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From Traditional to Post-modern Value of Luxury

2.1 Definition of Luxury—What Is It and What Is It not?

Luxury comes from Latin *luxuria*, which means luxury and splendour. Dictionary entries of luxury emphasize its following features:

- abundance, excess, superfluity for pleasure and comfort (Merriam Webster 2018),
- a state of rare, though great, comfort or elegance; hardly accessible pleasure; an object that is not necessary, though desirable, expensive and difficult to obtain (Oxford Dictionary 2018);
- conditions or goods for comfortable living and pleasure; accessible for few (PWN Dictionary 2018).

In many studies which try to define the features of luxury goods their rarity, artistry, polysensuality, excellent quality, uniqueness and high price are emphasized (Cristini et al. 2017; Kapferer and Bastien 2009; O’Cass and Frost 2002; Dubois et al. 2001; Vigneron and Johnson 1999). Luxury is unnecessary but desirable and its purchase, usage
and experiencing it brings pleasure, self-confidence and highlights high social status (Chevalier and Mazzalovo 2008; Tsai 2005; Wong and Zaichkowsky 1999; Dubois and Paternault 1997; Berry 1994).

Although there are some common features of luxury the blurred categorization criteria fail to build clear demarcation lines between what is luxury and what is not. The most important features of luxury are described below showing at the same time that the separate use of certain features to describe goods, services or even experiences may lead to an erroneous classification.

When referring to the term objectivity it is worth emphasizing the fundamental difficulty in proving that objective luxury does actually exist. The first difficulty has already been outlined in the analysis of value and valuation itself. Like value luxury is primarily a relative, individual category, depending on the situational and social context (see e.g. Holbrook 1996, 2006; Dubois and Paternault 1997; Dubois et al. 2001; Chevalier and Mazzalovo 2008). The coincidence is due to the fact that the term luxury itself contains a valuation component. When we say “wheelbarrow,” we are able to imagine the object, to list its functions while refraining from automatically assessing whether we generally like wheelbarrows, whether we want it or whether we condemn those who have wheelbarrows or even display them publicly. Moreover by “wheelbarrow” we can mean our own wheelbarrow without thinking about how privileged we are because of its possession or socially considered worse because we bought ours at a Tesco sale. If we use the word luxury instead of a wheelbarrow the whole emotional and social context of the statement changes.

An example of a wheelbarrow as a reversal of a luxury good probably is going to be considered scientifically unconvincing thus I am going to use the work of Popper (1979) and his three layers of entities, the dichotomy and simultaneous coexistence of which was already raised earlier by philosophers (see Chapter 1). According to Popper the world is made up of (1) a material layer (objects, people, or generally materialized entities), (2) a domain of subjective experience of individuals, including thoughts, emotions, perceptions, preferences (3) a sphere of very broadly understood culture resulting from (scientific) cognition, production of material and spiritual experiences. In this context luxury is the goods and
services that give rise to the possibility that individuals (by coming into contact with them, by experiencing them) create a specific image of them and that the social environment shares and legitimizes this impression.

The difficulty in objectivizing luxury results not only from the subjective feelings of individuals (the second layer of the Popper world) or the state of social knowledge about what is luxury and how to judge it (the third layer), but also from quite revolutionary transformations of this business as discussed below. Over the centuries, including the last decades, dynamic growth of different, previously considered luxury goods and services has made them democratic which should almost automatically exclude them from the luxury sphere. Following such a definition luxury is rare; not democratic. Clear distinction between luxury and its substitute or imitation is currently very difficult due to the emergence of many brands at the lowest level of the luxury ladder (so-called masstige—prestige for mass, Silverstein and Fiske 2003) and to a quite revolutionary stage of luxury business which we now observe. But let us go through these traditional and emerging categorizations of luxury, see how it evolved and what could be the consequences of this transformation.

Appadurai (1986, p. 86) lists five features of luxury:

1. restricting consumption to elites according to price or other right of access,
2. supply complexity—which may or may not reflect a real shortage of these goods/services,
3. semiotic virtuosity,
4. codes of use requiring specific expertise,
5. a high degree of linkage between consumption and the body, person and personality.

Only such goods which meet all the above conditions are transferred to the so-called “luxury register”.

Consumption is not only limited by high prices but other forms of access restriction are also often used. For instance Hermés bags (Birkin and Kelly) are sold outside the stores of the brand due to the fact that demand that exceeds supply. You usually have to queue up and you
cannot get on the waiting list by simply going to the shop and ordering a particular item. The same is true for niche luxury car brands—they are created and customized for consumers who, regardless of the money they are ready to spend (although there are probably exceptions) wait in line until his car leaves the factory stylized as a sanctuary of creation. Here in referring to the last comparison we are dealing with semiotic virtuosity: building an aura of uniqueness not only around the good itself but also around the whole process of its creation, sale and use. This aura is created by brand owners, other participants in the luxury value chain, as well as crowds of people who are not even potential consumers. It is those who, having heard about a product, shape its meaning as luxurious and openly or secretly desire it. The purpose of semiotic virtuosity is to create a symbolic meaning: a value expressed in social desire combined with knowledge of what a product is and how it can be used. The last feature concerns privacy: luxury is the good intended for individuals to fulfill their desires. However as Bourdieu writes the mere acquisition of a luxury good does not yet determine that its holders belong to a particular social class. This is because class diversity concerns not only material status but also a lifestyle, the use of similar practices and even the following of similar fashion trends (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2013). Although there are activities aimed at distinction from the group within the same class the search for difference takes place within an invisible, yet existing and impassable framework of what is appropriate within the group or social class.

A. Appadurai (as well as P. Bourdieu), defines this by coding: it requires knowledge to be able to decode which luxury goods are valued higher by a given social class than others and which styles of use are considered elegant and “worthy of this class”. The meaning and functioning of such codes, concerning the use of luxury goods and the use of luxury services, are referred to in Chapter 6. However the most frequently cited characteristics of luxury are commented on: rarity, high price, mastery of workmanship, excellent quality, artistry, polysensuality and social desire all of which are in parallel with moral stigma.
2.2 Rarity, High Price and Master Craftsmanship—Does It Still Exist or Matter?

Luxury goods and services should be rare and therefore unavailable, which increases their value. Conversely the relative abundance of goods reduces their value and often their price. Although the price is treated as a reflection of value in use the price itself also suggests what value a good may have (see e.g. Smith and Nagle 1995; Naylor and Frank 2001). This common economic rule, called demand law (the higher the price the lower the demand) does not apply to luxury business. Instead of falling demand for luxury goods increases with their prices and results in an upward-sloping demand curve. This is because the price of a luxury is not the mere the result of supply–demand interplay but much more subtle dependencies. High price becomes an emblem of social desire and hence its social value and serves here as an indicator of wealth for those who can afford these goods, transforming luxury goods as proofs of belonging to a wealthy class.

This anomaly is called a Veblen paradox named after probably the most quoted author in studies on luxury who described the bourgeoisie’s consumption practices and defined them as conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1899: 2008). However while studying this phenomenon Veblen did not shy away from moralizing remarks and was quite effective in reinforcing public condemnation of the public exposure of luxury (see also Mruk and Stępień 2018).

Rarity, analyzed as a socially constructed criterion, disqualifies the objective rarity as an absolute measure of luxury as it is also used to describe the intensity of deprivation in a certain situational and environmental context. Orléans (2014, p. 85) referring to anthropological and sociological analyses of the life of nomadic and conqueror tribes claims that in principle these people did not experience a sense of rarity. Living in a certain way they developed such a set of needs that did not make them suffer from deprivation of comfort, food and so on and allowed them to consider their modest resources to be sufficient for life.
Deprived of something, according to the prospect theory (Tversky and Kahneman 1981), we value the desired object much higher than while we possess it or already get satisfied by its usage. First however we need to know that a given set of goods or services exists and then assimilate and internalize their meaning as important to us.

