

Sustainability Through the “Nested” Luxury Retail Experience*

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Abstract

The sustainable luxury retailing debate remains in its infancy, with a gap concerning the modalities to integrate sustainability into the luxury retail brand experience. This paper aims to shed light on the sustainability implications for competitive luxury stores embedded in their hosting cities. It addressed the relationship between place and luxury retailing, discussing the research hypothesis of the store-hosting city connections as modalities to integrate sustainability into the luxury store experience.

This study proposes two case studies, Favotell in Shanghai (China) and Luisaviaroma in Florence (Italy). A cross-case analysis supports the definition of a multi-level framework explaining the concept store experience. The three “nested” spatial levels are the store, the fashion city and the urban brandscape. Findings reveal drivers facilitating, differentiating, and innovating the luxury store experience and suggest research avenues on the social and territorial dimensions of sustainable retailing.

Keywords: Luxury Store Experience; Sustainable Retailing; Concept Store; Fashion City; City Brandscape; Global Markets

1. Sustainable Retailing and Luxury

The sustainability agenda is changing the goals and characteristics of the luxury industry (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2020), with significant consequences for retailing. Luxury firms initially approached sustainability with a degree of cautiousness, overlooking the potential of their relationship (Hu et al., 2019). Emerging geographical markets, new target groups, including younger consumer segments (i.e., millennials and Gen-Z), fashion democratization and the consequent intensification of natural resource consumption triggered social and environmental concerns in the fashion and luxury industry (Brondoni & Arrigo, 2015).

Luxury consumers are willing to show their understanding and care for environmental and societal challenges (Ivan et al., 2015). Among these, millennial

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consumers combine their interest in product attributes and quality with their commitment to knowing about the quality of manufacturing processes (how, where and who produces) and product durability, which should inform business sustainability strategies (Slaton & Hurst, 2022). Consumer attitude and attention to sustainability in luxury consumption have gone along with companies' acknowledgement of the importance of reinterpreting and integrating sustainability into their value propositions (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2020).

The physical retail location, which allows consumers to experience luxury brands through their senses (Petermans & Van Cleempoel, 2009), continues to be of primary importance for luxury brands, triggering memorable customer experiences and motivation to purchase (Verhoef et al., 2009). Arguably, retailing may play a primary role in envisioning innovative brand value propositions centred on sustainability (Wiese et al., 2012; Wiese et al., 2015; Arrigo, 2018). Limited yet emerging research on millennial consumers may help retailers evolve, responding to novel needs and trends and integrating sustainability (Slaton & Hurst, 2022).

The sustainable retailing agenda remains in its infancy. There is an evident lack of research on how luxury retailing can integrate sustainability into the brand experience (Athwal et al., 2019). Research efforts are needed to explore the opportunity to design distinctive, unique and authentic retailers' approaches to sustainability which develop the differentiation potential of the luxury retail experience.

Limited attention has been drawn to the external elements of the luxury store in shaping customers' experiences and perceptions (Arrigo, 2015a). Some contributions focused on the interactions of the store with the fashion city (Breward & Gilbert, 2006; Power & Hauge, 2008; Jansson & Power, 2010), and the agglomerations of fashion brands located in geographically limited urban districts that produce a "luxury sense of place" (Arrigo, 2015a). The contribution of the urban context, intended as a social, cultural and symbolic landscape, to the luxury retail experience remained largely unexplored. In this regard, the relationship between the store and the hosting city as a modality to integrate sustainability into the luxury store experience, as an opportunity to boost distinctive, unique and authentic customer experience, is a research hypothesis that remained largely unexplored.

