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CONSUMER RAPPORT TO LUXURY:

ANALYZING COMPLEX AND AMBIVALENT ATTITUDES

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The very nature of luxury goods, the variety of consumption situations and the everlasting philosophical debate over luxury lead to particularly complex and ambivalent consumer attitudes, as evidenced by a first study based on the content analysis of in-depth interviews. A second study, based on surveys in twenty countries using finite mixture modeling, identifies three types of consumer rapport to luxury.

INTRODUCTION

For literally thousands of years, the consumption of luxury goods has led to consumer ambivalence, and has been surrounded by controversy. As early as in the 1st century AD, the Roman poet Statius (1990) describes his mixed feelings of awe, consternation and hesitation vis-à-vis luxuries. After the detailed description of a magnificent villa in Tivoli, "who seems to have been designed by Pleasure itself," his last compliment is that it is nevertheless full of "serene virtue" and "exempt from luxury." On the ethical side, while the hedonist philosophy of Epicurus and his followers approves the enjoyment of luxury, Aristotle warns against excesses and stands for the mean course between extremes of human behavior. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he criticizes the excessive man: "on small objects of expenditure he spends much and displays a tasteless showiness … And all such things he will do not for honor's sake but to show off his wealth, and because he thinks he is admired for these things" (Aristotle 1998, 4:2). More recently, Christian ethics has often condemned luxury altogether. On the legal side, luxury consumption has been the object of attention in various forms: From the sumptuary laws in ancient Rome, through consumption taxes in the Middle Ages onto the modern notions of luxury super-taxes. Berry (1994) surveys this long history of ambivalence and controversy.

Complexity and ambivalence still lie at the heart of consumer attitudes towards luxury. Complexity, first, as attitude components are numerous and intertwined. As shown later, the perception of luxury combines several interdependent dimensions; and consumer relations to luxury are also multidimensional. Ambivalence, second, as attitude components may be contradictory, not only across consumers, but more interestingly within consumers: Behavior may be inconsistent with self-reported attitudes, and consumers themselves may have trouble understanding their own contradictions (Otnes, Lowrey and Shrum 1997). People long for products they declare useless, some consumers are involved in love-hatred relationships with

brands, still others condemn altogether their own passion for flashy, expensive cars. In such cases, considering an individual consumer as a relatively simple unit following a consistent pattern of behavior based on unequivocal attitudes will be a misleading oversimplification of reality. Luxury, however, is not a unique case. Past research has attested the ambivalent nature of attitudes in a series of high-involvement consumption situations, such as brides' and grooms' attitude towards wedding (Otnes, Lowrey and Shrum 1997), college students' position vis-à-vis alcohol consumption (Prentice and Miller 1993), or gift giving (Sherry, McGrath and Levy 1993).

The purpose of this article is to analyze consumer attitudes towards luxury. We propose a two-stage procedure to assess such deeply held but ambiguous attitudes, a procedure that could be adapted to other instances of consumer ambivalence. The paper is organized as follows. In the first section, we review and comment research on luxury goods. This leads us to two studies. Study 1 relies on the content analysis of in-depth interviews. It identifies the many facets of consumer attitudes towards luxury and shows the presence of consumer ambivalence and even contradictions. Study 2 relies on a large-scale survey in twenty countries using items derived from Study 1. Data are analyzed by a probabilistic method that allows for numerous facets and consumer complexity, namely finite mixture models (Wedel and Kamakura 1998). Rather than trying to identify a few underlying dimensions and to position each respondent on these dimensions, as in traditional marketing scaling, the analysis identifies consumer segments, with the additional proviso that a given consumer may be split between two or more segments. In the last sections, we discuss the results, their managerial implications and future research directions.

PREVIOUS WORK AND ITS LIMITATIONS

The market for luxury goods has experienced considerable growth over the last two decades, being recently valued at 50 billion dollars (LVMH 2000). To a large extent, such growth has

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resulted from a strong «democratization» movement, in which goods formerly reserved to a restricted elite are now consumed by a large public even if only occasionally. This is exemplified by the emblematic growth of the French suitcase maker Louis Vuitton. In 1977, it was still a family business with sales under 10 million dollars. In 1999, the same company, now part of the LVMH group, reported sales approaching 2 billion dollars. This has been made possible through a gigantic increase in the number of Louis Vuitton consumers.

Since Veblen's seminal work (1989/1899), the « happy few » have been researched regularly in microeconomics and marketing (Stanley 1989, Hirschman 1990, LaBarbera 1988, Mason 1981). According to Veblen, the affluent classes of a given society express their economic superiority over the less well-off by the purchase, and, above all, the show-off of these goods which serve as status symbols. Micro-economic consumer theory suggests that these conspicuous consumption patterns can be identified at the individual consumer level in terms of "conformism" and "snobbism" (Leibenstein 1950, see also Corneo and Jeanne 1997). Conformist, also called "bandwagon", behavior occurs when consumer demand for the product increases just because other people are also purchasing it. Snobbish behavior is exactly the opposite: An individual tends to buy less of the product if others are buying the same. These two types of conspicuous consumer behavior correspond to «the desire not to be identified with the poor, and the desire to be identified with the rich» (Corneo and Jeanne 1997). Both snobbish and conformist consumption motives may give rise to the so-called «Veblen effect» at the aggregate market demand level: An increase in demand due to a price increase (Bagwell and Bernheim 1996, Hayes, Molina and Slottje 1988). In technical terms, this means that these "luxury goods" have an at least partially upward-sloping demand curve and may possess no real intrinsic utility (Coelho and McClure 1993).

While economic theory deals with the modeling of demand-level effects of luxury goods,

marketing studies focus heavily on the characteristics of luxury consumers in terms of culture and sociodemographics (Dubois and Laurent 1993, Dubois and Duquesne 1993), buying motives (Kapferer 1998) and life values (Sukhdial, Chakraborty and Steger 1995). All of these studies have relied upon standard deterministic segmentation analyses. Other authors have provided normative frameworks for the management of the affluent consumers of luxury brands (Dubois 1992, Kapferer 1996, Stanley 1989).

Two major shortcomings should be pointed out concerning research on luxury consumption. First, despite the growing body of research on this important sector, a systematic exploration of the domain of the concept of "luxury," as seen by the consumers, is still lacking. Many studies are devoted to the sector, to firm strategies, to the designers of luxury goods, to the role of tradition, in short to the supply side. Few studies analyze the demand side. Among those, most often, researchers point to a few objective attributes, such as quality and price, as primary associations with luxury (e. g. Kapferer 1998). The symbolic meaning of luxury remains elusive since authors rely on somewhat abstract characteristics such as "dream value" (Dubois and Paternault 1995) or "superfluousness" (Bearden and Etzel 1982). No systematic study has been undertaken to provide an in-depth, consumer-based, empirical definition of the domain of this complex construct. Second, the bulk of theoretical and empirical research deals with the attitudes of the more affluent consumers of luxury goods. Very little is known on occasional luxury consumers who, however, now represent a major part of the market (Dubois and Laurent 1998). Yet, given their relative lack of familiarity and experience with luxury, one could anticipate for these consumers somewhat different attitudes than those of the affluent.

To analyze the concept of luxury and consumer attitudes towards it, we decided therefore to undertake Study 1, a consumer-based exploratory analysis.

STUDY 1

In line with usual qualitative interviewing methods, our purpose was to gain a broad range of perspectives on the concept under scrutiny (McCracken 1988, Mason 1997, Strauss 1999). Therefore, the sample contained a contrasted set of respondents in terms of gender, age and occupation (see Appendix 1 for respondent profiles). All respondents had acquired (i.e. bought or received) at least one product *they* considered luxurious. Thus, some respondents considered as luxurious goods that other respondents may not have considered luxurious (e.g. prêt-à-porter clothes with a designer tag). A total of sixteen people were interviewed at their home by a professional interviewer. The interview type was an unstructured, narrative one, aiming at the elicitation of the context and meaning of the various relations of consumers with luxury, be it places, services or goods (Arnould and Price 1993, Fournier 1998, Fournier and Mick 1999, Stern, Thompson and Arnould 1998). The interview guide was designed according to a progressive approach, starting from specific recent acquisitions made by respondents (in at least two different product categories) to more general considerations about luxury. Respondents were first invited to remember and describe their last purchase (What was the occasion? What is for you or for someone else? Where did you buy it? Did you have a precise idea of what you wanted to buy before entering the store? Etc.). Then, interviewees were invited to use their imagination in answering questions such as: «Suppose you could spend a little bit more on this purchase, what would you have done? Suppose now there was no financial barrier at all… » Finally, respondents were asked to describe their views about luxury in general and the various concepts (product categories and brands) associated with it. On average, each interview lasted about one hour and a half. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed resulting in a few hundred pages of verbatim. First, an initial content analysis of the transcribed verbatim was carried out independently by the three authors. The results were then discussed in group in several work

sessions to identify the major themes appearing in the text (McCracken 1988). We discuss

successively results associated with consumers' visions of luxury and their personal rapport to it.

<div align="center">*VISIONS OF LUXURY*</div>

From the many views and comments offered by respondents on the nature and characteristics

of luxury, six facets emerge which, considered together, help define and structure the cognitive

domain of content. They are presented in turn below.

Excellent quality

The first notion is that of perceived excellent quality. The mental association between luxury

and quality is so strong that for some respondents, the two words are almost synonymous.

For me luxury means quality. (Respondent 7)

For mass-market items, consumers have many opportunities to judge product or service

quality, primarily through multiple purchase and personal consumption experiences. But how

can they assess the quality of a luxury good or service that they buy and consume very

infrequently, sometimes only once in their lifetime (as in the case of an engagement ring or a

honeymoon in a paradise hotel)? We found that respondents used two major indicators. The first

one refers to the perceived exceptional nature of the ingredients or components used in the

elaboration process. The second is based on the perceived delicacy and expertise involved in

manufacturing products or delivering services. Respondents believe that the elaboration of

luxury goods and services calls for considerable craftsmanship, with every detail being

important. When total perfection is achieved, a feeling of extreme refinement emerges.

If I can afford it and whenever I have a chance, I try to buy quality clothes, you have to admit that all of the top fashion designers are always using the best quality fabrics. None of them works with poor quality fabrics. So of course if you feel like having really beautiful things, you turn to them because they always have marvelous fabrics, perfectly cut, faultless, no problem … [he goes off to look in his armoire for clothes that he has purchased] Take a look at the pockets, with this designer they'll always be just right, the cut is always the same. With some other designers, the cut can go off in all sorts of directions. Here it is always lined up perfectly, always at the same place, with cross-stitching, all these details, no threads hanging out, you don't have to worry about the sleeve falling off if you tug on it….Nothing shows underneath jacket, and it doesn't hang out in the back. And everything, the finishing, the collar, everything is perfectly lined up….You know that it's always just right. (2)

Given such views, it becomes natural that respondents expect the product or service to perform perfectly during a long time. To them, excellent quality guarantees reliability and durability. The product or service can be trusted. There is no need to ever worry about defects. At the extreme, a luxury product can be used forever and then one gets a feeling of eternity.

I'm the sort of person who doesn't like changing my way of dressing, I like styles that last forever and Church Shoes will always be around… For me, luxury shoes are shoes that I am going to wear for a long time, that don't need to be changed, that are totally comfortable and which don't look flashy, rather they look serious and timeless, like Church or other shoes of that caliber. (12)

Conversely, a luxury item that fails to work or breaks down or a service that does not perform to expectations are immediately disqualified, just as products made of ingredients considered as «cheap» (such as plastics) or badly supported at the point of sale.

It's nicer to have materials that are warm and alive like leather or fabrics or things of that sort rather than cold dead stuff like plastic. More than anything, luxury means greater enjoyment (12)

Finally, through a sort of personal and social attribution, a number of respondents transfer the excellent quality factor attached to luxury products and services to the people buying or using them (including themselves). Through buying and consuming refinement, one becomes a refined person. Luxury is then considered to offer to their adopters an opportunity to feel apart and incorporate into themselves the excellence in quality it suggests, leaving them with a superhuman feeling of distinction and extreme well-being.

Just by itself that's a real luxury item. The Safrane Baccarat with its leather seats and all those options, and when you go in reverse the right hand rear view mirror lowers itself and you can see where the pavement is. It's really a wonderful car, I can't even describe it, it's very good looking … It has a lot of power if you want to get around and the feeling of power you get from it, it's all of that ... You feel great riding around in something like that. (2)

Very high price

The second notion spontaneously associated with luxury, and almost as salient as the previous one, is that of a very high price. Such a perception is established either on the basis of the absolute value of the price or, more frequently, by comparison with non-luxury alternatives.

