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# Prestige seeking consumer behaviour: A Case Study of Jhansi

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## ABSTRACT

*The luxury goods market has experienced a considerable growth internationally. With increase in the number of millionaires due to rapid growth experienced by the country in the last ten years, greater confidence in the economy, arrival of luxury global brands and mass consumers buying luxury, the future is bright for this segment. The concept of prestige has intensely been investigated in sociology. From the consumer perspective, a significant share of the literature seeks to explain luxury consumption in terms of a symbolic function that operates at the individual and collective levels. In this context, luxury is associated to a psychological value, a highly-involved consumer experience, the person's self-concept and the luxury item's function as a status symbol. As such, research activities in this stream focus on the motivations behind the purchase of luxury goods. Indian market is an emerging market for prestige-seeking goods and services, so it is really interesting to conduct a study about the prestige-seeking consumer behaviour in Jhansi (Uttar Pradesh). Important conclusions from the study are that gender has no significant influence on the prioritisation of values in the life. This study has also important implications for impulse purchases made by the consumers in the prestige segments. It indicates that, it is not always the fact that prestige purchases are an outcome of a well planned purchase.*

*Keywords: prestige purchases, conspicuous consumption, Likert scale. Chi square, attribute analysis and rank correlation*

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## INTRODUCTION

Consumer behaviour is defined as activities people undertake when obtaining, consuming, and disposing of products and service. That is to say, consumer behaviour is the study of consumer behaviour including and understanding of consumers' thoughts, feelings, and actions and an understanding of relevant marketing strategies.

According to Blackwell's definition, it mentions three activities which are obtaining, consuming and disposing. Obtaining refers to the activities leading up to and including the purchase or receipt of a product, such as how you decide what to buy, where to buy and how to pay and transport the product. They explain consuming as how, where, when and under what circumstances consumers use products and interpret disposing as how consumers get rid of products and packaging. Therefore, it is easy to know that Blackwell, conclude that obtaining, consuming and disposing compose consumer behaviour. In Arnold, point of view, consumer behaviour is individuals or groups acquiring, using, and disposing of products, services, ideas, or experiences. Acquiring includes a range of activities such as receiving, finding, inheriting, producing, and of course, purchasing while consuming includes collecting, nurturing, cleaning, preparing, evaluating, serving, displaying, storing, wearing,

sharing, and devouring.

The concept of prestige has intensely been investigated in sociology, referring to the social position conferred to an individual by other members of a group. There are a host of theories which tend to differ in the explanation of social positions, there seems to be an empirical consensus that:

- 1) Prestige is a cornerstone of social stratification;**
- 2) It is a product of both subjective and objective social reality; and**
- 3) There is considerable heterogeneity in the subjective perception of prestige across members of a society.**

From the consumer perspective, a significant share of the literature seeks to explain luxury consumption in terms of a symbolic function that operates at the individual and collective levels. In this context, luxury is associated to a psychological value, a highly-involved consumer experience, the person's self-concept and the luxury item's function as a status symbol. As such, research activities in this stream focus on the motivations behind the purchase of luxury goods.

From a product perspective, luxury brands are frequently defined in terms of their excellent quality, exclusivity,

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premium prices, distinctiveness and craftsmanship. Premium is defined as an adjective meaning of exceptional quality or amount; also: higher-priced. Premium items whether those may be clothing or any other form of consumer product are frequently related to prestige and quality. The difference between premium brands and non premium brands heavily relies on key qualities that relate to the consumer and the product.

