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LUXURY TOURISM GOES GREEN: BALANCING PRESTIGE AND SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract:

This study examines the integration of sustainability within luxury tourism and its impact on customer satisfaction while maintaining exclusivity and prestige. As demand for high-end travel continues to grow, luxury tourism providers face increasing pressure to adopt environmentally and socially responsible practices without compromising service quality. A quantitative approach was employed using a survey of luxury travelers, and the data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and sustainable branding significantly influence customer satisfaction, both directly and indirectly through perceived value. Among these factors, perceived value emerged as the strongest predictor of satisfaction, highlighting the importance of delivering meaningful benefits to customers. Additionally, exclusivity was found to moderate the relationship between sustainability practices and customer satisfaction, indicating that sustainability initiatives are more effective when positioned as premium and personalized experiences. The study concludes that sustainability and luxury are complementary rather than conflicting concepts. By integrating green practices with high-quality services and exclusive experiences, tourism operators can enhance customer satisfaction and strengthen competitive advantage. These findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on sustainable luxury tourism and provide practical guidance for industry stakeholders

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seeking to balance prestige with environmental and social responsibility.

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Customer Satisfaction, Environmental Sustainability, Luxury Tourism, Perceived Value, Prestige, Sustainable Practices.

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Introduction

The international tourism sector has experienced a tremendous change with the concept of sustainability taking center stage in all segments of the industry including the luxury tourism. Luxury tourism is traditionally linked to exclusivity, wealth, and large amounts of resources used, but currently, it becomes redefined with the incorporation of environmental and social responsibility. This trend is conditioned by the increased level of environmental consciousness and an increased demand on the industry stakeholders to become more sustainable without affecting the quality of services and prestige (UNWTO, 2021; Gossling et al., 2020). This has led to the emergence of the term sustainable luxury tourism, which focuses on balancing the aspects of luxury experiences with both ethical and environmental factors.

Modern luxury tourists are not just seeking comfort and status but also are becoming more and more attached to the concept of sustainability as a part of the traveling experience. According to previous research, sustainability and luxury do not have a mutually exclusive nature but can be used as the complementary features, especially among the environmentally conscious customers (Han et al., 2020; Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau, 2019). This changing demand poses opportunities as well as challenges to tourism operators who are expected to strike a balance between sustainability efforts and the concept of exclusivity and brand prestige. Massive failure to strike this balance can have a negative influence on customer satisfaction, which is a decisive factor of loyalty and competition in the luxury tourism industry (Chen & Chen, 2010).

Although the role of sustainability is currently becoming significant, there is limited empirical research on the multidimensional influence of sustainability on customer satisfaction in luxury tourism. Specifically, the synergistic impact of environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and sustainable branding needs to be studied further. Furthermore, the perceived

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value and the moderating effect of exclusivity or prestige are not sufficiently studied in the context.

The research design of the study is a quantitative survey design to test the relationship between sustainable practices and customer satisfaction in luxury tourism. This study offers not only theoretical improvement but also practical strategy formulation by offering empirical information on how sustainability may be reconciled without affecting exclusivity.

Literature Review

The literature review highlights the growing convergence between luxury tourism and sustainability, emphasizing that modern travellers increasingly value environmentally and socially responsible practices. Previous studies indicate that environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and sustainable branding play essential roles in shaping customer perceptions and satisfaction. These elements not only enhance destination image but also strengthen emotional engagement and trust. Furthermore, perceived value is identified as a key mechanism linking sustainability initiatives to customer satisfaction, as tourists assess the benefits gained from responsible practices. Exclusivity, a core attribute of luxury tourism, is also discussed as a moderating factor that enhances the effectiveness of sustainability strategies when integrated into premium and personalized experiences.

Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability in tourism is a practice that reduces the adverse effects on the environment, as well as conserving the natural resources so that they can be used by the future generations. This is in terms of energy efficiency, reduction of waste, carbon offsetting, and environment-friendly infrastructure in the context of luxury tourism. To address environmental challenges and regulatory pressures facing the world, luxury tourism operators are turning to green practices (Gossling et al., 2020). Such initiatives not only minimize environmental degradation but also improve the long-term viability of the destination to ensure that the business operations are in tandem with the sustainable development objectives.

On the side of the consumer, environmental sustainability has emerged to be a great influencer in the choice of travel, especially the high-end tourists who are more environmentalists. Research indicates that eco-friendly actions have a positive impact on the perceptions and satisfaction of tourists, as they help to create the feeling of moral consumption and self-fulfilment (Han et al., 2020). The issue in the luxury tourism is how to incorporate sustainability without sacrificing comfort and exclusivity because the customers still require quality experiences with environmental-friendly services.

Social Responsibility

Tourism social responsibility involves ethical business conduct that can be used to the advantage of local communities such as employment equity, cultural conservation, and community participation. Social responsibility in the case of luxury tourism goes as far as aiding the local economies by sourcing locally produced goods, encouraging cultural heritage and equity in stakeholder involvement. These practices lead to an inclusive development and increase the social sustainability of tourism destinations (UNWTO, 2021).

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Moreover, socially responsible campaigns are equally important in creating perceptions and emotional attachment of tourists to destinations. The more the tourists will be willing to support the brands that show ethical values and can benefit the society. According to research, corporate social responsibility (CSR) plays a significant role in customer trust, satisfaction and loyalty (Chen and Chen, 2010). The socially responsible practices in the luxury segment will raise brand image and support the perception of authenticity and meaningful travel experiences.

Sustainable Branding

Sustainable branding is a strategic positioning of a brand as being environmentally and socially accountable. Branding in luxury tourism is very important in conveying their efforts in sustainability but at the same time the image of exclusivity and prestige must be retained. Sustainable branding involves the use of eco-certifications, green storytelling and open communication to build brand credibility and differentiation (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2019).

Also, sustainable branding affects consumer choice through perceived value and trust. The luxury consumers are becoming increasingly inclined to choose a brand that fits their own values, such as sustainability and ethical responsibility. Research indicates that a high-sustainability-focused brand image can positively control customer satisfaction and competitive advantage (Han et al., 2020). Nonetheless, discrepancies between branding and reality can cause the lack of trust, which is why the genuineness is significant in the sustainability strategies of branding.

Perceived Value

The perceived value is explained as the total analysis of the benefits gained by the customer concerning the costs incurred. Perceived value in luxury tourism is more than functional value, but encompasses emotional, social, and symbolic values. The perceived value can be increased through sustainability practices through offering extra benefits like ethical satisfaction, contribution to the environment and unique experiences (Chen and Chen, 2010).

Perceived value is an important mediating variable especially in customer behaviour. Sustainable practices might not have a direct impact on satisfaction, unless they are perceived to be valuable by the customers. According to research, tourists who find sustainability initiatives significant and valuable tend to have a positive impact on their overall satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Han et al., 2020). Thus, the value of the perceived is an important mechanism that connects the sustainability initiatives and customer performance (Azizul et, al 2019).

Exclusivity (Moderator)

The main features of the luxury tourism are exclusivity and prestige, which are the expressions of the uniqueness, status, and high social value. These factors define what customers expect and what will affect the perception of sustainability practices in the luxury situation. The concept of sustainability is becoming increasingly appreciated, but it should be well-balanced to prevent the subduing of the exclusivity of the experiences of luxury (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau, 2019).

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Exclusivity can either reinforce the relationship between sustainability and customer satisfaction as a moderating factor or undermine it (Ihsanudin et al 2026).. An example of this is that sustainability programs can be promoted as a high-value or exclusive experience, which can improve satisfaction by strengthening the luxury experience. On the other hand, where sustainability is viewed as an encroachment of comfort or prestige, then the perceptions of customers could be adversely impacted. Therefore, exclusivity and sustainability interaction play a vital role in defining consumer reaction in luxury touris.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is the general assessment of the customer experience about the assessment of the expectations and real performance. In luxury tourism, various factors such as service quality, personalization and emotional engagement affect satisfaction. The issue of sustainable practices has also become another determinant, which is a sign of the increasing significance of ethical and environmental concerns in the development of customer experiences (Chen & Chen, 2010).