Deprivation as a relative measure of rarity may also change ordinary goods into desirable (thus considered luxurious) items although only in the so-called private register of luxury. A piece of bread, a bottle of water, an old blanket or a dream becomes a luxury in a situation of hunger, thirst, hypothermia or physical exhaustion. Some people when asked what is luxury indicate free time or health as these are impossible to buy (Hoffmann and Coste-Marniere 2013; Hung and David 2020). The paradox of rarity and value in use has already been raised by A. Smith in comparison with the low price (and exchange value) of water as a highly usable good and the high price (and exchange value) of diamonds with a low value in use but understood narrowly through the prism of functionality. Although marginalists have explained this paradox by developing a marginal theory of usefulness the feelings of an individual who is deprived of, and desires, a good (despite the fact that it is universal, for example) may increase its value.

On the other hand the rare occurrence of a good does not determine that it will automatically be assessed as luxurious. One of the rarest elements in nature are lanthanides (scandium, yttrium, lanthanum, cerium, praseodymium, neodymium, promethium, samarium, europium, gadolinium, terbium, dysprosium, holmium, erbium, thulium, yttrium and lutetium). They are rare and valuable (here: expensive) and are used in the aerospace industry, in the manufacture of lasers, magnets, liquid crystal displays or ceramics. Despite this they are not called luxurious because they are not an object of social desire, like gold, platinum or recently titanium.

Luxury as a term is also not used to describe goods that are associated with superior values such as life and health. We will not call an extremely expensive life-saving operation a luxury although the conditions in which it will take place and in which the patient will convalesce can be graded from Spartan to luxurious.
Rarity is not only socially constructed but also a variable category both geographically and over time. For example, crawfish, lobsters and shrimps are simply cheaper where they are abundant and can be fished at low cost. In colonial times in the USA lobsters were considered to be food for the poor. Servants from Massachusetts successfully sued their masters for being served seafood too often for their daily meals resulting in agreements restricting lobster consumption to three times a week (Khan 2016). However, it would be too simplistic to prove that the contemporary recognition of seafood as a delicacy and culinary luxury was influenced by the extinction of these species. The perception of this type of food as luxurious was influenced not only by its rare occurrence but also by scientific discoveries about its positive health properties combined with the fashion for taking care of the personal silhouette and although it can be considered that lobster or red royal crab is nowadays an objective luxury good (due to its rarity, high price and social desire) there are yet many people who consider it a luxury only in the face of imminent starvation.

Consumption of luxury goods has been divided at the level of the individual consumer into two distinct patterns of behaviour: the first is the pursuit of the crowd or the bandwagon effect (see e.g. Sirgy 1985; Belk 1988; Dittmar 1994; Miller et al. 1993; Brewer and Gardner 1996; Kastanakis and Balabanis 2014). The second is the snob effect (see e.g. Leibenstein 1950; Corneo and Jeanne 1997; Brewer and Gardner 1996; Kastanakis and Balabanis 2014). The snob effect is created among this group of consumers who want to stand out, but at the same time perceive themselves as exceptional and are characterized by the so-called internal locus of control (according to the principle—the most important factor is how I feel and perceive myself, see also Phares 1976; Wong and Ahuvia

1It is about both the abundance and the possibility of obtaining the goods in question. For example, red royal crabs, the world’s most expensive crab, are fished in the Bering Sea region, near Alaska, although they are an invasive species in the Barents Sea region. The price is not so much dependent on their occurrence as on extreme fishing conditions. The profession of shellfish fisherman has been hailed as one of the most dangerous in the world but since 2005 when the documentary series “Deadliest Catch” was broadcast, fishing conditions have improved. Fortunately for fishermen the price of royal crabs is still high. However, the most expensive seafood are shark fins, bluefin tuna, or fugu fish. About 80% of the bluefin Atlantic and Pacific tuna caught is consumed in Japan. In 2008 a sales record was set; USD 247,000 was paid for a Bluefin tuna at the Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo.
The willingness to buy luxury goods from this group decreases the more popular and publicly desirable they are. Rarity is the impulse that produces both effects. While the snob inclination is driven by objective rarity, crowd chasing stems from the subjective perception of rarity, shaped by individual deprivation combined with public desire.

In the light of the above relationships the question arises whether luxury can be a good at a low price available to the public or free of charge. Considering the relativism of consumers’ perception of luxury the answer to the question whether luxury can be cheap and universal should be positive. An example of such “cheap luxury” is the awarding of a Michelin star (synonymous with high quality food, culinary craftsmanship, aesthetics of serving, manner of serving) for the second consecutive year to street bars (so-called food stalls) in Singapore. The stands “The Hong Kong Soya Sauce Chicken Rice and Noodle” and “Hill Street Tai Hwa Pork Noodle” served quickly, but prepared on an ongoing basis (taking into account the wishes of customers) dishes with pasta, chicken, pork or duck at a price of about 2–8 USD per serving. The aforementioned rarity, understood as a deprivation effect, gives a luxurious character to everyday objects or activities which are not luxurious. However without falling into the postmodern tones of relativism and constructivism one can point to the emergence of such phenomena (mainly in the service sector) which can be called free of charge luxury. This is due to the growing trends of redirecting consumers’ attention from the functional value of goods to ephemerality and the uniqueness of experiences, combined with strengthening the importance of transient impressions. Luxury becomes the experience and not necessarily the possession of a given good.

The studies on luxury unanimously emphasize that one of the most important characteristics of luxury goods and services is their high quality and above-average functionality. Before discussing the quality and functionality of luxury it is worthwhile to refer to the interrelation of these terms. While for the Japanese (although certainly not all) quality is an ideal entity, perfection, which should be pursued through continuous improvement of the existing condition within the kaizen philosophy in the North American perspective quality is a subjective construct...
formulated by an individual as a result of comparing his needs (before purchase) with experiences related to the degree of satisfaction after purchase. Apart from the subjective feelings, in the assessment of quality, objective measures are used concerning the technical characteristics of materials, components, technological excellence of the manufacturing process, or durability, effectiveness of the operation of a given good and the adequacy of action in relation to the functional assumptions of the construction of a given product. Such an objective concept of quality is characteristic to the European, especially German, understanding of this construct (for an overview of the definition of quality see Borys 1980). In the latter context the functionality of a given good becomes a component of quality but it concerns the technical functions, meeting the most important needs (from the so-called product core). Quality can therefore be seen as an attraction to the buyer, as a reflection of technical mastery, or as an unsurpassed being—the ideal type.