## MOTIVATION FOR LUXURY CONSUMPTION

People involve in luxury consumption because they tend to achieve one or more values demonstrated in such consumption process. Prestige seeking consumer behaviour is generated by multiple motivations, especially the motivations of sociability and self-expression. In this regard, five perceived prestige values as well as five motivations were proposed as follows: Conspicuous consumption still plays a significant part in shaping preferences for many products which are purchased or consumed in public contexts. Many years ago it was suggested that conspicuous consumption was used by people to signal wealth and, by inference power and status. Thus, the utility of prestige products may be to display wealth and power and one could consider that highly visible prestige brands would dominate the conspicuous segment of the consumers. The reassurance consumers derive from prestige brands (e.g., of tradition, of authenticity) actually enhances the value they derive from the use of the product. They may feel a heightened pleasure of anticipation long before they use them. For instance, consumers may purchase and wear prestigious and branded expensive clothes because they are confident in the judgment of style from the design.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

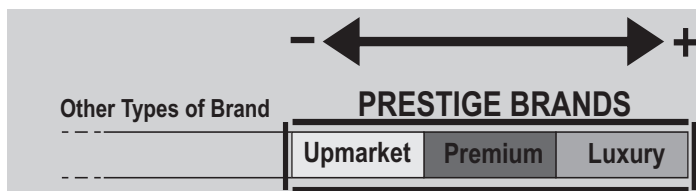
In consumer research, there is a long-standing tradition of research on conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899; Leibenstein, 1950; Mason, 1981). Conspicuous consumption is the ostentatious use of goods to signal status to other members of society. Vigneron and Johnson (1999) did extensive work on prestige-seeking consumer behavior; they related the distinction between premium and non-premium brands to five perceived values, dependent upon socioeconomic structure. Their developed framework consisted of:

In this research three types of brands were categorized as prestigious; upmarket brands, premium brands, and luxury brands, respectively in an increasing order of prestige. The important findings of their study were as follow:

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

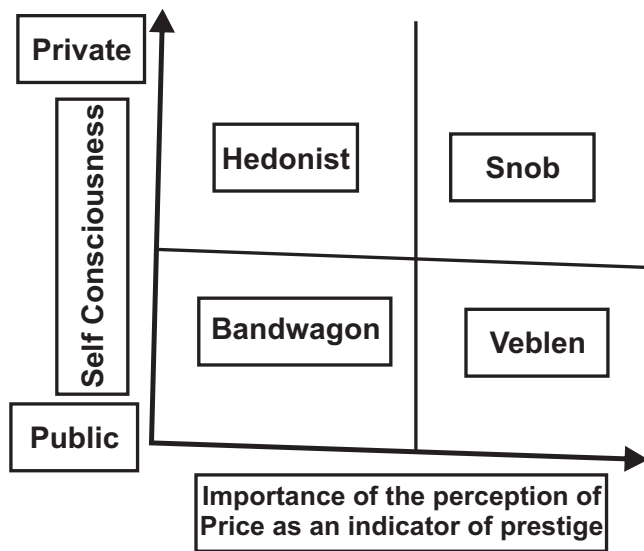
Monroe and Chapman (1987) developed a model of the relationships among quality, value, and price using the concept of perceived value. According to the model, positive relationships exist between price and perceived quality and between price and perceived sacrifice. In turn, perceived quality is positively related to perceived value and perceived sacrifice is negatively related to perceived value. The greater the perception of value, the greater the likelihood the consumer will be interested in purchasing the product.

As a general rule, prestige products have been used as an example of extreme-end high-involvement decision making. The assumption is that prestige products are infrequently purchased, require a higher level of interest and knowledge, and strongly relate to the person self-concept. For instance, Rossiter, Percy, and Donovan (1991) stated that the distinction between high and low involvement was dichotomous rather than continuous, and presented a second dimension operationalized as "informational-transformational. Their framework reasonably assumes that prestige products are high-involvement products, and that transformational brand choices (i.e., sensory gratification, intellectual stimulation, and particularly social approval) are the primary factors in selecting a prestige product. Although the involvement model is useful to distinguish prestige products from normal products, it does not significantly differentiate the level of



prestige among prestige brands. Therefore, in this paper, we refer to prestige brands when discussing the brand category whereas we used “luxury” when relating to the extreme-end of the prestige-brand category. Hence, it was expected that people would have different perceptions of the level of prestige for the same brands, and that the overall prestige level of a brand would consider the prestige perceptions from different people.

