

Trading up the New Luxury – Insights from the Indian Consumers

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Abstract

With the stock markets defying gravity and disposable incomes on the rise, India is being woken up to the luxury phenomenon that is already a decade old in China. The sweeping invasion is not only representing itself in products like perfumes, wines, leather, watches and jewellery but is also being seen in cars, consumer durables, and Indian fashion houses/boutiques. The consumers' changing mind-set is the catalyst - it's less about conspicuous consumption and more about self-respect and emotional need. The buyers of new luxury (as compared to old) are not slaves to brands. They are fiercely loyal when they choose to be, but they are also discriminating and know their needs. The purpose, therefore, of the study is to go into detail and examine trends that define luxury of today - *what does luxury mean to a common man?* The market for luxury goods is estimated at \$60 billion-80 billion; the US accounts for 30% of it, Europe 34% and Asia 36%. The study looked at various age categories and some specific communities located in a specific region of India. The findings revealed that women's interpretation of luxury was common across the communities within their age group. It was surprising to note that youngsters in the age of 18-25 are moving towards a mature outlook towards luxury and not driven by price. This particular age group came out to be the dreamer class. The next age bracket, that is 25-45 years, it was evident that they are after their realistic goals and to realize them would be luxury for them. They would rather speak about a luxurious life than luxury and were not driven by conventional luxury associations. The 45 plus respondents, however, chose to seek gratification through their consumption and associated luxury with what could give them instant gratification and a sense of achievement though this fact differed across the communities which was not the case in earlier set of respondents.

Introduction

The issue with the word luxury is that it is at once a concept (a category), a subjective impression and a term often subjected to moral criticism. Thus, *what is luxury for some is just ordinary for others*, while some brands are qualified as luxury brands by one half of public opinion, others are simply considered as major brands by the other half. Likewise, given the economic crisis, it has become ethically more dubious to like luxury or pursue luxury. Real luxury brands remain attractive but the word itself has lost its clout and sparkle because of the economic downturn in

industrialized countries. The word luxury has fallen out of favor a little; a hindrance to market researchers, who wish to measure their customers' sensitivity to luxury; though the same can't be said of its growing significance in the developing world. Luxury brands are very distinct. Even though France, Germany, US, and UK have created famous luxury brands, there is still some confusion over the concepts of luxury and luxury brand not to mention the French concept of *Griffe* which cannot adequately be translated into English. The same can be extrapolated to trends emerging in India. Though India is still a pigmy compared to western majors, she has a history of exclusive and luxurious lifestyles propagated by princely states and their maharaja's. In terms of old luxury, there exists a wealth of resources exemplified by rare gems and jewellery, lifestyle sports (Jaipur Polo Ground), leather items (LVMH and Raja Tikka Shatrujit Singh) and a fleet of cars (Rolls Royce and Maharaja Gaj Singh).

Thus, till recently there existed a big gap between the old luxury haves and the breeding young have nots; but all this is seeing a sea change with a host of multinationals crowding for space in the liberalized environs of modern India. This has led to what is called democratization of luxury - with international brands of the likes of Hugo Boss, LVMH, Tag Heuer, Boucheron, Mont Blanc, etc. closing the gap between the old luxury haves and the new evolving and young have nots. This is leading to destabilizing existing competition, creating new winners and losers, and along with it offering new rules for brand strategy. This study involves studying the patterns of consumption of goods that we have been just exposed to and not experienced firsthand.

Evolution of Luxury Market in India

Over the past decade, the rapidly-changing economic situations in India have brought with it wide international exposure and an obsession with luxury. The consumer in India is no longer a person with an old world socialist mindset. He does not earn money to keep in his coffers or to save for his children, but he earns so that he can spend it on himself, pamper himself and his family. Status and riches are no longer with a restricted business class 'haves' but is achievable by ambition and hard work. This motivates everybody because everyone can be 'rich'. Something critical is taking place in the emerging economies of the world, and India too has been part of this experience. When you sell to such a changing environment, there are two choices or routes. Either represent an old world cash crunching company that offers "value for money" and prides itself for having the cheapest product in its class to sell to its thrifty old customers or one can

become that 'aspirational' symbol - the category the product participates in becomes a non-issue.

The aspirational theory of marketing proposes the formation of an "aspirational class" — a type of positioning that nurtures man's deep-rooted desire for luxury. Aspirational class is one that a given segment of the market desires to belong to and which it is increasingly reaching for. Something that the middle-class consumer wants to reach someday and many are increasingly reaching owing to rising middle-class income levels in India over the past decade. Silverstein and Fiske (2003) call this "luxury for the masses". The idea behind this style of marketing is to position the product at an "accessible super-premium" for the given target segment of the market. Such a pricing at the top end of the standard segment prices will make the middle-class aspire to reach them. For them, the product now transmutes to a well-deserved luxury product. We believe we are actually doing the all-important role of differentiating segments and yet bridging the two high-end and low-end. Both hyper luxury and lower luxury products must practice such an extension. An example of such a positioning is visible in the Indian automobile market. For instance, the Skoda Octavia. Priced at 10.5 lakhs onwards, it forms a 'bridge' between the upper C segment, comprising cars such as the Mitsubishi Lancer and the prestigious D segment, comprising cars such as the Honda Accord and Hyundai Sonata. Thus, for the Octavia buyer who has just graduated from the upper C segment now feels like an owner of a higher segment car.

