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How to cite: Stannard C, Yoo J, Lansdell L, Penn J, Fannin J.M. Investigating Crafters as a Niche Market for Wild American Alligator Leather. Textile & Leather Review. 2026; 9:6111-6134.

<https://doi.org/10.31881/TLR.2026.6111>

How to link: <https://doi.org/10.31881/TLR.2026.6111>

Published: 12 October 2026



Investigating Crafters as a Niche Market for Wild American Alligator Leather

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Article

<https://doi.org/10.31881/TLR.2026.6111>

Received 9 September 2025; Accepted 25 February 2026; Published 12 October 2026

ABSTRACT

(1) Introduction: The wild American alligator leather industry is experiencing low prices, resulting in an oversupply of leather and creating a need to identify new niche markets. Crafters represent a growing potential market for wild alligator leather. The purpose of this research was to investigate crafters as a potential niche market for wild alligator leather by describing the demographics of crafters, understanding their preferences for craft types, craft supply stores, information sources, dollars spent on craft supplies and interest in sustainability. (2) Methods: An online survey was conducted to collect 1,303 responses from crafters regarding their preferences by demographic cohort. Crafters also reported their impressions and preferences regarding alligator leather craft kits. Descriptive statistics and regression were used to analyse the data. (3) Results: Crafters participated in multiple types of crafting, shopped at various locations and spent on average \$92.30 on their last craft supply purchase. Respondents were slightly above neutral in their preferences for sustainability and had the strongest preference for 'buying local'. (4) Conclusions: Regarding alligator leather, crafters perceived it to be more luxurious and fashionable than cowhide. They preferred alligator craft kits for keychains over those for luggage tags and earrings.

KEYWORDS

wild American alligator leather, crafter, niche marketing, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

American alligator leather is a beautiful and unique natural material associated with luxury fashion [1]. The alligator population is managed by branches of state governments responsible for wildlife and fisheries [2]. The alligator industry is a carefully monitored operation in which alligator eggs are harvested from the wild and raised on farms for the meat and leather [2]. Farm-raised alligator leather is sold at a premium to

European luxury fashion goods producers [3]. By law, farmers must return a percentage of their larger alligators to the wild to sustain the animal population [3]. Wild alligator populations are strictly controlled by state governments through the issuing of hunting permits [2]. Wild alligators tend to be larger than farm-raised animals, and they also have more opportunities to fight and encounter other obstacles in the wild, resulting in leather hides with more imperfections like scars [2]. Alligator management has created a profitable leather and meat industry as well as a sustainable population [3]. However, the wild alligator industry is grappling with historically low prices, which has led to a surplus of hides in the market [4]. Alternative leather choices, such as cowhide stamped with a faux alligator print and other imported crocodilian species, offer options that are often significantly cheaper than alligator. Identifying new markets for wild alligator leather is crucial to sustaining this industry. Adopting a niche marketing strategy that targets small segments of the population would allow alligator producers to focus their efforts on specific, amenable consumers.

Niche marketing involves a more precise marketing effort toward a small market segment [5]. Once the consumers are identified, 'niche marketers customize their products and marketing mix to fit the many tastes of the target group' [6]. Niche marketing has gained popularity with the spread of the internet and social media as locating small consumer groups with similar tastes became easier [5]. A niche marketing approach would be ideal for producers of wild alligator leather to specifically target new consumer segments by catering to the needs and wants of the group.

One consumer group that may be particularly interested in wild alligator leather is crafters. In 2024, online sales of craft supplies in the USA generated \$22.6 billion and are expected to continue growing in the next five years [7]. In 2016, over half (63%) of USA households had participated in a craft or hobby in the last 12 months [8]. Top retailers of crafting supplies in 2024 included Amazon, Michael's and Hobby Lobby [7]. Within the craft retail landscape, craft kits and supplies continue to gain importance and attract increasing consumer interest, especially since the COVID lockdown in 2020 [9,10]. Craft kits are often advantageous to crafters as they contain most, if not all, needed supplies and tools along with instructions to complete a prescribed craft item. However, academic understanding of hobbyist crafter purchasing behaviours, including craft kit preferences, is highly limited. Past researchers have called for a better understanding of crafter purchasing behaviour and retailers of raw materials for crafting [11].

There has also been increased academic attention to the potential for crafting to increase sustainability both environmentally and culturally [12-14]. Craft materials such as yarns for knitting have been marketed using

sustainability-related terms, including 'locally grown', 'environmentally friendly', 'natural' and 'slow', to indicate alignment with environmentally sustainable thinking [15-18]. Niche marketing strategies are often adopted for sustainable products because consumers interested in these types of products can be difficult to locate [19]. Wild alligator leather can similarly be tied to sustainability because of its local availability in various Southern states. Additionally, sustainability applies to wild alligator leather through the careful protection of animals to maximize the ecological health of wild habitat and maintain a sustainable population [2]. However, how crafters respond to sustainable statements about craft supplies has not been specifically studied. Understanding the importance of sustainable statements to crafters would aid in determining how to market to this group.

Thus, the purpose of this exploratory research was to investigate crafters as a potential niche market for wild alligator leather craft kits. We sought to describe the craft consumer niche market, including the demographics of contemporary crafters interested in leathercrafting, to understand their preferred types of crafts, craft supply stores visited, information sources and interest in sustainability. An additional purpose was to determine crafters' perceptions of alligator leather and preferences for alligator leather craft kits.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Niche Marketing

Niche marketing is a 'bottom-up approach to address the unique needs of a small market that is gradually expanding its consumer base' [5]. Niche marketing is heavily reliant upon understanding small target consumer segments including the demographics and psychographics such as interests, attitudes and values [6]. Once the needs of the small segment of consumers are understood, a firm can create or locate a product that can be marketed to the consumers in what is known as 'pull marketing' [20].

