Eco-fashion Luxury Brand: An Empirical Survey on the Attitudes of Millennials and Centennials

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Abstract. Millennials and Centennials represent the largest percentage of consumers in the luxury market, with a great influence on purchase culture and behaviors.

One of the distinguishing features of these generations is their tendency to prefer unique and authentic experiences instead of physical goods. Moreover, Millennials and Centennials are consumers with an increasing attention to issues as sustainability. In fact, they consider fundamental the sustainable values of brands and the environmental impact of fashion companies. As a result, many luxury brands are now investing in sustainable materials and ethical manufacturing in order to meet young consumers' environmental concerns and are trying to develop more personalized and digital purchase experiences.

In this framework, the aim of the paper was to understand what the attitudes and behaviors of Millennials and Centennials are when they faced with the purchase of luxury and sustainable fashion items. In doing that, a survey questionnaire turned out to be the most suitable tool to conduct such investigation. Furthermore, the paper will attempt to understand how the commercial distribution system is undergoing a post-pandemic reorganization.

Keywords: Sustainable Brands · Post-Pandemic · Environmental Issue

1 Introduction

From its beginnings, fashion has been constantly changing and has always played a crucial role in the lives of all individuals. However, today, we are in a social, economic and cultural context in continuous change that determines also transformations within the fashion industry, both at the managerial and communication level, due to the strong influences and changes in customs, costumes and fashion trends. In relation to consumer choices, a detailed profile has been developed with the peculiarities that distinguish consumers in the sector, giving fundamental importance to those who buy luxury products.

Nowadays, consumers' needs have been changed which have led to an increase in brands' diversification and a subdivision of the fashion market in two distinct segments:

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luxury and fast fashion. In particular, the latter has allowed the increase of the production of standardized fashion items at lower costs and with faster production rates. Consequently, the emerge of fast fashion and the increasing attention to sustainability, led businesses and consumers becoming more aware about those issues.

This awareness of both companies and consumers towards ethical issues, within fashion industry, about their impact on environment and society has led over the years to the arose of a new phenomenon, the so-called slow fashion or ethical fashion. This phenomenon has guided the fashion world not only through a slowdown in mass production and consumption of fashion items but also to the use of more sustainable raw materials and the maintenance of certain quality standards.

Within the article, a detailed profile of the consumers most involved in the field of luxury fashion has been developed: the so-called Generation Y and Z also known as Millennials and Centennials. These consumers, in addition to being increasingly proactive and informed, tend to develop a close relationship with brands, through the value co-creation. Then drivers of sustainable fashion consumption were defined, particularly trying to identify the attributes related to the product and the main features that guide consumers' choices.

In this context, Millennials and Centennials seems to constitute a large part of buyers in the luxury fashion market. Furthermore, it appeared necessary try to understand what were the variables that affect consumers' choices in buying eco-sustainable luxury products. From all the topics dealt with in the paper, it did not seem possible to draw certain conclusions, due to the contrasting theories developed in literature. For this reason, it was decided to continue with an empirical survey through a questionnaire with semi-closed questions, in order to better understand consumers' attitudes when they purchase products from luxury brands ad sustainable luxury fashion products.

The paper is organized as it follows: Sect. 2 Eco-Fashion items; Sect. 2.1 Slow Fashion; Sect. 2.2 Drivers of sustainable fashion consumption; Sect. 3 The role of Millennials and Centennials in the luxury market; Sect. 3.1 The Y and Z generations: attitudes for sustainable luxury; Sect. 4 Materials and Methods; Sect. 4.1 Methodology; Sect. 4.2 Data; Sect. 5 Result and Discussion; Sect. 5.1 Socio-demographic area; Sect. 5.2 Consumers behaviors and attitudes towards luxury brands; Sect. 5.3 Perceptions and reasons why consumers are not purchasing luxury items; Sect. 5.4 Eco-Fashion and Sect. 6 Conclusions, limits and future research.

2 Eco-fashion Items

The fashion industry ranks just behind oil as the second most polluting industry worldwide [1]. However, the emergence of sustainable fashion movements indicates that society is starting questioning the dominant consumer-oriented social paradigm, signaling an imminent shift towards more sustainable consumption and a greater commitment to sustainability initiatives [2, 3].

