



Vaasan yliopisto
UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

Inês Borralho

Sustainable branding in luxury business development

The case of the Luxury Hospitality sector

School of Management; School of
Marketing and Communication
Master's thesis in International Business
Master's degree program in
International Business (MIB)

Vaasa 2023

UNIVERSITY OF VAASA**School of Management, School of Marketing and Communication**

Author: Inês Borralho
Title of the Thesis: Sustainable branding in luxury business development: The case of the Luxury Hospitality sector
Degree: Master's Degree
Programme: International Business
Supervisor: Minnie Kontkanen
Year: 2023 **Pages:** 81

ABSTRACT :

For many years, luxury was seen as never changing and almost untouchable industry when it comes to market adaptation since its consumers would search for these brands regardless of trends. Nonetheless, in a constantly evolving business scenario, all brands must adapt, not only in order to remain competitive but, in the specificity of the luxury scenario, also to have an adequate offer for the new generations and their inherent concerns. One of these concerns that the younger generation generally has is regarding sustainability and the protection of the resources that exist in the planet. Not only that but also the increasing awareness about social issues that are behind most of the big corporations. Therefore, there is a gap in understanding the applicability of sustainability in luxury companies when new business is being developed. Hence, this thesis aims to answer the question of "How do luxury companies implement sustainable branding within business development considering the enablers, drivers, barriers and challenges inherent to the branding process and its steps?". Additionally, the author proposes to achieve the objectives of defining branding, luxury, sustainability, sustainable luxury branding and their inherent dimensions; identifying the phases of the sustainable branding process when inserted in a business development scenario; understanding what the drivers, enablers, challenges, and barriers in the sustainable branding process are; and exploring the sustainable branding process in a luxury company within the hospitality sector. When it comes to the key concepts of this thesis, they definitely are branding, luxury, sustainability, and sustainable luxury branding. The first three are key to understand the basis of the existing models in the literature whereas the last is not very commonly defined but is integrated in this paper as a combination of the main terms. All of these definitions as well as their dimensions and associated models are crucial to study the issue of this thesis. The methods used for the empirical research on this thesis were interpretivism with a deductive approach since the author made use of qualitative collection methods such as semi-structured interviews and secondary data through a case study strategy. All of this methodology was applied due to the subjectiveness of the issue which was more easily met with qualitative data and analysis. As for the main findings in this thesis, they were the synergy between luxury and sustainability; the constancy of sustainable branding in the whole process of luxury business development; and the drivers, enablers, challenges, and barriers affecting the sustainable branding process in luxury hospitality companies. To conclude, the author was able to answer the research question through a revised model of the literature that encompassed all the empirical findings even though there were limitations such as sample size and diversity and some possible language barriers.

KEYWORDS: Branding, luxury, sustainable development, business, brands, sustainable management, wellness tourism

Contents

| | | |
|-------|---|----|
| 1 | Introduction | 6 |
| 1.1 | Background of study | 6 |
| 1.2 | Research question and objectives | 9 |
| 1.3 | Delimitations of the study | 9 |
| 1.4 | Structure of the study | 10 |
| 2 | Theoretical Background | 12 |
| 2.1 | Branding | 12 |
| 2.1.1 | Definition of branding | 12 |
| 2.1.2 | Branding integrated into business development | 15 |
| 2.1.3 | Branding models | 16 |
| 2.1.4 | Drivers and enablers for the branding process | 21 |
| 2.1.5 | Challenges and barriers in the branding process | 23 |
| 2.2 | Luxury | 26 |
| 2.2.1 | Definition of luxury | 26 |
| 2.2.2 | Luxury dimensions | 27 |
| 2.3 | Sustainability | 30 |
| 2.3.1 | Definition of sustainability | 30 |
| 2.3.2 | Dimensions of sustainability | 31 |
| 2.4 | Sustainable branding in a luxury context | 32 |
| 2.5 | Framework | 35 |
| 3 | Methodology | 37 |
| 3.1 | Research philosophy and research analysis | 37 |
| 3.2 | Data collection | 38 |
| 3.3 | Data analysis | 40 |
| 3.4 | Reliability and validity | 41 |
| 4 | Findings | 43 |
| 4.1 | Company description | 43 |
| 4.2 | Main definitions | 44 |

| | | |
|-------|--|----|
| 4.2.1 | Branding | 44 |
| 4.2.2 | Luxury | 45 |
| 4.2.3 | Sustainability | 46 |
| 4.2.4 | Sustainable Luxury Branding | 47 |
| 4.3 | Process | 49 |
| 4.4 | Drivers, enablers, challenges, and barriers | 53 |
| 5 | Discussion | 60 |
| 5.1 | Main definitions | 60 |
| 5.2 | Process | 61 |
| 5.3 | Drivers, enablers, challenges, and barriers | 62 |
| 5.4 | Revised framework | 64 |
| 6 | Conclusion | 66 |
| 6.1 | Summary of the study | 66 |
| 6.2 | Theoretical & Managerial Implications | 67 |
| 6.3 | Limitations and further research suggestions | 68 |
| | References | 71 |
| | Appendices | 79 |
| | Appendix 1. Interview guide | 79 |

Figures

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 1. Brand Equity Model by Aaker (https://www.van-haaften.nl/branding/corporate-branding/112-brand-equity). | 17 |
| Figure 2. Keller's Pyramid (https://medium.com/@keatonhawker/kellers-brand-equity-model-what-it-is-how-to-use-it-84e42d562299). | 19 |
| Figure 3. The Triple Bottom Line of Sustainability (https://waste4change.com/blog/the-triple-bottom-line-of-sustainability-in-waste-management/). | 31 |
| Figure 4. Theoretical framework | 36 |
| Figure 5. ABC's business development process (ABC Hospitality, 2023b). [adapted]. | 50 |
| Figure 6. Revised framework | 64 |

Tables

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1. Interviewees, their roles, and dates of interviews | 40 |
|--|----|

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of study

As mentioned by Atwal & Williams (2009, p. 338), in the current context of luxury industry, the brands' marketing strategies have been shifting towards selling an experience corresponding with the consumers' lifestyles and ambitions, whilst keeping in mind their core values. In the last few years, alongside this shift, the consumer base in the luxury market has expanded which has led to an increase in Generation Z buyers ("International Luxury Marketing", 2022, p. 1). This generation is not only more digitally connected than the previous but is also pushing companies to be as sustainable as they are in their daily behaviours (Akrouit & Guercini, 2022, p. 96).

According to the OECD (2001), sustainability stands for the efficient use of the biosphere by the current generation with the aim of preserving it for the future. This definition can be related to luxury given that luxury products are developed and created to be durable and last through several generations (Athwal et al., 2019, p. 407). Additionally, concepts such as quality, skill and endurance are encompassed both in the luxury and the sustainable settings (Athwal et al., 2019, p. 406). Therefore, it can be stated that luxury does have some touchpoints with sustainability, such as durability, which allows for a pairing of both concepts in a business scenario.

Contrary to the parallels between luxury and sustainability mentioned in the previous paragraph, the main liability in the luxury sector, from the perspective of sustainable development and consumption, is the usage of natural resources and the exploitation of several animal species, which have an unwanted impact on the ecosystem (Athwal et al., 2019, p. 407). As mentioned by Akrouit & Guercini (2022, p. 93), the business model of selling luxury products in itself constitutes a sustainability problem. This problem's impact on the environment increases proportionally to the growing dimension and speed of the cycle of manufacturing and consumption (Akrouit & Guercini, 2022, p. 93).

Concerning sustainable luxury, conflicting opinions arise with respect to its viability. Taking into consideration that the aim of sustainability is to have a “balance between resources consumed and reproduced” (Akrou & Guercini, 2022, p. 92), luxury brands do not display commitment to this when following their traditional and most common purpose of selling exclusive products or experiences (Akrou & Guercini, 2022, p. 92). Some authors even affirm that luxury products cannot go hand-in-hand with the concept of sustainability given that the companies sell “short-lived” products which are, at its core, against sustainable principles (Akrou & Guercini, 2022, p. 92).

On the other hand, there are, now, successful sustainable luxury brands, such as Stella McCartney, which embody their mission through their operations and by actively promoting fair, ethical, and green values (Akrou & Guercini, 2022, p. 92). In other words, when applying the green values to the sector, on top of successful sustainable marketing practices, luxury companies can seek in their branding and operations key factors for sustainable competitive advantages (Akrou & Guercini, 2022, p. 92).

On the topic of marketing, this business branch has been increasingly taken advantage of to promote sustainable practices and operations for brands all over the world (Akrou & Guercini, 2022, p. 93). When a company wishes to be perceived as sustainable, it resorts to marketing strategies that can change “brand positioning, lever attributes, and companies’ relationship with direct customers and consumers.” (Akrou & Guercini, 2022, p. 93).

Given that, at its core, marketing proposes to create value for the consumers, brands from all sectors, and stakeholders can efficiently apply the value creation feature in a sustainable branding scenario. Hence, in the luxury sector, marketing, and more specifically, branding can be the central players in making brands come across as more sustainable. Nevertheless, a marketing campaign or rebranding action with no substantial change from within the company will be criticized by the customers and the overall public.

The stakeholders, even though they are key players in a company, they are not the only ones to be pleased, as is often erroneously believed. Consumers should be a priority for every organization that wishes to gain market value and a positive reputation. Furthermore, this audience should trust in a brand in order to buy from it. However, today's consumers are different, evolved and have new needs which makes it more challenging for companies to gain their trust. Nowadays, the consumer is extremely demanding of brands, is active and multifaceted, being able to appeal to several sectors at the same time but requiring the best from every company (Akrouit & Guercini, 2022, p. 97). With this in mind, luxury brands can raise interest within this consumer through, not only the delivery of sustainable products, but also through the promotion of Fairtrade and other sustainable practices such as recycling, reusing, saving energy, and supporting solidarity and sustainable causes (Athwal et al., 2019, p. 407).

It is evident in existing literature that the focus has been on the negative side of this topic, greenwashing, or on the impact that sustainable communication has on luxury consumers. Kong et al. (2021), for example, developed the study "Sustainability and social media communication: How consumers respond to marketing efforts of luxury and non-luxury fashion brands" where they analysed the perceptions of clients when faced by sustainable communications by luxury brands where it was apparent that sustainable claims decreased purchasing intentions whilst the eWOM (electronic Word-of-Mouth) increased. Another example is a study concerning greenwashing, the article by Szabo & Webster (2020) that studies "Perceived Greenwashing: The Effects of Green Marketing on Environmental and Product Perceptions". In this article, the authors research the perception that arises from greenwashing and what can motivate and result from this practice.

Therefore, there is a possible gap to explore in regard to the branding process of luxury companies that aim to develop their business in a sustainable manner. Additionally, the gap can be narrowed with studying only companies in the hospitality sector which have specific needs and less clear challenges when it comes to sustainability when comparing it with, for example, the fashion industry.

1.2 Research question and objectives

Taking the background into consideration, the research question for this paper is:

“How do luxury companies implement sustainable branding within business development considering the enablers, drivers, barriers and challenges inherent to the branding process and its steps?”

In order to answer the research question, the proposed objectives for this paper are:

- to define branding, luxury, sustainability, sustainable luxury branding and their inherent dimensions,
- to identify the phases of the sustainable branding process when inserted in a business development scenario,
- to understand what the drivers, enablers, challenges, and barriers in the sustainable branding process are,
- to explore the sustainable branding process in a luxury company within the hospitality sector.

In this paper, I will study, with the help of a sustainable luxury consulting company, what enables and what might be a barrier to diverse types of luxury hotels and properties to apply sustainable measures in addition to performing a complete analysis of the drivers and challenges that arise throughout the several steps of the branding process.

1.3 Delimitations of the study

Regarding delimitations, the main one in this paper is the type of company since the author is studying the specificity of sustainable luxury brands that are inserted into a model of business development. Even though there are born-sustainable companies, companies that are rebranding to become sustainable, and companies that are not sustainable nor are they working towards it, this study only focuses on the develop-

ment of the aforementioned. Nonetheless, the other types will be analysed to gather insights that could help the sustainability branding in luxury companies.

The second is that the firm to be studied is based in Portugal, which even though their clientele comes from all over the globe, the hotels and properties in study are all fixed in the same country.

Thirdly, the study will be focused on the brand marketing and branding components of a company's strategy which might only provide a generalist view of the sustainability changes and impact for the whole value chain.

1.4 Structure of the study

Concerning the structure of the study, this paper is composed by six sections that are presented in a logical way to give the reader the correct understanding of the discussed topic. Therefore, the first section deals with the introduction part which encompasses the background of the study, the research question and objectives of the paper, the delimitations of the study, and finishes with the structure of the study.

Following this section is the theoretical background part which is divided into five categories that emphasize the main topics of the thesis which are branding, luxury, sustainability, branding in a luxury context, and the framework that summarizes it all.

Thirdly, there is the methodology part that describes which research philosophy and research analysis are the most suited for this study. Additionally, it presents which data collection and analysis the author chose to use, and an overview of the reliability and validity of this methodology.

After the methodology, the next section is findings where all the relevant gathered data is listed to then be analysed in the fifth section which is the discussion. In the discussion, the research question and objectives are answered through the combination of the literature studied and the findings of the data collection.

Lastly, there is the conclusions section which summarizes the paper, gives insights for future work, and showcases implications and limitations of this study.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Branding

2.1.1 Definition of branding

According to Jones (2021), branding is fundamental in any business, and it has an especially critical impact nowadays with the effortless access to brands, that social media provides to customers. As the author mentions, a brand is not only about the external and aesthetic appearance of a company but rather an extensive definition of a company's personality. So, in order to stand out in the competitive market that organizations are currently on, it is crucial to develop and support strong, meaningful brands. Moreover, having good branding and a strong brand does not only influence the brand's perception from the clients' viewpoint but it also can mean that the company will, most likely, have higher returns than the overall companies in its sector (Gronlund, 2013, p. 1).