Niche marketing is a popular strategy within the fashion industry [5]. Textile and apparel firms in Western countries such as the USA and Canada are increasingly turning to niche marketing strategies to compete with significantly lower cost, imported goods [20,21]. Western producers of fashion goods may use a 'locally made' approach to signal a level of quality and premium appeal to niche consumers [20,21]. The use of 'locally made' terminology can entice niche markets of consumers interested in more sustainable and ethical fashion goods [19].

Niche marketing has also been utilized by brands marketing exclusive, luxury fashion goods [5]. In one research example featuring craft goods, smaller farmers of rare wools in New York state successfully marketed their

wools by highlighting the exclusivity of the fibre to entice potential consumers [18]. Alligator leather can be characterized as both a sustainable product as well as a luxury product, which aligns with the other goods that have adopted a niche marketing approach.

Crafters

Crafting grew as a leisure activity in the 2000s. Academic inquiries into crafting have grown as well but tend to focus on qualitative approaches and topics such as how craft enhances well-being [22], provides individuals with a valued leisure activity [23], and offers opportunities for craftivism [24]. Despite the vibrant craft community, few researchers have studied the characteristics, demographics and interests of large populations of crafters, which is critical to a niche marketing approach [6].

One notable quantitative study, which included demographics of crafters, was conducted by Väänänen and Vilhunen (2024) to investigate how Finnish craft hobbyists conceptualized sustainability and crafting. This work utilized a large online survey with over 900 responses. Respondents participated in numerous crafts such as knitting, woodworking and ceramics; however, specific statistics related to the types of crafts each respondent participated in were not reported. Additionally, this study was 95% female and only 5% male. The researchers utilized exploratory factor analysis to determine three factors of sustainability in crafting, which included keeping craft traditions alive, the value of craft products and well-being, among others [14].

Another large study of crafters by Collier (2011) surveyed 821 respondents and found the most popular crafts were knitting, sewing, crocheting and weaving. Out of those types of crafts, respondents felt they had mastered knitting, weaving and sewing and had tried an average of 11 different crafting techniques [22]. Hahn et al. (2013) surveyed 341 adult Korean women, dividing them into three age groups: young (18–25), middle age (26–45) and older (46–97). The younger cohort tried the most craft categories (the mean number of crafts tried by this cohort was nine), followed by the older age group with five crafts and the middle age group with three crafts. Among the respondents, the most popular craft types were quilting, knitting, needlework, sewing, beadwork and felt-making. The researchers found that middle-aged and older women were creating more functional items compared to the younger adults' non-functional items [25].

Craft Resources

New crafting information resources have emerged and evolved since the beginning of the 21st century to include online resources like videos, live online events, discussion boards or online classes [26,27]. Crafters today often use the internet to learn new techniques about their craft, and many take advice from other

crafters [9-10,26]. Blogs are used by knitters as a form of inspiration, community engagement and craft documentation [26,28,29]. As craft instruction progressively moved into free digital spaces, entrepreneurs found new revenue streams. Many of these included the sale of craft supplies and patterns [10].

Retailers of craft supplies have similarly evolved to use online avenues to reach their customers. Historically, crafting was associated with a 'make-do-and-mend' mentality of thrift [26,28]. However, researchers have argued that contemporary crafting has switched to an ethos of consumption in which premium, luxury materials are purchased to feed increasingly expensive hobbies [30,31]. Specialty craft supply stores, such as local yarn stores, have become more commonplace as they cater to the specialty supply desires of crafters [11]. Online marketplaces such as Etsy give aspiring craft designers a chance to sell their products in a niche market [27]. Despite the support for crafting as an expensive, consumption-based hobby in the literature, other researchers have found a strong desire among crafters to limit the exploding cost of craft supplies by visiting local thrift stores or discount retailers such as Walmart to find craft supplies [11,31]. To successfully use a niche marketing strategy, further understanding both the preferred instructional sources and retailers of supplies among crafters is critical.

Sustainability and Crafting

Crafting may be a potentially sustainable solution to overconsumption and mass production [14,15,28]. Home sewers have been critical of fast fashion and used their crafting to disrupt the hold of this business model on their consumption [26]. Researchers have also found that crafters are more emotionally connected to their handmade items [32], potentially making them less likely to toss the items out, as is often done with fast fashion and other mass-produced goods. Thus, crafting could be seen to be environmentally friendly, 'albeit, on a smaller scale and on an individual level' [14] by promoting sustainability and thoughtful consumption practices. The importance of environmentally friendly products was also emphasized by small craft supply businesses [16].

Researchers have noted that crafters often engage in a type of 'slow' production that involves mindfulness in terms of consumption and a desire to engage with handmade items in a more emotional way [13,26]. Part of the 'slow' ethos among crafters is the idea of supporting 'local' or 'locally made' craft supplies [11,18]. However, some crafters interested in sustainable or local products were deterred by the cost associated with these goods [11,31].

Despite the literature supporting the connection between crafting and sustainability, there is a reliance of crafters on the consumption of (often commercially made) craft supplies [30]. The need to consume craft supplies is against many ideals associated with sustainability. In a recent scoping review, Birau (2025) claimed that 'this review helps to pinpoint a rather weak connection between handmade activities and sustainability'. The researcher went on to highlight that many crafters were not motivated to craft to be sustainable and were not particularly knowledgeable about how crafting could specifically improve sustainability [9]. The researcher called for more examination into this topic.