This theory recognizes two types of self-conscious people. (a) Publicly self-conscious persons are particularly concerned about how they appear to others, and (b) privately self-conscious persons are more focused on their inner thoughts and feelings. “We believe that an analysis of the direct relationship between consumers and brands is the key to an improved understanding of such a market.” The initial assumption is that the private or public value of prestige goods comes from the inherent communicative status of these items.



### Three effects in luxury consumption

Luxury today is really about the ability to passions, and those passions are very different for person to person. Study on can be dated back to as early as 19th century. Veblen (1899) revealed that affluent often involved in luxury consumption to advertise their wealth so as to achieve higher social status.

Veblen effect, or conspicuous consumption, refers to “people’s desire to provide prominent, visible evidence of their ability to afford luxury goods”. Similarly Mason (1983) referred veblen effect as “the phenomenon of luxury consumption ....to the extent to which the demand for a consumer’s goods will increase because it bears a higher

rather than a lower price”. Furthermore, there are two other effects called Bandwagon and Snob effect in the study of conspicuous consumption. The bandwagon effect reflects the phenomenon that the demand for a product will increase mainly because many other consumer have already purchase such product.

The snob effect refers to that, the demands for a certain product will decrease potential consumers perceive such product has been consumed by lots of other consumers, therefore bears lower associated value. Therefore, both bandwagon and snob effects are related to the consumption of a product while the Veblen effect, in it pure form, it’s associated only with price.

### Research Objectives

Indian culture is very distinguished from western culture in many ways, so purchasing behaviours could be also very different. From the very beginning Indians have attached great value to prestigious purchases. Indian market is an emerging market for prestige-seeking goods and services, so it is really interesting to conduct a study about the prestige-seeking consumer behaviour in Jhansi (Uttar Pradesh)

The research questions are as follow:

1. To identify the motivations behind prestige purchases
2. To understand the role of gender in prestige purchases
3. To study associations among various attributes of prestige
4. Which future sectors are going to benefit from the increased consumption of prestigious goods and services

### HYPOTHESIS

We set out the following hypothesis which shall be tested using the primary data:

**H 1:** Perception about prestige and motivation for prestige purchases are independent.

**H 2 :** Motivation for luxury consumption is same for middle as well as high income group.

**H 3:** Motivation for luxury consumption is independent of age.

**H 4:** There is significant difference in the ranking of values (which people seek in their life) by females and males.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology adopted in this paper can be explained under following heads:

### RESEARCH DESIGN

This work is based on cross sectional data which is

qualitative. The data has been collected from the various individuals at same point of time about their perception about prestige. Thus, this study utilises primary data. The data has been collected using survey method.

### SAMPLING FRAME

The sampling design can be discussed under following heads:

**Sample size:** This study is a small sample study. The sample size is thirty. As we know for a sample to be small its size must not exceed thirty. The families with monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) of more than Rs. 3000 formed universe for the purpose of our study. The sample was drawn from this universe from the various localities of the city of Jhansi.

**Sampling period-** The sample was collected using a well designed questionnaire during a two month period of July-August 2010.

**Sampling method:** We have used stratified random sampling technique to collect the data. The respondents were allocated to two strata. The stratas were named as SSS 1 and SSS 2. The first strata i.e. SSS 1 consisted of individuals who belonged to middle class. The middle class has been defined as families with MPCE upto Rs. 4000 but not less than Rs. 3000. The families with MPCE exceeding were put into second strata i.e SSS 2.

After listing all the respondents in the both strata, random numbers were used to select the respondents.

**Questionnaire design:** The survey method used a well designed self administered questionnaire, for data collection. The questionnaire comprises of two parts. The first part consists of the demographic details. It consists of seven questions i.e. like gender, age, income, and occupation and so on. The second part is the main part of the questionnaire, including 31 questions, it mainly asked respondents' opinions and decisions of purchasing a prestigious product and factor which affect their purchasing decisions.

2 questions out of 31 questions are ranking type question and in other 28 questions we used 5-point Likert scaled questions on which the respondents were asked to measure their satisfaction towards current product and the importance of each factor in their future prestigious product purchasing.

