The Concept of Luxury from a Consumer Culture Perspective

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

2015

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Contents

List of Tables ............................................................................................................................... 8

List of Figures ................................................................................................................................. 9

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 10

Declaration ....................................................................................................................................... 11

Copyright Statement ........................................................................................................................ 12

Acknowledgement ............................................................................................................................ 13

1 Introduction .................................................................................................................................. 14

1.1 Background to the Study ........................................................................................................ 14

1.2 Research Gap ........................................................................................................................ 16

1.3 Research Aim, Objectives, and Questions ............................................................................ 17

1.4 Significance of the Study ......................................................................................................... 18

1.5 Methodology and Research Design ......................................................................................... 19

1.6 An Overview of the Thesis ...................................................................................................... 20

2 Literature Review ....................................................................................................................... 23

2.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 23

2.2 The Meanings of Luxury .......................................................................................................... 24

2.2.1 The Meanings of Luxury from a Consumer’s Perspective ................................................. 27

2.3 The Consumer as the Cultural Producer of the Meanings of Luxury .................................... 32

2.4 Practice Theory ....................................................................................................................... 35

2.4.1 The Development of Practice Theory .............................................................................. 37

2.4.2 Connecting Practices and Meanings ................................................................................ 44

2.5 Consumption Practices Surrounding Luxury Consumption ................................................. 50

2.5.1 The Functional Dimension of Luxury Consumption Practices .................................... 50
3.9 Data Analysis ................................................................. 116
  3.9.1 Steps Taken in Data Analysis ........................................ 116
3.10 Ethical Considerations of the Research ................................. 120
3.11 Methodological Reflections ............................................... 120
  3.11.1 Anxiety about Speaking English as a Second Language ........ 121
  3.11.2 The Interview Process ............................................... 122
  3.11.3 Fieldwork Experiences .............................................. 123
  3.11.4 Evaluation of the Research ......................................... 123
3.12 Chapter Review ............................................................. 126

4 Findings ........................................................................ 127
  4.1 Introduction .................................................................. 127
  4.2 Illustrative Case Studies .................................................. 128
    4.2.1 Alex .................................................................... 131
    4.2.2 Lisa ..................................................................... 135
    4.2.3 James ................................................................... 142
    4.2.4 Maesa ................................................................. 147
    4.2.5 Sun ..................................................................... 152
    4.2.6 Jack .................................................................... 158
  4.3 Conceptual Framework Describing Everyday Luxury Consumption Practices in a Cross-cultural Context ........................................ 165
    4.3.1 Structure and Purpose of Practice ............................. 166
    4.3.2 Metaphors for Luxury Consumption Practices ............. 168
5 Discussions ........................................................................................................ 207
5.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................... 207
5.2 Research Question 1: What are the practices of consumers surrounding luxury consumption? .............................................................................................. 207
  5.2.1 Status-based Practice .................................................................................. 208
  5.2.2 Escapist Practice ....................................................................................... 210
  5.2.3 Self-transformation Practice ..................................................................... 212
  5.2.4 Caretaker Practice .................................................................................... 214
5.3 Research Question 2: What are the meanings of luxury as understood through the practices of luxury consumption? ...................................................................... 216
  5.3.1 Construct .................................................................................................... 217
  5.3.2 Status .......................................................................................................... 220
  5.3.3 Experiences ............................................................................................... 221
  5.3.4 Object ......................................................................................................... 222
5.4 Research Question 3: How are different practices and meanings of luxury among young adult consumers played out in differing cultural contexts? ....... 224
  5.4.1 Self-construct ............................................................................................. 224
  5.4.2 Morality Construct .................................................................................... 226
5.5 Chapter Review .................................................................................................. 229
6 Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 232
6.1 Theoretical Contribution ................................................................................... 232
  6.1.1 Theoretical Contribution to the Concept of Luxury ........................................ 232
6.1.2 Theoretical Contribution to Constructing the Subjective Meanings of Luxury in a Cross-cultural Context .......................................................... 235

6.2 Methodological Contribution .................................................................. 239

6.3 Managerial Implications ........................................................................ 242

6.4 Limitations and Future Research .............................................................. 246

6.5 Conclusion ............................................................................................... 248

References .................................................................................................... 250

Appendices .................................................................................................... 287

Appendix 1: Research Advertisement ............................................................ 287

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet (Interview) and The Consent Form ........................................................................................................ 288

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet (Fieldwork) and The Consent Form ........................................................................................................ 292

Appendix 4: Collage Constructions Sheet ....................................................... 296

Appendix 5: Worked example of data analysis ................................................ 297

Word Count: 74,098 words
List of Tables

Table 1: Customer value framework for luxury goods (Wiedmann, et al., 2009; Tyan, et al., 2009) ........................................................................................................... 30
Table 2: Cultural values dimensions (Hofstede, 1980; 1983; 2001)........................... 65
Table 3: Summary of major cultural orientations .......................................................... 67
Table 4: An overview of international studies on luxury consumption behaviour in a cross-cultural context .................................................................................. 71
Table 5: Participants’ background and details ............................................................... 101
Table 6: Details of the selected cases of narrative practices ........................................ 112
Table 7: Profile of the Illustrative Case Studies .......................................................... 129
Table 8: Elements of actions: the caretaker practice .................................................... 169
Table 9: Elements of actions: the escapist practice ...................................................... 176
Table 10: Elements of actions: the self-transformation practice ................................. 183
Table 11: Elements of actions: the status-based practice ............................................ 188
Table 12: Traditional versus everyday luxury ............................................................. 217
List of Figures

Figure 1: The Circuit of Practice (Magaudda, 2011) ........................................ 45
Figure 2: How to use the Circuit of Practice ...................................................... 45
Figure 3: The Circuit of Practice (Arsel and Bean, 2013) ..................................... 46
Figure 4: The Circuit of Practice (Moraes et al., 2015) .................................... 48
Figure 5: Metaphors for consuming (Holt, 1995) ............................................. 57
Figure 6: Metaphors for consuming (Cheetham and McEachern, 2013) ............. 60
Figure 7: Four Types of Cultural Orientations (Shavitt et al., 2006) ................. 70
Figure 8: Recruitment and Data Collection Process ........................................ 97
Figure 9: Collage prepared by Alex ................................................................... 133
Figure 10: Collage prepared by Lisa ................................................................. 137
Figure 11: Crystal collection (source: Lisa) ....................................................... 139
Figure 12: Reading books (source: Lisa) ............................................................ 140
Figure 13: Collage prepared by James ............................................................... 143
Figure 14: Home cinema (source: James) ......................................................... 145
Figure 15: Collage prepared by Maesa ............................................................. 148
Figure 16: Christian Louboutin collection (source: Maesa) ............................. 150
Figure 17: Collage prepared by Sun ................................................................. 153
Figure 18: Yoga as a luxury (source: Sun) ....................................................... 155
Figure 19: Displaying status (source: Sun) ....................................................... 156
Figure 20: Collage prepared by Jack ............................................................... 159
Figure 21: Special treatment of luxury items (source: Jack) ............................ 161
Figure 22: Conceptual framework describing everyday luxury consumption practices ................................................................. 165
Figure 23: Caretaker Practice and the Meanings of Luxury ............................. 174
Figure 24: Escapist Practice and the Meanings of Luxury ............................... 181
Figure 25: Self-tranformative Practice and the Meanings of Luxury .............. 187
Figure 26: Status-based Practice and the Meanings of Luxury ....................... 195
Figure 27: Conceptual model: Interpreting the meanings of luxury .............. 237
Abstract

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The Concept of Luxury from a Consumer Culture Perspective
2015

Academic perspectives on the meanings of luxury often link luxury to status or conspicuous consumption, assuming that luxury derives its meaning primarily from a traditional viewpoint, in which it is narrowly associated with generic economic and social displays of superiority, as attained through the rhetoric of wealth (Vickers and Renand, 2003; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). However, this traditional view of luxury fails to appreciate the cultural and emotional complexity of luxury consumption: this rather limited interpretation therefore risks rendering consumers as passive and primarily homogeneous entities.

This thesis argues that the term ‘luxury’ has little meaning unless it is integrated within the current ‘practices’ of consumer culture. Thus, the study conceptualises luxury from a consumer perspective, wherein meanings are understood as resulting from luxury consumption practices adopted by diverse sets of consumers across cultures.

Sixteen UK and Sixteen Thai undergraduate and postgraduate students were selected to participate in two stages of data collection, involving collage construction, in-depth interviews and further fieldwork. The findings extend the existing research on luxury by developing four practices of luxury consumption: caretaker, escapist, self-transformation, and status-based. Accordingly, the study proposes an alternation view of luxury as ‘everyday luxury’, a view in which consumers can transfer and incorporate self-defined luxuries into everyday contexts.

The notion of everyday luxury fundamentally allows us to move beyond a purely materialistic understanding of luxury in order to reach a metaphysical account of luxury as a subjective, moral, ephemeral and immaterial concept present in our everyday living. Moreover, this idea considerably fulfils our understanding of contemporary luxury so that traditional luxury (Veblen, 1902) and everyday luxury can co-exist within the concept of luxury. Overall, the subjective truth of the meaning of luxury in a cross-cultural context is regarded as combining the construct and outcome of a reciprocal interaction between both traditional and everyday luxury, the understanding of the self and morality within different cultures and societies, and different reflections on individuals’ lived experiences.
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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my greatest gratitude to all those who supported me throughout this thesis, and without their help I am sure that I would have given up a long time ago. I am deeply indebted to my supervisors, Dr Emma Banister and Prof Stuart Roper, who have been a pillar of support and wisdom. I have been extremely lucky to have supervisors who cared so much about my work, and their patient guidance, constant support, and inspiring suggestions will not be forgotten.

Furthermore, I would like to thank all my PhD classmates and my Thai friends for all their friendship, support and encouragement, especially for making my time in the UK memorable. My appreciation also goes to all those who participated in the research for their time and their co-operation during the data collection process.

Especially, I would like to give my special thanks and deepest gratitude to my parents, Mr Suthee and Mrs Wararatana Potavanich, and my brother, Mr Sraiyavit Potavanich, who experienced all of the ups and downs of my research. Their greatest love and ultimately support encourage me to keep things in perspective throughout the duration of this thesis. It has been widely told that kids are supposed to make their families proud, and finally I have successfully made it. On top of that, I strongly believe that this thesis is the proof.
1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the context for this thesis and discusses the current research issues on the contemporary meanings of luxury and luxury consumption, highlighting how academic perspectives on the meanings of luxury have a rather narrow empirical basis, which often renders consumers as passive and primarily homogeneous entities. The research aim, objectives and questions are presented as well as the significance of the study. Moreover, the chapter gives a brief overview on the research methodology. Lastly, the structure of this thesis, chapter by chapter, is detailed.

1.1 Background to the Study

The luxury market has shown significant global expansion over the past few decades, despite the economic recession and is forecast to exceed $500 billion by 2015 (Masnick et al., 2014). According to Tynan et al. (2009) and Ho et al. (2012) the demand for luxury products is not just limited to European countries and the U.S., but is also incredibly evident in emerging countries such as China, India and the Middle East. According to The Telegraph (2013), Asia will account for more than half of the luxury goods’ market within a decade. Thailand has also experienced a remarkable rise in demand for luxury products. It has been found that the overall demand for luxury products in Thailand has grown by 30 to 40% per year over the past five years and is expected to rise by a further 20 to 40% to reach more than 10 billion baht or around $30 million (Marketeer, 2014).

However, the growth in the global luxury market has heightened competition among luxury brands. The uprising competition is apparent in the development of positioning strategies, whereby luxury brands are trading themselves down in order to meet a broader range of customers, thus making luxuries accessible to the masses. This trend of contemporary luxury consumption is referred to as the democratisation of luxury (Silverstein et al., 2004). Such phenomenon has also altered the traditional view of luxury, given that luxury products are no longer viewed as social and economic status products, priced at a level that only the elite can afford (Silverstein and Fiske, 2005). Instead, luxury is currently associated with more affordable and
high-volume goods with a premium image aimed at middle-class customers (Silverstein and Fiske, 2005).

In reality, it can be seen that consumers nowadays might not simply value the traditional view of luxury but prefer associating luxury with personal gratification and experience. Thus, consumers are likely to pursue products and services that offer higher levels of quality, aspiration and taste, but are not too highly priced as to be out of reach (Silverstein, et al., 2004; Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). Accordingly, there are many new terms, such as new luxury, premium and masstige, that qualify the term luxury nowadays (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). In this regard, the concept of luxury has been used in an inflationary manner and can refer to anything ranging from very expensive to affordable products, which are available to everyone (Heine, 2011). This has created confusion over the term ‘luxury’.

If luxury is taken to refer to everything, then the term luxury would no longer have meaning (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). It has been argued by Keller (2009) that understanding the concept of luxury dictates a reference to the concept of branding, since luxury represents one of its absolute examples. Furthermore, Heine (2011) suggests that the differentiation between luxury and non-luxury brands cannot be achieved through only evaluating the price of the products, but it should also be determined by the brand’s image and the luxuriousness of the product category with which the brand is associated. Accordingly, this view of luxury tends to be management-oriented, as the main underlying assumption predominates that marketing managers are the ones who can control what should be perceived as luxurious through the creation of branding and pricing strategies (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). However, it should be noted that different sets of consumers still can perceive things as luxury in different ways, although the brands contain the same creation of luxurious image and pricing (Wiedmann et al., 2007; 2009). Therefore, in order to consider something as luxury, it should depend upon the interpretation of whether consumers perceive them as luxurious or not (Bauer et al., 2011). This leads to a focus of attention on research in order to understand the meaning of luxury from a consumer’s perspective.
1.2 Research Gap

Most previous studies have identified management as being in control of the creation of luxury, assuming that marketing managers can control what should be perceived as luxury (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009; Keller, 2009; Heine, 2011). Accordingly, the concept of luxury is simply understood as something that is based on an economic view of luxury, wherein luxury items are set at a much higher price than comparable products (McKinsey, 1990; Keller, 2009; Parguel et al., 2015). However, such a traditional view of luxury risks restricting the understanding of luxury to the term ‘luxury products’, in which the meaning of luxury is narrowly associated with generic economic and social displays of particular products, and fails to appreciate the cultural and emotional complexity of the dynamic nature of luxury, which is more subjective, personal and contestable (Roper et al., 2013). In particular, changes in the luxury market, such as ‘new luxury’, and the phenomenon of a decline in the overt conspicuousness of expensive products, suggests that the understanding of luxury should incorporate an understanding of its availability to the masses as well as its diversion through everyday activities and experiences (Silverstein and Fiske, 2005; Trendwatching, 2014). Thus, fully understanding what luxury means, in a broader sense, may not be sufficiently explained by the traditional concept of luxury.

Drawing from the consumer culture theory, the meaning of luxury should depend on consumers and is perceived differently by diverse sets of consumers across different cultures (Wiedmann et al., 2007; 2009). Moreover, consumption objects play a role as a repository of meaning for consumers to use when living their own lives (Fournier, 1998). In line with Cova (1996), the meaning of things is not only arbitrarily associated with a characteristic attached to a product, but is also infinitely open to diversion through the ordinary experiences of everyday life. Accordingly, consumers have the capacity to act within a context to provide consumption meanings that are considered socio-cultural creations, not psychological entities that exist solely in consumers’ minds, which can be understood through the interpretive activities of consumers that affect, shape and reshape the cultural meanings of things (Thompson and Haytko, 1997; Allen, et al., 2008).
Although there are a number of research which provides a stronger consumer orientation towards the concept of luxury, they failed to assert the significance of understanding what consumers do with their luxury consumption as a crucial aspect in defining luxury (Ho et al., 2012). Although Roper et al. (2013) found that luxury consumers emphasise the experiential nature of their luxury consumption (being/doing) over material ownership (having/owning), there has been a scarcity in previous research of exploring and analysing in detail the meaning of luxury that is associated with the practices surrounding luxury consumption. As things are given meaning by usage (Hirschman et al, 1998), the present study will argue that luxury has little meaning until it is integrated within practices in a consumer culture. Overall, the research attempts to bridge the gap on the academic perspective on luxury, in which the meanings of luxury will be fully comprehended through manifestation with the practices.

1.3 Research Aim, Objectives, and Questions

This study aims to take a practice theory approach in seeking to conceptualise luxury from a consumer perspective in a cross-cultural context. In order to achieve the research aim, the thesis focuses on two research objectives. The first is to examine the contemporary meanings of luxury and luxury consumption, with a particular focus on the various practices of luxury consumption performed by individuals in order to enact their meanings of luxury. The second is to seek to understand how the notion of luxury and its practices hold up in two distinct cultures, those of the UK and Thailand.

This thesis seeks to address the following questions:

- What are the practices of consumers surrounding luxury consumption?
- What are the meanings of luxury as understood through the practices of luxury consumption?
- How are different practices and meanings of luxury played out in differing cultural contexts amongst young adult consumers?
1.4 Significance of the Study

The study proposes a new way of conceptualising luxury based on practice theory. Rather than narrowly focusing on the experience of the purchasing stage and material ownership, the use of practice theory provides an empirical focus on the methods of consumption, in which the usage and enjoyment of goods, services, or resources as well as routine activities are central to the study. By looking for the various ways in which consumers incorporate luxury into their everyday lives, the result of the study does not limit the interpretation of luxury to particular characteristics of products or brands. This enables the researcher to emphasise the understandings of luxury in a much fuller manner than the current literature does. Moreover, the meanings of luxury from the study are attached to consumers’ practices in reality, which provides a more practical and useful solution for academics and practitioners in further constructing the elements of luxury in broader sense - ranging from luxury products and services to luxury experiences.

As society has become structured around the differences in consumption practices, consumption among the young adult segment has played an important role as a driver of change to transform society. Throughout the differences in practices and meanings of luxury among this group, the study gives an understanding on how the changes or transformations within young adults’ consumer cultures in contemporary society have extended the concept and meaning of luxury from its traditional orientation and potentially shaped the way luxury is viewed by the next generation. Thus, this study provokes an academic contribution to a renewed interest and understanding of the term ‘luxury’ in a contemporary society.

The thesis also focuses on the idea that the concept of luxury should be studied in a way that allows for cultural differences, rather than by considering luxury consumers as single homogeneous entity. As a result, the study makes an original contribution by its conceptualisation of luxury from a consumer perspective, within a cross-cultural context. The main theoretical contribution of this thesis is a framework of everyday luxury consumption practice that provides shared practices and the meanings of luxury in a cross-cultural context. The thesis extends the existing research on luxury by developing four practices present in luxury consumption:
caretaker, escapist, self-transformation and status-based. This broadens our understanding of luxury, allowing us to understand luxury as a form of embodied practice.

The study also contributes to the literature by its development of an alternative view wherein consumers can transfer and incorporate self-defined luxuries into everyday contexts. This idea considerably enlarges our understandings of contemporary luxury, so that traditional luxury (Veblen, 1902) and everyday luxury can co-exist within a broader concept of luxury. The notion of everyday luxury allows us to move beyond a purely materialistic understanding in order to reach a metaphysical account of luxury as an ephemeral and immaterial presence in everyday lived experiences.

However, there is no absolute answer defining what should be regarded as luxury. The meanings of luxury are still relative and depend on different understandings of the self and the morality within different cultures and societies. Accordingly, this study proposes that the interpretation of luxury between two distinct cultures should be drawn in the diamond diagram. As a result, luxury, for British consumers, is interpreted in terms of superiority and enhancing the independent idealised self that also has a social and moral belief against excessive spending and too much ostentation. For Thai consumers, luxury, on the other hand, luxury depicts an interdependent idealised self and fulfils family obligations in which the public face of the family is a central moral concern.

1.5 Methodology and Research Design

The study used narrative methodology in order to gain a richer and more complex understanding of participants’ lived experiences of the practices surrounding luxury consumption. The research involved young adult university students (aged 18-28 years), as the student sample does not have the potential resources for driving its luxury consumption because of high prices or the limited availability of luxury goods. This draws the researcher’s attention to the role of the participants rather than marketers in understanding the meaning of luxury, as well as to the consideration of luxury consumption as an ordinary, everyday practice in a
meaningful context that reaches beyond the limited scope of social status and wealth and reflects a more democratic approach to understanding contemporary luxury.

The respondents were recruited from three universities in the northwest of England and three universities in Bangkok, Thailand. These universities were selected in order to incorporate variation (e.g., academic reputations and entrance requirements), given the accompanying differences in the student intake across the three institutions. 16 UK and 16 Thai undergraduate and postgraduate students were selected based on purposive sampling, with the intention of securing some variations in the respondents’ personal and family backgrounds.

The study involved two stages of data collection and a combination of verbal and visual narrative methods. The first stage of research involved collage construction (visual narrative) and in-depth interviews (verbal narrative). The participants produced a collage of pictures intended to express their understanding of, and associations with luxury. For the second stage, 12 narrative practices of luxury consumption in an everyday domestic context were also carefully selected for the fieldwork. The fieldwork at the participants’ homes attempted to explore their narratives regarding luxury consumption practices in a familiar setting. This involved participants telling stories about their practices of luxury consumption in their everyday domestic lives (verbal narrative) and visually performing the practices, as well as the researcher witnessing the specific domestic spheres in which the practices were carried out (visual narrative).

1.6 An Overview of the Thesis

As the thesis should have a unified structure (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991), a six-chapter structure is used effectively to present the details of the thesis as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction
Chapter 2: Literature Review
Chapter 3: Methodology
Chapter 4: Findings
Chapter 5: Discussions
Chapter 6: Conclusion
The thesis’ structure clearly addresses the examiners’ difficulty in discerning the argument of the thesis. To clarify, the structure is unified and focused on solving the one research problem. This helps the thesis to communicate one big idea. In line with Easterby-Smith et al. (1991), the structure emphasises the importance of consistency in a Ph.D thesis, which must have a position, and its purpose must be clear from the very beginning. Accordingly, this structure is explicitly or implicitly followed by published scholars; note that Varadarajan (1996), the editor of the respected *Journal of Marketing*, offered guidelines for articles that are remarkably similar to the structure constructed in this thesis.

The remainder of this thesis is structured in the following manner. Chapter 2 offers a review of the definitions of luxury, and conceptualises how luxury is viewed in this research. Likewise, this literature review suggests that existing research studies on the meanings of luxury have rather limited interpretation risks rendering consumers as passive, and primarily homogeneous, entities. Overcoming such exclusion guides the direction of this thesis, and the reviewed literature on practice theory, the connection of practices and meanings, the typology of consumption practices, and the variations of the meanings of luxury and luxury consumption practices according to cultural aspects, are provided as the theoretical framework of this thesis.

In Chapter 3, matters relating to the methodology and the method are introduced. This chapter reveals the interpretive paradigm utilised for this empirical research. The researcher appoints herself as a tool in the process of interpretation. The narrative methodology, comprising visual and verbal narratives, is introduced as a method of data collection. Practical matters are also described, such as how the respondents are recruited, how the research is conducted, the use of back-translation and the steps taken for data analysis. Chapter 3 concludes with the researcher’s reflections on methodological matters.

Chapter 4 introduces the six illustrative case studies, giving an introduction and illustrative details on the understanding of luxury and the underexposed elements of luxury from a consumer perspective. The conceptual framework for everyday luxury consumption practices in a cross-cultural context is formulated to illustrate
the whole picture of the common, everyday luxury consumption practices performed by consumers across different backgrounds and cultures. Each theme of practice surrounding luxury consumption, together with how the practices and meanings of luxury vary between participants from two different cultures, is then detailed together with the support findings from the participants.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to research questions constructed in this thesis. This chapter begins by discussing how the four practices of everyday luxury consumption have extended our understandings of luxury consumption, leading to the conceptualisation of an alternative consumer-based luxury concept based on everyday luxury. Here, the discussion between traditional luxury and everyday luxury is provided in which the unifying luxury concept can be understood by drawing on both traditional and everyday luxury.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusion to this thesis. The major contributions of this thesis on theoretical, methodological and managerial grounds are provided. This chapter concludes by presenting the limitations of this thesis and signals opportunities for future research.
2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to review elements of the long tradition of research on luxury consumption, with particular attention to exploring the meanings of luxury within the consumer research context. In particular, this chapter highlights a number of gaps in the current body of literature and the knowledge surrounding the meanings of luxury. This chapter proposes that many changes have occurred within contemporary luxury consumption, and that the meanings of luxury within existing studies have not received adequate research attention.

Consumer research needs to keep pace with the changes occurring in a contemporary context, and this chapter aims to highlight the call for further research which: (1) acknowledges alternative forms of conceptualising luxury, moving beyond the predominance of traditional luxury (Veblen, 1902); (2) extends the significance of understanding what consumers do with luxury consumption as a crucial aspect in defining luxury (Ho et al., 2012); and (3) focuses on rendering consumers as cultural producers and heterogeneous entities, where the meaning of luxury is perceived differently by diverse sets of consumers across different cultures (Wiedmann et al., 2007; 2009).

This chapter begins by reviewing the literature on the meanings of luxury. This first part of the literature review offers a detailed discussion of the changes in a contemporary context, which has led to the focusing of attention on research in order to understand the meanings and concepts of luxury from a consumer perspective. Then, literature investigating the meanings of luxury from a consumer perspective will be reviewed. Attention in the literature review is devoted towards understanding what we currently know, from a consumer’s behavioural perspective, about the importance of the role of consumers. This examines the practices in their daily lives, which also affect, shape and reshape the connotations that have been neglected and largely overlooked in the existing literature on the meanings of luxury. The second part of the literature review frames the theoretical framework with a focus on practice theory, the connection of practice and meaning, consumption practices
surrounding luxury consumption, the typology of consumption practices and the variations in the meaning of luxury and luxury consumption practices according to cultural aspects. Finally, a conclusion for the chapter is then offered.

2.2 The Meanings of Luxury

“What then is luxury? It is a word without any precise idea, much such another expression as when we say the eastern and western hemispheres: in fact, there is no such thing as east and west; there is no fixed point where the earth rises and sets; or, if you will, every point on it is at the same time east and west. It is the same with regard to luxury; for either there is no such thing, or else it is in all places alike” (Morley, 2013, p. 216).

There is a lack of agreement among academics as to how the term luxury should be defined. Dubois et al. (2005) claim that luxury is a derivative of the Latin term ‘luxus’, which implies an indulgence, lavish or excessive lifestyle, with connotations of sumptuousness, luxuriousness and opulence. Through the ages, the origins of luxury were closely aligned with prosperity, elitism and dominance through the adoption of non-necessities (Brun et al., 2008). Luxury goods were characterised as either being rare or regulated by sumptuary laws (Lynn, 1991; Pantzalis, 1995; Hauck and Stanforth, 2006). Typically, luxury referred to products that were in short supply, with considerable access restrictions, which resulted in them being solely within the realm of the privileged elite in society (Nueno and Quelch, 1998). Overall, as put by Kovesi (2015), luxury, in its origins as ‘old’ luxury or ‘traditional’ luxury, was a term used to describe the consumer practices of wealthy classes.

The advent of the Industrial Revolution signalled an era of greater affluence. Consequently, luxury goods became less scarce, were more readily available by the general population (Hauck and Stanforth, 2006). Once characterised as only available within the domain of the elite, luxury items were now easily attainable by the masses (Frank, 1999; Hauck and Stanforth, 2006). In the last century, plumbing systems, for example, were regarded as luxury, whereas nowadays their absence would be viewed as a sign of abject poverty (Hauck and Stanforth, 2006). By the end
of the nineteenth century, overall improvements in the standard of living for the general population led to the redefinition of the concept of luxury. It now embodied the concept of “things you have that I think you shouldn’t have” (Twitchell, 2003, p. 43).

Advancements arising from the Industrial Revolution have resulted in companies having the competency to generate premium and affordable products which symbolise an elitist way of life (Brun et al., 2008). Changes have become evident in the last few decades, whereby a multiplicity of luxury goods is now available across a range of areas to meet various ever-increasing demands. This has resulted in a wide array of commodities and services being categorised as luxury items. These include the food and wine sector, the fashion and car industries, as well as the world of travel (Frank, 1999; Chevalier and Lu, 2010; Reyneke, et al., 2011). However, the evidence is fairly limited on what key characteristics make such goods and services be perceived as luxurious or as “things you have that I think you shouldn’t have (Twitchell, 2003, p. 43)”. Therefore, an alternative definition of luxury was introduced which became known as ‘new’ luxury (Truong et al., 2009).

To clarify, new luxury is characterised as being affordable products, produced in large quantities, that have established a premium position in the market and are targeted at middle-class consumers (Van Auken and Daye, 2008; Truong et al., 2009). Danziger (2005) and Silverstein and Fiske (2005) both claim that new luxury is determined by the consumers’ experiential understanding of luxury which shifted the meaning of luxury from what the product is to what it represents based on hedonism and the experiential nature. In this regard, the Collins English Dictionary (1999, p. 876) gives the definition of luxury, which bridges the broader idea of old and new luxury, as “something that is considered an indulgence rather than a necessity”. Unfortunately, this rudimental interpretation fails to encapsulate the meanings of luxury for the broader consumers. In contemporary Western societies, for example, small cars are not always deemed to be luxury products. This is despite the fact that small cars are not perceived as necessary for human survival, especially in environments in which a wide range of alternative methods of transport is available. Therefore, solely confining the definition of luxury to be inclusive of non-
necessity items, fails to take complete the understanding of the meaning of luxury.

As argued by Cornell (2002, p. 47), “luxury is particularly slippery to define”. Despite the habitual use of the term ‘luxury’, the concept of luxury remains contentious owing to the controversy over the actual meaning of luxury (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; Vicker and Renand, 2003; Bauer, et al., 2011). However, there appears to be a general agreement that the term luxury should not be simply identified as a definitive definition in which the meaning of luxury is not solely a characteristic attached to a product (Brown et al. (2013). Alternatively, it should acquire a more conceptual and symbolic dimension, defined by decisions on how people and the market make sense of luxury (Reddy and Terblanche, 2005). Based on this view, academic perspectives on conceptualising luxury have considered the theoretical development of the meanings of luxury based on the decision over whether marketing managers or consumers are the ones who can control what should be perceived as luxury (Bauer et al., 2011).

As Roper et al. (2013) state, the traditional view of luxury is conceptualised from the marketers’ perspective, and focused on the interface between marketers and consumers in which consumers become passive as the object of the research. However, there is in danger that luxury will lose its meaning if consumers can control what should be perceived as a luxury (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). In this regard, the meaning of luxury is based on the traditional conspicuous consumption model by using self-consciousness and price perception, involving the perceived conspicuousness, uniqueness, quality, hedonic, and extended self, as the indicators of traditional luxury (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; 2004; Christodoulides et al., 2009; Walley et al., 2013; Chandon et al., 2015). However, it should be noted that consumers nowadays value luxury as a way in which to experience and attain individual contentment due to the occurrence of a down-market model of new luxury (Silverstein et al., 2004; Taylor et al., 2009). Rather than overtly conspicuous ownership, there has been a societal shift in recent times to inconspicuous consumption and a preference for access (Eckhardt et al., 2014). In this regard, research has begun to look at luxury as becoming more subjective, personal and contestable (Roper et al., 2013), an alternative view of luxury that seems to be
forging less traditional understandings in conceptualising luxury.

Overall, the meaning of luxury does not need to be completely synonymous with traditional luxury or be controlled by marketers. Instead, it has been found that the meaning of luxury has been thrown into flux, which allows consumers to attach their own meanings to determine what should be regarded as luxury (Bauer et al., 2011). Therefore, as consumers and their experiential experiences gain importance in understanding luxury consumption (Eckhardt et al., 2014; Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2006), the consumer-based perspective of luxury is an area of research that needs to be addressed in order to fulfil and advance our comprehension of contemporary meanings of luxury, which will be discussed in the following section.

2.2.1 The Meanings of Luxury from a Consumer’s Perspective

The changes in the luxury market as ‘new luxury’ and the phenomenon of declining overt conspicuousness of expensive products have radically transformed the contemporary definitions of luxury, enhancing various pastiche and democratised forms of luxury for the masses (Tsai, 2005; Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2006; Atwal and Williams, 2009; Eckhardt et al., 2014). In this regard, such phenomenon suggested that the meanings of luxury should be rethought in light of the democratisation of luxury altogether, with a continued attention to denote individuality and subjective experiences (Roper et al., 2013; Eckhardt et al., 2014). Contrary to many contemporary studies which narrowly concentrate on the meanings of luxury as the characteristics of luxury products (Dion and Arnould, 2011; Heine, 2011; Walley et al., 2013), it should be noted that new luxuries embody much more than merely a set of attributes, in that they are more about meaningful objects and activities that consumers might experiences as luxury in order to fulfil psychological and emotional requirements (Dubois and Laurent, 1994; 1996; Kapferer, 1997; William and Atwal, 2013). As shown by Kapferer and Bastien (2009), luxuries are affiliated to access to pleasure, comprising strongly subjective, hedonistic and aesthetic elements and responding to a deep, personal and spontaneous desire; otherwise, they would not be regarded as a luxury. These individual pleasures take precedence over the generic emphasis on price (Hauck and Stanforth, 2006). Therefore, luxury consumption is sometimes defined as internalised consumption
Although luxuries are more likely to be consumed for social purposes (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; 2004), Berthon et al. (2009) contend that luxury has a strong element of hedonism, whereby luxuries are consumed for personal pleasure, making luxuries psychologically distant from ordinary goods (Denizer, 2005). Such an emotional and dynamic nature of luxury poses a challenge in terms of defining luxury as not being tied simply to the social aspects of displaying status, wealth and exclusivity controlled by marketing and brands (Wiedmann et al., 2007; 2009). For example, consumers may perceive luxury as offering something remarkable and out of the ordinary (Horiuchi, 1984; Hansen and Wänke, 2011). In many instances, luxury has the ability to evoke the feeling of being special and exclusive (Phau and Prendergast, 2000) or being sacred (Belk et al., 1989). Alternatively, luxury can elicit the feeling of authenticity, which differentiates items from counterfeit goods (Beverland, 2006; Phau and Teah, 2009; Turunen and Laaksonen, 2011). Interestingly, it is significant to note that a luxury experience can grant entry to a whole new world which entails deep emotion and desire (Carú and Cova, 2007), assuming that consumers’ desire for luxury is independent from the restrictive availability shaped by the traditional view of luxury (Bauer et al., 2011).

Apart from this, as luxury is subjective in nature, luxury can be perceived differently due to the context of consumption (Phau and Prendergast, 2000; Shukla, 2010). Berthon et al. (2009) argue that attitudes towards luxuries may fluctuate, being contingent on a specific stage in time and place. Cultural differences have also emerged, where French and Italian consumers, for example, regard luxuries as part of their cultural legacy and as an intrinsic part of their lifestyles because of their strong, long-standing tradition in these countries (Aiello et al., 2010). Conversely, in Asian countries, luxuries are related to group orientations, social communication and reputation (Hennigs, 2012). It is, therefore, common for consumers from different backgrounds and cultures to perceive objects differently; their concept of luxury will differ significantly (Wiedmann et al., 2007; 2009). Thus, the traditional view of luxury fails to incorporate the cultural sensitivity and experiential nature of luxury consumption, which necessitates a redefinition of the meaning of luxury from the
perspective of consumers.

Although there is an increasing number of studies in support of a stronger consumer orientation regarding luxury consumption, there is still little research that focuses on the meaning of luxury from a consumer perspective. A study conducted by Atwal and Williams (2009) investigated the significance of consumer experiences in the context of luxury. They developed a framework to advance a greater understanding of the concept of luxury by speculating on the impact of reciprocal, concrete and physical experiences. Building on this premise, they put forward a theoretical model, which classified luxurious experiences into four ‘experiential zones’, established on the dimensional intensity of consumer involvement and experiences. These areas include (1) aesthetic, receiving a low rank in involvement and a high rank in the intensity of the experience; (2) escapist, with a high score in both involvement and the intensity of the experience; (3) entertainment, acquiring a low rating in both aspects; and (4) educational, gaining a high score in involvement but a low rating in the intensity of the experience. However, Atwal and Williams’ (2009) conceptualisation is not substantiated by empirical data.

Wiedmann et al. (2009) developed a customer value framework for luxury goods. They proposed four dimensions of luxury value for consumers: functional, financial, individual, and social aspects. Rather than capitalising on the conspicuous consumption model, like Vigneron and Johnson (2004), this framework also focuses on the experiential sensibility of luxury or consumers’ personal perceptions. These include the monetary aspects of luxury, the utility of the products and customers’ personal values regarding luxury consumption. These justify how luxury consumers are willing to consume luxuries.

Another piece of work in this area was developed by Tynan et al. (2009). They suggest a customer value framework for luxury goods based on the work on customer value creation by Smith and Colgate (2007). This is in line with the service-dominant logical approach to value co-creation by Vargo and Lusch (2004). For Tynan et al. (2009), luxury consumers are actively engaged in the value creation process through their consumption of luxury. While Weidmann et al. (2009) focus on social and personal aspects separately, Tynan et al. (2009) combine these two aspects
to define symbolic value. To reflect the nature of luxury products and the active value creation by consumers, this framework has five consumer value dimensions: utilitarian, experiential/hedonic, symbolic/expressive, sacrifice and relational values. Taken together, these two frameworks extend the managerial-centric perspective of luxury to incorporate the consumer perspective in which consumers become active as the subject of the research. The comparison between these two frameworks is provided in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Value</th>
<th>Weidmann et al. (2009)</th>
<th>Tynan et al. (2009)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Utilitarian</td>
<td>Functional value: quality/usability/ uniqueness</td>
<td>Craftsmanship/superior product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential</td>
<td>Individual value: hedonic</td>
<td>Hedonic/aesthetics/ experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifice</td>
<td>Financial value: monetary</td>
<td>Exclusivity/perfectionism effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td></td>
<td>Consumer-brand relationship/brand community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1: Customer value framework for luxury goods (Wiedmann, et al., 2009; Tynan, et al., 2009)

However, Bauer et al. (2011) argue that the main view of the research of Wiedmann et al. (2009) and Tynan et al. (2009) still seems to be management-oriented. While many studies attempt to identify the value of luxury, Schembri (2006) suggests that consumers do not only co-produce value, they also co-construct the meanings of products or services. Consequently, the categorisation of luxury experiences into taxonomy systems appears to predetermine the experiential categories into values rather than the significance of the essential meaning of luxury that the consumer conveys. As a result, these two frameworks fail to emphasise consumers’ interpretations of the meaning of luxury. Moreover, the concept of
luxury in these studies is loosely based on the managerial interpretation of luxury as a starting point, not on the interpretation of the consumers. In order to successfully gauge consumers’ notions of luxury, it is important to start from the consumer’s point of view.

Building on this idea, Bauer et al. (2011) and Roper et al. (2013) and have attempted to explore the concept of luxury in terms of consumers’ interpretations of the meaning of luxury. Bauer et al. (2011) achieve this based on the consumers’ experiences of what is perceived to be luxury. They find that the concept of luxury is reflected in the escapist, flexible and unlocking power of luxuries, and privacy, which supports the consumers’ identity projection. As such, they reject the view of traditional luxury. Roper et al. (2013) identify the concept of luxury through the role of consumer discourse in order to examine their discursive perspectives on luxury brand consumption, and find that the concept of luxury is a socially-constructed discourse that is expressed by its subjective, experiential, moral and artistic constructs.

A study by O’Guinn and Muniz (2005) claims that consumption meanings should be viewed as socio-cultural creations influenced by the marketplace, rather than psychological elements wholly within the mind of the customer. Consumers adjust and reconfigure meanings in their lives; therefore, their interpretation of the consumption meaning is dynamic. It is neither intrinsic to the goods nor consistent among individuals, but is instead influenced by the context in which the products reside and how they are used (Allen et al., 2008). However, it can be seen that Roper et al. (2013) and Bauer et al. (2011) have explored the meaning of luxury based on what consumers think about luxury rather than what they do with their luxury consumption. They fail to emphasise the significance of understanding the role of consumers as a crucial aspect in defining luxury. Things are given meaning by their present and historic use in a consumer culture (Hirschman et al., 1998). Consequently, in this present study consumers are conceptualised as the cultural producers of the meaning of luxury through their interpretive activities that affect, shape and reshape the cultural meanings of things (Allen et al., 2008; Thompson and Haytko, 1997).
2.3 The Consumer as the Cultural Producer of the Meanings of Luxury

In order to develop the consumer-centric perspective of luxury, the study is based on the assumption that the meaning of luxury depends on consumers’ interpretations, and that luxury is perceived differently by diverse groups of consumers across cultures (Wiedmann et al., 2009; 2007). This premise is derived from the consumer culture theory by Arnould and Thompson (2005), and its collection of theoretical perspectives on the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings. The consumer culture theory has been influenced by a series of theoretical questions focusing on the relationships between consumers’ personal and collective identities, the experiences they have encountered, systems, and networks as well as the nature and dynamics of the sociological categories in which these consumer dynamics are enacted and inflected (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Keat et al. (1994) propose that consumers influence the creation of commodities and services not solely by responding to their own physical and cultural consumption goals, but more essentially, by creating them through cultivating the key features of a consumption culture (information, significance and impact) and contributing to its development, regardless of the market. Gronroos (2008) and Berthon et al. (2008) have assembled theoretical and experimental data, which advocates that academics and experts move their focus away from viewing consumers as customers and instead envisage consumers as producers, acting as the initiators of the process of meaningful creation. Within this view, consumers are conceptualised as cultural producers in order to form their meanings of luxury and the interconnected system of luxury consumption. Therefore, the concept of luxury is not simply dependent on the luxurious context created by luxury companies.

In previous literature, the received view of the meaning of consumption objects is rooted in the disciplines of psychology and information economics and most of its conclusions are derived from the information-processing theories of consumer behaviour (Anderson, 1983). Within this framework, the understanding of the meaning of luxury takes precedence over brand image creation, so that the shared
knowledge that comes to reside in consumers’ minds is the intended meaning for a particular consumption object, assuming that there is one commonly held meaning for a specific item or brand (Allen et al., 2008). However, this idea lacks the ability to capture the dynamic nature of luxury, since luxury is more subjective, personal and fluid (Roper et al., 2013). Furthermore, Cova (1996) suggests that the meaning of things is not only arbitrarily associated with their original function, but is also infinitely open to diversion through the ordinary experiences of everyday life. This implies that greater emphasis should be placed on identifying the meaning of consumption in the real world, and should then be recast from simplifying informational vehicles, shaped by management, to explore the symbolic and experiential aspects of consumption that people value in real life (Elliott, 1994; Allen et al., 2008). Therefore, this study argues that the meaning of luxury is not simply a concrete definition but rather dependent on the interpretation of how consumers manifest their interactions with luxuries in everyday lives.

Although a wide range of consumption meanings can be regulated by general institutional and cultural forces such as socio-demographic situations (Kozinet, 2001), Thompson and Haytko (1997, p.38) suggest that the meaning of consumption is presented as “contestable terrain that consumers rework(ed) in terms of their localised knowledge and value systems”. As a result, in order to give meaning to things, consumer culture is a resource for consumers to use in its orientation and definition (Holt, 2002). McCracken (1986) proposes that the culturally shared meaning of things is considered as a one-directional flow of meaning starting from the culturally constituted product or brand to the consumer. However, it should be noted that consumption also plays a role as a repository of meaning for consumers to use in their own lives (Fournier, 1998). Accordingly, consumers become the beginning of the chain, rather than the end (Firat and Dholakia, 1998). Cova and Dalli (2009) contrast McCracken’s (1986) work by asserting that consumers undertake several activities that, directly or otherwise, increase the market value of whatever companies offer in the market, where tangible (product transformation), intangible (appropriation), positive (co-creation), and critical (resistance) activities shape the meanings of the things they consume. Thus, the direction of the flow of meaning should make it obvious that consumers become the starting point in order to
form consumption meanings through the interpretive activities of individual consumers, and these affect, shape and reshape the cultural meaning of things (Thompson and Haytko, 1997; Allen, et al., 2008).

Deighton (1992) asserted that the notion of performance is central to the creation of meaning, in which the performance changes the consumer into a producer of meaning. In addition, DeBerry-Spence (2007) made this claim by emphasising the irreducible role and performance of the consumer in interceding between the context (for example, the various consumption locations) and the meta-level considerations (beliefs, values, sub-culture and other factors). Consequently, actual meanings are allocated to these products based on contextual product meanings. Therefore, consumers are deemed to be cultural producers, as well as being adept at interpreting meanings at a micro-level, with ultimate control over contextual product meanings and competency in determining the meaning of the things they consume.

Currently, the consumption theory has moved from focusing on symbolic meanings and their function in identity formation. More recent debates have instead centred on the more mundane aspects of consumption, purporting that there are advantages in discussing ordinarily inconspicuous routines so as to form a greater understanding of the meaning of things (Gronow and Warde, 2001). The experiences surrounding daily living are potentially the key defining features of contemporary societies, where individuals embark on an ongoing journey to derive the meaning of things in their day-to-day lives (Featherstone, 1991). They also emphasise the importance of the routine, collective and conventional nature of consumption in order to generate a greater knowledge of how consumers comprehend meanings about their consumption (Warde, 2005; Magaudda, 2011).

Although Hansen and Wänke (2011) assert that most consumers do not have sufficient financial resources to indulge in luxury every day, Bauer et al. (2011) find that consumers nowadays have the ability to transfer and include self-defined luxuries in their everyday lives. Transforming luxury into ‘Everyday luxury’ is a context that might not traditionally be associated with luxury. Moreover, the phenomenon of the democratisation of luxury (Silverstein and Fiske, 2005; Godley and Williams, 2009) as well as the rise of inconspicuous consumption (Berger and
Ward (2010); Eckhardt et al., 2014) also support the consumer trend that luxury consumption nowadays has become more flexible, and has been appropriated for everyday use. Supported by Cronin et al (2012), the rise of inconspicuous consumption and a sense of new luxury can be communicated by consumers through their everyday experiences, routines, and even the most mundane of activities and objects. It is, thus, worth for the researcher to explore an alternative view of luxury on behalf of consumers by including more achievable domains of luxury consumption experiences in everyday life. As such, contemporary consumer-based definitions of luxury have been found to occupy a central space in consumers’ everyday lives.

Roper et al. (2013) found that consumers emphasise the experiential nature of their luxury consumption (being/doing) over material ownership (having/owning). However, previous research has failed to assert the significance of understanding what consumers actually do with luxury consumption, which is a crucial aspect in defining luxury (Ho et al., 2012). If the meaning of luxury can be defined through use, connecting it to the practice theory could help researchers to understand how luxury enters daily life practices and becomes meaningful to consumers.

### 2.4 Practice Theory

In the past, consumer research has tended to concentrate on the moment of acquisition by the consumer, rather than what consumers do as part of an ongoing consumption experience. Practice theory considers the behaviour surrounding the actions being carried out in this process (Hand and Shove, 2007). Prior to this, the primary focus of consumer research centred on how consumption objects could generate symbolic and self-identity elements (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1988; Featherstone, 1990; Holt, 1995). Conversely, practice theory purports that the consumption object is directly emulated in daily living (Shove et al., 2012). Accordingly, there is a need to comprehend consumption behaviour in the light of routine behaviour and the mundanity of life.

It has been found that consumer behaviour can be fully understood by reviewing continuous habitual activities, engagements, and performances that shape
our social lives (Arsel and Bean, 2013). According to Schatzki (1996; 2002), a practice can be described as a group of activities or an organised network of actions that systematically connect in a specific manner. Three principal avenues of linkages have been identified and can be achieved “(1) through understanding what to say and do; (2) through explicit rules, principles, guidelines, and instructions; and (3) through teleo-affective structures including ends, projects, tasks, purposes, beliefs, emotions and moods” (Schatzki 1996, p. 89). Therefore, the concept of practice can be described as “a routine behaviour consisting of several interconnected elements such as bodily and mental activities, things and their use, prior know-how, and motivational knowledge” (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249). Building on this concept, Shove and Pantzar (2005) and Warde (2005) further advance the association of practice theory and consumption, in which the consumption activities are viewed as the result of individual performances that are intertwined into a complex socio-material context where objects, their meanings and embodied activities are integrated into a specific configuration of practice. Essentially, practice does not manifest itself through the use of product, but rather through ways of doing in everyday life (de Certeau, 1984). Accordingly, the ownership of possessions and the way in which they are used is guided by the conventions of practice, which steer behaviour (de Certeau, 1984; Warde, 2005). This means that practices, rather than desires, create wants and explain why people choose to consume particular products or services (de Certeau, 1984; Warde and Marten, 2000; Swann, 2002). In line with the concept of the consumer as the cultural producer of meanings, a practice-theoretical approach, therefore, theorises consumers as producers constrained by socio-culturally constituted nexuses (Arsel and Bean, 2013).

Practice theory concentrates on the connection between objects, skills or competence, meanings and practices. It also highlights the significance of routine activities, and the collective and conventional nature of consumption (Warde, 2005; Shove, et al., 2012). The principals of practice theory can be used to examine consumption patterns and allow more abstract questions about the association between the various practice components. These include analysing meanings attached to practices and objects, as well as exploring the consequences of these relationships and the ‘fixity’ and ‘fluidity’ of patterns of consumption and everyday
consumer routines (Warde and Marten, 2000; Shove and Walker, 2010). Furthermore, practice theory draws on the subfield of the sociology of consumption, which studies the collective order in consumption patterns, the social construction of the concept of need and how these behaviours become normal, as well as the way in which they can fluctuate (Bourdieu, 1984; Shove and Warde, 2002; Watson and Shove, 2008). Accordingly, practice theory supports the analysis of luxury consumption behaviour, and facilitates the formation of the concept of emergent and co-constitutive associations between objects and actions, as well as the emulation of collective dialogue on what the meaning of luxuries conveys.

