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**Article:**

Henninger, C.E., Alevizou, P.J., Tan, J.L. et al. (2 more authors) (2017) Consumption strategies and motivations of Chinese consumers: The case of UK sustainable luxury fashion. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 21 (3). pp. 419-434. ISSN 1361-2026

<https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-05-2017-0046>

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**Consumption strategies and motivations of Chinese consumers – the case of UK sustainable luxury fashion**

Journal:	<i>Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management</i>
Manuscript ID	JFMM-05-2017-0046
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	consumer typology, motivators, sustainability, luxury fashion, Chinese consumers, UK

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## Consumption strategies and motivations of Chinese consumers – the case of UK sustainable luxury fashion

### Abstract

**Purpose:** This paper explores Chinese consumers' motivations to purchase luxury fashion products in the UK and in how far sustainability plays a role in the decision making process, by extending the Translators, Exceptors, Selectors consumer typology. We further add an additional dimension to defining 'luxury'.

**Design/methodology approach:** An exploratory design utilising multiple qualitative research tools (semi-structured interviews, focus groups) provides the basis for this research. Grounded analysis was applied.

**Findings:** Findings map motivational drivers to purchasing luxury products and establish a fourth consumer type 'Indulgers'. Wellbeing further emerged as a key characteristic that defines 'luxury'.

**Research limitations/implications:** The sample size is limited to Chinese consumers purchasing luxury fashion in the UK and thus, may not be generalized.

**Practical implications:** This research helps managers to understand the consumer types and underlying motivations of Chinese consumers purchasing luxury fashion in the UK. As one of the largest target groups, this research informs managers on how to further capitalise on this market.

**Originality/value:** This paper creates a new consumer typology that not only categorises consumers according to their consumption aspects, but further identifies their underlying motivations to do so.

**Keywords:** Consumer typology, motivators, sustainability, luxury fashion, Chinese consumers, UK

### ***Introduction***

This exploratory research contributes to knowledge by extending McDonald *et al.*'s (2006; 2006; 2012) consumer typology of 'Translators, Exceptors, Selectors' and adding a further dimension of 'Indulgers', based on qualitative research undertaken. This typology has been chosen for its prominence and applicability within a variety of different product categories, as well as its applicability to a more service oriented industry: tourism in Australia (Bergin-Seers & Mair 2009). The typology allows to frame consumers in accordance with their ability to identify and relate to sustainability provides an opportunity for further investigation (McDonald *et al.* 2016) on whether it is transferable to Chinese consumers purchasing luxury products. We focus on Chinese consumers and their attitudes towards sustainability in the luxury fashion industry – a consumer group that should be investigated further (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau 2014). Additionally, we explore key motivational drivers of this consumer group to purchasing and/or considering 'sustainability' in luxury products, by focusing on Chinese consumers' purchase experiences. The context of this study was chosen purposefully, as by 2020 Chinese middle-class consumers will account for £1.16trillion in incremental spending in China whilst at the same time make up 76% of China's urban population by 2022 (Iskryan 2016; Kuo 2016) and are thus becoming an increasingly interesting target group to research. The Economist (2016) further highlights that the majority of China's middle class is under 35 years of age and likely to have a higher education degree, characteristics we come back to in the methodology section. Further, Chinese consumers – in more general terms – account for one-third of global luxury sales (Hancock 2017), which equates to 46% of the global luxury products being bought by this consumer group (Financiero 2016). Political uncertainty, such as Brexit, have made the UK luxury fashion market a 'go-to' destination for Chinese consumers wanting to purchase luxury items, due to the devaluation of the £ (Deloitte 2016; McClean 2016).

### ***Sustainability and luxury fashion – and its meaning***

Sustainability is a fuzzy concept that is often intuitively understood, yet a commonly accepted definition is lacking. It is concerned with environmental, social, and economic aspects and seeks to meet the needs of the current generation, without holding back future ones to fulfil their needs (WCED 1987). Sustainability in the

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3 fashion industry is not a new phenomenon, but rather has seen various *waves*  
4 throughout the past decades, such as anti-fur campaigns, the use of more  
5 environmentally friendly materials and less toxins in the manufacturing process, as  
6 well as the demand for social responsibility across the entirety of the supply chain and  
7 more transparency (Joy *et al.* 2012; Achabou & Dekhili 2013; Henninger *et al.* 2015,  
8 2016, 2017). The latter has received renewed interest in recent years through the Rana  
9 Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh, which witnessed more than one thousand deaths  
10 and many more injured (Parveen 2014). Organisations, such as Fashion Revolution  
11 (2017a), have kept the spotlight on this tragedy by initiating the  
12 ‘#WhoMadeMyClothes’ campaign that calls for more transparency across the supply  
13 chain. At the same time, Fashion Revolution (2017b) draws upon environmental  
14 issues in the industry, which were visualised in their True Cost movie, thereby  
15 demonstrating that the fashion landscape needs to change. Although progress has  
16 been made, the fashion industry remains the second most polluting industry after the  
17 oil industry (Gunther 2016; Remy *et al.* 2016).