This research intends to study - what are the gaps that differentiate a luxury product from another; or how does a product transform from a mere consumption item to a brand of desire, from one social demographic to another. Silverstein and Fiske (2003) describe such a positioning as occupying a sweet spot between mass and class. While commanding a premium over conventional products, they are priced well below super luxury goods. Thus, one makes for affordable luxury. It can actually generate volumes without having to worry about losing exclusivity; a matter of concern while selling luxury products. The same trend is being witnessed in India - where luxury is becoming mass, and is experienced by not a few selected wealth creators but by a growing sea of professional employees working in sunrise sectors of modern India.

As Louis Vuitton, Tiffany, Hugo Boss, Bentley, Mont Blanc and other premium foreign brands have now spent over a decade of being in India. Luxury brands are not interested in regular malls as central locations and up-market neighbouring stores are a must, an industry professional stated

in an interaction. Rapidly changing economy is making the higher life available to more and more of the country's billion-strong population. College graduates are landing well-paying jobs in a host of emerging industries that barely existed in India a decade years ago: retail chains, fast-food restaurants, mobile-phone companies and especially call centers, data- processing firms and other businesses that do "back office" work for U.S. companies. The National Council of Applied Economic Research estimates that the number of people living in households that earn at least \$1,800 annually—considered the minimum for middle-income families—has increased 17% in just the past three years, to more than 700 million. At this income level, Indian families can purchase motorbikes, televisions and refrigerators. The organization expects the number to rise an additional 30% by 2015. "Income is growing like anything," says R.K. Shukla, a statistician at the National Council. The per-capita incomes in urban India are increasing at the rate of 40 to 45% in new economy jobs. "The future is very rosy in India." The mantra for the average Indian family, as in most of Asia, has always been save, save, save, but young Indians today, inspired by job opportunities, have switched to spend, spend, spend.

Need for the study

The need for this kind of a study stems from a simple fact - there is near to no research done on luxury and its manifestations in the Indian context. As this would be a lucrative but niche segment of the expanding economy, it is felt that this study would lead the way for further research in effectively targeting and segmenting the growing population of urban middle class to the luxuries that they desire and are a market of. There have been numerous articles on individual components of luxury - of what we call product categories - like cars, artefacts, leather, jewellery, etc. - but what comprises luxury to nearly 100 million plus population that would be a target to high end luxuries is still a question mark? Is leather or silk a luxury item to an individual from Punjab? Or is case of high quality and a 24 year old Remy Martin a luxury to one living in Gujarat? The need for the study also arises from the evolution of the new luxury from the old luxury. The current breed of new customers is luxury rich but asset poor - they are both an opportunity and a threat to the traditional luxury goods producers. Today's Indian consumers are more demanding and selective, and show less brand loyalty than the 'high net worth individuals' who the archetypal consumers of the old luxury were. They are willing to pay high prices, but they expect commensurate quality; old luxury was never so focussed. The forces propelling the

democratization of luxury are various and strong, on both the supply and demand sides. Travel has created more sophisticated global tastes; technology has made possible higher quality at lower costs, rise in real disposable incomes, demographic profile (53% of the population under the age of 25), dual income households, etc. Through this entire exercise, the effort would be to try and lay the foundation of the meaning of luxury - its different connotations, the different consumer preferences and habits, the products and services related to luxuries which are further dependent on the four parameters that we have selected.

Hypotheses

- Luxury is fashion driven - it's not about exclusivity, but about the current trends fostered by movies, fashion icons, role models, etc. that drive luxury branding.
- Social backgrounds play a significant role in determining the scope and meaning of luxury products.
- Consumers' age graph and time line determine the meaning of luxury - therefore luxury and its metaphors change with age.
- Luxury and democratization of it are self contradictory - luxury of masses essentially means creating a new class of consumers.
- Nature of profession and degree of control that a person exercises in his occupation also influences the kind of luxuries that a person would like to associate himself/herself with - and thus gender also renders itself important in determining luxury consumption.

Research Methodology

In line with the research objectives and the above mentioned hypotheses, in-depth interviews were used to gather information and insights for this research. As part of secondary data analysis, journals, articles, web pages, management databases, etc were effectively used to gather emerging trends in international and national markets. The total sample would be divided as mentioned in the table below. The age groups would be divided into three groups: 18 to 25 years, 25 to 45 years and 45 years and above.

