

A Review and a Conceptual Framework of Prestige-Seeking Consumer Behavior

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper discusses the existing consumer knowledge dealing with aspects of prestige, and based on this literature, develops a conceptual framework useful for the analysis of prestige-seeking consumer behavior (PSCB). The purpose of this paper is to combine the concepts of existing research on prestige consumers (rather limited) and studies which examined entirely different aspects of consumer behavior, but coincidentally produce valuable information. By examining all the sources of prestige consumption in a broad and integrated way, we shall provide a new perspective that draws from, rather than substitutes for, previous research.

The objectives of this literature review can be summarized as follows:

- Contribute to the emerging literature on prestige consumption in examining and defining the key perceived values which form the concept of prestige.
- Interpret and expand existing consumer behavior models in order to develop a specific prestige-seeking consumer behavior framework.
- Generate a framework to help marketers build and monitor the prestige of brands.
- Stimulate further research on prestige-seeking consumer behavior.

Defining Prestige

The distinction between prestige brands and non-prestige brands has been operationally defined in this paper as the distinction between brands exhibiting five perceived values, contingent on a particular socioeconomic framework.

1. The consumption of prestige brands is viewed as a signal of status and wealth, and whose price, expensive by normal standards, enhances the value of such a signal (perceived conspicuous value).
2. If virtually everyone owns a particular brand it is by definition not prestigious (perceived unique value).
3. The role-playing aspects and the social value of prestige brands can be instrumental in the decision to buy (perceived social value).
4. For a brand which satisfies an emotional desire such as a prestige brand, a product's subjective intangible benefits such as aesthetic appeal is clearly determining the brand selection (perceived hedonic value).
5. Prestige is derived partly from the technical superiority and the extreme care that takes place during the production process. For instance, a Rolex Sea-dweller works 1,220 meters underwater and is hand-crafted (perceived quality value).

This interpretation recognizes that the definition of prestige may vary for different people, depending on their socioeconomic background. Translated into marketing terms, consumers develop prestige meanings for brands based upon interactions with people (e.g., aspired and/or peer reference group), object properties (e.g., best quality), and hedonic values (e.g., sensory beauty). Such interactions occur at personal and societal levels. Thus, a brand's prestige is created

from a multitude of interactions between the consumer and elements within the environment. Prestige-seeking behavior is the results of multiple motivations, but in particular the motives of sociability and self-expression. In sum we define five values of prestige combined with five relevant motivations, as follows.

VALUES	MOTIVATIONS
Conspicuous	Veblenian
Unique	Snob
Social	Bandwagon
Emotional	Hedonist
Quality	Perfectionist

CONCLUSION

This review and analysis offers several potential contributions from previous works, but particularly, extends the exploratory analysis carried out by Dubois and Laurent (1994) on the attitudes towards the concept of luxury. We suggest that marketers may use the theoretical framework developed to assess the level of prestige from of their brands and then use the results to make certain positioning decisions, such as enhancing low aspects of prestige or evaluating the result of their latest advertising campaign aiming at improving prestige.

A REVIEW AND A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF PRESTIGE-SEEKING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

As a result of the spectacular growth of luxury markets¹ over the past ten years, the marketing literature has recently seen substantial interest in the study of prestige brands². Yet, little is known about how to best market and monitor prestige brands. Research in the UK by the market research firm Applied Futures anticipated important social changes as the year 2000 nears (Powderly and MacNulty 1990). Their research identified that people's needs for appearances and materialism were increasing. That is, they recognized an increasing demand for conspicuous and status products. In Australia recent market reports seem to support this prediction. The Sunday Telegraph reported a phenomenal increase in Australia's imports of luxury goods, such as increases in demand for mink furs (+1130.8% change from 1995/96), and diamonds (+27.5% change from 1995/96). "Australians have embarked on a shopping spree for imported luxury goods, with sales of diamonds, furs, caviar and champagne jumping this year" (Rees 1997, 8). The United States' economic recovery and the fast growing demand in Asia (before the slowdown that started in 1997) have also contributed to boost the growth of the luxury market in recent years (Echikson 1994).

Early research on this topic mainly started last century³ from work of John Rae (1834), Thorstein Veblen (1899) and Keasbey (1903). Recently the marketing literature has focused its study of luxury brands, specifically in terms of brand extensions (Roux 1995), conflict management between mass-marketing and luxury principles (Bechtold 1991; Roux 1994; Roux and Floch 1996), and measures of attitudes toward the luxury concept (Dubois and Duquesne 1993b; Dubois and Laurent 1994). Currently, the luxury market is taking a new direction with unprecedented demand coming from Asian countries, and thus research has focused on the cross-cultural comparison of attitudes toward the luxury concept (Dubois and Laurent 1996; Dubois and Paternault 1997) and the comparison of motivations between Asian and Western societies (Wong and Ahuvia 1998). However, these studies have focused on only some aspects of prestige-seeking consumer behavior. Although researchers agree that the study of prestige goods is interesting and important, there is currently little agreement about how best to define, and hence understand, the psychology of prestige-related consumer behavior. "Status brand strategies are intuitively recognized by marketing professionals and practitioners. However, there is little literature on the topic reported in scientific journals" (Andrus, Silver, and Johnson 1986). The reasons for the diverse definitions and measures of prestige are perhaps due to the different applications of the term prestige⁴.