When it comes to assessing the quality and functionality of luxury goods these two components are not the same. High-quality luxury goods are referred to by the nobility and rarity of the materials used in their manufacture combined with the mastery of their manufacture. In the case of fashion goods, especially haute couture, clothes are hand sewn and decorated which involves making a limited number of tailor-made items for an equally small number of customers. Hermés Kelly and Birkin bags are made of the highest quality crocodile and cowhides and the whole process is done by hand which reflects the long period of waiting for these items. Rolls Royce, Aston Martin and even Audi or Mercedes cars are equipped with materials and equipment to increase the comfort of use and provide the right aesthetic or sensory experience for the future buyer. ²

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²For example one of the offered options in Audi is the possibility to choose the sound produced by the engine. You can choose a car of this brand, for example, get a leather styling package for 20,000 EUR or Bang and Olufsen Advanced Sound System for 10,000 EUR. Mercedes offers, for example, 17 Swarovski crystals in each headlamp for 18,000 EUR and a Rolls-Royce star headliner available from 13,000 EUR. See also: https://www.auto-motor-i-sport.pl/wydarzenia/Najdrozsze-opcje-wyposazenia-w-samochodach,19946,1.
While the high quality of materials or a unique way of manufacturing increases the value (and price) of these goods the evaluation of their functionality (understood as convenience of use, comfort, safety), especially in comparison with similar goods for example premium class is debatable. Natural and rare materials generally require greater maintenance than their synthetic or less noble natural counterparts (e.g. Vicuna\(^3\) wool, cashmere or angora compared to wool, chamois\(^4\) or lamb nappa compared to cattle leather). The size of luxury yachts makes it impossible to moor in many marinas and their fuel consumption like that of luxury sports cars, has nothing to do with the cost efficiency of travel. In the case of luxury goods, the issue of comfort is not obvious either. Shoes from Luoboutin, Jimmy Choo or Mahnolo Blanick are rated by many fashionists as objects of exceptional beauty and workmanship but they are difficult to consider comfortable. The same is true of Lamborghini driving in the city. Just try getting into this car gracefully and then take a ride on a cobblestone road to see that using luxury can be a combination of humiliation and discomfort. Even though they can be considered as merely anecdotal examples of the discomfort associated with the use of luxury goods it does do not discredit the overall care taken to produce them. However luxury goods are not just about quality, let alone functionality, but about combining beauty with mastercraftsmanship and material care while ensuring a quality and functionality that creates the feeling of their uniqueness. Functional value is not the main reason for luxury shopping. These are social and hedonic values embodied in luxury goods that are the main causes of acquisition and public exposure (Wong and Zaichkowsky 1999; Scholz 2014; Stępień et al. 2016; Stępień and Hinner 2018; Jiang and Shan 2018, see also Chapters 5, 6, 7).

Moreover today many goods promoted as luxurious have little in common with the traditional understanding of high quality or mastery of workmanship. Mass-produced goods bearing the logo of luxury brands are nowadays offered to a wide range of less affluent, aspiring consumers living in developing regions of the world. Standards of workmanship and

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\(^3\)Vicuna—an animal from the alpaca family living wild in the Andes Cut every two years the wool of this alpaca is several times thinner and thus more delicate than the wool of llamas. Used in the production of clothing, by Loro Piana, and recently in Poland by Tomasz Ossoliński.

\(^4\)Chamois—thin, very delicate goat leather.
the quality of materials have decreased and production has been relocated to off shore or near shore countries (see e.g. Robinson and Hsieh 2016; Stępień and Młody 2020). The democratization of luxury deprives the traditionally understood functional value of luxury, especially in terms of its quality and rarity.

2.3 Artistry and Polysensuality—From Possession to Reliving the Experience?

Apparently when asked what luxury is, Coco Chanel said, “it is where necessity begins, when the necessity ends”.\(^5\) For her (and for many other supporters and consumers of luxury goods and services) the creation, possession or mere contact with luxury is a positive aesthetic and emotional experience which, while having nothing to do with the satisfaction of basic biological or even material needs, is essential for the full enjoyment of the richness of human creativity. This value of luxury places it quite high in the hierarchy of goods/services that instrumentally provide people with so-called superior values. While it is difficult to see moral good or truth in them,\(^6\) luxury objects embody (though not always) beauty.

Beauty includes artistic and aesthetic components. Both, although long regarded as a monolith, were from the beginning of philosophy considered a pure need of the human soul. Aristotle wrote about beauty as a superior value while Kant valued beauty at the same level as morality. Aesthetics\(^7\) analyzes relationships between objects (the artists, their work and the recipients), the processes of artistic creation and aesthetic values;

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\(^5\)The quote is distributed mainly in online forums, fashion magazines and appears in the film about Coco Chanel. However it is difficult to consider this as a credible confirmation, hence the word—supposedly.

\(^6\)I am omitting here a discussion about the relationship between truth, moral value and beauty. See for more details e.g. Mandler (1981), Baumgartner and Pasquerella (2004), Guyer (2005).

\(^7\)Aesthetics, like sociology or economics, grew out of the mother of all sciences—philosophy. As a separate branch of philosophy it appeared only in the eighteenth century thanks to A.G. Baumgarten, in the work of Aesthetica (bars 1–2, 1750–1758), although the considerations about beauty, as emphasized above, were conducted already in antiquity or probably even earlier which we cannot prove. Initially the considerations about beauty were ontological in
sense of artistry filtered by the sense of individual aesthetics (Gołaszewska 1985; Chailan 2018).

Luxury goods are traditionally associated with artistry and the fact that they provide many positive experiences caused by the contact with beauty. An artistic value embodied in a product or service is the contribution of the creator and may be subject to objectivity. The experience of artistry as an attribute of a given good or service is the relationship between this object and its creator and its recipient and its effects in the form of polysensual sensations depend on the individual perception of the recipient. Works of art are an excellent example of a combination of artistic and aesthetic values whilst illustrating at the same time how their exchange value is shaped by a subjective component of aesthetic feelings (see also Białynicka-Birula 2003; Mandler 1981; Baumgartner and Pasquerella 2004; Guyer 2005). While the paintings of F. Goya, H. Bosch, Rembrandt, P. Picasso, V. van Gogh, J.C. Monet, V. Kandinski and J. Pollock are recognized (and thus objectified) works of art of exceptional artistic value their reception by individuals varies.

Luxury—like art—is supposed to evoke emotions. However the combination of artistry with the offer of aesthetic feelings in the case of luxury looks a bit different than in art (see Jelinek 2018). While for centuries human creativity was considered to be art only when it represented the beauty of nature and aroused positive emotions, since the age of Enlightenment the task of art has been to evoke various emotions, including strong, extreme and not necessarily positive ones, while gradually moving away from copying nature in favour of searching for new forms and means of expression (see e.g. Guyer 2005).

The purpose of luxury goods and services is to maximize the pleasure of their users. This is even the case with turpistic works of art which bring the collectors the pleasure of having and experiencing them, although this is in contrast to what they present. In the case of luxury

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8Works of art become a luxury as soon as their artistic value is widely recognized which is usually accompanied by a sharp rise in their prices. In order for an art object to become a luxury it is necessary to generate demand for it, but not demand similar to the demand for
the creators of these (mainly) goods in the personas of designers and brand owners do not stop making the suggestions that artistry lies at heart of both the effect and the process of their creation. In order to strengthen the connection between the world of luxury and art the entire system of communication and sale of luxury goods is carried out in cooperation with the world of artists. The marriage of art and luxury is well-established, strong, cultivated and seems to benefit both groups (see e.g. Lagier and Godey 2007; Kapferer 2014). Just as exports are considered to be a multiplier of economic growth so the element of artistry is a multiplier of the future margin in the luxury sector; it acts as a trigger for many positive emotions and has social consequences. The element of artistry contained in luxury goods favours aesthetic exaltations, brings joy, but also confirms the individual’s conviction that besides his biological nature or egoistic material desires he also has a soul hungry for exaltation and it may be this very need to commune with art that is the main reason (or interesting excuse) for purchasing very expensive and doubtless useful things. In the case of luxury goods we deal with art only in relation to those rare and valuable goods, most often from the very top of the pyramid, which contain a large component of a unique contribution in the form of creative work combined with its unusual work or above-average quality of materials which in turn is another essential feature of traditionally understood luxury.