**Techniques and Tools:** We have used the technique of attribute analysis to study the nature of associations between various attributes of prestige. Furthermore, small sample tests have been put to use to test the significance of values.

The statistical and mathematical tools which have been put to use are following:-

- a) Co efficient of colligation
- b) Co efficient of association
- c) Rank correlation co efficient
- d) Chi square test

### DATA ANALYSIS AND EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

#### DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

The purpose of this section is to describe the profile of the consumers who responded to the survey questionnaire and who have been included as part of the final study. Based on the findings of previous studies, gender, age, income, occupation, education etc, have been identified as the most important demographic variables for this study of this nature. The important findings are listed below:

- ❖ The most common age group was between 21 to 30 years old. It constitutes 60% of total respondents. There was no respondent in the age below 20.
- ❖ The females and males are respectively 47% and 53% of total sample size.
- ❖ With regards to income majority of respondents ie. 53% belong to the income class 20 to 30 thousand.

**Table 1**

DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY - 1		
Gender	No. of Respondents	%
Male	16	53
Female	14	47
AGE		
Below 20		
21 – 30	18	60
31 – 40	4	13
41 – 50	3	10
Above 50	5	17
MPCE		
10K – 20 K	9	30
20K – 30K	16	53
30K – 40 K	1	3
40K & above	4	14
EDUCATION		
Uneducated	nil	nil
High School	nil	nil
SHS	1	3
Graduate	11	37
P G and above	18	60



The important demographic characteristics as reflected from table two are listed below:

- ❖ 81% of the respondents were fully employed and only 3% were unemployed. The source of income of unemployed ones is mainly from remittances from abroad or rental income.
- ❖ Majority of respondents have two earning family members. The percentage is 43% and 17% respondents have 4 earning members in their family.
- ❖ 38% of the respondents were govt. Employee and 14% were employed in MNCs.

**Table 2**

<b>DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY - 2</b>		
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
Full time	24	81
Part time	4	13
House wife	nil	Nil
Unemployed	1	3
Retired	1	3
<b>Nature of Employer</b>		
Govt. employee	11	38
Govt. enterprises	2	6
Private enterprises	9	31
MNCs	3	11
Self employed	4	14
<b>Earning members in family</b>		
1	8	27
2	13	43
3	4	13
4 and above	5	17

## ATTRIBUTE ANALYSIS

After analyzing the demographic profile of the respondents, we proceed to study the association between various attributes. The co efficient of association, co efficient of colligation and expected Vs. observed frequency method has been employed to judge the nature of association between various attributes. The first two are quantitative measures and the last one is a qualitative measure. Various combinations of attributes can be taken for study, but we have taken only four most important pairs of attributes for study. The figure in the brackets for co efficient of association shows its standard error.

The most important finding from the table is that impulse purchasing is negatively associated with the satisfaction

derived from that purchase. The standard error is also least for the value of coefficient of association for these two attributes.

**Table 3**

<b>Attributes</b>	<b>Nature of association</b>	<b>Coefficient of association</b>	<b>Coefficient of colligation</b>
<b>Snob effect and bandwagon effect</b>	<b>NEGATIVE</b>	<b>0.500 (0.353)</b>	<b>- 0.618</b>
<b>Snob effect and hedonic value</b>	<b>POSITIVE</b>	<b>0.438 (0.202)</b>	<b>0.230</b>
<b>Satisfaction and impulsiveness</b>	<b>NEGATIVE</b>	<b>- 0.500 (0.173)</b>	<b>- 0.101</b>
<b>Snob effect and impulsiveness</b>	<b>POSITIVE</b>	<b>-0.350 (0.190)</b>	<b>-0.127</b>

Association between Perception about prestige and Motivation for prestige purchases

It will be quite interesting as well as important to know that how is the perception held by people about prestige purchases associated with the motivation for the prestige purchases. To judge this association co efficient of contingency has been calculated and chi square test has been used to test the hypothesis.