After establishing the necessity of branding and before presenting a comprehensive definition of this concept, it is critical to explain the term "brand" and what this entails in organizations. According to the American Marketing Association (2023), "a brand is a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or service as distinct from those of other sellers". This definition is quite similar to the first intent of the word which was to mark products as a way to indicate their source (McLaughlin, 2011). However, this same author provides another definition that encapsulates the current reality of marketing and global businesses by indicating that a brand is a complex mix of emotional and factual perceptions that a firm's customers might have. Hence, it is less about how the company wants to be perceived and more regarding how clients perceive their actions, products, communication, and overall performance in the market. Overall, a brand is both a way for products and services to be correctly identified as having originated from a certain company, and a key factor for it to be identified by customers. Nonetheless, this identification will always be through the idea of the brand that lives in the customer's mind (McLaughlin, 2011).

With all of the aforementioned in mind, there is the need to explore the definition of branding. For some authors, branding is merely a means for a company to be able to brand their products, sell them, and be profitable (Menon, 2016, p. 47). Thus, defining branding as a more transactional business procedure. Kotler & Keller (2016, p. 146) agree with this view but they add the component “power” to the definition, turning it into a more subjective topic. Nonetheless, these authors humanize the concept of branding when stating that “branding creates mental structures that help consumers organize their knowledge about offerings in a way that clarifies their decision making and, in the process, provides value to the firm” (Kotler & Keller, 2016, p. 146).

On the other hand but following the line of thought from Kotler & Keller (2016), given that a brand is a concept tightly related to the customers, the branding process has to cater to the clients and their perceptions. So, as explained in the brand definition, branding may not only be about the company’s offer and its communication, but it can also have an impact on the consumers (Gronlund, 2013, p. 3). As mentioned by the previous author, branding is about creating and maintaining relationships with consumers based on authenticity and values that are in the core of both parties.

All in all, as mentioned by Bedendo (2019), branding has been shifting throughout the years to reach the current state of being more strategic and organizational. It started as a marketing strategy that had visuals and advertisement as the main scope and evolved to an organizational strategy that should be aligned with the company’s values and identity (Bedendo, 2019). As the author states, nowadays, branding is related and influences the development of products, the relationship with stakeholders, and even the training of employees. Therefore, branding can no longer be seen only as a marketing process but rather as a key component of the strategic planning and development of a firm’s activity.

Moreover, when thinking of branding in a business scenario, the concept of corporate branding arises. Corporate branding is, as the name indicates, branding in a corporate context, however, according to Schultz et al. (2006, p. 26), it has several dimensions. In

sum, the dimensions are the development of the organization, its image, its promises, ideas, and the relationship with stakeholders.

One last definition of branding encompasses another concept that is brand equity. This concept, which is commonly associated with branding, is fundamental to fully comprehend some of the developed models that define or design the branding process.

Brand equity, similarly, to the concept “brand”, encapsulates the assets and liabilities of a company, as well as its visual image. To these components, the created value of an organization’s product or service should be added or subtracted to achieve the total that is the brand equity of a firm (Aaker, 1991, p.16). However, the author mentions that this concept is variable and dependent on context. Thus, he mentions that there are five categories of contexts that one should keep in mind when defining brand equity for a specific brand. The contexts are “brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary brand assets” (Aaker, 1991, p.17).

The aforementioned means that branding can also be the process that aims to achieve, not only, a brand of a product or service, but also create value for the customer, generating brand equity.

To conclude, branding should be conveyed as a process that ultimately develops a brand and brand equity (Schultz et al., 2006, p. 10). The results of this process constitute the variables that the client analyses when researching companies that sell or provide a certain product or service. When the consumer finds all of this information and processes it, he still is contributing to the branding process as he is creating a perception of the brand in his head resulting from the value that the organization created for him. Considering that the branding process is continuous (as further discussed ahead), the perception of the client and the environment of the brand are, then, key components on the development, specially of brand equity.

2.1.2 Branding integrated into business development

Even though this paper is focused on branding, the case study will be portraying a sector that is known for new business development. Therefore, it is key to understand the definition of new business development as well as its process and the role branding plays in it.

Concerning business development, according to Sørensen (2012, p.1), it is a long-term business activity that aims to create value within a company through knowledge of their own business relationships, the market, and the consumer's needs and perspectives. Therefore, it requires organizations to research, innovate and improve continuously but in a sustainable manner.

As far as the process of business development is concerned, for this particular paper and to analyse the luxury hospitality sector, the most applicable one would be by Timmons & Spinelli (2007) who developed the entrepreneurial process model. This process is composed by six main steps that encompass several activities to develop new business. To begin the process, it is mandatory that a person or organization identifies an opportunity in the market and spends resources to analyse it fully (Timmons & Spinelli, 2007). Then, it should conduct a comprehensive feasibility analysis that includes industry, customer, competition, risk, potential, product, and concept studies (Timmons & Spinelli, 2007). Considering that these analyses validate the opportunity, a business plan can start to be developed with all its components of marketing, financial, operations, team, concept, and strategy (Timmons & Spinelli, 2007). By having a robust business plan, then the company is equipped to search for and secure financing by evaluating the funding sources and defining a financing proposal (Timmons & Spinelli, 2007). With the financing secured, the business can finally start its establishment phase that requires legal and accounting-related endeavours as well as the formation of relationships within the management team and with suppliers (Timmons & Spinelli, 2007). Lastly, the business defines its launch strategy, attracts its initial customer base, and officially launches to the market (Timmons & Spinelli, 2007).

It is relevant to mention that although this model suits this paper the best, there are others, such as the Lean Startup Methodology by Eric Ries (2011), which are more experimentation-based and focus on constant testing and feedback from external factors to approve of developments.

Taking into account that the marketing plan and strategy are inserted within the business plan stage of the business development process, as mentioned by Haag (2013), then branding can be integrated in this step. According to Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach (2018, p. 457), in the foundation of a brand, the marketing department or area in the company assumes the process of branding, which entails several steps. These are: developing the brand meaning and identity and spreading them through the market through advertising; observing the consumers' understanding of the meaning of the brand through their perspectives; and the interaction of all these individual meanings in a social environment (Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018, p. 457). Therefore, it can be concluded that the branding process is integrated within the business plan stage of the business development process.

This design of the process and integration of branding will be key for the construction of the theoretical framework of this paper.

2.1.3 Branding models

Due to having explained the concept of branding, at this point in the literature, it is fundamental for the development of the framework of this paper to discuss some theories and models that might serve as inspiration for the aforementioned.

To begin with, the first model to be introduced is the Brand Equity Model by David Aaker which is represented in Figure 1. This model serves the purpose of explaining brand equity, the five categories within it and how its comprehension can benefit companies and consumers.

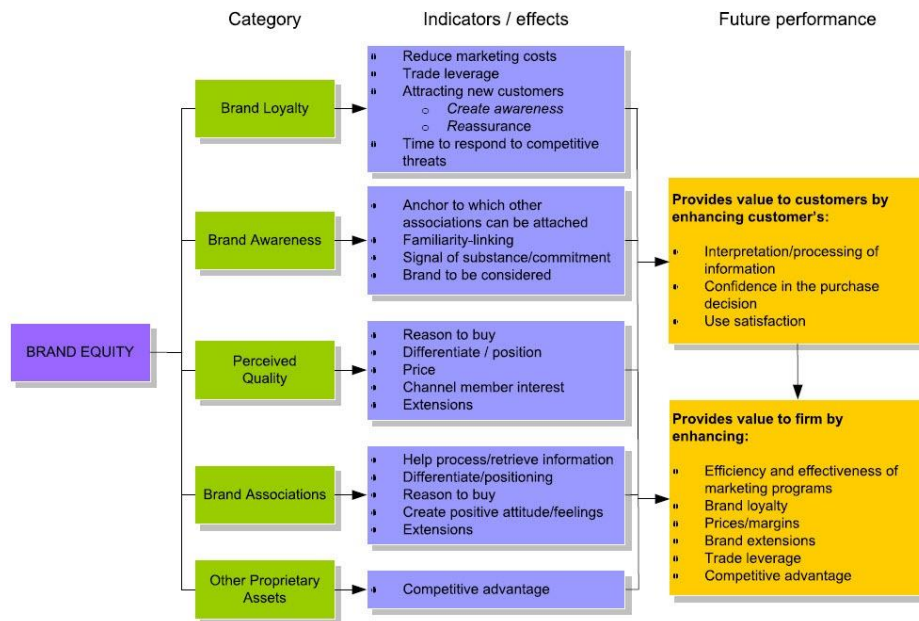


Figure 1. Brand Equity Model by Aaker (<https://www.van-haaften.nl/branding/corporate-branding/112-brand-equity>).

The categories that the author divides brand equity into are brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary assets (Aaker, 1991). According to the model, all of these categories combined result in added value for both the customers and the firms.

Brand loyalty is the brand equity category that explains the loyalty customers have with a specific brand and its products, this means that when faced with several brands for the same product, a loyal client will always choose the brand that they usually buy from (Aaker, 1991; Menon, 2016).

As for brand awareness, this category refers to the notoriety or level of recognition of a brand in the mind of the consumers (Menon, 2016). The more notoriety a brand has for one particular client, the more likely they will be to purchase from that brand instead of from an unknown brand (Aaker, 1991). It can even lead to the assumption that the brand that they are aware of is better than the remaining brands since the consumer knows of it (Aaker, 1991).

The perceived quality category is, probably, the most subjective out of the categories in brand equity since this represents the clients' opinion regarding the quality of the products (Aaker, 1991; Menon, 2016). The aforementioned means that until a customer reaches the stage of buying a product, they will not have the validation of their perceived quality. However, if the actual product quality falls behind compared to the perceived quality, the firm will suffer with client dissatisfaction (Menon, 2016, p. 49).

Next on Aaker's model is the category of brand associations that can be explained combined with the last category of other proprietary assets. Both these terms refer to how the brand can benefit from the partnerships, associations, and assets, such as trademarks, it develops overtime. In a nutshell, the aforementioned are components of a brand that clearly differentiate it from its competitors and that the clients will be able to associate them with. These are also elements of a brand that help the general public retain information about the firm.

To sum up, this model presents the five categories a company should have into consideration to build their brand so that it creates value not only for the enterprise itself but also for the customer which can ultimately be persuaded, through the quality of the brand, to buy from the company.

Nonetheless, Aaker's model does have its positives and negatives that should be considered. On the positive side is the fact that it's generally a very comprehensive and flexible model, since it does not require a set of sequential actions, with a customer-centric approach that gives great guidelines for brand building (Sun & Ghiselli, 2010, p. 157). On the other hand, concerning the flaws of the model, Gill & Dawra (2010, p. 198) mention that it lacks prescriptive advice in the sense that managers would need other sources beyond the provided framework in order to be successful. Additionally, in the paper of these authors it is perceived that the model may have not fully accompanied the evolution of the field given that it is a model from 1991 and that it is quite complex and subjective, giving that it relies substantially on the consumers' perceptions (Gill & Dawra, 2010, p. 198).

The second relevant framework to be introduced, due to its customer-centricity which can be compared with Aaker's, is Keller's Brand Equity Model or Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model. This model's main goal is to explain how companies can create value for their customers. Before diving into the framework, it is essential to define customer-based brand equity. Keller (1997) states that "the power of a brand" depends on the experiences the customers had with the brand, whether it be first-hand experiences or knowledge through word-of-mouth.

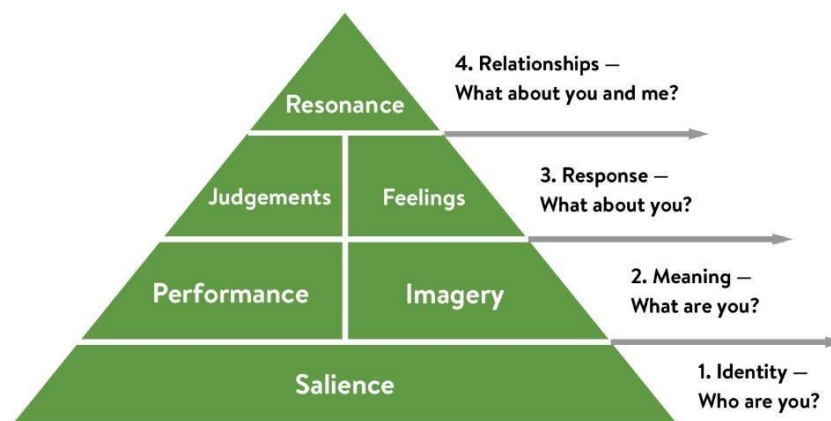


Figure 2. Keller's Pyramid (<https://medium.com/@keatonhawker/kellers-brand-equity-model-what-it-is-how-to-use-it-84e42d562299>).

Keller's Brand Equity Model is represented through a pyramid (Figure 2) that has four levels which convert into four steps: identity, meaning, response, and relationships at the top of the pyramid (Keller, 1997).

The first step, identity, has companies answering the question "Who are you?" and developing their brand salience (Keller, 1997). Brand salience is a relevant component for a company's brand identity since it measures the awareness level that a customer has of a brand regarding the needs it fulfils and the category it falls onto (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019; Menon, 2016, p. 50). Therefore, the brand's identity will be defined by the visual and mental associations a client makes of it and the main goal of this step is to have "deep, broad brand awareness" (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019).

The second level of the pyramid is composed by the brand performance and imagery, two necessary elements for brand meaning, “What are you?” (Keller, 1997). The objective of this level is to create “point of parity and difference” (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019; Menon, 2016, p. 50). Regarding brand performance, this is the element of a brand that aims to meet the clients’ functional needs whereas brand imagery seeks to meet the more social and psychological needs (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019).

Thirdly in the pyramid, Keller (1997) presents the brand response with the question “What about you?” and the goal of creating “positive, accessible reactions”. The components of this step are judgements and feeling giving that these are, in a way, the outcomes of the layers below this one in the pyramid (Menon, 2016, p. 51). In this context, judgements are the opinions of customers regarding the quality and credibility of the brand while the brand feelings represent the emotions that arise in the clients when confronted with the brand (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019; Menon, 2016, p. 51).

Finally, the fourth step of the pyramid, is the brand relationships which answers the questions “What about you and me?” that has the objective of establishing “intense, active loyalty” among the brand’s customers (Keller, 1997). In this last level, the associated component is brand resonance that completely aligns with the proposed goal since it describes a brand-consumer relationship where the consumer finds in the brand a sense of belonging and community (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019; Menon, 2016, p. 52).

