**Sacred and Treasured Luxury: The Meaning and Value of Luxury Possessions amongst Second-Generation Asian Indian Immigrants**

Luxury can be found everywhere in today’s society. The desire for luxury, the possession of luxury, the experiences of luxury are integral parts of consumers’ lifestyles. The meaning of luxury has been much discussed. For example, Sombart (1992:92) defines luxury in relation to necessity, “ Luxury is any expenditure that goes beyond the necessary” In contrast, historically Mandeville’s (1732) more controversial lens of luxury suggests it is impossible to understand and measure necessity. Luxury in general is defined as something more than necessity (Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Sombart 1992). Luxury has also been defined as superfluous and in contrast to necessity (Csaba 2008, Geerts and Veg, 2010). The luxury, necessity continuum continues to be discussed, however, Mandeville’s assertion of the ‘relativity of luxury’ leads the current author to develop this paper, pursuing Mandeville’s notion that we cannot ignore an individual’s perception and actual experience of luxury. In this context it is relevant to explore further Csaba’s (2008:3) assertion that “societies, of course, develop norms for what are considered luxuries and necessities, but these are fuzzy and vary over time, classes and cultures”. In the light of this, the cultural uniqueness and interpretation of luxury is further discussed and explored through empirical research with an immigrant community.

The increase in the spending power of consumers, as well as the influence of globalization, has been a driver for the growth in luxury goods. It has been predicted that the European luxury goods retail market alone will reach up to $149.8bn by 2018, this phenomena includes countries globally from France, Germany, Russia, and the UK (Conlumino, 2015)

Globalization has allowed the proliferation of luxury goods beyond geographical boundaries; consumers desire to experience brands that are globally recognized, and that help to portray their ideological selves and enhance their social status amongst their peers and the wider society. The power of luxury goods to enhance one’s social status, exclusivity and uniqueness, as well as to fulfil an inner desire, is ever present. The public meaning of these goods has been discussed extensively from a branding and marketing perspective (Levy, 1959a, Belk 1988, Elliott and Wattanasunan, 1998a), and the possession of luxury brands has been considered from a psychological viewpoint in consumer research (Dubois and Duquesne, 1993; Wong and Ahuvia, 1998; Wiedmann, Hennings and Siebels, 2009). However, much of the previous research has been presented in a Western context. This paper explores the meaning and value of luxury from a cultural perspective.

This study focuses on the meaning of luxury amongst second-generation Indian consumers living in the UK. Indians in the UK have been labelled as an affluent minority. This group has contributed in many ways to the richness of the country, through religion, spirituality, cuisine and the British economy (Qureshi, Varghese, Osella and Rajan, 2011). This work examines the cultural context of luxury consumption, and the personal and social meaning they attribute to their possessions. In addition the participants ritualistic behaviours in relation to luxury possessions are discussed. Global luxury brands have a plethora of globally distributed consumers, and this study explores how second-generation Indian consumers in the UK follow a transnational approach to luxury consumption. This work examines the cross-border connections of the participants and as Vertovec (2001:573) states certain migrant communities possess identities that “are negotiated within social worlds that span more than one place”. As luxury brands develop extravagant, globally recognized, homogenous marketing campaigns, we see how these consumers are influenced not only by their own bi-cultural identities but also by the maintenance of their ‘transcultural identities’ (Vertovec, 2001) in the consumption and possession of luxury goods.

**Cultural Consumption**

The transnational approach to consumption has been explored in a number of consumer culture contexts (Canclini, 2001; Appadurai, 1990; Penaloza, 1989, 1994; Oswald, 1999). The studies by Appadurai (1990, 1994) and Sirkeci (2013) on global consumer culture highlight consumption across several cultures and question the traditional theories of global consumer culture, arguing that as a result of globalization there is a “mutual consent of sameness and difference in a stage characterized by radical disjunctures” (Appadurai 1994:p. 296). Traditionally, cross-cultural studies of consumer research have focused on the dual cultural influences impacting consumer behaviour. Taking the transnational approach, the current study looks at global influences as well as the local traditions and values that influence consumption and attitudes of second-generation Indian luxury consumers. While current work on cross-cultural consumer research suggests that consumers are influenced by dual cultural values and norms and so negotiate the differences between two cultures, arguably when ‘host’ and ‘home’ country values influence consumption, consumption patterns are inherently eclectic, drawing from and beyond both the British and Indian cultures. Thus, the consumption of luxury is a complex mixture of cultural influences.