¹ In 1990, McKinsey & Co. estimated that the luxury goods market in the world was worth approximately \$86 billion. See also, research from Eurostaf (1992) in France, and Mackay Report (1986) in Australia. Examples of prestige brands; Louis Vuitton, Porsche, Kenzo, Cartier, Ferrari, Fred, Moët & Chandon, Chanel, Dunhill, Hermes, Christian Dior, Mercedes-Benz, Gucci, Rolex, Versace, Ralph Lauren, Tiffany, Patek Philippe, Mont-Blanc, Lalique, Gianfranco Ferragamo, etc.

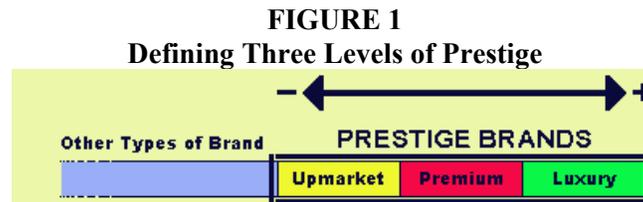
² See also, two recent examples of special issues from the top marketing journals in France focused on the marketing of luxury products, *Revue Française du Marketing*, 132-133 (1991), and *Décision Marketing*, 9 (1996), and the launch of MBA programs specialized in luxury marketing (e.g., ESSEC - Paris).

³ See also, Sekora (1977), Mason (1981), Castarède (1992), and Berry (1994) for an historical and conceptual view of luxury and prestige.

⁴ A review and attempt to reconcile the accounts from the literature of economics, marketing and psychology, show a general lack of consensus relating to the definition of prestige. Prestige in different areas leads to different definitions, and each discipline may have its specific definition concerning the concept of prestige.

- Economists have used luxury instead of prestige in comparisons between luxuries and necessities (e.g., Besley 1989).
- Marketing textbooks suggest the concept of prestige, when an organization is planning to position a product as high quality or exclusive; "prestige pricing is setting a rather high price to suggest high quality or high status" (McCarthy and Perreault 1987, 506).
- Finally, social psychologists have long been using the concept of prestige to study the effect of group forces on the formation and change of opinions and attitudes (e.g., Lorge 1936 and Asch 1948), or to assign prestige scores to social occupations (see, Wegener 1992, for review).

As a general rule, prestige products have been used as an example of extreme-end high-involvement decision making. The assumption is that prestige products are infrequently purchased, require a higher level of interest and knowledge, and strongly relate to the person self-concept. For instance, Rossiter, Percy, and Donovan (1991) stated that the distinction between high and low involvement was dichotomous rather than continuous, and presented a second dimension operationalized as "informational-transformational"⁵. Their framework reasonably assumes that prestige products are high-involvement products, and that transformational brand choices (i.e., sensory gratification, intellectual stimulation, and particularly social approval) are the primary factors in selecting a prestige product. Although the involvement model is useful to distinguish prestige products from normal products, it does not significantly differentiate the level of prestige⁶ among prestige brands (Horiuchi 1984). In this research three types of brands were categorized as prestigious; upmarket brands, premium brands, and luxury brands, respectively in an increasing order of prestige. Therefore, in this paper, we refer to prestige brands when discussing the brand category whereas we used "luxury" when relating to the extreme-end of the prestige-brand category (Figure 1). Hence, it was expected that people would have different perceptions of the level of prestige for the same brands, and that the overall prestige level of a brand would consider the prestige perceptions from different people.



Rather than treating each perceived value of prestige separately, as it has been characteristic of much of the writing in the field, we interpreted, combined, and expanded a set of prestige values into a single framework using a wide range of sources⁷ (Table 1). For instance, we used the work from Leibenstein (1950) which examined three consumer effects on demand⁸. His work suggested that the utility derived from a product may be enhanced by external effects such as the

⁵ The reference on the transformational versus informational distinction used by Rossiter and Percy (1987) was originally proposed by Wells, and developed in a paper by Puto and Wells (1984). (a) informational or "reason why", negative motivations which reduce or remove the problem, by providing solution or information, and (b) transformational which focuses on positive motivations, i.e., may improve the sensory gratification or social approval state of the purchaser or user.

