



Faculty of Law – E 3

# **GENDER ANALYSIS IN THE LUXURY FASHION INDUSTRY: SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The luxury fashion industry has grown to represent one of the most important sectors of the global economy. Researchers have been studying its rapid expansion and how it has shaped markets, cultures and societies. As part of this growth, women have been considered as one of the main actors of this industry, participating in every step of its value chain. Our work is focused on understanding the current state of research that tackles the different roles that women have played in the luxury fashion industry.

## **RESUMEN**

La industria de moda de lujo se ha expandido hasta representar uno de los sectores más importantes de la economía mundial. Los investigadores han estudiado su rápida expansión, y cómo han transformado mercados, culturas y comunidades. Como parte de este crecimiento, las mujeres han sido consideradas como participantes de gran importancia en la industria, presentes en todos los pasos de la cadena de valor. Nuestro trabajo se enfoca en entender el estado actual de investigación que trata los distintos papeles que juegan las mujeres en la industria de moda de lujo.

### **Keywords**

Luxury, fashion, industry, women, roles, research, analysis.

### **Palabras clave**

Lujo, moda, industria, mujeres, roles, investigación, análisis.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The luxury fashion industry is one of the biggest players in the world's global economy. Its reported revenues reach billions of dollars and employ workers from all around the world, most of which are female. Women are present in every step of the value chain, contributing to the prosperity of the industry, which reinforces the participation of women in the major global labor markets and economies.

Our work is directed towards studying what has been researched and published regarding this topic in academic articles written in English up to the year 2024. More concretely, we seek to understand the current state of research and representation of the different roles that women play in the luxury fashion industry in order to highlight current trends and discover new areas of research for the future.

To do so, we resorted to the so-called systematic literature review of the published articles that were found on two online databases: Scopus and Web of Science. By using the most adequate combination of keywords and criteria, these sources offered the available published articles that tackle the topic of interest, from which we performed a thorough dissection and analysis. The methods used in the systematic literature review contribute to the minimization of possible bias caused by the selection process (Nightingale, 2009). This process allowed us to understand the general expertise that has been settled in the field in order to update it and derive new conclusions from it.

As one of the biggest industries in the world, there has been increasing interest in luxury fashion. The exclusivity that surrounds its ownership, its historical evolution or the behavior of its female consumers have been studied by many throughout the years, often focusing on the female actors that participate in it. In the past few years, the luxury fashion industry has experienced several changes in terms of expansion, management and clientele. For instance, traditional luxury has shifted by popular demand into a more accessible category of fashion that still seeks to represent the original exclusivity that characterized traditional luxury.

Moreover, even though women have always participated in the design, manufacture and consumption of luxury fashion, the latest feminist movements have advocated for a higher representation of their role. Women who directly or indirectly interact with this industry should be taken into consideration when talking about the prosperous results of the luxury

fashion industry, which can be reflected in the number of academic articles that tackle the topic and have been published to this day.

Hence, our work seems to be perfectly aligned with the current popularity that surrounds both the success of the luxury fashion industry and the feminist empowerment movements. To ensure an understandable content, the work has been structured into five chapters.

The first two chapters delve into the general aspects of the luxury fashion industry and the role that women play in society, respectively. These chapters provide useful insights into the evolution of these two topics individually in order to introduce the reader into the analysis that combines them. The third chapter offers a careful explanation of the methodology and steps taken in order to select the set of articles that would be analyzed in subsequent sections. The fourth section is divided into two subchapters. The first one refers to the descriptive features that characterize the articles. The complementary subsection explains why it was necessary to develop a comprehensive framework that combines two principal dimensions studied by the articles: the roles played by women and the main areas of study identified in the articles. Finally, the last chapter delves into the conclusions that were drawn from the articles and briefly mentions future possibilities of research.

# CHAPTER 1 – THE FASHION INDUSTRY

## 1. BASICS OF THE FASHION INDUSTRY

### 1.1 Evolution of fashion

Fashion has assumed numerous roles throughout the course of time. From being perceived as a survival essential in the Paleolithic Era, to being used as an element of power and status in the Medieval Era, clothes and fashion have always played a relevant part in society. The term “fashion” is referred to as different definitions by the English language, but there is one description that depicts what we are about to study in this project: “a style that is popular at a particular time, especially in clothes, hair, make-up, etc.”<sup>1</sup>

There is not a unanimous opinion regarding when humans started to wear clothing. According to Ralf Kittler, Manfred Kayser and Mark Stokening (2003), the first use of clothing could be potentially referred to the exodus of the *Homo sapiens* from the African continent. Even though this assumption is subject to updates and modifications, studies suggest that during the first emigration of humans away from the heat of Africa is very close to the first infestation of clothing lice. More recently, studies have also shown that bone tools found in Morocco (dated 120,000 – 90,000 years ago) might have been used to “prepare hides for clothing” (Hallett et al., 2021), which coincides in the dates proposed by the previously mentioned studies. Nonetheless, there is yet to be found a widely accepted assumption among the scientific community.

As society evolved, the function of garments also shifted from being a mere tool for warmth and protection to being a sign of social status and personality. With the introduction of agriculture, humans began to craft with thread or even wool instead of depending solely on animal hides and fur. Neanderthals completed simple cloths with feathers, shells and other ornamental elements that were aimed to personally identify individuals in bigger groups (Zilhão et al., 2009). On many occasions, headpieces were crafted to carry out ceremonies such as funerals or fertility rituals, as represented in numerous paleolithic paintings.

The development of new garments then appeared, with new pieces to add to the body and give extra layers to the basic disguise. Furthermore, diverse styles of clothing began to

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<sup>1</sup> Cambridge Dictionary, 2024. Available at <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fashion>

appear in figurines, as humans started to give higher importance to symbolism and creating cultural differentiation. These new practices were also implicit in activities such as body tattooing and creating beaded ornaments, neither of which not served as a coverup for hard climate conditions, but as an expression of one's identity instead.

Around this era, we might locate the moment in time in which fashion started to be related to “dress” and not just “clothing”. The difference between these terms was explained by Roland Barthes, when he stated that “Man has dressed himself in order to carry out a signifying activity. The wearing of an item of clothing is fundamentally an act of meaning that goes beyond modesty, ornamentation and protection.” (Barthes, 2013, pp.90-91)

Ancient civilizations provide great examples of customizing clothes and jewels to reflect ideas, culture and social status. In Ancient Egypt, those that were perceived as important members of society were buried with jewels in their tombs as a sign of power and in order to symbolize an easy way to the afterlife. The Egyptians that were part of the working class, on the other hand, relied on very light and modest garments made of linen that facilitated their tasks. For instance, Egyptians cared so much about their appearance that they were known for shaving their heads, using wigs and headdresses as a sign their position in society (Pendergast and Pendergast, 2003).

The Romans acquired numerous styles from the Egyptians and the Greeks, such as the tunics and the footwear. Respectable members of society were identified by their official outfits, and there were even written rules regarding how and by whom certain items had to be worn. At the same time that the Roman Empire grew, conquered and, in the end, fell, the attire worn by the Romans adapted to reflect the city's power and culture, transforming the perception of fashion to inspire others in the future.

As new styles of art appeared, the clothing diversified, and fashion acquired different meanings. During the Medieval Era, trends were spread throughout Europe, representing once again the cultural and historical events that characterized the time. The desire to homogenize all territories under the Spanish Reign was manifested in the way of dressing and expressing art across its lands.

In the Renaissance period, fashion has been said to have reached a turning point in time. In the past, clothes were majorly made out of the materials that were available due to proximity, and the designs were not subject to drastic change due to the importance that was given to tradition. However, the customization of dress and creating new trends arose



in the fifteen century, which more and more people began to explore – and not just the wealthy members of society. The increasing stability of politics and wealth resulted in the improvement and spread of diverse fashion statements that built on the idea of fashion as something more than just clothing.

As capitalism irrupted and conquered the world, fashion became a source of profitability. Thanks to the addition of new machinery, new materials imported from America and the combination of powerful factories and workforce, the clothing industry expanded around the world. For instance, this industry was considered as the second largest source of employment in 1851 Britain (Godley, 1997). Nevertheless, this expansion came along with some downsides: workers such as dressmakers and seamstress were heavily exploited, which made it necessary to structure the fashion industry and regulate the salary system.

After the two World Wars hit our society, and while the industries recovered, fashion introduced the *Haute Couture*. The twentieth century gave birth to popular brand such as Valentino, Prada or Gucci, among others that are still relevant to this day. Contrary to popular belief, high fashion was not meant to represent luxury, but an expression of art instead. Lipovetsky (2004) defined this period as the century of fashion during which, the clothing industry organized systems of producers, distributors and retailers. Outsourcing and mass production characterized the end of the twentieth century and are still characterizing our current times (Tortora, 2010).

Nowadays, the structure of the clothing industry depends on a network of organizations that deliver the final product to the end customer. Collectively, these organizations come from very diverse nations and models of production, but there is always an international element that keeps them interconnected through magazines and art.

All in all, clothing appeared as a way of covering the skin and has ended up conquering our way of living. Fashion is constantly changing, and it mirrors the circumstances of society in time and space, constantly evolving.

## **1.2 Roles and principal agents of the fashion industry**

Globalization has impacted the clothing industry and its value chain. There are different agents that intervene in the Global Value Chain, which is distributed all over the world. Generally speaking, the value chain can be boosted either by suppliers – whose capacities mean influence the market – or by consumers and their interests. In the apparel industry,

its buyer-driven chain begins with the manufacturers located in labor-intensive countries – mostly Asian – that follow the orders of the retail firms headquartered in competitive markets. In this section, we will briefly describe the principal agents that encompass the industry.

