

# Helping consumers trade fast fashion for durable, sustainable luxury goods

April 6 2021, by Matt Weingarden

---



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Researchers from Columbia University and Georgetown University published a new paper in the *Journal of Marketing* that examines how consumers can adopt a sustainable consumption lifestyle by purchasing

durable high-end and luxury products.

The study, forthcoming in the *Journal of Marketing*, is titled "Buy Less, Buy Luxury: Understanding and Overcoming Product Durability Neglect for Sustainable Consumption" and is authored by Jennifer Sun, Silvia Bellezza, and Neeru Paharia.

What do [luxury products](#) and sustainable goods have in common? Luxury goods possess a unique, sustainable trait that gives them a longer lifespan than lower-end products.

Sustainable consumption is on the rise with all consumers. However, younger millennial and Gen Z consumers have been more vocal about their desire to embrace sustainability. Several trends have emerged that signal such an inclination, such as "buy less, buy better" and "slow-fashion," as witnessed by the trend of celebrities wearing identical outfits at multiple award ceremonies. Consumers advocating such lifestyles strive to purchase fewer, higher-end products that will last longer rather than many inexpensive products that will be quickly thrown away. However, these trends and movements still represent niche segments because products with expensive price tags do not fit the stereotype of sustainable consumption generally associated with restraint and moderation.

Fast-fashion retailers such as H&M and Zara have enabled consumers to buy disposable clothing and accessories, contributing to a 36% decrease in the average number of times an item is worn compared with 15 years ago. While fast fashion offers consumers access to trendy, albeit short-lived, attire at affordable prices, it also exacts high environmental costs. Indeed, the fashion industry has become one of the largest polluters, contributing 10% of global carbon emissions as well as 20% of global wastewater.

Sun says that "We propose that luxury goods possess a unique, sustainable trait of being durable, which includes being long-lasting and timeless in style, thereby allowing them to have a longer lifespan than lower-end products. Focusing on the clothing and accessories industries, we find that high-end products can be more sustainable than mass-market products."

Yet, why is it that consumers have such a hard time seeing sustainability and luxury as being compatible? Despite the long-lasting nature of high-end goods, sustainable luxury can be a paradoxical concept for consumers because many of them neglect the durability inherent in luxury products. Typical consumers prefer to buy multiple mass-market products instead of fewer, high-end items. "That is due to product durability neglect, a failure to consider how long products will last, even though durability is an important product attribute that consumers genuinely value," explains Bellezza. How can marketers help consumers focus on durability? The researchers say that when the long-lasting nature of high-end products is emphasized, consumers are more likely to overcome their durability neglect and buy fewer, but better high-end products.

While consumers can actively participate in the sustainability movement by selectively purchasing fewer, durable products that last longer, companies can also benefit from emphasizing product durability, an appealing and timely attribute that directly relates to sustainable luxury. In fact, many high-end entrepreneurial brands, such as Pivotte, Everlane, and Cuyana, as well as more established premium and luxury brands, such as Patagonia and Loro Piana, promote the use of high-quality materials and timeless styles that extend the longevity of their products.

Paharia says that "Focusing on the durability aspect of sustainability can be an effective marketing strategy for high-end brands to promote their products while at the same time helping consumers engage in more

sustainable consumption practices. That is, emphasizing product durability may shape consumers' actual purchase behavior while promoting an attribute central to [luxury](#) brands."

In fact, two notable campaigns that directly speak to these findings include Patagonia's "Buy Less, Demand More" advertisement, which posits that purchasing buying fewer, more durable Patagonia products is good for consumers and the environment, as well as Patek Philippe's iconic "Generations" campaign, which proposes that the brand's watches are so durable and timeless that consumers merely look after them for the next generation. Marketers and brand managers of high-end products can emphasize the durability of their products to help [consumers](#) overcome product [durability](#) neglect and nudge them towards buying fewer, better goods for a more sustainable future.

**More information:** Jennifer J. Sun et al, EXPRESS: Buy Less, Buy Luxury: Understanding and Overcoming Product Durability Neglect for Sustainable Consumption, *Journal of Marketing* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/0022242921993172](#)

Provided by American Marketing Association

Citation: Helping consumers trade fast fashion for durable, sustainable luxury goods (2021, April 6) retrieved 24 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-04-consumers-fast-fashion-durable-sustainable.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--