METHODS

To investigate contemporary crafters as a potential niche market for wild alligator leather, we conducted an online survey in Fall 2023- Spring 2024. We sought to describe the demographics of these crafters including, craft activities practiced, preferred retailers of craft supplies, and where they sought out information about crafting. We also investigated crafters' attitudes toward alligator leather, including perceptions of the material related to luxury, fashionability and sustainability. These traits were specifically explored as they have been successfully utilized by other niche marketing strategies [5,18,20]. Aside from demographics, perceptions and preferences among crafters, we sought to determine what types of alligator leather crafts would be most appealing to this group.

Alligator Leather Craft Kit Development

To foster more realistic findings, the survey was designed to include images of actual craft kits made from alligator leather, which were later offered as a participant incentive. Including the craft kits as a participant incentive necessitated the creation of real products. To begin, we searched leathercrafting retailers to determine what types of leathercrafting kits were currently available in the marketplace. We were unable to locate alligator leather crafting kits, so cowhide leather kits were used to inform our process. Retailers such as Tandy Leather (www.tandy-leather.com) and Weaver Leather Supply (www.weaverleathersupply.com) offered many craft kits to make cowhide leather items such as belts, key chains, coin purses, gun holsters and more. We determined that offering a small variety of kits for basic items with wide-reaching appeal across various age ranges and tastes would be ideal for the goals of this project. Due to budget limitations and a desire to maximize participant numbers, we chose to create kits that required smaller amounts of leather- a keychain, a luggage tag and a pair of earrings. Furthermore, there were examples of commercially available leathercrafting kits for each of these item types, so we could investigate what inputs should be included.

Based on the purpose of this work, to investigate crafters as a potential niche market for wild alligator leather, it was assumed that many crafters may not have specific experience in leathercrafting. Leathercrafting requires several specialized tools, such as chisels to poke stitching holes, edge burnishers to finish edges and knives for cutting out patterns. Based on the assumption related to a lack of leathercrafting experience, we also surmised that our participants may not own or have access to leathercrafting tools. Thus, the craft kits needed to be self-contained and require no additional tools to complete. To accomplish this goal, the leathercrafting kits (see Fig. 1) were created for beginner-level skills and contained: pre-cut alligator leather for the item which also included pre-punched stitching holes, two needles, waxed thread appropriate for leathercrafting, a small information card about the origin of the alligator leather and a business card with a QR code to directions for completing the kits. To cut the kits, wild alligator leather hides were digitized into Adobe Illustrator, and the layout of the required pattern pieces was done in the software, which allowed for the yield of total kits per hide to be maximized [33]. Following the layout process, each hide was laser cut using a Universal Laser system.



Figure 1. Example of alligator leather craft kit. Photo is the property of the authors.

Note: Kits contain pre-cut alligator leather, thread, needles, QR code to instructions (not pictured), and other supplies to complete each craft.

Many commercial leathercrafting kits featured printed direction sheets; however, many also offered video instructions typically delivered through a YouTube channel sponsored by the retailer (for example, see the leather project instructional videos at www.weaverleathersupply.com). Online tutorials related to craft

instruction are growing in popularity [9]; thus, we decided to create YouTube videos to document how each kit should be assembled.

The alligator leather craft kits were pilot tested by two of the authors, both with extensive backgrounds in sewing but not leathercrafting, to determine the ease of completing each item given the materials. Next, the craft kits were given to a small group of high school students ($n = 64$) as part of a summer camp. The students were able to complete the kits after viewing the online instructions, giving the research team confidence that the participants in this research would be able to assemble the kits.

Following the pilot testing of the craft kits and survey, data collection began. Craft kit production also commenced; the estimated need for incentives based on economic tests conducted as a separate hypothesis of this research was 400 kits, which were cut using a university-owned laser cutter and assembled in a design lab in Fall 2023.

Data Collection Procedures

The survey was created using Qualtrics and, following IRB approval, data collection occurred via a non-probability convenience panel provided by Dynata. The overarching purpose of the survey was to investigate crafters as a potential niche market for alligator leather craft kits, so crafters not interested in trying leathercrafting or opposed to using animal leather for crafting were screened out of this sample. Respondents were also required to have participated in at least one craft activity in the past six months and answer 'I will provide my best answers'. Crafters in multiple categories (those interested in painting/drawing, edible arts, kids' crafts, paper crafts, floral crafts, leathercrafting, knitting/crochet, woodworking/home décor, beading, needle arts, sewing and other crafts) took part in the research. Respondents were over the age of 18 and citizens of the United States.

Data were collected for about six months from Fall 2023 to Spring 2024. A total of 1,303 usable responses were collected. In addition to screening and demographic questions, respondents were asked to answer numerous questions related to craft activities, preferences and interest in sustainability. Most items were assessed using pre-determined categories or Likert-type responses. The respondents detailed their support (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree) for statements related to sustainability. The goal of this branch of questioning was to determine the level of support crafters had for three sustainable statements, 'I prefer to buy locally' ('Local'), 'I go out of my way to buy environmentally friendly products' ('Buy') and 'I am concerned about the impact of agriculture on the environment' ('Environment'). Agreement towards these

Likert statements were the variables of interest. Descriptive statistics were used for analysis to describe crafter demographics related to crafts practiced, preferred craft retailers, preferred sources of craft information or demographic characteristics influenced the likelihood of a respondent participating in certain types of crafts. Poisson regression was applied to model count data, such as the type of craft activities, allowing us to assess how various factors like preferred retailers and sources of craft information influence these counts [34]. Descriptive statistics were then used to calculate the mean and standard deviations for statements that may affect interest in various aspects of sustainability, perceptions related to alligator leather and preferences for alligator leather craft kit types. Together, the data effectively capture the relationships between crafters’ characteristics, behaviours, perceptions of alligator leather and their preferences for alligator craft kits. The statistical models were estimated using Stata 18 with logit and Poisson packages.