This paper explores the relationship between place and the luxury retail experience to discuss potential routes to tailor distinctive sustainability approaches that, while boosting the competitive luxury experience, set valuable connections between the store and the hosting city. The concept store model is in focus. This multi-brand retail format is particularly relevant for this explorative study because it has been highly impacted by sustainability concerning luxury product selection. Beyond this aspect discussed in sustainable retailing literature (Wiese et al., 2012), the concept store has to deliver a distinctive retail brand experience, a multi-sensory shopping experience that is crucial to its brand identity building (Rovai & Bellini, 2018). The development of a sustainable business model is a part of corporate sustainability in fashion companies (Arrigo, 2015b) and it is a concern for retailing too. To what extent is the luxury store experience spatially nested in the territory and city context? How and to what extent spatial embeddedness of the store provides an opportunity for tailoring sustainable retailing strategies? Two case studies, Favotell in Shanghai, China, and Luisaviaroma in Florence, Italy, are analysed. These two cases belong to different cultural and geographical settings and are characterised by strong connections with the hosting city contexts. Accordingly, they provide an opportunity to discuss and

strengthen the research hypothesis of the store-hosting city relationship as a modality to integrate sustainability into the luxury store experience.

2. Luxury Retailing and the Concept Store

Sustainability remained a largely unexplored area in retailing, although retailers play an important role in connecting producers and consumers and in the supply chains (Wiese et al., 2015). Early contributions to sustainable retailing concerned the search for energy savings (Thompson, 2007) and attempted to identify sustainability indicators including the environmental, social and economic dimensions in the case of grocery retailing (Erol et al., 2009). Attention was, then, paid to the sustainability criteria adopted by retailers in the selection of products and labels, considering retailers' commitment to sustainability as mainly related to sustainable product offering and sustainability standards of their suppliers (Wiese et al., 2015; Wiese et al., 2012). Retailing companies must respond to the general call for advanced ways to be responsible and accountable in the face of the global challenge of sustainable growth (Brondoni & Ricotti, 2022).

In the field of luxury retailing, the case of flagship stores was in focus, highlighting the role of communicating the sustainability commitment of luxury fashion brands and discussing the importance of store design and in-store communication in the delivery of sustainability messages for brands (Arrigo, 2018). A differentiation strategy for luxury stores might consist in providing customers with an opportunity to engage in a sustainable retail environment. However, "there is no research on how luxury retailing can incorporate sustainability into the brand experience: a significant research gap" (Athwal et al., 2019, p. 417).

The gap concerning sustainable retailing contrasts with the extensive literature on luxury retailing (Dion & Arnould, 2011).

Store uniqueness and a differentiating atmosphere (Klein et al., 2016) connect the customer with luxury brands at an emotional level. Cognitive brand judgement (Kim & Ko, 2012), affective relation, sensory and emotional engagement (Russo-Spena et al., 2012) are intrinsic to valuable store experiences (Klein et al., 2016). The internal elements of the store, creating space aesthetics, give evidence of the brand image and inspire customer purchase behaviours (Bitner, 1992; Bäckström & Johansson, 2006; Jones et al., 2010), boosting memorable, authentic and entertaining shopping experiences (Kozinets et al., 2002). The luxury store can showcase and narrate the talent and skills of the designers and manufacturers behind the brand and narrate unique stories about it (Rossetti, 2015).

Luxury retail embeds services and goods, creating an intangible value (Dion & Arnould, 2011), and motivating luxury consumers' purchases (Hennigs et al., 2015). The location of the store (i.e., the building) and its atmosphere are strategic elements in brand value creation (Ballantine et al., 2010), positioning (Cervellon & Coudriet, 2013) and customer identification (Dion & Borraz, 2018).

The multi-brand store is a brand in itself. Generally, the store is a "showcase for a branded experience", communicating and interacting with customers through their physical layout, steering emotional involvement (Russo-Spena et al., 2012). US retailing developed a store-as-a-brand strategy, especially in the apparel sector

(Grewal & Levy, 2009). Contrary to mono-brand and flagship stores, the idea of a cumulative attraction of brands dates to the 1950s (Nelson, 1958).

Implementing a store-as-a-brand strategy implies that retailers focus on an integrative in-store model where the environment and products' images are harmonised and consistent for a unique customer experience (Burt & Davies, 2010).

Concept stores, especially the most innovative cases of multi-brand "lifestyle stores", are characterized by an eclectic but selective and consistent combination of products (fashion, accessories, but also homeware and other design products) and services (cafés, restaurants, beauty centres and libraries) (Rovai & Bellini, 2018). The selected brands are explicitly associated with an aspirational lifestyle, therefore addressing the (actual and ideal) self-congruity needs of the targeted customers. Concept stores often stress the products' experimental, exploratory and unconventional characteristics for sale by highlighting connections with art (e.g., hosting exhibitions) (Rovai & Bellini, 2018).

