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**Going (in)conspicuous: a quantitative
study on the antecedents and
moderators of luxury consumption**

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Abstract

This study focuses on inconspicuousness, a recent luxury consumption phenomenon prevalent in more mature luxury markets. As a result of the democratization of luxury and consequent increasing worldwide luxury expense, consumers in mature markets feel like luxury has lost its uniqueness and exclusivity elements. This investigation takes a critical view on the makeover of luxury, by analyzing its conceptual evolution through the ages and matching it to its current landscape. Despite academia having long coupled conspicuousness and luxury and indissociable, this study intends to determine the main antecedents of inconspicuous luxury consumption, by quantitatively corroborating Makkar and Yap's (2018a, 2018b) and Shao, Grace and Ross' (2019a, 2019b) conclusions and, cross-culturally, analyzing conspicuous and inconspicuous luxury consumption. Findings suggest that Consumer Need for Uniqueness is an antecedent of Inconspicuous luxury consumption and that Cultural Capital has a negative effect on Conspicuous Luxury Consumption, mediated by Susceptibility to Normative Influence. Besides, evidence suggest that, between Southern European luxury consumers and Central and Eastern European luxury consumers, Cultural Capital has a different impact on luxury consumption. This research helps luxury brands and companies to better position themselves within their target audience, according to the type of consumption more prevalent among them. To the knowledge of the authors, this is the first endeavor to analyze conspicuous and inconspicuous luxury consumption as separate consumption habits, quantitatively determining antecedents for both, followed by a cross-cultural study of the differences between such precursors.

Keywords: inconspicuousness, luxury consumption, cross-cultural, cultural capital, PLS-SEM.

JEL Code: M10, M16, M19, M30, M31

Resumo

Objetivo: Esta investigação foca-se em consumo de luxo discreto, um recente fenómeno prevalecte em mercados de luxo mais maduros. Como resultado da democratização de luxo e conseqüente aumento da despesa em produtos e serviços de luxo, consumidores de mercados mais maduros sentem que o luxo perdeu os seus elementos de exclusividade e unicidade. Esta investigação tem uma abordagem crucial na investigação do marketing de luxo, analisando a conceptualização do mesmo ao longo da história e adaptando-o para o presente. Durante vários anos, os investigadores tornaram luxo e consumo conspícuo indissociável. Apesar disso, este estudo pretende determinar os principais antecedentes do consumo de luxo discreto, desagregando o luxo do seu consumo Conspícuo, corroborando quantitativamente as conclusões de Makkar e Yap (2018a, 2018b) e Shao, Grace e Ross (2019a, 2019b) e analisando transculturalmente o consumo Conspícuo e Discreto de luxo. Os resultados sugerem que: a Necessidade do Consumidor por Unicidade é um antecedente do consumo de luxo Discreto; que o Capital Cultural tem um efeito negativo no consumo de luxo Conspícuo, mediado pela Suscetibilidade à Influência Normativa; e que, entre os consumidores de luxo do Sul da Europa e os da Europa Central e Oriental, o Capital Cultural impacta o consumo de luxo de forma diferente. As descobertas ajudam marcas e empresas de luxo a posicionarem-se melhor perante o seu público-alvo, de acordo com o tipo de consumo mais prevalecte entre esse mesmo público. Para o conhecimento dos autores, este é o primeiro esforço para analisar o consumo conspícuo e discreto de luxo separadamente, determinando quantitativamente os antecedentes de ambos os tipos, realizando ainda uma análise multicultural das diferenças entre tais precursores

Palavras-chave: luxo discreto, consumo de luxo, transcultural, capital cultural, PLS-SEM.

Código JEL: M10, M16, M19, M30, M31

Table of contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Table Index</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Figure Index</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	<i>v</i>
1. Introduction	1
2. Literature Review	3
2.1 Luxury: Main theories.....	3
2.1.2 Intangible attributes of Luxury.....	3
2.2 Luxury Brand Management.....	5
2.2.1 Decoupling luxury from conspicuousness.....	6
2.2.2 Going inconspicuous.....	8
2.3 Antecedents of Luxury Consumption.....	8
2.3.1 Cultural Capital.....	10
2.3.2 Consumer Need for Uniqueness.....	12
2.3.2.1 Consumer Need for Uniqueness and Cultural Capital.....	12
2.3.2.2 Consumer Need for Uniqueness and Self-Construal.....	13
2.3.3 Susceptibility to Normative Influence.....	13
2.3.3.1 Susceptibility to Normative Influence and Cultural Capital.....	14
2.3.3.1 Susceptibility to Normative Influence and Self Construal.....	14
3. Methodology	15
3.1 Structure equational modeling.....	15
3.1.1 Reliability and validity.....	16
3.2 Survey design.....	16
4. Results and Discussion	20
4.1 Sample.....	21
4.2 Model Fit.....	21
4.4 Results and discussion.....	24
4.5 Multi-Group Analysis.....	26
5. Conclusions	29
5.1 Theoretical implications.....	29
5.2 Practical and managerial implications.....	31
5.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research.....	33
5.4 Final considerations.....	35
<i>Appendix</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>39</i>

Table Index

Table 1 - Major definitions of luxury	4
Table 2 - Theories about Conspicuous and Inconspicuous luxury consumption	6
Table 3 - Determinants of (In)conspicuous Luxury Consumption	9
Table 4 - Supported and not supported hypothesis	20
Table 5 - Reliability and validity measurements	22
Table 6 - Total, indirect and direct effects that Cultural Capital has over Conspicuous Consumption	25
Table 7 - Specific indirect effects that Cultural Capital has over Conspicuous consumption	26
Table 8 - Multi-group analysis SmartPLS output 1	27
Table 9 - Multi-group analysis SmartPLS output 2	27
Table 10 - Multi-group analysis SmartPLS difference between CEE and SE groups	28

Figure Index

Figure 1 – Proposed conceptual model.....	15
Figure 2 - Final Measurement Model.....	20
Figure 3 - HTMT Analysis Results.....	23

List of Abbreviations

AOS - Avoidance of Similarity
AVE – Average Variance Extracted
CC – Cultural Capital
CEE – Central and Eastern European
CNU – Consumer Need for Uniqueness
CONS – Conspicuousness
HTMT – Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations
INCONS – Inconspicuousness
IND – Independent Self-construal
INT – Interdependent Self-construal
PLS-SEM – Partial Least Square Structure Equational Modeling

SE – Southern European

SNI – Susceptibility to Normative Influence

UCC - Unpopular Choice Counterconformity

URGI – Utilitarian Reference Group Influence

VERGI - Value-Expressive Reference Group Influence

1. Introduction

In emerging markets, luxury is still synonymous with status-signal (Kaufmann, Vrontis, & Manakova, 2012). Academia has long been opulent in conspicuous research (see, e.g: Han, Nunes, & Drèze, 2010; Kaufmann et al., 2012; Leibenstein, 1950; Veblen, 1992). However, in traditional markets, luxury seems to no longer equate conspicuousness (Eckhardt, Belk & Wilson, 2015); in fact, the industry appears to be going inconspicuous (Crain, 2010; Eckhardt, Belk, & Wilson, 2015; Economist, 2005; Job, 2015; Wilson, 2014) and little is known about it (Makkar & Yap, 2018b). Despite Makkar and Yap (2018a, 2018b) and Shao, Grace and Ross (2019a, 2019b) first endeavours into inconspicuousness, more research that decouples luxury from conspicuousness, quantitatively corroborates previous findings and, cross-culturally, analyzes conspicuous and inconspicuous luxury consumption is in need.

The luxury market has been continuously growing since the 1990's (M.-S. S. Wu, Chen, & Nguyen, 2015), with a constant 5% growth rate expected to be maintained until 2020 (Montgolfier, 2017). Such tendency is explained by both economic (increased disposable income) and social factors (increased perception of high-end products and goods as essential in day-to-day life due to personal comparison) (Lewis & Moital, 2016). Traditional luxury markets (US and Western Europe) are still the biggest revenue gatherers (Delloite, 2018), but it's new money consumers (Husic & Cicic, 2009) from emerging markets (Delloite, 2017) that, through imitation of traditional ones, push the industry forward (Cervellon & Shammas, 2013; Hudders, Pandelaere, & Vyncke, 2013). In 2017, Chinese spending on luxury grew 7% (KPMG; Sohu) and 96% of Chinese millennials expect such rate to, in the future, at least match that of 2017 (KPMG). As a consequence, the actual luxury spending is increasing, contributing to the world wide spread of prominent logos, like the Louis Vuitton LV, and iconic designs, such as the Burberry plaid (Makkar & Yap, 2018b), but at what expense?

Scholars have long devoted their time to conspicuousness, mainly considering it indissociable from luxury consumption itself. However, there is no doubt that inconspicuousness, as a form of luxury consumption, is rising, and that academia has still devoted little attention to such an important phenomenon. This study aims to suppress that research gap and provide a clear understanding of the differences between conspicuousness and inconspicuousness, via the determination of antecedents for both luxury consumption habits.

Besides this section, this report is structured as follows. In Section 2, we present a review of the relevant luxury literature. Further scrutiny of luxury brand management is made in section 2.2, which encompasses a description and definition of both conspicuous and inconspicuous luxury consumption. Hypothesis formulation is done in subsection 2.3. In Section 3, the methodological approach utilized in this study is presented as well as the data collection process. Later, in Section 4, the main results are shown and discussed. Lastly, section 5 presents this study's conclusions, namely its theoretical and managerial implications and its limitations, as well as suggestions for future research and some final considerations about the study at hands. Finally, we present both an appendix and the bibliographic sources.

We hope this study is of a pleasant reading.

2. Literature Review

This chapter comprises a review of the relevant luxury marketing related literature, as well as the formulation of this study's hypothesis.

2.1 Luxury: Main theories

Academia always had trouble defining luxury (K. W. Miller & Mills, 2012), as its nature is constantly changing (Hudders et al., 2013). Over the years, several theories around the conception of a uniform and worldwide accepted definition of luxury have been put forward. Table 1 presents a comprehensive summary of such theories.

