

**WHICH LUXURY PERCEPTIONS AFFECT MOST  
CONSUMER PURCHASE BEHAVIOR? A CROSS CULTURAL  
EXPLORATORY STUDY IN FRANCE, THE UNITED  
KINGDOM AND RUSSIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to analyse consumer perceptions of luxury in three countries France, Russia and the United Kingdom. The objective is to define luxury perception from French Russian and British perspective as well as to develop frameworks for marketing luxury goods in those three countries.

Research results revealed relevance of four luxury facets to all three cultures: Aesthetics, Premium Quality, Product Personal History and Expensiveness. The Superfluousness dimension does not emerge as an important facet and the Uniqueness facet is found relevant only for the Russian culture. Finally a new luxury dimension of Self-pleasure is relevant for the three cultures. It is linked to Aspiration and Product Conspicuousness for the French, Functionality and Luxury Atmospherics for the British and Functionality for the Russians.

## INTRODUCTION

The luxury goods market has experienced a considerable growth internationally in all the sectors in the first decade of 2005. From LVMH financial reports, the revenues for the first decade of 2005 totalled 6.17 billion Euros, which is 10% higher than the revenues for the same decade of 2004<sup>1</sup>. The luxury market is finally booming again in the first decade of 2005. With the increase in the number of global millionaires, greater confidence in the economy and mass consumers buying luxury, the future is bright for luxury fashion houses. According to LVMH and Boston Consulting Group reports, the role of Europe and new developing markets, such as Russia, China and India, in luxury goods consumption has been growing since 2001<sup>2</sup>. Based on the Boston Consulting Group estimates, in 2004 the market for luxury products and services generated a profit of \$400 billion, primarily in European Union countries, such as UK, France, Germany and Italy, as well as Japan.

According to geographic proximity, linguistic similarities, population migration and historic developments, European cultures can be grouped into three main cultures Germanic, Romance and Slavonic. Research shows that the origin of this cultural typology is not quiet clear because of its ancient roots. Some researchers refer it to ancient Romans (Carlton 1965, Edcock 1960), others to St Bede, a British writer of 735, one of the first history writers (Bede, Webb and Farmer, 1996):

- Germanic cultures include ethnic groups of Germanic origin or the linguistic, cultural and racial descendents of the old Germanic tribes, such as modern UK, Germany and the Scandinavian countries (Bede, Webb and Farmer, 1996).
- Romance cultures are descendants of Italic origin, ethnic groups that spoke Vulgar Latin dialects and were part of the Roman Empire, such as modern Italy, France, Spain and Portugal (Bede, Webb and Farmer, 1996).

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<sup>1</sup> LE POINT, *Laser Economie: Actif*, number 1715, July 28, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> BCG Corporation “*The Luxury Industry in the European Union and Russia: New Tendencies and Potential*”, Moscow, Russia, December 1994.

- Slavonic cultures include ethnic groups of Slavic peoples speaking the Slavic languages, such as modern East and Central Europe, as well as the Balkans (Zelinsky, 1965).

Taking into account the growing importance of Europe luxury consumption, the current article will focus on luxury perceptions of consumers from Romantic, Germanic and East Slavonic cultures. Among those cultures, we have selected France, the UK and Russia for the following reasons:

- France has been selected as a representative culture of the Romantic origin for its status of a reigning fashion capital and for its high concentration of aging population. French luxury brands are the heritage of France. French people are often considered as the most style and fashion-conscious culture in Europe.
- The UK has been chosen as a representative to develop luxury perceptions of Germanic cultures because of the highest concentration of millionaires (47,000 people) in Western Europe with tastes for luxury<sup>3</sup>.
- Russia was lastly selected as a representative of East Slavonic cultures because it is considered one of the most perspective markets for luxury goods consumption. Together with India and China, it is part of what is seen as a “golden triangle” of the newly wealthy who are “thirsty” for luxury goods<sup>4</sup>.

This research is structured around three main parts. First, we will present the main contributions stemming from the literature related to luxury. Then, a second part will focus on the results obtained from a qualitative survey undertaken within the three aforementioned countries. Finally, we will conclude on the main contributions of this research and on the future research that could be undertaken.

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<sup>3</sup> THE GUARDIAN, London, *The UK Luxury Market Survey*, May 10, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> FINANCIAL TIMES, *Russia in Search of Luxury*, September 13, 2004.

## I. CONCEPTUAL FRAWORK

Research of academic literature reveals three main interrelated perspectives that were used to study and to define luxury brands, such as economic, psychological and marketing:

- Initially economic theories focused mostly on distinctions between luxury and necessity. Veblen was one of the first who analysed luxury goods in the social economic context in his celebrated “The theory of the leisure class” (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999). Nowadays the primary focus of economic theories is the influence of pricing strategies on exclusivity of luxury goods. They strongly associate luxury with a “high” or “exclusive” pricing. Based on the connection of price and exclusivity, Groth and Mc Daniel (1993) developed the Exclusive Value Principle as a framework for “marketing strategies to achieve brand exclusivity”. According to the authors, the Market Price for a product is a sum of the Pure Utilitarian Value of the product and the Exclusive Value Premium. For luxury goods, sources of utility include product quality, aesthetic design, excellence of service, etc. Exclusive Value Premium incorporates external factors that motivate luxury goods consumption behaviour, such as advertising and promotion campaigns.
- Social and behavioural psychology define luxury from luxury goods consumption motivations based on “interpersonal” or “external” factors, such as “opinions, influences, approval and suggestions of or interaction with others” (Groth and McDaniel, 1993) and “personal” or “internal” factors, such as feelings and emotions that stimulate luxury brands consumption (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). Luxury goods are consumed either for social recognition, status and positive impression management purposes (Vickers and Renand, 2003; Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; Mason, 1992; Novak and MacEvoy, 1990; Brinberg and Plimpton, 1986) or for hedonic and pleasure-seeking ones (Fenigshtein, Scheier and Buss, 1975; Vickers and Renand, 2003). Recent studies demonstrate that luxury brands possess “emotional values in access of their functional utility” and “are likely to provide subjective intangible benefits” (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999). Indeed, Dubois and Laurent (1996) already pointed out the emotional value as a vital characteristic of luxury products. They stated that “a vast majority subscribes to the hedonic motive (...) One buys luxury goods primary for one’s pleasure”.