The rise of online shopping is modifying the retail scenario (Blitz, 2016; Pentina et al., 2018). Some studies demonstrated that price, convenience, product availability and online shopping attitude formation are critical factors of value creation in the online store. In the offline store, aesthetic appeal, shopping experience, and consumer service are more salient (Liu et al., 2013). Digitalisation from a multichannel perspective facilitates and innovates the in-store multi-sensorial experience (Okonkwo, 2010). In-store digitalisation, focusing on self-service retailing (Cho & Fiorito, 2019) and digital entertainment (Ryding et al., 2016), is a relevant factor influencing retail clients' satisfaction. Luxury fashion brands pioneered digitalised strategy integrations, with in-store X-Reality adoption, like in the case of Burberry (Phan et al., 2011).

Smart technologies started modifying luxury retail management. Luxury fashion brand strategies, especially in the Chinese market, have relied significantly on smart technologies and Internet technologies to exploit opportunities for brand awareness, identity building, and customer relationship building (Lu, 2011). An increasing number of studies have focused on partial aspects of online and in-store luxury consumer purchasing behaviours, such as motivations and online shopping attitudes, consumers purchasing offline experience and in-store services (Liu et al., 2013). Scholars focused on smart technologies and their contribution to innovative shopping experiences (Kim & Ko, 2012; Willems et al., 2017). Further efforts are needed in light of the pandemic accelerating digital technology deployment in retailing (Fortuna et al., 2021).

3. The Link Between Place and Luxury Retailing

The place branding debate contributed to discussing the connections between place and retailing. Co-branding strategies between shopping centres and the hosting city areas were identified and discussed, highlighting degrees of reciprocity between retail and place marketing activities (Warnaby & Bennison, 2007). This connects with the collected evidence of retail atmosphere creating a sense of place, which boosts place attachment driving customer attitude and behaviour in retail services (Brocato et al., 2015). Retail agglomerations contribute to place attractiveness,

creating cumulative geographic advantages for retailers and place managers (Teller et al., 2010).

In luxury fashion retailing, these mechanisms are likely more evident, in contrast with the relatively limited scholarship focusing on luxury in place branding. The store localisation in fashion cities plays a role in the retail brand experience. Fashion cities are urban agglomerations of fashion actors, producers, designers, fashion events and stores (Power & Scott, 2004; Breward & Gilbert, 2006; Power & Hauge, 2008; Rantisi, 2011). All of these work as brand channels for the global fashion city (Jansson & Power, 2010).

The concentration of luxury flagship stores in city districts benefits the city image: high-profile retailers and fashion designers boost the “positive image and impression of the city” (Fernie et al., 1998). The concentration of luxury stores generates a “luxury sense of place”, which sometimes leads to the city’s recognition as fashion capital (Arrigo, 2015a, p. 524). On the other hand, flagship stores tend to concentrate on specific streets in which they take advantage of the allure and prestige of the buildings hosting them (Moore & Doherty, 2007). Luxury retailers undertake co-branding strategies when selecting their location to exploit and further boost luxury place-based associations (Arrigo, 2015a).

The fashion city is a critical “crucible for forging immaterial value and knowledge” (Jansson & Power, 2010, p. 902). In this regard, it is an essential spatial context where potential consumers can experience the country-of-origin effect (i.e. the “Made in”) (Hauge et al., 2009), whose influence on fashion product selection was proved (Aiello et al., 2015).

Beyond the fashion city, the city brandscape supports brand cross-fertilisation. The city brandscape was defined as the urban network of product, person, cultural institution and corporate brands (Bellini & Pasquinelli, 2016). It provides customers with cultural background, historical coordinates, visual identities and an opportunity for “sincere” and not purely commercial encounters with product brands. It contributes and adds meaning and symbolic value to the urban “lived experience” that fashion brands attempt to embody (Tokatli, 2013), seeking an “urban touch” for their brand identities. The city brandscape may represent the socio-cultural context providing a “lived” and interactive dimension to the luxury experience (Batat, 2017): this “lived” dimension provides an opportunity for differentiation, innovation and authenticity to the luxury retail brand experience.

