time)
 - ☐ Rarely (only when something major happens)
 - ☐ Never (I don't pay attention to them)
10. Have you ever purchased a luxury fashion product (clothing, bag, accessories, shoes - priced above €300)?
- ☐ Yes, I buy luxury fashion occasionally
 - ☐ Yes, I have bought one or two items as a special purchase
 - ☐ No, but I would like to in the future
 - ☐ No, and I don't plan to
11. Would you like to own a luxury brand product at some point in your life?
- ☐ Yes, definitely - it is something I aspire to
 - ☐ Maybe, if my financial situation allows
 - ☐ Probably not - it's not a priority for me
 - ☐ No - I wouldn't want to, regardless of finances

Continuation of Appendix 6

12. Before this survey, were you aware fashion brands such as Louis Vuitton, Dior, Céline and many more all belong to the same company - LVMH Group?

- ☐ Yes, I knew this
- ☐ I had a vague idea but wasn't sure
- ☐ No, I did not know this

13. Is sustainability a factor you consider when choosing which fashion brands to support or follow (even without buying)?

- ☐ Yes, always - it strongly affects which brands I respect
- ☐ Sometimes - it matters but is not decisive
- ☐ Rarely - I think about it but don't act on it
- ☐ No - sustainability doesn't influence my fashion choices

14. How familiar are you with sustainability issues in the fashion industry (e.g. overproduction, labour conditions, carbon emissions)?

- ☐ Very familiar - I actively follow this topic
- ☐ Somewhat familiar - I have general awareness
- ☐ Not very familiar - I have heard about it but know little
- ☐ Not familiar at all

15. Had you previously heard about LVMH's sustainability programme called LIFE 360?

- ☐ Yes, I know it well
- ☐ I have heard of it but know little detail
- ☐ No, I was not aware of it

16. Please evaluate statements, provided below on the scale from 1 to 5, where:

1 = Strongly Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 5 = Strongly Agree

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
I generally trust luxury fashion brands.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Luxury brands communicate sustainability honestly.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sustainability communication in luxury is often exaggerated.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Luxury brands should be more transparent about their environmental impact.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Continuation of Appendix 6

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
I trust brands more when they provide concrete, measurable sustainability data.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I trust brands less when they rely mainly on storytelling and emotional narratives.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sustainability is compatible with the luxury fashion business model.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Most sustainability claims in luxury fashion are primarily for marketing purposes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Brands should be externally audited and monitored for sustainability claims.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Learning that a brand is not sustainable would reduce my purchases from it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would share negative sustainability news about a brand on social media.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sustainability performance influences my perception of a brand's prestige.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

17. What is your main reason not to buy luxury fashion, if so? (Select the most relevant)

- ☐ Price - they are too expensive for my current budget
- ☐ Values - I don't believe in the luxury consumption model
- ☐ Sustainability - I avoid brands with poor sustainability practices
- ☐ Relevance - I simply don't feel these brands are for me yet
- ☐ I do occasionally purchase luxury fashion

18. Would genuine sustainability commitment make you more or less interested in owning a luxury brand in the future?

- ☐ More interested - sustainability makes them more aspirational to me
- ☐ It wouldn't change my interest either way
- ☐ Less interested - sustainability makes luxury feel less exclusive
- ☐ I'm already interested/uninterested for other reasons

19. Please evaluate statements, provided below on the scale from 1 to 5, where:

1 = Strongly Disagree | 5 = Strongly Agree

Continuation of Appendix 6

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Sustainability is something I expect from all brands, including luxury ones.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A luxury fashion brand's sustainability practices are an important part of how I perceive its overall reputation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sustainability feels out of place in luxury fashion - it undermines the glamour.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I believe luxury brands use sustainability as a marketing trick to attract buyers like me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A luxury fashion brand that is caught greenwashing would lose its reputation in my eyes permanently.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I think sustainability can become a new form of luxury status - 'responsible wealth'.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When I see a luxury brand promoting sustainability, I feel they are speaking to me as a future customer.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sustainability communication makes a luxury fashion brand appear more prestigious and trustworthy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

22. Does extensive sustainability communication increase your trust in a luxury brand?

- ☐ Yes, always -more communication means more accountability
- ☐ Only if the claims are backed by concrete, independently verified data
- ☐ Not necessarily -communication alone does not prove real action
- ☐ No, I am generally sceptical of sustainability claims from luxury brands

23. Through which channels are you most likely to engage with a luxury brand's sustainability communication? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Brand website / official sustainability or annual reports
- ☐ Social media (Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube)
- ☐ Product packaging and labels
- ☐ Editorial media and press coverage
- ☐ In-store communication
- ☐ I do not actively seek out this information

Summary of primary quantitative data

Figure 1

Distribution of respondents by approximate monthly income (%)