Decisions come from the managers and designers that work for the firms. Depending on the trends and customers' desires, brands might choose a different strategy in order to create value. The retail sector has been modified into what has been defined as “lean retailing” (Abernathy, 1999), which relies on standardized processes that gives bargaining power to designers and retailers against suppliers when it comes to decision making (Nordås, 2004).

The value chain then proceeds with raw material networks. Suppliers of natural fibers – such as cotton or silk – are essential for textile workers to start creating more complex components. Throughout this process, there are machines that automatize those tasks that might slow the process down if carried out by humans – due to them being too tedious or repetitive. The companies in the industry are constantly seeking to find functional upgrades that increase profitability and competitiveness in their sector.

These raw materials need to be turned into textiles by the entities part of the so-called “component network” (Gereffi, Frederick, 2010). Once transformed into useful fabrics, the designs can start coming to life thanks to the apparel production network. For this to take place, the information is always circulating among the different agents of the industry, so that the textile manufacturers can execute the plans as soon as the materials are available. On average, employment in these first steps of the supply chain is located in developing countries, or countries in which the labor cost tends to be cheaper.

Finally, the final products are then sold in retail stores, whose managers periodically change their stock to stay up to date with the public's desires. In this regard, customers are one of the main agents of the industry. As mentioned earlier in this section, the apparel industry is driven by the buyer, which means that the supply chain will always be majorly influenced by the trends that the public relate to.

### **1.3 Luxury inside of the apparel industry**

The behavior of consumption has been identified by numerous studies as a form of identity formation for individuals (Belk, 1988), especially when referred to the fashion industry. Consumers have to choose among an overwhelming number of brands, amid

which luxury brands are known for offering uniqueness and social status. Sometimes regardless of the high prices, consumers are willing to pay for luxury products to enjoy the “high fashion experience”.

Originally understood as the opulent and extravagant goods that only aristocrats were able to enjoy, luxury apparel has conquered the market, and nowadays is representative of the traditional haute couture art. Thanks to industrialization, haute couture shifted from the art of unique craftsmanship to the production of high-quality goods accessible to the emerging classes of the 1960s. For instance, Italian brands such as Armani or Versace introduced the luxury model known as “prêt-à-porter”, which broadened the possibilities of enjoying luxury fashion in the everyday life (Cabigiosu, 2020).

As a consequence, high fashion designers widened their inspiration sources to target a larger range of styles, while also shifting the customers’ attention from the product to the whole experience. Luxury brands’ marketing strategies feed off the public’s desire to own a product that is unapproachable to many in order to justify the investment. Hence, one of the key elements of success in the luxury industry is related to the “luxury service”. Reliability, comfort and elegance are three of the main factors that characterize the customer experience in luxury retail (Bell, 2022).

In this regard, the no-contact society that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic led to sharp declines in sales for many luxury brands, due to an initial incapability to offer the same experiences as they used to offer in-store. Moreover, sales associated to airports’ duty free stores were close to none when travel restrictions were imposed. At first, luxury brands were reluctant to shift to e-commerce due to their desire to stick to the traditional model that portrayed authenticity and exclusivity in the customer experience. However, the leading luxury companies have grown on owned platforms, while smaller players have partnered with multi-brand e-commerce platforms such as Farfetch or YOOX NET-A-PORTER Group (YNAP) (Deloitte, 2023).

It is interesting to understand the oligopolistic structure that characterizes the luxury market. During the fiscal year of 2022, the top three most-selling companies were luxury conglomerates: LVMH, Kering SA and Richemont (Deloitte, 2023). These conglomerates have taken over the industry with the competitive advantage that the “Neo-Luxury” category provides. As mentioned above, many luxury brands shifted from the traditional and exclusive business model to the more accessible luxury strategy in the

1980s. Neo-luxury goods allow companies to benefit from high levels of sales volume for prices that are lower than those of traditional luxury, but 200% higher than those of fast-fashion competitors (Cabigiosu, 2020). Mergers and acquisitions have proven to be rather successful in the context of luxury market, as they have strengthened the brands' market positions and widened their vision to an international perspective.

Nonetheless, there is another group of brands that still rely on the exclusive and premium business model. Their products are not accessible to everyone since these brands value rarity and uniqueness over accessibility. For example, the brand Hermès sticks to their philosophy to “keep craftsmanship alive” (Adams, 2014), and, as of September 2023, the company has not reported any M&A activity (Deloitte, 2023).

In sum, the luxury apparel industry has taken over the market, as one of the main drivers of growth in the retail sector. Deloitte's 2023 report on the Global Powers of Luxury Goods<sup>2</sup> confirmed a 26.5% composite sales growth for clothing and footwear companies in fiscal year 2022, recovering from the pandemic losses recorded during fiscal year 2021 thanks to improvements such as the incorporation of Artificial Intelligence. The forecasts for 2024 reflect a slower but normalized growth covered with uncertainty due to current geopolitical conflicts. Luxury brands will have to adapt to unexpected challenges, trends and shifts in consumer behavior in order to keep their competitive advantage in the market (McKinsey & Company, 2023).

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<sup>2</sup> Which include clothing, accessories, beauty, jewelry and others.

## CHAPTER 2 – THE ROLE OF GENDER

### 2. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY

Although women approximately represent 50% of the total population<sup>3</sup>, their role in society has not always been as representative. In the Prehistorical times, hunters and gatherers were not assigned exclusively to men, relying on structures based on sexual parity (Padmanabhan, 2008).

Throughout History, gender inequality has been present in our societies. Even in the preindustrial times, women were assigned tasks that did not have much power in society (Giuliano, 2014). Largely dedicated to taking care of the family and the household, women were often considered unable to participate in the public life. For instance, the use of the plough was mostly reserved to men, creating the current differences in gender roles (Alesina et al, 2010). Nonetheless, there were women who were able to find their place in society, against all odds. A great example of these heroines was Joan of Arc (1412-1431). She managed to support king Charles VII into winning several victories in the scope of the Hundred Years' War, becoming a French martyr and canonized in 1909.

The male population controlled almost every area in society, while women did not even have the right to vote. There was a dichotomy between the two genders: on one hand, men were representing the public sphere, dominating the labor market; on the other side of the spectrum, women were immersed in the privacy of the household. It is relevant to mention Jean-Jacques Rousseau's treatise – dated in 1762 – named *Emile, or On Education*, which perfectly described the role that was assigned to women in that era. For Rousseau, the perfect woman was the “passive and weak”, “made specially to please man”<sup>4</sup>; descriptions that reflect the position of women in society back then.

Little by little women began to find their place in the labor market. Small niches in the textile industry offered job opportunities to women who wanted to participate in society – under poor conditions that perdured for years. In Even though the French Revolution (1789) preached the principle of equality, women were not direct subject to it. Around

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<sup>3</sup> Population, female. The World Bank, 2022  
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS?end=2022&start=1960&view=map&year=2022>

<sup>4</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2023). Émile. *Encyclopedia Britannica*.  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Emile-or-On-Education>

this era, there were some timid feminist movements, arguing in favor of the genderless character of the term “equality” and the overall infringement of it.

Women’s entry into the labor market was restricted to sectors reserved as “women’s work” (Rennes, 2001), such as the textile industry, secretaries work and childcare. Moreover, these “women industries” were more likely to depend on the so-called sweatshops, where workers had to endure arduous conditions and very low wages. Their access to education was restricted as well, as communities prioritized the empowerment of young men into success based on their “natural superiority” over the female gender. Hence, women’s place in society did not improve much until the end of the nineteenth century, when some organizations were founded to fight for workers’ rights – such as the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union, founded in 1910.

During the World Wars, women were mostly asked home duties, and many were victims of abuse. Nevertheless, they played an essential part during these times. Not only did they replace the millions of male workers that had to leave for war, but they also made huge efforts to support the relief work in the battlefield. Working as nurses, telegraphers and operators, women’s role in society was starting to gain a new interpretation (Kim, 2003).

Since then, women started going to university, entering professions that had traditionally been reserved to the male gender – such as engineering or law. For the past century, this “Quiet Revolution” has boosted women’s involvement in economy, making female labor supply much more responsive to changes in salary and fair conditions (Goldin, 2006).

Nowadays, statistics still reflect a gender gap in employment. According to official reports (International Labor Organization, 2023), female participation in the labor market fluctuates around a fifty percent, which highly contrasts with men’s eighty percent. The gender gap is largest in low and middle-income countries like India, where the difference of participation stands at fifty-seven percentage points (World Economic Forum, 2022). Nevertheless, compared to the past, data reflects a sharp increase in female labor force participation in advanced economies that benefit from the growth of new technology. By 2018, reports reflected participation rates in advanced economies around 70%, which reflect a 12-percentage point increase compared to 1990 (Fabrizio et al., 2020).

## **2.1. The role of women in fashion**

Considered as a representative sector of the female gender, the fashion industry offered women an opportunity to enter into the economic life, a more independent way of living.

Women started to enjoy fashion not only as a customer, but also as a designer, as a seamstress, as a producer.

As customers, women have always fallen into certain stereotypes in advertisement and marketing strategies. “Women are often shown as passive, attractive, domestic, almost always young, and almost always white” (Cunningham, 2021). In this regard, women’s behavior in fashion has been stereotyped for decades. Fashion has been identified as a feminine activity that women tend to enjoy much more intensely than men, and the majority of campaigns are directed towards them. It has been said that this industry has capitalized on women’s insecurities, while also taking a toll on their self-esteem with restrictive clothing size categories, for instance (Mahoney, 2022).