2.1.1 Tangible attributes of luxury

Scholars have previously listed luxury's more tangible attributes: it should convey the idea of high quality, uniqueness, rareness and exclusivity of products and services (J.-N. Kapferer, 2014; Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001) with a low functional utility to price ratio (Dubois, 2001; K. W. Miller & Mills, 2012; Nueno & Quelch, 1998). Nevertheless, luxury is still a relative concept, with no accepted definition (Ko, Costello, & Taylor, 2017). This conceptual struggle results of all the previously enunciated features of luxury being determined by the perceptions that customers have of a luxury brand's ability to express those them (Heine, 2012; Ko et al., 2017). In fact, individual, social, financial and functional dimensions have been proven to influence luxury value perception, to the point that different consumers, for the same brands, would understand their respective value differently (Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2007a). Such discernments have not only fluctuated over the years (Ko et al., 2017), but also been ambivalent for a long time (Dubois, 2001), which further adds to the lack of clarity associated to the conceptualization of luxury. Henceforth, uncertainty and ambiguity are bound to mold any definition of luxury, as the interpretation one makes of the tangible characteristics of luxury are very subjective.

2.1.2 Intangible attributes of Luxury

Luxury has to encapsulate a rich ancestral heritage (Dubois, 2001), carry historical value (Cristini, Kauppinen-Räsänen, Barthod-Prothade, & Woodside, 2017), provide pleasure as a central benefit and promise access to a dream world (Hagtvedt & M. Patrick, 2009) through products and services that have a high intangible utility to price ratio (Dubois, 2001; K. W. Miller & Mills, 2012; Nueno & Quelch, 1998). For a long time, such promise was associated to status signaling intentions, manifested via conspicuous consumption, as initially postulated in 1899 by Veblen (1992, as in 1899). Ever since Veblen, academia has deemed luxury and

conspicuousness indissoluble, with measurement schemes including conspicuousness as a critical aspect of luxury (Dubois, 2001; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

Yet, recent research has suggested that differentiation can be declared inconspicuously, as a way to harden imitation (Makkar & Yap, 2018a) and defined luxury consumption as “a multi-faceted behavior, driven by a wide variety of factors, in addition to the long-established motivation of status attainment” (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014, p. 2147).

Table 1 – Major Definitions of Luxury

Authors (date)	Definition of luxury	General enough to apply to all types of luxury consumption?
(Kapferer & Florence, 2018)	Luxury is conveying a high price and justifying it with a brand’s ability to create a dream world symbolized by the brand itself and its heritage, that customers wish to be a part of.	The definition cannot be operationalized and, thus, no conclusion can be made
(Kapferer, 2014)	Luxury is: (1) a mix of high-quality product, brand heritage, singular know-how, exclusivity and specialized and personal services; (2) a growing sector and a business, where small companies and family owned business are moving to where the market is and joining large conglomerates.	Maybe, as it supports the theory of luxury democratization, thus opening the doors for inconspicuous luxury consumption to rise while still allowing for the existence of conspicuous consumption
(Han et al., 2010)	Luxury goods are those that the mere display of a particular branded product brings the owner prestige apart from any functional utility.	Maybe, as inconspicuous consumption itself brings sense of prestige to the owner of the luxury good.
(Dubois, 2001)	Luxury combines 6 dimensions: (1) high quality (2) high price (3) rarity and uniqueness (4) aesthetics and polysensuality (5) ancestral heritage and personal history (6) superfluosity.	No, implies no differentiation between conspicuous and inconspicuous product consumption.
(Nuño & Quelch, 1998)	Luxury delivers a premium quality, heritage associated to country of origin and craftsmanship, distinct design, and reputation; has a low ratio of functional utility to price, but a high ratio of intangible and situational utility to price.	No, discard the differences between low prominent and highly prominent luxury goods, detrimental to luxury consumption
(Bearden & Etzel, 1982)	Luxury goods are those that are exclusive and not accessible to the general public, yet recognizable by it.	No, implies that luxury products can be recognized by the general public, discarding the possibility of inconspicuous consumption.

Table 1 - Major definitions of luxury

The wide-spread of luxury is separating the traditional consumers from conspicuous new money consumers, who imitate the first type even in their effort to be different and unique (Husic & Cicic, 2009). As a consequence, traditional consumers are changing their perceptions of luxury, giving rise to Inconspicuousness and proving luxury consumption to be more than a simple homogeneous concept (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014), demanding from academia a conceptualization of luxury that includes inconspicuous consumption.

Thus, for the sake of this study, a broad definition of luxury is presented. It incorporates the wide range of essential luxury fundamentals cited by scholars over the years, while still allowing for the presence of both conspicuous and inconspicuous consumption. Hence, luxury is a brand's ability to convey an image of, on the one hand, social prestige and elevation associated to a high-quality and exclusive product commanding a high price and, on the other hand, uniqueness and singularity, inspiring a sense of distinction and inimitability, based on the promise and delivery of hedonic pleasure.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to comprehend the difficulty of properly encapsulating all the different dimensions and aspects of luxury in a cohesive and universally accepted designation. The main point of the present research is not defining luxury, but instead further enriching the body of knowledge around Inconspicuousness.

2.2 Luxury Brand Management

In the past, luxury was a quieter industry, with family owned singular brands marketing products that represented their heritage (Kernstock, Brexendorf, & Powell, 2016). Nowadays, the industry is run by large conglomerates, managing a stretched luxury portfolio, that operates in several industries and distinct markets, from apparel to wine, and distinct markets (e.g., the largest luxury group in the world, LVMH, owns very popular brands, like Marc Jacobs, as well as very exclusive brands, like Berluti) (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014). These conglomerates increasing worldwide presence (by either opening new flagship stores or increasing penetration rates with more accessible accessories and second lines) (Kapferer & Florence, 2018) results in the loss of the uniqueness element that was always associated to luxury. Nowadays, brand managers have to find ingenious ways to compensate for such loss. Today's market is heterogeneous (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014), and multiple comprehensions of what luxury means are possible, which in turn leads to different forms of luxury consumption (Cristini et al., 2017).

Table 2 - Theories about Conspicuous and Inconspicuous luxury consumption		
Authors (date)	Definition of Conspicuousness	Definition of Inconspicuousness
(Makkar & Yap, 2018a, 2018b)	Consumption activities aiming at the satisfaction of the need for signaling status, power and wealth	The use of subtle signals that are not identifiable by the mainstream but observable to those with the needed connoisseurship
(Berger & Ward, 2010)	Conspicuousness is the choice of products with the aim to communicate an intended identity through the use of products that have certain cues that facilitate that communication and allow observers to make inferences about the wearer	Inconspicuous products are subtly marked and mis recognizable by most observers except by those "in the know", i.e. the insiders that the necessary high levels of cultural capital that allow them to identify the product and its brand
(Han et al., 2010)	Conspicuous products are those that have a high brand prominence, i.e., those that have highly visible markings and cues that help observers identify the brand	Inconspicuous products are those that have a low brand prominence, i.e., those that have subtle markings or no markings at all, thus allowing brand identification exclusively to the "insiders"
(Dubois, 2001)	Conspicuous consumption of luxury products is often linked to trying to impress other while also attempting to be highly visible; when attempted by the "nouveaux riches", could result in brand degradation	-
(Bearden & Etzel, 1982)	Luxury goods that are exclusive, yet recognizable by other, are consumed in public as a result of pressure from a reference group	-
(Veblen, 1992)	The wealthier and more affluent classes express their financial superiority over the working classes by the purchase of expensive goods and, more importantly, the show-off they do of these goods	-

Table 2 - Theories about Conspicuous and Inconspicuous luxury consumption

The luxury market englobes conspicuous and inconspicuous consumers, with each group purchasing luxury based on its own definition of what luxury is and on luxury-related past experiences. Table 2 presents a comprehensive overview of different conspicuous and inconspicuous luxury consumption theories.

2.2.1 Decoupling luxury from conspicuousness

As previously mentioned, luxury carries historical value: it can reveal insights about the social norms and consumption patterns of a time (Cristini et al., 2017).

Veblen's (1992) late XIX century "*Theory of the Leisure Class*" posits that the wealthier express financial superiority over the working class by purchasing expensive goods and, more importantly, showing them off. Veblen's pivotal work, the basis of conspicuous consumption theory, states that those with high income acquire and (publicly) use expensive goods and services in order to signal their status, thus coming closer to those that they consider wealthier or to occupy a more prominent social hierarchical position.

Throughout time, scholars inherently utilized Veblen's ideas in their research. Based on Veblen's singular take on conspicuous luxury consumption, (Bearden & Etzel, 1982) designed a necessity-luxury continuum, in which products, according to a scale ranging from "full necessity" to "full luxury", would be categorized as a function of their utilitarian and hedonic values. This study portrayed luxury as a way for consumers to signal their status by opting for consuming low functional utility products with a high price. Specifically, consumers would purchase the goods that they considered their reference peers would deem usual, and derive utility not from the product itself, but rather from the considerations of the audience (Lewis & Moital, 2016). Later studies continued Veblen's school of thought, describing luxury consumption as a way to impress others while also attempting to be visible (Dubois, 2001). Conspicuous consumption is still prevailing in emerging markets (Han et al., 2010), were new money consumers who imitate more traditional luxury market consumers in their consumption habits, including in their search for distinctiveness (Husic & Cicic, 2009) deem possessions determinant for, on the one hand, the construction of the self (Belk, 1988) and, on the other hand, the exhibition of one social status in cultures that fuel and entice materialism (Piron, 2000). Hitherto, when analyzed through the lens of Veblen's theories, the reasons for the prevalence of conspicuous luxury consumption in such markets, however, had already been associated to conspicuous consumption in traditional markets (i.e. the US and Western Europe) in the past,

Lately, speculation that being a conspicuous consumer is now more difficult than ever in the traditional markets has arisen. (Economist, 2005). Research suggests the conspicuousness-brand relationship becomes weaker (Eckhardt et al., 2015): as a result of the democratization of luxury (Heine, 2012; Hudders et al., 2013) (i.e., increasing expense in luxury goods protagonized by the new money middle class of emerging countries (Deloitte, 2017; Hudders et al., 2013)), conspicuous consumption is no longer reserved to the exclusive classes, but evolved into a mass consumption behavior, turning traditional conspicuous consumers away from such manners (Lewis & Moital, 2016). The dilution of the signaling

ability that conspicuous luxury consumption conventionally projected has increased the desire for inconspicuous luxury (Shao, Grace, & Ross, 2019b).