- Marketing theories on luxury brands are grounded on economic and psychology theories. They deal primarily with differentiations of luxury goods from non-luxury ones, as well as definition of salient product features that could constitute luxury. Recently, Vickers and Renand (2003) developed a three dimensional model differentiating luxury brands from non-luxury ones based on symbolic meanings of luxury brands in terms of functionalism, experientialism and symbolic interaction. Functionalism is defined as product features that could ‘solve a current problem’ or ‘prevent a potential one’, such as ‘superior quality and strength, durability, confidence of items replacement’. Experientialism incorporates features that could stimulate sensory pleasure and hedonic consumption, such as ‘traditional and exclusive designs’, ‘special richness and tone of decoration’, ‘elegance of days gone by’. Symbolic interaction implies product components related to status, self-enhancement, and ‘group membership, such as ‘prestigious name’ or recognizable designer style. The most recent and important studies to define luxury perceptions on a cross-cultural level have been carried out by Dubois, Laurent and Czellar (2001). They performed qualitative and quantitative cross-cultural consumer-based studies in Western Europe, USA and Asia Pacific and gave a general definition of luxury as a combination of the following 6 dimensions: Price, Quality, Uniqueness, Aesthetics, Personal History and Superfluosness.

However, this literature review reveals that, despite a rapid growth of the luxury goods market and rich accumulated knowledge on the subject, there is no clear consensus of what constitutes a luxury brand (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004; Vickers and Ronand, 2003; Dubois and Duquesne, 1993) although the proposition by Dubois, Laurent and Czellar is considered as the most accurate global one (Dubois, Laurent and Czellar, 2001). Based on the results of cross-cultural luxury consumer studies it proposes six main facets of luxury (see table 1).

**.Table 1 : The six main facets of luxury according to Dubois, Laurent and Czellar (2001)**

• Excellent quality	Exceptional ingredients, components delicacy and expertise, craftsmanship
• Very high price	Expensive, elite and premium pricing
• Scarcity and Uniqueness	Restricted distribution, limited number, tailor-made
• Aesthetics and Poly-sensuality	Piece of art, beauty, dream
• Ancestral heritage and personal history	Long history, tradition, pass-on to generations
• Superfluousness	Uselessness, non-functional

It is noteworthy that no further cross-cultural research has been undertaken since 2001 to verify whether the existing 6 luxury facets can stimulate consumers of different cultures to purchase luxury goods or whether consumers changed their luxury perceptions and search for something else in luxury. Hence, almost ten years later, the objective of this research is to find out what are the main luxury perceptions among the consumers of the three selected countries and to verify to what extent the six luxury dimensions mentioned by Dubois, Laurent and Czellar (2001) have evolved over nearly ten years.

## **II RESEARCH DESIGN**

In order to assess cultural effects on consumer perceptions of luxury and to elicit the facets of luxury most relevant to Romantic, Anglo-Saxon and Slavonic cultures and due to the very exploratory nature of our study, qualitative research methods have been undertaken. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), “qualitative samples tend to be purposive, rather than random”. Therefore, a total of 30 people were interviewed, 10 per each culture, English, French and Russian, the sample contained active users of luxury brands of different gender, age and occupation. To avoid narrow sampling and to gain a better understanding of the studied phenomenon, a “peripheral sampling” was also chosen as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994). It included respondents “who are not central to the phenomenon but are neighbours to it” (Miles and Huberman, 1994). They are not active users of luxury goods but have bought at least one luxury product during the past year. In total 15 additional people were interviewed, 5 representing each culture, English, French and Russian.

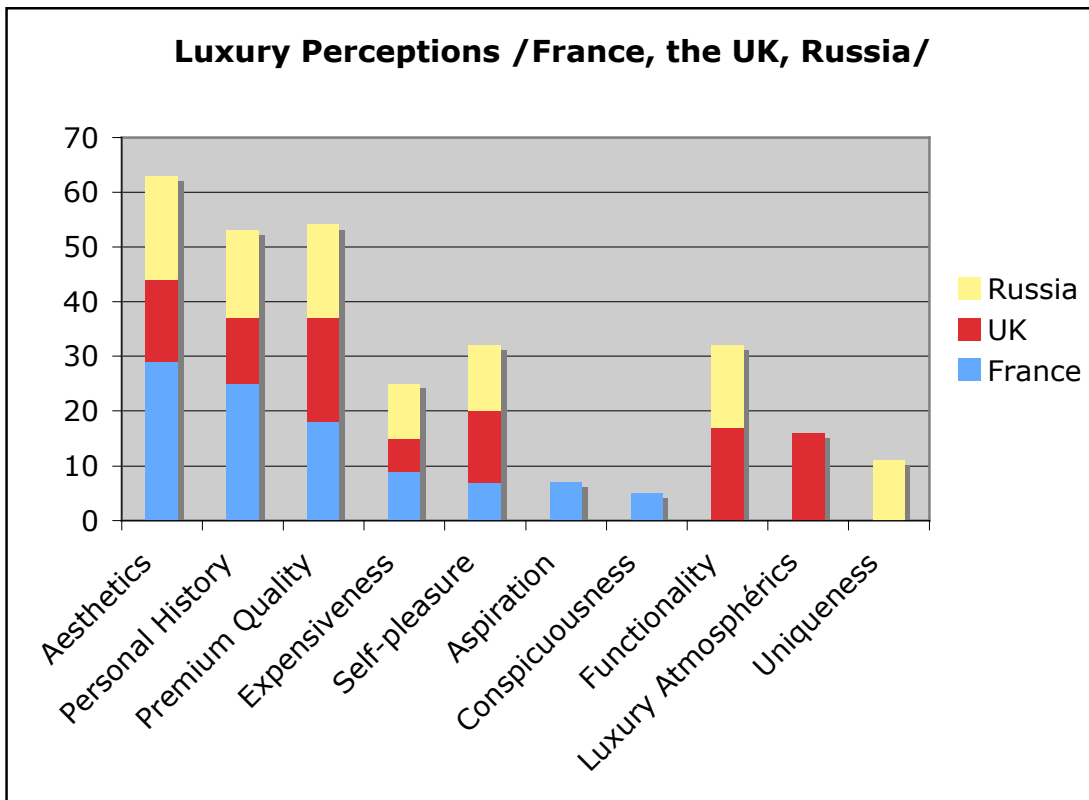
The interview guide was based on “a progressive approach” (McCracken, 1988) starting from a description of the latest luxury goods shopping experience and luxury products acquisitions to general perceptions of luxury. The six facets of luxury defined by Dubois, Laurent and Czellar (1996) were included in the interview guide as probes in order to test their importance and relevance to respondents. The interview type was an unstructured, narrative one aiming at getting information about luxury meanings relevant to consumers (McCracken 1988). On average, each interview lasted about one hour and a half. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. A content analysis of each interview was performed to identify the major themes or clusters appearing in the text (Miles and Huberman 1994).