Appadurai’s work on consumption discusses the social significance of consumption, labelling it as something “eminently social, correlative and active” (1990: 54), moving away from Stombart’s conception of luxury goods as distinct to necessity. In essence, the current work explores the consumer as fulfilling social cultural group needs in their consumption of luxury. The roles of consumption and culture are indeed multi-faceted. If we are also to explore Sombart’s notion of cultural necessity, we need to understand further how for these participants, luxury brands and possessions provide “levels of material comfort deemed necessary to maintain a minimum standard of decency or dignity in a given society” (Csaba, 2008: 8). The meaning of necessity too varies for individuals.

Consumption is more than the purchase and possession of certain goods for their utilitarian usage; it also symbolizes an individual’s culture and their belonging to it. In the context of this study, the participants discuss the personal, social and cultural significance of their luxury possessions. The cultural significance of luxury is ever present. However, traditionally these types of participants are said to be influenced by dual cultural values. Bhatia (2002) labels these types of participants as the “hyphenated generation”. These individuals are living between two cultures and so are influenced by a mixture of cultural values. Reese (2001) argues that a two-fold frame of reference exists with first-generation immigrants. However, the current research suggests this two-fold frame of reference can also be applied to the second-generation participants in this study, and extended further. Does their frame of reference extend beyond mere duality? Does it also include home, host, peer, and reference groups, global and ritualistic influences that extend further than host and home country values? The complex nature of the participants’ bi-cultural identity is explored in the context of luxury; the wider transnational influences are also discussed.

An individual’s transnational identity is influenced and impacted not only by their perception of global luxury brands and their global marketing campaigns, but also by the social, cultural and personal significance of these brands. For second-generation transnational consumers, luxury is a mixture of values, rituals and behaviours that reflect the eclectic nature of these luxury consumers.

Furthermore, traditional acculturation studies (Reilly and Wallendorf, 1984, 1987; Desphande, Hoyer and Donthu, 1986; Üstüner and Holt, 2007; Penaloza, 1994) focus on the impact and influence of home and host cultural factors on consumption. The current work suggests that this paradigm needs to be considered in a broader context with a focus on the culturally diverse influences of luxury consumption. These second-generation luxury consumers are part of a diverse, culturally rich society that impacts the development and negotiation of their identity.

Traditional acculturation studies, for example that of Penaloza (1994), look at the complexities of immigrants’ lives through a ‘dual’ lens, namely that of home and host country, the country of origin compared to the country and culture of immigration. This approach is also supported by Oswald (1999) and Askegaard, Arnould and Kjeldgaard (2005). The current study, in line with Luedicke (2011), looks at luxury consumption beyond duality and focuses instead on the complex and ever-evolving meaning of luxury in consumers’ lives. As Bauman (2005) and Sandıkcı and Ger (2010) develop, meaning is co-produced between immigrants and the indigenous population rather than just being impacted by host or home cultural values.

**Consumption: Culture and Values**

‘Ethnoconsumerism’ acknowledges that “people from different cultures, ethnic backgrounds and nationalities see and evaluate the world differently” (Davies, Fitchett and Shanker, 2003:102). This multilayered approach to consumption, considering the social, cultural and individual aspects, is discussed in the context of luxury.