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30 Similarly to sustainability, the term *luxury* is hard to define and no consensus has  
31 been reached (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014; Chandon *et al.* 2016; Janssen *et*  
32 *al.* 2017), as “what is luxury to one may just be ordinary to another” (Phau &  
33 Prendergast 2000: 123). Various authors have provided key characteristics of what  
34 luxury products need to incorporate, for example Phau and Prendergast (2000)  
35 suggest: exclusivity, well-known brand identity, increased brand awareness and  
36 perceived quality, and retain sales levels and customer loyalty; whilst De Barnier *et*  
37 *al.* (2012) suggest seven characteristics: exceptional quality, hedonism (beauty and  
38 pleasure), price (expensive), rarity, selective distribution and personalized service,  
39 exclusive character (prestige, privilege), and creativity (art and avant-garde). Defining  
40 *luxury* is further complicated when dividing luxury products into three categories of  
41 accessible, intermediate, and inaccessible luxury (Allers 1991; De Barnier *et al.*  
42 2012). Accessible luxury products refer to items that are targeted at the mass market,  
43 as a gateway to pursuing hedonic needs (*ibid*). Examples of accessible luxury are  
44 cosmetics, such as Prada’s perfumes (from £44.00) (HoF 2017) or Mont Blanc  
45 writing utensils (from £385.00) (John Lewis 2017). Intermediate luxury products a  
46 geared to towards a narrower target audience with higher disposable income  
47 (compared to accessible luxury). The Hermès (2017) Halzan Mini (£2,890.00) or the  
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3 Rolex (2017) Day-Date 40 (£25,500.00) are examples of intermediate luxury.  
4 Inaccessible luxury further narrows the target market, which is then geared towards  
5 the upper class, with examples being the 1997 Lamborghini Diablo (£ 234,732.00)  
6 (ClassicDriver 2017) or the Palmyre necklace (£312,200.00) (Van Cleef & Arpels  
7 2017).

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11 This research does not seek to provide a new, revolutionary definition of luxury  
12 products, but rather investigate consumer perceptions of sustainability in luxury  
13 products and their motivational drivers to purchase these. Thus, for the purpose of this  
14 research, we centre on intermediate luxury products, such as handbags and  
15 jewellery/watches and describe luxury products in line with De Barnier *et al.*'s (2012)  
16 seven characteristics. Similarly, sustainability is referred to as products that are either  
17 incorporating environmentally friendly raw materials and/or have been produced in a  
18 socially responsible manner.  
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### 26 ***Sustainability in luxury fashion – an idiosyncrasy or reality?***

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28 Luxury fashion, as defined in this research (De Barnier *et al.* 2012) links to  
29 sustainability in that their production cycle is slower and smaller batch sizes are  
30 produced - compared to High Street collections (e.g. H&M, Primark). In this sense, it  
31 could be argued that the overall environmental impact of luxury fashion retailers  
32 favours sustainability, yet luxury fashion products often contain *questionable* raw  
33 materials, such as fur, exotic animal leathers, or diamonds, which are both associated  
34 with negative social and environmental impacts (e.g. Carmignani & Zammori 2015;  
35 Henninger *et al.* 2016).  
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41 Authors (Joy *et al.* 2012; Janssen *et al.* 2017) highlight that aspects of sustainability  
42 and more specifically ethical issues have increased in importance and are addressed  
43 by major luxury fashion retailers. It may not be surprising that a majority of luxury  
44 brands, including, but not limited to Gucci (2016), Prada (2017), and Armani (2017)  
45 have implemented corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies and/or codes of  
46 ethical conduct. This implies that luxury fashion companies are capitalising on a  
47 'newly' emerging market opportunity by responding to growing consumer demands  
48 for transparency within the supply chain and more 'sustainable' choices (Joy *et al.*  
49 2012; Henninger *et al.* 2016). Luxury fashion retailers have adapted their strategies  
50 and seek to project a more sustainable and ethical image to their customers.  
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3 Whether or not luxury fashion is or can be truly sustainable is not the focus of this  
4 article. What is of interest to this article is consumer attitudes towards and motivation  
5 to purchasing a luxury product and/or consider sustainability when making a purchase  
6 decision. Whilst Kapferer and Michaut- Denizeau (2015) indicate that sustainability  
7 does not impact whether or not a consumer acquires a luxury good *per se*, they  
8 highlight that sustainability is a prerequisite, in that consumers have higher  
9 expectations on luxury goods and the way they are produced. Similarly, Cervellon  
10 and Shammas (2013) found that luxury fashion consumers believe that sustainability  
11 and luxury are complementary and strongly interlinked. Consumers pay a price  
12 premium for their products and not only expect higher quality, but also that that these  
13 luxury fashion houses make a contribution towards ensuring social and environmental  
14 responsibility. Consumers believe that *'doing no harm'* and *'doing good'* are  
15 prerequisites and core values of any luxury fashion brand (ibid). This implies that  
16 consumers believe that sustainability is an integral part of what luxury embodies.

