

Effects of Manipulating Antecedent Traits on Conspicuous Consumption Tendencies

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1. Acknowledgements

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2. Abstract

This study examines the impact of depletion and reinforcement of antecedent traits on two distinct types of conspicuous consumption, bandwagon and snob. This was achieved by undertaking a memory task designed to instill a self-perceived sense of uniqueness or conformity in participants who were found to be high in one of the two antecedent traits of consumer need for uniqueness or consumer susceptibility to normative influence. It was found that depletion of participants' antecedent trait that they were high in had an effect on conspicuous consumption tendencies, whereas reinforcement did not. The trait depletion findings were in line with previous research in the area. Trait reinforcement may not have had an effect due to the memories elicited having positive connotations, which are not remembered as accurately nor have the emotional impact of negative ones. The present study establishes both consumer need for uniqueness and consumer susceptibility to normative influence not just as antecedent traits to conspicuous consumption but also as situational factors, that are able to be depleted. These findings have applications throughout consumer research.

3. Introduction

119 years ago, Thorstein Veblen wrote “Property now becomes the most easily recognized evidence of a reputable degree of success as distinguished from heroic or signal achievement. It therefore becomes the conventional basis of esteem” (2017, p. 15). With the rise and prominence of capitalism and consumer culture, the link between the products a person owns and their identity is at an all time high. In an atmosphere such as this, where both wealth and its use to consume are highly valued, the more luxury products a person owns, the more highly they are viewed in terms of social class. This is the quintessential example of conspicuous consumption in action, but the concept has further applications for establishing identity. Two aspects that consumers can take advantage of to define themselves through products are conformity, and its avoidance, non-conformity. Consumers can choose to go with the crowd and gain a sense of conformity through products that are preferred by the majority, or foster a sense of individuality through products that are preferred by the minority. This study looks at which side of conformity and non-conformity a person identifies with, their conspicuous consumption decisions, and the manipulability of this relationship.

Conspicuous consumption describes the process by which individuals purchase and display products in attempts to be granted approval by other members of their social group, be it a significant other, family, neighbours, or reference group members. Once seen as a homogenous behaviour for the display of economic power, its definition has expanded in recent time, with more and more research being poured into the topic as its significance has increased globally. The establishment of two distinct types of conspicuous consumption behaviour, bandwagon and snob (Leibenstein, 1950; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014), is one

development that has given the concept a new and deeper understanding. Continuing down the chain of knowledge, a greater comprehension of the antecedents that precede conspicuous consumption behaviour has also allowed modern researchers to examine many new aspects in the field. Consumer need for uniqueness and susceptibility to consumer normative influence are two of the key antecedents and the determination of their manipulability and their existence as both traits and motivational states by researchers has allowed the development of the study undertaken here. Conspicuous consumption may be a booming driver of capital in the modern economy, but its origin extends far back into the history of economic psychology, and features some of the most well-renowned names in the field.

3.1 Literature Review

The term ‘conspicuous consumption’ was born from the mind of the 19th century Norwegian-American economist Thorstein Veblen. Many credit his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) as a key early text on the topics of consumerism and economic psychology, and it still has many applications in the present day. However, many of the important concepts that Veblen presents in his seminal work were originally broached by famous Scottish economist Adam Smith, a pioneer of political economy. These concepts mostly stemmed from Smith’s work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). With a much more philosophical viewpoint than Veblen, this is Smith’s treatise on the ethical and psychological components of economic thought. To begin, Smith crafted the image of a “stoic man” or “the man within”, an internalization of an ideal moral man within a person’s conscience who sits outside the corruptions of the world. From this “man within”, Smith believed that people should base their moral self-concept and their decisions on how they believed this image in their mind would act. However, Smith wrote that the “disposition to admire, and almost to

worship, the rich...is the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments” (2017 [1759], p. 33-35). This is one of the concepts that Smith first outlined that persisted into Veblen’s work and into the present day. Although Smith’s concept of behaviour was that it should arise from an understanding of ideal moral sentiments, he understood that most of human behaviour came as reflections of what they observed others doing around them (2017 [1759]). What Smith described here would later become known as interpersonal influence, one of many antecedents of conspicuous consumption behaviour. Two other concepts that Smith first described in a rudimentary form, one that would be expanded upon by Liebenstein (1950) and Kastanakis & Balabanis (2012), were the different conspicuous consumption archetypes, bandwagon and snob. Smith’s original description of these two types was as a dichotomy of individuals whose behaviour a person might emulate. The first of these is an individual who catches the attention of every wandering eye, the bandwagon, and the other is an individual who only attracts attention from “the most studious and careful observer” (Smith, 2017 [1759], p. 34), the snob.

The primary example for the wealthy individual that Smith puts forward is the man of fashion, who he describes as seeking self-reassurance through his wearing of trinkets that gratify flatterers around him. He also describes the process of customization, a method used in modern times to instil a sense of uniqueness into conspicuous consumption, by men of fashion in his time adding new pockets to their clothing so that they could carry an increased amount of valuable trinkets so as to display as much of their wealth as possible. Veblen wrote down his own thoughts on fashion and customization by the upper class. He believed that fashion was conspicuous consumption incarnate, due to clothes being always visible to those around and the association between the person’s wealth and themselves was right there, draped across their body. Veblen also postulated that clothing sent additional signals, such as

expensive clothing which restricted an individual's ability to take part in laborious work indicated leisure in itself (Watson, 2012). For customization, the advent of mass production meant that, in Veblen's era, it was possible for members of lower classes to afford cheaper versions of expensive clothing (Watson, 2012). As such, the wealthiest members of society needed to distinguish themselves even further, and did so through the use of customization, adorning themselves with objects that were unable to be replicated (Veblen 1998 [1899]). This harkens back to the wealthy of Smith's time adding extra pockets to their dress to be able to ornament themselves with further status-inducing items. Smith believed that society as a whole had become much too obsessed with the acquisition and display of ornaments and dress. He found it to be a great injustice that this type of behaviour was the normal archetype for individuals to emulate in his time. Always sentimental, Smith's aspirations were for those who displayed genuinely praiseworthy behaviour to be the models of society. He believed that following the example of the "man within" could lead people to throw off the corrupting influence of a society obsessed with superficiality. Veblen, however, was not so quick to believe that conspicuous consumption was something that an individual could exit once they were entangled within it.

Any understanding of the differences between Smith's and Veblen's analysis of conspicuous consumption behaviour must understand that they wrote in different times and spaces. The industrial revolution of the 19th century is often credited with creating the means for mass production that allowed conspicuous consumption to proliferate to the point that it has reached in the present day (Segal & Podoshen, 2013). Smith's understanding of consumers and their behaviours came in 1759, before this period of gross change, whereas Veblen came after the industrial revolution at a time when conspicuous consumption saturated societies much more deeply. Veblen, himself a keen admirer of Smith's work (Watson, 2012), even

stated as much, saying that Smith's account, or any account of economics, was a product of the thinking in its own time and place (Hodgson, 1998). Another cause of the different interpretations that each had was their attitudes. As stated earlier, Smith took quite a philosophical and moral approach, an approach which apparently became more pronounced in his work as he aged (Fleischacker, 2004). He was also a lot less willing to consider this practice as an inescapable social norm, and was a lot more optimistic in his faith in humanity to be able to overcome the clutches of capitalism to lead a life dictated by morals (2017 [1759]). However, Veblen did not agree with this sentiment. With his well-known witty cynicism (Watson, 2015), Veblen came to the conclusion that for conspicuous consumption to not be such a driving force, society as whole would have to transcend the concept of social relations based upon material possessions, essentially abolishing the leisure market (2009 [1919]). This difference in the belief of the ability of individuals within a society may have again been due to the period in which each author was writing. By the time Veblen was writing, conspicuous consumption had become a much more mainstream phenomenon, again due to the industrial revolution. Mass production put conspicuous consumption not just within the reach of the wealthy but the lower classes. As such, when Smith was writing it may not have seemed such a foregone conclusion that conspicuous consumption would be prominent in the lives of so many people in Veblen's time.

One topic that Smith and Veblen agreed upon was their distaste for the practice of conspicuous consumption in general. Both gave quite vitriolic critiques of the phenomenon, Veblen describing it as a competition in who was able to waste a larger amount of resources in pursuit of symbolic separation from those they considered below them (1998 [1899], p. 13). Smith described it as a delusion of the wealthy, confusing superficial acclaim with actual respect, and that anyone who took part in "prodigality", extravagance or excessive lavishness,

worked to impoverish their country (Smith, 1981 [1776]). But in his usual moral and hopeful standpoint, Smith saw that this status-seeking nature of the wealthy could help increase the prosperity of a nation and promote industry (Watson, 2012), an idea that would later be affirmed (Collins et al., 2015). Overall, it can be seen that although some of their notions for the interaction of society and conspicuous consumption differed, Veblen and Smith had quite similar foundations to their work, understanding the impact that the behaviour of those they observe has on an individual and each offering his own critique of the behaviours of the wealthy and of the capitalist structure. But, with the benefit of being able to build upon the workings of Smith, Veblen expanded on Smith's ideas and it is his writing that has persisted to modern times and became integral to the concept of conspicuous consumption.

In Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), he posits many new concepts that would be researched and examined from their inception and on to the present day. One form of conspicuous consumption, the concept that Veblen is most noted for and that was borne in this book, is pecuniary emulation. This is the phenomenon of members of lower classes reflecting behaviour that they see from the wealthier classes above them, in an attempt to match the social status that they observe in those that take part in the behaviour receiving. Despite having more meagre means, the aspiration for status is no less of an objective for the lower classes. With the US having just become the most productive and richest country in the world (Watson, 2015), this was the closest that the *hoi polloi* had come in history to being able to emulate the rich. Again, although Veblen originally wrote on this idea in 1899, its trappings can still be seen today. In modern times, terms such as "masstige" (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003), a portmanteau of mass and prestige, have come to describe the process that companies undertake to market mass-produced products with a sense of exclusivity. In

Veblen's time this would have been a nascent concept as mass production was not as prolific and fine-tuned across as many products as it is today.

Another term for an aspect of consumer culture that Veblen coined in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) was conspicuous leisure. This is the display of wealth, not through products, but through lack of productivity. Conspicuous consumption signals wealth by putting luxury products on display; conspicuous leisure signals wealth through the individual's ability to avoid laborious work and spend their time on non-productive activities that lacked utility. Fritjers & Leigh (2008) proffer the idea that a poorer individual must at any time make a choice between these two methods of displaying wealth. If one is taking part in conspicuous leisure, they are not working to earn income to spend on luxury products. Vice versa, if a person is working to afford to conspicuously consume, they are not able to be seen taking part in conspicuous leisure. They also noted that the utility of conspicuous leisure was dependent on the length of time that an individual had lived near those they wished to impress with their conspicuous leisure. Whereas conspicuous consumption is a signal of wealth that is evident immediately upon sight, time is a factor in interpreting the wealth signal of conspicuous leisure.