All in all, this framework is comprehensive and has a clear practical application, and, when compared to Aaker’s, it matches its positive point of being customer-centric, but it presents the added layer of resonance which can be useful to differentiate consumers (Stukalina & Pavlyuk, 2021). As for flaws of the framework, it is complex, subjective, and not that modern, similarly to Aaker’s model, and it can be mentioned that it would require several resources to achieve long-term brand equity which can be an issue for smaller companies or companies in fast-paced markets (Kuhn et al., 2008).

In conclusion, both frameworks serve the purpose of explaining the branding process, however, given the practicality and actionability of Keller's model, combined with the relevance it gives to the consumer, the author of this paper believes an adaptation of the latter will be the more indicated for the framework of this paper which will have the luxury hospitality sector as a base.

2.1.4 Drivers and enablers for the branding process

Considering that this paper aims to develop a framework of the branding process and taking into account that, generally, processes start due to enablers and drivers, the author understands that these should be researched for the branding process. It is relevant to note that all of the enablers and drivers presented can be adapted and serve the purpose of different realities and sectors. After analysing several perspectives on the topic, the author acknowledged that there are several drivers and enablers that could be applied to this scenario. Therefore, it was possible to encompass the most appropriate set of factors for the scope of this thesis.

In regard to the drivers, these can be grouped and explained into five factors: vision and purpose, entrepreneurial passion, market opportunity, unique value proposition and innovation and creativity.

Vision and purpose are grouped together since they are both key components of any brand (Aziz, 2018). The way these factors are drivers in the branding process is in the sense that they provide motivation and guidelines for the company to pursue the branding process (Jones, 2010; Aziz, 2018).

The second driver encountered was entrepreneurial passion and this is fundamental since a team alone cannot participate in a branding process without the enthusiasm and impulse that a brand owner should convey (Kapferer, 2008, p. 156). In a way, a company can have the will to start the branding process but without a passionate entrepreneur behind it, it will be a more challenging project (Arabian Business, 2021).

Thirdly, another relevant driver in the process being studied is the market opportunity that arises from one of the enablers to be mentioned ahead which is market research. Through market research it is possible to identify a gap in the market for what the brand wishes to pursue which is fundamental in encouraging a company to initiate the branding process (Barwise & Meehan, 2010). The authors add that, nowadays, market research should also consider social media as a representation of a part of the market (Barwise & Meehan, 2010).

The fourth driver presented in this paper is the unique value proposition that alongside market opportunity would give an advantageous start for a brand. By having a value proposition that distinguishes, in a unique way, the future brand from its competitors, a company can more confidently begin their branding (Kapferer, 2008; Vallaster & De Chernatony, 2005).

Lastly, innovation and creativity are mandatory factors in the marketing scenario which means that these are inherent drivers of the branding process (Shiu, 2017). Nonetheless, these characteristics can also be considered drivers for, not only the beginning stages of branding, but also throughout the whole process given that they highly impact product and/or service offerings and its differences from the remaining market (Kapferer, 2008).

Concerning enablers, in the literature research it was found that there are five main enablers for a company to start developing their brand. The aforementioned are market research, brand identity development, target audience understanding, budget allocation, and mentorship and guidance.

Starting with market research, as it was mentioned in the drivers' section of the paper, it is fundamental for brand building since it allows for companies to understand the competitive environment they are in, the consumer preferences, and, therefore, get insights that set them off for brand building (Barwise & Meehan, 2010; *Why is market research important for new business ideas?*, n.d.).

The second enabler is brand identity development which aligns with Keller's model (1997) since defining and aligning the brand's values and some visual elements is a starting point for the branding process (Ghodeswar, 2008, p. 10).

As the third enabler, literature such as the one developed by Sevin (2014) explains that in order to craft a branding strategy it is essential that companies understand their target audience.

Next on the list on the list of enablers is budget allocation, which is relevant for most management movements that aim to grow the company, and the branding process is not excluded (Bhattacharya et al., 2020). The authors mention that financial capability is a clear growth enabler since firms can ensure they have adequate resources to pursue their brand building.

The last enabler to address is good leadership which is validated by authors such as Vallaster & De Chernatony (2005, 2006, p. 776) and Ind & Bjerke (2007) who mention that a strong and motivated leader is extremely important to align resources that would at last proceed to the branding process.

To conclude, the mentioned drivers and enablers are key factors for a successful branding process. Even though they might not be applied for every business and situation, it is clear that it is beneficial to have them in mind when considering beginning a brand building process.

2.1.5 Challenges and barriers in the branding process

Although there are some clear drivers and enablers in the branding process, there usually are also various challenges and barriers that either result in a failed branding or do not even allow it to be pursued.

To begin with, the challenges encountered in the literature have several touchpoints with the enablers described above since most of those factors could either enable the process to move forward, if faced with a positive scenario, or challenge the companies

that are trying to pursue brand building. With this in mind, the challenges in the branding process are brand identity development, legal and trademark issues, consistency and cohesion, budget constraints, and adapting to change.

In regard to brand identity development, this could present a challenge if the company finds it difficult to maintain all brand related elements tied to one robust brand identity, or if the brand identity they showcased is not being perceived the same way by stakeholders and employees, for example (Veloutsou & Delgado - Ballester, 2018).

The second challenge a brand can face during their branding is legal and trademark issues given that, with globalisation, the competition is higher than ever, and most innovations already exist in the market, so launching a brand without caution for what already is owned in the market can be an issue (Kapferer, 2008, p. 35; Veloutsou & Delgado - Ballester, 2018, p. 263). Therefore, developing a brand in an environment so saturated can be challenging since several legal issues can arise (Kapferer, 2008, p. 35).

Thirdly, another common challenge in the branding process is consistency and cohesion given that the branding process requires those two factors between brand elements and stakeholders to be then clearly communicated to the market and well perceived by the public (Veloutsou & Delgado - Ballester, 2018, p. 263).

In the enablers part, it was discussed that budget allocation could facilitate the branding process. Therefore, another challenge in this process is evidently the possibility of budget constraints whether it be for the lack of financial structure or for the uncertainty of return on investment (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011).

The fifth, and last, challenge encountered was adapting to changes (Veloutsou & Delgado - Ballester, 2018). As mentioned before, the globalisation has made the market that much harder to navigate, thus, companies must be always looking out for the constant changes and having the challenge of adapting to them in order to not fall off the market (Veloutsou & Delgado - Ballester, 2018).

Concerning barriers, these are lack of clarity in brand vision, resource constraints, competitive landscape, initial investment costs, and target audience understanding which were studied by both Chapleo (2007) and Sandhu & Azhar (2019).

As for lack of clarity in brand vision, Chapleo (2007) mentions that this can lead to lack of cohesion between the brand and the stakeholders which is a barrier for development given that it means there was not a cooperative work for finding the brand's purpose.

Regarding resource constraints, this is a barrier because the branding process cannot develop if there are not financial, human, and/or technological resources available to make it happen (Chapleo, 2007; Sandhu & Azhar, 2019, p. 135, 136; Lobpries et al., 2018, p. 8).

Thirdly, the competitive landscape is presented as a barrier for the brand building process since, depending on the sector, it might be harder to develop a brand due to market saturation, maturity, or level of innovation (Chapleo, 2007; Sandhu & Azhar, 2019).

Similarly to resource constraints, there is also the initial investment cost of building a brand which is a definite barrier for smaller companies that lack financial structure to invest or companies that already have high costs (Chapleo, 2007, p. 23; Sandhu & Azhar, 2019, p. 135).

Finally, there is the barrier of target audience understanding which can be a constraint due to acceptance of the brand by the clients (Chapleo, 2007; Sandhu & Azhar, 2019; Lobpries et al., 2018).

In conclusion, the challenges and barriers presented in this section are factors that companies need to be aware of when considering their branding projects. Due to the investment and commitment that had to be put into the process, having these concerns in mind can make a difference in the success level of the brand.

2.2 Luxury

2.2.1 Definition of luxury

In order to understand the branding of luxury brands, which is the aim of this paper, it is vital to understand the concept of luxury and its characteristics.

To begin with, a definition presented by Rovai (2018) based on several other authors describes luxury as the values luxury brands exude, whether physical or psychological. In addition, the author mentions that luxury products are symbols of exclusivity and authenticity and are characterised as expensive, high-quality, and dispensable.

As for Bilge (2015, p. 35), this author starts by mentioning that luxury is gradually becoming more available and has successfully expanded its concept from a merely materialistic perspective into a more emotional one that often involves passion for the products and the brands. In the author's definition, characteristics such as extravagant, prestige, and abundance appear, and there is a mention of Savitha and Sathyanarayan (2014, p. 86), that define "luxury" as a factor for social differentiation. This author's perspective on luxury is that the goods in this sector "are the products 95% of whom are only available to the 5% of the population and that have a limited supply".

A third definition of "luxury" is Gosh & Varshney's (2013, p. 146), which displays a hedonistic viewpoint through indulgence and self-pleasure. Additionally, the authors enrich their definition since they consider that the complexity of this definition depends on one person's culture and individual factors that will make the person perceive it in a specific way (Gosh & Varshney, 2013, p. 147). Moreover, they state that the CEO of Rolex perceived luxury as an industry that is not product-specific but solely segment-specific (Gosh & Varshney, 2013, p. 149). In this context, a relevant word added by LVMH's CEO in reference to luxury was timeless.

Bilge (2015) mentions that goods, in general, can be sorted into three distinct categories based on price and quantity, which can also be applied to luxury. These are available luxury products, mid-level luxury products, and unavailable luxury products. The

available luxury products are the ones with a more affordable price and larger production values. On the other hand, the unavailable luxury products are only available to the elite due to their exclusive requirements and top-tier price (Bilge, 2015, pp. 38-39). Furthermore, the author presents another categorisation specific to luxury products only: old luxury products, new luxury products, and common luxury products. The first is similar to unavailable luxury goods in the sense that they can only be acquired by the elite. The second refers to more attractive luxury that appeals to the act of consumption. Whereas the third includes luxury goods with functional features, such as the price (Bilge, 2015, pp. 39-40).

Gosh & Varshney (2013, p. 147) similarly categorise luxury into four segments: true luxury, traditional luxury, modern luxury living, and life's little luxuries. True luxury compares to the aforementioned old luxury product since it is catered to the mega-rich in society. As for traditional luxury, this is the luxury with more notoriety in the industry and is composed of the fashion, jewellery, premium spirits, and fragrance segments. As stated in the name, "modern luxury living" is the more contemporary luxuries such as technology, travel, and overall experiences. Finally, the life's little luxuries segment generated the mass-luxury sector in the luxury market, which is described as affordable luxury (Gosh & Varshney, 2013, p. 147).

To sum up, the definition that is most applicable for this paper is one that combines several characteristics pointed out by some authors which is that luxury is timeless, exclusive, high-quality, expensive, and generates feelings of indulgence and self-pleasure. Additionally, the considered availability level of luxury for this paper will be the mid-level and the category will be a mix of true luxury and modern luxury living.

2.2.2 Luxury dimensions

Besides the base characteristics and definitions of luxury, as in all the other sectors, it should be considered that specific dimensions are crucial to developing strategic decisions in a company.

The dimensions gathered by Gosh & Varshney (2013, p. 151) through the study of numerous authors are somewhat unanimous in the research community. They are as follows: perceived premium quality, aesthetics, expensiveness, history, perceived utility, and perceived exclusivity. Regarding quality, this factor is named premium quality since the focus is on the perception of product's quality rather than on its actual quality. This factor, plus aesthetics and expensiveness, are inherent to the luxury brand, whereas history, for example, is more external since it depends on external factors such as time (Gosh & Varshney, 2013, p. 149).

Another dimension by Gosh & Varshney (2013, p. 150), but not unanimous in the research community, is functionality. Some authors consider that luxury products have no practical function, only "intangible utility". Contrarily, there is the notion that luxury products are beyond functionality, and customers end up buying them for the status and prestige of owning such products.

On another note, concerning Bilge's (2015) study on the dimensions of luxury, this author presents two sets of dimensions that she gathered from research on other authors.

The first set is based on Dubois et al.'s (2001) comprehensive study and defines six dimensions of luxury: outstanding quality; excessive price; a personal story from the past; rarity and uniqueness; aesthetics and beauty; and uselessness (Bilge, 2015). The outstanding quality dimension consists not only of a luxury product's quality but also of the quality of all surrounding aspects, such as the service (Bilge, 2015, p. 42). The author then explains that the excessive price dimension can, but is not the rule, represent a luxury product's quality. With regard to the "a personal story from the past" dimension, this one relates to the emotional connection customers build with the products and the brands since they consider they are buying the whole story behind the brand (Bilge, 2015, pp. 42-43). The fourth dimension, rarity, and uniqueness, arises from the fact that it can usually only be acquired by a specific set of people, meaning that it is not available to the majority of people. Regarding the fifth dimension, aesthetics, and beauty, it represents relevant features of luxury as these characteristics evoke in the luxury consumers the emotions of pleasure and happiness (Bilge, 2015, pp. 43). Lastly,

the uselessness is related to the functional aspect mentioned before, which states that luxury products do not have functionality (Bilge, 2015).

The second set of dimensions is a construct of ideas from Vigneron and Johnson (1999, pp. 4-8); Engand Bogaert (2010, p. 58); and Ghanei (2013, p. 24-25) combined by Bilge (2015, p. 41). This construct determines that perceived conspicuousness, perceived uniqueness, perceived quality, perceived hedonism, and perceived social value/ego are the critical dimensions of luxury.

The perceived conspicuousness is that luxury products can elevate one's social status since these are commonly used by celebrities or other personalities. In this scenario, luxury goods can be considered conspicuous symbols (Bilge, 2015, p. 41).

Secondly, the perceived uniqueness refers to the availability of luxury products which usually is scarce. Most luxury brands produce limited handmade products with high quality and price, which is automatically considered unique in society (Bilge, 2015, pp. 41-42).

Thirdly, the "perceived quality" results in the dimension that mostly depends on consumers' perception of the luxury brands. Therefore, even if the quality of the product does not match the price, at least the consumers will still perceive it that way (Bilge, 2015, p. 42).