⁶ Horiuchi (1984) observed that it made intuitive sense to classify luxury products as high involvement rather than low involvement. However, his work contributed to demonstrate that "the consumer decision-making process in the luxury goods market does not follow the high-involvement decision-making process of consumer behavior, although the high-involvement model is generally assumed to be applicable to both luxury goods and mass-produced high-quality goods" (Horiuchi 1984, 165). "On the other hand, when a product is very good but has not quite achieved the status of a luxury good, consumers seem to consider it as one of the mass-market, high-quality brands. In such a case, the high-involvement decision-making process does seem to apply" (Horiuchi 1984, 171). However, Horiuchi (1984) identified a third model that he called "M4-P", which indicated a decision-making process almost irrational, casual, having an impulsive-purchase nature. This latter result supports the argument that luxury products are often bought for non-functional reasons and perhaps only serve the purpose of pleasing oneself and/or impressing others.

⁷ Hence, the decision-making process for prestige brands was interpreted from different models such as models of conspicuous consumption (e.g., Bearden and Etzel 1982; Mason 1981 and 1992), models of involvement (e.g., Horiuchi 1984; Rossiter, Percy, and Donovan 1991), the materialism model (e.g., Belk 1985; Richins 1994a and 1994b), and research directly related to prestige (e.g., Veblen 1899; Leibenstein 1950; Dubois and Laurent 1994 and 1996; and Pantzalis 1995). This table provides examples of research which were used to identify a set of perceived values of prestige.

⁸ Leibenstein (1950 and 1976) used the original typology from Veblen (1899) with the Veblen effect, and included two other derivatives, the snob and bandwagon effects. More recently, Pantzalis (1995) studied the effects of price, limited availability, and social value of prestige brands. His study revealed the dynamics between the three typologies and the relative acceptance of prestige brands in terms of time.

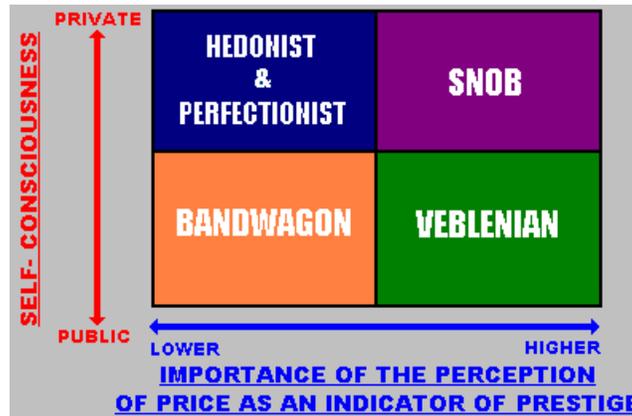
quantity of goods consumed by other persons, or relating to the fact that the product bears a higher rather than a lower price tag. The results from his study, particularly emphasized the role of interpersonal effects on the consumption of prestige brands, and derived three main effects. In addition, we extended the prestige-seeking framework to include two personal effects (Figure 2).

TABLE 1
Examples of Research Used to Define the Values of Prestige

AUTHORS	CONSPICUOUSNESS	UNIQUENESS	QUALITY	EXTENDED-SELF	HEDONISM	OTHER
Veblen (1899)	Conspicuous consumption Pecuniary emulation Status & Wealth	Invidious comparison Distinction	Fashion	Bourgeois Upper-class	Leisure class Pleasure	
Leibenstein (1950)	Veblen effect	Snob Effect		Bandwagon effect		
Mason (1981 & 1992)	Conspicuous consumption Status seeking	Scarcity value	Aesthetic quality	Distinction Conformity Achievement		
Bearden & Etzel (1982)	Conspicuous	Exclusivity		Publicly consumed	Privately consumed	
Horiuchi (1984)	Most expensive of their category	Limited production Infrequently purchased	Best functional or stylistic values Often hand made	Show who you are	Provide intrinsic enjoyment and satisfaction	Unnecessary to life and health Old brands
Rossiter & Percy (1987)	High involvement Conspicuous brand			Social approval Search audience Personal recognition	Sensory gratification	
Richins (1994b)	Conspicuous Socially visible Expensive Status concern			Success Achievement Expression of the self Stereotypes	Happiness Hedonic potential Pleasure	
Dubois & Laurent (1994 & 1996)	Very Expensive Elitism	Few People Distinguish Snob	Better quality Not mass-produced	Imitate rich Reveal who you are Refined people	Hedonic motives Life more beautiful For one's pleasure	To be offered as a gift & usefulness
Pantzalis (1995)	Setting high prices Status symbol	Exclusivity Uniqueness Selectively Accessible Limited supply Scarce for all others		Aspirational groups Imitation		
Dubois & Paternault (1997)	Expensiveness	Exclusive clientele Scarcity	Extreme quality Craftmanship		Hedonic experience Aesthetic appeal	Rituals Usefulness
Wong & Ahuvia (1998)	Conspicuous Wealth & social class Expensive & ostentatious Materialism	Conformity versus distinction	Brand manufacturer Country of origin	Public appearances Self-concept Personal success Reputation of family	Hedonic value Pleasure experience	Gift giving

