

When luxury brands use recycled materials: consumer and professional viewpoints on a transgressive effect

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Abstract

• Objectives / Research Questions

In response to mounting consumer pressure, luxury brands are increasingly turning to recycled materials in product design and innovation. However, as luxury and sustainability appear to vector fundamentally dissonant concepts (premium-quality vs. pre-used materials, rare vs. renewable resources, etc.), consumers may perceive pro-sustainability luxury brand initiatives as a transgression that could undermine the consumer–luxury brand relationship. Here we set out to: (1) understand the meaning of transgression in the specific case of this type of product; (2) compare the benefit–risk balance that consumers associate with the perceived transgression against the benefit–risk differential that luxury professionals take away from a transgression-driven brand management strategy.

• Methodology

Qualitative interviews were conducted in France with 25 luxury brand consumers and 21 luxury industry professionals.

• Results

The results highlight the transgressiveness of the luxury product made with recycled material. It is the visual identification (or not) of the recycled attribute that determines the nature of the perceived transgression (negative and provocative or positive and innovative). The perceived transgression brings benefits/risks for consumers that translate into differential benefits/risks for brands that either strengthen or weaken the consumer-brand relationship.

• Managerial implications

This research provides foundations for recommendations enabling luxury professionals to better orchestrate their strategies around product innovation using recycled materials and thus preserve the consumer-brand relationship.

• Originality

This scholarship brings originality by examining product innovation made with recycled materials from the perspective of transgression. It also enriches the research on the linkage between luxury and sustainability.

• **Keywords:** luxury, transgression, product innovation, recycled materials, consumer-brand.

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