Veblen voiced a distaste for the social class stratification and the role that conspicuous consumption played in its formation. He stated that the "utility of articles valued for their beauty depends closely upon the expensiveness of the articles" (1998 [1899]: 146, cited in Watson, 2012), and with this understanding he condemned the stratification that was caused by the different prices of luxury products. Veblen posited that these different levels of expensiveness essentially turned products into classifiers of their consumer's wealth that acted to stratify them more than they were already by society. Further expanding of his view

of class stratification, he considered the assignment of individuals to certain professions and utility to society to be counter-productive. He equated conspicuous consumption with the archaic predilection for aggressive force over productive work (Watson, Glaze, & Clarke, 2015). Its modern form, in Veblen's mind, was the respect and admiration that was paid to the cannibalizing businessman as compared to the low prestige of those who labour for a living.

Veblen and Smith may have been the pioneers who first introduced and broached the concept of conspicuous consumption, bringing forward the idea for the psychological and economic analysis of today, but this concept is a part of human behaviour that existed before these two. For an example, Kohn and Mithen (1999) believe that they found an example of conspicuous consumption at a time before homo sapiens in a series of hand axes. These researchers viewed the large number of symmetrically produced hand axes, a larger number than they deemed would have been necessary for survival, as an ancient sexual signal sent by the crafter to potential mates. Trading in shell beads dating back as far as 80,000 years was probably one of the earliest examples of conspicuous consumption that humans took part in (Collins et al., 2015). But even beyond these ancient examples, conspicuous consumption is a phenomenon born from the most primal and basic instinct of mating. The concept of sexual selection was first articulated by Charles Darwin (2006[1871]) who understood it as a deleterious endeavour by species to attract mates through displays. For some types of birds, this is the spectacle of bright and colourful plumages that may attract the attention of mates but also leaves them more visible to predators. For humans, this is the spectacle of conspicuous consumption at the cost of using resources on luxury items that could be utilized elsewhere. The behaviour, however, has been found to apply mostly to the male members of species. This comes down to the concept of parental investment (Trivers, 1972). The

contribution of the female of a species to the successful raising of offspring is much higher than that of the male. For the male, it requires only the investment of time and energy of sexual intercourse, but for the female it is the time and energy of pregnancy, nursing, and raising a child or children. From this perspective, it can be seen why the male member of a species would have to convince the female to mate. For humans, it is argued that conspicuous consumption is our current version of sexual signalling (Collins et al., 2015). Providing evidence for this hypothesis, Griskevicius et al. (2007) found that when male participants were presented with photos of women or asked to read a romantic scenario, they became more likely to purchase luxury products than men who were presented with neutral images. On the biological side of this argument, it has also been found that testosterone has its own role in conspicuous consumption behaviour. When driving an expensive sports car, it was found that men's testosterone levels increased, and they were found to decrease when driving an old family sedan (Saad & Vongras, 2009). In this same study, they found that men's testosterone levels would also increase when their social status was called in to question by the wealth display of a male rival in the presence of a prospective female mate.

Although males may be the primary users of sexual selection behaviour, females have their own biological instincts for attracting mates. When women were induced with mating motivations, no changes were found in conspicuous consumption behaviours (Griskevicius et al., 2007). However, women are more likely to take part in public, but not private, helping, and that this induced mating mindset also lead to an increase in public spending on helpful causes. Through this dichotomy of mating instincts, we can see the biologically encoded values that each sex seeks out. For men, the conspicuous display of wealth shows that they are able to provide and gather resources, traits that are both desirable for child rearing and for passing on to offspring. For women, the benevolence shown by helping others and donating

to causes signals the woman's nurturing and kind disposition, prosocial traits valued in motherhood. Although conspicuous consumption is not as important to women in attracting mates, they do make use of it in another way. Wang & Griskevicius (2013) examined the idea that women use conspicuous consumption as a signal to deter female rivals who threaten their relationship. One of the instincts that they believe plays a part in women's conspicuous consumption behaviour is that mate poachers have been found to be less likely to attempt to poach when a male partner is seen as highly devoted to his female partner (Schmitt & Buss, 2001; cited in Griskevicius & Wang, 2013). The display of luxury products by women is hypothesized by them to be a signal of their partner's devotion, deterring poaching by female rivals who view them together. Griskevicius & Wang (2013) backed up their hypotheses with findings that showed that when women were prompted with a motive to guard a mate from being poached, they were more likely to purchase and display luxury products. These products were more likely to be displayed publicly, compared to purchasing more expensive items in general. Considering the different ways that the two sexes utilise the displaying of their wealth, conspicuous consumption can be seen as a modern evolution of one of the most basic biological instincts.

The biological workings of sexual selection and conspicuous consumption have had an impact in economics. Some economists claim that the saturation of consumer culture and specifically conspicuous consumption has been a driving force behind economic growth (Rauscher, 1997). And due to conspicuous consumption being driven by sexual selection related behaviours, some argue that men's propensity to display wealth has led to increased economic activity causing the economy to grow (Collins et al., 2015). This relationship between conspicuous consumption and economic growth is attributed to two factors. The first of these is that capital is the currency for conspicuous consumption and that this is generated

through productive labour, so the increased demand for capital leads to increased labour, which in turn increases the productivity of businesses and grows the economy. Their second method that they describe is economic growth through technological progress. This is achieved in two ways; the demand of conspicuous consumers on luxury markets requires constant innovation as newer and flashier products demote the status of all older and less innovative products, and secondly the amount of capital, both financial and human, that is poured into these markets allows for technological progress.

One term that is often seen as going hand in hand with conspicuous consumption, and that can be viewed by lay people as one and the same, is materialism (Eastman, Fredenberger, Campbell, & Calvert, 1997). To give a description of materialism to go with the image already painted of conspicuous consumption here so that differences may be examined, it is the placing of material possessions as a central component of an individual's life and happiness (Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012). To further elaborate and examine its meaning, Ger & Belk (1996) crafted a model that consisted of four personality traits that expressed materialism; possessiveness, non-generosity, envy, and tangibility. Their definitions (Belk, 1984) are as follows; possessiveness is the need for control over possessions, envy is an attitude of distaste towards an other's superiority, in possessions in this case, non-generosity is the unwillingness to share possessions with others. The fourth factor of tangibility, the conversion of experience into material form, was added in a later study (Ger and Belk, 1990). This is not the only concept of materialism, as Richins and Dawson (1992) saw three separate factors that defined its manifestation; acquisition centrality, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness, and possession-defined success. Generally viewed as a negative value system (Segal & Podoshen, 2013), materialism has been found to hold many negative implications for life. Those who pursue materialistic goals have a reduced concern for things such as

public welfare and taking part in romantic relationships (Ahuvia, 1992). Sirgy (1998) believed that materialistic individuals have lower happiness and well-being because they have a tendency to judge themselves and others by the quality and quantity of their possessions, and that this could lead to them building very high standards-of-living for themselves. With the importance that both materialism and conspicuous consumption have within many societies in modern times, for the sake of accuracy and greater understanding it is imperative to separate these two concepts, and also to find areas in which they overlap. In an attempt to achieve just this, Eastman, Fredenberger, Campbell, & Calvert (1997) examined the variables of both conspicuous consumption and materialism in university students across the United States, People's Republic of China, and Mexico. The authors used the Richins & Dawson (1992) model of materialism, and although materialism was found to be significantly correlated with possession-defined success, it was determined that the materialism and conspicuous consumption were separate constructs. This was because materialism levels differed across the three countries, whereas conspicuous consumption levels remained constant. Outside of showing the distinction between the two constructs, this information also tells us that conspicuous consumption has global implications, while materialism may be impacted more by different cultures and societies.

Moving on from the areas that conspicuous consumption affects, there are many factors that affect the manifestation of conspicuous consumption and its behaviours. This distinction between the different values that effect conspicuous consumption decision making was originally proposed by Liebenstein (1950), who approached these ideas quite statistically and did not attempt to analyse the root causes of these behaviours.

One of the traits that is considered an established driver of conspicuous consumption is status seeking (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014). In terms of conspicuous consumption, this is the purchasing of luxury products for the purpose of enhancing social standing. This status can be achieved in three ways; status by definition or assignment, e.g. royalty; status by achievement, e.g. completing a marathon; and status by consumption, the one that is applicable in this work (Eastman et al., 1999). Status seeking, and specifically doing so through consumption, is a concept that has been seen as very similar to conspicuous consumption. As with materialism, this comparison has led to an effort to distinguish between the two to bring accuracy and understanding to the topic. O’Cass & McEwen (2004) determined the separation of the two constructs to be born out of the differences in consumers’ motivation behind decisions. They found that susceptibility to reference group influence is a factor in both status and conspicuous consumption. For those who take part in either or both, certain products signal an image to reference groups who shower the consumer with approval. Interpersonal influence is another aspect that crosses the boundary of these constructs. Both require the consumer to be influenced by how they and their products are interpreted by those around them. O’Cass & McEwen (2004) also found empirical data that highlighted the distinction of status and conspicuous consumption. They found significant gender differences in participants’ conspicuous consumption but not in their status consumption. Males, aged between 18 and 25, are more highly concerned with the conspicuousness of their product use, when compared with females of the same age. Previous findings (Eastman et al., 1997; Tse et al., 1989) have also shown men to be the more materialistic gender and to be more likely to seek validation externally through product purchases.

Two basic types of cultures are posited to exist within the world, individualistic and collectivistic (Hofstede, 1983). In terms of orientation, the western world is usually seen as the individualistic side, and the eastern world as collectivistic (Bellezza, 2013). The names of these two culture types are drawn from how a person is viewed within the scope of the culture i.e., within an individualistic society, a person is an individual; in a collectivistic society, a person is part of the collective. The reason that this division between cultural types is important here is that part of the differences in the cultures comes down to conformity and the idea of uniqueness, and this difference plays a big part in how conspicuous consumption has evolved in each culture type. The concepts of conformity and uniqueness that would be seen in an individualistic culture compared with a collectivistic one are different at almost every level.