RESULTS

Profile of Crafters

A total of 1,303 responses were collected. Of the responses collected, 846 were female, 435 were male and 22 preferred not to answer (see Table 1). The higher percentage of male respondents in this research presents a more balanced look at crafters across genders, past researchers excluded men [22,25], and Väänänen and Vilhunen (2024) had only 5% of their sample comprised of men. Overall, age cohorts with the highest participation in crafts were 35–44 (20.9%), 45–54 (19.1%), and 25–34 (17.7%). The sample had a more balanced and younger age sample compared to Collier’s (2011) study, in which over 65% of the respondents were over the age of 45. Most of the respondents had at least some college education (83%), the majority identified as white (80.6%) and just over half (54.6%) had an income between \$20,000 to \$79,999.

Table 1. Crafter demographics

Variable	%	Variable	%
Age		Race	
18–24	7.3	White	80.6
25–34	17.7	Black	12.8
35–44	20.9	American Indian	2.8
45–54	19.1	Asian	4.8
55–64	14.1	Native Hawaiian	0.4
65–74	17.0	Other	2.5

Variable	%	Variable	%
75–84	3.5	Household income	
85+	0.4	Less than \$20,000	9.1
Gender		\$20,000–\$39,999	18.6
Female	65.0	\$40,000–\$59,999	19.0
Male	33.4	\$60,000–\$79,999	17.0
Other	1.7	\$80,000–\$99,999	11.6
Education		\$100,000 or more	24.8
High school or less	17.0		
Some College	35.4		
Bachelor's degree	32.5		
Graduate degree	15.1		

The respondents were then asked to select what crafting activities they had participated in within the last six months from a list of 13 different categories covering a wide variety of crafts (e.g., painting/drawing, edible arts, kids' crafts) (see Table 2). The craft categories were adapted from a report by Statista of the most common crafts in the USA [35]. Most respondents had participated in two (19.0%), three (18.7%) or four (17.3%) crafting categories in the past six months. Nearly one third (31.4%) of the respondents were crafting diverse and participated in at least five types of crafts. Next, we determined if there was an association between age and amount of craft types chosen. Crafters between the ages of 18–24 selected an average of 4.53 craft types, while those 45–54 participated in 3.59 types, and crafters 75–84 did an average of 2.76 craft types. We found that as crafters age the number of craft activities chosen also significantly declines.

Table 2. Craft activities and resources

Category	%	Category	%
Craft activities per crafter		Store(s) visited	
1	13.7	Michaels	70.9
2	19.0	Hobby Lobby	61.9
3	18.7	General Retail	59.8
4	17.3	Joann's	46.0
5 or more	31.4	Etsy	30.5
Information source		Local/ Independent	30.2
YouTube	86.8	Other	10.1
Magazine/Books/ Patterns	48.0	None	1.3

Category	%	Category	%
Discussion boards (e.g., Reddit, Facebook)	34.5	Average spent on last craft purchase	\$92.3
In-person Workshop	23.0		
Online Class (e.g., Craftsy)	19.0		
Live Online Events (e.g., Facebook live)	17.1		
Other	6.8		
None	4.1		

Note: Craft activities included Painting/Drawing, Edible arts, Kids' crafts, Paper crafts, Floral crafts, Leather crafts, Knitting/Crocheting, Woodworking/Home décor, Beading/Jewellery, Needle arts, Sewing/Fabric and Other. For "average spent on last craft purchase", the conventional ± 3 SD rule identified one extreme outlier (\$100,000). After removing this value, the mean decreased from \$169 to \$92.30.

The respondents purchased craft supplies from numerous retailers in the last six months. The most popular stores visited were Michael's (70.9%), Hobby Lobby (61.8%) and general retailers like Walmart (59.7%). The respondents also reported how much they spent on their last trip to purchase craft supplies. This figure varied greatly as some crafters spent no money while others may have purchased expensive machinery like sewing machines. Overall, the crafters spent an average of \$92.30 USD on their last trip to purchase craft supplies. Information on how to do crafts was found in many locations. The most frequently chosen included YouTube (80.8%), followed by print sources like patterns (48%) and Reddit threads devoted to crafts (34.5%). Classes/workshops were also popular (23.0%) places to learn crafting, as well as online classes (19.0%). The most popular crafts among the respondents were painting or drawing (65.3%), paper crafts (42.7%), sewing (42.6%) and woodworking or home décor crafts (40.6%). The respondents spent a significant amount of time participating in their crafts weekly. The most popular amount of time spent was 1–2 hours per week, followed by 3–5 hours per week across most categories. (see Table 3). While most craft categories were made up of a plurality or majority of crafters with 11 or more years of experience, there was variation when grouping experience cohorts. Approximately 70% of sewing/fabric crafters had six or more years of experience, while 68% of leather crafters had five or fewer years of experience. Other craft categories with over 50% of respondents with less than six years of experience included edible arts, paper crafts, and floral crafts.