In the following sections, results common to the three countries are first presented, followed by a presentation of the luxury dimensions specific to each country.

## **2.1 Main Categories of Luxury : Analysis for the Three Countries**

The in-depth interviews with French, British and Russian interviewees revealed five facets common to the three countries: Aesthetics, Premium Quality, Personal History, Self-Pleasure and Expensiveness. A new dimension of Self-Pleasure common for all the three cultures, as well as new facets of Product Conspicuousness and Aspiration for France, Functionality and Luxury Atmospherics for the UK and Functionality for Russia emerged during the interviews. Chart 1 displayed below shows the frequencies of enunciation of these facets as well as the facets specific only to one or two countries. Exhibits I to III present into details the main themes and sub-themes frequencies for the three countries.

Chart 1



One of the interesting research findings was that for all respondents the luxury dimension of Superfluosness was irrelevant. For the French and the British respondents the facet of Uniqueness was also unimportant (see table 2 for excerpts). They were referred to as “very vague”, “intangible” and “hard to assess”. The respondents never think about Superfluosness and Uniqueness when they purchase luxury goods. The in-depth interviews reveal that consumers search for quality benefits in luxury brands associated with comfort, security or other special characteristics that could make life easier. Purchase of luxury goods is considered as an investment. For financial reasons consumers can’t afford useless things and can’t put up with the idea that luxury goods are superfluous.



### **2.1.1 Aesthetics**

The Aesthetics dimension is composed of design, colour and style that create beauty, they are of primary importance. When people see a luxury product they are attracted in the first place by originality of its design, colour and style. They motivate consumers to touch and to feel the product. Colour and its combination with materials are considered the most important facets of design and style because they bring out beauty and originality of style and design. On the one hand, design and style create a beautiful overall image of a luxury consumer emphasising his or her best features. On the other hand, design and style give a practical value to a luxury product allowing consumers to utilise it for different occasions from every day to special ones. In style and design the interviewees value a combination of fashion and tradition. For them fashion is associated with trends, innovation and modernity. Tradition stands for codes of luxury products that were invented years ago, such as straps on Chanel bags, Louis Vuitton or Dior symbols. For the British and the Russian respondents luxury atmospherics is an important aspect of luxury aesthetics. It is achieved by the interior design of a luxury boutique, by luxury goods presentation in boutiques and adverts, as well as by people who work in the luxury sphere. They inject life into intrinsic luxury goods aesthetics and make it more appealing to customers (refer to table 3 for excerpts). For France the Aesthetics dimension earned the highest position, 29%, in comparison to Russia, 19% and the UK, 15% (see chart2).

**Table 2: Irrelevance of Uniqueness and Superfluosness**

Excerpts from question: **“Why should others buy this product?”**

**France** *“Usefulness of the scarf. The products of this brand are created for people but not for models. The brand offers extremely practical things that could last forever and enjoy the feel of a good quality.”*

**UK** *“People should buy it because of quality, originality and usefulness. It could last for a long time and will make several generations of your family happy. Uniqueness and Superfluosness are unimportant for me because I do not understand how it can be measured and what is meant by uniqueness”.*

**Russia** *“People should buy it for usefulness and practicality. I can’t understand and accept superfluosness. How can I assess it? I prefer to have useful luxury things around but not the ones that take up space in my house. I would say that mass produced goods are superfluous because they last for a short time and you have to invest money in purchasing them again.”*

**Table 3: Aesthetics**

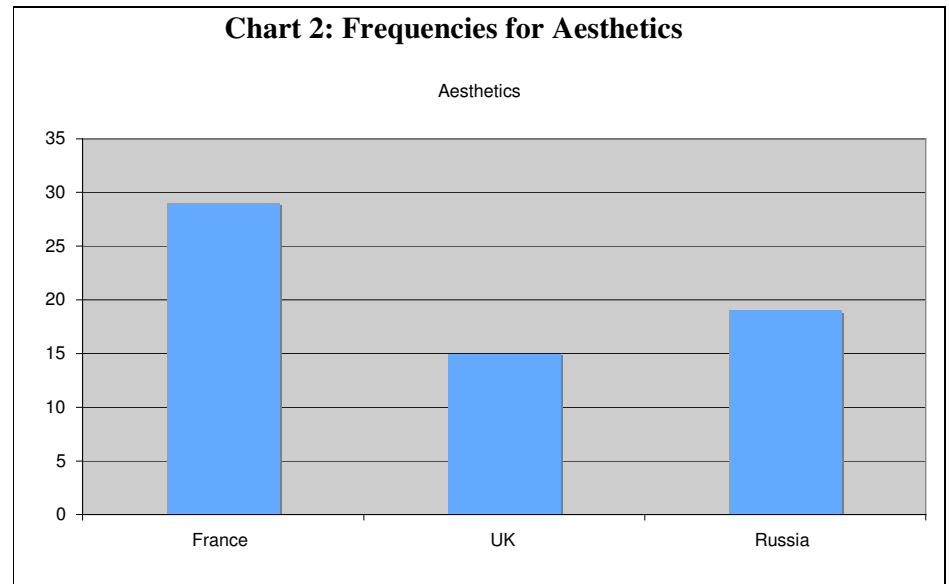
Excerpts from question: **“What does luxury mean for you?”**