However, the fashion industry is not only directed towards women as target customers. Millions of women with very different nationalities work in the fashion industry, although in 2022 men still dominate the “senior roles” – such as the job positions in the Boards – according to The British Fashion Council (Rush and Dixon, 2022). In the year 2019, the clothing industry employed approximately 50 million of female workers, which represented more than half of the workers employed globally (International Labor Organization, 2020a). Moreover, these statistics are rather meaningful for those women whose jobs in the garment industry have also provided them an access to economic independence and safety, in countries where these opportunities are rather scarce.

A great example that comes to mind when thinking about a female representative of the fashion industry is the editor-in-chief of *Vogue*, Anna Wintour. Since 1988, Wintour has managed to conquer the fashion world and have the power to decide about trends, celebrities and the relevance or irrelevance of luxury brands. Her decisions matter to designers, manufacturers and customers of fashion, making her the most powerful person in the garment industry (Weiss, 2014).

However, it is also necessary to mention the other segment of female workers that face the downsides of vulnerable employment in fashion. According to articles published by the International Labor Organization (2022), women tend to represent high percentages of the workers in vulnerable jobs, characterized by low or inexistent wages, and lack of maternity coverages or social protection access, among others. This reality was highlighted with the devastating collapse of the Rana Plaza factory in Bangladesh, where

women were prone to suffer inhuman working conditions and underwhelming safety measures (Kabir, et al., 2018).

The readymade garment industry in Bangladesh acts as one of the higher contributors to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but it also acts as a niche for vulnerable female employment. In 2018, reports showed that around 61% of garment workers in Bangladesh are women (International Labor Organization, 2020b). Their usual disadvantaged backgrounds lead them to accept exploitative conditions and exposure to diseases. In 2013, one of the main infrastructures in Bangladesh that was destined to readymade garment production collapsed, resulting in thousands of injured and dead workers. The disaster reflected the poor working conditions that the workers had to endure in a factory that, additionally, was questioned in terms of construction standards and safety measures.

Hence, from successful entrepreneurs to not-so-lucky manufacturers, women are present in every step of the value chain of the fashion industry. As of today, there has been little study regarding this topic, and there are not many papers that analyze women's presence in articles, scientific research or books. In this essay we have resorted to a research methodology to investigate the role of women in the fashion industry – more specifically, the luxury sector. The following sections will describe the methodology and results of our work.



## CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

### 3. METHODOLOGY

In order to analyze the presence of the topic of interest in academic literature, we performed a systematic review of the literature available to date in two recognized databases: Web of Science and Scopus. In order to understand this methodology, it is useful to mention the explanation provided by Lamé (2019). According to the author, systematic literature reviews “treat the literature review process more transparent, and apply concepts of empirical research in order to make the review process more transparent and replicable and to reduce possibility of bias.

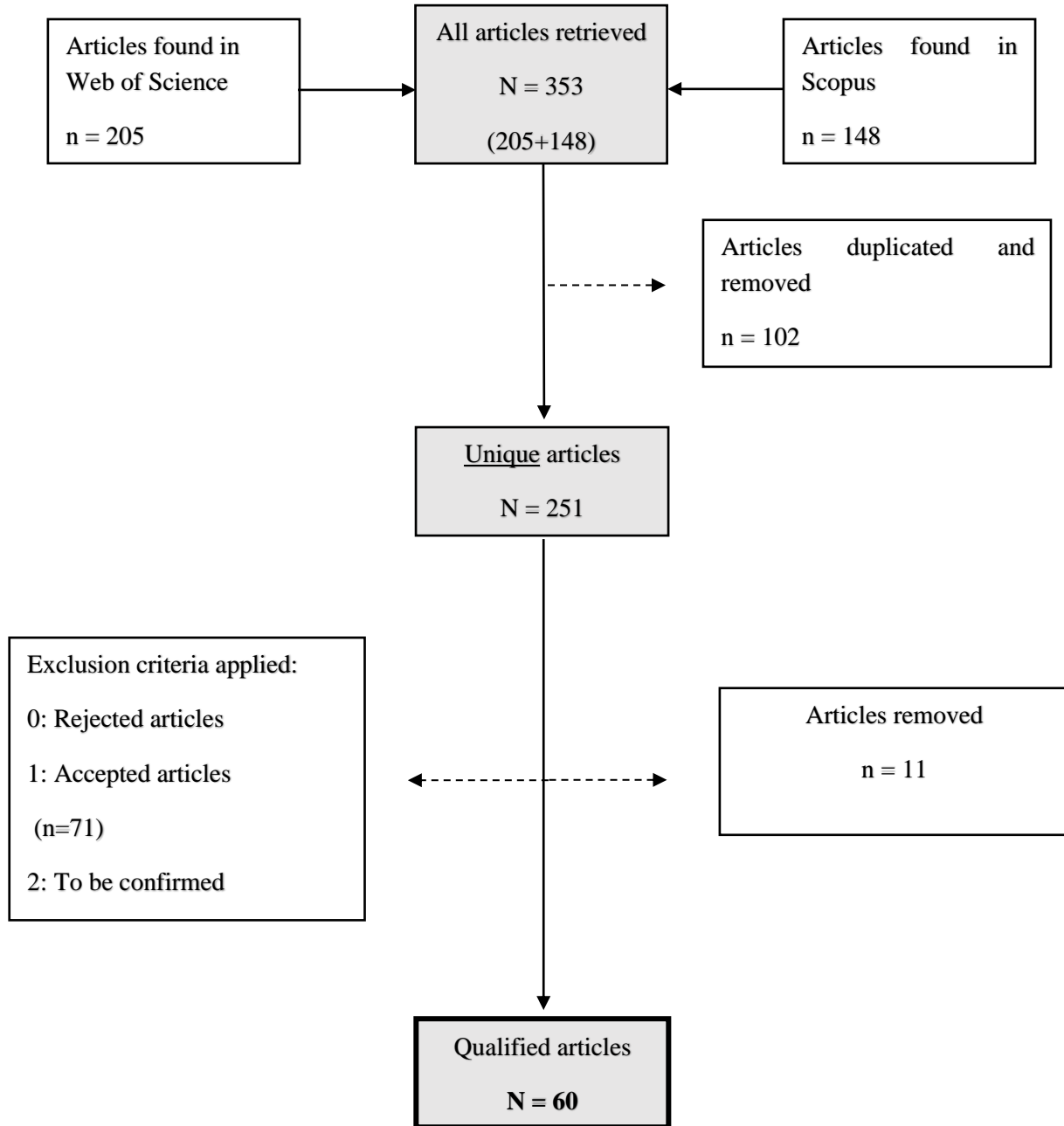
To conduct the review, it is first necessary to define the keywords that apply in the search of academic papers. This study aims to analyze the role of the female gender in the luxury fashion industry, so the keywords had to be representative enough to cover every synonym. Thus, the search string that we introduced in both databases was: (apparel OR textile OR fashion OR cloth\*) AND (gender OR woman OR women OR female) and (luxur\*). Furthermore, the research was limited to articles that had been published up until January 2024 in English, so that there were no language barriers when interpreting the content.

In January 2024, 205 articles were initially found in the Web of Science database, including those that would be later excluded due to irrelevance. On Scopus, 148 articles matched our criteria, 102 of which were duplicated in both databases. Hence, among both databases, the total sample size amounted to 251 articles. The extraction classified the articles by the following information: author(s), article title, journal where it was published, abstract and year of publication.

Our work began by identifying which of the total were actually relevant for our study. To do so, it was necessary to read the title, abstract and, when in doubt, the whole article. After the initial reading, each paper would be tagged with a number, depending on the actual usefulness. The articles that were doubtlessly useful would receive a “1”; the number “0” was assigned to those that were clearly irrelevant; and the ones that had to be subject to further examination were identified with the number “2”. The latter category would end up tagged with a “1” or a “0”, depending on the final decision. Through this classification, we were able to find 71 initially valuable papers, which were still up for exclusion in the future.

Among this initial group, all articles except 3 allowed full access, which contributed with the second step of the classification. We conducted a second and thorough review of all of the valuable articles, and 7 were excluded out of said valuable category (“1”), since the body of the text was not specifically related to the role of women in the luxury fashion industry. Additionally, 2 articles were also rejected to avoid any potential discrepancy caused by language barriers, since they were not written in English. In sum, the final sample summed up to 60 articles. Figure 1 below offers a visual summary of the selection process.

*Figure 1* Flowchart of the selection process



*Source: own elaboration*

Consecutively, it was necessary to conduct an in-depth analysis of the selected documents. Hence, we extracted detailed information from the full text of each article and compiled it into the Excel spreadsheet. The selected articles were classified according to the following detailed information: goal of the paper; role of women; area of study; sample time and place; conclusion of the paper; and methodology used (1=theoretical; 2=empirical); if empirical: (1=quantitative; 2=qualitative; 3=both). Table 1 provides a brief explanation of the categories referred to the methodology.

*Table 1 Explanation of article categories*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Subcategories</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Theoretical (1)		Articles that rely on existing theories to provide new perspectives that enrich the current state of the art in a certain field. (Reese, 2022)
Empirical (2)	Quantitative (1)	Articles that support new hypothesis through observation and experimentation of numeric variables (i.e. correlational research)
	Qualitative (2)	Articles that support new hypothesis through descriptive results and interpretations of non-numerical data. (i.e. case studies)
	Both (3)	Articles that rely on methods from both qualitative and quantitative research.