Table 3. Crafting participation

	PD	EA	KC	PC	FC	LC	KC	WH	BJ	NA	SF	O
Particip. (%)	65.3	22.4	34.2	42.8	24.9	11.2	34.9	40.6	36.3	23.1	42.7	4.5
Hrs/ week												
< 1 hr	13.8	19.2	17.9	21.4	23.8	11.6	11.4	11.5	14.6	14.0	15.1	13.6
1–2 hr	38.0	39.4	44.0	43.5	41.4	29.5	22.6	36.7	37.0	35.6	33.3	23.7
3–5 hr	29.0	29.5	26.2	24.1	21.3	28.1	37.6	34.6	30.4	33.9	30.4	28.8
6–10 hr	13.3	7.5	7.9	7.9	9.3	17.8	16.9	11.7	12.1	10.6	12.6	22.0
11+ hr	6.0	4.5	4.0	3.2	4.3	13.0	11.4	5.5	5.9	6.0	8.6	11.9
Experience												
< 1 yr	3.0	15.6	4.1	4.7	2.0	20.0	0.0	8.8	4.3	8.8	1.1	8.3
1–2 yr	7.5	17.8	16.4	20.0	22.5	20.0	12.1	13.8	20.4	14.0	8.6	16.7
3–5 yr	29.3	22.2	28.8	30.6	26.5	28.0	25.8	25.0	24.7	21.1	20.4	25.0
6–10 yr	11.3	13.3	17.8	15.3	20.4	8.0	13.6	20.0	22.6	10.5	10.8	16.7
11+ yr	48.9	31.1	32.9	29.4	28.6	24.0	48.5	32.5	28.0	45.6	59.1	33.3

Note: Craft activities included: Painting/Drawing (PD), Edible arts (EA), Kids' crafts (KC), Paper crafts (PC), Floral crafts (FC), Leather crafts (LC), Knitting/Crocheting (KC), Woodworking/Home décor (WH), Beading/Jewellery (BJ), Needle arts (NA), Sewing/Fabric (SF) and Other (O). Respondents could pick multiple craft activities. For each craft chosen, respondents detailed hours per week doing that activity and years of experience.

Crafter Demographics and Activities

The next stage of analysis identified the types of crafting activities associated with retail stores, information sources, and different demographic crosstabs using Poisson regression (see Table 4). Sensitivity analyses were conducted by removing outliers in the “average spent on last craft purchase” variable using two alternative definitions: (1) values exceeding ± 3 standard deviations from the mean ($n = 1$) and (2) the top and bottom 1% of the distribution ($n = 19$). The resulting estimates were highly consistent with the main model results. In aggregate, purchasing from a local or independent retailer or general retailer like Walmart, and getting information from YouTube significantly increased the likelihood of participating in painting or drawing, whereas being older (Age) had a negative impact. Purchasing at a local or independent craft supply store and taking an online class significantly increased the likelihood of participating in leathercrafting. Shopping at Joann's Fabrics increased the likelihood of participating in knitting/crocheting and sewing.

Table 4. Factors that affect the probability of participating in a craft activity.

	PD	EA	KC	PC	FC	LC	KC	WH	BJ	NA	SF
Refprice	0.000	0.000	0.012**	-0.005	0.014**	0.000	-0.002	0.005	0.000	0.000	-0.003
Local/Ind.	0.756***	0.529***	0.003	0.211	0.390**	0.632***	0.132	0.817***	0.261*	0.139	0.075
Michaels	0.563***	0.326*	0.433***	0.614***	0.811***	-0.258	0.167	0.362**	0.679***	0.117	0.073
Hobby Lobby	-0.003	0.267*	0.402***	0.036	0.548***	0.380*	0.128	0.479***	0.402***	0.107	0.218*
Etsy	0.053	0.202	0.102	0.200	0.432***	0.400*	0.071	0.213	0.571***	0.373**	0.223
Joann's	-0.246*	0.277*	0.172	0.346***	0.396***	0.034	0.881***	-0.118	0.111	0.745***	1.101***
Gen. retail	0.346***	0.528***	0.289**	0.544***	0.354**	-0.070	0.217*	0.423***	0.263**	0.164	0.798***
Other (store)	0.055	0.327	0.010	0.226	-0.353	0.455	0.515**	0.196	0.370*	0.563**	0.573***
YouTube	0.604***	0.046	0.300	0.618***	0.123	0.406	0.054	0.577***	0.248	-0.445**	-0.107
Live on-line	-0.316*	0.072	0.203	0.219	0.046	0.536**	0.045	-0.127	0.165	0.274	0.033
Magazine/Pat-terns	0.013	0.245	0.126	0.389***	0.058	0.304	0.441***	-0.194	0.287**	0.756***	0.317**
In-person Workshop	0.236	0.387**	0.082	0.408***	0.538***	0.551**	0.153	0.541***	0.394**	0.264	0.208
Discus-sion Boards	-0.035	0.228	0.317**	0.002	0.107	0.193	-0.075	0.064	0.070	0.303*	0.216
Online Class	0.180	0.283	-0.051	0.352**	0.403**	0.936***	0.190	0.236	0.178	0.204	0.332*
Other (Info. source)	-0.017	0.019	0.250	0.034	0.275	0.498	-0.105	0.185	0.534**	-0.141	0.199
Age	-0.357***	-0.154***	-0.159***	-0.236***	0.125***	-0.044	-0.048	-0.041	-0.122***	0.027	-0.002
Education	-0.062	0.040	0.117*	0.052	-0.061	0.132	0.055	0.010	-0.056	-0.075	0.009
Non-white	0.012	-0.001	-0.108	-0.027	-0.161	-0.152	0.000	-0.595***	0.222	-0.023	0.060
Constant	0.959***	-2.378***	-1.816***	-1.529***	-3.640***	-3.915***	-1.765***	-1.882***	-1.873***	-2.297***	-1.923***

Note: Significance noted below value * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$; Refprice (reference price) denotes average spent on last craft purchase (\$); Age and Education are categorical variables and Non-white includes Black, American Indian, Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Other (see Table 1).