**France** *“For me, luxury is beauty, elegance, refinement, as well as quality, which is a selection of materials, fabrics and a special cut and design. Beauty of the product is extremely important because it motivates me to touch it and to feel it.”*

**UK** *“It is style and design that incorporates fashion and tradition. When I say fashion – I mean modern trends when I say tradition it is the adaptation of the brand codes to modernity. This combination makes a product sophisticated and desirable.”*

**Russia** *“Luxury should combine modern and traditional that was invented a long time ago but still attracts attention, like straps on Chanel bags or Dior symbols.”*

**Chart 2: Frequencies for Aesthetics**



### ***2.1.2 Premium Quality***

Premium quality of luxury is relevant for the respondents of all the 3 countries as much as Aesthetics. In fact, this is the main criteria leading to a luxury purchase. For the interviewees it is associated with superior materials and colours that insure product longevity and durability. Materials should not only perform an aesthetic role but should also be of practical value to the customer. For the respondents the superior quality should ensure longevity when the product is passed on from one generation to another. It should never lose its appeal but should become better with time. From the respondents' perspective "luxury is an expensive investment". Therefore, a high price has to be justified by an outstanding quality and aesthetics that mass-produced goods can't guarantee. Taking into account expensiveness of luxury goods, aesthetics and exceptional quality should be interconnected (refer to table 4 for excerpts). For the UK the Aesthetics dimension earned the highest position, 19%, in comparison to France, 18% and Russia 17% (see chart 3).

### ***2.1.3 Personal History***

One of the most interesting research findings lies in the fact that French and Russian respondents associate Product Personal History with famous brand names. They regard it as one of the most crucial stimuli to purchase luxury because brand name guarantees quality and security that the product will last for a long time. The respondents prefer to buy luxury products from luxury brands that are considered experts in their fields such as for instance, bags from Hermes or Chanel, accessories from Gucci, jewellery from Cartier etc. Surprisingly, with comparison to the French and the Russian, the British do not associate luxury with famous brand names. They define Product Personal History as a good reputation that a luxury product achieved through favourable consumer references. Personal history is created by consumers' word of mouth rather than advertising and promotional campaigns (consult table 5 for excerpts). For France the Personal History dimension obtained the highest position, 25%, in comparison to Russia, 16% and the UK, 12% (see chart 4).

### ***2.1.4 Self-pleasure***

Respondents mentioning an association between luxury and self-pleasure explained that luxury makes them feel comfortable, fills their life with enjoyment and makes it more

interesting spiritually and intellectually. Above all, luxury gives pleasure derived from outstanding quality that creates comfort, security and harmony backed up by original aesthetics. Self-pleasure is also associated with self-cultivation or the intellectual aspect of luxury. It teaches people how to be sophisticated and refines their internal and external world (refer to table 6 for excerpts). For the UK the Self-pleasure dimension reached the highest position 13%, in comparison to Russia 12% and France 7% ( see chart 5).

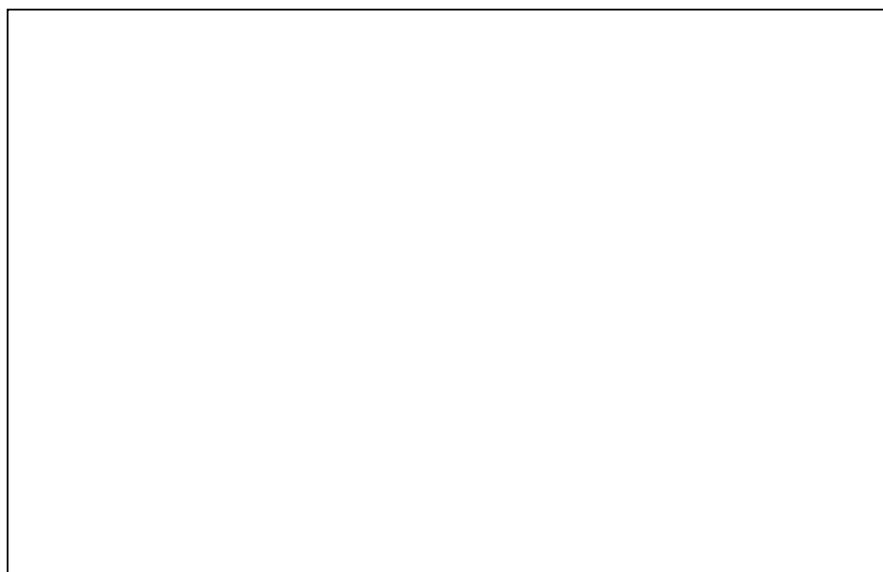
### **2.1.5 Expensiveness**

Respondents consider Expensiveness as a legitimate characteristic of luxury. One has to pay a high price for expensive materials and craftsmanship to ensure quality and longevity. It takes a lot of time and craftsmanship to create something original and durable. Durable materials guarantying longevity are costly. Therefore, the effort should be paid off by a high price (consult chart 6 for excerpts). For Russia the Expensiveness dimension earned the highest position, 10%, in comparison to France, 9% and the UK, 6% (see chart 6).