Particularly, an increasing number of fashion companies have launched projects to collect used clothes from customers, in which the obtained items are subsequently resold, donated to second-hand shops or recycled into fibers or fuels, reducing waste and pollution and preserving the environment.

Sustainable fashion is an alternative trend to fast fashion and refers to a series of activities aimed to try to limit damages caused by the fashion industry such as: cruelty to animals, environmental damage and exploitation of workers [4].

So, sustainable fashion, which is also known as "Eco fashion", is part of a philosophy and trend whose goal is to create a system that is sustainable, in terms of human impact on the environment and social responsibility.

Sustainable items provide environmental, social and economic benefits by protecting public health, well-being and the environment throughout their entire business cycle, from raw material extraction to final disposal, taking into account the needs of future generations.

Different ways have been proposed and developed to define and measure the sustainability of a product and one of these consists in make a more sustainable product which must have to respect the following standards:

- during the design phase, particular attention should be placed on raw material selection, the processes used, logistics and packaging optimization;
- ensure the supply chain, responsible work, community and health and safety practices of workers;
- products should have a low carbon footprint and include recycled materials.

Jawahir I. et al. [5] identified the three most common criteria for the development of sustainable products:

- minimization of the material and energy resources needed to combine product function and consumer demand;
- maximizing the use of resources necessary for the items production;
- minimize the negative effects of waste and emissions.

Despite interest in sustainable fashion, consumers also ask for aesthetics and style requirements. Studies have shown that price, quality and style of clothing are features much more relevant than ethics in relation to consumer purchasing decisions. It means that apparel items must not only be sustainable, but also include the aesthetic requirements by consumers. Therefore, the mere fact that a product meets a sustainability criterion does not seem to be a strong enough incentive for the consumer to prefer it over other products [6].

2.1 Slow Fashion

As we have already said, the growing interest in slow fashion is related to a greater awareness of issues as sustainability and the environmental impact of the fashion industry. This concept is associated with fair working conditions, sustainable business models and certifications [7].

The word slow fashion was coined immediately after the huge success of "Slow Food" in food industry. The main feature of the phenomenon of slow fashion is that it acts as a link between raw materials, workforce and environment and his holistic approach takes into account the entire product life cycle.

On the one hand, as for other items, the production process of slow fashion goods begins with the design phase, which however considers sustainability, ecological concerns and raw materials. The second phase, on the other hand, provides for the maintenance of certain quality standards regarding not only production but also the working life of the individuals involved and their salaries. The third and final step encourage recycling and reuse [8].

2.2 Drivers of Sustainable Fashion Consumption

Although most consumers agree that the impact of fashion products on the environment is an important issue when deciding which item to buy, this feature is not considered as important as quality and price (European Commission, 2009). Due to the variety of motivational factors behind buying sustainable fashion products, this concept still represents uncharted territory and consumer's attitude and behaviors gap remains a problem [5, 9].

Literature demonstrates that product attributes play a crucial role in ethical fashion consumption choices. The recurring aspects that tend to influence the consumption of sustainable garments are: price, quality, information, style and availability. Alongside product-related features, literature identifies a number of consumer-related characteristics, which influence ethical fashion consumption choices which are: personal interest, emotions, skepticism, self-expression, social acceptance, effort and behaviors.

3 The Role of Millennials and Centennials in the Luxury Market

In this modern and dynamic business environment, interactions between brands and consumers are growing, especially because customer engagement is now considered as a good tool to generate effective strategies not only for acquiring a greater competitive advantage, but also for sales growth and to increase profitability. Millennials and Centennials represent a fundamental category of individuals within the luxury market, due to their purchasing power and their active interaction on social media. The increasing purchase of luxury brands has led to the need to understand which are the factors behind consumers' attitudes towards these brands [10]. These generations are composed of young, educated, wealthy, increasingly sociable and fashionable individuals [11]. They tend to adopt new fashion trends by researching and gathering information both through traditional channels and social media [12]. In addition, they are groups of younger people who tend to buy goods online and use social media to find more information about items and services offered by brands.

3.1 The Y and Z Generations: Attitudes for Sustainable Luxury

In order to analyze the behaviors and attitudes of the Y and Z generations towards sustainability practices, it is necessary to wonder something interesting: can luxury brands maintain their quality standards and excellence by adding ethical and sustainable practices in their businesses?

