



Kristianstad
University
Sweden

Kristianstad University
SE-291 88 Kristianstad
Sweden
+46 44 250 30 00
www.hkr.se

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Identity and Conspicuous Consumption in Japan and Hong Kong

An exploratory study of what influences young
adults' identity in relation to conspicuous
consumption

Kenny Trang and Eden Haile Selassie

Faculty of Business

Authors

Kenny Trang and Eden Haile Selassie

Title

Identity and Conspicuous Consumption in Japan and Hong Kong: An exploratory study of what influences young adults' identity in relation to conspicuous consumption

Supervisor

Indira Kjellstrand

Co-examiner

Felix Terman

Examiner

Helené Tjärnemo

Abstract

This study is based on young adults' identity in Japan and Hong Kong and its relation to conspicuous consumption. The purpose of this study is to explore how conspicuous consumption influenced the young adults' identities in Japan and Hong Kong. In order to study this phenomenon, we created a conceptual model, we named "Young Adults Conspicuous Consumption Identity" (YACCI), which is based on previous research on identity and luxury values. The research is based on a qualitative study and the empirical data was gathered through 11 semi-structured interviews with young adults from Hong Kong and Japan. Findings show that the identities of young adults in Japan and Hong Kong are heavily influenced by the society that surrounds them. The results of the societal pressures force them to keep up with a certain standard of image which increase their conspicuous consumption behaviour. This study has contributed to a further understanding of underlying factors that influence young adults' identities in Japan and Hong Kong.

Keywords

Identity, Conspicuous consumption, Luxury, Hong Kong young adults, Japan young adults

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of this dissertation. Therefore, this chapter will contribute with; background, problematization, research purpose and research question. The introduction will give the reader relevant background information of the topic of identity, luxury consumption and conspicuous consumption. Based on this, the purpose of the research and research question are stated.

“*We are what we have*” is a well-known statement made by Belk (1988) which well describes consumer behaviour and how what one possesses is a part of the identity (Ahuvia, 2005, p.179). A basic human drive is to understand oneself, “who one is” and “what one believes in”. How humans perceive themselves largely influences their thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Once how you view yourself is central to your self-image, it becomes an identity and you start to aspire to “be” that type of person. The way consumers view themselves makes them behave in a way which is consistent with the person they aspire to “be”. This creates “identity-driven effects” which increases one’s attention towards identity-linked products and brands (Reed, Forehand, Puntoni & Warlop, 2012). Moreover, when a product requires the customer to invest a lot of resources, such as time, money and energy, the customer tends to view the product as part of their extended self in order to psychologically justify their investment in the product. For this reason, expensive purchases are more likely to become a part of the extended self (Mittal, 2006).

From a historical point of view, the presence of luxury has always been an important part of humanity (Henriksen, Henriksson & Wadsten, 2018). The term “luxury” is complex since it is a relative concept and what is considered luxury changes. Before, luxury was associated with leaders such as kings and queens and was used to display a certain status in order to be separated from the common people. Nowadays, luxury is not merely for the leaders and the wealthy population. Luxury goods are available to a broader set of consumers in all social classes. In contrast to the past, more young adults have a larger disposable income which makes luxury brands more accessible for them as well (Eriksson, Hall & Pettersson, 2012; Henriksen et al., 2018; Kradschnig, 2015). Throughout time man has always been competitive with the

emphasis on wealth, income and status by material purchases. This phenomenon is known as conspicuous consumption which is defined as the practice of purchasing luxury goods or services on a lavish scale to publicly display wealth and status, rather than to cover basic needs. The concept is not new and has been part of society for a long period of time. Furthermore, conspicuous consumption is often associated with luxury goods as this type of consumption generally is about displaying wealth (Veblen, 1994).

In regard to luxury consumption, East Asia is of special interest since East Asia is currently the largest market for luxury and prestige brands from the West (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). In particular, Japan and Hong Kong are of interest for several reasons. First of all, Japan is the second-largest luxury market in the world behind the USA and have the world's largest individual consumers of luxury brands (Degen, 2010). Further Japanese consumers are known for being image-conscious consumers, where an important factor is the pursuit of status and prestige items (Synodinos, 2001). Hong Kong, on the other hand, is ranked as the world's top five luxury destinations. The standard of living in Hong Kong has risen by an extreme degree and this is an important factor in order to understand the consumption in Hong Kong today. Since going from comparative poverty to having wealth and the possibility to freely consume and display wealth is seen as something positive. Hongkongers will not disregard those who flaunt conspicuous items but rather admire them (Master, White & Aloisi, 2019; Mathews & Lui, 2001). Further, the younger generation of consumers is the driving force behind the Asian appetite for luxury brands (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998).

1.2 Problematization

Identity is a complex notion which derives from the work of Erik Erikson, a psychologist known for his theory on the psychological development of human beings. Erikson (1994) is most known for coining the phrase *identity crisis* which is the failure to achieve ego identity during adolescence. Erikson (1994) defines adolescence as the period in the human life cycle during which the individual must establish a sense of personal identity and avoid dangers of role diffusion and identity confusion. The adolescent must find an answer to the identity questions such as “where did I come from?” “who am I?” and “what do I want to become?” (Erikson, 1994). Furthermore, how consumers identify themselves play a major role in their consumption behaviour. One can buy a product and consume it, not only for their functional utility, but as a way to express one's identity. Thus, consumers attempt to go for brands that align with their

identity (Mittal, 2015). According to Mittal (2006), consumers both unconsciously and sometimes consciously, know that their possessions are intimately tied to their sense of the self. Consumers can define and live out their identity through product ownership. The things we own define us since it surrounds us and therefore, we see ourselves as a part of it, but also since we use these products to display our inner self in order to display our identity. For example, when a consumer goes shopping for a pair of jeans, the consumer chooses the brand that in her mind seems to best fit her identity. Possessions are, however, not only a way of self-expression but also a way of identity transformation (Mittal, 2006).

Furthermore, young adults may struggle with their identity because they simultaneously try to define themselves as individuals and as someone who belongs to a group. As a result, they tend to resort to fashion in order to help resolve this struggle (Ahuvia, 2005). Young adults are also known for being status-conscious consumers, therefore the chances are bigger for them to be impacted by interpersonal influences. Moreover, what they wear displays their status and group dynamics and the major factor that prompts conspicuous consumption is supposedly social status (Vohra, 2016). Conspicuous consumption is thus motivated by the will of communicating a certain self-image to others, which is done by deliberately buying items that symbolically and visibly communicate one's self-image (Vohra, 2016).

Moreover, there are a few challenges for the field of identity development, namely cross-ethnic identity and cross-cultural comparisons. First, the problem with most of the research up until the 21st century is the absence of cross-ethnic diversity in identity studies. Instead the majority of the studies in identity and other areas related to identity have been exclusively using “*white samples*” which leads to a misleading perception if generalised. There is more knowledge, for instance, about white and predominantly white American adolescents than there are of similar aged individuals of other ethnic groups (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Meca, & Ritchie, 2012).

Second, as for cross-cultural comparisons, personal identity research was dominated by North American studies. Since most of the researchers were from America or Canada, the research was heavily focused on the identity development of North Americans thus giving a better understanding of the people in those areas compared to people in other parts of the world. This problem is referred to as the “neglected 95%” and has called for an increase in the representation

of other adolescents of other parts of the world (Schwartz et al., 2012). One of the areas where there is a lack of identity research is in East Asia, where only a few studies were conducted about personal identity in East Asia. The results have indicated that the structure of personal identity between East Asians and American adolescents is not equivalent (Schwartz et al., 2012). We would like to build on this research and shed light on how identities of East Asian young adults are developed.

Furthermore, the research on conspicuous consumption among young adults in Japan and Hong Kong is one of the lesser-explored fields within marketing. Instead, consumption is heavily focused on Western societies where the patterns of conspicuous consumption may be different from those in other societies (Jacob, Khanna & Rai, 2019). There is thus a theoretical need to better understand the underlying factors to why young adults in Japan and Hong Kong engage in conspicuous consumption. Do consumers indulge in luxury brands because they identify with these items? Are young adults' identities defined based on these goods or is it a subconscious decision to buy luxury brands? Does conspicuous consumption create a definition of one's identity or is it one's identity that pursues one to carry out conspicuous consumption? There is an existing gap in regard to empirical research trying to describe and understand identity and conspicuous consumption in the luxury market among young adults in Hong Kong and Japan. This thesis, therefore, aims to explore how conspicuous consumption influences the identities of the young adults in Hong Kong and Japan.

1.3 Research Question

What influences young adults' identities in regard to conspicuous consumption behaviour in Japan and Hong Kong?

1.4 Research Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to explore what influences the young adults' identities in Japan and Hong Kong. Further, the purpose is to study identity in regard to conspicuous consumption. This is partially studied by exploring different factors that contribute to the moulding of one's identity as well as exploring the underlying factors of conspicuous consumption.

1.5 Disposition

This thesis consists of five parts. The first part contains introduction, problematization, research question and the purpose of the research. In the second part the theoretical background and theoretical framework is presented. In the third part the methodological approach and the methods chosen for this study is described. The fourth part presents the empirical findings, analysis and discussion. Finally, in the fifth part a conclusion of this thesis is presented.

2. Theoretical background

The following chapter will review the academic literature and theories that serves as a foundation for our exploratory research. The topics include a definition of identity and a discussion about identity development, following a discussion about conspicuous consumption. In addition, two main models will be presented in this chapter, namely the model “Using components to define the self” and “The conceptual model”. The first model discusses six different components that form one’s “I”. The second model discusses different underlying values that cause one to engage in luxury consumption. Further, the chapter will present a brief background of the Japanese and Hong Kong luxury market as well as the general identities in these societies. Lastly, the theoretical framework of this thesis will be presented.

2.1 Identity development

Identity is a complex concept but can in sum be defined as an individual’s combination of behaviour preferences, thoughts, talents and beliefs (Vignoles, Luyckx & Schwartz, 2011). Over a lifespan one has a lot of different identities, for example, you are not the same person you were 10 years ago. Young people, in particular, have long been expected to develop a sense of personal identity in order to figure out who they wish to be and what they wish to do with their lives. This is because identity can give one’s life a sense of purpose and direction. Further, it allows the young people to choose the different life alternatives that fit with the sense of self that they wish to develop (Elkind, 1970).

Erik Erikson (1950) posited identity development as a lifelong process that ascends during the adolescent years. Erikson (1950) provided a model for thinking about the lifecycle as a series of eight stages which covers a whole lifespan. Erikson (1950) argues that a personality develops in a series of stages. *Identity versus Role confusion* is the fifth stage according to Erik Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development. The other seven stages are not of relevance for this thesis as they cover other age groups such as infants, adults and elders. The fifth stage occurs during adolescence between the ages of 12 and 18 where children face the question of identity versus role confusion. During this stage, the adolescents struggle with the questions about who they are and what they want to do with their lives. They develop a multitude of new ways of looking at and thinking about the world. Along this road, they try on different “selves” and explore

different roles, set goals in order to try and discover their “adult” selves. The answers to these questions might change with time or experiences. When adolescents are not showing enthusiasm or concern regarding the search for identity or are pressured to conform to their parents’ ideas of the future, it could lead to a weakened sense of self and lead to role confusion. Young adults who struggle to find a positive role will most likely struggle to “find” themselves as adults (Elkind, 1970).