*Source: own elaboration.*

All of the extracted information provided very valuable insight so as to perform the analysis and withdraw the conclusions that are presented in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS

### 4. FINDINGS

This section presents both descriptive and theoretical insights concluded from our comprehensive literature review, highlighting discrepancies and trends found in the sample.

#### 4.1. Descriptive insights

Firstly, we conducted a review to understand the descriptive differences that were found among the whole variety of articles. The conducted review showed that the topic of study was published a high variety of journals. More concretely, we found 45 different journals, which are presented in Table 2 below. It is to notice that the Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management stands out for owning the highest found number of published articles on the topic, representing 20% (12 out of 60) of the total sample of articles. This journal is followed by four equally represented journals: the Journal of Business Research, the Journal of Global Fashion Marketing, the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services and Qualitative Market Research: an International Journal. Each one of these journals have published relevant articles that represent 3% (2 out of 60) of the whole of our sample. The rest of the journals only accounted for one published, each one representing 2% (1 out of 60) of the total number of extracted articles.

*Table 2 Number of articles per journal*

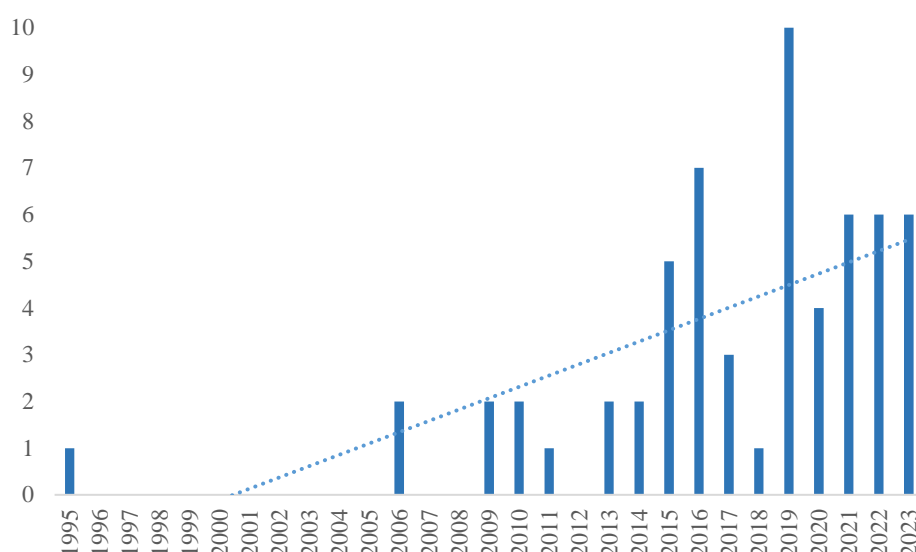
List of Journals	Number of Articles	% over total number
Journal Of Fashion Marketing And Management	12	20%
Journal Of Business Research	2	3%
Journal Of Global Fashion Marketing	2	3%
Journal Of Retailing And Consumer Services	2	3%
Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal	2	3%
Asia Pacific Journal Of Marketing And Logistics	1	2%
Asia-Pacific Journal Of Business Administration	1	2%
Business Horizons	1	2%
Central Asian Survey	1	2%
Costume-The Journal Of The Costume Society	1	2%
Cultural Politics	1	2%
Dlsu Business And Economics Review	1	2%
Feminist Economics	1	2%
French Historical Studies	1	2%
Humanities & Social Sciences Communications	1	2%
Iim Kozhikode Society & Management Review	1	2%

List of Journals	Number of Articles	% over total number
Independent Journal Of Management & Production	1	2%
Information Systems Frontiers	1	2%
International Journal Of Advertising	1	2%
International Journal Of Costume And Fashion	1	2%
International Journal Of Management	1	2%
International Journal Of Retail & Distribution Management	1	2%
International Journal Of Sociology And Social Policy	1	2%
International Review Of Retail Distribution And Consumer Research	1	2%
Journal Of Consumer Behaviour	1	2%
Journal Of Consumer Culture	1	2%
Journal Of Consumer Psychology	1	2%
Journal Of East-West Business	1	2%
Journal Of International Consumer Marketing	1	2%
Journal Of Islamic Marketing	1	2%
Journal Of Marketing Management	1	2%
Journal Of Risk And Financial Management	1	2%
Journal Of Transnational Management	1	2%
Journal Of Urban Culture Research	1	2%
Journal Of Womens History	1	2%
Luxury-History Culture Consumption Management	1	2%
New Testament Studies	1	2%
Psychology & Marketing	1	2%
Revista De Gestao E Secretariado-Gesec	1	2%
Sociological Forum	1	2%
Sociological Review	1	2%
Symbolic Interaction	1	2%
Tripodos	1	2%
Young Consumers	1	2%

*Source: own elaboration*

Figure 2 below represents the distribution of the reviewed articles along the years, starting from 1995 up to 2023. The graph shows that the role of women in the luxury fashion industry was not being discussed as intensively in the past, since we found two literature gaps: one gap identified in the period comprised from 1996 to 2006, followed by the literature gap found between 2006 and 2009. For instance, the maximum number of articles found that were published in the first half of the sample (from 1995 to 2009) was limited to 2. In contrast, the more recent literature appears to investigate the topic more thoroughly. The year 2019 is particularly notable, since we were able to find 10 published articles that focused on examining the role of women in the luxury fashion industry.

**Figure 2** Distribution of published articles through the years (1995-2023)



*Source: own elaboration*

Within the total number of published articles, the set that relied on theoretical methods and literature research reached a total of 9 articles. On the other hand, 51 researchers applied empirical strategies to support their hypothesis, 45% of which (23 out of 51) were classified as quantitative. The remaining 55% (28 out of 51) utilized mixed (9 out of 51) or qualitative (19 out of 51) methodologies. Table 3 below presents an in-depth classification of the selected articles according to the methodology employed.

**Table 3** Number of articles according to methodology

Category	Number of articles	Subcategory	Number of articles
Empirical	51	Quantitative	23
		Qualitative	19
		Both	9
Theoretical	9		

*Source: own elaboration.*

As previously noted, one of the main categories used to classify the selected articles was referred to the methodology used, namely empirical or theoretical. Within the empirical literature available, we found a noticeable diversity of nationalities and cultures. For instance, 9 articles conducted questionnaires and additional mixed-method strategies in order to methodologically analyze the culture and trends of Indian populations. The role

of Indian women in the luxury fashion industry, and how such industry works in the Indian market was explored in these articles, 2 of which appeared in the Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management (Jain, 2019; Ajita and Sivakumar, 2019). The United States was identified as the second most researched society, as it was the analyzed nation in 8 articles. It is also relevant to mention that 2 articles did not specify the country object of investigation. Table 4 below presents the variety of populations targeted by the empirical articles.

**Table 4** Locations studied by the articles

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Articles</b>
India	9
The US	8
Kuwait	4
China	4
France	3
Saudi Arabia	3
International	2
Turkey	2
The UK	2
Thailand	1
Canada	1
China and the US	1
Germany	1
Mexico	1
Qatar	1
Saudi Arabia and the UAE	1
Several African countries	1
Shanghai	1
Spain	1
Taiwan	1
Amsterdam	1
Trinidad and Tobago	1
Tunisia	1
<i>Unknown</i>	2

*Source: own elaboration*

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1. Creating a comprehensive framework: main dimensions

After conducting a first analysis of the selected articles, it was deemed necessary to create a comprehensive framework in order to structure the extracted information. The final set of articles presented highly fragmented data, since it provided ambiguous information

that diffculted the task of drawing representative conclusions. Our study is aimed at determining the current state of knowledge about the variety of roles that women play in the luxury fashion industry. However, and as will be explained below in Table 5, the majority of the research articles were mostly focused on women as consumers, while some scattered articles studied an alternative role. Consequently, it was convenient to create a new approach in order to carry out a thorough analysis of the available content.

The proposed framework is based upon two dimensions: the roles played by the groups of women analyzed by the articles, and the area of study on which these articles were focused. We believed that the extracted information would be more easily presented and examined if carefully categorized. Each article provided theoretical and practical insights for a specific area of study and a specific role in the industry. Hence, the comprehensive framework dives into the interaction of these variables in order to deliver relevant conclusions that complete the systematic literature review. In the following sections, we will provide an in-depth explanation of both variables.

#### *5.1.1. First dimension: role of women*

This dimension aims to study the perception of the selected articles in regard to women's roles in the luxury fashion industry. As explained in the previous sections, women are present in every step of the industry's value chain, playing a vital role as manufacturers, designers, consumers or entrepreneurs. However, research literature does not always reflect the exact state of reality. For instance, the role of women as entrepreneurs was not identified in any of the selected articles, which might prove that researchers are not necessarily focused on studying every role in the industry.

The women identified in our set of articles were portrayed as: consumers, workers, influencers and others. Among the category of workers, the roles were also segmented into two alternatives: the female workers who play a role inside of the luxury fashion industry, and the women who interact with luxury fashion as workers outside of the industry. Similarly, the role of influencers in the industry is referred to women who play a vital role in fashion, either directly, as proper influencers in social media or as powerful decision makers that impact the industry indirectly. Below this paragraph, we have construed Table 5 to compile the distribution of roles and their subcategories among the articles.



