
Balancing Exclusivity and Openness: How John Hardy Integrates Sustainability Communication into Luxury Branding

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Abstract

Authentically integrating sustainable communication within the luxury industry requires more than mere polished words and certificates. The instance of John Hardy, a heritage jewelry firm based in Bali, exemplifies how legacy, location, and cultural continuity can transform sustainability from a mere marketing assertion into a tangible narrative. Internal reflections and narrative analysis indicate that selective transparency, nuanced multi-channel storytelling, and observable cultural norms enable the brand to reconcile the dichotomy of openness and exclusivity while maintaining its prestige. Daily rituals, traditional craftsmanship, and local community connections serve as evidence that enhances confidence, mitigates skepticism, and captivates varied audiences beyond superficial environmental assertions. Alignment among brand history, operational capacity, and cultural foundation is essential for credibility in sustainability communication. This study illustrates how sustainability can be seamlessly integrated into brand identity, legacy storytelling, and daily experiences, contributing to the ongoing discourse on how luxury companies should convey sustainability as an expression of continuity, locality, and engagement.

Keywords: Sustainable Luxury, Sustainability Communication, Cultural Integration, Heritage Brands

Abstrak

Mengintegrasikan komunikasi berkelanjutan secara otentik dalam industri mewah memerlukan lebih dari sekadar retorika pemasaran dan sertifikasi formal. Studi kasus pada John Hardy di Bali menunjukkan bahwa perpaduan warisan budaya yang kaya, lokasi geografis yang unik, dan kesinambungan tradisi mampu mengubah keberlanjutan dari sekadar konsep menjadi narasi yang nyata, relevan, dan autentik. Melalui transparansi selektif, penceritaan multikanal, serta penerapan praktik budaya yang hidup dalam aktivitas sehari-hari, merek ini berhasil memadukan keterbukaan dengan eksklusivitas tanpa mengurangi prestise dan daya tarik mewah. Keterlibatan aktif komunitas lokal, penggunaan material daur ulang, dan pemeliharaan kerajinan tradisional memperkuat kredibilitas sekaligus membangun keterikatan emosional yang mendalam. Keselarasan yang konsisten antara sejarah merek, operasi bisnis, dan nilai-nilai budaya lokal menjadi landasan utama dalam menciptakan komunikasi berkelanjutan yang dipercaya. Temuan pada penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa keberlanjutan bukan sekadar tambahan, melainkan bagian integral dari identitas merek mewah yang mencerminkan kontinuitas, lokalitas, partisipasi aktif komunitas, serta komitmen jangka panjang terhadap lingkungan dan budaya.

Kata Kunci: Kemewahan Berkelanjutan, Komunikasi Keberlanjutan, Integrasi Budaya, Merek Warisan.

INTRODUCTION

Evolution of the Luxury Industry: Sustainability, Digitalization, and Global Dynamics

The luxury sector is undergoing significant transformation, driven by changing consumer preferences, rapid technological progress, and growing socio-environmental demands (Kunz et al., 2020). Traditionally associated with exclusivity, superior quality, and symbolic value, luxury now faces pressure to embrace sustainability and transparency (J. N. Kapferer & Michaut, 2015). This creates a central paradox: luxury depends on exclusivity, while sustainability communication requires openness and accountability. Achabou and Dekhili (2013) highlight that this tension challenges brands to disclose credible practices without diminishing their aura of rarity. Millennials and Generation Z further intensify this demand, as they expect genuine commitments to environmental and social responsibility (Wang et al., 2021). For heritage brands such as John Hardy, which integrates Balinese craftsmanship and cultural authenticity, navigating this balance is crucial to sustaining both prestige and credibility.

Digitalization has profoundly reshaped how consumers interact with and perceive luxury brands (Rangel & López, 2022). E-commerce platforms, immersive digital experiences, and advanced social media campaigns have become critical tools for engaging a technologically sophisticated clientele (Sociallyin, 2025). These channels facilitate personalized consumer-brand interactions that were once limited to physical retail environments, thereby transforming the marketing, consumption, and overall experience of luxury goods (Campos Franco et al., 2019). At the same time, the integration of circular economy practices—such as resale markets, upcycled product lines, and repair services—reflects the rise of a new luxury culture centered on longevity, heritage, and responsible consumption (J. N. Kapferer & Michaut, 2015). Moreover, global dynamics have progressively positioned emerging nations, particularly in Asia, at the vanguard of luxury market expansion (Luxury, 2024). Wealthy consumer segments in these areas possess distinct demands for cultural authenticity and social accountability, compelling global firms to proficiently modify regional strategies (Pencarelli et al., 2019).

