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A Cross-Country Analysis of Gen Z Consumers’
Perceptions towards Sustainable Luxury
in Italy and Finland

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ABSTRACT

The worldwide luxury fashion sector is facing a fundamental change in its way of thinking largely due to increased pressures to find a balance between traditional values of exclusivity and craftsmanship and the new demands of environmental and social responsibilities. Although the tension between luxury and sustainability has been the focus of numerous studies, major gaps still exist in the understanding of how national context influences Generation Z's perception of different Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) narratives. Most current research consists of single-country studies and treat sustainability as one concept, missing out on how structural differences between societies could affect people's understanding and judgement of sustainability.

The present study seeks to fill the gap by using a quantitative cross-national comparative approach to explore the differences in the perceptions of sustainable luxury between Gen Z consumers in Italy and Finland. Also, the study aims to find out to what extent Humanistic versus Environmental CSR models are prioritised by these young consumers. Italy and Finland are used as examples of structurally different national contexts: Italy is marked as a country where the institutional environment is mainly driven by heritage, craftsmanship, and social embedding. In contrast, Finland is portrayed as a country where the institutional environment is chiefly innovation-driven, environmentally oriented, and system-based. These two styles are then further described through measurable country-level indicators.

Primary data was gathered through an online survey based on different scenarios and included 106 Generation Z participants (64 Italians and 42 Finnish). All respondents were presented with two CSR brand scenarios.

Non-parametric statistical tests were used for analysing the data, including the Mann-Whitney test for between-group comparisons and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test for within group comparisons, supported by a chi-square test of independence.

The findings strongly support both hypotheses. While Gen Z consumers in Italy perceived the Humanistic CSR scenario as much more authentic than their Finnish counterparts, Finnish consumers showed a very strong and large-effect preference for the Environmental CSR narrative in all constructs, including purchase intention. A chi-square

test showed that there is a very significant difference between the two countries in overall narratives' preference.

Crucially, the Italian sample showed an intra-group attitude-behaviour gap: although they saw Humanistic CSR as slightly more authentic, Italian respondents did not really alter their purchase intention based on this evaluative preference

These results building on the sustainable luxury idea by revealing that the paradox is resolved in culturally distinct ways: by the human-centred heritage values in Italy and by the circular environmental innovation in Finland.

The research questions the idea of one single homogeneous European Generation Z consumer segment and provides luxury brand managers with practical knowledge for context-sensitive “glocal” CSR communication strategies.

ABSTRACT

Il settore globale della moda di lusso sta attraversando una trasformazione profonda nel modo di concepire il business, principalmente a causa delle crescenti pressioni finalizzate a trovare un equilibrio tra i tradizionali valori di esclusività e artigianalità e le nuove esigenze legate alle responsabilità ambientali e sociali. Sebbene la tensione tra lusso e sostenibilità sia stata oggetto di numerosi studi, persistono significative lacune nella comprensione di come il contesto nazionale influenzi la percezione delle diverse narrazioni di Responsabilità Sociale d'Impresa, con particolare riferimento alla Generazione Z. La maggior parte delle ricerche esistenti si basa infatti su studi condotti in un singolo Paese e tende a considerare la sostenibilità come un concetto unitario, trascurando il modo in cui le differenze strutturali tra le società possano incidere sulla comprensione e sulla valutazione della sostenibilità.

Il presente studio si propone di colmare tale lacuna adottando un approccio quantitativo comparativo transnazionale, volto ad analizzare le differenze nella percezione del lusso sostenibile tra i consumatori della Generazione Z in Italia e in Finlandia. Inoltre, la ricerca mira a determinare in quale misura i giovani consumatori attribuiscono priorità a modelli di CSR di tipo umanistico rispetto a quelli di carattere ambientale.

L'Italia e la Finlandia sono state scelte come esempi di contesti strutturalmente differenti. L'Italia è caratterizzata da un ambiente istituzionale fortemente influenzato dalla tradizione, dall'artigianalità e dal radicamento sociale. La Finlandia, al contrario, viene descritta come un Paese il cui contesto istituzionale è prevalentemente orientato all'innovazione, alla sostenibilità ambientale e a una logica sistemica. Tali differenze sono state ulteriormente rappresentate attraverso indicatori misurabili a livello nazionale.

I dati primari sono stati raccolti tramite un sondaggio online che ha coinvolto 106 partecipanti appartenenti alla Generazione Z (64 Italiani e 42 finlandesi). A tutti i partecipanti sono stati presentati due scenari rappresentativi delle due tipologie di CSR, al fine di analizzarne le preferenze. Per l'analisi dei dati sono stati utilizzati test statistici non parametrici, tra cui il test di Mann-Whitney per i confronti tra i gruppi e il test dei ranghi con segno di Wilcoxon per i confronti all'interno dei gruppi, supportati da un test di indipendenza chi-quadro.

I risultati forniscono un forte supporto a entrambe le ipotesi formulate. Mentre i consumatori della Generazione Z in Italia hanno percepito lo scenario di CSR umanistica come significativamente più autentico rispetto ai loro omologhi finlandesi, i consumatori finlandesi hanno mostrato una preferenza molto marcata e di ampia entità per la narrazione di CSR ambientale in tutti i costrutti analizzati, inclusa l'intenzione di acquisto. Il test chi-quadro ha inoltre evidenziato una differenza altamente significativa tra i due Paesi nella preferenza complessiva per le diverse narrazioni di CSR.

Questi risultati contribuiscono ad ampliare la letteratura sul lusso sostenibile, mostrando come il paradosso tra lusso e sostenibilità venga risolto in modi culturalmente diversi: attraverso valori umanistici e legati al patrimonio culturale nel contesto italiano, e attraverso l'innovazione ambientale e i principi dell'economia circolare nel contesto finlandese.

La ricerca mette quindi in discussione l'idea di un unico e omogeneo segmento europeo di consumatori appartenenti alla Generazione Z e fornisce ai manager dei brand di lusso indicazioni pratiche per sviluppare strategie di comunicazione CSR “glocali”, sensibili alle specificità del contesto locale.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Context and importance

The global luxury fashion industry is undergoing a significant transformation, driven by the need to reconcile traditional luxury, such as exclusivity and artisanal excellence, with growing demands for environmental and social responsibility (Zhao et al., 2023, p. 1). This shift has led to the development of the concept “sustainable luxury”, defined by many scholars as a condition characterised by internal tensions and contradictions (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015, p. 1). Numerous studies highlight that, while consumers demand more ethical corporate behaviour, they continue to attach great importance to the aesthetics, status, and symbolic quality typical of luxury goods (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013). This dynamic appears particularly relevant for Generation Z, generally defined as the demographic cohort born between the late 1990s and early 2000s, considered the key strategic segment for the future of the luxury sector (Dabija et al., 2019, p. 1). This generation is often described as more sensitive to environmental and social issues than previous generations (Kelleci, 2022, p. 1). However, more recent literature highlights the existence of an “attitude-behaviour gap”, a discrepancy between declared values and actual purchasing behaviour (Grazzini et al., 2021). Understanding how Gen Z consumers interpret the concept of sustainable luxury and which dimensions of sustainability they consider most important is therefore a fundamental element for the future strategies of international fashion companies.

1.2 Research gap

Despite growing academic interest in sustainable luxury, significant gaps remain in our understanding of the role that national context plays in consumer perceptions and

preference for different CSR models. While Niinimäki (2015) has extensively theorised the ethical foundations of the Nordic fashion model, a direct empirical comparison between this “circular” approach and the Italian “humanistic” approach remains absent. Most existing studies tend to consider sustainability as a unitary concept, focusing primarily on the ecological dimension and neglecting aspects related to the social and humanistic dimensions (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015, p. 5). Furthermore, many studies rely on single-country samples, limiting the possibility of generalising the findings. For instance, Grazzini et al. (2021, p. 24) emphasised the need to expand comparative studies across different cultural and national contexts, highlighting how perceptions of luxury and sustainability can vary significantly based on the institutional, cultural, and production characteristics of individual countries. Additionally, Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau (2015, p. 13) affirm that: “luxury is global and luxury research will less and less rely on the opinion of a single nationality”. Hence, this study answers the direct call of Grazzini et al. (2021) and Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau (2015) by extending the analysis to a comparative study of national contexts between Italy and Finland. This study is deliberately bounded to the luxury fashion segment, excluding other luxury categories (automobiles, jewellery, hospitality). The operational definition of Generation Z follows the 1995-2010 birth cohort (Dabija et al., 2019), and the study measures consumer perceptions rather than actual purchase behaviour.

1.3 Purpose and methodology

The purpose of this thesis is to tap into this research opportunity by answering the following research question:

“How do Gen Z consumers in Italy and Finland differ in their perceptions of sustainable luxury, and to what extent do they prioritise Humanistic versus Environmental CSR models?”

To answer this question, the thesis employs a quantitative comparative research design. Primary data were collected through an online scenario-based survey distributed to Generation Z in Italy and Finland. Moreover, in this study, Italy and Finland are treated as proxies for distinct national contexts rather than as measures of individual psychological values. The aim is not to assess the cultural orientation of respondents at the individual level, but to analyse how belonging to a specific national context, characterised by different institutions, production traditions and media narratives, influences Gen Z's perceptions of sustainable luxury. This study conceptualises the country as a macro-environmental variable defined by specific institutional and cultural dimensions. This is reflected in measurable national-level characteristics, such as the strong emphasis on environmental policies and circular economy in Nordic countries, and the long-standing tradition of craftsmanship, family-owned businesses, and the heritage-based production system in Italy, which shape distinct consumer expectations and evaluative criteria towards sustainability in luxury consumption.

1.4 Intended contribution

This study aims to make three main contributions to the existing literature. First, it contributes to the international business literature by providing an empirical cross-national portrait of how Generation Z consumers diverge in their sustainability preferences when evaluating luxury brands in two structurally distinct European contexts, Italy and Finland.

Second, the research offers useful managerial implications for luxury brands. The findings suggest that a glocal sustainability strategy must nevertheless be adapted to local cultural values. In Mediterranean markets, for example, emphasising craftsmanship, heritage, and human values may be more effective, while in Nordic countries, environmental innovation, transparency, and the circular economy may be more relevant.

Finally, from a methodological perspective, the study proposes an approach that combines cultural frameworks and measurable institutional indicators to represent the national context in a more concrete and comparable way.

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows: chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature on luxury, sustainability, CSR models and cross-cultural management; chapter 3 details the methodology and data collection; chapter 4 presents the analysis of the survey results; chapter 5 discusses the implications; and finally, chapter 6 the conclusions.

2. Literature review

This chapter provides a critical overview of the key literature relevant to the study. To systematically organise the current body of knowledge, the “funnel approach” (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 81) is adopted. The review begins with a broader exploration of the traditional concepts of luxury and the evolution of sustainability. It then narrows its focus to identify the theoretical collision between these two concepts, the sustainability-luxury paradox and explore how different CSR models attempt to resolve it. The chapter then proceeds further to examine the psychological role of perceived authenticity as a defence against greenwashing. It concludes with an analysis of Gen Z consumers and the role of national contexts. This progressive narrowing precisely defines the theoretical basis for the research hypothesis presented at the end of the chapter.

2.1 Understanding luxury: definitions and key characteristics

One of the most significant segments of the global fashion industry is the luxury fashion sector. It is notable for its products that hold very high symbolic values, are of superior quality, and have a very strong aesthetic element (Cabigiosu, 2020). In fact, its value and ability to generate brand equity are defined by a mix of functional and experiential features. Classic luxury literature states that luxury cannot simply be equated with price. It is defined by a combination of several factors including heritage, craftsmanship, rarity, quality of materials, and the ability to confer status and desirability (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015). These factors convey a message to the consumers through a set of associations and transforms the product not only into a social symbol but also into a symbolic experience (Keller, 2013; Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012). Luxury goods, based on Dubois et al. (2001), can be further detailed to a set of six characteristics that help identify a luxury product. These include among others: superior quality that is derived from exclusive materials and fine craftsmanship,

strong aesthetic and experiential value than turn the act of consumption into a sensory experience; very high price, which is justified by the product's durability and perceived excellence. Rarity that makes desirability be reinforced through the restricted accessibility of luxury goods. Furthermore, luxury goods are often characterised as non-essential items, that have a very strong link to tradition as heritage and continuity over time really play a major part in determining their perceived value (Dubois et al., 2001).

On fashion luxury, the conflict between the artistic and manufacturing aspects remains a highlight: perception of quality and craftsmanship excellence are the main tools for explaining price increases and maintaining consumer trust (Zeithaml, 1988; Aaker, 1991). At the same time, the sector remains influenced by market and cultural dynamics requiring adaptation: international growth, new generations of consumers, and growing public attention to sustainability. These elements are redefining the strategic priorities of luxury brands (Dabija et al., 2019). A few recent studies mention two main aspects that help to grasp modern luxury. First, luxury is a complex concept which cannot be defined without a set of measures capturing functional (quality, materials), symbolic (heritage, exclusivity) and experiential (service, storytelling) aspects (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015; Keller, 2013). Second, sustainability nowadays signifies both a challenge and an opportunity: integrating responsible practices without compromising the aura of exclusivity has become a strategic imperative for many brands (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015; Athwal et al., 2019). The growing awareness of fashion's environmental and social impacts has led both academia and the luxury industry to explore how sustainability can be integrated into an industry that has so far been mainly characterised by symbolic consumption and exclusivity.

Luxury may be treated as a hierarchical construct consisting of various categories ranging from the most exclusive to the least exclusive one. According to Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau (2015), these levels differ on the degree of exclusivity, price, and symbolic value. Brands such as Brunello Cucinelli are, from this point of view, closer to the top end and the less accessible segment of the luxury market. But Marimekko interprets luxury in a much more accessible way focusing on design, functionality, and sustainability. This difference is significant when talking about this thesis.

These standard categorisations impose serious constraints on the present investigation. They were mainly designed in the eras when there was no internet or online communication, topics such as sustainability, rarity, and exclusivity were just considered the core elements of the brands, whereas today the democratisation and ethical aspects of sustainability are becoming more important. Most particularly, none of these models take into consideration different countries follow different institutional setup and because of this construct luxury contextually in different ways, which is the research gap that this thesis intends to fill empirically.

Traditional scholars like Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau (2015) and Dubois et al. (2001), kept on highlighting exclusivity, rarity, and high price as unchangeable pillars of luxury. More recent authors, however, argue that instead of strict sets of rules, luxury should be seen a living continuum, where brands are constantly weaving the old tradition with the new values of the society (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015; Athwal et al., 2019).

2.2 Sustainability in fashion industry: concepts and challenges

Sustainability is a complex and multidimensional concept that, similarly to luxury, lacks a universally agreed definition. Nevertheless, several authors have attempted to define it, as will be discussed in this section.

According to the definition established by the Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), sustainable development can be defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. In 2015, the United Nations established the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a global framework designed to promote economic, social, and environmental development (United Nations, n.d.). The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are recognised as an advancement; for companies in particular the SDGs provide a valuable framework for setting priorities and ensuring they meet the expectations of consumers and stakeholders (United Nations, n.d.). This

concept has given rise to numerous definitions in literature. One important area of application is the corporate sector, where the term “corporate sustainability” is used.

Corporate sustainability is commonly framed through the Triple Bottom Line paradigm (Jeurissen & Elkington, 2000), planet, people, and profit stacked together. It is not just about nature, it insists on fairness and lasting business sense too (Alhaddi, 2015). The fashion industry faces significant challenges in this regard: water consumption and pollution coexist with labour rights violations across geographically dispersed supply chains. Due to the environmental factors (e.g. water consumption emissions waste) and the social factors (e.g. labour conditions in outsourcing countries) that characterise the fashion industry, sustainability is a major and multifaced concern (McKinsey, 2020; Niinimäki, 2015). To address the issue, corporate sustainability in global fashion supply chain is usually supported by governance and monitoring instruments as well as transparency tools. It is the checks, labels and disclosure that companies use to obtain and show their responsible behaviour which have been the main tools for sustainability assessment and communication for some time now (Coyne, 2006; Boiral et al., 2019). Critical literature has pointed out certain deficits of the current instruments: besides the great length of the value chains, the absence of uniformity and audits and the potential greenwashing practices are the causes of decreased credibility of sustainability claims (LeBaron et al., 2017; Boiral et al., 2019). These mechanisms of governance (like audits, certifications, reporting standards), which were mostly created in mass market and industries, are situations where sustainability is mainly manifested as compliance with regulations and efficiency in operations. So, directly applying these mechanisms to the luxury market is not that simple. In luxury, the meanings and stories that sustainability convey may be as significant or even more important than the actual sustainability figures. In fact, being a luxury brand holding many certificates could still fail to make the brand trustworthy in the eyes of consumers if its sustainability narrative does not connect well with its identity from the heritage perspective. Conversely, a brand with fewer formal documents but with a consistent and closely linked to sustainability global story may gain more consumer confidence. The gap between the operational sustainability and narrative sustainability represents a central issue explored in this research. So, transparency data quality and stakeholder involvement are considered as critical pillars to reinforce trust and effectiveness of sustainability programs (Seow et

al., 2006). About operational aspects, sustainable supply chain management needs an integrated approach including control of supplier base, collaboration of buyer-supplier, investments on traceability and product innovations (Seuring & Muller, 2008; Li, Y. et al., 2014). Transitioning to a low-impact circular economy requires both technological and cultural adaptations within firms and regulatory frameworks (McKinsey, 2020; Niinimäki, 2018).