2.2 Identity and sense of self

There are a lot of consumer research studies which have shown that products and brands are ways for consumers to prove their identity. Previous literature has shown that products serve to extend one’s sense of self (Mittal, 2006). Belk (1988) describes how individuals objectively perceive themselves by using the terms “self” and “sense of self” as a synonym for “identity” (Ahuvia, 2005). A basic human drive is to create a better understanding of oneself and as a result, people tend to acquire or like products they feel they can self-associate with (Reed et al., 2012). Questions such as “who am I”, “is the clothing I wear, are those I?” and “is my name and occupation I?” have long been of interest for consumer researchers, philosophers and so on. These are questions we frequently ask in order to understand oneself (Mittal, 2006).

Further, this “who am I” is integrated with what we consume, for instance, when shopping we tend to think “that is so me” or “that is so not me” (Mittal, 2006). For instance, Reed et al. (2012) argues that consumers who have a perception of themselves as “athletes” will be more interested in products that align with athletic behaviour. Furthermore, the authors discuss how one’s identity consists of several identities and that it is multidimensional. Individuals usually value all of their identities that exist on different levels, for example, a working woman would simultaneously value her identity as a mother and spouse. It is more essential to focus on how all these different identities are being processed by individuals based on the feedback they receive or how they perceive others to see and evaluate them (Reed et al., 2012).

2.2.1 Possessions and I

Previous research has indicated that possessions in the form of material are an extension of identity. Mittal (2006) examines what one is ‘*sans possession*’ meaning without possession, and what one becomes as a result of possession or with possession. The author, however, begins with analysing ‘*sans possession*’ identity in order to better understand how possession fits into

the consumer's identity. Previous literature on '*sans possessions*' identity has focused on two different discourses. The first concept is referred to as the 'core self' and it is from a 'personal identity' view. From this perspective identity "is a multi-faceted, multi-layered, social and psychological being, reflecting, deeply and continually, on itself" (Mittal, 2006, p. 551). Further, from this view, a consumer's identity is a personal narrative, where consumers' identities are played out in their minds. Thus, who they are or are striving to become are played out in their minds, and they use products as props in order to display themselves (Mittal, 2006). The second view is named "self-image" where the identity is based on one's traits. These traits include one's personality traits as viewed by oneself, but also one's superficial behavioural and body appearance traits. The latter refers to a person defining his or her identity based on self-image, which is a composition of personal descriptions such as "shy", "outgoing and more (Mittal, 2006).

After an identity has been adopted, the individual will evaluate the environment, people and objects based on their relevance to their identity (Reed et al., 2012). The consumers' identity is called "I" and this "I" is both the '*sans possessions*' self and the extended self (Mittal, 2006). Extended self is defined by Mittal (2006) as the identity created by the external objects one surrounds oneself with. Belk (1988) stated that since identity could extend to possession, it could then also influence the behaviour in regard to consumption such as buying or selling (1988). The concept "I" can consist of everything that one owns and lives with, however, the author mentions a systematic list that includes the following six components: *our values and character, our body image, our success and accomplishments, our subjective personality traits, our social roles, and lastly our possessions* (figure 1) (Mittal, 2006). These six components make a whole, however, this whole differs from one identity to another identity. For instance, for some their "I" might mostly be formed by their values and for others, their bodies might play a larger role in making their "I" and in some cases, possession can overshadow every other component. Every consumer has their own build-up of these components in order to form their "I" and some components might be put at the centre of one's "I" (Mittal, 2006).

The first component of "I" is the values one holds. Many consumers base their definition of self on their values and character which impacts one's life choices. Values are basically defined as goals in lives that one tries to achieve. While a character is defined as someone's behaviour mostly at test, for example, when it comes to tempting situations such as "whether or not to

return the excess change the cashier gave” you. Further, individuals might view their values as who they are because that is what they tell themselves, for instance, one might say “I live by those values because that is who I am” (Mittal, 2006).

The second component is our bodies, for the majority of consumers, an integral part of their “I” is their bodies, and this connection between their sense of self and bodies varies. For some, “I” is their soul which is a piece of God’s soul, therefore their soul is identical to any other soul which means that their “I” as well is identical to other people. This view is common for followers of, for instance, Buddhism and Hinduism. Here, “I” and bodies are separated since one’s body is seen as “a temporary housing” for the soul, it is an Eastern philosophy. However, lately in the East, consumers are moving towards a more western way of thinking. In the west, the body is their whole being thus consumers think of their bodies as “I” (Mittal, 2006).

How one perceives its own competence and success is the third component of “I”. The perception you have of these two will have a great influence on your self-efficacy which in turn impacts your life experiences, but also how you view yourself. For instance, a consumer that sees themselves as failures will have low self-esteem and perhaps even become depressed (Mittal, 2006).

The fourth component discusses how our self-image, for example, of being kind and social forms our identity whether it is true or not. Personality traits become a part of “I” as a result of how they are subjectively perceived and those traits that we are unaware of or do not know we have do not become a part of our “I” (Mittal, 2006).

The fifth component is referred to social role identity which is a way of connecting the individual to the social structure. From this perspective self is rooted in social roles, for instance, age, sex, race and more are viewed as social roles meaning people are expected to behave a certain way as a result of their, for example, sex. Further, these role definitions are then accepted by people as who they are thus it becomes part of their “I”. Previous research has shown that consumers associate their identity with their social roles such as parental roles, occupational roles and more. Moreover, identity distress can arise when people feel and experience that they are being torn by two incompatible roles (Mittal, 2006).

Possession is the sixth and final competent. This component basically refers to those things we both own and possess. There are two major reasons why our possessions define us. Firstly, we are surrounded by the things we own therefore we see ourselves as a part of them. Secondly, it is through what we possess that we show our inner “I” for others. As a result, possessions become a part of our extended self, it is a way for people to express both their identity and transform it (Mittal, 2006).

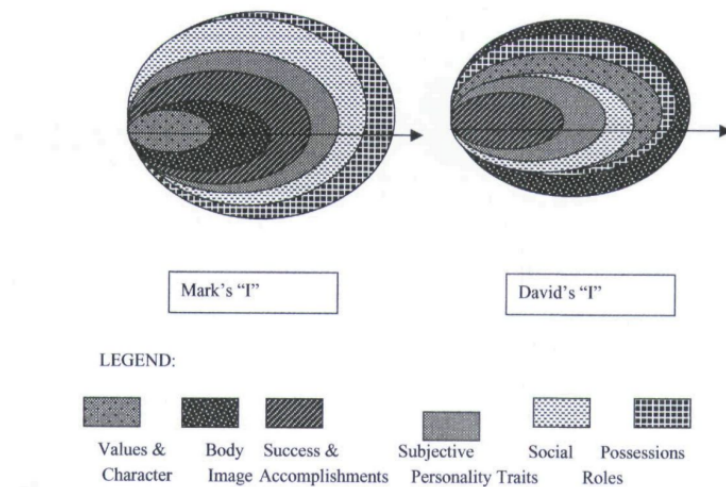


Figure 1. Using components to define the self

Figure 1- Using components to define the self. (Source: Mittal, Banwari 2006).

The products we consume do not always become a part of our possessions since some are just items we consume. Furthermore, not all products are qualified as possession becomes a part of the extended self. It is also common for products to relate to one’s identity without becoming part of the identity instead of these products help one achieve something which is a part of their “I”. For example, a consumer might love an economist journal because it can help them in order to reach business success and being successful is part of their “I”. Thus, these products create involvement but do not become part of “I” unless a consumer views it as a possession that defines their “I” (Mittal, 2006).

Further, there is a difference between how one defines identity and how it is perceived by others, and how others see one’s identity the author named “me”. Further, how one views their identity projects to how one views others, for instance, if my body is what I view as my identity I will

view others by their bodies. This passing of one's own identity to others causes tension between one's identity and "me" since identity is your competence and not your body as projected on you thus there will be a tension between your identity and "me". This tension is something people try to resolve, and consumption plays a major role in resolving this tension. Through consumption, one can change both identity and "me". Further, it can bring the "me" that has been projected closer to one's identity and this can be done by choosing products that are a better reflection of one's identity. Consumption functions as a reconciler. It can also be that one chooses products that display the desired "me" and by doing so shape "I" (Mittal, 2006).

Reed et al. (2012) discuss how consumers will try harder to reach their ideal selves when the distance between consumers actual and ideal selves increases. This aspiration to reach ideal self can be a major driver of behaviour. For example, a motivation for many consumers is to be thin and to have a "thin and healthy" identity. Therefore, they will try to reach this ideal self by exercising, dieting, buying products related to a "thin identity". Thus, consumers try to make their identity closer to their ideal identity. Furthermore, this identity pursuit can result in individuals striving to be viewed by others the same way they view themselves. This is more likely to occur if the individuals experience that their identification is under threat (Reed et al., 2012).

2.3 Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)

Consumer culture theory is the study of consumption choices and behaviours from a social and cultural point of view as opposed to an economic or psychological one. Consumer culture theory does not offer a grand unifying theory but refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that addresses the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings. It can generally be explained as a culture where social status, values and activities are centred on the consumption of goods and services. Further, in consumer culture theory, consumption is not viewed as a rational or conscious activity, but a sociocultural or experimental activity connected to emotions (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Consumer culture focuses on the spending on material goods in order to obtain a lifestyle in a capitalist economy. Cultural factors such as values and belief systems influence people's decisions. This means that culture also affects consumer behaviour. A few examples of cultural impacts on consumption are people's preferences. Basic characteristics of consumer culture are for

example the transformation of needs to desires, hedonic/utilitarian needs/values and conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

2.3.1 Conspicuous consumption in collectivist versus individualist cultures

The two cornerstones of consumer culture are materialism and conspicuous consumption (Vohra, 2016). According to Veblen (1899) conspicuous consumption is something that is done to identify with others as having superior wealth and social standing as opposed to something done to survive. There are different factors and characteristics of an individual that impacts their consumer behaviour. For example, younger people are more status-conscious consumers, and therefore the chances are bigger for them to be impacted by interpersonal influences. Moreover, what they wear displays their status and group dynamics (Vohra, 2016). The major factor that prompts conspicuous consumption is supposedly social status. Further, the purchases of luxury goods are a way of seeking higher status and it is an extensive factor that influences consumers' behaviour. Vohra (2016) also discusses that society pressures individuals which results in impacting their conspicuous consumption unconsciously.

Consumers engage in conspicuous consumption regardless of their income level, which indicates the uniqueness of human characteristics. Veblen (1899) also argues that the extensive reason for conspicuous consumption lay in the desire to display wealth to the rest of the society, further this is valid for all classes. Thus, even those who are considered to be the poorest engage in this type of consumption. Furthermore, Belk (1988) argues that people engage in conspicuous consumption in order to receive social acceptance and to improve social status, this is regardless of both income level and social status. Belk (1988) stated that consumers regardless of their income level find conspicuous consumption more important than both food and shelter (Atik & Şahin, 2011).

Furthermore, it has been argued that conspicuous consumption varies between different cultures as the motivations seem to be bound to cultural values. There have been many studies on examining the difference in conspicuous consumption between individualist and collectivist culture (Eriksson et al., 2012). Conspicuous consumption is motivated by the will of communicating a certain self-image to others and is done by deliberately buying items that symbolically and visibly communicate one's self-image (Vohra, 2016). A collectivist culture

emphasizes the needs and goals of the group as a whole over the needs and desires of each individual (individualists). In such cultures, the relationship with other members of the group plays a central role in a person's identity. Countries for example in Asia, South America and Africa tend to be more collectivistic and European and North American tend to be more individualistic (Hofstede, 2011). Thereof, Asian cultures put a higher value on group goals and there are cultural factors underlying luxury consumption (Vohra, 2016).