Nowadays luxury brands are considering moving towards more ethical and sustainable efforts which should be promoted and brought to the attention of the market. This suggests a positive influence on purchase intentions. Therefore, luxury brands that today incorporate more sustainable efforts, not only keep intact the prestige image of their brand but strengthen it, attracting more consumers pertaining to the Generation Y and generating positive attitudes towards luxury items and brands themselves.

Luxury goods allow consumers to express their individuality. As a result, luxury brands should try to design a reduced supply for consumers, in order to curb the rhythms of fashion through the main features of slow fashion. In this way, the characteristics of luxury as status, power and wealth can be managed providing sustainable material goods.

In conclusion, it can be said that through ethical and sustainable branding efforts and activities, luxury brands can limit their impact on the environment and, at the same time, provide diversified products and reaching new markets by satisfying the sensitivity of these categories of consumers towards sustainability [13].

4 Material and Methods

As we have seen in the previous paragraphs, the economic, cultural, social and technological growth are transforming the luxury apparel industry. However, as noted above, there are often conflicting opinions and assumptions in literature that do not provide a clear insight into consumer attitudes.

The aim of the paper is to investigate analytically different aspects of the purchase of luxury brands, ethical fashion and what the perceptions of consumers are towards these topics. The above macro-themes were explored through a structured survey questionnaire with semi-closed questions.

The selected target for the administration of the questionnaire, in fact, were Millennials and Centennials, also indicated by the expressions Generation Y and Z. As mentioned earlier, the former constitute a group of consumers, between the ages of 24 and 39, who are increasingly proactive, informed and inclined to the technological change. The latter instead include individuals between the ages of 18 and 23. These two groups of consumers were chosen for the reasons listed in the previous paragraphs, as they constitute a set of consumers increasingly involved in the fashion field, and as they are active and prone to the phenomenon of sustainability. Moreover, the choice of this target is also due to the importance they are acquiring within the fashion system.

4.1 Methodology

The first part of the research focuses on luxury brands in order to understand opportunities, frequency and motivations that drive consumers to purchase luxury brand products. In addition, this section investigate the opposite aspect that is understanding if the reasons that push consumers not buying such items are strictly linked to their purchasing power, personal characteristics or a lack of interest in luxury brands [14].

The second section tries to understand if today's consumers are aware of the new ethical and sustainable practices of the fashion world and what are the reasons that

encourage the purchase or not of an eco-sustainable item. Today, almost every consumer lives with this phenomenon and for this reason, we tried to study knowledge, propensity, frequency and attitudes towards sustainable fashion products.

In previous paragraphs were extensively discussed different topics including the need to slow down the frenetic production of the fashion industry through the use of the new model of ethical fashion and what are the motivations that push today's consumers to purchase such goods.

As already defined in the previous chapters, the two generations constitute the category of consumers most involved nowadays in the fashion industry and in particular in the luxury market. For this reason, the respondents were selected primarily through the age group to which they belong, to reach a wider number of respondents and to understand the differences between the two generations. Morover, other relevant variables were analyzed as: the income received within the household during the previous year, gender and social status. Those variables were considered for obtaining a heterogeneous sample of consumers, not necessarily identifiable by the designation of luxury consumers.

Furthermore, within the questionnaire, sixteen luxury brands were selected on a personal basis. This choice stems from the fact that luxury brands have a large presence in the fashion market. Moreover, some of them tend to diversify into various sectors of luxury fashion, while others concentrate only on one or a few sectors belonging to the fashion system. These selected and investigated brands were: Luois Vuitton, Gucci, Chanel, Dior, Dolce & Gabbana, Hermès, Rolex, Cartier, Burberry, Yves Saint Laurent, Prada, Lancôme, Faoma, Moët e Chandon, Versace and Tiffany & Co.

4.2 Data

At the end of the design phase of the survey, the next step, data collection, was started to find information about the selected sample and to analyze and measure the results obtained.

The tool that has been used both for the development of the questionnaire and for the collection of data was the web software of Google modules, a platform that allows the dissemination of the questionnaire through associated links.

For the collection of the data which were recorded inside the database in aggregate form in real time, while with reference to the sharing of the questionnaire various online tools have been used as: social media (mainly Instagram and Facebook), emails and private messages.

The link for access to the survey was mainly sent to university students, friends, acquaintances and family members, and consequently spread by them through the word of mouth.