The null hypothesis is:

$H_0 = \text{Perception about prestige and motivation for prestige purchases are independent}$

$H_A = \text{Perception about prestige and motivation for prestige purchase are not independent}$

$\chi^2 \text{ cal.} = 19.83521$

$\chi^2 \text{ tab} = 18.50$  at 1% level of significance with degree of freedom = 12

Since  $\chi^2 \text{ cal} > \chi^2 \text{ tab}$ , null hypothesis is rejected, meaning thereby perception and attitude held by an individual does determines his / her prestige purchases decisions (at 1% significance level)

**Association between Income and Motivation for prestige purchases**

Now we shall explore the association between income level and motivation for prestige purchases. The entire sample has been divided into two income groups namely middle class (with MPCE upto Rs. 4000) and rich class with MPCE exceeding Rs. 4000 thousand per month. To judge this association co efficient of contingency has been calculated and chi square test has been used to test the hypothesis.

The null hypothesis is:

$H_0 = \text{Motivation for luxury consumption is same for}$

middle as well as high income group

$H_A$  = Motivation for luxury consumption is not same for middle as well as high income group

$$\chi^2_{cal.} = 3.363$$

$$\chi^2_{tab.} = 9.49 \text{ at } 5\% \text{ level of significance with degree of freedom} = 4$$

Since  $\chi^2_{cal.} < \chi^2_{tab.}$  null hypothesis is accepted, meaning thereby middle and rich class have same motivations for prestige purchases.

#### Association between Age and Motivation for prestige purchases

The whole respondents have been classified into two groups namely adults and old with former including persons upto 40 years of age and latter included persons above 40 years. To judge this association co efficient of contingency has been calculated and chi square test has been used to test the hypothesis.

The null hypothesis is:

$H_0$  = Motivation for luxury consumption is independent of age

$H_A$  = Motivation for luxury consumption is not independent of age

$$\chi^2_{cal.} = 0.2672$$

$$\chi^2_{tab.} = 9.49 \text{ at } 5\% \text{ level of significance with degree of freedom} = 4$$

Since  $\chi^2_{cal.} < \chi^2_{tab.}$  null hypothesis is accepted.

Correlation between ranking of values by females and males

The rank correlation co efficient is calculated below:

$$\begin{aligned} \rho &= 1 - 6 \sum D^2 / N (N^2 - 1) \\ &= 1 - 6(44) / 9(81-1) \\ &= 0.633 \end{aligned}$$

Let us test the significance of  $\rho$ .

$H_0$  =  $\rho$  is significant

$H_A$  =  $\rho$  is not significant

$$\begin{aligned} t_{cal.} &= \rho / \sqrt{1 - \rho^2} \times \sqrt{n-2} \\ &= 0.6333 / \sqrt{0.5989} \times \sqrt{28} \\ &= 4.209 \end{aligned}$$

$$t_{tab} = 1.701 \text{ at } 5\% \text{ significance level}$$

Since  $t_{cal.} > t_{tab}$  null hypothesis is rejected. The interpretation is that females and males are consistent in their opinion of values they want to achieve in their life.

## RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The key research limitation lies within the nature of the qualitative and quantitative research which relies only on a small sample of regular and irregular luxury consumers in few localities of the Jhansi city. Obviously, replications on a larger scale should be undertaken. Moreover, the reliability of scales have not been tested. Finally, although both upper middle and rich respondents participated in the research, latter exceeded former. Consequently the research results are dominated by rich class luxury perceptions. Also, the attribute analysis undertaken in this study would greatly benefit from additional analyses relying on more sophisticated techniques.

## CONCLUSION

One of the most important conclusion which follows from this study is that gender is not an important determinant in deciding the values which an individual seeks to achieve in the entire lifetime. The globalisation has blurred the differences between the motivations for prestige purchases between upper middle class and rich class. The motivation for prestige purchases as conceptualized in this study in the form of snob, veblen, bandwagon, hedonist and perfectionist are equally distributed in both middle as well as rich classes.