The fourth dimension is perceived hedonism which also comes from the consumers and their feeling towards the goods. Acquiring a luxury product makes customers experience emotions of pleasure and happiness, which makes a luxury brand directly related to hedonism (Bilge, 2015, p. 42).

Lastly, the perceived social value is the dimension that explains the primary reason consumers buy luxury, and it is to associate with a particular brand or lifestyle that will position them in the prestigious groups in society (Bilge, 2015, p. 42).

To conclude, the dimensions that are relevant for this study are perceived premium quality and outstanding quality; aesthetics and beauty; expensiveness; history; per-

ceived utility; perceived exclusivity; functionality; rarity and uniqueness; and perceived social value. All of these apply to the luxury hospitality sector and, most importantly, to the sustainable niche in this sector.

2.3 Sustainability

2.3.1 Definition of sustainability

Sustainability, as well as luxury, is a concept that does not have a unanimous definition. Nevertheless, several authors have tried to explain it, as will be highlighted in this section.

The first one to be presented is by Seghezzeo (2009, p. 539), where they define sustainability as a global objective. This objective is related to the triple bottom line and aims to achieve appropriate ecological circumstances for the world in addition to economic and social systems.

Secondly, sustainability can be described as an emerging concern and challenge that will have an incredible impact on marketing, organizations, their survival and all the competitive environment in their markets of action (Martinez & Bosque, 2014, pp. 239, 241). Furthermore, these authors mention another more ethical definition that describes sustainability as an action that meets the needs of the present generation and allows the future ones to meet theirs.

Last of all, Fischer et al. (2020, p. 89), besides associating sustainability with the triple bottom line concept, add the concept of time to the equation in order to encompass the long-term benefits of adopting sustainable measures. Additionally, the authors argue that sustainability is a dynamic variable since it can suffer alterations over time (Fischer et al., 2020, p. 101).

For the purpose of this paper, the definition to be considered is that sustainability is an emerging concern that aims to achieve ecological circumstances through economic and

social systems throughout time. The time component will allow for future generations to have availability of resources (Martinez & Bosque, 2014).

2.3.2 Dimensions of sustainability

Concerning the dimensions of sustainability, most authors describe the triple bottom line characteristics as the adequate components of sustainability.



Figure 3. The Triple Bottom Line of Sustainability (<https://waste4change.com/blog/the-triple-bottom-line-of-sustainability-in-waste-management/>).

Within the triple bottom line framework, Martinez & Bosque (2014, pp. 241-242) explain the economic and the social dimensions. The economic dimension is described as the component that allows companies to be sustainable through their financial performance. This could be achieved by not only reducing costs but also by catering to the fair interests of stakeholders. As for the social dimension, this one is related to the matter of equality, people, communities, and tolerance between all (Martinez & Bosque, 2014, pp. 241-242).

Fischer et al. (2020, p. 89) present another explanation of the framework. They begin by stating that the economic component comprises the capital that an organisation

detains, such as the financial, physical, intellectual, and human capital. Concerning the environmental factor, it can be "dichotomised into critical natural capital and renewable, replaceable, or substitutable capital" (Fischer et al., 2020, p. 89). The social dimension concerns the needs of human capital, such as health, education and skills, and society's overall equity.

To conclude, Seghezze (2009) define a new framework with the dimensions of place, permanence, and persons.

Place is the dimension that goes beyond a geographical place to incorporate specific characteristics from localisation. A place typically contains diverse ways of life, public health, and culture, and all should be respected and concerned for something to be sustainable (Seghezze, 2009, p. 548).

The second dimension, permanence, relates to long-term and intemporal conditions of living or owning a business, adding the temporal component to the framework. This dimension requires planning the effects of the actions in the present and how they impact the future (Seghezze, 2009, p. 549).

Finally, the factor "person" comes from the inevitability of concerning human beings in business decisions, for example. It is fundamental to understand people, their problems, and their interests (Seghezze, 2009, p. 550).

All in all, it is fair to assume that the dimensions that are more generally accepted and that align with the goals of this paper is the ones defined by the triple bottom line model, social, environmental, and economical.

2.4 Sustainable branding in a luxury context

Although the main focus of this paper is branding, it is relevant to specify it in regard to the luxury sector as it is an incredibly particular market. Regarding luxury and its definition this will be developed in the next section of this paper.

To begin with, luxury brands have been, through the years, associated with characteristics such as high price, heritage, prestige, exclusivity, craftsmanship, and rarity (Rovai, 2018, p. 92). Therefore, in their branding, the author mentions that luxury brands must be able to evoke these characteristics in addition to the feeling of belonging. Additionally, there are even authors such as Kapferer (2016, p. 480) that state that luxury is one of the most globally coherent sectors in regard to branding since luxury brands have the capacity to sell even without local adaptation.

On another note, Daswani & Jain (2011, p. 137) mention that branding, in the luxury context, is essential since it is a sector that distinguishes itself for its products, but above that for their storytelling and the emotions portrayed and perceived in all communication channels. The ability to differentiate even a simple product by inserting it into a more desirable, or even hedonic scenario is what makes branding a fundamental part of luxury (Daswani & Jain, 2011, p. 137).

Keller (2008, p. 290) gives his perspective on the topic which aligns with the aforementioned when he mentions that “Luxury brands are perhaps one of the purest examples of branding (...)” since the sector relies so heavily on their branding to sell. In his paper Keller (2008) then goes on to listing and explaining ten characteristics of luxury brands which clarify branding in the luxury context. The characteristics are, in sum: premium image; intangible brand associations; quality and pleasurable experiences; brand elements; secondary associations; selective channel strategy; premium pricing strategy; brand architecture; competition; and legal and trademarks (Keller, 2008, p. 291).

The premium image characteristic is a crucial part of branding in the luxury sectors since these companies are able to profit mainly due to their image so, maintaining it is fundamental (Keller, 2008, p. 291).

Concerning intangible brand associations, Keller (2008, p. 291) states that the meaning and history behind luxury brands is in the base of branding in this sector given that this is how companies can portray their aspirational vision.

The third topic is related to the marketing strategy of luxury brands which has to ensure to the client that their products are not only the premium quality they are looking for but also their journey as customers will be as pleasant and accommodating as possible (Keller, 2008, p. 291). As for the distribution and pricing strategies, they both should be, as the brand, selective and premium in order to align their offer with their image, and the perception and demand from their target audience (Keller, 2008, p. 293).

When it comes to brand elements, secondary associations, and brand architecture, these all have an impact in luxury branding because they affect brand equity (Keller, 2008, p. 292). The brand elements go beyond the basic image components of the brand but have to do with all elements up to the packaging (Keller, 2008, p. 292). The author also mentions that in this context, brand architecture as well as the entities that are associated with the brand should be managed with care so as to not drift from the perfectly curated brand (Keller, 2008, p. 293).

Apropos of competition, this brings two topics into branding. Firstly, the luxury brand competition is unlike other sectors due to it being a competition between brands and not products (Keller, 2008, p. 293). The author explains that luxury brands compete between themselves despite the different product categories to reach new customers. Secondly, there is the legal issues topic that arise when non-luxury brands try to imitate the products in the sector at affordable price which can easily happen if luxury brands do not actively protect and patent their products (Keller, 2008, p. 294).

In a nutshell, branding in the luxury sector is proven to be challenging since the customers of this sector are demanding and have high expectations to be met. Additionally, there is the brand's concern to achieve brand equity and not incur in financial and/or legal losses.

After understanding how branding works in the luxury sector, ahead, the concept of sustainable luxury branding will be defined.

Even though there is no clear definition of sustainable luxury branding, it can be assumed, for the purpose of this paper, that the concept of sustainable luxury presented in combination with the luxury branding concept explained in the section before, represent a valid definition.

With this in mind, the Sustainable Luxury Awards (n. d.) define sustainable luxury as premium products with sustainable values. The organization mentions that even though it might seem that the two concepts are mutually exclusive, the fact is that they both share characteristics such as good quality, durability. However, most luxury brands up until this point were focused on using the best materials no matter what, so the challenge sustainable brands face is sourcing premium materials within the environmental and social standards set in place by sustainability norms (Sustainable Luxury Awards, n. d.).

As a conclusion, sustainable luxury branding is a complex concept that combines the thought-out strategies of luxury branding with the goal of, not only achieving their economic objectives but also to contribute to a more positive environmental and social scenario.

2.5 Framework

In order to sum up the literature review, the following framework (Figure 4) was developed encompassing all the major theories and concepts studied until this point. Here, it is possible to understand where the sustainable branding fits within the business development as well as the steps that are fundamental in the sustainable branding. Additionally, it can be observed that there are several drivers, challenges, enablers, and barriers that affect this fundamental part of the business plan.

In detail, in the framework it is possible to observe the business development process composed by the steps of opportunity, feasibility analysis, business plan, financing, establish, and launch. Within the step of business plan, the sustainable branding is included with its subsequent process of brand identity, brand meaning, brand response

and brand relationships. Finally, as mentioned before, the factors that enable, drive, challenge and that serve as barriers to the sustainable branding process are all connected to the business plan stage as it is the step that encompasses the aforementioned branding.

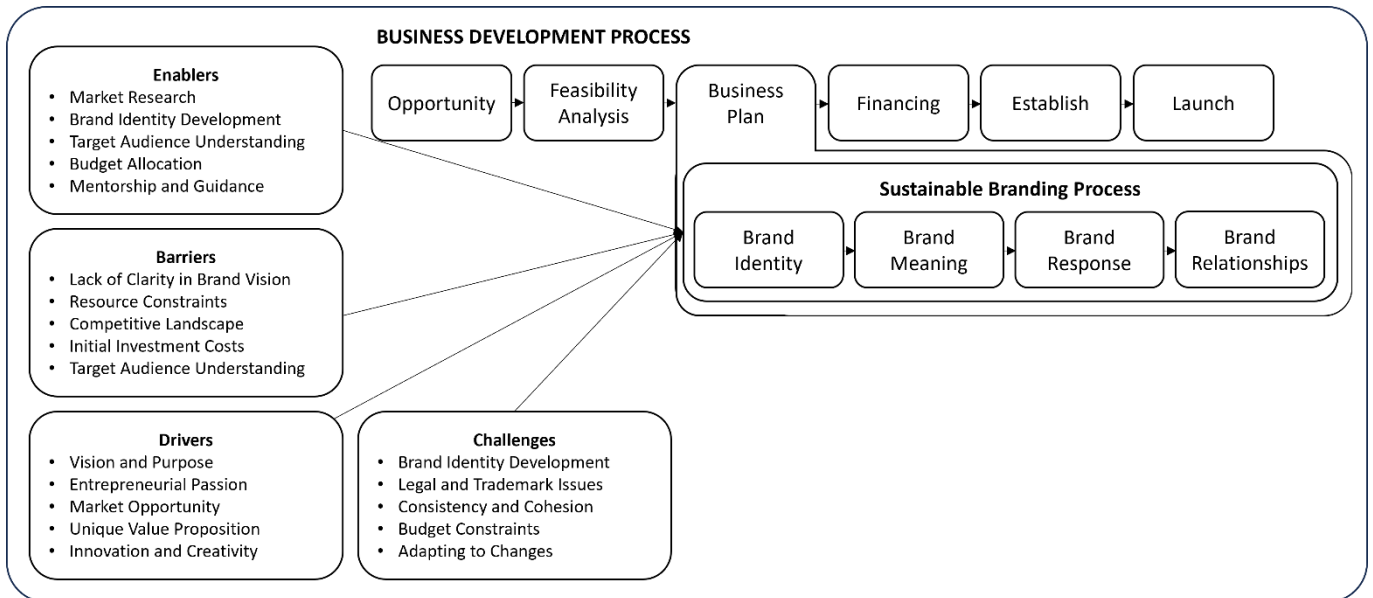


Figure 4. Theoretical framework

3 Methodology

The methodology section of a paper includes several issues regarding the research and the analysis such as research philosophy, research analysis, data collection methods, data analysis approaches, and reliability and validity of the study (Rudestam & Newton, 2014).

3.1 Research philosophy and research analysis

Concerning the research philosophy chosen for this study, it was interpretivism which highlights the importance of understanding and interpreting the subjective meanings and experiences of individuals in their social and cultural contexts (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 106-107). This philosophy and these authors emphasise the relevance of the social actor in the society and mention the significance of the mentioned interpretation, especially in business and management research (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 106-107).

The aforementioned philosophy was chosen due to the fact that the research was carried out through more qualitative and subjective methods. Considering that the topic of this thesis deals with themes that can differ in diverse environments and that are not predictable, unlike scientific issues, the author of this paper chose the interpretive approach.

As for the research approach, the one that fit better with this paper was deductive, also known as testing theory, meaning that the paper starts with a theory that is developed by the researcher and, through testing, it is possible to validate concepts, models, and processes, and get insights on the theory that was being analysed, acknowledging its legitimacy or modification need (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 117-118).

The deductive approach made more sense in this thesis since the general topic and research question would be more accurately answered through the testing of a pre-defined theory rather than building knowledge throughout the research process.

Finally, the research design that is applicable to this thesis is the explanatory which is used when there is a base situation which would require that researchers study the variables of this problem in order to find relationships between them (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 134).

The explanatory method was a better fit for this paper given that its aim is to explain the “how” of a process as well as the relationship between variables.

3.2 Data collection

Regarding data collection strategy and methods, the ones used in this paper were case study strategy through the methods of semi-structured interviews and written materials which are under the documentary category of secondary data.

To begin with, the strategy used for data collection in this paper was case study which involves testing a subject empirically in its real-world setting through the gathering of diverse sources of information (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 139). The case study method was chosen since it allows for a more detailed overview on one particular process which can provide more accurate conclusions when compared to studying different realities and through that trying to reach common ground. Therefore, by studying one company, in the view of different experts, in order to understand how luxury brands can achieve sustainable branding, the author of this paper is clearly applying the case study approach to test their theory. This theory is created through literature review.

As for the data collection methods, the semi-structured interviews, these are interviews that make use of open-ended questions and allow flexibility in the sense that there can be other questions besides the already defined ones (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 312). Additionally, even though there is a structure, the order of the questions can be altered in any of the interviews and there are even some that can be omitted if they are not as relevant in a certain interview (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 312). These interviews, as mentioned by the authors, are specifically used in qualitative research.