2.4.1 The Development of Practice Theory

The development of practice theory can be possible to classify into two branches of practice theory scholars (Schatzki et al., 2001). The first branch was pioneered by a number of renowned social scholars, namely Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1979; 1984), who placed the grounds on the understandings of practice theory. The second branch of practice theory scholars has examined and criticised these foundations by adding further extensions to practice theory. These key scholars in the second generation are Schatzki (1996; 2002), Reckwitz (2002), Warde (2005) and Shove, et al. (2012).

The first era of practice theorists explored the dissonance in philosophical studies between methodological individualism and methodological holism. Methodological individualism argues that social experiences must be viewed as a consequence of individual behaviour, while the reverse is true of methodological holism, which claims that systems or society in its entirety determine social phenomena (Jenkins, 2002). By evading the controversy surrounding methodological individualism, the first generation scholars instead concentrated on the human capacity to inspire revolutionary transformation, where they saw the human body as being at the centre of personal experiences and the world (Eriksen and Nielsen, 2001). Bourdieu (1977, p.15) purported that the world is rather bounded by structural constraints, which generate ‘permanent dispositions’ comprising various patterns of thought and perception which can have a generic function. Examples include the ordering of the world into various classifications, such as gender (male and female),
geographical points (East and West), time periods (past and future), positioning (top and bottom or right and left). In addition, fundamentally, the concept of a permanent disposition also encompasses physical demeanour and stances (practices), for example, behavioural aspects such as standing, sitting, observing, talking or walking. Subsequently, Bourdieu (1990) advanced the concept of ‘habitus’ in order to describe the continuous internalisation of social structures on the human body, as well as recognising practice as having the capacity for invention and improvisation through cultural habitus.

Regarding the notion of habitus, originally derived from the Greek term ‘hexis’, Bourdieu (1990) employed it to describe human demeanour and the way in which people portray themselves in the world, through their appearance, body language, deportment, etc. In a previous study conducted in Kabylia, Algeria, Bourdieu (1990) highlighted this concept, in his observation that males and females carry themselves in markedly different ways. Essentially, he proposed that women’s practices and bodies conform more with the female archetype of humility and self-discipline, while men’s practices and bodies tend towards other men. Accordingly, Kabyle’s different practices and body gestures are implied to be ‘mnemonic device’, which is used to emulate basic cultural oppositions, and becomes an intrinsic part of the practical cultural habitus which can be examined more through observation than formal teaching (Bourdieu, 1990). This theory is supported by Jenkins (2002), who argues that individuals are inclined to behave in specific ways so as to derive meaning from cultural resources in the face of formidable social constraints. Eriksen and Nielsen (2001) draw a parallel between the concepts of habitus and discipline proposed by Bourdieu (1990) and Foucault (1979) respectively. To clarify, Foucault (1979) claims that discipline is a system or control structure imposed on the body to create permanent dispositions. However, Foucault (1979) highlights the specific significance of disciplinary control as it progresses through the body. This results in individuals discovering how to control their behaviour and makes it less likely that they will require the involvement of authorities in their lives (Gledhill, 2000).

In order to enrich practice theory, the notion of ‘field’ was proposed by Bourdieu (1990). Fields refer to specialist domains of practice such as art,
photography, sociology (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu 1993; Benson and Neveu, 2005). According to Bourdieu (1984) and Reed-Danahay (2005), the understanding of fields embraces a distinctive amalgamation of various forms of capital, for example, economic capital (financial), symbolic capital (status, fame) or social capital (networks). A suitable analogy to describe a field is a situation like a sporting event where players only with abundant expertise and conviction in the game are prepared to devote time and energy in taking part (Bourdieu, 1992). While effective tactical plans for players and coaches can emerge from a casual observer’s rational and conscious thoughts, Bourdieu (1990) purports that realistically these successes are only attainable where there is effective appropriation between the habitus and the field. Therefore, in time, players can cultivate the necessary competencies together with an understanding of the game, known as a ‘practical sense’, which permits them to act in a systematic but apparently effortless manner (Swartz, 1997). To clarify, the habitus creates strategies which are objectively adjusted to the field, causing such actions to be directed by a ‘habit’, from which the appearance of rational action may be deduced (Bourdieu, 1993).

A useful illustration is the spontaneous choice exercised by a tennis player who races towards the net; such a decision has nothing to do with the tactics learned from the coaches. Instead, such practices are guided by a ‘feel for a game’ (Bourdieu, 1990). Accordingly, Bourdieu (1990) proposed another fundamental notion of practice-theoretical vocabulary, which is ‘doxa’. Doxa is described as a series of deeply held field-specific assumptions that ‘go without saying’ and are not subject to discussion or debate (Bourdieu, 1998; Benson and Neveu, 2005). Overall, according to Parkin (1997, p. 376), “practice is based on the dispositions inherent in habitus and unfolds as strategic improvisations – goals and interests pursued as strategies – against a background of doxa that ultimately limits them”.

Like Bourdieu (1990), Giddens (1979; 1984) also developed a practice theory, but he approaches practice theory from a very different direction. Giddens (1979) is more focused on the history of philosophy and social theory, while Bourdieu (1990) grounds his theories in empirical research (Eriksen and Nielsen, 2001). According to Giddens (1984), social relations are unified through the duality
of the structures and agency, and are ordered across space and time – this is what Giddens (1984) calls ‘structuration’. By critically rejecting Hägerstrand’s (1967) concept of authority and power which govern individual action, the structuration theory advanced by Giddens (1984) displays that human actions or practices are depended on social interactions and structures including the rules, resources and practical consciousness of the actors, rather than the enforcement onto an individual by a higher authority. Therefore, Giddens (1984) contends that the fundamental elements of practice theory cannot detach people from the day-to-day structures or contexts in which they carry out activities and habits, which play a vital part in their lives.

Moving to practice theorists in the second generation, while these scholars maintain the importance of the human body to practice, they tend to criticise practice theory base on the idea that practices should be the main sites of investigation. Instead, they proposed that practices are not solely within the psyche of the actors, but are out there in the practices themselves (Everts et al., 2011). Among second-generation practice theorists, Schatzki’s (1996; 2002) work has provided a foundation of practice theory for the most recent research. Unlike the first generation of practice theory which associated practices as mental routines, Schatzki’s (1996; 2002) concept of practice theory is less dependent on the notion of capital, habitus and field proposed by Bourdieu (1990) as well as the rules, resources and practical consciousness suggested by Giddens (1984). Instead, the work has focused on an analytical priority for practices, which takes on not only practices but also material and immaterial properties, and how they connect to each other in constituting meaning, order and arrangement.

Schatzki (1996; 2002) takes a step beyond Bourdieu and Giddens by moving practice theory into site ontology as a broader framework where practice, things and thoughts are associated within complex networks of entities. Accordingly, Schatzki (2002) proposes the concept of ‘the site of the social’ as a system of practices and orders embodied with materially interwoven practices, which are centrally organised around shared practical understandings. In this regard, we can only understand actions against the background of their particular practical contexts, as these actions
and bodies are built into practices, in which the skilled body is where the activity and the mind, as well as the individual and society meet (Schatzki et al., 2001). Furthermore, practices are sustained over periods of time due to the effective inculcation of shared embodied ‘know-how’ as well as their continued performance (Schatzki, 1996; 2002). On the whole, Schatzki (2002) has described practices as an assemblage of actions of which the human body is at the centre.

In addition, Schatzki (1996; 2002) classifies practices into two broad types, namely integrative and dispersed practices. Integrative practices are the more complex practices found in and constitutive of specific domains of social life, or found within particular fields such as cooking, driving, farming or business (Schatzki, 1996). Not only do they demand understanding on how to do something, they also necessitate the knowledge of the context in which the practice takes place. Conversely, dispersed practices describe those that are likely to be abstracted from a specific act of consumption, which occur within and across various domains or subfields, including defining, clarifying, inquiring, informing, analysing or conceptualising (Schatzki, 1996). Essentially, what differentiates integrative from dispersed practices are teleo-affective structures, which comprise a group of acceptable ends, orders, uses and feelings that direct the practices and ingrain them in a context (Schatzki, 2002). In other words, integrative practices consist of a specific “order of life condition pursued by its individuals” (Schatzki, 1996, p. 124).

Another contemporary approach to practice theory is that of Reckwitz (2002), who integrates elements from Schatzki (1996; 2002) in order to construct an ‘ideal type’ of practice theory. Reckwitz (2002) places attention on how the motivation and reasons of individual can cause routinised action and behaviour. While Giddens (1984), Bourdieu (1990) and Schatzki (1996; 2001) tended to less focus on the individual, Reckwitz (2002) includes the importance of individuals, supplementing the idea of the human agent in order to understand social practices where individuals are the unique focal points of practices as they carry out a multitude of various social actions. As Reckwitz (2002) points out, as the social world is first and foremost populated by various social practices which are carried out by human agents,
individuals are not only carriers of patterns of bodily behaviour, but carriers of practices, which are routine ways of desiring, understanding and participating.

Furthermore, Warde (2005) has drawn upon practice theory with a more objective and practical goal in mind, which gives rise to the application of practice theory into consumption studies. Warde (2005) has indicated that consumption is the outcome of practices in which consumption can be defined as the totality of consumer activities. For Warde (2005), practices are diverse according to the differences in degrees, qualities, and commitments in which individuals assert on the practice, and there is no practice that is impervious to other practices. Although practices are difficult to separate, Warde (2005) found that consumption practices can be broadly categorised by considering their usage and effects. To clarify, practices possess differentised rewards, either personal or instrumental, to the actors in which the effects of consumption give meaning through performances (Warde, 2005). For the use of consumption, it involves the totality of those activities in which a particular consumption practice can be categorised through a set of uniform transmissions of understandings, procedures and engagements. In relation to Schatzki (1996; 2001), Warde (2005) argues that the notion of integrative practices is likely to be more relevant to the sociology of consumption than the notion of dispersed practices (e.g., explaining, reporting, questioning, etc.) since the latter seems to be an individualist focus. Apart from this, it is worth noting that it is difficult to interpret these practices without attending to the wider governmental, foundational and technological settings in which they are maintained (Randles and Warde, 2006).

According to Warde (2005), an important change has occurred in the belief that practice centres around consuming and using things. Shove and Pantzar (2005) and Shove et al. (2007; 2012) reiterated this claim by asserting that consumption integrates two paradoxical notions, buying and using, whereby the consumption process is not a practice in its own right, but rather is instead perceived as a moment in almost every practice. In this regard, consumption describes a series of actions, whereby the consumers conduct specific practices, with the necessary knowledge to undertake these practices and the tools to engage as a practitioner (Shove et al., 2007;
In other words, behaviour in relation to consumption is governed by the conventions and principles of the practice, suggesting that practices are fundamental in driving consumption, as they are an important determinant of needs, knowledge, and perception (Warde, 2005; Shove, et al., 2012). Therefore, the appropriation of things is deemed to be just one component of practice (Shove et al., 2012). Furthermore, Shove and Pantzar (2005) and Shove et al. (2007; 2012) describe practices as involving inseparable connections of materials, meanings and forms of competence or doing, which advance research by envisaging consumers not as naïve and passive buyers, but rather as active and creative practitioners. These possess the ability and competence to carry out the acquisition of relevant goods or services to accomplish the practice with skill as well as to comprehend the meaning (Shove et al., 2012).

In summary, practice theory is an approach which focuses on the human body, viewing it as the centre of multiple actions (practices) undertaken with more or less responsibility, ability and dexterity and grace (Shove et al., 2012). Despite the fact that a number of the practices are broadly diffused over social time and space, others are assembled in configurations that change over time through the socially (re)productive agency of practitioners (Warde, 2005). In the age of the second generation of practice theorists, practice-theoretical approach is currently applied to various new areas across a range of disciplines. For example, Nuitjen (2003) and Evens and Handelman (2005) take a practical approach to social and political anthropology. Shove (2003), Shove and Pantzar (2005) adopted practice theory in the study of domestic and leisure practices. Whittington (2006) and Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) benefit from using practice theory in strategy research. Moreover, practice theory has been proved successful in the study of consumer culture and consumption, for example, the use of DIY items (Shove et al. 2007), everyday practices of shopping (Watson and Shove 2008), digital music consumption practices (Magaudda, 2011), and a taste regime in regulating everyday consumption (Arsel and Bean, 2013). As such, the rise in the use of practice theory in consumer research has provided an important aspect in the discussion of consumption, so that the relationships between consumers, materials, practices and meaning are getting more theoretical attention.
In relation to luxury consumption, practice theory has been adopted in order to explore ethical luxury consumption in the context of fine jewellery purchases (Moraes et al., 2015). However, such an investigation could have relied on a traditional meaning of luxury, which is narrowly associated with the characteristics of fine jewellery products and the particular context of fine jewellery purchases, overlooking a broader meaning of luxury gained through the ordinary experiences of everyday life. It should be noted that practice consists of both intentional and routinised or habitual actions in forming our ways of doing things in everyday life (de Certeau, 1984). Accordingly, it can be argued that the application of practice theory to frame an analysis of luxury consumption can contribute to the debate on luxury consumption by opening up new areas of inquiry. It can help researchers to appreciate and incorporate the more mundane and everyday aspects of luxury consumption. As such, the use of practice theory as the theoretical framework in this study provides an alternative view of luxury for consumers, which, in turn, has the potential to lead to new underexposed elements in luxury consumption as experienced in everyday life.

2.4.2 Connecting Practices and Meanings

As Shove and Pantzar (2005) and Shove et al. (2012) recommend, practice is understood as an inseparable relationship between materials, meanings and forms of competence, with meanings emerging from the interconnection of practice elements. Overall, practices are the result of the interaction between consumers and objects, which shapes social processes and activities, and implies the meaning of an object and its role in social life (Shove and Pantzar, 2005; Magaudda, 2011; Shove, et al., 2012). Magaudda (2011) develops this idea further and turns it into the Circuit of Practice (Figure 1).
The Circuit of Practice is a heuristic device, which investigates the transformation pathway that connects objects, meanings and doing. It aims to establish the ways by which practices are formed, maintained and altered, impacting on the meaning of objects and the doing components. These form the practice as a whole entity from the point of view of consumers and human actors (Magaudda, 2011). Figure 2 provides an illustration of how to use the Circuit of Practice (Magaudda, 2011) in analysing meaning from the doing process.

**Figure 1: The Circuit of Practice (Magaudda, 2011)**

**Figure 2: How to use the Circuit of Practice (Magaudda, 2011)**
Figure 2 illustrates how to analyse the meaning of luxury from the practices surrounding it, using luxury handbags as an example. Consumer-associated luxury products such as handbags (objects) elicit a high level of passion or positive feelings (meanings). The consumer engages these meanings into social values to develop new shared habits or practices of protecting the products from inappropriate use and damage, and treating the products with respect and care (doings). These practices produce a new meaning about the products as special possessions (meanings), which is connected to fears about damage and loss and hence requires knowledge of how to handle and take care of the products (doings) in terms of the product materials (objects).

As explained in the previous section (2.4.1), practices can be broadly distinguished as either integrative or dispersed (Schatzki, 1996). Arsel and Bean (2013) further developed this idea and refined the conceptualisation of the linkage between objects, doing and meanings in order to explain how dispersed practices are incorporated into integrative ones. Arsel and Bean (2013) identified three dispersed practices that constantly relate to the dimensions in the circuit of practice, objects, doing and meanings. The three dispersed practices (Figure 3) are problematisation, ritualisation, and instrumentalisation (Arsel and Bean, 2013).

![The Circuit of Practice](image)

Figure 3: The Circuit of Practice (Arsel and Bean, 2013)
Problematisation is defined as the process of indicating how deviations from normative and cultural standards have become coded as problematic (Thompson and Hirschman, 1995; Arsel and Bean, 2013). In other words, it involves questioning the alignment of objects and meanings, in which action is required in order to solve the lack of alignment between objects and meanings (Arsel and Bean, 2013). Ritualisation relates to the creation of an expressive and symbolic action, comprising a number of behavioural actions that occur in a rigid, intermittent cycle and are generally recurrent over time (Rook, 1985). Furthermore, the process aims to align objects with doing (Arsel and Bean, 2013). Longitudinal ritualisation and routinisation influences practical consciousness and creates practical knowledge, which, in turn, impacts on the dominant modes of daily activities and integrative practices (Bourdieu, 1984; Arsel and Bean, 2013). Lastly, instrumentalisation includes the mechanisms for linking objects and doing to the realisation of meaning, with the aim of attaining the desired physical and psychological states (Arsel and Bean, 2013).

Within the realm of practice, elements of practices have been integrated into the notion that meanings, human activity, knowledge and competencies occur (Schatzki, 2001). Such fields of practices can be treated as the ‘place’ to study the nature and transformation of their subject matter and become central to practice approaches (Schatzki, 2001). However, Magaudda’s (2011) and Arsel and Bean’s (2013) circuit of practice has been criticised for overlooking the important of place in their analysis of consumption through practices (Warde, 2014). As put by Evert et al. (2011) and Warde (2014), consumers incorporate norms, materials, meanings and competencies in their ways of doing, which are dependent on the consumption environment and place. This has led Moraes et al. (2015) to further add the role of norms, shared knowledge, and understandings, as well as experiences of the consumption place to the circuit of practice (Figure 4).
According to the circuit of practice framework by Moraes et al. (2015), it is possible to identify the complex relationship among objects, doings, and representations and the sets of actions that are connected by practical understandings, rules, and teleoafffective structures (Schatzki, 1997) through the experiences of consumption place. While Magaudda (2011) and Arsel and Bean (2013) focus on explaining the elements of practices in the individual and concrete levels in which practices are created, stabilised, and transformed, Moraes et al. (2015) asserted that the integration of the consumption place into the framework would benefit researchers by acknowledging the particular experience of the consumption environment and place in fostering specific types of luxury consumption practices. However, it should be noted that Moraes et al. (2015) have focused on the experience of luxury retail environments (the Birmingham Jewellery Quarter) in contributing to the understandings of fine jewellery consumption practices. In particular, this rather causes the analysis of the meanings of luxury to be narrowly attached to the importance of consumers’ experiences of service and retail controlled by the managerial perspective.

In this study, the researcher has decided to adopt the circuit of practice formulated by Arsel and Bean (2013). This is due to the aim of the research, which focuses on conceptualising luxury from a consumer perspective in a broader sense, rather than on limiting the understanding of practices to a particular consumption
situation. Moreover, the circuit of practice of Arsel and Bean (2013) offers a flexible approach for turning concepts of practice theory into empirical notions, thus making it a viable tool for exploring various consumer practices that individuals can perform (Halkier, et al., 2011). In this regard, such approach gives empowered roles to consumers in which the meanings of luxury can be constructed beyond the experience of exclusive service and perceived product characteristics.

In addition, the terminology of objects, doing, and meanings distinguishes between the three classifications with respect to the concepts that are familiar within the academic discourse on consumption. Moreover, the application of the circuit of practice is in line with the perspective of consumer culture theory that seeks to understand phenomena in a wider cultural and social context (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011). This is because the circuit provides a systematic approach linking components of practices with objects, doing, and meanings which assists analysts in developing a greater knowledge of how meanings, understandings, and intelligibility of social phenomena are worked into various activities that shape certain practices. While Margudda’s (2011) circuit of practice simply investigates the transformation pathway that connects objects, meanings and doing, Arsel’s and Bean’s (2013) approach rather presents a systematic approach that links the three components of practices with objects, doing and meanings, which assist analysts in developing a greater knowledge of how various practices are bound together into the actualisation of the meanings. Overall, this present research aims to adopt the circuit of practice from Arsel and Bean (2013) to explore the way in which luxuries, their meanings, activities are integrated into luxury consumption practices, and how consumers connect luxury consumption practices to the actualisation of the meanings of luxury in order to conceptualise luxury from a consumer’s perspective.

Although The circuit of practice developed by Arsel and Bean (2013) helps the researcher to explore the way in which consumers integrate understandings, materials, and competencies in their ways of doings in order to form meanings of consumption as a whole, the framework lacks the ability to identify how various consumption practices can be broadly categorised in order to allow researchers to structure the analysis of different consumption practices leading to different
meanings. In this regard, it is worthwhile exploring the common consumption practices surrounding luxury consumption and theoretical frameworks in order to categorise them.

2.5 Consumption Practices Surrounding Luxury Consumption

The study is based on the main argument that luxury has little meaning without manifesting it with the ‘practices’ of consumer culture. Holt (1995) describes consumption practices as specific acts of action, in which people make use of consumption in a variety of ways. When approaching the definition of luxury from the consumption practice perspective, previous studies have highlighted that the meaning of luxury arises in the core and intersection of the dimensions of consumption practice, namely the functional (the material and its characteristics), symbolic (the reflections of context and symbolic meanings), and experiential (individuals’ perceptions, interpretations and personal meanings) dimensions (Vickers and Renand, 2003; Berthon, et al., 2009; Wiedmann, et al., 2009; Truong and McColl, 2011; Zhan and He, 2012).

2.5.1 The Functional Dimension of Luxury Consumption Practices

The functional dimension refers to characteristics attached to luxury goods such as quality (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004; Kim, et al., 2009), and meanings derived from consumption practices involving the consumers’ interpretation of what the product can do and the use of luxury based on its functionality. For example, the meaning of luxury as superior and excellent quality emphasised in luxury products is related to the usability, durability and functionality of the use of the product (Vigneron and Johnson 2004; Wiedmann, et al., 2007; 2009; Tynan, et al., 2009). Moreover, the history and heritage of brand contributes to the perceived functionality of luxury products as having expertise, reliability, authenticity and durability (Beverland, 2006; Keller, 2009). However, as argued by Berthon et al. (2009) and Okonkwo (2009) the collection of functional characteristic attributes of luxury does not totally constitute the meaning of luxury, since these characteristics can also be found in any product which is not regarded as luxury. Accordingly, the ways through
which luxury receives symbolic and personal meanings through the symbolic and the experiential dimensions of luxury consumption practices will be reviewed.

### 2.5.2 The Symbolic Dimension of Luxury Consumption Practices

The symbolic dimension associates luxury with communication with the self (Gecas, 1982; Sirgy, 1982) and the way in which consumers signal to others by means of luxury consumption (Vigneron and Johnson 2004). Through the symbolic meanings of luxury, luxury has the ability to transform the consumer’s self (Hoppe, et al. 2009; Hemetsberger, et al., 2010; Bauer, et al., 2011). This dimension is socially driven, and aims to reflect a desire to impress others in which conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1902; Mason, 1981; 2001; O’Cass and Frost, 2002; O’Cass and McEwen, 2004; Truong, et al., 2008) and status consumption (Kilsheimer, 1993; Eastman, et al., 1997; 1999; Shukla, 2010) are the main theoretical foundations behind the social orientation of luxury consumption.

It appears that status and conspicuous consumption are frequently discussed in studies, as they emanate from similar consumption practices, where consumers pursue social prestige and affluence (O’Cass and McEwen, 2004; Truong, et al., 2008). Eastman et al. (1999) contend that status consumption causes conspicuous consumption, as raising the former will probably result in people being more inclined to flaunt their status. However, these two concepts differ, in that status consumption concentrates on the individuals themselves being in possession of luxury products, which they may or may not openly exhibit. Conspicuous consumption, on the other hand, focuses more on the obvious demonstration of status (O’Cass and McEven, 2004). Consequently, it is legitimate to recognise that status and conspicuous consumption are both alike in terms of meaning and these two concepts have frequently been interchanged in the research (O’Cass and Frost, 2002; Truong, et al., 2008).

Based on the notion of conspicuous and status consumption, consumers can associate practices surrounding luxury consumption with a form of displaying wealth and status through acquisition, using and displaying luxury possessions. This suggests definitions related to luxury are a symbolic tool for status (Dubois and Duquesne, 1993; Phau and Prendergast, 2000) and tangible resources in defining...
consumers’ selves (Belk, 1988; Klein and Hill 2008; Miller, 2005; 2009). It should be noted that the status must be granted by others, meaning that there must be some degree of shared understanding in the consumption context about the rankings among individuals, and such consumption practice must be socially evidenced (Veblen, 1902; Mason, 1981; Eastman, et al., 1999). Overall, Kapferer and Bastien (2009) identified that the symbolic drivers behind luxury consumption practices are two-fold: symbolic to others, and symbolic to the self. In line with Truong et al. (2008) and Giovannini, et al. (2015), luxury consumption involves consumers signifying greater status to both the individual and the surrounding significant others.

There are several consumption practices in which individuals use luxury to signal their status to others. Mason (2001) argues that consumers can emulate the consumption patterns of individuals who, in a social hierarchy, are either of an equal or a far higher status than themselves. Consumers can signal upward as ‘vertical signalling’ in order to be connected with those above them, and downward to separate or distance themselves from less affluent people. Moreover, consumers can involve themselves in ‘horizontal signalling’ in order to form a connection with others who are at the same level in order to conform to a desired group (Phau and Cheong, 2009; Wilcox, et al., 2009; Han, et al., 2010).

Both practices of vertical and horizontal signalling are in relation to what Leibenstein (1950) calls ‘the bandwagon effect’, which relates to the ways in which consumers acquire status in the view of others by replicating the stereotypes or lifestyles of affluence, in order to belong to the prestige group and/or to be distinguished from the non-prestige group (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1994; Kim, et al., 2001; Phau and Cheong, 2009). However, the practices of vertical and horizontal signalling are differentiated by the means of actions. Vertical signalling is attached to social respect, reputation, acceptance and admiration gained from others and involves a clear pursuit to manifest one’s status position (Husic and Cicic, 2009), whereas horizontal signalling is a more silent form of consumption practice that is consistent with the consumer’s current social standing (Han et al., 2010).

For the use of luxuries as symbolic to the self, the consumption practice has been related to ‘the snob effect’ (Leibenstein, 1950) which refers to the manner in
which consumers obtain and exhibit luxury possessions with the goal of distinguishing themselves from others. While the bandwagon effect focuses on the pursuit of belonging to a specific desirable group of people, highlighting the social or interpersonal meaning of luxury, the snob effect emphasises the individual’s own feelings of being different and distinctive, which relies on the meaning of luxury for personal and intrinsic reasons (Tian et al., 2001). In agreement with Mason (1981), the snob effect contains emotional desire and personal preferences related to luxury consumption. In this regard, the meaning of luxury is related to an individual’s need for uniqueness, which is reflected through the pursuit of differentness relative to others. However, the uniqueness of individuals is also the outcome of social comparison (Festinger et al., 1954), where an individual aims to be different from others and to become distinctive among a larger group, in which luxury serves as a symbol of uniqueness. Therefore, the aspiration to be unique can be attained by obtaining, using and disposing of luxury items in order to develop and enhance a personal and social identity, as well as their social status (Tian et al., 2001). It can be seen that the snob and bandwagon effects interactively complement each other: consumers engage in various actions to differentiate themselves (snob) from others in order to belong (bandwagon) to a desired group through their luxury consumption.

As suggested by Belk (1988), luxuries are considered special possessions, integrated into the individual’s extended self through consumption practices, such as habitual product use and collecting. Accordingly, another common consumption practice whereby consumers can engage with the symbolic dimension of luxury consumption is done through collecting (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979; Storr, 1983). Collecting luxuries contrasts from ordinary consumption and consumer acquisitions in which investment is not the primary impetus for acquiring luxuries (Belk, 1995b). According to Belk (1995a, p. 67), collecting can be defined as “the practice of actively, selectively, and passionately acquiring and possessing things removed from ordinary use and perceived as part of a set of non-identical objects or experiences.” Belk (1995b) also mentioned that collecting is a common acquisitive, possessive and materialistic pursuit practice that is a common form of materialistic luxury consumption, in which the collected luxury items serve as a symbol of achievement and social class. Most literature engages the meaning of luxury as a symbol of
achievement; individuals tend to attach this meaning to the expensive prices of luxury products, which implies that price can indicate the wealth and achievement of the individual (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; 2004; O’Cass and Frost, 2002; Shukla, 2008; 2010; Kapferer and Bastien, 2009; Heine, 2011).

Society, however, is not static. It has moved beyond simply associating overt conspicuous displays of wealth with status as consumers nowadays rather value inconspicuous and pleasurable luxury experiences (Williams and Atwal, 2013; Eckhardt et al., 2014). Besides the symbolic meaning of luxury, the hedonic or experiential nature of luxury affects the various ways in which consumers can make a use of luxury consumption, which will be discussed in the following section.

2.5.3 The Experiential Dimension of Luxury Consumption Practices

The experiential dimension emphasises that luxury consumption is internally driven to satisfy subjective wellbeing, emotional benefits and pleasure (Truong, et al., 2009; Sussan, et al., 2012) which reflects personal hedonistic and self-fulfilment goals (Silverstein, et al., 2004; Tsai, 2005; Bauer, et al., 2008). It has been argued that consumers have a strong passion for self-indulgence, which can extend luxury consumption practices beyond their traditional practices, stemming from the status and conspicuous consumption models and highlighting self-manifestation towards more individualistic consumption practices derived from the hedonic potential and promise of pleasure (Atwal and Williams, 2009). Consequently, luxuries can be equated to objects of desire (Berry, 1994; Belk et al., 2003) in which consumption practices can be seen as the emotional responses of consumers stemming from such desires and the experiences from the use of luxury (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Brakus et al., 2009; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010). This encompasses the understanding of these consumption practices to cover more than just the point of functionality and material ownership.

In previous literature, the hedonic aspects of luxury consumption are enhanced by consumers’ sensory gratification due to the experience based on exclusive service (Fionda and Moore, 2009; Carú and Cova, 2007). Joy and Sherry (2003), Atwal and William (2009), Brakus et al. (2009) all concur that multisensory experiences provided in luxury retail environments hugely contribute to the
evocation of indulgent feelings. Accordingly, luxury consumption releases consumers into a special world outside their ordinary existence. Apart from this, the experiential nature of luxury is often related to the hedonic and emotional pleasure derived from the perceived product characteristics (e.g., aesthetic beauty, flawless quality and materials) (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009; Heine, 2011; Walley, et al., 2013). In this regard, consumers are likely to incorporate the deep emotions and reactions they derive from the luxury products into their own consumption practice context by engaging in possession rituals (Bauer et al., 2011). McCracken (1986) argues that people carry out possession rituals in order to acquire meaning from the consumption object and assimilate that meaning into their everyday lives, thereby permeating through physical, mental and symbolic spaces (Heilbrunn, 2007; Pichler and Hemetsberger, 2007) Accordingly, rituals assist in connecting the consumption object with the actual personal consumption situation in everyday lives (McCracken, 1986; Heilbrunn, 2007).

However, it should be noted that the experiential aspects of luxury in existing consumer research in relation to the product characteristics or service experience covers only a part of the consumer’s experience. Tynan et al. (2009) highlight the role of the consumer as an interactive co-creator of luxury experiences, rather than a passive receiver of the experience or perceiver of the product attributes and brand image. As the consumer interprets the meanings of luxury on the basis of his or her own experience through consumption practices, which also generate and influence the consumer’s experiences, in that sense the practices and experiences cannot be strictly separated from each other. Therefore, it is worthwhile exploring further consumption practices to cover all the sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioural and emotional responses that consumers derive from use (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010).

Overall, to understand these various consumption practices that can be performed by various consumers from different backgrounds, Holt (1995) suggests a comprehensive framework to illustrate different ways in which people consume, in order to get a deeper understanding of how, why and what they consume and to consider its application to the world of luxury consumption.
2.5.4 Typology of Consumption Practices

Holt (1995) has developed a typology of consumption practices in order to systematically explain the universe of actions that constitute consumption. This is beneficial when reviewing the variety of ways in which people consume, how they differ depending on the parties involved and their context, the conditions that determine how various consumers consume, and the outcomes of such patterns. As an empirical study, Holt (1995) uses the context of baseball spectating as a means to describe four distinct metaphors for consuming. The framework (Figure 5) is based on two conceptual distinctions – the structure of consumption and its purpose (Holt, 1995). In line with Warde (2005), Holt suggests that although practices are difficult to separate, they can be broadly classified based on how they are utilised (structure of consumption) and their effects (purpose of consumption). Moreover, to include the everyday nature of routine practices, it has been noted by de Certeau (1984) that everyday practices can be evaluated in terms of what they bring about (their purpose) and the logic of the operations of action relative to the type of situations (their structure). Therefore, this confirms that the framework is suitable to use in the analysis of practices.

In detail, in terms of the structure of consumption, consumption contains both actions in which consumers exert an action over an object (object actions), and interpersonal acts in which consumption objects become focal resources (interpersonal actions) (Holt, 1995). In terms of purpose, consumers’ actions have two functions, firstly focused on themselves (autotelic actions) and secondly as a way of achieving other goals (instrumental actions) (Holt, 1995). This theoretical framework can be potentially useful in the context of luxury since luxury comprises two components: a social aspect and a personal aspect (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; 2004; Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). To clarify, there are inner dimensions of luxury consumption linked to personal gratification and spontaneous desire, and social dimensions of luxury consumption that refer to social motives (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). However, current research on luxury consumption lacks details of how consumers develop consumption practices in order to achieve both of these aspects (Gistri et al., 2009). Accordingly, Holt’s (1995) theoretical framework allows
researcher to address how consumers can exert action (object actions) on luxury products or carry out interpersonal acts (interpersonal actions) in order to serve their personal needs, thereby satisfying their desire or extending the self (autotelic action). In addition, it can address the social aspects of luxury, such as being impressed by others or signalling social class (instrumental actions).

In addition, it can address the social aspects of luxury, such as being impressed by others or signalling social class (instrumental actions).

**Figure 5: Metaphors for consuming (Holt, 1995)**

According to Holt (1995), the consumption practice of consuming-as-experience comprises psychological phenomena concerned with the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of consumption. This dimension corresponds with the hedonic meaning of luxury, which focuses on inner feelings and sensory gratification as obtained from consumption objects (Gistri et al., 2009). According to McCracken (1986), these subjective experiences are embellished by practices, where the consumer acquires knowledge of the interpretive framework that is necessary for making sense of things. These practices include accounting, evaluating and appreciating (Holt, 1995). Accounting involves understanding an object and the way it is used. Evaluating is defined as conducting an assessment of value judgments about objects. Appreciating is the final step and involves consumers’ emotional responses (Holt, 1995).

Holt (1995) describes the consuming-as-integration practice as the way in which consumers acquire and manipulate product meanings in order to form a part of their identity. This dimension deals with the symbolic meaning of products or brands
and the integration of the self and objects (Belk, 1988; Holt, 1995). According to Vigneron and Johnson (1999; 2004), the symbolic meaning of luxury is significantly derived from products’ physical aspects, such as superior quality, exclusivity and uniqueness. The integration practice is supported by three dispersed practices: assimilating, producing and personalising (Holt, 1995). Assimilating demands that consumers enhance their understanding and expertise, which would result in them becoming more proficient and able to interact with others. Producing aims to enhance the consumers’ image by engaging in the production of the consumption object. Personalising focuses on practices where consumers change their goods either symbolically or physically in order to acquire or shape their meanings.

The consuming-as-classification practice demonstrates the way in which consumers employ the consumption objects as a resource by which to classify themselves against other people and as a means for building affiliations with or enhancing distinctions from others (Holt, 1995; Hsin, 2007). It concentrates on the process by which consumption objects, perceived as repositories of cultural and individual meanings, serve to classify their consumers (Holt, 1995; Hsin, 2007). In general, luxury products are not only consumed as a means of social stratification in society (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009), but are also seen as the expression of particular tastes or lifestyles in postmodern society (Rytilahti, 2008). Overall, classifications by consumers are either enacted through the shared meaning of the object or through the manner or action they use to interact with the object (Holt, 1995).

The practice of consuming-as-play illustrates how individuals use consumption objects as an opportunity to recreate and form connections with others (Holt, 1995). Playing practices can be subdivided into two categories: communing and socialising (Holt, 1995). Communing pertains to the process by which consumers share reciprocally-felt experiences with each other, and socialising centres on how consumers make use of experiential practices to entertain each other (Holt, 1995). Overall, Hsin (2007) and Gistri, et al. (2009) found that playing practices capture the hedonic meanings of consumption objects, such as the emotions of pleasure and satisfaction that are associated with interaction or the social meanings of such objects.
Overall, it can be seen that Holt’s (1995) typology agrees with the idea of a circuit of practice (Arsel and Bean, 2013), which acknowledges the same logic that consumers (including their knowledge, understandings and competencies) interact with consumption objects (products, services, persons or experiences) in a complex system of interconnected meaning through their different ways of doing. It has also been noted by Warde (2014) that the realm of the circuit of practice (Arsel and Bean, 2013) focuses on how elements of practice (objects, meanings and doings) tie together a series of activities that are aimed at a specific desired set of outcomes and meanings, in which the exact nature of the different streams of activities that foster and justify particular consumption practices is still considered somewhat unclear. The understanding of consumption meanings should not only be interested in the interactions among materials, meanings and forms of competence, but also in the system that maps a bundle of consumption practices, including the possibilities and constraints that influence the extent of each specific consumption practice (Moring and Lloyd, 2013, Närvänen, 2014). A possible linking to such an argument is fulfilled by Holt’s (1995) framework, which suggests a typology for the connecting principles of how universal streams of activities or actions are systematically categorised into particular consumption practices.

However, it has been noted by Cheetham and McEachern (2013) that Holt’s (1995) typology illustrates the various ways in which consumers interact with consumer objects, in which the meaning of consumption is intrinsic to the characteristics of the consumption object and likely to overlook the sphere of inter-subjective relationships and co-construction of emotional experiences between consumers and consumption objects. Supported by Holbrook’s (1999) ‘active versus reactive’ taxonomic dimension, consumers are able to manipulate consumption objects so that they become part of some consumption experiences (the active dimension). On the contrary, the consumer can be moved as part of a consumption experience (the reactive dimension) by the consumption object. Accordingly, Cheetham and McEachern (2013) have proposed additional elements to Holt’s (1995) framework to incorporate the account of active and reactive relations in order to illuminate consumption practices in the context of consumers and their household pets.
As illustrated in Figure 6, Cheetham and McEachern (2013) acknowledged the co-construction between subject-object and subject-subject relations in the process of consumption in which consumers are inconsistently dealing with consumption objects either by sometimes treating them as objects, at other times interacting with them as subjects. In doing so, they identified the additional practices of competing, which is another form of playing and having fun; larking which emphasises the reciprocity of literal play between consumers and consumption objects; transforming, which highlights the fluid relationship of identity construction between the consumer and the consumption object; and classification through moral values which implies that consumers embrace their personal, social, and cultural values within the relationship between consumers and consumption objects in order to classify themselves against others.

In conclusion, Cheetham and McEachern (2013) provide an analysis of consumption practices and consumption meanings taking the perspective in which consumers and consumption objects co-construct the experiences, practices, and meanings of consumption. This is also true with contemporary luxury consumption since the experiential nature of luxury can offer consumers a remarkable experience.
or special feelings, as well as consumers becoming co-creators of luxury experiences, which extends consumption practice beyond the point of ownership to include the everyday nature of routine practices (Bauer et al., 2011; Cronin et al., 2012). Moreover, it is essential to utilise all knowledge of pre-existing categories – and in doing so, to reinforce them – in order to make sense of different practices, including everyday ones (de Certeau, 1984). In this regard, Cheetham and McEachern’s (2013) typology and the circuit of practice (Arsel and Bean, 2013) can be incorporated into this study. While Cheetham and McEachern’s (2013) typology can be a useful framework for researchers as a basis for categorising various luxury consumption practices and the meaning of luxury, the circuit of practice (Arsel and Bean, 2013) would enrich the research in terms of providing a deeper analysis into the process that reinforces each luxury consumption practice, providing that the meanings of luxury are not simply attached to consumption practices, but rather are inherent in the co-construction process between consumers and consumption objects, where consumers integrate salient meanings, consumption objects, and competencies within the realm of consumption practice.

Aside from universal principles, there is a need to take into account ‘the context of contexts’ that conditions the practices of consumption (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011). It should be noted that the meanings of luxury and consumption practices are also constrained by cultural differences (Wong and Ahuvia, 1998; Wiedmann, et al., 2007; 2009). In addition, as practices are seen as the embodied skills that consumers bring to bear in their everyday activities (Holt, 1995; Warde, 2005), they will vary among people with different sets of practical knowledge, skills, and dispositions or cultural capital resources (Holt, 1998; Arsel and Bean, 2013). Consequently, this study will take both the notion of cultural differences and cultural capital into account.
2.6 Variations in the Meaning of Luxury and Luxury Consumption Practices Between Consumers

It should be noted that the concept of luxury has both positive and negative connotations (Dubois and Laurent, 1994). While for some individuals luxury represents refined taste and enhanced quality (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009), for others it evokes distaste and immorality due to being excessive and ostentatious (Berg, 2004; Hilton, 2004). As pointed out by Vigneron and Johnson (1999), it is worth maintaining an awareness that the meaning of luxury could be varied for different people. Luxury is seen as a subjective and holistic sensation, which is a more profound experience in a socio-cultural context (Wiedmann et al., 2007). According to Wiedmann et al. (2009), Truong and McColl (2011) and Zhan and He (2012) the meaning of luxury is formed through an interaction between objects, individuals and the consumption context. In this regard, luxury is seen to be relative and context-related, as it is interpreted through reflections of consumption context. Research indicates that context can affect an individual’s interpretation of the meaning of consumption objects, thus, contexts such as culture could influence the meaning of luxury and the consumption practices for a consumer (Wong and Ahuvia, 1998; Wiedmann, et al., 2007; 2009).

2.6.1 Cultural Differences

Culture has been regarded as a pervasive force which affects a variety of actions of individuals in particular contexts (McCracken, 1989; Kleine and Kernan, 1991; Luna and Gupta, 2001). In fact, individuals are heavily influenced by their culture in terms of their decisions and preferences, which resulted in the influence over the subsequent actions that individuals act out, including their consumption practices (McCort and Malhotra, 1993; McDonald, 1994; 1995). According to Luna and Gupta (2001), the most profound impact on consumption practices in particular contexts typically comes from the system of cultural values, which tends to be operated over time as consumers are socialising with their social group. In previous research, the various traits that culture can influence include consumer behaviour (Belk, et al., 2003; Ko, et al., 2006), emotions (Lam, 2007), cognition (Aaker and
Despite the general assumption that culture plays an influential role in consumer behaviour, the ultimate meaning of culture remains inconclusive. This is partially due to the interchange of an assortment of terms to represent culture, including country, nation and language (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952). A philosophy has emerged in which the various definitions of culture are viewed along a continuum (Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 1992; 1999). One extreme of the continuum of the scale of culture is viewed as comprising values. This continuum progresses to a central point that encompasses various cognitions including beliefs and values, and the opposite extreme of the continuum characterises culture as all possible traits, thoughts, actions and possessions of an individual (Ferraro, 1994; Sojka and Tansuhaj, 1995).

In the study of culture, there are two dominant approaches: emic and etic (Morris et al, 1999). An emic approach to the study of culture is one that aims to understand culture from an individual’s perspective within that culture. As such, the approach focuses on how an individual from a select culture interprets or responds to a particular factor. An etic approach, on the other hand, aims to generate a universal model that is not based on an insider’s perspective (Lu, 2012). For this research, culture is defined through local knowledge and interpretations based on some universal psychological processes (etic) which are specifically given to a culture (emic) (Matsumoto and Juang, 2007). In line with Arnould et al. (2004, p. 142), they provide an explanation of culture as “frameworks for action and understanding that enable one to operate in a manner acceptable to other members”. Accordingly, the rules and practices of a culture are slowly internalised until they become the norm for individuals, and their behaviour thus naturally adheres to these rules. Therefore, individuals within a particular society associate their understanding of culture as a lens through which they perceive and understand the world.

For the common theoretical approach in cross-cultural research, cultural orientation is typically determined by using nationality, as a country will usually be exposed to the same laws, governmental policies and shared history which will
influence life views of the members within such country (Hall and Hall, 1990). Although this approach has limitations since it does not consider the diversity of the human condition within nations, it should be noted that, in a broader sense, cultural values can be referred to a common belief of what is perceived to be appropriate and desirable within a particular nation or society (Quester et al., 2007). In practical terms, nationality-based allocating of cultures is widely adopted in many studies due to the fact that individuals from one country will experience a different culture to those from another, and will, therefore, portray differing general beliefs and values (Wallerstein, 1991). Therefore, understanding cultural orientation can be inferred from the principal societal beliefs and the values that are held by people in each society.

It is possible to illustrate the dissimilarity between nations by considering whether they are individualist or collectivist. These two cultural orientations are polar opposites, and, therefore, it is most likely that a nation will only orientate towards one of them (Smith and Bond, 1999). For example, Western countries typically hold an individualist culture, while Eastern countries are typically collectivist (Triandis, 1990; 1995; Gao, et al., 2009). Individualist cultures will place greater emphasis on personal pleasure and fulfilment, while a collectivist culture places emphasis on public possessions in order to symbolise its desired status within a socio-economic hierarchy (Wong and Ahuvia, 1988). Thus, the two different cultures are likely to describe different consumption behaviour.

The influential work in this field was done by Hofstede (1980; 2001). Hofstede (1980) explored the work-related values of 117,000 employees of one company over 40 countries. Initially he portrayed the company to be Hermes; however, it later transpired that it was IBM. This research has been further extended to incorporate an additional dimension of cultural value, Confucian work dynamism, from the work of the Chinese Culture Connection (1987) through emic research in a Chinese context. Consequently, Hofstede’s (1980; 1983; 2001) dimensions of cultural values are shown in Table 2.
Table 2: Cultural values dimensions (Hofstede, 1980; 1983; 2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value Type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power Distance</td>
<td>The different solutions to the basic problem of human inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty Avoidance</td>
<td>The level of stress in a society in the issue of an unknown future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism/Collectivism</td>
<td>Individualism is the focus of the self over a group, while collectivism is the promotion of a group prior to the self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity/Femininity</td>
<td>The division of emotional roles between status goals and decisiveness (Masculinity) and personal goals and affectionate (femininity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-Term Orientation</td>
<td>The choice of focus for people’s efforts, the future or the present</td>
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</table>

A number of cross-cultural studies have been conducted to review the validity of Hofstede’s research (1980; 2001) and furthermore to place it in the context of marketing and consumer behaviour (Liu, et al., 2001; Jung and Kau, 2003; Sun, et al., 2004). These studies have reflected that the dimensions that Hofstede outlined continue to be valid. However, a small number of scholars believe that the cultural dimensions that Hofstede (1980; 2001) outlined are not complex enough to encompass an entire nation’s culture which means that the Hofstede’s (1980; 2001) dimensions of cultural values fail to apprehend the complexity and fruitfulness of national culture (Williamson, 2002; McSweeney, 2002). Moreover, Hofstede (1980) formulated his dimensions using only specific data samples, which were taken from one company, which leads to concerns over the representativeness of his data (Smith and Bond, 1999). A further limiting factor of Hofstede’s (1980) work is that the sample on which he based his dimensions was predominantly male within only particular divisions of the organisation. Thus, it could be argued that only one particular culture was explored. A final issue to consider with this research is that the data was collected in the 1960-1970s. It should be noted that society has undergone significant change over the past four decades, including a major uprising of technology, and therefore, these findings may not be compatible with contemporary society.

Due to the discrepancies in Hofstede’s (1980) work, it is advantageous to explore alternative approaches. One such alternative assumes that the meaning of values may be different for respondents according to culture (Schwartz and Bilsky,
1987; 1990; Schwartz, 1992; 1994). For example, while two cultures may understand the word humility, the term may represent something different for a Buddhist monk in Thailand compared to an American athlete (Schwartz, 1992). Overall, Schwartz and Bilsky, 1987; 1990) were aiming to create a set of values that would be universal, and therefore, initially considering the relationships between many values in many countries. Through this research, Schwartz (1992) indicates that there are four values that individuals hold. These are openness to change, conservation, power, and benevolence. There are a number of similarities between these dimensional values and Hofstede’s (1980; 2001) dimensions. Firstly, the value of openness to change appears to correlate with Hofstede’s (1980) concept of individualism, while the value of conservation correlates with collectivism. Moreover, both values of power and benevolence are also similar to Hofstede’s (1980; 2001) exploration of the high and low level of power distance. Accordingly, the four dimensional values proposed by Schwartz (1992; 1994) and Hofstede’s (1980; 2001) individualism, collectivism and high and low power distance are comparable and appear to indicate similar characteristics.

Another approach to the exploration of cultural values also reflects similarities to the previous two theorists. Trompenaars and his colleagues (Trompenaars, 1993; Trompenaars et al., 1996) propose a number of dimensions in conjunction with the dimensions uncovered by Schwartz (1992) and Hofstede (1980). For example, their dimension of loyal/utilitarian involvement parallels the individualism/collectivism dimension outlined by Hofstede (1980) since both of these dimensions are concerned about the way in which individuals assert their roles and contributions to the group. Moreover, another major dimension is egalitarian commitment versus conservatism, which is a parallel concept to work by Schwartz (1992; 1994).