*Table 5 List of roles*

<b>List of Roles</b>	<b>Articles mentioned</b>
<b><u>Consumers</u></b>	<b>51</b>
Consumers	50
Consumers and mothers	1
<b><u>Workers</u></b>	<b>4</b>
Inside of the industry	2
Outside of the industry	2
<b><u>Influencers</u></b>	<b>3</b>
<b><u>Others</u></b>	<b>2</b>
Prosumers	1
Supporters	1

*Source: own elaboration*

*a. Role 1: Consumers*

As presented by Table 5, the majority of articles (51 out of 60) were focused on analyzing the role of women as consumers in order to provide practical information for brands to apply to managerial and strategic decisions (Park, 2014; Adomaitis et al., 2023). The role of consumers is majorly identified with women who purchase luxury fashion items, ranging from Generation Y (Ramadan and Nsouli, 2022) or Generation Z consumers (Singh, 2023) to mothers who purchase luxury for their children (Silhouette-Dercourt and de Lassus, 2016). Nonetheless, some articles shifted their work to different categories of luxury fashion, such as masstige (Das et al., 2022; Ajitha and Sivakumar, 2019), second-hand fashion (Choi et al., 2019) or counterfeit consumption (Nagar, 2016; Perez et al., 2010).

Among the diverse groups of female consumers studied by the articles, we found a trend that focused on analyzing the interaction between the purchase intention of luxury fashion and different traits of personality, self-image and identity (Venkatesh et al., 2010; Perez et al., 2010; Thakur and Kaur, 2015; Loussaief et al., 2019; Navia et al., 2021). The consumption of fashion luxury offers a highly social activity for women, where going shopping is not restricted to purchasing the product. For example, some articles analyzed the social interactions that female consumers experience in the salesfloor (Mostafa, 2019;

Rosenbaum et al., 2015), which tends to be richer and more valuable among female consumers (Stokburger-Sauer and Teichmann, 2013).

This purchasing experience was studied for consumers with very diverse nationalities, comparing the impact of culture and social factors in consumers' decisions (Jung and Shen, 2011; Al-Mutawa, 2013; Wu et al., 2015; Al-Mutawa et al., 2015; Devanathan, 2020). This variety ensures more representative results that will allow brands to adapt their strategic decisions to specific geographical targets. For instance, Algumzi (2022) studied female consumers' behavior in Saudi Arabia to determine possible strategies for brands to follow in future projects that will be carried out in the country. Similarly, Ponglawhapun and Utiswannaku (2022) analyzed the attitude of elderly Bangkok women towards fashion with the goal of designing a successful fashion collection.

Furthermore, the selected articles covered the whole of the consumer experience. Some articles investigated the factors that influence female consumers' overall attitude towards luxury fashion (Dogan-Sudas et al., 2019; Jain, 2019; Vashi and Shah, 2020). Some of these articles focused on factors that belong in consumers' personalities, such as consumer envy and admiration (Joo and Kim, 2021) or their cultural sensitivity (Rambocas, 2021). Meanwhile, others were focused on the impact of external factors, such as the country of origin of the brand (Abalkhail, 2023) or socio-cultural structures (Al-Mutawa et al., 2023).

In parallel, we found several studies that focused on specific steps of the purchasing process, such as the reaction towards diverse techniques applied in marketing campaigns (Carrillat et al., 2019; Yin et al., 2020; Pankiw et al., 2021; Fetais et al., 2023), the female consumers' perceptions of luxury brand extensions (Eren-Erdogmus et al., 2018) or the experience of purchasing in pop-up shops (Taube and Warnaby, 2017).

It is relevant to notice that the articles did not study this role exclusively for managerial reasons. Batten (2009) provided a historical investigation about the clothing rules applied to women in Ancient Greece to understand the meaning of several Christian samples on the matter. Similarly, Chen (2016) assessed the popular fur headdress worn by wealthy women in China during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to understand the relationship between the use of luxurious garments and social status. On the other hand, Gruys (2019) explored the consumer experiences and potential inequalities that poor women face in welfare organizations when trying to acquire high quality clothing.

### *b. Role 2: Workers*

While it is common that the research literature concentrates on women as consumers due to the practical implications it carries, 7% (4 out of 60) of the articles investigated the role of women as professionals. Inside of this category, workers can be divided into two variables: those who work for the industry and those whose job is not directly related to fashion, but play an indirect role in the industry.

The first representation is related to women who somehow participate in the value chain of the luxury fashion industry. As previously noted, women do not exclusively interact with luxury fashion through its consumption; their participation in the industry's labor market has increased over the last decades. Boyle and De Keere (2019) assessed how saleswomen are capable of blurring the lines between their professional and private lives in order to provide a more aesthetic experience for the consumer. On the other side of the value chain, Kuldova (2016) highlights the exploitation and inequality that many women face in India, and how they actively reject the consumerist and socio-economic values that perpetrate as a way to protest.

The remaining two authors concentrated on the interaction between luxury fashion and women's professional lives in society. The luxuriousness and exclusivity associated with certain fashion statements has always played an essential role in numerous professional settings. For instance, Holcombe (2019) explained how the female workers of J. Lyons & Co. were dressed specifically to resemble the traditional servant figure that attracted customers who wanted to experience the wealthy lifestyle. Additionally, said exclusivity was also used as an instrument to influence female workers into certain beliefs and political values in the 1930s, according to Roosien (2022).

### *c. Role 3: Influencers*

One of the most important figures in luxury fashion is referred to influencers, people who inspire others, often by making a difference in the industry. The most recent – and probably most popular – category of this figure is related to influencers whose platforms are mainly social media centered, but this role has existed in different forms throughout all history. Among the articles selected, we identified 3 articles that depict the role of women in the industry as different categories of “influencers”.

Starting from the role of women in the British Imperialist era, Nechtman (2006) explored how female supporters of Indian luxurious garments contributed to the representation of

India's cultural identity while embodying the Imperialist wealthiness that characterized said period. Through fashion, these women challenged the traditional fashion norms as an indirect manifestation of more profound beliefs. This use of luxury fashion as a tool to make a change has also been characteristic of certain public figures, such as Madame Tallien. As studied by Adams (2014), the use of luxury fashion as an influential instrument helped Madame Tallien to be noticed and to become one of the first strong political female forces in France.

Nonetheless, how these influencers are perceived by consumers and luxury brands is not always positive. Influential women's ability to reach international audiences is often exploited by the brands through social media and advertising. However, their image can be portrayed as an unreal image of women's beauty just to attract the consumers attention – whose response might not always be positive (Mensa and Deng, 2021).

*d. Role 4: "others" (prosumers and supporters)*

This category compiles 2 articles that studied women who play roles that are different to the rest of groups: prosumers and women as supporters of fashion shows. The first role is related to Eastern women who resell Western luxury brands to middle-aged female consumers that cannot access them otherwise. Zhang (2017) shed light on this activity and identifies it as a feminization of labor that has offered women an opportunity to overcome the obstacles that capitalist regimes have imposed on countries such as the post-socialist China.

The second role in this category is the role of supporters. It is crucial for brands to understand the reasons behind women's support to their image and shows, since their opinion usually represents a big percentage of society. Salman et al. (2016) discovered that strong female gender identity influences Millennial women's support of certain fashion shows, mediating possible negative impacts that might come from their past fashion experiences.

*5.1.2. Second dimension: areas of study*

Due to the high fragmentation presented by the first dimension (role of women), it was crucial to develop a second variable, which will be explained in this section. More than half of the authors were focused on the role of women as consumers, which does not

provide sufficient information to perform our analysis. The intersections between the different variables not only ensure a more thorough approach to the analysis, but also provide more understandable conclusions for the reader.

Consequently, we classified the set of articles according to the main area of study. The main areas of study identified among the articles were displayed in Table 6 presented below.

*Table 6 Areas of study*

<b>Area of study</b>	<b>Articles</b>
Purchase intention	18
Marketing	16
Culture	12
Categories of consumption	6
History	5
Inequality	3

*Source: own elaboration*

*a. Area 1: Purchase intention*

The most represented area of study out of the group concerns the purchase intention of female consumers and the reasons behind the decision-making process. Among the whole set of articles, 30% (18 out of 60) were classified with this category. This area of study is primarily focused on determining the factors that influence women when deciding to purchase luxury fashion.

The articles focused on female consumers since they tend to value luxury brands more than men, especially in certain categories of products, according to Stokburger-Sauer and Teichmann (2013). Their decision-making process is subject to a high variety of influences, both internal and external. Some authors identified the main reasons to be related to social motives, such as the need for prestige, societal pressure and social status (Silhouette-Dercourt and De Lassus, 2016; Emmanuel-Stephen and Gbadamosi, 2022; Ramadan and Nsouli, 2022; Singh, 2023). Furthermore, Dogan-Sudas et al., (2019) completed these studies by adding that women have been more and more influenced by environmentally friendly values.

Brand image and reputation were also identified as highly influential factors that affect female consumers' purchase intentions towards luxury brands (Taube and Warnaby, 2017; Eren-Erdogmus et al., 2018; Vashi and Shah, 2020). To do so, luxury brands might

strengthen their image and reputation through celebrity endorsement or trend setting techniques (Wu et al., 2015).

Additional reasons why researchers believe that women might purchase luxury garments include uniqueness (Ajitha and Sivakumar, 2019), high fashion involvement that helps them comprehend certain trends, controversial consumption and higher prices (Summer et al., 2006; Bhaduri and Standford, 2016), or conspicuous value (Jain, 2019; Abalkhail, 2023).

The relevance of this area of study relies on its practical and managerial implications that the conclusions have for the luxury brands. By understanding their consumers' behaviors, they can accommodate their marketing strategies accordingly.

#### *b. Area 2: Marketing*

Similarly to the previous area of study, marketing turned out to be the second to most researched topic, representing 27% (16 out of 60) of the whole set. This area of study compiles articles that explored different categories of marketing strategies, and how they might influence consumers' perceptions of luxury fashion brands.