Through place-based associations (Molotch, 2003), brands persuade customers about their excellence and quality (Jansson & Power, 2010), help customers contextualise the luxury store and make sense of the store experience, and reinforce the customer's emotional engagement (Hede & Watne, 2013).

4. A Multi-Level Spatial Framework to Analyse the Luxury Store Experience

Table 1 presents the results of the literature review. The drivers of the store experience integrate a multi-level spatial framework of analysis. It results from the different streams of the literature analysed above (i.e., retailing and city branding). The luxury store experience can be analysed at three levels which are (1) the concept store, (2) the fashion-city brand and (3) the city brandscape.

Table 1: *Drivers of the Luxury Store Experience from the Literature Review*

| Level | Drivers |
|-----------------|---|
| Concept store | Internal elements - space aesthetics (Bitner, 1992; Jones et al. 2010) Services and goods (Dion & Arnould, 2011) Store-as-a-brand strategy (Grewal & Levy 2009) Integrative in-store model of diverse products and services (Burt & Davies, 2010) Connection with arts (Rovai & Bellini, 2018) In-store digitalisation (Ryding et al., 2016) Digitalisation innovating and facilitating the in-store multi-sensorial experience (Okonkwo, 2010) |
| Fashion city | Diverse symbolic links with fashion products, firms, events, stores (Jansson & Power 2010; Power & Jansson, 2011) Experiential setting for country-of-origin effect in fashion (Hauge et al., 2009) Urban agglomeration of fashion brands (Fernie et al., 1998; Moore & Doherty, 2007; Arrigo, 2015a) Luxury sense of place (Arrigo, 2015) |
| City brandscape | Urban population of diverse commercial and non-commercial brands (Bellini & Pasquinelli, 2016) Socio-cultural context (Batat, 2017) Cultural background, historical coordinates, visual identities, opportunity for “sincere” encounters with product brands (Bellini & Pasquinelli, 2016) Lived experience and the urban touch (Tokatli, 2013) Place-based associations (Molotch, 2003) |

Source: The Authors.

5. Favotell and Luisaviaroma Case Studies

The case study methodology was adopted (Eisenhardt, 2002). The case-based research was conceived as a first stage to provide a preliminary model inductively, which supports the discussion of the central research hypothesis (i.e., place-store relationship for tailoring sustainability approaches), opening to future investigation and testing. Although the literature review allowed an identification of theoretical constructs to guide the research, an inductive research process was adopted.

Two “extreme” and “revelatory” case studies (Yin, 1994; Eisenhardt, 2002) were selected, which offered specific insights into the concept store format and the related luxury brand experience. The cases are Favotell in Shanghai, China and Luisaviaroma (LVR) in Florence, Italy. The significant differences in their development paths and geographical contexts qualify them as “extreme”, broadening the scope of the empirical inquiry, and “revelatory” of the relationship between place (i.e., two reputable city brands) and luxury retail. The specific traits of the two cases were also “revelatory” of the potential engagement of sustainable retailers with local communities.

From a procedural perspective, the case study methodology relied on diverse sources of information, such as a desk analysis (official websites, news archive and social media); in-depth semi-structured interviews with founders and managers of the two concept stores, managers from local firms and institutions of the fashion

scene in Shanghai and Florence; visits and context observation of the stores and in the cities.

The in-depth semi-structured interviews investigated the two concept stores' branding strategies, including focused questions on the "place and space" dimension and collected opinions and practitioners' insights about the role of the fashion city and city brand (also intended as an urban network of brands) for the luxury brand experience within the two different geographical contexts.

The collected materials in the form of texts (from websites, news, and interviews) were coded as follows: "concept store", "fashion city", "city brandscape". These codes were designed in light of this study's aim and the literature review suggesting the relevance of different spatialities in entangling the luxury retail brand experience. A qualitative content analysis (Berg, 2001) of the collected materials was carried out.

5.1 Case Selection and Background

The two cases were selected as differed in their evolutionary paths and geographical settings. At the same time, their connection with the city of Shanghai (Favotell) and the city of Florence (Luisa Via Roma) was a criterion for selection.