## **2.2 Main Categories of Luxury: analysis of countries' specificities**

Despite similarities, the three studied countries show some differences in luxury perceptions. For instance, for France only Aspiration and Conspicuousness dimensions are relevant. Luxury Atmospherics is important for the British only, Product Uniqueness is mentioned only by the Russian and Product Functionality is a stimulus for the British and the Russian. Such differences can be explained by cultural differences derived from climate, language and habitual practices relevant for certain cultures (Hall, 1990; Hofstede, 1991; Trompenaars, 1993; Lewis, 2003).

France is representative of Romance cultures that Lewis (2003) defines in general as “aesthetic”, “conscious of beauty values”, “affective”, “aware of the value of feelings”, “romantic”, and “expressive”. Hall and Hall (1990), Hofstede (1991) and Trompenaars (1993) characterize Romance cultures as extremely creative, artistic, perfectionist in style, elegance and manners, people-centered and humanistic. Therefore, the emergence of Dream and Aspiration dimensions can be understood as specificities of Romance cultures.



**Table 6: Self Pleasure**

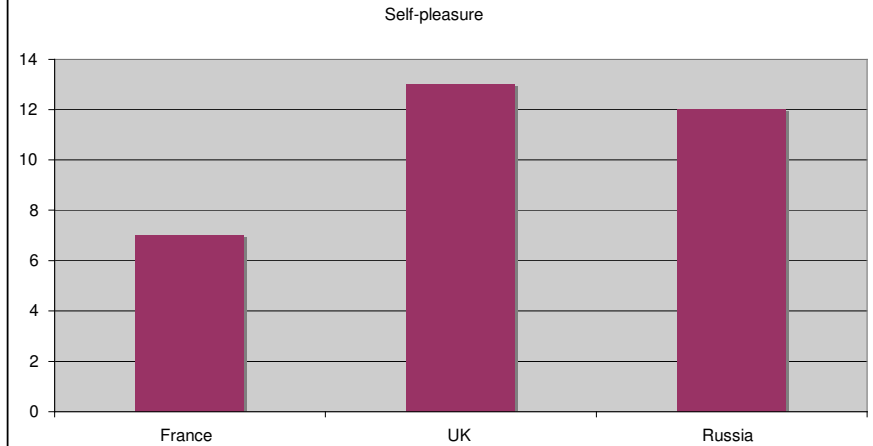
Excerpts from question: *“Why should people buy luxury goods?”*

**France** - *“People should buy luxury brands for pleasure and for cultivating a good taste and elegance”.*

**UK** - *“People should buy luxury brands to enjoy in the first place and to be different from others. “*

**Russia** *“People should buy them for pleasure. Life is very boring without them. I think that everyone should afford some amount of luxury. “*

**Chart 5: Frequencies for Self-Pleasure**



**Table 7: Expensiveness**

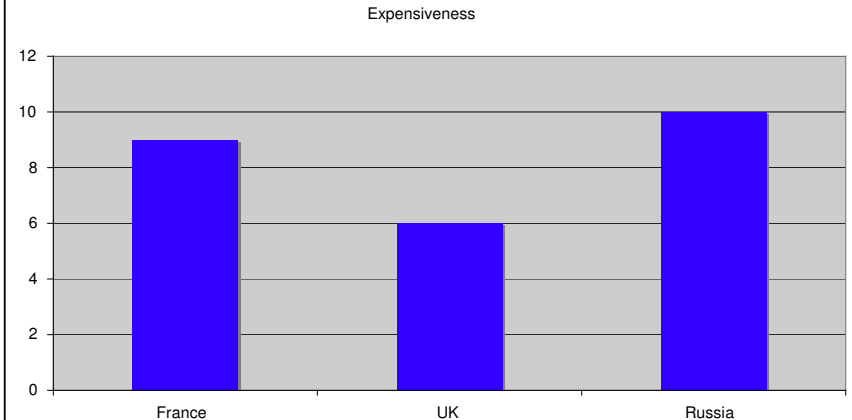
Excerpts from question *“What is the first thing that comes into your mind when I say luxury?”*

**France** *“The expensiveness of the materials was vivid that created a positive impression of quality”.*

**UK**- *“For me luxury is quality in the first place. It is a costly investment and a high price should guarantee quality that could last forever. It is necessary to pay a high price for a great effort, quality and craftsmanship. ”*

**Russia** - *“Expensiveness because one has to pay a high price for quality, craftsmanship and originality.*

**Chart 6: Frequencies for Expensiveness**



The UK represents Germanic cultures that are characterized as neutral with “opaque emotional state” when people are “subtle in verbal and non-verbal expressions” (Hoecklin,1995). The formation of Germanic cultures has been influenced to a large extent by severe cold, snowy or rainy climatic conditions that affected communication and expression models, as well as daily practices (Lewis, 2003). Climatic conditions affect selection of clothes and colors (Lewis, 2003). Brits, as well as Nordics and Germans, “are interested in the protective aspects of clothes (quality of materials, warmth and durability) for many months of the year” rather than appearance and style (Lewis 2003). In connection with that, Luxury Atmospheric and Functionality dimensions can be explained by characteristics specific to Germanic cultures.

Russia is representative of East Slavonic cultures. Its creation was profoundly influenced by Vikings, Scandinavian, Germanic and Baltic tribes in the north and by Khazar, Avar and Tartar tribes in the south, as well as Byzantine (X – XIV centuries), France, Germany and Italy (XVIII – beginning of XX century) that impacted their value and attitude toward wealth and luxury (Skrinnikov, 1997; Suslina, 2003). Such contrasting influences of the North and the South, as well as changeable climatic conditions, partly explain the ambivalence of East Slavonic cultures. In their expressiveness, they are described as “loquacious, emotionally self-indulgent and reserved” (Skrinnikov 1997). During 70 years of communism Russian people were deprived of luxury. It impacted their perception of luxury as something unique, accessible to the elite (Skrinnikov 1997). Therefore, the dimensions of Uniqueness and Functionality can be understood as specific to East Slavonic cultures.