Luxury (makes you think of) something that is *more* expensive [italics added]. Usually, it's a place like Lenôtre, where meat pies are three to four times dearer than at the local butcher's. You know that something is definitely going to be a luxury if it is dear – I don't know of any inexpensive luxury items. (1)

For many respondents, the very high price is considered as a logical consequence of the perceived excellent quality associated with luxury goods or services. To that extent, one may conclude that a very high price is viewed by many as an intrinsic characteristic of luxury.

Quality doesn't always mean a lot of money, but it's true that they often go together, after all leather and silk fabrics do cost a pretty penny. It's also true that labor costs are very high in the fashion industry and things that are made in silver, or the time you need to make a top-of-the-range pair of glasses, it has to cost more since it takes longer, there is more work being done on it…So much of the time quality and price do go together.(7)

As a result, for those who can afford it, the justification offered by quality for a higher price serves to legitimize the purchase and use of luxury goods. The cost becomes acceptable, especially when one takes into account the longevity of usage that superior quality is supposed to bring. It can even generate a feeling of comfort, well being and security.

Whenever I am going to invest in a camera or something along those lines, I do find the top-of-the-range more attractive … I mean something that will be reliable, expensive of course, but you can be confident that it is going to work … (13)

For those who cannot afford them, a similar rationalization process occurs, but in the opposite sense. Very high prices are perceived as a barrier that renders luxury goods and services inaccessible, at least under normal circumstances. They are considered as beyond acceptable thresholds, even if the quality is there.

I prefer not having any furniture at all rather than furniture which isn't good quality…On the odd occasion I go browsing through all of those modern furniture stores…These are things that I really can't afford to buy, really can't. Maybe for lamps I can spend up to…well maybe I can buy something for up 250 $ or 300 $ from time to time, but I really can't go up to 1500 $. That's impossible. (5)

Of course, when quality is denied, inaccessible prices are quickly perceived as excessive, or even extravagant. Certain attributes of luxury goods and services may reinforce such a perception, for example a strong relation to fashion (and therefore an ephemeral life), perceived fragility (as in the case of glasses), or, more generally, the lack of a decisive advantage, when consumers feel they can obtain very similar benefits from non-luxury items in the same product category.

By definition clothing is the sort of thing that will go out of fashion, you know that after a few years, and even if you

paid a lot the clothes will be out of fashion, you won't wear them anymore, so you end up feeling that you've basically spent money for nothing (1)

It should be noted finally that, for a number of respondents, the concept of a very high price is not limited to the monetary aspect but also involves the psychic and energy costs associated with their acquisition. Luxury products are not only expensive but require some effort on the part of the consumer. For many, they have to be deserved.

Scarcity and uniqueness

The third concept associated with luxury is that of scarcity. Scarcity is closely associated with the perceived excellent quality and high prices associated with luxury goods. Given the very special characteristics of the components used, the uncommon nature of the skills so essential to the manufacturing and delivery process, and the exclusive corresponding price levels, one should not be surprised to find that respondents consider that truly luxury products and services cannot be mass-produced and vice versa.

You don't find any fashion designers making off the rack clothing, it's not compatible with what they do[4]…In my opinion, fashion designers are the kings of the hill. (2)

But in the consumer's mind, scarcity is not limited to the nature of the offering but also extends to its availability and usage. Many people do expect luxury products to have a restricted distribution. In contrast to mass stores which offer a large assortment at all quality levels, a luxury shop is perceived to offer a careful selection. If the product is there, it means it has passed a hurdle. Conversely, most consumers consider that truly luxury products cannot be found in supermarkets.

That has to be true, after all [once a product is sold in a department store], it isn't a luxury item anymore. That's what happened with avocados which once used to be real luxury products, or salmon….Nowadays you can find them everywhere. (1)

Beyond filtering access to products and services, luxury shops offer consumers an experience

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[4] We understand that this statement does not entirely correspond to reality since a number of fashion designers also offer *prêt-à-porter*. It nevertheless illustrates the importance of uniqueness in the respondent's view on luxury.

that is considered by many as an important source of value. The atmosphere found in the shop, including the decor and the background music, the way the products are displayed inside and in the shop window, the interaction with salespersons, must convey a feeling of refinement and well-being. In the end, the shop is in itself considered as a luxury entity and is therefore expected to provide similar benefits.

In a luxury boutique, the colors have to be warm, and it can't be noisy… Maybe a bit dark inside, with a few plants…There shouldn't be too many clothes on display, I mean they shouldn't cover the whole floor space, and the atmosphere should be quiet and cozy….There has to be a salesperson who is completely available to serve you but who also knows how to leave you alone when you don't need him or her anymore. A salesperson who doesn't do any hard selling, who isn't there all the time telling you «yes, you look great in that». (6)

The dimension of selectivity does not only affect the way luxury products and services are made available but also the profile of those who buy them. Some respondents consider that only few people can have access to luxury, because this implies fulfilling requirements. For these people, there is clearly a vision of luxury being reserved for an elite of selected, exceptional people, the «happy few.»

If we take Mamounia as an example, I was 15 when I first came into contact there with luxury hotels, the thing that really impressed me was that it was a hotel for Heads of State. This was where Churchill had spent much of his time during the war… The people there were different from other places. They were special, quite unusual, in fact rather peculiar…The only sort of people you saw there…well, all you saw were famous people. That's what the Mamounia is like, it was a wall, a tall wall all in red brick with a few things behind it. And in the end, what people enjoy about luxury hotels, it's being on the other side of the wall … It's very important to get to the other side. (3)

Finally, at the extreme, a luxury product should be unique, made especially to one's requirements. Then no one else can have access to it. Those who can afford custom made goods describe the experience as a «wonderful» one, in which the feeling of uniqueness, i. e. being a unique person deserving unique goods and services, reaches its climax. They talk about «true luxury.»

True luxury is a real one-off. It's a suit I'd be the only person wearing or jewelry specially made for me. That's true luxury because no one else will ever have it. (8)

Aesthetics and polysensuality

The fourth aspect of luxury involves a strong aesthetic appeal. And, according to many consumers, it should always be the case. At the extreme, luxury products become pieces of art

which have to be recognized as such. This aesthetic dimension is not only expected from the goods themselves but also from the context in which they are presented as well as from the people who consume these goods. Looking at them opens a world of beauty, which makes one dream.

It was in a sort of castle where the surroundings were, well, it was summertime, the weather was lovely, and there were a lot of flowers…The plates were beautiful, the cheese selection sumptuous, things like that. It is a pleasure both to look at, and also because the food is wonderfully prepared, it isn't really a work of art but it is a bit like that. (1)

As a result, most consumers describe their consumption of luxury as a highly hedonic experience which can touch all the senses. Luxury products not only look beautiful but also are (and should be) pleasant to hear, smell, taste or touch. Luxury is a source of sensual pleasure.

I do indeed have a soft spot for fur coats, let's say that it is because of fur's sensuous side, plus what it feels like to touch it. (14).

I often buy clothes depending on how they feel on my skin …With perfumes, it is not the product itself that I'm interested in but the occasion when I will be wearing it… Scents are all very important for me…It's is much better to read a book printed on high quality paper, with a beautiful front cover, rather than some paperback … It's the same thing with pens… for example they have to smell nice. I have a pen in sandalwood, every time I take it out I just love it, it gives off a small scent (6).

Conversely, the opposite of luxury corresponds to an unpleasant, aggressive, noisy and brutal environment. Such is the world of «cheapness» where products smell bad, services underperform, and where shopping becomes a chore and consumption a nightmare.

I'm thinking about [a leading retailer known for its low prices] because I don't go there often but every time I've gone, it was like an airplane hangar and even worse there was a smell, the shoe section smelled like plastic, it's things like that, those sorts of stores are really downmarket, even if it is where I buy my detergent… I find stores like that repulsive (5)

Giving access (even if it is only a temporary one) to a dream-like world, luxury enhances one's self-concept. As mentioned earlier, when enjoying luxury goods, one feels beautiful, strong, powerful, freed from the frustrations of daily life. But the path to heaven is not a smooth one. It requires education, knowledge, initiation, and connivance, which, once they are mastered, become an additional source of pleasure, as for example, when one becomes a collector.

I've tried out the Safrane Baccara, ohhhh ! now for me that car is truly classy…It's really very beautiful, well made, intelligent…The car is magnificent, I can't find the right words to describe it, it is truly a joy to look at…50000 $, if

the money weren't a problem, I'd buy it immediately…Truly it is very, very beautiful…You step on the accelerator with its V8 engine and you feel great. That's the best way to describe it. You get something in which you feel great. (2)

Ancestral heritage and personal history

The fifth notion associated with luxury is its anchoring in the past. In consumers' mind, to be luxurious, products and services must have a long history and their elaboration processes as well as consumption should respect tradition. Luxury goods need to have a story to tell or even better a legend.

One Sunday, we went to visit a castle near Paris. We got there early, and the owner was going to show us around… We took a seat while waiting, and he came and sat down next to us. We had a chat and found out that the castle had been in his family for several generations and that he had inherited this enormous building and now owned it … We were in a sort of place, I don't know if the word luxury applies here…. It was opulent… We were in a place that deserved to be purchased, to have money spent on it. The man was in a space without time, beautiful things surrounded him. The portraits that he had inside, they had been in his family for 200 years. It's very different from buying some portrait in [Paris's] rue de Seine [art district]. (12)

On the demand side, the rapport to time is clearly observable in the elaborate rituals that, for many people, accompany the purchase and consumption of luxury goods. Tasting a grand crû involves obviously more than opening the bottle and pouring the wine. Similarly, spending a night in a palace hotel obeys a sophisticated script, from making reservations to saying good-bye to the personnel, that only connoisseurs completely master. The anchoring of luxury in the past extends the scarcity dimension over time. Luxury antiques acquire more value as time goes by and lucky owners take more and more pleasure in cherishing their possessions, developing over the years a unique and intimate relationship with them.

I had discovered Roots, a Canadian brand that had a store on the rue Saint-Sulpice [in Paris]. I was so happy with it that I decided for once in my life that I'd only wear Roots for walking shoes, for getting around town, for sandals or whatever. You'd go there, and there were very few models, five at most. The models had a family resemblance, you felt like you were always wearing the same shoes. They had this wonderful instrument to measure the width of your foot, its length and curve… and then they would bring the shoe itself, and it would fit your foot perfectly. There was nothing more to do, the shoes were perfect, I was always totally happy with them. And then one day Roots disappeared and I've never got over that. (3)

This relationship is further enhanced when one gets the feeling that the competence needed to appreciate luxury cannot be acquired in a snapshot but is the result of a long process often intertwined with one's personal history. It involves a continuous sequence of contacts with

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luxury products and luxury consumers which little by little contributes to the development of «good taste,» often described as a highly subjective and personal matter.

Building up my wine cellar, I have to admit that at first it wasn't intentional…The architect loved wine and had put in [a small wine cellar], it was like a special luxury… So he and I had already started to talk about wine together. And naturally I got advice from two or three friends… So it was my friends that lead me into this, that and a bit of chance … And then I bought wine from South France…Later I even became a member of a Swiss co-op which imported wines specifically for customers like me, and if you are their client and a member, they offer you information all year long. (10)

Finally, a logical implication of such a strong rapport to time is that, when they buy luxury goods, a number of consumers expect to keep them for a very long time, almost as if they were companions, and even perhaps envisage to pass them to future generations. Born in ancient times, having inherited from carefully maintained and sometimes secret traditions, luxury goods become immortal symbols of human creativity and intelligence.

It's true that there is this idea that you always have to say, OK it is valuable and maybe it is going to keep its value like other things have kept theirs… There was this feeling that you get when you keep your parents' or your grandparents' furniture. The idea of getting back to purchasing something that lasts for a long time and which doesn't go away … It's a little like getting attached to your possessions. If you want to pass it on to someone else, it doesn't necessarily have to be a luxury item, but it should be something that you've been attached to for quite a while. You shouldn't be having to change most of your possessions every week… You no longer see people carrying around the sort of beautiful furniture that you used to find in every home … (8)

Superfluousness

Finally, the concept of luxury implies some perceived superfluousness or uselessness. Luxury products are not felt to be necessary for survival. It is in this sense that consumers as well as researchers oppose luxuries and necessities (Berry 1994, Kemp 1998). In order to be regarded as luxurious, products or services must not derive their value from functional characteristics but from additional benefits of a different nature. That perhaps explains why perfume or jewelry are two product categories so often associated with luxury. In the case of more functional categories like cars, people typically highlight the non-functional characteristics of luxury objects as the major contributors to their luxuriousness.

