

# 4 Examining the role of sustainable luxury in the tourism sector

## The interplay between cultural context and personality factors

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### Abstract

Sustainable luxury in the tourism sector is an emerging trend that aims to reconcile the pursuit of high-end travel experiences with environmental and social responsibility. This paradigm shift represents a direct response to the growing demand for luxury offerings that go beyond mere opulence, instead favoring sustainable practices. Despite the growth reached by sustainable luxury in the last years, extant literature focused on understanding consumers' motivation thereby neglecting the possible interplay between cultural and personality factors. This chapter aims to identify how tourists' involvement in sustainable luxury services may vary between consumers with different cultural contexts and levels of consciousness. Based on an empirical study, we show that tourists with a high cultural context tend to display a greater involvement toward sustainable luxury services. This suggests that individuals who are more influenced by cultural norms are likely to embrace sustainable practices and luxury experiences that align with environmental and social responsibility. Interestingly, among tourists with a low cultural context, the individual trait of conscientiousness may favor involvement in sustainable luxury. Grounding on these findings, we identify possible targeting strategies that may help managers in the tourism sector develop more effective marketing communication campaigns.

**Keywords:** sustainable luxury; tourism sector; cultural context; consciousness; consumer behavior; sustainable practices

## Introduction

In the global travel business, luxury tourism has grown to be a significant sector that draws affluent tourists looking for unique experiences and customized services. According to the report on luxury tourism by IRISS-CNR (2023), Italy is the most popular destination for international luxury tourism in 2023. Luxury tourism generates 15% of the total turnover of the Italian hotel industry and 25% of total tourism expenditure (direct and indirect). Between 2020 and 2022, high-end international tourists (the so-called 'big spenders') spend around 25 billion euros in Italy: 7 billion for accommodation, 2 billion for catering, and 14 billion for visits, tours, or shopping.

Despite the recognized important contribution of luxury tourism to the economic development of a territory, in the context of travel, it extends beyond opulence and lavishness. It includes outstanding hospitality, exclusivity, and one-of-a-kind experiences. As noted by different authors (Batat, 2019; De Angelis et al., 2017) luxury tourism is distinguished by the aspiration for perfection, the establishment of remarkable experiences, and the delivery of customized services that accommodate individual tastes and whims.

Travelers' impressions of luxury are largely shaped by the degree of customization that travel agencies provide. Tourists view luxury as exclusivity and customized experiences when their preferences are recognized and accommodated. This emphasizes the importance of comprehending each person's requirements and preferences when providing luxury travel experiences.

The availability of distinctive and genuine experiences is another important component of luxury travel. More and more tourists are looking for immersive experiences that let them interact with the local way of life, customs, and environment. Amatulli et al. (2021) posit that experiences of this nature, which offer a sense of freshness, genuineness, and personal progress, contribute to the perception of luxury. Luxury travel providers must provide unique experiences that give guests a better grasp of the location.

As a result, the physical surroundings and aesthetics of tourist destinations are frequently considered to be aspects of luxury. Luxurious