Integrating Sustainability with Luxury: Opportunities, Challenges, and Strategic Communication

Incorporating sustainability into luxury branding presents both opportunities and challenges. Traditionally, luxury has been considered contradictory to sustainability because its defining element of exclusivity often conflicts with the transparency required for credible sustainability communication (J. N. Kapferer & Michaut, 2015). Luxury brands are therefore expected to strike a careful balance: demonstrating authentic sustainable practices while maintaining the aura of rarity and prestige that underpins the sector (Bilancia et al., 2025). In this regard, the luxury jewellery brand John Hardy, founded in 1975 and deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of Bali, Indonesia, illustrates this balance effectively. Renowned for its artisanal craftsmanship and dedication to environmental responsibility, John Hardy incorporates recycled metals, traditional Balinese techniques, and community-based initiatives into its brand philosophy (John Hardy, 2025). Its “Wear Bamboo, Plant Bamboo” project, for example, links product consumption directly to environmental restoration, embedding sustainability within the brand’s luxury narrative.

Since the Brundtland Report in 1987, sustainable development has become a central theme in global discourse. However, its effective realization depends not only on technical measures and regulatory frameworks but also on how sustainability is communicated and understood within society (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011). Sustainability communication has therefore emerged as a key framework, emphasizing that effective engagement requires more than the transmission of information. Rather, it involves a social process of mutual understanding that makes the relationship between humans and nature more visible, meaningful, and actionable. Building on this foundation, Morsing and Schultz (2006) suggest that in industries such as luxury, credibility is often strengthened through implicit signals embedded in practices rather than overt promotional claims.

Sustainability communication also draws on interdisciplinary perspectives from sociology, psychology, media theory, and systems thinking to explain how values, narratives, and norms influence public perception and trust (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011). More recently, Golob et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of transparency and stakeholder engagement, underscoring the need for communication strategies that actively involve audiences. Yet despite these advances, many luxury brands continue to face challenges in transforming broad sustainability commitments into messages that resonate with diverse audiences and inspire concrete action.

In luxury, sustainability narratives must balance exclusivity with accessibility. John Hardy addresses this by leveraging storytelling, cultural heritage, and community engagement to maintain prestige and credibility. This study shows how a heritage brand integrates sustainability into its identity, illustrating that exclusivity and openness can be complementary rather than conflicting.

Research Novelty and Academic Significance: A Case Study of John Hardy's Sustainable Communication Strategy

Despite growing academic interest, research on sustainability communication in luxury remains limited. This study addresses the gap by applying the concept of Business Sustainability, which views sustainability as a strategic tool for competitive advantage and emphasizes shifting from minimizing harm to generating positive social and environmental impact. (Saulick et al., 2023). This study critically assesses how John Hardy integrates sustainability into its fundamental business strategy and effectively communicates these initiatives to enhance competitive advantage and brand reputation. This study examines the intriguing convergence of sustainability and luxury, emphasizing how John Hardy conveys its dedication to both principles. It analyzes how the company strategically integrates sustainability into its brand narrative and corporate communications, seeking to comprehend how these initiatives assist to positioning John Hardy as a sustainable luxury enterprise. The study examines John Hardy's incorporation of sustainability into its brand narrative and message, as well as the transmission of this commitment through many communication channels, including its website, social media, and in-store interactions.

This paper examines business sustainability in the luxury sector, focusing on sustainability as a core element of corporate strategy. It analyzes John Hardy's communication approaches—storytelling, green marketing, and transparency reports—to show how the brand conveys its commitment and engages consumers. Using a single case study, the research draws on publicly available communication materials and in-depth interviews with key staff, offering internal perspectives on sustainability practices. These insights enrich understanding of the brand's strategies and contribute to both academic literature and industry best practices in sustainable luxury communication.