Crafters' Interest in Sustainability

Given the support for niche marketing strategies that utilize sustainability as a product characteristic, respondents were asked to rate their attitudes about sustainability, including local shopping and environmentally friendly products. Three statements ('I prefer to buy local', 'I go out of my way to buy more environmentally friendly products', and 'I am concerned about the impact of agriculture on the environment') were given

with a five-point Likert scale for the respondents to rate from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. The respondents' answers were slightly above neutral for all the questions. Their preferences for 'buying local' had a mean of 3.7 (see Table 5). Respondents were also slightly concerned about the impact of agriculture on the environment (3.4) and were slightly averse to purchasing environmentally friendly products (3.1).

Table 5. Crafter attitudes toward sustainability

	Mean (se)	Strongly Dis- agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither nor disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
I prefer to buy locally.	3.7 (0.024)	1.6	4.5	29.6	46.7	17.7
I go out of my way to buy environmentally friendly products.	3.1 (0.030)	7.2	20.4	34.5	26.3	11.7
I am concerned about the impact of agri- culture on the environment.	3.4 (0.031)	6.8	11.4	25.1	39.5	17.2

Crafter Perceptions and Preferences of Alligator Leather Craft Kits

The respondents were shown images of the three types of alligator leather craft kits (see Fig. 1). Of the three kits of basic items, the keychain kit was the most preferred, with 29.3% of respondents choosing this item. Luggage tag was the second most popular kit with 24.0% and earrings were less popular with 22.0% picking that item.

The respondents were also asked to relay their impressions of alligator leather in relation to the basic cowhide leather alternative. Five questions related to alligator leather impressions were given with a five-point Likert scale for the respondents to rate from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. These included comparison statements such as, alligator leather is more environmentally-friendly than cowhide leather and alligator leather is more luxurious than cowhide leather. The respondents' answers were again slightly above neutral for all the questions (see Table 6). Respondents did feel that alligator leather was more luxurious than cowhide (3.8) and that it was more fashion forward (3.7).

Table 6. Crafter perceptions of alligator leather

	Mean (se)	Strongly Dis- agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither nor disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
More environmentally-friendly	3.2 (0.972)	5.6	10.3	51.0	21.9	11.2
Lasts longer	3.6 (0.937)	1.9	7.2	39.6	32.5	18.8

	Mean (se)	Strongly Dis- agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
More local	3.3 (1.112)	6.8	16.1	34.1	27.9	15.1
More luxurious	3.8 (1.030)	3.8	6.8	24.4	39.1	26.0
More fashion forward	3.7 (1.012)	3.5	6.2	28.1	37.3	25.0

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Crafter Demographics and Activities

The present work investigated the appropriateness and preferences of crafters as a niche market for wild alligator leather craft kits. We began by detailing key demographics of crafters in this niche market. Crafting has been suggested to be a feminine activity [36]. However, one-third of the present sample was made up of men, indicating they do have a sizeable presence in crafting and should be considered in a marketing effort. Neither Collier (2011) nor Hahn et al. (2013) included men in their samples, and Väänänen and Vilhunen (2024) had only 5% of their sample comprised of men. The inclusion of a more balanced sample to understand crafter demographics and preferences is a major contribution of this work to the body of craft literature.

When considering craft types that these respondents had done in the last six months, the respondents more frequently participated in painting or drawing, papercrafts and sewing. The least popular crafts were leathercrafting, edible arts, needle art, and floral crafts. Of the sample, only 11.2% had participated in leathercrafting within the last six months, which indicates that there is significant growth potential among the other 88.8% of the sample who indicated at the onset of the survey that they were at least interested in trying leathercrafting. Respondents were also likely to participate in multiple types of crafts. In the past six months, 31.4% of respondents had done five or more types of crafts, and over half (55%) had done two to four types of crafts. These figures were similar to Collier (2011) and Stalp and Winge (2008) [37]. Thus, crafters seem comfortable doing multiple types of crafting, allowing for leathercrafting to be potentially added to their hobby rotation. However, the high number of craft types undertaken by participants could also present a challenge. If crafters have low commitment to craft types and easily switch between activities it could create a problem for alligator leather producers. Crafters in our sample tended to settle on fewer, favoured crafter types as they aged, meaning that new types of crafts such as leathercrafting might have more success in gaining loyal followers when introduced to younger audiences. Further investigation is needed to fully understand why crafters commit and more fully engage in a single type of activity to help support supply industries.

Most crafters spent 1–2 hours on their chosen craft per week, except for knitters, who spent an average of 3–5 hours. The variation in time spent on crafting echoes Martindale and McKinney (2020) who found home sewers spent between one to forty hours a week sewing. The consumption of craft supplies by the respondents was also reported. Crafters in this study spent an average of \$92.30 on their last craft supply purchase. This was an overall average of all the craft types surveyed. However, the survey results reported here were not for an average month, simply the last craft supply purchase, making comparison with past research difficult. Craft supply costs can vary significantly depending on the type of craft. A total of 26.7% of the 15 home sewers interviewed by Martindale (2018) spent over \$100 a month on craft supplies [38]. Whereas, in a large survey of knitters/crocheters/weavers, just under 60% spent \$30 or less in an average month on craft supplies [39]. The willingness of crafters to spend significant sums on their hobbies bodes well for alligator leather producers, as alligator leather commands a higher price point than cowhide, crafters would need to be willing to spend more to use this material.