Social Groups	Age group 18-25 yrs				Age group 25-45 yrs				Age group 45 yrs and above				Total Respondents
	M		F		M		F		M		F		
	SE	SP	SE	SP	SE	SP	SE	SP	SE	SP	SE	SP	
Punjabi	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	60
Gujarati	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	60
Marwari	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	60
Parsi	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	60

This would be further classified into gender categories: M (Males) and F (Females). The gender classification would be further grouped under occupations - SE (Self employed) and SP (Salaried professionals). Total numbers of respondents who gave all the answers was 240. These interviews were transcribed and content analysis was performed to get the finding from these 240 respondents to derive parallels and similarities across categories. From the sample grid, various permutations and combinations were made on the responses generated from respective interest groups. Also within the same age bracket, different responses from similar social group members but different genders were construed to mean a particular trend. The respondents were from the following cities in India: Mumbai, National Capital Region and Ahmedabad. The data was collected during the period: Janaury 2013 to September 2014.

Literature Review

The distinction between prestige brands and non-prestige brands has been operationally defined by Vigneron and Johnson (1999) as the distinction between brands exhibiting five perceived values, contingent on a particular socioeconomic framework:

- The consumption of prestige brands is viewed as a signal of status and wealth, and whose price, expensive by normal standards, enhances the value of such a signal (perceived conspicuous value).
- If virtually everyone owns a particular brand it is by definition not prestigious (perceived

unique value).

- The role-playing aspects and the social value of prestige brands can be instrumental in the decision to buy (perceived social value).
- For a brand which satisfies an emotional desire such as a prestige brand, a product's subjective intangible benefits such as aesthetic appeal is clearly determining the brand selection (perceived hedonic value).
- Prestige is derived partly from the technical superiority and the extreme care that takes place during the production process. For instance, a Rolex Sea-dweller works 1,220 meters underwater and is hand-crafted (perceived quality value).

This interpretation recognizes that the definition of prestige may vary for different people, depending on their socioeconomic background. Translated into marketing terms, consumers develop prestige meanings for brands based upon interactions with people (e.g., aspired and/or peer reference group), object properties (e.g., best quality), and hedonic values (e.g., sensory beauty). Such interactions occur at personal and societal levels. Thus, a brand's prestige is created from a multitude of interactions between the consumer and elements within the environment. Prestige-seeking behaviour is the results of multiple motivations, but in particular the motives of sociability and self-expression. In sum we define five values of prestige combined with five relevant motivations, as follows:

Values	Motivations
Conspicuous	Veblenian
Unique	Snob
Social	Bandwagon
Emotional	Hedonist
Quality	Perfectionist

As a result of the spectacular growth of luxury markets over the past ten years, the marketing literature has recently seen substantial interest in the study of prestige brands. Yet, little is known

about how to best market and monitor prestige brands. Early research on this topic mainly started last century from work of John Rae (1834), Thorstein Veblen (1899) and Keasbey (1903). Recently the marketing literature has focused its study of luxury brands, specifically in terms of brand extensions (Roux 1995), conflict management between mass-marketing and luxury principles (Bechtold 1991; Roux 1994; Roux and Floch 1996), and measures of attitudes toward the luxury concept (Dubois and Duquesne 1993; Dubois and Laurent 1994). Currently, the luxury market is taking a new direction with unprecedented demand coming from Asian countries, and thus research has focused on the cross-cultural comparison of attitudes toward the luxury concept (Dubois and Laurent 1996; Dubois and Paternault 1997) and the comparison of motivations between Asian and Western societies (Wong and Ahuvia 1998). However, these studies have focused on only some aspects of prestige-seeking consumer behavior.

Although researchers agree that the study of prestige goods is interesting and important, there is currently little agreement about how best to define, and hence understand, the psychology of prestige-related consumer behavior. "Status brand strategies are intuitively recognized by marketing professionals and practitioners. However, there is little literature on the topic reported in scientific journals" (Andrus, Silver, and Johnson 1986). The reasons for the diverse definitions and measures of prestige are perhaps due to the different applications of the term prestige. As a general rule, prestige products have been used as an example of extreme-end high-involvement decision making. The assumption is that prestige products are infrequently purchased, require a higher level of interest and knowledge, and strongly relate to the person self-concept. For instance, Rossiter, Percy, and Donovan (1991) stated that the distinction between high and low involvement was dichotomous rather than continuous, and presented a second dimension operationalized as "informational-transformational". Their framework reasonably assumes that prestige products are high-involvement products, and that transformational brand choices (i.e., sensory gratification, intellectual stimulation, and particularly social approval) are the primary factors in selecting a prestige product. Although the involvement model is useful to distinguish prestige products from normal products, it does not significantly differentiate the level of prestige among prestige brands (Horiuchi 1984). In this research brands were categorized as prestigious; upmarket brands, premium brands, and luxury brands, respectively in an increasing order of prestige.