2.4 Luxury consumption and young adults

For centuries, people worldwide have satisfied themselves with the possession of beautiful goods, but what is luxury exactly? The term “*luxury*” is regularly used in our everyday lives to refer to products, services or a certain lifestyle, however, the term elicits no clear understanding. This is because luxury comes in many different forms for different people and is dependent on the mood and experience of the consumer (Wiedmann, Hennigs & Siebels, 2007).

Since 1980 the market for luxury goods has been growing at an exceptional pace. As a result, luxury goods have been the subject of intensive discussions and debates. Today, consumers have at their disposal a larger discretionary income than ever before. Income has increased throughout the hierarchy scale, but most dramatically in the highest social classes. Current consumers are willing to offer considerably higher amounts of money for luxury products (Henriksen et al., 2018). Henriksen et al. (2018) argues that luxury goods from a historical point of view have been associated with rulers such as kings and queens, who used luxury goods to display their wealth. Luxury has since the beginning of time always played an important role in people's lives and was often considered as symbolic goods as they separated the leaders of the culture from the common people. Further, they created prestige to the owner and created status (Eriksson et al., 2012). The word prestige may, however, vary depending on different people and their socioeconomic backgrounds (Henriksen et al., 2018).

Furthermore, luxury goods have been exclusively targeted at the richest of the rich known as *The Elite* and *Nouveaux Riches*. The *Nouveaux Riches* (new rich) are the individuals who have acquired their wealth rather than by familial inheritance. These individuals previously belonged to a lower social class and economic stratum but have now with the help of money allowed upward social mobility. With a strong need for validation of the Elite, the *Nouveaux Riches* are

often acknowledged for their engagement in conspicuous consumption. Elitists, on the other hand, could be recognized by their extravagant lifestyles, titles and family reputations (Henriksen et al., 2018).

Moreover, today luxury goods are not only available to the rich but also to the general population and this is because the average person has more time to go shopping as well as a higher income. But even people who have a lower salary can be willing to sacrifice the money they earned to buy luxury goods. One example is young adults who often have lower income than the elder but choose to spend their money on luxury goods. They have a strong need to express themselves and create their own identity as well as to retain social membership (Eriksson et al., 2012). The consumption of luxury goods has increased a lot but what might have been considered luxury before may differ from what it is considered today. Similar to the elitist and Nouveaux Riches, these young adults are the same type of consumer who uses luxury in their identity creating phase in order to distinguish themselves from the rest of the populations. As opposed to the Nouveaux Riches who used conspicuous consumption to impress the Elite, a new social group was studied with other motives behind their luxury consumption. This new social group pursued conspicuous consumption to enhance their identities as well as to fit in with any individual group within the society, who has a preferable social status (Henriksen et al., 2018).

2.4.1 Dimension of luxury value perception model

With regards to the regular consumption values which directly explains why a consumer chooses to buy a product, there are different values that influence a customer when purchasing a product. For example, a customer's luxury brand perception and the motives for luxury brand consumption is not only related to displaying status, success or distinction, but also other factors such as their financial state, as well as the functional and individual utilities of a brand. The luxury value has both social and individual, as well as financial and functional factors that affect it (Wiedmann et al., 2007).

Further, the dimension of value perception framework was created to combine a set of luxury value dimensions into one single multidimensional model instead of treating each perceived value of luxury separately, as it has been done in the previous research literature. The dimension

values are the *financial*, *functional*, *individual* and *social value* and can be seen in (figure 2) (Wiedmann et al., 2007).

The financial value direct monetary aspects when purchasing a product i.e. price, resale price investment, discount etc. It refers to the value of the product expressed in currency dollars, euro or yen - and to what is sacrificed or given up obtaining a product. A consumer who desires a social status often recognizes a higher price for a product because they often link high price with high quality. However, a product or service does not always have to be expensive to be considered luxurious. Some examples of these products are wedding rings, part of personal history or ancestral heirloom and this is because they add sentimental value instead of solely based on price (Wiedmann et al., 2007).

Functional value refers to such core product benefits and basic utilities, for example, the uniqueness of a product, usability, quality, reliability or durability given by the product. For example, when a consumer purchases a luxury brand, they often relate it to superior quality. Further, aside from the basic function factors, the consumers expect that the product function and performs as promised, design as well as long-lasting. These expectations increase even more in terms of luxury items. Most consumers who purchase luxury brands often do it because of the superior quality reflected by the brand. This is because consumers may perceive the luxury product as superior quality over other non-luxury products and reassurance which makes them believe they get more value from the purchase. Uniqueness is another factor that may be of great importance if one seeks to differentiate themselves from their surroundings. One way of doing this is by engaging in luxury consumption. A product that is exclusive or rare may lead to a greater desire or preference towards the brands (Wiedmann et al., 2007).

The individual value concentrates on factors such as a customer's personal orientation toward luxury consumption and addresses personal matters such as materialism, hedonism and self-identity values. Self-identity refers to one's self in terms of the way the individual perceives him or herself. Consumers, therefore, tend to use the products that their image congruent with their own self-image. Consumers may thus use luxury to integrate the products to create or develop their own identity. When it comes to materialism, it emphasizes people's desire for money as well as possession and acquisition. The more materialistic a consumer is the more likely he is to acquire possessions. A consumer who is very materialistic may thus engage in

luxury consumption as they tend to devote more time and energy in their purchasing decisions. It is often the external factors such as public status and social identity that stimulate one to engage in materialistic behaviour. Hedonic value has to do with the emotional value and intrinsic enjoyment provided by products and services. In terms of luxury consumption, there are many emotional factors in play such as sensory pleasure, gratification, aesthetic beauty and excitement (Choo, Kim, Moon, & Yoon, 2012).

The last dimension is the *social value* of luxury value perception. It relates to the conspicuousness values and prestigious values added by purchase. Conspicuousness is one of the most important factors in regard to luxury consumption. Many products that are purchased and worn on public occasions are more likely conspicuous products in contrast to a product that is consumed on private occasions. Existing research about prestige demonstrates that people tend to conform to the majority opinion of a membership group when forming attitudes. Thus, consumers may engage in the consumption of luxury brands as those products often are related with high prestigious values (Wiedmann et al., 2007).

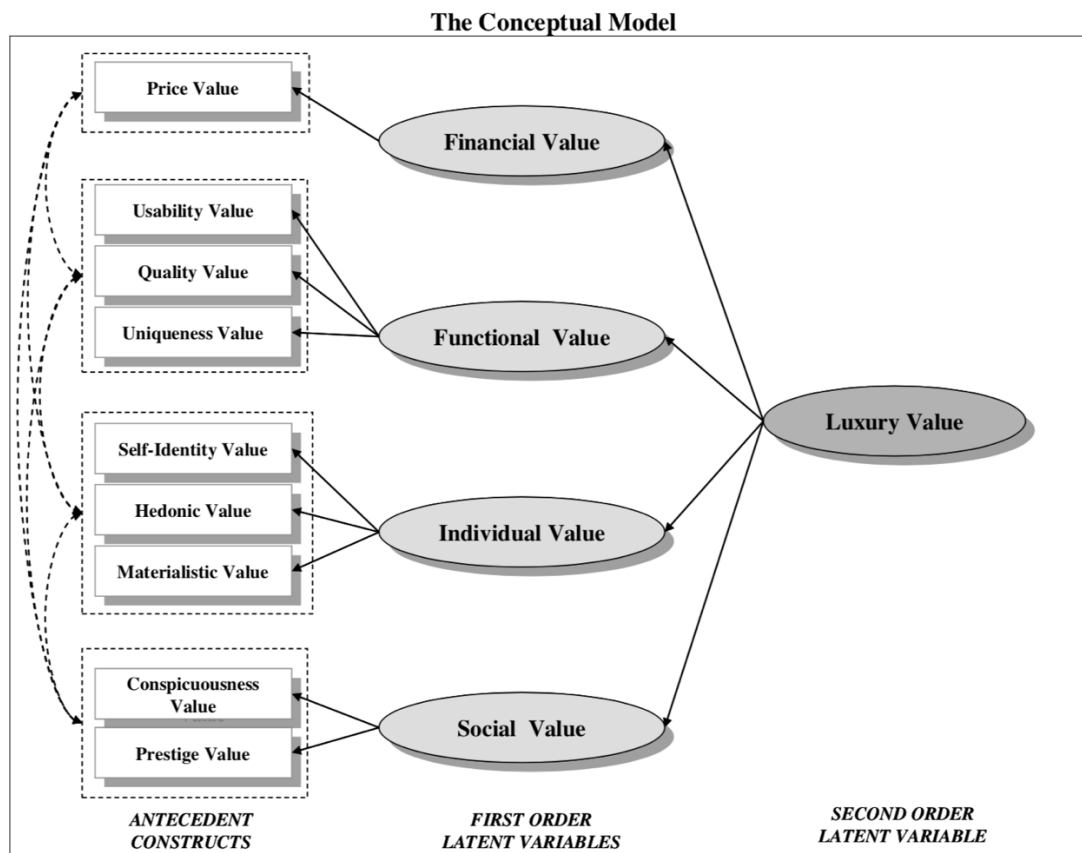


Figure 2- The conceptual model. (Source: Wiedmann, Klaus-Peter, Hennigs, Nadine & Siebels, Astrid 2007).

2.5 The Japanese luxury market

The Japanese are the world's largest individual consumer of luxury brands and forms the second largest market for luxury goods after the United States (Degen, 2010). They are in fact the world's most concentrated source of revenue for luxury brands with the highest per capita spending on luxury brands in the world. The Japanese brand consumers and their voracious need for conspicuous consumption inspired the world to the concept of democratization of luxury. This concept essentially means giving everyone access to luxury branded goods. Furthermore, the Japanese were the driving force behind the growth of the luxury fashion retail all over Asia as well as Europe and were responsible for the in-duty free luxury sales in all travel destinations. (Degen, 2010).

In the early 1970 the Japanese GDP grew fast with an per capita income rising to that of Western Europe. This was the same period that the Japanese tourist shoppers became a noticeable phenomenon in Europe. Many of the rich luxury countries such as France, Italy and Switzerland all saw this opportunity and started to set up sales branches in Japan. Short after, Gucci opened their first store in Tokyo in 1972 in response to the Japanese tourists in Europe. Louis Vuitton followed short after and opened their store in 1978. In 2005 more than 90 per cent of Tokyo women in their twenties owned both an item by Louis Vuitton and one by Gucci, and more than half of them owned an item produced by Prada and Chanel (Mcniel & Riello, 2016). It was during this period when the Japanese addiction for western luxury fashion started. The Japanese were somehow different from the western people when it came to luxury fashion. Western focused more on luxury cars, grand homes and large properties in wealthy neighbourhoods. This was impossible for the Japanese thus they showed their wealth by dressing richly. The more expensive the luxury articles they wore, the higher status they would get (Degen, 2010).

2.5.1 Japanese culture identity

Japan is a society that strongly relies on social sanctions (Dolan & Worden, 1992). Japanese children learn very early that human fulfilment comes from close association with others. Being part of a group in Japan often provides enjoyment and fulfilment, but it also causes a lot of tension. This is because Japan is an extremely competitive society. Minor issues are sometimes dealt with by appeals to a higher authority (Hofstede, n.d.). The Japanese social order is heavily influenced by Confucianism. Confucianism is often characterized as a system of social and ethical philosophy. One of the most famous quotes in Confucianism is “Da Xue” or “The Great

Learning” which described the order and harmony of a society. This shows that a hierarchy is natural and relative status differences define nearly all social interaction”. Age, gender, education and place of employment are common distinctions that guide interaction. It is common that a Japanese person try to avoid social interaction with a stranger to avoid potential errors in etiquette. This is why business cards are often used in Japan as they are valuable tools to minimize social interaction and still provide enough information. One big difference between Western society and Japanese is that western often acts to minimize status differences. Japanese on the other hand find it very awkward or incorrect when a person does not behave in accordance with their status expectations (Dolan & Worden, 1992).