Overall, it is clear that a large quantity of the work proposed by each of these three theorists overlaps. Table 3 summarises the work of these three researchers (four studies) to provide the major cultural orientations.
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| **Individualism** | Individualism: The focus on the self as an individual | Openness to Change:  
1: Hedonism: Pleasure is the greatest achievement for the self  
2: Stimulation: Derives from the need for life’s challenge and excitement.  
3: Self-Direction: Need for control and mastery of the self and life choices | Intellectual Autonomy: An individual’s own thoughts and ideas are encouraged  
Affective Autonomy: Promoting the pursuit of experiences that incur positive emotions | Utilitarian Involvement: A utilitarian stance is taken when involving individuals in a particular group |
| **Collectivism** | Collectivism  
The focus on the group to which an individual belongs, wishing to place the group rules and priorities before the self | Conservation:  
1: Tradition: Maintenance of the traditions that are upheld within an individual’s culture  
2: Conformity: Adhering to the rules or expectations of others and minimising behaviour that contrasts with the expectations  
3: Security: Safety of the self and the general stability within the society | Conservatism: Individuals are embedded in a group. High value is placed on enhancing social relationship, preserving the status quo, and avoiding actions that might undermine the traditional order of things. | Loyal Involvement: Group involvement is a product of loyalty |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vertical</th>
<th>High Power Distance: The acceptance of inequality as a part of life</th>
<th>Power: The status an individual has within society, which may include control and dominance.</th>
<th>Hierarchy: Power is unequally distributed in accordance with a hierarchy that is not contested against. Mastery: Society and nature are manipulated in order for the benefits of particular groups or individuals.</th>
<th>Conservatism: Ascribed status is more important than achieved status.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal</td>
<td>Low Power Distance: Equality in society</td>
<td>Benevolence: Preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact</td>
<td>Egalitarian Commitment: Shared interests unite the community in conjunction with concern for their fellow community members</td>
<td>Egalitarian Commitment: Achieved status is more important than ascribed status.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The findings from these four major studies indicate that there are two main cultural orientations that can be agreed upon. These are individualism/collectivism and vertical/horizontal. Individualism/collectivism can be viewed as the extent to which individuals consider themselves to be autonomous, and therefore, entitled to voluntary relationships, or the extent to which individuals believe that they do not have autonomy and feel that they have an obligation to help others in their interdependent community (Schwartz, 1994). Each theorist recognises this value, however, each offers differing terminology. For Hofstede (1980; 2001) this is individualism versus collectivism, while for Schwartz (1994) it is termed intellectual and affective autonomy and egalitarian commitment versus conservatism. Finally, Trompenaars et al. (1996) consider this value to be loyal involvement versus utilitarian involvement. A second value that all three theorists present can be described as the process through which resources are allocated and people are treated, in that the culture utilises a hierarchy or allocates it equally (Schwartz, 1994). For Hofstede (1998; 2001) this is considered to be power distance, for Schwartz (1994) this is termed egalitarian commitment versus hierarchy and mastery. Finally, Trompenaars et al. (1996) refer to this as egalitarian commitment versus conservatism.

Extensive research has been conducted into the role of individualism/collectivism in consumer behaviour as a theoretical lens when examining and contrasting consumer behaviour in different cultures (Watkins and Liu, 1996; Laroche, et al., 2005; Mourali, et al., 2005; Malai, 2007). However, previous research has failed to significantly consider the effect of the second dimension of vertical/horizontal in the research. Yaveroglu and Donthu (2002) and Singh (2006) suggest that power distance is potentially a significant influence on certain consumer behaviour. Moreover, power distance will not impact on consumer behaviour in the same way that collectivism/individualism cultural values do, therefore, it should be considered in its own right (Shavitt et al., 2006). Thus, research should consider assessing the vertical/horizontal dimension that has been outlined in conjunction with individualism/collectivism. Triandis (1995) has
attempted to harmonise these two dimensions and subsequently generated four types of cultural orientations. These are: (1) vertical individualism (independent/different); (2) horizontal individualism (independent/same); (3) vertical collectivism (independent/different); and (4) (interdependent/same) horizontal collectivism (interdependent/same) (Triandis (1995). Furthermore, Shavitt et al. (2006) illustrate these cultural orientations incorporating the four categories in Figure 7, and this cultural orientation has been employed as the basis of a theoretical understanding of cultural orientation in the current study.

Figure 7: Four Types of Cultural Orientations (Shavitt et al., 2006)

In relation to research on luxury consumption, cross-cultural research has been noticeably shown little consideration. The findings that can be ascertained from the research are outlined in Table 4. These depict a consecutive overview of relevant international studies concerning luxury consumption in accordance with cultural influences. Although a review of existing studies shows that the findings within these studies are diverse, it is possible to deduce that there are distinct differences in luxury consumption behaviour between Eastern and Western cultures (Wong and Ahuvia, 1998; Tsai, 2005; Li and Su, 2007; Shukla, 2010; Li and Zhang, 2011).
Table 4: An overview of international studies on luxury consumption behaviour in a cross-cultural context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Research Participants</th>
<th>Main Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dubois and Laurent (1993)</td>
<td>Survey, 12,500 customers (UK, France, Italy, Denmark,)</td>
<td>For segmentation purposes, geographic or country affiliation becomes less significant in distinguishing consumers than socio-economic factors (income, occupation and education). There are still, however, some cultural differences among consumers from various European countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tidwell and Dubois (1996)</td>
<td>Survey, 167 French and Australian students</td>
<td>Luxury items were viewed more negatively in Australia in comparison to in France. In France it appears that students have a significant association between luxury and self-concept and the concept of luxury as related to traditional luxury and theories of conspicuous consumption.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigneron (2000)</td>
<td>Survey, 500 Classic Car Club members (Australian and New Zealander)</td>
<td>The quality of the luxury item is a significant factor of luxury consumption among individuals in New Zealand. Australia consumers appeared to strongly relate to conspicuous and hedonic dimensions of luxury consumption.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Dubois et al. (2001)       | 1. Survey, 16 Luxury Customers  
                            2. Survey, 1848 students (20 nationalities)                                  | It transpires that the attitudes consumers hold towards luxury items are complex and varied. There are three attitude types in segmenting luxury consumption practices: elitism, democratisation and distance. |
| Dubois et al. (2005)       | 1. Survey, 16 French  
                            2. Survey, 1848 students (20 nationalities)                                  | These findings were consistent with those presented by Hofstede (1980) and the four dimensional framework. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher(s)</th>
<th>Sample Description</th>
<th>Findings/relevant aspects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tsai (2005)</td>
<td>Survey, 945 Luxury Customers (North America: US, Canada, VS Europe: UK, France, Denmark, VS Asia Pacific: Japan, Singapore, HK)</td>
<td>Personal aspects of luxury consumption can be generalised among consumers from different countries. The results reveal that quality assurance, personal pleasure, self-gifting, and congruity with internal self can influence repurchasing of luxuries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de Barnier et al. (2006)</td>
<td>Survey, 45 luxury customers and noncustomers (UK, France, Russia)</td>
<td>The UK, France and Russia all consider the aesthetic appearance of an item to connote luxury, along with the quality and cost of the product. A further attributional factor is their previous history or knowledge of the product. In France, consumers desire for the product to represent wealth or their personal aspirations. In the UK and Russia, consumers were more interested in functionality and luxury atmospherics. It also transpired that superfluity and uniqueness are no longer of interest to these consumers. In conjunction with other research, the concept of self-pleasure emerged from all three cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li and Su (2007)</td>
<td>Survey, 114 Chinese and 106 American</td>
<td>Reference groups are strongly influential over Chinese consumer in comparison to those of Americans. Chinese consumers are prone to relate product brands and prices to their “face” consumption, and emphasise luxury as being prestige products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shukla (2010)</td>
<td>Survey, 544 consumers (UK, India)</td>
<td>Status consumption is influenced by brand, socio-psychological and situational antecedents in which their degree of influence can be differed considerably. This is since both UK and India consumers attain social status based on different purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podoshen et al. (2011)</td>
<td>Survey, 245 Chinese, 265 North American</td>
<td>Chinese individuals are more materialistic and tend to follow conspicuous consumption to a greater degree than American individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study (Year)</td>
<td>Research Method</td>
<td>Sample Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shukla (2011)</td>
<td>Survey, 568 (British, Indian)</td>
<td>Consumers from collectivist culture are likely to focus on informational and interpersonal influences. As the brand image moderates with normative interpersonal influences and purchase intention for both consumers from both individualist and collectivist culture, normative interpersonal influences offer an opportunity to standardise for global consumers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hennigs et al. (2012)</td>
<td>Survey, 10 countries: Brazil, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Italy, Japan, Slovakia, Spain, and the United States, 100 students in each region</td>
<td>Luxury items are determined by their cost and perceived function, as well as individual and social factors. This transpired across all of the countries researched which indicates that these factors should be generalisable across countries; only individual consumer perceptions differ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shukla and Chattalas (2015)</td>
<td>Survey, 201 US and 229 UK Consumers</td>
<td>Although US and UK consumers are similar in terms of macro cultural traits, their value perceptions on luxury are differ. While functionality drive luxury consumption for both countries, personal value of luxury is an important factor only among UK consumers, and social value perception only in the US.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in Table 4, it can be inferred that luxuries are consumed for different reasons and motivations, even if the same product is consumed by various cultures. However, it is worth recognising that there are the same set of the motivation traits for luxury consumptions between Western and Asian consumers. To clarify, interpersonal influences, such as social relationships, recognition and status, are fundamental to luxury consumption practices among individuals from Asian societies, while Western consumers are likely to base their luxury consumption on personal needs and gratifications. Such insights into cultural influences on various luxury consumption practices among different cultures can be concluded from Wong and Ahuvia (1998). In this conceptual paper, considerations are made between Western and Southeast Asian Confucian cultures and it transpires that many of the motivational traits for these two cultures can be attributed to either individualism/collectivism and vertical/horizontal dimensions. To clarify, Western societies are predominantly motivated by horizontal individualism, while Asian societies are motivated by vertical collectivism. Based on their conceptualisation, Wong and Ahuvia (1998) attribute the differences in Western and Southeast Asian cultures to the following four dimensions: interdependent self-concept, the balance between individual and group needs, hierarchy and the legitimacy of group affiliation.

**Interdependent self-concept:** it has been found that Asian individuals typically assume an interdependent self-concept, in which their self-concept is united with other individuals (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Moreover, Asian individuals believe that ‘face’ is highly important, in that they must appear a certain way to others (Ger and Belk, 1996; 1994). Therefore, due to their cultural values, an Asian individual will most likely focus on his/her external self, or that which the public sees, rather than that which is private (Lebra, 1992). In contrast to this, Western societies appear to be more concerned with their internal self-aspect. They express their internal self-aspect through inner dimensions, rather than those expressed outwardly (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Thailand is a highly collectivist culture (Hofstede, 1980). Here they place heavy emphasis on ‘face’ and ‘family’, and, therefore, this is thought to motivate the large consumption of luxury products in
Thailand, and many other Asian countries (Komin, 1991; Childers and Rao, 1992; Wongtada, et al., 1997; Viswanathan and Moore, 2002).

The balance between individual and group needs: the cultural perspectives of group relationships heavily influence the way that group and individual needs are balanced within a society (Triandis, 1990; Yamaguchi, 1994). Accordingly, Asian cultures place a greater emphasis on group norms, and, therefore, individuals will be more obliged to conform to these. Moreover, an Asian individual will place his/her own needs after those of the group, in direct contrast to the view of Western individuals who are likely to rank themselves before group needs (Abe et al., 1996).

Hierarchy: the notion of hierarchy is contingent on wealth and is a common factor among collectivist cultures (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). In Southeast Asia the culture is highly influenced by hierarchy (Wong and Ahuvia, 1998). In contrast to this, the influence of hierarchy is not legitimated in Western societies, since many upper- and middle-class people place emphasis on self-expression and self-actualisation, rather than wealth status (Abramson and Inglehart, 1995).

The legitimacy of group affiliation: as group affiliation is highly desirable in Asian cultures, individuals from these cultures will experience significant concern over conforming to the norms of their social group (Churchill and Moschis, 1979; Moschis, 1981; Abe, et al., 1996). Thus, their consumption practice will also reflect the standards of this group, whether it is their family group or a wider nationality (Wong and Ahuvia, 1998). As collectivist cultures are likely to emphasis a ‘we-identity’, the influence of a reference group has greatly influenced their consumption behaviour (Hofstede, 2001). However, the individualist culture in Western society does not assume that an individual represents a group, but rather that each individual represents him or herself (Lee and Green, 1991; Wong and Ahuvia, 1998).

In conclusion, Asian individuals will be more interested in publicly visible possessions that outwardly reflect luxury or wealth and, therefore, enhance their social status due to their collectivist culture; while Western individuals will be more motivated to purchase luxury items that they can enjoy privately due to their individualist culture (Wong and Ahuvia, 1998; Gao, et al., 2009). Accordingly, luxury consumption tends to promote the social status and prestige-seeking in a
collectivist culture, rather than an individualistic orientation. It is important to recognise, however, that each society may possess individualists and collectivists since individuals possess both independent and interdependent aspects of life (Triandis, 1995). Thus, it may be important for researchers to place cultural orientation according to which cultural dimensions have been valued the most in relation to luxury consumption practices.

2.6.2 Cultural Capital

It has been found that Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of taste and cultural capital is significantly influential in explaining the social pattern of consumption. According to this theory, consumption is assessed in relation to the taste which shapes our desires and pleasures gained from certain products and activities in relation to others. Therefore, it is important to consider taste when assessing variations in consumption across consumers (Holt, 1998). A consumption object will present a particular value, which will subsequently be assessed by potential consumers. They will then decide whether such items or goods satisfy their taste, which will, therefore, influence their judgment and classification on the consumption objects as well as the acts of consumption (Arser and Bean, 2013). Overall, taste is a significant part of cultural consumption and is able to provide researchers with two facts: the preferences of the culture and the actualised consumption (Peterson, 1983; Bourdieu, 1984; Van Eijck, 2000).

When assessing cultural consumption, it is important to acknowledge the essence of training and time investment in the process of object appreciation and the formation of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Scitovsky, 1992). To clarify, taste is often operationalised as a set of embodied preferences that hinge on cultural capital (Holt, 1998; Arser and Bean, 2013). It is important to recognise that cultural capital is different to economic capital and social capital. While economic capital refers to the financial resources, and social capital refers to relations and affiliation, cultural capital is specifically associated with the set of distinctive skills, knowledge, and practices (Bourdieu, 1984). Thus, cultural capital is able to shape individual tastes and the act of consumption in which the skills and knowledge are attained from
socialisation within various groups, such as family, peers, and education (Bourdieu 1984; Alasuutari, 1997).

Taste is typically assumed to be linked to social stratification. In this regard, individuals with greater capital will be dominant in illustrating their perceived tastes, while those with less capital will prefer to spend this on less culturally accepted or less prestigious products (Van Rees et al., 1999). Literature relating to cultural consumption, tastes and the patterns of consumption indicates that individuals consume patterns of products, which typically comprise individuals’ lifestyles. This lifestyle can also be called ‘homogeneity’. The literature also indicates a link between the patterns of consumption and social status, which is ‘homology’ (Bourdieu, 1984; Sintas and Álvarez, 2004). For example, when individuals are considered to be part of the upper class in society, they will consume products that represent their culture. In contrast, when individuals are part of the middle or lower classes of society they may be less inclined to follow the consumption patterns of the upper class and consume products that are reflective of their lower cultural status (Sintas and Álvarez, 2004). This view postulates that consumption patterns reflect their social status in cultures where social status defines an individual’s taste, lifestyle, and cultural competency (Bourdieu 1984).

Individual’s cultural competency is deemed by Bourdieu (1984) as the notion of distinction, which is a process for reflecting and maintaining social status in which, in order to achieve cultural competence, cultural capital is required. Holt (1998) also supports that, among three capital resources, cultural capital resources have become an essential element in explaining status struggles (Holt, 1998). Although all these resources are executed in every aspect of life, in the field of consumption, especially in the light of this study, cultural capital operates in the form of taste and becomes visible in consumption practices (Arsel and Bean, 2013). According to Erickson (1996), the most beneficial and the most useful form of cultural resource to be highlighted is having a large spectrum of knowledge concerning all sorts of cultural phenomena. Thus, individuals are able to adapt this knowledge to multiple social situations and conduct themselves in a socially acceptable way that meets the rules of the situation.
When the concept of cultural consumption is considered, an individual’s cultural competency is likely to be obtained from an educational establishment (Kesler, 2003). To clarify, when individuals are educated to a higher level, they are more inclined to have an interest in cultural products or services, such as attending the theatre, ballet, museums and engaging with literature (Van Eijck, 2000). In more contemporary society, however, it should be noted that this simplistic approach to class and culture may no longer be valid (Bihagen and Katz-Gerro, 2000). A greater number of human conditions are now influential such as an individual’s age, gender, religion and finally ethnicity (Toivonen, 1992; Katz-Gerro and Shavit, 1998; Wilska, 1999; Räsänen, 2008). Although high status jobs are often offered to those who hold high educational achievements in Western society, research indicates that these individuals have indiscriminate consumption patterns (Peterson, 2004). These findings would suggest that consumption is no longer a direct product simply of status or social hierarchy (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005).

Socialisation within the family is thought to be an important sociological element in cultural competency. Within families, values and consumption practices are formulated and determined by a range of intergenerational mechanisms (Holt, 1998). This process actively helps to maintain the structures of the individual social classes (Trigg, 2001). The appreciation of arts, for example, is learned as one understands the arts not only through school but also family education. This, therefore, indicates that there are two components involved in developing cultural capital, which is the socialisation within one’s family, and also the education system (Trigg, 2001). As consumers construct skills and knowledge that emerge from their family upbringing, level of education, occupational background and relationship with consumption objects (Holt, 1998, Miller, 2001; 2005; 2009), when the skills are learned, rehearsed and reproduced through everyday actions, this will shape the way consumers feel, think and act. Thus, cultural capital resources, not economic resources, are crucial when determining manners and patterns of consumption (Holt, 1998).

Holt (1998) finds that the variation in cultural capital leads to different patterns of consumption practices. Bourdieu (1984) states that the variation in
cultural capital is constrained by three primary sites of acculturation: family upbringing, formal education and occupational culture. In relation to luxury consumption, the level of cultural capital an individual has will affect their luxury consumption practices. For example, when an individual is categorised as being in the low quintile of cultural capital (LCC), they will be more inclined to purchase products that are widely interpreted as being luxurious (Holt, 1998). For LCC individuals who also have a low income, luxury products are strongly desired (Holt, 1998). In direct contrast, when an individual is in the high quintile of cultural capital (HCC), they will focus more so on their personal experiences, rather than attempting to outwardly portray luxury. Thus they will focus on creativity and expanding their education (Holt, 1998). A luxurious item for these individuals is not ascribed to the brand, but rather its ability to enhance their lives (Holt, 1998). Accordingly, LCC individuals wish to portray a certain image with items that are economically perceived as luxurious, while HCC individuals wish to achieve self-expression through their luxury items.

The research shows the diminished importance of the theory of conspicuous consumption, since the cultural elite (HCC individuals) is moving away from displaying wealth and turning towards having their own sets of exclusionary practices to affirm their identity (Trigg, 2001). However, the results from LCC show that luxury consumption practices as a means for displaying wealth and status still function in our social lives (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). As the meaning and practices of luxury may vary for different people from differing socio-economic backgrounds (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999), applying the notion of cultural capital would provide additional insights into how consumers from different socio-economic backgrounds demarcate the boundaries of their luxury consumption through the allocation of their cultural capital resources (Trigg, 2001).

2.7 Chapter Review

From the literature review, the main critique of the thesis is developed from the view that the traditional view of luxury has been criticised as a primarily management-oriented concept, which fails to incorporate cultural and emotional complexity as well as the lived experiences of consumers in the interpretation of
luxury. Because a thing alone has no meaning until it is integrated into consumption practice (Shove and Pantzar, 2005), the concept of luxury should be integrated into consumers’ experiences of luxury consumption practices. If the meaning of luxury can be defined through use, connecting it to practice theory could help researchers understand how luxury enters daily life practices and becomes meaningful to consumers. Given the relevance of practice theory, the research objective is, therefore, to examine the contemporary meanings of luxury and luxury consumption from a consumer perspective, with a particular focus on the various practices of luxury consumption that individuals can perform in order to enact their meanings of luxury.

The use of practice theory has the potential to emphasise aspects of luxury consumption that tend to be underexposed in the available literature, since the main focus goes beyond simply owning or having luxuries, to include using as well as doing in terms of luxury consumption. As luxuries are given meaning by the practices that are present in a consumer culture, the meaning of luxury is seen as a product of practice. As things also possess a role as a repository of meaning for consumers to use in living their own lives (Fournier, 1998), understanding luxury consumption practices is not only related to their original function, but is also infinitely open to diversion through the ordinary experiences of daily lives. Accordingly, consumers can ascribe meanings to things they consider to be luxurious, and adapt these meanings to usage situations that they perceive as appropriate in an everyday context, making them everyday luxuries.

However, previous research ignores the activities of individual consumers in their daily lives that also affect, shape and reshape the meaning of luxury. Two research questions have emerged from this argument. Firstly, what are the practices of consumers surrounding luxury consumption? Secondly, what are the meanings of luxury as understood through the practices of luxury consumption? As put by de Certeau (1984), it is important to draw together all knowledge of pre-existing categories – and in doing so, to reinforce them – in order to make sense of different practices. While Holt’s (1995) and Cheetham and McEachern’s (2013) typology have influenced this study as a basis for categorising various streams of activities.
that constitute luxury consumption practices, the circuit of practice (Arsele and Bean, 2013) would enrich the research by providing a deeper analysis into the processes that imbue each luxury consumption practice with meaning. Overall, these will help researchers to concentrate on how consumers communicate their meanings of luxury through various activities of luxury consumption in their everyday lives and uncover the meanings of luxury that are underexposed in the available literature.

Drawing from consumer culture theories, the meaning of luxury should depend on consumers and is perceived differently by diverse sets of consumers across different cultures (Wiedmann et al., 2007; 2009). Some scholars have asserted that it is important to consider the notion of cultural differences when attempting to understand the behaviour of consumers (McCracken, 1989; Kleine and Kernan, 1991; Luna and Gupta, 2001). However, there is minimal research that empirically explores meanings and luxury consumption practices on a cross-cultural basis. Accordingly, another research objective is to seek understanding in how the notion of luxury and its practices hold up in different cultures.

Although the same luxury product may be used by consumers from different nations, this does not guarantee that the meanings of luxury will be the same. Differences in motivation and meaning for luxury consumption practices have been argued between South-East Asians and Westerners (Wong and Ahuvia, 1998). Also, as practices are seen as the embodied skills that consumers bring to bear in their everyday activities (Holt, 1995; Warde, 2005), they will vary across people with different sets of practical knowledge, skills, dispositions or cultural capital resources (Holt, 1998; Arsele and Bean, 2013). Thus, the final research question - how are different practices and meanings of luxury among young adult consumers played out in differing cultural contexts? - is generated by this study taking into consideration both cultural differences and cultural capital. If differences are found to exist between consumers from different parts of the world, this may be of some assistance to academic researchers in understanding luxury far beyond the traditional view.

The next chapter builds upon this literature review, particularly in relation to how research should be conducted. It offers an account first of the interpretive research paradigm, which was drawn upon for this study, which used a narrative
approach; and second, it discusses the research strategy employed in order to gain understanding of the meanings and practices of luxury. The methods adopted in this study are also presented, along with an account of the steps taken to analyse and interpret the data.
3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will first present the ontological, epistemological and methodological choices made in studying the meanings of luxury through the practices surrounding luxury consumption. Narrative theory is introduced as the theoretical perspective underpinning this study. This discussion is followed by a consideration of the research strategy, including the methods, sampling, recruitment, data collection and the analytical steps taken to elicit the findings. Finally, the overall methodology and a personal reflection on methodological matters will be discussed.

3.2 Choosing a Research Paradigm

The importance of identifying their research paradigm has been widely acknowledged as a means of helping researchers to determine an appropriate framework. According to Milliken (2001), a ‘paradigm’ refers to a way of looking at the world, concerning certain philosophical assumptions that guide and direct thought and action. Guba and Lincoln (1994) note that questions concerning research methods result from questions regarding paradigms. These questions outline the worldview of a basic belief system that determines an investigation, not only in terms of the choice of method but also in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways. As such, the selection of research methodology and methods must be determined from the research paradigm (Staller et al., 2008). Additionally, carrying out research within a declared worldview has the advantage of providing a clear framework for further discussion and research (Groff, 2004). However, the selection of a methodological approach based on a worldview is not a trivial task; Groff (2004) suggests that worldview choices should be made clearly, although each paradigm “cannot be proven or disproven in any foundational sense; if that were possible there would be no doubt about how to practice inquiry” (Guba, 1990, p.18).

As different strategies for data collection and analysis can influence the overall process of the research in different ways, it is essential for researchers to think about their principal orientation and the relationship between research and
theory in terms of deductive and inductive approaches (Gilbert, 2002). According to Bryman (2008), deductive approaches involve the testing of theory, confirming or rejecting hypotheses and revising theories accordingly. Inductive approaches work in the opposite direction with the application of grounded theory, and consider the effects of researchers on their findings for the generation of data or theory.

This study aims to explore the consumption practices of young people from various backgrounds (in terms of class, education, opinions on luxury and experiences of luxury consumption) in order to conceptualise the notion of luxury from a consumer’s perspective in a cross-cultural context. To clarify, this research attempts to generate a theory or a framework to explain and analyse luxury consumption practices, and the meaning of the term luxury among young adult consumers from two distinctly different cultures. The framework will assist academics and practitioners in understanding the elements of luxury consumption in contemporary society, rather than testing the existing theories of luxury consumption. In this regard, an inductive strategy provides the best fit, acknowledging and explicitly associating the research with a subjective stance throughout the process, instead of overlooking it (Sandberg, 2005). Therefore, it is essential to consider the investigator’s paradigm from an epistemological and ontological perspective.

Epistemological consideration involves the question of what should be regarded as appropriate knowledge in a discipline. In general, there are two different positions on epistemological consideration, namely positivism and interpretivism (Bryman, 2008). This current study is designed within an interpretivist paradigm, suggesting that knowledge and meaning are viewed as intersubjective, socially constructed and varied, depending on whom we interact with (Weber, 2004). In contrary to the interpretivism paradigm, the positivist view of knowledge is objective, based on the methods of natural science and observed data (Weber, 2004; Bryman, 2008). As human phenomena – such as the meaning of luxury, luxury consumption and its derived practices – are complex, intentionally formed and shaped by particular cultures, goals and experiences (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002), it is appropriate to adopt an interpretivist position in this research. As such, the
research process is based on understanding rather than causality, in order to grasp the
dynamic meanings of both communication and actions from the perspectives of the
particular actors (Prasad, 2005).

Ontological orientation considers whether social entities should be regarded
as possessing an objective reality, which is external to social actors (objectivism), or
as social constructions determined by the perceptions and actions of social actors
(constructionism). Many scholars, such as Bartels (1951) and Palmer and Ponsonby
(2002) agree that marketing should be considered as a social construction, since
marketing in an academic context is likely to be involved with the understanding of
human phenomena. Drawing from consumer culture theory, this study adopts the
view that the meanings of luxury are negotiated socially, culturally and historically.
In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals, but are formed through
their historical and present practices in consumer culture, and vary between people
from different backgrounds and cultures (Wiedmann et al., 2007; 2009). Accordingly, the constructionist paradigm is appropriate for this research. The study
does not separate the subjects of enquiry (individuals) from their social and cultural
context, so the research relies as much as possible on the participants’ views of
situations (Prasad, 2005).

Overall, the researcher believes that reality has multiple constructions, and
that knowledge about the meaning of luxury is dynamic in nature. It is accepted that
knowledge, especially regarding the meanings of luxury, cannot be formed without
interpretation, and trying to make sense of the respondents’ world interpretation will
be inevitable. Therefore, researchers should pay attention to these social
constructions in examining how young adult UK and Thai consumers construct and
interpret the meanings of luxury through consumption practices, rather than
attempting to determine the causes and effects of their luxury consumption. Accordingly, interpretivism and the constructionist paradigm seem to fit best with
the objectives and direction of this research.
3.3 Narrative Theory

The aim of interpretivist research is to obtain a first-hand understanding from participants, rather than arrive at a causal explanation (Ozanne and Hudson, 1989; Szmigin and Foxall, 2000) Hirschman and Holbrook (1986) suggest that consumer research needs to grasp consumer experiences first-hand and move away from its preoccupation with conventional decision-oriented approaches. Accordingly, meanings are understood by accepting consumer experiences on their own terms, rather than by trying to capture them via a pre-constructed framework (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1986). According to Bruner (1990) and Carlson (1996) meaning is about the story of life, which includes the activities of individuals that shape a self and the coherent meaning of things. In fact, an individual’s life can be understood through the metaphor of narrative theory, wherein narrative emphasises an individual’s lived experience and attempts to describe stories of human events that contain an array of specific details, such as thoughts and feelings, statements, questions, and overt actions or practices (Freedman and Combs, 1996).

Like other interpretive perspectives, a narrative theory asserts the logic and suitability of transferring the philosophy, theory and methods of the natural sciences to understanding human action (Shankar et al., 2010). Although narrative theory is difficult to define (Riessman, 1993; 2002; 2008), most scholars ground their understanding of the narrative theory based on the work of Fisher (1984; 1985a; 1985b, 1987; 1988; 1989; 1994). As stated by Fisher (1989), the narrative theory refers to a philosophical statement that provides an approach to the interpretation and assessment of human experience, assuming that all forms of human behaviour can be fundamentally seen as stories. In this regards, humans are essentially storytelling animals, for whom the world is perceived as a set of stories from which we choose and thus continually recreate our lives (Fisher, 1987; 1994). Accordingly, objects, actions, and practices or behaviour of (or in) the social world, only become real to the individual once they have been interpreted and have thus acquired meaning through narrative, which occurs in time and is shaped by history, culture and character (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Fisher, 1989; Shankar, et al., 2010).
It is fair to acknowledge that the construction of the meanings of luxury through the study’s exploration of consumer practices can be fulfilled with the use of narrative theory. Firstly, narrative theory is based on the view that human experience is a never-ending construction of meaning, rather than a search for the truth (Gonçalves, 1994; Richert, 1999). The narrative approach treats respondents as culturally informed actors, engaging in their chosen activity in an ongoing and reflexive manner (Bruner, 1990; Haigh and Crowther, 2005). In this regard, the individual is the centre of analysis, where the process of interpretation places the participants and their experiences, in line with this study’s aim of conceptualising luxury from a consumer perspective. Secondly, the knowledge of human beings is passed on through the stories that we know about ourselves and our world, via the stories we live through, which are shaped from expectancies and core beliefs that are developed through unique experiences and shared cultures (Pollio, et al., 1997; Romanoff and Thompson, 2006). Accordingly, narratives are pervasive at individual, social and cultural levels (Shankar et al., 2001), interpreting that the meanings of luxury and derived practices constructed within a narrative approach, encompass individual, social and cultural contexts. This highlights the idea of the consumer culture theory, which places phenomena in a wider cultural and social context (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011), in order to conceptualise luxury in a cross-cultural context.

3.3.1 Narrative Theory and Research on Consumer Practices

The concept of practice can be approached through the lens of narrative theory, which asserts that storytelling is an essential human activity, both in our actions and representations (MacIntyre, 1981; 2001). According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), narrative is a metaphor for the universal foundation of human thought and behaviour, which contains a series of events and actions that are meaningfully connected in temporal and causal ways. Accordingly, narrative theory itself is complementary to the adoption within research of the practice theory approach, which attempts to understand how individuals construct meaning from their experiences of the world as a chain of ongoing narratives of human activity (Fisher, 1989). As such, whatever meanings people create have their origins in
human activity; therefore, the totality of cultural objects and social artefacts is a fundamental inclusion in human actions. This means that narrative ideas fundamentally underlie all schools of thought that believe that in order to understand human behaviour, it is necessary to understand the meaning attributed by individuals as the experience of absorption into a story, which contains the activities that individuals engage in which occur in the narrative (Gerrig, 1993; Green and Brock, 2000).

With regard to practice theory, it should be noted that every moment of practice takes place in a mode of being as our everyday involvement in the things in our world (Manen, 2007). Practices are not rules; rather, they are an understanding of the way of being in our life, and our formative relations with others (Bourdieu, 1977). In narrative theory, experience is illuminated and elucidated through the stories we tell others and ourselves, in which the meanings provided by the respondents are attached to practices, rather than being a direct control of individuals’ independent states of mind. This is because stories influence our actions, identities and ongoing experiences of daily life, guided by the respondents’ own personal and socio-culturally situated experiences, or ‘being in the world’ (Shankar et al., 2001). This view is, therefore, highly intertwined with the experiences associated with consumer practice, since this is also conditioned by external structures; the emergence, transformation and decline of practices are associated with how people are able to grasp, manipulate, and understand them (Halkier et al., 2011). Everyday lived experiences provide shape and content to our practices, and the narrative approach helps researchers to place phenomena outside of the individual and within the socio-cultural context, in order to enrich our knowledge of consumer practice and determine the meanings of consumption from personal experience (Manen, 2007).

Moreover, Warde (2005) clarifies Schatzki’s (1996; 2002) concept of practice as comprising a connection of practical activity and its representations (doings and sayings), which are coordinated by understandings, procedures and engagements. This view is, therefore, compatible with the metaphor of narrative, since the coherence of narrative is tied to how well a story hangs together, including the
consistency of characters’ actions, and is evaluated in three ways: (a) argumentative or structural coherence (understanding); (b) material coherence (procedure); and (c) characterological coherence (engagement) (Fisher, 1987). Accordingly, stories told by people whose thoughts, motives, and actions are stable, in which interaction and communication take place within a narrative, are full expressions of practices.

Lastly, as the evidence highlights, marketing scholars have used narrative theory to explain consumption phenomena, stating that consumers use stories in order to make sense of their experiences (Arrould and Price, 1993; Escalas, 1998; Escalas and Bettman, 2000; Shankar, et al., 2001). Furthermore, narrative theory provides the frameworks that are adopted by consumers in structuring their everyday lives and consumption practices (Grayson, 1997; Escalas, 1998; Escalas and Bettman, 2000). For example, Shove et al. (2007) adopt a narrative approach in explaining the practices of digital photography. Cherrier (2007) has discovered various practices of ethical consumption, in relation to the co-production of self-expression and social recognition. Epp and Price (2008) have introduced a framework of family identity interplay to consumption practice. Humphreys (2010) focuses on the legitimation of consumption practices, in the context of casino gambling. Foden (2012) provides an understanding of how individuals engage in alternative consumption practices as a political act, through everyday practices and Chronis et al. (2012) investigate the role of imagination in the consumption experience, through exploring the consumption practices at Gettysburg. Accordingly, it is appropriate for this research to adopt a narrative theory, in order to guide the research methodology and choice of research methods.

It should be noted that narrative approach is not rigid, and neither are there step-by-step directions as to how the research should be conducted. The next section will, therefore, address the methodology employed to collect the stories about the participants’ lived experiences surrounding luxury consumption, practices and their interpretations of luxury.
3.4 Methodology

Before the methodology is discussed, it is important to briefly review some methodological issues which have emerged from the research adopting the practice theory as its core theoretical and empirical focus. The current study sought a new way of conceptualising luxury based on practice theory, proposing that the term luxury is of little use until it is integrated with practices in consumer culture, and meanings are understood to result from the luxury consumption practices adopted by diverse sets of consumers. Accordingly, practice theory enables the conceptualisation of luxury as an empirical focus on methods of consumption, in which the uses and enjoyment of goods, services, or resources are fundamental to the study (rather than focusing on the purchasing stage). However, this focus on practice theory creates potential methodological challenges in selecting an absolute and adequate data collection method, since practice theory emphasises the conditions surrounding the practical activity of social life, in which routine and the mundane are central aspects (Brownlie and Hewer, 2011).

The practice-theoretical assumption about the mundane performance of social life suggests focusing on the ways in which different contexts of data production form different kinds of social actions being performed (Atkinson and Coffey, 2003). One interesting feature of practice theory is the variety of data collection methods that researchers employ in order to describe and reflect upon both ‘doings’ and ‘sayings’ and their complicated relations in data production (Halkier et al., 2011). For example, Gram-Hanssen (2010) used interviews, documentation and historical case studies; Magaudda (2011) and Murphy and Patterson (2011) conducted interviews; Halkier and Jensen (2011) adopted participant observation, photography, interviews, and focus groups; Truninger (2011) carried out interviews, participant observation, and a filmed observation; and Hargreaves (2011) used a series of voluntary internships, intensive participant observations in meetings and events, and interviews. Halkier et al. (2011) argues that there is no superior method within practice theory. Instead, method selection within a practice-theoretical perspective should be varied and reflect the particular aim and objectives of the study.
According to Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) and Hirschman (1986), retrieving the subjective experiences of consumers, requires various research methods that are typical of the experiential-consumer research field. Law (2004) has suggested the notion of ‘method assemblages,’ which is a set of practices that make particular items of knowledge present and others absent, meaning that things which cannot be verbalised will be ‘absented’ if we only use methods that allow for the verbal articulation of things. In this regard, it has been found that narrative methods provide theoretically informed, qualitative data-gathering methods, in which experiential stories offer opportunities for evoking and reflecting on practice, both verbally and visually (Riessman, 1993; 2002; 2008). While many studies still use interviews, giving little thought to the nature of their enquiry on practices (Halkier and Jensen, 2011), this study utilises verbal and visual narrative methods. The way in which this narrative enquiry is supplemented, given the concerns regarding the adequacy of the interview method in practice theory, will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

3.4.1 Verbal Narrative and Visual Narrative as a Method

The narrative method is a powerful way of understanding the construction, performance and practices of individuals (Riessman, 1993; 2002; 2008; Cortazzi, 2001). However, the main problem with the narrative method in social science research on practice theory is that it gives priority to interview methods (Hurdley, 2006). As such, empirical studies of consumption practices tend to use qualitative interview samples for data collection, to the exclusion of other approaches. There is a danger of disregarding the fact that not all participants can take part in the popular social scientific practice of unstructured in-depth interviews, since some people cannot tell long stories about their practices. Bloch (1991) notes that there are challenges during interviews if actions or practical expertise are too complex and not sufficiently ‘language-like’ for easy translation into words. This means that the interview structure remains stichomythic (Coolen, et al., 2002; Hurdley, 2006), which calls into question the creditability of some studies related to practice theory that adopt the interview structure as the only data collection method. As such, a variety of data collection methods adds credibility to the aggregate knowledge.
created in practice theory research, which helps in understanding the ambiguities in complex practices and further enriches future studies (Halkier et al., 2011).

Narratives can refer to any type of format where an individual relates a story in a particular medium – in words, sound, imagery, movement or any combination of these (Bruner, 1990; Bal, 1997). As noted by Keats (2009), there is a variety of formats for participant-constructed narratives in research, reflecting the complexity of lived experiences and consumer practices. As such, there are three main types of narrative formats that can be used: verbal narrative, written narrative and visual narrative.

Verbal narrative refers to a formally recorded interview, informal conversation, or discussions with the researcher, group members, and others during the research project (Leander and Prior, 2004; Keats, 2009). Written narratives include books, articles, letters, emails, journals, poetry and other such texts, or a specific text that an individual participant wrote (Keats, 2009). Through reading or writing these texts, informants form their ideas, images and narratives about what such experiences would be like, which assists them in constructing their narratives (Bazerman, 2004). Finally, a visual narrative consists of various objects that are either made or collected by participants or created by others, such as drawings, art pieces, collages, collected items and photographs, as well as other image-based texts, including videotapes, visual media, and other visual expressions or actions (Wysocki, 2004; Keats, 2009).

Hurdley (2006), Boyd and Ikpeze (2007) and Money (2007) suggest that offering informants multiple formats for expressing stories around their ideas, emotions, and activities expands a researcher’s opportunities for comprehending the complex phenomena of how participants live through their experiences. Furthermore, Marten (2012) suggested that enhanced insights could be gained verbally and visually through research contexts, which set out to stimulate such a focus. Therefore, this study employs a variety of narrative formats in order to gain a richer and more complex understanding of participants’ lived experiences of practices surrounding luxury consumption.
As the study has attempted to understand the subjective meanings of luxury through practices of luxury consumption and the stories surrounding them, this involves what Smith (2008, p. 53) refer to as a ‘two-stage interpretation process’, whereby participants make sense of their world and the researcher assimilates their sense-making. The first stage is associated with the discovery of the essence and interpretation of phenomena, and the second stage involves verifying whether the interpretation of events is what it seems (Denscombe, 1998; Smith, 2008). According to Bryman (2008), different methods can be used to collect data on the same aspect, since seeing things from a different perspective and the opportunity to corroborate findings can enhance the validity of the research. As such, the variety of narrative format methods used in this study could enhance the validity of the research and create a repetitive cycle for the topic.

In order to identify the meanings of luxury, this study explores the practices surrounding luxury consumption in two distinct cultures, between UK and Thai university students, with two stages of data collection and a combination of verbal and visual narrative methods. The first stage of research involves collage construction (visual narrative) and in-depth narrative interviews (verbal narrative). The participants produce a collage of pictures intended to express their understandings of, and associations with luxury. In-depth narrative interviews are then conducted, in order to allow participants to elaborate on the collages and stories surrounding their experiences of luxury consumption practices. For the second stage, narrative practices of luxury consumption in an everyday domestic context have also been carefully selected for the fieldwork. The fieldwork takes place in the participants’ homes attempting to explore their narratives regarding luxury consumption practices in a familiar setting. This involves participants telling stories about their practices of luxury consumption in their everyday domestic lives (verbal narrative), and visually performing the practices, as well as the researcher witnessing the specific domestic spheres in which the practices were carried out (visual narrative).

Overall, the use of multiple narrative formats and the two stages of data collection, helps to link the interpretations of both the researcher and the participants.
to the findings. To clarify, the first stage of data collection tends to elicit the participants’ own accounts of their practices and meanings of luxury. The second phase then enriches the findings through fieldwork, in which the understanding of the practices is not just channelled by what informants say about them, but is also witnessed through the visual presentation of the practices to produce a fully comprehensive picture of the luxury consumption practices performed by the participants. This augments the ways in which we understand luxury and supports the claim to develop the concept of luxury via a consumer-centric approach.

3.5 Research Strategy

The aim of this thesis is to examine the concept of luxury, shifting the definition towards a consumer perspective. In order to represent a robust depiction of consumer-defined luxury, participants have been purposefully selected to meet the aim of contributing to the understanding of the practices and meanings of luxury among young adult consumers in the UK and Thailand, from different backgrounds. However, a considerable amount of luxury consumption research still directs its attention towards a traditional group of consumers (the upper class), which overlooks the nature of contemporary luxury and the current democratisation of luxury consumption.

3.5.1 Sampling Considerations

According to Bryman (2008), outlining the target population involves the selection of those who will be included in the sample. This research uses non-probability sampling techniques, since the whole population does not have an equal opportunity of being selected, in contrast to probability sampling (Malhotra, 2007). However, one of the main problems with sampling in the available studies of luxury consumption is that these studies often equate luxury consumption with conspicuous consumption, in which consumers seek social status and wealth and obtain satisfaction from the reactions of others through the conspicuous acquisition and consumption of expensive goods (O’Cass and Frost, 2002; O’Cass and McEwen, 2004). This view has encouraged many studies, such as Dubois and Laurent (1994), Vigneron and Johnson (2004), Hauck and Stanforth (2006), and Wiedmann et al.
to focus on a particular type of consumer (i.e. the upper class), with the meaning of luxury defined largely by the expensive prices commanded by luxury brands, not by the consumers themselves.

In reality, consumers from all walks of life can be involved in luxury consumption and engage with a variety of practices in daily life that exceed the limited scope of social status and wealth; and they are able to acquire things that feed their aspirations for a better life (Bauer et al., 2011). Moreover, the trend for luxury and ‘masstige’ goods (Silverstein and Fiske, 2005; Truong et al., 2009) suggests that everyday consumption is becoming influenced by the notion of luxury. Supported by Trendwatching (2014), contemporary luxury is giving rise to target consumers of a more democratic post-demographic status, with the younger generations acquiring ‘new’ status symbols (experiences, sustainable lifestyles, connection, health and ethical, etc.), regardless of age, income, occupation or location.

To reflect a more democratic approach in understanding contemporary luxury, this study focuses on young adult UK and Thai university students (aged between eighteen and 28 years at the time of this study. Generation Y (Paul, 2001) has played an important role as a driver of change in the transformation of luxury (Giovannini et al., 2015). The ways in which luxury is viewed and consumed by this generation are constantly changing, and differ from the patterns among other generations due to developments in technology, the rising trend of social networking (Okonkwo, 2009), and their high levels of self-esteem and self-image awareness. This makes them more conscious of luxury consumption in everyday living (Bauer, et al. 2011; Giovannini, et al., 2015). While the Baby Boomer generation focused on luxury in terms of aristocracy and high price, Generation Y consumers view luxury more as a right than a privilege (Silverstein and Fiske, 2005; Stein and Sanburn, 2013). As noted by Okonkwo (2009) and Giovannini, et al. (2015), Generation Y will influence older segments of the population, as well as shape the way luxury is viewed and consumed by the next generation. Through exploring the differences in the practices and meanings surrounding luxury among young adults, this study will help to gain an understanding of how changes or transformations within young adult
consumer cultures have further extended the traditional concept and meaning of luxury.

Furthermore, previous studies, such as Dubois et al. (2005) and Mandel et al. (2006), have become interested in understanding luxury consumption among university students. Although students do not have the extensive financial resources to drive their luxury consumption because of the high prices or limited availability of luxury goods, they are able to personalise and express themselves through luxury consumption to a greater degree than ever before. This is due to digital experimentation and online social networks, which allow a greater range of experiences at a lower cost (Okonkwo, 2009). This development has drawn the researcher’s attention to the role of participants in understanding the meanings of luxury, and to the consideration of luxury consumption as an ordinary practice in a meaningful context.

Lastly, the study focuses on UK and Thai undergraduate and postgraduate students. According to Wong and Ahuvia, (1998), luxury consumption practices are subject to cultural differences that are associated with the notions of individualism and collectivism: Thai people tend to hold a collective orientation, whereas the British are likely to embrace an individualist tradition. According to prior research, such as Wong and Ahuvia (1998) and Gao et al. (2009), the meaning of luxury is more person-oriented in terms of outstanding quality and unique experiences among European consumers, while the meaning of the signalling of wealth and status via luxury consumption is still dominant among Asian consumers. Accordingly, the study focuses on the idea that the concept of luxury should be analysed on the basis of cultural differences, rather than through considering luxury consumers as single, homogeneous entities. As the level of luxury is also perceived differently by consumers from different socio-economic backgrounds (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004), a purposive sampling approach has been adopted. This is an attempt to incorporate variation on the basis of the respondents’ personal and family backgrounds.
3.5.2 Recruitment, Selection and Data Collection Process

Respondents were recruited from the University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University, and the University of Salford in the northwest of England, and from Chulalongkorn University, Assumption University and Ramkhamhaeng University in Bangkok, Thailand. These six universities were selected in order to incorporate variation into the sampling (e.g., academic reputations and entrance requirements), given the accompanying differences in the student intake across these six institutions. The recruitment and data collection process is illustrated in Figure 8.

![Recruitment and data collection process diagram](image)

Figure 8: Recruitment and data collection process
Recruitment was carried out through emails, posters and websites. The advertisement announced the study’s focus on the idea of luxury and consumption practices, and targeted undergraduate and postgraduate students aged eighteen to 28 years from various personal and family backgrounds. The researcher contacted each university’s student service centre, in order to obtain permission for accessing and distributing the research advertisement through students’ emails and university websites, such as the research volunteer webpage, the student webboard, and social media sites (the university’s Facebook page and Twitter account). Also, the advertisement posters were located at various places within the university premises, such as the student union centre, schools’ PR boards and the canteen, in order to create more opportunities for recruitment. A copy of the advertisement is shown in Appendix 1.

All potential respondents who were interested in participating were invited to attend an initial, informal meeting during the recruitment process. The meetings were held on university premises and lasted for around 15 to 20 minutes. At the beginning of the meeting, informed consent was obtained. Details of participant information sheet and the consent form for the first stage of data collection are provided in Appendix 2. This initial meeting took place in order to provide respondents with more information about the sense of the study and the research process, as well as to provide opportunities for the researcher to find out more about the respondents, in order to identify suitable, potential participants for the study. Accordingly, to ensure diversity within the sample, information was collected on the participants’ backgrounds and demographic information, such as age, course of study, self-identified social class, brief personal and family background stories, their reasons for participating in the study, and their general ideas, feelings, and opinions of luxury. Additionally, another advantage of the initial, informal meeting was that the researcher could clarify any doubts and ensure that respondents properly understood, and were comfortable with the research.

There were 19 UK (nine males and ten females) and 20 Thai (eight males and 12 females) university students who responded to the recruitment drive. However, the eventual sample of 16 UK (eight males and eight females) and 16 Thai (eight
males and eight females) undergraduate and postgraduate students was selected in order to ensure some diversity in the sampling profile. Selection was made on the basis of the individuals’ level of education (undergraduate/postgraduate), course of study (arts/social science/science), self-identified social class (upper/middle/working class), and initial opinions about luxury (positive or negative/traditional or non-traditional).

Although most assessments of social class in consumer research have paid attention to objective measurements such as income, occupation, education and material possessions (Sirin, 2005), it has been argued by Kraus et al. (2009, p. 922) that “social class comprises both an individual’s material resources and an individual’s perceived rank within the social hierarchy”. Such a view on social class is in agreement with Bourdieu’s (1987) consideration of social class in which individuals from different social classes, involving their differing access to social, cultural and economic capital, give rise to subjective identities that embody and reify their own social classes. Within this view, it has been found that recent studies (Horberg, et al, 2009; Kurdna, et al, 2010; Hamamura, 2012; Jones and Vagle, 2013) have stressed the more subjective nature of social class in which subjective measures of social class become more reliable than objective measures, especially in research with students (Ostrove and Cole, 2003; Ostrove and Long, 2007).

Accordingly, the researcher focuses on the use of subjective, self-definitional measures of social class in this study, which allows respondents to reflect on their own internalised standards based on their individuality, reference groups, and context-specific experiences (Rubin, 2012; Rubin et al., 2014). Unlike objective measures, social class is thus interpreted in a contextual manner which provides more direct assessments that relate to students’ self-definition, and a better potential for comparisons between different groups, situations, contexts and cultures (Langhout, et al., 2009; Hamamura, 2012).