Larger, national retail stores were the most popular retail stores to purchase crafts, with Michaels, Hobby Lobby, general retailers and Joann's as the most frequently visited. Almost all the craft types used at least one of the national stores for supplies. Only 30.2% of the respondents reported purchasing craft supplies from local stores. Perhaps, the preference for national retailers reflects the thrift-mindedness described by past researchers [11,31].

We also discovered which retailers affected the probability of being involved with specific craft types. Crafters who shopped at Joann's Fabrics were significantly more likely to be knitting/crocheting or sewing. Shopping at Michael's significantly increased the probability of being a floral crafter. Leathercrafters were significantly more likely to shop locally for craft supplies. This finding indicates that alligator leather producers should determine how to retail goods locally to reach crafters.

In terms of information sources, YouTube was by far the most consulted source, with 86.8% of respondents having used this resource. Additionally, online classes were significantly associated with those crafters who currently participated in leathercrafting. Technology continues to be an important way for crafters to learn new skills when teachers are potentially not locally present [9].

The general preference for digital information sources among crafters has been well-described [9,26,27] though not based on the craft type as was found in this work. Despite the importance of online sources, there

was significant interest in physical classes and print materials, indicated by the survey results which, should not be ignored by craft supply retailers or academics.

Both pre-recorded and live online workshops should be investigated as ways to teach skills to those interested in learning to use alligator leather. The leathercrafting industry has realized the importance of teaching skills to keep crafters engaged. In 2025, the Al Stohlman award, a lifetime achievement award given out internationally to an outstanding leather crafter [40], went to Aaron Heizer from Makers Leather Supply. Part of that award recognized his video instruction, which helps crafters build skills. Makers Leather Supply (www.makersleathersupply.com) has structured their business around a model wherein it provides extensive instructional resources to help leathercrafters, and logically, in turn, it sells more leathercrafting supplies by growing their consumers' skills. This savvy business move should be carefully studied by alligator producers seeking to sell leather to crafters. Crafters must be provided with instructional support regarding the special characteristics and inherent challenges of alligator leather to stave off potential frustration and to keep this niche market as a feasible option.

Crafters' Interest in Sustainability

Crafters have long been assumed to be more sustainable in their attitudes [13,14], and successful niche marketing strategies have been built around sustainability [5]. Yet, the present findings were somewhat mixed in terms of supporting sustainability. Of the three statements related to sustainable thinking, only the preference for buying local was somewhat supported by the respondents. When asked about their attitudes towards crafting, over half of the respondents agreed they preferred to buy locally. Using a 'local' niche market has been seen by producers of USA fashion and textile goods to compete with cheaper imports [20]. Wool producers in New York state have similarly adopted the 'Made in New York' label to declare the local nature of their goods to attract consumers [18]. Alligator producers could similarly capitalize on this trend, highlighting the use of American alligator to hold space against cheaper alternative leathers such as stamped cowhide or competing crocodilian leathers.

Interestingly, respondents who were already doing leathercrafting were significantly more likely to purchase supplies locally. It may be that having the local supplies invites crafters to try leatherwork simply by being physically present. Perhaps this desire among leathercrafters to purchase supplies locally is related to a need to physically see and touch leather supplies. Other crafters have reported the 'need for touch' as an important factor when choosing craft supplies [11]. Alligator leather producers should consider how to address the need

for touch and seeing an unfamiliar product in a craft retail landscape wherein brick and mortar stores are being overtaken by online stores [41]. The bankruptcy and subsequent closure of all Joann's Fabrics stores occurred after our data was collected [41]. While the closure of Joann's has created uncertainty in the USA craft supplies retailing landscape at a more local level, based on the growth in crafting and supply expenditures over the last 20 years [7,8,10], we expect that the market will shift to other retailer outlets or online.

One venue that alligator producers may want to consider are craft festivals or pop-up events. Multiple operators of small wool farms in New York state found that local fibre festivals allowed them the ideal opportunity to find the specific consumers, many of whom were crafters seeking yarn and fibre [18]. It may be that participation in craft-specific festivals or events would best position alligator leather to be experienced by potential buyers in a more target-rich retail environment.

The lack of stronger support for sustainability among crafters may also be mirroring other research in fashion consumption, in which many consumers are ultimately swayed by price [42]. Research has described a 'gap' between consumers who intend to be sustainable and yet still purchase goods based on price [21]. Researchers [12-14] have claimed that crafting is a more sustainable alternative to mass consumption, and yet it appears that crafting may be yet another example of fashion consumption in which price is the ultimate decision-maker. Furthermore, the recent economic conditions in the USA and globally may also be impacting the decision to look for the cheapest option as opposed to supporting sustainable choices.

There is some logical tension between the idea of sustainably minded crafters and the desire to motivate these consumers to purchase leather made from wild, regulated exotic animals. While the wild alligator industry is built on a model wherein ecological sustainability is of primary importance [2,3], few consumers understand the industry to this depth. Past researchers have discovered that tourists who received education regarding alligators and their ecosystem had more positive beliefs and attitudes about the animals [43]. There is even a popular alligator leather business (www.vaughgators.com) which creates leather from nuisance gators. It is possible that consumer education could be used to help crafters understand how wild alligator leather relates to sustainable ecosystems.