Luxury items, meaning jewelry, pictures, books…are things you buy for the pleasure they give you, things that you don't need. Well you do need them to satisfy a passion. It's a bit like being infatuated….Take my profession, I sell old books…in fact it's a luxury item, because people don't need it to live. (14)

Once I almost bought a Hispano Suiza. It was very affordable, and had been made in 1929, but it would truly have been a big luxury. I thought of this in particular because a crystal set had specifically been designed for this Hispano Suiza, so that passengers sitting the back could drink cocktails while the chauffeur was driving them around. (3)

Superfluousness may be perceived in many different ways. A first aspect is related to over-abundance. For functional reasons, one may need to buy at least one unit of the product category. A limited number of units may still be accepted as «reasonable» but luxury appears when one buys a large number, a number which goes far beyond functional needs and may correspond to an addiction, a number so large you sometimes stop counting.

Anyway I like having books. That's a luxury also. I buy a lot of books, even though I already *have too many* I don't even know where to put them, but I always go out and buy books. (10)

Luxury could mean having a simple, basic pair of glasses and then being able to change your glasses just because you want to have some fun, get different models…Luxury means being able to vary things, having a whole bunch of pricey trousers, all in good taste, different dresses too. (7)

A related aspect of overabundance is the resulting feeling of freedom, freedom to do as you like, to go where you want to go, to leave when you want to leave, and to behave as you please. Applied to the purchase and consumption arena, such freedom nourishes a right to choose, a right to variety seeking, a right to experiment without fearing the consequences of a bad choice, a right to do something extraordinary « at least once, just to see what it's like. » For a number of consumers, the access to luxury that abundance permits is like a passport to paradise, even if it is not valid for an unlimited number of trips.

The idea of luxury, maybe it also means being able to say well I feel like going to the US so I'm leaving Thursday. I might travel in First class or maybe just in Economy but I can choose the date, I can leave when I want to and no one can say to me that I have to leave on 13 June if I feel like leaving on the 8th. Real luxury is being able to go back and forth several times…whenever you want….with no restrictions on anything, whether the type of transport, the hotels, the places you choose to visit. (8)

Another related aspect may take the form of extended life space: Room, light, quietness. Luxury is then perceived as immaterial, as a concept and no longer product. Examples include leisure time, liberation from daily constraints, absence of stress. To quote Statius again "Hic aeterna quies" (Statius 1990).

For me, a luxurious apartment has space, room, plus it has to be well lit, that too is a sign of quality. For me all of that spells luxury…being surrounded by silence. (12)

I don't necessarily think that luxury has something to do with an object itself. Nowadays the main luxuries I like to buy with my money aren't physical objects. It's having time, being able to do things slowly and without stress. It's being able to get away. (10)

Interestingly enough, the superflousness dimension attached to luxury objects tends to be transferred to its most prominent consumers. Following Veblen (1899), many perceive the international jet set society as composed of idle people indulging in useless activities, and in so doing, being perceived as useless or parasitic themselves.

[Luxury] is a relatively negative thing for me. I don't know why I tend to associate it with laziness, people wanting to show off, things that are ultimately pretty superficial and that I don't trust … (1)

DIMENSIONS OF CONSUMERS' PERSONAL RAPPORT TO LUXURY

In the preceding section, we presented the six dimensions of the concept of luxury that emerged from the qualitative study. In the next section, we discuss the four aspects of consumer attitudes towards the concept. Contrary to the affluent who generally hold very positive attitudes towards the world of luxury, occasional buyers are often critical about the concept itself and what it represents to them.

Mental reservations and excessive conspicuousness

Respondents state several important, but distinct, reservations about luxury in general. Moral condemnations of luxury already appeared at the time of the Ancient Greeks (see Berry, 1994 for a review). One still encounters them, spoken at the first person. The high price of luxury goods is perceived as indecent. It could be morally wrong to spend that much money. Indecency can be described in absolute moral terms, or, more practically, by reference to less affluent persons, or to alternative uses of the money. Respondents themselves spontaneously relate such feelings to their religious or moral upbringing. They may try to transmit the message to their children.

For ourselves we don't necessarily have luxurious tastes. We like nice things but we feel uneasy and it bothers us when we consume things that are horribly expensive. It's a feeling of malaise, ultimately a guilty conscience, it makes us feel guilty. With me I think that this comes from having been educated at a convent school, something like that, it doesn't keep me from going ahead but I'd always regret it a little bit afterwards…a feeling of futility, yes of

guilt… I don't know how to describe it to you, it's a malaise. It doesn't enhance the pleasure. (10)
With the children, I try to fight against that….I mean they are ready for luxury goods, after all they do everything they can to have clothes with their favorite brands …And that is something I don't like at all, amongst other reasons because it seems useless to me, and even worse it seems idiotic. They are totally involved in that scene and we know that we are getting ripped off. (1)

Consumers of luxury products are often charged with trying to impress others, with trying to be highly visible. The purchase of luxury goods would then not result from an intrinsic appreciation of the goods but rather from snob and bandwagon effects, as pointed out early by Leibenstein (1950). This in contrast to «good taste» which is somewhat unobtrusive. In fact, conspicuous consumption by the «nouveaux riches» may degrade the psychological value of the product.

Nowadays you see quality clothing that are still pretty garish ….Really people wear things that are very flashy. It's become fashionable…In any event, there is a lot of snobbism. Plus people want to be seen. I can understand luxury in a beautiful piece of furniture, in something that is beautiful, it can be a real pleasure but not necessarily for what you see on the outside…Cars can also be a type of snobbism, choosing a car that other people will notice. The fable of the label… I think a lot of it is playing to the gallery (4)

In contrast, of course, respondents often indicate that they themselves do not buy luxury products to impress others, but rather because of the products' intrinsic qualities, which, according to them, are the only legitimate sources of value.

I look for gold, diamonds, but discrete stuff, nothing that is outlandish, too obvious, I prefer fine things… I associate refined things with discretion, beauty…For me, when too much gold is showing, it's too loud… it's too…too ostentatious…and it's vulgar, I don't think it's very pretty when it's thrown in your face…I don't like the look of a big flashy ring when a small one maybe with a single stone can be more attractive to look at and more gracious… (13)

Another criticism describes luxury as being old-fashioned. This is sometimes seen positively, but mostly negatively. This pertains to the special rapport of luxury to time, discussed earlier. What is positively appreciated as a living symbol of ancestral and respectable traditions can also be seen as a dusty artifact of ancient times.

Furs are totally out of fashion nowadays (1). They remind me of Delft porcelain and also of the sort of porcelain that you can find in museums. (11) Good taste … to simplify a lot of things, it's my mother. For me, good taste has deeply negative connotations. It's a stilted world full of boring museum pieces. (12) [Goldware and silverware] makes me think about old things, old-fashioned gold, it never makes me think about modern design, just old things. (7)

A few minority opinions perceive certain forms of luxury as sad, fragile, unreliable, not worth

the money. Of course, this is in complete contradiction with the common association of luxury with quality and reliability, discussed earlier.

More than anything else, I think that the great hotels are sad places … (11) Usually the dearest products mean good quality but they are often fragile as well… you can't put them in a washing machine, and it can be really hard work….and maintenance starts to become expensive. (6)

Overall, this leads certain consumers to strong negative feelings, leading sometimes to a total rejection of a world perceived as artificial.

If you line them up it makes you think of luxury, sure, even with things that aren't very nice…it's also true that there are more things I don't like than things that I do like…In fact for me many of those items are repulsive. (11)

Personal distance and uneasiness

Some respondents, while not being really critical of luxury, feel apart from foreign to the world of luxury. They indicate it is «another world,» something inaccessible, out of their life styles, too «high society» for them. Note that this does not imply a negative view of luxury products. And some consumers, while feeling objectively apart from the world of luxury, may still dream to access it.

I've seen some very beautiful leather goods at Gucci's but they are not for me. (14)

This comes largely from a very concrete feeling that the consumer never buys nor consumes specific luxury products or services, and, furthermore, will never have an opportunity to do it.

I'm not in the habit of visiting jewelry stores … Often I do a bit of window shopping and look at the jewels but my head never goes click, saying «ah, I'm going to buy something, I'm going down to Van Cleef's» … You know, there is nothing I can do about it, I'd never wear them, it's not the world I live in… I don't fantasize at all about the top fashion designers. No, not at all. Not at all, even though the clothes are very pretty I don't know of any occasions when I could wear them. Sometimes I do dream about it but very sporadically, sometimes I dream about a beautiful evening dress but right away I tell myself that I wouldn't have any occasion to wear it and that kills the dream right off…Having a diamond tiara around your neck is very pretty but I couldn't imagine going to work like that. (1)

Also, consumers may feel that they would not know how to use the luxury good or service, because they have not received the appropriate education. One may then fear appearing ridicule, «disguised» or at minimum being ill at ease, so ill at ease that it would spoil any positive feeling derived from using the luxury product. In a variant, consumers may feel they are not elegant

enough, or beautiful enough, to wear a luxury garment.

I have to feel good in the clothes, in fact to a certain extent the clothes have to look like me. I don't think that that sort of clothing is made for me, it wouldn't be me, I'd be wearing a disguise, anyway I wouldn't look good in it and wouldn't feel right. Plus it would be stupid. (1)

Another feeling is that luxury products may spoil the pleasure because they make things too formal, or because one is afraid of breaking the product, of losing it or of having it stolen.

… I don't really like bringing out the silverware, I don't feel comfortable, it's too much like a formal evening, it's over the top… I prefer informal dinners with friends… (13)

I never wanted to have a Dupont because I was always afraid of losing it... It's the same thing with pens, I prefer having a ballpoint rather than running the risk of losing a real pen, because I'm always leaving my pens behind when I visit clients…Rolex for instance, a watch that costs 6000 $, I can't imagine wearing something like that on my wrist….It looks far too big on me, it's in gold. And one of the reasons I can't imagine wearing that on my wrist, it's because I'd have to walk around the Paris Metro with my hand in my pocket, like my friend does, to avoid someone stealing it. (13)

This can reach deeper layers, as some consumers may feel they are not worth a luxury treatment, and lead to a sentiment of incompetence, of not being knowledgeable about luxury products or services:

If someone were to take me somewhere to buy a diamond, I'd feel like that was disproportionate to my own value… You don't see top fashion designs. So it's a world I'm not familiar with and I wouldn't know what to pick out. If I see someone who is very rich and who is wearing certain objects, I have no idea what I'm looking at. And I can't evaluate jewelry either. (5)

On a specific but important aspect, this feeling of personal unworthiness can lead to one practical behavioral consequence: Consumers may fear entering a luxury store. They may be afraid of appearing incompetent, ill-dressed, ill-mannered in front of the other customers, and of salespersons, who appear as fully belonging to the world of luxury.

I don't think I'd feel comfortable in the super luxury stores, meaning I wouldn't buy anything, they're stores I don't feel comfortable in. (1)

…once I went into Guerlain's shop on the Champs-Elysées and was treated rudely. I prefer buying Guerlain perfume in a small shop that I know and which is close to home, where the people are very friendly and in fact, because let's say you are known and a regular customer, you can sometimes get a discount…plus you are treated well. (13)

Involvement: Pleasure and deep interest

When one speaks of consumer involvement, there is a classical distinction between different facets of involvement: Interest, pleasure, risk, sign value (Laurent and Kapferer 1985). In

relation to luxury, respondents mention three of these facets very frequently: Interest, pleasure and sign value. Note that such comments typically do not bear on luxury in general, but are focused on specific products and services, which appear as highly pleasurable. Respondents use astoundingly strong and rich words, well beyond joy, satisfaction or pleasure: Passion, extreme sensitivity, deep love, adoration, marveling, ecstasy, fascination, fanaticism, dream, enchantment.

I like setting the table nicely for the two of us, even for me alone, first of all because it's a pleasure for me. I'm delighted…I prefer drinking my little sips of port in pretty glasses rather than in ordinary ones …in fact I love it, it's important to me …(8) I like watching a beautiful automobile like some people like watching a beautiful girl…It's gorgeous to look at on the road, on the motorway when you see a red rocket flying by, vroom ! Man it's a real… what can you say! (8)

And this pleasure should be enjoyed as often as possible.