In East Asian societies, principally collectivistic cultures, the Western term of uniqueness corresponds with their own negative term of deviance (Kim & Markus, 1999). Their role in the culture and their interpretation are also areas that are large points of separation. In an individualistic culture, uniqueness is a primary goal of members of society, whereas in collectivistic culture, connectivity to others, such as family is key, and conformity is not viewed so negatively (Bellezza, 2013). Imhoff & Erb (2009) have a different take on this dichotomy of understanding. They postulate that members of individualistic cultures attain uniqueness through an emphasis on their distinction from others. Uniqueness is still part of collectivistic cultures, but is gained through accentuating the unique role of the individual within the group. A meta-analysis of studies using Solomon Asch's (1956) notorious line judgement test, which tested how likely a single participant was to speak out against a clearly incorrect majority, looked at this work through the scope of collectivistic and individualistic cultures (Bond & Smith, 1996). They found that collectivistic countries had higher levels of conformity, while the individualistic countries showed less conformity,

confirming their hypotheses of how uniqueness and conformity were valued in each culture type.

Conspicuous consumption also has very different implications depending on the culture in which it is undertaken. Ahponen (2016) determined a set of four scales with opposing values at each end, which they believe would distinguish individualistic and collectivistic cultures. The first of these four scales targets the inherent value or need that an individual satisfies with a luxury item. Individualistic members seek out products that have hedonic value, i.e. that provide a pleasant sensation through their use or presentation. Alternatively, collectivistic members look to find products that have symbolic value, i.e. that reference their values or social consciousness. Moving to the next set of aspects, collectivistic culture members utilise luxury products in attempts to empathize social standing within a group, be it of age, wealth, or profession. For individualistic members, the emphasis is on personal meaning, i.e. they look to show a sense of themselves through their products. The third set of aspects revolves around the social context of conspicuous consumption. The collectivists are much more likely to consider their purchases and their wealth in general in the context of their community, e.g. children will consider their wealth as more of a familial asset. For individualists, as the name suggests, conspicuous consumption is much more of a solo activity, and others are mostly taken into account when thinking of how a product's signal will be interpreted. The last set of aspects is the variance from conformity to personal integrity. As shown by Bond & Smith's (1996) meta-analysis of Asch's (1956) conformity experiments, speaking out holds much more value in individualistic cultures. For the collectivists, conformity is valued and seen as the mature option when personal beliefs do not match those of others. So the interpretation of uniqueness and the role of conspicuous consumption within different culture types is complex, but can be better understood through empirical data. Here again, the most common example for comparison is Asian versus

American cultures. Conspicuous consumption in and of itself is traditionally seen as a very western idea, however Asian countries have started to come into their own with regards to consumer culture, with luxury product markets growing at a much faster rate than anywhere in the west (Kapferer, 2012). When comparing Chinese participants aged 18-35 with their American counterparts, the Chinese were found to have higher levels of both materialism and conspicuous consumption (Podoshen, Li, & Zhang, 2011). These researchers note that only 5 years previously, Chinese teens aged 14-17 were found to be less materialistic than both American and Japanese teens (Schaefer et al., 2004). Momentous changes to the culture and attitudes of China, happening alongside large increases in China's wealth, have led to a boom of the luxury industry. This rapid growth had two outcomes that affected conspicuous consumption. Firstly, the gap in both understanding and acceptance of the new luxury products was a point of contention between younger and older Chinese citizens who grew up in distinctly different cultures (Podoshen, Li, & Zhang, 2011). Secondly it led to the infusion of the old collectivistic culture that values connectivity, with the new luxury consumer culture that values image. With conspicuous consumption also revolving around luxury product consumption and the importance of the image presented to others, it can be understood why this alignment of values in China has led to a large increase in conspicuous consumption (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998; Ahponen, 2016).

One of the two key variables in the present study is the need for uniqueness. This is a human characteristic and behaviour that determines the importance that one puts on being an individual or unique. People who have a high need for uniqueness work harder to imbue themselves with a sense of individuality and are sensitive to their similarities to others (Snyder, 1992). Those with high need for uniqueness are less likely to agree with a majority opinion than those with low need for uniqueness (Imhoff & Erb, 2009). Need for uniqueness

is not just a trait, though, and can be a temporary motivator as well, with situations arising that can cause one's sense of uniqueness to be depleted or reinforced (Imhoff & Erb, 2009). When a discrepancy between current state and desired state occurs, individuals will be motivated to eliminate this difference (Higgins, 1987). In terms of need for uniqueness, this means that when an individual is feeling too similar to others, they will work to try and regain a sense of uniqueness. A study by Imhoff & Erb (2009) looked to put these concepts to the test. They presented participants with bogus feedback, such as a researcher telling them their answers were standard or a fake graph showing them they sit right on the mean, to lower their sense of uniqueness. Following this depletion of their uniqueness, high need-for-uniqueness participants were more likely to disagree with a majority opinion and agree with the minority. When the researchers allowed the participants a chance to regain their sense of uniqueness following the bogus feedback, they found that the majority opinion became the favoured option, but that agreement did not return to control group levels, implying that the bogus feedback may have still had some lingering effect on the participants' need for uniqueness.

Outside of disagreeing with majority opinions, a sense of uniqueness can be achieved in many ways. Snyder & Fromkin (1977) found that those who are high in need for uniqueness are more likely to join unique groups, and also have larger signature sizes on average. So a sense of uniqueness can be gained through almost anything, but one of the ways that is most prevalent is through the products one buys. Here need for uniqueness is closely tied to conspicuous consumption. Several aspects of consumer behaviour are governed by a need for uniqueness, for example, innovation and fashion leadership. Snyder & Fromkin (1977) also found that participants high in need for uniqueness also showed high levels of consumer innovativeness. This link has been backed up by other researchers (Burns & Kampf, 1992;

Lynn & Harris, 1997). Fashion leaders, seen as high in innovativeness, have been found to prefer scarce fashions (Szybillo, 1975). Adam Smith (2007 [1776], p. 139) himself noted the link between consumer preference and the availability of a product almost 250 years ago, observing that “the merit of an object that is to any degree either useful or beautiful, is greatly enhanced by its scarcity”. This desire for scarcity affects a wide range of products. A study by Worchel, Lee, & Adewole (1975) found that cookies that were regarded as scarce were regarded as more desirable than cookies that were abundant. Those who wish to distinguish themselves through their product choice may also shop for niche products (Mason, 1984). It has been found that the desire for unique products has a positive relationship with desire for niche products, and that niche products were more likely to be adopted by opinion leaders, fostering a link between the already established need for uniqueness characteristic in conspicuous consumption and niche product choice. Niche products are specialized items that appeals to small markets, and have specific aspects that draw in consumers, such as quality or affinity to brand image. Other aspects of conspicuous consumption that are affected by a desire for unique are a preference for customized products, and for unique shopping venues (Lynn & Harris, 1997). Overall, it can be seen that need for uniqueness is a complex attitude with many different possible behaviours. Its connection to conspicuous consumption is very well established and the use of consumption to attempt to satiate a need for uniqueness is rife around the world.

Susceptibility to normative influence is the other key variable in the present study

This trait is the main driver for bandwagon conspicuous consumption behaviour (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014). But, normative is only one of the two types of interpersonal influence, a phenomenon wherein individuals change their social behaviours depending on the signals and opinions of others. Bearden et al. (1989) originally found that the differences in people’s

choices could be attributed to the degree of how much they were influenced by the opinions of others. Later on, they found that individual values affected the degree to which an individual's behaviour was affected by those around them. They deemed this concept interpersonal influence. Other than normative, the other type of interpersonal influence is informational. This component entails the obtaining of information to determine the social customs in a situation through observation of others or by requesting information (Kropp, Lavack, & Silvera, 2005). Informational influence mostly just gives individuals a better understanding of their environment and is not as reliant on the opinions of others directed towards an individual. As such it is not very applicable in the context of conspicuous consumption. Normative influence is an individual's tendency to conform to social standards to gain the acceptance of others (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2005). Normative influence in itself consists of two aspects, which were originally seen as two separate types of influence before being combined by Bearden et al. (1989) due to their overlapping. The first of these is value expressive influence, which is defined in terms of conspicuous consumption as the use of products to enhance the image of one's self in the eyes of others. The other component is utilitarian influence, which is the use of products to comply to expectations so as to avoid any social punishment from divergence and gain the social rewards of conformity. Collapsing these two aspects into one, normative influence encompasses both using consumption to enhance image as well as conform to group standards. It can be seen from these principles for normative influence that it revolves heavily around the opinions of others. This is reflected in the values of those high in susceptibility to normative influence.

It is also believed that need for uniqueness would be negatively correlated with consumer susceptibility to normative influence, i.e. the desire to conform to acceptable consumer behaviour, but they found that these two concepts were independent of each other. This may be because of their relationship with another concept that bridges the gap between

uniqueness and conspicuous consumption, optimal distinctiveness theory. This concept, first proposed by Marilyn Brewer (1991), builds on the ideas of social identity theory (Turner & Reynolds, 2010), which describes the attitudes and behaviours of an individual in regards to intergroup behaviour, and of uniqueness theory (Fromkin & Snyder, 1980), which posits that people do not wish to be either very similar or very different to others, and wish to find a middle ground. Optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 2003) fuses aspects of both these concepts, positing that there are two selves at play when it comes to conformity and uniqueness. The personal self monitors individuality and personal integrity, while the collective self monitors the relationship with social groups and security. Brewer believes that individuals seek an optimal balance between inclusiveness and distinctiveness and that the two desires are in constant opposition. One way in which both of these objectives are reconciled is through identification with an in-group, or a community that the individual belongs to, while maintaining distinctiveness from the out-group, e.g. other groups or humanity in general. This relationship allows for security in conformity within an in-group but also a sense of individuality from society on the whole.

A key distinction in this study is that between the two types of conspicuous consumption behaviour, bandwagon and snob, as determined by Kastanakis & Balabanis (2012, 2014). These two behaviours are very distinct, falling on the opposite ends of the conspicuous consumption spectrum. The first, bandwagon, is when a product's value increases with the number of people who own it. The utility of a product for a bandwagon consumer is in their association with others who own the same product. At the other end, snob behaviour is the valuing of a product more highly with the few people who also own it. For snob consumers, utility is gained through the exclusivity that is granted by the small number of people that own or have even heard of a product. There are a variety of antecedents that impact an

individual's propensity to engage in either bandwagon or snob conspicuous consumption behaviours (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). As was discussed already, status-seeking is considered an important driver for conspicuous consumption (Eastman et al., 1999; O'Casey & McEwen, 2004). Status seeking relates to both bandwagon and snob behaviour. Members of each consumer type are looking for different characteristics in their products, be it popularity or uniqueness, but both groups are trying to gain recognition through purchasing products with those characteristics. Kastanakis & Balabanis (2012) backed up the link between these two concepts by finding that status-seeking is positively correlated with both the propensity to engage in bandwagon consumption and the propensity to engage in snob luxury consumption.