The Chinese case of Favotell regards a recently established concept store and its relationship with an emerging fashion city in an Asiatic fast-growing economy, Shanghai. The Italian case (i.e., Luisaviaroma) regards a mature concept store whose history dates to the 1930s and its relationship with the 1950s fashion capital of Florence. Both cities are characterised by significant cultural heritage and lively urban socio-economic contexts, with a rich symbolic and imagery endowment extending beyond their respective fashion scenes.

The two analysed cases followed different evolution paths. Favotell is a Sino-British innovative concept store linked with a media company based in London. In 2013 the founders, Jialing Kong and her partner, after a few years in global luxury brands, such as Hermes and Miu Miu, decided to create a new model of concept store and luxury company focusing on emerging Chinese fashion designers. As Jialing and her partner put it, "we wanted to allow Chinese designers and artists to reach the deserved visibility", contributing to Shanghai fashion city.

Luisaviaroma (LVR) in Florence is a luxury concept store with a global outlook, offering a selected variety of international designers. It was born as a family business back in the 1930s. A small shop in Florence started after a straw hats business in Paris was closed. The founder's grandson, Mr Andrea Panconesi, today runs the business in the same property in Florence and through an online trade channel, turning Luisaviaroma into a "top online fashion luxury destination". Sales have been increasing in the last years, with 90% company's revenues coming from online trade. In 2018, sales achieved 130 million Euros, with the offline store in Florence accounting for 8%. Buyers at the Florentine store are especially international tourists, with an increasing share of visitors from the Asian tourism market. The company was transformed from a physical retailer into a digital enterprise, as the e-commerce sales demonstrate (Ranfagni, 2021).

Attempts to brand the city in support of cultural and creative industries were made in Shanghai. However, while domestically Shanghai products are associated with high quality and modernity, globally, a "liability of origin" remains (Power et al., 2014). Between 1900 and 1930, Shanghai represented the "Paris of the East",

inspiring the “Shanghai Dream” where East and West cultures meet: here, Chinese fashion was born in the form of the Qipao (Rovai, 2016).

Florence is globally known for its cultural and creative industries and is a reputable city of art and fashion (Capone & Lazzeretti, 2016). Its fashion and luxury leather industrial legacy remains strong. The metropolitan area has a significant manufacturing capacity (Merlo and Polese, 2006), retailing and shopping districts (Guercini & Ranfagni, 2007; Kim & Ko, 2012), and a fashion scene that is part of the city’s cultural heritage (Bellini & Pasquinelli, 2016).

5.2 The Concept Store

Favotell

The name “Favotell” refers to the corporate mission to build a community sharing information about new designers and brands (Favotell stands for “sharing with customers the favourite to tell”). The digital nature of the initial project favoured the emergence of a sharing community.

Favotell founders created their luxury fashion brand (i.e., Whisptopia), targeting new Chinese segments of wealthy Millennials with classy sport and athletic fashion and apparel. Online presence with a digitally focused marketing and brand strategy was prioritised. Their presence on Wechat and other social media allows nurturing the brand meaning and associations and creating a buzz on luxury and fashion trends in the Shanghainese context where Favotell has been firmly positioning its brand. The online brand community originated before any physical presence, which became relevant in the second stage of development.

Initially, Favotell was a digital project, an online business supporting the diffusion and market entry of Chinese luxury and fashion brands. However, in the second phase, the focus on online channels was coupled with an offline mode, mainly through organising events in Shanghai. The offline mode resulted in successful retailing operations. Despite the offline mode’s increasing relevance, Favotell has no permanent location in Shanghai, and its retailing operations are itinerant in the city. However, there is a constant factor in the store location selection: the mix of luxury and art is to be evident. The prestige of the selected locations for the events and photo shootings is important to Favotell brand identity.

Luisaviaroma

LVR store is in Florence’s old town (a UNESCO world heritage site), which hosts the fashion district. The prestigious store location is deemed fundamental. Famous for innovative and “surreal” window displays, in 2008, LVR physical store was redesigned as a “minimalist, high tech multi-use space with a new light and form created through the extensive use of massive glass load” (Etherington, 2009).