The questionnaire was released on the web on November 6th 2020 and after about a week, the desired result was reached corresponding to 352 respondents. Then, the investigation moved on to the analysis of the results through a descriptive method and the support of graphs to simplify their understanding.

As anticipated, the analysis of the data was carried out based on the most relevant criteria resulting from the survey, in a manner described. During this phase, the aspects were investigate through the help and production of tables and graphs personally made.

5 Result and Discussion

5.1 Socio-Demographic Area

The dissemination of the questionnaire resulted in its elaboration by 352 individuals, including 80 men and 272 women. This result shows a higher percentage of women, equal to 77.3%, probably because the female gender is the most interested and involved in the fashion field.

The respondents were also divided into the two age groups corresponding to the generations studied and from the data result that the sample is distributed almost equally. In addition, 49% of respondents were reached for Millennials, compared to 51% for Generation Z. Within the Millennials category there are mainly graduates and workers; while Generation Z consists of students, recent graduates, workers and unemployed.

Moreover, the sample was then subdivided according to the area of residence. The answers provided by the respondents revealed a majority of individuals living in Southern Italy and the Islands, reaching a percentage equal to 56% of the sample.

The last question in the first section of the questionnaire was about the knowledge and the subdivision of this sample in terms of income received within the household during the year 2019. For this variable there was a strong predominance of the band belonging to 0–18,000.00 euro with a percentage equal to 27% of respondents.

From the analysis of the above data, it can be said that luxury purchases are not only made by those with greater purchasing power, but also by individuals with lower incomes. This is presumably due to the fact that such purchases this type of items bring numerous benefits to buyers, including high brand symbolic values (Fig. 1).

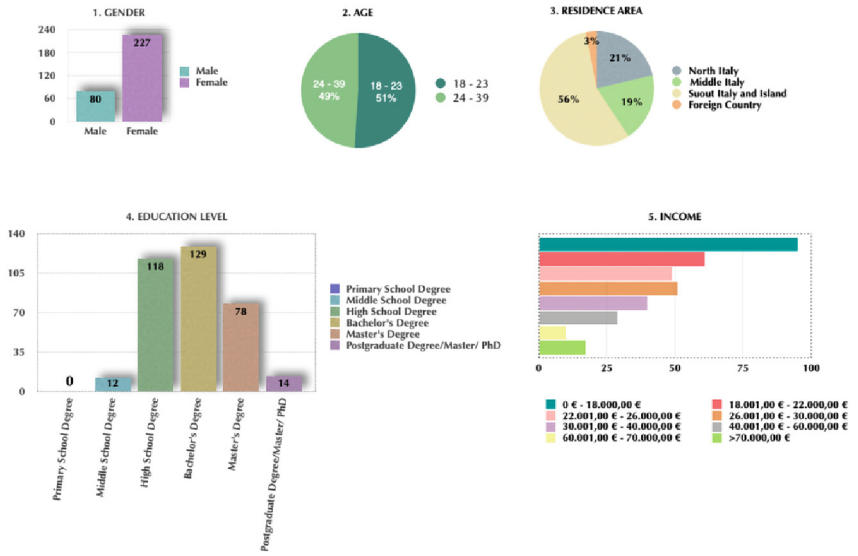

Fig. 1. Socio-demographic area (Author: Sinatra F., 2023)

5.2 Consumers Behaviors and Attitudes Towards Luxury Brands

The second step, in answering the research question, was focused on understanding if the respondents of the sample have bought luxury items during their lives at least once. Out of a total of 352 respondents, it emerged that 194 respondents purchased luxury goods, while 158 respondents never made a luxury purchase.

Regarding the subdivision of the two generations considered within the survey it emerged that among luxury buyers, most are Millennials (110 out of 194), presumably due to their higher purchasing power than the Centennials which mostly consist of non-working students, recent graduates, or unemployed people.

After identifying who were luxury buyers, on a sample of 194 individuals, a question was developed to better understand the frequency with which luxury consumers purchase eight different categories of luxury products. The data obtained have showed a greater propensity to purchase products such as: shoes, glasses, perfumes and food and drinks. Lastly, by carrying out a more in-depth analysis, it emerges that mostly Centennials tend to buy categories such as footwear, glasses and perfumes; in relation to food and drinks categories emerges that Millennials are the category of consumers who mostly buy it.