Preferences and Impressions of Alligator Leather

The respondents had positive impressions of alligator leather, finding it to be more luxurious and fashion-forward than cowhide leather. Both impressions related to alligator leather have been documented by other researchers [1]. Alligator producers should highlight the luxury and fashionability of the leather as part of

future marketing strategies. Wild alligator leather and kits made from this material can be positioned within the craft supply landscape as “affordable luxury” goods. By using their skills alongside wild alligator leather kits crafters can obtain a luxury-look for a fraction of what farm raised European goods would cost. The affordable luxury approach to branding wild alligator leather will help to distinguish this product while reconciling the potential conflicting brand identity. Farmers producing rare wools in the USA have been able to communicate the exclusivity of their products to consumers [18]. Using these two characteristics of the leather (i.e. Made in USA and exclusivity) could help alligator producers compete against cheaper leather alternatives like stamped cowhide and other crocodilians.

Additionally, the respondents preferred the alligator leather keychain kits, with earrings being the least popular kit type. Alligator producers should think about a product mix that will satisfy the crafter niche market. Researchers have not investigated specific preferences for craft kits previously; there is room for development in understanding what types of craft kits are preferred and why.

Conclusions, Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

The purpose of this research was to investigate crafters as a potential niche market for wild alligator leather by using small craft kits. An online survey in fall 2023-spring 2024 collected 1,303 responses from US crafters about their preferences. Based on our findings, we suggest alligator leather producers should consider adopting a B2C concept in which they can sell directly to crafters either through a business website or through a craft marketplace like Etsy. This approach is preferable based on the low-entry cost [10] and mirrors how many popular leathercraft retailers currently sell kits through online channels. We recommend a product mix that focuses on similar small items (our sample preferred keychains) as these can be easily cut in mass. Craft kits for small items can avoid damaged areas of wild alligator hides allowing producers to maximize their cutting yield while keeping the overall cost of the kits down. Future research should investigate what product mixes would most appeal to this demographic to maximize profitability.

An important implication of this work was the preferences and support for three sustainability statements among crafters. In general, the respondents were fairly indifferent toward the sustainability statements, though there was some support for the use of local goods. Alligator leather producers will most likely not benefit from using a marketing strategy that leans heavily on the sustainability of the product, though emphasizing the ‘local’ aspects of their goods and potentially getting these goods to areas where consumers can actively touch and see them would be somewhat more impactful.

Craft retailers may need to focus less on offering sustainable products or re-examine how they educate the crafting population about sustainability. Those providing information resources, such as craft YouTubers, could also possibly assist in promoting and educating crafters about sustainability. Education related to how consuming wild alligator leather contributes to ecological sustainability may also be important to more ethically minded crafters. It would be particularly interesting to examine if education related to this point could change crafter perceptions and attitudes toward wild alligator leather as it has been shown to positively influence tourist attitudes towards these animals [43].

Other implications for craft teachers and creators of patterns and resources can be found in the very high percentage (86.8%) of the respondents who utilized YouTube to find crafting information. YouTube should become a part of any crafter resource provider's marketing strategy for reaching potential consumers.

The findings from this research have some limitations that should be discussed. This work utilized a survey with no open-ended response options, so there was no opportunity to ask respondents to provide additional details or explain their preferences further. As kits were physically produced as part of this effort, it was not possible to test preferences across kit attributes, such as the skill level needed to complete a kit. It was also not possible to offer mass-customization options in the kits, but this would be another interesting way to investigate the preferences of the crafters for various products. Further, while we follow several best practices to attain high-quality responses, it must be acknowledged that surveys remain subject to hypothetical bias, the deviation between stated intentions compared to actual decisions with binding outcomes [44].

Future research should further investigate how retailer preferences and sustainable attitudes among crafters interact. It has been suggested that crafters will learn new crafts like those they have already tried [32]. It would be interesting to investigate a timeline of craft techniques adopted to determine if certain crafts are gateways to other types.

Another aspect of learning new crafts is heavily reliant on YouTube and digital resources. This change begs the question: Do crafters avoid taking up new types of crafts without a strong digital support network? Furthermore, is the strong reliance on digital resources in crafting leading to changes in the types of crafts being chosen? Are some crafts that may have been dying out due to a small number of teachers, like lace-making or basketry, enjoying resurgence due to the sheer number of crafters that can now be reached digitally?

Within this paper, we suggest that producers of wild alligator leather use a niche marketing strategy to target crafters. Next, we need to investigate how best to achieve success among crafters for wild alligator leather

producers, including the ideal product mix, pricing scheme, and other merchandising strategies. We would also find value in determining how crafters using fabric or leather supplies might be enticed to substitute alligator leather for their current materials. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see how wild alligator leather crafts could be tied to the very lucrative tourist/cultural heritage industry in the Southern USA.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization – Stannard C, Fannin J, and Penn J; methodology – Penn J and Yoo J; formal analysis – Yoo J and Penn J; writing-original draft preparation – Stannard C, Lansdell L, and Yoo J; writing-review and editing – Fannin J and Stannard C; visualization – Yoo J and Lansdell L. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding

This research was funded by Louisiana Sea Grant Competitive Research Program (Project ID: R/A-63). NOAA Award # NA22OAR4170105

Human research subjects

The research was approved by the LSU AgCenter's Institutional Review Board and conducted following relevant guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all human research subjects.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their time and suggestions.

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