Overall, the academic literature converges on a view of sustainability in fashion as a complex systemic and multidimensional problem, an issue is even more insidious in the space of luxury, as explored in the following sections. Yet critically, the literature examined within this section consider sustainability first and foremost as a global concept, a set of practices and disclosures which in theory should be equally meaningful across contexts. But this presumption becomes increasingly problematic. If consumers' perceptions of sustainability differ by national context, cohort and product category, then whether any sustainability practice is effective depends on where this study fills a gap: rather than evaluating luxury brand sustainability, it evaluates sustainability within two different national contexts.

2.3 Sustainable luxury and the luxury-sustainability paradox

2.3.1 Definitions and operational dimensions

The idea of combining sustainable aspects with the luxury sector was first launched as an effort to bring together the value systems of the traditional luxury with the one of environmental and social responsibility. In fact, nowadays sustainability is becoming the most discussed topic in the fashion field. This is because of the very large environmental footprint of textile production and the role of consumer awareness in the negative impact of working conditions in supply chains worldwide (Vassalo et al., 2024). This industry is identified as the second-largest polluter of the environment after the oil industry (Niinimäki, 2015; Vassalo et al., 2024). It is a fact that consumers'

demand for transparency, ethical production and environmental supervision has caused the fashion industry to go through a major turning point (Zeynep, 2017). Because of this, many fashion companies have begun to create strategies oriented towards sustainability, for example, using materials that are good for the environment, adopting circular economy models and improving the conditions of the workers throughout the whole chain of production.

Jean-Noël Kapferer and Delphine Michaut-Denizeau (2015) depict the two concepts of luxury and sustainability as two sides of the same coin. They state that luxury, continues to be based on certain core attributes, like exclusivity, rarity and aesthetic excellence, which quite naturally complement sustainability principles revolving around protection and long-lasting value. From that perspective, authentic luxury should provide personal satisfaction but also benefit society and the environment. The reason is ethics and aesthetics when brought together, lead to sustainable luxury (Scaturro, 2009; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015). Obviously, disagreeing with the mistake of seeing sustainability as a prohibition of luxury features, the authors note that it is in fact a luxury attribute reformulation: quality durability and craftsmanship will be reinterpreted as sustainable ones. Niinimäki (2018) comes up with the notion of circular aesthetics, which merges design, functionality, and circularity as elements of aesthetics and value. Still, the combination of these two value systems or cultures is not something that happens automatically or it is true everywhere. The question of whether sustainability will result in the enhancement or the damage of the luxury brand perception depends very much on the framing, the communication, and the consumer perception of it, a dilemma that the research community acknowledges as the luxury-sustainability paradox.

2.3.2 Paradox and implications

The global fashion industry has been part of the global debate over sustainability for years, focusing mainly on luxury fashion. Integrating sustainability into luxury presents

a significant theoretical tension, often referred to in literature as the “luxury-sustainability paradox”. Traditionally, luxury is linked to exclusivity, limited editions, and symbolic consumption. While sustainable is about environment and collective responsibility (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015; Achabou & Dekhili, 2013). This is reflected in both what is valued and what is communicated: customers could see a sustainable brand as a brand with a great value or as brand whose luxury aura through sustainability is somehow reduced. Several scholars have noticed that these two value systems will look quite opposite. Achabou and Dekhili (2013) emphasise how customers associate sustainable products with a lower level of luxury due to sustainability sometimes being related to simplicity, functionality, or aesthetic austerity. In fact, luxury mainly stresses symbolic value and social status, whereas sustainability has a stronger appeal to the collective and altruistic values (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015). The paradox of Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau’s (2015) is still widely adopted, but some newer studies (Zhao et al., 2023; Kunz et al., 2020) confirm its continued relevance but also reveal the behavioural pattern changes caused by digital communication and Gen Z values. The luxury sector is heavily supplemented by customers, the media, and institutions in the form of the requirement for luxury to contribute to the transition to responsible production. This change is only one of the factors that led luxury brands to integrate social and environmental responsibility into their business model strategies (Zhao et al., 2023). On the other hand, authors reveal that the very interpretation of sustainability within the domain of luxury by consumers can differ not only among consumers but also among geographical and age groups (Grazzini et al., 2021). Empirical research of consumer segmentation also supports this diversity: Chang et al. (2022) identify different consumer groups, which have a large variance of preferences on sustainable luxury, they even emphasise that a single sustainability message is not suitable for all segments.

There have been two approaches suggested in the literature to resolve this paradox. The first one is structural integration: to bring it in materials production, durability, in such a way that it will become a natural feature of the luxury product. The second one is consistent storytelling: pairing sustainability with heritage, craftsmanship, and responsible innovation (Kapferer, 2015; Athwal et al., 2019).

Immediately, when critically discussing the “luxury-sustainability paradox”, we should also consider whether such a tension results from the industry’s intrinsic incompatibility or is just a cognitive bias that we inherited from usual consumption patterns. Achabou and Dekhili (2013) point out a contradiction that is going to be perceived by the consumer, but mostly their results represent the viewpoint of the classic consumers. Still, for Generation Z, this paradox may not represent an irreconcilable contradiction, but rather a challenge for brands to communicate sustainability credibly. The real problem is not the possibility of the co-existence of luxury and sustainability, but the most effective way of the story so that the sustainability does not lower the brand’s symbolic level.

2.4 CSR in luxury

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has recently attracted the attention of researchers, policymakers and corporations (Kraus et al., 2020). CSR reflects a firm’s discretionary actions towards social and environmental interests (Song et al., 2019). Companies are responsible for the social and environmental dimensions of their operations (Van Marrewijk, 2003) and of managing the interests of employees and shareholders. The concept of CSR can be perceived as an effective, incorporated business model that meets the demands of stakeholders while addressing social needs and environmental production to generate economic benefits (Sanchez-Infante Hernandez et al., 2019).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), within the luxury fashion industry, focuses on several key areas. Nowadays, there is an increasing attention being devoted to employee working conditions, with companies trying to ensure fair treatment, respect for workers’ rights and safe labour environments (Bhattacharya et al., 2007; McKinsey, 2020). In addition, sustainable practices and the recycling of organic materials are essential to reduce the environmental impact of production (Niinimäki, 2018; Vassalo et al., 2024). Finally, firms seek to enhance traceability and promote ethical and responsible practices

at every stage of production, for this reason transparency within the supply chain has become a central concern (Boiral et al., 2019; Seow et al., 2006).

Now more than ever, companies in the fashion sector are recognizing the need and the importance of integrating corporate social responsibility into their business strategies (Zhao et al., 2023; Athwal et al., 2019). This direction generates positive impacts on society, on environment and meets growing consumer expectations (Van Marrewijk, 2003; Carroll, 1991).

One way to look at corporate social responsibility in luxury is through its varied forms and how they are framed. While some firms treat CSR as daily actions, like fair labour, cleaner production, or better sourcing, others shape it into a brand story highlighting tradition, craftsmanship or environmental innovation. Two narratives emerge particularly frequently in the literature on luxury, as explained in the next sections. These narratives are not necessarily mutually exclusive; in fact, many brands combine elements of both, but the choice of the focus of the communication influences the perception of authenticity and consumer response. Consistency between claims and concrete practices is the determining factor for the success of CSR as a positioning lever (Kong et al., 2021; Athwal et al., 2019).

2.4.1 Traditional CSR Frameworks

Fundamental CSR frameworks provide an important theoretical basis for comprehending the corporate social responsibilities. Carroll's (1991) pyramid model, which is shown in Figure 1, classifies corporate duties into four levels, starting with economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic, where economic responsibilities are at the bottom of the pyramid.

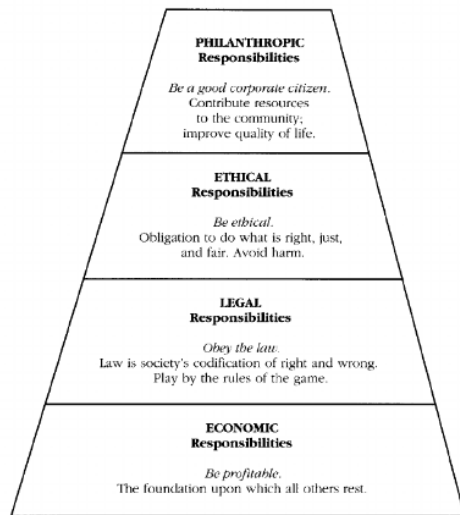


Figure 1. CSR Pyramid (Carroll, 1991)

In addition, Freeman's (2001) stakeholder theory expands the notion of corporate responsibility beyond shareholders to all individuals who are impacted by the company, like employees, local communities, and the environment.

On one side, if we want to use these models for the luxury industry, geographically speaking, we cannot ignore the fact that these two models have major drawbacks that the thesis has to deal with. Carroll's pyramidal model implies that ethics and philanthropy are mere options, and even the lowest of priority ones, which companies can only try if they have already made enough economic profit Garriga and Melé (2004), through work of CSR theories, showed ways in which only instrumental and integrative models are too limited to account for the identity-based and relational aspects of corporate responsibility. This remark goes even further in the luxury sector: for brands like Brunello Cucinelli or Marimekko, being ethical and having an aesthetic identity are not just luxury for added value at the tip of the economic pyramid; they are a large part of brand value and authenticity as perceived by consumers from the bottom up. Sipilä et al. (2020) also

suggest that luxury companies' CSR activities are most successful when customers feel that they are a natural part of the brand's legacy and not just a mere product of management decisions for compliance. In addition, there is not even one out of Carroll's pyramid and Freeman's stakeholder model that include how luxury brands achieve their legitimacy through their symbolic and narrative means of communications. In the luxury sector, meaning is mainly derived from storytelling, heritage, and emotional connection what is completely missing in systems based on institutional compliance and rational stakeholder management. While Carroll's philanthropic tier considers ethics, human dignity, and craftsmanship as discretionary elements, the Humanistic setup treats them as central, seeing them as intrinsic values. This approach corresponds very well to the character of heritage luxury brands such as Brunello Cucinelli, who's deeply running identity is humanistic. The thesis breaks free from these conventional typologies and makes a differentiation of the two CSR directions which are the closest to the storytelling of luxury brands: Humanistic CSR and Environmental CSR.

2.4.2 CSR Communication

The way companies communicate sustainability to consumers represents a central aspect in the literature. Sustainability communication has become a key component of marketing strategies, especially in sectors with high public visibility such as fashion (Karaosman et al., 2015). Sustainability communication presents some specific challenges in the luxury context. Because, on the one hand, brands must demonstrate their commitment to responsible practices; on the other hand, they must avoid compromising the symbolic associations traditionally linked to luxury (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015). Athwal et al. (2019) point out that sustainability narratives can significantly influence consumer perception, help to strengthen brand reputation and improve purchase intention. In the luxury sector communication is an indispensable element for the effectiveness of CSR initiatives and for the degree of perceived value, which depends mostly on symbolic and narrative dimensions (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015; Keller, 2013). CSR risks remaining invisible to consumers if is not communicated, or if it is communicated in a fragmented way, this could limit its ability

to influence attitudes and purchasing behaviour (Kong et al., 2021; Athwal et al., 2019). A lack of transparency fuels scepticism and reduces brand credibility, in fact the literature emphasises that communication must be clear, consistent, and supported by concrete evidence (Kong et al., 2021). The choice of the narrative must be aligned with the brand's positioning and the cultural expectations of the target market (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015; Karaosman et al., 2015). Because effective communication reinforces the perception of authenticity and contributes to bridging the gap between stated values and actual purchasing behaviour, particularly among younger consumers (Grazzini et al., 2021).

For instance, some brands in the field of sustainable fashion may highlight the social aspects of sustainability, with a focus on craftsmanship, tradition, and respect for human labour. Bhattacharya et al. (2007), define the social construct as a way in which employee satisfaction can be explained about the creation of value through collaborative approaches and sustainable practices. In fact, a company should establish a working environment where employees are given both responsibility and decision rights, so that they could find motivation in their work; for this reason, providing decent working conditions, ensuring employees' security and gender equity are some of the best practices in the camp of luxury firms. One example of this social responsibility ethic is LVMH group, which in 2013 published its "EllesVMH" initiative to encourage women's empowerment throughout the group. After adopting the principles of the UN WEPs (Women Empowerment Principle), the company launched new gender policies and most importantly increased the share of women in high management positions from 23% in 2007 to 42% in 2020, achieving an excellent gender equality index of 91.3/100 (LVMH, 2020).

Similarly, other brands focus on a communication strategy which is based on environmental innovation, using renewable energies and low-impact productions. For operational sustainability, Gucci offers a strong example. By transitioning away from fossil fuels, Gucci claimed that sustainability levels were at 93% green and renewable energies used in all its store offices and manufacturing sites by 2020. This results in a decrease of costs in energy procurement, demonstrating the economic viability of environmental CSR initiatives (Gucci Equilibrium impact report, 2022).

The way consumers interpret the concept of sustainable luxury and evaluate brand authenticity could be influenced by these different communication strategies.

This study distinguishes between two main CSR orientations that emerge prominently in luxury literature. The first is **Humanistic CSR** orientation, which emphasises social values of craftsmanship, employee well-being, community involvement, and ethical responsibility, drawn from heritage and long-term relational values. The second is **Environmental CSR**, which actively encourages ecological sustainability, the circular economy, material innovation, and lowering environmental impact, perhaps associated with functionality, transparency, and future-oriented innovation.

Within luxury, Humanistic and Environmental approaches to CSR set the boundaries of how a specific brand shapes its inherent meaning, how that meaning is perceived as authentic, and how it offers a compelling story of worldliness to justify its exclusivity. The relevant analytical question shifts from asking how a luxury firm operationalises responsible practices to investigating how craftsmanship, human dignity, and ecological innovation redefine the nature of luxury value.

These two orientations are explored in the following sections.

2.4.3 Humanistic CSR

Studies of corporate social responsibility have long acknowledged that practices of social responsibility stem from the personality, history, and moral convictions of corporate actors. These are translated into practices and are institutionalized by the organisation. Thus, there is growing interest in the study of “Humanism” and how human nature explains the choice, the institutionalisation and the sustainability of CSR activities (Katamba et al., 2024, p. 22). From this perspective, the individuals behind the organisation are the true drivers of social action, whilst the company serves as its operational vehicle (Katamba et al., 2024; Abbas, 2025). This perspective has recently been conceptualised by Koon and Fujimoto (2024) as Corporate Humanistic

Responsibility (CHR) that goes beyond the conventional aspects of CSR and focuses on three core dimensions of Humanistic Capital that constitute the core of the corporation and its practices: human dignity, employee well-being, and relational value as constitutive dimensions of corporate identity rather than supplementary commitments. In the luxury context, social responsibility is mainly rooted in the social dimension of value creation by protecting the human dignity of workers, celebrating their skills and involvement in the production process, and fostering relationships with local stakeholders to generate value from the local territory. Luxury companies are also characterised by a long-term vision based on slow growth, care for all the stakeholders involved in the production and distribution process, and a strong narrative that connects the past with the future (Napolitano & Fusco, 2019; Sipilä et al., 2020). These elements create several psychological and communicative mechanisms that enhance the perception of authenticity of the actions of the corporation by strengthening the belief that these actions are driven by the human nature and are consistent with the narrative that the corporation communicates to its stakeholders. Social initiatives that are perceived as rooted in personal values and coherent narratives (Katamba et al., 2024; Athwal et al., 2019) appear less instrumental and more credible (Morhart et al., 2014; Kong et al., 2021). From a practical viewpoint, the main challenge for managers consists in ensuring that the humanistic intent is not lost in the process of institutionalisation by creating appropriate governance structure, by setting up foundations and by establishing mechanisms of accountability that make the corporation's communication consistent with its actions (Katamba et al., 2024; Sipilä et al., 2020; Kong et al., 2021).

One of the most outstanding examples of "Humanistic Capitalism" in luxury is Brunello Cucinelli. The brand, started in 1978 in Solomeo Umbria, is a shining example of Italian heritage luxury, mastering artisanal excellence and, at the same time, embracing a humanistic corporate philosophy (Napolitano & Fusco, 2019; Brunello Cucinelli, 2023). Human rights are considered as the main element of value generating, supporting better pay, moral running of the company, and well-being of the staff (Napolitano & Fusco, 2019). One of the features that hardly go unnoticed is the great involvement with the local Solomeo that has been revived and beautified through corporate investment (Napolitano & Fusco, 2019; Brunello Cucinelli, 2023). This approach reflects a long-term vision based on "slow growth", cultural preservation and a balance between profit

and social harmony. This alignment of values and practices enhances the brand's authenticity in the eyes of consumers, strengthening brand equity and willingness to pay (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015; Sipilä et al., 2020). In this sense, craftsmanship serves as a strategic experiential asset. It reinforces the perceived legitimacy of Humanistic claims and strengthens consumers' engagement with brand narrative (Tarquini et al., 2022).