### ***2.2.1 Aspiration for France***

The Aspiration dimension scored 7% among the French interviewees. For the respondents, luxury is an aspiration or a dream to achieve perfection, sophistication, self-refinement and class through the ownership of luxury products that are in their nature perfect and sophisticated. They enhance to a large extent external image and internal world of the consumer, his character and manners. Luxury is the world of beauty (refer to table 8 for excerpts).

### ***2.2.2 Conspicuousness for France***

The Conspicuousness dimension scored 5% among the French interviewees. It is noteworthy that the respondents do not associate conspicuousness with personal ambitions to show off status or wealth. It is rather an intrinsic quality of luxury goods. They are conspicuous by their nature because of their aesthetics and superior quality that makes them visible among other products. The respondents envision conspicuousness in a positive light because it is one of the stimuli to purchase luxury products. They admit that conspicuous products help differentiate themselves from others but it is not the key stimuli. They purchase conspicuousness for pleasure to own a piece of art (consult table 9 for excerpts).

### ***2.2.3 Luxury Atmospherics for the UK***

The Luxury Atmospherics dimension scored 16% among the British interviewees. According to them, luxury is a philosophical notion. A non-luxury object can become a luxury one depending on atmospherics. It is associated, in the first place, with the extremely high standards of services that are linked to the selling skills and image of vendors. The primary goal of vendors is to create an appropriate luxury shopping experience for the consumers. Boutique interior design is also a crucial component of luxury atmospherics and experience. The British respondents prefer boutiques with cosy atmosphere of elegance and class. They do not have to be dominating and loud, but sophisticated, simple and original, bringing out the essence of luxury products. Finally, merchandise presentation is considered as an important aspect of the boutique atmospherics and luxury experience, because for British respondents the consumers are attracted, not by the products, but by their presentation (see table 10 for excerpts).

### ***2.2.5 Uniqueness for Russia***

The Uniqueness dimension scored 11% among the Russian interviewees. It is associated with a limited number of luxury products that allow their owners to distinguish themselves from others and to create a special original and sophisticated self-image. Due to their art status, pieces of art can't be mass-produced. Therefore, luxury goods which the respondents regard



as pieces of art can't be mass manufactured either. Uniqueness also serves as an indication of quality and expensiveness (refer to table11 for excerpts).

#### ***2.2.4 Functionality for the UK and Russia***

The functionality dimension is an important research finding which shows that the British and the Russian search for usefulness in luxury. They look for intrinsic product qualities that provide them with functional benefits of outstanding comfort, easy operation and security that mass-produced goods lack of. Nowadays, people prefer to invest it in something that should serve their needs to the best. For the British and the Russian it is the mission of luxury products to ensure the premium satisfaction of human needs through superior quality and functionality. They invest money into multi-purpose luxury that could be utilised several times in different combinations, but not once in a lifetime (see table 12 for excerpts). For the UK the Functionality dimension scored 17% and for Russia it scored 15%.

### **III DISCUSSION**

Although exploratory in its very nature, this research brings out several interesting results, either from a conceptual stand point or a more operational perspective that are outlined in the following sections.

#### **3.1 Overall contribution**

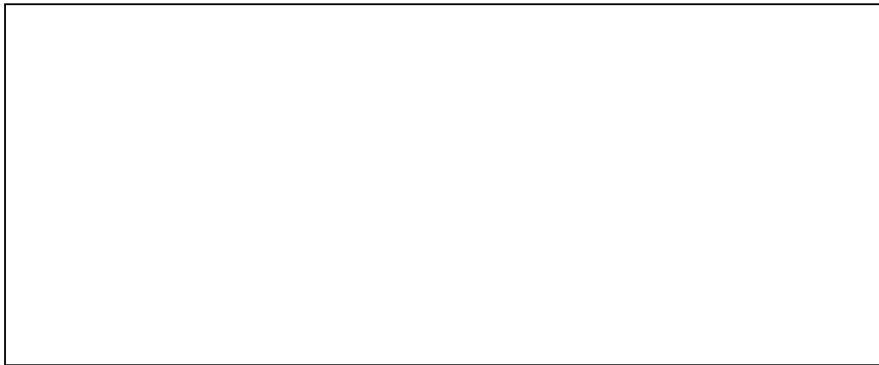
The research analysed consumer perceptions of luxury of Romantic-French, Germanic-British, and East Slavonic-Russian, cultures choosing the luxury definition given by Dubois, Laurent and Czellar (2001). Our results enrich the previous studies and contribute to the understanding of the luxury phenomena in the following ways.

First of all, this research confirmed the relevance of defined luxury dimensions of Aesthetics, Premium Quality, Personal History and Expensiveness as pointed out by Dubois, Laurent and Czellar (2001). However, one of the most important research finding is that it revealed new trends in luxury goods consumption with the emergence of Self-pleasure dimension and the relative lack of importance of Uniqueness and Superfluousness facets.

The emergence of a new Self-pleasure dimension can be linked to previous findings of social and behavioural psychology showing that goods may be consumed for experientialism and hedonic interaction (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Vickers and Renand, 2003). This dimension was found relevant for all three cultures probably because of luxury internationalisation through global advertising and promotion campaigns emphasising hedonic consumption of luxury, on the one hand. On the other hand, people travel a lot, exchange ideas, develop certain international tastes for luxury and adopt new common trends for luxury consumption. (Vickers and Renand, 2003).

It is noteworthy that the discovered Self-pleasure dimension challenges the traditional positivist perception of consumer behaviour. This traditional perspective assumes that “product purchase is the end result of a objective, rational, thoughtful process by the buyer and that because of this rational process, it is possible to “predict” consumer behaviour” (Huang, 2001). This dimension is in line with the interpretive approach of consumer behaviour stating that “emotions, feelings, and subjective contextual meaning play an important role in product purchase. Each consumption experience is unique and findings are not generalizable” (Bourgeon and Filser, 1995).