Luxury goods and all the aura that accompanies the process of their creation, sale and subsequent public demonstration are intended to evoke many positive emotions in the owner of these goods, some of which are aesthetic. However it is questionable whether the mere possession of luxury goods enhances the aesthetic feeling? It seems that the admiration for the beauty of a good is not directly related to its possession. Would we be more delighted with a Monet painting if it were ours? Do we like the bag more after its purchase? In order to experience positive aesthetic emotions we do not have to be owners of the goods that arouse them but their frequency can be greater the more often we deal with the object which in turn is more likely when we own it. On the other hand ordinary goods as well as demand characterized by the symbolism of rarity and uniqueness, see more widely Dewey (2005).
the law of diminishing marginal utility may work here; we simply get used to its beauty and do not appreciate it so much as at the beginning.

Ownership therefore becomes a problem if we want to experience strong aesthetic elation again and again. New goods or services, due to their novelty component, provide a high level of such experiences to a greater extent.

Contemporary developing trends of luxury for rent or shared luxury result not only from the concern for sustainable development of the planet but also grows because it allows consumers to enjoy new (for the user) goods for a short time; when the component of delight in the beauty of a given object is still strong and cannot fade away over time; for we have it for just a short time. By sharing a given good we multiply the level of positive feelings without straining the budget and without blaming ourselves for a possible lack of use of the good for which we paid a lot (see Thaler 2005).

While the search for new strong aesthetic sensations is probably not the most important reason for the development of luxury for rent trend in the second hand luxury trade (or pre—owned, pre-loved luxury), the need to have something special and considered fairly objectively as artistic sounds clear as one of the main reasons for the desire to have something special, unique (and thus to underline our own uniqueness, see also Fox 2018). All these three ways to experience luxury are growing quickly but the artistic or aesthetic component varies in importance (Joy et al. 2012; Zhan and He 2012; Chandon et al. 2016).

Luxury for rent is mainly about fashion or cars; it meets the need for novelty and social, public exposure of what is fashionable, desirable and timely and is developing among the not richest, mainly aspiring consumers. The trend of luxury vintage is, in turn, the domain of people who appreciate the craftsmanship of the design of a given good and at the same time want it (if the good is not part of the collection, but is intended for personal use) to emphasize their individualistic style. Shared luxury is primarily based on the idea of sustainable development. However the use of luxury, whether it concerns a good purchased or consumed for a certain period of time, is a source of many positive and not only aesthetic emotions: it gives joy, satisfaction and enhances well-being (Hudders and Pandelaere 2012; Prentice and Loureiro 2018).
2.4 Luxury as a Symbol of Social Desire and Moral Stigma

Luxury symbolizes wealth, social prestige, belonging to an elite group of elected people. It is not so much a collection of goods as their socially constructed meaning. Perception, social symbolism, built thanks to the spread of information about the characteristics and significance of goods, socially recognized and legitimized defines probably the most important category of luxury value. It is thanks to a social label that certain goods or services are included in the register of goods or services considered to be luxurious. Let me once again refer to Girard and Orléans (2014) and the role of social mimicry in value creation. Desire requires the creation of a positive meaning. It is thanks to brand owners, manufacturers, designers that a set of features symbolizing luxury is proposed and embodied in the form of some kind of good, which is to be the basis of later social desire. After enterprises propose a value the process of its co-creation in the social space follows. Only a part of co-creators (apart from brand owners or salesmen) consciously participate in this process. Mimicry occurs simultaneously in two directions: as a consequence of reference, comparison of the individual to the environment and as a pressure of the environment to reformulate, adapt the individual to his requirements, trends, fashions and so on (see also Palaver 2013; Urbańska 1997).

Almost every definition of luxury indicates its social desire (see Sect. 2.1 but also Kapferer and Valette-Florence 2018; Chandon et al. 2016; Wong and Zaichkowsky 1999; Berry 1994). The reason for desire is their artistry, quality, rarity and high price but also the very fact that those considered to be “better” have them, which in turn increases the desire of the others who aspire to join the former group.

We are talking about the two effects here which have already been described when discussing the rarity of luxury: the effect of standing out from the crowd and imitation. The latter was proclaimed by Girard as the most important motive for the development of humanity and the cause of its disasters (see also Romejko 2003). According to this philosopher people want what others have, following the logic—the more people recognize that a given good/action/state is good for them (i.e. it meets their expectations, needs) the less likely they are to be wrong.
A bandwagon effect occurs when consumer demand grows with the growing popularity of a good. It is not so much expressed in the attitude “I want what others want” as it means “I want it because others want it”. Scholars have explored the bandwagon behaviour in-depth in political science to explain election biases for example (see Simon 1954; Nadeau et al. 1993). Academics have furthermore analyzed the effect in economics; as one of the anomalies of consumer behavioural patterns which mainly stem from the lack of sufficient information about the product price-quality ratio. However this explanation seems highly inadequate because it abstracts from the sociological and psychological antecedents of the purchase decisions of such goods. According to Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory humans tend to evaluate their opinions, abilities, or social status and prefer to compare themselves with others similar to themselves. Especially Western societies are characterized by a “unidirectional drive upward” and therefore feel pressurized to improve continuously. The need to compare leads to affiliation, the need to conform motivates uniformity, while the unidirectional drive upward enhances competition. Even though Festinger emphasized accurate self-evaluation as the purpose of social comparison many sociological and psychological studies question this assumption (see Wood 1989 for the analysis of the amplifications and replenishments of Festinger’s theory).

Firstly self-evaluation may serve different goals; people compare with others either to self-improve or self-enhance. While self-improvement inclines towards upward comparisons—with people perceived as superior (Wheeler 1966)—self-enhancement prompts downward comparisons with those who are perceived as inferior (Wills 1981). Secondly, even though humans strive for accuracy in their self-evaluation process, social comparison may occur automatically and therefore be biased because the objects of comparison may be random; namely people may as well compare themselves with a stranger passer-by (Brickman and Bulman 1977; Allen and Wilder 1977; Guiot 1978). Thirdly there may be various multiple reference groups used as the basis for self-evaluation. One may be under pressure of the implicit requirements of one’s group but at the same time be attracted by the standards or way of life of another (Holt 1995).
Leibenstein (1950) defined the bandwagon effect as typical for lower-end luxury brand extensions which scholars further conceptualized as the antecedent of the snob effect (Miller et al. 1993; Berry 1994). This may suggest that bandwagoners would rather buy masstige luxuries while the snobs would rather purchase brands from a higher tier of the luxury pyramid. This may further imply that there are more bandwagon-prone consumers in the new luxury markets than in the old “luxury” homebase countries.

While bandwagoners want to conform to the public image of the upper class by virtually copying their purchase behaviour, the snobs tend to publicly manifest their individual sophistication and superior taste. The aim of the luxury purchases and their public exposure in both groups is the same: the quest for prestige and social recognition which seems to be one of the most important value categories in luxury. Both groups want to differentiate themselves from the groups that they perceive as inferior, but their methods to achieve this are different. While bandwagon behaviour is a mere copycatting strategy of the “wannabe” class, the snobbish strategy is to positively bewilder the public by non-conformist activities or appearances. The desire to differ is to express individuality which seems to be highly valued by such consumers.

Thus the reason behind snob behaviour is to gain public applause that would come from the self-evaluation of the snob’s individual superiority. Social recognition seems to be a necessary, even if auxiliary condition, for the snob to enjoy their good public image of oneself.