2.4.4 Environmental CSR

Material innovation, design for durability, circular economy, and reduction of environmental impact characterise this second narrative. Brands that focus on transparency, technological innovation, and traceability practices are often associated with this dimension (Niinimäki, 2018). Environmental CSR strategies and ecologically friendly processes can directly influence corporate performance and image (Fosu et al., 2024). Environmental CSR creates new business models and advanced processes, saving costs and adding value to services and products (Reverte et al., 2015; Fosu et al., 2024). Environmental CSR and green innovation affect all dimensions of CSR, improving a company's ratings, helping with stock performance, credit advantage, and potential risk control (Bannier et al., 2022; Fosu et al., 2024). Promoting green environmental practices benefits organisations, the government, and society (Bannier et al., 2022; Kraus et al., 2020). For example, organisations improve their legitimacy and image in society, while the government spends less on cleaning up pollution of natural resources such as water and air. Society benefits from a healthy environment and green products as well.

Marimekko is an example of Environmental CSR, it was established in Helsinki in 1951, and it represents a Nordic approach to sustainability, strongly rooted in environmental responsibility, durability, and functional design (Niinimäki, 2018). Marimekko has integrated sustainable design practices and circular economy, focusing on material innovation and supply chain transparency (Aav, 2003). The brand closely adheres to the idea of timeless beauty, aiming to create long-lasting products that reduce overconsumption. The printed design is intended to withstand trends and seasons,

reflecting a philosophy of durability over disposability (Marimekko, 2023; Niinimäki, 2018). The company's management has been designed to set for itself targets for minimising the environmental effects of printing on fabrics, cutting water usage, and reducing carbon emissions from transport. These points, from design to logistics, aim to reduce pollution, waste, and reuse. Materials are selected for their durability, the unsold clothes can be bought on the Vestis website, and the energy used by company comes from biogas and renewable sources (Marimekko, 2023). Its communication and design philosophy reflects transparency and simplicity, which are part of the Nordic institutional culture (Niinimäki, 2015; Hall, 1976). This positioning aligns sustainability with functionality and durability, reinforcing the brand's credibility in the Environmental CSR domain and its perceived authenticity among consumers with high environmental literacy (Li et al., 2024; Sipilä et al., 2020).

This distinction between Humanistic and Environmental CSR might be relevant for luxury. In this market, brand identity appears to be linked with symbolic meaning and storytelling (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015; Keller, 2013). Luxury brands differ from the mainstream luxury, because they use storytelling as a significant tool to be or remain exclusive, worthy of their high prices (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015, Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012). Because of this, the different positions towards Humanistic or Environmental CSR could cause a difference in consumers' perception of brand authenticity, which might affect the reaction to it (Morhart et al., 2014; Kong et al., 2021). Despite being for a global market, brand's message is mostly evaluated through the lens of the home country culture. The effectiveness of these CSR narratives cannot be assumed to be universal because national context plays a crucial role in shaping how consumers interpret and evaluate sustainability messages (Karaosman et al., 2015; Grazzini et al., 2021). Since it is expected for heritage-oriented countries like Italy, that the consumers appreciate Humanistic CSR to be more authentic (Napolitano & Fusco, 2019; Sipilä et al., 2020), while for innovation-oriented countries, like Finland, Environmental CSR appeals stronger for its focus on technology, efficiency and awareness for the environment (Niinimäki, 2015; Niinimäki, 2018).

Considering CSR as a multi-narrative, this research brings a structure which would allow a more accurate theorisation of the effect of narratives on perceived authenticity

and purchase intention across different country contexts. Also, the presentation of business cases illustrates how narrative is translated into practices and frames of perception. Business cases demonstrate how different forms of managing sustainability can be implemented without decreasing the luxury image, if the strategy is coherent and based on transparent implementation (Athwal et al., 2019; Kong et al., 2021). Besides, they make research more effective by providing methodological guidance: comparing narrative scenario and measuring perceived authenticity are two practical and efficient ways to evaluate the effectiveness of CSR initiatives in the luxury brand environment (Morhart et al., 2014; Forehand & Grier, 2003).

2.5 Perceived authenticity and consumer responses in sustainable luxury

One of the recurring findings in empirical research is the importance of perceived authenticity. Perceived brand authenticity essentially determines the effect of sustainable practices on brand equity and purchase intention (Morhart et al., 2014; Sipilä et al., 2020). If sustainability efforts are seen as real, genuine, supported by evidence (audits, certifications, transparency), and coming from the brand's identity, history, and values, they will promote the building of trust, purchase propensity, and higher perception of luxury (Morhart et al., 2014; Grazzini et al., 2021). Otherwise, sustainable communication can be counterproductive and generate negative reactions (Grazzini et al., 2021), when it appears opportunistic and in the absence of credibility (Szabo & Webster, 2021; Boiral et al., 2019). In fact, the risk that communicating sustainability in a mere instrumental or non-verifiable way leads to scepticism, distrust of consumers is also mentioned in the literature (Szabo & Webster, 2021; Kong et al., 2021). Perceived authenticity does not only contribute to the enhancement of brand equity from a critical perspective; it is a protection shield against "greenwashing". In an era characterised by information abundance, Generation Z is very sceptical about corporate claims (Grazzini et al., 2021; Kong et al., 2021). Szabo and Webster (2021) reveal that perception of greenwashing can result in a very serious lowering of the environmental and product

evaluations. Consequently, this study critically posits that authenticity may well be considered a “must have” in CSR rather than an “extra” benefit: the sustainability claim will probably provoke purchase intention only if there is a perception of authenticity; otherwise, it can mean identity threat and cognitive dissonance (Szabo & Webster, 2021; Grazzini et al., 2021).

The literature shows that brand trust and brand authenticity are the main factors that link sustainable practices and brand value. Brand authenticity is a sense that a brand is real, believable and that it sticks to the values it declares (Morhart et al., 2014). Beverland (2005) believes that authenticity in luxury brands is a result of several elements, like a dedication to quality, time-wise consistency, and the capacity to keep a strong connection with their origins and traditions of manufacture. The luxury segment, where value creation and customer relations heavily depend on these narratives related to tradition, craftsmanship, and the history of the company (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015; Beverland, 2005), really embodies this notion. In recent years, sustainability has become an increasingly important dimension in building brand authenticity.

It is essential to acknowledge that literature operationalises brand authenticity in several competing ways. For example, Beverland (2005) uses a historical approach and focuses on storytelling and historical links, whereas Morhart et al. (2014) offer a dimensional concept: continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism. Considering the scenario-based quantitative approach of this study, which needs to measure consumer perception of different brand narratives, this thesis follows Morhart et al.’s (2014) dimensional conceptualization. This method is the best as it offers a standardised way of assessing the impact of different CSR scenarios on the perception of authenticity.

Perceived quality, brand trust, and consumer loyalty are the primary sources of brand equity in luxury goods (Aaker, 1991; Zeithaml, 1988). Zeithaml (1988) defines perceived quality as the consumer’s overall rating of a product’s excellence, based on intrinsic (materials and performance) and extrinsic (price, trademark, promotion) attributes. Perceived quality makes a difference in luxury goods as it helps in price justification and brand equity maintenance (Aaker, 1991).

Introducing sustainability prompts a change on how perceived quality is assessed: sustainable materials, high-quality, and ethical production processed can be regarded as indicators of superior quality and enhance perceived value if properly communicated and confirmed in a credible way (Athwal et al., 2019; Morhart et al., 2014). However, the relationship is not guaranteed: in fact, the attributes of a luxury brand should be seen as compatible with sustainability, otherwise the exclusivity and status aspects will suffer, and the consumer perception will change negatively (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015; Achabou & Dekhili, 2013). In this context, some authors mention that the perception of brand authenticity may work as a psychological tool or channel through which sustainability programs can bring consumers' reactions, so influencing brand trust and ultimately purchase intention (Morhart et al., 2014; Grazzini et al., 2021; Sipilä et al., 2020).

2.6 National context and consumer perceptions of sustainable luxury

International business research widely acknowledges that consumer perceptions and preferences are shaped by the cultural and institutional environments in which individuals are embedded (Hofstede, 2001; Karaosman et al., 2015). Literature suggests that the meanings attributed to luxury consumption are socially constructed and depend on the cultural and institutional systems in which consumers are embedded (Hofstede, 2001; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015). Luxury, in fact, represents a social and symbolic phenomenon that reflects the specific values, norms, and traditions of different societies (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015).

Although both Finland and Italy are EU members, they have significant cultural, economic, and national value system differences. These differences may depend on institutional and cultural characteristics, such as the role of tradition in production systems, the level of environmental awareness, and the diffusion of sustainability-oriented policies.

The study uses Hofstede's (2001) dimensions of national culture to describe the differences between these two cultures. These differences are not interpreted as direct determinants of individual behaviour, but rather as indicative of broader societal tendencies that may shape how sustainability and luxury are perceived in different countries. Therefore, while this study does not apply these dimensions at an individual level, they provide a theoretical framework for understanding how cultural environments shape consumer expectations and interpretations, offering a useful descriptive framework for comparing national contexts (Hofstede, 2001; Taras et al., 2010). Hofstede's dimensions have been a major point of reference across different management areas due to their ability to establish a common basis for comparing cultural differences. Based on Hofstede (2001), national cultures can be characterised by six main cultural dimensions: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence.

As it is illustrated in Figure 2 "Hofstede's 6D framework", Finland (33) and Italy (50) are both countries with relatively low power distance levels, which means that in general, they prefer less hierarchical social settings (Hofstede, 2001).

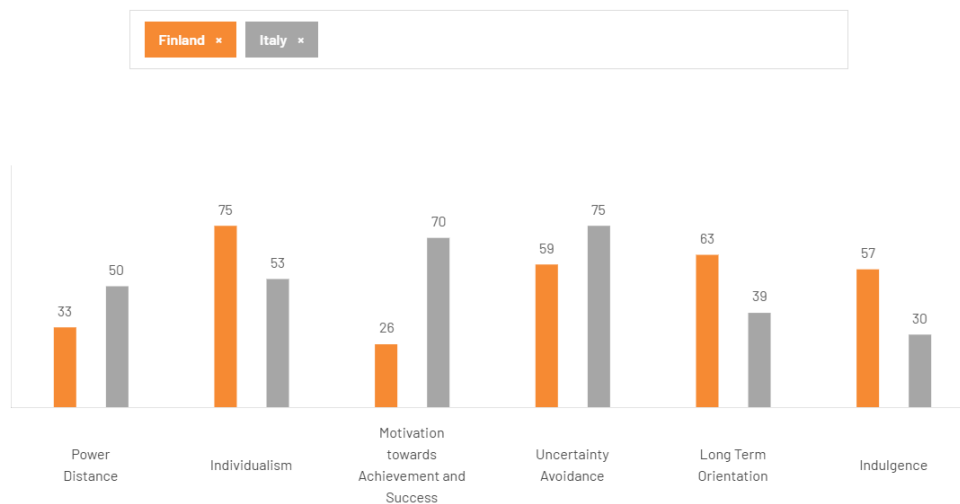


Figure 2. Hofstede's 6D framework (Hofstede, 2001)

Even so, Finland's score is even lower which means that the Finnish put more emphasis on equality and having less hierarchical relationships than the Italians. Major cultural differences exist in areas like masculinity and long-term orientation. Italy ranks very

high in masculinity (70), which is represented in Hofstede's 6D framework as "motivation towards achievement and success", and represents a strong orientation to achievement, competition, and prestige. Finland's much lower score (28) signals an orientation that is quite different, aimed at attaining a good life and social welfare (Hofstede, 2001).

In societies such as Italy, where there is a greater tendency to avoid uncertainty (75), it is very likely that consumers will look for authenticity and get their assurance from the well-established, founder-led traditions as these represent history, stability and cohesive social factors (Hofstede, 2001; McSweeney, 2002). In contrast, in cultures like Finland, the degree of uncertainty (59) is counteracted by the trust in the system involving reliance on scientific data and logical arguments. Even though Hofstede's approach is still the most frequently used instrument for cross-cultural comparison, the present study will at least mention the main restriction of it. Firstly, the data on which this theory is based were originally collected from the late 1960s to early 1970s (McSweeney, 2002). Culture of a nation is not only a fixed heritage: a few decades of globalisation, immigration, and digital media have greatly changed the value systems, mostly those of Generation Z, who have been exposed to a global media environment that may attenuate within-country cultural distinctiveness (Taras et al., 2010). Second, Hofstede's scores are basically national averages and don't reflect the diversity within countries: not all Italian consumers are strongly averse to uncertainty avoidance, nor do all Finnish consumers have a low masculinity score. Third, using national-level scores to predict individual behaviour is dangerous since it often means the so-called ecological fallacy (Robinson, 1950). Because of this, this research does not consider Hofstede's cultural dimensions as direct predictors of individuals' behaviour. Instead, they act as a major reference point for each national setting and give a general idea of the prevailing cultural patterns without being taken as definitive consumer preference explanations.

Hall's (1976) concept of high-context and low-context cultures also deepens our understanding of cultural differences. As shown in Figure 3, Italy is described as a relatively high-context culture, where a lot of communication is understood through tradition, symbolism, and social contacts (Hall, 1976; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015). By contrast, Finland is considered a relatively low-context culture, where people

communicate their thoughts explicitly, are open, and rely on logic (Hall, 1976). Due to these variations, consumers from these two countries may respond differently to sustainability narratives, with Italians being most interested in the themes of storytelling and heritage and Finns in clearness, usefulness, and environmental impact (Karaosman et al., 2015). It should also be kept in mind that Hall's (1976) model was originally focused mostly on communication between people and communication in organisations and was not mostly aimed at consumer behaviour. Given these premises, the relationship between high/low-context cultures and the preferences for specific CSR narratives is not presented here as an established empirical fact, but rather as a theoretical proposition: consumers in high-context cultures (Italy) are theoretically expected to resonate more with humanistic narratives, while those in low-context cultures (Finland) are expected to favour transparent and environmental narratives.



Figure 3. High/Low-context cultures (Hall, 1976)

To provide a more rigorous operationalisation of national context, this study incorporates measurable and verifiable country-level indicators reflecting structural differences between Italy and Finland.

First, according to Table 1, environmental orientation and innovation capacity are captured through these indicators:

- The Environmental Performance Index (EPI) is a biennial report by Yale and Columbia universities which ranks 180 countries based on their performance in

terms of sustainability, environmental health, and ecosystem vitality. It assesses the strengths and effectiveness of environmental policies using 58 indicators and serves as a scorecard for tracking policy targets. The 2024 report ranks Estonia, Luxembourg, Germany, Finland, and the UK as top performers (Environmental performance index site, 2024).

- **SDG achievement:** according to the Sustainable Development Report 2023, Finland ranks very high in the SDG's indicators (Sachs et al., 2023). In July 2022, Finland adopted the Climate Act aiming for considerable reductions in emission by 2030 and 2050. According to the new Act, Finland must become carbon neutral by 2035 (Finnish Ministry of the environment, n.d.)
- **Global innovation index** is the world's leading benchmarking tool for measuring and analysing the innovation performance of different countries. Published annually by the WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organisation), the report aims to provide a holistic, flexible, and comprehensive measurement of innovation at a global level (WIPO, Global Innovation Index 2024).
- **R&D Expenditure (% of GDP):** in the EU the level of R&D expenditure, i.e. the share of expenditure relative to GDP, remained stable at 2.2%. Only six countries have met the 3% target set by the EU: Sweden, Belgium, Austria, Finland, Germany, and Denmark. According to the latest data, in 2023 Italy invested €29.4 billion in R&D, with an intensity of 1.37% of GDP, one of the lowest in the European Union. Overall, the EU is strengthening its research capacity, whilst for Italy there is a clear need for more substantial investment to bridge the technological gap and support future competitiveness (World Bank, 2023).

Table 1. Environmental Indicators

Indicator	Finland	Italy
Environmental Performance Index (EPI 2024)	73.8 (2024)	60.3 (2024)
SDG achievement (2023)	87.02 (1° place)	80.26 (22° place)

Global Innovation Index (2024)	Score 57.7 (7° place)	Score 44.9 (28° place)
R&D Expenditure (% of GDP)	3,09 (2023)	1,38 (2023)

Finland consistently ranks among the top-performing countries, reflecting strong environmental policies and high ecosystem vitality. Together, these indicators support the characterisation of Finland as an innovation-driven and environmentally oriented context.

Second, humanistic and heritage orientation are captured through quantitative and qualitative data.

- Number of UNESCO world heritage sites globally: Italy is the world's leader, holding 61 UNESCO sites and representing deep-rooted cultural and historical legacy. Finland counts 7 sites (Statista, 2025).
- Family-owned businesses, which account for a significant proportion of firms, particularly in manufacturing sectors. This structure fosters long-term orientation, strong ties to local communities, and the preservation of craftsmanship traditions. Italy counts for 15800 family enterprises, forming the backbone of the Italian economy (Aidaf, n.d.).
- Furthermore, the Italian economy is characterised by the widespread presence of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating within “industrial districts”. As conceptualised by Becattini (1989), an industrial district is a socio-territorial entity characterised by the active coexistence of a community of people and a population of industrial firms within a defined geographical area. This unique organisational model fosters profound territorial embeddedness and strong interdependence between businesses and their local communities. Production in these districts is driven by culture and tradition, alongside a deep-seated pride in craftsmanship and a “sense of work” (Bramanti & Brugnoli, 2019).

These structural differences provide empirical grounding for the theoretical distinction proposed in this study.