For the initial opinions about luxury, these are classified into either positive or negative feelings of luxury (Dubois et al., 2005) as well as traditional or non-traditional views of luxury (Bauer et al, 2011). The traditional view of luxury is based on the view asserted by Veblen (1902) that luxury is perceived as a signal of
status and wealth. Accordingly, traditional luxuries are characterised by a premium image, higher perceived price, superior quality, uniqueness/scarcity and symbolism (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). Rather than narrowly focusing on the traditional view of luxury as a function of price, individuals also associate luxury with experiential sensibility, which leads to a contestable and fluid concept of luxury as non-traditional view that extends beyond more than merely the scope of wealth and status (Roper et al., 2013).

For the second stage of data collection (fieldwork in the participants’ homes), respondents were carefully selected after their participation in the first stage based on the key aspects of luxury consumption practices, which emerged from an extensive analysis of the first stage of data collection. As a result, 12 examinations of narrative practices of luxury consumption were conducted in the participants’ homes (with six UK respondents and six Thai respondents). Prior to the fieldwork, second informal meetings were held in order to explain the details of the fieldwork to the respondents, and to ensure that both the researcher and the respondent felt comfortable continuing with the study. Written consent was separately attained for this stage; details of participant information sheet and the consent form for the fieldwork are provided in Appendix 3. Overall details about all participants in the study are shown in Table 5.
Table 5: Participants’ background and details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Self-identified social class</th>
<th>Initial opinions on luxury</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Finance (PG)</td>
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<td>Both traditional view and non-traditional view Both positive and negative feeling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oat</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>Middle class</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
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<td>F</td>
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<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Both traditional view and non-traditional view Positive feeling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thai Participants: Assumption University

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Gender</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Self-identified social class</th>
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<td>F</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Gender</td>
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**UK Participants: Manchester Metropolitan University**

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**UK Participants: University of Salford**

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3.6 Stage 1: Collage Construction and In-depth Narrative Interviews

As the term ‘luxury’ is integrated into practices in a consumer culture, providing cues connected with luxury should provoke respondents to recall their lived experiences of luxury and their own practices when expressing opinions. Thus, it is essential for the study to investigate what luxury means to consumers, as a basis for exploring stories around consumer practices. However, consumers have thoughts, desires, feelings, emotional experiences and fancies, which they may not be able to articulate easily in verbal narrative (Koll et al., 2010). This is especially true in the case of luxury, since ideas of luxury are sometimes vague and complex, and they become intense in ordinary speech (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999). As such, this required a complementary method to uncover such deep thoughts.

Projective techniques or elicitation materials such as pictures, collages, short stories or quotations can be employed as a complementary method for generating cultural talk in a concrete context, in order to investigate abstract or personally distant issues (Donohue, 2000; Belk, et al., 2003; Costa, et al., 2003; Moisander and Valtonen, 2006; Hofstede, et al., 2007). Moreover, it has been found that projective techniques have proven useful in a variety of consumer research contexts, where more direct questioning methods are not able to capture an adequate understanding of consumer behavioural processes (practices) and the meanings of consumption (Belk et al., 1997; 2003). As described by Moisander and Valtonen (2006), collage construction, as the expression of projective techniques has been widely adopted by researchers with a theoretical interest in consumers’ emotions, desires, motivation, the meanings of a consumer episode and brand influence. Collages have been used in consumer research to elicit the meanings of certain types of consumption-oriented experiences, such as lived meanings of brand association (Koll et al., 2010), consumer guilt (Dedeolu and Kazanolu, 2010), beauty types (Martin and Peters, 2005), desire (Belk et al., 2003) and nostalgia (Havlena and Holak, 1996).

Many studies have agreed that the narrative interview is a useful method for acquiring and evoking consumer experiences of practices (Money, 2007; Gistri, et
al., 2008; Brownlie and Hewer, 2011; Magaudda; 2011; Murphy and Patterson, 2011; Arsel and Bean, 2013). However, it has been suggested by McNiff, (1992) and Thompson (2003) that in order to bypass the reluctance, defence mechanisms, rationalisation and social restrictions that tend to obstruct direct verbal narrative, collage construction can provide an instrument for the emergence of verbal narrative. This is because telling a story through visual images can support the experiences of a world of meaning, revitalising our connections to lived experiences and enhancing the richness of consumer practice stories. Accordingly, the combination of collage construction and in-depth narrative interviews is considered appropriate to the data collection in this study, which aims to explore stories around the lived experiences of luxury consumption practices in as much detail as possible. The researcher has been able to uncover deep thoughts, emotions, metaphors and unconscious thoughts about the ideas of luxury from the collages, together with exploring verbal narratives around mundane practices surrounding luxury consumption. This offers a valuable window into the respondents’ subjective experiences of luxury consumption and their ideas about the term ‘luxury’.

3.6.1 Collage Construction and Interview Procedure

In a practical sense, the richness of collages varies depending on the time respondents are able to spend browsing images for their construction (Koll et al., 2010). Respondents in this study were asked to produce a collage of pictures to express their own concept of luxury one week prior to the interview. An example of a collage instruction sheet is provided in Appendix 4.

As generating narratives of consumption is a variant of introspection in which the narrative is a result of the interaction or the emergent experience of researcher and participants (Ellis, 1991; Sharkar, et al., 2001), the researcher drew on pre-understandings (Arnold and Fischer, 1994) pertaining to the topic of inquiry. Due to the subjectivity of luxury, it is necessary to understand the meaning of contemporary luxury in terms of local truthfulness, whereby changes within young adult consumer cultures in a postmodernity era have altered the meaning of luxury from its traditional orientation. As such, the researcher encouraged the respondents to think about their own meanings of luxury by intentionally explaining in the collage
instruction sheet that “luxury can mean very different things to different people”, which reflects the local truth behind the social and cultural elements of the contemporary meanings of luxury. This was intended to prompt the respondents to think more about the alternative meanings of luxury, which enable rather than constrain interpretation, wherein the researcher’s pre-understandings of the local beliefs of the contemporary meanings of luxury were used positively, as part of the data of conscious experience, helping to establish the horizon of the meaning of luxury.

However, in order to maintain natural attitudes towards the meanings of luxury, the researcher set aside her personal assumptions by giving freedom to the respondents to construct their collages in the way they wanted. This meant that they could cut and paste pictures from magazines or take images from the internet rather than being limited to the image resources provided by the researcher (Dedeolu and Kazanolu, 2010). By doing this, the meanings of luxury are not set by the researcher’s personal assumptions, but are largely defined by the respondents’ own feelings, intuitions, imaginings and associations as expressed through their collages. The meanings of luxury obtained here will go beyond mere descriptions of luxury products or brands, providing alternative meanings of luxury that reflect the nature of contemporary luxury.

Moreover, the collage construction method also focuses on prompting the respondents to recall their experiences while constructing their own collages. This means that respondents were asked to think carefully about their ideas of luxury and their practices prior to the interview, which allows them to be prepared. For the interview procedure, Dedeolu and Kazanolu (2010) and Koll et al. (2010) have suggested that a combination of collages with in-depth narrative interviews, probing into each collage element, is a suitable method when breadth of knowledge is desirable. Accordingly, the interview process replicated the methods used by Dedeolu and Kazanolu (2010) and Koll et al. (2010) in which both studies employed the combination of collage construction and in-depth narrative interviews to explore the meanings of certain types of consumption.
During the interview, respondents were asked to explain what their collage represented, as well as to discuss the associations between the collage and the concept of luxury. Moreover, respondents were encouraged to elaborate on the link between their collage and their own experiences. The aim of narrative interviewing is to generate a detailed account of events or experiences (Riessman, 1993; 2002; 2008). Accordingly, the interviews tended to be conversational (Shankar, et al., 2001), allowing participants’ stories to unfold in their own words, with little prompting from the researcher, and most importantly, involving participants’ own emphases, pauses and inflections, as well as content. Accordingly, the discovery of the meanings of luxury in this study has evolved through a process of reflection, interpretation and narration, throughout which the natural attitudes of the respondents are maintained.

The researcher began each interview with a very short statement, explaining the aim of the research: to understand the meanings of luxury and the stories surrounding luxury consumption practices. At this time, the researcher also explained that the interview would be unstructured. The opening question for beginning the interview was: “could you please explain your collage? I would like you to start by talking to me about your collage, discussing what you have included and what the contents of your collage mean to you.” This acted as an icebreaker for the interview and a starting point for eliciting narratives, since the discussion started out broadly in order to gain a sense of the individual participant’s world, before homing in on the stories of consumption practices that surround their perceived concept of luxury.

The role of the researcher was to provide a context in which respondents could freely describe their stories around their lived experiences of luxury. During the interview, respondents were asked to provide more detail about each collage element, to provide illustrations, to present issues in context through recalling their experiences of practices surrounding their ideas of luxury, and share their experiences and interpretations of luxury through storytelling. The researcher used follow-up questions to gain deeper information on issues, for example:

- “According to this picture, what does luxury mean to you?”
• “Please tell me more about your experiences of this aspect of luxury that you mentioned”
• “Can you recall an example related to your ideas about luxury?”
• “Think of a time that you experienced luxury, and describe as fully as you can what stands out for you about that experience.”

In addition to these follow-up questions, probes were used in order to gain additional clarification of, and details about participants’ responses (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). All probing questions were phrased in a manner intended to support continued description and interpretation by respondents (e.g. “can you talk a little more about...?”) The researcher tried to do this unobtrusively, in order to elicit further information without interrupting the flow of the story.

The aim with the interviews was to exhaustively explore the theme of luxury and the respondents’ experiences of luxury consumption practices. The process was completed when a cycle of repetition became apparent in the responses. The data was recorded on an audio recorder and through notes, and each interview lasted approximately one to one and a half hours, depending on the information provided by the respondent. Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher thanked the respondents and informed them that they would be asked to verify the accuracy of their responses once the interviews had been transcribed. Overall, the main objective of this stage was to gain rich data on luxury consumption practices, provide insight and extend the description of the meanings of luxury gained from the collage construction task.

3.7 Stage 2: Fieldwork in the Participants’ Homes

Although the interviews helped the researcher to collect information on various consumer practices surrounding luxury consumption, it should be noted that these retrospective interviews were unable to capture some aspects of practices, especially the intricacies of what people do (Fellman, 1999; May, 2001). To overcome the problems related to the accuracy and validity of interview data, capturing visual presentations of the context to which respondents refer, helped to
illustrate and enrich discussions from the interview data during the first stage. This suggested a second stage to further recognise both the visual and narrative aspects of consumer practices surrounding luxury consumption. It has been found that everyday consumption practices within the domestic sphere best highlight the ways in which individuals have become producers of meaning, rather than simply consumers of goods (Cieraad, 1999; Money, 2007). However, previous research has focused on the experiential nature of luxury consumption in the context of brand-related experiences, whereby consumers become passive recipients of marketing products and communications, and not on the context of everyday domestic life experiences created by consumers.

Accordingly, the second stage of data collection focused on employing both visual and verbal narratives in order to illustrate and enrich the information about how the concepts of luxury were used, lived with and appropriated into everyday life. Hurdley (2006) and Money (2007) note that an exploration of domestic consumer practices significantly benefits from the combination of visual and verbal narratives, as it allows the presentation of a visual validation of the importance and meaning attached to certain aspects of consumer culture. This is accompanied by the verbal accounts provided by the participants at that particular time. Also, fieldwork in the home, through a combination of visual and verbal narrative methods, has been used; this has proven to be successful in certain studies of domestic, everyday practices (Miller, 2001; 2005; Clarke, 2002; Hurdley, 2006; Money, 2007).

3.7.1 Performing Fieldwork in the Participants’ Homes

The main feature of this method was viewing the meaning of luxury and its derived consumption practices in a familiar setting. As this study was conducted over two stages, there was a temporal overlap between them, which meant the analysis of the first stage (collages and in-depth interviews) had to take place before the second stage of data collection could go ahead. As a result, 12 cases of narrative practices for the fieldwork have been selected, in order to encompass key aspects of the luxury consumption practices found from the first stage of data analysis; these include the structure of practices (practices asserting luxury objects, complementary practices in creating luxury experience), and the purposes of practices (personal and instrumental
purposes). Details for each selected case of narrative practices are provided in Table 6.

In practical terms, the researcher visited the participants’ homes to explore their narratives about routine practices of luxury consumption in a familiar setting. The focus of this stage was to invite informants to tell stories about their routine practices of luxury consumption in their everyday lives (verbal narrative). An example of an initial descriptive question is: “could you describe your everyday experience and engagement with luxuries?” The talk was also supplemented with the following questions: “where?”; “when?”; “with whom?”; “what did you do?”; “what came out of it?”; and “how did you experience it?” These types of questions were also used in conjunction with the application of visual narrative, by witnessing the specific domestic spheres in which the practices were carried out, as well as by asking participants to visually perform the practices if possible (visual narrative). As such, fieldwork narratives were performative and relational (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009), which made it possible to elicit detailed enactments about practices, both verbal and non-verbal accounts, and helped the researcher to cross-check the information discussed in the first stage, and to more effectively gain the understanding of the everyday nature of luxury.
Table 6: Details of the selected cases of narrative practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Structure of Practices</th>
<th>Complementary Practices</th>
<th>Purposes of Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practices with Objects</td>
<td>Complementary Practices</td>
<td>Personal Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maesa</td>
<td>Using, collecting and</td>
<td>Showing off luxuries on</td>
<td>Passion, care, hedonism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>displaying luxurious</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Using, collecting and</td>
<td>Yoga as an everyday</td>
<td>Personal achievement,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>displaying luxurious</td>
<td>luxury, Displaying</td>
<td>self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Using, collecting and</td>
<td>Yoga as an everyday</td>
<td>Personal achievement,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>displaying luxurious</td>
<td>luxury, Displaying</td>
<td>self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oat</td>
<td>Cooking as a luxury</td>
<td>Cooking as a luxury</td>
<td>Social relationship,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champ</td>
<td>Riding vintage bicycle</td>
<td>Creating and decorating</td>
<td>Social relationship,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>Playing piano</td>
<td>Space creation for</td>
<td>Hedonism, personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Collecting and hiding</td>
<td>Creating space for</td>
<td>Enjoyment, fun, escape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>limited edition movie</td>
<td>home cinema</td>
<td>personal engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Using and hiding</td>
<td>Photography as luxury</td>
<td>Personal interests,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>professional camera</td>
<td>experience, Facebook</td>
<td>care, passion,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Collecting crystals</td>
<td>Reading as a luxury</td>
<td>Self-indulgence,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>experience</td>
<td>aspiration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Signalling</td>
<td>Signalling status, distinction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Using and special treatment with luxury handbags</td>
<td>Care, respect,</td>
<td>Luxury image, status, membership credential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Showing off luxuries on Facebook</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>Drawing as a luxury experience, art appreciation and learning through home decoration</td>
<td>Personal interests, pleasure, learning,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Using perfumes, collecting and displaying bottle of perfumes</td>
<td>Passion, care, hedonism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Signalling status, distinction</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Also, fieldwork in the home helped both the researcher and respondents to step beyond the interview from the first stage, since the method engaged with the pluri-sensory characteristics of practice: smells, sounds, tastes, and the tangible and stored properties of experience (Pink, 2004). The respondents’ narratives offered an insight into the personal, interactive and ongoing aspects of their domestic lives and the accomplishment of routine practices related to their everyday luxuries. As a result, the researcher uncovered other aspects of practices that might not have been raised in the first stage of data collection. The method supports the claim of conceptualising luxury from a consumer-centric approach, and has created an interpretative circle for the data analysis.

Overall, the data was collected through photographs, recorded audio and field notes. These notes included details of the physical setting, any unusual events that occurred, the researcher’s overall impressions of the fieldwork and any non-verbal behaviour of interest. These were all recorded to describe the scenery, interaction, conversations and experiences of the individual. The notes provided an additional context to each fieldwork and narrative interview and were referred to later during the data analysis (Sin, 2003).

3.8 Transcription

Transcription is essential, since it offers a more accurate report of interview records than memory alone (Reissman, 1993; 2008; Fraser, 2004). Although it was time consuming the researcher decided to take on the role of transcriber, since this provided some benefits to the study. First, the researcher became closer to the stories, which helped her to provide a clearer picture when piecing together the specific data in the latter phase of analysis (Reissman, 1993; 2008). Additionally, having others transcribe the interviews would have run the risk that they would not have produced the type of transcript that best illustrates the expressions gained from the interview situation in a way that the researcher would understand (Fraser, 2004).

Since the interviews with the Thai participants were conducted in the Thai language, the researcher decided to adopt the use of back-translation, which is the
most common approach when conducting international market research (Bontempo, 1993, Chen and Boore, 2009). The focus of the use of back-translation is to transfer the meaning of the target language into English, in which the broader sense of the meaning after translation is still considered accurate and reliable (Cull et al., 2002; Temple et al., 2006). As we can presume that the translation will not absolutely provide the meaning of what the participants meant in their own language, there is the need for a professional bilingual translator (or independent translator) who can translate the findings back into the original language in order to verify the validity and reliability of the research (Groot et al., 1994; Halai, 2007). Due to the limited amount of time, the researcher decided to play the role of back-translator. However, to ensure that the quality of translation was accurate and meaningful, the original transcriptions in the Thai language and the translated transcriptions in English were sent to a professional translator for translation approval. If there was agreement between the researcher and the professional translator, the translated transcriptions were considered ready for the data analysis stage. However, if there was a disagreement, a further discussion was undertaken, in which the transcriptions were revised by the professional translator in order to avoid language differences and misunderstandings in the data transcriptions and translations (Patton, 2002; Halai, 2007). Overall, the forward and back process of translated transcriptions between the researcher and the professional translator, enhanced the accuracy and reliability of the translation (Groot et al., 1994; Temple et al., 2006).

Back-checking the accuracy of the transcription is another possible approach to ensure interview validity (Fraser, 2004). This is done by sending a copy of the transcriptions to respondents for verification. However, care should be taken to ensure that participants are under no obligation to do this (Reissman, 1993; 2008). Accordingly, participants were asked at the end of their interviews whether they would be interested in reading over their transcriptions, and if they agreed the interview transcriptions were sent back to respondents to increase the interview validity and to reach an agreement between the researcher and the respondent. Overall, seven UK and nine Thai participants wanted to review their transcriptions, and they were satisfied with the content and accuracy of the transcriptions. By doing
this, it provided participants with control over the data, as transcribed by the researcher, and it ensured the trustworthiness and authenticity of the material.

3.9 Data Analysis

Although the methods of analysis used by narrative researchers vary markedly, the selection of the types of analysis is associated with what we want to extract from the information, and how it will be utilised (Bryman, 2008). According to practice theory, a practice is not synonymous with action – it expands the unit of analysis to the system that fosters action (Dourish, 2001), in which the analysis of practices involves empirically applicable concepts from practice theory, such as understandings, procedures and engagements (Schatzki, 1996; 2002; Warde, 2005), as part of the categorisation of data-patterns into a particular practice. In line with a thematic analysis, it is a procedure for encoding qualitative data in which the focus is on the content through which the narratives are communicated (Aronson, 1994). This is in order to see how the participants impose stories in terms of conceptual and practical understandings, procedures (rules, principles and instructions) and the engagement (teleology and affectivity) with the flow of experiences, as a way of understanding how they appropriate the actions and make sense of such actions in their lives (Riessman, 1993; 2002; 2008). Thematic analysis has been proven successful for research employing practice theory (Korkman, et al., 2010; Duffy et al., 2012; Spotswood et al., 2015). Accordingly, this tool is considered suitable for this study. The steps taken during data analysis are detailed, below.

3.9.1 Steps Taken in Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to build a richer picture of the practices of consumers surrounding luxury consumption. The procedures for performing the thematic analysis followed the guidelines recommended by Spiggle (1994) and Braun and Clarke (2006). The central framework for conducting a thematic analysis is to construct an index of the central themes and subthemes, based on the research participants and their reported events and actions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Under the recommendations of Spiggle (1994), wherever possible, the data was integrated with concepts and theories from the literature, in order to aid the explanatory power.
and the scholarly conceptualisation of naturalistic behaviour. Through this process, the interpretation of data occurs through delineating units of general meaning (Spiggle, 1994). A worked-example of the data analysis of one transcription is provided in Appendix 5.

Step 1: Transcription

The analysis phase begins when the transcription starts, as this is the point where the researcher is beginning to actively engage, interpret and make sense of what they are transcribing (Fraser, 2004; Braun and Clarke, 2006). As such, the researcher kept notes of any impressions or points of interest that surfaced for each participant, as well as any preliminary thoughts or interpretations that came to mind. This helped the researcher to make sense of the similarities and differences between the participants in order to create a whole picture. Also, the transcription was treated as an autonomous body of data (Edwards, 1993), which meant that all hypotheses and existing theories were put to one side, allowing the researcher to be open to uncover the experience as it was lived and presented by the respondents.

Step 2: Listening to recordings and re-reading the transcriptions together with collages

In order to understand the respondents and their experiences, the transcriptions were reread several times and the interview recordings were revisited. Each transcription was read to elicit the participants’ lived experiences of practices surrounding luxury consumption and the derived meanings of luxury. The researcher also examined various aspects of the data line by line, including the self of the narrators (their background story, personal beliefs, identity, cultural perspectives and reflexivity); the narrative viewpoint of the experience; unusual perspectives (secrets or puzzles); issues of attention (single or diverse experiences recounted and subjects described); sequences (how events are told, flashbacks and events omitted); stretches of time over which the experiences are told; and the contexts in which the narratives took place.

Additionally, the collages helped to prompt memories and illustrate points made in the transcriptions. Visual and verbal narratives were related, and influenced each other in terms of interpretation and analysis (Keats, 2009). Interpretation and
analysis also involved multiple iterations of coding, with the researcher repeatedly returning to the multiple forms of data in order to refine a thematic view. By reading various visual and verbal narrative formats, the researcher was better able to understand the complex narratives of the lived experiences. The researcher also made further notes about what the participants said, together with thoughts and interpretations, in the left-hand margin of the page or on the relevant section of the text itself, and also referred back and forth to notes made during the transcription. This step is similar to one described by Edwards (1993) delineating units of general meaning, where the rigorous process of going over each word, sentence and line of data begins with notes made in the margin to identify extracts of significance at this early stage.

Step 3: Assigning early themes

Once the transcripts for each participant had been read and the marginal comments were made, the text was then read repeatedly until the researcher was familiar with the respondents’ inflection and the story itself. This time the right-hand margin was used to develop the earlier comments into concise phrases or codes, which focused on capturing the essential quality of what was found in the narrative (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Then, the initial notes made in step 2 and the concise phrases made in the right-hand margin were thus categorised, transformed and abstracted into coherent patterns or themes in order to represent the meanings and experience of the participants (Spiggle, 1994; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Once the researcher reached a point where there were no new insights to be gained from the first interview, she applied the same procedure to the other transcripts to gather more information and augment the themes already identified. This necessitated revisiting previous transcripts, and helped to safeguard the congruence and robustness of the analysis. Accordingly, the researcher carried out a comparison technique (Spiggle, 1994) as an intra-case analysis of individual experiences of luxury consumption practices and meanings of luxury, together with an inter-case analysis to look for common storylines or themes, as well as moving across individual narratives to draw out common stories between the participants.
Early themes, such as the practices with luxury objects and the practices of luxury (structure of practice), the personal purposes of practices (pleasure, experiences, aspirations, etc.) and the instrumental purposes of practices (status, self identity, etc.) were identified at this stage, and this helped the researcher to select the participants for the second stage of data collection. For this, the participants were selected for their salience in illuminating themes emerging from the analysis of the narrative sections in all the interview transcripts.

Step 4: Reading and re-reading both verbal and visual narratives from the fieldwork

The data analysis for the fieldwork was conducted in the same manner as described for the first stage (steps 1 and 2). Reading and re-reading both the verbal and visual narratives provided deeper comprehension and more evidence for the themes constructed in the first stage of data analysis, and provided credibility for the research.

Step 5: Developing final themes and connecting the themes

While the researcher was immersed in the data from both stages, reading and re-reading the transcripts, collages and fieldwork was also dimensionalised and integrated with a focus on the literature, which allowed an understanding of the participants’ worldviews and set aside the researcher’s expectations, identifying properties of categories and construct as well as enriching conceptual meanings (Spiggle, 1994). Overall, this process helped to construct the final themes related to the different practices and meanings of luxury.

The final themes were listed as they presented themselves to the participants. This step necessitated a more analytical approach to the data, with the final themes clustered based on a theoretical ordering. Each cluster was then given a group heading which was consistent with what the respondents were saying (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The researcher drew her interpretations in order to make sense of the narratives, but at the same time continuously checked her own sense-making against what the participant actually said. Such an iterative process (Spiggle, 1994) of going back and forth across the participants’ words enabled larger patterns of thematic relationships to emerge (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This process aimed to capture the
essential dimensions common to all participants. Overall, the themes were a synthesis of all the preceding interpretations, modified by continuous analysis and developing explanations focusing on the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions in order to be applicable to the wider theory (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

Finally, after all the verbal and visual narratives (transcripts, collages, and pictures) from both stages had been analysed, the researcher produced a summary table of themes, supplemented with index references from transcriptions, collage number references and evidence from picture extracts to support each theme, thereby creating an audit trail for tracing back to the raw data.

3.10 Ethical Considerations of the Research

The aim of the study, the data-collection process, and participants’ right to confidentiality and anonymity were made known at the start of the study. The research involved two stages of data collection, and participant information sheets were handed to respondents and a consent form signed before the data collection at each stage was conducted. It should be noted that the participants were still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to themselves. The researcher acted as custodian for the data generated by the study, taking appropriate measures to ensure that all data (hard copy and electronic) were stored securely. Moreover, participants were allocated a pseudonym upon recruitment to the study and were not identified by their real names, or by any specific information that could potentially reveal their identity. The anonymised data were shared with supervisors and were seen initially by a limited number of academic staff along with the findings contributing to this PhD thesis. Overall, the data will be kept no longer than necessary, and will only be disseminated for academic purposes as part of this PhD thesis and future academic publications. The data will be securely deleted when they have reached their retention date – typically, 2–3 years after thesis submission.

3.11 Methodological Reflections

This section discusses some issues which arose as a result of collecting data, including anxiety about speaking English as a second language, reflections on the method employed, and the evaluation of the research.
3.11.1 Anxiety about Speaking English as a Second Language

As I am an international student, conducting research in English with British respondents caused me some anxiety. This is due to my own fear of the negative evaluations and perceptions of a low verbal ability, which might cause problems affecting the quality of the interview. To overcome the language anxiety, I attended an English presentation course, which allowed me to gain confidence in English speaking. Moreover, a pilot study was carried out with two British PhD students before conducting the main research. The pilot study stage was specifically designed to check the success of the collage construction and in-depth narrative interview in order to ensure that such methods would provide an appropriate means to elicit relevant lived experiences of luxury consumption practices, as well as to give me the opportunity to practise conducting research in English.

Before conducting the pilot study, the participants were reassured that their information would be safeguarded and that the results would only be used to examine how the data-collection procedure worked in order to give the researcher the opportunity to modify the approach, if necessary. Also, the pilot study participants were asked to produce a collage expressing their understanding of luxury 2–5 days prior to the interview. At the interview, they were encouraged to explain the link between their collage and their own experiences of luxury consumption practices. The findings from the pilot study participants showed that the collage construction and in-depth narrative interview methods, constructed for this research, were realistic and workable for uncovering the various practices surrounding luxury consumption. Moreover, there were potentially new insights arising from the pilot studies, as participants elaborated on the aspects of luxury consumption in their everyday lives, allowing me to uncover an underexposed element of the meaning of luxury beyond the traditional viewpoint. However, it has been found from the pilot study that the richness of the collages varied depending on the time participants were able to spend on collage construction. As a result, the amount of time given to respondents for preparing their collages prior to the interview was changed from 2–5 days to one week.
Not only were the pilot studies a way to check that the research design did what the researcher intended, they also allowed me to ascertain the most effective approach to developing my English language skills for conducting research. During the pilot studies, I requested feedback on my performance in the interviews – in particular my speaking skills – in case it needed improvement prior to the real interviews. The suggestions provided were in reference to sounding more confident, and to improving my elicitation technique in terms of follow-up questions during the interviews. Overall, the pilot interviews flowed well and gave me a sense of what the actual interviews would be like, which lessened my worries about speaking English as a second language.

3.11.2 The Interview Process

Luxury is a concept that is hard for respondents to explain, since the meaning of luxury also deals with abstract and inner thoughts, which may not be easy to articulate in a verbal narrative. Also, it is difficult to allow participants to talk about their own practices as they might not be aware of them. In fact, they might think of the practices simply as purchasing and using. As such, I felt that there might be a potential risk of leading questions in the interview process, causing some bias within the research.

However, the use of a combination of collage construction and narrative interviews made the discussion of luxury and luxury consumption practices easier. First, the collage prompted the respondents to recall their luxury experiences during the construction. This meant that individuals thought carefully about their ideas of luxury and their practices prior to the interview, so they were prepared. Thus, discussions about luxury and luxury consumption practices were both enriched and set largely by the respondents. When the respondents felt unable to elaborate in the interviews, I suggested that they should go back to the collages. This enabled the respondents to recall earlier experiences and share their interpretations, and it encouraged them to further discuss the issues, so that they could talk more about their lived experiences. Accordingly, there was less awkwardness or ‘dead air’ during interviews, and there was a better logical flow to the interviews. Also, the collages gave the participants a free rein to present luxury in a way that was
meaningful to them; in the interviews, this was then elaborated on, and it allowed key practices to emerge which were most relevant to provide the focus for the fieldwork stage.

3.11.3 Fieldwork Experiences

Narrative enquiry has the power to reveal individuals’ complexity and uniqueness to the researcher in ways that observation alone cannot (Reissman, 1993; 2008). This is due to the classic problems I encountered when using the participants’ observation of routine and mundane practices. It proved difficult for me to arrange my actions or participation in order to optimise the data collection possibilities, since the participants were implicated in existing routine practices and expectations in a far more rigid manner than I was myself. Additionally, the depth and nature of certain personal routine practices are restricted to the participants, such as luxury appreciation. This is difficult for me to either observe or participate in.

In the fieldwork, I found that the process of employing a combination of visual and verbal narrative methods provided opportunities to retrieve orally-performed stories surrounding routine practices with access to visual display features (such as interactive activities within the practice, gesture, posture, facial expression and looks). I could witness the context of the event or situations in which the practices were carried out, while still having space to think about the situation. As such, this contributed to the authenticity of the findings because of having been there, spending time in the field and being honest with the field experiences and practices (Sherry and Kozinets, 2001).

3.11.4 Evaluation of the Research

Although many scholars are reluctant to admit the trustworthiness of qualitative research, frameworks for ensuring rigour in qualitative research have been present for many years. Guba’s (1981) constructs, in particular, have achieved considerable favour and formulate the evaluation of this study. Accordingly, a number of procedures were adopted to satisfy four criteria, as follows:

Credibility is concerned with the question of how congruent the findings are with the phenomenon (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). A narrative approach has been
adopted in various studies concerning the everyday life experiences of consumers and consumption meanings, and it has proved successful in research within the field of consumer practices (Shove et al., 2007; Cherrier, 2007; Epp and Price, 2008; Humphreys, 2010; Arsel and Bean, 2013; Chronis, et al., 2012; Foden, 2012).

The purposive sampling of respondents is appropriate given the nature of the investigation. The study focuses on the contemporary phenomenon of luxury consumption, in which people consume luxury goods not necessarily corresponding to their income level. Therefore, exploring the views of the Thai and UK university students allowed a democratic approach in which numerous voices, demonstrating characteristics of similarity, difference and variation in terms of both socio-economic backgrounds and cultures in the sampling, were sought in order to gain a greater knowledge of a wider young adult group and to reflect the contemporary phenomenon of luxury consumption.

I also employed tactics to help ensure honesty from the respondents. In particular, I intended to establish rapport at the beginning of the interviews, and specified that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions. I was self-aware during the data collection process so that the interview could be guided largely by the respondents, with no leading questions that might interfere with the credibility of responses to cause any bias in the research. Moreover, checks relating to the accuracy of the data also took place on the spot, both during and at the end of the data collection sessions, to verify the credibility of the research (Shenton, 2004).

As stated by Silverman (2000), the ability of the researchers to relate their findings to an existing body of knowledge is a key principle for evaluating qualitative enquiries. Accordingly, I also examined the results from past studies in order to assess the degree to which the research findings were congruent with those of previous research. In addition, I sought to evaluate the study throughout the research process as it developed. This was done using a reflective commentary from supervisors, which helped to evaluate the effectiveness and establish the credibility of the research methodology employed in the study.

**Transferability** is dealing with the extent to which the findings of one study can be useful in other situations (Guba, 1981). As the research attempted to explore
luxury consumption practices in a cross-cultural context between Thai and UK university students from various personal and family backgrounds, this provided multiple environments where the phenomena took place, yielding a fundamental understanding with which the results of subsequent work may be compared.

**Dependability** shows whether similar results would be attained if the research was repeated in the same manner in terms of context, methods and sampling (Guba, 1981). In order to tackle the issue of dependability more candidly, the processes within the research should be transparent and reported in detail, thereby allowing a future researcher to repeat the work (Shenton, 2004). This thesis provided in-depth details, which allow the reader to evaluate the extent to which the proper research practices were followed. This involved the research design and its application, unfolding what was planned and employed on a strategic level, the operational detail of data collection and the minutiae of what was done in the field. Accordingly, readers are able to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research methodology as well as to evaluate its effectiveness.

**Confirmability** is associated with the qualitative scholar’s concern for objectivity, given that the research findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants (Shenton, 2004). In this study, the role of triangulation in supporting such confirmability has been highlighted in order to diminish the influence of researcher bias. The findings from the interview were cross-checked again during fieldwork to ensure the confirmability of the results from the respondents. Moreover, my own suppositions about the meanings of luxury, which can mean different things to different people, have been acknowledged in the report. The methods adopted were described, together with the reasons for choosing one approach when others could have been selected. In terms of the results, preliminary theories that were not borne out by the data were also discussed, derived from the ongoing reflective commentary constructed during the research process. Overall, an audit trail was produced in order to allow researcher to trace the course of the research step by step via the decisions made and the procedures described (Denscombe, 1998).
3.12 Chapter Review

This chapter has documented the narrative theoretical approach to data collection that has been adopted in this thesis. A narrative methodology was employed in order to gain a richer and more complex understanding of participants’ lived experiences of practices, with regard to luxury consumption. This involved two data collection stages and a combination of verbal and visual narrative methods. Furthermore, the research focused on university students as they are involved with luxury consumption and engage with a variety of practices in daily life that exceed the limited scope of their social status and wealth, as with any other luxury consumers.

16 UK and 16 Thai undergraduate and postgraduate students (eight males and eight females from each country) were selected based on purposive sampling. The research was carried out through a combination of collage construction and in-depth narrative interviews in the first stage. For the second stage, twelve narrative accounts of practices of luxury consumption in an everyday context (involving six UK and six Thai respondents) were also carefully selected for the fieldwork. The findings were analysed using thematic analysis, and will be presented in the following chapter.
4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the data collected from the collages prepared by the participants, in-depth narrative interviews and fieldwork undertaken in the participants’ homes. Data was collected in two stages: the first stage (combining data collected from the collages and the in-depth narrative interviews) helped identify the essence and interpretation of luxury and the derived consumption practices. The second stage (the fieldwork in the participants’ homes) focused on the participants’ luxury consumption practices in everyday domestic life in an attempt to capture their familiar settings. Therefore, the study captures rich data on luxury consumption practices in everyday domestic life in order to provide an insight into the meaning of luxury and conceptualise consumer-oriented notions of luxury consumption in a cross-cultural context.

The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. In a similar manner to Thompson et al. (1990), a small number of illustrative case studies are initially presented to facilitate a part-to-whole understanding of the participants’ narratives in order to give a holistic picture of cross-cultural luxury consumption practices to the readers. These six narratives (three Thai and three UK informants) signal common early themes, thus providing an introduction to the conceptual framework of the study. The chapter begins with a table summarising the case studies’ backgrounds in order to give details about how and why each participant was selected, as well as to signpost the key aspects of their understandings of luxury. Each case is then presented, giving an introduction to the conceptual framework for everyday luxury consumption practices in a cross-cultural context.

To reflect how each of the five steps of data analysis was executed, each case was analysed individually (Step 1 and 2). That was followed by a second phase of an iterative process of going back and forth across the participants (Step 3) and from both stages of the data collection (Step 4). This was utilised in order to carry out an analysis at the different levels of data collection and to capture the essential dimensions common to all participants (Step 5). The thematic analysis from these
case studies presented the major interpretive themes developed from the two stages of data collection and the four main dimensions of the conceptual framework of everyday luxury consumption practices. The four emergent themes used to categorise the findings are (1) Caretaker practice, (2) Escapist practice, (3) Self-transformation practice, and (4) Status-based practice.

In addition to the illustrative case studies, the thematic descriptions within the conceptual framework will be discussed in detail by presenting illustrative excerpts from the participants. Overall, the interpretation aims to provide an in-depth representation of how luxury consumption is practised in everyday domestic life, the meanings of luxury that can be seen in practices of luxury consumption, and how the practices and meanings of luxury vary among participants from two different cultures.

4.2 Illustrative Case Studies

This research aims to gain a holistic understanding of the practices that constitute luxury consumption in two distinct cultures, using UK and Thai university students. Understanding luxury beyond the socio-economic point of view allows one to more fully explore the dynamic, subjective, and complex nature of the meanings of luxury. Accordingly, the recruitment sought variation in terms of personal background (age, gender, hometown, university, course of study), family background (parent’s occupation), and self-identified social class. Equally, the informants’ understandings of luxury and key features of the stories surrounding their lived experience of luxury consumption were considered as criteria for selection. Table 7 offers a summary of each participant who was selected as an illustrative case study and details his/her profile according to the participant selection criteria.
Table 7: Profile of the Illustrative Case Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Family’s background and self-identified social class</th>
<th>Opinions and lived experiences of luxury</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Faculty of Art (PG), Salford University.</td>
<td>Working-class family. Mother: Nurse.</td>
<td>Luxury is about what is meaningful to his life. He considers nature and photography to be luxuries, as he believes that expensive stuff is meaningless in his life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Faculty of Humanities (UG), Manchester Metropolitan University.</td>
<td>Working-class family. Father: industrial worker. Mother: housekeeper/cleaner.</td>
<td>Dream objects (she collects crystals, which were dream objects when she was a child). Thinks of luxury as the moments she enjoys most (i.e., reading a book).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences (UG), Manchester University.</td>
<td>Middle-class family. Father and mother: university lecturers.</td>
<td>Luxury is the ability to do something that makes him happy (i.e., watching a movie). He associates luxury with achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maesa</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Faculty of Humanities (PG), Assumption University.</td>
<td>Upper-class family. Father and mother: company directors.</td>
<td>Loves luxury products (Christian Louboutin), buys lots of them. Luxury is about having passion and adequate knowledge to be able to appreciate and consume.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Family Origin</td>
<td>Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences (UG), Chulalongkorn University.</td>
<td>Middle-class family Father and mother: doctor and clinic owner.</td>
<td>Luxury is about putting in effort (time, skills). She considers yoga as her everyday luxury practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Faculty of Life Sciences (UG), Ramkhamhaeng University.</td>
<td>Working-class family Father and mother: agriculture business.</td>
<td>He considers gift-giving to be luxury consumption.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each participant’s story will now be presented in turn. The illustrative case studies highlight the various practices that individuals believe constitutes luxury consumption and how meanings of luxury consumption are constructed through such practices. These stories will signal the key themes across participants, thereby providing an introduction to the conceptual framework for luxury consumption practices in a cross-cultural context. The meanings of luxury can be framed as everyday in nature, providing a consumer-oriented approach to understanding luxury.

4.2.1 Alex

Alex is a 24-year-old art student. He is from a large industrial English city (where his mother still lives) and attends Salford University, where he shares a flat with two friends. Alex self-identifies as working class and expressed worries about his family’s financial security.

“I come from a working-class family…my mum is a single mother and just a nurse…you know, she’s still a semi-professional worker so we don’t really have enough money to afford expensive stuff…I have to save my money ‘cos we don’t know what will happen in the future if my mum loses her job or gets sick. So now I’m helping my mum…I am a part-time wildlife photographer.”

Alex grew up in an area where he had to experience a significant amount of waste and pollution. This experience drove Alex to increase his personal trait of being highly environmentally considerate. This may have informed his tendency to identify things as luxurious in a different way from the traditional concept of luxury (Veblen, 1902); for Alex, the preciousness of green environments and nature, not expensive items such as diamonds, are perceived as luxurious.

“I don’t think diamonds are luxurious to me. What am I going to do with diamonds? Wearing them or having them…it is meaningless to my life. I think luxury is all about personal preferences and how we place value on our life in a realistic way according to our backgrounds and culture, perhaps. For me, I come from a place where there is lots of pollution. That’s why I consider nature, rather than materials, as luxury. As I am a wildlife photographer, it’s
kind of a privilege that I am able to see and capture all these beautiful places...and I would love to spend my money and my time doing something with nature as my own luxury consumption.”

Although Alex highlights that his concept of luxury tends to be realistic in terms of his financial circumstances, his understanding of luxury is not totally connected to the economic dimension. Alex also perceives luxury in terms of his particular background, identity and consumer culture. To clarify, Alex considers experiencing nature to be luxurious, since practices involving nature are valuable and meaningful to him in terms of his everyday life, as well as congruent with his personal preferences and identities. On the other hand, he considers diamonds as non-luxury, as he views the practice of owning diamonds as meaningless and existing outside his consumer culture. The case of Alex also highlights that the contemporary meaning of luxury has moved away towards the high intensity of consumers’ lived experiences of luxury consumption and personal preferences and identities (Yeoman and McMahon-Beatti, 2006; Bauer, et al., 2011). Accordingly, Alex is included to illustrate the early themes of luxury as the instrument and representation of self and the practices relate to the communication of the self and status.
Alex sees nature as precious and luxurious to him because of his lived experiences as a child; travelling in search of wildlife also fascinates him. His collage (Figure 9) emphasises his interest in nature, since he depicts his aspirations of travelling to places rich in it. Alex also has an interest in photography, which drives him to pursue higher education in this area. He loves taking pictures of wildlife, nature and animals; he put some of his personal photographs in the collage, thereby demonstrating his expertise. To Alex, the art of taking photographs is luxurious and his identity as a wildlife photographer communicates luxury status to him.
“Photography is luxurious. Well, everyone knows how to take a photo. It’s not that difficult. But to be able to take a good and beautiful photo is different. It requires learning, knowledge, skills, and experience and I’m sure that not many people have such a level of knowledge when they take photos. So owning an expensive camera doesn’t mean luxury until the person who owns the camera actually possesses superior skills in photography.”

Alex perceives luxury in terms of items that fit an individual’s personal background, tastes, interests and identity, which, in his case, concern nature as well as photography. He specifically separates the object (an expensive camera) from his understanding of what constitutes luxury. Rather, it is the practices, expertise and skills involved in taking photographs that are assigned luxury status. Although it is clear from previous studies that the possession of items is a driving factor in how people portray their luxury status (Dubois and Duquesne, 1993; Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; 2004; Phau and Prendergast, 2000; Kapferer and Bastien, 2009; Heine, 2011), Alex demonstrates that, for him, being in possession of an expensive item does not represent luxury in itself. Instead, it is his photography skills that denote the activity as being luxurious. Alex’s sense of superiority is associated with the cultural rather than economic capital which individuals have in their lives. Alex’s case illustrates that cultural capital, such as knowledge, education, and skills, (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998) can give individuals social distinction.

“I feel like I become more of a professional and cool when I take photos. I mean, luxury gives you…you’re feeling like you’re transforming to a better you…like…when I’m taking pictures, it’s still me but it’s me in a more ideal professional version…I behave differently when I am holding my camera…I hold it firmly…and act cool with it.”

Alex suggests that using his camera affects how he feels about himself. This use of luxuries as the representation of the self has been extensively acknowledged by many scholars, such as Belk (1988), Truong et al. (2008), and Giovannini et al. (2015). To Alex, luxury acts as a support for enhancing the ideal self; thus, he will behave and feel differently while luxury is consumed (during the time he is holding his camera and taking pictures). This self-concept can stem from the realisation of
both internal and external self-transformation (‘a better you’, ‘ideal professional’, and ‘acts cool’). In contrast to clear and overt efforts in relation to identity transformation, Alex moulds luxury into an integral part of himself as being ‘cool’ and ‘professional’. Although luxury is undoubtedly an external support (Holt, 1995; Tian, et al., 2001; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004; Tsai, 2005), it is notable from Alex’s case that the meanings of luxury are moving beyond the need to portray a stratified societal role to the fulfilling of individual’s self-appreciation and acceptance.

The key point to emerge from Alex’s case is that luxury is subject to the reality of consumers’ lived experiences, personal interests and identities. Accordingly, owning goods is not everything; individuals demonstrate luxury practices based on their surroundings and activities. In Alex’s case, he subjects his luxury item (a professional camera) to the symbolic and physical actions to acquire and manipulate his meanings of luxury as well as to achieving his desired self-identity. Rather than assuming that consumers derive identity primarily from generic economic and social displays of superiority, such as those attained by the demonstration of wealth (Vickers and Renand, 2003; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004), Alex combines the symbolic significance of luxury with his own personal interests and identities. From Alex’s narration, the confident feeling and the way he holds and acts with his camera while taking pictures create the luxury experience that he is ‘professional’ and ‘cool’, as well as communicating his luxury status in terms of his skills and knowledge of photography.

4.2.2 Lisa

Lisa is a 20-year-old social science student from Manchester Metropolitan University. She is now living with her family in a town just outside of Manchester, that is one and a half hours away from Manchester by bus. She comes from a working-class family where both parents are blue-collar workers. As Lisa’s parents had to leave school early and started work at a young age, she is the first person in her family to go to university; she is also planning to pursue a master’s degree, something she believes will be a significant achievement because of her working-class background. Given her low income, Lisa tends to restrict her spending in order
to save her money for future education. For example, she makes packed lunches rather than paying for lunch at the university canteen.

“I don’t have much money...McDonald’s is a luxury to me because I don’t have money to have it so often. It’s like...once in a big while that I actually buy a McDonald’s for lunch...normally I just make my lunch and bring it to school.”

Lisa demonstrates that affordability and the idea that something is out of the ordinary are comparable when it comes to identifying things (McDonald’s) as luxurious. Although Lisa relates luxury to the traditional view of expensive items, she also mentions that price is not enough for identifying what should be regarded as a luxury.

“I think price is not the only factor in identifying what should be regarded as a luxury...it’s more about my feelings and experiences...I think luxury is more of...like a moment which you enjoy most...the moment when I wear such a nice dress or even when I read a book...something like that.”

Lisa has been included to illustrate a reoccurring early theme across the sample surrounding the psychological phenomenon and the practices of luxury related to the emotional and experiential dimensions of luxury consumption. To Lisa, luxury is more about the special moments spent doing something like reading books or wearing a nice dress, which create luxurious experiences. This means her own interpretations of luxury extend beyond the mere idea of luxury products, or brands (Roper et al., 2013). Lisa suggests that, regardless of income, consumers can integrate luxury into their lives. This contrasts with Heine (2011), who claims that luxury consumption tends to be mostly associated with upper-class consumption.
“At first, I put pictures about something that we all generally identify as luxuries like expensive stuff and brands…but then I realised that these things weren’t luxurious to me. So I put more pictures that really represent what luxury means to me based on my own feelings and experiences with it.”

Lisa constructed her collage (Figure 10) with images ranging from items that would traditionally be associated with luxury, such as diamonds or expensive brand names and products priced so that they are only affordable for the wealthy, to simple activities relating to her personal lived experiences, such as reading books, going to concerts and crystal collections. This highlights the fact that individuals have a sense of separation between what luxury means to them and the traditional understanding of what luxury means. A good illustration is when Lisa mentions the pictures of diamonds and crystals in her collage. For her, crystals, not diamonds, are perceived as luxury items due to the lived experiences and positive feelings she had with crystals when she was a child.
“I’m thinking of crystals. It’s the first thing coming to my mind when I’m thinking of luxury. I don’t know why I don’t think about diamonds... Maybe it’s when I look at a diamond...I feel nothing about it apart from the fact that it’s very expensive. But when I look at crystals...they remind me of a time when I was a kid. My mum took me to her boss’s house and his house had crystal displays in the living room...It was like...wow...I really liked it...and dreamed that one day when I grew up...I’d have a nice crystals display like this.”

Lisa’s data suggests that the meaning of luxury is controlled by consumers’ experiences, not just the perception of price. To Lisa, crystals have come to represent luxury and success due to her childhood experiences: it was the house of her mother’s employer where she first saw crystals, and now she, too, has managed to build up a collection in order to fulfil her dreams. When Lisa looks at her crystal display, the crystals embody an escapist quality and allow her to recapture a childhood dream. Accordingly, luxury consumption is escapist in nature, allowing consumers to experience something extraordinary in routine life in order to enjoy a precious moment of indulgence.

In the fieldwork (Figure 11), Lisa illustrated the practice of collecting an item (crystals) that she believes is luxurious. The way she arranges and takes care of her collection endows a meaning of luxury in which the luxury item becomes an object that demands never-ending care from the owner.
“I collect crystals; it’s just a small collection because I don’t have the money to afford a large collection. If I earn more money, I will definitely buy more. I put them carefully on my dressing table with my glasses, so that I can see and look after them every day...Well, the collection is just especially for me and I give lots of respectful treatment to them. I have to make sure that they’re properly displayed, clean and neat. I feel so good every time I look at them...I don’t know...it’s such a pleasant feeling when I look at them and it reminds of my time at that house.”