There are several techniques used by luxury brands to attract the attention of potential and current customers. Some luxury brands feed off of the desire to enjoy a unique experience that is not easily accessible to them or to others (Holcombe, 2019), while others portray high fashion as wearable art, which is timeless and a representation of self-expression (Venkatesh et al., 2010). In order to do so, several brands resort to celebrity endorsement techniques, whose reputation and portrayal are to be taken into consideration depending on the results sought and the target public (Carrillat et al., 2019; Yin et al., 2020).

Additionally, Social Media Marketing has turned out to be one of the most useful platforms to communicate with clients. Even though some brands have been criticized for their irreal portrayal of the female consumer (Mensa and Deng, 2021), social media acts as a tool to communicate the brands' good intentions and increase consumers' admiration towards the brand (Joo and Kim, 2021; Fetais et al., 2023). For instance, instead of offering an irreal image of women, brands would benefit from using average-sized models, whose appearance creates better impression among female consumers (Lou and Tse, 2021).

The management of the retail store is also considered crucial by many authors. From creating bonds with the customer (Rosenbaum et al., 2015) to using beneficial comparison strategies (Boyle and De Keere, 2019), salespeople try very diverse strategies to convince the customer to purchase. According to Peretz (1995), the retail store functions as a stage for salespeople to sell the clothes, and for consumers to rehearse before showing the garments to the “real world”.

Furthermore, this area also concerns the marketing techniques used by brands in the after-sales customer services, as they are very highly valued by female consumers (Kim, 2020). Thakur and Kaur (2015) believe that these strategies are rather impactful in female consumers’ brand loyalty and emotional attachment.

### *c. Area 3: Culture*

As presented by Table 6, 12 articles studied and compared the particularities of certain cultures when consuming luxury fashion. According to the articles, culture acts as a highly influential factor in female consumption of luxury fashion. For instance, and, as explained by Devanthan (2020), Indian consumers tend prefer local luxury brands when it comes to Indian culture products – such as the sarees –, in contrast to the overall preference of Western brands for the rest of luxury garments.

A high percentage of these articles was focused on explaining the differences that lay on societal and religious norms in Muslim countries (Al-Mutawa, 2013; Dekhil et al., 2017; Algemzi, 2022; Al-Mutawa et al., 2023). Since the majority of luxury brands are Western, their values and advertising strategies do not always meet the Eastern women’s requirements and beliefs. However, instead of negating the market, most of these women benefit from own interpretations to find a more representative symbolic value (Al-Mutawa et al., 2015).

In parallel, some authors covered literature gaps by studying the differences between consumers’ perceptions depending on their nationalities. Wu et al. (2015) compared the differences in luxury fashion consumption between Taiwanese and English female consumers, to find out that there are not true divergences between both. On the other hand, American consumers are not as similar to Chinese consumers, since the former tend to show higher levels of brand awareness (Jung and Shen, 2011).

#### *d. Area 4: Categories of consumption*

In this area of study, we compiled 5 articles that tackled different subcategories of luxury fashion consumption. Over the past few years, luxury fashion consumption has proliferated in terms of diversity and accessibility. The exclusivity that used to characterize this industry has been replaced by new terms such as renting, collaborative or second-hand consumption.

Both renting and second-hand consumption revolve around the idea of giving old clothes a new life. People have become more environmentally conscious, boosting the popularity of these two categories of luxury fashion consumption. Renting, or using non-exclusively owned luxury garments, allow users to enjoy different versions of themselves, since renting does not tie them down like owning does (Loussaief et al., 2019). Regarding second-hand fashion, Choi et al. (2019) proposed that female consumers are very positively influenced by their perceived value of the collection and confidence on its quality.

In contrast, some people resort to counterfeit consumption. Even though this alternative is usually perceived as cheap or dishonest, it currently is a highly popular practice among female consumers all around the world. Two articles explored the reasons behind counterfeit consumption. While Nagar (2016) demonstrated the link between high life satisfaction and self-control over counterfeit consumption, Perez et al. (2010) assessed how these consumers are motivated by the satisfaction of feeling smarter than those who pay higher prices for real luxury products.

One author also highlighted the innovative way of reselling luxury clothing through the act of presumption (Zhang, 2017). This new category of luxury fashion consumption has allowed mostly Chinese women to either gain economic independence by reselling Western luxury clothing, or have the possibility of purchasing exclusive garments that, otherwise, would not have been accessible.

#### *e. Area 5: History*

The second to last area of study compiled 4 articles that studied different roles of women in luxury fashion from a historical perspective. These articles are not necessarily aimed at providing practical insights for luxury brands, but at comprehending the role that many women have played in the past in the luxury fashion industry.



For example, Chen (2016) explored how women used luxury headdresses to portray a certain social status, flaunting their wealth at society similarly to how British women in the Imperialist era wore Indian luxury garments to represent Britain's power (Nechtman, 2006).

*f. Area 6: Inequality*

The last area of study identified among the articles refers to the inequalities faced by women in the luxury fashion industry. Nowadays, there are still women who are victims to stereotypes and inequalities when it comes to consuming and working in this industry. Three articles covered three different versions of inequality to shed light on the issue and give voice to their stories.

Women have been repeatedly stereotyped when it comes to luxury and success. More specifically, black women have faced limits when accessing equal opportunities in society and in fashion. For instance, even though the luxury handbag has been identified as a definition of female empowerment, it actually stereotypes and limits further alternative meanings of female success (Iqani, 2023).

These stereotypes do not only affect black women. Even though NGOs try to improve poor women's situations by providing them with professional attire to access the labor market, the process is full of inefficiencies that result in further inequalities for poor women. According to Gruys (2019), many women still fall victim to race and body-type stereotypes that limits their access to the more luxurious garments similarly to what happens in their everyday life. Furthermore, many female workers in the fashion industry face multiple inequalities in their workplace, falling victim to the consumerism-based system that authors like Kuldova (2016) define as responsible for these inequalities.

**5.2. Interactions between the roles of women and main areas of study**

This content analysis of the theoretical insights aims to provide an overview of the roles of women in the luxury fashion industry inside of the main areas of study covered by the selected articles. In order to dive into the conclusions reached by the articles, this section explains the main interactions between the roles of women in the luxury fashion industry and the different areas of study.

With the aim of offering a visual summary of the interactions found among the articles, we have created a table that distributes each article according to the specific interaction between the role of women and the area of study that was identified. This information is included in Table 7, as one of the Appendices at the end of our work.

### *5.2.1. Purchase intention in consumers*

The experience of purchasing luxury fashion items is heavily influenced by different factors depending on the specific circumstances of the buyer. The purchasing intention and its results are determined by factors such as the consumer's country of origin (Albalkhail, 2023; Devanathan, 2020), brand reputation (Wu et al., 2015) or conspicuous value (Jain, 2019), among others. Hence, consumers tend to go through a complex decision-making process when buying new clothes, influenced by several factors that generally vary depending on the type of fashion and the profile of the consumer. This area of content analyses the purchase behavior of women as current and potential consumers of luxury fashion.

Fashion has always been known for helping people to create and express an identity. Clothes work as a white canvas for society to represent ideas, desires and personality traits. Through fashion, people aspire to achieve the desired image that is to be perceived by the rest of the world. This is mostly applicable to female young consumers, since they usually are more easily influenceable consumers. Younger consumers of luxury apparel desire to achieve a certain social status through fashion, which relieves any possible guilt that comes from buying higher priced products (Wu et al., 2015). The need for uniqueness that positively influences the intention to purchase luxury apparel affects female youngsters more intensively due to their higher levels of self-monitoring, according to Ajitha and Sivakumar (2019). Moreover, through social media, young women are constantly exposed to fashion and thus are highly involved in the world of luxury fashion industry. For instance, Gen Y female consumers are used to engaging with luxury brands through online platforms, shaping their identity through trends (Ramadan and Nsouli, 2021).

As women grow up, some of their interests and purchase decisions evolve, while some factors remain as influential. Emmanuel-Stephen and Gbadamosi (2022) believe that hedonic implications and social motives such as the need for belongingness positively

impact the purchase intentions and decisions of female consumers towards luxury apparel. Luxury fashion provides a feeling of connection in a high status community, where quality and uniqueness play a vital role. Women who were not able to access such status when they were younger also build on the idea of their idealized selves by purchasing luxury apparel for their pre-adolescent children. Silhouette-Dercourt and De Lassus (2016) examined the motivations for young mothers who purchase luxury fashion for their children to reveal that not only does this behavior connect them to the feeling of motherhood, but it also allows them to create a unique identity – same as it happens with younger consumers.

This decision-making process does not develop equally for men. While the higher prices do not hinder the purchase intention in most cases for female consumers, men do not usually value the social and symbolic value that women perceive in luxury (Stokburger-Sauer and Teichmann, 2013).

It is to mention that the higher prices of luxury fashion have resulted in the emergence of new categories of fashion that try to satisfy the consumers' desire to own luxury. Traditionally, only the higher classes in society were able to purchase luxurious clothing, due to the expensive prices linked to craftsmanship. Nowadays, even though masstige brands have allowed middle-class consumers to afford new luxury, second-hand items and counterfeit consumption have also emerged as alternatives. Das et al. (2022) found that the consumption of masstige brands is influenced by factors that similarly impact consumers' purchase intention of traditional luxury (such as the symbolic value or quality), while second-hand luxuries were purchased due to the perceived value of the collection (Choi, et al. 2019).