Individual consumers are embedded and immersed in a cultural context over their whole life span, as are their consumption activities. If we are to better understand how consumers’ attitudes towards luxury possessions develop, we need to better comprehend what luxury means to these consumers, as well as the value they place on luxury possessions. Second-generation Indians represent a diverse mix of national cultures, but importantly, of subcultures rooted in their parents’ migration. Luna and Gupta (2001) argue that an individual’s behaviour is directly linked to their cultural value system. These value systems develop over time through the socialization process. The individual’s cultural value system is formed from societal culture, regional culture and familial values. Luna and Gupta (2001) further present culture as influencing behaviour through various manifestations that are key components of the cultural value system. These manifestations include values, heroes, rituals and symbols. Values are regarded as a fundamental part of culture, as it is an individual’s values that will drive and influence their behaviour.

**Consumption and Rituals**

The influence of rituals is also seen as central to consumption and culture (Luna and Gupta, 2001). In their most basic sense, rituals are regarded as behaviour of religious or mystical significance. Others have, however, defined rituals in a broader context. Rook (1985: 252), for example, describes ritual as “expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviours that occur in a fixed episodic sequence, and that tend to be repeated over time. Ritual behaviour is dramatically scripted and acted out and is performed with formality, seriousness and inner intensity.”

McCracken (1988: 84) also examines rituals in the context of consumption and sees them as “a social action devoted to the manipulation of the cultural meaning for purposes of collective and individual communication and categorization”. Others argue that products bought have the symbolic capacity to operationalize the ritual: Luna and Gupta (2001: 47) conclude that “products can be ritual artefacts and their very consumption becomes a ritual too”. The ritualization of luxury possessions is explored further. We see how luxury goods are not bought for their utilitarian value, but rather are a sacrament possession displaying a religious-like status. Luxury possessions become redundant in terms of their usage, and their possession becomes symbolic of one’s identity in the wider Indian community. The possession of luxury is likened to possessing a religious and most sanctimonious item, which is revered and worshipped.

There is limited consumer research on the ritualization of goods. Sherry (1983) observes gift giving as an exchange ritual, while Wright and Snow (1980) regard consumption as a ritual of modern day living. Rituals and ritualistic behaviour have been discussed in religious and mystical contexts; however, Rook (1985) defines ritual phenomena as “highly varied types of expressive behaviour that occur in quite diverse settings” (p. 252).

It is argued by Rook (1985) that the ritual experience is made up of four component parts, namely ritual artefacts, a ritual script, ritual performance and ritual audiences. Arguably, the ritual artefacts in the context of this research are the luxury products being consumed, the actual luxury possessions. If we take a broader view of rituals and ritual activity in a non-religious context, we see how the consumption and possession of luxury follows ritual-like behaviour. The consumption of luxury goods can be likened to a rite of passage; the purchase, storage, use and consumption of luxury goods are psychologically more complex than mere habitual behaviour, following ritual-like practices that have become normative aspects of luxury consumers’ behaviour. Erikson’s (1977, 1982) explanation suggests that “ritual behaviour is rooted in human psyche”, and that this can be either “large-scale” or “everyday ritualized behaviours”.

In a consumer context, Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry (1989) most notably explore how certain products move from the ‘profane’ to gain sacred status. Interestingly, Belk et al. assume that profane consumption is transformed from its mere pious status to one of relevance and sacredness. A limitation of this assumption is that sacred status is achieved post-purchase; is this true of luxury goods and brands in the immigrant Indian culture? Could it not be argued that superior status already exists, and is then maintained by these luxury consumers? The luxury brand, the brands’ values and the brands’ status in the luxury market are transcendental to its consumption, sacred status and reverence by its owner.

Product symbolism is a key part of ritual behaviour; the luxury brands consumed become symbolic stimuli at a number of levels, from personal, social to cultural. The author discusses the different dynamics of this symbolic luxury consumption and its link to the participant’s self-concept and identity in a wider cultural context.

**Self-Concept and Consumption**

The social meaning of material possessions has been discussed in a consumer research context (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996: 41). In whatever context consumption takes place, goods are part of an individual’s thinking and creativity, and form part of a ‘nonverbal medium’. Consumption is also part of a social statement that consumers make that forms part of their identity and their belonging to a particular community, society and country; as defined by Berry (1994), it becomes a social necessity.