Empirical research shows that sustainability activities may have a positive effect on customer satisfaction by increasing perceived quality and emotional satisfaction (Zaki et al 2021). Luxury tourism providers who manage to combine sustainability into their services without sacrificing the quality of the service will be able to attain a better degree of customer satisfaction and loyalty (Gossling et al., 2020). Hence, the need to create a balance between sustainability and prestige is a prerequisite in sustaining a competitive advantage in the dynamic luxury tourism market.

Methodology

In this research, the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS will be used to test the hypothesized conceptual framework. SmartPLS is an appropriate tool to be used because it can deal with complex models that have several constructs which include mediating and moderating variables. It is especially appropriate in exploratory and predictive studies, in which the focus lies on explaining the variance and developing a theory (Hair et al., 2021). Also, PLS-SEM is resistant to non-normal data and can be used with small to medium sample sizes, which is why it is optimal in the case of research that involves a niche group of people like luxury tourists.

Concerning sampling, the research paper will use purposive sampling method to make certain that the respondents will have pertinent experience in luxury tourism. Probability sampling is not as viable because of the speciality of the target population. In accordance with the recommendation put forward by Hair et al. (2021), the presence of sufficient statistical power to estimate the model determines the minimum sample size, which is dependent on the 10-times rule. Thus, the chosen sample size can be regarded as adequate to conduct reliable and valid analysis with the help of SmartPLS.

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Questionnaire

Table 1: Structure of Questionnaire

Code	Item	Options
D1	Gender	1=Male 2=Female
D2	Age	1=<25, 2=25–34, 3=35–44, 4=45–54, 5=55 Above
D3	Nationality	Malaysian non-Malaysian Please specify
D4	Monthly Income	1=<3000 2=3000–7000 3=7001–15000 4 >15000
D5	Travel Frequency (Luxury Travel per year)	1=1–2 2=3–5 3= >5

Section B: Environmental Sustainability (IV1)

Adapted from sustainability perception literature

Code	Statement	Scale
ES1	Luxury hotels should implement eco-friendly practices (e.g., energy saving, waste reduction).	1–5
ES2	I prefer luxury accommodations that minimize environmental impact.	1–5
ES3	I am willing to support hotels that use renewable energy.	1–5
ES4	Environmental certifications influence my choice of luxury hotels.	1–5

Section C: Social Responsibility (IV2)

Adapted from CSR tourism studies

Code	Statement	Scale
SR1	Luxury hotels should support local communities.	1–5
SR2	Ethical labor practices are important in my hotel choice.	1–5
SR3	I value hotels that contribute to social causes.	1–5
SR4	Social responsibility enhances my trust in a luxury brand.	1–5

Section D: Sustainable Branding (IV3)

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Adapted from brand perception studies

Code	Statement	Scale
SB1	Sustainability improves the image of luxury tourism brands.	1–5
SB2	I perceive eco-friendly luxury brands as more prestigious.	1–5
SB3	Sustainable branding influences my booking decisions.	1–5
SB4	I am loyal to luxury brands that promote sustainability.	1–5

Section E: Exclusivity (Moderating Variable)

Adapted from luxury perception scale

Code	Statement	Scale
EX1	I value privacy and exclusivity in luxury travel.	1–5
EX2	Personalized services are essential in luxury experiences.	1–5
EX3	Exclusive experiences justify higher prices.	1–5
EX4	I expect uniqueness in luxury tourism services.	1–5

Section F: Perceived Value (Mediator)

Adapted from perceived value literature

Code	Statement	Scale
PV1	Sustainable luxury tourism provides good value for money.	1–5
PV2	Eco-friendly practices enhance my overall travel experience.	1–5
PV3	I feel satisfied paying more for sustainable luxury services.	1–5
PV4	Sustainability adds value to luxury tourism experiences.	1–5