On the other hand, counterfeit brands seek to compensate the need for conspicuous consumption by selling fraudulent copies of luxury products for an infimum price – compared to authentic luxury. This activity is rather popular in Asian countries such as India, where counterfeit brands target female consumers who show low levels of life satisfaction. These type of buyers are more attracted to counterfeit consumption because it offers quick access to achieve perceived status – and thus, self-satisfaction – through visible evidence at a lower cost (Nagar, 2016).

Researchers have been studying the factors that influence these purchase behaviors in order to provide insight not only for theoretical implications, but also for managerial

reasons. Brands base their strategies on knowledgeable backgrounds so as to build a strong brand image that meet the current trends and requirements of the targeted consumers (Vashi and Shah, 2020).

As we mentioned before, there is an extended need to demonstrate uniqueness and differentiate oneself from others, which is rather complicated to achieve consuming fast fashion. The higher the need for uniqueness, the higher women are involved in fashion. Consequently, these consumers have a better understanding of the value of the product and will be more willing to pay for the higher prices that characterize luxury fashion (Bhaduri and Stanforth, 2016). Dogan-Sudas et al. (2019) also opined that women have begun to value the environmental values of the luxury brands, apart from the exclusivity and social prestige that attracts them to purchase.

Moreover, these implications are also useful for brands to apply in corporate strategy. Brand extension and pop-up shops are also valued positively by consumers as long as the brands approach these strategies with certain levels of cohesion and exclusivity in regards to their brand image (Taube and Warnaby, 2017; Eren-Erdogmus et al., 2018).

In short, it is vital that the fashion industry understands that while female consumers' purchase intentions might be influenced differently according to their age or interests, there is a general need for uniqueness that impulses their purchase decision when it comes to luxury. The research available has demonstrated that brands should focus on differentiation strategies that portray an exclusive image to the female customer.

#### *5.2.2. Marketing in consumers, workers and influencers*

Brands create a sense of exclusivity that provides differentiation in a highly competitive environment, where consumers are not only attracted by the product itself, but by the intrinsic values of the brand and, sometimes, by the perception of high fashion as a form of art and self-expression (Venkatesh et al., 2010).

To do so, luxury brands should take into account the specific characteristics that define the target public that they want to attract, and how they can be influenced to purchase. Features such as nationality or gender are direct influences over the potential response to marketing strategies. As an example, in luxury e-commerce, male consumers have proven

to care about order and delivery management, while female consumers also value customer service and trust (Kim, 2020).

Nonetheless, the strategies chosen by luxury brands should not only cater to the specific needs of their potential and current customers, but also to their own managerial and business objectives. For instance, celebrity endorsement techniques vary depending on the decision of the luxury brand to change their image or revitalize it (Carrillat et al., 2019).

In terms of advertising, decisions such as the choice of endorsers and how they are represented also play a crucial role. Over the past few years, the portrayal of the female figure in advertisements has evolved from the traditional perfect image that brands used to depict. Thanks to the recent boost of the feminist movement, female consumers are more responsive towards advertisements that use average-sized models (Lou and Tse, 2021) that are portrayed as smart rather than sexy (Yin et al., 2020), in contrast to the unreal idea of beauty that is very commonly promoted through social media (Mensa and Deng, 2021).

In this industry, brand loyalty is crucial to build strong brand relationships that convey value to both potential and current consumers. It is necessary for luxury brands to create an emotional attachment with consumers in order to strengthen consumers' brand loyalty (Thakur and Kaur, 2016). Tools like targeted social media marketing (Joo and Kim, 2021; Fetais et al., 2023), strong after-sales services (Thakur and Kaur, 2015) and the use of Corporate Social Responsibility motives in marketing (Pankiw et al., 2021) have proven to increase consumers' attraction and brand loyalty.

In terms of female workers, luxury brands also take advantage of specific marketing strategies to create a certain image. Following the model of J. Lyons & Co., some brands have used fashion to dress their workers to appeal to customers who seek a luxurious experience (Holcombe, 2019). Alternatively, other brands inculcate certain selling techniques among their salespeople in order to sell the experience through personal interactions (Boyle and De Keere, 2019).

Consequently, marketing techniques should be adapted to potential and current female consumers from the moment they step into the retail store. One of the main differentiative aspects of luxury fashion refers to the exclusive experience customers are able to enjoy apart from just purchasing. In some retail stores, this concept is built through the creation

of bonds between the salesperson and the customer. While the salesperson tries to sell an identity, rather than a piece of clothing, the consumers get to create a commercial relationship where they can feel safe and rehearse before showing their new identity to the rest of the world (Peretz, 1995; Rosenbaum et al., 2015).

### *5.2.3. Culture in consumers*

Available research has proven that the socio-cultural circumstances of each nation impact the purchase behavior of consumers in numerous ways. Moreover, the strategies followed by brands in marketing and business management vary according to the culture settled in each nation. This area of study approaches the cultural implications that affect women as consumers and entrepreneurs in the luxury fashion industry.

In the luxury fashion industry, there has been a recurrent trend for the principal brands to follow in marketing campaigns, which is showing high levels of female sexuality (Adomaitis et al., 2023; Al-Mutawa, 2013). Advertisements in fashion portray female models desirable and sensual in order to attract attention from potential consumers, but the results do not always meet the expectations. Over the past few years, the feminist movement has conquered the fashion industry, encouraging brands to shift their marketing strategies from the ideal stereotypes of women to a more realist approach. As a consequence, consumers – especially female – have begun to reject this type of advertisements and, in contrast, less sexuality in luxury advertisements are perceived as more attractive (Adomaitis et al., 2023).

Luxury fashion brands are mostly marketed and produced in Western societies, and, sometimes, consumers from foreign countries are not necessarily identified with the values these brands represent. Religion is one of the main factors that differentiate consumers' behavior among these cultures. Those nations where religion plays an elemental role in society have implicitly imposed behavioral patterns in consumers – especially female. There are certain religions where modesty is a crucial value for women to follow, which applies to clothing and purchasing decisions. For instance, Western luxury is consumed by Muslim women with a different meaning, conveying a message that combines their tradition with modern trends (Al-Mutawa, 2015)

In line with this argument, Al-Mutawa (2013) explains that the religious values settled in Muslim countries also advocate for a more modest approach in fashion, leading to

“Modestly Sexy” representations of western fashion. In Kuwait, although the younger female generations do not relate to the conservative principles that their mothers used to follow, even the most liberal consumers are influenced by religion. Mostafa (2019) argues that, to this day, Kuwaiti culture and religion still play an enduring influence on women’s purchasing behavior. Moreover, Saudi female consumers are deeply influenced by the traditional social norms imposed by Islam, which contrasts with the sensual image that is depicted in western luxury fashion (Algumzi, 2022).

Extant research has explained further cultural elements that distinguish consumers according to their nationalities. The available literature appears to focus on behavioral purchase patterns of Asian women. Jung and Shen’s research (2011) suggests that Chinese women are more likely to show greater brand loyalty and overall brand equity for luxury fashion brands. Wu et al. (2015) studied the differences between female consumers from Taiwan and the UK, to reveal that, although there were no major behavioral differences, Taiwanese women tend to purchase luxury fashion driven by identity-seeking motivations. In South Korea, women value accessible discounts, celebrity endorsement and inspiring stories that lead them to admire the luxury brand, according to Park (2014). These findings show that female consumers of luxury fashion in Asia have complex desires, as opposed to the general understanding that Asian women main incentive to buy luxury brands is to own foreign goods.

#### *5.2.4. Categories of consumption*

The exclusivity that surrounds luxury fashion makes it difficult to access, but the desirability that characterizes this industry acts as a counterforce. Researchers have studied how consumers have found diverse ways of enjoying this luxury – or benefiting from it, in the case of prosumers (Zhang, 2017).

The least accepted way of consuming luxury fashion is through counterfeit consumption. Purchasing fake copies of luxury brands raises controversy due to the disrespect it shows to the endeavor of designers and the team of creative management. Women who practice this type of consumption are characterized by having low levels of life satisfaction and the desire to project the elevated image that luxury provides (Perez et al., 2010; Nagar, 2016).

Nowadays, conscious consumption is more socially accepted. Women are increasingly concerned about the damages of fast fashion and the importance of giving a second life to clothes. Instead of purchasing a one-use dress for a special occasion, female consumers are choosing to rent, buy second hand or consume collaboratively. The main reasons why women tend to choose these types of consumption are related to their fashion involvement and leadership (Navia et al., 2021), or the freedom to create an alter-ego for a specific occasion (Loussaief et al., 2019).

#### *5.2.5. History of female consumers, influencers and workers*

The evolution of the roles played by women in the luxury fashion industry through history has been object of study for the past few decades. Even though women have always been present in the industry, their different roles have been undervalued for years. During the British Imperialist era, women challenged the traditional social norms while defending the power of their country. These influential women wore luxurious garments that represented the powerful position of Great Britain while representing the Indian culture that covered their clothing (Nechtman, 2006).

This interaction between luxury fashion and women is present even in historical religious transcripts. In Ancient Christian communities, there was a constant tension between the modest clothing that texts imposed to women and their use of luxurious clothing as a way to show rebellion (Batten, 2009).

Female workers of luxury fashion have also been playing one of the most crucial roles for the evolution of the industry. However, instead of being recognized, many have fallen victim to exploitative working conditions and poor economic independence, increasing their vulnerability to the system (Roosien, 2022).

Hence, it seems like, throughout history, luxury fashion has been an indirect instrument for women to show their true strength, and to fight the strict regimes that societies have imposed on them (Chen, 2016; Adams, 2014).