2.2.2 Going inconspicuous

Following *The Economist's* anticipation of a shift in traditional markets' consumption of luxury, Berger and Ward (2010) e Han et al. (2010) mentioned that, for certain consumers, wealth is not enough to achieve status; instead, they are opting for a more discreet and sophisticated consumption that approaches them to similar classes and dissociate them from imitators. Heine (2012) defended that luxury is more than an abundant state of superfluous consumption – it's anything that is desirable and delivers a dream. Today, wealth is signaled using a more intricate and elusive attitude (Makkar & Yap, 2018a), as the loss of exclusivity contributes to the rise of inconspicuous luxury consumption. Eventhough the inconspicuousness phenomenon has been gainig attention in the media (Crain, 2010; Economist, 2005; Job, 2015; Wilson, 2014) and in academia (Shao et al., 2019a, 2019b; Wilson, 2014; Z. Wu, Luo, Schroeder, & Borgerson, 2017), more empirical research is in need (Hume & Mills, 2013; Makkar & Yap, 2018a, 2018b).

Eckhardt et al. (2015) have defined Inconspicuousness as the use of delicate and subtle signals, untracable and unrecognizable to mainstream luxury consumers, but observable to those with the required level of knowledge. Inconspicuous goods have low brand prominence and, thus, being only recognizable to the insiders in the know (Berger & Ward, 2010; Han et al., 2010), who have high levels of cultural capital, which enables them to recognize an inconspicuous good (Makkar & Yap, 2018a, 2018b).

Considering this new type of luxury consumption and the attention academia is demanding from it, it seems logical to attempt the determination of new luxury consumption antecedents.

2.3 Antecedents of Luxury Consumption

Literature has identified the antecedents of both conspicuous and inconspicuous luxury, some of which summarized in Table 3. All in all, a specific set of cultural, social and self-related determinants seem to be more often associated to Conspicuous and Inconspicuous luxury consumption. Accordingly, our proposed model, which is based arround Kastanakis & Balabanis (2014), Makkar & Yap (2018a, 2018b) and Shao et al. (2019a, 2019b) studies, (1) introduces the variable Cultural Capital as an antecedent of both types of luxury consumption; (2) argues in favor of the positive effects that Consumer Need for Uniqueness has over Inconspicuousness and that Susceptibility to Normative Influence has over

Conspicuousness; and (3) proposes a set of mediators for the relationships between Cultural Capital and both Inconspicuous (Independent Self-Construal and Consumer Need for Uniqueness) and Conspicuous (Interdependent Self-Construal and Susceptibility to Normative Influence) luxury consumption.

Table 4 shows all the research hypothesis, followed by our proposed conceptual model (Figure 1).

Table 3 - Determinants of (In)conspicuous Luxury Consumption			
Theories		Determinants	Authors (date)
Inconspicuous Luxury Consumption		Cultural Capital; Need for Identity Signaling	(Makkar & Yap, 2018a, 2018b)
Bandwagon and Snob Conspicuous Luxury Consumption		Independence vs Interdependence; Status Seeking; Susceptibility to Normative Interpersonal Influence; Consumer Need for Uniqueness	(Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014)
Cultural Approaches	Cross Cultural Approaches to Conspicuous Luxury Consumption	Materialism; Social Symbolism and Exclusivity; Need to Conform; Individualism vs Collectivism; Creation of an Extended Self	(M.-S. S. Wu et al., 2015)
		Cultural Distinctions (Horizontal vs Vertical & Individualistic vs Collectivistic); Susceptibility to Normative Interpersonal Influence; Brand Connoisseurship	(Yi-Cheon Yim, L. Sauer, Williams, Lee, & Macrury, 2014)
	Conspicuous Luxury Consumption in Eastern European Transition Countries	Symbolic Consumption (need for Status and Uniqueness); Brand Perceptions of Quality; Cultural Influences	(Kaufmann et al., 2012)

Table 3 - Determinants of (In)conspicuous Luxury Consumption

2.3.1 Cultural Capital

Research suggests that cultural capital plays a significant role in comprehending and forecasting consumers' behaviors (Berger & Ward, 2010; Bernthal, Crockett, & Rose, 2005; Wei, Bergiel, & Song, 2019; Weinberger, Zavisca, & Silva, 2017).

Bourdieu (1984), utilizing art as an example of expensive and luxurious goods, suggests that its comprehension is a cognitive exercise that implies the conceptualization, application and following of a cultural code, responsible for the superior classes' ability to both be pleased with the simplicity and the esquisity of superior art and deny its more normal and vulgar versions. Bourdieu's elite goods are described as requiring a significant level of cultural capital to be properly appreciated, and the consumption of art is, like that of other elite goods, luxuries, ignited by such capital, is conscious and deliberate, fulfilling a job of social separation in between classes.

One can more broadly define Cultural Capital (CC) as a set of socially idiosyncratic and uncommon tastes, skills, practices and acquaintance that will determine one's level social status and power (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998; Makkar & Yap, 2018a). Such Cultural Capital will secure the individual the respect of others, since he proves himself to be a part of the only few that have acquired the ability to consume more abstract and conceptual objects (Holt, 1998). Hence, the accumulation of Cultural Capital is determined by one's level of education, social interactions, upbringing context and previous purchasing experiences.

Due to luxury's wide-spread, cultural elites in post-modern societies can no longer prove social distinguishment via conspicuous consumption (Hudders et al., 2013). Instead, they have to adjust their consumption practices: in social spaces where there is a great overlay of the types and the brands of luxury goods being consumed, one attempts differentiation by consuming the same product categories in ways that are rather inaccessible to others (Holt, 1998). Such inaccessibility will not be demonstrated via economic capital, but rather via cultural capital. Literature suggests that CC allows the cultural elites to truly comprehend the value behind inconspicuous luxury brands (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998; Makkar & Yap, 2018a, 2018b).

Hence, CC will interfere with luxury perceptions and change its consumption habits. For those with a high level of CC, inconspicuous luxury is a distinctive consumption source and symbol of great taste and true exclusivity (Bernthal et al., 2005; Wei et al., 2019). Conversely, at a low level of CC, conspicuous luxury consumption presents itself as the social

differentiating factor (Berger & Ward, 2010). We argue that CC will have a positive effect over Inconspicuousness (H1a) and a negative one over Conspicuousness (H1b).

H1a: Cultural Capital has a positive effect on Inconspicuousness

H1b: Cultural Capital has a negative effect on Conspicuousness

2.3.1.1 Cultural Capital and Self-Construal

Wong and Ahuvia (1998) have differentiated between luxury consumers according to their propensity to focus on social connections. Some consumers put more emphasis on their interpersonal domain and others' opinions, meaning that they focus on their Interdependent Self (INT) (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014), which has been described by Markus & Kitayama as "seeing oneself as part of an encompassing social relationship and recognizing that one's behavior is determined, contingent on, and, to a large extent organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others in the relationship" (1991, p.227). The application of such definition to this study entails that these consumers comprehension of luxury still lacks complexity and further nurturing (i.e., CC levels are low) (Makkar & Yap, 2018a), leading them to a social understanding of luxury, focused on materialism and possession. Since luxury consumption is being interpreted as a social tool, consumers prefer to feed their social identity. Henceforth, we argue that lower levels of Cultural Capital lead consumers towards the improvement of their Interdependent Self (H1d), which in turn will increase Conspicuous luxury consumption (H2d).

Conversely, other luxury put more emphasis on their internal domain and self-related goals, meaning that they focus on their Independent Self (IND) (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014), described by Markus & Kitayama (1991) as "construing oneself as an individual whose behavior is organized and made meaningful primarily by reference to one's own internal repertoire of thoughts, feelings, and action, rather than by reference to the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others" (p. 226). The application of such definition to this study suggests that the mentioned consumers are extremely selective with their purchases, due to their high level of acquittance with the luxury market, which equips them with the right levels of knowledge to back up their purchase and consuming decisions (Makkar & Yap, 2018a). Luxury is now comprehended according to its more personal dimensions, as they prefer to build their own singular identity. Thus, we claim that that higher levels of Cultural Capital lead consumers

towards the improvement of their Independent Self (H1c), which will in turn increase Inconspicuous luxury consumption (H2c).

H1c: Cultural Capital has a positive effect on Independent Self-construal

H2c: Independent Self-construal has a positive effect on Inconspicuousness

H1d: Cultural Capital has a negative effect on Interdependent Self-construal

H2d: Interdependent has a positive effect on Conspicuousness

2.3.2 Consumer Need for Uniqueness

Consumer Need for Uniqueness (CNU) is “the trait of pursuing differentness relative to others through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's self-image” (Tian et al., 2001, p.52). The need for uniqueness theory suggests that different people manifest desire of having a separated identity with different intensities (Fromkin, 1970; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980).

Considering the characteristics of luxury products, researchers have long devoted their attention to the linkage between luxury consumption and CNU (e.g., Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014; Tian et al., 2001). Consumers with a high need for uniqueness will manifest Avoidance of Similarity (AOS) behaviors, as they reduce their usage of certain luxury products if they realize they are no longer exclusive and will rather seek goods that deviate from the norm (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014; Tian et al., 2001). Inconspicuous consumption satisfies such aspect of CNU – not only is the inconspicuous luxury good different from the mainstream option, but it is also “unpopular”, as it is not immediately comprehended by the masses as luxury. We suggest that CNU will have a positive effect on Inconspicuous luxury consumption (H3a).

H3a: Consumer Need for Uniqueness has a positive effect on Inconspicuousness

2.3.2.1 Consumer Need for Uniqueness and Cultural Capital

As seen, a higher CNU steers the consumers towards more different products. Such nonconformity could put the consumer at risk of social disapproval, a conscious decision the consumer makes known as Unpopular Choice Counterconformity (UCC) (Tian et al., 2001).