[She]: Oh I really love that, it means a lot to me. I love drinking from it … I love serving myself from the pitcher….There are only the two of us, and I use silver cutlery … I love drinking from a crystal glass, and would have no problem using one every day…. I mean, if I gave you a beautiful glass, you would ask me why I am doing that. You'd find it bizarre… [He]: … that's because for me those are valuable things, luxury items…a good glass deserves to have good things inside of it... [She]: Jean thinks that it should be reserved for special days, holidays [He]: I think there should be some sort of ceremony, that's right … that is sort of what it represents for me. [She]: But if you really want to take full advantage, you have to do what I am saying, using things on a day-to-day basis, otherwise you're not really benefiting from it… I'm sure that his parents never used these glasses, maybe once or twice because they had guests and all that, so should we be doing the same? No, no, I want to get as much use out of it as I can. If I invite you over to dinner, you won't be sitting there with a kitchen glass in front of you, you'll have a crystal glass…I'd be up for the same sort of ceremony as if there were ten of us…after all, I have the glasses … Of course I would be disappointed if someone broke one, that's true, I am after all a bit maniacal, but no more than that, I wouldn't fall apart at the seams….and at least we would have the pleasure of using them.(8)

It is a major disappointment when one cannot, or can no longer, enjoy this pleasure. At the extreme, this form of focused involvement could appear as some form of addiction: One cannot do without the luxury product or service.

[Perfume] it's the luxury item for me … It's impossible for me to do without it… It's the only luxury I have, that and the hairdresser which actually costs a lot of money. I spend a lot on that. Even if I had no money left, I'd be on bread and water, because I can't live without perfume. And there are many ranges of perfumes but I can't change my product range, it just isn't possible. I can't go down market…I have a sister who is like that, she has been unemployed for a long time…She can't resist, there are other things she saves money on, a lot of other things, but she'd never get a lower quality perfume. When you have to tighten your belt, it is truly the only thing that is left, that and the hairdresser. (5)

As a consequence of this deep attachment, a lot of observation and thinking is devoted to these products and services.

The nicest way of finding wine is still to go to the winegrowers, to do a tasting, also to get some information,

because otherwise it's hard to know everything since there are so many different wines…You can use guides, read reviews, do a bit of tasting and there is also word of mouth, people tell you about some wine or the other, and finally you start to get a bit of experience. As soon as you've had a wine that you liked, and which is very affordable, well when you want to order some more you go back to the same place…And ultimately you get some advice from a wine seller *whom* you know well, and who will give you some tips as to which wines you should be tasting even if you don't buy your wine from him. You try to get it straight from the grower. (14)

Finally, for some respondents, rarity adds to pleasure. Can daily consumption be luxurious at all? For some persons, luxury is associated with exceptional festive occasions. Of course, this is in contrast with the opinions of other respondents, reported earlier.

… it's a pleasure because it is something that is unusual, otherwise I think it's like everything else after a while, like the canteen at your place of work. (1) You know that on a special occasion, everything comes out of the mothballs. Jewelry if you have some, the best suit you have. That's what it means having a special occasion. It's a certain type of luxury I suppose, putting on your evening finery….or a luxurious evening, with everything that goes along with that…instead of the half-luxuries you experience day in day out. Special occasions are starting to fall by the wayside. (8)

Involvement: Sign value

Luxury products or services reveal a little bit who we are. They allow us to draw conclusions about the users. Other people do it, we do it, we may judge this evaluation process positively or negatively.

In your professional life, people pay attention to the way you are dressed, and especially the shoes you wear. It's the first thing people look at. (1) When you choose a piece of furniture, it's a way of making a statement about yourself. The objects people surround themselves with completely show what sort of persons they are, as do the luxuries they choose or their attitudes towards wealth, where they invest their money, the places they choose to go, all of that is highly indicative of who the person is. (5) My cousin…judges people on the clothes they wear…I think that that's stupid…It's true that I like it when people dress well. But you can't judge their personality on that basis. (9)

Consumers may therefore choose or avoid using luxury products in order to convey some message about themselves.

When you go to someone's house and you want to show them that it was an honor for you to have been invited, that you have a lot of respect for them, you do end up showing this respect, and one way of showing it, well it doesn't mean showing up with a bouquet of violets, it's coming with a bouquet that is beautiful and which also appears to be somewhat pricey, yet which isn't saying to the people how much you paid for it. (2)
Dad offered me a pearl necklace but Mum wears it. I'd put it on for special occasions but wouldn't wear it every day of the week. Wearing it doesn't suit my personality…I prefer staying simple….I'll never wear them every day…whether they are made out of gold or not, I don't care. I don't have any need to make a display of myself. (9)

And you want to avoid a faulty decoding of the intended message. Help from a professional, or the caution given by an established brand, can be helpful. Sometimes, this may lead a consumer to offer a gift that would not be his or her personal choice, to ensure recognition by the recipient.

When you go to someone's house, someone who you respect, you always think that that person knows what they are doing, so you don't want to make any mistakes at all with the way you act. It's always a bother to think that your present won't please the people you are giving it to, or that your gesture will be taken in the wrong way. So you try to get everything just right. And that's why the florist's professionalism is so important…When you're not really sure about someone whose house you are going to, you say to yourself I'll bring the starter's course, and then if you want to express your consideration for them, and maybe because you don't know them very well… If it is someone who doesn't know you, you buy something from an up market store like Fauchon or Caspia, because you know that your host will see that it comes from Fauchon or Caspia… I could have bought it elsewhere and maybe even something which is better quality, but it wouldn't have come from an upmarket store and my host may not have appreciated it as much … As long as I'm not sure that my hosts know me well or know what I am doing, I prefer showing them that I'm flattered that they invited me… and since they don't know me yet, I'll buy something from Fauchon or Caspia so they can see that I'm flattered to have been invited. Then, once they know me, I won't do it anymore, I'll buy the same sort of thing but without the wrapping. (2)

An important form of signaling is based on the perceived other users of the product. The clients are the message.

… to show you how important this hotel is, it's where the King of Libya…came on a spa holiday when Khadafi kicked him out…it's the hotel where all the kings and presidents ... a top hotel is one that is visited by the King of Libya. It seemed to me like there were two wings, one for the Heads of State, and another for people like us. We weren't put in the same wing as the Heads of State…There is a whole wing which is for all the Emirs, Heads of State, and a section for the plebeians, maybe upper class ones, but commoners all the same. So we were put with the commoners and there wasn't anything particularly special about the place, except that it is big, and a bit garish. (3)

However, one should be careful about limits. If a luxury good becomes too common or too showy, it may lose its symbolic value.

Cartier, OK but I don't get really enthusiastic about it. It's become an everyday product, maybe because I hear too many people talking about it. Everyone has a Cartier. Not everyone, but all the people that we know. Who doesn't have anything from Cartier? It's almost a sin not to have bought one of their products. It's no longer anything special when the whole world has it. (8)

In some extreme cases, some people may choose a luxury product only because of its symbolic value, rather than for its intrinsic interest. Luxury consumption then becomes artificial, a means to convey an impression.

I'm not the sort of person to take the label off one piece of clothing so as to sew it on another. (1)

And then you have the other type of person, often someone with new money, who wants to try to show off. He'll go out with his investment counselors to buy what seem to be the right books, he'll get sent all this advertising, it's the same thing *as* with a brand name, for me the guy is a dumb ass, because all he sees are things that are unnecessary, plus investments, because in this situation people like that are always going out and making yet another investment. He is relatively uninterested in what he buys, meaning he is more interested in the appearance of the object that he buys…It's partially for their public reputation that they do that, more for the neighbors than for themselves, usually, except for a few things….A person with something like that is someone who has an enormous amount of money, and who in my opinion doesn't have to have good taste, but who wants to wow the whole world. (14)

In contrast, some persons, if they have good taste, can manage to give a good impression without

having to buy luxury products.

I don't know, there are some people, it's true that they can afford things but they have no taste…It's a bit sad. On the other hand, there are some people who, when you see them, they could be wearing cheap off-the-rack clothes from Tati [a popular clothing chain] yet it would be in good taste, they can do something good with it. I think that, at least in this sense, good taste is not necessarily a criteria of wealth … (13)

Finally, the strong symbolic content of luxury can sometimes lead to it being perceived as provocative, or inappropriate. One may want to avoid this.

[Husband] I have a few pieces of jewelry but I don't wear them. I don't wear them because I feel that it's a bit ostentatious and for a man to walk around with certain things on doesn't seem right to me, it bothers me, it does bother me, there's nothing else to say… [Wife] I once gave him an identity bracelet in pure gold and he never put it on. It's in our safe. I used to like it when he would put on his chain, and his zodiac sign, the same thing! … he doesn't want to…it's no fun for him. I bought you a signet ring…he wears from time to time. Not so much anymore. But at least he has worn it. I've been lucky that at least he has worn it. [Husband] I will wear it. [Wife] When he goes out, I have to put it on his glasses otherwise he'd forget…. … (8)

AMBIVALENCE AND CONTRADICTIONS

Study 1 shows that there are many contradicting views and attitudes about luxury. Especially between attitudes vis-a-vis the generic concept of luxury, where mental reservations exist, and attitudes vis-a-vis specific products or services, where a deep level of involvement can be observed.

This could be due to disagreements, contradictions across respondents. In fact, a fascinating outcome from the study is that these contradictions very often occur *within* a person. The same consumer in the same interview, sometimes in the same paragraph or sentence utters statements that would appear incompatible, on logical bases. Luxury makes Respondent 1 "fantasize a bit," but he considers it "not really right."

I don't find that tempting, it makes me fantasize a bit but still I find it, I prefer, well it doesn't bother me that it exists. A world like in China, for me that would be extremely sad. I consider it a bit indecent and not really right. It would be a problem just for me, the shock would be for myself, but, after all, if certain people enjoy it, it doesn't bother me for them. (1)

For Respondent 4, luxury is "very pleasurable," but morally he "can't allow [him]self." He likes pure silver, but in a "discrete" form.

… all in all I prefer things that are relatively simple. I like plainness…I do like pure silver, sure, but in an object that doesn't shout at you…Luxury doesn't really mean much to me. Not that my tastes are particularly modest. But morally I can't allow myself, or let's say that I don't see the need. It's very pleasurable, sure…this hotel has 3 stars,

it's a deep pleasure being here. (4)

Luxury has "[no] hold" on a Respondent 12, but it is "incredibly pleasurable."

Luxury in the sense of affirming one's wealth or power or success by having a big car, I mean with a big engine, a large body etc., none of that has any hold on me. But the other day I got in a 1960s Jaguar that was completely made out of wood and leather, etc. … And it was incredibly pleasurable. (12)

Two respondents express especially clearly such avoidance/attraction contradictions. They produce very sophisticated statements about the symbolic role of luxury products, and how they use it. Respondent 3 "deeply loves luxury," but he doesn't want to display it ostentatiously. At the same time, he is very careful to send subtle signals of luxury, that only knowledgeable people will decipher. All this because he thinks a "luxurious appearance" generates "protection" and "respect."

I am a man who is extremely sensitive to luxury and who deeply loves luxury. I try to understand this contradiction between the fact that I don't appear to be a man of luxury and the fact that you need a very sharp eye to notice that my clothes are very expensive. Maybe it's luxury that lets you to go around looking messy. Because whenever you wear luxury clothing, well cut items, you no longer need to pay attention to certain things…. Luxury is a kind of laziness… In my opinion, luxury is basically not having to think about certain things. So in essence, it's a sort of freedom, a laziness, and at the same time you're still being careful about the way you look, since a luxurious appearance gives me a bit of protection. And it is easier when people around you hold you in respect. (3)

Respondent 2 criticizes the "new money" for "showing off" their luxury possessions, in an effort to signal their "importance." (Note these are, word for word, the terms used by Aristotle.) At the same time, she says that you don't need such a show off behavior, as the important people (those "in certain social circles") will "see right away that it's a quality piece of clothing." In other words, she is not really criticizing the fact of using luxury goods for sending signals, but the fact of doing it clumsily.