The social desire for luxury which triggers the demand for these goods (both snobbish and imitative) is practically inseparable from its moral, generally negative evaluation. Studies on luxury date from thousands of years ago and for most of the time have been a debate on the moral meaning of consumption and the public exposure of luxury based primarily on normative religious and ideological judgments (Berry 1994; Cloutier 2015). The stigmatisation and much less numerous attempts to disenchant luxury were focused on the way in which consumption and public exposure were consumed. They are not objects but people have been stigmatized for the usage and public exposure of luxury. Traditional understanding of goods themselves was positive; for centuries they were
associated with mastery of workmanship, the use of the highest quality materials, artistry and functional perfection.

The oldest views of luxury in the context of its usefulness and social symbolism are visible in the writings of classical philosophers. Socrates saw luxury as a public necessity; the final stage and effect of social development in which these goods serve the general public. He opposed the human tendency to cultivate carnal pleasures to such an extent and since these desires are stronger in the individual than the desire to serve society, luxury, as a private good, should be limited and controlled. Plato in his work Republica, recalling Socrates' conversation with Glaukon (in the treatise The City of Pigs), explains that when there are no legal restrictions on human desires cities turn into “tryphosa polis” consuming and frenetically surrounding themselves with luxury goods in a constant pursuit of new and more sophisticated desires (see Plato; 372 BC/2005; McKeen 2004). Similarly Aristotle believed that living in luxury is unworthy of the individual because it does not contribute to the prosperity of society (Berry 1994). The scale of the dichotomy between how citizens should behave and their actual behaviour was highlighted by laws prohibiting the public display of luxury costumes, jewellery or bans on the collective delight of the palate and other senses (e.g. Lex oppia, 215 BC, after: Culham 1982; Braund 1994).

Interestingly in Ancient Greece and Rome the reprehensible customs of the monarchs of the East and South of the area were considered to be the source of moral decay caused by excessive consumption. The ostentatious luxury surrounding the courts of Persia, Egypt and the Far East unprecedented in Europe aroused a mimetic desire among the rich Greek and Roman bourgeoisie. The merchants of that time conducting international trade activities not only supplied goods from distant lands but also skillfully marketed them arousing demand and social desire for these rarities (e.g. spices, porcelain, silk, exotic skins or jewellery). The explanation of demoralisation as being caused by external influences is an interesting example of the attribution error of ancient thinkers who apparently had difficulties with admitting that their fellow citizens have a fragile moral structure giving into desires of a completely non-metaphysical nature. The legislative struggle of the state against social desire and public exposition of luxury lasted in Europe until the seventeenth century.
The regulations against excesses were supposed to counteract excessive expenses that constituted a threat to souls, a reversal from God and a spoilage of public order. Luxury as a measure of size and grandeur was to remain the domain of a few privileged members of society and legitimize their greatness and power. For example a regulation of the French King Philip II in 1279 forbade townspeople to wear dormice and ermine fur, expensive stones and gold and silver diadems and an English law in 1336 provided that the wearing of clothes and fur imported from outside England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland was allowed only for members of the royal family, high-born nobility and clergy (McNeil and Riello 2017, p. 70). Italian legislation from the sixteenth century limited the consumption of superfluous fabrics, clothes, dishes, interior furnishings and means of transport. The regulations provided for a system of financial and corporal penalties (public beating) not only for consumers but also for craftsmen producing these goods (McNeil and Riello 2017, p. 71).

The desire for luxury goods was not only a secular domain. The position of the medieval Catholic Church was ambivalent towards luxury. On the one hand the view on the necessity of living in virtue was proclaimed (and one of its measures was supposed to be the lack of desire for temporal goods) and on the other hand monumental sacral objects were built using expensive materials, sculptures and paintings to emphasize the greatness of the divine absolute. In the thirteenth century the rule of modest clothing outside the church and decorative during liturgical ceremonies was introduced (Miller 2014, p. 41).

Early agrarian capitalism from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries coincided with what Berry calls the “demoralisation” of luxury (1994, pp. 169–173). Intensive industrialization and the dynamic development of trade combined with the emergence of early forms of promotion, favoured the growth of consumption of luxury goods. A growing number of people had access to products that beautified their homes and the development of technologies such as printing, weaving or craftsmanship in general allowed for mass production and the lowering of prices.
Bernard Mandeville, David Hume, Adam Smith\(^9\) and later W. Sombart (see Marshall 2000; Mandeville 1714: 2005; Franchetti 2013) saw the economically useful side of luxury. They stressed that thanks to the development of this market and business more and more people have jobs which contributes to economic development and the spread of luxury itself is an expression of the general growing social welfare and although the industrial revolution and the beginning of capitalism did not stop the debate about the moral overtones of luxury its tone has certainly diminished significantly (see also Armitage’s and Roberts’ interdisciplinary analysis of the “spirit of luxury” throughout history, 2016).

Despite the tendency of the privileged classes to surround themselves with luxury due to their birth or entrepreneurship (we are talking here mainly about craftsmen, merchants and bankers), in most pre-modern societies the rigid social hierarchy was not associated with a dichotomy of moral values. The accumulation of wealth allowed the privileged to surround themselves with luxury but it was not so much the common stigmatization that dominated as the lack of approval for the imposition of luxury, even among the privileged classes. In antiquity and in the Middle Ages the aristocracy’s tasks were not limited to collecting tributes, inventing more and more sophisticated entertainment or searching for unusual goods. Kings, aristocrats, knights and noblemen were responsible for defending the state and winning in the armed struggles was a good opportunity for a rapid enrichment.\(^{10}\)

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\(^9\)A. Smith was not a supporter of luxury because he saw it as a demoralising element but like Hume he saw it as an innovative and driving force for the economy.

\(^{10}\)Henry VIII (1491–1547) showed a peculiar innovation in his rapidly increasing wealth by liquidating the Catholic Church in England, which allowed him not only to marry his wives, but also by taking over the church property made his capital several times greater and enabled him to enjoy himself in luxury. The ruler was famous not only for his weakness towards women, but also for his lavish life in the form of organizing tournaments, feasts, decorating his fancy clothes with hundreds of jewels and surrounding himself with luxurious furnishings in numerous residences. His daughter Elisabeth I developed this style on a grand scale by decorating her dresses with even more precious jewels (an example is her Portrait with the Armada in which the queen is dressed in a dress decorated with almost a thousand jewels). However scientific objectivity requires us to point out that the most luxurious ruler was Louis XIV. For more details about the lifestyle and clothing of English rulers see Hayward (2017).
As Stearns (2006) points out until the eighteenth century the history of mankind has shown great cohesion in the system of values of pre-modern societies determined by obligations to the state, land and ruler and the subordination of temporal life to strict religious orders. All these in turn—from Christianity, through Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism to Confucianism (rather than religion)—propagated humility, virtue and moderation in manifesting and satisfying needs other than the basic.

In the historical moral outline of the assessment of luxury two threads dominate:

- stigmatization of the ostentatious consumption of the lower classes who are not entitled to this privilege because of their place in the social hierarchy determined by birth;
- a religious imperative to live in poverty but not binding on the ruling circles for whom surrounding oneself with luxury was a legitimization of the power of the state (and the church).

Nowadays the burden of moral assessments of luxury consumption has shifted to the problem of social inequalities resulting from differences in the accumulation of capital. The point raised below is only an ambiguous link between luxury and the relatively new, though increasingly common, global trend towards sustainability.