Therefore, in this paper, we refer to prestige brands when discussing the brand category whereas we used "luxury" when relating to the extreme- end of the prestige-brand category. Hence, it was expected that people would have different perceptions of the level of prestige for the same brands, and that the overall prestige level of a brand would consider the prestige perceptions from different people. Rather than treating each perceived value of prestige separately, as it has been characteristic of much of the writing in the field, this research interpreted, combined, and expanded a set of prestige values into a single framework using a wide range of sources. Leibenstein (1950) which examined three consumer effects on demand. His work suggested that the utility derived from a product may be enhanced by external effects such as the quantity of goods consumed by other persons, or relating to the fact that the product bears a higher rather than a lower price tag. The results from this study, particularly emphasized the role of interpersonal effects on the consumption of prestige brands, and derived three main effects. To operationalize the interpersonal and personal constructs in this framework, the concept of self-consciousness to represent consumers' responses to social influence (Brinberg and Plimpton 1986) was used. Self-Consciousness is defined as the consistent tendency of persons to direct attention inward or outward (Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss 1975). This theory recognizes two types of self-conscious people. (a) Publicly self- conscious persons are particularly concerned about how they appear to others, and (b) privately self-conscious persons are more focused on their inner thoughts and feelings. In this case, it was assumed that the consumption of prestige may vary according to this susceptibility to others. This proposition is also consistent with previous research which demonstrated that individuals' behavior varies across persons depending on their susceptibility to interpersonal influence (e.g., Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989). As emphasized by Dubois and Duquesne (1993a, 115), "*we believe that an analysis of the direct relationship between consumers and brands is the key to an improved understanding of such a market.*" The initial assumption is that the private or public value of prestige goods comes from the inherent communicative status of these items (Dawson and Cavell 1987). Much of the existing research has emphasized the role that status plays in communicating information about their possessors and about social relationships (Hyman 1942; Barkow 1975; Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Dittmar 1994).

The New Luxury Phenomenon

People across the globe are now willing and eager to pay a premium price for remarkable kinds

of goods that are called 'New Luxury'—products and services that possess higher levels of quality, taste, and aspiration than other goods in the category but are not so expensive as to be out of reach. This phenomenon is called trading up. A significant pool of consumers today want to trade up, and so many can now afford to, that New Luxury goods have ousted the conventional wisdom that says, "*The higher the price, the lower the volume.*" They sell at much higher prices than conventional goods *and* in much higher volumes than traditional luxury goods and, as a result, have soared into previously uncharted territory high above the familiar price-volume demand curve. In a large number of categories of products and services the New Luxury winners have emerged, traditional leaders have been dethroned, and the entire category has been transformed. The phenomenon forces us to think in new ways about the relationship between consumer needs and consumer goods, and it offers a huge opportunity for business leaders to pursue their own aspirations and realize growth. This is happening in categories of goods and services, at prices ranging from just a few dollars to tens of thousands. It involves consumers who earn \$50,000 a year and those who earn \$200,000. Who are these consumers and what are they buying? All kinds of people are trading up almost every day for reasons that are unexpected and counterintuitive. With more women working in the United States and India, divorce rates on the rise, people marrying later, and more singles choosing to stay that way, there are a lot of consumers—men and women—looking for an emotional lift in the form of a New Luxury purchase.

Trading up spans so many categories and appeals to such a broad range of consumers, that it has come to represent a major and growing segment of the economy. As the demand is highly elastic because it can be created in categories that have never had a premium offering before and because even a category that has been transformed by a New Luxury product can be traded up again.

The Characteristics of New Luxury

From our analysis of the most successful New Luxury goods in more than thirty categories, we have identified three major types. "Accessible super-premium" products are priced at or near the top of their category, and at a considerable premium to conventional offerings. They are still affordable to the middle-market consumer, however, because they are relatively low-ticket items. "Old Luxury brand extensions" are lower-priced versions of products created by companies