In regard to the documentary secondary data, this includes mostly written documents that a company can provide, such as correspondence, magazines, notices, books, amongst others (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 248). This data is commonly used in research to support a primary data collection method and its availability depends on the level of access a researcher has during their process (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 248).

So, to apply the methods mentioned before, to reach the point of the semi-structured interviews, the author contacted fifteen companies related to luxury but of several different product offerings. The initial idea of the author was to find companies that were themselves going through the process of sustainable branding, but this ended up being difficult since the companies that are doing these processes are not available for sharing their work. The first contact with the companies would be through LinkedIn and the ones that showed interest proceeded the discussion through email. In the end, only one company maintained its interest, AB&C Hospitality, so this author had a first call with the company's CEO in order to explain what was necessary on both ends. This company is, therefore, the case study for this thesis and, even though, it is not a company that is undergoing the process of sustainable branding, it provides this service to their clients (consultancy company). The fact that it is a consultancy company still allowed for the study to be carried out since the author had the possibility of learning about the same process for the different types of clients this company has. Another call followed this one to clarify some doubts and, before getting to the first interview, the CEO presented an overview of the company, their processes, and organized the follow-up interviews through a call on Microsoft Teams. In total, there were five semi-structured interviews with employees from the company from diverse departments as shown in Table 1. These interviews were carried out based on the interview guide in Appendix 1. The relevance of the different roles and responsibilities of the interviewees is that each has their own expertise and perspective on the business model and the processes which allowed for both an holistic view of the company but also a detailed look into each step.

Table 1. Interviewees, their roles, and dates of interviews

| Name | Role in the company | Date of interview |
|----------|--|-------------------|
| Person 1 | CEO & New Business Manager | 26/01/2023 |
| Person 2 | Financial Knowledge | 01/02/2023 |
| Person 3 | Branding & Marketing | 29/03/2023 |
| Person 4 | People & Talent Manager | 30/03/2023 |
| Person 5 | Partner for Authentic Hospitality Wellness Projects, Management & Operations | 30/03/2023 |

As for the secondary data that was used, it was mostly the company's website and some informational presentations and proposals that were sent to clients in the beginning of their branding processes. These documents present relevant and practical information about the company's practices.

3.3 Data analysis

Apropos of data analysis, in line with all that was mentioned before, the method used for data analysis was the qualitative one. The qualitative analysis relies heavily on the authors themselves when they are dealing with the gathered data (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 478). The authors state that this analysis is so subjective that it presents three dimensions which have a spectrum of applicability depending on the researcher. Saunders et al. (2007, p. 479) states that qualitative data analysis can go from less structured to more structured; from interpretivist to procedural; and from inductive to deductive.

In their book, Saunders et al. (2007, p. 479-484) add to their definition by mentioning the four key steps in qualitative data analysis which are "categorisation; 'unitising' data; recognising relationships and developing the categories you are using to facilitate this;

developing and testing theories to reach conclusions". The first is related to finding different themes and categories that arise from the data collection process and from literature (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 479-480). 'Unitising' data is the step that comes afterward and that refers to process of gathering the data and sorting it into the different categories (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 480). The authors' third step is about relating the categories that are already structured in the process between each other and the final step is to use all of these relationships to form theories that can be tested upon in order to reach conclusions (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 482-484).

In this paper, the author made use of this analysis method by using a tool that allowed for a categorization of all the interviews into several different topics and concepts that were then analysed in the light of what had been previously studied and what was the aim of this thesis.

All in all, the chosen method suited this paper the best due to its subjectivity and the fact that it deals with topics that are not consensual in the academic world.

3.4 Reliability and validity

The last topic in this methodology section is reliability and validity which evaluate the aspects of the chosen methodology that make the paper more trustworthy and applicable.

Concerning reliability, this refers to the consistency and repeatability of the collected data (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 149). The authors mention that assuring reliability can be a hard task since four main issues can occur: subject or participant error; subject or participant bias; observer error; and observer bias.

In this paper, subject or participant error were avoided given that all interviews occurred either on Wednesdays or Thursdays, which are neutral days of the week, in times that were convenient for the interviewees. As for the participant bias, this was also avoided given that all interviewees were experts in their own fields and that have

a role in the company that gives them the availability to state their opinions without being conditioned by their work environment. In regard to observer error and bias, given that all interviews were conducted by this author, even though the research is more aligned throughout since there is only when perspective, it can also be less reliable given that it lacks other points of view.

When it comes to validity, it refers to the accuracy of the research findings (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 150). The validity component of a research assesses if the measures that were used in the research process fit their goal whether the findings reflect reality (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 150). The authors state that validity can be affected by several factors, which are history, testing, instrumentation, mortality, maturation, and ambiguity about causal direction.

As for this paper, the author does not believe there is an issue with validity given that the research methods proposed do evaluate and do align with the research question and the overall objectives of this thesis.

4 Findings

In the findings section of this paper, the description of the studied company will be presented as well as all the findings related with the research question and subsequent objectives.

4.1 Company description

The interviewed company was ABC Hospitality which describes itself as being “a consulting and hotel management company specialising in the realization of premium hospitality projects focused on the Wellness & Healing segment, with the implementation of sustainable management and strategy – ESG” (ABC Hospitality, 2023a). This company was founded in 2015 in Portugal and its’ CEO is Person 1 which has been in the premium hotel industry since a very young age. For all their clients, ABC offers a 360º holistic business approach that incorporates sustainable branding in all stages of the process (ABC Hospitality, 2023d).

Throughout the years the company has built a team of eight specialists in their own areas, a network of national and international partners and facilitators, and has successfully implemented the sustainable luxury branding in nine hotels and properties (ABC Hospitality, 2023a).

The mission and the core values of the company were mentioned in all the interviews, and it was clear that sustainability and luxury were main characteristics that defined the way this business operates:

I would say it is Luxury Wellness Hospitality. It's ABC's mission. (Person 2)

And this is very much part of ABC Hospitality's mission, Sustainable Luxury Hospitality, therefore, luxury for us is intrinsic to sustainability (...) (Person 3)

The mission is effectively this and based largely on sustainability, it is the ability to include the local community in our projects. (Person 4)

ABC Hospitality, in terms of operation, is basically a company that creates concepts from A to C, that is, it creates sustainable luxury concepts, from its conceptual component to the implementation and opening of the unit. (Person 5)

4.2 Main definitions

Throughout the interviews, the author of this paper asked the interviewees their view on the most relevant definitions of this thesis: branding, luxury, sustainability, and sustainable luxury branding. The responses to the prompt vary but mostly align with each other and with the company's purpose.

4.2.1 Branding

Concerning branding's definition, this was probably the one that was more diverse since only one of the interviewees was a branding specialist. Nonetheless, it is perceptible that, in general, there is an agreement that branding is an extremely important component for successful brands and that portrays the main values from a company to the general public. However, it is also stated that the perception of clients regarding a certain brand is also a part of branding itself. This can be understood through the analysis of the following quotes:

Let's see the brands that manage to have a well-done branding exercise, they are those that manage to produce clear attributes and that practice this generation of attributes in people's minds in a consistent, well-managed way. For me, the objective of branding is to communicate a series of values and a series of attributes that are very clear to people. (Person 2)

And that is the principle of positioning a brand, it is knowing exactly who I am targeting, who will want what I have to give, who identifies with my brand and not wanting to please everyone. (Person 3)

(...) branding has to do with the message that I receive and has to do with my emotional part and the emotional area. What does branding tell me differently

about a product? And I'm going to look for it and I think that's what branding should be, it's about touching people's emotions. (Person 4)

The issue of brands or branding is a super important component. Each of us also has our own branding, with certain characteristics and, therefore, from there, you then work on the brand as you wish and your own positioning. The issue of branding in the luxury hotel sector is super important (...) (Person 5)

4.2.2 Luxury

As for the definition of luxury, some interviewees had an approach more related to the traditional luxury with characteristics such as price, exclusivity, history, quality, and service level as follows:

Now I agree that luxury brands are institutions, in some cases, centuries old. And, therefore, they are things that have to be very respected and everything that is done has to be very thought out (...) (Person 2)

Luxury has to do with the idea of creating exclusivity. (Person 2)

And I can't be doing things every day that call into question that exclusivity that I want to trust. Luxury brands have to be sought after (...) (Person 2)

(...) user experiences or customer journey in which everything is taken care of (...) (Person 2)

So it's true, luxury are brands with a certain positioning, prices, that people associate with. (Person 1)

(...) very high standards and service standards (...) (Person 4)

(...) not forgetting that luxury is also always about exclusivity, as a feeling provoked in a person. I want to provoke this emotion in people or this feeling that their needs have been met in addition to and the way that this has just made sense to the person, often in an exclusive way, the person wants to feel on a completely different level. (Person 5)

Whereas others focused on the new luxury that is more wellness and experience oriented:

(...) unique and differentiating experiences (...) (Person 2)

For me, luxury involves being well. Being well with ourselves, having time to be with ourselves. It really is the new luxury. (Person 1)

(...) the interpretation of luxury is very individual. It depends on each person's priorities, which is why luxury increasingly needs to be rethought. (Person 1)

So the notion of luxury from then on, I believe it has changed a lot and nowadays, the essential thing is that I can be at peace, I can have peace of mind, I can look at myself and feel good, I can be in the middle of nature with basic and essential things, which is breathing, having water, having some nutrients to feed me, to nourish myself and maybe little else and having time has become an incredible luxury, (...) being able to stop, being able to enjoy the simplest things, became a luxury. (Person 4)

(...) I don't need to have luxury products, for example, in a hotel, to have a luxury service. (Person 4)

Luxury is the way a person feels. Luxury is exactly the person feeling that their needs, not their basic needs, are satisfied and often satisfied beyond what the person actually perceived they needed. (Person 5)

4.2.3 Sustainability

Regarding sustainability, overall, there was an agreement across all interviewees that the three dimensions that compose this topic are the ones defined in the Triple Bottom Line (social, economic and environmental), however, governance was also mentioned by almost all the interviewed people:

(...) because I don't have a business plan in economic terms if I don't have this ecological concern (...) (Person 2)

Because it is impossible for us to talk about sustainability without these three main pillars, which are the three pillars of any organization (...) (Person 1)

I think we will only achieve this environmental impact when these 2 are aligned. Without these 3 we were making a huge mistake a few years ago because we were all only associating ourselves with environmental resources. (Person 1)

Sustainability is a possibility of ensuring that a certain destination, a certain product, a certain function, a certain relationship, even, is carried out in the most positive way possible. In other words, positive even for the impact it has on us, on the environment, on society and on the relationships we have as people with each other. (Person 5)

And therefore, for me, sustainability is not just that conversation that we usually have at the environmental level. It's much more than that, it's actually having the ability to realize that there is a large sociological component involved. (Person 5)

Yes, the model makes sense and there really has to be this circular relationship between the economy and the social and environmental aspects (...) (Person 5)

Nevertheless, there is another common reference when describing sustainability which is limited resources:

And adding value is also this awareness that we are on a planet and that we have limited resources. (Person 3)

For me, the word sustainability is really making things happen in a natural way, in a careful way, with attention to others, with attention to planet Earth, with attention to resources that are increasingly limited and with that respect that is possible to have, as long as it is properly planned. (Person 1)

(...) sustainability is clearly reducing the impact, both on the community and on resources, therefore, there must be very careful management of my resources (...) (Person 1)

4.2.4 Sustainable Luxury Branding

As for the last topic, it is sustainable luxury branding and, when speaking about these concepts, some interviewees agreed that, first of all, luxury and sustainability are terms that are not mutually exclusive and can exist in the same business concept.

Now, sustainability is not the enemy of luxury. (Person 2)

And much of ABC Hospitality's mission, Sustainable Luxury Hospitality, therefore, luxury for us is intrinsic to sustainability (...) (Person 3)

ABC Hospitality is a company that I created in 2015 exactly with the premise of sustainability as the new luxury, wellness and well-being. (Person 1)

In addition, it was referred sometimes that for sustainable luxury branding to occur, companies need to explore solutions in a creative way and reinterpret what has been done throughout the years to adapt to the new reality.

But I don't need to employ resources in an unsustainable way to create exclusive experiences. (...) creativity and technology combine in a sustainable way to produce a vision for an exquisite experience. (Person 2)

tourism Portugal, for example, for the 5-star rating we are required to have 50% of hotels with a bathtub. Now, bathtubs are currently one of the least sustainable things, so it's a matter of reinterpretation. (Person 1)

It's all a matter of us redefining our values and what priority we give to our values, and I believe that everything goes there. (Person 4)

Some examples of what this company does in order to achieve sustainable luxury branding are listed below. The examples encompass issues of caring for both the social and the natural environment surrounding each project as well as the impact that these actions can have on the people, the environment, and even the investment and financial viability of the hotels and properties.