Lisa’s case illustrates how lived experiences from past childhood memories and personal feelings have shaped the way she classifies things as luxurious; these have driven her to become the caretaker of her luxury possession (her crystal collection). Lisa is very passionate about crystals, so she attempts to create her own collection, even though she does not have adequate financial resources to do so. Douglas and Isherwood (1979), Storr (1983) and Belk (1995b) have acknowledged that luxury items and collections serve as symbols of success and social class, implying that price can indicate the wealth and achievement of individuals as well as
the conspicuousness of collecting luxuries. However, Lisa has revealed a different aspect of luxury consumption; she does not continue to collect luxury items simply to display the conspicuousness of luxury consumption. Instead, she puts her crystal collection on her dressing table near items she uses every day (i.e., her glasses), so that she can relive the hedonic experiences she had with luxury, allowing an escape to her childhood memories rather than achieving any other purpose. Moreover, Lisa also asserts a strong never-ending desire to collect crystals and look after the collection, which must be properly displayed and kept clean and neat. Lisa’s extract defines luxury as reflecting person-object relationships. In Lisa’s case, it is her relationship with her crystal collection that gives the meaning of luxury to such an item, so that the luxury item becomes something that provokes a kind of relationship that demands Lisa’s constant care and respectful treatment.

Apart from this, Lisa has the ability to turn a simple activity in everyday life, such as reading books, into a luxurious experience. This is in agreement with the view of Bauer et al. (2011), who found that although luxury is often not associated with everyday ordinary things, it could still be integrated into consumers’ everyday lives. The painting on her collage also represents this point.

![Figure 12: Reading books (source: Lisa)](image)
“I like to read novels in my garden and this is the way I read the novel. I’ll put the plastic chair down like this and also my blanket here...I don’t know...it just makes me feel luxurious when I read...It’s more comfortable and the scenery is so nice here in my garden...I always feel as if I’m reading in Central Park in New York...I wish I could read a book there one day.”

Lisa uses a plastic chair as a couch in a garden. She changes something super ordinary, a plastic chair, into something altogether more special. This helps her to create a luxurious experience and steers her imagination during the time she is reading a book, making her feel as if she were reading in Central Park. In reality, it is impossible for Lisa to read a novel in Central Park every single day. However, she can use her own imagination and creativity to align the non-ordinary luxury experience with her everyday life, so that the way she reads a book allows her to experience luxury as a special escapist moment. It can be seen from Lisa that the escapist view of luxury is fundamentally grounded in consumers’ experiences and generally applies to special moments derived from past memories (childhood memories of a crystal collection), present experiences (imagination while Lisa is reading a book) and future desires (reading books in Central Park).

Overall, Lisa reveals that the luxury consumption does not seem to be predominantly motivated by the desire for status and conspicuousness. While Alex’s case focuses on the instrumental aspect of luxury as a tool for enhancing his self-concept and social status, Lisa rather values hedonic experiences of luxuries due to their ability to generate special moments associated with escape in a private context. Thus, the meanings of luxury engage with a consumption experience with high imaginative intensity and emotional involvement. To Lisa, luxury provokes an emotional involvement in a relationship in which the luxury item (the crystal collection) has become a special possession, which requires involvement in a process of continual dedication and never-ending care. Moreover, luxury consumption enables Lisa to escape from material reality, an escape which occurs or resides in her imagination. For Lisa, her crystal collection embraces escapist qualities that allow her to recapture a childhood memory. Equally, the way she reads her books allows
her to unleash her imagination and provides aspirational and escapist experiences during consumption.

4.2.3 James

James is a 21-year-old full-time science student at the University of Manchester. James is from a middle-class family. His parents are university lecturers. He lives with his family in their home in a well-to-do suburb in the northwest of England. James’ parents are quite sceptical about how he spends his money and they identify things as luxury in a different way.

“I love buying stuff like movie’s limited edition premiums. I think they’re luxury to me...but my mum doesn’t agree with it. She always says to me that it’s ridiculous...and I’m crazy to spend money on it. Well, she thinks that expensive clothing is luxury but I don’t think so.”

The narrative shows that the understanding of luxury is not entirely connected to family upbringing; it is also subject to different personal preferences, causing different notions of luxury between individuals like James and his mother. James further elaborates on his experiences and negative feelings with expensive clothes:

“My mum loves Ralph Lauren so she bought me their polo shirt. I wore it once to school and I was unhappy...I felt really really guilty, like I might offend some of my friends who might not have much money...I know luxury is still about materialism, wealth and exclusivity. For me, it’s a bit superficial to think of luxury as a tool to discriminate between the poor and rich...But I don’t like this idea, so I prefer to think of luxury as the ability to perform things...or experience something that makes me happy.”

James gets to decide what path of interpretation he takes when he is pursuing his own luxury consumption, one which is based on his lived experience. James uses his childhood experience of wearing a Ralph Lauren polo shirt to illustrate his discomfort regarding traditional associations with luxury. Instead, he links the meaning of luxury with positive emotional and experiential effects, such as the
ability to perform things and personally relevant rewards (something that makes him happy). This is also illustrated in James’ collage (Figure 13).

According to Figure 13, the right-hand side of the picture suggests relaxation, such as travelling or reading books at the beach. Additionally, the collage features the word ‘accomplish’, which suggests that James engages with a concept of luxury linked to performance and accomplishment, rather than one limited to the financial side of luxury consumption. It can be interpreted that James acknowledges the importance of luxury experience over objects; here, luxury consumption is distinct from ordinary consumption due to its experiential nature (Tynan, et al., 2009; Roper, et al., 2013).

“I think it’s all about experience…the process...or the story you have with it that makes something become luxury to you...It’s mostly the experience that you gather; it’s kind of cheesy, but I like it!”

James focuses on the totality of individual lived experiences, wherein the meanings of luxury stem from the experiences he gathers and his own feelings from
the things he does. For James, things can be regarded as luxurious because of the totality of the effort, processes, stories or experiences behind such things, which highlight the importance of incorporating an understanding of the role of practices in influencing the interpretation of the activities, objects and experiences that are viewed as luxurious. Accordingly, James has been included to illustrate a reoccurring early theme of complementary actions performed by the participants, which serve to transform ordinary activities to luxurious experiences as well as to create the meanings of luxury. James emphasises this point in the collage (Figure 13) by using a picture depicting a cinema. He describes a specific process, format or practice that has led him to consider watching movies as luxury consumption:

“I believe that watching a movie in a movie theatre is sacred…luxurious. Well, it’s about the format when you watch a movie in a theatre. It’s more of...a procedure for you to execute...you have to be silent, it has to be dark, and a big screen should be present. At home, the whole experience is completely different, not luxurious...like it is fine to eat or chat, or you can stop the movie and go to the toilet or do anything you want. So I try to create the same atmosphere as that in a theatre. That’s what I do in my house...there is no watching movies with the lights on. It allows you to be with the movie, as if you’re a part of the movie. When I’m really into the movie, I feel like I’m that character on the screen. You can’t be distracted when you’re watching a movie in a theatre...chatting is not allowed! You can’t stop the movie to go to the toilet, so you enjoy the movie in the totality of the movie experience.”

Things that might otherwise be perceived as restrictive become positively interpreted as markers of a luxurious experience. For example, the silence and darkness in the cinema complement the immediacy of watching the film; this offers a special and unique experience, encouraging personal and pleasurable engagement. The totality of this experience renders it luxurious for James. Also, James reveals a repositioning of what can be understood as luxury, in which a simple activity of everyday life (e.g., watching a movie at home) can, indeed, be a luxurious experience. In fact, he has applied his observations of the luxurious experience of
watching a movie in a cinema into an everyday experience. James creates his own experience at home that follows the same procedures/rules as those in a cinema.

Due to an atmosphere of relaxation created by the absence of disruptive practices in the cinema environment, the meaning of luxury is associated with sacredness. Sacredness (Belk et al., 1989) emerges collectively when society removes certain things from ordinary human use. In this way, the meanings of sacredness and luxury are the same, as they are both defined partly by their contrast to ordinary profane experiences. This is partially true in the case of James, as he has the ability to transfer and create the sacredness of luxuries into his everyday experiences, allowing him the time and pleasure to experience an escape from the mundanity of everyday life and enjoy a precious moment of luxury in the context of his imagination while he watches the movie.

In addition to placing a great deal of importance on his own personal gratification in consuming luxury, James also associates his home cinema (Figure 14) as luxurious via the realisation of personal achievement through the complementary practice associated with high levels of cultural capital. He reveals that his home cinema becomes his ultimate luxury, rather than going to the cinema,
as his home cinema implies his own exclusionary set of practices involving a high level of knowledge, effort, time and dedication, which contributes to his success in creating a luxurious home space.

“Watching movies, either at home or at a cinema...they’re both luxury, but I think watching movies at home becomes my ultimate luxury consumption...Going back to my idea about the word accomplish, luxury is about telling about your accomplishment. In my case, I’m pretty sure I know a lot about movies, and I can manage my time and effort to create this amazing and unique theatre at my home, so this gives me a superior status.”

James has the ability to use his creativity beyond imitating the luxury experience provided in a cinema and to become an active creator of his own enjoyable luxurious experiences by incorporating decorative lights and making efforts to create his own unique theatre. For James, the sense of superiority in conveying his luxury status in this area is derived from the practices performed to express the superiority and uniqueness of owning a personal cinema at home. This also includes the sacrifice of large amounts of time and effort in order to create his home cinema, which can therefore be seen as a symbol of achievement. Although most of the reviewed literature refers frequently to the meaning of luxury as a symbol of achievement, the definition of luxury still attaches luxury to the price of products (Mason, 1992; O’Cass and Frost, 2002; Shukla, 2008; 2010). In James’ case, the meaning of luxury gained from achievement is created when the consumption process requires elements of dedication and sacrifice from the consumer in order to convey his superior status on the basis of a high level of cultural capital.

Overall, James’ experiences point to the contemporary phenomenon of luxury consumption in which consumers can engage the dynamic meanings of luxury through the complementary actions that they perform, which serve to transform ordinary activities, such as watching movies, into luxurious experiences. In James’ case, he carries out the complementary practice of escapism when watching movies in the theatre he set up at home in order to recreate the luxurious experience of watching movies, allowing him to relate luxury to an escape from the ordinariness of
everyday life. Moreover, the creation of James’ own cinema reveals that James seems to recognise the importance of status via the realisation of personal achievement, through the complementary practices associated with high levels of cultural capital (effort, time, learning and dedication) as evidence for defining luxury status.

4.2.4 Maesa

Maesa is a 26-year-old social science postgraduate student from Thailand. She comes from a wealthy family; her parents own a public limited real-estate company in Thailand. She is now living with her family in one of the most expensive housing areas in Bangkok. Maesa works part-time as a consultant for her parent’s company. As a wealthy child, she has experienced luxury consumption in terms of luxury brands and expensive products, as her parents always bought her brand-name products, such as clothes, bags and shoes. She mentioned that luxury, to her, had become a tool to imply the position of her family in society.

“My parents bought me brand-name stuff since I was like 13 years old, so I started using expensive things at a young age...like...LV or Prada bags...or Chanel shoes and cardigans...something like that. I think luxury is a tool implying where you come from...Well, the hierarchy system still functions for Thai people and...frankly speaking, we consume luxury to say that we come from a superior family...we are in a superior position.”

It can be interpreted that Maesa’s opinions about luxury consumption are formed by her family upbringing and are consistent with status and conspicuous consumption, in which luxury is used as a tool to communicate the superior status of the owner (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; 2004). However, the findings also illustrate the interesting point that luxury consumption for Maesa is associated with the cultural beliefs in the hierarchical system and the family’s status, rather than just the individual’s status. In line with Childers and Rao (1992) and Viswanathan and Moore (2002), Thai consumers base their luxury consumption on their families in order to conform to social norms. Accordingly, the meanings of luxury need to be understood in light of where the luxury consumption takes place.
To Maesa, the meaning of luxury has become interchangeable with the idea of superiority. This also can be seen in Figure 16, given her inclusion of the word ‘superior’ in her collage; most of the pictures depict luxury as superiority in terms of social recognition, status and hierarchy, such as the picture of a pyramid, a woman who stands out from the crowd, and a woman walking on a red carpet. With this approach, the main basis of luxury is its ability to convey the owner’s status (Walley et al., 2013.)

Figure 15: Collage prepared by Maesa

During her free time, Maesa is passionate about collecting Christian Louboutin shoes and includes pictures of them on her collage (see Figure 15). Owning luxury goods is not everything; Maesa has demonstrated various actions asserting her luxury possessions in order to imply what luxury means to her. Overall, the case of Maesa is included to illustrate the early themes that participants engage with, revealing the meanings of luxury through actions related to an object they perceive or experience as luxurious (object actions).
“I love Christian Louboutin...I have lots of them and collect them. For other brands, I don’t think they’re my luxury items...I don’t know... I just feel like I don’t have a passion for them in the same way as I have with my Louboutin...and I don’t know much about them in the same way I know about Louboutin. Well, owning expensive things is not enough...I think you must have passion and adequate knowledge to be able to appreciate and consume luxury. Expensive stuff can simply imply that you’re rich, but to be able to say that you have superior status...you must be eligible for it. I am proud to say that I know lots about these high heels and have lots of passion and own lots of them”.

Maesa asserts that luxury does not infer a superior status that is identifiable from an economic perspective, as she reveals that she uses luxury to gain superior status in terms of social distinction. Although it is clear from Maesa that the possession of items is an important external tool for individuals to communicate their luxury status in relation to others (Dubois and Duquesne, 1993; Phau and Prendergast, 2000; O’Cass and Frost, 2002; Shukla, 2008), such an exceptional luxury position and status is also formed by internal components, such as her knowledge and passion. To Maesa, collecting luxuries serves as a visible support in enhancing superior status and reinforcing self-esteem, since collecting makes her feel knowledgeable and proud of herself for being an expert on a particular subject.

Moreover, Maesa experiences a self-transcendent passion for the high heels she possesses, where she is involved in the never-ending process of hunting, purchasing and taking care of her collection, all to satisfy her passion and gain cultural capital from such items.

“I think luxury is about a passion that you have for something, so I can’t stop collecting them. It’s like a mission and it becomes a ritual in my everyday life...like I have to learn about the new model. I have no idea when I’m going to stop collecting them ...I know I have plenty of them...Some of the shoes are not even my size, but I feel like I have to collect them anyway.”

The narrative shows that Maesa exhibits a high degree of passionate possessiveness when collecting luxury items. She asserts that the collection of luxury shoes has become an essential part of her everyday life in which the practice of
collecting and the collections themselves contribute to her personal lifelong quests. She further elaborates more on how she takes charge of her luxury possession on a daily basis.

“I store them carefully. I have to take care of them...I have to make sure that they're displayed nicely in my closet...make sure they're still in the best condition...and so on. As you can see, I have a nice, pretty closet for displaying them, and my mom really loves it...Well, if one day...I don’t bother to take care of them...it means they’re not my luxury items anymore.”

Figure 16: Christian Louboutin collection (source: Maesa)

The findings reveal that collecting requires Maesa to become a caretaker of luxury possessions; she does not limit herself to sorting and acquiring the collected items. According to Figure 16, Maesa arranges her collection in a wardrobe with a glass door and assumes the role of the curator of her own high-heel shoe museum. Maesa creates a relationship with the items. Collecting as a luxury happens when individuals subject the collection to continual dedication and constant care. If such a
relationship does not exist or ends, the collection of items would not be identified as a luxury anymore. Accordingly, consumer-defined luxury is defined through person-object relationships, rather than the conspicuous characteristics of expensive products.

The narrative also reveals that her display is also meant to make a good impression and obtain acceptance from her in-group members (her mother). Accordingly, the individual’s luxury consumption also becomes family consumption. This is opposed to Churchill and Moschis (1979) and Moschis (1981) who suggested that luxury consumption tends to be influenced by peers, while necessity consumption is likely to be influenced by family.

Not confined to collecting, Maesa also considers her Christian Louboutin high heels as part of her external self. She experiences luxury as the representation of resources that enable her to transform her social image. She is also more likely to behave in a certain physical way with her luxury object in order to create the look of luxury.

“I become more of a lady when I wear my Louboutins. I walk nicely and confidently as if I’m on the red carpet….So it’s not about just wearing…it’s also the way that you’re using them in order to create your luxurious look.”

It can be seen from Maesa that utilising luxury items alone does not in any way enhance the owner’s identity. Through the specific ways that Maesa behaves and transforms herself when wearing her high heels, she prefers to be identified as a classic lady to confer her external physical appearance. These findings are in agreement with Belk (1988), Vigneron and Johnson (1999; 2004), Klein and Hill (2008), and Miller (2005; 2009), who state that participants combine the symbolic significance of luxurious things with their own personal concepts and identities. Consequently, the meanings of luxury are connected to the desired traits of self-perception.

In conclusion, although Maesa generally associates her meanings of luxury in relation to the traditional concept of luxury which primarily focuses on the characteristics of luxury objects, her case also raised a major point in which the understanding of luxury cannot be completed without manifesting itself in practice.
By looking for the various object actions in which Maesa incorporates luxury objects into her everyday life, it is clear that there are important and underexposed elements in understanding the meaning of luxury from both personal and interpersonal perspectives. In Maesa’s case, the never-ending care exercised on the luxury collection also suggests that it is not only the possession of the objects but also the relationship that Maesa develops with them that gives the meaning of luxury from a consumer point of view. For an interpersonal perspective of luxury, the various mannerisms Maesa performs when wearing her luxury high heels imply that luxury is also conspicuously inconspicuous in broadcasting a desired personal identity, which is an integral part of the self.

4.2.5 Sun

Sun is a 22-year-old medical student from Chulalongkorn University. She self-identifies as being middle class. Her parents own a small medical clinic in a large province in the north-eastern part of Thailand. She is now living at her cousin’s house in Bangkok. As a medical student, she spends most of her time studying, so she does not have much time for recreation. Accordingly, she has to be efficient with the time she spends studying so she still has time for her hobbies.

Due to the limited amount of time that her parents can give to Sun, together with her busy lived experience of studying, she asserts that she has learned that time is the ultimate luxury. This can be seen in the collage she prepared (Figure 17), where Sun made time the overall theme by using picture of clocks, slogans like ‘the luxury of having time’ and ‘family matters’, and other activities involving spending time, such as cooking and yoga.
“My parents are always busy with their patients, and I’m also busy with my studying, so we don’t really have time together. For me, time is the ultimate luxury. Well, I know that...luxury goods cost money, but in theory, everyone can always earn more money, but no one can make more time...Well, it’s not only just about the limitation of time, but it’s also about indulging in a deliberate sense of luxury...So true luxury is being able to own your time, not be compelled by obligation.”

What Sun mentions about luxury and time is in line with the traditional concept of luxury, as it relates to a feeling of scarcity (Hauck and Stanforth, 2006; Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). However, Sun further mentions that the identification
of a limited amount of time as luxurious is also related to personal indulgence and non-compulsory activities. The key point to emerge from Sun’s case is that she can turn her routine activities into luxury experiences, which is consistent with James’s case. They both focus on the time and personal effort spent in creating a feeling of indulgence, personal pleasure and escape as well as communicating their superior status through having their own set of exclusionary escapist and skill-based practices. She further illustrates this point by using cooking and yoga as an example.

“I love cooking as a hobby...Cooking will be a luxury, especially the times when you don’t have to force yourself to do it. I mean, someone will have to cook every day. It’s kind of necessary in their life to cook, but that kind of cooking is not a luxury for me because I can’t find any joy in it. Luxury is not something that is necessary, but rather it’s indulgence to you...like something you want to do because it gives you pleasure, and you want to do it again and again.”

According to Sun, cooking is a luxury when the time spent is not compelled by obligation, which means that cooking is perceived as a non-compulsory act (a hobby) which gives Sun a feeling of indulgence and personal pleasure. Accordingly, a routine activity can become luxurious through certain markers or complementary practices, which facilitate its transformation into a luxury practice in consumers’ everyday lives.

In addition to spending time, Sun also mentions that personal effort serves as evidence of her individual status and self-esteem; these are additional dimensions of luxury. Sun spends some time doing yoga every evening at home after attending university. She asserts that yoga has made her superior to others because of the high level of skill required to do yoga.
“Doing yoga is very luxurious to me. There are many forms for you to achieve, so you have to sacrifice your time and effort to practise it. Compared to ordinary exercise, yoga is more difficult so it gives me...I don’t know...a better position than others who do normal exercise in their everyday lives. At least, none of my friends do yoga, so the fact that I can do yoga makes me unique and more special than them.”

The case of Sun implies that the level of luxury is associated with the level of cultural capital, which individuals have at their disposal. Just as with James, Alex and Maesa, cultural capital (Boudieu, 1984) can be considered an important element for classifying objects and acts of consumption. Individuals tend to imply their exclusivity through skills and knowledge regarding certain things or activities, such as yoga, photography, movies or brands. As such, things will become luxurious from an individual’s perspective when they feel there is a need for highly valued cultural capital resources that allow them to do, have or deal with them. Furthermore, this superiority status is not only demonstrated through the high level of cultural capital needed to perform tasks (a masterful accomplishment that is skill/knowledge-based) such as achieving difficult yoga positions; Sun also faces challenges and makes
sacrifices in terms of time spent and personal effort. Thus, luxury serves as evidence of self-esteem.

However, Sun is slightly different to the other participants as she also considers luxury as a means for building affiliations in everyday living, not only using luxuries in creating distance between individuals and enhancing their distinction from others. Sun is able to display her difficult yoga positions and poses in pictures, which she posts on her Instagram account (Figure 19). It can generally be concluded that Sun is more likely to use luxury as a tool for social communication with her group.

“I also love to post pictures of myself doing yoga. I don’t know...maybe that is my idea of luxury...to tell other people that I can achieve this difficult yoga pose. I think luxury is about social communication...telling people that you’re better than others, and I think luxury status also gives you credentials that you belong to a certain group of people you’re wish to be in. Well, on...my
Instagram...my friends and other followers realised that I am skilful at yoga. I feel like this privilege I have allows me to be a part of the group of individuals who are masters at yoga.”

As well as demonstrating her superiority through her yoga skills, Sun is also able to apply her luxury status to create membership credentials and demonstrate a sense of belonging. Sun feels privileged to have gained a social media presence on Instagram through her engagement with yoga. Therefore, most of her friends associate her with a certain group of people who are masters at yoga. Sun’s case shows that yoga may be an everyday activity to other people but it can become a luxury practice when an individual shows others how they take pleasure in life and demonstrates masterful accomplishments that are skill/knowledge-based. Thus, the individual can communicate the luxury status of doing yoga and thereby acquire a privileged status through public posting on social media.

Moreover, the interesting point that arises from Sun’s narrative is that the way in which she communicates her status is also indirectly motivated by the importance of family.

“I don’t know whether it’s cheesy or not...but it (yoga) is something that makes my mum proud of me...so I think it becomes more luxurious because...family matters! (laugh)...it’s something that enhances the esteem of my family, even though it’s indirect anyway.”

By showing off her luxury status in terms of yoga skills to a wider public, Sun also inherently boosts her own self-esteem and that of her mother. Agreeing with the case of Maesa, they equate an individual’s luxury consumption to a family’s consumption; what is considered to be real luxury is also associated with the degree to which luxury can enhance the face of a family. Accordingly, luxuries can be perceived as instrumental objects that are related to the family’s esteem and social status.

Overall, the case of Sun provides an illustration that contemporary luxury consumption has become more flexible and can be appropriated to multiple activities and purposes, allowing consumers the ability to self-define luxuries beyond the traditional viewpoint. Sun highlights an interesting point surrounding practices
related to how individuals use luxury as an instrument to display their status to others. Luxury status is not only about competing with other individuals; it also helps people to recognise which individual is superior in terms of certain aspects of life that are important to a wider society. Sun is also concerned with feeling as if she was part of a group defined by her desired attribute; thus, her luxury status can become a tool for socialisation, improving credentials for her identity or image so that Sun can belong to a certain desirable group.

4.2.6 Jack

Jack is a 20-year-old science student at Ramkhamhaeng University. He comes from a working-class background; his family owns a small agricultural business in a small province near Bangkok. Jack is now living in a student dormitory provided by the university and shares a room with four other students. He also works part-time at Starbucks in order to provide his living expenses in Bangkok.

Jack has grown up with difficulties, as his father faced a large amount of debt due to the family business. Ever since he was a child, Jack has had to help his parents take care of the farm, as well as be responsible for his homework and chores. Due to his family upbringing, Jack mentioned that, when he thinks of luxury, the first thing that comes to his mind is something very expensive which he has never experienced.

“The first thing I think of as a luxury is, well... it is a very expensive thing... and I have never experienced expensive things in my life so I’m not really into it.... I’m poor so... owning expensive stuff to imply that I’m rich is ridiculous. Well, luxury for me... it’s about being precious..., I don’t think that expensive stuff is precious to my life anyway.”

From Jack’s narrative, it can be seen that the economic aspect of luxury consumption cannot fully capture the essence of what luxury is from his perspective. In fact, he identifies luxuries based on what is perceived to be precious and realistic, and luxury comes close to his lived experience and personal background. This contrasts with Danziger (2005) and Hansen and Wänke (2011), who found that luxury is presented as more distant from the everyday experiences of individuals.
The case of Jack highlights a total set of core practices that various consumers from different backgrounds and cultures can associate with luxuries in everyday living. It can also be seen in his collage (Figure 20) that Jack has included pictures of things that he believes to be luxurious, ranging from a cup of Starbuck’s coffee and gifts, to pictures depicting lived experiences associated with luxury. The latter includes images about giving respect, gifting and the picture of a cat looking a mirror and seeing itself as a lion, thereby depicting the idea of self-esteem.

Firstly, Jack has related the meaning of luxury to gifting. He believes that gift-giving can establish and maintain social ties as well as enhance the self-esteem of the gift recipient and bring honour to the gift giver by displaying his or her ability to give a present. In line with Wong and Ahuvia (1998) and Walley et al. (2013), appropriate luxury is a reflection of the important role of gifting.
“I believe gifting is luxury. I think gifting is a really important thing in our culture... we consider gifts as a luxury no matter what the price is, because they can communicate the superiority of people who are in the process of gifting and ease social anxiety over the idea of getting and giving respectively. The fact that people think of you and give you a gift makes you feel happy, as if you’re a special and superior person because they give respect to you so you’re being treated with gifts...and the fact that you give respect to others and can give gifts to them makes you feel superior, like you and your family are well-off that you have the ability, efforts and good manners to give a gift.”

The narrative shows that gifting implies the status, and superiority of those who are in the process of gifting since the complementary practices associated with gifting in Thai culture require a high level of cultural capital such as the ability, efforts and manners in gifting (knowledge) which bring respect to individuals and honour to the family. The findings are in contrast with previous studies, such as Dubois and Laurent (1994; 1996), Wong and Ahuvia (1998) and Tsai (2005) as they have related gifts to luxury in terms of conspicuousness with regard to the wealth and superiority of the person who gives expensive gifts. In addition, studies of gifting in luxury consumption have been primarily confined to the wine sector (Chevalier and Lu, 2010; Reyneke, et al., 2011). However, the findings from Jack assert that superiority in terms of wealth is not an important element for gifting to be luxurious. In fact, it is the hedonic experience at the moment of gifting that yields the social obligation of gifting and eases social anxiety over the important matter of giving and getting respect. It can be seen from Jack’s narrative that gifting as a luxury can also provide an escapist experience and a moment of luxury during the gifting, which relates to concepts of consumer happiness and eudaimonic wellbeing. This eases social anxiety about the individual and their family’s reputation and superiority.

During the fieldwork, Jack discusses the different practices that he associates with his collection of cuddly bears, which he considers to be both a luxury and a non-luxury. Jack perceives the cuddly bears he received as a gift as luxurious ones, which tend to draw his attention and so he gives them special treatment to them.
“As I said, I consider a gift as a luxury...I think it’s precious when my friends think of me and buy these bears for me because they know I like bears. I feel very superior and feel I am being respected when I receive these gifts so I treat them special, like a little prince...As you can see, if it’s a bear I buy for myself...I just do nothing and put it here...but if it’s one which I received as a gift, I put it in a plastic bag before putting them together. It kind of shows how I really care and show respect.”

The case of Jack shows that his bear collection has become a cherished possession. He gave special treatment to these gifts; thus, luxuries are not perceived just an object, but are integrated into everyday life as a special person (a little prince) who he needs to treat with respect. This aligns with Pichler and Hemetsberger’s (2007) findings, where it was shown that consumers tend to perform intimate rituals with objects, such as hugging, holding or giving them special treatment, as a way of connecting with their objects of devotion. It can be seen that luxury is different from an ordinary experience because of the practical way (object actions) in which luxuries require continual respectful/special treatment from individuals in everyday lives, which is very different from the way in which ordinary products are treated. Accordingly, it highlights the main argument of the study that luxury is the result of practices.
Moreover, Jack also mentions that he sees a cup of Starbuck’s coffee as a luxury item. Just as with Alex, the confident feeling and the mannerisms he performs when he holds a Starbuck’s cup transform him into a true professional.

“It’s kind of common for luxury consumption. You are what you consume basically. I love to drink Starbuck’s. It’s not about the coffee, it’s more about the image when I hold a cup of Starbuck’s…People will think that I’m one of those professional people, as I desire to be. By holding this cup, my image has changed from the ordinary me…I like the feeling when I hold a cup of Starbuck’s and bring it to the class…I feel like…yay, look at me…and I act more confident when I hold this cup, you know, like I’ve got the image…I feel more like I become more of a professional as my parents wish for, not a normal student anymore…that’s it.”

Jack views luxury (a cup of Starbuck’s coffee) as a source of self-transformation. In turn, this has enabled him to depict an ideal self, especially when the luxury item is in use. It is not just what Jack consumes that transforms him, as previously mentioned by Hoppe et al. (2009); he also seems to absorb and transform luxury into an integral part of himself, linking luxury to self-appreciation and a critical awareness of the individual’s corporeality. However, Jack has pointed out a different aspect from Alex. While they both agree on the use of luxuries in broadcasting their idealised self as being professional, Jack tends to integrate in-group members, particularly his family, deeply into the structure of the integral self. In contrast, Alex’s meanings of luxury are quite intimate; they are inner-directed resources that enhance the independent idealised self. On the other hand, Jack asserts meanings to luxuries that are more social-oriented than those stated by Alex; for the former, luxury serves as a social signal in heightening the interdependent idealised self.

Overall, Jack demonstrates a variety of practices ranging from object actions to complementary actions in order to satisfy both personal and instrumental dimensions of luxury consumption. On a cross-cultural level, the case of Jack contrasts with those of James, Alex and Lisa, as Jack’s understanding of luxury is closely linked to the family. Jack demonstrates concerns about the social obligation
of gifting, as he is afraid of being unable to promote the face of the family through gifting as a luxury consumption ritual. Although Jack and Alex’s practices seem to be similar (as they both use luxuries for self-transformation into the idealised self), the motivation behind the construction of the self is somewhat different. It can be seen from Jack that the traditional concept of luxury fails to incorporate the cultural and emotional complexity of luxury consumption, which means there is a risk of rendering consumers as passive and primarily homogeneous entities in the act of interpretation.

The examples of the above six illustrative case studies also help to illustrate how each step of data analysis, explained in section 3.9.1 in Chapter 3, were executed. To clarify, after reading each participants’ individual narratives (Steps 1 and 2), one can see that each participant associated their meanings of luxury, as seen in their collages, with something that could range from items traditionally associated with luxury (such as diamonds and expensive or brand-names products) to simple activities related to personal lived experiences (such as watching movies, cooking, or even reading). From the different reflections from the perspectives of individually lived experiences (e.g. the consumers’ life circumstances and experiences of luxury), findings from interviews also reveal that the various meanings of luxury among participants can be understood as a consequence of practices in which the story, processes, formats or actions within everyday lived experiences induce individuals to consider something luxurious.

To draw out early themes between the participants, a second phase occurred in the data analysis. This was an intra-case analysis of individual experiences of luxury consumption practices, together with an inter-case analysis to look for common storylines, as well as moving across individual narratives (Step 3) and both stages of interviews and fieldwork (Step 4). Although the practices found in the case studies were fairly individually motivated and were based on personal preferences and identities, there were specific cultural issues that tended to give a larger picture of the different interpretations of luxury across the Thai and British participants. While the Thai participants are likely to emphasise luxuries as instrumental family resources related to the family’s esteem and social status due to cultural beliefs about
family and hierarchy, the British participants showed that their consumption of luxuries was quite intimate and was motivated by their personal preferences, tastes, abilities and values, rather than by the aspirations prevalent in society. For example, Maesa displays her Christian Louboutin collection in order to obtain acceptance from her family member. On the other hand, Lisa aims to arrange her crystal collection in order to allow an escape to her childhood memories. Or while Alex asserts his distinction and luxury status through his photography skills, Sun tends to show off her luxury status as yoga skills in order to communicate her superior to others, to create membership credentials, and to boost her own self-esteem and that of her mother.

Aside from the differences in understandings of luxury across the Thai and British participants, common ways in which participants associated with luxury were also identified. Early themes, such as the practices with luxury objects and the practices of luxury, the personal purposes of practices (pleasure, experiences, aspirations etc.) and the instrumental purposes of practices (status, self-identity etc.) were identified across all participants. As evidenced through interviews and fieldwork, Lisa, Maesa and Jack instilled a sense of care into their perceived luxury items (the practices with luxury objects); James and Sun carried out complementary practices in order to turn their routine and ordinary activities into luxurious experiences (the practices of luxury); Lisa, James and Sun valued their hedonic experiences with luxury owing to its ability to generate special moments (the personal purposes of practices); and Alex and Maesa merged luxuries with themselves in order to broadcast their self-image as well as to communicate their superior status to others (the instrumental purposes of practices).

Overall, in order to capture the essential dimensions common to all participants (Step 5) and facilitate a shared understanding of cross-cultural luxury consumption, there was a need for the study to look first at the collective ways in which consumers from two distinct cultures incorporated luxury into their everyday lives. The study was then able to examine an underexposed element of luxury where its meanings can be framed as routine in nature. To give the reader a holistic picture of how luxury consumption is practised in everyday domestic life across cultures, as
well as to develop the final themes emerging from the findings, a conceptual framework is presented in the following section.

4.3 Conceptual Framework Describing Everyday Luxury Consumption Practices in a Cross-cultural Context

Rather than solely focusing on a traditional view of luxury, consumers also have the ability to transfer and incorporate self-defined luxuries into their everyday lives. Accordingly, the meaning of luxury is becoming more flexible, unprecedented and appropriate for everyday use. By viewing luxury in terms of its versatile applicability, it has become a crucial part of the daily lives of consumers. Therefore, the understanding of the contemporary meaning of luxury would not be complete without discussing how consumers engage with luxury through everyday practices.

![Conceptual framework describing everyday luxury consumption practices](image)

Figure 22: Conceptual framework describing everyday luxury consumption practices

A conceptual framework (Figure 22) is presented, which integrates the major themes and identifies the common practices that consumers from different backgrounds and cultures associate with luxury consumption and their culturally shared meanings of luxury. This framework will be outlined in the following sections.
4.3.1 Structure and Purpose of Practice

The selected case studies illustrate the early themes to which the participants engage with the meanings of luxury through actions related to an object they perceive or experience as luxurious (object actions) and through specific arrays of practices, which serve to create luxurious experiences (complementary actions). For instance, Lisa and Maesa take special care of items they perceive as luxurious; they collect luxury items and treat their collections with respect. James also carries out complementary practices when watching movies in the cinema he set up at home, in order to recreate the luxurious experience of watching movies. Equally, Sun asserted that yoga could be luxurious through the complementary practice of putting in the effort, time and dedication and via the realisation of personal achievement through a high level of cultural capital. This is in line with the findings of Schatzki (1996) and Warde (2005), who broadly distinguished the structure of practices as being either integrative or dispersed. Integrative practices refer to specific acts found within specific fields of consumption. This type of structure is defined as consisting of a set of acceptable ends, orders, uses of objects (object actions) and emotions that direct the practices and embed them in a particular context (Schatzki, 2002). Dispersed practices, on the other hand, are practices that can take place across different domains or subfields that accompany individual lived experiences (complementary actions) (Schatzki, 1996).

The reasons behind the need to engage in consumption practices related to luxury are also highlighted as the early themes in the narratives. For example, Alex’s luxury consumption practices involve both personal and instrumental aspects. That is, his engagement with nature and photography provides a way of fulfilling his passion for nature as well as transforming his inner self-concept, rather than showing off his expensive professional camera simply to imply his social status. It is widely acknowledged that luxury possesses two aspects: a social aspect and a personal aspect (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; 2004; Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). In literature, luxury consumption plays an important role as a means of creating, sustaining, and enhancing interpersonal relations as well as achieving personal gratification because it holds the promise of an improved social position (Dubois and
Duquesne, 1993; Phau and Prendergast, 2000). Although consumption undoubtedly contributes to enhancing social relations, most studies focusing on luxury consumption have overlooked the larger role of this invisible aspect of consumption and its dynamic role in everyday experiences. Overall, the findings reveal that interpretations of luxury consumption go beyond the personal aspect to some further ends.

The early themes concerning the structure of practices and their purpose are the primary conceptual ideas that form the framework describing everyday luxury consumption practices as well as the development of the final themes of the framework. These two conceptual ideas are also in line with Holt’s (1995) and Cheetham and McEachern’s (2013) typology of consumption practices. Their framework is based on two basic concepts of consumption: the structure of consumption versus its purpose. Warde (2005) supported the same differentiation. He agreed that although practices are difficult to separate, they could be broadly categorised on the basis of their use (structure of consumption) and effects (purpose of consumption). The framework emerged fundamentally from the findings, even though the researcher has been influenced by previous academics such as Holt (1995), Warde (2005), and Cheetham and McEachern (2013). In fact, there is a primary significant point of difference from Holt’s and Cheetham and McEachern’s work. While both Holt (1995) and Cheetham and McEachern (2013) place an emphasis on consumption as a form of social action, the case studies show that luxury is a contestable and fluid concept that extends the understandings of contemporary luxury consumption to incorporate the more mundane and routine activities in everyday life.

As the logic of structure of practices should be evaluated relative to the type of situations (de Certeau, 1984), everyday luxury consumption should be viewed as a form of both mundane and social actions in nature. Accordingly, the findings inform a different point of view from that of Holt (1995) and of Cheetham and McEachern (2013) by arguing that the structure of luxury consumption practices does not simply represent consumption object actions and interpersonal actions to which the consumption objects are subjected. According to the case studies, the meaning of
luxury is the outcome of practices, and it involves the totality of consumer activities and experiences. Thus, this study views consumption practices in a variety of ways that consist not only of social actions but also of mundane performances in which consumers and their competencies co-construct meaning with the consumption object (products, services, experiences). As such, object actions and complementary actions are considered suitable for reflecting both mundane and collective aspects of everyday luxury consumption practices. While object actions address a collective understanding of the uses of objects and of the emotions that direct particular practices in our social lives, complementary actions are likely to be dispersed across different subfields in which the routine and mundane are central aspects.

4.3.2 Metaphors for Luxury Consumption Practices

With regard to the two wider basic conceptual distinctions – the structure of consumption and its purpose – the framework proposes four distinct metaphors or the final themes for luxury consumption practices, which reveal the role of the luxury in everyday life. Accordingly, the conceptual framework proposed in this study categorises the practices by relating the consumers’ total set of actions to each theme found in the data analysis. Each theme, therefore, contains elements that facilitate the classification of consumption practices. Four themes reflecting the four main metaphors of everyday luxury consumption practices are proposed: (1) status-based practice, (2) self-transformation practice, (3) caretaker practice, and (4) escapist practice. It should be noted that several consumption practices might overlap; it is not clear to which metaphor they belong, since some elements of practices can straddle the metaphors (Shove et al., 2012).

Overall, the four main metaphors of everyday luxury consumption practices represent a total set of core practices that various consumers from different backgrounds and cultures can associate with luxuries in everyday living. This helps us to understand the shared meanings of luxury in a cross-cultural context. The data analysis for each theme of practices taps into how practice ‘exists’ and ‘lives’ in the narratives. By focusing on Schatzki’s (1996) ontology of practices, everyday luxury consumption practices have been analysed as an organised nexus of actions in the sense that the actions are linked (or organised) through particular principles of
understanding (conceptual/practical), teleo-affectivity (a linking of ends, means and moods appropriate to a particular practice), as well as embedded rules, principles and instructions. Moreover, the meanings of luxury are analysed based on the co-construction process between consumers and consumption objects, where consumers integrate salient meanings, consumption objects, and competencies within the realm of consumption practices (Arsel and Bean, 2013). In the following section, each final theme will be explained in more detail drawing on data from the other participants. Details of additional participants are found in Table 5 in Chapter 3.

4.4 Theme 1: Caretaker Practice

The caretaker practice refers to consumers’ tendency to imbue objects they perceive as luxurious with emotions and feelings, employing themselves as ‘caretakers’. Within this role, they perform caring responsibilities and treat items with affection and respect. According to the illustrative cases, it can be seen how passion, personal values and lived experiences drive Maesa and Lisa to become dedicated caretakers of their luxury possessions. Lisa treats her luxury possession (a crystal collection) with respect by displaying it nicely and keeping it close in her personal space (bedroom) due to a fear of separation. Maesa also takes good care of her luxury items (a high-heel shoe collection) with never-ending care and passion by keeping them safe and displaying them as if there were in a museum. The overall analysis of the act of caretaker practice is presented in Table 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of actions</th>
<th>Caretaker practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principles of understanding (conceptual/practical).</td>
<td>Luxury as a cherished possession needs to be treated with never-ending dedication and constant care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teoleology (ends and purpose) and affectivity (beliefs, emotions and moods).</td>
<td>To fulfil a self-transcendent passion, and to ease a fear of inappropriate use and separation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded rules and instructions.</td>
<td>Collecting and special treatment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Elements of actions: the caretaker practice
4.4.1 Conceptual and Practical Understandings of Caretaker Practice

The prevalence of caretaker practices is evident when the participants consider an item to be luxurious. This highlights the nature of consumer-perceived luxury as being related to the need to possess or treat something with affection and care. In fact, it has been found that the meaning of luxury includes strong personal feelings like pleasure, trust, respect or fear of loss and separation, all of which involve the participants’ emotional responses driving them to become the caretakers of the luxury items they possess.

“I can tell you I won’t care…I mean if it’s just an ordinary stuff…Well, I religiously collect bottles of perfumes and they’re like…my life savers…my best friends” (Charlotte, 19 years old, UK female).

Charlotte highlights the fact that luxury consumption tends to direct participants’ emotions and feelings towards consumption objects. While Charlotte asserts a weak emotional attachment to ordinary items (as she mentions that she does not care about them), she has a strong emotional attachment to her perfumes, a feeling of trust which has turned them into cherished possessions in her everyday life. The understanding of luxury as related to the notion of cherished possessions generates a conceptual and practical understanding of caretaker practices. The process whereby luxury items become cherished possessions steers a kind of relationship that provokes the participants to devise caretaker practices in order to look after/take charge of their luxury possession, thereby enabling them to obtain meanings from these items. As Byrd puts it:

“One thing that makes it easy to identify whether an item is a luxury for me is my feeling after I’ve got the item. For me, if I feel like I have to take care of this item, it’s a luxury item…it’s so precious and special to me. Then, I have to look after it. I collect Marvel comics. Well, it’s not an expensive thing, but it’s luxurious to me as I have been reading them since I was young, so I feel really engaged with them. They are very special to me. Regarding other comics, I don’t really have an intention to collect them, I just read them and that’s all. But the Marvels, I feel like I need to keep them properly. I am keen to have
them as a collection, so it’s like a lifelong quest for me to look after these comics and I can’t stop doing it” (Byrd, 25 years old, Thai male).

As Byrd clarifies, it is not just the price of the product that makes them luxurious; rather, it is the relationship he develops with such items that help to define them as luxuries. Due to the lived experience he has with reading comics and the strong feeling of personal engagement and passion, Byrd has obligated to become a caretaker who collects, watches over and takes good care of his Marvel comics’ collection. Accordingly, taking care of luxury items becomes a lifelong quest.

Through caretaker practices, Byrd and Charlotte can integrate the meaning of luxury into their daily lives by attaching meaning and allocating space to these items that go beyond the mere physical attributes or the brands of the items. For example, Charlotte associates the role of luxury in everyday lives as a life-saver and a best friend while Byrd equates his luxury possession to a never-ending quest in his everyday life. Overall, caretaker practices infer that luxury becomes a special/cherished possession that consumers need to treat with care in everyday life. The findings suggest that luxury consists of person-object relationships and is not simply defined by the characteristic of products being expensive or branded, as was claimed in previous studies (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; 2004; Meffert and Lasslop, 2003; Wiedmann, et al., 2007; Kapferer and Bastien, 2009; Heine, 2011).

4.4.2 Teleo-affectivity, Rules and Instructions of Caretaker Practice

There are many ways in which the participants can look after their luxury possessions and adopt different meanings of luxury in everyday life. In order to take care of their luxury possessions, there are two broader instructions on how the participants can perform caretaker practices in domestic life: collecting or subjecting such items to some form of special treatment.

It has been found that collecting is one of the most common actions exercised on items perceived or experienced as being luxurious. However, the findings also reveal that the practice of collecting requires the participants to become caretakers of their luxury possessions; this goes beyond the sorting and acquisition of collected items mentioned by Belk (1995b).
“I collect DVDs on ballet performance...those of Mariinsky Ballet, Royal Ballet...and stuff like that. I arrange them nicely in the cupboard. Well I feel a little bit, you know, how do you say, it’s a passion and requires lots of intention and care that I can manage to get all of them, so the whole collection become luxury possession to me. They become part of life...I don’t know when I’m going to stop collecting them...I just feel like I have to do it...it’s my duty to collect this stuff...If I stop collecting, I guess it means that I get bored with this stuff and they are no longer luxuries to me anymore” (Chloe, 27 years old, UK female).

Apart from sorting and acquisition, Chloe also engages in developing person-objection relationships with her ballet performance DVDs where she subjects the collection to continual dedication and constant care, such as arranging the collection so it is displayed nicely and the continual dedication towards collecting. This finding is in line with those from Charlotte and Byrd, who consider their practice of collecting as ‘religiously collecting’ and a ‘long-life quest’. It is not the individual item, but the notion (and associated practices) of the collection that gives the meaning of luxury to consumers. In this regard, the meanings of luxury are the products of practice, the result of a never-ending dedication and care for the collection. If such a relationship did not exist or came to an end, the collections or items would no longer be identified as luxurious. Moreover, participants assert a strong feeling of passion for collecting, which becomes a teleo-affective dimension of the act of collecting. Unlike Belk’s (1995b) findings, this reveals that the participants do not arrange luxury items simply to display the financial aspects of luxury consumption but also to fulfil a self-transcendental passion for the objects that they possess.

Besides collecting, another caretaker practice adopted is giving special treatment to cherished objects. When luxury items become cherished possessions, the participants give them special treatment, which is very different from what happens during ordinary consumption.
“Well... if it’s not a luxury product, it will be just a thing for me. But if this thing is a luxury item for me, I will feel more engaged with it, bond with it... For example, my luxury handbag is not just a bag, it goes beyond that... it is my little baby. I have to take care of it... I carry my bag gently and firmly like when you hold a little baby... I even put a plastic bag inside my luxury handbag; in case it rains, I can put my luxury bag in the plastic bag so it will be safe” (Emily, 19 years old, UK female).

“For my luxury clothes... They are like my treasure... my dear friend. So I try to make them look nice in my closet... I hang them up even though they are T-shirts... and I have to make sure that they’re kept appropriately, not mixing with the other clothes so they’re with me all safe within my closet... Well, If they are an ordinary clothes, I’ll just fold them” (Best, 18 years old, Thai male).

Both Emily and Best show a high level of involvement and devotion in the special treatment they give items, which they believe are luxuries. It is found that the participants subject the objects to intimate rituals and give them special treatment as a way of connecting with the objects. For example, Emily performs specific intimate rituals with the bag; she carefully carries the bag, treats it as if she was holding a baby, and has a plastic bag to keep it safe from the rain. Equally, Best treats his luxury clothes in a special way: he hangs them up nicely and makes sure that the storage place is appropriate and safe, almost as if the clothes are treasure. Accordingly, the aforementioned luxuries become akin to special people (such as a family member, a dear friend, or even a baby) who need to be treated with care.

Moreover, a strong feeling of respect and the fear of inappropriate use and separation are clearly presented in Emily and Best’s narratives as the main tele-affective dimension of their act of special treatment. Unlike Bauer et al. (2011) and Heine (2011) it is not only the physical characteristics of the product material or the high price that determine the treatment to luxury possessions; the participants give special treatment to the luxury items because of feelings of respect, fear and dedication. Accordingly, luxury consumption compels the participants to enter into a
kind of relationship which transcends sheer materialism, one in which the sense of care is central to luxury consumption practices.

As well as having or owning luxury products, the participants tend to focus on making sense of the existence of luxury possessions in their everyday lives. They do so through caretaking in order to respond to their need for emotional bonding with the luxury item and to look after products they perceive to be luxurious. In this way, they gain meaning from the luxury item, which makes it a crucial part of their everyday lives. Through the relationships they have with luxury items as caretakers, luxury is not necessarily perceived as an unnecessary consumption object. Although consumers’ survival does not depend on these luxuries, it can be seen from the findings that, emotionally speaking, luxuries are rather crucial to their lives on a regular basis, in which luxuries require the owners’ continual dedication to, and constant caretaking of the items in everyday life.

4.4.3 Caretaker Practice and the Meanings of Luxury

![Diagram of Caretaker Practice and the Meanings of Luxury]

Figure 23: Caretaker Practice and the Meanings of Luxury
Caretaker practices have shown that luxury is defined through person-object relationships, in which the participants show self-transcendental passion, trust and respect for the objects that they possess. Accordingly, it can be inferred that the meanings of luxury are subject to such feelings. The findings show that the participants have entered into a kind of relationship, which transcends sheer materialism; this means that the luxury items have become more than just objects in the participants’ lives. These items assume the roles of friends, lifetime partners, family members or even a personal quest, all of which require the participants’ continual dedication and never-ending care. If such dedication and care did not exist or came to an end, the meanings of luxury would no longer be identified.