2.6 The Hong Kong luxury market

Hong Kong is one of the top destinations for luxury brands and has long been viewed as a luxury shoppers paradise considering the city is full of luxury shopping malls (EOS Intelligence, 2019). Hong Kong is an important market for luxury brands such as Gucci, Prada and Tiffany who have many of its stores located in the city. Most of the leading luxury retailers receive an important portion of their sales from Hong Kong (EOS Intelligence, 2019). Hong Kong has blossomed into a billion-dollar luxury market with several luxury stores that attract shoppers from the rest of Asia, mainly China, due to the city’s tax-free policy. The growth of Hong Kong’s luxury market is well linked with the city itself which went from being a fishing village into becoming a central place for business. It was during the 1970s that the luxury brands started trooping in and it is also during this time that Hong Kong’s economy started booming. Since 2009 the GDP per capita in Hong Kong has been rising and is expected to rise to then stand in 2020. In general, Hong Kong consumers prefer foreign products compared to domestic ones since they are highly influenced by western trends. The Hong Kong market favours brands that are endorsed by Western celebrities but also Asian fashion icons. Hong Kong consumers tend to be price-sensitive but brand-conscious even though they are most fond of luxury brands. In fact, “face” and social status are of much importance in Hong Kong thus brands that indicate great social and economic status are sought-after and the Hongkongers are more than happy to pay a premium (Santander, 2020).

2.6.1 Hong Kong cultural identity

In 1997 the sovereignty of Hong Kong was returned to the People's Republic of China (PRC) after being a British colony for 155-years, but this was more than just a political transition this was also a cultural transition. As a result of being a British colony, Hong Kong adopted an identity characterized by western values such as civil and human rights, freedom of speech and more while PRC instilled socialist values. These differences lead to the unique Hong Kong identity which is described as ‘modern, Western-influenced, materialistic and predominantly urban’ (Lai, 2011, p. 250). But as Japan, Hong Kong is much influenced by Confucianism and the collectivist cultural traditions because of its history.

As earlier mentioned, the standard of living in Hong Kong has risen by an extreme degree and this is an important factor in order to understand the consumption in Hong Kong today. Since going from comparative poverty to having wealth and the possibility to freely consume and afford goods is seen as something good and positive. It is well known that the people in Hong Kong only live for money. Hong Kong has even had the most possession of Rolls Royces and this is more than a display of their wealth, this also indicates that most Hongkongers will not disregard those who flaunt conspicuous items but rather admire them. Hong Kong is known for taking the best from the West and the East and this cultural mixture is shown in the populations’ consumption. There is, however, a class pattern where the elder less educated consume more Chinese elements such as what they wear. The younger and more educated consumers, on the other hand, consume more internationally from countries such as Japanese, American or European. The youths especially assume a higher standard of living and material sophistication (Mathews & Lui, 2001).

2.7 Theoretical framework

Two models from different fields have been combined to develop the theoretical framework used in this study. The framework is a combination of “Using components to define the self” (figure 1) presented by Mittal (2006) and the “Conceptual model” (figure 2) presented by Wiedmann et al. (2007). Mittals’ (2006) model has been chosen since it explains identity which makes it possible to explore how identities of young adults in Japan and Hong Kong's are constructed. Wiedmann et al. (2007) model has been chosen since it explains conspicuous consumption hence it covers the part of our research question that is concerned with conspicuous consumptions' role in shaping young adults' identities. Components from each

model that are connected and that are of relevance for our research question have been selected and compiled into the new model “Young Adults Conspicuous Consumption Identity” (YACCI) (figure 3). The aim of the model is to help in understanding what influences young adults' identities in regard to conspicuous consumption in Hong Kong and Japan. The YACCI model consists of six components and one dimension that interrelate. The six components are *body image, values, competence & success, social role identity, self-image, and possessions*. The dimension is *social value*.

The left part in the YACCI model represents conspicuous consumption and the right part represents identity. Social value (to the left) examines conspicuous consumption and the six components of “I” (to the right) examines identity. Social value examines conspicuous consumption in general (Wiedmann et al., 2007), however, this thesis aims to understand young adults in Hong Kong and Japan’s engagement in conspicuous consumption in order to display their personal identity. The left side solely, will not help in understanding the underlying reason as to why young adults in Hong Kong and Japan engage in conspicuous consumption as the conspicuous consumption part only displays the general view of the phenomenon. In order to better understand Asians, Mittal’s (2006) six components have been included in the YACCI model which will make it possible to examine the identities of Hongkongers and Japanese. Hongkongers and Japanese in general have an identity that is different from westerners because of the differences in the cultures (Hofstede, 2011). By compounding these two models it will be possible to understand what influences young adults’ identities in Hong Kong and Japan and how it affects their conspicuous consumption behaviour. Thus, young adults’ conspicuous consumption identity can be explained by social value and the six components of “I”.

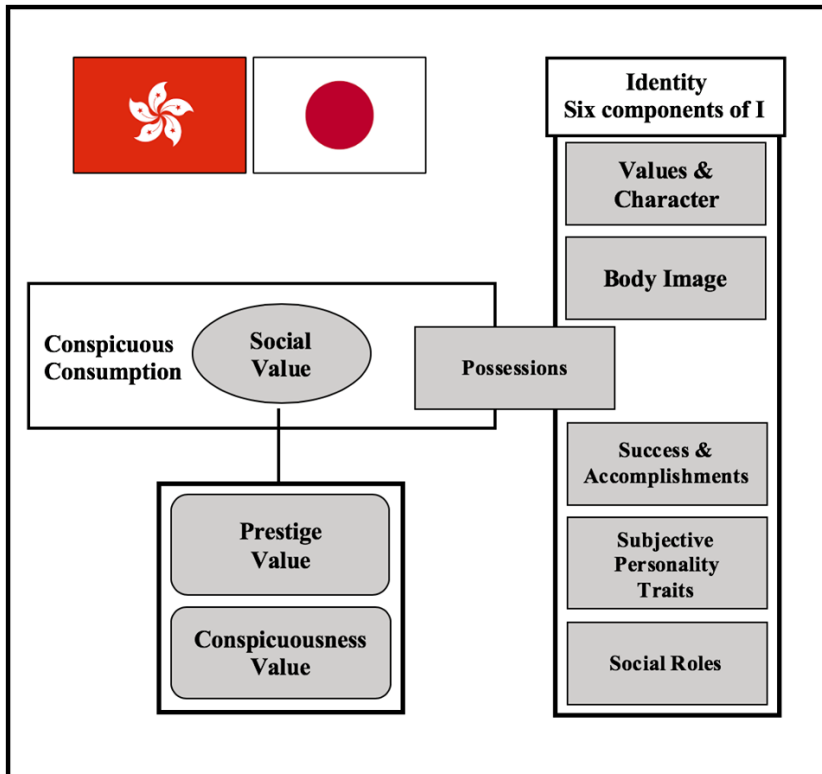


Figure 3- Young Adults Conspicuous Consumption and Identity (YACCI) framework.

The identity part of the framework made of Mittal's (2006) model consists of six components that make up one's identity and every consumer have their own build-up of these components in order to form their "I". All of these six components presented by Mittal (2006) play a crucial role in shaping one's identity and have been used in order to construct the YACCI model. The six components have the same definitions in the YACCI model as presented by Mittal (2006). By including all of the components it will be possible to examine how young adults' identities in Hong Kong and Japan are constructed but also to what extent the different components affect their perception of themselves. For example, if the young adults view themselves as materialistic this will be a part of their "I" thus it can be what influences their engagement in conspicuous consumption.

Wiedmann et al.'s (2007) model consists of four luxury value dimensions named "financial value", "functional value", "individual value" and "social value". The "financial value" refers to the monetary aspects of purchasing a product while the "functional value" refers to the core product benefits gained by engagement in conspicuous consumption. These dimensions are not of interest since the dimensions do not highlight the conspicuous consumption part. Further, the

individual value was not chosen from Wiedmann et al. (2007) model because it focuses on explaining conspicuous consumption by looking at the individual and the individuals' identity which Mittal's (2006) model about the six components of "I" already covers. Therefore, as earlier mentioned, only social value will be used in the YACCI model. This dimension has been extracted from Wiedmann et al.'s (2007) model because it is more relevant to this thesis research question.

Moreover, the social value dimension consists of the following two sub-dimensions: *conspicuous value* and *prestige value*. The dimension will have the same definition in the YACCI model as presented by Wiedmann et al. (2007). Social value was chosen since studies have shown that the conspicuousness value of a product is positively related to its susceptibility to a reference group (Wiedmann et al., 2007). For example, if young adults consume goods in public it may be conspicuous goods in comparison to goods that are consumed privately. In regard to prestige, a lot of existing research has shown that people seek confirmation from the majority opinion of a membership when forming attitudes. As a result, consumers might engage in conspicuous consumption since those products often are related to high prestigious values (Wiedmann et al., 2007). Studies have also shown that Asian cultures tend to put a higher value on group goals than personal goals and the opinions of the group play a central role in a person's identity (Hofstede, 2011; Vohra, 2016). Thus, by including this dimension it will be possible to look at how young adults in Hong Kong and Japan's surroundings affect their attitudes and engagement in conspicuous consumption.

3. Methodology

The following chapter presents the research design and the data collection. Further, this chapter will discuss how methods and techniques are applied in the research, validity and reliability of the data gathered and methodological limitations.

3.1 Research design

The following section presents the methodology used in this thesis. Firstly, the research purpose is presented, then the research philosophy and lastly the research approach of this thesis.

3.1.1 Research purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to understand what influences young adults' identities in regard to conspicuous consumption, therefore, this thesis used an exploratory design. According to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) exploratory research aims to better understand a phenomenon through exploring the research topic from different perspectives. Further, the intention with exploratory research is not necessarily to provide conclusive evidence thus the direction might change after the data collection (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015) In this thesis, the phenomenon is young adults where the focus is to gain insights to what influences their identity in regards to conspicuous consumptions.

3.1.2 Research philosophy

Research philosophy refers to beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge, but it also refers to how information should be collected, analysed and used in research. There are different ways of viewing research philosophy namely ontology and epistemology (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Firstly, ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and is basically the study of things around us. Further, ontology examines if the existence of social reality is independent of human understanding and interpretation. There are two different ontological positions, and these are objectivism and constructionism. Objectivism implies that social phenomena exist independent of social actors. Constructionism, on the other hand, implies that things and meanings are dependent on each other, thus the social world is a consequence of human

interaction (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This study had a constructivist position since the concern is to understand the social world as a consequence of human interaction.