At ABC we follow projects that are no longer just a hotel. These are differentiating projects that typically attract foreign investment, that typically have wellness and sustainability concerns, and therefore, that try to bring something good to the community. Almost always with the application of local products, with respect for local heritage, creation of jobs, the cultivation of projects outside large urban centres. (Person 2)

Examples: bringing a lot of nature into hotels, having a sand clock in the shower so that anyone taking a shower realizes that 5 minutes is equivalent to X litres of water and that these litres of water have this impact. (Person 3)

It is our criteria in projects to have Portuguese architects, for example. Always look for national options for materials (...) so everything that is a national product or from national suppliers is highly privileged, it is always the option. (Person 3)

(...) being able to involve the community around me, whether by generating employment or career opportunities for those who live nearby and, therefore, do not have to travel anywhere else, for example, as well as involving local artisans so that they can provide value the unit itself. (Person 3)

I'll give you an example, the cards that allow you to connect the electricity, the ones made of wood, the price is much higher, but who are the units that can do these, luxury units, and these are the ones that can, once again. Awareness comes from higher social strata and if they can contribute to those lower down, that's how it should be. (Person 1)

(...) because once again, we can even take a towel to a hotel, but what we have to understand is what are we going to do with it? The way we wash the towel, what do we get out of it? I can, for example, buy x glass bottles for the hotel and the question is what am I going to do with these glass bottles next? What am I going to do while I return to us? For example, there are those who say no, but Michelin restaurants are some of the most sustainable possible. There is minimum waste, there is the possibility of using waste materials to make compost, using this composted material to use as fertilizer for our own garden and so on. (Person 5)

4.3 Process

When it comes to the general process of the company's business development, each specialist presented it in the perspective of their own role in the company. So, as a starting point, in Figure 5 from ABC Hospitality (2023b) it is possible to observe the general process the company applies for each new business with the following steps:

1. Integration of the wellness & sustainability concept;
2. Financial viability & business plan;
3. Add value and recover;
4. Branding strategy, marketing & sales;

5. Team management & leadership;
6. Soft start.

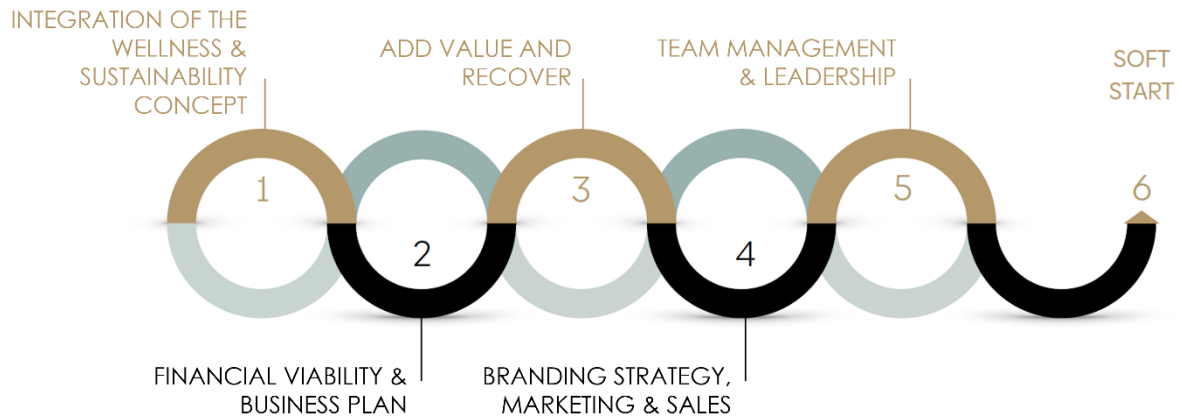


Figure 5. ABC's business development process (ABC Hospitality, 2023b). [adapted].

This process is validated through the explanation the author got from the company's CEO:

Usually, the first thing we do is start the concept. Therefore, when a project arrives, we think, study, reflect on the concept of what will be created, be it a requalification or a new project. Therefore, there is a huge creative moment. (...) Then we present market studies, and then the whole team starts to collaborate. We create a business plan, which together with the concept are the first things we present. After the business plan enters finance, and the entire team has to provide input on everything that will materialize. Then, if the project is subject to financing, we coordinate with banks, partners, investors, everything. From the moment we choose who we will build or requalify the unit with, we monitor the works and construction and at the same time, we are creating the product itself, in other words, the branding is being born. We are constantly monitoring, and we are creating a product and solidifying all the steps until we reach the opening time. Naturally, what we include is recruitment, choosing partners, choosing the director, who will work with them, what the distribution channels are. We fol-

lowed the process until the hotel opened. After opening the hotel, we already have a team in place, we have everything set up, depending on the agreements we have (...) There is an implementation done and then I monitor the soft opening of the unit to ensure that everything we set out and create with the client is really feasible and done efficiently by the teams that are hired and from the moment the soft opening ends, we move on to the next project. (Person 1)

It is interesting to note that even though the layout of the process is always the same, the approach and content of each project is completely different and tailor-made to the client, given that, after all, this is the luxury sector:

We make an individual concept for everyone. We do tailor made, we take great care in working on each project in a very unique and authentic way. (Person 1)

Each client is different, they are special and that's why we always have to first look at what that client's values are and then, ok, we can't do it without that, it's not a "chapa cinco" (a Portuguese expression that refers to doing something in a formatted or repetitive way) at all. (Person 4)

It is always tailored for every customer. We already have frameworks that are usable in rural, urban or resort terms, whatever, but we always have a model that we work with and think about from the start. (Person 5)

There are big differences, and we do tailor-made for each client, depending on the type of unit, the type of objectives the client needs, but we always start from a pre-existing base in terms of work methodologies. (Person 2)

However, there is also the specificity of the branding process itself which was presented in detail by the branding specialist:

We are not available to all clients or all investors and then it is this internal analysis that we do, which is "are these people really aligned for what they want to do? Is it really a project they believe in or is it just another investment? Is it just another economic interest or is it truly a project to which they want to add value?" (Person 3)

“What do they want? What is their vision?” It's the whole branding process, I use Why? How? What? and focus a lot on why? Everything that we can then extract with the concept that is then created for that project specifically, from these two sources of information, it is my mission to create a very structured, very complete briefing. “How did this project come about? What is your concept? What is your DNA? What is our vision? Our mission, our values? Who are the customers we target as personas? What are you looking for?” And this briefing is then sent to the agency. (...) and then go through this whole process of building a brand and strategy. (Person 3)

(...) with “Person 1” I work on the entire concept, and we have to be comfortable and confident that the concept is adjusted to the vision and purpose of the owners, because that is what makes them involved in the entire process. (Person 3)

(When asked about post-launch monitoring) Yes because we have to ensure that everything we do is being correctly implemented. (Person 3)

All in all, it is relevant to state that even though, in theory, the branding has its own phase in the project, the sustainable branding requires the integration of sustainability in the whole process, and it is present from the beginning to the end. In the presentation by ABC Hospitality (2023d) it can be read that the company provides “A more sustainable, regenerative & conscious hospitality (...) Sustainability is one of the priorities for these units that wish to contribute to the whole in a significant way”. It was also stated by a few interviewees:

We already have branding, we already have a concept, so then, ok, let's align what type of people and what profile of people will be able to integrate and align with this mission and this vision. (Person 4)

When we started the concept, we started talking about sustainability and the importance of sustainability and, therefore, here at ABC, at this moment, the 3 pillars are transversal. (Person 1)

Personally, I always try to have these 3 in parallel, in the way we, at the restaurant level, apply, for example, the products we buy, whether it has to do with

small productivity producers and with sustainable agriculture or not, which has good sustainability practices or not in the products we consume, in the types of materials we use inside the hotel. (Person 5)

If we want to join the Leading Hotels of the World today, there are issues of sustainability metrics already within the audit itself and therefore luxury will always end up being included in this component. (Person 5)

What we do, at ABC Hospital, is really create projects from the beginning, so from the first moment a hotel is designed until the opening of the units, with concepts where well-being and sustainability are always the basis of the project. (Person 1)

4.4 Drivers, enablers, challenges, and barriers

Finally in the findings component of this paper are the ones related with the drivers, enablers, challenges, and barriers of the sustainable branding process in a luxury environment.

To begin with, there were several drivers stated by the interviewees which could be grouped into the topics listed below:

- Vision and Purpose since the clients/investors of the properties that have a clear idea of what they want to portray can more easily advance with sustainable branding.

Typically, the customer knowing what they want is an important thing. (Person 2)

I can create a logo, but if I don't invest in the perception that people have of my logo, in the knowledge that people have of my logo, of my brand, it wouldn't be there. (Person 5)

- Investor Passion

(...) it is necessary to truly believe in the project, especially when we are waiting for financing, funds, loans, these are moments of high tension, even more so for the investor. (Person 3)

I think this component comes, once again, from social perception or the social perception that they also have regarding the subject. Many of them it's the way they live, they live. So, this idea is what they also want to convey in a unit, because it ends up being the image of the investor himself.
(Person 5)

- Market Opportunity since the company makes use of the changes that happen in the market to dive into the sustainable branding.

This is something that I have started to see people, many people who no longer want to be working in Lisbon and who start working remotely and want to stay in the places where they are native, make their lives there remotely, if necessary. (Person 2)

(...) the significant increase in energy costs that happened in 2022 was decisive for people, they started to look at sustainability as a business. (Person 2)

- Differentiation because finding the one thing that sets one project apart from the remaining is a clear driver for the process.

(...) companies that believe that the face of the company is the first impact that any person has with the company, it is through its message, through its branding, which is the first impact. (Person 2)

A brand, a branding process always starts with the person, with the investor. If sustainability is not important to that person, there is no branding, at least not with us. (Person 3)

- Innovation & Creativity due to it being the way to achieve sustainability in a sector that is not used to adapting that way.

(...) creativity and technology combine in a sustainable way to produce a vision for an exquisite experience. (Person 2)

(...) innovation based on what Portuguese heritage is, what our traditions, our stories, our gastronomy, our wine are. (Person 2)

As for enablers, it was clear that guidance, target audience understanding, budget allocation, identity development, and market research are constantly present as motivators to begin the sustainable branding process.

- Market research which is related to the aforementioned market opportunity since it is through findings in market research that the investors get their market opportunities.

(...) the significant increase in energy costs that happened in 2022 was decisive for people, they started to look at sustainability as a business. (Person 2)

Try to find sites that have a cultural, architectural and landscape heritage that is commendable, interesting to explore, if possible, in areas that do not yet have economic activity, use this to develop more economic activity to settle people. (Person 2)

- Identity development given that coming up with an identity can be a first step to evolve to sustainable branding.

So there is a constant challenge here of bringing knowledge in, which naturally means that decisions are not so immediate, because people have to think. (Person 1)

And no, the level of awareness that has to do with sustainability, has to do with awareness and not with trends, and not with make-believe, is putting pressure on the hotel industry to change, to evolve. (Person 3)

- Target audience understanding.

This luxury and sustainability tourism with sustainable light is not aimed at everyone, it is aimed at people with high purchasing power. (Person 2)

So there is this gap where many hotel brands still believe that they are above the consumer and that they will believe everything they are telling them. (Person 3)

- Budget allocation since without budget availability, it is unlikely to advance with a good branding approach.

Then, obviously, it is a process in which we have to have some investment and the person must be available to invest, because it is a continuous process. (Person 1)

- Guidance since it is key to have someone guiding the people and resources to achieve a good branding strategy.

If there is no awareness and someone who can carefully explain to investors, the owner and those who are making the decision about the importance of this investment, because branding is an investment with a guaranteed return, it is very complicated. (Person 1)

In regard to the challenges, the most mentioned ones were identity development, market research, legal issues, cohesion, budget constraints, and change management.

- Identity development since there some friction points that can arise when deciding on the identity for the brand.

What owners normally do is go by personal taste. So, one of the first conflicts we have is, we are in the branding process, and we are not doing this for your home, of course you have to like it (...). (Person 1)

So there is a constant challenge here of bringing knowledge in, which naturally means that decisions are not so immediate, because people have to think. (Person 1)

In the room, when you arrive and we want to have a Le Labo amenity, for example, but Le Labo doesn't have anything that isn't made of plastic and we say that we have to convert it to another one, then there is resistance on the part from the owners because they realize that no, "we have always been known for this, so we don't want to change this component". (Person 5)

And no, the level of awareness that has to do with sustainability, has to do with awareness and not with trends, and not with make-believe, is putting pressure on the hotel industry to change, to evolve. (Person 3)

- Market research can be an enabler but also a challenge if it is not performed in a favourable way for the branding process.

Try to find sites that have a cultural, architectural and landscape heritage that is commendable, interesting to explore, if possible, in areas that do not yet have economic activity, use this to develop more economic activity to settle people. (Person 2)

- Legal issues

There are other challenges, often in terms of the inability to introduce that particular concept, because there is a budget restriction, there is a legal, environmental restriction, whatever. (Person 5)

It may have to do with, once again, also with the municipal councils themselves and with the local authority issue, in terms of licensing, we wanted to build 50 rooms, they only let us build 40, but to only let us build 40 we already need to give something in return. (Person 5)

- Cohesion between branding factors can be challenging but it is key for a successful branding strategy.

(...) the main obstacle is, for us to be able to guarantee that the thing is born well, I think this is actually very, very important for us to be able to have a healthy exploitation afterwards. (Person 2)

- Budget constraints

Financial sustainability can typically be called into question with investment amounts. (Person 2)

(When asked about the biggest challenge of the sustainable branding process) Financial. (Person 1)

There are other challenges, often in terms of the inability to introduce that particular concept, because there is a budget restriction, there is a legal, environmental restriction, whatever. (Person 5)

- Change management can be a challenge due to the morosity and complexity of decisions between the company and the investor/client.

In our branding process, perhaps it is slow after the decisions, but it is not ours, it has to do with external decisions, sometimes moving forward with bills because it impacts branding. (Person 1)

Concerning barriers, lack of clarity in brand vision, resource constraints, market landscape, initial investment costs, and target audience understanding were the ones more commonly appointed.

- Lack of clarity in brand vision because there might be some difficulties both on the company side or on the investor side in terms of comprehending or aligning brand visions.

We have had cases of saying “look, we wish you lots of luck for your project, but we are not going to do your project” and this has a lot to do with the investor's attitude, because we are talking about very serious things. (Person 3)

(...) branding has to be explained to the investor because most people think that branding is about making a logo. (Person 1)

- Resource constraints is a clear barrier given that this sector sustains itself on people and suppliers, and having issues with any of them can be a barrier in moving forward with a project.

People are a constant challenge and leading people means managing emotions and this is constant every minute. (Person 4)

The biggest challenges are, above all and once again, the mindset of people who are not present and which human beings forget very quickly. (Person 4)

(...) we often also have problems with suppliers, delivery times, difficulty in achieving objectives, or in understanding the briefing we gave and delivering what we need. (Person 5)

- Market landscape can also be a barrier to implementing certain ideals since it can, in a way, reflect the consumers' preferences.

(...) country completely full of completely undifferentiated 3-star hotels. (Person 2)

- Initial investment costs

Financial sustainability can typically be called into question with investment amounts. (Person 2)

The initial investment will always be very large (...) (Person 5)

- Target audience understanding is enabler but also a barrier due to the lack of it causing difficulties in starting a sustainable branding process which requires a comprehension of the consumer.