The three analytical layers mobilised in this section, Hofstede's cultural value dimensions (Hofstede, 2001), Hall's communication style framework (Hall, 1976), and the country-level indicators, operate at fundamentally different analytical levels and must therefore be understood as complementary and not equivalent sources of evidence. Hofstede (2001) describes broad value orientations historically embedded in national societies; Hall (1976) describes communication preferences that shape how individuals interpret meaning; and the institutional indicators (EPI scores, SDG achievement, R&D expenditure, UNESCO heritage sites, family enterprises density) reflect the structural and policy environment in which consumers are socialised. Instead of treating these as three independent pillars each sufficient on their own, this study uses them as convergent, multi-level indicators that together construct a coherent national context profile. The proposed logical chain is based on this rationale: different national institutional environments, Finland's powerful policy setup for the environment and its innovation ecosystem, Italy's production system based on historical and artisanal heritage, these are the factors that determine the main evaluative narratives shared by each population. Changes at the structural level of society then affect the common interpretative frames through which consumers determine authenticity, responsibility and trustworthiness in a brand. Generation Z consumer is shaped by the institutional and cultural environments. So, it is to be expected that Italian and Finnish Gen Z consumers as a group would show the evaluative tendencies dominant in their respective national contexts. This does not mean that institutional indicators straightforwardly determine individual preferences, the point is that prolonged exposure to certain cultural and policy environments probably results in patterns of collective judgement which are predictable (Hofstede, 2001; Taras et al., 2010). This group-level logic is the foundation of the comparison setup in Section 2.8, and it is also the rationale for the statistical method used in Chapter 3.

It follows then, that people from different cultural origins may interpret and understand the sustainable luxury concept in different ways (Karaosman et al., 2015; Grazzini et al., 2021) and may be inclined to give more weight either to the social or environmental aspects of sustainability. First, Italian consumers in cultural contexts where the heritage theme is predominant may for instance, see the handcraft element, the traditional aspect and the human side as being the most important components of the "story" (Napolitano & Fusco, 2019; Sipilä et al., 2020). However, Finnish consumers in a context oriented

towards innovation may be more interested in environmental credentials, openness and sustainability through technology (Niinimäki, 2015; Niinimäki, 2018). So, it is theoretically assumed that consumers from a country with very visible environmental policy (Finland) would use environmental criteria for brand authenticity evaluation, while those from a country with a strong tradition of artisanal production (Italy) would use human-centred criteria. Importantly these differences are not described as cultural universals, but rather as theoretically derived hypotheses that need to be verified through research.

2.7 Generation Z: attitudes, gaps and implications for sustainable luxury

A significant driver of the sustainable luxury movement is the changing preferences of younger generations (Dabija et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2023). A key driver of this shift is the emergence of a new consumer cohort that prioritises environmental awareness alongside the traditional values associated with luxury consumption (Athwal et al., 2019; Kunz et al., 2020). To millions of them, fashion is a way of reflecting their identity, an indicator of belonging, an age, gender, socio-economic status signifier and a way of finding fulfilment (Escourido-Calvo et al., 2025; Dabija et al., 2019). To the luxury brands, Gen Z is a high potential but odd segment: demand high levels of authenticity, transparency and consistency and are attached to the old-fashioned allure of product quality, aesthetic flourish and social cachet (Escourido-Calvo et al., 2025; Dabija et al., 2019). Generation Z has also been identified as an eco-conscious cohort more aware of social and ecological issues than their antecedents (Dabija et al., 2019; Kelleci, 2022). In fact, Gen Z and Millennials (a generation born between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s), who now account for at least 30% of luxury market (Dabija et al., 2019; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015), tend to embrace brands that take a clear stance on social equity and ecological protection. Empirical evidence, such as research conducted by Nielsen (2015), underscores this transition toward conscious consumption, revealing that 73% of consumers are willing to pay a premium price for products associated with

sustainability or socially responsible practices. In this context, transparency has emerged as a critical cornerstone of brand equity (Kong et al., 2021; Grazzini et al., 2021). Modern luxury consumers no longer accept exclusivity at the expense of ethics; instead, they demand detailed information on all the managerial areas (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015; Athwal et al., 2019):

- Provenance and origins: seeking a deep connection to the territory and the history of the product (Athwal et al., 2019).
- Material innovation: prioritising eco-friendly or circular materials that align with their personal values (Niinimäki, 2018; Grazzini et al., 2021).
- Production processes: assessing the ethical integrity of the supply chain to balance social harmony and preserve craftsmanship (Boiral et al., 2019; McKinsey, 2020).

This shift indicates that for younger generations, the value proposition of a luxury brand is increasingly tied to its ability to synchronise traditional excellence with modern accountability (Athwal et al., 2019; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015).

For these consumers, luxury is a powerful means to build identity and to show off social position (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015; Keller, 2013). Still, their greater sensitivity to ethical issues can clash with this quest for status, which generates an attitude-behaviour gap (Escourido-Calvo et al., 2025; Dabija et al., 2019). In fact, the literature emphasises a persistent gap between attitudes and behaviour: consumers hold positive attitudes, but these do not always translate into purchases, mostly about purchase factors like price, design or status (Grazzini et al., 2021; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014). Qualitative and quantitative studies suggest that sustainability may turn into a decisive purchase factor for Gen Z when there is no compromise with quality or symbolic value (Grazzini et al., 2021; Chang et al., 2022). Besides, trust in sustainability claims is key to turn attitudes into purchases (Grazzini et al., 2021). Understanding how Generation Z views sustainability in luxury is therefore an essential concern for determining the future strategies of companies working in the sector (Dabija et al., 2019; Escourido-Calvo et al., 2025). Consumer behaviour is now more than ever impacted by economic, structural, and cultural factors (Grazzini et al., 2021; Yadav, 2025). There are several contrasting theoretical arguments about the reasons why pro-sustainability attitudes do not lead to actual purchases. In other words, psychological mechanisms, for instance

cognitive dissonance, lead consumers to justify their making of unsustainable choices through convenience, habit or the belief that their individual impact is very limited (Grazzini et al., 2021; Yadav, 2025). Also, decision-making biases, like the preference for known products (status quo bias) and the tendency to use only the information that is readily available or immediately apparent (availability heuristic), discourage consumers even further from choosing the more sustainable options (Yadav, 2025). Social influence is a very important factor as well: people tend to do what others are doing consumption-wise, even if it is going against their own values (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). An absence of economical and infrastructural arrangements, like higher prices of environmentally friendly products (“the green premium”), low supply and lack of adequate structures (Grazzini et al., 2021; Escourido-Calvo et al., 2025), such as recycling systems and the availability of sustainable alternatives, add to the problem. Factors related to culture and trust issues, like distrust of sustainability claims and worries about greenwashing, undermine the consumers’ intention to act in line with their pro-environmental attitudes (Szabo & Webster, 2021; Kong et al., 2021). Aggravated by the factors mentioned above, this situation creates a very complicated gap between intention and behaviour, proving that, even though positive attitudes toward sustainable consumption are important, they are not enough by themselves to motivate such behaviour (Grazzini et al., 2021; Yadav, 2025). Despite this, the attitude-behaviour gap is an occurrence that is constantly recorded in Gen Z consumer groups worldwide (Grazzini et al., 2021; Yadav, 2025), the current body of literature leaves open an important theoretical question: is this gap equally intense across all national environments, or does its magnitude vary depending on the degree to which sustainability is institutionally embedded in a given context? Theoretical discussions point to the latter. First, sustainability as a behaviour may be less of a behavioural norm and because of this, there is a shorter cognitive distance between one’s stated preferences and actual purchase decisions in such countries as Finland where environmental responsibility is part of the national culture, public policy, and educational discourse (Thøgersen, 2005). Second, in country where it is difficult to change people’s deep rooted purchase behaviour and at the same time the purchase culture allows things such as status signalling, the possibility that a person’s pro-sustainability attitudes will be so much influenced by other evaluative systems at the moment of purchase, that the intention-behaviour gap, will be further widened seems very likely (Kapferer & Michaut-

Denizeau, 2015; Escourido-Calvo et al., 2025). Third, different countries will be affected differently by structural barriers to sustainable consumption, like price sensitivity and scepticism toward corporate claims, depending mainly on the degree of development of the sustainable consumer market (Grazzini et al., 2021). Looking at everything, these points imply that although the attitude-behaviour gap may be a universal trait of Gen Z consumer psychology, its strength is expected to change across different countries as a matter of theory. This study does not formally hypothesize this asymmetry, which would require a pre-registered prediction, but treats it as a theoretically plausible pattern worth exploring empirically.

In conclusion, closing the gap between attitudes and behaviours in relation to sustainability requires a mixed approach involving economic incentives, structural investments, cultural engagement, effective communication, and supportive policies (Grazzini et al., 2021; Thøgersen, 2005). Incorporating these elements can promote a more sustainable consumer culture and bridge the gap between positive attitudes and actual behaviours (Yadav, 2025; Escourido-Calvo et al., 2025).

2.8 Theoretical framework

Drawing on the existing body of literature featured in the sections above; this study proposes a conceptual model of how the two types of corporate social responsibility narratives are differently perceived in two structurally different national environments. As study shows (Morhart et al., 2014), authenticity is a defining cognitive factor playing into customer evaluation about brand actions and the assessment of their sincerity. When perceived authentic, sustainability efforts facilitate consumer trust and positive attitudes for purchase intention (Grazzini et al., 2021; Sipilä et al., 2020). Using a cross-national research design, the proposed research considers nation as the operationalised variable in the model, which distinguish consumer environment (Italy vs Finland). The core proposition is that the effectiveness of each CSR narrative is not universal but contextually contingent: the same sustainability message will be evaluated differently

depending on the institutional and cultural environment in which it is received (Karaosman et al., 2015; Hofstede, 2001). This comparative framing is directly aligned with the statistical approach employed: Mann-Whitney U between-group comparisons and Wilcoxon signed-rank within-group comparisons are designed to detect whether the two national groups differ systematically in their construct scores.

A further clarification is warranted regarding the level of analysis. This study uses country-level institutional indicators, including the Environmental Performance Index, SDG achievement scores, R&D expenditure, and the prevalence of family-owned enterprises and UNESCO heritage sites, to characterise Italy and Finland as structurally distinct macro-level contexts. It is important to acknowledge, however, that what holds at the aggregate institutional levels does not necessarily apply uniformly to individual consumers within that country, a risk known in the methodological literature as the ecological fallacy (Robinson, 1950). Accordingly, this study does not assume that each Italian or Finnish Gen Z individual personally internalizes the values embedded in their national institutional context. Rather, the hypotheses are explicitly framed as group-level comparative propositions: the study tests whether Gen Z consumers sampled from Italy, as a group, systematically assign higher perceived authenticity to Humanistic CSR narratives than their Finnish counterparts do, and vice versa. National context thus functions as a structural proxy for the dominant evaluative frameworks expected to be prevalent within each population, rather than a direct determinant of individual-level values. As illustrated in Figure 4, two cross-national comparative propositions are advanced: Italian Gen Z consumers, as a group, are expected to assign higher perceived authenticity and purchase intention to the Humanistic CSR narrative than their Finnish counterparts (H1); and Finnish Gen Z consumers, as a group, are expected to assign higher perceived authenticity and purchase intention to the Environmental CSR narrative than their Italian counterparts (H2).

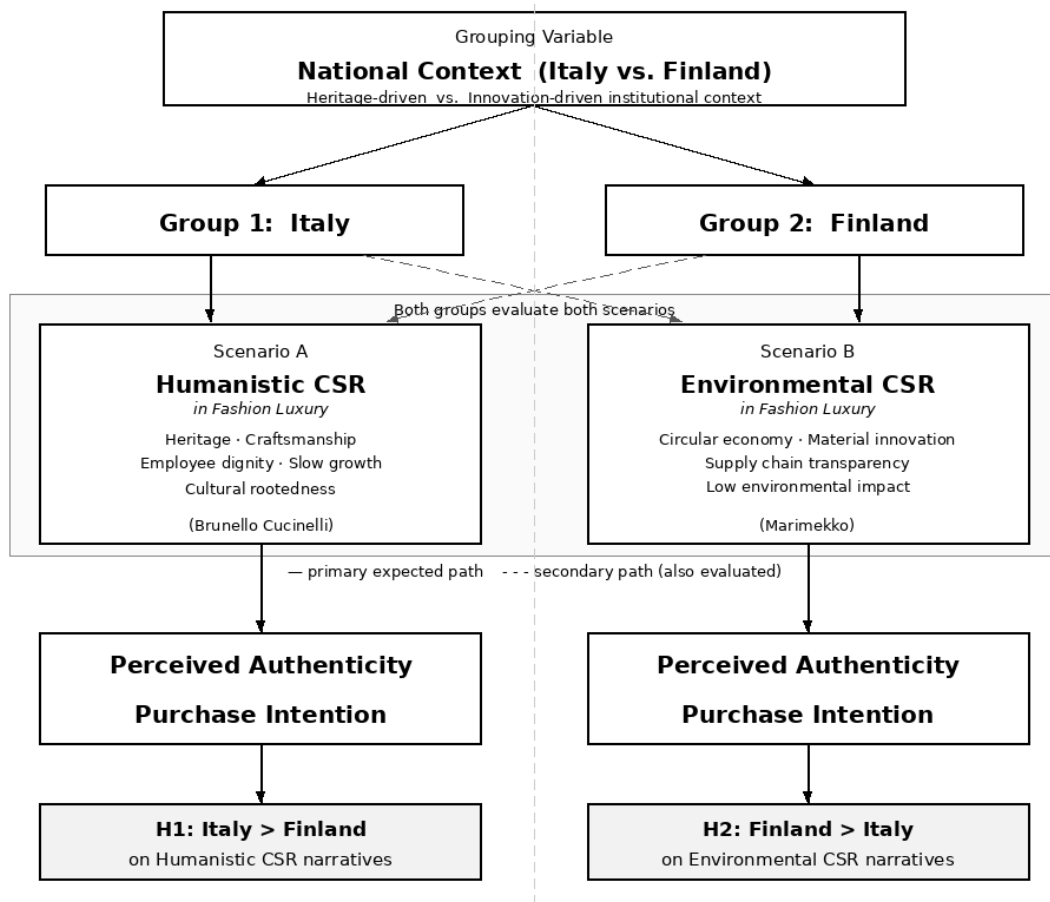


Figure 4. Conceptual Framework

Building on this theoretical synthesis, the following hypotheses are formulated as group-level comparative propositions:

H1: As a group, Italian Gen Z consumers assign higher perceived authenticity and purchase intention to Humanistic CSR attributes (e.g. tradition, craftsmanship, social equity) in sustainable luxury compared to Finnish consumers.

H2: As a group, Finnish Gen Z consumers assign higher perceived authenticity and purchase intention to Environmental CSR attributes (e.g. circular economy, material innovation, recycling) in sustainable luxury compared to Italian consumers.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research philosophy, approach and design

The research adopts positivist philosophy, which assumes that the social reality is objective and measurable, and patterns in consumer behaviour are discoverable through systematic data collection and statistical analysis (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 145). The researcher, in agreement with this line of thinking, maintains neutrality and relies on a structured methodology to ensure validity, reliability, and replicability.

A deductive approach is employed for theory development. The theoretical deduction about the CSR narratives and their differing ability to resonate in various national contexts have been taken from literature and are now subjected to empirical testing (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 156).

To address the research question, the thesis is structured as a descripto-explanatory study (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 181). The descriptive part of the study focuses on understanding the differences between Italian and Finnish Gen Z consumer's perception towards Humanistic and Environmental CSR narratives, which is aligned with the "How" and "to what extent" structuring of the research question. Then, the explanatory component seeks an understanding of the reasons behind these differences by using the national institutional context as the theoretical framework. This approach aligns with Saunders et al.'s (2023) view that descriptive research often precedes explanation, to form an integrated descripto-explanatory design. As the study employs a non-experimental survey design, the findings are interpreted as associative rather than causal.

Furthermore, the method of this thesis is defined by Saunders et al. (2023, p. 184) as mono method quantitative research. This indicates that the study uses only a single quantitative data collection technique. In fact, to answer the research question and test the proposed hypotheses, this study employs a quantitative cross-sectional comparative survey design. While a longitudinal approach might offer different insights, a cross-sectional study design was selected for this thesis because of time and resources

limitations (Saunders et al., 2023, pp. 212–213). Consequently, data were collected at a single point in time to empirically compare the two distinct national samples. Data collection took place between April and May 2026. The primary objective is to empirically compare the attitudes and perceptions of Generation Z consumers across two distinct national contexts (Italy and Finland) regarding sustainable luxury.

Primary data were collected via a structured online questionnaire. The target population consists of Generation Z consumers, specifically defined as individuals born between 1995 and 2010, reached through a convenience and snowball non-probability sampling strategy (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 324–325). The questionnaire was distributed digitally via university mailing lists, student platforms, and social media channels. A target of approximately 50 valid responses per country was set, for a total target sample of 100 respondents. This sample size is considered adequate for the planned statistical analyses. The participation in the survey is voluntary and anonymous, additionally it does not collect any personal identifying information. The design is comparative in nature: the same instrument is administered to two independent national samples, allowing for direct comparison of perceptions across groups. Rather than manipulating variables experimentally, this study presents both CSR narrative scenarios to all respondents and measures their evaluations, enabling within-respondents and between-groups comparisons.

3.2 Data Collection and Questionnaire Structure

The questionnaire was developed using Google Forms and structured into four main sections, each serving a specific analytical purpose.