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18 Contrarily, Beckham and Voyer (2014) insist that luxury consumers felt indifferent  
19 about a luxury brand's shirt that was clearly labelled to have used recycled materials.  
20 Their research indicated that whether or not luxury products are produced more  
21 sustainably has no impact on the consumers' purchasing decisions. In their study,  
22 consumers claim that they do not have enough knowledge on the meaning of  
23 sustainability and in how far any negative environmental impacts are caused by  
24 purchasing luxury fashion, yet they are open to gain more information (Hill & Lee  
25 2012). Whilst it was implicitly suggested that consumers are aware of the  
26 environmental damage inflicted by the clothing industry, the other two dimensions  
27 (economic and social) are predominantly ignored. This notion is furthered by distrust  
28 and suspicion towards advertising campaigns that have sustainability at the core of  
29 their message (Gardetti & Torres 2013). An explanation could be that consumers lack  
30 information and knowledge of what sustainability in the fashion industry entails (e.g.  
31 Henninger *et al.* 2016, 2017). With scandals of greenwashing having emerged across  
32 a variety of industries (Cervellon & Wernerfelt 2012), it may not be surprising that  
33 consumers are increasingly sceptical towards any claims made by luxury brands  
34 concerning sustainability. Greenwashing implies that a company claims to produce  
35 garments that may have environmental benefits, yet these claims are unsubstantiated  
36 and thus, may mislead the consumer (Carrigan *et al.* 2012; Kuo & Chen 2013).  
37 Janssen *et al.* (2017) further support this and insist that CSR and luxury are two  
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incompatible concepts, which may link to the fact that *questionable* raw materials are being used in the manufacturing process.

This article is exploratory and qualitative in nature and investigates to what extent consumers associate luxury fashion with sustainability, as well as the degree to which consumers of luxury fashion products are concerned about the ecological and ethical impacts of fashion; or otherwise referred to as green consumers (McDonald *et al.* 2012).

### Luxury Fashion Purchase Motivators

With twofold intentions towards sustainability in luxury fashion, it is important to explore what the underlying motivations are that influence consumer choice purchasing luxury fashion for future strategic development. Ehrnrooth and Gronroos (2013) indicate that consumption is no longer about simply fulfilling ones needs, but rather consumers increasingly create an identity and lifestyle for themselves through consuming luxury goods. A majority of people purchase luxury fashion for its symbolic meaning as an expression of their personality. Tsai (2005) concurs with Ehrnrooth and Gronroos (2013) and identifies four types of consumer intentions to purchasing luxury garments specific to Eastern cultures and luxury consumption: hedonism, self-gift giving, self-identity, and quality assurance, which further complement the seven characteristics of luxury products brought forward by De Barnier *et al.* (2012). Four underlying motivational factors can influence a consumer's decision-making process to purchasing luxury fashion (Table 1):

*Table 1:* Intentions and Motivators of luxury fashion purchase

Intentions	Meaning	Reference
<b>Hedonism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Satisfaction of needs</li> <li>• Expression of experiential consumption</li> <li>• Fostered by attitude towards brands</li> </ul>	Bardhi & Arnould 2005; Cardoso & Pinto 2010
<b>Self Gift Giving</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fulfilling owns fantasies, dreams, and aspirations</li> <li>• Either leaves negative or positive state of mind</li> </ul>	Tsai 2005
<b>Self- identity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expression of self-identity to others</li> </ul>	Kastanakis & Balabanis 2014



Motivation	Meaning	Reference
<b>Quality Assurance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Price equals quality</li> </ul>	Tsai 2005
<b>Conspicuousness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purchasing luxury goods to present and show off wealth</li> <li>• Desire to impress others</li> <li>• Projects importance to others</li> <li>• Enhances social status</li> </ul>	Wang & Griskevicius 2014
<b>Snob Effect</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for uniqueness, individuality, and exclusiveness</li> <li>• Prefer limited editions</li> </ul>	Bian & Forsythe 2012; Kastanakis & Balabanis 2014
<b>Bandwagon</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opposite to Snob Effect</li> <li>• Acquire same products as peers – sense of belonging</li> <li>• Matching social status</li> </ul>	Tsai <i>et al.</i> 2013
<b>Sociality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social factor vital within Chinese culture</li> <li>• Communicates social status</li> <li>• Sexual signal</li> </ul>	Chen & Kim 2012; Wang & Griskevicius 2014

Extant research on motivators and intentions to purchase luxury fashion provides an insight into why consumers may purchase these items. Yet, extant research omits in how far these motivators and intentions are applicable within the sustainable aspects of luxury fashion. This research addresses this gap by focusing on McDonald *et al.* (2012) green consumer typology and explores whether specific motivators and intentions can be linked to these consumer types.

#### ‘Translators, Exceptors, Selectors’

The previous sections have indicated that the luxury fashion market has seen dramatic changes in its landscape, with sustainability emerging as a trend that fashion retailers can capitalise on (Joy *et al.* 2012; Henninger *et al.* 2017). This implies that consumer behaviour and consumption patterns are changing, with growing numbers of consumers seeking more sustainable products. This highlights a key challenge for marketers in terms of identifying these consumer groups and potentially re-positioning products. McDonald *et al.* (2012) in their research identified three

consumer 'types' and their behaviours towards sustainability. Table 2 provides an overview of their developed typology.