4.5 Theme 2: Escapist Practice

The escapist practice refers to the psychological phenomenon whereby a consumer engages in the experience of luxury consumption with high imaginative intensity. In this way, luxury consumption becomes an escape from material reality. Within this dimension, luxury consumption is structured in the imagination. Here, the consumers can perform complementary actions, allowing them to escape from the ordinariness of everyday life and enjoy a precious moment of luxury in the context of their imaginations. For example, James has created an authentic cinematic experience at home, following similar procedures and rules to those experienced when viewing films in a cinema. The practices allow James to transform the everyday home movie experience into something that more fully drives his imagination. Meanwhile, Jack asserts that gifting as luxury can provide an escapist experience; the moment of gifting helps him escape from social anxiety about the reputation and superiority of an individual and his family in order to enjoy precious moment of luxury, which is related to happiness, wellbeing and eudemonism. Table 9 summarises the analysis of the act of escapist practice.
Elements of actions: the escapist practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of actions</th>
<th>Escapist practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principles of understanding (conceptual/practical).</td>
<td>Luxury as a special moment that aids the escape from mundanity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teleology (ends and purpose) and affectivity (beliefs, emotions and moods).</td>
<td>To enjoy a precious moment from the past, to imaginatively satisfy yearning for the future, and to experience the enjoyment of time and the present consumption to its fullest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded rules and instructions.</td>
<td>Reminiscing, appreciating, daydreaming, prolonging the experience and removing distracting elements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Elements of actions: the escapist practice

4.5.1 Conceptual and Practical Understandings of Escapist Practice

Apart from the materiality of owning or having luxury items, luxury consumption also involves high-intensity involvement during the consumption experience. As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, individuals’ lived experiences are key to identifying things as luxurious. This demonstrates that the participants’ own meanings of luxury have extended beyond the particular experience based on material ownership to include a more experiential nature of luxury that is lived in consumers’ everyday lives. The findings show that one of the main characteristics of a luxury consumption experience is that it has an escapist quality that transforms common practices in everyday domestic life and allows people to experience special moments.

“Novels can be luxurious to me when I read them, it makes me escape from my daily life like...I am really into the story; I can’t hear anything else...just me and my novel. And that’s the special moment in my everyday life” (Mike, 24 years old, UK male).

“I think the rain shower is a luxury to me. Not only because of the design...but it’s about the moment that I take a shower perhaps. Like...when the water from the rain shower falls on my head...I only hear the sound of water and it makes me feel like I’m actually alone with myself...it gives me a moment of escape from my busy reality” (Kate, 22 years old, Thai female).
Both Mike and Kate illustrate that consumers value the luxury experience as a ‘special moment’ or ‘the moment of luxury’, which generates the conceptual and practical understanding of the escapist practice. Moments of luxury enable experiences of something extraordinary in ordinary life. The act of the escapist practice requires that consumers involve themselves in an act of imagination, which functions as a driving force aiding the escape from mundanity. For example, it is the way in which Mike imaginatively immerses himself into the story while reading or Kate’s appreciation for time alone and the sound of water when showering, causing a novel or a rain shower to become luxury items, since these imaginative activities are complementary practices in providing escapist experiences during consumption. Accordingly, their luxury consumption experience does not exist only in material reality through the actual use of such items (reading novel or showering); the experiences are also constructed in the imagination as a moment of luxury.

In this respect, luxury embodies a unique practice of escapism in nature, which can transform common routines, activities or ordinary things into special moments. The escapist practice reveals that luxury is different from ordinary consumption due to the experiential nature of luxury as an escapist moment. Luxury allows consumers to experience something extraordinary in their routine lives, to escape from the banality of everyday life and enjoy a precious moment of indulgence in their imaginations.

4.5.2 Teleo-affectivity, Rules and Instructions of Escapist Practice

By performing escapist practices, the participants have the unique ability to generate special moments as luxurious experiences. The instructions as to how the participants assert imaginative activities in rendering their moment of luxury are associated with learning from the past and present experiences of consumption, together with anticipation for the future, all of which lead to different meanings of luxury.

Some participants are able to enjoy moments of luxury in their daily lives by recalling memorable and precious past experiences or events. The luxury experiences also feed into consumers’ memories, where lived experiences or events that seem to be precious and unforgettable are considered luxurious experiences.
“Luxury is about an experience that happens once. Like...when you travel or go to a concert; the particular experiences happen only once. I mean the memories will never be the same...you know...it’s unique...precious and happens just once. You might go to attend the same concert band or travel to the same place, but the experience each time will be different. I like to recall these things 'cos I know these experiences will never occur again. It has taken place already...I put my train tickets, concert tickets and pictures from my travels on the wall in my bedroom. When I look at them, I can recall my memories about them. These memories are precious to me; they’re unforgettable experiences to me” (Natasha, 24 years old, UK female).

“I can’t travel back in time so memories are precious to me especially those that matter to my life...so time is the limited asset as luxury. I have the collection of magnets of movies I watched in a cinema with my high school friends. I didn’t realise that they are precious to me until I looked back at them and realised that I actually don’t have a chance to experiences these things again. So, every time I look at them, they remind me of my memorable past experiences with my friends...like I can escape back to that time again by seeing those things” (Boat, 21 years old, Thai male).

Luxuries are valuable to consumers because of their scarce availability, which is in agreement with Lynn (1991) and Pantzalis (1995). The scarce availability of luxuries is also reflected in both Natasha and Boat’s narratives, since they associate luxury with the limitation and rarity of time and experience. The personal desire to enjoy the precious memories from the past can be considered the teleo-affective principle that emotionally guides the purpose of their escapist practices. However, the excerpts extend the understanding of the rarity dimension of luxury, as the scarcity of luxury can go beyond its availability. In the narratives, both Natasha and Boat consider particular lived experiences or events as valuable and as precious, owing to the impossibility of experiencing them exactly as they were in the past. For example, travelling, going to concerts, or experiences with friends are considered luxurious experiences by the participants because they are unable to encounter/recreate the exact same experiences with the same people, time,
environment or situations. These constraints contribute to the value of experiences so they become more memorable to the participants; they are likely to recall those luxury experiences again through an imaginative task like reminiscence in order to escape from their mundane daily lives and enjoy a precious moment of luxury from the past. Accordingly, the rarity of luxury is integrated into everyday lived experiences and also influenced by consumers’ judgment of the experiences and their inability to recreate such experiences.

Apart from focusing on the non-present and learning from the past, consumers also anticipate and plan for the future (Jenkins et al., 2011). For some of the participants, luxury is a means of daydreaming in everyday domestic life. Therefore, the participants are likely to view luxury as the source of either personal inspiration or aspiration, that triggers an escape from reality and enables them to enjoy a precious moment of daydreaming.

“I associate luxury with art…maybe because I’m an artist, so art seems to be the core of my life. So I put pictures of the great art in my bedroom. It’s like I’m living with the great artists that inspire me. They are luxury in a way that these pieces of art influence, move, guide or inspire me. By looking at them each day, I appreciate them...like I’m really into them. I learn different things about life. I don’t know how to explain...but when I see these arts...the way or colour they paint...from the little details to the whole picture...they give me some hints for my own art works and the way a successful artist should be” (Samuel, 24 years old, UK male).

“I always want to travel around the world... Well, this is about my daydreaming... I believe luxury is about having the ability to seek or attain something you dream of...I wish I could travel to these beautiful places. It would be amazing and the experience will be, of course, luxurious... This is what luxury means to me ... it’s about your aspirations and dreams... Now I might not have an opportunity to visit these places, but just dreaming that I was there...kind of gives me a moment of luxury.” (May, 26 years old, Thai female).
The act of escapist practice is also related to imaginative tasks like daydreaming and appreciation. As a teleo-affective presence in escapist practice, consumers tend to associate emotions, feelings and personal desire and appreciation with luxury, in order to imaginatively satisfy a yearning for the future. The findings show that Samuel sees great artworks as luxurious and a source of personal inspiration. Through his daydreaming and art appreciation, Samuel imaginatively escapes into the world of art, gains inspiration for his own art, and dreams of being an accomplished artist. Alternatively, luxury plays a role in personal aspiration. May sees traveling as luxurious and a source of personal aspiration, and she appreciates and daydreams about travelling around the world, which triggers an escape from reality. Both Samuel and May illustrate that their luxury appreciation is not simply attached to the beauty and design of luxury brands (Gistri, et al., 2009; Kapferer and Bastien, 2009; Heine, 2011). Instead, the appreciation stems from either a personal inspiration or aspiration which a consumer has in his/her life, where luxury and its appreciation in practice serves as a dream or a desirable entity which he/she appreciates, yearns for and anticipates in the future.

Moreover, luxury can be consumed during a moment of imagination in the present. Escapist practices reveal that the imaginary luxury experience is highly reliant on time, especially in terms of how the participants make use of time in order to create a luxury experience.

“I think...I also eat slowly to make the food I am eating become more luxurious. Like...I want to enjoy the food for as long as I can. You can feel more with the food like...it's popping in your head...like well now, the steak that I'm slowly chewing is melting onto my tongue and the beef juice is filling in my mouth the same time. I can't actually see the steak in my mouth...but I can feel...imagine about it when eat slowly” (Oat, 21 years old, Thai male).

Oat deliberately prolongs the experience through slow eating, allowing him the time to enjoy the food in order to trigger his imagination. The enjoyment of time thus becomes the important element of the teleo-affective dimension of escapist practice, wherein the amount and quality of the time spent helps to render an imaginary luxury experience. In contrast, consider a snatched lunchtime snack: such
rush experiences might not allow consumers time to provoke any further imaginative acts and thus the meal will not render a luxury experience in the same way as slow eating.

Moreover, by slowly eating the food, Oat can stimulate his imagination with the foods being consumed. Imagining the beef melting in his mouth suggests that the food is cooked to his taste, which drives the enjoyment of an imaginary luxury experience to its fullest. The narrative from Mike (at the beginning of the section 4.5.1) asserts the same idea. Mike mentions that he cannot hear anything while he is reading a novel, which allows him to fully escape into another world. Both Oat and Mike give instructions on how the quality of time affects the creation of imaginary luxury experiences. It can be seen from the findings that the participants focus when there are not many thoughts and ideas in their minds and when they are removed from a distracting environment during the time of consumption; this allows them the fullest experience of escape.

When luxury is fully consumed, it can be used to escape from material reality because the consumption affects thoughts, feelings and other structures in the imagination. The narratives show that luxury plays a major role in driving the imagination of individuals, which uncovers an underexposed element of luxury in the previous literature. According to earlier studies, luxury consumption is different from ordinary consumption because it involves a large degree of conspicuousness; luxury is consumed for social recognition and is used as a tool for enforcing social stratification (Veblen, 1902; Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; 2004; O’Cass and Frost, 2002; Shukla, 2008; 2010). However, escapist practice reveals that luxury consumption is distinct from non-luxury consumption in the sense that luxury consumption is also consumed in a moment of imagination and not just in material reality.

Overall, these findings depict the escapist view of luxury, which is fundamentally rooted in consumers’ experiences. With respect to this, consumers consider luxury to be the driving force that aids the escape from mundanity experienced on a daily basis. This generally applies to special and significant moments derived from past memories, present experiences and future desires.
4.5.3 Escapist Practice and the Meanings of Luxury

Luxury, from a consumer’s perspective, is not characterised by boldly exhibiting products and brands but rather constitutes exceptionally valuable and personal moments of luxury in everyday life. It is the experience of something extraordinary in ordinary life. This results in deep feelings of pleasure and harmony. Escapist practice drives luxury experiences to incorporate intrinsic and personal effects, where luxury is equated to the joy of living and refers to pleasurable feelings derived from the escape, such as peace, joy, relaxation, dream and felicity. In that sense, the concept of luxury is similar to the concepts of consumer happiness and eudemonism (Bauer et al., 2008).

Figure 24: Escapist Practice and the Meanings of Luxury
4.6 Theme 3: Self-transformation Practice

The self-transformation practice refers to how consumers acquire and manipulate the meanings of luxury in order to integrate them as part of their identity. Luxury items, therefore, serve as instruments for enhancing their self-concept and achieving self-transformation. Consumers subject their luxury items to symbolic/physical actions to acquire and manipulate their meanings of luxury. In Alex’s case, the way in which he holds his camera and acts cool while taking pictures creates a self-concept that he is a professional and is cool. For Maesa, the specific way in which she behaves when wearing her high heels facilitates her self-perceived transformation into a ‘classy lady’. The overall analysis on the act of self-transformation practice is provided in Table 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of actions</th>
<th>Self-transformation practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principles of understanding (conceptual/practical).</td>
<td>Luxury as the enhancement of the idealised self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teleology (ends and purpose) and affectivity (beliefs, emotions and moods).</td>
<td>To achieve the look of luxury or a desired self-image (external self), and to incorporate luxury into the integral image (internal self).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded rules and instructions.</td>
<td>Symbolic and physical actions on luxury possession and the indulgence of luxury in relation to self-appreciation and acceptance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Elements of actions: the self-transformation practice

4.6.1 Conceptual and Practical Understandings of Self-transformation Practice

Participants experience luxury as the representation of resources that mainly comprise significant and substantial signals that enable the participants to clearly identify and define themselves. The findings are in line with many scholars (Johnson, 1999; Holt, 1995; Vigneron, 2004; Klein and Hill 2008; Miller, 2005; 2009) as they have found that luxury consumption can sustain and support customers during their personal development. As Best put it:

“When I wear my suit and tux, I guess it’s the magic of luxury...I feel like I become more of a gentleman...so I kind of talk nice...walk nice with it...like it
can transform you into a better version...ideal version of you” (Best, 18 years old, Thai male).

The enhancement of the self becomes an essential element in the conceptual and practical understandings of the narratives with respect to self-transformation practice. The act of self-transformation practice engages with the realisation and understanding of the self; thus, one will behave and feel differently based on what one consumes. By consuming luxuries, Best can achieve his idealised self by turning luxury (suit and tuxedo) into a part of his identity, a transformation of the self into a gentleman, an identity that is in agreement with his corporeality. Best’s excerpt also reveals that his self-transformation practice is associated with various different mannerisms (talking and walking properly) when using the luxury items in order to integrate luxury as a part of his identity. It has been found that the different mannerisms that consumers adopt when consuming luxury items can be either symbolic or physical actions:

“The main feeling is that it is so much better when I'm surrounded by people or by myself. It’s kind of a positive and special feeling. When I carry my luxury bag (Gucci), it makes me feel like I'm a successful lady...smart and professional...as I wish to be. I am like...chin up every time when I carry my bag...and I hold my bag firmly with pride...So I can become someone who I wish to be in everyday live by just using it” (Emily, 19 years old, UK female).

Emily’s excerpt shows that the self-transformation practice is also tied to a symbolic action (chin up) or a physical action that a consumer can enact with or on luxury items (holding the bag firmly). When the luxury item is in the service of her everyday life, Emily can depict different qualities of her idealised self, such as being smart, professional and spiritually successful. It can be inferred that the use of luxury provides the general ability to change an individual’s self-realisation and understanding. In this regard, it can be concluded that consumers use luxuries as a resource for defining their identity; here, luxury serves as a support to enhance their idealised selves in their everyday lives. Through self-transformation practices, consumers use luxury as a way of ensuring the transformation of the self. Such a transformed self is linked to the integral part of consumers’ selves (a better person, a
gentleman, or a smart lady), which goes beyond a materialistic understanding and realisation of the self.

4.6.2 Teleo-affectivity, Rules and Instructions of Self-transformation Practice

Self-transformation practices can be realised for various purposes. It has also been found that the participants use luxury to transform both their internal and external selves. It can be inferred that the participants are potentially prone to changing themselves because of luxury. In general, the participants feel that luxury is a noticeable self-support resource that aids in displaying themselves with respect to others, which is in agreement with Belk’s (1988) concept of the extended self.

“I like vintage bicycles…I think it’s really a luxury to me. You know I feel like an image when I ride it, that makes it feel so luxurious. Well, there is a picture in a magazine...like a guy...he’s wearing a nice suit and riding a vintage bicycle and I really love it ...it’s a very classic way to ride a bike...it looks so very gentlemanly...classic, and luxurious to me. Actually, some people might ride very expensive bicycles but it wouldn’t give you the same image...I mean you’ll look like a guy with an expensive bike...not a luxurious image to me at all, but if you wear a nice suit and ride a vintage bike...it blows my mind away...it’s classic and luxurious. So I always wear a nice suit when I ride my bicycle...I feel like I’ve become like that guy in the magazine...and it’s the image I want others to see me in... like this guy (in the picture in the collage)...he is such a classic” (Champ, 27 years old, Thai male).

Champ’s narrative supports Holt (1995), Wong and Ahuvia (1998), Vigneron and Johnson (1999; 2004) and Tsai (2005), who suggest that consumers combine the symbolic significance of luxurious items with their own personal concepts and identities. The need to change the self in reference to others and the striving for ‘the look of luxury’ is presented as the teleo-affective principle of the act of external self-transformation. From the narration, utilising luxury items alone does not entirely convey the owner’s identity. Champ asserts clear instructions on the creation of the look of luxury (riding a vintage bicycle while wearing a suit) based on his perceived
image of luxury and his desired self-perception to be classy. The excerpt from Champ is in agreement with Emily and Best’s narrations, in which they do not mention luxury when describing themselves simply as sophisticated or exclusive luxury consumers. Instead, it is the desired self-image that instructs how the consumer can create the look of luxury through external self-transformation practices. Accordingly, luxury is not only an object of desire but also a means to achieve a desired self-image linked to an individual’s aspirations.

However, the findings reveal that participants also associate with an extension of the identity of one’s internal self. Participants are also able to incorporate luxury into an inner component. This forms a self-connection to both the physical and symbolic representations of luxury in reference to the participants’ personal feelings. It should, therefore, be noted that luxury also acts as a concealed self-aid for the transformation of one’s inner self.

“I feel better with my perfume...it fulfils me...and I feel like I’ve become a perfect woman with this scent with me...I don’t think people will know that...I mean they might know I wear a perfume and that’s all...I don’t care about what they think...because it’s just a personal feeling like I’m the only one who feels this luxurious...like it’s a special feeling...it transforms my inner self...like I said, I feel that I’m a perfect woman with it and I love myself when I’m wearing my perfume and smell the scent” (Charlotte, 19 years old, UK female).

In order to achieve the need to fulfil the self, Charlotte’s excerpt illustrates that participants can incorporate luxury into the integral self; this particular inner self is an inner part of the participants’ corporeality, such as being a spiritually better or more perfect person. Charlotte’s self-transformation practice involves not only the element of the symbolic meanings of luxury defining the self, but also the indulgence of luxury, such as the smell of perfume, as an intangible element that allows Charlotte to feel magically transformed by what she consumes. She thus transfers the meanings of luxury into her aspired identity. Here, personal feelings associated with the indulgence of luxury are presented as the teleo-affective dimension and provide instructions for inner self-transformation practices. It is not just the physical image of
the luxury items that participants consume which transforms them but also the 
experience of luxury indulgence which constitute self-appreciation, acceptance, and, 
then, instructs the transition of the inner self.

Previous literature positions luxury as providing external self-support (Holt, 
1995; Wong and Ahuvia, 1998; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004; Tsai, 2005); they 
overlook the fact that self-concept is composed of both the inner and external selves 
(Gecas, 1982). However, as per our findings, self-transformation practices extend 
that luxury is also a fairly intimate and personal experience based on an individual’s 
idealised self (internal self-support). This applies to either a personal ideal image or 
an individual’s self-appreciation and acceptance, leaving behind the need to portray a 
stratified societal role in terms of economic class.

4.6.3 Self-transformation Practice and the Meanings of Luxury

![Diagram of Objects, Meanings, and Doings]

Figure 25: Self-transformation Practice and the Meanings of Luxury

While Belk (1988), Klein and Hill (2008) and Miller (2005; 2009) show the 
importance of material things and why they potentially qualify as a means for 
identifying luxury, the findings argue that owning and displaying luxury possessions 
does not fully capture the meanings of luxury. Rather, the deep symbolism of 
possessions and how they relate to consumers’ selves and lives through self-
transformation practices can help identify what luxury means. Owing to the differences between the desired traits of identity, consumers experience luxuries as symbolic resources that constitute important tangible and intangible cues, allowing consumers to fulfil the self. By performing self-transformation practices, the meanings of luxury can be turned into meanings related to aspired identities.

4.7 Theme 4: Status-based Practice

The status-based practice refers to the way in which consumers use luxury consumption as an instrument to display their status to others and as a means for building affiliations or enhancing distinction from others. It focuses on the process which uses luxury as a vessel for attaining cultural and personal meaning and which is enacted through having their own set of exclusionary and skill-based practices in order to define their superior status. For example, Alex and Sun convey their distinct status by displaying their exclusive skills in photography and yoga respectively. The process of both activities requires time, learning, dedication and confronting challenges, which then serve as evidence denoting their luxury status. Table 11 provides the overall analysis on the act of status-based practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of actions</th>
<th>Status-based practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principles of understanding (conceptual/practical).</td>
<td>Luxury as signifying status.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teleology (ends and purpose) and affectivity (beliefs, emotions and moods).</td>
<td>To communicate social distinction, the feeling of pride and the need to be a part of a group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded rules and instructions.</td>
<td>The demonstration of belonging (high level of engagement) and the demonstration of superiority (time, dedication and effort).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Elements of actions: the status-based practice
4.7.1 Conceptual and Practical understandings of Status-based Practice

It has been unanimously agreed by the participants that luxury is used to convey the owner’s superior status; otherwise, it would not be considered a luxury (Walley et al., 2013.) As Pat and Samuel mentioned:

“Luxury is all about status…it’s about showing off. I think people engage with luxuries because they wanna say that they’re better than others. It’s about hierarchy…saying that I’m in the higher position in many ways. Like…I’m richer than you…I have a better lifestyle than you…or it happens that I know about some particular things more than you…or I can do something better than you. For me, I’m at good at playing piano and I can gain such luxury status from others when I show off my piano performance” (Pat, 22 years old, Thai female).

“The important factor of luxury is that it helps to enhance your status. Otherwise, such a thing can’t be regarded as luxury…Luxury can guarantee the owner’s superior position…Of course, luxury is expensive but it’s not just about…look at me! I am rich! For example, art is luxury to me…arts can be very expensive or cheap…but it’s also about your knowledge to be able to understand and appreciate such art as well…and I consider such accumulated knowledge as the important element in enhancing superiority” (Samuel, 24 years old, UK male).

The narratives from both Pat and Samuel show that the idea of ‘status’ becomes the central conceptual and practical understanding with respect to luxury consumption. Status is related to the task of enhancing superiority and communication of the pre-eminence of the individual’s position to others. Superiority of status can be either internal, such as the accumulated knowledge that Samuel has of art or skills like those Pat has on the piano, or external, such as showing off during a piano performance. Luxury has been widely understood as a classic tool for enforcing social stratification based on economic capital resources (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). However, the majority of the participants feel that the cost of items and services is not a significant factor in determining the owner’s status
with regard to luxury. This means that, as long as the owner’s property is in agreement with his/her status, then they automatically qualify as luxuries, regardless of their price. As Nut illustrated:

“Luxury is about saying who you are in society...your position in the society that you live in. It doesn’t have to be just about saying that you’re rich or poor. For me, I think it’s about saying that you are superior to others. For example, Apple products are a luxury to me. There are many expensive laptops out there in the market but using a MacBook is kind of...proof of the fact that I have skills in the area of design. At least, other designers will acknowledge my skills if they see I am using a MacBook. Compared to Vaio...Vaio Pro is more expensive than MacBook Air. But I don’t think it is a luxury to me, because Vaio says nothing about my design skills” (Nut, 28 years old, Thai male).

The act of status-based practice is also tied to activities such as evaluating (comparing between status positions) and socialising (getting membership credentials and gaining distinction). Nut reveals that there has been a significant shift in people’s view of the state of luxury beyond the economic point of view. He evaluates his position as a designer in relation to others while showing no interest in using luxury as a stratification tool in terms of finances. Instead, he uses his MacBook to gain some form of social distinction, since doing so helps him display his dominance and expertise in design. Therefore, the notion that material ownership does not ultimately represent luxury is echoed throughout the narratives; instead, it is the possession of practices (such as design skills) that have enabled consumers to possess an exceptional luxury position and status.

“I watch ballet. It is something that ordinary people don’t do and also requires special knowledge to understand the performance. Actually, I always buy ballet DVDs. Anyone can own ballet DVDs. It’s not expensive...but I’m sure that not many people can own the necessary knowledge to appreciate the ballet performance” (Chloe, 27 years old, UK female).

“It’s not like you have a nice kitchen in your house and you can say that...well, this is luxury. For me, it’s about how you cook. I try to cook a complicated menu or...create something new. Obviously, it shows that I’m not like everyone
who cooks for a living. I feel like I’m more of an expert than others...like I can cook this complicated menu and it also tastes good. Well, everyone can cook, but the idea of it being luxurious encourages you to do something in order to become better than others” (Oat, 21 years old, Thai male).

Both Chloe and Oat’s excerpts highlight that the act of status-based practice is also connected to an exclusionary set of knowledge and skill-based practices, which function as evidence to communicate luxury status to others. For Chloe, the fact that she owns a ballet DVD and is knowledgeable about ballet implies her social distinction. Similarly from Oat’s statement, being in possession of a nice kitchen does not ultimately represent luxury. Instead, it is his expertise in cooking that has enabled him to convey his outstanding luxury position and status. The narratives also reveal that luxury can be produced by drawing on resources other than economic capital, such as cultural capital resources (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998).

“I always paint when I have free time. I paint in colour and in black and white...it’s more difficult to paint in black and white than in colour. For black and white paintings, I only use...black ink...it takes lots of effort, so if I make a mistake, I have to throw it away and start painting again because it can’t be fixed, so these black and white paintings are what I consider my luxury items” (Samuel, 24 years old, UK male).

Samuel illustrates how consumers make use of cultural capital in identifying what should be regarded as luxury. He also highlights how ordinary things and activities in everyday life, such as painting, can be considered as luxury through skill-based practices. To clarify, Samuel considers painting in black and white to be his ultimate luxury. He believes in this kind of luxury because black and white painting requires a high level of cultural capital for one to be able to paint as he does. He claims that his paintings are far superior to colour ones, which seem to require fewer cultural capital resources. This shows that an individual’s luxury level could be related to the level and state of the cultural capital resources that he/she possesses. Moreover, the variety of ways in which consumers use their cultural capital resources can extend the understanding of luxury from the traditional point of view.
“Well, people say luxury is a high quality product…but not all high quality products are luxuries. I think the difference between luxuries and high quality products is the fact that luxury product is produced on the basis of high skill and knowledge. For example, Haute Couture clothing…people don’t wear them only for their higher quality or functionality but they ought to have knowledge about design or cutting techniques…stuff like that…in order to be able to appreciate it as luxury. Then, the luxurious nature of Haute Couture and the status of people who wear it is based on such knowledge” (Oil, 26 years old, Thai female).

By the very nature of luxury markets, objects have traditionally been seen as high quality because of their functionality and durability (Weidmann et al., 2007; 2009). Oil’s view on objects adds cultural capital to the consumption process: a luxury product is different from a high quality product due to the cultural capital resources that consumers expend on such a product. Oil’s excerpt demonstrates that luxury is open to active evaluation based on skill and knowledge practices. As a skilled practitioner, a consumer is required to gain more knowledge during the consumption process. In this way, luxury, both objects and experience, can be seen as the embodiment of a high level of cultural capital, which requires consumers to develop their own cultural capital resources in order to be able to consume luxury and gain superior status.

Overall, luxury consumption is a matter of status. Conceptual and practical understandings of status-based practices associate luxuries with the fact that consumers use luxury consumption to communicate their superior status in terms of social distinction, rather than social stratification based on an economic point of view. The practices involve the evaluation of the individual’s status based on the level of cultural capital resources that he/she possesses, and on socialisation with others, wherein consumers can affirm and relate their luxury to others by having their own sets of exclusionary and skill-based practices.
4.7.2 Teleo-affectivity, Rules and Instructions of Status-based Practice

The research findings indicate that practices based on a participant’s luxury status conform to their social distinction. In addition, two instructions of status-based practice for communicating social distinction include the demonstration of belonging and the demonstration of superiority.

Most participants reveal that luxury consumption can be used to show the consumer’s superiority status (Vigneron, 1999; Johnson, 2004; Kapferer and Bastien, 2009; Heine, 2011; Walley, et al., 2013). Status-based practices are associated with a high level of cultural capital as evidence of superiority; consumers need to make sacrifices to overcome the challenges involved with the process of luxury consumption. Thus, time, effort and dedication become the essential elements when it comes to status-based practices. As Oat illustrates on the process of cooking:

“This is a kind of a trial and error process until I finally manage to get it done as I wanted in the beginning. I think the process itself is very fascinating when you can continue learning something new or more complicated and try to cook or adapt the menu to suit your preferences. It’s like a never-ending process...it takes time, effort, and dedication to cook this menu and I will continue to find a new menu to challenge myself. I never get bored of it...it makes me superior and I’m very proud of myself every time I can cook it” (Oat, 21 years old, Thai male).

Oat talks about his numerous attempts at preparing food menus that may be considered complicated. This is very similar to Samuel’s assertions on paintings. He claims that black and white painting involves a lot of effort and some complicated skills. Therefore, it is clear from the participants’ view that time, dedication and effort are the rules and instructions required to achieve the desired skills and to overcome the complexity of the activity. Feeling ‘proud’ is also presented as the teleo-affective dimension of status-based practice as the demonstration of superiority, in which luxury tends to be equated to self-esteem. Unlike the majority of the reviewed literature (Kapferer, 1998; Dubois, et al., 2001; Vigneron and Johnson 2004; Keller, 2009) which associated luxury as a symbol of some kind of
achievement due to the price of the products, Oat’s narration shows that the meaning of luxury stemming from achievement and self-esteem arises when there is a task that requires dedication, sacrifice and challenge from the participants who need to improve their self-esteem.

It is also evident from the narratives of those participants whose luxury status assists in establishing their membership credentials that consuming luxury is not only about competing with other individuals but also about realising which individual is better in certain aspects of life. While previous literature asserts that the luxury status has been largely applied as a way of depicting an individual’s social distinction in terms of supremacy (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004; Walley, et al, 2013), it is also interesting to note from the findings that the participants are able to derive credentials from their luxury status.

“It’s more about the fact that you have time to enjoy something...So, it’s not only about possessing expensive branded items. In my case, I always post short video clips on my Facebook while I’m playing the guitar. It’s about showing off that I have better skills in playing the guitar. When people see these clips, this implies that I...have a credential membership...like people will recognise that I am...part of a group of people who are skilled musicians” (Boss, 19 years old, Thai male).

“When something becomes luxurious to you, you...like to engage with it. On my Facebook...I always post about fashion...like updating items or interesting trends. What I do gives me a privileged position...friends on my Facebook post responses to what I post. Some of them might change their attitudes to fashion and ask me for opinions when they go shopping. I feel like this privilege I have allows me to be seen as one of those fashionistas” (Emily, 19 years old, UK female).

The teleo-affective dimension of status-based practice is the demonstration of belonging. Both Boss and Emily are concerned with feeling as if they are part of a group with their desired attributes. Their status-based practices require a high level of engagement in activities to which Boss and Emily attach the notion of luxury: this is an essential rule for deriving credentials from their luxury status. From the
experience of Boss, it can be seen that he is highly engaged in playing the guitar and then posting a significant number of video clips on Facebook. When he does this, he hopes to be considered as one who belongs to a special group of people. The same applies to Emily, who is privileged to have gained a particular status through her overwhelming interest in fashion via social media; most of her friends associate her with fashionistas. It can be seen that a high level of cultural capital resources in a particular activity or thing can show other people how an individual takes pleasure in life through an overwhelming engagement in such an activity.

In general, luxury is a skill-based practice. It basically allows people to show their existing luxury status in diverse ways by either demonstrating their superiority or that they belong to a special group because of the development of cultural capital. Therefore, the understanding of luxury extends towards a high level of cultural capital; here, sacrifices, dedication, challenges and membership credentials serve as evidence of social status.

### 4.7.3 Status-based Practice and the Meanings of Luxury

**Figure 26: Status-based Practice and the Meanings of Luxury**

- **Objects**
  - 1. Social status
  - 2. Status-based Practice
  - 5. Luxury functions as a means for social distinction in everyday lives

- **Meanings**
  - 3. Superior status in terms of self-esteem, achievement, supremacy, and membership credentials
  - 4. The embodiment of high cultural capital
  - 6. The function of luxury as a means for social distinction in everyday lives

195
Status is an important element with respect to luxury consumption. Veblen (1902) noted how wealthy people associate conspicuous consumption of luxury goods and services in order to reinforce or enhance their social status. However, it has been found here that luxury status can be achieved through ordinary things and activities in everyday lives. Status-based practice shows that the meaning of luxury is the embodiment of high cultural capital where luxury functions as a means for social distinction. In order to achieve luxury status, consumers need to make considerable sacrifices involving time, learning and dedication. In this regard, the meanings of luxury can be related to superior status in terms of self-esteem, achievement, supremacy and membership credentials.

Overall, the meaning of luxury can be conceptualised as an embodied practice that is individually, socially and contextually constructed. While the traditional view of luxury fails to appreciate the emotional and cultural complexity of luxury consumption, the four practices from the findings shed light on what constitutes the concept of luxury for a consumer when the practices are parallel and overlapping depending on the consumer’s interpretation and the cross-cultural context in question. It has been found that there are specific cultural issues that give rise to different meanings of luxury between Thai and UK participants, which will be explained in the following section.

4.8 Cultural Observations on Everyday Luxury Consumption Practice

In seeking to understand notions of everyday luxury, this study also attempts to develop an understanding of how these explanations hold up in different cultural contexts. Although the study discovers that the four main practices found in the framework are relevant to both cultures included in the study, the motivation behind the doing or the practice is more complex and varied. The data suggests that varied understandings of the self and morality within different cultures and societies inform of the motivations for the practices that construct the subjective meanings of luxury in a cross-cultural context.
4.8.1 Self-understanding

The motivation of luxury consumption practices across cultural contexts is subject to different understandings of the self within different cultures/societies (individualism and collectivism in Western and Eastern cultures respectively). It can be seen from the narratives that the main influencing factors that lead to a variation in the meanings of luxury between the Thai and UK participants, are the feelings and cultural beliefs about the concept of luxury in relation to the self.

“I don’t want to associate with luxury if it is meant for classifying between the rich and the poor. It’s meaningless to do that so luxury for me...is a tool for showing your distinction to others in terms of your interest or achievement...stuff like that, not just with wealth” (Lee, 26 years old, UK male).

“It’s not only about saying that you’re rich and others are poor. Luxury is pretty much about uniqueness...about distinction rather than hierarchy. In my case, I collect action figures, only villains. I love villains. They are my luxury possession because I guess they represent me well. I feel like I am one of them. I don’t like heroes as others do, they piss me off. I think it’s important to stay true to who you are rather than trying to please others” (Colm, 23 years old, UK male).

It can be seen from the narratives that aspects of self-esteem and individual fulfilment are important motivations and meanings for luxury consumption among UK participants. Colm illustrates this point: the motivation behind his luxury consumption is to assert the uniqueness of his identity, enhancing the independent self and self-appreciation rather than being an interdependent self. Moreover, the UK participants hesitate to totally engage with the traditional concept of luxury. Rather than using luxury as a tool to construct a social hierarchy based on a financial dimension, the excerpts from Lee and Colm illustrate that individuals in society should be judged on the basis of their own merits. Here, luxury is viewed as a form of social distinction based on personal interest and achievement. The findings are in line with Triandis (1990) and Markus and Kitayama (1991) in which, in the West, social hierarchy is seen as a potentially illegitimate aspect of society, especially if it
cannot be clearly linked to individual achievement. However, strong social hierarchies are a common trait among collectivist cultures including the Thai culture.

“We do care about others, especially what they think about us. If you have luxury items, you will feel better about yourself and also look better and make a good impression on others. In my case, I love reading books at the coffee shop...I think it’s the overall image that people will perceive about me...like when they see me reading books at the coffee shop...they will feel like I have a better life...slow life while ordinary people are so busy...so the idea of luxury here is about getting acceptance and showing that you’re above others in some way and implying the superiority of your class and family” (Nummon, 19 years old, Thai female).

“Social hierarchy is the important element of our society. I think people consume luxuries because they wanna get...kind of social acceptance that they have a higher status or position in the society” (Champ, 27 years old, Thai male).

For the Thai participants, belonging, social acceptance and social relationships are central motivations and meanings for their luxury consumption practices. For example, Nummon suggests that her ‘slow lifestyle’ (e.g. reading a book in a coffee shop) implies her superiority in terms of her work-life balance, which allows her more time to sit and read books. When it comes to luxury consumption, it can be seen that both Nummon and Champ are not just acting as autonomous individuals, but they also feel that they are the representatives of the groups to which they belong, whose views and opinions they value. Also, they are likely to be concerned about what others will think of them; thus, they base their concept of the self on an interdependent view. Moreover, the rhetoric of social hierarchy is an important element in their narratives regarding luxury. Nummon and Champ relate luxury to the legitimacy of hierarchy (being above others/the higher position), where luxury serves as a marker of a stratified societal role, which is in line with the traditional luxury concept.

In those cases where the participants have similar luxury consumption practices, the findings also reveal that the motivation in relation to the self-
understanding between UK and Thai participants is clearly distinct. For example, through drinking wine, Kathy and Champ incorporate luxury into their self-understanding and status in alternate ways.

“I love wine…I think wine is luxury. It’s always a happy hour when I drink wine…But, drinking wine requires wine knowledge…so you need to become a wine expert in order to fully appreciate and understand the enjoyment of drinking…So luxury is about achievement…it increase your self-esteem in some way” (Kathy, 28 years old, UK female).

“Wine might be a good example…I mean you just look cool in the view of others by just holding a glass of wine. People kind of…pay respect to you that you’re in a higher position in terms of your class and lifestyle if you consume wine” (Champ, 27 years old, Thai male).

The narratives show the contrasting view between Kathy and Champ in which Kathy focuses on getting status in terms of social distinction (not stratification) and on enhancing her independent self according to her personal interests (being a wine expert). Conversely, Champ considers luxury to be about the communication of status in terms of a stratified societal role (either class or lifestyle) and gaining social acceptance in the view of others. Moreover, Kathy suggests that drinking wine requires knowledge and with that knowledge comes status, which is inherent to her personal interests, whereas Champ is likely to focus more on the luxurious image and put less attention on the knowledge. By purely drinking wine, any wine, status is experienced among others. The results are in line with Wong and Ahuvia (1999), who found that consumers (re)interpret and organise luxury differently, resulting in the meanings of luxury being influenced by individualism and collectivism in Western and Eastern cultures respectively. However, the research does not seek to generate generalisations about the meanings of luxury among the Thai and UK consumers, as Wong and Ahuvia (1999) did. Instead, individualism and collectivism can be used as lenses in shaping the interpretation of luxury when luxury consumption takes place in different societies.
Moreover, the major difference in interpretation between UK and Thai participants is how they strike a balance between public luxury consumption and cultural understandings of self-knowledge.

“Normally, we can easily download songs or albums we like online. But I think finding the actual CD, especially if you like Japanese music, is a bit challenging and exclusive, because there are not many shops in the UK that actually sell Japanese CDs...I categorise my CDs according to the type of music and the artists. I also sub-categorise them into like...this is the live concert...then, album and single. Also, I ordered each of them in the year they were released. I don’t know whether others can tell how I arrange my collection...They might be impressed that I’m a Japanese music fan when they see my collection, but actually I think I just display the collection for myself. Like I’m the only one who can understand this and it expresses who I am and what I am capable of... I’m the expert on this thing” (Mike, 24 years old, UK male).

Mike is more likely to sustain his distinct status through knowledge of a particular genre of music in order to enhance the expression and actualisation of his inner self as an expert rather than simply associate his self-understanding with the public aspect of his CD collection. Mike exemplifies the fact that, for UK participants, they are more likely to focus on the independent self as the ideal self in which their self-understanding is central to personal preferences, tastes, abilities and personal values. As Mike mentions, he made the display for the CD collection for himself; thus, even when UK participants consume luxury products to manage the impressions they make on others, they are either trying to express their ideal selves or they are aware of their actions as strategic and view them as deceptive. However, Thai participants assert a different point of view. As Pat mentions:

“When I’m playing the piano...it always makes me feel like I am one of those talented kids...I play it confidently...try not to look at the keyboard every time to make me look more like a professional pianist and my family is very proud of me...because the fact that I’m a professional pianist and belong to a group
of talented kids can enhance my family’s reputation…it’s not only about me…it’s about my family too” (Pat, 22 years old, Thai female).

Pat talks about the public image of how she plays the piano as a professional. Her social belonging and self-concept as being talented and professional, are formed by the outward role of supporting her family’s reputation. Since Thai culture is based on an interpersonal notion of the self, Asian consumers are likely to value their belonging group goals or norms significantly (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Abe, et al., 1996; Viswanathan and Moore, 2002). Accordingly, the social norm is compounded by the fact that Thai individuals place attention more on the public and tended to integrate in-group members deeply into the construction of the self. Consequently, it can be seen from the case of Pat that the consistency between the public aspect of consumption and internal values is not expected in Thai culture, where outward roles are seen as legitimate. Accordingly, the Thai participants see the external role as the centre of their idealised selves, rather than being an obstacle to the idealised self since the ability to conform to role expectations and set one’s personal preferences is viewed as a positive sign of strength and maturity.

However, the difference between the meanings of luxury in a cross-cultural context does not only manifest itself in terms of self-knowledge, individualism and collectivism, as highlighted by Wong and Ahuvia (1998). It is also rooted in morality constructions within society, which will be illustrated in the next section.

4.8.2 Morality

Many participants assert that luxury consumption has become increasingly moralised. This means that satisfaction depends not only on their own luxury consumption, but also on the moral responsibility of the individual to fellow citizens. The findings support Roper et al. (2013) who utilised the morality construct in order to explore discourses on luxury. However, their work still did not attempt to understand morality in light of the specific cultural context in which it takes place.

“I am aware of my luxury consumption. I mean I don’t want people to think of me as a selfish materialist because I’ve got luxury stuff...so I try to be a bit sensible. Well, I try to balance my spending. I usually mix up cheaper clothes
with luxury stuff...like Topman and Paul Smith scarves something like that...rather than going too over the top or showing off too much luxury” (Kris, 19 years old, UK male).

“I try and be careful with my luxury consumption...I mean it’s about morality...kind of...you don’t want people to judge you as lacking self-discipline. I collect bottles of perfumes but it’s not like...I buy those perfumes every week. I’ll just buy a new one when I get through a bottle. So it took me around 1-2 months to buy a new perfume and I don’t collect my perfumes for overwhelming ostentation...I mean I don’t tell people like...oh I have lots of perfume, check it out (laugh)” (Charlotte, 19 years old, UK female).

The narratives from Kris and Charlotte illustrate that there is an intellectual and cultural movement towards a more morally-oriented luxury consumption, since both Kris and Charlotte emphasise ‘being careful’ and ‘being sensible’ as morally responsible behaviour that they exercise during their luxury consumption. The findings contrast with the traditional notion of luxury in which traditional luxury often considered immoral (O’Cass and Frost, 2002; Berg, 2004). Instead, from the findings, neither the consumers nor the desire for luxury are intrinsically immoral.

Both Kris and Charlotte engage in a more careful and self-disciplined approach to luxury. Crucially, this is achieved by invoking negative images of a person who ostensibly lacks moral autonomy and self-discipline. These two participants discipline themselves with regard to spending and other ostentatious behaviour towards their perceived luxury items. They reveal an awareness of social morality and a negative view of being excessive, over the top, or overwhelming showing-off associated with their perceived luxury possession. Accordingly, luxury consumption also involves a process that establishes conditions favourable to the maintenance of morality by encouraging the prevalence of a sense of self-discipline and circumventing negative self-attributions associated with social moral standards on the nature of affluence. In the case of the UK participants, they associate a negative self with awareness of excessive spending and ostentation. However, the findings from the Thai participants show that they have questioned the nature of their
own affluence and the negative self-attributions associated with socially informed morality in a different way.

“When it come to luxury consumption, it's not just about me...it's about my family too. We place the family unit above all else and recognise the importance of luxury in enriching the family unit. Well...I don’t know maybe it’s about the belief of Karma and culture as well...if you don’t think of your family...you’ll become traitor. I have to aware that my luxury consumption is sensible anyway...it must help to promote my family too. So it’s common to see people showing off their luxuries” (Boom, 24 years old, Thai female).

“Displaying or showing off somehow is necessary...I guess people consume luxury to reduce their worries about the face of the family. One of the prime responsibilities is to be aware of how your action will affect your family...Well, we can say family is central to Thai life...and Thailand is a hierarchical society and high-ranking people somehow receive most respect. So you have to be careful...if your luxury consumption can’t help to fulfil that, you’ll be perceived as being spoiled and a great shame to your family” (Nut, 28 years old, Thai male).

In these passages, Nut and Boom emphasise the importance of family in Thai culture. They assert a socially moral belief and a negative self, such as betrayal, being spoiled and shame, when their luxury consumption is unable to promote the affluent or the ‘face’ of the family. In comparison to the UK participants, the Thai participants are likely to focus more on interdependent tastes, traits or goals, where luxury not only reflects one’s personal pleasure but also the position of the family and kinship group (Ger and Belk, 1996; 1994). This has major implications for luxury consumption. When a Thai consumes luxury excessively, he/she is not labelled a selfish materialist, but rather is seen as someone who-upholds the social virtue of fulfilling a familial obligation. Consequently, it can be implied that, for the Thai participants, an individual’s luxury consumption becomes his/her family’s consumption.

Furthermore, the morality of self-discipline in matters of affluence is an important element in constructing how individuals from different cultures justify
their level of luxury. Although both the UK and Thai participants associate luxury with the strong hedonic experiences they have with their luxury possessions, the findings show that the Thai participants are probably influenced by the public ability of their possessions to represent the face of the family. In contrast, the private meaning of possessions is a more important motivation driving luxury consumption among the UK participants. Accordingly, the level of luxury is also determined by the degree of private or public possession and morality within different cultures and societies.

“I mean…I know that part of luxury consumption is still about ownership…but I need to make sure that it’s not too extreme...like too much spending or showing off...so I would rather put a higher value on luxury when it comes to indulgence. Like...I can spend an hour...just looking at the art pieces. So owning lots and lots of art pieces might not be that meaningful to me” (Samuel, 24 years old, UK male).

Samuel values luxury because of its hedonic and experiential nature, and he focuses on being modest and humble to control the potentially negative consequences of excessive luxury consumption. Thus, the narratives imply that the level of luxury for the UK consumers is associated with a degree of intimacy, where real luxury is sparse and limited to personal consumption in which the level of luxuriousness is intimately connected to the degree of private luxury possessions in a personal context. However, the Thai participants tend to have different perceptions. As Oil mentions:

“If such a thing cannot promote the face of my family, I might not consider it as luxury...I mean my personal pleasure is not enough...luxury is also about the reflection of my family status as well” (Oil, 26 years old, Thai female).

Oil considers elaborate luxury consumption as appropriate to one’s social status and reputation, and she holds luxury possessions to be important in reflecting the status of one’s family. In contrast to the UK participants, the Thai participants feel they are obliged to consume luxury to fulfil the criteria of vanity and ostentation, where the degree of public luxury possession and its relation to the face of the family determine the level of luxury.
Overall, in British culture, there is a higher tendency for people to consume luxuries because they want to satisfy personal preferences; in Thai society, there is a higher tendency for people to behave in this way because they feel they have to conform to their social background. For the UK consumers, the meaning of luxury is quite intimate, as inner-directed resources relate to individual indulgence and fulfilment. This means that luxury status is depicted in terms of distinction and enhancing the independent idealised self. Accordingly, they place a higher value on luxury because of its hedonic experiences, which are based on preferences, tastes, abilities and personal values in which there is a moral belief regarding the awareness of excessive spending and too much ostentation. On the other hand, the Thai consumers assert meanings to luxuries that are more socially oriented than the UK consumers; luxury serves both as an individual tool for personal indulgence and an exemplary social virtue that enhances the communication of social status, belonging and the interdependent idealised self. For the Thai participants, upholding the face of the family is their central moral concern in terms of luxury consumption; in this, the Thai consumers put a higher value on luxuries as instrumental family objects, which are related to the family’s esteem and social status.

4.9 Chapter Review

Traditionally, the meaning of luxury has been fundamentally based on the theory of conspicuous consumption. However, from the findings of our study, it is clear that there is an alternative way of defining the meanings of luxury, as highlighted by the participants’ assertions. The meanings of luxury can be seen in everyday moments of luxury and can be understood as embodied practices.

From our findings, a conceptual framework has been formulated to help analyse core daily luxury consumption practices in a cross-cultural context. Rather than generating a theoretical framework for quantitative testing, the conceptual framework in this study aims to visualise the practices in terms of the consumers’ total sets of actions related to each theme found in the data analysis. Through Schatzki’s (1996) ontology and analysis of practices, the four universal acts which consumers can engage in are status-based practice, self-transformation practice, caretaker practice and escapist practice. These four practices have moved the
meanings of luxury from materialistic to metaphysical accounts of eudaimonic wellbeing, idealised selfhood, the never-ending care relationship and the embodiment of high cultural capital.

Although the study found that luxury consumption practices across cultures do not clearly differ, the motivation behind the practices is different in a cross-cultural context. The motivation behind luxury consumption practices in different cultural contexts is subject to different understandings of the self within diverse cultures and societies (the independent and interdependent self in Western and Eastern cultures respectively) and in the moral code of each society in relation to the nature of affluent. Both the UK and Thai consumers question the nature of luxury, and the negative self-attributes derive from socially informed morality in different ways. The UK consumers associate a negative self with the awareness of excessive spending and ostentation while their Thai counterparts assert a negative self when their luxury consumption is unable to promote the ‘face’ of the family.