To operationalize the interpersonal and personal constructs in this framework, we used the concept of self-consciousness to represent consumers' responses to social influence (Brinberg and Plimpton 1986). Self-Consciousness is defined as the consistent tendency of persons to direct attention inward or outward (Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss 1975). This theory recognizes two types of self-conscious people. (a) publicly self-conscious persons are particularly concerned about how they appear to others, and (b) privately self-conscious persons are more focused on their inner thoughts and feelings. In this case, we assume that the consumption of prestige may vary according to this susceptibility to others. This proposition is also consistent with previous research which demonstrated that individuals' behavior varies across persons depending on their susceptibility to interpersonal influence (e.g., Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989). As emphasized by Dubois and Duquesne (1993a, 115), "we believe that an analysis of the direct relationship between consumers and brands is the key to an improved understanding of such a market." The initial assumption is that the private or public value of prestige goods comes from the inherent communicative status of these items (Dawson and Cavell 1987). Much of the existing research has emphasized the role that status plays in communicating information about their possessors and about social relationships (Hyman 1942; Barkow 1975; Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Dittmar 1994).

FIGURE 2
Prestige-Seeking Consumer Behaviors



INTERPERSONAL EFFECTS

The Veblen Effect: Perceived Conspicuous Value

In the early 1980s, several researchers conducted studies based on the original work of Bourne (1957), which focused on the influence of reference groups on the consumption of prestige brands (Mason 1981 and 1992; Bearden and Etzel 1982). These authors found that the conspicuousness of a product was positively related to its susceptibility to reference-group influence. For instance, Bearden and Etzel (1982) concluded that publicly consumed luxury products were more likely to be conspicuous products than privately consumed luxury products.

Conspicuous consumption still plays a significant part in shaping preferences for many products which are purchased or consumed in public contexts (Braun and Wicklund 1989; Hong and Zinkhan 1995; Bagwell and Bernheim 1996; Corneo and Jeanne 1997). Thorstein Veblen (1899) many years ago suggested that conspicuous consumption was used by people to signal wealth and, by inference power and status. Thus, the utility of prestige products may be to display wealth and power and one could consider that highly visible prestige brands would dominate the conspicuous segment of the consumers⁹.

Several authors have also demonstrated that the price of products may have a positive role in determining the perception of quality (Erickson and Johansson 1995; Lichtenstein, Bloch, and Black 1988; Tellis and Gaeth 1990). These studies revealed that consumers often used the price cue as evidence for judging quality when choosing between different brands. In practice, a higher price would infer a higher level of quality. In addition, research which suggested that consumers who perceived price as a proxy for quality, also perceived high prices as a positive indicator suggesting a certain degree of prestige (Lichtenstein, Ridgway, and Netemeyer 1993). Thus, consumers would use a price cue as a surrogate indicator of prestige. This argument is further supported by the marketing literature which recommend the use of "prestige-pricing strategy" when appealing to status-conscious consumers (Berkowitz, Kerin, Hartley, and Rudelius 1992, 341; Groth and McDaniel 1993). Although the construct of conspicuousness has dominated most of the past literature on prestige, it is important to recognize that conspicuousness only partly explains the perceived values of prestige products, since a vast majority of these products are also consumed in private, for example when a person consumes fine wine at home.

⁹ "It has been noted that little research has been carried out directly into the motivations and purchase preferences of conspicuous consumers. Evidence of status linked consumer behaviour is only indirectly available - that is, it tends to occur in research studies which were set up to examine entirely different aspects of product choice and buyer behaviour but which coincidentally produce information which is of value to the conspicuous consumption researcher. Again, the principal reason why specific studies into conspicuous consumption have been particularly difficult to design and carry out has been the entirely rational and understandable reluctance of consumers to admit that any purchases are motivated by personal status considerations" (Mason 1981, 125).

Proposition 1: Veblenian consumers attach a greater importance to price as an indicator of prestige, because their primary objective is to impress others (Figure 2).

The Snob Effect: Perceived Unique Value

For this reason, the second effect described by Leibenstein (1950), namely the snob effect, is complex because of its origin on both interpersonal and personal effects. Clearly, it takes into consideration the personal and emotional desire when purchasing or consuming prestige brands, but it also influences and is influenced by other individuals' behaviors (Mason 1992).

In sum, the snob effect may occur during two circumstances: (1) when a new prestige product is launched, the snob¹⁰ will adopt the product first to take advantage of the limited number of consumers at that moment¹¹, and (2) "snob effect is in evidence when status sensitive consumers come to reject a particular product as and when it is seen to be consumed by the general mass of people" (Mason 1981, 128). Pantzalis (1995) used an extension of the Bass model to test the effect of limited supply on two populations comparable to the snob and bandwagon consumers, as described below. His study effectively substantiates that the diffusion of the brand in two populations is interdependent and is influenced by the distance (e.g., social or cultural) between the target group and the outside group.