#### *5.2.6. Inequalities faced by female consumers and workers*

Unfortunately, research proves that inequality is still an issue to tackle in the luxury fashion industry. One of the biggest inequality issues that surrounds the industry is related



to the inequalities faced by many workers. The social structures imposed in production-intensive economies have created profound inequalities among the female workers, creating paradoxical luxuries. In places such as Lucknow, female workers endure inhumane conditions and exploitation due to the recent boom in consumption and material culture, creating false promises of meritocracy and competitive inequality (Kuldova, 2016).

Additionally, some consumers of luxury fashion also fall victim to inequalities and stereotypes. The capitalist system that governs the majority of societies has established an economy that, in some cases, prioritizes the role of men over women. For years, the only role that was associated with the female figure was related to housekeeping, while most men had the possibility of accessing the wider labor market, turning women into economically dependent beings. Thus, over the past few decades, new feminist movements have arisen to advocate for female empowerment and participation in society's economy, politics and labor markets. Nonetheless, some women are still treated unequally, and the definition of empowerment has sometimes been limited to superficial possibilities, such as the ownership of luxury fashion (Iqani, 2023).

On the other side, other women are still not able to afford their economic independence. Millions of women do not have the chance to access the necessary means, and resort to non-profit organizations in search of resources such as professional attire, often to face a new source of discrimination. Sometimes because of race, others because of their body type, not all poor women are not treated equally when it comes to getting access to luxurious professional attire (Gruys, 2019).

## CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSIONS

### 6. CONCLUSIONS

Our study was based on a systematic literature review of the available research literature to understand the current field of knowledge regarding the different roles of women in the luxury fashion industry. To do so, we conducted a thorough search of the most relevant published articles in two databases and found 60 articles that matched our criteria. Thus, our study was directed towards analyzing the published literature on the role of women in the luxury fashion industry to highlight the areas of study that are yet to be properly investigated.

The content analysis of the selected articles showed that the role of women in the luxury fashion industry was not as intensively studied until the end of the 2000s, when we found a boost of research articles on the topic. Furthermore, the articles were primarily focused on studying the interaction of four roles with six different areas of study.

The first major interaction studied by the articles was found between the different purchase intentions and the female consumers of luxury fashion. Current studies on the matter show that the most popular reason why women purchase luxury fashion is because of the social status it is commonly associated with (Silhouette-Dercourt and de Lassus, 2016; Dogan-Soudas et al., 2019; Emmanuel-Stephen and Gbadamosi, 2022; Ramadan and Nsouli, 2022; Singh, 2023). The exclusivity that surrounds luxury fashion gives the owners a sense of belongingness in specific groups of society where people are considered relevant, a feeling that especially certain minorities usually dread. This theory was also completed by the articles that analyzed how female consumers of luxury fashion were also inspired by traits like uniqueness, high fashion involvement or conspicuous values (Ajitha and Sivakumar, 2019; Jain, 2019; Vashi and Shah, 2020).

Secondly, one of the most researched interaction was related to the impact of marketing strategies on female consumers. One of the main aspects of luxury fashion consumption is related to the experience that comes along with it. Several articles highlighted how the way in which women are approached both in retail and online stores determines the level of attraction and loyalty to the brand (Peretz, 1995; Rosenbaum et al., 2015; Kim, 2020). Decisions such as the specific portrayal of the female models in advertisements, the management of social media platforms, or the use of Corporate Social Responsibility motives have proven to be relevant for the majority of female consumers (Lou and Tse,

2021; Pankiw et al., 2019; Joo and Kim, 2021; Fetais et al., 2023). These insights provide useful implications for brands to apply when designing the management of their customer base, notwithstanding their necessary adaptation of the strategies to the cultural and psychological features that very often change the consumers' sensibility towards them (Venkatesh et al., 2010; Yin et al., 2020).

A high number of authors of the selected articles also focused on the impact of culture on consumers' decision-making processes. Cultural backgrounds, societal pressure and religious values were investigated as factors that affect female consumption of luxury fashion (Jung and Shen, 2011; Devanathan, 2020). Some women are heavily influenced by traditions and personal values that have been imposed through religion or culture, which leads them to interpret Western luxury fashion accordingly (Al-Mutawa, 2013; Al-Mutawa et al., 2015; Aljumzi, 2022; Al-Mutawa et al., 2023).

The rest of the articles were more fragmented, focusing on the different categories of luxury fashion consumption (Perez et al., 2010; Nagar, 2016; Zhang, 2017; Choi et al., 2019; Louissaief et al., 2019; Navia et al., 2021), historical investigations of female figures in luxury fashion (Nechtman, 2006; Batten, 2009; Adams, 2014; Chen, 2016; Roosien, 2022) or inequalities faced by women who work or consume high fashion (Kuldova, 2016; Gruys, 2019; Iqani, 2023).

In summary, most articles were focused on the female consumption of Western luxury fashion and the variety of factors that influence their purchasing decisions. For the most part, the set of articles provided useful insights for luxury brands to apply when targeting specific groups of female consumers or markets. Female consumers act very differently to male consumers, and their purchase intentions vary differently, depending on how marketing campaigns, or public opinion. This line of research is crucial in terms of brand management, but it can also turn out to be relevant to understand general female behavior in society. Women have proved to be heavily influenced by external factors, traditions and norms that have been imposed through history, which reflects on their daily life – including the way in which they approach luxury fashion.

However, women play very different roles in the luxury fashion industry. Given the significant evolution that women have experienced in terms of participation in the labor market, these data highlight the issue that women still face in terms of lack of

representation. In Section 2.1 of this Work, we demonstrated that women have shifted from only consuming high fashion to being the most relevant participants of the industry.

As shown on Table 7, we did not find certain interactions between dimensions. While it is true that the area of study that covers purchase intentions can be specifically focused on consumers, we believe that the rest of areas could target women who play different managerial roles. For instance, an interesting interaction could be found between women who are entrepreneurs and how they have experienced inequality due to the existing gender gap. Even though we found scattered articles that mentioned important female figures in luxury fashion, further representation could be enhanced through future research.

Lastly, while we discovered that there has been some progress regarding the number of articles that tackle the role of women in the luxury fashion industry, the maximum number of articles found in one year did not surpass the total of 10 articles. This field does not only provide relevant managerial information to brands, but it also helps to finally represent women's crucial participation in society. Researchers could then shift their attention to this area of study so as to contribute to the desired equal representation of genders.

## APPENDICES

*Table 7 Summary Table*

<b>Roles of women</b>  <b>Areas of study</b>	<b>Consumers</b>	<b>Workers</b>	<b>Influencers</b>	<b>Others</b>
	<b>Purchase intention</b>	Singh (2023); Mostafa (2019); Emmanuel-Stepehn and Gbadamosi (2022); Wu et al (2015); Stokburger-sauer and Teichmann (2013); Rambocas and Mahabir (2021); Abalkhail (2023); Das et al (2022); Ramadan and Nsouli (2022); Bhaduri and Stanforth (2016); Ajitha and Sivakumar (2019); Jain (2019); Silhouette-Dercourt and De Lassus (2016); Taube and Warnaby (2017); Eren-erdogmus et al (2018); Dogan-Sudas et al (2019); Vashi and Shah (2020); Summer et al (2006); Kaigler-Walker and Gilbert (2009)		
<b>Marketing</b>	Kim (2020); Lou and Tse (2021); Peretz (1995); Rosenbaum et al (2015); Yin et al (2020); Venkatesh et al (2010); Thakur and Kaur (2015); Pankiw et al (2021); Joo and Kim (2021); Carrillat et al (2019); Fetais et al (2023); Thakur and Kaur (2016)	Holcombe (2019); Boyle and De Keere (2019)	Mensa and Deng (2021)	

<b>Roles of women</b>	<b>Consumers</b>	<b>Workers</b>	<b>Influencers</b>	<b>Others</b>
	<b>Areas of study</b>			
<b>Culture</b>	Ponglawhapun and Utiswannakul (2022); Al-Mutawa et al (2015); Al-Mutawa et al (2023); Adomaitis et al (2023); Al-Mutawa (2013); Wu et al (2015); Algumzi (2022); Park (2014); Dekhil et al (2017); Devanathan (2020); Jung and Shen (2011)			Salman et al (2016)
<b>Categories of consumption</b>	Nagar (2016); Loussaief et al (2019); Navia et al (2021); Choi et al (2019); Peretz et al (2010)			Zhang (2017)
<b>History</b>	Batten (2009); Chen (2016)	Roosien (2022)	Nechtman (2006); Adams (2014)	
<b>Inequality</b>	Iqani (2023); Gruys (2019)	Kuldova (2016)		

*Source: Own elaboration*

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Por la presente, yo, Gema Álvarez Hernández, estudiante de E3 de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas al presentar mi Trabajo Fin de Grado titulado “*Gender analysis in the luxury fashion industry: systematic literature review*” declaro que he utilizado la herramienta de Inteligencia Artificial Generativa ChatGPT u otras similares de IAG de código sólo en el contexto de las actividades descritas a continuación [el alumno debe mantener solo aquellas en las que se ha usado ChatGPT o similares y borrar el resto. Si no se ha usado ninguna, borrar todas y escribir “no he usado ninguna”]:

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Afirmo que toda la información y contenido presentados en este trabajo son producto de mi investigación y esfuerzo individual, excepto donde se ha indicado lo contrario y se han dado los créditos correspondientes (he incluido las referencias adecuadas en el TFG y he explicitado para que se ha usado ChatGPT u otras herramientas similares). Soy consciente de las implicaciones académicas y éticas de presentar un trabajo no original y acepto las consecuencias de cualquier violación a esta declaración.

Fecha: [04.06.2024]

Firma: \_\_\_\_\_ Gema Álvarez Hernández \_\_\_\_\_