Furthermore, epistemology is the theory of knowledge and refers to what is considered acceptable knowledge about social reality. Further, this concept is important in business research as it provides an answer to how the research can be conducted (Bryman & Bell, 2015). There are two main perspectives within epistemology, namely positivism and interpretivism. Positivism is a philosophy which believes that social reality can be studied by applying the methods of natural sciences such as measurements. This perspective tries to explain human behaviour. Critics of positivism argue that natural science models are not the most appropriate when studying social reality. A contrast to positivism is interpretivism which is a philosophy that puts emphasis on understanding human behaviour. This perspective strives to gain an empathic understanding of why humans act in a certain way. Thus, the aim here is to understand social reality through the human interpretation of it (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This study is based on interpretivism research philosophy since it is most aligned with the research purpose. This thesis is concerned with understanding the “how” and “why” behind human behaviour with regards to what influences young adults’ identity and conspicuous consumption. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate and understand the social behaviour of the young adults in Hong Kong and Japan (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

3.1.3 Research approach

Bryman and Bell (2015) describe that in regard to the relationship between theory and research there are mainly two different approaches, the *deductive* and *inductive* approach. A combination of these two approaches can also be used, namely an *abductive approach*. A deductive research approach refers to testing an already known theory by formulating a hypothesis from that theory. Data is then collected in order to test and analyse the hypothesis. On the contrary, an inductive research approach refers to gathering data to then detect patterns within this data in order to develop new theory. Thus, this approach moves from data collection to theory. The inductive research approach is generally associated with qualitative studies where the outcomes of the observations result in theory. Lastly, an abductive research approach refers to moving between theory and data collection. This approach begins with identifying facts within an empirical phenomenon that existing theory cannot explain. These facts are then tested empirically while still relating back to theory as a result abductive approaches integrate both

theory and empiricism. Further, an abductive approach is usually associated with interpretive studies as there is an ongoing process between the data and the researcher's preunderstandings (Bryman & Bell; 2015; Lind, 2014). This thesis was based on an abductive research approach since it was more appropriate considering that the study is based on previous research and theories that are empirically explored in order to provide better understanding of the social world in Hong Kong and Japan.

Moreover, Bryman and Bell (2015) argues that quantitative and qualitative research usually are distinguished; however, this distinction is ambiguous since some argue for the distinction whereas others oppose it. In brief, quantitative studies focus on explaining and analysing a phenomenon through the collection of numerical data. This study, however, aims at exploring a phenomenon and not quantifying a phenomenon therefore a quantitative approach does not fit within the context of this study. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is a strategy that collects and analyses data by emphasizing on describing and understanding different phenomena rather than trying to quantify those phenomena. Further, quantitative research seeks to understand small-scale aspects of social reality and what really is of importance from the perspective of those being studied. Accordingly, a qualitative research approach was chosen for this thesis, which is aligned with the research question, but also the sample size which is small. The aim is to gain in-depth understanding of what influences young adults' identity and how it might influence their conspicuous consumption. Therefore, a qualitative research approach was appropriate, and interviews are a great way of gaining deeper insight of human behaviour.

3.2 Data collection

This section provides a description of the research method used in the thesis. Information of how the data was collected and how the participants were chosen is also presented in this section.

3.2.1 Research Method

When collecting data one can choose from primary data or secondary data. The primary data is empirical data that has been generated for the research project in question. In contrast, secondary data is data that has already been collected in the past through primary sources and that are available for researchers to use in their own research (Alvehus, 2013).

The most used method within the qualitative method is interviewing which is considered a source of primary data. Interviews can take many different forms, but the two major interview types used in qualitative research are *unstructured interviews* and *semi-structured interviews*. This thesis will conduct the latter. Semi-structured interviews are flexible, yet they follow a structure. In semi-structured interviews the interviewers usually have an interview guide and a set of questions on specific topics that aims to be covered, but the order and the wording of the questions can be changed based on the participant. Also, the interviewers might ask questions that are not included in the interview guide but that the interviewers find appropriate based on the participants' replies. Overall, the interview questions that are being asked are the same from one participant to another participant (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Semi-structured interviews were seen as the most relevant form for this thesis since the aim is to get a view of the young adults' perception of themselves and their surroundings. By conducting semi-structured interviews (see appendix 1 for interview guide), it will be possible for the participants to speak more freely and the interviewers can adjust the questions based on the participant. These factors can lead to the participant giving more detailed answers which is preferable in qualitative research. Thus, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 11 participants from Hong Kong and Japan in order to collect in-depth information. The respondents were located in other countries, thus a face to face interview was not an option. As a result, the interviews were conducted over audio without video on the platform ZOOM and there are both disadvantages and advantages with conducting interviews over audio (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

One disadvantage with interviews audio without video is that the interviewers cannot observe the participant and take advantage of non-verbal data. For example, in a face to face interview, it is possible to see if the participant looks confused by a question and in that case the interviewer can respond to that by clarifying the question for the participant. Another disadvantage is that some evidence demonstrates that face to face interviews are superior to telephone interviews. For example, participants that engage in an interview over the phone are more likely to utter socially desirable answers and to be less engaged with the interview process as a whole. A third disadvantage is that it is not appropriate to interview those with no or limited access to telephones or computers. An advantage, however, is that it is possible to include participants that would otherwise be inaccessible, for example, as for this thesis where the

participants were located far away. Another advantage is that it might be easier for the participants to fit in an interview into their own time and also it might be more effective to ask sensitive questions since the participants will be less stressed by the interviewers' physical presence. Lastly, the participants' answers are less likely to be affected by the appearance, age and gender of the interviewers (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

3.2.2 Participant selection

The selection of participants was a mix of mainly through comfort selection since both the interviewers had acquaintances in Hong Kong and Japan. This method was chosen since it is most suitable for small scaled research where researchers were under time constraint. Further, the participants were selected using a purposive sampling method in order to acquire information most relevant to the research of young adults' identity (Denscombe, 2016). The authors aimed to select participants of various characteristics and backgrounds such as rich and poor. Most of the participants were however from the same universities since it was the most comfortable for the interviewers. The majority of the respondents in Japan were from Aoyama Gakuin University and Hong Kong Baptist University, which are universities where both of the interviewers had studied at.

3.2.3 Interviews

The empirical findings were collected through semi-structured interviews (table 1) a brief compilation of the respondents' backgrounds. As demonstrated in Table:1 the respondents' in Hong Kong and Japan are between the age of 19 to 24 and they come from different social classes. The majority of the respondents were students, only four out of 11 were full-time workers.

Table 1- Compilation of all the respondents' backgrounds

Respondent	Gender	Age	Occupation	Social Class	Country
1	Female	21	Student/ Part-time job	Poor	Japan
2	Female	20	Student	Average	Japan
3	Female	20	Student	Average	Hong Kong
4	Male	20	Student/ Part-time job	Average	Hong Kong
5	Male	19	Student/ Part-time job	Rich	Japan
6	Female	24	Full-time worker	Average	Hong Kong
7	Female	20	Student/ Part-time job	Rich	Japan
8	Female	20	Student/ Part-time job	Poor	Japan
9	Male	23	Full-time worker	Above average	Hong Kong
10	Female	24	Full-time worker	Average	Hong Kong
11	Female	22	Full-time worker	Above average	Japan

Before the interviews, all the participants had to orally agree a consent form (appendix 2) which was read out to them prior to the interview, and whether or not they agreed, by stating their name and date. The consent form described the purpose of why the research project was conducted, and included contact information of both authors, as well as how the information about the personal information was going to be handled. The interviewers started by introducing themselves and a brief explanation of the topic, followed by stating that the interview would be audio recorded during the interview. The semi-structured interviews had three parts, general questions of the individual to understand the background, questions regarding the YACCI framework as well as an exercise using Mittal's (2006) framework of "I".

The general questions were asked first to get background information of the respondent. Another reason was because the general questions were more sensitive friendly questions to make the respondents more relaxed for the upcoming part. Since the study focused on a sensitive topic about conspicuous consumption, the interviewers did not want to affect the answers by asking questions regarding conspicuous consumption too early. The second part consisted of 18 questions which could all be related to the YACCI framework. The questions were open-ended which enabled the participants to give more descriptive answers. The purpose was to develop a discussion and facilitate new thoughts as the interview went on. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour and was conducted in English. The language used in the interview was adapted based on language skills as some of the participants were very fluent while others had a harder time to express themselves due to different language proficiency. In the last part,

the participants were asked to look at Mittal's (2006) framework of "I", and value their own identity based on the same model. After the interview, the participants were thanked and provided with the interviewers' contact information in case further questions were needed.

3.2.4 Data analysis

After the data was collected, the transcriptions of the interviews were executed. The material was thereafter thoroughly analysed by reading the transcriptions multiple times in order to gain alternative perspectives on the data. The material was then analysed through an abductive coding strategy, which is a combination of deductive- and inductive coding, by moving from data to theory. The data was coded into different categories and sub-categories. The categories were taken from the theoretical framework and refers to a deductive way of coding. While the sub-categories were based on the findings from the respondents in order to develop theory and refer to an inductive way of coding (Bryman & Bell, 2015). When the data had been coded, different tables were created as can be seen in chapter 4. The illustrative examples were included with the aim of clarifying the underlying purpose of the categories and sub-categories.

3.2.5 Trustworthiness

According to Denscombe (2016) it can be hard to ensure the trustworthiness of a qualitative research method since it's difficult to understand a social context externally. Trustworthiness concerns the "truth value" of qualitative research. According to Bryman and Bell (2015), there are four criteria that help ensure the quality of a research namely; *credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability*. The first criteria are credibility which can be seen as the most important aspect when establishing trustworthiness. It means to what extent the findings in the research can be considered as credible. In this research, 11 young adults from Hong Kong and Japan were interviewed who possess knowledge about the Japanese and Hong Kong society. Further, the interviews were semi-structured which allowed more open answers providing in-depth information. The interviews were mainly by audio on Zoom allowing a more comfortable environment. The respondents may thus not feel pressured to answer in certain ways, instead they are able to express their opinions more truthfully. However, one disadvantage with interviewing acquaintance is that the interviewers and the acquaintances usually assume that they understand each other. Instead of exploring the assumptions and seeking clarity about experiences, interviewers may possibly assume that they know what is being said (Seidman, 2006). As a result, it could potentially affect how the respondents' answers are interpreted and

analysed, which can have an impact on the results. The interviewers may interpret the findings in a way that gives an undistorted image of the act of conspicuous consumption and identity in Hong Kong and Japan. In order to minimize this disadvantage, the interviewers tried to ask follow-up questions when an unclear answer was given but also when a clear answer was given. This was done to assure they had understood what was said, instead of assuming that they had understood.

The second criteria are *transferability*, which can be described as to what extent the findings of a study can be generalized and transferred to other contexts or settings (Bryman & Bell, 2016). Since our research aims to get in-depth information about young adults' identity in Hong Kong and Japan this study does not focus on transferability of the research. Since the sample or participation is small scaled, it makes generalizations of the study questionable Denscombe (2016). The third criteria are *dependability*, which refers to the aspect of consistency in a research for example consistency of raw data collected such as transcripts. (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Denscombe (2016) Suggest that the whole process of data collection and analysis of empirical data should be available if requested. The whole process of the interviews, from recording to transcript and coding is stored on the interviewer's computers and is available if requested. The fourth and last criteria is *confirmability* which refers to the level of confidence that the research study's findings are based on the participants' narratives and words, instead of other potential researchers. It explains if the researchers have acted in good faith and excluded personal values (Bryman & Bell 2015). The authors of this study aimed to analyse the data from an objective perspective although both authors have little insight in the two societies.

3.3 Limitations

This research has mainly three limitations. Firstly, the majority of the respondents were females, 8 out of 11 respondents. This may have an impact on the answers since female and male young adults' values, beliefs and actions can differ. Secondly, the time limitation of the research limits the research to be small scaled. This is a limitation since smaller sample sizes get decreasingly representative of the entire population. Since this study aims to understand young adults' identity in Hong Kong and Japan, it could affect the reliability of the research. Lastly, the language barrier may limit the researchers to get in-depth information since respondents in

Hong Kong and Japan may not be fluent in the English language, thus having a hard time to express themselves correctly.