As anticipated, for the survey, sixteen luxury brands were considered. The results reveal a significant phenomenon: most consumers have never purchased products belonging to the luxury brands taken into account. Another important data comes always from respondents: the frequency with which they purchase one of those brands, named Faoma (which offers luxury furniture products) is extremely low. The hypothesis of such results stems probably from the fact that this brand is not well known by the Z generation or from their lack of interest in this category of products as the youngest category in the study. A small proportion of consumers belonging to the Y generation, however, claimed to have purchased at least once items belonging to the aforementioned brand [15].

To better understand the opportunities and buying habits of the sample, it was necessary to analyze the frequency with which they buy luxury products through different distribution channels.

The Fig. 2 shows that the frequently used channel is the one related to multi-brand stores, even though a large percentage of consumers have responded that they never make the purchase through this channel. In addition, it can be said that outlet factories are becoming a more widely used channel by consumers.

It is clear that e-commerce remains the preferred channel for consumers, particularly the different online brands' retailers rather than buying through the company website. This outcome arose presumably because, within the brand's retailers it is possible for them to find a wider number of items, offered by different brands or the incentive stemming from the greater presence of discounts [12, 16].

From the data came a further distinction in relation to traditional and online channels: the former are mostly used by Millennials while Centennials prefer online purchases.

Also, it were investigated which are the attributes that influence consumers' purchase of luxury items, taking into account features such as: price, quality, made in, design, style, personal interest, emotions, social acceptance and habits.

Regarding the price, such variable affect the purchases choices of luxury consumers [17, 18]. In relation to the other variables analyzed in the analysis emotion emerges because it constitutes a more incisive variable on the purchase choices of the Centennials,

presumably due to the fact that they are consumers who seek and desire a high experiential value from the items they purchase.

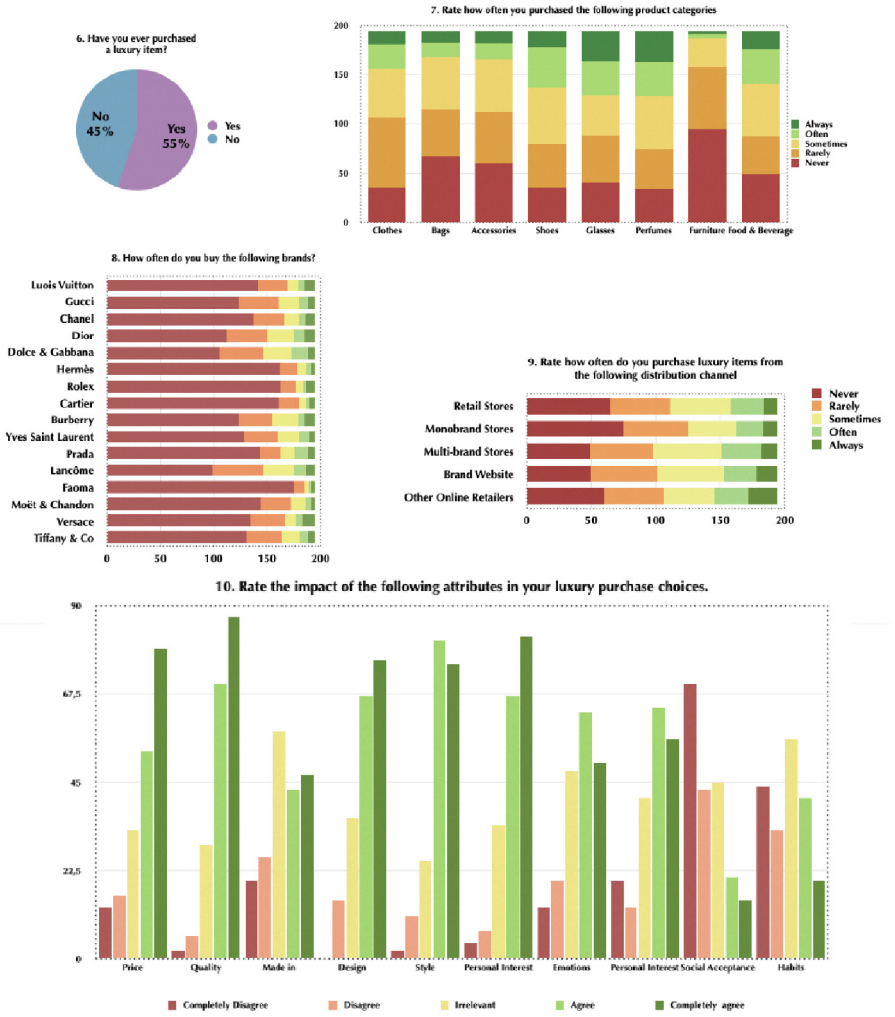

Fig. 2. Consumers behaviors and attitudes section (Author: Sinatra F., 2023)