Overall, these four practices, together with cultural self-knowledge and morality, contribute to a contemporary conceptualisation of luxury; further discussions of the implications of this will be provided in the next chapter.
5 Discussions

5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter introduced the six illustrative case studies and the supporting findings from the participants, thereby giving an introduction and illustrative details of the conceptual framework focusing on everyday luxury consumption practices in a cross-cultural context. The themes described in Chapter 4 also offer an understanding of the various practices of luxury consumption that individuals can perform in order to enact their meanings of luxury, which provide the major differences between the traditional and consumer-centred views of luxury and underlie the foundations for conceptualising an alternative view of everyday luxury.

The findings are discussed in accordance with research questions constructed in chapter 1. This chapter begins by discussing how the four practices of everyday luxury consumption have extended our understandings of luxury consumption beyond traditional viewpoint. The second part of discussion introduces a comprehensive overview underlying the major differences between traditional and everyday views of luxury. Then, the findings are discussed in accordance with cultural issues on self-knowledge and morality in order to seek out the explanation of how the practices and meanings of luxury are played out in a differing cultural context. Lastly, the chapter presents concluding remarks. It describes how the conceptualising of contemporary meanings of luxury through a practice theory approach has led to new understandings of contemporary luxury.

5.2 Research Question 1: What are the practices of consumers surrounding luxury consumption?

According to the findings, the four major themes found in the study (status-based practice, escapist practice, self-transformation practice and caretaker practice) represent a total set of core practices that various consumers from different backgrounds and cultures can associate with luxuries in everyday living. These generate the underexposed understandings of luxury consumption which will be discussed as follows:
5.2.1 Status-based Practice

In a broader sense, it has been agreed by all participants that luxury can convey their superior status to others; otherwise, they would not consider such object or practice as luxury. The status-based practice refers to the way in which consumers use luxury consumption as an instrument to display their status to others and as a means for building affiliations or enhancing distinction from others. Accordingly, the narratives on status-based practice are in line with the recent work from Walley et al. (2013), who found that participants who wish to subscribe to a particular status group indulge in particular practices of luxury as a means of establishing distinctive status and creating credentials for membership. In general, status-based practice is still associated with vertical and horizontal status signalling (Mason, 2001), as well as what have been referred to as the ‘snob’ and ‘bandwagon’ effects (Mason, 1981; Leibenstein, 1950).

However, it has been found from the findings that luxury serves as a tool for social classification and status beyond mere economic means. To clarify, the majority of the participants do not consider the cost of items and services to be a significant factor in determining and signalling the owner’s status, which is opposed to McKinsey (1990), Nueno and Quelch (1998), Keller (2009), and Parguel et al. (2015), who assert that luxury is a function of price. A good example is from the participant who perceives Apple products as luxurious. Although Apple products could be considered a luxury using the traditional economically focused perspective, the participant integrates the meanings of luxury rather than the cost or the signalling of wealth. This is since he believes that Apple products can help him to display his dominance and expertise in design. As long as the owner’s property is in agreement with his/her own identity and status, then they automatically qualify as luxuries, regardless of their price. This finding seems to be in line with Eastman et al. (1999), O’Cass and Frost (2002), and O’Cass and McEwen (2004), in which it is clear that the possession of items is a driving force for how people portray their luxury status. However, being in possession of Apple products does not just ultimately represent luxury. Instead, it also represents his skills and knowledge with Apple when working
as a designer. It is this representation that gives him an exceptional position and status.

Apart from this, hitherto the understanding of luxury often links the high prices of luxury products to the ‘sacrifice value’ (Tynan, et al., 2009; Weidmann, et al., 2009), which refers to the economic and psychological cost that customers have to sacrifice in order to achieve the benefit and status from luxury consumption. In contrast to this, status-based practice reveals that the participants can demonstrate luxury consumption practices, such as yoga or playing piano, in which the sacrificial dimension of luxury has been reinterpreted as the amount of time and effort that participants need to sacrifice in order to confer luxury status through particular skill-based activities.

Moreover, how consumers perceive practices of luxury has changed. Although Veblen (1902) and Mason (2001) identify particular key practices of luxury in conveying status (for instance, engaging in wasteful leisure activities), the findings from the status-based practice assert a different point: practices of luxury now tend to be associated with the cultural capital which consumers hold. This involves activities that require high levels of sacrifice in terms of time, learning, dedication and challenges. Thus, the whole experience is not considered as wasteful, since progress towards the end result also contributes to self-esteem and achievement.

While Mason (1981, 1992) claim that individuals consume luxuries in order to be recognised among others in terms of social approval, reputation and achievements, the findings reveal that luxury status as a symbol of achievement does not only derive from the price of the luxury products (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004; Shukla, 2008; 2010). It is also formed by the high level of cultural capital needed to perform the tasks (a masterful accomplishment that is skill/knowledge-based). As a skilled practitioner, a consumer is required to develop more knowledge and skills during the consumption process. In this way, luxury can be seen as an embodiment of a high level of cultural capital, which requires consumers to develop their own cultural capital resources in order to be able to consume luxury and gain superior status.
Bourdieu (1984; 1992) argues that cultural capital becomes embedded in the consumption object: a high cultural object requires significant cultural capital properties such as scarcity, aesthetic qualities or distinctiveness. However, the findings suggest that, in order to convey a luxury status, luxury objects are less important than the consumers’ skills or competence. So it is not the nature of the consumption object (objectified cultural capital) but the experience of the consumption practices (embodied cultural capital) that makes something become luxurious. For example, a piano is not perceived as luxurious because it requires comprehensive piano education or because it is expensive. Instead, it becomes luxurious to consumers when they experience great sacrifices of time, learning and dedication in the process of consumption.

Besides this, Holt (1998) found that consumers who have a low quintile of cultural capital (LCC) prefer to consume luxury for material conspicuousness, while consumers who have a high quintile of cultural capital (HCC) pay attention to the subjective experience derived from the luxury possession or service. However, the findings from the status-based practice show that the participants, even from different family upbringings and backgrounds, place the same level of attention on the idea of luxury as the ability to facilitate a metaphysical experience. Thus, it can be interpreted from status-based practice that luxury status can be associated with the amount of cultural capital that individuals have at their disposal.

5.2.2 Escapist Practice

The findings suggest that participants can communicate their meaning of luxury through their everyday experiences, routines, and even the most mundane activities and objects, which is in line with Cronin et al. (2012). In this regard, the participants’ meanings of luxury relate mostly to the perception of personal pleasure that emerge from special moments of luxury as an escapist experience. The escapist practice refers to the way in which a consumer engages in the experience of luxury consumption with high, imaginative intensity. In this way, consumers can perform complementary actions, allowing them to escape from the ordinariness of everyday life. In other words, ordinary routines can be transformed into luxurious activities via
escapist practices, which turn common, routine practices into special personal moments. Escapist practice allows consumers to experience something extraordinary: they will escape from the ordinariness of everyday life and enjoy a precious moment of luxury. Moreover, escapist practices reveal that the imaginary luxury experience is highly reliant on time, especially in terms of how the participants make use of time and appreciate it in order to create a luxury experience. Although limitations on time are in line with the traditional concept of luxury, as they relate to a feeling of scarcity (Lynn, 1991; Hauck and Stanforth, 2006; Kapferer and Bastien, 2009), it has been found that true luxury for the participants involves being able to have and enjoy their own time, whether it be to reminisce, daydream, or steer imaginations while in the present.

Not being compelled by obligation gives the participants a feeling and experience of escape, since personal pleasure and the imagination are unleashed during this indulgence. In this regard, the concept of luxury is related to the concepts of consumer happiness and eudemonism (Bauer et al., 2008; 2011), which are themselves derived from escapist feelings associated with time, such as dream, peace, joy, relaxation and happiness. In contrast to the arguments of Sussan et al. (2012), a luxury experience not only correlates to subjective wellbeing in terms of material wealth, but also captures the emotional motivations behind consumption; thus, escapist experiences of luxury suggest an understanding of luxury as a metaphysical experience of eudemonism and spiritual motivation.

Moreover, in contrast to Atwal and William’s (2009) description of the escapist qualities of luxury brands, the findings assert that the escapist experience of luxury is fundamentally grounded in consumers’ lived experiences, not in the context and space created by luxury brands: it generally applies to special moments derived from past memories, present experiences and future desires. Accordingly, luxury becomes a tool for everyday daydreaming. This can be illustrated by the case of Lisa, whose crystal collection allows her to recall precious childhood memories, and her use of her imagination and a plastic chair turns reading into a luxury experience. This allows her the pleasure of spending time in the present and the opportunity to escape and steer her imagination and future desires. This is in line with Joy and Sherry
(2003), Brakus et al. (2009) and Bauer et al. (2011) who support the importance of the multi-sensuality that accompanies consumers’ luxury experiences.

Furthermore, the findings also extend the works by Joy and Sherry (2003), Brakus et al. (2009) and Bauer et al. (2011) by asserting that the escapist element of luxury takes the form of constructing space for fantasy, fun and emotions (Holbrook and Hirschmann, 1982). Luxury spaces created by consumers are expressed as a yearning for alternative worlds and alternative ways of consuming. Here, escapist practice sheds new light on consumption practices that have not been captured by Holt (1995) or by Cheetham and McEachern (2013). To clarify, the findings reveal that consumer experiences not only underpin consumers’ emotional responses to consumption objects as the actual action in reality, but they also underpin the emotional connection between consumers and their escapist imaginations. As such, luxury consumption is distinct from non-luxury consumption in the sense that luxury consumption is also consumed in a moment of imagination and not only in material reality.

5.2.3 Self-transformation Practice

The self-transformation practice refers to how consumers acquire and manipulate the meanings of luxury in order to integrate them as part of their identity. In previous research, the experience of ‘owning’ and ‘displaying’ strongly reflects the traditional conceptualisations of luxury and highlights how consumers define and express their materialistic selves in terms of luxury possessions that are ‘mine’ (Belk, 1988). Contrastingly, the participants’ narratives instead revolve around the experience of self-transformation and related special moments of luxury that provide support to consumers’ selves in everyday living. The findings suggest that participants, in general, experience luxury as symbolic resources. In this regard, luxury has the ability to transform participants into their idealised selves by making them feel as if they are, for instance, ‘a professional’, ‘a classic lady’, or ‘a better person’. Accordingly, self-transformative practice reveals that a transformative experience seems to be an essential characteristics of luxury as experienced by consumers.
The use of luxuries can ultimately support individuals in their individual identity projects (Thompson and Haytko 1997; Arnould and Thompson, 2005); here, luxuries serve as a support for the self. They constitute principal tangible and intangible cues that allow consumers to define themselves and to transfer the meanings of luxury into their idealised identities. The previous literature defines luxury as providing external self-support (Dubois and Duquesne, 1993; Holt, 1995; Phau and Prendergast, 2000). However, the findings show that self-conceptualisation in relation to luxury consumption is composed of both the external and inner self (Gecas, 1982). It should not be assumed that consumers derive their identities primarily from generic economic and social displays of superiority, such as those attained by the demonstration of wealth, exclusivity, prestige and sophistication based on traditional understandings of luxury (Vickers and Renand, 2003; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). Instead, the respondents combined the symbolic significance of luxury with their own personal interests and identities. Participants feel magically transformed by what they consume. Accordingly, individuals tend to turn luxury into an integral part of the transition of an individual’s self-realisation and understanding, rather than using luxury to simply portray a stratified role in society.

In the previous literature, the experience of individuals feeling transformed by what they consume has been signified as the self-transformative power of brands (Hoppe, et al., 2009; Hemetsberger, et al., 2010; Bauer et al., 2011). Cheetham and McEachern (2013) also capture the transformative power between consumers and consumption objects in identity construction and propose the practice of transforming in order to extend consuming-as-integration practices proposed by Holt (1995). However, the findings show that luxury experience and its transformative power stemmed from self-transformation practice are not only just a consumer’s perceived extended self (Belk, 1988); rather, they also provide an opportunity to undergo different selves, owing to the deep symbolic possession and indulgence of luxuries in special moments. While other studies such as Belk (1988), Klein and Hill (2008) and Miller (2005; 2009) demonstrate the importance of material things, which serve as moments of luxury, the findings argue that simply owning and displaying does not constitute a luxury moment. Instead, the deep symbolic meanings of luxury
possessions and how they integrate themselves into consumers’ selves and everyday lives form the basis for such moments.

Lastly, self-transformative practice shows that luxury possessions are valued as a fairly intimate internal support for the self, which applies to either a personal ideal image or an individual’s self-appreciation and acceptance. Accordingly, self-transformation practice also implies that luxury is not just an object of desire (Berry, 1994; Belk et al., 2003), but rather it constitutes a desired part of the idealised self. Sirgy (1982) also suggests that consumers have both an ‘actual self’ (a realistic view of how they perceive themselves) and an ‘ideal self’, (how they would like to be). In this study, the gaps between the actual and the ideal self can be illustrated by the ways in which luxury possessions potentially enhance a consumer’s construction of him/herself through the transference of certain meanings of luxury to the self. Consumers appropriate luxury objects for the purpose of self-transformation: transformative experiences denote short-term changes that consumers undergo when consuming valued objects, which help them bridge the gap between their real and ideal selves. Accordingly, luxury consumption contributes to consumers’ identity construction by encompassing a broad array of self-fulfilment experiences, ranging from the actual to the ideal and transformative.

5.2.4 Caretaker Practice

It has been found from the findings that participants tend to experience and integrate intense emotions and feelings with luxury objects via caretaker practices. Within this role, they perform caring responsibilities and treat items with affection and respect. This is similar to Heilbrunn (2007), who found that individuals tend to apply possession rituals that allow them to extract meaning from products and integrate this meaning into their daily lives. The findings illustrated luxury as reflecting a person-object relationship. This is close to Belk’s (1988) concept of special possessions, where people integrate the meaning of consumption into their extended selves through various consumption practices, such as collecting and habitual use.
However, it has been shown that consumers enter into a kind of person-object relationship, which transcends sheer materialism: luxury items become more than just the representation of resources. In fact, the respondents assert that luxury items assume the roles of friends, lifetime partners, family members or even a personal quest, all of which makes luxury objects a necessary part of everyday lives that demands the individuals’ continual dedication and constant care. Accordingly, luxury becomes a special or cherished possession, which demands consumers’ the ultimate sense of care.

The findings position luxury objects as distinct from ordinary objects owing to the care and respect they are afforded. This complements the findings from Pichler and Hemetsberger (2007) where it was shown that consumers tend to perform intimate rituals with luxury objects and give them special treatment. However, they link the practice of special treatment with the desire to protect the product/brand from inappropriate use, meaning that the material characteristics of luxury still stand central in practice. The findings make a different point, since caretaker practices are not determined by the material aspects of a luxury object, such as the physical characteristics of the product material or the high price. The participants subject the luxury objects to special treatment because of the self-transcendental passion, trust and respect for the objects that they possess.

Apart from confirming special treatment for luxury objects, the findings support Douglas and Isherwood (1979), Storr (1983), Belk (1995b), who demonstrate that consumers can engage with luxury objects through collecting them. The findings address interesting parallels with prior discussions on collecting, where the participants show emotional thrills and commitment related to their luxury possessions upon extending a collection (McIntosh and Schmeichel, 2004; Zonneveld and Biggemann, 2014). The meanings attached to luxury show how the passion and the story behind the item evoke a strong emotional commitment in order to take care of the collection. An illustration is provided by Maesa, who arranges her collection in a cabinet with a glass door and commits to the role of curator for her own high-heel shoe museum. However, the participants do not limit the practice of collecting to sorting and acquiring the collected items where collecting luxury items
serves as a symbol of achievement and social class in economic terms, as asserted by most of the literature (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; 2004; O’Cass and Frost, 2002; Shukla, 2008; 2010; Kapferer and Bastien, 2009; Heine, 2011). In fact, the findings assert that the participants collect luxuries in order to fulfil their never-ending passion for the objects that they possess.

In conclusion, academic perspectives on luxury consumption and the meanings of luxury have, for a long time, been based on the theory of the leisure class (Veblen, 1902), in which luxury is narrowly defined as a tool of social stratification and which is based on an economic point of view (O’Cass and McEwen, 2004). However, after listening to consumers more carefully and exploring their practices of luxury consumption, luxury becomes more conspicuously inconspicuous, where consumers hold luxury as an integral/inconspicuous part of their selves in order to conspicuously portray their selves towards others. Also, it tends to be highly imaginative, less materialistic and economically involved than traditional understandings of luxury. Thus, such differences arising from the findings underlie the foundations for a practice-based conceptualisation of consumer-based luxury which will be explained in the next section.

5.3 Research Question 2: What are the meanings of luxury as understood through the practices of luxury consumption?

In previous literature, luxury was perceived as highly valuable, highly priced, high quality, exceptional and special, thus exhibiting strong commonalities with the traditional definitions of luxury (Vickers and Renand, 2003; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004; Heine, 2011). However, the four practices of luxury consumption also reveal the underexposed view in which luxury becomes more present in everyday lives, giving rise to an alternative view of luxury as everyday luxury. Accordingly, the major differences between traditional luxury and everyday luxury emerge from the findings, and lay the foundations for an alternative conceptualisation of luxury from a consumer perspective. Table 12 provides a comprehensive overview and a
comparison of the four major assumptions underlying traditional and everyday views of luxury

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Assumptions</th>
<th>Traditional luxury</th>
<th>Everyday luxury</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major explanation</td>
<td>Economic explanations</td>
<td>Cultural explanations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct</td>
<td>Conspicuous consumption is viewed as the main construct in determining luxury or non-luxury.</td>
<td>The meanings of luxury are formed as embodied practices in which they are subject to different self-understanding and morality constructs within each society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Economic capital is the significant indicator of luxury status.</td>
<td>Cultural capital is the significant indicator of luxury status.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Consumers emphasise luxury experience of material ownership (having/owning and displaying).</td>
<td>Consumers emphasise the experiential nature of their luxury consumption (being/doing).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object</td>
<td>Traditional luxury focuses on the importance of materiality and derives meanings of luxury primarily from the characteristics attached to luxury objects.</td>
<td>Everyday luxury focuses on the relationships that consumers develop with regards to luxury objects in defining luxury.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: Traditional versus everyday luxury

5.3.1 Construct

Traditionally, luxury is associated with the need of the individual to indicate his/her wealth to other members of society and is linked with Veblen’s (1902) assertion that conspicuous consumption is an important construct of what should be defined as luxury. This view renders consumers as passive and homogeneous entities, since it assumes that consumers inherit the same understandings of luxury and practices of luxury consumption. Accordingly, the meanings of luxury are passed over, starting with the pricing and branding strategies shaped by producers of luxury goods to the individual consumers, which is in agreement with McCrackern’s (1986) cultural meaning model. However, the findings show that consumers have more complex views regarding their definition of what luxury means to them. A
consumer-based understanding of luxury is more subjective, which contrasts with McCracken’s (1986) work by arguing that the direction of the consumption meanings should take consumers as the starting point at which the meanings of luxury are formed by the interpretation of practices surrounding luxury consumption. As such, the meanings of luxury should be viewed as the subjective construct in which consumer definitions of luxury vary according to the practices that individuals perform, as well as their backgrounds, interests, everyday lived experiences and understanding of the culture they live in.

According to the findings, all participants associate luxury with different products and experiences. Some associate it with traditionally luxurious items, such as diamonds, expensive brand names, and products priced so that they are only affordable for the wealthy (Silverstein, et al., 2004; Silverstein and Fiske, 2005; Van Auken and Daye, 2008). Other informants associate it with simple activities relating to personal lived experiences and interests, such as reading books or watching movies; in the latter case, bonding and affinity become central. It can be inferred that that participants have a sense of what luxury means to them, alongside the traditional understanding of what luxury means. Therefore, in general terms, the participants are found to have two co-existing opinions of luxury: they clearly distinguish between its traditional meaning and their own personal understanding.

The economic explanation of the traditional view of luxury is considered to be the one that society already knows and accepts, thereby generating a consensus of what should be identified as luxury in general. While previous studies (Nueno and Quelch, 1998; Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; 2004; Kapferer and Bastien, 2009; Keller, 2009) simply associate luxury with social stratification and high pricing, it should be noted that the participants have also tried to make sense of what they consider luxury to mean in terms of their lived experiences. The type of luxury found in this research has been dubbed ‘everyday luxury’. These findings are in line with Cova (1996) and Fournier (1998), who suggest that consumption functions as a repository of meaning, which can be opened up through the ordinary experiences of everyday life. This highlights the fact that the contemporary meaning of luxury has extended beyond the traditional perception of prestige and exclusivity set by luxury
brands towards high-intensity everyday consumer experiences and personal preferences (Yeoman and McMahon-Beatti, 2006; Bauer, et al., 2011). Accordingly, the perception of what constitutes luxury tends to be subjective, contestable and fluid and is, therefore, defined by cultural explanations in terms of the individuals’ lived experiences.

By perceiving luxury in terms of their individual lived experiences, the participants widely agree that it is the story, process, format or practice within their lived experiences that has brought them to consider something as being luxurious. While other scholars, such as Dubois and Laurent (1994; 1996) and Heine (2011), assert that the meaning of luxury is the shared knowledge that comes to reside in consumers’ minds, the findings argue that the meanings of luxury should be viewed in terms of shared cultural creations as the result of practices performed by consumers. As illustrated in the case study, the format or practice of watching a movie at a cinema, such as the silence and darkness in a cinema theatre allowing for the immediacy of watching a film and the excitement of not being able to interrupt the process, creates a highly personal engagement and pleasure, rendering it luxurious for the participant. This indicates that an array of different practices within individuals’ lived experiences is responsible for their understanding of luxury. The findings support Hirschman et al. (1998) and illustrate the main argument of the research that the participants’ own meanings of luxury are reflected in their historical and current practices, which in turn are derived from living within a consumer culture.

Moreover, the participants indicate that the simple things in everyday life can be turned into luxurious experiences through a number of specific practices. For example, cooking, which can be considered an ordinary or even mundane activity, can become a luxury when there is no compulsion to do it; thus, the participant’s meaning of luxury relates to the perception of personal pleasure that comes from changing cooking from an everyday requirement into something more exceptional. Accordingly, through practices, participants can adapt the meanings of luxury to everyday contexts, thus making them everyday luxuries by bringing the extraordinary into the ordinary. This is in agreement with Bauer et al. (2011), who
found that luxury can still be integrated into consumers’ everyday lives. In contrast to Horiuchi (1984), Hansen and Wänke (2011) and Heine (2011), luxury becomes more versatile when appropriated for everyday use and is no longer perceived as unnecessary. Although the participants assert that their survival does not depend on these luxuries, they admit that emotionally these things are rather crucial to their lives on a regular basis. As such, contemporary consumer-based definitions of luxury exist in consumers’ everyday lives.

Overall, the above discussion implies that practice is the key to understanding luxury; in other words, luxury is a form of embodied practice. What people do affects the meanings of objects and experiences in their lives (Shove and Pantzar, 2005; Shove, et al., 2007; Magaudda, 2011). What separates society’s traditional understanding of luxury and the participants’ own interpretations can be understood through practices, which are dependent on the participants’ everyday engagement with individual lived experiences and their prior exposure to a consumer culture. As such, the four practices found in the study generate the shared meanings of luxury in a cross-cultural context in relation to status, experiences and objects which will be discussed in the following sections.

5.3.2 Status

Veblen (1902) noted how people with wealth indulge in highly conspicuous consumption in order to enhance their social status. However, it is interesting to note how postmodernity has impacted on how consumers reflect their status through the use of luxuries, since Veblen (1902) made his initial observations. In fact, there have been changes in the types of people who seek status through markers of social class. While social class still plays an important role in structuring many societies, such as the UK and Thailand, it is not as dominant as when Veblen (1902) was writing his theory of conspicuous consumption. Social class has become more subtle and unspoken nowadays. This leads some changes to the meaning of luxury in term of luxury status. While traditional conceptions of luxury develop an understanding to regard it as a tool of social stratification, whereby luxury status is identified through a high level of economic capital, status-based practice suggests that luxury status can also be viewed in terms of social distinction through displaying superiority and
belonging. This interpretation can also help forge a more contemporary meaning of luxury, given that consumers are moving away from the display of wealth to affirm status towards exhibiting personal sets of exclusionary skill-based practices. Accordingly, time and effort are tied to luxury from the outset: learning skill-based practices is a personal endeavour and is bound by the time commitment given to this process. In this way, luxury could be considered a form of high cultural capital, involving high-level skills and knowledge. The actual process involves great sacrifices of time, learning and dedication, which serve as evidence of luxury status.

5.3.3 Experiences

Experiences gained via traditional luxury are associated with conspicuous consumption: they either inflate the ego or display wealth through luxury possessions (Tynan, et al., 2010; Dion and Arnould, 2011). Accordingly, the meaning of luxury is traditionally identified through the experience of material ownership (owning and displaying). The role of the pleasure taken in satisfying the need to display status and wealth through luxury possessions seems to be a common means to evoke positive feelings of exclusivity and prestige, which then become an important component of the experience of luxury (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009; Heine, 2011). In this particular consumption situation, consumers experience luxury and luxurious feelings in purchase situations, exclusive services and perceived product characteristics (Fionda and Moore, 2009; Keller, 2009).

Although luxury has long been identified as the opposite of ordinary things (Horiuchi, 1984; Denizer, 2005; Hansen and Wänke, 2011), it has been found that the meanings of luxury are integrated in consumers’ everyday lives. These findings are in line with Carú and Cova (2007), who showed how consumers immerse themselves in experiential spaces in their daily lives in order to give meaning to things. As such, luxury becomes flexible and versatile: consumers adapt luxuries to everyday contexts that might not be associated with traditional luxury products and brands. Within this regard, consumer-defined luxury values the experiential nature of luxury consumption in everyday lives (being/doing), in which the meanings of luxury can be constructed beyond the experience of exclusive service.
According to the narratives on escapist practice and self-transformation practice, luxury experiences are rather manifested in the imagination as moments of luxury. These moments of luxury are integrated into everyday lives, where they serve as support for the self and enable the experience of something extraordinary. The transformative power of luxuries can temporarily change an individual’s common practice in order to enable either special and personal moments as an escapist experience or an individual’s self-realisation and understanding as a self-transformation experience.

In general, the findings are in agreement with Bauer et al. (2011) who found that the concept of luxury is reflected in the escapist, flexible, unlocking power of luxury and privacy, which underlines luxury’s role as an important hidden resource for relating to one’s self. Overall, the findings extend the understanding of the luxury experience (Atwal and William, 2009), which should be tied to the temporal context as a special moment of luxury. Consumers emphasise that the experiential nature of luxury in their everyday lives shows that luxury is valued as an ephemeral and transformative experience. While Vigneron and Johnson (1999; 2004) aim to identify luxury and its experience through its materialistic dimensions such as uniqueness, quality, hedonism, extended self, and conspicuousness, the narratives from escapist and self-transformation have shown that the meanings of luxury should be extended in order to comprise metaphysical notions of eudaimonic wellbeing and self-fulfilment.

5.3.4 Object

While the traditional notion of luxury and the theory of conspicuous consumption focus on the importance of materiality (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009; Dion and Arnould, 2011; Heine, 2011), the caretaker practice suggests that it is not only objects that define luxury, but also the relationships that are developed with them. Although Vigneron and Johnson (2004), Wiedmann et al. (2007), and Kim et al. (2009) discuss the interpretation of luxury in terms of what a luxury product can do based on its materiality, the findings from the caretaker practice suggest that luxury is also identified with intense emotions, which stem from the consumers’ personal interests, passions, loves, desires, fears and other deep emotions. In this
regard, consumers can generate meanings of luxury through personal relationships that are not dependent on the material attributes of the luxury object in question. Accordingly, luxury is not inherent in an object: luxury comes from the immaterial properties of an object, the result of never-ending dedication and care for the possession. If such a relationship did not exist or came to an end, such items would no longer be identified as luxurious.

Overall, the four practices of everyday luxury consumption have extended the existing research by encompassing four aspects of luxury consumption, thus introducing alternative views of luxury as a form of everyday luxury. The notion of everyday luxury fundamentally contributes to our understanding of luxury as an ephemeral and immaterial concept present in our everyday living. The ephemeral aspect of luxury shows that consumers value luxury experiences as an experienced moment of the imagination in everyday living. Luxury has a unique transformability, which can temporarily change either an individual’s common practices to enable extraordinary experiences in ordinary life (escapist practice) or an individual’s self-realisation and understanding (self-transformation practices). Moreover, everyday luxury suggests that immaterial entities involving continual dedication, constant care (caretaker practices), and high levels of cultural capital (status-based practices) can be marked as luxuries by consumers.

Despite the shared meanings of luxury across cultures, it should be noted that the meanings of luxury are subjective in nature. Given the ostensibly subjective nature of luxury consumption (Roper et al., 2013), it is surprising that few studies have formally examined its practical properties in a cross-cultural context. As such, the study also seeks to the meanings and the practices of luxury in two distinct cultures (Thai and UK) which will be discussed in the following section.
5.4 Research Question 3: How are different practices and meanings of luxury among young adult consumers played out in differing cultural contexts?

While the traditional view of luxury maintains that the meanings of luxury are fixed for various consumers and different contexts (Eastman et al., 1997; 1999), the findings argue that the subjective nature of the meanings of luxury in cross-cultural contexts is constructed via the concept of the self and the morality constructs of each society as discussed as follows:

5.4.1 Self-construct

Although the practices are fairly individually motivated in which there does not seem to be a distinct cultural pattern of luxury consumption practices between Thai and UK consumers, both the Thai and the UK participants still (re)interpret luxury in a cultural pattern according to a different understanding of the self within each society. Such subjective understanding of the self across cultures consists of an independent/interdependent self-concept, the balance between the self and group needs, the nature of hierarchy, and the legitimacy of group affiliation (Wong and Ahuvia, 1998). The findings are in line with those of scholars like Triandis (1995), Wong and Ahuvia (1998), Tsai (2005), Li and Su, (2007), Gao et al. (2009), Shukla (2010), and Li and Zhang, (2011), in which individualism and collectivism in Western and Eastern cultures are used to clarify the differences in meanings of luxury in a cross-cultural context. However, these scholars base their understandings of luxury on particular practices in relation to status/conspicuous consumption, which results in a generalisation of meanings. Their understanding of the practices of luxury are grounded narrowly within the nature of luxury possessions (Vickers and Renand, 2003; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004), thus limiting the interpretation of luxury.

To clarify, previous research asserted that while Western consumers are predominantly influenced by luxury possessions in a private context, public luxury possession is an important practice for luxury consumption among Asian consumers (Wong and Ahuvia, 1998; Dubois, et al., 2005; Gao, et al., 2009). However, the
findings suggest that consumers from both societies engage in luxury consumption both privately and publicly. Instead, the subjective meanings of luxury across cultural contexts are actually grounded in the nature of self-concept within each society. For the UK participants, self-esteem and individual fulfilment, not only just private possession, are central to the interpretation of the meanings of luxury. In contrast, for the Thai participants, the interdependent self, social belonging and social relationships are central to their meanings of luxury. In a broader sense, the findings are in line with Wong and Ahuvia (1998), since the interpretations of the UK participants are framed by horizontal individualism, while the Thai participants are vertically collectivists in their cultural orientation.

It can be seen that individualism (independent self) and collectivism (interdependent self) can be used as a lens to shape ‘the context of contexts’ (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011) when luxury consumption is carried out in different societies. However, the findings extend from previous studies on luxury consumption in a cross-cultural context (Tsai, 2005; Li and Su, 2007; Shukla, 2010; 2011; Podoshen, et al., 2011; Hennigs et al., 2012) by asserting the major difference in the interpretation of luxury between two distinct cultures. Such a difference is interpreted by how consumers strike a balance between the motivation for using luxuries and the cultural understanding of the concept of the self. For the UK participants, personal preferences, tastes, abilities and values are central to their self-concept; for them, the use of luxuries is motivated by the enhancement of personal pleasure and fulfilment, a notion of the independent idealised self, self-esteem and social distinctive status. Since Thai culture is based on an interpersonal notion of the self and social hierarchy (Komin, 1991; Wongtada, et al., 1997), the Thai participants are more likely to focus on the public self, or the outer self, than the UK participants. Here, the use of luxuries is a means not only for personal indulgence, but also for exemplary social virtue that enhances the communication of the social hierarchical status and belonging, and depicts an interdependent idealised self.

Finally, earlier studies, such as Wong and Ahuvia, (1998), Li and Su (2007), Gao et al. (2009), Podoshen et al. (2011), and Hennigs et al. (2012), make the conclusion that luxury consumption is likely to support the search for social status
and prestige from a collectivist orientation, rather than from an individualistic one. However, the findings argue different points of view since both the UK and the Thai participants view luxury as a resource in the search for social status and prestige. Instead, the notion of status and prestige through luxury consumption is interpreted differently according to different cultural orientations. For UK consumers, luxury consists of an intimate person-object relationship, as inner-directed resources, such as luxury status and prestige, are understood as a form of an individual’s self-esteem and distinction. On the other hand, Thai consumers assert a relationship to luxuries that is both personal- and social-oriented. This drives Thai consumers to view luxury status and prestige as a form of an interpersonal relationship based on hierarchy and the awareness of the face that one presents to society.

Apart from this, the meanings of contemporary luxury have become more oriented towards consumers’ interpretations of lived experiences than they were before. It can be seen from the findings that there is an alternative way of viewing the meanings of luxury and its consumption. These views are predominantly directed inwards towards things like personal feelings of moral responsibility for luxury consumption. From a cross-cultural point of view, a particular moral belief about luxury consumption can trigger either positive or negative personal feelings and thoughts about the concept of luxury, which causes a variation in the meanings between the Thai and UK participants. The morality construct will be discussed in the following section.

5.4.2 Morality Construct

It has been proven that the distinct difference in the meanings of luxury in cross-cultural contexts is not only constructed through individualism and collectivism in Western and Eastern cultures, as highlighted by Wong and Ahuvia (1998) and Dubois et al. (2005), but is also rooted in the morality constructions within each society. The findings show that luxury consumption has become increasingly influenced by consumers’ morality construct. Accordingly, consumer satisfaction depends not only on individuals’ personal pleasure in luxury consumption, but also on the moral responsibility of the individual to fellow citizens.
It has been acknowledged that the economic explanation of traditional luxury causes the notion of luxury to be considered as immoral. Accordingly, traditional luxury is negatively viewed as a function of corruption, because excessive expenditure and material wealth can lead to terrible convulsions in the national economy and push consumers to exercise discrimination (O’Cass and Frost, 2002; Berg, 2004; Hilton, 2004). However, the findings reveal that that there is an intellectual and cultural movement towards a more morally-oriented luxury consumption, since the participants have become aware of the disciplines surrounding their luxury consumption in order to enhance their moral character and to avoid negative self-identity in others’ opinions. Accordingly, the desire for luxury is not intrinsically immoral.

Although Roper et al. (2013) utilise the morality construct when explaining the discourses on luxury, in which the consumer constructs a morally inner-directed, autonomous self in order to frame his/her views on luxury, most previous studies have not attempted to understand morality in light of the specific cultural context in which it takes place. Hofstede (1980; 2001), Schwartz (1992; 1994), and Trompenaars et al. (1996) have outlined a parallel range of cultural values in terms of the two major orientations of culture: individualism/collectivism and vertical/horizontal. However, given the rising trend whereby consumers are becoming more morally motivated in their consumption, the findings also revealed that a refinement of the individualism/collectivism and vertical/horizontal axes would produce better results in cross-cultural consumer research, since the incorporation of the morality constructs of each culture will enhance the understanding of cultural orientation.

It is clear from the findings that participants are concerned about how they and their actions appear to others, so they prevent the negative self-attribution associated with a taste or distaste of luxury in terms of the nature of affluence as a basis to classify people and things. In fact, UK participants are aware of the punitive social norms of excessive spending, over-the-top consumption and too much ostentation. This finding is in line with Roper et al. (2013), who has discussed the moralistic nature of luxury discourses among British consumers in relation to the
awareness of excessive spending: these discourses help to contrast the positive and negative aspects of people (Thompson and Haytko, 1997). However, the findings also show that UK consumers connect extravagance and conspicuousness with luxury to a lesser extent. They encourage a sense of discipline by justifying their spending on luxuries as more humble and sensible and they associate luxury consumption with hedonism and self-appreciation.

For the Thai consumers, on the other hand, the face of the family and kinship group (Ger and Belk, 1994; 1996) is the major moral motivation for luxury consumption. They assert a negative self-image, consisting of qualities and feelings such as betrayal, being spoiled and shame, when their luxury consumption cannot promote the social face of the family. Accordingly, the rhetoric of luxury as connected to the prestige position of the family has supplanted cultural beliefs in Thai society: the participants are obsessed with the idea of making a good impression on others by consuming luxuries in order to conform to the status of their group. The Thai consumers are obliged to consume luxury according to the criteria of vanity and ostentation in order to signal their family’s esteem. This seems to be in line with the idea of traditional luxury and the conspicuousness of luxury consumption in Eastern societies discussed by Triandis (1995), Wong and Ahuvia (1998), Li and Su (2007), and Gao et al. (2009). However, the morality construct of luxury in Thai society reveals that luxury is seen as an exemplar of social virtues and is fulfilling a familial obligation; thus, it is not labelled as a selfish materialist.

In agreement with Hennigs et al. (2012), while individual consumer perceptions might differ, the basic values of cultural orientation when it comes to luxury consumption are generalisable. The discussion suggested that luxuries, as defined by UK consumers, are quite intimate and relate to the independent self. This independent self is constructed via moral beliefs that reject excessive spending and overwhelming ostentation. For the Thai consumers, luxuries are likely to be viewed as being both instrumental and family-related; in terms of moral beliefs, the face of the family is a central concern in the construction of the interdependent person.

In conclusion, the understanding of self and morality constructs within different cultures demonstrated in this research comes close to the discussion by
Vigneron and Johnson (2004), where they argue that, within the same brands or products, different consumers can perceive the level of luxury differently. The findings suggest that the way in which individuals from different cultures justify their level of luxury is determined by the degree of independent/interdependent self and morality within different cultures and societies. For the Thai participants, the level of luxury is perceived to be high when such products allow for the interdependent self to represent the public face of the family, social relationships and belonging. In contrast, the level of luxury for the UK consumers is associated with a degree of intimacy, where real luxury is sparse and limited to the independent self in order to assist the development of self-esteem and fulfil individual preferences.

5.5 Chapter Review

Since Veblen (1902), luxury has been understood as synonymous with conspicuous consumption, which narrowly associates the meanings of luxury with the purchase of expensive goods in order to maintain or gain higher social status. In this view, the meanings of luxury are viewed as the apex of a collection of characteristics attached to a product or a brand that provide economic and social capital to the owner (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999). However, society is not fixed across time. The findings from this present study have pointed out the recent phenomenon of luxury consumption being diverse through everyday activities and experiences, giving rise to inconspicuous consumption (Eckhardt et al., 2014) as well as the more mundane moments of luxury consumption in reconceptualising the meanings of luxury.

Moreover, the use of practice theory for framing the exploration and analysis of a luxury consumption practice can open up new areas of inquiry within research on consumption practices and luxury consumption. While both Holt (1995) and Cheetham and McEachern (2013) focus on conceptualising consumption as a form of social action, practice theory sheds new light on conceptualising consumption practices by allowing researchers to examine both routinis ed and intentional actions (de Certeau, 1984). As derived from the findings, a framework of everyday luxury consumption practice (figure 22) reveals that consumption practices incorporate not only social actions, but also mundane performances that are important and
underexposed elements of luxury consumption and the meanings of luxury. Accordingly, luxury becomes more about meaningful objects and activities in which consumers experience them as luxurious.

According to the findings, the participants widely agreed it is the story, process, format or practice within the lived experiences of their everyday lives that has brought them to consider something as luxurious. As such, the meanings of luxury are steered toward the connection between activities, objects, and meanings which is in line with the logic of the circuit of practice (Magguada, 2011; Arsel and Bean, 2013). As a result, the thesis extends the existing research into luxury by developing themes of everyday luxury consumption practices: caretaker, escapist, self-transformation and status-based, which provide shared practices and the meanings of luxury in a cross-cultural context. This broadens our understanding of luxury; luxury can now be understood as a form of embodied practice, thus leading to a discussion of four main aspects of luxury consumption that extend our understandings of luxury beyond the traditional point of view.

Firstly, the meanings of luxury are not constant across individuals; luxury consumption doesn’t simply equate to conspicuous consumption. Instead, the findings suggest that the meanings of luxury are subjective constructs that vary according to the practices that individuals perform, as well as to different self-understanding and the morality constructed within each society. Also, luxury is drifting from its traditional concept of existing at a high economic capital level and is attaching itself to the consumer’s cultural capital, becoming involved with high levels of the sacrifice of time, learning, dedication and challenges as evidence of luxury status. It has been found that luxury experiences stem not only from experiences involving material ownership. Luxury experiences are also valued in the mundane moments of imagination, which can temporarily change either an individual’s common practice in order to enable special and personal moments, or an individual’s self-realisation and understanding. Lastly, luxury is not solely a characteristic attached to a product. It is also about a consumer-object relationship in which things will become luxuries when consumers subject them to a kind of relationship that sheers continual dedication to and constant care of such things.
Although this study focuses primarily on the alternative ways in which consumers immerse luxury into their everyday lives, this does not mean that the traditional views of luxury are rejected by this study. Accordingly, a unifying concept of luxury should incorporate both traditional and everyday views of luxury in order to allow us to further develop understandings of contemporary luxury in the fullest sense. Overall, the findings reveal the underexposed element of the meaning of luxury, in which luxury becomes much more self-intimate, morally related, and ephemeral in nature, and less materially focused, than had been previously assumed by the context of traditional views of luxury. As such, the major theoretical significance of the findings that extend our understanding of luxury from its grounding in conspicuous consumption will be addressed in the concluding chapter.
6 Conclusion

This chapter explores the implications and contributions of this thesis at three main levels. Firstly, the major theoretical significance of the findings extends our understanding of luxury from its grounding in conspicuous consumption towards a subjective, moral, ephemeral and immaterial concept. The contribution of this thesis in methodological terms will also be discussed in order to provide an approach for future research: this will focus on the application of practice theory. Lastly, the chapter provides a conclusion with managerial and marketing implications arising from the findings. Also, a detailed discussion of future research possibilities and the limitations of this study are offered.

6.1 Theoretical Contribution

This thesis has proposed that the understanding of luxury needs to be integrated into the practices of consumer culture. Thus, the study conceptualises luxury from a consumer perspective, wherein meanings are understood as resulting from the luxury consumption practices adopted by diverse sets of consumers in different cultures. This study extends the existing research into luxury by developing four practices of luxury consumption: caretaker, escapist, self-transformation and status-based. This broadens our understanding of luxury. The study makes two main theoretical contributions in relation to the research objectives. They will be discussed in detail below.

6.1.1 Theoretical Contribution to the Concept of Luxury

The first research objective of this thesis was to examine the contemporary meanings of luxury and luxury consumption, with a particular focus on the various practices of luxury consumption that individuals can perform in order to experience their meanings of luxury. Accordingly, the researcher proposes a new way of conceptualising luxury, one in which luxury can be understood as a form of embodied practice. Rather than solely focusing on the traditional view of luxury, the present research suggests an alternative view where consumers can also transfer and incorporate self-defined luxuries into everyday contexts. This idea considerably
enlarges our understandings of contemporary luxury, so that traditional luxury (Veblen, 1902) and everyday luxury can co-exist within a broader concept. The notion of everyday luxury allows us to move beyond a purely materialistic understanding in order to reach a metaphysical account of luxury as an ephemeral and immaterial presence in everyday lived experiences.

Firstly, luxury is not only a permanent state in certain situations of conspicuous consumption or just the experience of material ownership. The notion of everyday luxury suggests an ephemeral state of luxury, where it is valued as a fleeting experience in moments of imagination that are generated by the transformative power of luxuries. Everyday luxury embodies a unique practical element of transformability, a transient state that manifests itself in the imagination as moments of luxury. Moments of luxury serve to enable extraordinary experiences in ordinary life (escapist practice) and to support self-realisation and understanding in everyday living (self-transformation practice).

While traditional notions of luxury emphasise the materiality of having/owning and displaying (Vigeron and Johnson, 1999), escapist practices reveal luxury consumption as distinct from ordinary consumption due to its experiential nature (being/doing) in everyday lives. Luxury consumption is not only consumed by material reality, but also consumed within the imagination, reflecting a moment of luxury. Everyday luxury embodies a unique practice of escapism, which can transform common, routine practices and ordinary things into personal, special moments, allowing consumers to experience something extraordinary. They can escape from the ordinariness of everyday life and indulge in a special moment of luxury.

In opposition to overt and conspicuous endeavours to create an identity, everyday luxury asserts a new understanding of consumers’ selves as portrayed to relevant others. Everyday luxury is also conspicuously inconspicuous since consumers merge luxuries with themselves in order to (conspicuously) broadcast their idealised self (the inconspicuous part of themselves) to others. Rather than necessarily defining themselves as being exclusive, prestigious or sophisticated, people turn luxury into an internal part of their selves, a transformed self, unified
with their corporeality, such as ‘a professional’, ‘a classic lady’, or ‘a better person’. Self-transformation practices show that luxury experiences are not only just a perceived extension of the self (Belk, 1988); instead, they also provide consumers with the chance to temporarily undergo different selves in everyday living, reflected by deep symbolic meanings of luxury objects and the indulgence of luxury in special moments.

Secondly, traditional luxury focuses on the importance of the conspicuousness of materiality and derives meaning primarily from the functional, symbolic, and experiential dimensions of luxury objects (Vickers and Renand, 2003). However, everyday luxury suggests that luxury is also forged through immaterial properties, such as a certain person-object relationship whereby things are experienced as luxuries when consumers develop relationships involving continual dedication and constant care (caretaker practice). Another immaterial property that defines luxury is the process of consumption embodied in high cultural capital, time, learning, dedication, and meeting challenges to serve as evidence of a luxury status (status-based practice).

The concept of everyday luxury suggests that it is not only the properties of the objects themselves that define them as luxury, but also the relationships that people develop with them. Caretaker practices have shown that luxury is defined through person-object relationships, in which consumers show self-transcendent passion, trust and respect to the luxury objects that they possess. The luxury items become more than just tools which people use to signify wealth and prestige (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; 2004). Instead, these items assume the role of friends, lifetime partners, family members or a personal quest, all of which require participants’ continual dedication and never-ending care.

While the traditional luxury status is identified through a high level of economic capital (O’Cass and McEwen, 2004), status-based practice reveals that luxury status can be produced through other forms of capital. Consumers can also affirm their status through having their own sets of exclusionary and skill-based practices. The process of luxury consumption is embodied in high cultural capital, involving a high level of skill and knowledge; here, the actual process, which
involves time, learning, dedication and confronting challenges, serves as evidence of luxury status.

Although this study focuses primarily on the various ways in which consumers incorporate luxury into their everyday lives, this does not mean that the traditional views of luxury are ignored. However, if we only focus on the traditional views of luxury, we fail to appreciate and incorporate the more mundane moments of luxury, which are an important and underexposed element in the meaning of luxury. Overall, the co-existence of the two types of luxury, traditional and everyday, suggests that the concept of luxury can be produced by drawing on economic capital, cultural capital and imagination resources.

6.1.2 Theoretical Contribution to Constructing the Subjective Meanings of Luxury in a Cross-cultural Context

In seeking to understand the notions of everyday luxury, the second research objective of this study also attempted to develop an understanding of how these explanations would hold up in different cultural contexts. This aspect draws on two key elements: self-concept and morality. Self-concept and morality serve as motivations for the practices that construct the subjective meanings of luxury in a cross-cultural context.

The study finds that luxury consumption practices between two distinct cultures do not clearly differ: it is the motivation behind the doing/practice that stands out as informing the difference between the various meanings of luxury in cross-cultural contexts. The motivation behind luxury consumption practices across cultural contexts is subject to the different understanding of the self within different cultures and societies (individualism and collectivism in Western and Eastern cultures respectively). In line with Wong and Ahuvia (1998), aspects of self-esteem and individual fulfilment are important motivations for luxury consumption among the British participants. In contrast, for the Thai participants, belonging, social acceptance, and social relationships are the central motivations for, and the meaning of their luxury consumption.
The thesis has extended the work of Wong and Ahuvia (1998), who conclude that the practices and meanings of luxury in cross-cultural contexts are also rooted in the morality constructed within each society. Luxury consumption has become increasingly moralised: the satisfaction experienced by individuals depends not only on their own luxury consumption, but also on how they appear to fellow citizens based on the social judgment and beliefs associated with a taste or distaste of luxury in terms of the nature of affluence. While luxury consumption used to be generally perceived as amoral (Berg, 2004; Hilton, 2004), the findings argue that luxury has become a process that establishes conditions favourable to the maintenance of morality by encouraging a sense of discipline that prevents negative self-attribution associated with the moral standards regarding affluence. It should be noted that the way in which culturally informed moral beliefs influence different culture experiences of luxury. Both the UK and Thai consumers question the nature of luxury and negative self-attribution in an association with moral beliefs in different ways. The UK consumers associate a negative self with excessive spending and ostentation, while their Thai counterparts assert a negative self when their luxury consumption is unable to promote the ‘face’ of the family.