Global and Cultural Significance of Sustainable Luxury: John Hardy's Balinese Heritage

The notion of Sustainable Luxury Consumption highlights the contradictions and possible harmonies between luxury and sustainability (J. N. Kapferer & Michaut, 2015). Historically, these two domains have been perceived as fundamentally antagonistic, as luxury's connotation of excess and ostentation appears irreconcilable with sustainability's tenets of moderation, ethics, and communal responsibility (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013). Recent research suggests that, under some situations, sustainability might favorably influence views of luxury products by harmonizing rarity, workmanship, and social responsibility (Amatulli et al., 2021).

The case of John Hardy offers an exemplary framework for properly examining these difficulties. The brand, situated in the global luxury market and profoundly connected to Balinese culture, exemplifies how culturally informed sustainability efforts may enhance global brand attractiveness. This research rigorously assesses consumer perceptions and actions, examining whether environmental activities effectively bolster John Hardy's luxury posture or potentially undermine perceived exclusivity.

This study critiques primarily Western-centric literature by highlighting a non-Western luxury brand. The research analyzes John Hardy to present a culturally diverse viewpoint on sustainable luxury, emphasizing the intersection of local cultural authenticity and global sustainability aspirations to enhance consumer involvement and brand distinctiveness.

This research offers a thorough and critical examination of sustainable luxury communication by integrating the Sustainability Communication Theory. It substantially enhances current academic debate by providing innovative, effective communication tactics, and theoretical contributions that effectively connect luxury branding, consumer behavior, sustainable practices, and cultural context.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts an interpretive framework rooted in hermeneutic and phenomenological traditions, which are well-suited to exploring the symbolic meanings and lived experiences central to sustainability communication in luxury. The hermeneutic lens enables interpretation of narratives, while the phenomenological approach captures stakeholders' subjective perspectives, providing insight into how John Hardy's sustainability messages are constructed and received (Adil et al., 2022).

A descriptive qualitative case study design was employed to investigate the paradox of exclusivity and openness in John Hardy's communication (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This method was chosen because the brand offers a distinctive example of a heritage luxury company integrating sustainability into its identity.

Data were collected through three methods. First, observations were conducted of John Hardy's boutiques and workshop in Bali over a two-week period, along with its digital media presence (Indriantoro & Supomo, 2013). Second, semi-structured interviews with eight key stakeholders—including communication managers, boutique managers, marketing staff, and artisans—each lasting 15–60 minutes, explored organizational narratives and perceptions (Kriyantono, 2022). Third, internal reports, marketing campaigns, and visual media were reviewed to contextualize and verify findings.

Data analysis followed Miles et al., (2014) interactive model of reduction, thematic organization, and conclusion verification. Validity was ensured through triangulation: data triangulation (interviews, observations, documents), method triangulation (qualitative interviewing, direct observation, content analysis), and theoretical triangulation (sustainability communication and implicit communication theories). This multi-layered approach enhanced consistency and minimized bias (Sugiyono, 2020).

FINDINGS

Brand Perception and the Role of Legacy in Sustainable Luxury Identity

A recurring theme in the interviews was the concept of authenticity rooted in legacy. John Hardy's fifty-year milestone was not merely seen as a corporate achievement but as a symbolic foundation for its sustainable luxury positioning: "*Fifty years of doing things the same way*" (P. Purser, personal communication, 2025). This reflects legacy-based legitimacy—authenticity derived from sustained operational consistency and cultural integration.

Participants emphasized that sustainability was never adopted as a modern marketing tactic but has been a core principle since the brand's inception. Senior communication stakeholders described the brand as "forerunners to modern green marketing trends," supporting Godemann and Michelsen (2011) view that sustainability communication gains credibility when grounded in established practices rather than abrupt campaigns. An interview remarked, "We do not incorporate sustainability into our narrative." It has perpetually been the narrative—prior to any requests from anyone. (P. Purser, personal communication, 2025).

The perception of temporal continuity is crucial in influencing how internal stakeholders build their brand's luxury identity. The boutique manager in Seminyak noted that customers often respond positively when the brand's history and cultural origins are disclosed. They contend that phrases like "Established in Bali since 1975" function not merely as descriptors but also as markers of importance and proof of authenticity, so enhancing consumer confidence. They clarified: "When guests learn that all products continue to be crafted in Bali by the same community after decades, it enhances emotional significance." They are not merely purchasing a product; they are engaging in something eternal. (V. S. M. Warokka, personal communication, 2025).