Consumers with a higher CC tend to focus on the achievement of their own consumption related goals, as their superior knowledge provides a strong support for their consumption

decisions, usually based on more identity-relevant products (Berger & Ward, 2010). Hence, the consumption of more unique and inimitable goods aligns with the need to differentiate from new money luxury consumer (Berger & Ward, 2010; Husic & Cicic, 2009), shielding them from embarrassment and provide personal satisfaction (Makkar & Yap, 2018a).

We argue that CNU is positively affected by CC (H1e) and mediates the relationship between this and Inconspicuousness.

H1e: Cultural Capital has a positive effect on Consumer Need for Uniqueness

2.3.2.2 Consumer Need for Uniqueness and Self-Construal

As formerly advanced, consumers with higher levels of CC place the relevant focus of luxury consumption on the achievement of their Independent Self. Moreover, their level of knowledge backs up their consumption decisions, based on self-relevant goods (Berger & Ward, 2010). Higher levels of CC enable the choice for subtler luxury products, thus providing distinction from the new money consumer (Husic & Cicic, 2009), while avoiding them embarrassment (Makkar & Yap, 2018a). Hence, high CC luxury consumers will look for luxury goods that satisfy their need for uniqueness, thus enhancing their IND through dissociation from such them (Leibenstein, 1950). We argue that building an IND will positively affect CNU (H2a).

H2a: Independent Self-construal has a positive effect on Consumer Need for Uniqueness

2.3.3 Susceptibility to Normative Influence

Consumer Susceptibility to Normative Influence (SNI) is “the need to identify or enhance one's image with significant others through the acquisition and use of products and brands, the willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions” (Bearden, Netemeyer, & E Teel, 1989, p.474). Consumers with a high SNI act according to what a certain reference group expects from them, so as to avoid punishments or get rewards from it, a phenomenon defined by Park and Lessig (1977) as Utilitarian Reference Group Influence (URGI). Conspicuous luxury consumption satisfies this condition, as those products will be recognizable by the majority, thus signaling to the reference group an intention of belonging (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014). We suggest that SNI will have a positive effect on Conspicuous luxury consumption (H3b).

H3b: Susceptibility to Normative Influence has a positive effect on Conspicuousness

2.3.3.1 Susceptibility to Normative Influence and Cultural Capital

Consumers with low knowledge of the luxury market are concerned about the inferences that others may draw regarding their behavior, which will lead to higher Susceptibility to Normative Influence (Hoyer, MacInnis, & Pieters, 2018). In fact, consumers more susceptible to the influence of their peers tend to have a higher level of public self-consciousness, meaning that they try to create a favorable public image by consuming the types of luxury goods that they deem others will approve (Lewis & Moital, 2016). Such type of consumption is a reflection of a low level of acquaintance with the luxury market, which translates in the purchase of conspicuous products (Makkar & Yap, 2018a), as luxury is comprehended more as a social tool to imitate consumers, even in their desire to achieve higher status (Husic & Cicic, 2009). Hence, low levels of CC will shape one's luxury consumption decisions according to the reference group's norms. Susceptibility to Normative Influence is negatively affected by Cultural Capital (H1f) and mediates the relationship between this and Conspicuousness.

H1f: Cultural Capital has a negative effect on Susceptibility to Normative Influence

2.3.3.1 Susceptibility to Normative Influence and Self Construal

Consumers with a greater susceptibility to social norms tend to act in certain ways that strengthen the reference group's impressions of them, a phenomenon Park and Lessig (1977) called Value-Expressive Reference Group Influence (VERGI). These new money consumers (Husic & Cicic, 2009) are motivated to comply with the opinions of those in the know (Makkar & Yap, 2018a). Like this, luxury consumers more focused on their interdependent self are more susceptible to normative influence. Luxury consumption can, hence, be used as a tactic to associate with their aspirational reference groups (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014). We propose that consumers with a higher focus on their INT exhibit higher SNI (H2b).

H2b: Interdependent has a positive effect on Susceptibility to Normative Influence

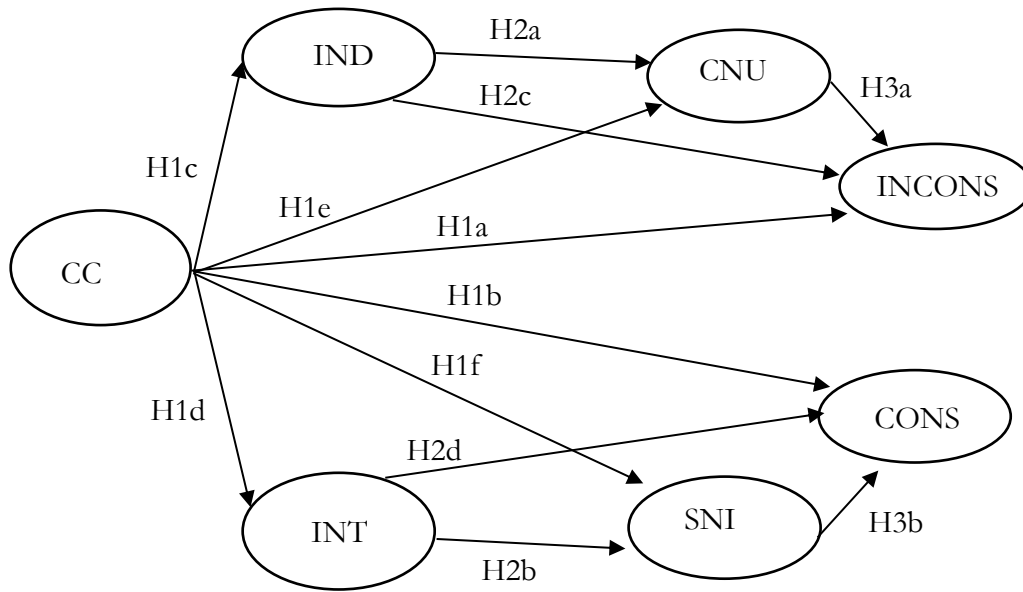


Figure 1 – Proposed conceptual model

3. Methodology

The following chapter addresses our study’s methodological procedures.

The reviewed literature provided some key understandings into the antecedents of both conspicuous and inconspicuousness. The following research takes a quantitative methodological approach, in order to provide academia with solid quantitative data in regard to Inconspicuousness. Furthermore, massification of luxury seems to be pushing Inconspicuousness in traditional luxury markets, which suggest that a cross-cultural analysis is also in need.

3.1 Structure equational modeling

Structure Equational Modeling (SEM) is a multiple regression modeling technique used to test the validity of theoretical models with underlying and hypothetical relationships between variables. SEM is a combination of two classical statistical techniques: factorial analysis, which outlines the measurement model and operationalizes the latent variables; and linear regression, that determines the relationship between said variables (Marôco, 2014a). One of SEM’s biggest advantages is the opportunity to study variables that cannot be directly measured, usually referred to as latent variables, but instead measured by their influence in other variables, the observed variables.

This study opted for employing a Partial Least Squares-based Structure Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), as opposed to another SEM analysis, like Covariance-based (CB-SEM). PLS-SEM not only requires no distributional assumptions (Huang, 2019), but also can be used for relatively small samples (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982). Additionally, PLS-SEM has been found to better explore high-complexity models' underlying theoretical structures (Jöreskog & Wold, 1982), since it is most often used to test and validate, at a more theoretical level, hypothesized relationships of exploratory models. Considering the inherent complexity of the model presented, PLS-SEM seems to be the better methodological fit for our study.

3.1.1 Reliability and validity

Confirmatory factor analysis tests the quality of the model. One of the main basic principles of confirmatory factor analysis is that the covariance between a set of manifested variables is due to the existent of one or more constructs, or latent variables, common to those variables, (i.e. the latent variable is the cause of the manifested variable's behavior).

Confirmatory factor analysis is used, usually, as a precursor to SEM, given that it sets the ground for the testing of a viable measurement model before moving to the analysis of the structural model. Typically, to test the scales' reliability, the Cronbach's α is calculated. A construct's reliability relates to the measurement's consistency and reproducibility. Within a given sample, an instrument is considered "reliable" if it fulfills these two peculiarities (Marôco, 2014a). Validity tests are usually conducted as well. Given that to the knowledge of the authors, not only have none of the constructs being measured in this study ever been associated in the same research before, but also some of the scales have never been adapted to a luxury consumption investigation, Confirmatory Factors Analysis is conducted, in order to test the instruments' reliability and validity.

3.2 Survey design

Specific questions regarding whether or not the survey takers had previously bought luxury products and considered themselves luxury consumers were added in the beginning of the questionnaire.

Existing scales have been selected, in order to measure each of the constructs.

The instrument chosen to measure the consumer's level of Cultural Capital is the cultural capital scale (CCS) proposed by Khodadady and Natanzi (2012). The CCS consists of a list of 31 items, dealing with several cultural declarations of the inquired participants. However, in order to only take into account, the items that better capture one's levels of Cultural Capital, some alterations to the original scale were made. The number of items was reduced

to 17. We removed those loading under 0.50 and kept those that better constituted a match to the definition of Cultural Capital presented above.

The Interdependent and Independent Self-construal Scales (W. Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, & Karimi, 1994) have been the instruments chosen to measure the luxury consumer's Self-construal orientation. These measures of Self-construal's are composed of a total of 29 items (15 measuring Independent Self-construal and 14 measuring Interdependent Self-construal). This scale derives from etic measures, which is advantageous for crafting cross-cultural appraisals (W. B. Gudykunst & Lee, 2003) (Hackman, Ellis, Johnson, & Staley, 1999). Thus, the Interdependent and Independent Self-Construal Scales were proven to be a fit for our analysis.