The term ‘conspicuous consumption’ originates from Veblen’s (1899) Theory of the Leisure class. It defines consumption as symbolizing wealth, status and power, with these socially motivated behaviours being used to impress and influence others. A plethora of luxury consumer research has referred to the concept of ‘conspicuous consumption’. However, it is important to look beyond these socially motivated reasons for consumption. The need to understand one’s “personal oriented type of consumption should also be considered in the marketing management of luxury brands” (Wiedman, Hennigs and Siebels, 2009:626).

The significance of consumption is closely linked to self-concept. As Rosenberg (1979: 7) states, “self-concept (image) has been viewed as the totality of an individual’s thoughts and feelings with reference to themselves as an object”. The maintenance and enhancement of one’s self-concept can be linked to the products chosen to purchase and use (Gardener and Levy, 1955; Levy, 1959). Hence, goods purchased have a symbolic value. Consumer research literature suggests that self-concept is of value to consumers, and that consumers will direct behaviour “toward the protection and enhancement” of it (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967: 24). In addition, Sirgy (1981, 1982a, 1982b) has developed a self-image/product-image congruity theory that suggests that product consumption is closely related to one’s self-image, and different congruity states will influence purchase motivation. Hence, consumers have an actual image and ideal image, and their consumption helps to fulfil their ideal image state. The findings of this paper reveal how the consumption of luxury is a part of the consumer’s image state and how luxury possessions become an extension of the consumer’s identity. Participants’ identity is an integral part of the cultural expectations and values of their community.

In addition, luxury consumption forms part of the individual’s situational self-image based on the symbolic interactionism school of thought. Schenk and Holman (1980) define situational self-image as the meaning of the self that the individual wishes others to have. Sirgy (1982a) further links this to the two self-concept motivations of ‘self-esteem’ and ‘self-consistency’. From the self-esteem perspective, the consumer will be motivated to purchase a positively valued product to retain a positive self-image and avoid purchasing a negatively valued product to avoid self-abasement. However, the self-consistency motivation predicts that the consumer will be motivated to purchase a product with an image that is congruent with his or her self-image belief. The consumption and possession of luxury is an integral part of an individual’s motivational state, arising from self-esteem and/or self-consistency needs (Sirgy, 1982a).

If we are to further explore and understand consumers’ extended self-portrayal through luxury possessions, reference needs to be made to Belk’s (1988) extended self. Belk suggests that the mere act of consumption serves to produce a desired self through the images and styles that are conveyed through one’s possessions. Belk’s work introduces the importance of others to our self-concept, and this is supported by McCracken (1986, 1988). Thompson and Hirschman (1995) and Dubois and Laurent (1994) suggest that consumption is strongly influenced by others and by what the current norm is, suggesting that consumption is in a constant state of flux and arguably is constantly influenced by the social and cultural context of the luxury consumer.

There is agreement that consumption decisions are influenced by culture in one form or another, and equally that consumption itself influences one’s self and identity formation. The act of consumption signifies and reflects different aspects of an individual’s life. The significance of one’s self-concept in luxury consumption highlights the influence of others in one’s decision making, as well as the many images one wishes to portray and the ideal self-concept aspirations that are sought through luxury consumption.

**Methodology**

The empirical research investigated attitudes towards and consumption of luxury by second-generation Asian Indians from Punjab. The primary research was undertaken using an interpretive and ethnoconsumerist methodology (Ozanne and Hudson, 1989; Member and Venkatesh, 1995). The ethnoconsumerist framework advocates studying consumer behaviour on the “basis of the cultural realities of the group”. In particular, Venkatesh (1995) argues that similar behaviour and practices across cultures may in fact have differing cultural meaning. The consumption of and attitudes towards luxury may at one level signify the desire to possess certain brands and experience luxury, yet at a deeper level may reveal that the choice of brand, the reason for its consumption and its possession has a unique cultural context.