Self-concept is another trait that impacts conspicuous consumption behaviour heavily, and can be seen as the foundation for which behaviour type an individual will lean towards (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014). The two types of self-concept are the independent and interdependent self. The independent self is identified by its emphasis on personal aspects, such as self-related goals, what makes them unique, and expressing personal tastes. The independent self is related to snob luxury consumption behaviour. For the interdependent self, the emphasis is on how their attitudes and beliefs are viewed by others, and social relationships. This self-concept type is related to bandwagon luxury consumption behaviour. This self-concept theory runs along the lines of previous research in the area by the likes of Tsai (2005), who posits that luxury consumption is either socially or personally oriented, and Wong & Ahuvia (1998) who believe that luxury consumers either seek products for their personal effects, such as utility, or for their social effects, what they communicate to others. Self-concept boils down to how highly an individual values different aspects of life. It is less two types of personalities, however, and more two thought processes that are in constant

opposition. Where people fall on the scale is determined by how influenced they are by their independent and interdependent selves.

Moving on from the foundation of conspicuous consumption behaviour, several other traits have an impact on the decision making process. Consumer susceptibility to normative influence, status consumption, and consumer need for uniqueness are the peripheral traits that Kastanakis & Balabanis (2012) found to mediate the relationship between self-concept and conspicuous consumption and these determine where an individual will fall on the spectrum of bandwagon and snob behaviour. Firstly, consumer susceptibility to normative influence is associated with the interdependent self and is a precursor to bandwagon behaviour (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). Normative influence is described as the “influence of other people that leads us to conform in order to be liked and accepted by them” (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2005). This trait is how much conspicuous consumers take into account the norms of their product’s reference group when making consumption decisions. Next, status consumption may appear to already be covered under the trait of status-seeking, but there is a differentiation. This is an individual’s propensity to seek products that increase their status (Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 1999). The difference here being that status seeking can be achieved in many ways, and this distinction from status consumption confirms that individuals are seeking their status through consumption. Also, unlike status-seeking, which is linked to both the independent and interdependent self, status consumption was found to be positively related to the interdependent self, but negatively related to the independent self (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014).

The last trait, consumer need for uniqueness, has already been examined, but as an antecedent to conspicuous consumption, it can be examined further. Consumer need for uniqueness has three dimensions (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014). The first of these is creative choice counter-conformity, the tendency to purchase products that are outside of

social norms but are still seen as acceptable choices, e.g. using hair dyes outside of standard hair colours. Next is unpopular choice counter-conformity, related to choosing products that oppose social norms and may be met with social disapproval, e.g. clothing with inflammatory images or words. Lastly, avoidance of similarity is identified as the inclination to steer clear of products that have been co-opted by mainstream culture, i.e. any product that has not been adopted by the majority of people. Consumer need for uniqueness is a trait that is seen in the independent self and is an antecedent for snob behaviour. Although the model for conspicuous consumption seen here is the one that is used as the basis for this study, other researchers have crafted their own interpretations of the traits that determine conspicuous consumption behaviours. An earlier work by Kastanakis (2010) also included traits such as hedonism, consumer perfectionism, narcissism, vanity, and fashion consciousness.

This study examines the dichotomy between conformity and non-conformity. Conformity is the adherence to the social codes of conduct that lead to social acceptance and avoid disapproval (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Non-conformity is the deviation from these same social codes that can come at a social cost (Bellezza, 2013). However, a social cost is not the only outcome of non-conformity, and this behaviour is rewarded in some circumstances. Status can be awarded to those who non-conform, as it is taken as an ability to afford the social cost that non-conformity is usually met with (Bellezza, 2013). When viewed by others, there are antecedents that determine if an observer will meet non-conformity with distaste or approval. The observer's need for uniqueness governs whether status is attributed to an act of non-conformity, with high need for uniqueness individuals granting more status than those with lower levels (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). Perceived autonomy, whether an act of non-conformity is seen as intentional or accidental, also affects whether status is attributed to the act. Situations in which an observer is unfamiliar with an environment and is not aware of the

rules of social conduct will also cause any status gained or lost through non-conformity to be reduced (Bellezza, 2013). Non-conformity can be born out of a desire by individuals to distinguish themselves from other people or groups they dislike (White & Dahl, 2007). This disassociation extends to brands, with individuals viewing brands and products that are used by those they dislike negatively and so they avoid purchasing them.

3.2 Research Gap

The three main works from which this study draws its inspiration from are Kastanakis & Balabanis' (2014) *Explaining Variation in Conspicuous Luxury Consumption: An Individual Differences' Perspective*, Fromkin's (1970) *Effects of Experimentally Aroused Feelings of Undistinctiveness upon Valuation of Scarce and Novel Experiences*, and Imhoff & Erb's (2009) *What Motivates Nonconformity? Uniqueness seeking blocks majority influence*.

Beginning with the last, this study was referenced above in regards to need for uniqueness.

These researchers sought to find the effect that need for uniqueness has on majority influence. To achieve this, they ran three studies. The first simply determined that those with high need for uniqueness were more likely to disagree with a majority opinion than those with low need for uniqueness. This works to solidify the researchers' underlying notion that high need for uniqueness individuals may seek to gain a sense of uniqueness through not yielding to majority influence, clarifying an important idea for the rest of their work. Their second study involved the use of bogus feedback, a technique drawn from Fromkin's (1970) work that also influences this study, to deplete participants self-perceived sense of uniqueness. This was achieved by first determining the self-attributed need for uniqueness of participants and splitting them into a high need for uniqueness group and a control group.

Following this, participants would fill out a test that would supposedly measure personality traits, but would be a guise through which results could be given that undermine uniqueness. Results would show on the computer screen that told participants a certain percentage of a population of 10,000 individuals responded to the test the same way they did. For high need for uniqueness participants, this percentage was between 79 and 85%, for the control group it was 36 to 41%. As an extra measure, a comment such as “You’re just the standard mean, too” or “hmm, exact average” would be said to participants in the high need for uniqueness group by the experimenter while they were examining their test sheet. Following this bogus feedback, participants in both the control and high need for uniqueness groups were subjected to either majority or minority influence. They were asked to complete a text comprehension task which included information which stated that either a majority, 83%, or a minority, 17%, of respondents considered a local lake a rewarding vacation spot. Imhoff & Erb found that this bogus feedback led participants with high need for uniqueness to rate the local lake much higher when it was endorsed by the minority, and rate it much lower when endorsed by the majority. This showed again that majority influence can be ignored by high need for uniqueness individuals and that this effect is exacerbated when their uniqueness is threatened. The last study conducted sought whether this effect could be reversed by allowing a sense of uniqueness to be regained. The same procedure was followed as the previous study. However, following the bogus feedback but before the majority-minority influence, a third group of high need for uniqueness participants was given the ability to recoup the sense of uniqueness lost through the bogus feedback. This involved participants in the third group writing down three aspects that they thought made them different to others. For this uniqueness recoupment group, it was found that ratings for the vacation spot increased back almost to control group level following the regaining of uniqueness. The results of this study help clarify that it is the need for uniqueness that causes disagreement with majority opinions.

When the desired state of uniqueness is achieved through different means, it is no longer necessary to do so through majority opposition. It also shows that self-recognition of aspects that characterize traits is an effective method for inducing a desired motivational state, such as that of uniqueness found here. So Imhoff & Erb's (2009) work establishes three concepts that are important to this study. It solidifies the idea seen in previous research (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977; Snyder, 1992) that high need for uniqueness leads individuals to oppose the majority or cultural norms. The second concept that is established is the manipulability of uniqueness. It is a well-acknowledged aspect of motivation behaviour that when a current state does not match a desired state, individuals are motivated to close this gap (Kruglanski, 1996). What these studies provide is empirical evidence for this and mechanisms for how uniqueness can be experimentally manipulated. Lastly, this work establishes uniqueness as a situational factor, that can be both depleted and regained, as well as determining methods for achieving both states of depreciated and recuperated uniqueness.

The next study that is integral to this work was undertaken by Kastanakis & Balabanis (2014). Again discussed earlier, this paper examined a conceptual model that explains the behavioural patterns for two types of conspicuous consumption behaviour, bandwagon and snob. They attempt to determine the antecedents to both types of consumer behaviour and then set about empirically establishing the links between the behaviours. From their research, they find that status seeking mediates both bandwagon and snob luxury consumption.

Consumer susceptibility to normative influence is positively related to bandwagon consumption, but negatively related to snob consumption. Consumer need for uniqueness was found to be positively correlated to snob consumption, and negatively with bandwagon. What this paper achieves is to determine empirically the antecedent behaviours for both types of conspicuous consumption, as well as update and expand upon ideas that were originally

conceived nearly 70 years ago (Liebenstein, 1950). It also finds the important link between need for uniqueness and conspicuous consumption, a relationship that is key to this study.

The last paper that this study takes inspiration from is Fromkin's (1970) work on the link between preference for scarce experiences and depleting sense of uniqueness. This paper is the original study that made use of the bogus feedback mechanism that would later be co-opted by Imhoff & Erb (2009). It also has quite a similar methodological layout to the study undertaken here, but there are several key differences. Fromkin attempted to test his hypothesis that scarce experiences will increase in preference compared to plentiful experiences as the sense of uniqueness decreases, or "feelings of undistinctiveness increase" as he describes it. To achieve this effect, Fromkin gave participants bogus feedback on a superfluous test that would describe the participant as either extreme, high, or low in uniqueness. Next, participants were given information on four psychedelic chambers that subjects could enter. These chambers were described as either available or unavailable, and either producing novel feelings or familiar feelings. Participants then evaluated and ranked which chamber they would like to enter. It was found that unavailable chamber rankings increased relative to the decrease in self-perceived uniqueness, independent of whether novel or familiar feelings were supposedly triggered. This shows that the desire for scarce experiences increases when an individual's sense of uniqueness is threatened. Again similar to Imhoff & Erb (2009), this work strengthens the concept that reducing self-perceived uniqueness will lead to individuals attempting to recoup this sense of uniqueness through other means, and establishes, just as with opposition to majority influence, that this effect can be achieved by a preference for scarce experiences.