Bearden et al. (1989) Susceptibility to Normative Influence Scale, adapted by Batra, Homer and Kahle (2001), has been the instrument chosen to measure the luxury consumer's Susceptibility to Normative Influence. The original 8-item scale refers to the influence of "others", whilst Batra et al. (2001) 7-item adaptation refers to the influence of "friends". We believe this is a relevant change, since the most pertinent groups for social and consumption choices influence are more prone to be one's with whom the consumer relates to on a daily basis, like friends or co-workers. Rewording opens the door for different interpretations of the items. However, Batra et al. (2001) combined both scales to form a 15-item battery that were administered to participant in follow-up studies to their main one. Their conclusion was that in order to capture the measurement of the same domains as the original scale, a minimum number of 4 items had to be used on their adapted scale. We propose to use the 7 items, in order to assure that the best measurements are obtained. Additionally, the scale proposed better incorporates both the URGI and VERGI phenomena (Park & Lessig, 1977). Thus, we believe that (Batra et al., 2001) SNI Scale, complying with our requirements, is the best choice for our measurement scale when it comes to measuring CSNI.

Consumer Need for Uniqueness will be measured using Tian et al. (2001) Consumer Need for Uniqueness Scale, which expanded on previous studies about need for uniqueness. This scale encompasses both the AOS and the UCC dimensions of Consumer Need for Uniqueness previously considered and posits that need for uniqueness is a determinant in the way individuals consume ("individuals with a high consumer need for uniqueness would more often engage in the consumption of products for purposes of classification rather than experience, integration, or play" (Tian et al., 2001, p.64), functioning thus as the right scale for this investigation.

The instrument chosen to measure Conspicuous Consumption was the Consumers' Conspicuous Consumption Scale presented by Souiden, M'Saad and Pons (2011). Their scale is composed of 5 items, which had been used as measurement items from four studies: (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006; Henry, 2002; O'cass & Frost, 2002; H.-J. Park & Davis Burns, 2005). The choice for a measurement scale for the Conspicuous Consumption variable boiled down to the one Souiden et al. (2011) used and to the scale put forward by Podoshen, Li, and Zhang (2011). Both scales had been used in cross-cultural studies. However, the items in the latter one were found to conflict with chosen Consumer Susceptibility to Normative Influence scale, as they were worded as to put the inquired in a position *a priori* to consumption. Thus, we opted for Souiden et al. (2011) Conspicuous Consumption Scale.

Finally, the scale used to measure the Inconspicuous consumption is composed of 5 items from 2 different studies: 2 items from Berger and Ward (2010) who clarified, through social identity and distinction, the inconsistency between Veblen's initial theory of luxury consumption as a communication of status and power and the finding that high-end products were less likely to contain brand logos and thus, more likely to be mistaken as cheaper by affirming that insider consumers were more prone to acquiring such high-end products to facilitate communication among the insider group; 3 items from Dogan, Ozkara and Dogan (2018), who developed a luxury consumption tendency scale that encapsulates the aspect of inconspicuous luxury consumption pointed out by Berger and Ward (2010), namely the need for belonging to a minority of insiders. The reason why the Inconspicuous Consumption measurement scale, unlike the others, is composed of items withdrawn from two studies has to do with the inexistence, as far as the authors know, in the current relevant literature of a proper, fully functional and empirically validated measurement scale for Inconspicuous Luxury Consumption.

A final set of demographic question was added to the survey.

A 10-point Likert Scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, was chosen based on Awang, Afthanorhan and Mamar's (2016) comparative analyses of the performance of two categories of measurement scales, namely the 5-point and the 10-point Likert scale and their appliance to a Structure Equational Modeling methodology. Their analysis shows that the 10-point scale is more efficient in operating measurement, as the construct measurement of 10-points better satisfy SEM's requirement of ensuring that the construct involved in the model is both viable and reliable.

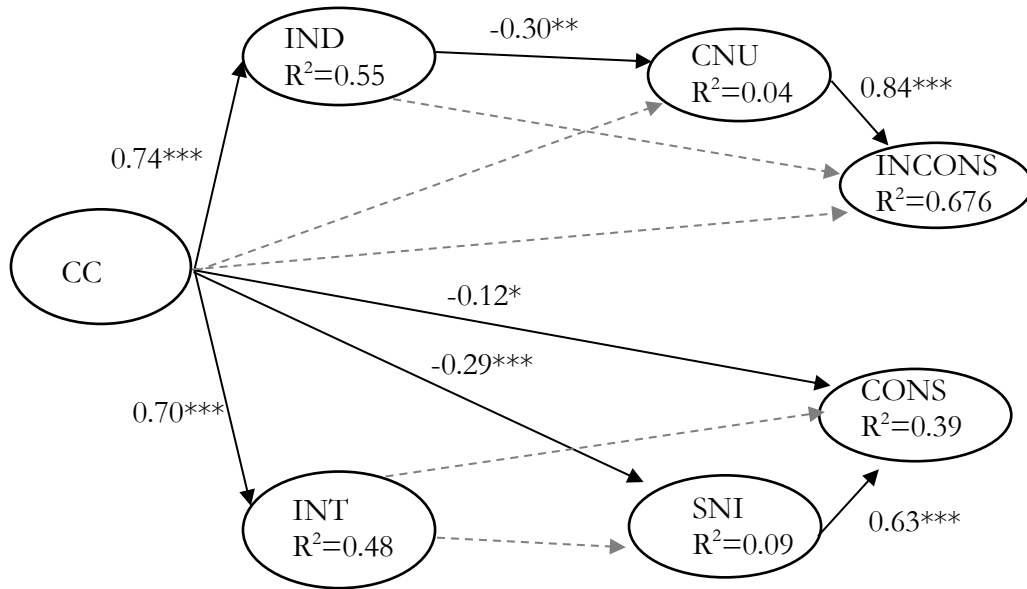
Regarding the study itself, all the necessary preventive and preemptive actions in order to counteract the negative effects of the Common Method Bias were implemented. This declaration is of the utmost importance, not only due to the particular method of data collection that will be put into practice, but also because academic reviews are, currently, actively looking for evidence that the authors of the studies being reviewed have considered the Common Method Bias when designing their studies (Conway & Lance, 2010). Therefore, when designing the survey, the wording in each scale was slightly updated in order to better fit the purpose of the study and the definition put forward in the literature review in regard to the constructs as well as to prevent biased answers. To test the clarity of the formulation of the items, a pre-questionnaire was implemented in 10 participants. The pertinence of the comments received dictated which adjustments were necessary, so as to maximize the chances of respondents fully comprehending the purpose of each item of the questionnaire and mitigate all potential biases and second-hand interpretations.

Appendix 1 shows the final items used for quantitative data collection.

The questionnaire was built on the Google Forms platform and released via email and direct contact with potential respondents, calling for its completion and sharing with family and friends, with the disclaimer that it should only be answered by luxury consumers.

4. Results and Discussion

Three different studies were carried out. We first conducted a Confirmatory Factor Analysis, followed by a Partial Least-Square Structure Equational Model Analysis. Finally, a Multi-Group Analysis was made. Studies were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 25 software and Smart PLS 3 software (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015).



Notes: * p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01; dashed lines: not significant; solid lines: significant

Figure 2 - Final Measurement Model

H1a	not supported	H2a	not supported**
H1b	supported*	H2b	not supported
H1c	supported***	H2c	not supported
H1d	not supported***	H2d	not supported
H1e	not supported	H3a	supported***
H1f	supported***	H3b	supported***

Note: *p>0,1; **p<0,05; ***p<0.01; n.s.: non-significant

Table 4 - Supported and not supported hypothesis

4.1 Sample

Data was collected between April and May of 2019. In total, 294 responses were obtained, despite one having registered nothing but empty values in all items. The vast majority of respondents claimed to have purchased luxury products before (79.5%), notwithstanding that only a small percentage of respondents consider themselves luxury consumers (26.6%). Nonetheless, no answers revealed to be potential outliers.

In percentage terms, 73% of respondents were female, while 26.3% were male and 0.7% preferred not to disclose their gender. The distribution of ages was as follows: 1.7% under 18 years, 46.1% between 18-24 years, 22.2% between 25-34 years, 10.9% between 35-44 years, 10.2% between 45-74 years and 8.9% above 55 years old. Of this sample, only 36.6% of respondents were students, as the bulk revealed being employed full-time (43.2%). The vast majority of the respondents were born in Albania (40.3%), Portugal (33.8%) and Italy (12.3%) and are currently living in those same countries, despite having obtained answers from countries like Germany, Romania, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand and others. Appendix 2 includes a simple statistical analysis of all the countries from which responses were obtained.

4.2 Model Fit

Relevant literature about PLS-SEM cautiously advises researchers towards reporting model fit indices (Hair, Hollingsworth, Randolph, & Chong, 2017; Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016). Even though some researchers have already started requesting to report model fit indices for PLS-SEM, the majority still refrain from doing so, considering that the proposed critical threshold values are still in their early stage of investigation, and thus often deemed as not totally useful. SmartPLS provides model fit indices, namely the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and the Normed Fit Index (NFI). However, SmartPLS users are advised by the software developers that there is still much research necessary in order for such indicators to be properly applied. Hence, the authors have decided to withhold disclaiming model fit indexes.

4.3 Measurement Reliability and Validity

Using SPSS 25 and SmartPLS 3, factor analysis was conducted on all constructs in order to test for reliability, which was initially measured via the Cronbach's α . Cronbach's α indicates how closely related a set of items are, within a specific group. The higher the value of α , the more reliable the scale is. According to Kline (2015), a Cronbach's α comprised around .90 is considered to be excellent, whilst one around .80 is thought to be very good. SmartPLS 3 suggests a threshold of 0.7 for Cronbach's α . A combined analysis of each construct's Pattern Matrix and Covariance Matrix suggested the elimination of certain items so as to increase the Cronbach's α . As a result, item cc5, measuring Cultural Capital, item int1, measuring Interdependent Self-Construal, item sni6, measuring Susceptibility to Normative Influence, item cnu7, measuring Consumer Need for Uniqueness and items cons4 and cons5, measuring Conspicuous Consumption were eliminated. Through SmartPLS 3, further reliability optimization of the model was obtained, namely by assessing the constructs' Composite Reliability. SmartPLS 3 suggests that Composite Reliability is obtained when its value surpasses a suggested threshold of 0.7. The outer loadings of the model were calculated.