The Self-pleasure dimension of luxury consumption confirms and enriches previous studies on experiential marketing carried out by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), Bourgeon and Filser (1995), as well as Vickers and Renand (2003). It demonstrates that luxury goods possess “emotional values in excess of their functional utility” and “are likely to provide subjective intangible benefits” (Vigneron F. and Johnson 1999). This finding points out the emotional value as a vital characteristic of luxury products (Dubois and Laurent 1996). It shows the importance of hedonic aspects in luxury goods consumption stemming from a personal experiential interaction with a luxury product. Hedonic interaction is linked to sensory pleasure derived from an outstanding product aesthetics backed up by a premium quality and personal history (Gorth and McDaniel, 1993; Dubois, Laurent and Czellar, 2001; Vickers and Renand, 2003; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004).



**Table 9: France *Excerpts for Conspicuousness***

*“Its design and quality were so wonderful that the product was like a piece of art. It attracted attention by its beauty and a selection of high calibre materials. It was showing off its sophistication and class. To possess such a product meant refinement and elitism. It was conspicuous and could differentiate the owner from others.”*

*“It was the product attractiveness and conspicuousness. It stood out of the others by its beauty and quality. To possess such a product is to be different from others, to be conspicuous. But you do not show off yourself. It is the product that creates attractiveness and conspicuousness.”*

**Table 11 Russia *Excerpts for Uniqueness***

*“Uniqueness is an important aspect of luxury. You possess a piece of art created by a famous artist, in this case the company designer that no one can copy. Unique original things also have interesting association for history, people and events.”*

*- “...the uniqueness of the collection. The owner could be different from others because it was not a bag for everyone because of a high price and a limited number. I liked the design and the color which reflected the color of horse skin.”*



**Table 13: Functionality for The UK and Russia**

**Excerpts from question: “*What attracted you mostly in the product?*”**

**UK:** *“Quality and practicality of the jacket that I could combine with different things and wear on daily bases, as well as for special occasions. It is an extremely functional product because of its practicality and easy care, as well as resistance to unfavorable weather conditions.”*

**Russia** *“It is the original design and expensive materials, used for the jockey themes, as well as an impeccable quality of leather. It is an extremely practical thing for Russia because it closes on top. It is wise to buy bags that could be closed on top for rainy and snowy Russian weather. I was also attracted by the product interesting history because it was especially designed for the anniversary in limited numbers. It will make me different from others for many years to come and will enhance the value of the bag. “*

Additionally, this research demonstrated that Superfluosness was not important for the interviewees from all three countries. Uniqueness was only relevant for the Russian respondents. Since the respondents were looking for tangible utilitarian benefits in luxury products associated with aesthetics and quality it was difficult for them to assess and to appreciate Superfluosness and Uniqueness. This research finding confirms the Exclusive Value theory developed by Gorth and McDaniel (1993) as a framework for “marketing strategies to achieve brand exclusivity”. According to this theory, Luxury goods are purchased for the utility they offer to the buyer. For luxury goods, utility includes product quality, aesthetic design, and excellence of service.

### **3.2 Managerial implications**

This exploratory research shows that it is necessary to take into account consumer perceptions of luxury. A company can stimulate consumer purchase behaviour of its luxury products through careful management of its marketing communication mix by addressing specific factors and dimensions relevant for modern consumers on an international level. The cultural hierarchies of luxury perceptions can be used in a boutique environment as guidelines for salesmen to sell successfully products to customers of different nationalities. They can indicate the key selling points of luxury products relevant for consumers.

In addition, this research can help managers to understand that luxury goods possess certain dimensions and attributes of high relevance to consumers that differentiate them from standard or non-luxury goods. The studies reveal that despite some differences in luxury associations French, Russian and UK consumers have a hedonic approach for luxury derived from aesthetics, quality and personal history. Therefore, any marketing communication mix should emphasise these aspects. Also, the research pointed out that beauty, quality, personal history and expensiveness differentiate luxury goods from standard ones. By examining these differences managers can create a more valued image of luxury products that could enhance their competitive positions versus non-luxury ones.

Finally, as consumers expect to have a unique piece of art when purchasing a luxury good, it is recommended that luxury companies get organised to fight the spreading of fake luxury products on the market. Such practices harm luxury industry through low quality level, low prices and rendering common place of luxury products.

### **3.3 Research limitations**

The key research limitation lies within the nature of the qualitative research which relies only on a small sample of regular and irregular luxury consumers per country. Obviously, replications on a larger scale should be undertaken. Moreover, respondents of only one country per culture (Slavonic, Romance or Germanic) were interviewed. Finally, although both male and female respondents participated in the research, there were more women than men. Consequently the research results are dominated by female luxury perceptions. Also, the content analysis undertaken in this study would greatly benefit from additional analyses relying on more sophisticated lexical techniques that could help to identify vocabularies universal or specific to the selected cultures.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This research reveals a new trend in luxury goods consumption and enriched the existing definition of luxury with the Self-pleasure dimension. It also demonstrates that Superfluousness and Uniqueness facets are no longer relevant to present day consumers due to the lack of tangible characteristics that could help them to assess and to appreciate these dimensions. Consumers look after utilitarian values in luxury goods associated with aesthetics and quality.

Moreover respondents of the three cultures have expressed a hedonistic approach to luxury. They purchase luxury goods for self-pleasure. This self-pleasure is linked to aesthetics, quality and personal history. Therefore, it would be of prime importance to explore to a greater extent which sub-dimensions could constitute the self-pleasure orientation, on a broader international and multicultural level. Also, the research gave surprisingly few results on symbolic consumption of luxury. Finally, further research is needed to understand the way in which self-pleasure is assessed by consumers and how this dimension is linked to symbolic interactions while consuming a luxury product.