A lot of people are very sensitive to the image of a top quality product…this kind of behavior…is typical of new money…People who feel good about themselves, who are satisfied, and who are happy to be able to wear things they like, they don't need to undo their jacket to show where it's from. First of all because the person they are sitting with will know, so it's not worth going to the effort…Show-offs are the only ones to undo their jacket or to say, «did you see my shoes, they're from Weston's»… The only people to act that way are dumb asses…it's because they are trying to be acknowledged, telling others «you can see that I'm a member of a certain social class, I'm an important person, I'm wearing…Church shoes.» People can see that they're Church shoes…you don't have to say it as well. When you operate in certain social circles, everyone sees right away that it's a quality piece of clothing…They see it, you don't have to carry a sign. That's way too flashy, it reeks of new money. (2)

The latter respondent then ponders on the possible long-term causes of her own contradictions

("I'd have a taste for the fine things in life, but I can't"), deeply rooted in a Catholic education

("We weren't supposed to get too much pleasure from anything we did").

If I were to let myself go, I'd have a taste for the fine things in life, but I can't. It's nothing other than a moral hang-up, not a financial one. Even the things that I can afford for myself, in certain circumstances I don't do it, I can't. Maybe it's a leftover from the years I spent at a convent school, it leaves its mark on you. They used to talk about sacrifice all the time. We weren't supposed to get too much pleasure from anything we did. It may well be that some of this education has stayed with me. Even if I'm aware of it, I can't get over it completely. Plus I still don't see the need for this type of luxury. Yesterday we ran across several cars like that. In one day, within a period of two hours, I saw three Rolls Royce, one Jaguar and a Daimler, not too bad. My husband told me, «you'd like having…» and I told him no, that I'd be very uncomfortable in a Rolls for example. No no no! Even though it's a car I admire. (2)

Respondent 3 openly describes himself as ambivalent: "a consumer of luxuries" with a "Judeo-Christian disapproval of luxury."

To me that seemed a little vain, uninteresting, ostentatious. So to a certain extent I looked down on that…I am something of an ascetic, I like Saint Francis of Assisi, a man who scorned luxury. So my attitude towards luxury is a bit ambivalent, I suppose I am a consumer of luxuries to a certain extent, for hotels, even for restaurants, clothes, travel, but at the same time I feel a Judeo-Christian disapproval of luxury and wealth (3)

As a conclusion, and a summary, see how Respondent 10 tries to analyze his own contradictions. He states that different people may have very different visions of him ("those who would never say that I love luxury, and others who know I love it."). And that he himself finds it difficult to reconcile the contradictory components of his attitude towards luxury ("I always find it a bit confusing"). In an understatement, all this is "not very obvious."

I have mixed feelings about that… all of these top-of-the-range products, I can see them, appreciate them, I like them. It's one side of the equation, plus I use them. The other side, it's that they are after all linked with snobbery, capitalism, a lot of money, too much money, arrogance … There is that side as well. So I always find it a bit confusing. And in my life, it's exactly the same thing. Meaning that there are a lot of people who would never say that I love luxury, and others who know I love it. It's not very obvious to people. (10)

Overall, Study 1 has led us to identify numerous facets of consumer attitudes towards luxury. Some of them can be considered as cognitive, as they describe components of the respondents' vision of luxury, perceived characteristics of luxury goods and services: Excellent quality, very high price, scarcity and uniqueness, connections to aesthetics and sensuality, ancestral heritage and personal history, competence and personal history, superfluousness. Other facets have to do with each consumer's personal rapport to luxury: mental reservations, especially regarding excessive conspicuousness, personal distance and uneasiness, an involvement rooted in deep

interest and pleasure, a powerful sign value. This second set of facets shows disagreements, contrasted positions, across consumers.

But Study 1 goes beyond the sheer enumeration of a series of specific attitude facets. It suggests more general conclusions on the global structure of attitudes towards luxury. First, the large number of facets makes it difficult to simplify these attitudes along a small set of underlying dimensions. Attitudes towards luxury are not unidimensional. They cannot even be simplified along three or four simple dimensions. Second, they comprise both positively and negatively loaded components, but these are typically distinct facets, rather than opposite ends of the same facets. Thus, the perception of the aesthetic value of luxury is a positive component, while the mental reservations related to excessive conspicuousness is a negative one. But these positive and negative components are not opposed at both ends of a single axis. Rather, they are largely independent aspects, which may, or not, be present in the same person. Third, contradictions and ambivalence are organized along much more complex attitude structures than what one observes in most product categories. In simple cases, such as attitudes towards baseball or broccoli, each person can be easily described as having either a positive or a negative attitude. Some consumers love broccoli, while others hate them. And one will rarely see someone eating voluntarily lots of broccoli while disliking it. Some people are fanatics of baseball and others hate the game. The former could perhaps describe inning by inning the last World Series game in which their home team was involved, while the latter may not even know the names of the key players in that team. But you will rarely see someone accumulating a deep knowledge of baseball, and spending hours at the park, while hating baseball. For luxury, you may find that the same person knows a lot about a product, and is deeply involved in it, buys or consumes it, while simultaneously nurturing deeply held, almost religious, negative feelings about the whole process. The last section of Study 1, «Ambivalence and Contradictions» provided multiple

evidence of this. Independent, or even contradictory, attitude components can co-exist in the mind of the same person.

These structural properties of attitude components have a major consequence in terms of marketing research. The prevalent Churchill (1979) paradigm for assessing attitudes cannot be applied in the usual manner. The process of identifying by iteration reliable, convergent measures of a small number of underlying unidimensional constructs is, by essence, inappropriate for attitudes having such a complex structure. At the same time, of course, it seems especially interesting to attempt to capture through a formal, systematic instrument and methodology, the multiple and complex components of attitudes towards luxury that were unearthed in the qualitative interviews of Study 1. This is the goal of Study 2.

STUDY 2

Study 2 proposes and demonstrates a measurement methodology for assessing consumers' attitudes towards luxury. Study 1 was based on qualitative interviews with a small number of respondents in a Western cultural context. A closed-form instrument of limited length should allow for a systematic assessment and comparison of the attitudes held by a large sample of respondents, belonging to different target populations. Study 1 provided the foundations for this large-scale survey of consumer attitudes towards luxury. For reasons discussed at length in the preceding paragraphs, it suggests adopting somewhat original directions, in terms of questionnaire content, statistical technique, and sampling frame.

In terms of contents, Study 1 shows that a large number of such facets of an individual's attitude towards luxury are important. Furthermore, a key conclusion is the high degree of ambiguity and self-contradiction that can be associated with the domain of luxury. A first consequence of such potential complexities is that the full set of facets should be assessed. It does not appear reasonable to concentrate on a few facets, thus eliminating most of the very

richness of the attitudes to be assessed. This is in contrast with many situations in which attitudes are assessed, where the goal of the researcher is to measure a small number of dimensions, sometimes a single underlying dimension (Churchill 1979). A second consequence appears if we wish to keep the instrument at a reasonable length. The sheer number of facets implies that the questionnaire has to be limited to a moderate number of questions or items per facet. This goes, of course, against the generally recommended procedure, in which a higher number of items per facet offers a better reliability.

Study 1 also has implications in terms of statistical technique. Such complex and ambivalent attitudes lead to fuzzy data in the sense of Varki, Cooil and Rust (2000): "items vary in the intensity to which they belong to different categories, even when the categories are distinct and well defined." Also, a respondent may belong simultaneously to several response categories. Consequently, the analysis of fuzzy data calls for alternative research approaches in terms of data analysis. The classical method recommended by Churchill (1979) is to relate a corpus of attitudinal items to one or a small number of underlying dimensions, using iterative factor analytical tools. Here, we do not wish a priori to reduce the richness evidenced by the qualitative part of our project, but rather to preserve it. Our goal is to seize, as much as possible, the complexity inherent in consumer attitudes towards luxury, by assessing each and every one of the facets identified in Study 1. Furthermore, we wish to follow a holistic, rather than analytic, approach. We would like to grasp simultaneously the full spectrum of attitudes held by a respondent, rather than to handle each aspect separately. Thus, the diagnostic established on a specific respondent should not be thought of as a scalar position on an underlying continuum, but as a syndrome of consistent but complex attitude components. Finally, we also wish to be able to identify contradictions in a respondent's positions. As evidenced in the last section of Study 1, a person can hold ambivalent, sometimes strongly contradictory views. This is not due to

measurement error or to random variations in weakly held positions. In her or his rapport to luxury, a person may simultaneously be committed to strongly positive and to strongly negative attitude components. We need to use a statistical technique that allows for such deeply split attitudes to be permitted, analyzed, and recognized.

To this end, we use a finite mixture model (Wedel and Kamakura 1998). In this method, «the observations from a sample are assumed to arise from several groups mixed in unknown proportions. The purpose is to 'unmix' the sample, that is, to identify the groups or segments, and to estimate the parameters of the density function underlying the observed data within each group… The unconditional likelihood of the observed data is then defined as a mixture of the group-level densities, with the mixing weights defining the relative size of each group.» (Wedel and Kamakura, 1998, p.73). A finite mixture model combines four useful properties. First, it allows us to take simultaneously into account a large number of items (33 in our case, as explained below). Second, it does not require these items to load on a small number of underlying dimensions. Rather, it considers the full diversity of items, even if each of them provides somewhat different and non-correlated information. Third, it identifies groups of respondents with similar attitude profiles. However, since this similarity is assessed on the basis of the full set of largely independent items, this does not imply that similar respondents obey to a simple unidimensional schema. Rather, a group can be composed of respondents having similar but complex attitudes. Fourth, the technique allows for a second level of complexity. While the technique identifies types that are well structured, a given respondent needs not be assigned to a single type. The technique provides, for each respondent, probabilities of belonging to each type, the total of these probabilities being 100%. This corresponds to the recommendation of Lilien and Rangaswamy (1997, p.60): «Are customer segments to be discrete (each consumer in only one segment), overlapping (a customer can be in two or more groups), or fuzzy (each customer is

assigned a proportional membership in each segment)? Assigning each customer to a single segment is easier to understand and to apply, but we may be sacrificing information. Overlapping or fuzzy segments are intuitively more appealing, more realistic, and theoretically more accurate.»

Study 1 also serves as a guide for sampling. The diversity of attitudes observed in the qualitative interviews strongly suggests to gather a sample that ensures a strong variability in the survey data. Furthermore, the importance of personal history and cultural and religious influences suggests adopting a sampling frame in which such potential influences are accounted for. An international sample frame provides such a diversity. We describe it below.

Methodology

On the basis of the attitude components identified in Study 1, we developed a French questionnaire, comprising Likert items. This was done through a series of successive pre-tests and re-formulations, involving the authors and professional interviewers. The final version of the French questionnaire was used for a survey of 420 consumers, the results of which are reported elsewhere (Authors Date). In order to perform an international survey, we then translated the questionnaire into English. The final list of English items is presented in Table 1. Given the extensive analysis of attitude components in Study 1, we provide no further discussion of the items' content, but we organize them, in Table 1, under the section headings of Study 1.

Insert Table 1 around here

Three items were added to those suggested by Study 1. They refer to specific topics which have often been mentioned in the previous literature (Berry 1994), sometimes going back to the Greeks, but did not appear in the interviews of Study 1. One item has to do with taxes («Luxury items should be taxed more heavily»), another one with the use of luxury products as gifts («For the most part, luxury goods are to be offered as gifts»), and the last one with the idea that

advertising may damage the image of a luxury good («A real luxury brand does not advertise its products»). The questionnaire finally comprised the 34 items in Table 1. After the survey was completed, we had to set aside one item («Real luxury is rather unobtrusive»), as it had posed comprehension problems to respondents in several countries: The word «unobtrusive» itself proved difficult to understand, and this led to numerous non-responses in several countries. The statistical analysis is therefore based on 33 items.

Our main objective in Study 2 is to assess the great diversity of luxury attitudes in a quantitative way. We therefore collected data in twenty different countries, listed in Table 2. They represent a large diversity of developed countries, located on four continents. While country diversity was essential, we needed at the same time to collect comparable samples in each country. We therefore surveyed in each country a sample of management students, for four reasons. First, several interviews suggested that strong differences in luxury attitudes were associated with age, and samples of management students ensured age homogeneity across countries. Second, the same homogeneity argument applies to social class and education, two other important variables. Third, we wanted to avoid the potential problems that would have been associated with translations of the questionnaire in more than 15 languages, and a sample of management students ensured that respondents would have no problem answering questions in English. Finally, management students may be actual or potential customers of luxury goods, as pointed out by Kapferer (1998). Questionnaires were filled out in class. The final sample comprised 1848 subjects (39.4 % female, mean age 26.5).