Table 5 – Reliability and Validity Measurements

	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
CC	0.76	0.76	0.52
CNU	0.76	0.76	0.51
CONS	0.90	0.90	0.76
INCONS	0.83	0.83	0.56
IND	0.89	0.89	0.62
INT	0.82	0.83	0.54
SNI	0.80	0.80	0.58

Table 5 - Reliability and validity measurements

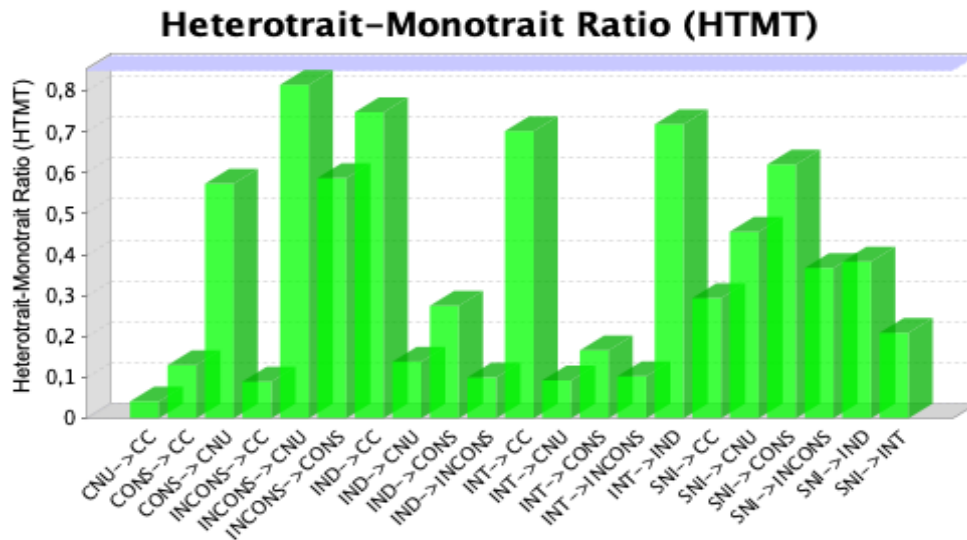


Figure 3 - HTMT Analysis Results

All items loading less than .7 were eliminated, with the exception for the CNU construct. Kline has mentioned that “models with factors that have only two indicators are more prone to estimation problems, especially when the sample size is small” (2015, p. 172). Therefore, in the case of CNU, a third item loading .69 was kept in order to keep a minimum of three items per construct. Values for both Cronbach’s α and Composite Reliability were then obtained. Results are shown in Table 6. We concluded that acceptable reliability has been achieved.

Subsequently, validity tests were conducted. Specifically, the calculation of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) through SmartPLS 3 allowed to assess construct’s Convergent validity. Convergent validity refers to the degree to which two different variables that have been theoretically hypothesized to be correlated, in fact are. Convergent validity is achieved when the construct’s AVE is superior to .5 (Barclay, Thompson, & Higgins, 1995). AVE for all constructs exceeded .5, thus confirming that all measurements exhibited satisfactory convergent validity.

Next, Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) was calculated. Typically, in order to determine Discriminant validity, that is to verify if a reflective construct, in comparison with other constructs, has the strongest relationships with its own indicators (Hair Jr et al., 2016), researchers tend to use the Fornell-Larcker criteria (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), which states that Discriminant validity is achieved if the correlations between a construct and all other constructs are inferior than the square root of the initial construct’s AVE). However, researchers using PLS-SEM are advised to assess Discriminant validity

through different procedures (SmartPLS). Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt (2015) suggest an alternative method, based on the multitrait-multimethod matrix: the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT). SmartPLS software developers also recommend using the HTMT method. Discriminant validity is achieved if HTMT values are inferior to 0.9, according to the suggested SmartPLS threshold. For all constructs, HTMT was below the 0.9 (Figure 3), thus confirming that all measurements exhibited satisfactory discriminant validity.

4.4 Results and discussion

Several correlations for crucial theoretical relationships between constructs were significant ($p < .1$), as per data shown in Figure 2, thus supporting H1b, H1c, H1f, H3a and H3b. Furthermore, and even though H1d and H2a were not supported by our study, the correlation between the constructs mentioned in those hypotheses were statistically significant.

This study has demonstrated positive relationships both between CNU and Inconspicuous luxury consumption (H3a) and between SNI and Conspicuous luxury consumption (H3b). Such findings constitute an incredible and remarkable discovery for Inconspicuous luxury consumption research, since to the knowledge of the authors, it is the first time that not only an antecedent to inconspicuous consumption has been quantitatively determined via PLS-SEM, but also the two types of consumption have been properly quantitatively differentiated in terms of their main antecedents. Thus, it has been statistically proven that, while a part of the luxury consumers consumes luxury products/brands as a way to conform to the expectation those who belong to their aspiration group may have, another satisfies an internal need of pursuing something unusual, in terms of consumption goals, by consuming luxury products/brands in an inconspicuous manner.

Additionally, this research confirms the hypothesized positive relationship between CC and IND (H1c). Higher levels of CC manifest themselves in a more mature comprehension of luxury and its complexity and depth. Such level of acquaintance results in a personal-centric opinion about luxury, rather than a more social one – hence, the higher CC, the more independent one's self-construal will be.

H1f and H1b were also supported by this investigation. The positive relationship between CC and both SNI (H1f) and Conspicuousness (H1b) proves that lower levels of CC, which translates into an undeveloped comprehension of luxury, increase one's willingness to enroll

Table 6 – Total, Indirect and Direct effects that Cultural Capital has over Conspicuous consumption

Variables	Point Estimate	Bootstrapping			
		Bias-Corrected 90% CI		Percentile 90% CI	
		Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Total Effects					
CC -> CONS	-0,12*	-0,24	-0,01	-0,23	-0,01
Indirect Effects					
CC -> CONS	-0,29**	-0,45	-0,15	-0,45	-0,15
Direct Effects					
CC -> CONS	0,17*	0,01	0,31	0,02	0.32

Note: 1000 bootstrap samples; two-tailed; * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$

Table 6 - Total, indirect and direct effects that Cultural Capital has over Conspicuous Consumption

in a conspicuous luxury consumption activity (with the purpose of signaling the aspiration group), by the mediation of the normative influence being exerted by others (H3b).

In order to further investigate the indirect effects of CC on Conspicuous Consumption through the mediator SNI, both bias-corrected and percentile bootstrapping analysis were executed, using 1000 bootstrap samples to calculate 90% confidence intervals. As displayed in Table 7, the bootstrap results confirmed the existence of a positive and statistically significant mediating effect for SNI between CC and Conspicuous Consumption. All in all, SNI seems to lean consumers with a low level of understanding of luxury (i.e. low levels of Cultural Capital) more towards being induced by other's choices and expectations, when it comes to luxury consumption decisions. Nonetheless, we had initially hypothesized that INT would also mediate the relationship between CC and Conspicuous. Even though H2b was not supported, further analysis into this relationship was conducted. Table 8 shows the statistically significant specific indirect effects found. Indeed, INT does not seem to function as a mediator between the relationship – SNI is the only mediator between CC and Conspicuous Consumption.

Contrariwise, hypothesis H1a, H1d, H1e, H2a, H2b, H2c and H2d found no empirical support, despite H1d and H2a having shown statistical significance. Disagreeing with what the reviewed literature indicated, our investigation has shown evidence of a positive relationship between CC and INT (H1d) and a negative relationship between IND and CNU (H2a) – our analysis of these results follows below in section 5, as they constitute an investigation opportunity for future researchers.

Table 7 – Specific Indirect Effects that Cultural Capital has over Conspicuous consumption

Variable	Point Estimate	Bootstrapping			
		Bias-Corrected 90% CI		Percentile 90% CI	
		Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Specific Indirect Effects					
CC->CONS					
CC -> INT -> SNI-> CONS	-0,01 (n.s.)	-0,10	0,11	-0,11	-0,10
CC->SNI->CONS	-0,18*	-0,35	-0,04	-0,34	-0,04
CC->INT->CONS	0,10 (n.s.)	-0,23	0,01	-0,22	0,01

Note: 1000 bootstrap samples; * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; n.s.: not significant

Table 7 - Specific indirect effects that Cultural Capital has over Conspicuous consumption

4.5 Multi-Group Analysis

Multi-Group Analysis was conducted in agreement with the Nonparametric Confidence Set Approach (Sarstedt, Henseler, & Ringle, 2011). A partial least square, 1000 bootstrap samples, two-tailed, bias-corrected 95%-bootstrap confidence intervals was constructed for both Southern Europe (SE, $N_{SE}=137$) and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE, $N_{CEE}=125$) groups. The SE group was constituted by survey answers from Spain, Greece, Italy and Portugal respondents while the CEE group was composed by Albanian, Romanian and Russian data. The results are presented in Tables 9, 10 and 11.

As it can be seen, the correlations between CC and CNU, CC and Conspicuousness and, finally, CNU and Inconspicuousness have been detected as dissimilar between SE and EE groups.

However, the Nonparametric Confidence Set Approach works on the basis that significantly differences found between the two group models are assumed, to exist when the method's criteria are met. Thus, and in order to corroborate the findings, another Multi-Group Analysis was done. The standard SmartPLS3 MGA was conducted, in which we evaluated the p-value of the three correlations found to be different between the two group models for both groups individually and for the p-value of the difference between the effects of both groups (CEE – SE). The results can be found in Table 11. We concluded that the difference between the total effects of the correlations measured in both models are statistically significant. Furthermore, the correlations between CC and both CNU and Conspicuous consumption are partially statistically significant, while the correlation between CNU and Inconspicuousness is fully statistically significant.