4. Empirical findings, analysis and discussion

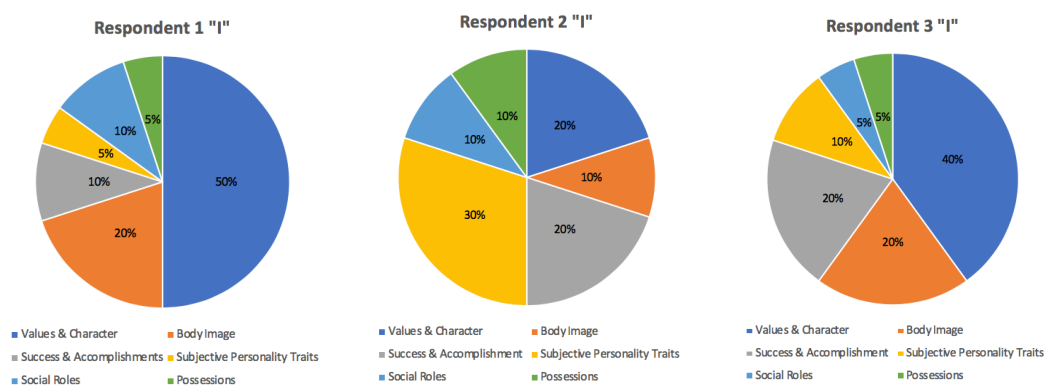
The following chapter will present the findings of the primary data collection, an analysis and a discussion of the data. A table of pie charts is shown in the beginning of the chapter with a summary of the respondents' constructed identity in order to give the reader an overview of the individuals identity. Thereafter, an analysis and discussion are conducted of the empirical findings based on the theoretical framework presented in chapter 3.

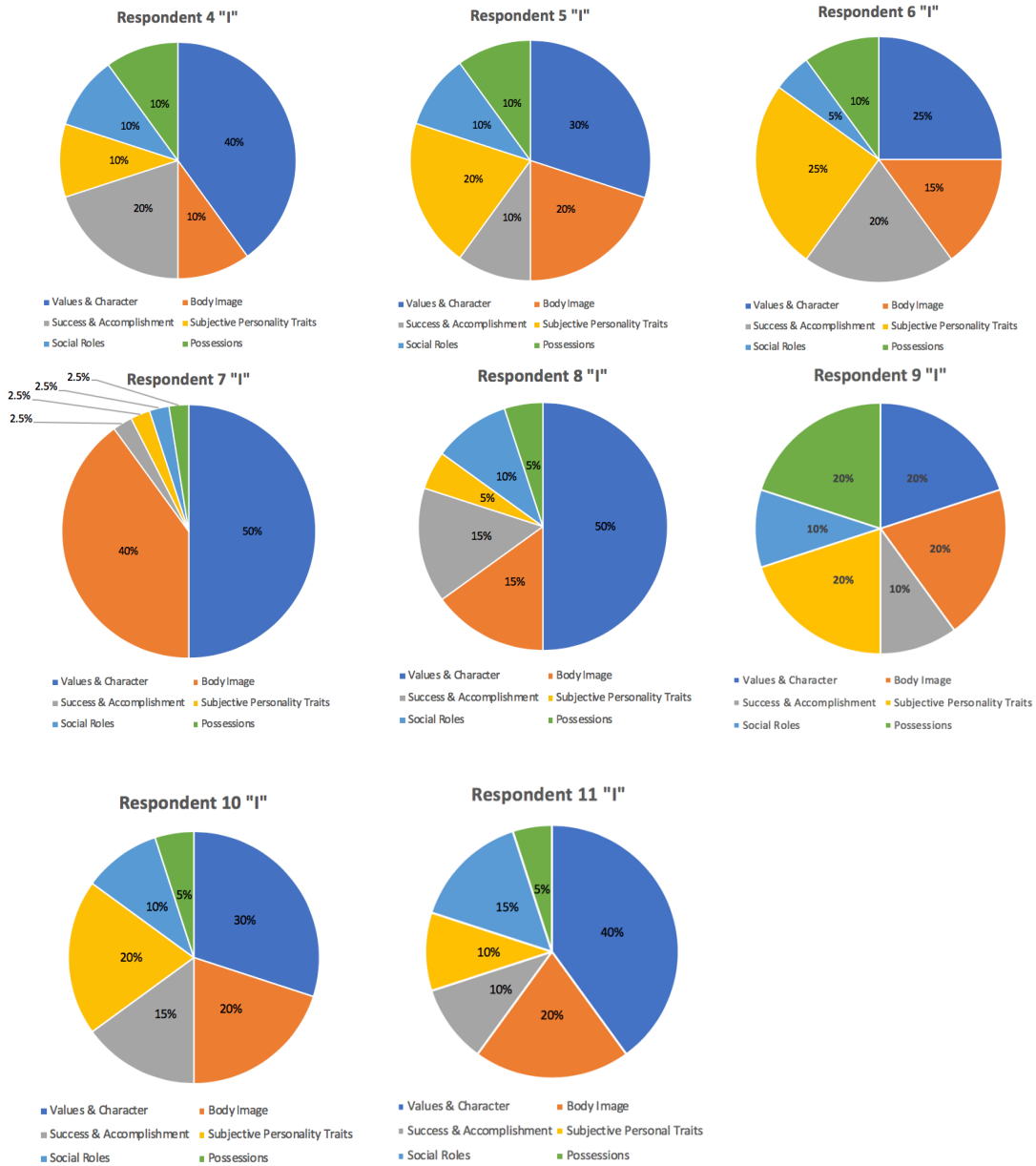
4.1 Analysis of the identity part of the framework

This part of the analysis will focus on the six components of I and how they are related to young adults' identity in Hong Kong and Japan.

Table 2 displays the respondents' identity or "I" according to Mittal's model. At the end of every interview Mittal's model "Using components to define the self" was introduced to the respondents in order to get a view over how these six components make their whole "I". The respondents' "I" differ from one respondent to another (table 2). For example, for respondent 1 his/her "I" mostly consist of "Values & Character" and for respondent 2 his/her "I" mostly consist of "Subjective Personality Traits".

Table 2- Respondents' "I" according to Mittal's (2006) Model





4.1.1 Values & character in relation to identity

The first component Mittal (2006) describes is values and character. Values and character are special features that describe how one person thinks, feels and what one person believes (Mittal, 2006). A good character has for example values that shape one's priority and help one distinguish between right and wrong. Choices are deliberately made to adopt certain values and discarding other values and these values become a part of many since they try to live by them. Aquino (2003) argues that research on values are contrasting but historically values have played an important role for scholars looking at the nature of the self and also the individual's relationship to the society.

When examining the empirical data regarding values and character the majority of the respondents valued this the highest in their "I". 10 out of 11 respondents valued it either equal to another component or the highest among all. This shows how important this component is for young adults' identity in Japan and Hong Kong.

Table 3- The young adults' values and character % according to Mittal's (2006) model of "I"

Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female
Country	Japan	Japan	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Japan	Hong Kong	Japan	Japan	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Japan
Value & Character	50 %	20 %	40 %	40 %	30 %	25 %	50 %	50 %	20 %	30 %	40 %

One question related to own values was whether or not the respondents have bought counterfeit products or would consider buying counterfeit products. Most of the respondents replied that they would never do it because it would be embarrassing and that people around them do not think it is cool. However, respondent 11 from Japan explained that she had bought fake brands before but that people in her surroundings did not know it was fake, due to the quality being very good. Although the respondents' did not specifically say that the reason for them not buying counterfeit products was because of their values, it could be argued that it is one of the reasons since personal values are things that are important to us and may motivate us and guide our decisions (Boer, Fischer, 2013). Further, Lucio and Valero (2017) explain that personal characteristics are associated with the consumption of counterfeit products whether it is objective (e.g., age, sex, family, occupation or income) or subjective such as (ethics, moral

principles or self- control). For instance, one moral principle is honesty and if the young adults’ values honesty, they may not want to buy fake products as it does not match their values.

“Some studies show the influence, on the purchase decision of counterfeit products, of the moral judgment that the consumer and the acquaintances have in connection with the purchase of fakes.” (Lucio & Valero, 2017, p.3)

During the interviews, family values were frequently brought up to discussion and several respondents stressed the importance of excelling in school. The young adults also discussed how they always are compared to other individuals in their surroundings by their parents. As one respondent explained,

“They compared me with the others. Even in school they give us the ranking of the results. Like you are six out 300 people. Every time and every test or event they give us ranking.” (Respondent 1, Japan)

It was evident through the interviews that young adults in Japan and Hong Kong are being pressured to keep up with their family values. As mentioned earlier, Japan and Hong Kong are influenced by Confucianism thus being obedient and always listening and respecting your elders are important parts of the culture (Wong & Ahuvia 1998). Therefore, it could be argued that family and social values make up a major part of young adults' identity in Japan and Hong Kong.

Table 4- Values and characters of young adults’ in Hong Kong and Japan.

Components	Category	Sub-Category	Illustrative examples
Identity	Values & character	<i>Counterfeit vs real products</i>	<p><i>“Yes, as a traveller I was walking around in Vietnam. I saw a shop that sold fake shoes. I was kind of drunk at that time and that’s why I bought it. But I would never do it in Japan.” (Respondent 1, Japan)</i></p> <p><i>“No, I would never do it.” (Respondent 7, Japan)</i></p> <p><i>“Korea is very close by, so maybe they did buy from Korea But they are very secretive about it. I also bought some fake ones, but they don’t realize it’s fake.” (Respondent 11, Japan)</i></p>

“No, I would rather save money and buy a real one rather than having 10 fake ones. Because counterfeit products actually, if you are using it only you will feel good but none of the people around you will feel good because everyone can tell it is fake.”
(Respondent 10, Hong Kong)

“No, I would just buy the real one or I would just not buy it because you know it is fake. Like the quality of the fake is like poor. If other people know I would not feel embarrassed.”
(Respondent 6, Hong Kong)

Parents comparing with others *“They compared me with the others. Even in school they give us the ranking of the results. Like you are six out 300 people. Every time and every test or event they give us ranking.”* (Respondent 1, Japan)

School and University matters *“Asian culture is known for being very success oriented and by having good education demonstrate success and also a good image of the family. Respondent 5 said that their parents always paid attention to which university they went as well as their performance. “ They always make me improve my performance and grade at school.”* (Respondent 5, Japan)

“Always, always. My mum always loves to compare with other children like the same age and they study in the famous school and I do not play the piano skills. I think because my mother wants to win like my son is better and compare with other parents. I think in Hong Kong somehow it is to show that your kid is better.” (Respondent 4, Hong Kong)

“Literally like 24 hours a day 7 days a week. This is a cultural thing like your parents are never going to be satisfied with what you have [...] for academics, like all the time like “whose son or whose daughter is doing so much better than you can [..].”
(Respondent 9, Hong Kong)

4.1.2 Body image in relation to identity

The second component is the body which is an essential part of the “I” for many individuals (Mittal, 2006). According to the empirical findings the majority put 20 % or lower on body image as being part of their “I”. Respondent 7 from Japan stood out among the rest by putting 40 % on body image as being part of her identity but based on her interview answers it was not obvious that her body image plays such a huge part of her identity. However, she did state the following *“[...] I want people to tell me I have long nice hair and that I am slim.”*

Table 5- The young adults' body image % according to Mittal's (2006) model of "I"

Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female
Country	Japan	Japan	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Japan	Hong Kong	Japan	Japan	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Japan
Body Image	20 %	10 %	20 %	10 %	20 %	15 %	40 %	15 %	20 %	20 %	20 %

Further, 3 out of the 11 respondents argued in their interviews that they do not believe appearance is important. The rest 8 respondents think appearance is utterly important which was found through the interview questions and this shows that appearance is something that is highly valued by the young adults' in Hong Kong and Japan.