5.3 Perceptions and Reasons Why Consumers are not Purchasing Luxury Items

Given the strong propensity of consumers to perceive luxury brands as expensive and prestigious, in addition to the analysis of luxury buyers, within the questionnaire was reserved a section dedicated to those who have never made a luxury purchase. The measured variables were multiple to understand which ones really affected purchasing

decisions. For this purpose, it was also given the possibility to indicate more than one possible answer, to not to limit respondents having to choose between one or a few options. It appears from the data obtained that the main reason is not the lack of purchasing power as assumed, but the low interest of these individuals in luxury products (91) and the high price of luxury brands (90).

Although in a smaller line, 63 respondents, mostly from the Z generation, indicated as reasons of this choice the impossibility to purchase due to their insufficient income, and 50 of them explain the reason behind their choice as they are not interested in following fashion trends. In addition, 31 individuals indicate that luxury products do not reflect their personal taste while only 4 people the lack of information provided about such products.

Finally, only 2 people belonging to generation Y, indicated the answer "other", stating that they do not perceive the need to buy such items and prefer to use their earnings differently (Fig. 3).

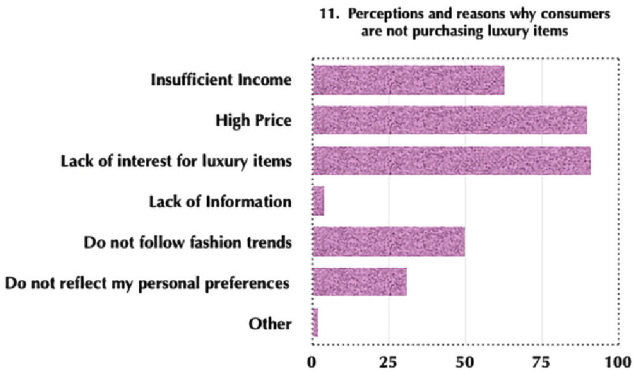

Fig. 3. Consumers' perceptions (Author: Sinatra F., 2023)

5.4 Eco-Fashion

Growing awareness on sustainability and ethical practices among businesses and consumers has made it necessary to slow down the production of the fashion industry and increase the focus on the use of sustainable raw materials in order to reduce the environmental and social impact resulting from the production of fashion items [19]. For this reason, the current situation regarding this phenomenon has been thoroughly analyzed in the previous paragraphs. The aim assigned to the next section of the questionnaire, named eco-fashion, was specifically to better understand the attitudes and propensity of respondents to this phenomenon.

The section opens with a first important question that was whether respondents were aware of the recent arose of the phenomenon of ethical fashion. On the one hand, a relatively high 38% of the sample indicated that it was not aware of this phenomenon. On the other hand, instead, 35% of respondents indicated that they were aware of this phenomenon. As for the remaining 28% of interviewed, they gave a different answer,

("I've heard about it"), presumably because they have less in-depth knowledge of ethical fashion.

The study of eco-sustainable fashion ends with a further question regarding the propensity to purchase eco-sustainable fashion products. From the data collected during the survey, it emerged that only a small percentage of respondents, almost all Millennials, purchased eco-sustainable luxury products at least once, recording a percentage equal to 12% of the sample.

The remaining 88% never made a sustainable luxury purchase, probably because this particular question was addressed to the whole sample, which also includes those who have never purchased luxury products [20, 21] (Fig. 4).