Research reveals that a perceived limited supply of products enhances the consumers' value and preference for a brand (Verhallen 1982; Lynn 1991; Pantzalis 1995). "Items that are in limited supply have high value, while those readily available are less desirable. Rare items command respect and prestige" (Solomon 1994, 570). In addition, Verhallen and Robben (1994) state that scarcity of products has a even greater effect on demand if people also perceive the product as unique, popular and expensive.

These arguments are consistent with psychologists who observe situations through which individuals express a "need for uniqueness" (Snyder and Fromkin 1977). This need is the outcome of a social comparison process (Festinger 1954), where an individual's desire is to be perceived as different from other individuals. This hypothesis would support the idea that the inherent scarcity, and exclusivity of prestige goods would satisfy a need for uniqueness¹².

¹⁰ This argument is supported by Rogers (1983, 215) who stated that: "Undoubtedly one of the important motivations for almost any individual to adopt an innovation is the desire to gain social status. For certain innovations, such as new clothing fashions, the social prestige that the innovations convey to its wearer is almost the sole benefit that the adopter receives. In fact, when many other members of a system have also adopted the same fashion, the innovation (such as longer skirts or designer jeans) may lose much of its social value to the adopters. This gradual loss of status given on the part of a particular clothing innovation provides a continual pressure for yet newer fashions".

¹¹ "One way in which snobs gain their competency is by serving as an avenue for the entrance of new ideas into their social system" (Rogers 1983, 282). According to Rogers (1983) snob consumers may have higher socioeconomic status and may serve as opinion leaders since they are generally the first to adopt a product (innovator). "The most innovative member of a system is very often perceived as a deviant from the social system" (Rogers 1983, 27). Typically, we expect that followers or bandwagon consumers (to be discussed in a following section) seek an opinion leader of somewhat higher status than their own. For example, Rogers (1983), observed the influence of interpersonal communication in determining the adoption process: "... an innovation is first adopted by an individual who is socially closest to the source of the new idea, and that it then spreads gradually from higher-status to lower-status individuals" (Rogers 1983, 41).

¹² The projection, or defense mechanism proposed by Freud, may be related to this phenomenon (Freud 1961 [as compiled]). Defense mechanisms are unconsciously engaged to explain, reduce or divert the causes of unsolved conflict. For instance, people's consumption of prestige brands may in reality translate their frustrated desire to belong to a certain elite or aristocracy. Apart from Freud's theory, and the primary motive for consumption underlined by the perceived uniqueness value of prestige brands, another possible explanation of snob consumers may be better analyzed from a positive versus negative reference groups perspective (see, Kelley 1952; Fenchel, Monderer, and Hartley 1951, for discussion).

Groth and McDaniel (1993, 11) support the assumption that exclusive or unique perception of a brand is also related to its cost. They state that "brand exclusivity is the positioning of a brand such that it can command a high price relative to similar products". They suggest applying a prestige-pricing strategy to support the marketing of luxury or high-quality products. Pantzalis (1995) not only demonstrates that brand exclusivity is a factor positively affecting the demand for prestige brands, but he also recognizes that a limited supply for the high-end brand results in a transfer of status symbolism and a higher preference for the lower-end brand extension.

Proposition 2: Snob consumers perceive price as an indicator of exclusivity, and avoid using popular brands to experiment with inner-directed consumption (Figure 2).

The Bandwagon Effect: Perceived Social Value

Leibenstein (1950) called the effect which influences the lower-end brand extension, the bandwagon effect. The bandwagon effect¹³ may be conceptualized as the antecedent of the snob effect (Rogers 1983; Miller, McIntyre and Mantrala 1993; Berry 1994). "Even though snobs and followers buy luxury products for apparently opposite reasons, their basic motivation is really the same; whether through differentiation or group affiliation, they want to enhance their self-concept" (Dubois and Duquesne 1993b).

Belk's (1988) notion of extended self may be useful to interpret the prestige value which encourages a bandwagon effect. People's desire to possess prestige brands may serve as a symbolic marker of group membership. We propose that the bandwagon effect influences an individual to conform with prestige groups and/or to be distinguished from non-prestige reference groups (French and Raven 1959; Sirgy 1982; Midgley 1983; Solomon 1983; Mick 1986; McCracken 1986; Belk 1988; Dittmar 1994). The contribution of reference theory in the analysis of prestige consumer behavior appears to be the central motivation underlining prestige consumption. Multiple reference¹⁴ groups refer to the problem of being under pressures and demands of one's own membership group, and attracted by the standard dictated by another reference group (Hyman 1942; Holt 1995).

Research has originally demonstrated that people tended to conform with the majority opinion of their membership groups when forming attitudes (Festinger 1954). Hence, a person may use a prestige brand during the week, to conform with their professional position, and use a modest brand during the weekend, to match social standards of his/her neighborhood. Thus, bandwagon consumers may use the perceived extended-self value of prestige brands to enhance their self-concept. Following Kelman's (1961) theory of opinion change, we propose that the presence or absence of the referent may affect the behavior of the prestige-seeker within a spectrum of no effect (internalization) to total effect (compliance).