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## EXHIBIT 1 THEMES AND SUB-THEMES FOR FRANCE

<i>Main Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>	Word Frequencies		Main Themes Frequencies
		Number 517	%	%
<b>Aesthetics</b>	<i>Design and style</i>	32	22%	<b>29%</b>
	<i>Beauty</i>	29	20%	
	<i>Simplicity and chic</i>	23	15%	
	<i>Elegance</i>	21	14%	
	<i>Colour</i>	18	12%	
	<i>Colour and Materials</i>	15	10%	
	<i>Tradition and Fashion</i>	11	7%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>149</b>		
<b>Personal History</b>	<i>Famous brand name</i>	30	23%	<b>25%</b>
	<i>Security guarantee</i>	25	19%	
	<i>Reflect consumer values</i>	22	17%	
	<i>Know-how</i>	20	15%	
	<i>Craftsmanship</i>	20	15%	
	<i>Cultivates consumer tastes and image</i>	14	11%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>131</b>		
<b>Premium Quality</b>	<i>Superior materials and colours</i>	28	31%	<b>18%</b>
		27	29%	
	<i>Longevity / Durability</i>	27	29%	
	<i>Pass on to generations</i>	10	11%	
	<i>Become better with time</i>			
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>92</b>		
<b>Expensiveness</b>	<i>High price</i>	20	41%	<b>9%</b>
	<i>Exclusive</i>	18	37%	
	<i>Elite</i>	11	22%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>49</b>		
<b>Self-pleasure</b>	<i>Comfort</i>	11	32%	<b>7%</b>
	<i>Pleasure</i>	11	32%	
	<i>Enjoyment</i>	8	22%	
	<i>Interesting life</i>	5	14%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>35</b>		
<b>Aspiration</b>	<i>Dream</i>	11	31%	<b>7%</b>
	<i>Sophistication</i>	8	24%	
	<i>Class</i>	8	24%	
	<i>Self-refinement</i>	7	21%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>34</b>		
<b>Conspicuousness</b>	<i>Show-off</i>	10	37%	<b>5%</b>
	<i>Different from others</i>	10	37%	
	<i>Association with the trendy</i>	7	26%	
		7		
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>27</b>		

**EXHIBIT II THEMES AND SUB-THEMES FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM**

<i>Main Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>	<b>Word Frequencies</b>		<b>Main Themes Frequencies</b>
		<b>Number 560</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Premium Quality</b>	<i>Longevity</i>	31	28%	<b>19%</b>
	<i>Tradition</i>	31	28%	
	<i>Pass on to generations</i>	28	26%	
	<i>Becomes better with time</i>	20	18%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>110</b>		
<b>Functionality</b>	<i>Usefulness</i>	34	36%	<b>17%</b>
	<i>Comfort</i>	33	35%	
	<i>Protection and security</i>	27	29%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>94</b>		
<b>Luxury Atmospherics</b>	<i>Impeccable service</i>	25	27%	<b>16%</b>
	<i>Soft selling versus hard selling</i>	20	22%	
	<i>Interior design</i>	18	19%	
	<i>Merchandise presentation</i>	16	17%	
	<i>Classy</i>	14	15%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>93</b>		
<b>Aesthetics</b>	<i>Boutique atmospherics and quality</i>	23	26%	<b>15%</b>
	<i>Product presentation</i>	20	23%	
	<i>Selling skills of vendors</i>	20	23%	
	<i>Beauty</i>	15	17%	
	<i>Design</i>	10	11%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>88</b>		
<b>Self-pleasure</b>	<i>Make life more interesting</i>	27	37%	<b>13%</b>
	<i>Enjoyment</i>	20	28%	
	<i>Pleasure</i>	15	21%	
	<i>Self-cultivation</i>	10	14%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>72</b>		
<b>Personal history</b>	<i>Know-how and tradition of manufacturing</i>	25	37%	<b>12%</b>
	<i>Good reputation</i>	23	33%	
	<i>Favourable references</i>	21	30%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>69</b>		
<b>Expensiveness</b>	<i>High price</i>	34	100%	<b>6%</b>
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>34</b>		

### **EXHIBIT III THEMES AND SUB-THEMES FOR RUSSIA**

<i>Main Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>	<b>Word Frequencies</b>		<b>Main Themes Frequencies</b>
		<b>Number 852</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Aesthetics</b>	<i>Beauty and Originality</i>	32	21%	<b>19%</b>
	<i>Design</i>	30	19%	
	<i>Materials and Colours</i>	30	19%	
	<i>Magic atmospherics</i>	25	17%	
	<i>Never out of fashion</i>	22	13%	
	<i>Piece of Art</i>	20	11%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>159</b>		
<b>Premium Quality</b>	<i>Premium Quality</i>	36	26%	<b>17%</b>
	<i>Longevity</i>	33	23%	
	<i>Expensive materials</i>	28	20%	
	<i>Pass on to generations</i>	24	17%	
	<i>Resistance to unfavourable conditions</i>	20	14%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>141</b>		
<b>Personal History</b>	<i>Famous brand name</i>	35	26%	<b>16%</b>
	<i>Famous designer</i>	30	22%	
	<i>Traditional know-how</i>	28	20%	
	<i>Long story and interesting associations</i>	25	18%	
	<i>Quality guarantee</i>	20	14%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>138</b>		
<b>Functionality</b>	<i>Usefulness</i>	38	29%	<b>15%</b>
	<i>Multi-purpose</i>	32	25%	
	<i>Comfort</i>	25	19%	
	<i>Easy to operate</i>	20	15%	
	<i>Security</i>	15	12%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>130</b>		
<b>Self-Pleasure</b>	<i>Enjoyment</i>	28	29%	<b>12%</b>
	<i>Intellectual growth</i>	25	26%	
	<i>Sensorial satisfaction</i>	24	23%	
	<i>Admiration from others</i>	20	22%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>97</b>		
<b>Uniqueness</b>	<i>Limited number</i>	35	36%	<b>11%</b>
	<i>Different from others</i>	31	33%	
	<i>Original image</i>	29	31%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>95</b>		
<b>Expensiveness</b>	<i>Premium price</i>	37	40%	<b>10%</b>
	<i>Quality guarantee</i>	30	33%	
	<i>Craftsmanship guarantee</i>	25	27%	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>92</b>		