In Figure 27, the meanings of luxury of Thai and UK consumers have been sketched in the form of diamonds in order to illustrate the interpretation of luxury in a cross-cultural context.
The diamond metaphorically illustrates how the meanings of luxury come to exist through the reflections on luxury in a cross-cultural context. The study relies on the idea that there is no single truth about luxury or ‘reality’. Instead, there are constructs based on a consumer’s experiences and interpretations, which are derived from symbolic interaction (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Figure 27 bridges the gap between the elements of luxury, which are often discussed separately as distinctly perceived value dimensions (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004; Wiedmann, et al., 2009; Tynan, et al., 2009). The study suggested that the ‘subjective truth’ of the elements which make up luxury are placed in the core of the diamond. The meanings of luxury are regarded as combining the construct and outcome of a reciprocal interaction between both traditional and everyday luxury, the understanding of selves and morality within different cultures and societies, and the different reflections on individuals’ lived experiences (e.g., personal backgrounds and preferences and experiences of luxury consumption).

The diamond diagram also demonstrates a relative and context-bound understanding of luxury in which the consumer occupies a central role as an interpreter and experiencer. To this end, the meaning of luxury is an interpretation, and the consumer’s own experience is the fundamental truth of luxury. Accordingly, the meaning of luxury depends on how one looks at the diamond and what light one
shines upon it. As the diamond is rotated, it displays different reflections that are derived from consumers’ perceptions and reflections in relation to individual, social and cross-cultural contexts. As a result, when we look at the diamond from a perspective of UK consumers, it can be interpreted that luxury has an intimate person-object relationship, as inner-directed resources relate to individual indulgence and fulfilment. Luxury is depicted in terms of superiority and enhancing the independent, idealised self. There is also a social moral belief against excessive spending and too much ostentation. Thai consumers, on the other hand, assert a relationship to luxuries that is both person- and society-oriented. Luxury for them serves as an individual tool for personal indulgence and as an exemplary social virtue to enhance the communication of social status and belonging. Luxury depicts an interdependent idealised self and fulfils family obligations: the public face of the family is also a central concern.

In a boarder sense, UK consumers found great value in individualist culture, and social moral beliefs revolve around how to judge their own merits. The study UK participants preferred to associate themselves with luxuries in order to enhance themselves, and consider using a luxury item a pleasurable experience in which their interpretation of luxury is likely to be related to notion of everyday luxury. On the other hand, Thai participants in this study preferred to place attention on the aspects of luxury consumption that help them achieve social acceptance derived from the hierarchical nature of society and social morality in a collectivist culture. Accordingly, Thai consumers’ interpretation of luxury tends to be more grounded in the traditional and conspicuous views of luxury than is the interpretation of the UK consumers.

In conclusion, the study has broadened our understandings of luxury beyond the traditional point of view by asserting that what constitutes luxury tends to be ephemeral and immaterial. These metaphysical elements are constructed by a liminal moment of eudaimonic wellbeing and the fulfilment of the ideal self, the never-ending and constant care relationship, and the embodiment of high cultural capital. These also fluidly interact with individuals’ lived experiences as well as with cultural
issues related to self-concept and morality in order to conceptualise the meanings of luxury in a cross-cultural context.

6.2 Methodological Contribution

An increasing amount of attention has been paid to the methodological considerations of applying practice theory to marketing research. While sociology researchers have suggested a variety of verbal, visual, and non-visual research methods within a study of everyday and social practices (Närvänen, 2014; Wills et al., 2015), most marketing research that utilises practice theory is still simply associated with combining observations and interviews in order to investigate practices (Martens, 2012). As such, this study contributes an alternative methodological approach to marketing research by combining visual and verbal narrative methods with ‘taking’ and ‘doing’ practices. According to Riessman (1993; 2008), narrative enquiries can reveal the complexity and uniqueness of individuals to the researcher in ways that neither interviews nor observations alone can do. This is due to the classic problem that people do not tell long stories about their practices, which makes it difficult for researchers to observe or participate in practices in order to optimise data collection. If the participants lack the literacy to express themselves, they may provide vague or tentative answers to the stimulation.

It should be noted that the use of practice theory in research focuses on thinking about how to push beyond the barriers between talking about practices and performances, and those between the intersections of ‘bodily movements, things, practical knowledge and routine’ in the practical accomplishment of everyday life (Reckwitz, 2002). Here, there is a need to think more creatively about how to capture these realities of practices through research methodology. Through the combination of visual and verbal narrative methods, this research proposes an integrative approach to understanding practices where visual performances and talk are interpreted in conversations between the researcher and the informants.

As Visual data has been integrated with verbal interpretations by the informants (Keats, 2009), the study suggests that visual narratives should be used simultaneously during the research process in order to facilitate making sense of the
practices, especially with the research aiming to fully capture various details within the practices. This moves the verbal narrative from being solely an external stimulus for prompting answers. Within this approach, the visual and verbal dimensions of practices become an integral component of the research process, where they were used to elicit examples of practices from participants and then to facilitate the whole research process.

To clarify, in the first stage of the data collection, the use of the in-depth narrative interviews and collage construction provides communicative advantages to the researcher, such as building rapport and provoking deeper verbal narratives concerning the meanings of luxury and the practices surrounding it. During the interview process, the collage acts as a boundary object (Star, 2010) and spans the knowledge boundaries between the researcher and the participant by providing a multi-dimensional method of communication. It also provides a joint focus, which helps to foster articulation, integration and the co-construction of knowledge by accommodating the needs of the researcher and participants. This allows for the provision of robust information to the discussed topic. Accordingly, in order to understand practices, there is a need for ‘talking’, but given the practical nature of what is being discussed, using visual methods offers an additional important dimension and allows researchers to capture some aspects of the ‘unspoken’.

For the fieldwork, the use of visual narratives provides a reference for the verbal narratives attained during the fieldwork. The method enables both the researcher and participant to build on each other’s contributions and to keep track of the discussion as it proceeded over time. It can also promote further discussion and additional insights into the practices being discussed, thus eliciting nuances that lead to unexpected findings. Moreover, the process of employing a combination of visual and verbal narrative methods provides opportunities to retrieve the orally-performed stories that surround the routine practices through visual features (such as interactive activities within the practices and the gestures, postures, facial expressions and gazes of an individual). The researcher can witness the context of an event or situations in which the practices were carried out, while still having space to think about the situation. As such, these methods can contribute to the authenticity of the findings by
virtue of the fact that the researcher was spending time in the field and being honest in the face of experiences and practices.

Overall, the combination of visual and verbal narrative methods has helped to overcome the knowledge barriers between talking about practices (verbal) and the actual performance (visual) to be transgressed and elicits a full understanding of the practices. It also builds a shared understanding of practices between the researcher and the participants and increases the opportunity to compare information on practices across multiple stages of the data collection. To clarify, the practices are presented in a visual format, which allows the researcher to check them against the verbal format for validation purposes. This is a classic tactic to enhance our understanding and sharpen our findings (Shenton, 2004).

Halkier (2011) has acknowledged the need to provide a diverse range of qualitative research methods while at the same time expanding the breadth of qualitative methodology research in terms of practical theory. This study suggests a methodological development for marketing research by integrating visual narratives as a technique to facilitate the verbal enquiry about practices. While interviews and observations have been used for a long time in marketing research, this study argues that the inclusion of verbal and visual narratives can overcome many challenges inherent in purely verbal interviews or simple observation. It argues that this offers a greater involvement from the participants in shaping the research encounter. In the combination of verbal and visual narratives, the involvement of the participants is extended to all stages of the research process: from the initial stage where the visual narrative is being presented, to the final stage, where the verbal narrative is concluded with a visual narrative that has been presented throughout the research process.

Lastly, in future studies, researchers should evaluate the combination of verbal and visual narrative methods by comparing the richness of the data from such sources, with that gathered from purely verbal interviews and observations. Overall, the methodological approach set in this study hopes to show how meanings are made through understanding and practices. This may help answer the question posed by
Atkinson and Coffey (2003): how can we know what they think and do until we see what they say?

6.3 Managerial Implications

This study provides two types of managerial implications: insights into consumer and luxury contexts, and the processes of luxury brand management when creating everyday luxuries.

Access to the market for luxury goods is expanding to the masses, which might cause confusion over what should be perceived as luxury. In order to solve such a paradox, this study provides an understanding about contemporary contexts where luxuries are available and are consumed in an everyday context. Understanding contemporary consumers and their alternative meanings and practices helps to target the marketing and additional services to better serve consumers’ desires. Moreover, it is vital to acknowledge the alternative channels through which luxury brands have an indirect effect on present and potential future customers. Thus, the alternative channel of the luxury market as ‘everyday luxury’ may be an option that enable luxury brands to stand out in a competitive marketplace, especially with the democratisation of luxury (Silverstein et al., 2004).

According to Kapferer and Bastien (2009), many strategies have been adopted by luxury brands to facilitate the democratisation of luxury, such as new luxury, masstige (a portmanteau of mass and prestige), and premiums which serve to support different product ranges within the same overall luxury brand name. These strategies have used a two-pronged attack; on the one hand, by hyping their brands mercilessly through branding or advertising, and, on the other, by making their products available both physically and economically so that most customers can afford them (Thomas, 2008). For example, Mercedes offers luxury cars such as the S-class and non-luxury cars such as the A-class (Dubois and Laurent, 1995). However, these strategies are strongly associated with specific associations concerning luxury product characteristics (Heine, 2011) and overlook the importance of consumers’ own experiences in constructing the interpretation of the luxury.
Positioning the consumer at the core of luxury brand management practices provides an advantage that challenges traditional luxury brand management. Although luxury brands highlight the importance of consumers’ experiences of service and retail, they still neglect the practices of consumers and consumption experiences, which give empowered roles to consumers. According to Brakus et al. (2009), ‘experience providers’ can create a favourable basis that allows the consumer to create the experience. By acknowledging consumers’ practices in everyday luxury consumption, the practical elements of everyday luxury experience (constant care, escapism, self-transformation and high cultural capital) could be taken into account when planning marketing tactics and strategies in brand marketing and management. These can serve as the basis for generating luxury experience providers.

As luxury experiences are driven by a personal viewpoint, luxury marketers should take this into consideration when looking to provide customers with a memorable experience and an affinity with luxury products (Brun, 2008). Caretaker practices suggest that consumers show constant care and dedication to luxury products. Through storytelling and the creation of content around the brand, luxury brands should deliver their products with content about the care invested in adapting luxuries to everyday life. This could involve a plausible advertising campaign, pictures, or product placements in the media showing how to keep or take care of luxury items at home, or the attractiveness and appealing interfaces of luxury possessions. Demonstrating the care experiences that consumers need to develop with luxury products after their purchase will allow luxury brands to give consumers the opportunity to place themselves at the centre of their luxury possession experiences, forge an emotional bond with the products, and finally draw a strong consumer loyalty to the brand.

Moreover, in the making of everyday luxury experiences, the escapist element of everyday luxury shows that consumers are likely to overcome the issue of having too much work and too little time. They are looking for ways to escape in order to reward themselves after a tough day and gain personal pleasure in everyday life. Accordingly, luxury brands should perform in ways other than function, which requires a clear strategy when delivering intangible value (Heine, 2011). Apart from
the personal pleasure gained through the aesthetics and comforts of luxury products, the study suggests that the imagination is an additional intangible value and a powerful mechanism for stimulating creativity, passion, and innovation (Serf-Walls, 2014). This can be related to dreams, memory reconstruction, emotional imagination, and imaginative fantasy (Hunter, 2013). It can be done through imagination-based advertisement, which uses marketing messages to provoke positivity towards the brands.

Apart from this, every luxury experience also involves the use of luxuries as instrumental resources for self-transformation. This suggests that luxury brands should simultaneously offer a self-transformation experience through sensory pleasure and self-esteem. Sensory pleasure comes from the use of products which allow the transformation to take place. This notion of such a transformation can be created through careful product placement in movies, television and music videos by showing the various ways in which celebrities use a luxury item and how a luxury product is woven into the storyline. Moreover, enabling self-esteem can be achieved through the self-enriching message of a brand, which makes consumers feel good and proud about themselves and attach their idealised self to the brand identity. Accordingly, it provides the opportunity for luxury brands to move from being just a situational product to an everyday necessity.

Consumers also associate luxury status with a high level of cultural capital. This means they consider themselves knowledgeable enough to seek out experiences that challenge them and help define their superior status in their own eyes and those of others. Accordingly, it is vital for luxury brands to offer questing experiences to consumers. Questing experiences should encompass gaining new experiences and overcoming personal limits through the use of luxuries. In the process of luxury consumption, products should allow consumers to learn new things, master new skills and have fun. This helps consumers to develop their cultural capital and realise their superior status.

Apart from this, the cultural differences between Thai and UK consumers have some managerial implications for luxury brands. Thai consumers find great value in luxury products that allow them to achieve social acceptance and which
reflect the hierarchical nature of society and social morality in a collectivist culture. Accordingly, luxury experiences for the Thai consumers are fundamentally collective experiences in which the luxury possession represents the face of family. Luxury brands can take this opportunity to convey in marketing messages the product’s social acceptability and its connection to achievement and the public face of the family. For the UK consumers, the focus on an individualist culture and social moral beliefs revolves around how to judge their own merits. They are likely to seek to enhance themselves through luxury consumption and consider luxuries as an enjoyable experience. Accordingly, luxury brands targeting UK consumers should emphasise how a brand could enhance consumers’ sense of self and make them feel good about themselves.

It can be seen that consumers also engage with luxuries in their everyday lives through the use of social media. Within this developing market, consumers are perceived as wanting to be seen, meaning that they like to show their luxuries online. In this regards, luxury brands should engage with social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and blogs, in order to create an opportunity to project luxury into the everyday lives of consumers. In fact, consumers are not likely to show off their possessions, but rather the way they live with their luxuries. Thus, consumers yearn for a luxury lifestyle knowledge and not just the products: social media serves as a great channel for luxury brands to communicate and educate about this particular message.

Overall, luxury brands can extend and emphasise the involvement of their existing and new customers in order to create more holistic luxury experiences for consumers. To create luxury branding and experiences, it should be understood that luxury consumption can be experienced in an everyday context. The perceived luxury can be created through consumption practices in which a supportive marketing communication strategy should reflect such practices, rather than solely focusing on the product. The four practical elements of luxury experiences can become a universal guide in creating perceived luxury experiences in a cross-cultural context. Although it is much more convenient to treat global luxury consumers as one market, this does not fit the reality. Accordingly, luxury brands need to provide a
distinctive message strategy and focus on creating brands in the West and East in order to reflect the cultural beliefs of each society. The study’s limitations and suggestions for further research will be addressed in the next section.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study is not without limitations. The data has only been collected from Thailand and the United Kingdom. Due to such limitation, the findings might not explain the phenomenon of global consumers as a whole. However, the study has brought hidden attitudes or feelings about luxury and its consumption practices into the open, which may be used by future research to render results that can be used as a generalisation. Moreover, the context of the research (the meanings of luxury in a broad term) can be seen as a limitation if one seeks to draw a generalisation and make conclusions about luxury brands and consumption in their context-specificity.

While it could be argued that a greater breadth could have been achieved in this thesis by recruiting a greater number of participants, depth has been achieved by collecting data that incorporates variations within the sample in terms of personal, family background and opinions of luxury: this necessitated a smaller sample size (Fournier, 1998). Achieving this level of depth required a trade-off in terms of the number and variety of participants. Equally, the number of participants was limited because of the constraints (particularly in terms of time) of the doctoral research.

However, these limitations can be opportunities for future research. As the study is exploratory in nature, there is still more depth and detail to be elicited focusing on a wider sample or other specific segments using qualitative methods. For example, it is worth acknowledging the differences between generations concerning the practices and meanings of luxury; thus, future research could incorporate different age groups of consumers. For example, how and through what luxury consumption practices do seniors connect when defining luxury and how do their perceptions differ from those of younger consumers? Apart from this, the framework of everyday luxury consumption practices proposed by this study could be used as a theoretical framework for exploring and analysing the practices of luxury in future
research in the more context-specific field of luxury consumption, such as cars, food, home decoration, travel and accommodation.

In addition, the findings offer some preliminary evidence for the existence of differences between Thai and UK societies. The exploration of a cross-cultural context through the use of samples from various countries in both Western and Eastern societies would enhance this research and would provide a comparison of similarities and differences in order to offer an insight into global consumers as a whole. It would be fruitful for deepening our understanding about the variations in luxury consumption practices in different countries, and how these are characterised by different stages in the development of the luxury market. An interesting aspect in this regard would be the comparison of consumers from countries with a mature stage of luxury consumption with consumers from emerging markets with a relatively short tradition of luxury consumption.

Apart from this, for those researchers who are interested in using quantitative methodology, the results of this study could be approached quantitatively to support or reject the assumption that luxury is an ephemeral and immaterial concept. Moreover, hypothesis testing could be made against each practice of luxury in order to verify its validity and generalisation for a larger population.

Lastly, the notion of luxury has been previously applied to materials. Accordingly, exploring the immaterial, co-creative and integrative aspects of luxuries would offer a broad field for future research. This study provides a first reconceptualisation of luxury from consumption practices and hopes to encourage more research on consumption practices in the future. For example, it would be interesting to examine the alternative contexts of luxury, such as a luxury counterfeiting or second-hand luxuries, and how they connect to the meanings of luxury. This realm of study calls for a better understanding of how consumers perceive alternative ways to construct the meanings of luxury.
6.5 Conclusion

The changes in the luxury market to incorporate ‘new luxury’ and the phenomenon of the declining overt conspicuousness of expensive products have radically transformed the contemporary definitions of luxury, in which the concept of luxury should be rethought in light of the democratisation of luxury altogether, with a continued attention to denote subjective and everyday experiences. In this regard, luxury is not solely a characteristic attached to a product. Instead, it is an experience and an interpretation derived from the practices of consumers from various backgrounds and cultures surrounding their luxury consumption. The final outcome of this thesis is a conceptualisation (a framework of everyday luxury consumption practice) that provides shared practices and the meanings of luxury in a cross-cultural context. The empirical findings extend the existing research on luxury by encompassing four aspects of luxury consumption, thus introducing alternative views of luxury as a form of everyday luxury. The notion of everyday luxury fundamentally contributes to our understanding of luxury as an ephemeral and immaterial concept present in our everyday living.

The ephemeral aspect of luxury shows that consumers value luxury experiences as an experienced moment of the imagination in everyday living. Luxury has a unique transformability, which can temporarily change either an individual’s common practices to enable extraordinary experiences in ordinary life (escapist practice) or an individual’s self-realisation and understanding (self-transformation practices). Moreover, everyday luxury suggests that immaterial entities involving continual dedication, constant care (caretaker practices), and high levels of cultural capital (status-based practices) can be marked as luxuries by consumers. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the co-existence of traditional and everyday luxury suggests that the concept constitutes economic capital, cultural capital and imagination resources.

However, there is no absolute answer to what should be regarded as luxury: the meanings of luxury are still relative and depend on different understandings of the self and the morality within different cultures and societies. This study creates a conceptual model to interpret the meanings of luxury. By depicting the meanings of
luxury in a diamond form, the study highlights the different subjective interpretations of luxury made by UK and Thai consumers. This is because when the diamond diagram is moved, different elements constituting luxury are displayed and reflected in consumers’ understanding of luxury in their own lives in relation to the particular cultural issues of self-knowledge and morality constructed within each society. Historically, luxury was viewed as a tool for social stratification and non-ordinary consumption; today, however, luxury has become versatile in terms of its appropriation and it is derived from the practices and realities of our everyday lives.
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266


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Appendices

Appendix 1: Research Advertisement

“What does luxury mean to you?”

I am conducting research into the meanings of luxury and luxury consumption with British and Thai university students. The aim of the study is to find out what luxury means to young people. I would like to explore your ideas about luxury and your experiences with luxury consumption.

If you are an undergraduate or postgraduate student between the age of 18 and 28 years then I would be interested to hear from you. I would like to include participants from a range of backgrounds and financial circumstances. Participation involves a collage construction and interview conducted on university premises, and will last around 1 to 1 ½ hours.

If you are interested in being involved, please contact me at:

Contact for further details

Tisiruk Potavanich

PhD Student

Manchester Business School

Tel. +66914505664, +447446142445

Email: Tisiruk.Potavanich@postgrad.mbs.ac.uk
Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet (Interview) and The Consent Form

The Concept of Luxury from a Consumer Culture Perspective

Participant Information Sheet (Interview)

You are being invited to take part in a research study that forms the requirement for a PhD Business and Management. Before you decide whether to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

Name: Tisiruk Potavanich

Address: Manchester Business School, The University of Manchester
Booth Street West Manchester M15 6PB, UK

Title of the Research

The Concept of Luxury from a Consumer Culture Perspective

What is the aim of the research?

The research focuses on young-adult university students, from various backgrounds, in order to conceptualise luxury from a consumer perspective in a cross-cultural context.

Why have I been chosen?

The study involves UK and Thai undergraduate and postgraduate students aged 18 to 28 years old. Informants are selected based on variation in the participants’ personal background (such as their course of study and hometown), their family background (such as parent’s occupation and education) as well as initial opinions and experiences about luxury.

This will be a comparative study between UK and Thai university students. As well as being interviewed, informants will be asked to produce a collage of pictures that expresses their thoughts and feelings about luxury. The interview will revolve around the meanings of luxury stemming from consumers’ experiences with luxury consumption.
What would I be asked to do if I took part?

The process will start with asking informants to consider what luxury means to them in advance of the interview. As such, the participants will be asked to produce a collage of pictures that expresses their own meanings of luxury prior to the interview. Then, the interview will start by asking informants to explain the interpretations of the collages they made and will revolve around their deeper explanation and experiences on the ideas of luxury.

What happens to the data collected?

If you agree to participate in this study, the data will be audio recorded, and notes will be taken during the process. The data collected will be securely and handled with due regard for confidentiality. Informants’ potential identifiable information will not be shared with any person or any third parties that is not related to this project. All published excerpts from the interview will be identified only by pseudonym in order to protect anonymity. Overall, the data collected will be disseminated for only academic purposes as a part of this PhD thesis.

How is confidentiality maintained?

Confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured to all respondents in the study. Participants will be allocated a pseudonym upon recruitment to the study and will not be identified by real name, initials or date of birth. All study data in manual form will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked room. Any data removed from the university will have personal identification removed. Furthermore, the participants will not be identifiable in publications that include their data. The data will not be kept longer than necessary. The researcher and supervisors will have control of and act as custodians for the data generated by the study, and they will have access to that data.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

No.

What is the duration of the research?

Approximately 60 minutes – 90 minutes
Where will the research be conducted?

The interview will be on the university premises:

Chulalongkorn University, Assumption University, and Ramkhamhaeng University, Bangkok, Thailand

University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University, and University of Salford, Manchester, UK

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

The results will be disseminated for only academic purposes and will not be shared with any person or any third parties that is not related to this project.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Tisiruk Potavanich at tisiruk.potavanich@postgrad.mbs.ac.uk

What if something goes wrong?

I do not expect anything to go wrong. In the very unlikely event that something untoward does happen, you can contact me in the first instance. You can also contact my supervisor (Emma.Banister@mbs.ac.uk or Stuart.Roper@mbs.ac.uk). If you wish to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the research, please contact the head of the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.
The Concept of Luxury from a Consumer Culture Perspective

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below.

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to any treatment/service.

3. I understand that the data will be audio-recorded.

4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.

5. I agree that any data collected may be shared with the PHD supervisor

I agree to take part in the above project

Please Initiate Box

Name of participant _______________________________ Date _______________________________ Signature _______________________________

Name of person taking consent _______________________________ Date _______________________________ Signature _______________________________
Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet (Fieldwork) and The Consent Form

The Concept of Luxury from a Consumer Culture Perspective

Participant Information Sheet (Fieldwork)

You are being invited to take part in a research study that forms the requirement for a PhD Business and Management. Before you decide whether to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

Name: Tisiruk Potavanich

Address: Manchester Business School, The University of Manchester
Booth Street West Manchester M15 6PB, UK

Title of the Research

The Concept of Luxury from a Consumer Culture Perspective

What is the aim of the research?

The research focuses on young-adult university students, from various backgrounds, in order to conceptualise luxury from a consumer perspective in a cross-cultural context.

Why have I been chosen?

Participants will be carefully selected after their participation in the first stage (collage construction and interview) based on the key aspects of luxury consumption practices which emerged from an extensive analysis of the first stage of data collection. Accordingly, informants will be asked to consider participation in an additional stage of the research involving fieldwork in participants’ homes. More information about this stage will be issued to those participants who receive the request to participate in this stage, and participation is entirely voluntary. In this stage, practices and meanings of luxury will be witnessed in a real setting through informants’ routine lives over a short period of time.
What would I be asked to do if I took part?

The researcher will witness the routine practices of luxury consumption by visiting participants’ home. The process will involve informants telling stories about their routine practices of luxury consumption in their everyday domestic lives and visually performing the practices, as well as encountering the specific domestic spheres in which the practices are carried out.

What happens to the data collected?

If you agree to participate in this study, the data will be audio recorded, photographed, and notes will be taken during the process. The data collected will be securely and handled with due regard for confidentiality. Informants’ potential identifiable information will not be shared with any person or any third parties that is not related to this project. All published excerpts from the interview will be identified only by pseudonym in order to protect anonymity. Overall, the data collected will be disseminated for only academic purposes as a part of this PhD thesis.

How is confidentiality maintained?

Confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured to all respondents in the study. Participants will be allocated a pseudonym upon recruitment to the study and will not be identified by real name, initials or date of birth. All study data in manual form will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked room. Any data removed from the university will have personal identification removed. Furthermore, the participants will not be identifiable in publications that include their data. The data will not be kept longer than necessary. The researcher and supervisors will have control of and act as custodians for the data generated by the study, and they will have access to that data.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

No.

What is the duration of the research?

Approximately 1 hour – 2 hours based on participants’ conveniences.
Where will the research be conducted?

The data collection will be carried out at the participants’ home.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

The results will be disseminated for only academic purposes and will not be shared with any person or any third parties that is not related to this project.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Tisiruk Potavanich at tisiruk.potavanich@postgrad.mbs.ac.uk

What if something goes wrong?

I do not expect anything to go wrong. In the very unlikely event that something untoward does happen, you can contact me in the first instance. You can also contact my supervisor (Emma.Banister@mbs.ac.uk or Stuart.Roper@mbs.ac.uk). If you wish to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the research, please contact the head of the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.
The Concept of Luxury from a Consumer Culture Perspective

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below.

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to any treatment/service.

3. I understand that the data will be audio-recorded and photographed.

4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.

5. I agree that any data collected may be shared with the PHD supervisor.

I agree to take part in the above project

Name of participant __________________________ Date __________________________ Signature __________________________

Name of person taking consent __________________________ Date __________________________ Signature __________________________
Appendix 4: Collage Constructions Sheet

“What does luxury mean to you?”

Luxury can mean very different things to different people. I would like to explore what luxury means to you. Please put together a collage, this can include images, photos, words, in fact anything which helps you to communicate your feelings, experiences and understanding of luxury.

To come up with your collage, you can think of anything that you consider luxurious and links with your feelings, and experiences surrounding these things. You also have the freedom to use your own imagination and creativity to make this collage as you would like. The collage can be made in any size. You could cut and paste pictures from magazines, newspapers and add your own words and photographs if you wish, or you may prefer to produce this collage electronically using material from the Internet.

Please bring your collage with you to your interview or email it to me at Tisiruk.Potavanich@postgrad.mbs.ac.uk.
Appendix 5: Worked example of data analysis

Transcription 4: Best (18 years old, Thai, Male)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Page</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Interview Text</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The meaning of luxury for Best is very subjective, depending on whom we interact with Traditional luxury fundamentally generates socially perception of what should be perceived as luxury.</td>
<td><strong>Researcher:</strong> Could you please explain about your collage? I would like you to start by talking to me about your collage, discussing what you have included and what the contents of your collage mean to you. <strong>Best:</strong> For my collage, I chose pictures...when people ask me about luxury, I think it should be about this stuff. Personally, I think the meanings of luxury can be very diverse. If you ask others, they will think the same way. If you ask me, I might think differently from them. So, first of all, I tried to choose the pictures that everyone will...kind of agree regarding the meanings of luxury. I think it’s a consensus that luxury products refer to expensive things. So I put pictures like...expensive sport cars, Hermes, expensive watches with lots of diamonds, the most expensive beer in the world, and a big house with a swimming pool. I think when we’re talking about luxury, these would be items that we all think about.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Luxury as a tool for social status. Using ‘taste’ in justifying luxury Luxury as a tool for social communication about the self (uniqueness), belongings, and acceptance</td>
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<td><strong>Researcher:</strong> Basically, luxury is about being expensive? <strong>Best:</strong> No, sometimes it doesn’t have to be expensive. However, people in society perceive and give a consensus...if you have these things, it levels up your social status. So I put group of pictures like Apple, Starbucks and pictures of a big crowd of people. Basically, sometimes things do not have to be extremely expensive like the previous group of pictures I mentioned before. They are still luxurious because these things are in favour in our society. For example, people who drink Starbucks are perceived to be coffee lovers...as if they have a better taste in coffee than others, or people who use MacBook will be perceived to appear... unique or they must do something cool...like they are artists...composing music on MacBook...something like that. I think luxury is a tool that makes your socialisation easier...people will favour you, if you have these things. <strong>Researcher:</strong> Can you recall an example related to your ideas about luxury? <strong>Best:</strong> Personally, I pay attention to social acceptance...such as from my friends. For example, a laptop...I like Dell. However, when I was</td>
<td>4.1 Status: signifying status 4.2 Self: the enhancement of self 4.3 Belongings</td>
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</table>
The influence of reference groups affects decision-making on luxury consumption. Collectivism orientation, focusing on group identity, and conformity is legitimated in Thailand, using luxury as a tool for social stratification. About to buy one, it was about my family and friends as well. They all said that the MacBook Air looks better...more luxurious. Actually, when I am going to buy something luxury, sometimes it’s not about me. It’s also about people surrounding me. Like...what they will think about it, and how they feel. Finally, I had to buy a MacBook. As I said, luxury is the easiest tool for you if you want to socialise...or get along with or become a part...or represent your groups of people. So it’s sensible and kind of...a cultural belief to own luxury products to enhance your social status as well as your family’s position and relationship with others.

Researcher: Can you talk a little more about cultural beliefs in luxury?

Best: I think this is the culture that happens in Thailand. I don’t know about any other countries...they might not prefer to have luxury items. In our society, we’re living in hierarchy system where social status stands in a central position and affects the way we live our lives. For example...in the department store...if you drive an expensive sports car, you can find a parking slot easily. They will provide the space for you. Because people at the top of society always get priorities over

### 4.3 Belongings

### 4.2 Self:

interdependent self

### 4.4 The face of family:

family status and reputation
Luxury possessions as family possessions, enhancing the face of family and reputation.

Contrast with the traditional view, price is not the main indication of luxury.

Researchers: Please tell me more about your experiences about using luxuries to represent your family’s position and reputation.

Best: Well, people might think about different things when they’re talking about luxury because each person has different family backgrounds and stories in their lives. For me, I come from a middle...

4.1 Status: social distinction, superiority

4.2 Self: interdependent self (family-identity)

4.4 The face of family
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>Luxury is formed by family upbringing</th>
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<tr>
<td>Practices with luxuries in relation to the expression of self in terms of the idealised self</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participants have both an upper class family. My dad and my mom are both working in a professional accounting firm. Image means everything to them because they have to make themselves look professional. Otherwise, the client will doubt them. So I have been taught to dress well since I was a kid. I think it’s the reason why I really care about how I look to the others because it’s not just about me…it also reflects my family’s reputation as well as how they teach me. So I guess that’s why I also associate luxury consumption pretty much with clothing.</td>
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**Researcher:** Can you talk a little more about your experiences with luxury clothing?

**Best:** I put the picture here about my suit and tux. I think they’re luxuries no matter how much the price is. Actually, it’s about the look I experience when I’m wearing it…When I wear my suit and tux, I guess it’s the magic of luxury…I feel like I become more of a gentleman…so I talk nicely…and walk nicely with it…as if it can transform me into a better version...an ideal version of me. So people will recognise that I have kind of…got the look of luxury and the image of a gentleman when I’m wearing suit and tux so they can imply something positive...

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.4</th>
<th>The face of family</th>
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<td>4.2</td>
<td>Self: internal self (to incorporate luxury into the idealised self)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Self: symbolic and physical actions on luxury (suit and tux) in relation to self</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>internal self (feel like a gentleman) and an external self (look of luxury which is based on group (family)’s identity)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Morality: feeling guilty and shame if luxury possession cannot promote family</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Highlighting the importance of practice, identification of luxury from the ‘use’ about my family. Compared to other clothing...for example, I used to buy expensive Kenzo T-shirts, but when I was wearing them...I felt as if they didn’t look good on me and I don’t think it communicated much about my family’s reputation as much as the suit and tux do. I don’t feel like I’ve got a luxury image when wearing it. Actually, I look a bit silly in it. It’s not cool at all... it’s just me in an expensive T-shirt. So I felt a bit guilty...I don’t know...it’s kind of a shame that I spent lots of money on an expensive T-shirt and it did nothing to enhance my family’s status. So I think luxury is also about experiences as well. Because sometimes you might think that this thing is luxury due to its price...but actually when you use it...the experience you have tells you different stories.</td>
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<td>Researcher: You mentioned that you tend to pay attention to your own experiences when identifying things as luxurious, not just the price. Does this mean your own meaning of luxury is expanded from the traditional consensus of luxury that you have mentioned earlier? Or is it all about social stratification and family reputation?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Best: Well, I think luxury can be classified into two main points.</td>
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<p>| 4.2 Self: external self (to achieve the look of luxury) |
| 4.4 The face of family: to ease morality concerned with family reputation |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4</th>
<th>Two aspects of luxury, personal and social aspects</th>
<th>Things I prefer and things that others people surrounding me prefer. For me, sometimes I bought things other people prefer...like the MacBook or wearing a suit and tux in order to get social acceptance from people surrounding me and to enhance my family’s reputation. I feel like it’s a bit of responsibility or necessity to have luxuries in order to save my position in society. <strong>Researcher:</strong> What kind of position or status does luxury communicates? Is it all about economic status or something else? <strong>Best:</strong> It’s all about communicating that you’re in a superior status than others. You’re better than others. Simply, it can be about saying that you’re rich. But owning expensive things doesn’t totally signify a luxury status because everyone can own expensive luxury products nowadays. Actually, some people might buy them for the full price but there are also some people who can buy a second-hand product for a very cheap price and no one knows. Well...as I said earlier, people who use a MacBook will be perceived like...they are in better position and more unique than ordinary laptop users...as if they are skilful artists who use MacBook to compose music or do graphic designs or...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>MacBook (luxury) vs Windows (non-luxury)</td>
<td><strong>4.3 Belongings:</strong> to gain social acceptance <strong>4.4 The face of family</strong> <strong>4.1 Status</strong> <strong>4.1 Status:</strong> high level of skills and knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Knowledge in demonstrating social distinction and luxury status</td>
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Two views of luxury: Traditional and participants’ own experiential views of luxury

Using lived experiences and animations...something like that. Also, if you want to be able to use a MacBook, you need to sacrifice your time to learn more about it because it’s totally different from using Windows. So, in order to consume luxuries, you need to put in dedication because it’s not that easy to use and then your luxury status is developed from that.

**Researcher:** You also said that luxury is about things you prefer. Please tell me more about this aspect of luxury that you mentioned?

**Best:** Luxury for me is also about something more than just an instrument for social communication about social status. I also pay attention to my own experiences and my personal feelings when justifying things as luxurious as well. So, luxury for me can be refereed to as things I prefer...it is pretty much about the experience that affects personal feelings in a positive way. So I put in two pictures here...a 5-star luxury hotel and a Homestay boutique. For example, one guy...is used to travelling and staying in 2 or 3-star hotels. One day, he could stay in a 5-star hotel...that 5-star hotel is luxury to him. Another guy, he loves backpacking and adventure. Staying in a 5-star hotel would not be luxurious to him so he may think the Homestay boutique is 4.1 Status: demonstrating superiority through time, dedication and learning (MacBook user)

4.1 Status

4.5 Experiences

4.6 Hedonic: personal feelings
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| 5 | personal preference as an alternative indication of luxury | luxurious to him. Well, it’s all about personal preferences and how they place value in a person’s life.
Researcher: Can explain me more about this by giving examples from your own experiences?
Best: I think the experience I will consider as luxurious should be an experience that is likely to be out of the ordinary. I put in the picture about jazz music and CDs here. During my free time I love listening to jazz. I love jazz music; that’s why I think it is luxurious to me, and I also think that jazz music CDs become luxury items to me. When I was young, it was commonplace to listen to music from CDs. Then, there were things like digital music so we didn’t have to listen to music from CDs anymore. At that time, it turned out that iPods seemed to be a luxury item if you wanted to listen to the music. Until today, the experiences I got from digital music became ordinary to me. It’s going back to CDs that have become luxury items to me again because I have got used to living in a digital culture.
Researcher: So CDs become luxurious to you because they seem to be something out of the ordinary nowadays. But you also mentioned that | 4.6 Hedonic: personal preferences |
|   |   |   | 4.5 Experience: out of the ordinary |
| 6 | Luxury experience as something out of the ordinary in everyday life |   | 4.5 Experience: out of the ordinary |
| 6 | **Jazz (luxury) vs pop (non-luxury)** | Jazz music itself is luxurious as well. Can you talk a little more about that?  
**Best:** Yes, jazz music is luxurious to me. It also gives me...a kind of extraordinary experience when I listen to it. For me, other kinds of music, such as pop music, are non-luxury. I feel as if I’m not really into such music. I don’t have any emotional attachment with it. I don’t know that I feel anything when I listen to it. However, the experiences when I listen to jazz music are much different. I’m really into it. It gives me pleasure. **It seems to be that the moment when the jazz music is on, my busy reality is off.**  
**Researcher:** Think of a time that you experienced jazz music, and please could you describe as fully as you can what stands out for you about that experience?  
**Best:** Well, I guess...the moment that I listen to jazz music is my luxurious experience because I feel a bit of escape...like I’m entering into something that is kind of...soothing and rests my mind from my busy studying. Because we’re living in a busy world...everything is in a rush. So...the moment that I can feel calm and peace...not being in a | 4.6 Hedonic: high intensity of emotion  
4.5 Experience: to aid special moments  
4.5 Experience: an escape from reality  
6 Hedonic: personal |
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<th>6</th>
<th>Practices of listening to music as luxurious Using practices in identifying luxury: putting special actions (luxury) vs do nothing (non-luxury)</th>
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<td>7</td>
<td>rush is very luxurious to me. Basically, when I listen to jazz music, I will lock my room and throw my mobile phone away...just to make sure that nothing will distract me so that I can enjoy the moment when I listen to jazz music as much as I can. I don’t know...it’s just like...when you consider something as luxurious, it drives you to do something extraordinary or special with it perhaps. Because if it happens to be some other kind of music, I wouldn’t do anything. <strong>Researcher:</strong> Besides listening to jazz music, have you ever do something extraordinary or special as you mentioned with any other kind of luxury consumption? <strong>Best:</strong> Umm...let me think... <strong>Researcher:</strong> Actually, you can have a look at your collage in case there might be something you can think of. <strong>Best:</strong> Ok...yes, suit and tux. I almost forgot about this point. I tend to take care of them specially as well...all the clothes I consider as luxurious, not only suit and tux actually. As I said, it’s also about my feelings when associating with luxury. I feel that these clothes...they are not just clothing. I mean...my luxury clothes...they are like my pleasure</td>
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<td>4.5 Experience: removing distracting elements to aid listening to music in the fullest sense</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4.6 Hedonic: cherished possession</td>
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| 7 | Special treatment of luxury items  
Sense of care and security  
(luxury) vs no sense of care and security (non-luxury) | treasure…my dear friend. So I try to make them look nice in my wardrobe…I hang them up even though they are T-shirts…and I have to make sure that they’re kept appropriately, not mixing with the other clothes so they’re with me all safe within my wardrobe…Well, if they are ordinary clothes, I’ll just fold them up.  
**Researcher:** How about other pictures in your collage?  
**Best:** I put the quotes here. “I’m a traveller, not a tourist”. I think for me…it’s the best quote to describe between luxury and non-luxury very well.  
**Researcher:** How is it?  
**Best:** I also associate luxury with travelling…I see myself as a traveller, not a tourist. Tourists, they travel by tour and go to the same tourist attractions. While travellers…they go travelling by themselves and travel to the places they want to go. They might go to the places beyond just the tourist attractions. They experience something special beyond what those tourists do. Well, I went to Korea with my friends last summer and we travelled by ourselves…we went to the places that are not just tourist attractions…like Insadong market…which is the art  
4.5 Experience: special treatment on luxury clothes  
4.6 Hedonic: to ease a fear of separation |}

| 8 | Travelling as luxurious | 4.5 Experiences: out of the ordinary  
4.6 Hedonic: time |
Personal pleasure owing to the indulgence of time
Luxury experiences in association with how to spend time (time spending without obligations)
Focusing on the experiential nature of luxury consumption (doing/being)

High level of learning as evidence of luxury status in

market and we had a nice coffee there for an hour. I think if I had gone to Korea by tour, I might not have been able to do something like this because they wouldn’t have taken me to that place and allowed me that much time...an hour...just to sit and drink coffee. So the experience when I do travel like a traveller is luxurious to me because I have been to the places where lots of tourist might not be able to go. My experiences become more special and go beyond ordinary experiences than those tourists since they go to the same places where everyone else normally goes. Being a traveller makes me feel like I’m unique and proud of myself as I can do something that other people don’t do. So I’m in a luxury status...better than those tourists.

Researcher: Do you mean being a traveller makes you unique so it gives you a luxury status?

Best: Yes, especially when you travel by yourself, you have to learn about directions by yourself, places you want to go, foods you want to eat. So it gives you a chance to indulge yourself fully when you travel but it’s also challenging...like you need to prepare a lot...read a lot before travelling and during travelling. But after you finish the trip, at

indulgence

4.5 Experiences: prolonging the experience (in the coffee shop)

4.1 Status: superiority

4.1 Status: demonstrating superiority through high level of knowledge (a
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>terms of distinction</th>
<th>the end it becomes like…you know, <strong>doing lots more things than those tourists...</strong> you know the directions and many interesting things about the places you have travelled to. <strong>It’s like...I’m in a luxury position because I’m proud to say that I can travel within Korea by myself</strong>...I mean I can buy a plane ticket and travel there without waiting for the tour or anyone to take me there...something like that.</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Luxury status as a tool for self-esteem</td>
<td><strong>Researcher:</strong> How about this picture, the last one, in your collage? <strong>Best:</strong> This one is about food. I think it’s quite a trend nowadays. See...everyone posts pictures of food they have eaten on Facebook or Instagram. I do it as well. I always share photos of the food I ate on my Instagram account. <strong>Researcher:</strong> So according to this picture of food, what does luxury mean to you? <strong>Best:</strong> I think it’s kind of showing that you have a particular lifestyle quality. It is... about telling people that you have a wonderful life...I think luxury is about showing that you have... a desirable or superior lifestyle. You don’t have to eat expensive food. <strong>It’s more that you have time to enjoy eating...</strong> Well, I think luxury is not just only simply about...</td>
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<td>Time as luxury, indulgence of time as a luxury</td>
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4.6 Hedonic: the feeling of pride

4.1 Status: distinction, self-esteem

4.6 Hedonic: time indulgence
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<tr>
<th>9</th>
<th>experience</th>
<th>possessing expensive brand name items. It’s more like…as I said, experiences and your personal feeling…so it’s like doing something, and the experiences and personal feelings make you feel like you want to engage more with it. The more you engage, the more luxurious it becomes to you. [\text{Researcher}: \text{Can you talk a little more about your own experiences about posting these pictures on your Instagram site?}] [\text{Best: In my case, the more I go out to eat and post pictures, the more credentials I get.} \text{People will see these delicious food pictures and this can imply that I have a desirable way of life, and it seems like I’m one of those people who have a great lifestyle. Also, I always put the picture of foods that I think are delicious so that my friends can go and try them. I feel really good if they follow my suggestion to go to the restaurant I used to go to or they come to ask me for a suggestion…like…where should they go for dinner…something like that. It makes me feel like I’m a food guru. Again, it is the luxury status I get from posting these food pictures because it makes me feel good about myself and helps to maintain a good relationship with my]</th>
<th>4.5 Experience: high level of engagement activities perceived to be luxurious (eating out)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Enhancing social belongings and credentials for membership</td>
<td>Gaining luxury status from</td>
<td>4.3 Belongings: creating credentials for membership (food pictures on IG)</td>
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<td>Guru as luxury status</td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Status: demonstrating superiority through high level of knowledge (food guru)</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>‘doing’, not just owning products</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Luxury as an instrumental tool for social communication and a personal tool for hedonic experiences</td>
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<td>Two views of luxury: Tradition luxury alongside the participant’s own understandings of luxury</td>
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Researcher: OK, are there any aspects about your meanings of luxury you can add?

Best: Well, I don’t know…I guess luxury is pretty much about being social and personal. Like…it is a consensus that everyone uses luxury as an instrument for social communication about your status in society and enhancing your family’s reputation. However, I also have my own understandings of luxury, perhaps…it’s also about my own experiences and personal feelings in order to tell whether these things are luxury to me or not. So it’s still very subjective because different people have different preferences. I guess overall…apart from what we generally know about luxury as being expensive and social class, luxury is also pretty much about things you prefer because at the end of the day it’s your own pleasure and experiences that count. So my conclusion for the meanings of luxury would be, it is about your own happiness perhaps. Otherwise, what else can it be? I think that’s all from me about luxury. I can’t think of any more now.

Researcher: That’s good. Thank you so much for your interview.
Conclusion to Best: It seems to be that Best has two views of luxury; the traditional view and his own view based on his personal experiences and preferences. Best’s social view of luxury is very much about getting along with traditional luxury. This is due to the Thai cultural belief, which is focused on the importance of hierarchy in structuring Thai society, as well as collectivist orientation, which drives the importance of family and reference groups. However, the way luxury status is understood by Best has been changed from a high level of economic capital being involved to a high level of knowledge (MacBook/travelling/food guru). The understanding of consumers’ selves in relation to luxury from Best’s point of view is not only about being rich but is also about his desired image and idealised sense of self (gentleman). Best also incorporates luxury into everyday life by associating luxury with ordinary activities such as listening to music or how he takes care of his luxury clothes in everyday living. There are also elements of routine practice that help Best to identify luxury and non-luxury, for example, the way he listens to music in order to categorise jazz music as luxury and other kinds of music as non-luxury or the actions he asserts on the clothes he perceives as luxury and non-luxury.
Clustering Early Themes (Best)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice with Luxury Objects</th>
<th>Practices of Luxury</th>
<th>Purposes of Practices</th>
<th>Instrumental Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Self: symbolic and physical actions on luxury (suit and tux) in relation to self</td>
<td>4.1 Status: demonstrating superiority through time, dedication and learning (MacBook user)</td>
<td>4.4 The face of family: to ease morality concerned on family reputation</td>
<td>4.1 Status: high level of skills and knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Experience: special treatment of luxury clothes</td>
<td>4.1 Status: demonstrating superiority through high level of knowledge about travelling (a traveller)</td>
<td>4.5 Experience: an escape from reality</td>
<td>4.1 Status: social distinction, superiority</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>4.1 Status: demonstrating superiority through high level of knowledge about restaurants (food guru)</td>
<td>4.5 Experience: to aid special moment</td>
<td>4.1 Status: self-esteem</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>4.3 Belongings: creating credential for membership (food</td>
<td>4.6 Hedonic: personal preferences</td>
<td>4.2 Self: the enhancement of self</td>
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<td>4.6 Hedonic: high intensity of emotion</td>
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<td>4.5 Experience: removing distracting elements to aid listening to music in the fullest sense</td>
<td>4.5 Experiences: prolonging the experience (in the coffee shop)</td>
<td>4.5 Experience: high level of engagement activities perceived to be luxurious (eating out)</td>
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<td>separation</td>
<td>4.6 Hedonic: time indulgence</td>
<td>4.6 Hedonic: the feeling of pride</td>
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<td>4.6 Hedonic: happiness</td>
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<td>4.3 Belongings: to gain social acceptance</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.4 The face of family: family status and reputation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**References:** Transcript No. 4, Collage No. 4
Assigning final themes (Best)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caretaker</th>
<th>Escapist</th>
<th>Self-transformation</th>
<th>Status-based</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Experience: special treatment of luxury clothes</td>
<td>4.5 Experience: out of the ordinary</td>
<td>4.2 Self: the enhancement of self</td>
<td>4.1 Status: signifying status, social distinction, superiority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 Hedonic: cherished possession</td>
<td>4.5 Experience: an escape from reality</td>
<td>4.2 Self: interdependent self (family-identity)</td>
<td>4.1 Status: high level of skills and knowledge</td>
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<td>4.6 Hedonic: to ease a fear of separation</td>
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<td>4.5 Experience: removing distracting elements to aid</td>
<td>4.2 Self: internal self (to incorporate luxury into the idealised self)</td>
<td>4.1 Status: demonstrating superiority through time, dedication and learning</td>
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<td>listening to music in the fullest sense</td>
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<td>(MacBook user, a traveller, a food guru)</td>
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<td>4.5 Experiences: prolonging the experience (in the coffee shop)</td>
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<td>4.3 Belongings: creating credential for membership (food pictures on IG)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.6 Hedonic: time indulgence</td>
<td>4.2 Self: external self (to achieve the look of luxury)</td>
<td>4.4 The face of family (family status and reputation)</td>
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<td>4.6 Hedonic: personal pleasure</td>
<td>4.4. The face of family (suit and tux vs Kenzo T-shirt)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 4.6 Hedonic: high intensity of emotion | 4.6 Hedonic: personal preferences | 4.5 Experience: high level of engagement activities perceived to be luxurious (eating out) in order to demonstrate belongings  
4.6 Hedonic: the feeling of pride |

**References:** Transcript No. 4, Collage No. 4