Section 1: Screening and demographics. Respondents were asked to confirm their age (born between 1995 and 2010, consistent with Generation Z) and their nationality (to confirm that respondents are only Italian and Finnish). To ensure data validity and filtering out off-target responses was implemented a screening logic. If a respondent selected a birth year outside this range or a different nationality, the survey automatically

ended and redirected to the submission page. In fact, 6 responses were excluded following the automated screening logic: 1 respondent indicated a birth year outside the 1995-2010 range, and 5 selected a nationality other than Italian or Finnish.

In addition, basic demographic variables (gender, level of education, field of study/work) were also collected to allow for descriptive profiling of the sample.

Section 2: General perceptions of sustainable luxury. This section assesses respondents' baseline attitudes towards sustainability in the luxury sector, prior to their exposure to the specific brand scenarios. As shown in Table 2, Items cover the perceived importance of sustainability dimensions in luxury brands and the personal attitudes towards sustainable luxury consumption.

Table 2. Survey questions

Importance of sustainability dimensions in luxury brands
It is important to me that luxury brands demonstrate environmental responsibility (e.g., reducing emissions, using sustainable materials)
It is important to me that luxury brands demonstrate social responsibility (e.g., fair wages, worker wellbeing, community engagement).
A sustainable luxury brand must implement circular economy models to actively reduce waste.
Utilising recycled materials and green technologies is essential for a sustainable luxury brand.
The craftsmanship and heritage of a luxury brand are important indicators of its sustainability commitment.
A luxury brand's use of local artisanal traditions makes it more responsible in my eyes.
I believe that adopting sustainable practices does not compromise the exclusivity or desirability of a luxury brand.

Personal attitudes towards sustainable luxury consumption
When purchasing luxury goods, I actively consider the brand's sustainability practices. (Dimension: Interest)
I am willing to pay a premium price for a luxury product if it is sustainably produced. (Dimension: Willingness to pay)
I find it difficult to trust sustainability claims made by luxury brands. (Dimension: Scepticism)

The items addressed three key theoretical dimensions discussed in the literature review: consumer's interest in socio-environmental practices because they are part of the luxury-sustainability paradox (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015), their potential scepticism toward corporate claims, which acts a fundamental defence against perceived greenwashing (Szabo & Webster, 2021), and their willingness to pay a premium price for luxury goods that are produced in a sustainable way (Nielsen, 2015). A 5-point Likert scale, in which the number 1 represents “strongly disagree” and 5 “strongly agree”, was used throughout this section to ensure measurement consistency.

Section 3: Scenario evaluation. A scenario-based approach was adopted to translate abstract concepts, such as “Humanistic CSR” and “Environmental CSR”, into concrete and comparable brand narratives. This allowed respondents to evaluate realistic representations of sustainable luxury models. The scenarios were also inspired by real-world luxury brands: Brunello Cucinelli and Marimekko represent prototypical examples of humanistic and environmental CSR, respectively. They were selected as the most theoretically coherent and empirically documented archetypes of their respective CSR orientations within the luxury and premium fashion space. As acknowledged in Section 2.1, Marimekko occupies a more accessible position on the luxury continuum. This distinction is intentional: the study does not test whether the two brands are perceived as equally luxurious, but whether the CSR narrative embedded in each scenario generates differential levels of perceived authenticity and purchase intention across national consumer groups. Therefore, these brands were not analysed and were not stimuli for

brand recognition testing but were used as illustrative archetypes to enhance the realism and credibility of the narratives.

The content of Scenario A and Scenario B was created exclusively by the researcher. The two CSR scenarios were developed using a systematic and theory-driven process to ensure methodological rigour. The information used was derived from academic literature (Katamba et al., 2024; Niinimäki, 2018; Napolitano & Fusco, 2019), company reports (Brunello Cucinelli Annual Report, 2023; Marimekko Sustainability Report, 2023) and publicly available sources. Additionally, the brands' official websites were shared with respondents as supplementary reference material. This structured approach ensures that the scenarios are based on theory and suitable for comparative analysis. Scenario-based designs have been widely employed to operationalise abstract corporate responsibility constructs into evaluable stimuli, this allows researchers to isolate the effect of specific narrative frames on consumer perceptions while controlling for confounding variables (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). Within the sustainable luxury literature specifically, scenario-based approaches have been adopted to present respondents with distinct brand profiles and measure their evaluative responses (Vock, 2022; Sipilä et al., 2020). This approach is particularly suited to the present study, which requires respondents to compare two distinct CSR orientations.

The construction of the scenarios was guided by defined criteria. Firstly, each scenario was designed to include coherent, internally consistent elements such as core values, business practices, and communication style documented in the academic literature and corporate reports associated with each CSR orientation. For the Humanistic CSR scenario, these values were drawn from Napolitano and Fusco's (2019) analysis of Brunello Cucinelli's philosophy and from brand's publicly available report (Brunello Cucinelli, 2023). For the Environmental CSR scenario, they were derived from Niinimäki's (2018) work on circular fashion and from Marimekko's sustainability report (Marimekko, 2023). In both cases, the values embedded in each scenario are therefore attributable to documented brand philosophies and peer-reviewed scholarship. These elements reflected either a humanistic orientation (e.g. craftsmanship, employee well-being, and heritage) or an environmental orientation (e.g. circular economy, material innovation, and transparency).

Secondly, the scenarios were constructed to be comparable in length, structure, and level of detail to minimise potential response bias. Therefore, to make the theoretical concepts of “Humanistic CSR” and “Environmental CSR” tangible to the respondents they are presented with two short brand profiles.

- Scenario A: Humanistic CSR (based on the Italian brand Brunello Cucinelli): a narrative emphasising human dignity, fair wages, artisanal craftsmanship, community engagement, and slow growth rooted in Italian heritage.
- Scenario B: Environmental CSR (based on the Finnish brand Marimekko): a narrative emphasising recycled materials, circular design, supply chain transparency, low environmental impact, and functional timelessness rooted in Nordic design culture.

The instrument was reviewed by the thesis supervisor and piloted with a small convenience sample of four (two Italian and two Finnish) Generation Z respondents, who were not included in the final dataset. They were asked to complete the full questionnaire and provide feedback on the clarity of the instructions, the comprehensibility of the scenario descriptions, and the overall flow of the survey. Feedback confirmed that the scenario descriptions were comprehensible and sufficiently differentiated. This assessed clarity and face validity of the scenarios prior to full distribution.

Both scenarios were presented to all respondents to allow direct comparison. After reading these two approaches, respondents were asked to evaluate their perceptions on the questions exposed in Table 3 on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree).

Table 3. Scenario Perceptions

This brand appears genuine.
This brand is sincere in its sustainability efforts.
This brand communicates its values honestly.
This brand seems trustworthy.

To provide a more complete picture of respondents' evaluation perceived authenticity and purchase intention were measured for both Scenario A and B.

- Perceived authenticity, measured using a four-item scale adapted from Morhart et al. (2014), covering dimensions of continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism, as shown in table 4.

Table 4. Perceived authenticity dimensions

Continuity: This brand's sustainability commitment has been consistent over time and is deeply rooted in its history
Credibility: I believe this brand delivers on its sustainability promises - its actions match its stated values.
Integrity: This brand's sustainability initiative seems genuinely motivated by ethical conviction, not by marketing.
Symbolism: This brand's identity as a responsible company feels authentic and meaningful to me.

- Purchase intention, as shown in table 5, was measured using a three-item scale: direct purchase consideration, positive word-of-mouth, and willingness to pay a premium price. This scale was adapted from established behavioural intention and sustainable luxury literature (Dodds et al., 1991; Jain & Rathi, 2023; Li, G. et al., 2012).

Table 5. Purchase intention Dimensions

I would consider purchasing a product from this brand.
I would recommend this brand to friends or family who are interested in sustainable luxury.
Knowing about this brand's sustainability approach increases my willingness to pay its premium price.

Section 4: Preferred CSR orientation. After evaluating both scenarios, respondents were asked a direct comparative question “Which of the two brand profiles do you find more credible as a sustainable luxury brand?” (Scenario A / Scenario B / No preference). This allows for straightforward cross-national comparison of narrative preferences. A non-mandatory open-ended question was included at the end of the questionnaire to express comments or other thoughts.

3.3 Data Analysis

The research data gathered were processed and analysed using Jamovi (2.6). it is an advanced statistical spreadsheet software, developed on top of the R statistical language (The Jamovi project, 2024). The analytical approach was divided into four steps, set to answer the research question and test the proposed hypotheses in a systematic and transparent way.

Step 1: descriptive statistics. Means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions were reported for all key variables, providing a descriptive profile of each national sample’s perceptions of sustainable luxury.

Step 2: reliability analysis. Before carrying out the hypothesis testing, the consistency of the multi-item Likert scale was measured through Cronbach’s Alpha. Conventionally, 0.70 is considered the minimum acceptable level, based on consumer research standards (Nunnally, 1978).

Step 3: Hypothesis testing. To measure the difference in mean scores of the Italian and Finnish samples on each construct, the normality of the data distribution was checked with Shapiro-Wilk. Since Likert-scale data in consumer studies deviate from normality quite often, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was chosen as the main method comparing the two groups, since it does not demand normality assumptions and it is also suitable for ordinal data (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 625). The usual significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ was used for all hypothesis tests. This method was used to test if Italian Gen Z

consumers have much higher score on Humanistic CSR attributes than Finnish consumers (H1), and if Finnish Gen Z consumers have a higher score on Environmental CSR attributes than Italian consumers (H2). The effect sizes are shown as rank-biserial correlations (r) to indicate the size of the differences observed.

In addition, within-group comparisons were conducted within each national sample to compare evaluations of Scenario A versus Scenario B, providing insight into intra-group narrative preferences. Given the ordinal nature of Likert data, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was selected as the most appropriate non-parametric method for these comparisons.

Step 4: Preference comparison. A chi-square test of independence offers a direct cross-national comparison on the narrative preference. It was used to compare the distribution of preferred CSR narrative (Scenario A / Scenario B / No preference) between Italian and Finnish respondents.

3.4 Credibility of research and Limitations

This study employs several methodological strategies to ensure the validity and robustness of its findings, while also acknowledging its limitations.

As noted by Saunders et al. (2023), because it is impossible to know with absolute certainty whether research results are right or wrong, researchers must reduce the possibility of errors by paying strict attention to two fundamental features of research design: reliability and validity.

Reliability refers to the degree to which the data collection techniques or analysis procedures result in consistent findings (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 831). In quantitative research, a critical aspect of reliability is the internal consistency of multiple-item scales. In this study, internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha.

Validity, in turn, measures whether the findings are really what they appear to be about and whether the measures accurately reflect the intended concepts (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 837). Firstly, construct validity is strengthened by using measurement scales

adapted from existing literature. Perceived authenticity is operationalised using validated scale developed by Morhart et al. (2014), ensuring consistency with prior research. Furthermore, the use of scenario-based stimuli grounded in real brand philosophies clarifies and makes more interpretable abstract concepts such as humanistic and environmental CSR. Secondly, the standardised structure of the questionnaire and the presentation of both CSR scenarios to all respondents support internal validity. This design reduces potential confounding effects and allows for direct comparison across groups. However, as the study employs a non-experimental survey design, it is not possible to definitively establish causal relationships, and the findings should be interpreted as associative rather than causal. Thirdly, external validity is partially ensured by the cross-national comparative design, which includes respondents from two distinct European contexts. This makes the findings more relevant beyond a single-country setting and responds to calls in the literature for greater cross-cultural generalisability (Grazzini et al., 2021, p. 24). Nevertheless, the use of non-probability convenience and snowball sampling methods limits the generalisability of the results to the broader Generation Z consumer population.

Several limitations must also be acknowledged. Firstly, relying on self-reported data increases the risk of social desirability bias, especially since sustainability-related topics are sensitive. A related methodological concern is common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Since all constructs, perceived authenticity and purchase intention, were measured using the same self-report instrument administered to the same respondents at the same point in time, there is a structural risk that the observed associations between constructs may be partially inflated by shared method variance rather than reflecting genuine attitudinal relationships. While the scenario-based design of this study partially mitigates this concern by separating the evaluation of two distinct stimuli, it cannot fully eliminate the risk inherent in single-source and single-occasion survey data. Future research could address this limitation by adopting multi-method designs, for instance combining self-report measures with implicit association tests or behavioural proxies.

Secondly, while the sample size is appropriate for a master's thesis, it may limit the statistical power of the analysis and the detection of subtle cross-cultural differences. Thirdly, as the study captures consumer perceptions at a single point in time, it does not

account for potential longitudinal changes in attitudes. Additionally, while scenario-based descriptions are beneficial for comparability, they may oversimplify the complexity of real-world brand perceptions. Respondents evaluate stylised representations of CSR narratives rather than fully developed brand experiences, which may influence their responses. A further limitation concerns potential brand familiarity bias. The two CSR scenarios were developed using real brand philosophies as archetypes: Brunello Cucinelli for the Humanistic CSR narrative and Marimekko for the Environmental CSR narrative. Although respondents were not explicitly asked to rate the brands, their previous exposure to or knowledge of these companies might have affected their evaluation of the situations. This mixing of the brand's country of origin with the participant's national identity is a fundamental limitation of the scenario-based approach chosen. Although the scenarios were designed as theoretically grounded archetypes rather than direct brand stimuli, the matching of brand nationality with respondent nationality is something that cannot be completely separated from the cultural preferences that are being studied. The next studies can deal with this problem by developing imaginary brand profiles or by adding a screening question to measure prior brand awareness and then using it to explain scenario evaluation differences. Despite these limitations, the research offers an organized and theoretically supported comparative study of the views of Generation Z about sustainable luxury. By combining confirmed measuring instruments with a cross-national design, the research brings theoretical and practical insight into differences in interpretations of CSR narratives across culture.

4. Findings

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study conducted to answer the research question: *How do Gen Z consumers in Italy and Finland differ in their perceptions of sustainable luxury, and to what extent do they prioritise Humanistic versus Environmental CSR models?*

In accordance with the analytical framework outlined in Chapter 3, the analysis proceeds in four stages: first, descriptive statistics are reported for both national samples to provide an overview; second, the reliability of the measurement scales is assessed; third, the hypotheses are tested using independent samples and paired comparisons; finally, a chi-square test is used to analyse cross-national differences in overall CSR narrative preference.

4.1 Descriptive statistics

The final sample consists of 106 valid responses. As shown in Figure 5, the sample includes 64 Italian (60.4%) respondents and 42 (39.6%) Finnish respondents, all belonging to Generation Z.

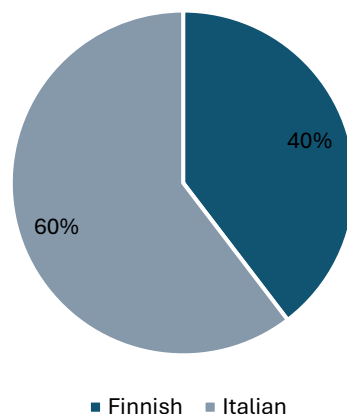


Figure 5. Distribution of the final sample by nationality

The pre-defined target was 50 respondents per country ($N = 100$ total); the final distribution slightly exceeds the total target while exhibiting a moderate imbalance between groups. However, the non-parametric tests employed are robust to unequal group sizes, and the adequacy of both sub-samples for the planned analyses is maintained.

The items included in Section 2 of the questionnaire, that cover respondents' general attitudes towards sustainable luxury consumption, including interest, willingness to pay, and scepticism, were collected for descriptive profiling purposes and to contextualise respondents' baseline orientation prior to scenario exposure. These items were not designed to test the study's hypotheses and are therefore not subjected to formal inferential analysis. The descriptive results indicate comparable baseline across the two national groups, respondents demonstrate moderate-to-high interest in sustainable luxury and moderate scepticism towards corporate claims. These patterns are consistent with the profile of Generation Z consumers documented in the literature (Grazzini et al., 2021; Kong et al., 2021). These results confirm that both samples approached the scenario evaluation from similar attitudinal starting points and support the comparability of the two groups prior to hypothesis testing.

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the key constructs: perceived authenticity and purchase intention for both CSR scenarios.

As illustrated in Figure 6, Italian respondents consistently outscored their Finnish counterparts on both constructs for Scenario A, with a mean difference of approximately 0.38 points on perceived authenticity and 0.41 points on purchase intention. These descriptive already suggest an alignment between Italian respondents and the Humanistic CSR narrative, a pattern that the hypothesis tests will formally examine.

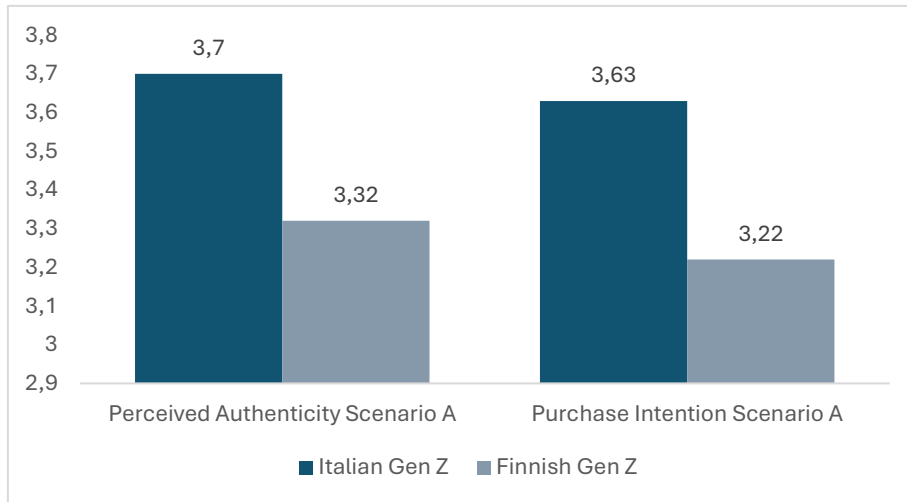


Figure 6. Mean scores for perceived authenticity and purchase intention towards Scenario A (Humanistic CSR) by national group

Figure 7 reveals a markedly reversed pattern compared to Scenario A: Finnish respondents showed higher perceived authenticity and purchase intention towards the Environmental CSR narrative, with mean purchase intention reaching 4.13 compared to 3.50 among Italian respondents. The Finnish advantage on purchase intention is visually more pronounced than the Italian advantage observed in Scenario A, this anticipates the large effect sizes confirmed by the Mann-Whitney U tests.