While these papers do create solid groundwork for the current study, they leave gaps that are able to be expanded upon and further examined. Beginning with Imhoff & Erb's (2009) work, although their establishment of the manipulability of the motivational state of uniqueness is an exceptionally interesting development, their work does not pertain to conspicuous consumption, looking instead at need for uniqueness' relationship with majority influence. With the well-researched link between conspicuous consumption and need for uniqueness (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, 2014; Lynn & Harris, 1997), many of the methods used in their work could be applied to the realm of conspicuous consumption to see if this same manipulability of self-perceived uniqueness might cause shifts in luxury product decision making, a task undertaken in the study conducted here. Kastanakis & Balabanis (2014) provide insight into the heterogeneous nature of the two conspicuous consumption types through the various antecedents to luxury consumption behaviour, and this is a very useful basis to show how the concepts that they examine work in action. Again, this is the aim of the study conducted here. Lastly, Fromkin's (1970) work is the most similar in methodology to this study. But his work focuses on scarcity. Scarcity is an aspect that attracts those who have high need for uniqueness (Worchel, Lee, & Adewole, 1975; Lynn, 1987), and is a characteristic of many of the different products and experiences that are consumed by these individuals, but it does not encompass the full extent of goals of that are pursued in uniqueness consumption. Products that are desired more by those with high levels of need for uniqueness can be valued for their scarcity, or for their innovativeness, for being customized or ability to be customized, or even for being outdated (Lynn & Harris, 1997). Fromkin is also looking at the impact of loss of self-perceived uniqueness has on experiences, i.e. psychological chambers, rather than products, the main focus of conspicuous consumption.

The three antecedent variables for bandwagon and snob conspicuous consumption status seeking, consumer need for uniqueness and consumer susceptibility to normative influence were examined in the present study. Consumer need for uniqueness is expected to be linked to snob behaviours, consumer susceptibility to normative influence is expected to be linked to bandwagon behaviour, and status seeking is expected to be part of the manifestation of both types of conspicuous consumption. Using these traits as framework, the method of trait depletion, seen in Imhoff & Erb's (2009) and Fromkin's (1970) work, was used to examine the effect on conspicuous consumption tendencies. A new method of trait reinforcement was also used.

3.3 Hypotheses

Status Seeking

Status-seeking is a key component of conspicuous consumption. Status can be gained through products that are either unique or popular, and these products can convey status to various reference groups of varied sizes (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Others believe that status is not applicable to snob consumption behaviour due to the normal definition of status being that it is enhanced by the more people who use a product, the inverse of how a snob consumer views products (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014). However, others suggest that status-seeking is still a behaviour of snob consumers, but this status is born out of the uniqueness of the products (Lynn & Harris, 1997). Possession of a good that is owned by many conveys status as much as a good owned by few, but perhaps a different kinds of status, and this status may be awarded by different individuals. Thus, it would be expected that those who show high levels of either of these two behaviours would also be found to have high status-seeking

levels. Vice versa, it is expected that low status-seeking individuals would not have high levels of either bandwagon or snob conspicuous consumption behaviours.

H1a. Status-seeking is positively related to bandwagon conspicuous consumption behaviours

H1b. Status-seeking is positively related to snob conspicuous consumption behaviours

Depletion Hypotheses

When Leibenstein (1950) first crafted the terms for the different conspicuous consumption types almost 70 years ago, he described them as a dichotomy of desires; whether an individual values a product more when it is consumed by others, bandwagon, or they value a product less when it is consumed by others, snob. In their more current model of these conspicuous consumption behaviours, Kastanakis & Balabanis (2014) established consumer need for uniqueness and consumer susceptibility to normative influence as antecedent traits that causes this rift between the two types of behaviour. Individuals with a high need for uniqueness are acutely perceptive of their similarities with others, and when these similarities arise they are likely to behave in such a way to accentuate their feeling of uniqueness (Snyder, 1992). This depletion of self-perceived uniqueness through feelings of similarity can cause high need for uniqueness individuals to oppose majority influence, and values scarce experiences more highly (Imhoff & Erb, 2009; Fromkin, 1970). It is expected that uniqueness depletion will have similar effects when used in the context of conspicuous consumption behaviours.

H2. When self-perceived uniqueness is depleted in high need for uniqueness participants, they will show increased levels of snob conspicuous consumption behaviour

Conversely, the main antecedent that determines bandwagon behaviour is consumer susceptibility to normative influence. Individuals who are heavily influenced by this trait value highly the symbolic significance of luxury conspicuous consumption (Bearden & Etzel, 1982). Social relationships, understanding of the norms of reference groups, and curation of public image are all aspects that are important to individuals with high susceptibility to consumer normative influence (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989). When these individuals have their self-perceived conformity depleted they will take this as negative due to its opposition to their desired state of conformity within their reference groups.

H3. When self-perceived conformity is depleted in high susceptibility to consumer normative influence participants, they will show increased levels of bandwagon conspicuous consumption behaviour

Reinforcement Hypotheses

For both participants high in need for uniqueness who have their uniqueness reinforced, and participants high in consumer susceptibility to normative influence who have their conformity reinforced, it is expected that changes in conspicuous consumption behaviours will be minimal. There may be small movements in their behaviour levels from both groups due to optimal distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991). Although their self-perception aligns with their desired state, it may push them too far into similarity or uniqueness. The theory of optimal distinctiveness posits that individuals desire to find a balance between their inclusion and separation from the world around them. So although their desired image may be reinforced, it may be that they attempt to counterbalance the shift in their self-perception that

is caused by the experiment by moving in the opposite direction with their responses to their conspicuous consumption behaviours.

H4. When self-perceived uniqueness is reinforced in high need for uniqueness participants, they will show minimally increased levels of bandwagon conspicuous consumption behaviour

H5. When self-perceived conformity is reinforced in high consumer susceptibility to normative influence participants, they will show minimally increased levels of snob conspicuous consumption behaviour

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

The survey for this study was sent out across multiple participant recruitment websites such as Survey Circle, Find Participants, and Reddit. From these sites 340 responses were returned within the survey timeframe of 6 months. Cases were excluded from the study if they showed low levels of status seeking, defined as a score of lower than 4 on the survey scale. (See below for survey details.) These cases were excluded from the main experimental conditions of the study as status seeking is a key antecedent to conspicuous consumption and those low in status seeking would not be expected to take part in either bandwagon or snob behaviours. However, their data was used for comparison between low and high status seeking in terms

of conspicuous consumption behaviour. Participants were also excluded if they showed high levels (scoring more than 4.0) of *both* of the variables, consumer need for uniqueness and consumer susceptibility to normative influence. These two variables are the opposite ends of the conspicuous consumption spectrum, and if a participant showed high levels of both, it was assumed that there was a breakdown in understanding or comprehension of the survey. Overall, 20 participants were excluded due to low status seeking, and 3 were removed due to high levels of both high consumer need for uniqueness and consumer susceptibility, for a total of 23 cases excluded. This left a total of 317 participants. Age and gender data was collected on participants. 43% (137) were men and 57% (180) were women. 11.36% (36) of participants were under 18, 30.28% (96) were 18 to 24, 34.07% (108) were 25 to 34, 15.14% (48) were 35 to 44, 5.68% (18) were 45 to 54, and 3.47% (11) were 55 to 64. No participants were in the 65 to 74, or over 74 age ranges.

4.2 Measures

Consumer Need for Uniqueness

To measure consumer's need for uniqueness, Ruvio, Shoham, & Brencic's (2008) scale was used. This is a short-form, 12 item version of Tian, Bearden, & Hunter's (2001) original scale and covers the three aspects of this concept; creative choice counter-conformity, unpopular choice counter-conformity, and avoidance of similarity. This scale originally worked on a 5 point Likert-type response system but this was extended to include 7 points to fit with the response systems of the other scales in the study. The responses ranged from strongly disagree at 1 to strongly agree at 7. Participants would choose one of the 7 responses that best

explained their agreement with the statement of each item. The scale contained items such as “As a rule, I dislike products or brands that are customarily bought by everyone”, and “having an eye for products that are interesting and unusual assists me in establishing a distinctive image”.

Consumer Susceptibility to Normative Influence

Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel’s (1989) scale for consumer susceptibility to normative influence was used in this study. This scale also contained 12 items and used a 7 point Likert-type response system. The responses ranged from strongly disagree at 1 to strongly agree at 7. Participants chose one of the 7 responses that best explained their agreement with the statement of each item. Items included “If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy”, and “If I want to be like someone, I often try to buy the same brands they buy.”

Status Seeking

The scale by Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn (1999) determines the tendency of consumer to purchase goods and services based on status. The scale consisted of five items that are scored on a 7-point Likert-type response system, ranging from strongly disagree at 1 to strongly agree at 7. Participants chose one of the 7 responses that best explained their agreement with the statement of each item. Items include “I would pay more for a product if it has status”.

Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour

The final scale was created by Kastanakis and Balabanis (2014) for their study into conspicuous consumption behaviour types. It determines consumer preferences towards bandwagon or snob type behaviours. This scale consists of six items, with three items related to bandwagon factors and three to snob factors. These items are graded on a 7-point Likert type response system, with 1 being very unlikely and 7 being very likely. Participants being asked how much they would be likely to purchase a luxury product. A watch was used in the original study as the luxury item in the description, but the watch was replaced by the phrase “luxury product” in this study in an attempt to not evoke any prejudices participants may have against any specific products. Bandwagon factor items include “A luxury product that is worn by most people as a symbol of achievement”. Snob factor items include “A luxury product of very limited production”. The three items for bandwagon factors were reverse-coded to give a single output for conspicuous consumption type, titled Bandwagon/Snob. With the scale formatted this way, a value of below 4.0 would indicate bandwagon behaviour, and a value of above 4.0 would indicate snob behaviour.

4.3 Design

The first section of the survey consisted of scales on the three key variables that determine conspicuous consumption behaviour. Firstly, status seeking values were recorded. Participants were deemed to have high levels of the antecedent variables, consumer need for uniqueness and consumer susceptibility to normative influence, if they had a mean value of more than 4.0. As stated earlier, 3 participants were above 4.0 on both of the variables, which excluded them from the study. All participants who were found to be below 4.0 in both of the

antecedent type variables were also below the 4.0 threshold for status seeking exclusion. However, the remaining participants who were high in one antecedent were found to be in a correspondingly similar low range for the other, e.g. a participant with a mean value of 6 on the consumer need for uniqueness scale would have close to a mean value of 2 on the consumer susceptibility to normative influence scale. With levels of this independent variable determined, participants were put into two groups of (1) high consumer need for uniqueness and (2) high consumer susceptibility to normative influence. The sample sizes for each antecedent type was 158 for the consumer need for uniqueness group and 159 for the consumer susceptibility to normative influence group. From each of these groups participants were assigned randomly to one of three subgroups for the other independent variable, task type. This consists of the two experimental conditions, and the control group. This was done so that very similar numbers of both antecedent types were in each group.