whose brands have traditionally been affordable only for the rich—households earning \$200,000 and above. Mercedes-Benz, for example, has dramatically changed its product mix in the past ten years, with continual reductions in the price of the entry-level C-class coupe—now about INR 22,00,000—and a steady increase in revenue from this model. Mercedes-Benz has also worked to keep the brand aspirational by extending it upmarket as well. The Maybach sells for over INR 200,00,000—more than ten times the price of the entry-level C-class coupe. Such Old Luxury brands have mastered a neat trick: becoming simultaneously more accessible and more aspirational. "Masstige" goods—a word used for "mass prestige"—are neither at the top of their category in price nor related to other iterations of the brand. They occupy a sweet spot in the market "between mass and class," commanding a premium over conventional products, but priced well below super-premium or Old Luxury goods. Despite the wide price range of New Luxury goods and the variety of categories in which they appear, they have particular characteristics that are common across all categories and prices—and they are different from those of super-premium or Old Luxury goods, and also from those of conventional, mid-price, middle-market products. Most important, New Luxury goods are always based on emotions, and consumers have a much stronger emotional engagement with them than with other goods. Even relatively low-ticket items, such as premium vodkas that sell for around \$30 a bottle, have a well-defined emotional appeal for their consumers. The engagement tends to get more intense and long lasting with big-ticket items, such as home appliances and automobiles. BMW drivers, for example, are particularly engaged with their cars. Most consumers make one dominant emotional connection with a product, but there are usually others involved as well. When a New Luxury brand successfully delivers the ladder of benefits, it can catch fire. It will take hold in the minds of consumers, quickly change the rules of its category, grow to market dominance—as Starbucks, Kendall-Jackson, and Victoria's Secret have—and force a redrawing of the demand curve. The category tends to polarize. Consumers shop more selectively. They trade up to the premium New Luxury product if the category is important to them. If it isn't, they trade down to the low-cost or private-label brand, or even go without. They scrimp and save across a broad swath of spending in order to afford their New Luxury purchases—polarizing the household budget. Just like Americans, a large portion of Indians engage in this practice of spending a disproportionate amount of his income in a category of great meaning. The combination of trading up and trading down leads to a "disharmony of consumption," meaning that a consumer's

buying habits do not always conform to her income level. She may shop at Big Bazaar or a Mother Dairy Safal Outlet but drive a Mercedes. As consumers buy more selectively, trading up and trading down, they increasingly ignore the conventional, mid-price product that fails to deliver the ladder of benefits. Why bother with a product that offers neither a price advantage nor a functional or emotional benefit? Companies that offer such products are in grave danger of passing away in the middle—they will be unable to match the price of low-cost products or the emotional engagement of New Luxury goods. They will lose sales, profitability, market share, and consumer interest. To survive, they must lower prices, revitalize and reposition their products, or exit the market.

The Forces behind New Luxury

What has caused the rise of New Luxury, and what forces are fuelling its growth? This trading-up phenomenon has come about as the result of a confluence of social forces and business factors. Indian consumers got a breadth of fresh air after the first round of economic reforms unleashed in early 90s and the current feel good factor being spread across the sectors - from agriculture to manufacturing to IT enables software services. India as a country has progressed by leaps and bounds and as such the aspirations of the Indian consumers have also changed dramatically. This trend towards New Luxury is also associated with it. New Luxury is driven by fundamental, long-term forces on both the demand and supply sides, forces that will keep it thriving for years to come. On the demand side, trading up is being driven by a combination of demographic and cultural shifts that have been building for decades. Most important, the Indian households as has been with their western counterparts have more discretionary wealth available to be spent on premium goods than ever before. Real household income has risen for Indians over the past thirty years, and it has risen fastest for the highest earners. The percentage of women in the workforce has risen steadily and dramatically over the past four decades, and the percentage of married couples with a wife in the paid workforce has gone up significantly. Educated consumers are eager to know about the products they use and the context of their categories. The total number of Indians visiting North America, Europe of Australia etc runs into Millions. This exposure has also contributed to the growing aspiration of owning and using the new Luxury.

The supply-side forces have been just as important in producing the New Luxury business endeavour. Perhaps most important is the increased acceptance and role of the "outsider"—the

entrepreneur or innovator who gathers ideas and inspiration from sources outside the category, rejects the conventional wisdom of the leaders, and works outside the system. (At least initially: often the "outsider's way" eventually becomes the established system.) Like the consumers of their goods, these innovators are usually more knowledgeable, more sophisticated and emotionally driven, and less willing to settle for creating conventional goods than established managers in the category. The growing e-commerce domain, entrepreneurship and India becoming a services hub for the world have also contributed to this trend. Changes in retailing have also contributed to the trading-up phenomenon, by increasing the availability of New Luxury goods in retail outlets across India. The proliferation of malls throughout the country has made it possible for premium specialty retailers. A large number of luxury brands are now in India either on their own or through the joint venture route with some significant Indian business house.

Findings and Analysis

As described earlier in the methodology section this study was focusses on the sample of respondents based on categories formulated with demographics, cultural differences differences across gender and occupation. Keeping these four parameters into consideration, what has been found in the initial part of data collection is as mentioned below:

- For the age group 18 to 25, there was very little difference between communities and their description of what luxury meant to them. Also in this age bracket, occupational differences were minimal. As such the part of Content Analysis following this section, within the age group of 18 to 25 years, gender differences and limited variations across communities will be presented.
- For the age group '25 to 45', findings were similar to the earlier age bracket of 18 to 25; though gender differences were more pronounced. While occupation and communities continued to play a near insignificant role in defining luxury. Content Analysis in this age bracket focussed on gender differences, and communities and occupation remained limited factors.
- For the final age bracket of '45 and above', occupation and communities played a substantial role of creating differential between their individual meanings of luxury. Along with gender,

this was the age bracket that came closest in creating diversity across the 4 parameters. Content Analysis in this age group focussed on all 3 parameters, i.e., communities, gender and occupation.