(...) businesspeople and even hotel directors and finally, this layer of top management still hasn't realized that you can't fake it. (Person 3)

This luxury and sustainability tourism with sustainable light is not aimed at everyone, it is aimed at people with high purchasing power. (Person 2)

So there is this gap where many hotel brands still believe that they are above the consumer and that they will believe everything they are telling them. (Person 3)

5 Discussion

In this section of the paper, the findings will be discussed in combination with the theories found in the literature review. Therefore, the main concepts, the process and the influencing factors will be analysed in order to achieve a consolidated revised framework and to answer the research question of this thesis.

5.1 Main definitions

The three base definitions of this paper are branding, luxury, and sustainability but it is also crucial to understand the concepts of luxury branding and of sustainable luxury branding.

When it comes to **branding** it is clear that it is a fundamental aspect of any business that wants to be successful nowadays, as it was mentioned by both Jones (2021) and by the interviewee Person 5 when he mentions that “The issue of branding in the luxury hotel sector is super important (...)”. It is a process that aims to develop and convey a cohesive and relevant image and message to the brand’s target audience which will ultimately develop brand perception in the consumers’ minds (McLaughlin, 2011; Kotler & Keller, 2016).

As for the definition of **luxury** it can be stated that it is a term in the process of evolution given that the market still generally agrees with the old luxury definition but, on the other hand, there is a substantial rise of people that agree with the new luxury definition. In the case of this thesis, luxury is defined through its dimensions of high-quality, exclusivity, expensiveness, self-pleasure, and wellness (Rovai, 2018; Bilge, 2015; Gosh & Varshney, 2013).

In regard to the **sustainability** definition, it has to do, mainly, with the concern for the available resources and the way these can be preserved and improved through economic, social and environmental matters (Martinez & Bosque, 2014; Seghezzeo, 2009).

The fourth concept, **sustainable luxury branding**, is then a culmination of the aforementioned definitions which makes it a complex concept which, firstly recognizes the possibility of sustainable luxury (Akrouit & Guercini, 2022).

Additionally, it defines the process of branding that develops in a creative and innovative way, aiming to impact social and environmental matters positively in the prestigious and exclusive luxury industry without prejudice to the quality of the products/services and with economic viability (Sustainable Luxury Awards, n. d.).

5.2 Process

Moving onto the **sustainable branding process**, it generally is in alignment with what was studied in the literature review concerning the steps of business development and the ones of branding. However, in the theoretical background section, it is stated that according to Haag (2013), branding is inserted into the business plan step of the business development process which is true but not entirely applicable when the sustainability component is added. As mentioned by some interviewees, sustainable branding has to be present in all stages of the process since it is integrated from the conceptualization to the launch of the hotel.

In addition, there is also the stages of the sustainable branding process which resemble the ones of “regular” branding according to Keller (1997). In the case of sustainable branding there are also the questions of figuring out identity, meaning, response and relationships but with the factor of sustainability behind all of them as mentioned by the branding specialist:

Overall, the revised process with the delineation of all the stages that culminates the theoretical and the empirical knowledge will be presented ahead.

5.3 Drivers, enablers, challenges, and barriers

Related to the aforementioned process are the drivers, enablers, challenges, and barriers that either streamline initiation and development or that can be obstacles to overcome.

Firstly, the drivers of the sustainable branding process in the case of luxury hospitality were discovered to be vision and purpose, investor passion, market opportunity, differentiation/unique value proposition, and innovation and creativity. Out of these five, the one that differs from what was presented in the theoretical background is investor passion. The remaining all made sense in the case of the studied company and were validated with the empirical data.

Investor passion is an adapted driver from what was designated by Kapferer (2008) as entrepreneurial passion. In this case, it is relevant to shift to investor since they not only need to put time and investment into this project but also trust in the company to implement their ideals in the branding process.

Secondly, the found enablers for the process in study are market research, identity development, target audience understanding, budget allocation, and guidance. All of these were present in the literature review as motivators that can start up a branding process and, with empirical evidence these were validated even if slightly adapted. It was clear that both market research and identity development could either be enablers or challenges since having them were a great starting point for a sustainable branding process whereas the lack of them or the incorrect development sustained challenges for the company. Target audience understanding, similarly could either be an enabler or a barrier given that comprehending the consumer that a company aims to reach is key to start a branding process but missing this could stop or risk the success of the aforementioned.

The enabler guidance is slightly different from what was presented in the literature review by Vallaster & De Chernatony (2005, 2006) and Ind & Bjerke (2007) as good leadership because in this particular case it is fundamental to have the guidance and

mentorship that ABC Hospitality can provide to the investor so that they can understand the project in a whole as a starting point for the branding process.

Thirdly, the barriers of the sustainable branding process are lack of clarity in brand vision, resource constraints, market landscape, initial investment costs, and target audience understanding. The latter has already been discussed as either an enabler or a barrier, but the remaining are all mostly aligned with the theory that already exists and that was considered for this study. Market landscape was the only barrier that seemed more appropriate than competitive landscape (Chapleo, 2007; Sandhu & Azhar, 2019), when comparing with the literature, since there is really not one company that directly competes with ABC Hospitality. Nonetheless, having a market that is not that appetizing for the aimed business can definitely be a barrier due to either unalignment of audiences or just overall market saturation.

Lastly, there are six challenges in the branding process in study which are identity development, market research, legal issues, cohesion, budget constraints, and change management. The first two were mentioned above since the other end of the spectrum presents them as enablers. As for legal issues, cohesion, and budget constraints, these all are aligned between what is the theory and what was found in the data collection process.

When it comes to change management, not being able to achieve it can be a challenge in the process. There is always the possibility that when something happens in some stages of branding that can cause a change in plans, it can lead to disagreements that should be managed by the company in order to keep the investor aligned with the plan. Even though not adapting to change is a challenge as mentioned by Veloutsou & Delgado - Ballester (2018), not being able to manage change seemed to be more relevant in the empirical study.

5.4 Revised framework

To finalize the discussion portion of this paper, below is the revised framework (Figure 6) which incorporates the findings of this paper when faced with Figure 4 which presented the literature review framework.

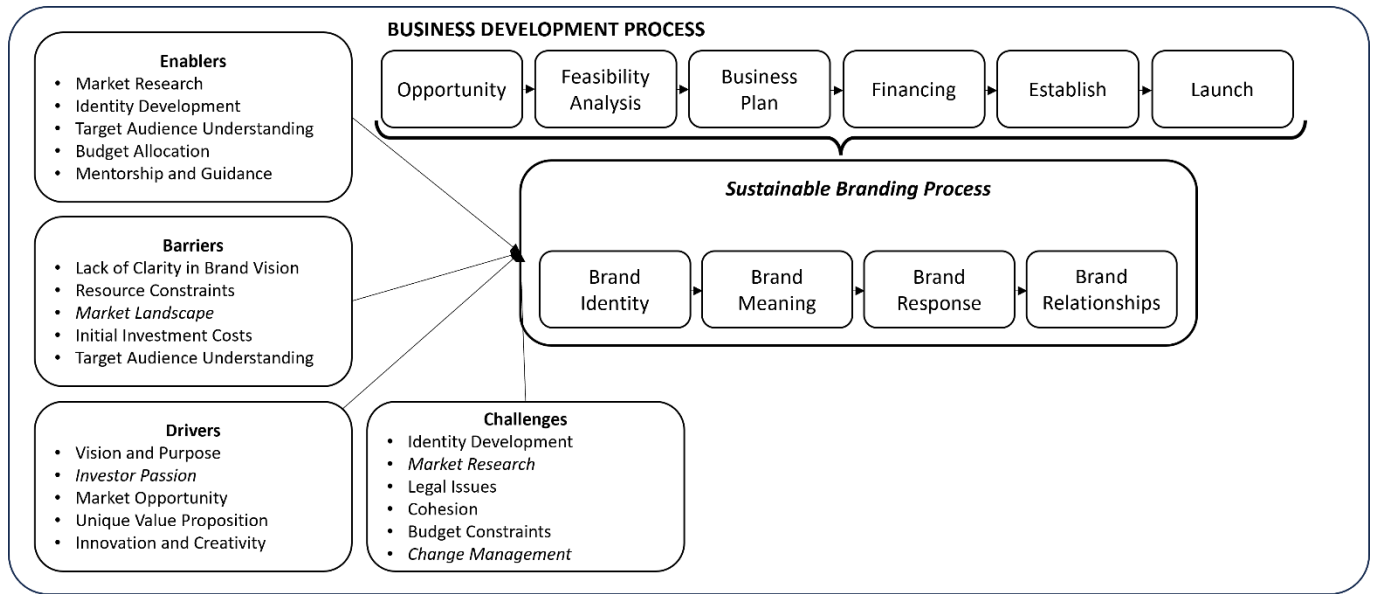


Figure 6. Revised framework

In this process it is possible to observe the aforementioned enablers, barriers, drivers, and challenges that affect the sustainable branding “stage” of the business development process. This suffered some alterations in comparison to the previous framework in order to be more suited for this sector and reality.

The business development process was kept the same as it appeared in the literature review since all the stages described by the study company could fit and made sense integrated in the presented process.

As for the branding process itself, since the company does not provide a step-by-step methodology for branding but rather agrees with the questions proposed by the show-cased model, it remained in the scheme made by Keller (1997).

Finally, the major alteration between the two framework is the sustainable branding “stage” that no longer fits only inside the business plan but rather is present throughout the whole process from conception to launch.

In conclusion, the revised framework proposes a practical and applicable answer the to this paper’s research question on “How do luxury companies implement sustainable branding within business development considering the enablers, drivers, barriers and challenges inherent to the branding process and its steps?”.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Summary of the study

The purpose of this study was to study sustainable branding in luxury business development meaning that the goal was not only to study the sustainable branding in the luxury sector, but more specifically to study luxury business development through the case study of the hospitality luxury sector.

The literature review of this thesis focused on branding, luxury, and sustainability, all as individual concepts that then were merged to reach the definition of sustainable luxury branding. All the definitions and dimensions of these concepts were studied as well as models for branding, and the drivers, enablers, challenges, and barriers of the branding process.

The empiric findings were based on qualitative data through the case study approach and with use of semi-structured interviews and secondary data.

All in all, this paper aimed to answer the question:

“How do luxury companies implement sustainable branding within business development considering the enablers, drivers, barriers and challenges inherent to the branding process and its steps?”

As for the main findings of this paper these would be that a synergy between luxury and sustainability is possible; that the sustainable branding “phase” in luxury business development is something continuous throughout the whole process; and that there are several drivers, enablers, challenges, and barriers which either positively or negatively affect the sustainable branding process in luxury hospitality companies.

Concerning the synergy between luxury and sustainability, it not only is possible but also advisable since luxury companies are the ones that have the power to influence the more mass-market ones. In addition to the fact that in some aspects, such as wellness, they are intrinsic factors in themselves.

Apropos of the sustainable branding “phase”, as it was discussed in the previous section, it needs to be a constant from the conception of the hotel to the launch and the posterior follow-up since every strategy or implementation action should have a sustainable thought and premise behind it.

Finally, in the revised framework, the author presented the drivers, enablers, challenges, and barriers which constantly apply to the sustainable branding process in the luxury hospitality sector. These differentiate from a “standard” branding process in the sense that the value proposition as to be properly curated as to not incur in greenwashing and the investment for this sort of project is extremely high. Plus, this is a process that has work from both the investor and the company that is developing the project which requires trust, passion, and good adaptation to change.

6.2 Theoretical & Managerial Implications

In regard to theoretical implications, on one hand, this paper validates most points made in the literature review.

In regard to the gap found in the literature, this paper is able to fill it by explaining the sustainable branding process for the specificity of luxury companies that have business development as their business model. Therefore, all points validated could, generally, be applicable to this sector.

On the other hand, it disassociates the branding strategy from being a step in a process and rather being something that is constantly present and that should be regularly consulted to achieve greater success when launching. This way, companies can ensure that the image and the message they communicate is more easily understood by the customer in the way that the company aims.

Another point, which was referenced several times throughout the paper is the disagreement with some authors (Akrouf & Guercini, 2022) that perceive the combination of luxury and sustainability as incompatible. It is evident that if the goal is set in a way

and the implementation actions are made so that they contribute to a better environment and society, than it can still be luxury and promote its inherent values.

Concerning managerial implications, it can be stated that the finding in this study can be applicable to similar companies in Portugal or even in other European countries given that the luxury sector behaves generally the same in these countries.

The implementation of the revised framework in sustainable luxury companies could be successful given that they may suffer from the same issues as the company in study, meaning that by managing all the affecting factors in an effective manner and following the proposed steps, they could reach success. Nonetheless, each scenario must be analysed carefully, and the applicability of the framework must be questioned before implemented.

At this point, the author believes that by being the only company occupying this space in the Portuguese competitive market, ABC Hospitality's process and overall concept is a valuable competitive advantage that should be constantly improved and refined throughout the years. Nonetheless, it would be recommendable that the company continues their journey of increasingly implementing more sustainability and wellness in the luxury sector, specifically when it comes to reducing resource consumption and waste that, at this point, cannot be avoided.

Another idea would be the possibility to expand into other communities in Portugal that could use development and purposeful tourism, given that there are still several areas in Portugal that do not get the same attention and investment as the urban centres due to their lack of development in the last decades.

6.3 Limitations and further research suggestions

As it is common in most academic studies, this paper has some limitations in regard to the process of data gathering and analysing as well as the conclusions it reached.

First of all, a clear limitation is the sample size since this study only covers data from one company and of that one company of only five specialists. This means that even though these specialists have a lot of expertise in their fields, the information is still very restricted to their own personal views.

Secondly, it can be limitative for this study to have only one specialist of each field which does not allow for idea comparison between experts that had the same responsibilities in the company.

Aligned with the aforementioned is the fact that this company is only established in Portugal and only has properties and hotels in this same country, meaning that there is a lack of an international perspective. Even though most of the clients and consumers are international it is still not the same as establishing a business abroad.

Fourthly, another limitation is the fact that all interviews were conducted in Portuguese, meaning that some expressions or thoughts might not be fully translatable into the English language. Therefore, some conclusions might not have been taken due to this factor.

When it comes to further research, it would be interesting to observe this same issue but in other countries, especially ones outside of Europe to understand if sustainability can be applicable in the luxury hospitality industry abroad.