The experimental conditions were two memory recollection tasks that groups had to undertake. The first experimental condition memory recollection task asked participants to recall three times they have felt similar to others and to write a sentence describing each of these three memories. The goal of this task was to induce the sense of conformity that would be triggered by these memories and undermine the participants' self-perceived sense of uniqueness. This condition is called uniqueness depletion for those high in consumer need for uniqueness and normative influence reinforcement for the high consumer susceptibility to normative influence participants. The task is the same for both groups, but the goals of the task are different. A feeling of conformity has different connotations depending on an individual's primary antecedent type, hence the distinction in title. For the other half of the participants, the experimental condition also consisted of memory recollection. For this task, participants were asked to recall three times when they had felt unique/different from others and write a sentence describing each of these three memories. The goal of this task was to

reinforce the participants' self-perceived sense of uniqueness. This condition is called uniqueness reinforcement for the high consumer need for uniqueness participants and normative influence depletion for the high consumer susceptibility to normative influence participants. Again, this is due to the differences in the connotations of the task depending on the participant's primary antecedent type. The goal of these tasks was to either heighten or lower participants' self-perceived sense of uniqueness, which is expected to have differing effects dependent of the participant's level of consumer need for uniqueness or consumer susceptibility to normative influence. Hypothetically, a shift in sense of uniqueness should lead to a response in the participants' conspicuous consumption behaviour dependent on their levels of the two independent variables. The control group participants took part in no task, and provide a baseline reading of both of the antecedents for comparison. With these experimental conditions added to the mix, the study consists of a 2x3 factorial design, with groups consisting of high consumer need for uniqueness/uniqueness depletion (N=53), high consumer need for uniqueness/ uniqueness reinforcement (N=53), high consumer susceptibility to normative influence/ uniqueness depletion (N=53), and high consumer susceptibility to normative influence/uniqueness reinforcement (N=53), as well as high consumer need for uniqueness control (N=52), and high consumer susceptibility to normative influence control (N=53).

For the last section of the study, participants of all groups filled out items for a scale of the dependent variable, conspicuous consumption behaviour type. This determined whether the participant is a bandwagon or snob conspicuous consumer, and their level of this type of behaviour. Participants' conspicuous consumption behaviour values were expected to have shifted from where they would supposedly sit, as seen in the control group, due to the depletion or reinforcement of uniqueness subjected by the memory tasks. Overall time to

complete the survey was estimated to be between 5 and 10 minutes depending on whether participants were in a task or control group.

4.4 Data Analysis

A regression analysis was run to find if there was a significant negative correlation between the two types of conspicuous consumption behaviour, bandwagon and snob. This was done to determine if reverse-coding the responses of the bandwagon items of the scale would have an effect on the validity of the scale. However, a significant negative correlation (see below) was found between bandwagon and snob conspicuous consumption behaviours, meaning that the corresponding values of each item could be reverse-coded, e.g. 1=7, 2=6, 3=5, 5=3, 6=2, and 7=1. This allowed for both the behaviour types to be measured on one scale, known as BandwagonVsSnob, with the values below 4.0 indicating bandwagon behaviour and the values above 4.0 indicating snob behaviour.

For the main analysis, the participant data are measured on 2 independent variables. The first of these is antecedent variable type, which has two levels, high consumer need for uniqueness and high consumer susceptibility to normative influence. The second independent variable is task type which consists of three levels, uniqueness depletion, uniqueness reinforcement, and the control group. With this 2x3 variable design, the best test to analyse the data is a Factorial ANOVA. This would allow for comparison of the mean differences between groups, and find if the interaction between antecedent variable type and task type has an effect on the dependent variable, conspicuous consumption behaviour. For determining the relationship between status seeking and conspicuous consumption behaviour, regression analysis was used. Both bandwagon and snob behaviours were expected to have positive relationships with

status seeking. Mean scores in both the antecedent types were measured for the low status seeking participants, as well as for the different sex and age groups in the study.

5. Results

5.1 Preliminary Results

To determine if the conspicuous consumption types, bandwagon and snob, were significantly related to one another (and thus allowing one of them, bandwagon in this study, to be reverse coded, transforming the score output into a single value, BandwagonVsSnob), a Pearson correlation was run. The correlation between the two conspicuous consumption types was found to be significant ($R^2 = .431$, $F(1,315) = 237.74$, $p < 0.05$). This meant that the scores for the bandwagon item scales could be reverse coded, allowing for conspicuous consumption type to be made into one value.

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the scales used within this study.

Ruvio, Shoham, & Brencic's (2008) consumer need for uniqueness scale returned a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.88. For Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel's (1989) scale of consumer susceptibility to normative influence, the score was 0.76. The snob and bandwagon effect scale (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014) had an alpha of 0.81 for the bandwagon items, and an alpha of 0.87 for the snob items. The value for Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn's (1999) status seeking scale was 0.71.

Correlational analysis was used to determine the relationship between status seeking and both snob and bandwagon conspicuous consumption types. It was found that status seeking was strongly positively correlated with bandwagon behaviour, with a r-value of .73 ($p < 0.05$). Snob conspicuous consumption behaviour was found to have a weak negative correlational relationship with status seeking, with a r-value of -.24 ($p < 0.05$). The 20 low status seeking participants had a mean status seeking score of 2.46 (SD = 0.90).

5.2 Experiment Results

The high consumer need for uniqueness/uniqueness depletion participants had a mean consumer need for uniqueness score of 5.32 (SD = 0.74), and a mean consumer susceptibility to normative influence score of 2.74 (SD = 0.79). The high consumer need for uniqueness/uniqueness reinforcement participants had a mean consumer need for uniqueness score of 5.25 (SD = 0.92), and a mean consumer susceptibility to normative influence score of 2.81 (SD = 0.86). The high consumer need for uniqueness control group had a consumer need for uniqueness score of 5.34 (SD = 0.85), and a mean consumer susceptibility to normative influence score of 2.85 (SD = 0.95).

The high consumer susceptibility to normative influence/normative influence depletion participants had a mean consumer susceptibility to normative influence score of 5.24 (SD = 0.88), and a mean consumer need for uniqueness score of 2.99 (SD = 0.70). High susceptibility to normative influence/normative influence reinforcement participants had a mean consumer susceptibility to normative influence score of 5.30 (SD = 0.83), and a mean consumer need for uniqueness score of 2.87 (SD = 0.77). The high consumer susceptibility to normative influence control group had a mean consumer susceptibility to normative influence

score of 5.21 (SD = 0.92), and a mean consumer need for uniqueness score of 2.94 (SD = 0.68). These results show that the randomisation process was effective in equating the subgroups for both antecedents.

A Factorial ANOVA was conducted to determine the main effects of antecedent type and task type and the interaction effect between these two independent variables on the dependent variable, BandwagonVsSnob conspicuous consumption behaviour. The interaction between antecedent type and task type yielded a significant effect on conspicuous consumption type, BandwagonVsSnob ($F(2,311) = 4.91, p < 0.05$). The main effect of antecedent type ($F(1,311) = 1654.46, p < 0.05$) was found to show a significant difference between high consumer need for uniqueness participants and high consumer susceptibility to normative influence participants in conspicuous consumption behaviour. Task type was also found to have a significant effect on conspicuous consumption behaviour ($F(2,311) = 24.84, p < 0.05$). All independent variable effects were found to be significant at the .05 significance level. Table 1 displays the mean and standard deviations of each group on BandwagonVsSnob conspicuous consumption behaviour.

Table 1: BandwagonVsSnob Scores

Antecedent	Task	Mean	Standard Deviation
Consumer Need for Uniqueness	Uniqueness Depletion	5.34	0.47
	Uniqueness Reinforcement	4.79	0.39
	Control Group	4.95	0.37
Consumer Susceptibility to Normative Influence	Normative Influence Depletion	2.69	0.53
	Normative Influence Reinforcement	2.97	0.47
	Control Group	3.02	0.50

Tukey's HSD (Honestly Significant Difference) post-hoc test was used to assess the changes in BandwagonVsSnob behaviour in the different groups following their tasks. Significant differences were found between the high consumer need for uniqueness/uniqueness depletion group and the high consumer need for uniqueness group, and the high consumer susceptibility to normative influence/ normative influence depletion group and the high normative influence control group. No significant differences were found between the high consumer need for uniqueness/uniqueness reinforcement group and the high consumer need for uniqueness control group, and the high consumer susceptibility to normative influence/ normative influence reinforcement group and the high consumer susceptibility to normative influence control group. Results from the Tukey's HSD test can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Tukey's HSD Results

Group	Mean Difference	Standard Error	<i>p</i> -value
High Uniqueness / Uniqueness Deplete v High Uniqueness Control Group	0.39	0.09	<0.05
High Uniqueness / Uniqueness Reinforce v High Uniqueness Control Group	-0.16	0.09	>0.05
High Normative Influence / Normative Influence Deplete v Normative Influence Control Group	-0.33	0.09	<0.05
High Normative Influence / Normative Influence Reinforce v Normative Influence Control Group	-0.05	0.09	>0.05

The antecedent trait depletion groups had mean differences of 0.39 and -0.33, and were both found to be significant. The antecedent trait reinforcement groups had mean differences of -0.16 and -0.05 which were both found to be not significant.

5.3 Gender Results

Male participants were found to be more extreme in their antecedent types than female participants. Male participants' high in consumer need for uniqueness had a mean consumer need for uniqueness score of 5.44 (SD = 0.48), compared to female participants, who had a mean score of 5.25 (SD = 0.41). Using a one-way ANOVA, this difference was found to be significant ($F(1,156) = 3.27, p < 0.05$). Male participants high in consumer susceptibility to normative influence had a mean consumer susceptibility to normative influence score of 5.22 (SD = 0.39), compared to female participants, who had a mean score of 5.02 (SD = 0.47). This difference was found to be significant ($F(1,157) = 3.35, p < 0.05$). A significant

interaction effect was found between gender and antecedent type on BandwagonVsSnob conspicuous consumption behaviour ($F(1,313) = 4.21, p < 0.05$). No significant interaction was found between gender and task type ($F(1,311) = .605, p > 0.05$).