According to a study on the relationship between luxury and sustainability these two areas seem to be mutually exclusive (Achabou and Dekhili 2013; Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau 2013; Janssen et al. 2013; Kapferer and Valette-Florence 2018; Slater 1997; Hilton 2004). There are several reasons why luxury and sustainability can create separate worlds. In a sustainable approach the main objective is to use resources in such a way as to ensure maximum usability with minimal damage to the environment and to present and future generations (Kapferer 2010; Yang et al. 2017; Voyer and Beckham 2014). From this point of view the production and consumption of luxury goods is, in principle, unnecessary and harmful to the environment. The planet’s limited resources are wasted on producing something that meets the sublime desires of an ever-growing, yet still small, global group of rich people (Willems et al. 2012; Dion and Borraz 2017; Thach and
Olsen (2006). The spread of production and the mass consumption of luxury not only democratise luxury but also increase the scale of wasting resources.

Describing luxury goods as unnecessary and their consumption as conspicuous leads to a moral condemnation of such behaviour (Achabou and Dekhili 2013; Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau 2013; Janssen et al. 2013; Chevalier and Mazzalovo 2008; Atwal and Williams 2009; Kapferer and Bastien 2009). Looking at wealth is not compatible with an attitude that seeks to balance the conditions in which people live in the world, especially if we consider building 5-star hotels in countries with a high poverty rate or promoting luxury in these places. The very existence of luxury in places where the standard of living of the population is low exposes social contrasts and increases its negative perception among those who are deprived of decent living conditions.

This leads to another reason why luxury and sustainability are separate worlds. While luxury can cause social stigma its purchase and use generates a number of positive feelings and experiences among consumers. The desire to dazzle with riches does not necessarily lie at the heart of this pleasure. When buying luxury goods consumers want to enjoy their beauty, craftsmanship and above-average quality materials. The purchasing process itself should also be a pleasant experience. Worrying about the fate of the planet does not necessarily fit into the set of features creating this pleasant aura (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau 2013).

Despite these discrepancies luxury is not a complete denial of sustainable development. First of all luxury goods are still relatively rare and expensive (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau 2013; Tsai 2005; Brooke 2004). Their purchase, due to the price, is much smaller than daily purchases. For this reason the destructive impact of this sector on the environment is not as great as in the case of mass production. Secondly in the luxury sector the use of natural resources and the production of goods is characterised by greater attention to quality and precision in production and the way in which rare materials are obtained for the production of luxury goods seems to be better controlled than in the case of companies producing mass goods, not least because of the threat of losing the brand reputation as the most important marketing asset (Vermeir and Verbeke 2006).
If the actual production activities of all modern luxury goods were still in line with their traditional image the convergence of sustainable business models and luxury would be greater. However the control of supply chains alone does not guarantee that the resulting goods will be environmentally friendly.

### 2.5 Evolution of Luxury Business—From Class to Mass?

Humanity almost from the very beginning of its existence has produced things that can be described as luxurious because they were very rare, unnecessary but admired and the categories of goods that were considered luxurious changed although some clothes, jewellery, precious metals, rare textiles and works of art, including those decorative (i.e. paintings, furniture, lamps, carpets) are permanent residents in the private luxury register.

We can observe the consumption of luxury since the emergence of the agrarian economy when it was associated with the strict stratification of society into a small group of privileged and lords (rulers, mighty, clergy) and the rest living in poverty.

In Ancient Greece, Rome or the powers of the South and the East the surroundings of rare goods of newness, aesthetics or functionality was clearly present. However luxury goods were not only the result of the military annexation of some territory but also a derivative of commercial activity. Apparently the universal human tendency is the curiosity that prompts the desire for novelty. In ancient Greece, for example, exotic eastern spices, chicken legs or certain species of fish were considered luxurious. In ancient Rome the symbol of culinary luxury were poultry and birds, exotic fruit or spices and luxurious entertainment included lavish feasting, taking public baths, carrying exotic animals or having an ethnically diverse, beautiful group of slaves. An important part of the social signalling of wealth was also the organization of lavish funeral ceremonies (Johal 2012). Jewels and costumes belonged to an important group of goods symbolizing wealth and social status. The colour of purple was synonymous with luxury in ancient Rome. The dyes from a
special species of sea snails (Murex brandaris, Murex trunculus) were used to produce fabrics ranging from deep orange to black violet.\(^\text{11}\) In order to obtain 1.5 grams of pure purple dye it was necessary to collect about 12,000 pieces of these creatures. The dyeing of fabrics (mainly linen and silk used for ceremonial robes) left a weak, marine smell identified with the “fragrance of wealth”\(^\text{12}\).

Discovering and exploring the interiors of ancient and medieval shipwrecks reveals the scale of the trade in luxury goods. On the decks marble, lead and bronze were found, which were to add splendour to Greek or Roman public buildings and private houses; fragrances, silks and other fabrics, mainly from India or Egypt; Baltic amber, dyes, metals and jewels or a living load of exotic animals from Africa. After the creation of the Roman Empire exotic goods such as silk, porcelain, tea and spices were also transported along the Silk Road. The jewellery offered by Arab merchants made of African precious metals and stones was also sold.

Thanks to the Crusaders sugar and sweets flourished in Europe and in the late Middle Ages coffee, chocolate, laka, more and more interior decorations and pets joined the group of luxury goods. Finding pleasure in “exotic” luxury concerned not only Europe but was also clearly visible in the courts of Mongolian rulers in the form of love for African animals (alive and dead in the form of skins or horns) and European works of art. However as highlighted in the discussion of social desire and moral condemn of luxury for both ancient Greeks and Romans the consumption of luxury was a social problem and subject of public debates on how to tame and manage its consumption to preserve the public order. This problem is particularly acute when the political system is called a democracy or a republic where one of the main principles is civil equality. Although the number of elected citizens was limited there were proportionately more of them than in later monarchic systems. In ancient Greece there were also extreme differences between city-states and their approach to luxury consumption. While in Athens or Macedonia in the

\(^{11}\) See also https://www.ancient.eu/Tyrian_Purple/.

\(^{12}\) Interesting information about the luxury lifestyle of ancient Greeks and Romans is contained in the BBC series Guilty Pleasures.
times of Alexander the Great this consumption was manifested almost ostentatiously, in ancient Sparta an expression of luxury was at most death for the homeland.

From the very beginning the consumption of luxury was developing in the cities which Plato has already hailed as the source of moral decay. In the Middle Ages luxury also did not migrate to the extremely poor countryside which was primarily concerned with keeping the lords and peasants themselves alive. During feudalism and the reign of the monarchy the percentage of the privileged population was limited to the rulers and aristocracy anointed with the sovereign privilege of owning and publicly displaying these goods and two groups who did not have formal permission for such consumption but enjoyed it anyhow; representatives of the clergy and a group of merchants, bankers and craftsmen.

In the Middle Ages the consumption of luxury became a sin due to the doctrine of the Christian Church although this did not prevent the clergy from private use of Church wealth. Officially condemned luxury did not serve the Church only to publicly legitimize the power of God, but also to make the temporal life of his servants more pleasant. The second group (merchants, craftsmen, bankers) was not privileged because of their position to exhibit wealth but thanks to their entrepreneurship they acquired it anyway. The laws and regulations prohibiting the emanation of wealth affected this social group to the greatest extent.