Table 2: Identifying Translator, Exceptors, Selectors (McDonald *et al.* 2012: 457)

Aspect of Consumption	Translators	Exceptors	Selectors
Conception of sustainability	Fragmented	Holistic	Selectors may act as either Exceptors or Translators for their focus activity, but as grey consumers in all other aspects of their consumption
Orientation to information seeking	Passive	Active	
Treatment of sustainability information	Accepting and uncritical	Cynical	
Trusted information sources	Government info, product advertising, charity marketing campaigns	Specialist networks	
Information formats	Mainstream (TV, direct mail)	Online searches for CSR; specialist print media for product info	
Level of research focus	Products	Companies	
Compliance with information	High	Only if corroborated by research	
Motivation	Good citizen	Saving the planet	
Initiation of behaviour	External counsel	Internal values	

The typology indicates that there are Translators, who adapt their behaviour, if the external environment influences them and if they have received sufficient information about sustainability issues. On the other hand, Exceptors have an inner desire for a sustainable lifestyle and apply their values to all aspects of their life. Yet, Exceptors do leave some flexibility in their consumptions habits to allow for the use of so unsustainable practices, for example using a dishwasher or popcorn maker. Selectors emerge as a hybrid consumer type that can take on characteristics of both Translators and Exceptors. Within the fashion industry, sustainability has not yet matured, when compared with the food industry for example; this implying that consumers may still lack information and knowledge of what constitutes

sustainability (Hill & Lee 2012; Henninger *et al.* 2016). This research addresses this issue by investigating whether McDonald *et al.*'s (2012) typology is applicable to our specific research context and whether there are other types that can be identified.

### **Methodology**

This research is exploratory in nature as it seeks to understand Chinese consumers and their attitudes towards sustainability in the luxury fashion industry, as well as their motivational drivers to purchase (sustainable) luxury fashion. Extant research (De Banier *et al.* 2012; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau 2014, 2015) has predominantly been quantitative and with Western consumers in the Western hemisphere. Yet, research on Asian consumers in a Western market remains limited (Chen & Kim 2013; Siu *et al.* 2016), which justifies a qualitative enquiry.

Multiple research techniques were implemented to collect data, by way of ten in-depth semi-structured interviews and three focus groups with five participants each were also administered (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 2015). Participants for this research were chosen purposefully to meet the following criteria: 1) part of the Chinese middle class, those have a household earning between £8900 and £34000 per year; and 2) consumers of intermediate luxury fashion products in the UK market. As indicated in the introduction the majority of people falling within the middle class spectrum in China are under 35 (Economist 2016), which is further reflected in the age range of the participants taking part in this research.

Interviews were conducted with both male and female Chinese participants, who are regular consumers of intermediate luxury products and purchase these in the UK. Open-ended questions were posed concerning the key thematic of this paper, covering questions relating to interpretations of luxury fashion, general purchase behaviour, underlying motivations for consumption and the meaning and significance of sustainability for decision making. A natural saturation point was reached after 10 in-depth interviews. Following the first stage of this research, we recruited a total of 15 participants split across three focus groups to further explore the themes that emerged from the initial interviews and have in-depth discussions around the topic areas highlighted previously.

In accordance with Brügger and Willaims (2009) and Oates & Alevizou (2017) each focus group was conducted with five participants and one moderator. The relatively small group size allowed for non-verbal cues and reactions to be observed, and

enabled us to identify when a saturation point was reached (Oates & Alevizou 2017). The three focus groups allowed exploring the themes further, whilst confirmed the natural saturation point in information gained. Research participants were split almost evenly between female/male participants (Table 3). This research was conducted over a 6 months period, interviews and focus groups being conducted in the five largest cities in the UK. The interviews took an average of 35 minutes, whilst the focus groups lasted for an average of 60 minutes.

*Table 3:* Summary of data collection

<b>Semi-structure Interviews</b>			
Participant ID	Gender	Age	Occupation
I1	Female	28	Manager
I2	Female	25	Master student
I3	Female	24	Young professional
I4	Female	22	Master student
I5	Female	25	Young professional
I6	Male	37	Manager
I7	Male	29	Assistant manager
I8	Male	25	PhD student
I9	Male	27	Manager of chain store
I10	Male	25	International luxury goods buyer
<b>Focus Group (FG) I</b>			
F1a	Male	34	Assistant manager shoe store
F1b	Male	32	Owner of Online Clothing shop
F1c	Male	37	Manager of sports club
F1d	Female	23	Master student
F1e	Female	26	Young Professional
<b>Focus Group (FG) II</b>			
F2a	Female	25	PhD Student
F2b	Female	21	University Student
F2c	Male	23	Master Student
F2d	Male	22	University Student