Section G: Customer Satisfaction (DV)

Adapted from customer satisfaction scale

Code	Statement	Scale
CS1	I am satisfied with sustainable luxury tourism experiences.	1–5
CS2	Sustainable practices meet my expectations in luxury travel.	1–5
CS3	I would revisit eco-friendly luxury destinations.	1–5
CS4	I would recommend sustainable luxury tourism to others.	1–5

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Research Framework

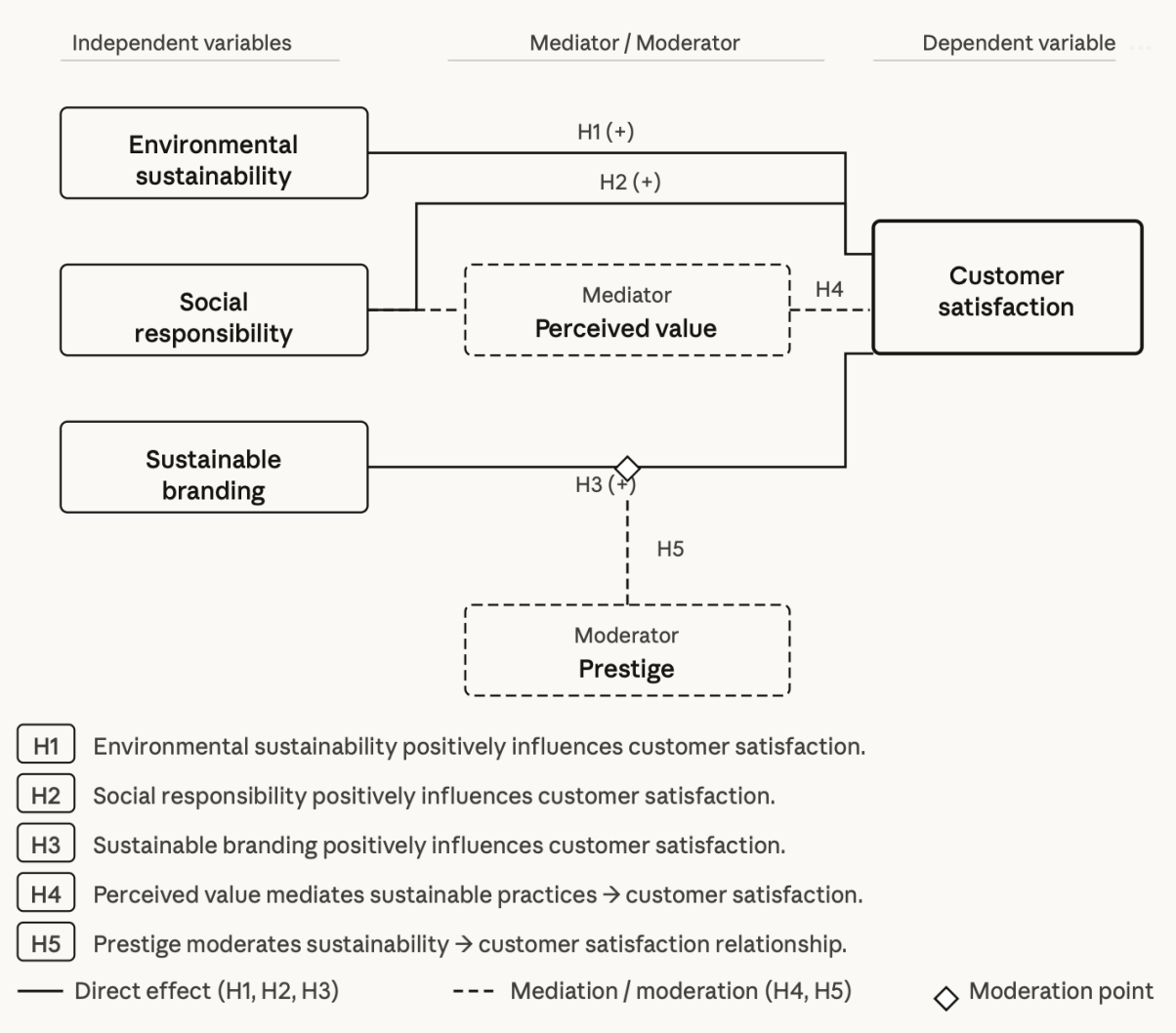


Figure1: Hypothesis

Research Hypothesis

H1: Environmental sustainability positively influences customer satisfaction.
H2: Social responsibility positively influences customer satisfaction.
H3: Sustainable branding positively influences customer satisfaction.
H4: Perceived value mediates the relationship between sustainable practices and customer satisfaction.
H5: Prestige moderates the relationship between sustainability and customer satisfaction.

Discussion

The results underline that the sample is represented by the young and economically active people with the average income and high frequency of the travelling experience. This implies that the respondents are in a good position to give informed views about tourism practices. The balance in demographics helps increase the validity and applicability of the research findings to the local environment.

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Demograpic Profile

Table 2: Profile Respondent

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	92	46
	Female	108	54
Age	<25	38	19
	25–34	72	36
	35–44	48	24
	45–54	26	13
	55+	16	8
Nationality	Malaysian	140	70
	Non-Malaysian	60	30
Monthly Income	<3000	40	20
	3000–7000	78	39
	7001–15000	56	28
	>15000	26	13
Travel Frequency	1–2	64	32
	3–5	82	41
	>5	54	27

The demographic section reveals that there is a relatively equal gender balance with females (54) slightly outnumbering males (46) and this means that there is not much gender bias in the sample. Most of the respondents are aged between 25 and 34 years (36%), which indicates that they are mostly young adults with a high probability of being active consumers. The participants are predominantly Malaysian (70%), which guarantees