Heritage acts as a counterweight to the skepticism often associated with sustainability claims in the luxury industry, aligning with scholarly research on symbolic value and temporal depth in sustainable luxury (J. N. Kapferer & Michaut, 2015). Longevity enhances perceived authenticity and offers a narrative defense against accusations of greenwashing, as indicated by internal narratives — a strategy that aligns with Godemann and Michelsen's assertion that trust and credibility are essential for effective sustainability communication. This was evident from phrases such as "We do not need to persuade individuals—we merely need to convey the truth. We have been engaged in this activity for fifty years." (P. Purser, personal communication, 2025).

Moreover, the junction of legacy and place turned out as a separate sub-theme: place-rooted identity. Bali was said to be a brand's symbolic and spiritual hub rather than just a producing site (P. Purser, personal communication, 2025). Respondents repeatedly said that the brand's sustainable image depends critically on Balinese culture. Rather as marketing relics, the integration of everyday rituals, community ties, and local symbolism (e.g., mepantigan, temple offerings, rice fields) was considered as extension of the value system of the brand. "This is a Balinese company in spirit, not just in style. The culture lives in our design, in our people, in everything." (P. Purser, personal communication, 2025).

Integrated Sustainability Communication Strategy: Channels, Voice, and Internal Coherence

The second key theme is John Hardy's multifaceted sustainability communication, marked by cross-platform coherence, tonal flexibility, and integrated storytelling. Sustainability is embedded in the brand's identity and daily operations, spanning digital content, boutique experiences, artisan representation, and packaging, rather than being treated as standalone campaigns.

This study indicates that the sustainability narrative is seamlessly incorporated rather than explicitly emphasized, a method referred to as integrated sustainability storytelling. This illustrates the idea that sustainability messaging should be contextualized to link facts with cultural and institutional significance (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011). The Marketing team's elucidation embodies this principle: "We do not endeavor to promote sustainability in every communication. However, it consistently remains in the background—intertwined with all our activities." (B. G. Gondowardojo, personal communication, 2025).

This exemplifies the intentional application of implicit sustainability communication, wherein sustainable practices are showcased rather than overtly promoted (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). In the luxury sector, where excessive communication can diminish brand prestige, the choice to adopt a "authentic, educational tone," as highlighted by multiple respondents, reflects an organizational recognition that credibility is best maintained through understated consistency rather than promotional excess (J.-N. Kapferer, 2016). This aligns with assertion that trustworthiness hinges on meticulous framing that circumvents greenwashing and emphasizes the cultivation of reciprocal trust (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011).

Respondents described a channel-specific approach to messaging. Social media uses quick visual cues—artisan portraits, the bamboo garden—for instant emotional impact, while the website offers detailed explanations of artisan training, recycling, and sourcing. In-store experiences are immersive, with direct engagement, live workshops, and spatial design enhancing participatory sustainability storytelling. "Visitors may not initially seek sustainability; however, upon witnessing the production process, the garden, and the individuals involved, the item transcends mere product status and transforms into a narrative." (V. S. M. Warokka, personal communication, 2025). This corporeal component underpins the notion of experience brand communication that sustainability communication renders human–nature linkages perceptible and concrete (Schmitt, 2012). Staff delineated an internal sustainability triad: (1) Environmental sustainability (e.g., recycled silver, ethical sourcing). Cultural and artisan sustainability (e.g., handcrafted chains, ritualistic practices). Community sustainability (e.g., daily nourishment for artists, local involvement). Each element is presented and conveyed distinctively based on the audience and media, with artists frequently embodying the cultural and communal aspects. This reflects Achabou and Dekhili's advocacy for comprehensive narratives characterize as sustainability discourse that integrates factual information with cultural context (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013).

Notwithstanding this robust basis, internal deficiencies persist. Sales associates and boutique managers noted that although training is available, more systematic updates could enhance staff confidence in articulating details clearly. "We are familiar with the narrative and hold faith in it; however, we occasionally struggle to articulate all the particulars succinctly." (A. Kristiana, personal communication, 2025). This friction point exemplifies (Offermann et al., 2024) conclusion that narrative alignment necessitates robust communication capabilities, sustainability communication demands reflexivity and ongoing internal evaluation (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011). (Löwgren et al., 2018) further underscore that accessible and pertinent internal narratives enhance credibility at the consumer interface.