F2e	Female	23	Master Student
<b>Focus Group (FG) III</b>			
F3a	Male	26	Young Professional
F3b	Male	27	Young Professional
F3c	Male	27	Young Professional
F3d	Female	23	Young Professional
F3e	Female	24	Young Professional

Data collected provided rich data sets, which followed two coding cycles. The primary coding cycle was based on a grounded approach, which allowed for patterns to emerge organically and provided us with a better understanding of the consumers' understanding of sustainability and their motivations to purchase luxury fashion (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 2015). The second coding cycle followed principles of template analysis, whereby the emerging patterns were recorded for the purpose of looking for themes that match the green consumer typology (McDonald *et al.* 2012). Data went through several coding phases, with multiple researchers looking through the data sets. Patterns were discussed and evaluated, with discrepancies recoded. The research findings were shown to participants for validating purposes.

Although the participants were Chinese, the interviews and focus groups were predominantly held in English. Where consumers were unable to express their opinion sufficiently, they voiced their comments in Mandarin Chinese, which further supports the relatively small focus group size. These passages were carefully translated by two of the authors, who are fluent in both language, from Mandarin into English and back to ensure the key meaning of the section remained.

## Findings & Discussion

### *Sustainability and Luxury Fashion*

Before providing an analysis of sustainability and luxury fashion, it is vital to understand how the participants define luxury. When asked to provide key characteristics of luxury fashion, participants indicated that "*luxury goods are those products with high prices, and they're expensive that can be distinguished from general merchandise*" (I3). At the same time "*I think luxury goods aren't necessities... but they are produced with superior craftsmanship, and are usually*

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3 *tagged with high prices*" (I1). It was further suggested that luxury products are rare in  
4 the market and are not affordable to the ordinary person, but rather only for the upper-  
5 (middle) class (I7, F1c). The statements made indicate that the participants define  
6 luxury products in accordance with De Barnier *et al.*'s (2012) seven characteristics,  
7 whilst at the same time indicate that there are different levels of luxury (Janssen *et al.*  
8 2017).

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10 Data from interviews and focus groups suggest that participants are aware of aspects  
11 of sustainability and highlighted some day to day activities that they engage with,  
12 such as recycling (paper, glass, plastic), switching off lights, and using public  
13 transport (FG I, II). *"In China, we realize that wasting is shame and saving is virtue.*  
14 *It's from our deep-rooted education and tradition. It's a way to show that we care*  
15 *about sustainable development"* (F1a). FG I participants highlight that aspects of  
16 environmental sustainability are prevalent in the food industry which has seen food  
17 safety scandals in the past, thus, they have a *"good look... I wanna be sure it's safe"*  
18 (F1d). Interestingly, although *"wasting is shame(ful)"* (F1a) it can be seen as part of a  
19 cultural norm especially in the food sector, where plates will have plenty of leftovers  
20 are finishing a meal, as it is a sign that it was plentiful and enjoyable (FG II).  
21 Although a variety of participants insist that *"I'm an environmental friendly person*  
22 *and I want to change the current awful environment. So I always care about*  
23 *sustainability"* (F3a), convenience is a key factor in determining whether actions are  
24 taken. To explain, I8 states that whilst studying in the UK they used to recycle paper  
25 and glass, as containers were provided in their housing block, yet they were not  
26 willing to go out of their way and bring their plastic waste to a designated area. He  
27 further insists that *"we don't have recycle stations, there's nothing I can do"*, which  
28 seems to provide a guilt free pass.

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30 Data suggest that consumers prioritise different product categories in terms of actively  
31 seeking for 'sustainable' solutions. Food scandals have made participants conscious to  
32 pay more attention to what they eat and drink, yet, for other product categories  
33 sustainability takes a backseat: *"if I like it, I buy it"* (F3e). Whilst a majority of  
34 participants engage with daily sustainability practices/routines, it becomes apparent  
35 that these practices need to be convenient and easy to achieve. Similar to extend  
36 research, we thus far found that consumers predominantly identify environmental  
37 aspects with sustainability in everyday activities, and neglect social and economic  
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3 issues in their understanding and definition of sustainability (e.g. Hill & Lee 2012;  
4 Gardetti & Torres 2013).