Twenty in-depth interviews were conducted with second-generation Asian Indians from Punjab. The second-generation participants of this study are all children (now adults) of first-generation Punjabi immigrants. The first generation migrated over in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As a result of British labour strategies, many Punjabis migrated from India (Punjab) in search of work and educational opportunities, and were eventually joined by their families. Historically there have been strong colonial links between India and Britain, with British rule starting in the 17th century, as well as the East India Company’s conquest, which led to control in India through the British Raj. Punjabis account for 45 percent of Indians living in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2012).

The majority of second-generation Punjabis pursue prestigious, well-paying professions. By focusing on the second generation, the author was able to explore the influence of dual cultural values as well as the bi-cultural identities of the participants in the context of luxury consumption and behaviours. In addition, the study allowed the author to explore and understand further the two-fold frame of reference that is believed to influence decision making (Reese, 2001; Bhatia, 2002), as well as understand the transnational influences of luxury consumption for this group.

Prior to the interviews, participants were asked to take photographs of luxury possessions that were important to them. The author did not restrict the number of photographs that the participants should take, allowing the participants to develop a narrative of their luxury possessions through visual materials. (Harrison, 2002). Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2009: 2) argue that “the resulting visual juxtapositions frequently reveal new connections and understandings that have previously remained tacit”. The use of photographs and interviews gave a richness and depth of data that allowed the author to better understand the cultural significance, relevance and meaning of luxury to the participants.

**Findings**

**Unattainable Luxury**

The findings revealed a number of themes with regard to the meaning, relevance and significance of luxury. Interestingly, for second-generation Asian Indians, luxury has to be inaccessible, unattainable and difficult to reach. If luxury brands can be bought with no trouble, effortlessly and simply, they are not deemed pure luxury. As participants below discuss:

*If you go to a certain brand, like the Hermes bag, I can’t afford that, so I don’t think like Prada, LV or even Coach are luxury brands because I can afford it. What is a luxury brand is the brand I cannot afford; at least I cannot afford it currently. (Female , 25)*

*I think the Hermes bag is special because they are hand-made and they have a limited quantity, also the biggest influence is social status, people that can afford this bag, which can be over £5,000, for me that means that they are really rich, it’s just beyond my life. (Female, 42)*

The status of ‘luxury’ is only accorded when an item is hard to reach, when it is not affordable, not typical and clearly something that will not become the norm. The price of luxury goods influences the status they receive. Participants elevate the status of the luxury goods if they are, in their view, expensive. Prestige is linked to levels of accessibility, cost and price (Brucks, Zeithaml and Naylor, 2000).

*Luxury to me means something that you don’t experience every day. A real treat. Something that typically costs quite a bit, whether it be direct cost to an individual or an indirect cost. Luxury is more than possession, it can be a way of living, but typically in my mind it is to do with physical items. Luxury to me can also be things like travelling first class, chauffeur-driven cars, having a butler, having regular massages. The brands I would classify as luxury are the brands I would not purchase every day. These are purchases I would need to contemplate, take time to think about rather than just purchasing. At the time of purchasing these items, I would get a little butterfly feeling in the pit of my stomach. (Male, 44)*

*So luxury to me is something that I can’t possibly have, so a luxury holiday. So unless it’s highly luxurious I can’t be bothered. There’s no point to it being normal, what you can have regularly, it needs to be pure luxury. (Female, 55)*

The participants feel a certain level of excitement: they are experiencing something out of the ordinary. This is closely linked to cost; there is a definite correlation between cost and luxury, and the status of luxury is lowered if it is affordable and accessible.

**Collective Self**

The two-fold frame of reference is discussed. There are many aspects of what constitutes a luxury brand. This can be likened to conspicuous consumption; however, it is deeper than that. It involves status, respect and gaining acknowledgement from others, especially the community that consists of family and friends. Luxury represents and affords status to the participants of this study. The participants measure their personal achievement through luxury. They realize and acknowledge that luxury is measured not only at a personal level but also at a collective level, based on others’ expectations and recognition. Reese (2001) suggests that a two-fold frame of reference exists for first-generation immigrants, and we see that this can also be applied to the second generation. Arguably, it extends beyond duality and also incorporates friends, family and the indigenous population.