- As part of Content Analysis, cross sectional differences and similarities between the four categories is being presented.

Keeping the above major factors in mind, following is the brief description of the outcome of content analysis divided between the 3 age groups mentioned above. The details of the content analysis are available with the researcher.

Content Analysis Findings

Age Group: 18 - 25 years

Males

Extremely focused, individualistic in their behavior and mindset, awareness to all, iconoclastic to the trends but still striving to make an impact - is how the authors would conclude the behavioral characteristics of this age- group. Luxury to them closely connects with their passions - they are willing to let go of the present to attain a superior and luxurious future. Luxury and its semiotic analyses again matches with their inherent obsession to a product category - price is of little consequence (only to maintain exclusivity) - therefore it varies from a Rs. 70 edition of a 1970s 'Alice in Wonderland' to a self purchased 'Tanishq' ear-rings for his mother. While being visible, the brand or a service shouldn't try too hard to stand out only on the basis of its label, but on the basis of its superior material and emotional/softer aspects equally (if not more).

Females

In-line with the trends, greatly influenced by societal craze and close family and friend circle, rich and exorbitant taste, prestigious labels that matter but, only if complemented by equally high quality and finally, conventional in their purchasing patters - this somewhat dichotomous image is presented to us by females in the aforementioned age bracket. Will travel to buy 25 miles within National Capital Region to a village called 'Shahpur Jat' to buy authentic tussar silk cloth costing twice to what's available in branded Indian ethnic wear stores - and will call this Luxury. Accessibility is not a criterion that inhibits their definition of enjoying luxury - what matters to them is - the best quality at an equally impressive price. And still be as comfortable enjoying

white water rafting in Ganges as sipping a cup of coffee at the 'Machan', Taj Mahal Hotel. Ostentatious to the things they cherish (compare what men have to say in the same age category), while equally submissive and effective in enjoying day to day leisure.

Group: 25 - 45 years

Males:

The monthly household income played a significant role in the responses generated from the people in the group. The level of aspirations and perception towards luxury varied across the income brackets and it was interesting to see that the group appeared to be a more mature and evolved than the 18-25 group. Their responses were more realistic, something which they seriously aim for, something which they see themselves indulging in future, something which they know for sure is coming their way. Been there done that echoed through the responses generated and the group was looking forward to live life at their own terms, the way they want it, the way they dreamt it. This is a group which is on the verge of realizing what they have been aspiring for in life and is moving ahead towards getting control over their lives. No compromises, spending at own will were something which was the underlying tone of most of the responses. The group is in a transitory phase moving towards economically stable phase where the purchases are more about impulse and desire rather than the price factor. This group holds the promise to be the bread and butter for the new luxury market in India as a more informed, stable, realistic, and confident lot. These people want to enjoy their life and live their life to its true essence and they are willing to pay the price for it. They have matured to the stage where they know good things in life come with a price.

Females

The attitudes towards luxury and their understanding of it differed greatly with variation in age and we felt that there is a huge difference in the perspectives of a woman who is 40 from the woman who is 30 even though they have been clubbed under the same age bracket in our research study. Slight differences owing to different sociocultural background were also evident in the course of the study. For e.g. A Marwari woman was more family centric and her attitudes towards luxury were more about getting the best for everyone. She did display some guilt in indulging in high-end luxury only for herself. A Punjabi woman on the other hand was more forthcoming and expressive in her attitudes and was seeking indulgence and pampering for

herself. She was more individualistic in her attitude even though the well being of her family was of importance to her as well. Value for money did appear important for the women and they were more conscious about the benefits being derived from the product or the service thus showing a more rational approach in their purchase behaviour than their male counterparts in the same age bracket.

Luxury is exclusive, something special, and something expensive for the women; something that gives her the sense of indulgence, satisfaction, pampering, and an edge over the women in the same league. Their need to be acknowledged and recognized in the male-dominated society plays a significant part in setting their goals and aspirations.