Additionally, studying the overall sustainable luxury branding in other sectors besides hospitality might bring some relevant thoughts to discussion. An example of one of these sectors would be premium and luxury cars that still rely heavily on fossil fuels.

Since this thesis explored some affecting factor for the sustainable branding process in a holistic way, it would be relevant to study the detail of the drivers, enablers, barriers, and challenges. In a nutshell, future research could explore, in a more profound way, the proper impact of each factor and if they have different levels of prioritization in the branding process.

Lastly, understating if sustainable luxury branding in the hospitality industry would be possible in hotel chains such as The Ritz-Carlton or the Rosewood Hotels & Resorts.

References

- Aaker, D. A. (1991). *Managing brand equity*.
https://openlibrary.org/books/OL1532721M/Managing_brand_equity
- ABC Hospitality. (2023a, September 28). *About ABC Hospitality - ABC Hospitality*.
<https://www.abchospitality.pt/about-abc-hospitality/>
- ABC Hospitality. (2023b). *ABC Sustainable Luxury Hospitality_Presentation*. [PowerPoint slides].
- ABC Hospitality. (2023c). *ABC Sustainable Luxury Hospitality_Clever_Sustainable ESG*. [PowerPoint slides].
- ABC Hospitality. (2023d). *ABC Sustainable Luxury Hospitality_Vision and Operations*. [PowerPoint slides].
- Akrout, H., & Guercini, S. (2022). Sustainability in fashion and luxury marketing: Results, paradoxes and potentialities. *Journal of global fashion marketing*, 13(2), 91-100.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/20932685.2021.2017320>
- American Marketing Association. (2023). *Branding Archives*.
<https://www.ama.org/topics/branding/>
- Arabian Business. (2021, November 14). *Building a brand with passion is the key to success*.
<https://www.arabianbusiness.com/opinion/comment/building-a-brand-with-passion-is-the-key-to-success-2>
- Athwal, N., Wells, V. K., Carrigan, M., & Henninger, C. E. (2019). Sustainable Luxury Marketing: A Synthesis and Research Agenda. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 21, 405–426. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12195>
- Aziz, A. (2018, November 26). Brand Purpose 101: Everything you wanted to know but were afraid to ask. *Medium*. <https://medium.com/@afdhelaziz/brand-purpose-101-everything-you-wanted-to-know-but-were-afraid-to-ask-21593fb37d33>

- Bahraini, A. (2022, August 3). *The triple bottom line of sustainability in waste management - Waste4Change*. Waste4Change. <https://waste4change.com/blog/the-triple-bottom-line-of-sustainability-in-waste-management/>
- Barwise, P., & Meehan, S. (2010, December). *The one thing you must get right when building a brand*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2010/12/the-one-thing-you-must-get-right-when-building-a-brand>
- Bedendo, M. (2019). *Branding: Processos e Práticas para a Construção de Valor* (1st ed.). Saraiva Educação.
- Bhattacharya, S., Momaya, K. S., & Iyer, K. (2020). Benchmarking enablers to achieve growth performance: a conceptual framework. *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, 27(4), 1475–1501. <https://doi.org/10.1108/bij-08-2019-0376>
- Bilge, H. (2015). Luxury Consumption: Literature Review. *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 18(1), 35-55.
- Chapleo, C. (2007). Barriers to brand building in UK universities? *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 12(1), 23–32. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.271>
- Daswani, A., & Jain, V. (2011). Understanding luxury branding. *Media Asia*, 38(3), 131–139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2011.11726892>
- Dicuonzo, G., Galeone, G., Ranaldo, S., & Turco, M. (2020). The Key Drivers of Born-Sustainable Businesses: Evidence from the Italian Fashion Industry. *Sustainability*, 12(24), 10237. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su122410237>
- Einwiller, S., & Will, M. (2002). Towards an integrated approach to corporate branding – an empirical study. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 7(2), 100–109. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13563280210426160>

- Fischer, D., Brettel, M., & Mauer, R. (2020). The Three Dimensions of Sustainability: A Delicate Balancing Act for Entrepreneurs Made More Complex by Stakeholder Expectations. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *163*, 87-106.
- Ghodeswar, B. (2008). Building brand identity in competitive markets: a conceptual model. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *17*(1), 4–12. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420810856468>
- Ghosh, A., & Varshney, S. (2013). Luxury Goods Consumption: A Conceptual Framework Based on Literature Review. *South Asian Journal of Management*, *20*(2), 146-159. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.04.020>
- Gill, M., & Dawra, J. (2010). Evaluating Aaker's sources of brand equity and the mediating role of brand image. *Journal of Targeting, Measurement and Analysis for Marketing*, *18*(3–4), 189–198. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jt.2010.11>
- Gronlund, J. (2013). *Basics of Branding: A Practical Guide for Managers (Most Business Managers Really Don't Understand "Branding". T)*. Business Expert Press.
- Haag, A. B. (2013). Writing a Successful Business Plan. *AAOHN Journal*, *61*(1), 19–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/216507991306100104>
- Hawker, K. (2021, December 11). Keller's brand equity model — What it is & how to use it. Medium. <https://medium.com/@keatonhawker/kellers-brand-equity-model-what-it-is-how-to-use-it-84e42d562299>
- Ind, N., & Bjerke, R. (2007). *Branding governance: A Participatory Approach to the Brand Building Process*. John Wiley & Sons.
- (2022). International luxury marketing. *Strategic Direction*, *38*(2), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1108/sd-11-2021-0152>

- Jones, K. (2021). *The Importance of Branding in Business*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2021/03/24/the-importance-of-branding-in-business/?sh=68671af67f71>
- Jones, R. I. (2010). Corporate Branding: the role of vision in implementing the corporate brand. *DOAJ (DOAJ: Directory of Open Access Journals)*. <https://doaj.org/article/13bd81facbcb43c4aaa2f88cad551a8f>
- Kapferer, J. (2008). *The new strategic brand management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Long Term*. Kogan Page Publishers.
- Kapferer, J. (2016). The challenges of luxury branding. In *The Routledge Companion to Contemporary Brand Management* (1st ed., pp. 473–491). Routledge.
- Keller, K. L. (1997). *Strategic Brand Management: building, measuring, and managing brand equity*. <https://yrewik.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/strategic-brand-management-building-measuring-and-managing-brand-equity.pdf>
- Keller, K. L. (2009). Managing the growth tradeoff: Challenges and opportunities in luxury branding. *Journal of Brand Management*, 16(5–6), 290–301. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2008.47>
- Keller, K. L., & Swaminathan, V. (2019). *Strategic Brand Management: Building, measuring, and Managing Brand Equity, Global Edition*. Pearson Higher Ed.
- Kong, H. M., Witmaier, A., & Ko, E. (2021, July). Sustainability and social media communication: How consumers respond to marketing efforts of luxury and non-luxury fashion brands. *Journal of Business Research*, 131, 640–651. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.08.021>
- Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2016). *Framework for Marketing Management, Global Edition* (6th ed.). Pearson.

- Kuhn, K. L., Alpert, F., & Pope, N. K. LI. (2008). An application of Keller's brand equity model in a B2B context. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 11(1), 40–58. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13522750810845540>
- Leek, S., & Christodoulides, G. (2011). A literature review and future agenda for B2B branding: Challenges of branding in a B2B context. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40(6), 830–837. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2011.06.006>
- Lobpries, J., Bennett, G., & Brison, N. T. (2018). How I Perform is Not Enough: Exploring Branding Barriers Faced by Elite Female Athletes. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 27(1). <https://doi.org/10.32731/smq.271.032018.01>
- Martinez, P., & Bosque, I. (2014). Sustainability Dimensions: A Source to Enhance Corporate Reputation. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 17(4), 239-253.
- Menon, S. (2016). Branding and Models of Branding. *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation*, III(X), 47–53.
- McLaughlin, J. (2011, December 21). *What is a Brand, anyway?* Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jerrymclaughlin/2011/12/21/what-is-a-brand-anyway/?sh=558aa3202a1b>
- OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms. (2001, September). Sustainability. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=2625>
- Ries, E. (2011). *The Lean Startup: How Today's Entrepreneurs Use Continuous Innovation to Create Radically Successful Businesses*. Currency.
- Rovai, S. (2018). Luxury Branding and Digitalisation: The Case of European Brands in China. In P. Chow, C. Chiu, A. Yip, A. Tang (Eds.), *Contemporary Case Studies on Fashion Production, Marketing and Operations* (pp. 89–104). Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-7007-5>

- Rudestam, K. E., & Newton, R. R. (2014). *Surviving your dissertation: A Comprehensive Guide to Content and Process*. SAGE Publications, Incorporated.
- Sandhu, M. S., & Azhar, T. M. (2019). Barriers to branding in SMEs: An exploration at surgical industry of Sialkot, Pakistan. *Paradigms*, 13(1), 134-142.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2007). *Research methods for business students*. Pearson Education.
- Schultz, M., Antorini, Y. M., & Csaba, F. F. (2006). *Corporate Branding Purpose/People/Process* (1st ed.). Copenhagen Business School Press.
- Seghezze, L. (2009). The five dimensions of sustainability. *Environmental Politics*, 18(4), 539-556. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644010903063669>
- Sevin, E. (2014). Understanding cities through city brands: City branding as a social and semantic network. *Cities*, 38, 47–56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2014.01.003>
- Shiu, E. (2017). Research Handbook of Innovation and Creativity for Marketing Management. In *Edward Elgar Publishing eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9780857937957>
- Sørensen, H. E. (2012). *Business Development: A Market-Oriented Perspective*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Stukalina, Y., & Pavlyuk, D. (2021). Using customer-based brand equity model in the higher education context: simulating the current university's brand. *Business, Management and Economics Engineering*, 19(02), 272–288. <https://doi.org/10.3846/bmee.2021.14692>
- Sun, L. B., & Ghiselli, R. (2010). Developing a conceptual model of brand equity in the hotel industry based on Aaker's perspective. *Journal of Quality Assurance in*

Hospitality & Tourism, 11(3), 147–161.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1528008x.2010.483417>

Sustainable Luxury Awards. (n.d.). *Sustainable Luxury*. Retrieved October 22, 2023, from <https://sustainableluxuryawards.com/sustainable/>.

Szabo, S., & Webster, J. (2020). Perceived Greenwashing: The Effects of Green Marketing on Environmental and Product Perceptions. *Journal of Business Ethics*.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-020-04461-0>

Tarnovskaya, V., & Biedenbach, G. (2018). Corporate rebranding failure and brand meanings in the digital environment. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 36(4), 455-469, <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-09-2017-0192>

Timmons, J. A., & Spinelli, S. (2007). *New Venture Creation: Entrepreneurship for the 21st Century*.

Vallaster, C., & De Chernatony, L. (2005). Internationalisation of Services Brands: The role of leadership during the internal brand building process. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 21(1–2), 181–203.
<https://doi.org/10.1362/0267257053166839>

Vallaster, C., & De Chernatony, L. (2006). Internal brand building and structuration: the role of leadership. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(7/8), 761–784.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560610669982>

Van Haaften, R. (n.d.). *Brand equity*. <https://www.van-haaften.nl/branding/corporate-branding/112-brand-equity>

Veloutsou, C., & Delgado - Ballester, E. (2018). New challenges in brand management. *Spanish Journal of Marketing - ESIC*, 22(3), 254 – 271.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/sjme-12-2018-036>

Why is market research important for new business ideas? (n.d.). The British Library.
Retrieved October 20, 2023, from <https://www.bl.uk/business-and-ip-centre/articles/why-is-market-research-important-for-new-business-ideas>.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview guide

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

1. Could you briefly introduce yourself by stating your name, your role, and your past experience?
 - a. What are your main responsibilities in this current role?
 - b. What was it that drew you to the luxury hospitality sector?
2. What would you say is the core operation of ABC Sustainable Luxury Hospitality?

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE TOPIC

3. What does sustainability mean to you?
 - a. And how does it affect companies in general?
 - b. Do you believe that the Triple Bottom Line is a good base model for sustainability? Why?
4. What about luxury, how would you define it?
 - a. What would you say are the main differences between luxury products and luxury services, specifically the luxury hospitality service?
5. Some authors believe that sustainability and luxury cannot go hand-in-hand since luxury can be often associated with consumption. In the case of hospitality, an example can be the use of freshly washed towels everyday regardless of the duration of a stay.
 - a. What is your opinion regarding this topic? Can the two be combined? How?

QUESTIONS ABOUT BRANDING

6. Since my thesis focuses on branding, I would like to know what is your perception of this business component?

7. In general, what do you think are the main drivers for companies to invest in branding?
 - a. And what about the main challenges that companies face when branding, what do you think those are, normally?
8. What do you feel are enablers for branding?
 - a. And the barriers?
9. Do you think there is a difference between branding a “normal” brand vs a luxury brand? Could you elaborate on why?
10. How would you say branding is developed and implemented in companies?
 - a. What would you say are the stages of a branding process?

QUESTIONS ABOUT ABC

11. How would you describe your day-to-day responsibilities in a project at ABC?
12. How does the team handle each project that comes in the company?
 - a. Does this differ regarding the dimension or the nature (rural vs. urban) of the client?
 - b. What are the steps that you take in the process?
 - i. Are the steps always the same or is it adapted to each project?
 - c. Are there any specific challenges that commonly arise in your projects? Could you give examples?
13. What are the steps taken within the main project/process to achieve sustainable branding?
 - a. What is your role in this subprocess?
14. In your projects, what components of sustainability do you prioritize?
 - a. What are the common actions or changes in operations you propose in the:
 - i. Social aspect?
 - ii. Environmental aspect?
 - b. How do you ensure the viability of the economical aspect?

15. What are the main drivers and enablers for individuals or companies to aim for sustainable branding?
 - a. Does this differ from rural to urban clients?
16. What are normally the main challenges and barriers that occur in your projects, specifically regarding the sustainable branding component?
 - a. Does this differ from rural to urban clients?
17. What could be improved in the branding process you propose?
18. Was there any project that failed to benefit from sustainable branding?
19. What were the most significant impacts that the sustainable branding process had in your clients?

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE

20. What would you say is the future of Sustainable Luxury Hospitality?
21. Will sustainability be economically sustainable for these companies in the future?