The respondents from Hong Kong seemed well aware of their body image relative to how their surroundings perceive their bodies even though they did not put high percentages on body image. Mittal's model (2006) is built around an individual's own perception of identity. However, the empirical findings show that the respondents connect their own body image to the opinions of others around them. An explanation for this can be that, according to Wong and Ahuvia (1998), East Asian cultures are based on interdependent identities that put emphasis on social roles and public perceptions as central to one's identity. The authors further discuss how this leads to the Asian focus of "face" or mien-tzu "*which stands for a reputation achieved through getting on in life through success and ostentation*" (Wong and Ahuvia, 1998, p. 10). "Face" is a universal concept, but it is particularly crucial in order to both understand and explain the behaviour of people from Confucian cultures. As a result of "face" being a major concept, people in Confucian cultures are more concerned with how others perceive them and in maintenance of their status, compared to people in Western cultures. This is how one of the young adults from Hong Kong explained about her body image in relation to others:

"The thing they always compare about is the body image, the body size of me and other kids. Because in Asia a lot of kids are like US size 2 or 4 but I am US size 6 so I am above average in Asian standards..." (Respondent 10, Hong Kong)

These statements show that social factors such as interactions with family and friends have an impact on how the young adults' in Hong Kong and Japan perceive their body image. Based on the respondents' answers, people in their surrounding do comment on their looks whether it is

positive or negative comments. Among friends, comments seem to be more of a compliment type, while among families it is more of a criticism or judgement on your body image. Further, respondent 10 from Hong Kong was explaining how society says that overweight individuals should hide their fat during big clothes and that many Asians that are overweight cover their bodies. Also, through the interviews, it was discovered that the typical body image for most young adults' in Hong Kong is being slim and respondent 6 from Hong Kong shared how she has always been slim but still she never felt that she was slim enough. There seem to be an ideal body image that they young adults strive to achieve. Contrary, the respondents from Japan did not, apart from respondent 7 mentioned above, discuss their body image and what their family and friends say about their body. Instead they mentioned how their parents compared them to other individuals academically.

Table 6- How body image is perceived by young adults' in Hong Kong and Japan.

Components	Category	Sub-category	Illustrative examples
Identity	Body Image	<i>In relation to others</i>	<p><i>"[...] a lot of people in Asia they are like when they think they are fat they do not wear certain types of clothes, but I do not see that as a problem. It is what society keeps telling us like if you are fat you have to hide all of your fat under some really big clothes but yeah, I do not feel like that." (Respondent 10, Hong Kong)</i></p> <p><i>"[...] Because in Hong Kong I would say that the girls really care if they [...]are slim enough or not, it is pretty sad but in Hong Kong, it is like this. And because I was pretty slim when I grew up even though I am so slim I would still feel like I am not slim enough and that is kind of like over. It is over because when I was young, I would think I was not slim enough but now I think it is pretty ridiculous now for me..." (Respondent 6, Hong Kong)</i></p>
		<i>Criticism</i>	<p><i>"...I do not know why my mum criticise on my body so much like I think back then 3 or 4 years ago I was quite fat well not fat but I mean I was fatter than I used to be so my mum would say something like "I [you] cannot even pass through the door so please do some sport, lose some weight"..." (Respondent 10, Hong Kong)</i></p> <p><i>"...my friend would say my arms are too strong. You have to fix it and then he would say, in general, you are good, but your arms are too big [...]." (Respondent 6, Hong Kong)</i></p>
		<i>Compliments</i>	<p><i>"My friends or surroundings always tell me today you look so cute, or today I like your style. They always tell me good things to me. It is common to do it between friend as greetings. Like hi today you are so cute" (Respondent 2, Japan)</i></p> <p><i>"I don't think they comment if I look bad but if I look good, they will comment, especially girls." (Respondent 1, Japan)</i></p>

4.1.3 Success & accomplishments in relation to identity

The third component that is a part of identity is success and accomplishments. The perception a person has of this component can play a big part in the person's self-esteem since, for example, if a person does not believe that they are successful and competent it will lead to low self-esteem and even depression (Mittal, 2006). Marcussen (2006) also discusses the relationship between identity and self-esteem and how identity and self-esteem respectively represent the cognitive and affective aspects of the self. By looking at the empirical findings it seems like success and accomplishments are not that significant in the young adults' identity. The majority of respondents gave this component between 10 - 20 % of their whole "I".

Table 7- The young adults' success & accomplishments % according to Mittal's (2006) model of "I"

Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female
Country	Japan	Japan	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Japan	Hong Kong	Japan	Japan	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Japan
Success & Accomplishments	10%	20%	20%	20%	10%	25%	2.5%	15%	10%	15%	10%

Based on the interviews it appears that a way of showing success and accomplishments in Hong Kong and Japan is by your appearance, for example, one respondent argued the following:

"[...] yeah but for Asian people especially I think like some, like Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore people are like you are nothing without a luxury bag. [...] I think this is, like buying luxury products in Asia is one way to like build your self-worth." (Respondent 9, Hong Kong)

As earlier mentioned, Mittal (2006) argues that one's perception of one's success and accomplishments has a link to one's identity and self-esteem but for the young adults' it is not solely their own perception that matters for how they view their identity. A common way for young adults' in Hong Kong and Japan to feel successful is by acquiring luxurious products as it helps displaying their success and may further increase their self-esteem. If the young adults'

do not have luxurious products it might lead to them not feeling successful which can result in them suffering from low self-esteem and even depression (Mittal, 2006; Marcussen, 2006).

Another way of showing success is by performing well academically which, as mentioned earlier, is an important and common value in Confucian cultures (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). The empirical findings confirm that displaying success and accomplishments through academics is important for the young adults' in Hong Kong and Japan. The respondents spoke about the competitive and comparative environment that surfaces in their home countries and that their parents compare them with others. Two respondents from Hong Kong and Japan discussed success in regards of education:

"[...] I think it is the Chinese concept. If you want to succeed in the society you have to receive higher or more education [...]" (Respondent 6, Hong Kong)

"...Many parents put a lot of emphasis on which high school or which university you go to. The school you graduate from will affect which company you can get into. It affects your future the most compared to other foreign countries. That's why my parents always pay attention to which university or high school but also my performance in school. They always make me improve my performance and grade at school. They are kind of strict and always tell me to study." (Respondent 5, Japan)

Wong and Ahuvia (1998) argues that the measures of one's success is defined by others and not by the individual since goals frequently are presented as being for the benefit of the in group, for example, family instead of solely being for the individual. Although the pie-chart showed that success and accomplishments were a mere part of their "I" it is interesting that the interviews display another perspective of success and accomplishments. The young adults' do not view this component as a huge part of their identity which may be a consequence of success being defined by others rather than the individual (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998).

Table 8- How success & accomplishments is shown among the young adults' in Hong Kong and Japan.

Components	Category	Sub-category	Illustrative examples
Identity	Success & Accomplishments	<i>Appearance</i>	<p><i>"[...] in Asian countries like the first question you asked me how my parents bring me up like all the time they tell me "you are the worst I have ever seen, you are so I do not know" well so that kind of thing your mother always belittle you so you have a feeling like if you grow up like that you have a feeling to "okay I have to do something to prove myself" like okay "now mum look at me I can afford this Chanel bag so I have my self-worth"."</i> (Respondent 9, Hong Kong)</p> <p><i>"Certainly, yes in Hong Kong because Hong Kong people are really judgemental so if you are like not wearing good stuff and you are like dirty people just will not sit next to you or be friends with you. "</i> (Respondent 10, Hong Kong)</p> <p><i>"[...] I think it's mostly because Japanese want to look good and impress and show that you are not a messy person. In Japanese history if you look messy you are not respectful. So maybe it has to do with culture. That's why they always try to look good."</i> (Respondent 8, Japan)</p>
		<i>Parents pushing</i>	<p><i>"Literally like 24 hours a day 7 days a week. This is a cultural thing like your parents are never going to satisfy with what you have [...] like "whose son or whose daughter is doing so much better than you can, why are you being so lazy can you go to [after] school like five days a week"..."</i> (Respondent 9, Hong Kong)</p> <p><i>"My mom didn't but when my dad was still at home with us in elementary school, he was very strict about playing sport or athletic. He was always telling us to do our best in sports events. Whenever we did good or bad, he always told us to do this or this. They compared me with the others. Even in school they give us the ranking of the results. Like you are six out 300 people. Every time and every test or event they give us ranking. We needed to submit that to our parents. And sometimes our teachers use the rankings to talk to our parents in summer. Like your kid got this and she got this rank. I felt like I always had to do better than the last time."</i> (Respondent 1, Japan)</p> <p><i>"I think she compared me a lot to my friends but not family. She compared me how I concentrated in my things like the way I had a goal. She also compares me to others because I always want to have fun and went to many parties."</i> (Respondent 8, Japan)</p>

4.1.4 Subjective personality traits in relation to identity

The fourth component is subjective personality traits and Mittal (2006) describes subjective personality traits as one's characteristic behaviour that does not directly form one's identity. Instead these traits become a part of one's identity as a result of how they are subjectively perceived. However, those traits that one is unaware of do not become a part of one's identity (Mittal, 2006). When looking at the empirical data regarding subjective personality traits it is shown that the percentages vary among all the respondents.

Table 9- The young adults' subjective personality traits % according to Mittal's (2006) model of "I"

Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female
Country	Japan	Japan	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Japan	Hong Kong	Japan	Japan	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Japan
Subjective Personality Traits	5 %	30 %	10%	10 %	20 %	25 %	2.5 %	5 %	20 %	20 %	10 %

The respondents were asked to describe themselves in order for the authors to get an image of who they are. According to Mittal (2006), how individuals view themselves shapes their identity regardless of the perceived image others have of them. Even though the respondents described themselves as, for example, being outgoing and adventurous it is only their identity and not necessarily how others view them. The respondent's description of themselves varies, but most of them have the perception of themselves as being extroverts and outgoing. There was a slight difference between how the young adults from Japan and Hong Kong describe their personality, more of the Japanese described themselves as being shy compared to the Hong Kong people where not even one described themselves as shy. This could be because of the Japanese culture discouraging people from standing out. However, respondent 3 from Hong Kong did describe herself as being an introvert.

As earlier mentioned, East Asian cultures are based on interdependent identities as being central to one's "I" hence one's personal attributes are not considered representative of one's identity (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). According to Wong and Ahuvia (1998), a person with a highly interdependent identity who is asked to describe their personality will answer based on his or her family relationships, social roles and more instead of internal attributes. The young adults

did not once base their answers on social roles or family relationships, even though the young adults' come from Confucian cultures they answered after their internal attributes which may indicate that they do not have highly interdependent identities (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). Yet, it was noticeable that the students found it difficult to describe themselves and they asked several times what the authors meant by asking them to describe themselves, however, this can also be a result of a language barrier. Respondent 4 from Hong Kong argued, "I do not know how to describe myself..." and did not further explain his personality.

Further, even though the young adults did not describe themselves as being materialistic, a few respondents displayed distinct materialistic personality traits, and this was noticed by the way they answered the interview questions. These respondents mentioned that they wanted to own more of certain exclusive brands such as Tiffany or Chloé bags which both can be considered as luxury items. One might question why those respondents specifically wanted these brands instead of lower tier items. This could be interpreted as the young adults' having materialistic personality traits as these types of consumers are more focused on luxury-oriented products (Choo et al., 2012).