5.4 Age Results

Participants aged 24 and under who were high in consumer need for uniqueness had a mean consumer need for uniqueness score of 5.47 ($SD = 0.69$), compared to participants aged 25 and over, who had a mean score of 5.29 ($SD = 0.63$). A one-way ANOVA found this difference to be significant ($F(1,130) = 4.07, p < 0.05$). Participants aged 24 and under who were high in consumer susceptibility to normative influence had a mean consumer susceptibility to normative influence score of 5.41 ($SD = 0.65$), compared to participants aged 25 and over who had a mean score of 5.30 ($SD = 0.71$). This difference was also found to be significant ($F(1,183) = 3.92$). A significant interaction effect was found between age and antecedent type on BandwagonVsSnob conspicuous consumption behaviour ($F(1,313) = 4.43$). No significant interaction was found between age and task type ($F(1,311) = 1.58$).

6. Discussion

The hypotheses regarding depletion were supported by the results for both consumer need for uniqueness and consumer susceptibility to normative influence. The depletion of antecedent traits can lead to changes towards more extreme expressions of conspicuous consumption.

The reinforcement of antecedent traits was expected to be expressed by small changes in conspicuous consumption tendencies towards the central value on the BandwagonVsSnob scale of 4.0. However, reinforcement of either antecedent trait was found to have no significant effect. The limitations, implications and future directions of these findings will be discussed here.

6.1 Status Seeking

H1a. Status-seeking is positively related to bandwagon conspicuous consumption behaviours

H1b. Status-seeking is positively related to snob conspicuous consumption behaviours

It was found that status seeking was strongly correlated with bandwagon conspicuous consumption behaviour. This is in line with the findings of several other researchers who examined this link (Eastman et al., 1999; O’Cass & McEwen, 2004). Individuals who seek status often take advantage of consumer culture to achieve their status goals. This is especially applicable to bandwagon conspicuous consumption as it is already deeply entrenched within interpersonal influence, an area in which status seeking thrives. In Kastanakis & Balabanis’ (2014) work on their conspicuous consumption model, status seeking related positively to bandwagon behaviour, and the results here help supplement their findings, and increase confidence in their accuracy.

Snob conspicuous consumption behaviour and status seeking were found to have a negative relationship, albeit a weak one. This was contrary to the hypothesis presented in this work, as it was believed that status seeking would be positively related to snob behaviour. This hypothesis was posited around the concept that snob conspicuous consumer still sought to gain status in the same sense that bandwagon conspicuous consumers did, but that they

differed in their descriptions of status (Lynn & Harris, 1997). Where bandwagon conspicuous consumers attributed more status to a good the more it is consumed by others for status, the inverse is true for snobs. In snob conspicuous consumption, status is attributed to an item based on aspects such as its uniqueness, scarcity, and unpopularity (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014). However, this interpretation of the relationship between status seeking and snob behaviour does not appear to be accurate for the participants in this study. This study is also contrary to the results of Kastanakis & Balabanis (2014), whose results were in line with the concept described above.

6.2 Depletion Discussion

H2. When self-perceived uniqueness is depleted in high need for uniqueness participants, they will show increased levels of snob conspicuous consumption behaviour

H3. When self-perceived conformity is depleted in high susceptibility to consumer normative influence participants, they will show increased levels of bandwagon conspicuous consumption behaviour

Both of the hypotheses surrounding depletion of antecedent traits were confirmed, finding that high consumer need for uniqueness participants had increased snob conspicuous consumption tendencies when their consumer need for uniqueness was depleted, and high consumer susceptibility to normative influence participants had increased bandwagon conspicuous consumption tendencies when their consumer susceptibility to normative influence was depleted. This demonstrates that conspicuous consumption behaviour of either type can be provoked when its corresponding antecedent trait is undermined. These increases

in both types of conspicuous consumption behaviour appear to come from the need of participants to regain their usual sense of identity, as either a unique individual or someone who follows the majority. This behaviour has been noted previously in individuals high in need for uniqueness, finding that they are more sensitive to their similarities to others, and will respond more acutely when they fear they are losing their individuality (Snyder, 1992). When individuals find that there is a difference between their desired state and their current state, they are motivated to close this gap (Higgins, 1987). Eliminating the difference between states can be achieved through different means, i.e. if one source depletes sense of uniqueness/conformity, another source can replenish it (Heider, 1958, as cited in Imhoff & Erb, 2009).

The present study establishes conspicuous consumption as a means for regaining a sense of both uniqueness and conformity, a finding unseen previously. Harkening back to the works that this study took its inspiration from, the finding that antecedent trait depletion leads to changes in conspicuous consumption tendencies sheds new light onto the conceptual model laid out by Kastanankis & Balabanis (2014). The present study supplements their findings by providing additional evidence of the links between need for uniqueness and snob conspicuous consumption behaviour, and susceptibility to normative influence and bandwagon conspicuous consumption behaviour. These findings also show that not only do need for uniqueness and susceptibility to normative influence exist as antecedent traits of conspicuous consumption, but they are also states of mind that can be depleted. Imhoff & Erb (2009) found in their work that this was applicable to need for uniqueness, but the present study shows the reasoning encompasses susceptibility to normative influence as well. Their work, along with that of Fromkin (1970), provided the foundations for the research into the manipulability of self-perceived sense of uniqueness. The findings here expand the

understanding of this area in two ways. Firstly, Fromkin's (1970) and Imhoff & Erb's (2009) work used manipulation of self-perceived sense of uniqueness to elicit changes in majority influence and evaluation of scarce experiences. The present study extends this to find that depletion of self-perceived sense of uniqueness elicits an effect on conspicuous consumption. Secondly, these findings show that the manipulation of the antecedent traits of conspicuous consumption is applicable to susceptibility to normative influence as well, an area which had not been researched.

The present study also showcases the use of memory recollection as an effective method for depletion of the antecedent traits. Participants were asked to recall times at which they had felt similar/different from others. It was expected that this recollection of times at which the participants' antecedent trait had felt depleted would induce a state of depletion of that trait. This expectation was based on previous findings showing that autobiographical memories can induce moods congruent with the emotional state of the memory, e.g. sad autobiographical memories induce sad emotions (Parrot & Sabini, 1990; Vuosoki & Eerola, 2012). The present finding also supplements the research in the area of memory mood induction, as almost all studies in this area examine the induction of basic emotions such as happiness and sadness. Research such as Jallais & Gilet's (2010) have extended this range a bit further, to include elation and anger, but the use of memory recollection to induce a complex state of mind such as a need for uniqueness adds a new channel to this area. Lastly, the present work could be classified as a modernized variation of the work of Fromkin (1970). His work used the concept of scarcity as the outcome variable whose need would increase when self-perceived uniqueness was depleted. Using an updated conceptual model of conspicuous consumption, it is now understood that scarcity is only one aspect that high need for uniqueness consumers seek. The modern equivalent, snob conspicuous consumption,

details a range of desirable traits in products, including scarcity, niche appeal, lower popularity, and innovativeness.

6.3 Reinforcement Discussion

H4. When self-perceived uniqueness is reinforced in high need for uniqueness participants, they will show minimally increased levels of bandwagon conspicuous consumption behaviour

H5. When self-perceived conformity depleted in high consumer susceptibility to normative influence participants, they will show minimal increased levels of snob conspicuous consumption behaviour

Participants high in consumer need for uniqueness who had their uniqueness reinforced through a memory recollection task showed no significant change in conspicuous consumption tendencies, in the direction of either snob or bandwagon values, when compared with the high consumer need for uniqueness control group. The same was found to be true for high consumer susceptibility to normative influence participants who had their consumer susceptibility to normative influence depleted. It was believed that when a sense of uniqueness or conformity was reinforced, participants who were high in the corresponding antecedent trait's scores on the BandwagonVsSnob scale would move towards the center value of 4.0, indicating a levelling out of conspicuous consumption behaviour. However, no effect was found. The decreases in conspicuous consumption tendencies were posited as it was believed that when the participants' need for uniqueness or susceptibility to normative influence was satiated by its reinforcement in the memory collection task, that they would no

longer be inclined to seek uniqueness or conformity through conspicuous consumption to the same level that they had before the task, and they would instead attempt to counteract the reinforcement to remain at their preferred balance of conformity and non-conformity (Brewer, 1991).

The failure of the hypotheses may be due to several reasons. One of these could be negativity bias, a cognitive function that leads humans to weigh negative information more highly than equivalent positive information (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). When considering the valence of the moods induced from the different memory tasks, it could be that when high need for uniqueness individuals are asked to remember times when they felt the same as others, this would be tied to negative emotions. Vice versa, it might be that high need for uniqueness individuals would have positive emotions tied to memories of times when they felt different from others. Similar reasoning applies to high susceptibility to normative influence individuals. Negativity bias could explain why the tasks that were tied to negative information and emotions led to larger shifts in conspicuous consumption tendencies. Three of the four components of negativity bias could be at play in the findings (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Firstly, negative potency is the idea that negative information is weighted more heavily than positive information of the same magnitude. Secondly, the negativity of negative information grows more rapidly the closer in space and time it gets to the present situation than the positivity of positive information does (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). And lastly, the cognitive formation of negative information is more varied and complex than positive counterparts (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Other research has also found that negative stimuli are attended to much quicker and more attentional resources are used to interpret them, and that memories that elicit negative emotion are remembered with greater detail (Carri   et al., 2001; Kensinger, 2007). With this multitude of cognitive mechanisms attending to negative

information, the positive information that is attained from the reinforcement tasks may not be of a high enough magnitude to elicit a response in conspicuous consumption tendencies.

Cacioppo et al. (1999) argued that while negative emotion acts as a signal for behavioural and cognitive adjustment, positive information is a signal of safety in pursuing the current course. So positive information may be more likely to elicit a response of continuation of the current behaviour, than the change that was originally expected.

6.4 Age Discussion

Participants over the age of 25 had lower overall scores in the antecedent traits than those under the age of 25. These results are in line with previous research showing that younger individuals desire conspicuous products more than older individuals, and are more prone to conspicuous consumption (Kim, 2015). It is argued that this is due to the fragility of self-identity at younger ages and that young individuals turn to conspicuous consumption as a way to manage their uncertainty of image (Piancentini & Mailer, 2004). Conspicuous consumption is also a central social tool in avoiding punishment from dominant peer groups (Wooten, 2006). However, as time goes on and self-identity becomes more stable, older individuals turn more towards preservation of identity rather than using conspicuous consumption to establish it. One way in which this is achieved is through consumption of nostalgic products (Belk, 1988). Research has found that older individuals are more likely to consume products that relate to past experiences. Overall, conspicuous consumption for young individuals is related to the social trials and tribulations of that age, who have to both fit in and find a self-identity. Conspicuous consumption for older individuals does not put as much weight on the socially symbolic aspect of products (Kim, 2015).