<div align="center">Insert Table 2 around here</div>

We use the mixture clustering model implemented by Wedel in his Glimmix2 software (Wedel and Kamakura 1998). This choice is based on the need, described above, of recognizing that some consumers may have contradictory attitudes towards luxury. A mixture model allows a

consumer to be split, if necessary, between two or more clusters, in a probabilistic manner. At the same time, it does not force such a split: A consumer can be clearly assigned to just one cluster, if he or she fits well with that cluster.

We followed the procedure recommended by Wedel and Kamakura (1998, pp.73-98). Rather than starting the clustering from a random initial assignment, we used as a starting point the outcome of a k-means cluster analysis, which had produced three clearly contrasted types. We independently applied the procedure with three other starting points based on k-means analyses, with two clusters, three clusters and four clusters. We compared the outcome of these four analyses, using the statistical criteria suggested by Wedel and Kamakura (1998). Information criteria were calculated for a two-, three-, and four-segment solution with a randomly chosen 20 % of the final sample. The changes of the information criteria are only marginal between the first two alternative latent segmentation schemes (CAIC values are 34690, 34749 and 34999 respectively). These results mean that, on purely statistical grounds, the two-segment and three-segment solutions are equivalent. We kept therefore a three-segment solution for the substantive reasons given in the following paragraphs.

Results

The results are presented in Table 3. The three columns correspond to the three types (described as Elitism, Democratization, and Distance). Each line indicates, for the corresponding item, the estimate of the average scores observed for the three types. To increase readability, we have reordered the items from Table 1 in three tiers. The first tier comprises items for which the differences across the three types are moderate. In that sense they are "consensus" items. The scores of all three types are in bold. The second tier comprises items that strongly differentiate Type 1 (Elitism) from Type 2 (Democratization). To focus attention on these differences, the contrasted scores of these two types are in bold. The third tier comprises items on which the third

type (Distance) is clearly different from the two other types. Accordingly, the score of that third type is in bold.

Insert Table 3 around here

The first tier allows us to identify the consensus: What the three types mostly agree on. Luxury goods are perceived as being of better quality and pleasant. They reveal who we are, they are bought for pleasure. Note that on these items the "Distance" scores are slightly less positive than those of the other two types. The opinions are neutral, close to the mid-point, on whether luxury items are offered as gifts: Purchases as a gift could be as frequent as purchases for oneself. Finally, respondents from all three types disagree on average with the last two items. Luxury items need not be useless, and they can be advertised.

The second tier of items provides a clear contrasted definition of the first two types, which we have labeled "Elitism" and "Democratization." They oppose a traditional vision of luxury as addressed to a small elite, the "happy few," to a more modern vision of luxury as open to a larger audience, which we could describe as the "happy many." Respondents in the "Elitism" type tend to think that few people own luxury products, and that it should be so (few people should access them). They see luxury as reserved for "refined" people (themselves, likely), because some education is needed to fully appreciate luxury goods. Luxury implies "good taste" (their taste, likely), and allows its users to differentiate themselves from others. It is inevitably very expensive. Finally, speaking of production and marketing, "elitists" think that luxury items cannot be mass-produced, and should not be available in supermarkets.

In contrast, respondents in the "Democratization" group tend to think that many people own luxury products, and that it should be so (everyone should access them). Luxury is not reserved to "refined" people, and no special education is needed to fully appreciate luxury goods. Luxury is not synonymous with a narrow and selective "good taste," and it is not seen as an instrument

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of differentiation from others. It is not necessarily very expensive. Finally, speaking of production and marketing, "democrats" think that luxury items can be mass-produced, and should be available in supermarkets. Note that this open attitude towards luxury is a positive one. It carries no restriction towards luxury. In fact, it may be seen as a proselytizing posture. Luxury is good, and there is no reason why access to it should not be large. This is opposed to the vision of the "elitists," who also think that luxury is good, but who think it is, and should be, restricted to a small group to which they belong.

The last tier of items allows us to identify the "Distance" type. These respondents have no markedly negative attitude towards luxury, but they feel it's a different world, a world in which they don't belong. This has several aspects. First, they are not that much attracted personally (while, remember, they see luxury as pleasant and of better quality). On average, they like luxury less, they dream less about it, they do not think it makes life beautiful, they are less interested, and less likely to talk for hours about it. Second, this leads them to a more negative vision of luxury. They are more likely to see it as useless and too expensive. Third, in terms of behavior, they are more likely not to buy luxury goods, and to think that a "fine replica" is as good as the original thing. Fourth, they may have a feeling of estrangement: They would not feel at ease in a luxury shop, they would feel disguised if they used luxury goods, and they feel they don't know much about luxury. All this can be summarized by the term of "Distance." These respondents feel they are strangers, far off from the world of luxury. The remaining items describe a few consequences: Finding luxury somewhat old-fashioned and flashy, describing luxury users as snobbish and trying to imitate the rich, stating that luxury should be taxed more.

A Graphical Representation

The result of this cluster analysis has two characteristics: It allows each respondent to be assigned, in a probabilistic manner, to more than one type, and it comprises three types. In other

words, for each respondent, we obtain three estimated probabilities of belonging to each type, and these probabilities add up to 100 %. This leads us to propose a specially suited graphical representation (Figure 1). It consists of an equilateral triangle. The top left angle denotes the "Democratization" type; the top right angle, the "Elitism" type; the bottom angle, the "Distance" angle. A well-known property of equilateral triangles is that, from any point within the triangle, the sum of the three distances to the sides of the triangle is a constant. If we define this sum as representing 100 %, the position of any point within the triangle can denote an allocation of these 100 % between the three types. Thus, a point located at the top left angle represents a respondent with a 100 % allocation to "Democratization". A point located at the top right angle represents a respondent with a 100 % allocation to "Elitism," and a point at the bottom angle represents a respondent with a 100 % allocation to "Distance". A point in the middle of the triangle, equidistant from all three sides, represents a respondent with a 33 % estimated probability of belonging to each type.

Insert Figure1 around here

This allows us to plot, for each item in the questionnaire, the average position of those respondents who gave an extremely positive answer ("totally agree") to the item, and of the respondents who gave an extremely negative answer ("totally disagree"). These points appear on Figure 1. To increase readability, we have linked, for each item, these two extreme positions by a straight line. One can easily identify the statements that are closely associated with one type. Close to the "Democratization" angle, one finds statements such as "not expensive," "in supermarkets," "mass produced," "many people own luxury products," "not snob," "should not be taxed," "at ease in a luxury shop," etc. Close to the "Elitism" angle, there are statements such as "could talk for hours," "for refined people," "some education is needed," "good taste," "makes me dream," "not mass produced," etc. Close to the "Distance" angle, the items are "not interested

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in luxury," "rather don't like luxury," "really useless," not at ease," "don't make life beautiful,"

etc.

The first benefit of this graphical representation is therefore to provide a simple intuitive

interpretation of each type: Each type can be defined on the basis of the statements that are close

to the angle that represents it, and by contrast against the statements which are away from that

angle. The graph also illustrates, once more, the complexity of attitudes towards luxury. Each

straight line corresponds to one item, since it links the opposite extreme answers ("totally agree"

and "totally disagree") to that item. Figure 1 makes it clear that the different items are oriented in

a great variety of directions. If the underlying attitudes were simple, as in the cases that can be

handled by the classical Churchill paradigm, one would find a number of consistent straight lines

going in about the same direction. If one, say, were considering attitudes towards broccoli or

base-ball, most of the attitude items would be arranged, in a consistent manner, in the same

direction opposing positive attitudes to negative attitudes. Extreme positive answers to different

items would be close to one another, and extreme negative answers to the same items would also

be close. In such a case, factor analysis would bring together these consistent items, and the

Churchill paradigm would allow us to identify one underlying factor, or a small number of

underlying factors[5].

<center>Insert Figure 2 around here</center>

Attitudes can be linked to self-reported behavior (Figure 2). We have plotted, by the same

method, the average positions of the five groups of respondents defined by their answer to one

item of self-reported behavior: "I almost never buy luxury products." The line in Figure 2

connects, in that order, the points representing the average positions of those who strongly agree,

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[55] Given the complex, fuzzy nature of the data, factor analysis leads to an unstable factorial structure, which explains less than 50 % of the information, even with eight factors for 33 items. Detailed results are available upon request from the authors.

agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree with the item. The main orientation is vertical. Respondents who strongly agree, i.e. respondents who almost never buy a luxury product belong almost exclusively to the "Distance" type. Feeling distant from luxury is associated with not buying luxury goods. From that point, one moves vertically to the other points in the scale. The stronger the self-report of luxury purchasing, the lower the probability of belonging to the "Distance" type, and the higher the probability of belonging to either the "Democratization" or the "Elitism" type. This stresses that these two types both purchase luxury products, while holding somewhat different attitudes: They offer two roads to luxury purchases. Note however that respondents choosing the extreme position on the item ("strongly disagree") have an average location on the graph that is slightly to the right, closer to the "Elitism" angle than to the "Democratization" angle. This, combined with location very close to the upper side of the triangle, indicates that among these heavy self-reported buyers of luxury goods, there are almost no respondents belonging to the "Distance" type, and there are more members from the "Elitism" type than from the "Democratization" type (the exact proportions in the sample being easily evaluated by the physical distances to the triangle sides).

Insert Figure 3 around here

Finally, Figure 3 presents another result: the average position of respondents from each country. Great contrasts can be observed. Very close to the "Democratization" type, which indicates that a large majority of the respondents from these countries belong to that type, one finds four countries that share a protestant religious orientation (Denmark, New Zealand, Holland, Norway). Close to the opposite side of the triangle, indicating almost no members of the "Democratization" type, one finds a set of catholic countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Hungary). Given that no question on religious attitudes were asked in the survey, it would be difficult to analyze in-depth this strong contrast. But we have to observe that the contrast exists,

and appeared in our analysis so to speak spontaneously, in spite of the absence of religion-related questions in the data that were the bases of the latent class analysis. Among catholic countries, one can observe also that some are closer to "Elitism" (France, Poland, Hungary), while others are closer to "Distance" (Portugal, Italy, Spain). The common point is the rarity of the "Democratization" type. Finally, the central part of the triangle suggests that a number of countries are split between the three types (Germany, Switzerland, Canada, Sweden, Australia). Advertising campaigns in such countries are, of course, difficult to design, as the three types should be sensitive to different, or opposite, messages. In contrast, countries that belong homogeneously to one group would seem easier to target.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

A major conclusion from both Study 1 and Study 2 is that consumer attitudes and behavior towards luxury are highly ambivalent, following an attraction/avoidance pattern often experienced within the same individual. In their visions of luxury, however, consumers are not as divided and among the six facets identified above, one may distinguish three – quality, time incorporation, and hedonism- on which there is a relative consensus, while the three others – scarcity, high price and superfluousness- (which, to a certain extent correspond to the three summits of the triangle show in Figure 1) are more controversial. This distinction is important for managerial purposes as it helps facilitate the identification of cases where intra-individual marketing is needed as opposed to more traditional marketing.

Quality, time incorporation, and hedonism, being well accepted by consumers as consensual indicators of what luxury is, can be considered as the typical dimensions of the product universe, in the sense that products and services which are bad quality, brand new or do not provide any pleasure are immediately discarded as non luxury. A set of managerial implications follows both for non luxury and luxury brands.

Companies whose brands and products are not presently known as « truly » luxury but would like (and have reason) to be recognized as such have no choice but to convince demand that they possess the three desired characteristics. Obtaining recognition in terms of superior quality and hedonic experience can only be achieved by stimulating consumption. In order to facilitate trial, and as it would seem premature to communicate about quality and hedonism, capitalizing upon the time dimension seems preferable. This explains why so many brands and products aspiring to luxury status put forward their ancestral heritage. In Europe, for example, Mercier, a middle-of-the range champagne has recently decided to communicate about Eugène Mercier, the founder of the company who in the middle of the nineteenth century developed methods to improve the quality of the wine. Similarly, Delpeyrat, a French company producing goose liver highlights the traditional methods used in the elaboration process since it was founded in 1891.