Group: 45+ yrs

For the first time, the authors could draw out clear distinction across communities and their interpretation of luxury in this age group. As has been mentioned earlier, community-based differences are more pronounced amongst males than the females. These differences are attributed to their upbringing in much more conservative environments than the new generation and have thus had a lasting impact on their personalities. It was also seen that there was a marked generation gap between the people currently in the 30s and people in this age group and this only point to one factor and that goes back to their early days. Their thought process, attitudes and perceptions are still driven by the values that were inculcated back then and have a great impact on their interpretation of life. So we see a Punjabi seeking luxury in a different way from a Gujarati or a Marwari irrespective of where they stay or what they do. Females on the other hand have had restricted exposure to the outside world. Even though they have socialized and worked all their life, their interaction with life is much different than their male counterparts. For them personal gratification is luxury at this age after having worked hard all their life. Their family, their home, health are very important to them and their ideas generally revolve around these points. Family and peers tend to be the major influencers in their case and their interpretation of luxury is chiefly driven by the preferences of others with the exception being in home segment, family or jewellery.

Overall Conclusions and Implications

As part of our content analysis in the earlier section, primary difference was evident amongst the respondents in terms of age demographics, followed by gender and lastly community and

occupational variations. In this section, authors have tried to club together certain contrasting attitudes, meanings, awareness and understanding of the broad breadth of respondents that we met in the following two exclusive groups: Males, Females. Within each of the above mentioned sexes, we will cross tabulate the responses we got from the three age brackets, the four communities and the two occupational backgrounds to draw valuable implications and interpretations for both marketers and academicians towards further research and understanding.

Males

Their meaning of leisure and shopping behavior varied drastically across the age groups. For the 18 to 25 old respondents, shopping was essentially a need-based activity and rare, though they liked the overall experience of it. For them, like 25 to 45 year olds, leisure meant relaxing, catching a movie, spending time with friends, eating out, etc. For people above 45 years of age, leisure encompassed health related activities, family and unusual indulgences they have not been exposed to. Brands played an important role for the middle age bracket - they emphasized a lot on the latest brands, while for the junior most age group - individualistic and iconoclastic behavior was most evident. For them price mattered only to keep a product exclusive, and even a Rs. 70 book of 1970s edition can be termed as luxury. Their personality, independent frame of mind, and a need to possess the best in its class drove luxury appeal. If for a 23 year old it's the sense of confidence and perfection that are fundamentals on which luxury is dependent, then for 34 year old executive, it's the purpose of having arrived in life - the idea that people around me acknowledge my presence - and having the best for my family - time and quality - are the sole fundamentals of luxury.

For the 45-year-old plus, it's a sense of creation - an idea of celebrating achievements - that reinstates the meaning of luxury. Amongst this age group, communities played an important role in creating primary differences - a Punjabi's scope of luxury was very similar to the new age and independent luxury typified by the 18 to 24 year olds - living for the day and making the most of it; western cultures played an influential role in indulging in luxury. For a Marwari on the other hand, luxury was safer - it was orthodox and required time and money - it was playing the waiting game to enjoy the fruits of life - like investing in a house, getting the daughter married, away from the lifestyle oriented luxury definitions of a Punjabi - but more aligned to family needs and desires - jewelry, cars, house vis-à-vis Royal Salute, a Blue label, an international

cruise for a Sikh/Punjabi.

Another peculiar thing to note was, HHI and the comparable understating of luxury was not moving hand in hand for the juniors - the more they earned/parents earned, more conservative they were - but for a 34 year old businessman, HNI and occupation background played an important role in enjoying luxuries of life. Items of luxury varied across communities and age groups. Clothes, fast cars, watches and accessories like after-shave lotion and perfumes topped the list for 18 to 24 year olds. The best in its class and the one held in high esteem by others (ostentatious value) ruled for them - though they still said that subtleties and not garish is what differs an authentic luxury from fashion driven and mass one. If what's stated above can be termed as dreamy, and somewhat unrealistic, for a 25 to a 45 year old - luxury was practical indulgence, valuable and achievable product or a service - traveling club class, owning a personal bungalow, a Skoda and not a Porsche, IBM ThinkPad, etc were termed as luxuries. Driven by western lifestyle items, family comforts, good life and not just convenience, escaping from the high life epitomized by the current economic expansion - cruises, virgin beaches, finest Scotch, farmhouse, and at last attaining permanence in status is how the senior age group characterized luxury.

Concluding, for males, luxury spans from James Bond to Rekha, from Audrey Hepburn to Vijay Mallaya. Royal Blue that exhibits prestige and class to White that testifies having arrived to Crimson Red that stands for speed and velocity are the colors that can be associated with luxury. Symbols vary from Alfa Romeo and Bose Music System, to Personal Bar and an evening with Anna Kournikova. For a marketer targeting Males, therefore, 'Luxury' has multiple connotations attached to it as we move from one age category to another - from one community to another. Within those independent age brackets, roles and understanding towards luxury are common. Luxury has a daring and an independent look (with stated semiotics) for an 18 to 25 year old, its accessible and commands respect and awe for a middle aged man, and finally its leading a life kingsize with a high service quotient and not merely functional product oriented attributes that condition a 45 plus male.