Recent research demonstrates that consumers often use television to learn about affluent lifestyles (O'Guinn and Shrum 1997), and then try to imitate stereotypes of affluence by consuming similar prestige products (Dittmar 1994). O'Guinn and Shrum (1997) examined the consumers' use of television to construct social reality. Their study identified that the prevalence of products and activities associated with an affluent lifestyle were positively related to the level of exposure to television. In addition, Hirschman (1988) analyzed the impact of television shows such as "Dallas" and "Dynasty" on consumers' orientation and ideology. The results revealed that viewers used the information on affluent lifestyle portrayed in these programs to project their own ideology and orientation. Holt (1998) applied Bourdieu's theory (1984) relating

¹³ "... one aim of the rhetoric of luxury in advertising that is attempting to stimulate a bandwagon effect. Yet the transient quality of the status 'luxury' necessarily means that a particular 'luxury good' will move to the snob effect. This means that self-styled purveyors of luxury goods must always be on their guard to maintain the cachet of 'exclusiveness'" (Berry 1994, 27). See, also for example, Leibenstein (1950 and 1976), and Roger (1983), Mason (1992), and Biddle (1991) for discussion on the dynamic effect between snob and bandwagon demand.

¹⁴ "One prominent use of fashion discourse by consumers is to develop a sense of personal identity through a contrast between their perceived fashion orientation and that of others in their social setting. Through this logic of self-identity construction, the sense of 'who I am' is constantly defined and refined through perceived contrasts to others. Hence, personal identity does not reflect a stable set of essential features but is negotiated in a dynamic field of social relations" (Thompson and Haytko 1997, 21).

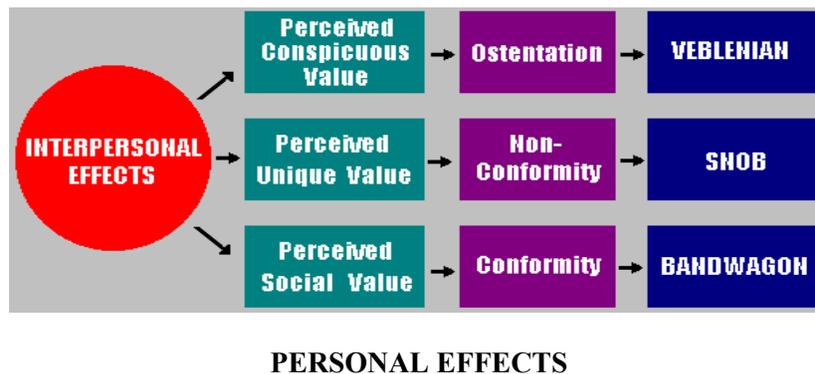
levels of cultural capital to consumption patterns¹⁵ to the contemporary US. His analysis suggested that, in the contemporary US, mass rather than high culture structured patterns of taste, and that consumption continued to serve as an effective element for the reproduction of social class. Consequently, both the consumption of "high" as opposed to "mass" culture interdependently contribute to the construction of prestige; high cultural capital emulating mass cultural capital, and inversely.

The literature on materialism provides a framework which helps to understand the meaning that consumers attach to worldly possessions (Belk 1985). The link between materialism and prestige has received recent attention (Richins 1994a and 1994b; Wong and Ahuvia 1998). The consumption of prestige brands represents one type of materialistic consumer behavior, where the more materialistic consumers regard prestige possessions as a cue to evaluate personal or others' prestige. Although the materialism framework provides an important part of the decision-making process when explaining the reason why people purchase or consume luxury products, it gives little insights on the specific characteristics of the prestige brand itself (e.g., uniqueness and quality values).

Proposition 3: Relative to snob consumers, bandwagon consumers attach less importance to price as an indicator of prestige, but will put a greater emphasis on the effect they make on others while consuming prestige brands (Figure 2).

The consumption of prestige brands appears to have a strong social function, and therefore, interpersonal effects may be significantly affecting the propensity to purchase or consume (Figure 3). However, personal matters such as aesthetic taste and sensory emotion may also independently encourage prestige-seeking consumption.

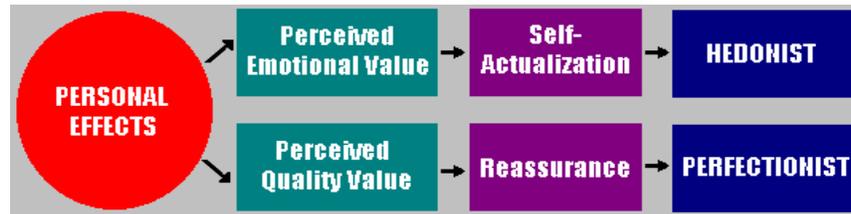
FIGURE 3
Interpersonal Effects on Prestige Consumption



Thus, the main contribution from our paper is to add to the traditional three-factor structure based on interpersonal effects a two factor structure based on personal effects (Figure 4). To be more specific, the proposed analysis is designed to take account of consumers' motivations when dependent or independent of the consumption of others. While both effects may influence all consumers, we distinguish the two effects and suggest that consumers are usually influenced by one more than the other. Other sources give evidence of personal motivations when purchasing or consuming prestige brands, as follows.