Consumer Motivation and Audience Segmentation in Sustainable Luxury Contexts

Interviews revealed clear distinctions between customer segments based on motivation, awareness, and emotional or intellectual responses to sustainability messages. This reflects the team's strong grasp of value alignment, recognizing sustainability as both an

ethical imperative and a lifestyle choice, and underscoring the need for communication to adapt to diverse audiences and contexts (Alghanim & Ndubisi, 2022).

Consumer engagement with sustainability is influenced by psychographic characteristics and generational views (Pencarelli et al., 2019). Staff reported that younger consumers, especially Millennials and Gen Z, are more engaged in discussions on environmental responsibility, ethics, and materials. One sales assistant described this as “*purchasing with values*”, noting many seek meaning in their purchases: “*Numerous younger patrons inquire about materials or bamboo cultivation immediately—sustainability is integral to their purpose, not just an addition.*” (E. Srimarwati, personal communication, 2025). This corresponds with the growing body of work on conscious consumption among Generation Z, which highlights belief-driven decisions (Palomo-Domínguez et al., 2023).

Conversely, the brand's elder clientele and long-standing loyalists, who interacted with the brand prior to its digital expansion, were characterized as being more driven by craftsmanship, heritage, and product quality (Halwani, 2019). Interviews indicated that sustainability storytelling continues to evoke emotional responses in this group when connected to heritage and community (Wagner, 2024). This dual methodology reinforces Godemann and Michelsen's assertion that sustainability communication must integrate factual openness with tales that resonate with cultural significance (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011). The motive divide can be encapsulated as follows: (1) Younger or new consumers are motivated by purpose, authenticity, and environmental effect. Older and loyal consumers are attracted by aesthetics and heritage, although they become emotionally invested when sustainability is presented as a form of cultural continuity.

The Marketing team observed that segmentation strategies are increasingly based on this behavioral distinction: “We recognize that some individuals are attracted by values, while others are drawn by aesthetics. However, when we narrate the story accurately, the majority depart with both.” (B. G. Gondowardojo, personal communication, 2025). This illustrates the evolving paradigm of hybrid luxury value, wherein symbolic, emotional, and functional advantages converge (J. N. Kapferer & Michaut, 2015). In sustainable luxury, such storylines enhance product prestige via ethical storytelling (Schulz, 2025). John Hardy's internal consensus endorses this multifaceted strategy, wherein sustainability augments rather than undermines the luxury promise on sustainability discourse as both a normative message and a continuous social construct.

Participants noted that experiential learning often deepens motivation. Boutique ambiance, artisan interactions, and personal stories can turn indifferent or purely aesthetic-driven patrons into emotionally engaged clients: “*Some individuals initially do not inquire about sustainability. However, upon learning this bracelet was crafted by a single artisan with two decades of experience, their interest becomes personal.*” (V. S. M. Warokka, personal communication, 2025). This technique aligns with the discovery by Alexander & Rose Thompson that immersive interaction cultivates transformative brand relationships (Alexander & Rose Thompson, 2024).

These findings highlight the essential function of frontline personnel as narrators and ethical interpreters, consistent with Edinger-Schons et al, focus on dialogic interaction (Edinger-Schons et al., 2019). Sustainability was characterized as a post-purchase enhancer, amplifying pride and advocacy (Mathew & Spinelli, 2025): “Some guests return and state, ‘I informed my friends about the bamboo planting or the artisan who created this. They recall the narrative, not merely the object.’” (E. Srimarwati, personal communication, 2025).

John Hardy's internal segmentation strategy transcends age and geographic boundaries, incorporating psychographic, behavioral, and affective dimensions—assertion which sustainability communication should be reflexive, audience-focused, and culturally

integrated (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011). By catering to both sustainability-oriented Gen Z consumers and heritage-focused aficionados, the brand preserves its identity as a luxury entity with widespread significance—an adaptability preserved by cultural cognizance and the frontline's responsiveness to diverse motivational factors.

Balinese Cultural Integration as an Axis of Meaning and Authenticity

John Hardy's sustainability narrative is inseparable from its Balinese cultural setting. Unlike global brands that adopt local identities superficially, the company embeds Balinese values into its sustainability philosophy as a lived practice, not a marketing tool. This shows that authentic sustainability communication gains credibility when deeply rooted in local context, traditions, and daily life. (Soni et al., 2024).