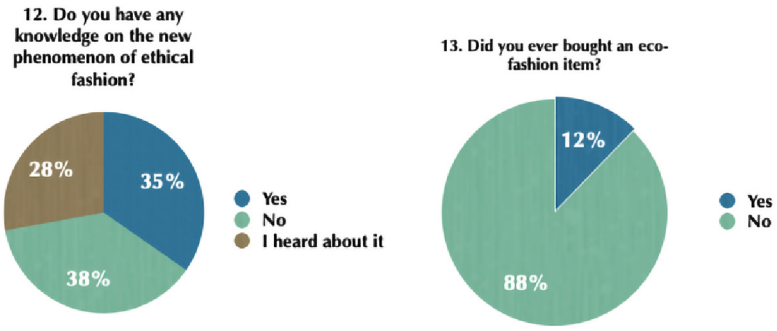

Fig. 4. Eco-Fashion section (Author: Sinatra F., 2023)

6 Conclusions, Limits and Future Research

This article has several limitations. In the first place, it is an elaboration realized through theories often in contrast whose do not to provide an exhaustive answer related to the various topics addressed.

Secondly, having developed a survey limited only to two categories of consumers (Millennials and Generation Z) has not made it possible to compare and examine in depth differences between other consumers' categories.

Third, the use of a limited number of luxury brands led to a circumscription of the sample. This implied an increase in negative responses from consumers, as most of the brands considered belong to the so-called "inaccessible" luxury category. Therefore, it would be interesting in future research to expand not only the sample but also the number of luxury brands investigated. In the future it would be recommended base the research on a more qualitative research model, in order to better understand motivations and attitudes that lead to certain final purchasing choices.

Moreover, in recent years, there have been major changes in the commercial structure of cities in relation to fashion industry. These changes include the rise of online commerce, the concentration of commerce in large shopping centers, the rise of second-hand clothing stores, technological innovation and the evolution of consumer needs.

According to literature [22, 23], e-commerce, social media and crowdfunding are revolutionizing the fashion and retail industry, allowing companies to reach a wider audience and test new products quickly and economically.

As already said, sustainability is another aspect that is becoming increasingly important in the fashion industry. Some authors [24] highlight the need for new supply chain management models [25] to reduce the environmental impact of fashion industry and improve conditions for workers. Also, fashion is becoming increasingly technological [26], with the introduction of smart fabrics, connected clothing and sustainable production technologies.

Furthermore, the influence of digital media [27] on the fashion industry, highlight how companies must adapt to consumers' needs and whose are increasingly interested in sustainable fashion and transparency in the production practices.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the fashion industry and on the economy in general. In particular, it has led to changes in the commercial structure of cities, both in the way people buy clothing and accessories, and how businesses operate within cities [28].

A major study published in the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services in 2021 examined the impact of the pandemic on the distribution channel strategy of fashion operators in Italy. Authors pointed out that lockdown has led to a significant increase in online purchases, even for fashion products, with a negative impact on physical store sales. In addition, the pandemic also accelerated the current trend towards omnichannel, which means the combination of different sales channels (online, physical stores, social media, etc.) in order to offer customers a more integrated and personalized shopping experience. This was also highlighted in a study published in the International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management in 2020, which examined the omnichannel strategies adopted by fashion companies in China [29].

The fashion industry is also becoming increasingly aware of the sustainability and environmental impact of its activities, with a growing interest in local production and reducing carbon emissions. This could lead to a greater focus on the production and sale of sustainable clothing and accessories within cities.

Pandemic has increased the focus on the importance of sustainability in the fashion industry. In particular, the industry has started to focus more on the production and sale of sustainable products, with a growing focus on reducing environmental impact. This has led to a greater focus on local production and the reduction of carbon emissions, with possible repercussions on the structure of cities where the fashion industry is present.

In addition, the health emergency has speed up the digitalization of the fashion industry, leading to an increase in online purchases and the growth of e-commerce platforms. This has guided to a restructuring of the commercial structures of the cities, with greater attention to logistics and the organization of home delivery services. Also, pandemic has led an increase in online shopping and has also influenced consumers' choices to purchase in physical stores, leading to a change in the commercial structure of cities.

During the pandemic, the attention of many individuals has moved to issues as inclusiveness and diversity in the fashion industry, with a growing interest in representing people of different ethnicity, gender and involve them in fashion models.

For example, there have been initiatives to promote diversity between fashion models and to ensure that industrial workers are treated fairly and safely.

This could lead to a change in the structure of cities where the fashion industry is present, with a greater focus on promoting diversity and inclusion.

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