¹⁵ Holt (1998) applied Bourdieu's theory of judgment of taste to the contemporary US. According to Holt (1998), the symbolic power of pecuniary distinction is declining. Objects of "elite" culture are increasingly available across all social classes, and the expression of distinction between classes has now focused on consumption practices (e.g., lifestyles) rather than consumption objects (e.g., materialism). "Objects no longer serve as accurate representations of consumer practices; rather, they allow a wide variety of consumption styles ... As popular goods become aestheticized and as elite goods become 'massified' the objectified form of cultural capital has in large part been supplanted by the embodied form" (Holt 1998, 5).

FIGURE 4
Personal Effects on Prestige Consumption



The Hedonic Effect: Perceived Emotional Value

Motivation research conducted by Dichter (1960) was instrumental in advancing the view that consumer choice may be driven by noncognitive and unconscious motives. Certain goods and services have been known to possess emotional value in excess of their functional utility (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Sheth, Newman, and Gross 1991). Recent studies in luxury consumption have identified that luxury products are likely to provide subjective intangible benefits. For example, Dubois and Laurent (1994) recognized that the emotional value was an essential characteristic of the perceived utility acquired from luxury products: "... a vast majority subscribes to the hedonic motive ('One buys luxury goods primary for one's pleasure') and refutes the snobbish argument" (Dubois and Laurent 1994, 275). Research discussing the semiotics of luxury have repeatedly identified the emotional responses associated with the consumption, such as sensory pleasure, aesthetic beauty, or excitement (Alleres 1990; Benarrosh-Dahan 1991; Fauchois and Krieg 1991; Roux and Floch 1996). Further, advertisers have long been promoting the emotional responses expected from the use of luxury motor cars. For instance, BMW has used for many years "Sheer Driving Pleasure" as its main slogan, or more recently Mercedes has launched its new CLK coupe with the slogan: "It's for baby boomers who want to reward themselves".

Accordingly, we refer to the hedonic effect when consumers value the perceived utility acquired from a prestige brand to arouse feelings and affective states. Therefore, people who relate to personal values that depend upon the individual alone for fulfillment, such as self-respect (e.g., role-relaxed consumers, Kahle 1995, or inner-directed consumers, Riesman, Denney and Glazer 1950), and who are not susceptible to interpersonal influence (e.g., conformity to groups norms, Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989), when purchasing and using prestige brands may represent hedonist type of consumers.

Proposition 4: Hedonist consumers are more interested in their own thoughts and feelings, thus they will place less emphasis on price as an indicator of prestige (Figure 2).

The Perfectionism Effect: Perceived Quality Value

In addition, the studies exploring issues related to luxury consumption often underline the specific function of quality. "Excellent quality is a sine qua non, and it is important that the premium marketer maintains and develops leadership in quality" (Quelch 1987, 39). Prestige brands are expected to show evidence of greater quality, and luxury or premium brands should display even greater levels of quality (Garfein 1989; Roux 1995). In practice, "high prices may even make certain products or services more desirable" (Groth and McDaniel 1993, 10) because people perceive higher prices as evidence of greater quality (Rao and Monroe 1989). Based on these studies and on the available literature on luxury products, it was proposed that the quality cue might also be used by consumers to evaluate the level of prestige of brands. For example, we assume that a low level of quality would play a negative role over the perception of prestige. In contrast, if the buyer or the consumer perceives the brand as having an excellent level of quality, his or her quality perception would play a positive role over his or her perception of prestige on the same brand.

The reassurance consumers derive from prestige brands (e.g., of tradition, of authenticity) actually enhances the value they derive from the use of the product. They may feel a heightened pleasure of anticipation long before they use them. For instance consumers may purchase and wear prestigious clothes because they are confident in the judgment of style from the designer.

Accordingly, we refer to the quality effect when consumers value the perceived utility acquired from a prestige brand to suggest superior product characteristics and performance. Therefore, people who relate to personal values and who assess the value of prestige brands according to the value of reassurance expected from prestige brands (e.g., comfort and speed for a prestige car, or precision for a prestige watch), may represent perfectionist types of consumers.

Proposition 5: Perfectionist consumers rely on their own perception of the product's quality, and may use the price cue as further evidence supporting the quality issue (Figure 2).