Table 8 – Multi Group Analysis SmartPLS Output 1

Variables	Point Estimate	Botstrapping	
		Bias-corrected 95% CI (SE)	
Total Effects (CEE)		Lower	Upper
CC -> CNU	0,184 (n.s.)	-0,362	-0,048
CC -> CONS	0,027 (n.s.)	-0,424	-0,03
CNU -> INCONS	1,001***	0,606	0,92

Note: N_{CEE}= 125; N_{SE}=137; 1000 bootstrap samples; ** p < 0.05; ***p<0.01; n.s.: not significant

Table 8 - Multi-group analysis SmartPLS output 1

One of the most significant differences between the two groups has to do with the impact that CC has on both CNU and Conspicuous luxury consumption. Specifically, this effect is non-significant in the CEE group and negative in the SE group. Such findings are of pivotal importance, since this study has been able to prove that indeed there are significant differences in the way culture impacts luxury consumption.

Table 9 – Multi Group Analysis SmartPLS Output 2

Variables	Point Estimate	Botstrapping	
		Bias-corrected 95% CI (CEE)	
Total Effects (SE)		Lower	Upper
CC -> CNU	-0,23***	-0,029	0.397
CC -> CONS	-0,25**	-0,154	0.231
CNU -> INCONS	0.791***	0,823	1.190

Note: N_{CEE}= 125; N_{SE}=137; 1000 bootstrap samples; ** p < 0.05; ***p<0.01; n.s.: not significant

Table 9 - Multi-group analysis SmartPLS output 2

Table 10 – Multi Group Analysis SmartPLS Difference between CEE and SE groups

Variables	Total Effects Original (CEE)	Total Effects Original (SE)	Total Effects-diff (CEE - SE)
CC -> CNU	0.139 (n.s.)	-0.186 **	0.326***
CC -> CONS	0.021 (n.s.)	- 0.222 **	0.244**
CNU -> INCONS	0.759***	0.622***	0.137**

Note: N_{CEE}= 125; N_{SE}=137; 1000 bootstrap samples; two-tailed; ** p < 0.05; ***p<0.01; n.s.: not significant

Table 10 - Multi-group analysis SmartPLS difference between CEE and SE groups

5. Conclusions

This research drew on Makkar and Yap's (Makkar & Yap, 2018a, 2018b) and Shao et al., (2019a, 2019b) pivotal studies about inconspicuous luxury consumption to examine, in a quantitative manner, the effects that the accumulation of cultural capital had on luxury consumption.

Four main research findings were obtained. First, and for the first time in academia, to the knowledge of the authors, an antecedent for Inconspicuousness was quantitatively determined via PLS-SEM, as this study has proved that Consumer Need for Uniqueness is a predicator of Inconspicuous luxury consumption. Secondly, Susceptibility to Normative Influence was found to not only equally have a positive impact over Conspicuous luxury consumption, but also to be a mediator for the negative effect that Cultural Capital has over Conspicuous luxury consumption. This research also has demonstrated that there are, indeed, culturally enticed differences in luxury consumption. Finally, this investigation has evidenced that the accumulation of Cultural Capital has a positive impact on Independent Self-construal.

Inversely, two other findings ended up contradicting what the review literature predicted. Namely, contrary to what the authors expected, Cultural Capital positively affects Interdependent Self-construal and Independent Self-construal negatively affects Consumer Need for Uniqueness.

This study brought contributions both on a theoretical and a practical dimension. These contributions are enumerated in further detail below.

5.1 Theoretical implications

Our main finding is that Consumer Need for Uniqueness is an antecedent of Inconspicuous luxury consumption. Considering that scholars had mentioned the lack of investigation in regard to inconspicuous luxury consumption (Hume & Mills, 2013; Makkar & Yap, 2018a, 2018b), it is to our belief that this discovery is of the upmost importance. Our finding corroborates Shao, Grace and Ross' (2019a), conclusion that individuals with a higher Need for Uniqueness are more predispose to consume luxury in a Inconspicuous manner. Hence, this research's main conclusion gains extra significance and weigh in academia. We make a strong conceptual contribution to luxury consumption literature, since we consolidate the theory that, for certain consumer groups, a differentiating status can be affirmed without brand prominence, as a way to harden imitation from others (Makkar & Yap, 2018a, 2018b). The need for uniqueness theory advocates that people try to manifest a

desire of having a different identity (Fromkin, 1970). Hence, when a luxury consumer is willing to pursue of distinctiveness from the herd (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014), through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods, meaning that the luxury consumer exhibiting a high need for uniqueness (Tian et al., 2001) is more likely to engage in a type of luxury consumption characterized by goods that bear more delicate and subtler signals, unadentifiable as luxury to the mainstream luxury consumers; that is, the luxury consumer will consume luxury in an inconspicuous manner (Eckhardt et al., 2015).

The present study also examined the link between Cultural Capital and luxury consumption. On the one hand, we found no empirical evidence that, in fact, Cultural Capital exerts a significant positive effect on Inconspicuous luxury consumption, as the relevant analyzed literature seems to affirm (Eckhardt et al., 2015; Makkar & Yap, 2018a, 2018b). Bourdieu's (1984) and Holt's (1998) theories, supported by Makkar and Yap (2018a, 2018b) recent discoveries, allowed for an understanding of the current state of the luxury consumption scenario that entailed that the accumulation of cultural capital would enable cultural elites to comprehend luxury brands and consumption in a unique and inimitable manner. However, our research revealed no such perception, as the relationship between Cultural Capital and Inconspicuous luxury consumption was statistically insignificant.

Alternatively, this research has demonstrated on the negative influence that Cultural Capital has on Conspicuous Luxury Consumption. Results indicate that the accrual of Cultural Capital negatively affects Conspicuous luxury consumption not only directly, but also indirectly, since it negatively affects one's Susceptibility to Normative Influence, which in turn positively contributes to Conspicuous luxury consumption. Particularly, the less Cultural Capital acquired, the more one will be subject to demonstrate conformity to the rules that allow membership attainment in a certain group (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014) due to lack of complex comprehension of what luxury is and, thus be more willing to engage in consumption habits that easily cause association with higher status groups (Han et al., 2010).

The present investigation has shed light on culturally provoked differences between how Central and Eastern European consumers and Southern European consumers consume luxury. Particularly, southern European luxury consumers will reduce the consumption of Conspicuous luxury as Cultural Capital accumulates. Relevant literature has revealed that cultural differences cause alterations in consumer behavior (D. Miller, 2005; Shaw & Clarke, 1998; Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2007b) and diverse perceptions of what luxury is and

entails (Godey et al., 2013). Our discoveries go in line with cross-cultural luxury consumption research. For example, Italian luxury consumers immediately use the word “exclusive” to describe luxury (Godey et al., 2013): since luxury is an elite privilege that only belongs to a certain few, and belonging is not only an important element of luxury but also extremely associated with connoisseurship (Cervellon & Shamma, 2013; Husic & Cicic, 2009), the more identity investments a Southern European consumer makes in the luxury consumption field, the more Cultural Capital is acquired (Wei et al., 2019) and the less Conspicuous the brands purchased will be, since those are the luxury products that are, currently, becoming not only more accessible, but also being more consumed by the vast “new money” (Husic & Cicic, 2009).

Conversely, in Central and Eastern Europe there seems to be a more accentuated effect of Consumer Need for Uniqueness on Inconspicuous luxury consumption, and Cultural Capital exerts no significant effect over Conspicuousness and Consumer Need for Uniqueness. Taking this into account, and considering this study’s main finding (Consumer Need for Uniqueness positively predicts Inconspicuous luxury consumption), we could potentially explain this according to Tian et al.’s (2001) Creative Choice Counterconformity (CCC) phenomena, which states that consumers, despite consuming products that enhance their uniqueness, will still select goods that are likely to be considered by others as good choices. Hence, a higher Need for Uniqueness would translate in the purchase of goods that, having low brand prominence, would still be recognizable by a few insiders (Berger & Ward, 2010; Han et al., 2010).

All and all, this study advances the understanding of luxury consumption by (1) providing a quantitative analysis of luxury consumption that differentiates between conspicuous and inconspicuous luxury consumption, (2) quantitatively identifying antecedents for both types of luxury consumption, (3) evidencing cultural provoked differences between Central and Eastern European Consumers and Southern European Consumers.

5.2 Practical and managerial implications

These findings also bear significant implications for tactical aspects of not only luxury brand management but also, and ultimately, luxury marketing, since our research confirms that luxury consumers are not a uniform and standardized group. Managers must incorporate this fact into their managerial endeavours. The segmentation of consumers in terms of conspicuous and inconspicuous consumption patterns allows managers to recognize the antecedents of those two types of consumption and to best tailor their marketing campaigns,

in-store retailing experiences and CRM and database structures, that help the brands to survive in the current worldwide luxury markets

Our investigation provides a deeper understanding on how luxury marketers can better design their campaigns, as our discoveries can be used to mold the customer's experience. Inconspicuous brands should design pull-type marketing campaign that enhance the consumers' Need for Uniqueness, like social media communication that is more uniqueness-signaling and demonstrates emotions related to individuality and distinctiveness, since consumers who acquire luxury brand for the communication of central beliefs and values respond positively to more value-expressive advertisement (Shao et al., 2019b). Conversely, managers who are targeting more conspicuous consumers who seek social approval may want to design their campaigns based on a more push-type strategy, which entices consumers to go group shopping and conveys the idea of public display of power, wealth and status.

Consequences of these two different types of campaigns need to be accounted for, whether brands are exclusively positioning themselves among either inconspicuous or conspicuous consumers, or trying to captivate both types. Managers need to carefully choose through which touchpoints consumers should engage with the brand, particularly in-store. For example, retail managers must develop training schemes to aid sales associated to recognize signals and prompts that indicate either inconspicuous or conspicuousness and then tailor the customer experience in store. Brands aiming to position themselves as more discrete should invest in the uniqueness of consumption experiences and inimitability of product quality and design as the two essential pillars of the in-store purchasing experience. In order to do that, sales associates can be trained to be more sensitive towards more inconspicuous consumers. Customization of products should also be made available, in order to mold and shape the sale and the experience to the client's need for uniqueness. Contrarywise, brands that are more focused on targeting the conspicuous consumers should encourage group purchasing experiences by offering the opportunity to compare the potential purchases of each individual consumer. In-store assortment should also be altered in function of the type of consumers targeted. More inconspicuous consumers should be given the opportunity to engage with a deeper, wider and more exclusive assortment, since their Need for Uniqueness would likely be more satisfied by encountering products that are not so often consumed by the new money (Husic & Cicic, 2009). Conversely, Conspicuous consumers may want to get a hold of a product assortment with a minor depth that only showcases the most sold variations of each product.