LVR provides an in-store social experience. A terrace on the top roof hosts a café, a restaurant, and a co-working space to organise book presentations and events. A new space of 2,000 sqm in Florence was a company’s project involving important brands and emerging designers. This will be a multifunctional space where people will meet, eat, drink, study and work, and the shopping experience is not the only option. The space will also host young artists, towards whom LVR has always drawn particular attention. Various lifestyle products (not only fashion products) will be integrated into this space. Social and brand diversity will be the ingredients of this

new store, conceived as an urban meeting place, an aggregation pole where people with the same interests can meet, according to LVR CEO (Corriere Fiorentino, 2017).

Although the business is now mainly digital, the physical store has been a way to create LVR brand awareness. It provides an opportunity to create a limited yet relevant number of ambassadors, a difficult and costly process online. There is a connection between the online experience and the in-store experience: today's relationship is thinner than in the past but still adds high value to the brand. In the past, the physical store had a fundamental role in creating knowledge about the digital channel and educating people to use it when e-commerce was not so popular. Today, the physical store plays a cultural role in proposing the LVR cultural experience.

Since 2008 LVR boosted a transition towards a more digitally-oriented business, with the physical store becoming an extension of the online store. The number of in-store available items reduced, space dedicated to products decreased and the in-store experience was anchored to digital devices and touch screens (connected to the official website) where customer assistance facilitates and supports the in-store digital experience. The website drives the in-store experience and works as digital support for the customer by recreating a "like home" experience and a sense of familiarity with the LVR experience.

5.3 The Fashion City

Favotell in Shanghai

Favotell started its activities in London since this is a global fashion city, an international centre for art and innovative fashion. The first Favotell temporary pop-up store was located in London in an art gallery to launch a Chinese creative designer. In the second phase, Favotell started embedding operations and events in the historical district of Shanghai in order to reinforce the company image and identity locally. A series of fashion events were organised in an ancient Shanghaiese house on one of the main well-known historical roads of Shanghai, Huahua Lu, where an agglomeration of flagship stores of luxury brands and malls is located.

Before establishing a physical presence in Shanghai, Favotell narrated a virtual presence in the city through social media marketing (i.e., Wechat, Weibo and Red), proposing an online experience of Shanghai. This was to create a buzz in the emerging fashion capital, anticipating their landing in the city.

Luisaviaroma in Florence

The fashion city plays a role in the LVR experience too. There is no rational choice in buying in Florence as the prices are the same elsewhere or online. The reason for buying in the LVR store in Florence is motivated by a "Florence effect" and even an "Italy effect" in luxury fashion, as an interviewee from the corporate management maintained. In Florence, the market is mainly touristic. The Florentine concept store is a "destination within the destination", promoting a unique cultural experience for Florentine international tourists who may become ambassadors in their home country.

In 1999 LVR developed a digital strategy which has significantly grown in relevance, with a mix of social media platforms supporting the official website. The leading online channel, the official website and shopping platform, is rich in original content. The LVR Diary section is a space devoted to storytelling about fashion

brands, fashion designers, and reputable fashion customers narrating their experience of LVR: such storytelling draws significant attention to the physical store in Florence. The LVR CEO commented, “our customers come to our website for interactive engagement that reflects the iconic experience of shopping at our store in Via Roma in Florence” (Rabimov, 2017).

LVR’s physical store in Florence connects with the fashion city through events that are settings for digital content production. The fashion city facilitates corporate events as platforms for specialised and business clients, emerging creators, and trendsetters. In 2010, to celebrate the company’s ten years of online activities, LVR launched Firenze4ever...It’s Magic!, gathering the most influential fashion bloggers globally. Until its last edition in 2017, the event was a reference for luxury fashion professionals and customers: scheduled right before Pitti Uomo, the main Florentine fashion event, this LVR event used to host about forty fashion bloggers participating in the Style Labs, where they had the opportunity to create multi-brand looks and make photoshoots in Florence most iconic locations. This was considered a communication event of crucial relevance for the digital platform: editorial content was produced through the store turned into a “virtual scene”, privileging bloggers and influencers over traditional press agencies.