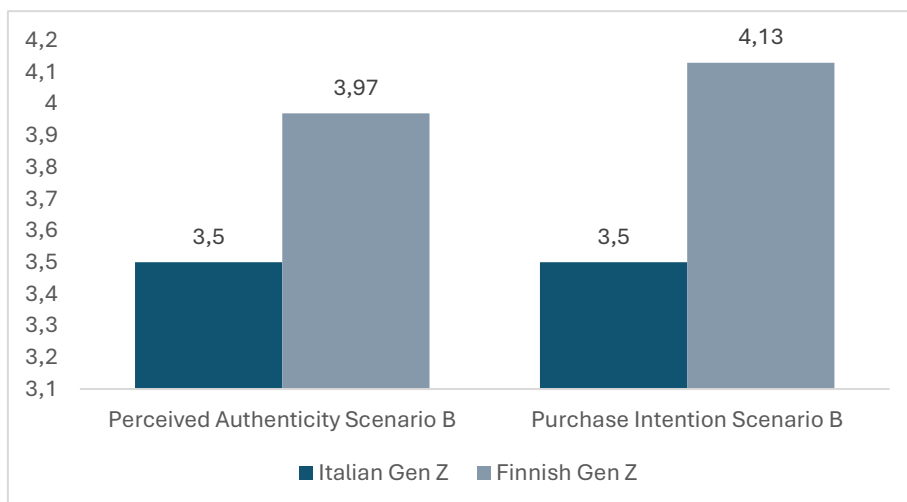


Figure 7. Mean scores for perceived authenticity and purchase intention towards Scenario B (Environmental CSR) by national group

4.2 Reliability analysis

The internal consistency of multi-item scales was measured through Cronbach's alpha, before the hypothesis testing stage, as recommended by Saunders et al. (2023, p. 523). The evaluation of the reliability of measurements in quantitative research is done with the usual minimum threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ (Nunnally, 1978). As the data shown in table 6, each of the scales have numbers beyond this level, with values between $\alpha = 0.751$ (Purchase intention Scenario A) to $\alpha = 0.935$ (General perception Scenario B). These findings indicate that the tools for the measurement have a high degree of internal consistency and can be relied upon for the planned analysis. That, in all constructs, the scales of Scenario B have shown larger alpha than those of Scenario A, which could be interpreted that the CSR narrative environmental elicited more coherent and internally consistent evaluative responses from the respondent.

Table 6. Cronbach's Alpha

Humanistic CSR	$\alpha = 0.852$
Environmental CSR	$\alpha = 0.862$
General perception Scenario A	$\alpha = 0.895$
General perception Scenario B	$\alpha = 0.935$
Perceived authenticity Scenario A	$\alpha = 0.808$
Perceived authenticity Scenario B	$\alpha = 0.884$
Purchase intention Scenario A	$\alpha = 0.751$
Purchase intention Scenario B	$\alpha = 0.842$

4.3 Hypothesis testing: between-group comparisons

Prior to hypothesis testing, the assumption of normal distribution was evaluated using Shapiro–Wilk test. Its purpose is to determine the probability (likelihood) that an observed set of values for each category of a variable differs from a specified distribution (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 833).

The null hypothesis represents the normal distribution. A p-value greater than 0.05 indicates that the data follow a normal distribution, instead p-value lower than 0.05 shows deviation significantly from normality. In this case, as shown in Table 7, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 7. Shapiro-Wilk for Normal distribution (The Jamovi Project, 2024)

	Nationality	Auth_A	Auth_B	Purch_A	Purch_B
N	Finnish	42	42	42	42
	Italian	64	64	64	64
Shapiro-Wilk W	Finnish	0.826	0.906	0.900	0.849
	Italian	0.959	0.940	0.939	0.927
Shapiro-Wilk p	Finnish	<.001	0.002	0.001	<.001
	Italian	0.034	0.004	0.003	<.001

The traditional independent samples t-test could not be applied since the data were skewed and violated the strict normality assumptions required for parametric testing. Consequently, the Mann-Whitney U test was employed as the most appropriate and robust non-parametric equivalent (Saunders et al., 2023). Effect sizes are reported as rank-biserial correlations r to quantify the magnitude of the observed differences, interpreted following conventional benchmarks: $|r| = 0.1$ (small), $|r| = 0.3$ (medium), $|r| = 0.5$ (large) (Kerby, 2014). Values are reported in table 8.

Table 8. Mann-Whitney U test results for between groups comparisons

Variable	U	p	r (rank-biserial)
Auth_A (Humanistic)	792	< .001	+0.411
Purch_A (Humanistic)	868	.002	+0.355
Auth_B (Environmental)	805	< .001	-0.401
Purch_B (Environmental)	667	< .001	-0.504

Note: Positive r values indicate higher scores for Italian respondents; negative values indicate higher scores for Finnish respondents. Effect sizes follow Kerby (2014).

H1: As a group, Italian Gen Z consumers assign higher perceived authenticity and purchase intention to Humanistic CSR attributes (e.g. tradition, craftsmanship, social equity) in sustainable luxury compared to Finnish consumers.

There are significant statistical differences between Italian and Finnish respondents on Humanistic CSR issue. Italian respondents show much higher perceived authenticity for Scenario A whereas Finnish respondents (U = 792, $p < .001$). The effect size corresponds to the interval from medium-to-large, which is indicative of a change that is affectively meaningful. To graphically display the cross-national differences in the assessment of Humanistic CSR, Figure 8 shows the spread of the perceived authenticity scores. As shown, the Italians' sample' average trend is strongly higher than that of the Finnish sample, which visually explains the statistically significant difference (by Mann-Whitney

U test, $p < .001$) discovered. The mean in the figure is indicated by the circle and the median by the square.

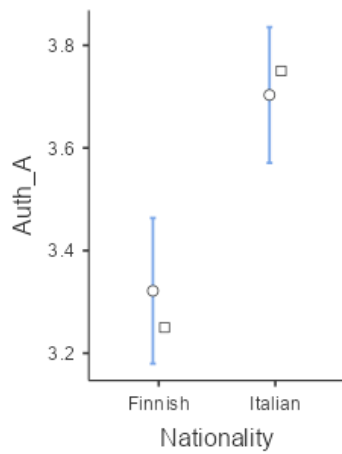


Figure 8. Perceived authenticity Scenario A between groups (The Jamovi Project, 2024)

In the same vein, the intention to purchase was much greater among Italian participants ($U = 868$, $p = .002$). Generation Z consumers are more positively influenced by Humanistic CSR. Figure 9 shows the distribution of purchase intention scores for Scenario A.

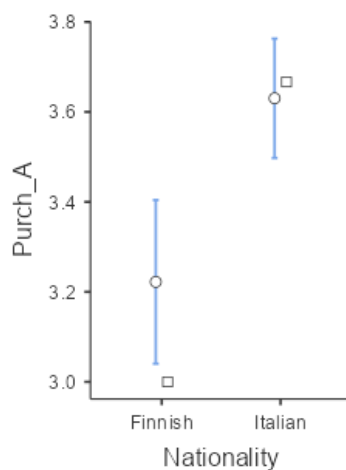


Figure 9. Purchase intention Scenario A between groups (The Jamovi Project, 2024)

The diagram points out that Italians are more willing to buy products from a brand that is oriented towards humanistic values than Finns ($p = .002$).

H2: As a group, Finnish Gen Z consumers assign higher perceived authenticity and purchase intention to Environmental CSR attributes (e.g. circular economy, material innovation, recycling) in sustainable luxury compared to Italian consumers.

Significant differences also emerged for Environmental CSR. Finnish respondents reported significantly higher perceived authenticity for Scenario B compared to Italian respondents ($U = 805$, $p < .001$), reflecting a medium-to-large effect. The distribution of Perceived authenticity scores for Scenario B (Environmental CSR) is shown in Figure 10. The plot clearly demonstrates an upward shift in the Finnish sample's evaluations, reflecting the significantly higher credibility assigned to this narrative in the Finnish national context compared to the Italian one ($p < .001$).

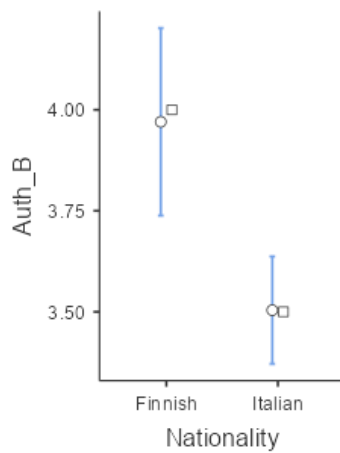


Figure 10. Perceived Authenticity Scenario B between groups (The Jamovi Project, 2024)

Between-group difference is most pronounced for purchase intention towards Scenario B. In fact, the mean score was significantly higher among Finnish respondents than Italian respondents, yielding a large effect size ($U = 667$, $p < .001$). These indications support H2, showing that Environmental CSR is more positively viewed among the Finnish participants. Figure 11 displays the purchase intention for the Environmental scenario in each of the nationalities. The Finnish responses are clustered at the high end of the scale ($M = 4.13$), clearly illustrating for H2.

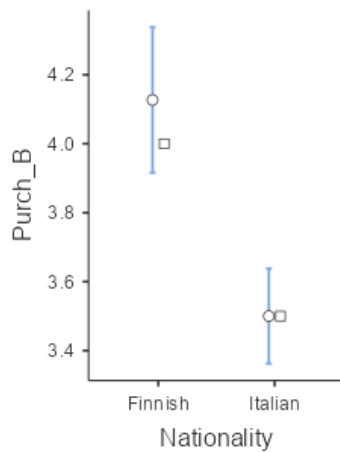


Figure 11. Purchase intention Scenario B between groups (The Jamovi Project, 2024)

4.4 Within-group comparisons

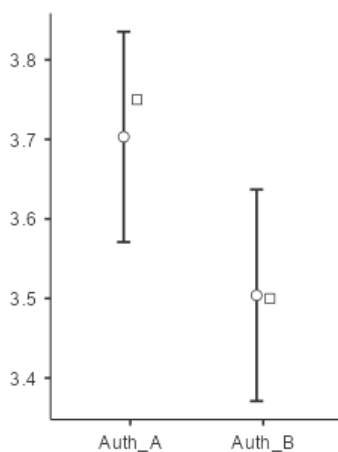
Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were conducted within each national sample to compare the evaluations of Scenario A and Scenario B. This non-parametric test was selected as the most appropriate method given the ordinal nature of Likert data and the presence of ties. These analyses serve as exploratory evidence enriching the interpretation of how each group internally differentiates between the two CSR narratives.

Table 9. Paired-samples comparison of Perceived Authenticity

Groups	W	p	r
Italian	770	.061	0.309
Finnish	39	<.001	-0.808

Note. W = Wilcoxon signed-rank statistics; r = rank biserial correlation (effect size); significance threshold $\alpha = .05$

Table 9 shows that the situation is quite complex among Italian respondents. The non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test does not reach conventional significance ($W = 770$, $p = .061$, $r = 0.309$). This support the idea that, Italian respondents are more likely to rate the Humanistic narrative as being more authentic, then again, they give quite similar ratings to the two scenarios within their own frame of reference. The general direction of pattern agrees with H1, yet the preference within the group is a mere suggestive trend and not statistically strong evidence, so it should be interpreted with caution. The estimate of Scenario A above Scenario B is very slight, and the broad overlap of the confidence intervals is consistent with the Wilcoxon test results ($p = .061$) as illustrated in Figure 12, indicating a direction of preference rather than a string one in this group.

**Figure 12.** Perceived Authenticity within group, Italy (The Jamovi Project, 2024)

Among Finnish respondents, Scenario B received significantly higher perceived authenticity score than Scenario A, confirmed by the non-parametric Wilcoxon test ($W = 39.0, p < .001$). Finnish respondents thus not only rated the Environmental narrative higher than Italian respondents did in absolute terms, but also clearly distinguished Scenario B as more authentic than Scenario A. Figure 13 clearly illustrates the internal preference of the Finnish sample for Scenario B.

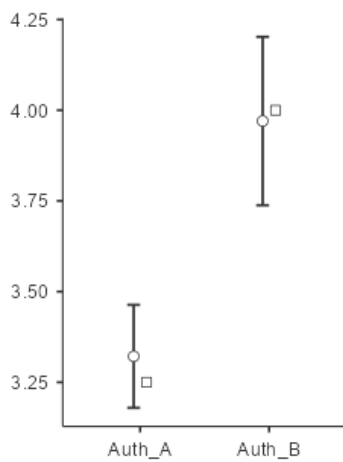


Figure 13. Perceived Authenticity within group, Finland (The Jamovi Project, 2024)

The plot displays a significant gap between the evaluations of the two narratives, with Environmental CSR being perceived as substantially more authentic than the Humanistic model ($p < .001$).

Table 10. Paired-samples comparison of Purchase Intention

Groups	W	p	r
Italian	495	.257	0.206
Finnish	25.5	<.001	-0.890

Note. W = Wilcoxon signed-rank statistics; r = rank biserial correlation (effect size); significance threshold $\alpha = .05$

Among Italian respondents, purchase intentions towards Scenario A and Scenario B do not differ significantly, as shown in table 10 ($W = 495$, $p = .257$). Despite recognising the Humanistic narrative as marginally more authentic, Italian respondents do not translate this evaluative preference into a correspondingly stronger purchase intention. The distribution of purchase intention scores among Italian respondents, illustrated in Figure 14, is similar for both scenarios.

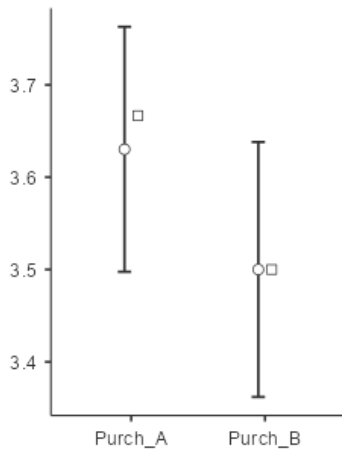


Figure 14. Purchase intention within group, Italy (The Jamovi Project, 2024)

This visual symmetry confirms the absence of a statistically significant difference on purchase intention between Italian respondents, ($p = .257$) confirming the attitude-behaviour gap, observed in the Italian context (Grazzini et al., 2021; Escourido-Calvo et al., 2025).

By contrast, among Finnish respondents, the preference for Scenario B over Scenario A reflects a large effect size ($W = 25.5$, $p < .001$). This result indicates that Finnish Gen Z consumers express substantially stronger purchase intentions towards the Environmental CSR brand profile and it represents the most robust result of the study. This decisive preference for Scenario B among Finnish respondents is further reinforced in Figure 15,

which shows a marked increase in purchase intention for the Environmental approach compared to Scenario A ($r = -0.890$).

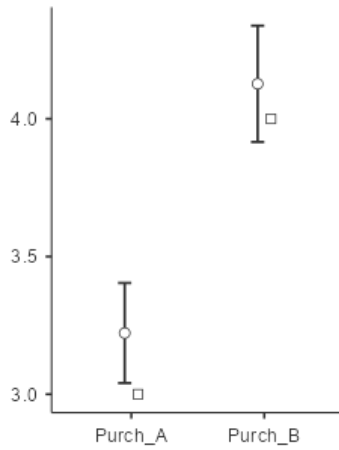


Figure 15. Purchase intention within group, Finland (The Jamovi Project, 2024)

4.5 Cross-national preference comparisons

To complete the scale-based hypothesis tests, respondents were asked to indicate which of the two brand profiles they found more credible and appealing as a sustainable luxury brand (Scenario A / Scenario B / No preference). A chi-square test of independence was used to compare the distribution of preferences across the two national groups. Results of the chi-square test are reported in Table 11.

Table 11. Chi-square test (The Jamovi Project, 2024)

Chi-square test

Which of the two brand profiles do you find more credible and appealing as a sustainable luxury brand?		Nationality		
		Finnish	Italian	Total
Brand A (The Humanistic Approach)	Observed	5	28	33
	%	11.9%	43.8%	31.1%
Brand B (The Environmental Approach)	Observed	29	22	51
	%	69.0%	34.4%	48.1%
No preference / I find them equally credible	Observed	8	14	22
	%	19.0%	21.9%	20.8%
Total	Observed	42	64	106
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Test χ^2

	Value	df	p
χ^2	14.7	2	<.001
N	106		

Nominal

	Value
Cramer's V	0.372

The Phi coefficient is undefined for contingency tables larger than 2x2 and is therefore not reported. The chi-square test yields a highly significant result ($\chi^2 = 14.7$, $p < .001$), with a Cramer's V of 0.372, indicating a medium association between nationality and narrative preference (Cohen, 1988, where $V \approx 0.10$ is considered small, $V \approx 0.30$ medium, and $V \approx 0.50$ large). The distribution of preferences reflects the theoretical predictions of the study: 69.0% of Finnish respondents selected Scenario B (Environmental approach) as the more credible sustainable luxury narrative, while only 11.9% preferred Scenario A (Humanistic approach). By contrast, 43.8% of Italian respondents preferred Scenario A (Humanistic approach), compared to 34.4% who

favoured Scenario B. A notable proportion in both groups (19% of Finnish and 21.9% of Italian respondents) expressed no clear preference, suggesting a degree of ambivalence. Figure 16 summarizes the overall preference distribution between the two national groups. The chart highlights the contrast in narrative interest.