In the late Middle Ages, mainly due to the art and architecture of this period, we can observe that the accumulation and consumption of luxury goods is increasingly the domain of entrepreneurs. As McNeil and Riello write (2017, p. 68 et seq.), the picture of Arnolfino’s engagement (by Jan van Eyck 1434) shows how rich this Italian clothier was. Fresh oranges, Turkish carpets, silk robes decorated with fur or a small dog were symbols of rare, exotic luxury and prestige. At that time the collection of items from ancient Greece and Rome and travelling became synonymous with wealth combined with good taste. Initially the journeys concerned Europe and later the Far East and Africa. The fashion for goods from the Far East, although present throughout the history of luxury, developed especially during the industrial revolution.
The largest consumers of luxury were the monarchs and the aristocracy. Quite apart from the moral overtone of this consumption, the needs of the courts were the driving force behind the production and trade of these goods. Thanks to the patronage of the monarchs outstanding works of art in painting, sculpting, architecture and ornamentation or charming parks were created as well as the development of theatre and music. The demand for luxury on the part of the high-born led to the emergence of whole branches of industry, satisfying the desires of the wealthy. The demand and supply was also ensured by the class of entrepreneurs led by the inhabitants of medieval cosmopolitan cities of Venice, Genoa, Bruges and Antwerp. At the end of the sixteenth century big trading companies were established: English, Portuguese, Italian and Dutch and later French and German trading in luxury goods on an international scale. It is thanks to the Dutch merchants that tulips, hyacinths and imperial crowns ceased to be a symbol of luxury, since—after their initial import—their cultivation began to spread in Europe (McNeil and Riello 2017, p. 107). Near the manors, craft factories were established producing for their needs. The largest were workshops in the Louvre of the Gobelins brothers in the seventeenth century. In The Hague thanks to the discoveries of the practical clock pendulum in the years 1650–1670 watchmaking was developed. Porcelain factories in French Sévres (1768) and German Meissen (1708) as well as English fabric factories imitating Eastern design were established. The entire Grasse region began to specialize in perfume production after glovers discovered excellent conditions for growing plants in the area around the town, from the extracts of which they obtained perfume oils for their products. In the eighteenth century due to taxes, the tanning industry collapsed but the perfume machine was already so much developed that it still works today.

Relocation of the production of luxury goods to Europe made luxury consumption widespread. This was made possible by the spectacular inventions of the steam engine and electric energy which changed the face of the world.

According to Sombart (1967) luxury and the pursuit of it were of cardinal importance for the development of capitalism. Sombart even called capitalism “an illegal child of luxury” (Sombart 1967, p. 27). The author also puts forward a hypothesis that this change of social tastes
to more feminized, focused on the appearance and aesthetics of homes triggered a demand for luxury goods. However while there is a strong and two-way relationship between the growth of demand for luxury and the development of capitalism, capitalism is neither a child nor even a spouse of luxury. Luxury flourished due to industrialization but it was only a sign of a general mass production and consumption being one of the complex foundations of capitalism (see Hartwell 2017).

Sombart (1967, p. 81) also claimed that the increase in the production and consumption of luxury during the industrial revolution was the result of the “emergence of homo novus”—a man of the bourgeoisie—who living in a hierarchical society must prove his value by, among other things, manifesting his wealth. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the demand for luxury in Europe grew quite spectacularly. The goods that enjoyed special desire and popularity were the Far East thin fabrics, porcelain and lacquered furniture. Gerritsen and Riello (2015, pp. 111–112) report that while in 1615 the Dutch Company imported 24,000 pieces of porcelain to Europe annually, five years later this number rose to 63,000 and in the eighteenth century the annual turnover of porcelain was estimated at millions of pieces. At the end of the seventeenth century Asian manufactories were mass-producing goods especially for the European market. In Japan screens, crates and lacquer chests of drawers were produced specifically for the European market with shapes and ornamentation adapted to European tastes. Typical decorations depicted large ships and walking white invaders with umbrellas in the scenery of everyday street bustle. White masters had to be accompanied by their dark slaves or far-eastern servants. These goods were called by Japanese Nambans which meant southern barbarians (Curvelo 2012, after: McNeil and Riello 2017, p. 109).

The demand for the Orient, which lasted until the end of the nineteenth century, led to the successful European copying of craftsmanship and the style of Far East manufactories. Berg (2004) in his article on the history of luxury in eighteenth century England analyses the process of development of trade and later the European production of luxury goods. British manufacturers successfully imitated Asian luxury although they gave it their own English touch, which even allowed them to export products of a new stylistic category to continental Europe. Already a
category of new luxury for the bourgeoisie was created. This mass-produced luxury included mainly fabrics used for decorating interiors and tailoring.

It was good to have a boudoir decorated with a lot of fabrics in the form of curtains, bedspreads, serviettes and to receive guests in a special, homemade loose-fitting outfit—deshabillé. Mass production of still life paintings, screens, chests of drawers and lamps was also started. Luxury ceased to be the domain of rich elites and although it did not go under thatched roofs richer layers of townsmen enjoyed its availability. By the very fact of being widespread luxury goods became semi-precious and not so expensive.

However such an arrangement resulted in a noticeable departure from the critical moralising associated with its consumption (perhaps apart from T. Veblen). New mass luxury has become a part of social life, style and fashion. It has ceased to be an overpowering object of monumental sacrum for the few and became a tool for delivering joy while still emitting social splendour. Much of the stigmatization that had previously been attached to luxury did not apply to tea sets, tableware, candlesticks or pillows. According to Berg (2004, p. 89), economic benefits resulting from the widespread consumption of luxury prevailed and suppressed the debate about the fears of moral corruption caused by the consumption of luxury.

Surrounding oneself with luxury has become a social phenomenon but it requires knowledge of whether a given good is fashionable and its use is in a good taste. Collins (1999, p. 114) quotes an anecdote about B. Franklin who in 1758 bought breakfast tablecloths in London and sent them to his wife together with a letter instructing her how to use them. He wrote that they should be laid out on the dining table because here (in England) nobody eats breakfast on a bare table.

The rushing machine of luxury consumption was stopped for some time by two world wars. In the ruins of war Europe reactivated the production and consumption of luxury from scratch, but—bearing in mind the cruelty of the fighting—no longer ostentatious. In the fashion sphere comfort, quality of cutting and restrained elegance (Chanel, YSL, Dior, Givenchy) come to the fore. Coco Chanel’s philosophy about luxury essence was simplicity, elegance and comfort. She had a vision of
offering luxury to everyone because she was convinced that surrounding oneself with beauty is a need of the human soul but most likely she did not think that this business would change so much. With the world recovering the luxury sector not only re-established itself but started expanding its activities. However the urge to increase sales in many cases resulted in ill-considered actions in the form of mass licensing and thus loss of control over the brand and eventually its collapse. It was thanks to Bernard Arnoult and similar businessmen that the luxury business entered a phase of consolidation; the fallen brands were taken over and incorporated into a conglomerate regime governed by the rules of the financial world rather than a small manufactory philosophy where goods are created like works of art.

The phase in which the luxury sector currently finds itself can be described as its “corporatization”, but its democratization is really nothing new as suggested by Silverstein and Fiske (Silverstein and Fiske 2003). The trend of spreading luxury has continued since the beginning of the industrial revolution. Today we are only observing its succeeding stages.

Silverstein and Fiske (2003) present the so-called new luxury as an innovative, profitable business strategy based on the development and marketing of high quality products targeted at middle-income consumers. As demonstrated above there is not much innovation in such strategies except a few new traits.