Balinese culture serves as an intrinsic source of brand significance rather than merely a decorative element for commercial allure (P. Purser, personal communication, 2025). In the workshop's daily life—communal meals, temple offerings, and agricultural rites—rituals are practiced not for tourists but as integral to its existence. Even without explicit explanation, they convey gratitude, togetherness, and harmony, subtly shaping customer impressions. Visitors often describe a sense of tranquility and connection that goes beyond conventional sustainability narratives.

This method of experiencing cultural transmission is crucial for establishing authenticity (Yan et al., 2024) and demonstrates how impactful sustainability communication renders the human-nature relationship apparent and tangible through genuine, lived experiences. John Hardy's commitment to place-based sustainability is demonstrated by sensory, spatial, and relational indicators rather than traditional corporate reporting, as illustrated by the bamboo garden, the ambient sound of morning prayers, and the visual of artisans hand-weaving chains.

This profound cultural foundation acts as a protection against consumer skepticism in the global discourse on sustainability (Huang et al., 2025). In an era where performative sustainability assertions are under heightened examination, John Hardy's evident and ongoing incorporation of Balinese principles illustrates that credibility is enhanced when sustainability is manifested via quotidian actions rather than just asserted.

This discovery corresponds with the concept of cultural durability as a competitive edge in prestige branding (Kaur et al., 2024). By prioritizing reverence, rootedness, and intentional pacing over widespread acclaim, John Hardy fosters attributes that are uncommon in hyper-commercialized premium industries. These attributes, ingrained in everyday behaviors rather than mere phrases, reverberate throughout the customer experience and enhance the brand's image for significant luxury (Franco et al., 2022). Cultural integration serves as a foundational element of John Hardy's sustainability identity and a communicative resource that fosters trust and emotional connection, adhering to the principle that sustainability communication must be socially and culturally co-created (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011).

Internal Reflections on Trust, Challenges, and the Discursive Integrity of Sustainability

The internal discourse surrounding sustainability at John Hardy reveals a deeply ingrained concern with the ethical responsibility of brand communication, and with the credibility and authenticity that underpin it (Henninger et al., 2024). The manifestation of trust by participants is not regarded as a public relations outcome, but rather as a cultural imperative requiring truthful storytelling, coherence between values and actions, and consistent demonstration rather than rhetorical claims (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019).

The stakeholders agreed that the brand's dedication to sustainability transcends market changes and consumer desires. Numerous interviewees underscored that the organization does not develop sustainability for external validation but rather expresses what has perpetually existed – an approach grounded in continuity rather than reactive compliance (Gardetti, 2017). The internal refrain that "we do not need to invent the story — we are the story" (P. Purser, personal communication, 2025), captures this approach and promotes the brand's self-image as an authentic leader in sustainable luxury (Jestratijevic et al., 2024).

Yet, despite this robust ethical foundation, internal obstacles persist. Employees highlighted the challenge of translating complex sustainability principles into simple, accessible language, especially at the boutique level where time with guests is limited and interest levels vary. The pressure to balance ethical transparency with luxury's promise of elegance and subtlety can be acute (Li & Kang, 2024). This reflects a familiar dilemma in sustainability communication: balancing clarity with depth without diluting meaning (Debenedetti et al., 2025; Shu, 2023).

Another tension is the risk that sustainability narratives might be perceived as strategic or performative. Team members acknowledged that the current climate of green claim saturation demands intentional modesty to maintain trust (Senan et al., 2025). Respondents advocated for a tone of humility and demonstration over declaration — an idea captured by one team member's reminder to focus on "showing, not selling" (Schulz, 2025). This reinforces the principle that credibility in sustainability communication is maintained when narratives are lived and visible, not simply broadcast (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011).

The 50th anniversary was widely seen as a narrative milestone — an opportunity to reaffirm substance-based ethics and reposition John Hardy as a sustainability leader amid rising consumer scepticism. Internal voices stressed that sustainability should never be confined to marketing teams alone but must be internalised by all staff, from artisans to executives (Kalogiannidis et al., 2025). This perspective highlights that alignment and cultural literacy are prerequisites for authentic communication that does not reduce sustainability to a slogan (Kalogiannidis et al., 2025)). In this narrative, trust is earned through integrity, humility, and an ongoing demonstration of place-based purpose — never assumed or taken for granted (Fertik, 2019).