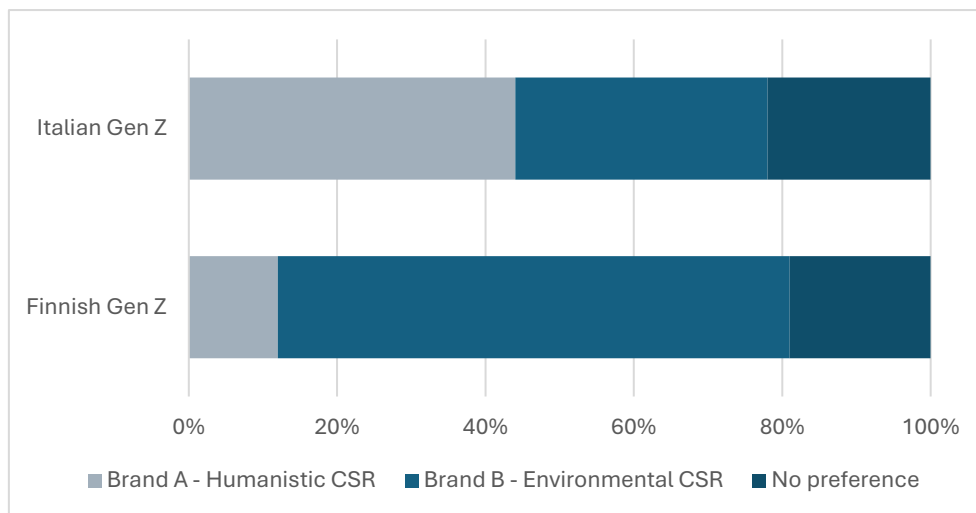


Figure 16. Results of Chi-Square test

4.6 Summary of findings

Data supports both hypotheses as illustrated in table 12. Finnish Gen Z consumers assign higher evaluations to the Environmental CSR narrative on perceived authenticity, purchase intention, and direct preference, with large and statistically robust effect sizes. Italian Gen Z consumers show a pattern of relative rather than absolute preference for the Humanistic CSR narrative. They rate Scenario A higher than Finnish respondents do, and marginally higher than Scenario B within their own group, but the difference in purchase intention is not statistically significant. These findings collectively suggest that national context operates as a meaningful differentiator of CSR narrative resonance

among European Generation Z luxury consumers. The implications are discussed in Chapter 5.

Table 12. Summary of hypotheses

Hypotheses Statement	Key result	Outcome
H1: As a group, Italian Gen Z consumers assign higher perceived authenticity and purchase intention to Humanistic CSR attributes (e.g. tradition, craftsmanship, social equity) in sustainable luxury compared to Finnish consumers.	Auth_A: U = 792 p < .001 r = 0.411; Purch_A: U = 868 p = .002 r = 0.355	Supported
H2: As a group, Finnish Gen Z consumers assign higher perceived authenticity and purchase intention to Environmental CSR attributes (e.g. circular economy, material innovation, recycling) in sustainable luxury compared to Italian consumers.	Auth_B: U = 805 p < .001 r = -0.401 Purch_B: U = 667 p < .001 r = -0.504	Supported

5. Discussion

This chapter interprets the empirical findings presented in Chapter 4 considering the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2. The aim is to critically analyse how the results contribute to the existing literature on sustainable luxury, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and cross-cultural context behaviour. The discussion is organised as follows: first, the hypotheses are interpreted; second, the role of perceived authenticity is examined; third, the findings are linked to the luxury-sustainability paradox, fourth, the attitude-behaviour gap is discussed; fifth, the role of national context is elaborated; and sixth, the theoretical contributions and managerial implications are articulated.

5.1 Interpretation of hypotheses

The results, presented in Chapter 4, support H1 based on between-group comparisons. Italian Gen Z consumers assigned significantly higher perceived authenticity scores to the Humanistic CSR scenario than Finnish respondents did ($U = 792$, $p < .001$, $r = 0.411$), and their purchase intentions towards Scenario A were significantly higher ($U = 868$, $p = .002$, $r = 0.355$). These between-group differences, with medium to large effect sizes constitute the main and most direct evidence for H1, revealing that Humanistic CSR is in fact more appealing to Italian Gen Z as a group. It is important, however, to distinguish this between-group finding from the within-group pattern observed in the Italian sample. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test did not reach conventional significance when comparing Italian evaluations of Scenario A versus Scenario B ($W = 770$, $p = .061$). This indicates that, within their own group, Italian respondents did not strongly discriminate between the two narratives in terms of perceived authenticity. The Italian preference for Humanistic CSR is thus directionally consistent with H1 but not strongly confirmed at the within-group level. In sum, H1 is supported through cross-national group differences, while the intra-Italian narrative preference remains a suggestive tendency rather than a statistically robust finding.

The findings also strongly support H2, and with notably stronger effect sizes than those observed for H1. Finnish respondents assigned significantly higher perceived authenticity scores and substantially stronger purchase intentions to Scenario B, the Environmental CSR narratives, compared to Italian respondents. The effect size for purchase intention is particularly striking, $r = -0.504$ in the between-group comparison (Mann-Whitney U), reaching the threshold conventionally associated with a large effect. This is further complemented by an exceptionally strong intra-group preference among Finnish respondents for the environmental narrative over the humanistic one ($W = 25.5$, $p < .001$, $r = -0.890$ in the within-group comparison Wilcoxon signed-rank test).

This is confirmed without a doubt by the chi-square test, where the figure of 69.0% (Finland) chose Scenario B, which was the more plausible sustainable luxury story, over just 11.9% who preferred Scenario A. These results are theoretically consistent with Finland's institutional profile as a leading environmental innovator. As documented in Table 1 of Chapter 2, Finland ranks among the top performers globally on the Environmental Performance Index (73.8 in 2024), achieved the highest SDG score among all countries (87.02), and invests 3.09% of GDP in R&D. The results confirm Niinimäki's (2018) claim that circular aesthetics reflect an appropriate sustainability logic embedded in Nordic cultures.

A methodological clarification is warranted regarding the different empirical layers mobilised in this study. The between-group Mann-Whitney U tests constitute the primary and direct evidence for H1 and H2: they test whether Italian respondents, as a group, scored the Humanistic CSR scenario higher than Finnish respondents did, and vice versa for Environmental CSR. The within-group Wilcoxon signed-rank tests address a related but conceptually distinct question: whether respondents within each national sample internally discriminate between the two narratives. The chi-square test of preference addresses a third separate and direct question: which narrative respondents select as more credible. This set of three empirical layers brings a consistent and convergent story, but it is not the case that they are three equal tests of the same hypothesis. A group can score one scenario higher than the other group does, confirming H1 or H2, without necessarily scoring that scenario significantly higher than the alternative within their own group. Treating all three tests as interchangeable evidence

for the hypotheses would conflate cross-national comparison with intra-national discrimination and explicit preference, which are empirically separable. This distinction is maintained in the discussion.

5.2 The role of perceived authenticity

A central contribution of this study is to emphasise perceived authenticity' role as a key element through which CSR stories influence consumer reactions. The results verify sustainability effort shape consumer view positively only when deemed genuine, supporting the argument of previous research (Morhart et al., 2014, Grazzini et al., 2021). Looking into the different aspects of Morhart et al.'s (2014) measure, Italians' inclination for Humanistic CSR corresponds mainly to be continuity and symbolism aspects: people see authenticity when a brand's dedication is historically based and symbolically significant within the Italian heritage context. But the Finns who favour Environmental CSR may be said to correspond quite a bit to the credibility and integrity aspects: authenticity is determined by the confirmability of environmental statements and the perceived congruence between the expressed values and the actual practices, which is reflection of Finland's culture, exposure and responsibility deeply ingrained in their institutions. This thesis so goes beyond the literature by showing that authenticity is not one and the same construct everywhere; it varies across contexts. In Italy, authenticity is linked to continuity over time, tradition and workmanship, as well as human and moral values. In Finland, authenticity is mainly related to openness and traceability, environmental accomplishments, as well as green and technological breakthroughs. This way, authenticity is a culturally situated decision-making filter rather than an absolute or object attribute. Most importantly, such finding also means that greenwashing potential varies across cultures too: statements that damage authenticity in one place (e.g. undefined environmental commitments in Finland) may not necessarily be so in another (e.g. heritage narratives in Italy) (Szabo & Webster, 2021; Kong et al., 2021).

5.3 Revisiting the luxury-sustainability paradox

The findings give us a fresh perspective on the ongoing discussion about the paradox of luxury and sustainability. The results do not support the idea that luxury and sustainability are always at odds with each other. On the contrary, the results seem to indicate that the perceived conflict may depend on that sustainability is presented and communicated. In both national contexts, sustainability does not appear to diminish the perception of luxury, quite the contrary. When aligned with culturally relevant values, it enhances brand authenticity and, in the Finnish case, substantially strengthens purchase intention. This supports the argument that the paradox is not an inherent structural incompatibility but rather a narrative challenge (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015). Luxury and sustainability can coexist, if CSR strategies are consistent with the brand's identity and the expectations of the target market. Critically, this thesis argues that the paradox is resolved in contextually distinct ways: through human-centred heritage values in Italy, and through circular environmental innovation in Finland. This finding is consistent with the recent systematic review by Zhao et al. (2023), who confirm that the paradox's salience is contingent on how sustainability is narratively framed rather than on an inherent structural incompatibility. Similarly, Chang et al.'s (2022) segmentation study demonstrates that consumers with distinct value profiles respond to the same luxury brand's sustainability cues in fundamentally different ways, with no single narrative proving universally effective. Furthermore, when interpreting how this paradox is resolved it is important to recognise that the way in which the tension between luxury and sustainability is addressed is inherently limited by the market positioning of the brands that represent each national narrative. While Italy's Humanistic model is historically anchored in relatively inaccessible, high-end heritage luxury systems (e.g. Brunello Cucinelli), Finland's circular environmental model is operationalised through a more democratic, design-driven luxury continuum (e.g. Marimekko). Rather than being a confounding artefact of brand preference, this systemic asymmetry suggests that the behavioural translation of environmental corporate social responsibility (CSR) among Finnish Generation Z may be facilitated by the market availability of accessible, premium frameworks that align with students' socio-economic realities. Conversely, the

Italian resolution of the paradox remains tied to aspirational, elite artisanal systems which, despite generating high perceived authenticity, face steep structural friction when converting attitudinal resonance into immediate purchase intentions.

The present study advances both contributions by identifying national institutional context, operationalised through convergent cultural and structural indicators, as the structural differentiator that shapes which resolution of the paradox is most credible and behaviourally effective. In this sense, the luxury-sustainability paradox is best understood not as a fixed theoretical tension, but as a contextually negotiated challenge whose resolution is always relative to the evaluative framework that a specific consumer population brings to it.

5.4 The attitude-behaviour gap

One of the most theoretically interesting patterns to emerge from the data concerns the within-group analysis of the Italian sample. While Italian respondents assigned marginally higher perceived authenticity to the Humanistic narrative (Auth_A = 3.70 vs. Auth_B = 3.50), this evaluative preference did not translate into a statistically significant difference in purchase intention (Purch_A = 3.63 vs. Purch_B = 3.50; $W = 4.95$, $p = .257$, $r = 0.206$). It is important to note that this pattern was not specified as a pre-defined hypothesis: it emerges as an exploratory post-hoc observation from the within-group data and should be interpreted accordingly rather than as a confirmed theoretical prediction.

Nevertheless, the finding is theoretically meaningful and warrants discussion. The literature on Generation Z widely documents a persistent attitude-behaviour gap in sustainable consumption (Grazzini et al., 2021; Yadav, 2025), whereby pro-sustainability attitudes do not consistently translate into purchase behaviour. What is notable here is not the existence of this gap per se, which is well established, but its asymmetry across the two national groups. Finnish respondents show no such gap: their strong preference for Environmental CSR is expressed consistently across both

perceived authenticity and purchase intention, with a large effect size ($r = -0.890$). While this cross-national asymmetry was not formally hypothesized, it aligns closely with institutional theory frameworks.

A plausible explanation lies in the degree to which sustainability is institutionally embedded in each national context. In Finland, where environmental responsibility is deeply embedded in policy frameworks, consumer culture, and public discourse (as reflected in EPI rankings, SDG scores, and high R&D investment), the alignment between stated preferences and behavioural intentions may be structurally reinforced: Finnish consumers have fewer competing cognitive frameworks that would pull purchase decisions away from their stated evaluative preferences. In Italy, by contrast, sustainability narratives compete with established purchase drivers, status signalling, aesthetic appreciation, price sensitivity, and brand heritage, which may attenuate the behavioural translation of authenticity evaluations (Grazzini et al., 2021; Escourido-Calvo et al., 2025; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014). This institutional embeddedness hypothesis is consistent with the comparative framework developed in Section 2.8 and suggests that the attitude-behaviour gap is not a universal feature of Gen Z consumption but a contextually variable phenomenon.

5.5 The role of national context

These results demonstrate that the national context is a very important factor in how consumers perceive sustainable luxury. The findings validate the comparative argument made in Chapter 2: it is being part of a certain national institutional environment, and not one's individual cultural identity, that much differentiates the resonance of CSR narratives. Italian participants used criteria of evaluation that were based on continuity, heritage, and relational trust, whereas Finnish participants gave priority to the environmental verifiability and systemic transparency. The results provide a basis for questioning and confirming this distinction: the institutional context does not blindly predict the preferences in the abstract, rather it influences them in

statistically significant and behaviourally meaningful ways. Because of this the results back up the claim that consumer preferences are not the same across the world, even among the same generational cohort. On the contrary, they are influenced by locally rooted values systems and institutional systems. This align with the wider international business literature, which argued that the meanings attached to consumption are socially created and influenced by cultural and institutional systems in which consumers are immersed. (Hofstede, 2001; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015).

5.6 Theoretical contributions

This study makes three interrelated theoretical contributions to the existing literature.

First, it provides empirical evidence extending the sustainable luxury paradox framework by demonstrating that the resolution of this paradox is contextually relative. Prior literature established that the perceived tension between luxury and sustainability varies with individual definitions of luxury and generational cohort (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015; Achabou & Dekhili, 2013). This study advances this line of inquiry by identifying national context, operationalised through convergent, multi-level institutional indicators, as the key structural differentiator that shapes how CSR narratives are evaluated. Crucially, this differentiation is not assumed to operate at the individual level: the study explicitly frames its propositions as group-level comparative analysis, acknowledging the ecological fallacy risk that arises when aggregate national characteristics are used to predict individual behaviour (Robinson, 1950). By combining measurable country-level indicators with group-level statistical comparisons, the study offers a methodologically transparent approach to cross-national comparison that responds directly to calls for cross-national replication in sustainable luxury research (Grazzini et al., 2021; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015).

Second, the study contributes to the Generation Z literature by demonstrating that European Generation Z consumers do not constitute a homogenous segment with respect to sustainable luxury preferences. The assumption of a uniform global youth

culture is frequently implicit in single-country studies (Grazzini et al., 2021). The present findings challenge this assumption by documenting systematic, statistically robust between-group differences between Italian and Finnish Gen Z consumers, even within the shared political-economic context of the European Union. Beyond this, the data reveal an exploratory and theoretically interesting asymmetry in the attitude-behaviour gap: while Finnish respondents show strong consistency between perceived authenticity and purchase intention, Italian respondents recognise the Humanistic narrative as marginally more authentic without translating this into significantly differentiated purchase intentions. This asymmetry was not a pre-specified hypothesis, but it is theoretically plausible and consistent with the comparative framework: it suggests that the attitude-behaviour gap may itself vary by national context depending on the degree to which sustainability is institutionally embedded in the national environment. This represents one of the first exploratory empirical illustrations of this phenomenon in the European luxury sector and warrants formal testing in future research.

Third, the study makes a methodological contribution by operationalising national context through a multi-level combination of cultural frameworks and objective institutional indicators. Rather than relying exclusively on Hofstede's cultural dimensions (2001) or Hall's communication styles (1976), which operate at the level of value orientations and interpersonal communication respectively and carry well-documented limitations including static cultural assumptions and limited applicability to digitally socialised generations (McSweeney, 2002; Taras et al., 2010), this study combines these frameworks with verifiable structural indicators. These three analytical layers are treated as convergent rather than equivalent, each contributing a distinct dimension to the national context profile. This multi-level approach grounds cross-cultural comparisons in empirically observable structural realities and offers a methodological template that future cross-national studies in sustainable luxury and international business could usefully adopt.