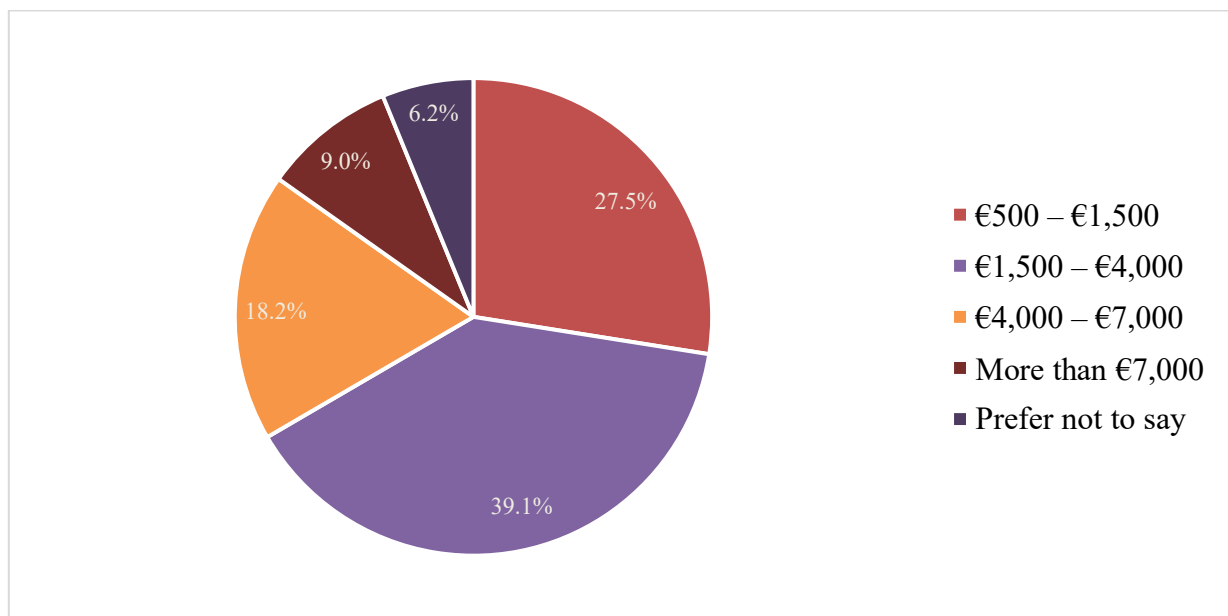


Table 1

Frequencies of statement “I generally trust luxury fashion brands”

Mean	3.08
Median	3
Standard deviation	1.1

	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Strongly disagree (1)	43	11.1 %	11.1 %
Disagree (2)	44	11.3 %	22.4 %
Neutral (3)	187	48.1 %	70.5 %
Agree (4)	67	17.2 %	87.7 %
Strongly agree (5)	48	12.3 %	100.0 %

Table 2

Frequencies of statement “Luxury brands should be more transparent about their environmental impact”

Mean	4.01
Median	4
Standard deviation	0.97

Continuation of Appendix 7

	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Strongly disagree (1)	14	3.6 %	3.6 %
Disagree (2)	18	4.6 %	8.2 %
Neutral (3)	43	11.1 %	19.3 %
Agree (4)	188	48.3 %	67.6 %
Strongly agree (5)	126	32.4 %	100.0 %

Table 3

Frequencies of statement “Sustainability is compatible with the luxury fashion business model”

Mean	4.04
Median	4
Standard deviation	0.98

	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Strongly disagree (1)	12	3.1 %	3.1 %
Disagree (2)	17	4.4 %	7.5 %
Neutral (3)	57	14.7 %	22.2 %
Agree (4)	159	40.9 %	63.1 %
Strongly agree (5)	144	37.0 %	100.0 %

Table 4

Frequencies of statement “Sustainability feels out of place in luxury fashion - it undermines the glamour”

Mean	2.03
Median	2
Standard deviation	1.18

	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Strongly disagree (1)	179	46.0 %	46.0 %
Disagree (2)	90	23.1 %	69.1 %
Neutral (3)	62	15.9 %	85.0 %
Agree (4)	45	11.6 %	96.6 %
Strongly agree (5)	13	3.3 %	100.0 %

Table 5

Frequencies of statement “I trust brands more when they provide concrete, measurable sustainability data”

Mean	4.23
Median	4
Standard deviation	0.84

	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Strongly disagree (1)	6	1.5 %	1.5 %
Disagree (2)	14	3.6 %	5.1 %
Neutral (3)	25	6.4 %	11.5 %
Agree (4)	182	46.8 %	58.3 %
Strongly agree (5)	162	41.6 %	100.0 %

Table 6

Frequencies of statement “I trust brands less when they rely mainly on storytelling and emotional narratives”