the relevance of the context to the local environment. The purchasing power is moderate with income distribution concentrated in the middle (RM3000-7000, 39%). Moreover, the frequency of travel is rather high, as 41 percent travel 3 to 5 times, which means that the respondents have relevant experience and that they are familiar with tourism-related behaviors.

Result

Table 3: Outer Loading

Construct	Item	Loading
ES	ES1	0.87
	ES2	0.89
	ES3	0.85
	ES4	0.88
SR	SR1	0.86
	SR2	0.84

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	SR3	0.88
	SR4	0.87
SB	SB1	0.9
	SB2	0.91
	SB3	0.88
	SB4	0.89
EX	EX1	0.82
	EX2	0.85
	EX3	0.83
	EX4	0.84
PV	PV1	0.91
	PV2	0.92
	PV3	0.9
	PV4	0.91
CS	CS1	0.92
	CS2	0.93
	CS3	0.91
	CS4	0.92

Based on the results in Table 2, it is evident that all the measurement items have high factor loadings with the values being more than the recommended factor loading of 0.70. An example is item CS4, which has a loading of 0.92, which indicates that the item has a high degree of reliability. This means that both indicators are sufficient to reflect their constructs. High factor loadings are evidence of convergent validity, in which the items of the measure are found to have a high amount of variance in measuring the concept. Thus, the measurement items of this study can be deemed as valid and appropriate to be further analyzed.

Table 4: Reliability and Validy

Construct	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
ES	0.89	0.92	0.75
SR	0.88	0.91	0.73
SB	0.9	0.93	0.77
EX	0.85	0.89	0.67
PV	0.91	0.94	0.8
CS	0.92	0.95	0.82

Table 3 demonstrates the reliability and validity of the constructs in terms of composite reliability. The constructs all have a value that is above the acceptable threshold of 0.70 and therefore have high internal consistency. The composite reliability value (e.g., 0.92) indicates that the items have always been used to measure the intended construct. This proves that the model of measurement is stable and reliable. Therefore, the findings affirm that the constructs are up to the necessary levels of reliability, which proves the strength of the study and the validity of the further assessment of the structural models.