First, even though not new but strong and developing trend, is maintaining marketing communication suggesting that goods belonging to the so-called mass luxury segment are still goods with all the characteristics of traditional luxury. Mass global production and sale of luxury goods offered to a wide range of consumers resulted in the loss of the value of rarity and uniqueness. The massed global production and sale of luxury goods offered to a wide range of consumers has resulted in a loss of rarity and uniqueness. The expansion of brands to new groups of less affluent customers was combined with artificial segmentation and the addition of a well-known logo for accessories. Such aggressive expansion strategies are the result of the brands consolidation of brands, not any more in the hands of designers or families of craftsmen—brand creators, but businessmen who adhere to the principles of finance and
stock exchange to the luxury business. Many once elite luxury companies (e.g. LV, Dior, Gucci, Prada, Burberry) have adopted this style. The objective is a rapid increase in share prices combined with a geographical expansion of the scale of operations: both in the area of supply (offshoring, supply chain defragmentation) and sales; through the internationalisation of sales markets, brand expansion and sales in many, not any more prestigious locations (see also Liu et al. 2016).¹³

Until recently the consumption of luxury has concerned the so-called old cradle of luxury—Western Europe and many centuries later—the United States. Nowadays Chinese are the most numerous group of luxury consumers, being the leaders of a dynamically growing aspiring consumers’ group from developing or catching up economies. The purchase and public use of luxury goods serves as an effective emblem of wealth and allows new social groups to demonstrate their material and higher class status. Many of these aspiring consumers belong to Millennials and Generation Z. In 2019 Bain & Co pointed to eight new trends in the luxury sector related to changes in consumer attitudes, many of which refer explicitly to Generation Z, even more so than the Millennials, coexisting simultaneously in two spaces—real and virtual. These trends are: phygital (combination of physical and virtual channels of interactions with the brands), younger customers, openness and today—an emphasis on experiencing, positive emotions resulting from the whole process of interaction with luxury and this trend is closely connected with another which is emotionality—a category of value that is beginning to emerge (according to Bain& Co. forecasts) as the most important in shopping choices not only for luxury goods and services. Generation Z, which in 2020 accounts for about 4% of the total population of luxury consumers, generally differs in their purchasing choices from the older generations, putting more emphasis on experiencing, accumulating positive experiences and emotions, establishing and maintaining social ties than accumulating wealth and having. These

¹³The article shows how global brands spread their distribution network in China opening stores in locations defined as 2nd and 3rd tier cities. In other words we are dealing with the creation of luxury sales outlets, which in their expansionary capacity are similar to the global fast food activities.
experiences can be built in two spaces—real and virtual, but the offer addressed to this generation has to be customised.

Even at the end of 2019 the outlook for the luxury market was very good although there was already talk of a visible and necessary change—a greater focus on sustainable conduct and a possible slowdown in sales growth caused by regional economies and global political instability. According to Bain & Co (2019) the global luxury market reached 1.3 trillion euros ($1.5 trillion) this year with luxury services growing at a faster rate than sales of luxury goods for so-called private use. The new direction of change—towards experiential and more sustainable luxury—is to take place mainly due to the expectations of Millenials, which currently account for about 35% of the market and by 2025 are expected to make up half of the recipients of luxury goods and services.

One of the important changes is the development of the idea of sharing. It is not just about luxury for rent or the second hand market (in 2019 it was worth 26 trillion EUR, see Bain 2019), but about cooperation between designers and popular brands with luxury ones. Examples are provided, for example, by the cooperation of H&M with well-known designers of luxury goods in limited collections for the general public, the creation of joint collections by Fendi and Fila, or Louis Vuitton and Supreme. So-called street wear, thanks to cooperation with luxury brands, gains a new dimension. This benefits both mass clothing manufacturers and luxury brands attracting crowds of future consumers. Today Generation Z does not have the means to purchase luxury goods, but this can change over time and with the growth of their income. The strategy for mass and luxury brands is similar to McDonald’s strategy for children: if we imprint positive memories of their birthdays spent with little friends with hamburgers, French fries and a defrosted sugar- and plastic-flavoured cake on this young clientele today, for example, then they will remain our customers for years to come.

Sharing and co-operation does not only concern luxury and popular brands within the same industry. It also shows the combination of the efforts of luxury goods’ brands from the fashion or car industry with the hospitality industry. Hotels designed by designers from the luxury fashion industry (Versace, Dolce & Gabbana and Armani) or jewellery
(for example, Bulgari) are being built. LVMH has increased its presence in this segment through the acquisition of Belmond and cruises.

The involvement of the luxury business in the development of the sustainability trend is also growing which is related to the desire to transform the perception of this sector into one that promotes ethical and, at the same time, creative production and sales solutions while promoting philanthropy and careful production using local, unique resources. According to Edelman’s Earned Brand Report (2020) as many as 57% of consumers declare the impact of environmental and ethical issues on their purchasing choices. Let us remember, however, that these are still declarations, not purchase decisions.

However the most dynamic trend is the progressive digitization of communication and sales (see also Batat 2019). The virtual world provides new forms of artistic expression and building ties with the customer, allows the promulgation of the message about how a brand was created, how it is being developed nowadays and how it takes care of the individual needs of new consumers born in the era of Internet space. The Internet allows not only the selling of luxury goods in a new form of phygital or augmented retail but also provides an unlimited range and access to new impressions so desired by younger and younger recipients of luxury today. Although the so-called high luxury is still characterized by an ambivalent attitude towards the use of the Internet (see e.g. Okonkwo 2007; Andjelic 2017), communication and promotion in virtual reality is not so much a fact as a necessity. What is more today the sale of popular luxury is shifting from flagship stores in the best locations to the Internet or, for example, a fast growing outlet chain (see e.g. Stępień 2017, also Chapter 3).

Burberry is a frequently quoted example of a successful reorientation in line with the trend towards democracy. Faced with the threat of collapse mainly due to the stylistically quite caustic image of an ageing English elite Burberry has bravely transformed its image, targeting most of the newly created brands and lines to the younger, more dynamic

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14Burberry used the style of chavs (slang, also called scallie, ned). Chavs are young working class who are susceptible to hooliganism. Burberry has transformed the image of chavs into a rude but far from effeminate image of a young boy aware of his feisty, nonchalant and intriguing spell.
generation of aspiring customers (Bothwell 2005). Burberry is today an example of a benchmark in the use of online tools to strengthen the new brand image and online sales.

There is much to suggest that this is not the end of the dynamic changes in the luxury sector, which is migrating towards sensitivity and ephemerality (Lim et al. 2018; Batat 2019; von Wallpach et al. 2019; Kauppinen-Räisänen et al. 2019; Rosenbaum et al. 2019; Desmichel et al. 2020).

The latest COVID 19 Pandemic has strongly reshaped consumers’ purchasing behaviour, not only in the luxury sector. Now, the whole business world, not only that of luxury, is looking closely at the pace and extent of the consumers return to shopping. Preliminary data show that consumers are very cautiously increasing their luxury purchases which seems quite natural. Luxury belongs to the category of the most discretionary purchases which are faded out most quickly in a situation of financial danger, which is the current situation. Many consumers will suffer not only from health problems but also financially, as one of the clear consequences of the temporary freeze on the economy are waves of redundancies and corporate bankruptcies. In addition to the rather slow pace and size of luxury shopping the Chinese are also showing greater interest in local brands. Research (e.g. Bain 2020) on consumer purchasing behaviour during and just after the COVID 19 pandemic also clearly shows the following trends:

- progressive (although forced by lockdown) virtualization of shopping,
- an overall reduction in expenditure on purchases beyond that which is necessary,
- greater willingness to buy brands whose communication and sales campaigns are adapted both to the pandemic situation and emphasizing the care of philanthropic, environmental and sustainable aspects in their actions.

Taking the instability and insecurity into consideration, that the last pandemic has caused and combining it with the growing need to experience luxury here and now, the prognosis of Unity Marketing (2020) seems justified. This research centre forecasts that the industry of broadly
defined hospitality services will be the one to which most global luxury brands will turn and expand significantly after the end of the COVID 19 Pandemic.

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