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6 Data concurred with extant literature in that the opinion of whether luxury fashion and  
7 sustainability are compatible was twofold. In Focus Group III F3c and F3d had a  
8 heated discussion with F3d indicating that sustainability and luxury fashion goes hand  
9 in hand, as luxury retailers have a sustainability section on their website and use more  
10 environmentally friendly raw materials: *“Every luxury brand needs to consider  
11 sustainability since sustainability is becoming a part of luxury itself. For those luxury  
12 brands that sustain for a very long period of time, they’ve already done sustainability  
13 to some extent”*. This indicates that F3d defines sustainability through an  
14 environmental and an economic angle, as without being able to compete and adapt to  
15 external environment companies will not survive in this competitive landscape. This  
16 concurs with I5’s opinion, who indicates that luxury fashion is made to last longer and  
17 thus, does not need to be replaced as often as other fashion items, which makes it  
18 more sustainable: *“The largest benefit luxury goods gave me is that they provided  
19 good quality and reliability which can sustain for a very long time. For example, my  
20 Rolex watch works precisely for over 20 years and didn’t have any problem yet”*.  
21 These statements indicate that they believe luxury brands have not only a duty to be  
22 more responsible, as they charge a price premium, but also that sustainability is a core  
23 attribute for these brands, which supports Kapferer and Michaut- Denizeau’s (2015)  
24 research. Yet F3c disagrees with these statements indicating that *“I cannot think of  
25 the word of sustainability and the word of luxury could be appeared in the same  
26 sentence. I mean, how can they ever be matched with each other?”*. The participant  
27 continuous his argument by highlighting that luxury is about consuming something  
28 that is not necessarily needed and whether or not raw materials are environmentally  
29 friendly has no influence on this aspect. *“I get easily attracted by limited editions and  
30 some special collections that made of leather and fur and I will totally forget to think  
31 where the leather comes from”* (F3e). Sustainability is thus not a key contributor of  
32 the decision-making process, as other characteristics such as rarity, hedonism, and  
33 uniqueness emerge more dominantly (F3c).

34  
35 Data highlight that participants, who believe that sustainability and luxury fashion can  
36 not only co-exist, but also are interwoven, clearly see pro-sustainable behaviour  
37 emerging within fashion organisations. F1e indicates that *“one of my favourite brands  
38 Stella McCartney always insists to use artificial fur and green materials in their  
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*products*". Whilst F3b points out that *"I know from Facebook that some luxury brands such as Giorgio Armani and Dolce & Gabbana are doing funding to support charities for children in Africa"*. Participants associate the use of artificial substitutes of *questionable* raw materials as well as CSR activities as key attributes of sustainable behaviour. Although participants unanimously agree that there are steps taken towards more sustainable practices, these are not applied throughout the whole of the supply chain and do not necessarily influence on whether they purchase a product. Participants indicate that poor working conditions and environmental damage through chemicals that are released into rivers are still commonplace (Carmignani & Zammori 2015; Henninger *et al.* 2016). I1 mentions that it would also be challenging to find out whether a luxury fashion retailer is sustainable as the information available is produced by the company themselves and may not be as transparent when it is posted by a third party after a big scandal. Moreover, F2c highlights that *"most of the brands still use real animals' fur and leather to make products and they encourage people to buy these products for so-called uniqueness and extreme luxury feeling"*. I4 states that she is aware that not all luxury products are sustainably made, yet *"purchasing luxury goods can heal me when I suffer unbearable pressures of life and work... Someone may choose sport as the way to release stress, while purchasing luxury goods is the best way for me"*. This is further supported by I6 highlighting that *"I feel good after (I) purchased several luxury goods... though I may not actually need them... I like the feeling when I look for different products in the shop"*. This provides an opposing reflection of the fashion industry as portrayed by F1e.

Interestingly only one participant specifically commented on the effect luxury fashion has on society: *"I know from internet that (luxury brand) has employed a 14 years old teenage girl to walk for their show. It's absolutely unethical since she was still a child yet now she needs to control her body shape and eat less"* (F2b). The participant insists that social sustainability is not only linked to aspects of the supply chain, but also how it affects younger generations and their wellbeing. This aspect has previously not been identified as part of sustainability in fashion and forms a valuable contribution to extending what sustainable fashion or in this case sustainable luxury fashion entails (Henninger *et al.* 2016). Although F2b passionately debated this issue during the FG II session, F2e believes that for her it is more important to *"own a luxury bag by (luxury brand)... especially if it's desired by but not owned by*

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3 *everyone... it's something powerful that always motivates me to purchase luxury*  
4 *goods, and I enjoy the feeling when everyone is jealous looking at my new luxury*  
5 *brand bag". Even though the accusations made by F2b are undeniable, F2e chooses*  
6 *to ignore these aspects in favour of her own benefit. .*  
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10 Although there was no consensus on whether luxury fashion and sustainability are  
11 complementary, participants agreed that it is the luxury fashion industry's  
12 responsibility to make changes happen and actively encourage sustainability  
13 (Kapferer & Michaut- Denizeau 2015). I3 insists "*yes, they definitely do. Because*  
14 *they've to give good examples to other industries since they charge consumers more*  
15 *money and they should do better". This finding may be rather contradictory, seeing as*  
16 *half of the participants believe that luxury fashion and sustainability are disconnected.*  
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18 Whilst data indicate that the participants disagreed with exploitation of the work force,  
19 child labour, and other social and environmental issues, these are consciously  
20 overlooked if consumers believe the newly acquired product provides a *feel good*  
21 *factor* that outweighs any 'guilt' they may feel of knowing that luxury brands may not  
22 act in a perfectly ethical/sustainable manner.  
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### 30 31 *Consumer types - luxury fashion*