5.4 The City Brandscape

Favotell in Shanghai

Favotell’s omnichannel strategy has focused on the Shanghainese urban setting. Online media content is filled with iconic symbols of Shanghai culture and history. As a socio-cultural context, the urban landscape is mainly referred to as the setting to create valuable customer relationships.

Favotell developed a deep link with the Shanghainese-styled context. Currently, Favotell is partnering with the Shanghai municipality for the opening of a permanent concept store in one of the historical areas of Shanghai, participating in contemporary urban development. On the one hand, Favotell relies on Shanghai’s cultural heritage and historical background. On the other hand, it collaborates with local authorities to strengthen the city brand. The company is planning to open a luxury porcelain house, an interactive museum, and activation of collaborations with local and international craftsmanship schools. This is an opportunity for brand extension across diverse luxury sectors (fashion, porcelain and crafted products) by leveraging the urban context where customers can experience a ‘related diversity’ of products, leading to a luxury Shanghaiese lifestyle.

Luisaviaroma in Florence

For LVR, the city of Florence is a source of visual identity elements. Videos, pictures, and texts presenting the company and its history refer to Florence’s iconic symbols and landmarks to a large extent, e.g., Brunelleschi’s Dome and Palazzo della Signoria, as places of affect and intense expressivity.

The city brandscape does not only come into play for describing the company’s history and heritage. Florence attracts famous visitors to the concept store. An example is a story narrated in the LVR Diary regarding the Italian rapper Sfera Ebbasta shopping in the LVR store before his concert at the Viper Theatre. This story

speaks of the city’s contemporary urban music scene and a mix of music, art, fashion and pop culture.

A city event promoted by LVR in collaboration with Florence City Council, i.e. the Fashion and Technology Summit, gave visibility to the concept store in the city as a cutting-edge digital player. An urban system of local firms in fashion, manufacturing and technology firms, and local institutions of the Florentine higher education cluster, such as the reputable fashion institute Polimoda, are part of the city brandscape mobilized by this event. Images of digitalisation, innovation and technology spill out from this urban network of brands.

6. The Concept Store Experience: Emerging Routes Towards Sustainability

The two case studies produced evidence of the multi-level drivers shaping the concept store experience where the physical and digital store dimensions are both significant (Table 2).

Table 2: *The Concept Store Experience: Summary of Key Drivers*

| Level | Physical drivers | Digital drivers |
|-----------------|--|---|
| Concept store | Store location Connection with the arts Social experience and meeting place In-store education to brand culture Staff assistance to the digital brand experience | Sharing community In-store digitalization |
| Fashion city | Symbolic links with fashion products, firms, events, stores Direct experience of the ‘country-of-origin’ | Online city experience Spatial platform for digital content production |
| City brandscape | Cultural and historical background Brand elements and visual identity Relationship building with the ‘living’ city Brand extension across luxury sectors (luxury urban lifestyle) | Bridge with contemporary urban knowledge and technology system |

Source: The Authors.

The findings support the research hypothesis of place-store relationships as a ground for tailoring sustainable retailing approaches. Parallel to the digitalisation of the concept store, the store-place connection remains pivotal to the brand experience. The concept store configures as a social experience, a physical and digital gateway to the local community, heritage, creativity and lifestyle, a valuable connection in a luxury market increasingly receptive to the sustainable agenda for both physical and digital store visitors. The concept store engagement with the city brandscape (and the

related stakeholders) contributes to producing image and knowledge spillovers in the hosting city, further conveying sustainability messages and value to the store visitors.

The two concept stores, for their locations (Bitner, 1992; Bäckström & Johansson, 2006; Jones et al., 2010) and connections with the local arts (Rovai & Bellini, 2018), are the physical space for social experiences and meeting place, offering quality, diversity and multifunctional spaces combining the shopping experience with broader life and lifestyle experiences. In LVR, this was particularly evident since the foundation of the business (i.e., the physical store). For Favotell, the trajectory of the enterprise development, from digital to the digital and physical store, transposed the digital social interaction and the sharing community (at the core of the company's mission, as stated by the company brand name) to the physical store. The hosting city participates in the concept store experience, entering the company's strategies for contributing to creating clients' store visit motives and attitudes (i.e., the "the destination within the destination" and the growing fashion and creativity buzz in Shanghai).