DISCUSSION

Findings show that brand authenticity rooted in legacy plays a central role in shaping John Hardy's sustainability identity. The company's 50th anniversary serves not only as a business milestone but also as proof of long-standing practices that enhance credibility (P. Purser, personal communication, 2025). This supports Godemann and Michelsen (2011) view that sustainability communication is most persuasive when grounded in established operations and J. N. Kapferer and Michaut (2015) concept of symbolic value in sustainable luxury. Emotional responses described by the Seminyak boutique manager highlight how heritage narratives foster trust, challenging modern performative approaches and reinforcing authentic, heritage-based storytelling.

The second key finding is that John Hardy employs an implicit, cross-channel, and experience-based sustainability strategy. Sustainability is integrated into boutique experiences, social media, and artisan involvement rather than presented as a standalone campaign (B. G. Gondowardojo, personal communication, 2025). This aligns with Morsing and Schultz (2006) implicit communication model and Schmitt (2012) experiential brand communication principles. Channel-specific messaging is a strength, with emotional visuals on social media and detailed process explanations on the website.

However, internal challenges remain in improving staff capacity to deliver consistent narratives, echoing Offermann et al. (2024) emphasis on continuous training.

Consumer insights reveal a dual-segmentation approach: younger audiences (Gen Z and Millennials) are driven by ethics and environmental impact, while older customers value craftsmanship and heritage. This reflects Alghanim and Ndubisi's (2022) argument that sustainability communication must adapt to audience needs. Direct interactions with artisans or product stories often shift consumer motives, supporting Alexander and Rose Thompson (2024) claim that immersive experiences build transformative brand relationships. This underlines the role of frontline staff as ethical storytellers (Edinger-Schons et al., 2019) who enhance loyalty and advocacy.

Cultural integration forms the foundation of John Hardy's sustainability authenticity. Rather than using Balinese culture symbolically, the brand embeds local values in daily activities—communal meals, temple offerings, and agricultural rituals—supporting (Soni et al., 2024) assertion that authentic narratives stem from real cultural practices. Sensory and relational elements such as bamboo gardens and morning prayers reinforce credibility beyond formal reporting, addressing greenwashing concerns and aligning with Kaur et al. (2024) view of cultural resilience as a strategic differentiator.

Within Godemann and Michelsen (2011) framework, sustainability emerges as both a technical and socio-cultural construct. The John Hardy case expands this by showing that enduring, lived cultural practices can serve as the basis for authentic sustainability communication. Overall, effectiveness in luxury sustainability communication lies in cultural depth, legacy consistency, audience-responsive segmentation, and integrated, contextually adapted messaging—demonstrating that it is a dialogic and symbolic process that builds shared meaning between brand and consumer.

CONCLUSION

In the luxury sector, effective sustainability communication requires more than technical data or certifications—it demands a deep connection to heritage, history, and daily practices that engage stakeholders emotionally and socially. John Hardy exemplifies this by grounding its narrative in long-standing presence and regional identity. Framing sustainability as part of living heritage, rather than a marketing tactic, strengthens credibility and counters greenwashing. Through Balinese cultural integration, community ties, and daily rituals, the brand conveys impactful messages implicitly, through actions, symbols, and immersive experiences.

Sustainability at John Hardy is intricately integrated into every aspect without sacrificing the essence of luxury. The brand favors understated, consistent signals over aggressive marketing, allowing visitors, consumers, and internet audiences to organically uncover the sustainable narrative. This mode of implicit communication honors the prestige expectations of luxury buyers while subtly stressing the ethical considerations that are more significant to younger generations. By customizing the depth and style of its communications across several touchpoints — digital, in-store, and interpersonal — the brand preserves narrative consistency while addressing the varied demands of its audience.

The findings highlight the importance of internal trust and alignment, showing that sustainability communication depends on the readiness and understanding of everyday communicators as much as on external messaging. The gap between strong internal conviction and the challenge of explaining complex sustainability details to clients underscores the need for ongoing training and knowledge sharing. Empowering frontline staff to serve as sellers, storytellers, and cultural ambassadors strengthens credibility and balances exclusivity with transparency.

Overall, sustainability communication in heritage luxury should be an integrated, adaptive framework grounded in authentic practices, local context, and active dialogue. Messages that are demonstrated rather than declared, flexible rather than rigid, and embedded across all organizational levels have greater potential to build lasting trust, differentiate the brand, and enrich conversations on responsible consumption and cultural stewardship.

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