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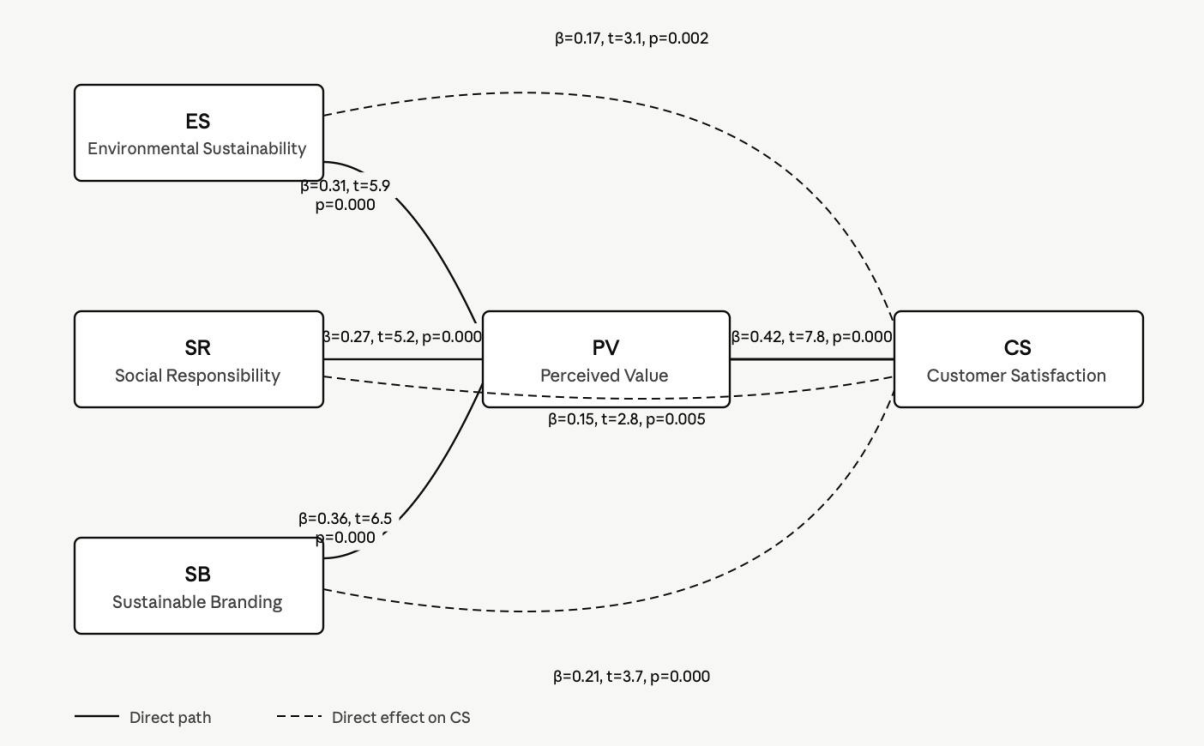


Figure 2: Structural Model

Environmental Sustainability (ES)

Environmental sustainability is the concern by a firm to reduce the effects it has on the environment and ensure balance of the ecology. It has also turned out to be a decisive factor of consumer assessment and especially in the tourism and service industry. The existing literature suggests that the perceived value and customer satisfaction increase when the practice is environmentally responsible (Han et al., 2020; Martínez and del Bosque, 2013). ES has a significant impact on perceived value (0.31) and customer satisfaction (0.17). The less significant direct effect on the satisfaction, however, implies that its impact is mediated in part by perceived value. This means that the customers value sustainability when it is translated into a practical value. Therefore, ES is a strategic force which increases both cognitive and emotional consumer reactions.