Concerning the fashion city level, findings are in line with the existing theoretical contributions concerning the symbolic links with fashion products, firms, events and fashion stores, producing image spillovers in the urban agglomeration of fashion players (Power & Scott, 2004; Breward & Gilbert, 2006; Power & Hauge, 2008; Rantisi, 2011). A "luxury sense of place" (Arrigo, 2015a) characterises the fashion city that works as a "crucible for forging immaterial value and knowledge" (Jansson & Power, 2010, p. 902).

Adding to existing literature, in one of the two cases (i.e., Luisaviaroma), one relevant physical driver about the fashion city level concerned the opportunity for store visitors to have a direct experience of the country-of-origin of luxury fashion products. This is related to the synergy between the fashion city brand and the localisation of the physical store. It is in the historic district of one of the most reputable and iconic cultural tourism destinations in Italy (i.e., Florence) where the attention for the fashion industrial heritage narration is growing (e.g., fashion events and corporate fashion museums are examples).

The online fashion city experience and the connection between the physical city and its digital representation emerged as a novel element adding to the existing knowledge on the concept store brand experience. The city becomes an online city experience through the city's narration on social media and digital channels. At the same time, the fashion city becomes the platform for gathering niche/elite or connoisseur clients, emerging creators and trendsetters to produce digital content for the concept store brand building.

At the city brandscape level, the results suggested a brand cross-fertilisation in the urban network of brands (Bellini & Pasquinelli, 2016). The city brandscape works as the cultural and historical background for the concept store experience (especially in the case of Favotell), a source of brand elements and visual identity.

The city brandscape also emerged as the physical context where an urban lifestyle could be shared and inspire luxury brand extensions (e.g., concerning the emerging Shanghaiese luxury cluster). According to the results, the urban "lived experience" integrates the concept store brand experience: the two analysed concept stores competitive strategies sought a distinctive and contemporary "urban touch" (Tokatli, 2013; Batat, 2017). The city brandscape also provided the context for collaborations

and partnerships for advancing the luxury and fashion industry players' adoption of advanced technologies and digitalisation strategies.

7. Conclusion

This paper contributed to the sustainable retailing agenda, aimed at exploring routes for tailoring sustainability for luxury store brands. Addressing the evident research gap concerning the modalities for luxury retailing to integrate sustainability into the brand experience (Athwal et al., 2019), this research made an effort to explore the opportunity to tailor sustainability by designing distinctive, unique and authentic concept store experiences that are “nested” in the hosting city. The hosting city was conceptualised as a fashion city and city brandscape, in a multi-level spatial framework that helped identify and discuss the drivers of the luxury store experience.

The two case studies produced evidence suggesting two research avenues on sustainable retailing to further develop the hypothesis of the place-store relationships. First, the physical and digital dimensions of the city experience integrate the luxury store experience. In a time when digitalisation is a priority in the luxury market, this research suggested the role of the physical store in devising sustainability strategies. The link between the physical store and sustainability is not in contrast with digitalization. Rather, the physical store is a strategic asset for defining distinctive strategies that combine sustainability and digitalisation for luxury consumers.

A second research avenue regards the role of stakeholder engagement in sustainable retailing. The case studies suggested the engagement with the city brandscapes of Shanghai and Florence and the embedded players. The production of image and knowledge spillovers in the city brandscape represents a starting point for analysing forms of stakeholder engagement in retailing. In this direction, retailers need to go beyond sustainability approaches that focus exclusively on product suppliers (Wiese et al., 2012; Wiese et al., 2015) and integrate their sustainability agenda into the relationship building with multiple stakeholders, including local stakeholders and communities.

This paper limited its contribution to identifying and discussing a research hypothesis, while additional efforts are needed to test this and develop the research avenues suggested above. Further explorative efforts are needed by adding case studies, highlighting critical perspectives across luxury retail formats in different geographical settings. Finally, this research proposed the perspective of corporate managers. It looked at the representation and design of the retail brand experience, focusing on the set of stimuli and inputs that may boost it. This perspective should be complemented with research efforts investigating the visitors'/customers' retail brand experience to enrich and expand the insight into tailoring sustainability through the place-store relationship.

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