5.7 Managerial implications

First, the results strongly support the adoption of context-sensitive CSR communication strategies rather than standardised global sustainability narratives. The significant between-group differences documented in this study suggest that the same sustainability content can generate substantially different levels of perceived authenticity and purchase intention depending on the national context. Luxury brands that have ambitions in Southern and Northern European markets should invest in culturally aligned communication planning and recognise that there is not a universally right sustainability story (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015; Kong et al., 2021). Therefore, brands should not choose one exclusive narrative but rather develop a modular communication architecture consistent with a global sustainability commitment and accompanied by a market-specific focus. In practice, the same brand could focus on foreground craftsmanship or territorial establishment in Italy and circular design, measurable environmental outcomes or supply chain transparency in Finland. However, both campaigns could be anchored to the same underlying set of sustainability practices. The described approach is consistent with a “glocal” positioning in the international marketing literature (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015; Karaosman et al., 2015) and provides an empirical ground as to which narrative elements should be adapted locally and why.

Second, Humanistic CSR narratives and emphasis on craftsmanship, artisanal heritage, employee dignity, and community involvement represent the strongest sustainability positioning for brands operating in the Italian market. However, it is important to note the observed attitude-behaviour gap that emphasises that cultural resonance alone is insufficient. To decrease the gap between recognition and purchase intention, communication of Humanistic CSR in the Italian territory should be paired with concrete and verifiable evidence of social practices by implementing third-party certifications, supplier audits, wage transparency reports, and measurable community investment (Kong et al., 2021; Athwal et al., 2019; Szabo & Webster, 2021). Moreover, environmental sustainability should also be included as Italian Gen Z considers it a baseline expectation instead of a differentiator.

Finally, brands that operate or which to operate Nordic markets, such as the Finnish one, should focus on Environmental CSR narratives that centre around the circular economy principle, material innovation, supply chain transparency, and measurable environmental outcomes. These are considered more credible and behaviourally effective. Indeed, the large effect size that was observed for Finnish purchase intentions ($r = -0.890$) suggests that sustainability narratives that are well executed and focus on the environmental aspects mentioned above can induce commercially significant shifts in the purchase intentions of Gen Z customers in these markets. Therefore, brands should prioritise specific and quantifiable environmental commitments in their communication rather than generic sustainability claims which can mistakenly and sceptically be seen as greenwashing in an educated customer base (Szabo & Webster, 2021; Kong et al., 2021).

5.8 Conclusion of the discussion

Overall, the outcome of the study is that sustainable luxury is dependent on the national context and the effectiveness of CSR narratives frameworks. Luxury brands should not adopt a one-size-fits approach but focus on a “glocal” strategy that combines global sustainability commitments and locally adapted communication. In the following Chapter, the conclusion of the thesis will be presented, as well as its limitations and directions for future research.

6. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

6.1 Conclusions

The aim of the study was to investigate how Generation Z customers in two different markets, Finland and Italy, perceived sustainable luxury and to what extent they prioritise Humanistic or Environmental CSR models. The research question was: “How do Gen Z consumers in Italy and Finland differ in their perceptions of sustainable luxury, and to what extent do they prioritise Humanistic versus Environmental CSR models?”

The findings provide clear and statistically robust evidence that sustainable luxury is not interpreted uniformly across national contexts, operationalised as the primary grouping variable in the cross-national comparative study. Consumer perceptions are shaped by culturally and institutionally embedded frameworks that influence how sustainability is evaluated in relation to luxury. Both hypotheses are supported based on between-group comparisons. Italian Gen Z consumers assigned significantly higher perceived authenticity and purchase intentions to the Humanistic CSR scenario than Finnish respondents did.

It is important to qualify the support for H1. While the between-group differences are clear and significant, the within-group Wilcoxon signed-rank test for the Italian sample did not reach conventional significance ($W = 770$, $p = .061$), indicating that Italian respondents did not strongly discriminate between the two narratives within their own evaluative frame. The Italian preference for Humanistic CSR is therefore supported as a cross-national group tendency but should not be overstated as an unambiguous intra-group preference.

Moreover, other than hypothesis confirmation, the study also contributes to the nuance that the two national groups do not react with equal strength or consistency to culturally congruent CSR narratives. Finnish respondents show a decisive and large preference for Environmental CSR that includes factors like perceived authenticity and purchase intention. On the contrary, Italian respondents see Humanistic narrative as marginally more authentic but do not consistently translate this recognition into differentiated

purchase intentions, a pattern interpretable as an intra-group manifestation of the attitude-behaviour gap documented in the Gen Z sustainable consumption literature (Grazzini et al., 2021) and plausibly varying with the degree to which sustainability is institutionally embedded in each national context. This asymmetry can be seen as one of the most theoretically interesting findings of the study as cultural narrative congruence emerges as a necessary, but not sufficient condition for shaping sustainability perceptions into purchase behaviour. This finding builds on the understanding of why institutional embeddedness matters for Generation Z luxury customers and when.

Overall, the findings emphasise that the luxury-sustainability paradox is dependent on context and can be resolved in different ways. Indeed, among Italian Gen Z the human-centred heritage should prevail, whereas among Finnish Gen Z the focus should be on circular environmental innovation. The findings challenge the assumptions of a homogenous Generation Z in the European territory, respond to calls in the literature for cross-national replications of sustainable fashion research (Grazzini et al., 2021; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015), and offer a transparent approach to comparison across two different nations that acknowledges the group-level nature of its propositions.

6.2 Limitations

Despite the contributions, the study has some limitations that should be acknowledged and kept in mind by the reader.

The first and most significant limitation is related to the size of the sample. The final sample of 106 respondents is composed of 42 Finnish respondents and 64 Italian. Therefore, it deviates from the balanced target of 50 respondents from each country that was outlined in Chapter 3. The imbalance of respondents' country of origin reflects the different accessibility of the two populations through the mechanism of snowball sampling. However, despite this imbalance, both sub-samples exceed the minimum

threshold for non-parametric testing ($n \geq 30$), and the Mann-Whitney U statistic adopted is design specifically to provide valid inference under conditions of unequal group sizes. Overall, the moderate imbalance may have led to some asymmetry in statistical power even if the non-parametric tests employed are robust to unequal group sizes. More fundamentally, the reliance on convenience and snowball sampling strategy limits the generalisability of the findings to the broader Generation Z consumer population.

A second limitation concerns the potential for social desirability bias. The questionnaire addresses sustainability and ethical corporate behaviour, topics on which respondents may be predisposed to provide responses aligned with perceived social norms rather than genuine purchase dispositions. This is a structured feature of self-reported survey data and cannot be fully controlled through methodological design.

A third limitation is related to the Scenario-based survey. Although the use of real brand philosophies, Brunello Cucinelli for Humanistic CSR and Marimekko for Environmental CSR, was intentional and theoretically motivated, it introduces an inherent confound between CSR narrative type and brand-nationality familiarity. Italian respondents may have responded more favourably to Scenario A partly due to pre-existing familiarity with Brunello Cucinelli as an Italian brand, and Finnish respondents' stronger preference for Scenario B may have been amplified by familiarity with Marimekko as a Finnish national brand. This brand familiarity bias cannot be fully disentangled from the cultural preferences under investigation using the present design. A related limitation concerns the asymmetry in luxury positioning between the two archetypal brands. Brunello Cucinelli represents a high-end, inaccessible luxury tier, while Marimekko occupies a more accessible design-driven segment. Although the scenarios were constructed as abstract narrative descriptions rather than direct brand evaluations, this categorical asymmetry may have introduced uncontrolled variance in respondent's evaluations, independent of the CSR narrative content.

A fourth limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the data, which captures perceptions at a single point in time. Given the rapidly evolving landscape of sustainable luxury and Generation Z's well documented sensitivity to emerging social and environmental issues, the findings may not remain stable over time.

Finally, the study concerns two national context in the European Union. This aspect constraints the generalisability of the findings to different cultural and institutional environments outside the European Union or in different countries within the European Union.

6.3 Directions for future research

The findings and limitations of the study lead to different directions for future research.

First, the intra-group behaviour gap that was observed between Italian respondents could be further investigated. Indeed, future studies could test whether the perceived authenticity is a mediating factor for the relationship between CSR narratives type and purchase intention by using structural equation modelling on Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro to conduct moderated mediation analysis. Research in this field would lead to a precise decomposition of how national context can shape the relationships between CSR narrative evaluation and behavioural outcomes. Moreover, it would allow to move beyond the group-level comparative approach that was adopted in this study towards individual-level inference.

Second, extending the comparative framework to include more national contexts would enrich the generalisability of the findings. Other Southern European countries with strong craft traditions such as Spain, Portugal, Greece should be included alongside other Nordic countries like Sweden, Denmark, Norway to test whether the Italian Finnish comparison is representative of a broader Southern-northern European sample. Moreover, extending the analysis to non-European contexts like Chinese, Japanese, or North America markets, would advance the contributions of this line of research. In addition, the exploratory asymmetry in the attitude-behaviour gap between Italian and Finnish could be formally investigated. Future research could hypothesise that the degree of institutional embeddedness of sustainability in different national environment shapes the strength of the gap among Gen Z luxury consumers. Therefore, a longitudinal or experimental design that, for instance, tracks actual purchasing behaviour following

exposure to CSR narratives, could allow this proposition to be tested with more internal validity with respect to a cross-sectional survey.

Third, future studies could use fictitious brand profiles to address brand familiarity confound instead of real brand narratives as experimental stimuli. Otherwise, future studies could also incorporate a pre-screening measure of brand awareness to better allow statistical control of familiarity effects.

Fourth, a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative surveys and qualitative techniques like interviews or focus groups could be adopted in the future to allow for a more in depth exploration of what meanings and interpretations consumers attach to sustainability in luxury as well as the reasons why cultural narrative resonance does not directly translate into purchase intentions.

Fifth, a particularly promising research direction would be the analysis of the moderating role of individual-level environmental identity within national contexts. This research treats country as a proxy for institutional values. However, the variance within the same country could be substantial and more Italian Gen Z consumers with high personal environmental identity may react to Environmental CSR as strongly as Finnish respondents, thus attenuating the national context effect. Therefore, a multi-level modelling approach, that combines country-level institutional indicators and individual-level measures would allow to identify cultural and personal drivers of CSR narrative preference.

Finally, longitudinal research designs would allow to recognise whether the preferences that are documented in this study are stable over time or can be susceptible to change as Generation Z's purchasing power increases, as luxury brands evolve their sustainability strategies, and as the broader institutional environment for corporate sustainability continues to develop.

6.4 Final remarks

The luxury industry is continuous evolution in response to sustainability challenges. Therefore, understanding how different consumer segments value and interpret CSR initiatives is increasingly critical in this environmental. This study demonstrates that the effectiveness of different sustainability strategies depends on what companies do and how their actions are perceived in specific cultural and institutional contexts.

The research suggests that companies should move beyond the false choice between global consistency or local adaptation and adopt a modular architecture with one sustainability commitment and locally adapted narratives which would be both strategically coherent and empirically grounded. What makes sustainability credible is alignment with cultural values, not uniformity.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Questionnaire Structure

Sustainable Luxury and Consumer Perceptions

Welcome to this survey!

The survey will take 5 minutes to complete.

Informed Consent and Data Protection

By participating in this survey, you agree to the following:

This research is conducted by Giorgia Gagliardi, master's student at the University of Vaasa. The researcher is responsible for data collection and data procession. The purpose of this study is to understand Generation Z's perceptions sustainable luxury. Data collected will be used for academic research purposes. The survey is conducted via Google Forms. Data will be stored on password protected devices and institutional accounts. It is important to state that no personal identifying information, such as names or emails, will be collected. The collected data will be stored for the duration necessary to complete the thesis and will be deleted after the research is completed. The data will not be shared with third parties. Only the researcher and the academic supervisor may access the data for academic purposes. Participation is voluntary, and there are no right or wrong answers. Participants have the right to: withdraw from the study at any time and without any negative consequences, request access to their data and request correction or deletion of their data.

For any questions regarding this research or data processing, please contact: giorgiagagliardi2@gmail.com

Do you consent to participate in this study?

- Yes, I consent to participate
- No, I do not consent

SECTION 1: Screening & Demographics

What is your birth year?

- Before 1995
- Between 1995 and 2010
- After 2010

What is your nationality?

- Italian
- Finnish

What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say

What is your highest level of education?

- High school
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Other

What is your broad field of study/work?

- Business / Economics
- Humanities / Social Sciences
- STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics)
- Other

How familiar are you with the concept of "Sustainable fashion"?

- Not familiar
- Slightly familiar
- Moderately familiar
- Very familiar
- Extremely familiar

SECTION 2: General Perceptions of Sustainable Luxury

Instructions: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding what makes a luxury fashion brand truly sustainable.

2A: Importance of sustainability dimensions in luxury brands

- It is important to me that luxury brands demonstrate environmental responsibility (e.g., reducing emissions, using sustainable materials)
- It is important to me that luxury brands demonstrate social responsibility (e.g., fair wages, worker wellbeing, community engagement).
- A sustainable luxury brand must implement circular economy models to actively reduce waste.

- Utilising recycled materials and green technologies is essential for a sustainable luxury brand.
- The craftsmanship and heritage of a luxury brand are important indicators of its sustainability commitment.
- A luxury brand's use of local artisanal traditions makes it more responsible in my eyes.
- I believe that adopting sustainable practices does not compromise the exclusivity or desirability of a luxury brand.

2B: Personal attitudes towards sustainable luxury consumption

- When purchasing luxury goods, I actively consider the brand's sustainability practices.
- I am willing to pay a premium price for a luxury product if it is sustainably produced.
- I find difficult to trust sustainability claims made by luxury brands.

SECTION 3: Brand Scenario Evaluation

Please carefully read the two brand profiles below. These are narrative descriptions for illustrative purposes, based on actual brand philosophies. After reading each profile, you will be asked to rate it using the same set of statements.

SCENARIO A: Humanistic CSR Model

Brand Profile: Inspired by the philosophy of Brunello Cucinelli

Imagine a fashion brand communicating its sustainability initiatives. This luxury brand focuses strongly on the social dimension of sustainability. It emphasises its commitment to preserving traditional craftsmanship and ensuring ethical working conditions throughout the production process. Its core philosophy is based on "Humanistic capitalism", which prioritise human dignity, fair wages, artisanship, community engagement, and slow growth rooted in tradition and heritage.

For more information: <https://www.brunellocucinelli.com/it/home.html>

PERCEPTIONS (Scenario A)

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

- This brand appears genuine.
- This brand is sincere in its sustainability efforts.
- This brand communicates its values honestly.
- This brand seems trustworthy.

PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY (Scenario A)

- This brand's sustainability commitment has been consistent over time and is deeply rooted in its history.
- I believe this brand delivers on its sustainability promises - its actions match its stated values.
- This brand's sustainability initiatives seem genuinely motivated by ethical conviction, not by marketing.
- This brand's identity as a responsible company feels authentic and meaningful to me.

PURCHASE INTENTION (Scenario A)

- I would consider purchasing a product from this brand.
- I would recommend this brand to friends or family who are interested in sustainable luxury.
- Knowing about this brand's sustainability approach increases my willingness to pay its premium price.

SCENARIO B: Environmental CSR Model

Brand Profile: Inspired by the philosophy of Marimekko

Imagine a fashion brand communicating its sustainability initiatives. This luxury brand focuses strongly on the environmental dimension of sustainability. Its core philosophy is based on "Circular design", prioritising recycled materials, supply chain transparency, low environmental impact, and functional timelessness rooted in ecological innovation. It has built its identity on timeless printed patterns and functional aesthetics that transcend seasonal trends designed for longevity and resistance to fashion cycles.

For more information: https://www.marimekko.com/com_en

PERCEPTIONS (Scenario B)

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

- This brand appears genuine.

- This brand is sincere in its sustainability efforts.
- This brand communicates its values honestly.
- This brand seems trustworthy.

PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY (Scenario B)

- This brand's sustainability commitment has been consistent over time and is deeply rooted in its history.
- I believe this brand delivers on its sustainability promises - its actions match its stated values.
- This brand's sustainability initiatives seem genuinely motivated by ethical conviction, not by marketing.
- This brand's identity as a responsible company feels authentic and meaningful to me.

PURCHASE INTENTION (Scenario B)

- I would consider purchasing a product from this brand.
- I would recommend this brand to friends or family who are interested in sustainable luxury.
- Knowing about this brand's sustainability approach increases my willingness to pay its premium price.

SECTION 4: Preferred CSR Orientation

***Instructions:** Having evaluated both approaches, please answer this final comparative question*

Which of the two brand profiles do you find more credible and appealing as a sustainable luxury brand?

- Brand A (The Humanistic Approach)
- Brand B (The Environmental Approach)
- No preference: I find them equally credible

Other comments: please feel free to share any feedback, thoughts, or observations you might have.

Appendix 2. AI Declaration

This study was conducted in accordance with the University of Vaasa guidelines. Artificial intelligence tools were used in a limited and transparent manner. Specifically, AI-assisted writing tools (Claude, DeepL, Google NotebookLM) were used to review selected passages for language and grammar, aiming to improve their clarity and correct academic register. It is important to note that AI tools were not used at any stage of the scenario-building process.

For illustrative purposes, passages were submitted with prompts such as “Please review this paragraph for grammatical accuracy without changing its content or argument”.

Jamovi statistical software (version 2.8) was used for all quantitative analyses; no AI tools were used to generate, interpret, or replace statistical results.