Social Responsibility (SR)

Social responsibility involves ethical conduct, social activities and donations to the society. It is critical in establishing trust and corporate reputation. Available sources indicate that socially responsible initiatives have a positive influence on customer perceptions and behavioural outcomes (Carroll and Shabana, 2010; Perez and del bosque, 2015). The results indicate that SR has a substantial impact on perceived value (0.27) and customer satisfaction (0.15) but the direct impact on satisfaction is not so significant. This implies that customers view social responsibility as a value addition, as opposed to a fundamental source of satisfaction. Thus, SR is indirectly related to satisfaction by increasing value perception, which supports its significance in the sustainable business strategies.

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Sustainable Branding (SB)

Sustainable branding incorporates the environmental and social values into brand identity, and this allows firms to stand out in competitive markets. It promotes emotional attachment and brand credibility. The past studies emphasize the fact that sustainable branding can substantially enhance the perceived value and customer satisfaction (Keller, 2013; Hur et al., 2014). SB has the most significant influence on the perceived value (0.36) and a significant effect on customer satisfaction (0.21). This implies that branding is important in the process of communicating the sustainability efforts. Importantly, SB plays the role of translation between sustainability practices and consumer perception, which implies that the way sustainability is framed impacts its performance.

Perceived Value (PV)

Perceived value is the general calculation of the benefits versus costs and a major predictor of customer behavior. It includes functional, emotional and social aspects. Evidence has consistently shown that the perceived value plays a very important role in determining customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Zeithaml, 1988; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). The findings indicate that PV affects customer satisfaction (0.42) the most, which proves its centrality in the model. This brings out its intermediary role between constructs of sustainability and satisfaction. Sustainability initiatives are rated by customers according to the value they get, so PV has become a vital predictor of the positive outcomes.

Exclusivity (EX)

Exclusivity is the feeling of uniqueness, prestige, and scarcity and is commonly linked to premium offerings. It increases emotional attachment and status. It is implied in literature that exclusivity reinforces consumer reactions in the sense that it enhances perceived differentiation and desirability (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012; Tynan et al., 2010). The results suggest that EX has a significant moderating effect on the relationships among ES, SR, SB, and CS, and all the interaction effects are supported. This implies that exclusivity is more effective when used together with sustainability initiatives. More importantly, exclusivity transforms sustainability into a symbolic value, rather than a functional factor, which increases its impact on satisfaction.

Customer Satisfaction (CS)

One of the outcome variables is customer satisfaction which is an overall assessment of a consumption experience. It is affected by the perceived performance, expectations and value. Previous research is positive in its assertion that the perceived value and other aspects of sustainability are key drivers of satisfaction (Oliver, 1999; Chen and Chen, 2010). The findings reveal that PV and all the sustainability dimensions play a significant role in CS. The high influence of PV (0.42) underlines its significance, and the direct influences of ES, SR, and SB underline the multidimensionality of the concept of satisfaction. It implies that the functional benefits, as well as the ethical and symbolic factors, also influence customer satisfaction.