Although we assume that the five prestige values are independent, we posit that they relate additively and contribute incrementally to brand selection. While consumers may choose to maximize all five prestige values, in practice it seems reasonable to believe that consumers would trade off less salient values for more salient ones. Therefore, we propose that the preference for each alternative value may describe a separate prestige-seeking profile (i.e., Veblenian, snob, bandwagon, Hedonic, and perfectionist), but also agree that certain consumers may belong to more than one category.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The primary goal of this paper was to examine the issue of brand prestige. We developed a framework, subsequently named prestige-seeking consumer behavior (PSCB), principally based on the results of previous research (e.g., Mason 1992 or Dubois and Laurent 1994). The research hypothesis is that the consumer decision-making process is explained by five main factors which form a semantic network. This research contributes to the further development of the social psychology of material possessions, linking together existing theories such as models of conspicuous consumption (Bearden and Etzel 1982; Mason 1992) or models of involvement (Horiuchi 1984; Rossiter, Percy, and Donovan 1991). In particular, we sought to review the latent structure of, and the interrelations among, the primary meanings of the prestige concept that, according to the described models, should underlie the decision-making process of prestige brands. Basically, the conceptual framework identifies five types of prestige seekers which are influenced by five perceived prestige values and self-consciousness. Self-consciousness appears to affect consumer decision processes regarding brand selections. This influence varies depending upon the person's susceptibility to interpersonal influence. But more significantly, the prestige framework included personal effects such as hedonist and perfectionist motives, thus supplementing the traditional three-factor structure (i.e., snob, Veblenian, and bandwagon motives) inherited from Leibenstein (1950). In doing so, the model established a balance between personal and interpersonal oriented motives which tended to dominate past research on luxury consumption.

The implications of this research are of significance for marketers and scholars in the field of prestige brands. Specifically, it offers a potential contribution to the measurement of prestige, and suggests an alternative approach to the issue of positioning prestige brands recently advanced by Roux (1991). In sum, our findings contribute to new explanations of prestige brand advantage beyond that explained in the economics/analytical literature. Our framework assumes the existence of latent prestige constructs influenced by personal and interpersonal perceptions toward the brands. These findings help explain the five key prestige values that managers must establish or monitor for creating a lasting prestige brand. As noted, the propositions of this review could serve various purposes, but perhaps be specifically applied to create and build brand prestige, or address issues such as how to maintain brand prestige once it is established. The benefits from this framework reside in helping researchers understand how consumers view prestige brands. The contribution is both useful from a market segmentation point of view and from a market positioning point of view. From a market segmentation point of view, clustering groups according to their primary perceived values of prestige for a brand may reveal other demographic or psychographic characteristics which may better represent these consumers. The proposed factor structure for the concept of prestige suggested during the literature synthesis provided a basis for developing several profiles of consumers. These different consumer's profiles may indicate distinct market segments to which different products appeal or advertising strategies could be implemented.

From a market positioning point of view, if monitoring a prestige brand indicated a declining level of prestige, researchers could identify and concentrate on the specific prestige value which is weakening. Accordingly, researchers may change the advertising message, stressing the perceived values, and emphasizing benefits of the brand over competing brands. For

example, if the prestige image of a luxury car was distinctly decreasing due to a reduction of perceived uniqueness (e.g., exclusivity), then appeals which would emphasize the limited number of cars available or give the consumer information about the precious components used in making the car, would be appropriate to reinforce the overall prestige image. Similar illustrations could be drawn from each of the other five perceived values.

The five perceived values are particularly useful for comparing several prestige brands and thus for recognizing competitive advantages. Relative strengths and weaknesses can be identified in the target market along either each of the underlying values comprising the prestige concept. Future research may examine which of the perceived values discriminate most significantly among the three levels of prestige brands (i.e., luxury, premium, and upmarket brands). We anticipate the findings from this review will stimulate further research on prestige-seeking consumer behavior. In particular, future research should explore and test the conceptual framework described in Figure 2, 3 and 4. This framework could be used to develop a scale measuring the proposed latent structure of the prestige concept. A scale measuring prestige would provide several benefits to the study of prestige-seeking consumer behavior. For instance, it may;

- Establish a clear definition concerning what constitutes a prestige brand compared to a non-prestige brand.
- Assess the multidimensional constructs of prestige (establish evidence for both aspects of reliability and validity).
- Test convergent and discriminant validity between the newly developed "prestige" scale and involvement scales. Although the concept of prestige is theoretically different than the concept of involvement, they have certain dimensions in common such as the "symbolic" and "hedonic" value (Laurent and Kapferer 1985).
- As a starting point, examine the consumer behavior framework using the prestige scale to measure the level of perceived prestige within brands and across respondents.

Hence, it would provide a useful instrument to substitute for the ad hoc and untested scale used to test propositions that have previously been used in the field. This common definition and measure are important as researchers have not yet offered any acceptable and generalizable definition, which would set forward a theoretical direction concerning the conception or the evaluation of prestige brands. The theoretical and applied research question that could be used in future research may be: how can a new brand in particular, or perhaps a low-prestige established brand, build prestige?

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