Mean	4.24
Median	4
Standard deviation	0.85

	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Strongly disagree (1)	7	1.8 %	1.8 %
Disagree (2)	9	2.3 %	4.1 %
Neutral (3)	36	9.3 %	13.4 %
Agree (4)	168	43.2 %	56.6 %
Strongly agree (5)	169	43.4 %	100.0 %

Table 7

Frequencies of statement “Brands should be externally audited and monitored for sustainability claims”

Mean	3.84
Median	4
Standard deviation	1.08

	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Strongly disagree (1)	16	4.1 %	4.1 %
Disagree (2)	29	7.5 %	11.6 %
Neutral (3)	79	20.3 %	31.9 %
Agree (4)	143	36.8 %	68.7 %
Strongly agree (5)	122	31.4 %	100.0 %

Table 8*Frequencies of statement “Luxury brands communicate sustainability honestly”*

Mean	2.44		
Median	2		
Standard deviation	1.13		

	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Strongly disagree (1)	93	23.9 %	23.9 %
Disagree (2)	114	29.3 %	53.2 %
Neutral (3)	126	32.4 %	85.6 %
Agree (4)	30	7.7 %	93.3 %
Strongly agree (5)	26	6.7 %	100.0 %

Table 9*Frequencies of statement “Sustainability communication in luxury is often exaggerated”*

Mean	3.99		
Median	4		
Standard deviation	0.93		

	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Strongly disagree (1)	10	2.6 %	2.6 %
Disagree (2)	19	4.9 %	7.5 %
Neutral (3)	53	13.6 %	21.1 %
Agree (4)	189	48.6 %	69.7 %
Strongly agree (5)	118	30.3 %	100.0 %

Table 10*Frequencies of statement “Most sustainability claims in luxury fashion are primarily for marketing purposes”*

Mean	3.62		
Median	4		
Standard deviation	1.17		

	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Strongly disagree (1)	30	7.7 %	7.7 %
Disagree (2)	27	6.9 %	14.6 %
Neutral (3)	104	26.7 %	41.3 %
Agree (4)	127	32.6 %	73.9 %
Strongly agree (5)	101	26.0 %	100.0 %

Table 11

Frequencies of statement “I believe luxury brands use sustainability as a marketing trick to attract buyers like me”

Mean	3.9		
Median	4		
Standard deviation	1.05		
	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Strongly disagree (1)	11	2.8 %	2.8 %
Disagree (2)	39	10.0 %	12.8 %
Neutral (3)	53	13.6 %	26.4 %
Agree (4)	161	41.4 %	67.8 %
Strongly agree (5)	125	32.1 %	100.0 %

Table 12

Frequencies of statement “A luxury fashion brand's sustainability practices are an important part of how I perceive its overall reputation”

Mean	3.86		
Median	4		
Standard deviation	0.95		
	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Strongly disagree (1)	9	2.3 %	2.3 %
Disagree (2)	27	6.9 %	9.2 %
Neutral (3)	70	18.0 %	27.2 %
Agree (4)	187	48.1 %	75.3 %
Strongly agree (5)	96	24.7 %	100.0 %

Table 13

Frequencies of statement “A luxury fashion brand that is caught greenwashing would lose its reputation in my eyes permanentl.”

Mean	3.89		
Median	4		
Standard deviation	0.97		
	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Strongly disagree (1)	7	1.8 %	1.8 %
Disagree (2)	33	8.5 %	10.3 %
Neutral (3)	65	16.7 %	27.0 %
Agree (4)	173	44.5 %	71.5 %
Strongly agree (5)	111	28.5 %	100.0 %

Table 14

Frequencies of statement “Sustainability communication makes a luxury fashion brand appear more prestigious and trustworthy”

Mean	1.99
Median	2
Standard deviation	1.17

	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Strongly disagree (1)	183	47.0 %	47.0 %
Disagree (2)	97	24.9 %	71.9 %
Neutral (3)	52	13.4 %	85.3 %
Agree (4)	44	11.3 %	96.6 %
Strongly agree (5)	13	3.3 %	100.0 %

Table 15

Hypothesis test results

Hypothesis	Statistical test	Statistic	df	p	Decision
H1	Pearson correlation	$r = 0.045$	—	.373	Not supported
H2	Paired-samples t-test (Tables 6, 7)	$t = -0.13$	388	.899	Supported
H3	One-sample t-test ($\mu_0 = 3.0$)				Supported
	• Table 9	$t = -9.78$	388	< .001	
	• Table 10	$t = 21.00$	388	< .001	
	• Table 11	$t = 10.45$	388	< .001	
	• Table 12	$t = 16.91$	388	< .001	
H4	One-sample t-test ($\mu_0 = 3.0$)				Partially supported
	• Table 13	$t = 17.85$	388	< .001	
	• Table 14	$t = 18.15$	388	< .001	
Supp.	Pearson correlation – reputation T13 and greenwashing T14	$r = -0.039$	—	.447	n.s.

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