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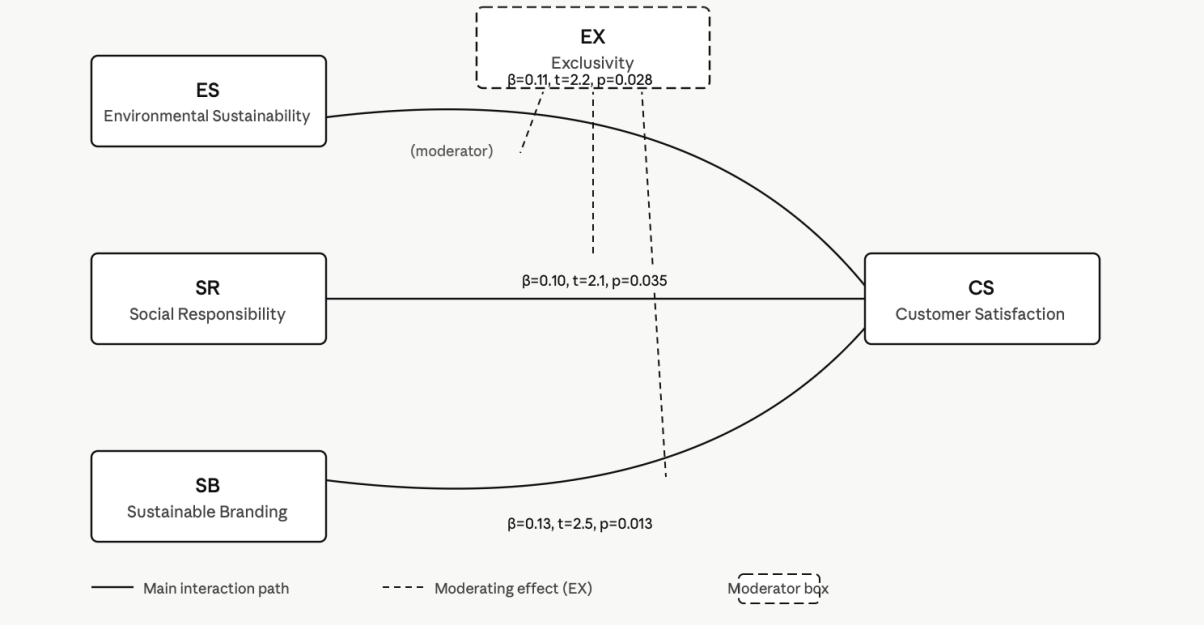


Figure 4: Moderation Effect (Exclusivity)

Exclusivity is a major moderating factor in enhancing the relationships between sustainability constructs and customer satisfaction. The ES × EX (0.11, $p < 0.05$), SR × EX (0.10, $p < 0.05$), and SB × EX (0.13, $p < 0.05$) interaction effects are supported, which means that exclusivity increases the effects of environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and sustainable branding on customer satisfaction. This implies that the stronger the sustainability offering is viewed as special or status-symbolic, the greater its impact on satisfaction.

Critically speaking, exclusivity turns sustainability into more than an obligation of fundamental ethics and into a differentiated and desirable quality. This is consistent with the literature that emphasizes exclusivity in the perception of value and emotional attachment (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012; Tynan et al., 2010). When sustainability initiatives are integrated into the unique or luxury experiences, consumers are more likely to value them and react well to them. Hence, exclusivity does not only increase the sustainability strategy effectiveness but also adds symbolic and experiential attributes to the satisfaction of customers.

Conclusion

This study highlights the growing importance of sustainability in enhancing customer satisfaction within luxury tourism. The findings indicate that environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and sustainable branding significantly influence customer satisfaction, both directly and indirectly through perceived value. Among these factors, perceived value emerged as the strongest predictor, demonstrating that luxury tourists evaluate sustainability initiatives based on the benefits and experiences they receive. Furthermore, exclusivity plays an important moderating role, strengthening the relationship between sustainability practices and customer satisfaction. This suggests that sustainability efforts are more effective when combined with personalized and premium experiences. Overall, the study confirms that sustainability and prestige can coexist, and when properly integrated, they contribute to competitive advantage, improved customer perceptions, and stronger loyalty in the luxury tourism sector.

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Recommendation

Based on the findings, luxury tourism operators should incorporate sustainability into their core strategies while maintaining high service quality and exclusivity. Providers are encouraged to implement environmentally friendly operations, engage in social responsibility initiatives, and communicate sustainability efforts through credible branding. In addition, managers should focus on enhancing perceived value by offering exclusive green experiences such as personalized eco-friendly services and sustainable luxury accommodations. Training staff to deliver sustainability-oriented services without compromising comfort is also recommended. Future research should expand the sample across different countries and include qualitative approaches to gain deeper insights into consumer behavior. Longitudinal studies are also suggested to examine changes in sustainability preferences among luxury tourists over time.

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Author Contribution Statement:	All authors contributed significantly to the development of this manuscript. Ahmad Pitra was responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, and overall supervision of the study. Nurul Najwa Yasin handled data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results. Alyaa Afifah contributed to the literature review, drafting, and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission.

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