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33 F3a states that looking after the environment and being more respectful is something  
34 that he has been brought up with. Whilst he enjoys purchasing luxury items he insists  
35 "*I'll not buy unsustainable luxury clothing because I don't want to get blame from my*  
36 *family after I spend so much money on it". This links again to the aspect of saving*  
37 *face and wanting to be seen has having virtue. F3a implicitly highlights that being*  
38 *sustainable is a lifestyle choice that he seeks to reflect in all his actions, which links to*  
39 *the Exceptor type (McDonald et al. 2012). F3b is more explicit in their lifestyle*  
40 *choice insisting "I'm trying to be as sustainable as possible, I care! No matter if it's*  
41 *food, clothing or other stuff, I search to find the best option". Participants in this*  
42 *category further highlight that they research companies prior to making any purchases*  
43 *and are very active on social media, which provides them with real time information*  
44 *on any issues in the industry. "When I hear media coverage about luxury industry*  
45 *hiring child labour or making employees work overtime without money, I feel really*  
46 *angry and I support the exposure of these ugly events to make people realize luxury*  
47 *doesn't mean good all the time... you have to pick and choose the right retailers"*  
48 *(F1e).*  
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3 Participants in FG II indicate that whilst they think being sustainable may be  
4 beneficial *“I’m a person to follow the trend and fashion. If other people around me*  
5 *are doing sustainability, I will too”*. Similarly I5 mentions that she receives all her  
6 knowledge about brands from her friends: *“they also like to buy luxury clothes so*  
7 *sometimes they will tell me which brand is doing good and which brand has two*  
8 *faces”*. Rather than actively looking for information herself, the participant relies on  
9 her immediate friendship group to provide her with information. Thus, some of the  
10 participants in this research are Translators, who can be persuaded to change their  
11 behaviour if their external environment provides them with the necessary information  
12 (McDonald *et al.* 2012).  
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20 I2 states that when she is shopping for food, she will always go for organic  
21 products, as these are better for her health. She mentions that when she looks at  
22 luxury fashion *“I get easily attracted by limited editions and some special collections*  
23 *that made of leather and fur and I will totally forget to think where the leather comes*  
24 *from”*. This further supports the Selector typology in that consumers seek sustainable  
25 options in certain product categories, whilst in others, being up-to-date and trendy is  
26 more important. Participant I9 is sceptical of any sustainability activities advertised  
27 by retailers in general. *“I don’t trust them. My belief is that if you’re doing something*  
28 *good to society and environment, you’ll just do it. You don’t need to show and repeat*  
29 *loudly about how you’re doing good things to the society. It makes me feel*  
30 *hypocritical”*. From the discussion it becomes apparent that I9 believes companies  
31 that need to shout about sustainability and consumers that highlight how sustainable  
32 they are simply trying to overcompensate for their ‘negative’ actions. This links to the  
33 notion of greenwashing (Carrigan *et al.* 2012; Kuo & Chen 2013).  
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43 A fourth consumer type strongly emerged from our data, defined here as ‘indulgers’.  
44 Indulgers are consumers that are aware of sustainable practices (e.g. recycling,  
45 composting) and incorporate these in their daily routines. Moreover, they are aware of  
46 what is going on in the industry and aware of any unsustainable allegation towards  
47 luxury brands. Yet, when it comes to acquiring luxury products their ‘moral compass’  
48 that points towards sustainable behaviour in a majority of their practices, is ignored.  
49 These consumers choose to *indulge* in luxury consumption and thus ignore whether  
50 products are made from questionable materials (e.g. fur, leather) or if brands have  
51 been in the news for unethical behaviour. The indulgence in these luxury products is  
52 more than simply an exception based on product criteria and/or practicalities (e.g.  
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3 using a dishwasher), it is more than a simple selection process, rather luxury goods  
4 are “*expression of my personality and quality, and I would purchase luxury goods*  
5 *that can show off my characteristics*” (I4). Luxury goods are linked to social status  
6 and personal identity – “*because this brand or design fits me very well*” (I6), which is  
7 given a top priority by Indulgers. This implies that Indulgers are only interested in  
8 fulfilling personal needs and desires regardless of whether this can have an  
9 environmental impact or not. This further supports authors (Boulstridge & Carrigan  
10 2000; Carrigan & Attalla 2001) who state that consumers do not consider a  
11 company’s ethical performance or commitment to sustainability when making a  
12 purchase decision, yet, reflecting a favourable image and developing CSR strategies  
13 remains important.  
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### 23 *Intentions and motivations for purchasing*