These findings also illustrate the importance of the ‘collective self’ to the participants. They collectively refer to what being ‘Asian’ means, and how it influences the choice of luxury brands. Once again the theme of status is highlighted, and status through luxury consumption is discussed.

*Yeah, the brand is really important, especially in the Asian world. BMW, Mercedes – it’s a very Asian thing. We all drive luxury brands, it has to be the right brand, it gives us status, it’s almost like the ‘WOW’ factor. It’s not just what my community says about the car, it’s also what my work friends think and I suppose how the brand is respected globally too.” (Female, 41)*

*Luxury brands are important with Asians, they tell you something about a person. I mean, there are some makes you really want, cars – BMW, Mercedes, Aston Martin, Porsche – but equally there are some you would avoid. The Bentley: people in our community have it, but it’s who has it… this guy has it and he’s so tacky, and now it’s put me off wanting it, even if I could afford it. (Male, 40)*

*The only thing with our community is that we constantly want to impress and show people that we are successful, and sadly this is measured by what we have. Luxury brands are a big part of that. (Female, 52)*

The participants are well aware of what others will think and how others will measure them. There is a desire to belong to their community, to ‘fit in’ and yet ‘stand out’. Importance is definitely placed on what is expected and even prescribed by Asian society. Luxury brands are regarded as facilitators: they allow for belonging but equally inspire accepted individuality. Participants discuss negative symbolic consumption, brands they wish to avoid. They have their own hierarchy of luxury brands that influence consumption decisions. Participants choose luxury brands that complement their identity. They construct and negotiate their identity and their image through the consumption of certain luxury brands, and steer clear of luxury that evokes negative images for their public self.

*Certain brands are off limits. There is luxury and then there is luxury. I don’t see luxury as those brands that everyone can have – they become common. I actually buy something different on purpose. If I stick with what everyone has, what’s the point? It’s not luxury, it’s just common. (Male, 43)*

**Sacred Status**

Luxury equates to achievement. Achievement in all its forms is directly linked to the Asian social context that the participants experience. They desire admiration from their personal and social groups. Achievement for the participants is personal, but it is also a means of satisfying the social need for admiration from reference groups, family and friends, as well as status from the wider community. As luxury brands are closely linked to the participant’s achievement, which is core to cultural expectations, they become sacred, almost holy and revered.

*Luxury is something I have to work hard for, not something that I can just pick up, but in our community it is more than that. I really want to have a Rolex watch, I won’t waste my money getting anything less, but having the luxury brand – that’s not enough, you have to have something behind it, you have to have the education, the respect, otherwise it doesn’t mean anything. That’s why luxury is so important. I know once I have my Rolex, it will be special. I will really look after it – I’m not sure if I could even wear it!!! (Male, 44)*

The importance and significance of luxury is discussed, and it is clear that luxury only gains the elevated status if it is accepted and respected by peers, as well as meeting social, community and cultural expectations. However, the participants strived to fulfil and exceed what was expected of them.

*Luxury is special, it’s occasional. I remember where my parents came from, how hard they worked – it’s all those years of hard work, it’s the culmination of that. It has to be really expensive: I value that. ( Female, 35)*

The consumption and experience of luxury takes on a religious-like status. Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry’s work on the sacred and profane (1989) suggests that goods take on a sacred status. However, for the participants in the current study it is clear that luxury possessions and experiences are already regarded as sacred. The participants liken the possession of luxury as being blessed, coming from humble immigrant roots, working hard and now possessing luxury. It is a part of their identity and their being. It is about gaining and maintaining respect from their most important referent groups.

*A luxury is a lifestyle. Luxury is opportunities…privileges, yes privileges, and luxury for us is the identity of a person who is driven, who is dynamic, I don’t know – even entrepreneurial. I actually look up to people that have it that have worked for it and aspire to have more. History of luxury is also important. It’s like this kind of X factor….with each brand there is an X factor. They have a unique identity, unique pieces, like Chanel, it makes them distinct. (Female, 26)*

The pursuit of luxury goods is one thing, but the actual possession is another. Luxury goods lose their functional value, participants are hesitant to use them, and they take care of them, guard them and almost worship their ownership.