6.5 Gender Discussion

Males had higher overall scores in both of the antecedent traits compared to female participants. Previous research in the area of sex and conspicuous consumption has found similar results, finding that men are more prone to overt displays of wealth. O’Cass & McEwen (2004) found that males aged 18 to 25 valued the conspicuousness of their product use more highly than females of the same age range. They also argued that men have stronger conspicuous consumption tendencies, a concept that is aligned with the results found here. Research has also shown that males are more materialistic than females (Tse et al., 1989). This may be due to men being more oriented towards seeking validation externally, such as through conspicuous consumption (Eastman et al., 1997). It has also been argued that there are biological underpinnings to this sex difference. As stated earlier, conspicuous consumption acts as a signalling system for individuals seeking mates, showing that a person has the money to provide security for a partner (Griskevicius et al., 2007). With men being traditionally considered the leaders in mating encounters, they are more often found to use luxury goods as signals for their wealth to attract romantic partners (Sundie et al., 2011). Overall, the findings here are in line with the previous research in the relationship between sex and conspicuous consumption. The agreement of the age and gender results of the present study with previous work in the area helps establish the reliability of all results, including the new developments.

6.6 Limitations & Future Research

Although the previous research on the relationship of status seeking as an antecedent for conspicuous consumption by Kastanakis & Balabanis (2014) found that status seeking was positively related to both snob and bandwagon tendencies, the findings here showed snob conspicuous consumption as negatively related to status seeking to a small degree.

Bandwagon tendencies results aligned with previous research, exhibiting a positive relationship. Differences between the status seeking results in this study and the hypothesis, as well as the results of other researchers, may come down to cultural differences or differences of understanding. The diversity of conspicuous consumption behaviours across cultures has been shown in previous chapters (Kim & Markus, 1999; Imhoff & Erb, 2009; Ahponen, 2016). Individualistic and collectivistic cultures, membership of different ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds, all affect conspicuous consumption behaviour and could lead results to differ such as here. Interpretation of the word ‘status’ may have also contributed to the negative relationship between snob conspicuous consumption behaviour and status seeking. The more traditional concept of status that is seen in bandwagon behaviour, that of products gaining status from others use of them, may have tarnished the snob consumer’s concept of status. A question such as “I would buy a product just because it has status”, an example from Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn’s (1999) scale, may be interpreted by snob conspicuous consumers as asking if they would purchase a product because others do. Status seeking in this scale is seen as a homogenous behaviour, but the differences in how this behaviour is seen by bandwagon and snob conspicuous consumers shows that there may be room for two heterogeneous descriptions similar to the distinction between snob and bandwagon behaviours. One method that could aid in determination of whether snob and bandwagon conspicuous consumers have different interpretations of the

idea of status seeking could be creating a scale or scales with items that cater to the different goal intentions and antecedent behaviours that are linked to each type of conspicuous consumption. This would allow for placement on the status seeking scales to more accurately represent the individual who is taking part in it.

Cultural differences were ignored in the present study. However, individualistic and collectivistic cultures have differing values, traditions, and beliefs that seep into their interpretations of conspicuous consumption (Jenkins, 2016). The present study could be easily adapted to find if conspicuous consumption tendencies are as prone to being manipulated across these two culture types. Research has found that the Chinese, a collectivistic culture, are a more materialistic people (Eastman et al., 1997), and that Korean people, another collectivistic culture, are higher in consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence compared to individualistic cultures such as Australia and Canada (Kropp, Lavack, & Silvera, 2005). Based upon this past research, it may be true that collectivistic cultures members would be more affected by depletion of their antecedent traits, leading to larger movement in conspicuous consumption tendencies. Undertaking studies that compare participants from individualistic and collectivistic cultures using the method of the present study would provide empirical clarity on this issue.

It was expected that when antecedent traits were reinforced in participants high in these traits, they would show small reductions in their conspicuous consumption tendencies. However, no change was found when compared with control group levels. One reason for this lack of any effect may have been the memory task used in the study not provoking a strong enough emotional response to cause any shifts in conspicuous consumption tendencies. A method

similar to Asch's (1956) famous experiments in conformity could work to create a more naturalistic interaction approach to inducing feelings of uniqueness and conformity. For example, participants might answer scales on the antecedent traits to the conspicuous consumption types, while placed in a room consisting of confederates masquerading as fellow participants in the experiment. The lone legitimate participant would be asked an opinion question and be given options for a response. The confederates would respond to a question either all the same as the option the real participant chose or all together choosing a different option than the real participant. Afterwards, participants would respond to conspicuous consumption scales.

This method would allow for depletion and reinforcing of the antecedent traits of conspicuous consumption in a real time naturalistic encounter. This would be expected to increase the magnitude of effect of the depletion and reinforcement as the uniqueness or conformity experience would be much fresher in the mind of a participant. As such, use of this method may be able to elicit a greater change in conspicuous consumption tendencies, finding different results to those here. Alternatively, perhaps using the face to face bogus feedback approach that was effective in Imhoff & Erb's (2009) and Fromkin's (1970) work could be used

6.7 Implications

The findings here have applications within the world of consumer research, establishing new consumer tendencies and traits. To begin with, the present study has established the antecedent traits of consumer need for uniqueness and consumer susceptibility to normative influence as not just static aspects of a consumer's personality, but as situational factors

which can be depleted. In the context of marketing implications, this extends the range of emotions that advertisements would be able to evoke in an individual. This finding outlines how advertisements would be able to situationally lower an individual's sense of self-perceived uniqueness or conformity. The results also show that the induction of a depleted state of uniqueness or conformity is able to move individuals' conspicuous consumption tendencies in one way or another, toward bandwagon behaviours or snob behaviours. This gives a picture of the effect of antecedent trait depletion, meaning that advertisers of certain products, snob-related (e.g. scarce) or bandwagon-related (e.g. mass-produced), would be able to know that depletion of the relevant trait would lead to an increased tendency toward purchase of their product in certain individuals.

The results also suggest the strength of negative information over positive information. Depletion of the antecedent trait of a conspicuous consumption type seems much more effective than antecedent trait reinforcement. The findings here can only claim this statement to be true for the use of memory recollection, however, and different methods for eliciting emotions may be more effective across the board. Lastly, the findings also provide descriptive information of the age and gender of individuals who are more likely to be swayed by the methods used within the present study. Individuals under the age of 25 showed higher levels of both the antecedent traits, consumer need for uniqueness and consumer susceptibility to normative influence, meaning that marketing towards individuals' sense of uniqueness or conformity would be more effective if it was aimed towards those under 25. Male participants were also found to have significantly higher levels of both the antecedent conspicuous consumption traits, implying that uniqueness and conformity marketing geared toward male individuals would be expected to be more effective.

7. Conclusion

The present study has managed to fuse the previous understanding of the manipulability of need for uniqueness with the topic of conspicuous consumption. It has also shown that this manipulation is applicable to the key antecedent to conspicuous consumption on the bandwagon behaviour side, consumer susceptibility to normative influence. The study also details the relationship between conspicuous consumption and status seeking, age, and gender. The findings on the manipulation of consumer need for uniqueness and consumer susceptibility to normative influence, and conspicuous consumption tendencies allow this paper to supplement the work of Kastanakis & Balabanis (2014) and their model of conspicuous consumption behaviour. They also show the situational nature of the antecedent traits to conspicuous consumption behaviour, in that the traits- or at least the expressed state of them - can be depleted by a situation. Another important development found in the present study is the lack of effect of antecedent trait reinforcement. Positive emotion elicited through memories linked to consumer need for uniqueness or consumer need for susceptibility to normative influence does not seem as effective a motivator for change in conspicuous consumption tendencies as negative emotion elicited through memories. These findings have implications for the marketing of any product that is conspicuously consumed, allowing a clearer image of the effects of emotion elicitation through memory on conspicuous consumers, as well as detailing the age and gender of individuals who are more susceptible to this method.

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9. Appendices

Status Seeking – Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn (1999). Uses a 7 point Likert-type response, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

1. I would buy a product just because it has status.
2. I am interested in new products with status.
3. I would pay more for a product if it had status.
4. The status of a product is irrelevant to me.
5. A product is more valuable to me if it has some snob appeal.

Consumer Need for Uniqueness Scale - Ruvio, Shoham, Brenčić (2008). Uses 5 point Likert-type response, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

1. I often combine possessions in such a way that I create a personal image that cannot be duplicated.
2. I often try to find a more interesting version of run-of-the-mill products because I enjoy being original.
3. I actively seek to develop my personal uniqueness by buying special products or brands.

4. Having an eye for products that are interesting and unusual assists me in establishing a distinctive image.
5. When it comes to the products I buy and the situations in which I use them, I have broken customs and rules
6. I have often violated the understood rules of my social group regarding what to buy or own.
7. I have often gone against the understood rules of my social group regarding when and how certain products are properly used.
8. I enjoy challenging the prevailing taste of people I know by buying something they would not seem to accept.
9. When a product I own becomes popular among the general population, I begin to use it less.
10. I often try to avoid products or brands that I know are bought by the general population.
11. As a rule, I dislike products or brands that are customarily bought by everyone.
12. The more commonplace a product or brand is among the general population, the less interested I am in buying it.

Consumer Susceptibility to Normative Influence - Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel (1989). Uses a 7 point Likert-type response system, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

1. I often consult other people to help choose the best alternative available from a product class.
2. If I want to be like someone, I often try to buy the same brands that they buy.
3. It is important that others like the products and brands I buy.
4. To make sure I buy the right product or brand, I often observe what others are buying and using.
5. I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them.
6. I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase.
7. If I have a little experience with a product, I often ask my friends about the product
8. When purchasing products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of.

9. I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others.

10. I frequently gather information from friends or family about a product before I buy.

11. If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy.

12. I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase.

Conspicuous Consumption – Kastanakis & Balabanis (2014). Uses 7 point Likert-type response, ranging from very unlikely to purchase (1) to very likely to purchase (7).

Bandwagon

1. A very popular luxury item that everyone would approve its choice

2. A luxury item recognised by many people as a symbol of success

3. A luxury item that is worn by most people as a symbol of achievement

Snob

1. A luxury item that only a few people own

2. A luxury item of very limited production

3. A luxury item that is recognized and valued by a small circle of connoisseurs