For companies already « established, » playing with the three dimensions has to be done with more subtlety. Simply reminding consumers about the exceptional quality of their products or their ancestral heritage would be useless and might be even harmful if such communication results in raising doubts about their legitimacy in consumers' mind (why are they telling me all this?). While emphasizing hedonic consumption seems without risk, messages about quality have to be understated in order to be inferred by the public. Focusing on the details of the elaboration or delivery process may be a powerful way of obtaining the desired result. Thus, in their respective brochures (rather than in their advertising, which would be too direct an approach), Hermès details the great care with which skins are selected for their leather goods and Vuitton explains that it takes several years to train a craftsman capable of assembling suitcases (which are therefore implicitly described as handmade). More direct approaches to control the level of quality can be also be instrumental if they are known and admired by the targeted public. For example, the leading châteaux in Bordeaux are known for occasionally deciding not to sell wine

under their name, in years when they judge the quality of the grapes not to be good enough. Quality standards can also be defined by industry rules or independent authorities and mechanisms can be established to make sure they are strictly adhered to.

By contrast, scarcity, price and abundance are more difficult to handle as these dimensions correspond to concepts which not only consumers perceive differently but also, as we have seen in Study 1 and Study 2, towards which the same individual can hold conflicting attitudes. Intraindividual marketing is needed here as luxury companies need both to encourage occasional consumers to buy but also help them to cope with their reservations and sometimes guilt. Several mechanisms can be envisaged.

First, as we have seen that reservations about the *general* concept of luxury did not prevent consumers from getting deeply involved into the purchase and consumption of *specific* luxury products, it would seem inappropriate to emphasize the luxury nature of such products. In other words, highlighting the affiliation of the products selected by consumers to the generic category of «luxury» is not only unnecessary but also counter-productive. More generally speaking, using the word «luxury» in advertising or public relations material is not recommended and less «loaded» words like prestige may appear more appropriate.

Second, as we have seen that occasional consumers generally have a limited esteem for the happy few, often described as idle parasites, it seems risky when presenting luxury goods or services to make explicit reference to what may appear as their «regular» consumers, with whom, given their limited experience and familiarity, »newcomers» do not (and do not wish to) identify. Focusing on personal benefits directly attached to the intrinsic properties of the product would seem more adequate.

Third, because of their very inexperience and frequent feeling of uneasiness, occasional consumers are particularly demanding and may be easily disappointed if even a small part of

their «dream scenario» (for example when going to a highly prestigious restaurant) is contradicted by reality. Of course, the worst approach would be to use their low frequency of purchase to justify a second-class treatment. What is needed is a fairly delicate balance in the management of the interaction: Special attention without obsequiousness, understanding without arrogance, and connivance without familiarity. Here again, salespersons working for luxury firms have to develop their intraindividual marketing skills to quickly adjust to the conflicting aspirations of occasional buyers.

Finally, luxury companies have to understand that occasional luxury buyers are more interested in developing a lasting relationship with the product category of their choice than in a specific transaction. Preparing the purchase and experiencing consumption provide more value that buying the product. After-sales service is therefore essential. Personalized contacts, customized gifts, selected invitations can do more to reassure occasional buyers than offering rebates or special purchase terms.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The paradoxical nature of luxury consumption was pointed out more than 2,000 years ago by Greek philosophers. Despite this fact, research on a systematic, consumer-based definition of luxury has remained surprisingly scarce. In this paper, we develop a new approach for assessing the concept of luxury via consumer attitudes towards it. Study 1, through a series of in-depth interviews, identifies the major themes that consumers associate with luxurious goods, services or places. We also see that these themes are intertwined in the mind of the consumer. Moreover, the same consumer can show a deep ambivalence. The analysis of such complex and ambivalent attitudes calls for a holistic and probabilistic approach in the data analysis of the international survey of Study 2. In the end, we identify three attitude types across twenty countries.

These results suggest several new directions for substantive enquiry on specific dimensions of

luxury, namely personal history, polysensuality and scarcity. First, the role of personal history in shaping a consumer's attitude towards luxury seems essential. However, in Study 2, we could not go beyond the level of intuitive suggestions, since our questionnaire comprised very few questions on the consumer's individual characteristics. It would be extremely interesting to collect detailed data not only on the socio-cultural variables that appear to play a role (religion, parents' social class and attitudes towards luxury, education, income) but also on psychological variables such as self-monitoring (Gangestad and Snyder 2000). This could allow for a better understanding of the role of social norms and expectations on the dynamics of a person's attitudes towards luxury. Note also that the sample in Study 2 is homogeneous in terms of age. However, some interviews in Study 1 strongly suggest that important differences in attitudes towards luxury may exist across generations. Here again, an individual level analysis could be fruitful, as it could help predict the likely orientation of the consumer's vision of luxury. To mention only one possible hypothesis, is it the case that elitism is more frequent among older consumers, and democratization among younger ones?

Second, polysensuality should be better investigated. The last two decades have witnessed a progressive shift in consumer research, as a mostly cognitive approach has been complemented by a stronger stress on emotional and affective factors (e. g. Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Bagozzi, Gopinath and Nyer 1999). This paper suggests that sensory dimensions such as taste, smell and touch may be important factors in establishing both short- and long-term consumer attitudes and preferences towards luxury goods. A fruitful research path would be the elicitation and structuring of these hedonic aspects of luxury products as well as their relation to other dimensions of luxury.

Third, is scarcity a necessary feature of luxury? Will a brand or a product lose its status if it becomes too common? Contrasted opinions were expressed in Study 1 by "elitists" and

"democrats." This suggests a dynamic analysis of the image of some brands, as they pass from a restricted, shielded market (Park, Jaworski and McInnis 1986) to a larger availability. What do they lose over time? What do they win? Historical methods as well as recent case studies could be the appropriate tools to address these issues.

In a broader perspective, communications-related questions result from the existence of the two groups of "democratization" and "distance." How could one address these groups? Is it possible to lower the feeling of "distance?" Should one rather use a communication approach, based on advertising, or rather a behavioral one, focusing on a stepwise integration of "distant" consumers into the domain of luxury? We suggest the use of exploratory-type interviews with marketing managers to answer these questions.

Some interviews in Study 1 unearthed a form of self-deprecation that is related to the "distant" consumers. Some respondents feel their body is inadequate for wearing luxury clothes; that they don't know how to use luxury products; that they have no social opportunities to do so; or, at a more abstract level, they are not worth of a luxury product. This is a very special form of consumer attitude, in which personal reluctance may keep someone apart from a good that he or she nevertheless considers as deeply attractive. What are the possible forms of such a conflicting relationship? What might be its psychological or social causes and consequences? Can this contradiction be resolved over time? In-depth qualitative studies could shed light upon these unanswered questions.

Finally, our two-stage approach could be applied to other high-involvement consumption experiences where complex and ambiguous attitudes are generated, such as gift-giving (Sherry, McGrath and Levy 1993), weddings (Otnes, Lowrey and Shrum 1997) or even some types of consumer-brand relationships (Fournier 1998).

APPENDIX

Respondent profiles in Study 1

(1) Female, 46 years, project study manager in a metal construction company, married to a CPA, two children

(2) Male, 50 years, administrative director of an exclusive men's club, married to an engineer, two children

(3) Male, 63, years, restaurant owner and merchant, married to a factory manager, three children

(4) Female, 70 years, wife of a high-level civil servant, two children

(5) Female, 53 years, civil servant at the Ministry of Culture

(6) Female, 29 years, music teacher, lives with a professor of economics, one child

(7) Female, 26 years, primary school teacher, unemployed, spent a great part of her life in different countries due to the profession of her father

(8) Male and female, around 55 years, public relations manager in an industrial company, wife works at home, no child

(9) Female, 17 years, graduating year of high school, both parents are senior managers

(10) Male, 53 years, well-known foreign journalist, divorced, two children, has lived in Paris for four years

(11) Female, 25 years, architecture student; male, 27 years, advertising manager, son of a Parisian banker, two children

(12) Male, 49 years, computer scientist, married to a foreign language teacher, two children

(13)   Male, 45 years, typewriter repairer and office furniture seller, married to a middle-level executive, two children

(14)   Female, 39 years, bookseller specializing in ancient books, lives with a jewel designer, no child.

TABLE 1

Items used in the international study
(All items were asked using a 5 point agree-disagree Likert format)

Extreme quality
In general, luxury products are better quality products.
A fine replica of a luxury brand is just as good.
High price
 Luxury products inevitably are very expensive.
 In my opinion, luxury is too expensive for what it is.
Scarcity
 Few people own a truly luxury product.
Today, everyone should have access to luxury goods.
 Truly luxury goods cannot be mass produced.
A luxury product cannot be sold in supermarkets.
Aesthetics
 In my opinion, luxury is pleasant.
 Luxury makes me dream.
Luxury products make life more beautiful.
 One buys luxury goods primarily for one's pleasure.
Personal history/competence
 Some education is needed for appreciating luxury products.
I almost never buy luxury products.
I could talk about luxury for hours.
I don't know much about the luxury world.
Superfluity/Plenty
 In my opinion, luxury is really useless.
A product must be somewhat useless to be a luxury product.
Mental reservations/Conspicuousness
In my opinion, luxury is old fashioned.
In my opinion, luxury is flashy.
One needs to be a bit of a snob to buy luxury products.
People who buy those products seek to imitate the rich.
Personal distance and uneasiness
I would not feel at ease in a luxury shop.
When I wear a luxury item, I feel a bit like I'm disguising myself.
Involvement: Deep interest and pleasure
In my opinion, luxury is good taste.
All things considered, I rather like luxury.
I'm not interested in luxury.
Involvement: Sign value
The luxury products we buy reveal a little bit who we are.
People who buy those products try to differentiate themselves from others.
Those who buy luxury products are refined people.
Three specific items
Luxury items should be taxed more heavily.
For the most part, luxury goods are to be offered as gifts.
A real luxury brand does not advertise its products.
Discarded item
Real luxury is rather unobtrusive.

TABLE 2

National samples

Country	Final sample
Australia	130
Austria	39
Belgium	84
Canada	120
Denmark	25
France	121
Germany	169
Hong Kong	100
Hungary	47
Italy	34
Netherlands	55
New Zealand	211
Norway	150
Poland	82
Portugal	138
Spain	66
Sweden	66
Switzerland	98
United Kingdom	29
USA	84
Total	1848

In each country, we excluded non-nationals from the statistical analysis, thus setting aside 12% of the initial respondents. The table above gives, for each country, the number of nationals in the final sample.

TABLE 3

Average segment scores on the 33 items
(1: strongly disagree   5:strongly agree)

	Segment 3 Elitism	Segment 1 Democratization	Segment 2 Distance
Better quality	**4.05**	**3.54**	**3.40**
Pleasant	**4.21**	**4.08**	**3.62**
Reveal who we are	**3.89**	**3.60**	**3.46**
One buys for pleasure	**4.00**	**3.85**	**3.46**
Offered as gifts	**2.88**	**2.47**	**2.96**
Must be useless	**2.20**	**1.78**	**2.60**
Does not advertise	**2.58**	**2.21**	**2.81**
Few people own	**3.51**	**2.57**	3.54
Everyone should access	**2.85**	**3.21**	2.91
Refined people	**3.05**	**2.44**	2.54
Some education needed	**3.56**	**2.60**	2.86
Good taste	**3.82**	**3.21**	2.90
Differentiate from others	**3.80**	**3.08**	3.85
Inevitably very expensive	**3.90**	**3.13**	4.02
Not mass produced	**4.00**	**2.88**	3.69
Not in supermarkets	**4.08**	**2.87**	3.80
Rather like luxury	4.07	3.80	**2.97**
Makes dream	3.73	3.18	**2.67**
Make life beautiful	3.94	3.43	**2.84**
Not interested in	1.91	2.20	**3.05**
Could talk for hours	2.51	1.96	**1.78**
Really useless	2.16	2.03	**2.84**
Too expensive	3.14	3.00	**3.82**
I almost never buy	2.38	2.60	**3.35**
Fine replica as good	2.30	2.60	**2.93**
Not at ease	2.33	2.22	**3.19**
Disguising myself	2.54	2.23	**2.96**
Don't know much about	2.34	2.47	**3.21**
Old fashioned	2.25	2.08	**2.61**
Flashy	3.24	3.00	**3.61**
A bit of a snob	2.83	1.97	**3.25**
Imitate the rich	2.82	2.16	**3.42**
Should be taxed more	2.64	2.49	**3.58**
Segment size	28.5%	35.2%	36.3%