24 Participants indicate that one of the reasons they purchase luxury items is to fulfil one  
25 of their own needs and experience luxury consumption, which links to hedonism  
26 (Cardoso & Pinto 2010; De Barnier *et al.* 2012). I7 states “*sometimes I purchase*  
27 *luxury goods just for having a good mood, as I enjoy the shopping experience from*  
28 *luxury brand store, and the services they offered are considerate and superior... for*  
29 *example the Patek Philippe store offers fruit and drinks to customers*”. Similarly, I5  
30 mentions that she simply enjoys the process: “*I feel good after purchased several*  
31 *luxury goods though I may not actually need them, and I like the feeling when I look*  
32 *for different products in the shop*”. However, enjoyment and experience are not the  
33 only influencing factors, quality of the products purchased play a key role.  
34 Participants indicate that normally they see what their friends are buying and go to the  
35 same stores. This has various implications, on the one hand these participants want to  
36 be accepted in their social reference group, thus purchasing similar items makes this  
37 more acceptable and on the other hand, if their friend tell them about aspect of  
38 sustainability, they can ensure to follow these recommendations if they choose to.  
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50 Various participants indicate that for them it is vital to show their believes to others.  
51 F1a insists that when he purchases luxury items, they all reflect sustainability  
52 attributes, which is something he prides himself on. Similarly, I10 states that sourcing  
53 and consuming luxury goods shows “*a certain status... I want people to see that I’m*  
54 *different, I care and I believe that things should be looked at with sustainability in*  
55 *mind*”. It can be said that Exceptors do not simply purchase luxury goods as a way to  
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express their inner feelings and believes, but also to demonstrate to others that being sustainable is an option that should be considered in all aspects of their everyday life – with luxury consumption being no exception.

“People face different pressures from live and work.... for me luxury purchase gives me a good mood and it’s a good way to release pressure” (I4). I6 and F3e further state that their ‘Self-gifts’ should also be unique and different. “For me luxury goods are like a symbol of my status and family wealth, I would like to own these goods and services so as to be different from others”(I6). Indulgiers want to clearly distinguish themselves from their peers and own goods/services that are unaffordable or unknown to others (e.g. Kastanakis & Balabanis 2014).

In summary, the motivations and intentions to purchasing luxury goods can be clearly linked to one another and mapped onto the individual consumer types (Table 4).

*Table 4:* Translators, Exceptors, Selectors, Indulgiers (adapted from McDonald *et al.* 2012)

Aspect of Consumption	Translators	Exceptors	Selectors	Indulgiers
Conception of sustainability	Fragmented	Holistic	Selectors may act as either Exceptors or Translators for their focus activity, but as grey consumers in all other aspects of their consumption	Fragmented
Orientation to information seeking	Passive	Active		Not at all
Treatment of sustainability information	Accepting and uncritical	Cynical		Neglecting
Trusted information sources	Government info, product advertising, charity marketing campaigns	Specialist networks		None
Information formats	Mainstream (TV, direct mail)	Online searches for CSR; specialist print media for product info		Through a variety of channels, yet the information received is not of interest
Level of research focus	Products	Companies		None
Compliance	High	Only if		None existent

<b>with information</b>		corroborated by research		
<b>Motivation</b>	Good citizen	Saving the planet		
<b>Initiation of behaviour</b>	External counsel	Internal values		Internal values
<b>Motivational Factors</b>	Bandwagon	Sociality		Snob Effect, Conspicuousness
<b>Intention</b>	Quality Assurance, Hedonism	Self Identity	Quality Assurance, Hedonism	Self-gift giving

### Conclusion

Our study indicates that Chinese consumers maintain high levels of sustainability awareness. Interestingly consumers did not only highlight environmental and social aspects of sustainability, as referred to in the literature (Henninger *et al.* 2016), but also suggested that sustainability incorporates wellbeing. This aspect is novel, in that it does not form part of social aspects of sustainability. It could further be added as an eighth characteristic of what luxury is (De Barnier *et al.* 2012), as it links to the *self-concept* and further portrays an emotional response to luxury fashion.

Our findings suggest four consumer types within the context of luxury fashion and sustainability. Motivational factors and intentions can be clearly mapped onto the individual types (Table 4). This has various managerial implications: understanding what types of consumers are shopping for luxury fashion and knowing what forms intention creates a source of competitive advantage is vital for survival in the industry. Incorporating wellbeing as an integral part of luxury could further enhance the customer experience, and potentially increase sales, whilst at the same time reflect aspects of sustainability: wearing toxin free clothing is better for the skin and ones health. As more pressure builds from the public, businesses will be forced to combine ecological and ethical issues with good business practice. By investing further into sustainable practices, an understanding of customer typologies provides management with key messages, which can be used as a strategic weapon to win over favourable brand perceptions.

Although the sample size of this study could be seen as a limitation as it focused on Chinese middle class consumers purchasing intermediate luxury products in the UK, it provides an insight into a target group that has and will have a large impact on the



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3 economic contribution of the industry (Economist 2016; Hancock 2017). This  
4 research did not seek to generalise its findings, but rather to provide an insight into a  
5 growing target audience, thereby highlighting what motivates consumers to purchase  
6 luxury products and whether sustainability is a key contributor. The results indicate  
7 that whilst sustainability is not a vital factor that influences consumers, especially the  
8 Indulgents, it is essential for organisations to clearly associated themselves with CSR  
9 practices and codes of ethical conduct, as these are minimum requirements that are  
10 expected by their consumers. Yet, luxury brands should not broadcast this  
11 commonplace across their communication channels, as this may lead to consumer  
12 scepticism. In order to further validate this research's findings it is suggested to  
13 conduct a survey and create a cluster analysis, which would then allow generalising  
14 these findings.  
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