Finally, our research opens up the door for new types of consumption related data to be created and recorded. Inconspicuous and Conspicuous purchasing information would allow managers to analyze and match the demand of those different customer segments.

5.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study is one of the first attempts to advance a separate analysis of inconspicuous and conspicuous luxury consumption and to determine antecedents for both phenomena. Thus, it is bound by limitations, which in turn leave suggestions for future undertakings.

Considering the nature of our study, it seems only logical to argue that our results are limited by the ability that survey respondents had to correctly read, interpret and comprehend the aim of each item composing the questionnaire. Hence, we propose a replication of our study with new measurement scales.

Luxury marketing research is limited by the difficulty of reaching and connecting with luxury consumers. As a consequence of this fact, data collection was impaired. In order to collect a reasonable sample size that would allow us to continue with our investigation, 294 responses were collected from 21 countries. Thus, the sample ended up being small and heterogenous. We would suggest future research to not only collect more data, assuring that a certain level of homogeneity is maintained.

Another limitation had to do with the lack of an appropriate for Cultural Capital measurement scale, adapted to luxury consumption research, as well as any proper Inconspicuous luxury consumption measurement scale. Further research could dwell into the creation of these scales.

Inconspicuousness is a luxury marketing field that still lacks further research. The initial stones have been set, but it still important to mention that our study was limited by the lack of relevant literature around this topic. Our research affirms that Consumer Need for Uniqueness is an antecedent of Inconspicuous luxury consumption. We suggest researchers to further venture into this relationship, by investigating, for example, the possible effects that the different theorized dimensions of Consumer Need for Uniqueness (Tian et al., 2001) have over Inconspicuousness. Furthermore, more studies need to dwell into the theorized relationship between Cultural Capital and Inconspicuousness, since ours contradicts the qualitative conclusions drawn by Makkar and Yap (2018a, 2018b).

Additionally, further investigation should be done in regard to this study's hypothesis that, despite having not found empirical support in our study, were still statistically significant. Our investigation, much contrary to what we had initially posited, reveals that the

accumulation of Cultural Capital positively affects the nurturing of an Interdependent Self. This result could perhaps be interpreted in the light of Husic and Cicic's (2009) theory. They posit that the purchase of a brand signals the desire to be linked with the group who frequently uses that brand and that "new money', (...) imitate the first group [the 'aristocracy'] in everything, including their aspiration to distinguish themselves from others" (Husic & Cicic, 2009, p.243). Hence, the Cultural Capital accrued by new money consumers could be linked to the purchase of brands that trigger a sense of not only closeness to the aristocracy, but also belonging to the group of consumers of those brands. Such phenomena would be more agreeable to the construction of an Interdependent Self.

Moreover, and contrary to results shown by Kastanakis and Balabanis (2014), our results revealed statistical significance for the negative effect exerted over Consumer Need for Uniqueness by the construing of an Independent Self. Curiously, Need for Uniqueness theory, despite posing that individuals desire difference and distinguishment, suggests that one will still try to preserve a certain level of resemblance to others, be it high or low (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Contrariwise, the Independent Self-construal theory advances that one's behavior is arranged according to one's own self-references (instead of the opinions, emotions and actions of others), eventually turning meaningful as a result of such organization (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This indicates that construing an Independent Self leaves no room for any level of similarity to the others. Ultimately, we believe that further investigation into these two relationships should be done, as a deeper understanding of these phenomena could contribute to a profounder comprehension of the luxury consumption phenomena and its more psychological elements (Husic & Cicic, 2009).

Deeper research into cultural enticed differences in inconspicuous and conspicuous luxury consumption should also be made. Namely, further investigation into the effect that CCC has over Inconspicuousness in Central and Eastern European countries could contribute the further understanding of how Need for Uniqueness affects Inconspicuous Luxury consumption.

Finally, PLS-SEM is a Structure Equation Model analyzes that is still in its early days of research. Mathematicians and scholars are still grappling with, for example, the definition of model fit thresholds, despite notably being the best SEM analyzes to run under the conditions this study was conducted. We recommend the replication of this study when such thresholds are communicated, and scholars are more comfortable with the analysis procedures.

5.4 Final considerations

Despite these limitations, this study improves the body of knowledge around luxury marketing and provides managers with a new understanding of inconspicuous and conspicuous luxury consumption.

Having arrived at similar conclusions as to the ones presented by Shao et al. (2019a, 2019b) in regard to the positive effect that Need for Uniqueness has over Inconspicuous luxury consumption is an important step towards the validation of an idea that, despite having been implicitly prevalent in the relevant luxury marketing literature, had never been addressed before, to the knowledge of the authors.

Additionally, having been able to determine different antecedents for both conspicuous and inconspicuous luxury consumption has clearly led us to a fruitful decoupling of luxury from conspicuousness, which offers researchers and managers a new and unprecedented standpoint in conceptualizing luxury consumption.

All in all, this investigation has laid the groundwork for future inconspicuous luxury consumption research. It provides a base of understanding as to how the inconspicuous trend came to be and, if paired up with other pieces of relevant literature on inconspicuousness (Eckhardt et al., 2015; Makkar & Yap, 2018a, 2018b; Shao et al., 2019a, 2019b; Wilson, 2014), delivers a solid foundation for future endeavors into inconspicuousness, which is this study's authors' ultimate wish.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Items used in the questionnaire

Cultural Capital (CC)	cc1	I buy lots of books, read them and keep them in my library	(Khodadady & Natanzi, 2012)
	cc2	I attend handy-craft galleries	
	cc3	I have grown up in a civilized family	
	cc4	I am a civilized person	
	cc5	I have a personal library in my room, and I like to add books to it	
	cc6	I visit museums/historical places	
	cc7	I read fashion magazines	
	cc8	I buy newspapers regularly	
	cc9	I would like to continue/have continued my education to a higher level	
	cc10	My parents read in their leisure time	
	cc11	I have fluency of speech and people understand me easily	
	cc12	I visit art galleries/fashion shows	
	cc13	I visit news and political websites	
	cc14	I watch documentaries	
	cc15	My parents can/could communicate in English	
	cc16	I am interested in literature and poetry and have literal studies	
	cc17	I attend art courses	
Independent Self- Construal (IND)	ind1	My personal identity is important to myself	(W. Gudykunst et al., 1994)
	ind2	I prefer to be self-reliant rather than depending on others	
	ind3	I take responsibility for my own actions	
	ind4	It is important for me to act as an independent person	
	ind5	I should decide my future on my own	
	ind6	I enjoy being unique and different from others	
Interdependent Self- Construal (INT)	int1	It is important to consult close friends and get their ideas before making a decision	
	int2	I will sacrifice my self-interest in benefit of the group	
	int3	I respect decisions made by my group	
	int4	I stick with my group even through difficulties	

	Int5	I maintain harmony in the groups of which I am a member	
	Int6	I comply with the majority's wishes in groups of which I am a member	
Susceptibility to Normative Influence (SNI)	sni1	When I shop for a brand, it is important to me that my friends like it	(Batra et al., 2001)
	sni2	When I shop for a brand, it is important to me that my friends have it	
	sni3	I like buying the same products/brand that my friends do	
	sni4	My friends and I tend to buy the same brands	
	sni5	I buy brands which will make me look good in front of my friends	
	sni6	It is important to me to have a lot of friends with whom I can do things	
	sni7	When I buy the same things my friends buy, I feel closer to them	
Consumer Need for Uniqueness (CNU)	cnu1	When shopping/dressing, I have sometimes dared to be different in ways that others are likely to disapprove	(Tian et al., 2001)
	cnu2	I avoid product/ brands that have already been accepted and purchased by the average consumer	
	cnu3	I have often gone against the understood rules of my social group regarding when and how certain products are properly used	
	cnu4	I give up wearing fashions I've purchased once they become popular among the general public	
	cnu5	I have often violated the understood rules of my social group regarding what to buy or own	
	cnu6	The more commonplace a product or brand is among the general population, the less interested I am in buying it	
	cnu7	Concern for being out of place doesn't prevent me from wearing what I want to wear	
Conspicuous Luxury Consumption (CONS)	cons1	I purchase branded products/services because they make me gain respect	(Souiden et al., 2011)
	cons2	I purchase branded products/services because they enhance my popularity	
	cons3	I purchase branded products/services because they make me noticed by others	
	cons4	I purchase branded products/services in order to show who I am	
	cons5	I like luxury	

Inconspicuous Luxury Consumption (INCONS)	1	incons	When purchasing clothing and apparel, it is important for me to choose items that differentiate me from other consumers	(Berger & Ward, 2010; Dogan et al., 2018)
	2	incons	It is important for me to avoid things that other consumers would buy	
	3	incons	I do not enjoy buying a product/service that can be bought by the vast majority of society	
	4	incons	It bothers me when many of the people around me have a product that I have	
	5	incons	I would like to feel that I belong to an exclusive minority through the products/services I purchase	

Appendix 2: Geographical distribution of answers

ALB	BR	CH N	DN K	DTC H	ESP	FIN	GRE	IND	IT
40,3%	0,7%	0,3%	0,3%	0,3%	0,3%	0,3%	0,3%	0,3%	12,3%
MEX	MIXED	N.A	NIG	PT	ROMAN	RUS	STH AFR	STH KR	THAI
0,3%	0,7%	3,1%	0,3%	33,8%	1,0%	1,4%	1,7%	0,3%	1,7%

Notes: ALB – Albania; BR – Brazil; DNK – Denmark; DTHC - Deutschland; FIN – Finland; GRE – Greece; IND – India; IT – Italy; MEX – Mexico; MIXED – Mixed Nationalities; N.A – Not Answered; NIG – Nigeria; PT – Portugal; ROMAN – Romania; RUSS – Russia; STH AFR – South Africa; STH KR – South Korea; THAI - Thailand

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