This study vindicates the negative association between two groups of consumers- snob and bandwagon. Thirdly, in this study the prestige seeking consumer behaviour has been found to be independent of age. This has one clear cut message for the companies engaged in niche marketing. This study has also important implications for impulsive purchases made by the consumers in the prestige segments. It indicates that, it is not always the fact that prestige purchases are an outcome of a well planned purchase. Still another important conclusion is that the perception and attitude of an individual about the prestige does determine the nature of prestige purchases made by that individual (at 1% level of significance). With regards to future prestige purchases most of the individuals view real estate investments as the first choice followed by purchase of luxury cars, foreign visits and jewellery purchases. Thus, there exists good potential to develop these segments as the prime segment in prestige purchases.

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# Questionnaire

## Prestige Seeking Consumer Behaviour Questionnaire

*For research Only*

### DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

**1. Gender**

- ❖ Male
- ❖ Female

**2. Age**

- ❖ Below 20
- ❖ 21-30
- ❖ 31-40
- ❖ 41-50
- ❖ Above 50

**3. May I know your monthly household consumption expenditure (exclude tax )**

- ❖ 10000-20000
- ❖ 20000-30000
- ❖ 30000-40000
- ❖ 40000 and above

**4. What is your current educational level?**

- ❖ Uneducated
- ❖ High School
- ❖ Senior High School
- ❖ Graduate
- ❖ Post graduate or above

**5. What is your current occupation?**

- ❖ Employed full time
- ❖ Employed part time
- ❖ Housewife
- ❖ Unemployed
- ❖ Retired

**6. Which of the following category does your employer go under?**

- ❖ Government authorities
- ❖ State-owned enterprises
- ❖ Private enterprises
- ❖ Indo-foreign joint ventures
- ❖ Foreign invested company/representative office
- ❖ Free lance/self-employed
- ❖ Others

**7. How many employed people are in your family? (only refer to yourself and those who live with you at least 5 days a week)**

- ❖ 1
- ❖ 2
- ❖ 3
- ❖ 4 or more



## CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

### 8. Before purchasing a product, it is important to know:

- |  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| ❖ What others think of different brands or products?                 | 1...2...3...4...5 |
| ❖ What kinds of people buy certain brands or products?               | 1...2...3...4...5 |
| ❖ What others think of people who use certain brands or products?    | 1...2...3...4...5 |
| ❖ What brands or products to buy to make good impressions on others. | 1...2...3...4...5 |

### 9. The scale is a six-item, measure and is scored on a 5-point Likert-type format from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The items are as follows:

- |   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| ❖ It is important to me to have really nice things.                                     | 1...2...3.. 4.. 5.. |
| ❖ I would like to be rich enough to buy anything  | 1.. 2.. 3.. 4.. 5.  |
| ❖ I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.                                  | 1.. 2. .3.. 4.. 5.  |
| ❖ It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I want. | 1.. 2.. 3.. 4. .5.  |
| ❖ People place too much emphasis on material things                                     | 1.. 2.. 3.. 4. .5.  |
| ❖ It's really true that money can buy happiness.  | 1.. 2.. 3.. 4.. 5.. |

### 10. List of values:

The following is a list of values that people look for or want out from life.

Please read carefully and rank each one according to how important it is in your life.

- |  |                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Self-respect .....                  | 2. Self-fulfilment.....           |
| 3. Security .....                      | 4. Fun and enjoyment of life..... |
| 5. Excitement .....                    | 6. Sense of accomplishment.....   |
| 7. Sense of belonging .....            | 8. Being well respected.....      |
| 9. Warm relationship with others ..... |                                   |

### 11. Motivation for luxury consumption:

The following is a list of values relating to the motivation for luxury consumption. Please indicate to what degree the following values are important to you (1= Not important at all, 3= Normal and 5 = The most important):

I consume luxuries because consumption of luxury conveys

- |                     | Not important At all          | Normal | The most important |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|--------|--------------------|
| ❖ Conspicuous value | 1..... 2..... 3..... 4..... 5 |        |                    |

(I can afford the expensive price. This gives me the sense of prestige.)

- |                 |                               |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| ❖ Unique value. | 1..... 2..... 3..... 4..... 5 |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|

(I consume this product because it is unique and exclusive.)