FIGURE 1

Visualizing Three Attitude Types

Democratization — Elitism

Distance
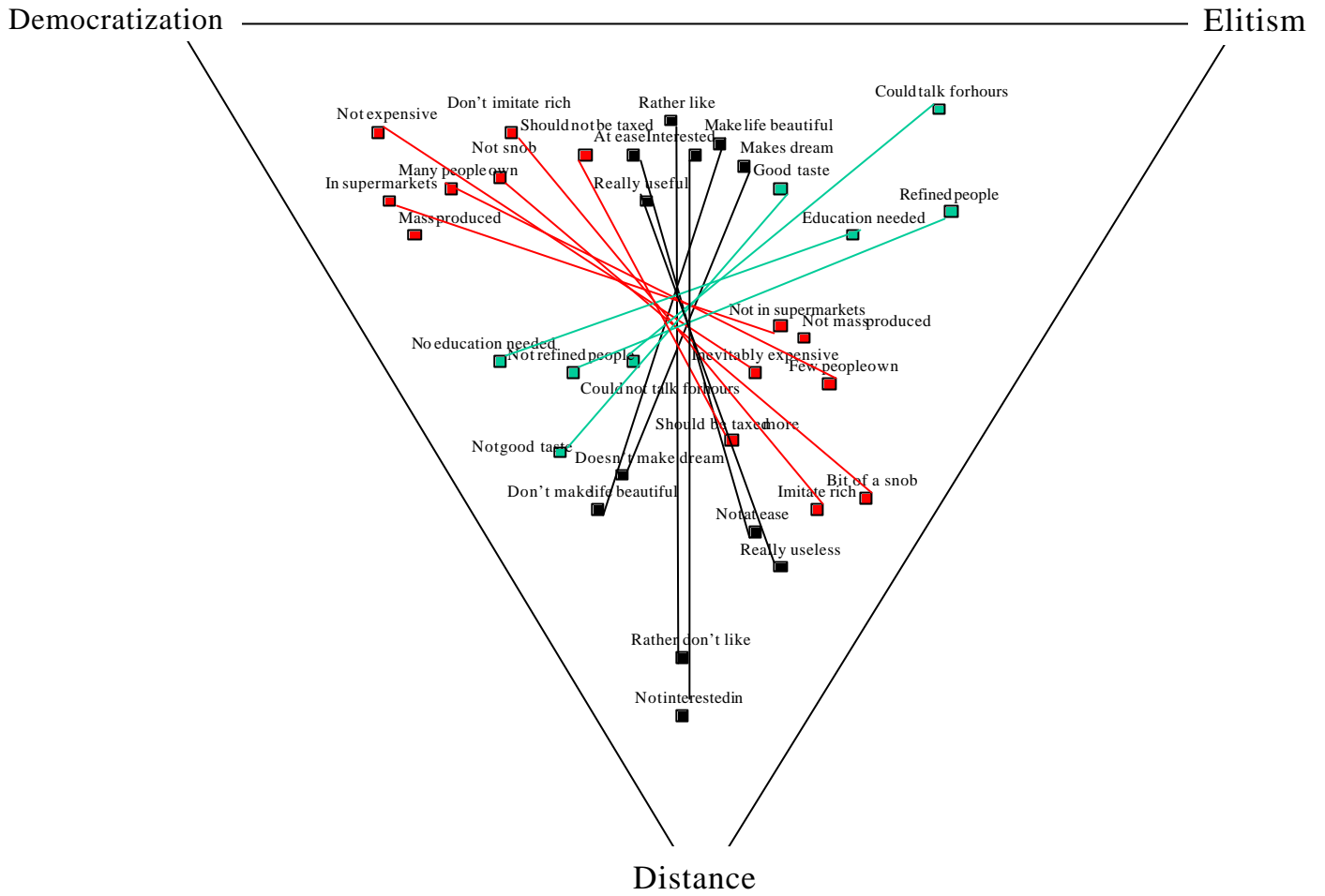
FIGURE 2

Attitudes and buying behaviour

ALMOST NEVER BUY
(STRONGLY DISAGREE)

Democratization

Elitism

Could talk for hours

Not expensive

Don't imitate rich

Rather like

Should not be taxed

Make life beautiful

Not snob

At ease

Interested

Makes dream

Many people own

Good taste

In supermarkets

Really useful

ALMOST NEVER BUY
(DISAGREE)

Refined people

Mass produced

Somewhat useful

Education needed

ALMOST NEVER BUY
(NEITHER/NOR)

Not in supermarkets

Not mass produced

No education needed

Not refined people

Inevitably expensive

Few people own

Could not talk for hours

Should be taxed more

Not good taste

Doesn't make dream

ALMOST NEVER BUY
(AGREE)

Bit of a snob

Don't make life beautiful

Imitate rich

Not at ease

Somewhat useless

Really useless

Rather don't like

Not interested in

ALMOST NEVER BUY
(STRONGLY AGREE)
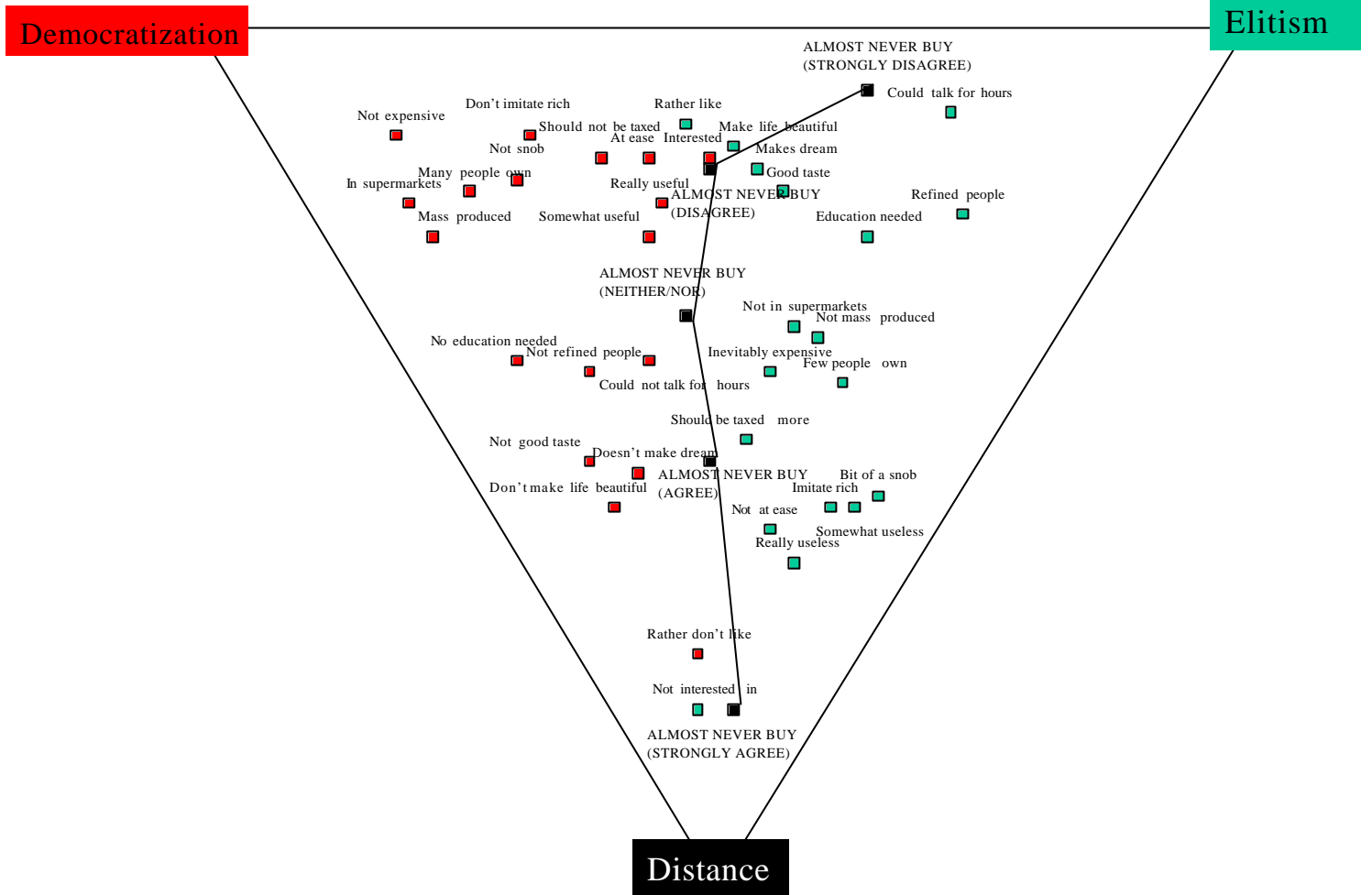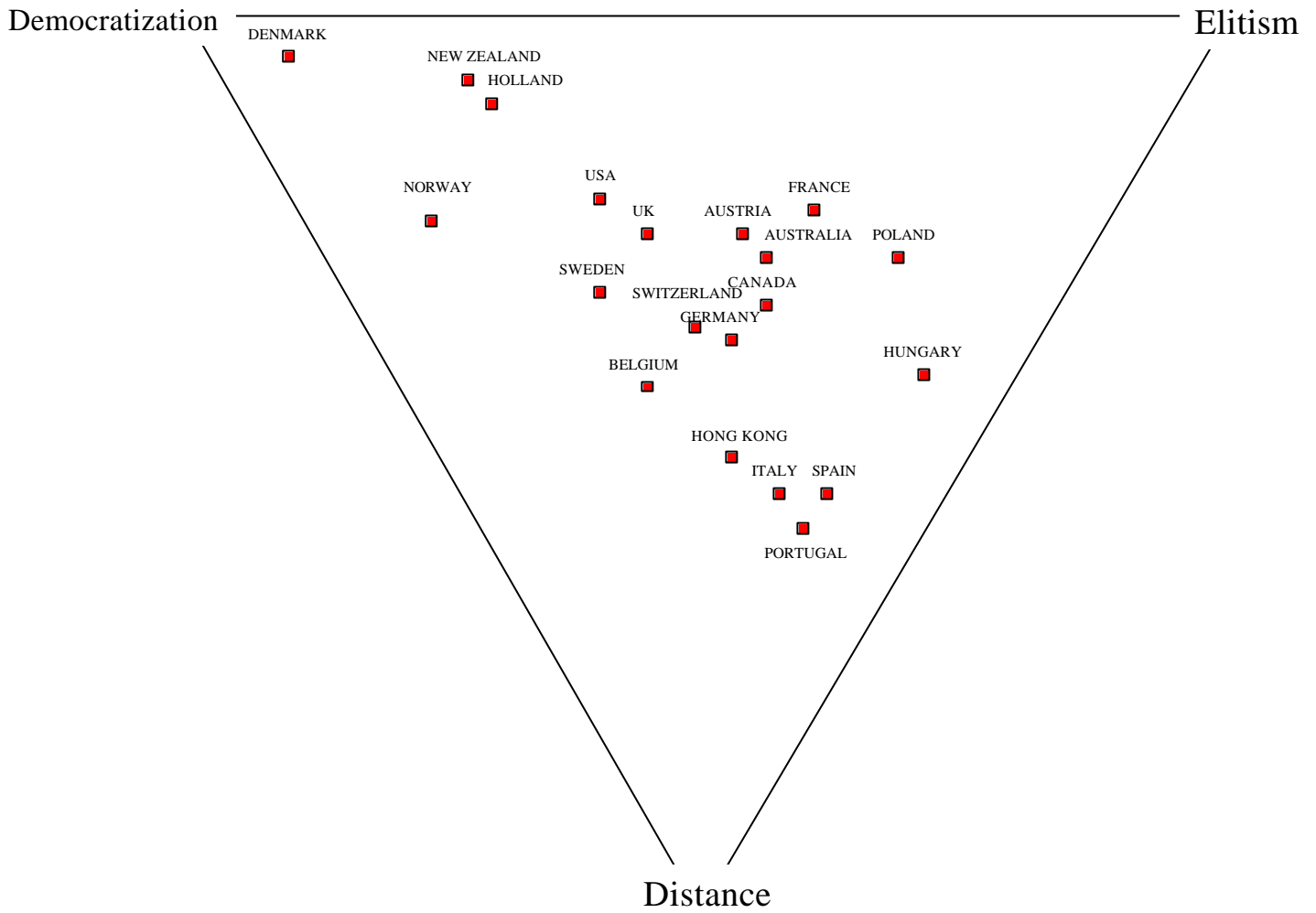
Distance

FIGURE 3

Average Positions of Twenty Countries

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