Females

A study of women across the 40 years and 3 diverse communities have brought about some interesting revelations. It was actually surprising to see that there was negligible difference

amongst the women even though they belonged to 3 different communities. Their aspirations, desires, attitudes and interpretations about things zeroed around similar things within their age group. This could be attributed to the prevalent cosmopolitan culture in our metropolitans. The attitudes, outlooks, perceptions are getting influenced by peers rather than immediate family. Also, the disintegration of families has contributed to this kind of scenario as the upbringing of the new generation has been done in a far different way than their own parents. The shifts from extended families to nuclear families have given rise to a totally different generation. Growing up in a harmonious and secure environment of a large family has given way to a hushed up growth with parents pressed for time in metropolitans. This has led to similar ideas flowing through across the generation crossing the barriers of communities, cultures, and languages.

We saw a transition in aspirations and desires very markedly across the age groups. The 18-25 age group was seeking for more materialistic and flamboyant things and their perception of luxury was largely influenced by movies, magazines, and word of mouth. This was more of a dreamer group that wants to have the best lifestyle in their present circumstances. The willingness to work hard for such a lifestyle is also missing but nevertheless it is desired. Shopping for themselves is the best luxury for them, dining out at exclusive places, top brands, cosmetics and perfumes, their world revolves around this only. They prove to be an ideal market for cosmetic, perfumes, and garments brands. They were also very adventurous in their preferences and would try out newer brands as well. Luxury for them was to have no limit on spending and shop.

At the same time, if we consider the next age group that is 25-45, it was seen that these women had matured in their aspirations and had a realistic picture of life. They knew what they have been working for and what they can achieve in life. Their idea of luxury was more like what they would like to achieve in near future. They spoke of things which they desire for themselves. It was very evident from their responses that they are pressed for time and they feel bad about not spending enough time with their families. They also showed signs of stress and spoke of breaking free from their present times. So for them whatever makes life easier with them turned out to be luxury. A peaceful weekend with family was a matter of luxury for them. A nice holiday abroad, expensive gold and diamond jewellery or just doing nothing was luxury for them. It was very clear that either something that breaks their routine life and distracts their mind for a while from the hustle bustle of life or something through which they can indulge in personal preferences is a matter of luxury for them.

This was again different when it came to the age group of 45 plus women. Females on the other hand have had restricted exposure to the outside world. Even though they have socialized and worked all their life, their interaction with life is much different than their male counterparts. For them personal gratification is luxury at this age after having worked hard all their life. Their family, their home, health are very important to them and their ideas generally revolve around these points. Family and peers tend to be the major influencers in their case and their interpretation of luxury is chiefly driven by the preferences of others with the exception being in home segment, family or jewellery. So for them luxury was more of expensive household products which could be flaunted as well as be useful in making their lives easier was luxury. Buying the best for their family and their home was again a matter of pride and they would indulge heavily in these activities. Jewellery was seen again as a common driving force across the women in all communities, and pampering themselves with the best of designs and styles was luxury for these women.

Primarily if we see then for the whole group of women that we studied best of home furnishings and appliances, cosmetics, travel abroad, jewellery, and perfumes were the main categories which were identified as luxury segments or as the ones that denote luxury in their minds. This holds a great promise for these categories as there is a huge demand and aspiration for them across the age groups and across communities. Community, age, or profession has no bearing on a woman's desire for realizing the luxury in their own way. The brands could actually catch them young in the age bracket of 18-25 and hence begin a lifelong relationship with women as their preferences remain to border around the same categories. At the same time, even if they have missed the early bus, they could enter the household through the 45 plus bracket and then attract the attention of the younger ones of the house. So there is immense potential of a brand interacting with all the women in a household provided there are offerings for all of them in the product portfolio of the company.

Values like pride, self-indulgence, exclusivity, uniqueness, high price were associated with the term luxury and holds the key to the desired brand personalities of any brand that wants to portray itself in the luxury bracket to the women. Colours like white, purple, gold, deep red were the ones which were associated with the term luxury and could be intelligently used as the brand colours for brands seeking attention of this segment. Personalities like Pierce Brosnan, Richard Branson, Amitabh Bachhan, Ambanis, Birla, Vijay Mallya were the most talked about icons

associated with luxury. So the brand communications targeted at the women should bear resemblance to the lifestyles of such personalities if they are to be positioned ideally in the luxury segment as the women categorically identified them as icons of luxury in their own perception. Something, which really holds the key for all the women, is the travel sector. We feel this is one area that still has not been able to exploit its potential to the fullest. The communication if targeted at women could hold the key for this sector as they did appear to bear a deep-rooted desire for travel and could be an influence on the male counterpart in planning out such a trip. Also, the strip down versions of such tours would also help to attract the initial business for this sector and could result in the repeat interaction for future trips.

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