*For me it has to be my Hermes bag. I was given it by my parents, it was a surprise, I was there when they bought it but I didn’t expect it. To be honest, even now when I look at it, touch it, feel it, I feel like, I don’t know really, I can’t describe this feeling. Sometimes I don’t even want to take it out of the bag. I mean, if it’s raining outside I do think I might not take it, I take it out of the bag, then put it back in, because it’s so special. It’s very difficult because in the beginning I think I didn’t touch it, I didn’t take it out from the box from the shop maybe from the first three months. (Female, 21)*

Meaning is attached to luxury goods by the participants. They not only identify their special possessions, which are luxury brands, but also go on to discuss why these are cherished and why from the outset they are sacred. There is no reference to the profane, to the normality of these purchases. They have been accorded sacred status before consumption, and post-consumption are elevated further to retain their almost sanctified status.

*These possessions mean different things. Example: my Rolex was significant as it was a purchase I made after a life-threatening illness. I decided to purchase this as it was a critical stage in my life and I wanted to mark the fact that I survived. When I drive/wear these possessions it makes me feel good about myself. It makes me feel a certain kind of ‘status’, makes me feel special. It also highlights to others and me in my community that I have had success in my professional life, which has allowed me to afford these items. That’s important for us, we are influenced, or should I say, want to impress lots of people, family, friends, peers from our own community and from the British community, like people I work with and my friends. Examples of luxury in my life are my Rolex wristwatch, my Fendi blazer, and to a certain extent my Mercedes Benz car. When I bought these items I felt they were luxury items, things I wouldn’t buy every day. As time has gone by the luxury ‘aspect’ of some of them has decreased, for example my Mercedes Benz, whereas the luxury aspect of my wristwatch and my blazer remains. I think I can go over the top: I don’t just like to leave my Fendi blazer out, I have to cover it. I don’t always get a chance to wear it, so sometimes I just unzip the cover, take a look and then zip it up and put it away. Also, my Rolex wristwatch is in its own case, which stops it from getting damaged easily. (Male, 44) (See figures 1 and 2 displaying this participant’s luxury possessions).*

The sacred status attached to luxury possessions is further enhanced by the affirmation and acknowledgement sought from peers, whether friends, family or the local community. Arguably, in the same way that “jewelers on their behalf (the consumers), may convert formally unconvertible profane items into sacred ones” (Hartman and Kiecker, 2004:52), the participants’ peer group further enhance the sacred status of luxury possessions. The participants discuss the desire to look at their luxury possessions, to touch them, feel them, but then guard them and reluctantly use them.

It is the participants’ peer and referent groups, as well as the need to use luxury brands as symbols of success and achievement, which, one could argue give the luxury possessions sacred and superior status. The desire to stand out, yet to belong, and to gain respect from the Asian community results in the participants elevating the status of luxury possessions. This status results in the functionality of the possession declining and instead the possession is worshipped, taking on a religious-like sacred status.

**Summary**

The participants are also part of the immigrant journey: they aspire to fulfil community and social expectations that come with being a second-generation immigrant in the UK. Luxury has to reflect status, wealth and achievement; it is a fundamental part of the individual’s identity and is key in facilitating belonging. The meaning of luxury is influenced by their transnational identity, which as Vertovec (2001) states is a combination and a mix of differing social realities for the participants. These realities derive from cultural, social and professional ties. Participants possess their own brand perceptions’ that have been formed through status accorded by the wider community. These expectations and brand perceptions are a mixture of their personal, cultural and transnational influences.

Luxury has to be worked for, has to be aspired to, and cannot easily be accessed. The participants discuss how luxury brands are only respected if they are difficult to obtain, and once obtained they are worshipped and taken care of as they achieve elevated status as possessions. It is clear that the status of luxury brands is transient: as certain brands become commonplace, they lose their luxury status and are reclassified. As Berry states (1994), the ‘transience of luxury’ is ever present in the participant’s lives.

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