"I would, I actually want to have more Tiffany because I never own anything, and I just like the style and image they share. I feel like they have a really successful brand image and that every girl should own a Tiffany." (Respondent 10, Hong Kong)

"I would say bags (want to own more of). I would like to buy a Chloé bag or I would like to have different bags of different brands like the design is very simple. It is about design like Chloé is a very simple design." (Respondent 6, Hong Kong)

Further respondent 9 from Hong Kong showed distinct materialistic and superficial traits. The respondent explained that he would buy expensive luxury products if he had the money for it. *"totally if I would have more money, I would definitely try to get something like luxury bag, luxury coat if I can like yeah"*. This materialistic behaviour strengthens the previous statement that a consumer who is materialistic may engage in luxury consumption (Choo et al., 2012). One thing to acknowledge is that the consumer did not purchase these items which indicates that he is not a conspicuous consumer.

Table 10- How young adults' in Japan and Hong Kong perceive themselves.

Components	Category	Sub-category	Illustrative examples
Identity	Subjective Personality Traits	<i>Shyness, extrovert, introvert</i>	<i>“Well I’m born and raised in Japan in a really Japanese family. I was pretty shy and always thinking about groups, like people surrounding me.” (Respondent 1, Japan)</i>
			<i>“When I was young, I was a little bit shy so if I feel a little bad or angry, I couldn’t express myself. But I changed and I can better express my feelings better.” (Respondent 2, Japan)</i>
			<i>“My personality, I’m always hilarious and talkative. Japanese are usually shy but I’m an exception. I never think my personality has to do anything with my fashion. Every point of my life, my fashion changes over time again and again.” (Respondent 5, Japan)</i>
			<i>“There’s many times I have to explain about my personality in job interviews. So, in that case I always say that my personality is very kind and friendly. I can make friends who I meet for the first time. I’m not so shy and I’m very talkative. I’m the mood maker in a group in university. I make people laugh.” (Respondent 7, Japan)</i>
			<i>“I consider myself as an introvert because I do not really do social activities and I do not go to parties and stuff. And on my free time, I like reading books and watching movies and I do not really interact with people a lot, even in conversations I play the passive part, or I just listen all the time.” (Respondent 3, Hong Kong)</i>
			<i>“That is pretty hard to describe. Okay so my personality I am quite outgoing, I am an outgoing and proactive person and then I like to try many different things like, for example, different sports [...].” (Respondent 6, Hong Kong)</i>
			<i>“So, I am pretty extroverted and outgoing, so I really like to do a lot of outdoor activities and hang out with friends.” (Respondent 10, Hong Kong)</i>
		Materialism	<i>“Wow, it is like, it sounds so superficial but it [appearance] is like everything to me. Or not everything but like 80 %. I would say because I was born and raised in Hong Kong which is a very comparative society so you need to do everything you can to stand out and to like to look smart well for me. But honestly, when you first see a person what would you judge? Like, of course, your appearance, how you dress, do you have a sense of fashion and dress fashionable? So, I think this is very important for me and for a lot of people, even I would judge people by their look so much.” (Respondent 9, Hong Kong)</i>

4.1.5 Social roles in relation to identity

The fifth component in Mittal's (2016) model of "I", is social role also referred to as social role identity. A social role is a way of connecting the individual to the social structures. From this perspective identity is rooted in social roles, for instance, age, sex, race and people are expected to behave a certain way as a result of their social role (Mittal, 2006). As earlier mentioned, East Asian countries put great emphasis on social roles as being central to one's identity (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998).

Table 11- The young adults' social roles % according to Mittal's (2006) model of "I"

Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female
Country	Japan	Japan	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Japan	Hong Kong	Japan	Japan	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Japan
Social Roles	10 %	10 %	5%	10 %	10 %	5 %	2.5 %	10 %	10 %	10 %	10 %

The respondents discussed how high school students' roles in Hong Kong and Japan are specified by the fact that they all need to wear the same uniforms. School uniforms are used as a social leveller in the classroom, playground and on the street where everyone is the same. One of the main reasons for using uniforms is to minimize the differentiation in status as well preventing racial and religious discrimination (Wordie, 2017).

"...In high school we used uniforms and then everyone had the same standards.... Hair need to cut and.... you need to wear white socks. You cannot wear your own clothes in Hong Kong." (Respondent 4, Hong Kong)

In Japan, for example, being untidy and unclean is seen as being rude or disrespectful as your appearance is a visual presentation of yourself. Japanese are often careful with how others perceive them which leads to them paying more attention to how they present themselves. It is a part of the Japanese norm to dress well in order to fit into the society (Li, 2019). According to the majority of the respondents, students are encouraged to be the same as everyone else and not to be unique. The reason is because it is a social rule that dictate their behaviour and those

who do not follow becomes socially rejected by their surroundings. The respondents described that they in university have the free will to wear what they want which enables them to express themselves more compared to before. This may be one of the reasons for why the young adults during the interviews expressed that they want to be more unique. One explanation may be that the pressure to be the same during school times, motivates and drive them to be unique. According to (Eriksson, 1950), young children between 12 and 18 undergo a crisis namely role confusion (Elkind, 1970). However, Japanese and Hong Kong children appear to not have an opportunity to experience role confusion as they belong to a school system that requires uniforms and pressures them all to be equal.

Räisänen-Kauppinen, Björk, Lönnström and Jauffret (2018) discuss how consumers that feel the need to be unique aim to differentiate themselves from others by seeking after differentiating brands. A way to express one's identity is through material goods since material possessions are seen as an extension of the self. Luxury brands are viewed as exclusive and rare hence, luxury brands are often used as a means of accomplishing the need for uniqueness. This need for uniqueness is triggered by conspicuous consumption and it also influences purchase intentions. Thus, this might explain why young adults' in Hong Kong and Japan engage in conspicuous consumption since luxury products are prestigious, which in turn would help them enhance their uniqueness by owning it.

"[...] In Japan we say we are a collectivist society. The more you kill your uniqueness the better. So, I was raised in this way. So even in classrooms, you even look at your pens, and if you have a unique style on your pen then you would be picked at. And I didn't like that, so I always tried to fall back to normal standards. I wanted to be standing among them. I feel like I always was killing my uniqueness and it was boring. They would make fun of me if I did stand out." (Respondent 1, Japan)

Conspicuous consumption can further be explained by gender. In general females are the group who spends the most on luxury goods and the reason for this is them having a more positive attitude towards luxury compared to men. Women experience a greater difference in the value between luxury goods non luxury offerings in terms of uniqueness, hedonism and status (Watson, 2018). However, according to the empirical data, the majority of the respondents, including all the three males, showed great interest in luxury goods.

Table 12- How social traits influence young adults’ identity in Japan and Hong Kong.

Components	Category	Sub-Category	Illustrative examples
Identity	Social roles	<i>School role & Uniqueness</i>	<i>“Even in high school because we use uniforms. Even on the weekend we have club activities so we would always use clothes or school uniforms. We would go to school 7 days a week. We were not allowed to dye our hair brown or wear make-up. I think that makes us want to be us. Like I want to dye my hair, I want to pierce myself or wear my clothing in university. So, when they enter university, they can do whatever they want. Even if you have like light brown hair as a Japanese, teachers would tell you to dye your hair black. You want to be the same as others. It is kind of a rule.” (Respondent 1, Japan)</i>
			<i>“Yes, because in high school we used uniforms and then everyone had the same standards.... Hair, need to cut and....you need to wear white socks. You cannot wear your own clothes in Hong Kong.” (Respondent 4, Hong Kong)</i>
			<i>“[...] when we are in high school we used to use uniform so at the time you can hang out with your friends you care more about your dressing style because normally we are all the same but like when it comes to weekends you show the difference [...].” (Respondent 6, Hong Kong)</i>
			<i>“Yes, I do, because in university in Hong Kong we get a higher degree of freedom to choose what we want to wear and people will start to compare their outfits like the brand and the style so yeah I think it is more important because in High School we had to wear uniforms so we could not show off our brands and accessories.” (Respondent 3, Hong Kong)</i>

4.1.6 Possessions in relation to identity

The last component of identity is possessions, which Mittal’s (2006) describes as the things we own or possess and how they define us.

Table 13- The young adults’ Possessions % according to Mittal’s (2006) model of “I”

Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female
Country	Japan	Japan	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Japan	Hong Kong	Japan	Japan	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Japan
Possessions	5 %	10 %	5 %	10 %	10 %	10 %	2.5 %	5 %	20 %	5 %	5 %

All of the respondents, except one, discussed how much they enjoy shopping and acquiring items. It might perhaps not say a lot about their identity, but possessions are something that gives the young adults' plenty of joy. Respondent 8 from Japan who stood out from the other young adults explained: *"I don't think so. I don't have that obsession for clothes or accessories. I'm a person who doesn't like to spend much money. And I usually go to cheap stores of course."* Two of the respondents who enjoyed shopping explained:

"...I love to get new things and I think it makes me feel happier and it puts me down from stress. I come from work and school and have much stress from many people. Shopping can make me calm down and to do whatever I want; it is just a time where I can enjoy the moment for myself [...]." (Respondent 4, Hong Kong)

"...I started being able to make more money to use for [buying] clothes and shoes or materials. It is very satisfying for me. That was like a self-experience for me. Even if I made money like 100 000 yen, I always use all of them for clothes and food. Paying so much money is a new experience for me. I usually go to expensive stores like high brands." (Respondent 5, Japan)

According to Wong and Ahuvia (1998) people in Western societies put more emphasis on hedonic experiences and people in Confucian societies put more emphasis on publicly visible possessions as it helps contribute to their image of being successful. The authors (1998) continues to discuss that advertising in Hong Kong stresses more on hedonic advertising themes since in Asia this city is most exposed to Western culture. The empirical findings, however, indicate that the young adults' both in Hong Kong and Japan enjoy the hedonic experiences with shopping. All of the respondents in Hong Kong expressed that they enjoy shopping and the majority of respondents in Japan, but as the citations in table below indicate, the young adults' in Japan actually put more emphasis on the hedonic aspect of shopping. This is interesting since Wong and Ahuvia (1998) discuss that Hong Kong is more exposed to Western culture that values hedonic experiences more. The young adults' also put a lot emphasis on the importance of publicly visible possessions which is common in Confucian cultures and this will be discussed later on in this analysis.

To understand whether or not possessions have any impact on one's identity, the respondents were asked whether or not they feel like possessions describe their identity. According to Mittal (2006) possessions are a way for one to display one's inner "I" for others to see. Looking at the empirical data one can see that the majority valued possessions as being part of their identity between 5 - 10 %. The majority of the young adults' valued possessions surprisingly low which is interesting since Confucian cultures, as earlier mentioned, usually put a lot of emphasis on public image or "face". Considering image is important in Confucian cultures one would expect that the pie chart would display a higher value as possessions are needed to maintain a socially appropriate appearance. Although the values were low, the answers of the respondents showed the opposite. Several of the respondents agreed that their identity could be described by what they own or how they dress:

"Definitely, I think how I dress, like I grow up with an idea that how I dress directly reflects who I am. Like. When I was in high school I would, I bought some clothes that are very unique, and I think that helps to show that I am a unique person from my clothing and to attract people to come and like be friends with me." (Respondent 9, Hong Kong)

Further, Reed et al. (2012) argues that a basic human drive is to create a better understanding of oneself and as a result, people tend to acquire or like products they feel they can self-associate with. For example, consumers who have a perception of themselves as "athletes" will be more interested in products that align with athletic behaviour. The majority of the respondents indicate that this is correct, for instance, respondent 3 from Hong Kong and respondent 1 from Japan stated that they like street fashion since they believe it is more aligned with their behaviour. However, two respondents had different thoughts about using items to describe one's identity. Respondent 7 from Japan argued *"No, I don't because it's not a characteristic. My appearance from finding clothes does not characterize me. I separate my identity from what I dress."* Similarly, respondent 4 from Hong Kong argued that he *"...do not use clothing to express who I am."*

Table 14- Young adults’ relation to possessions in Hong Kong and Japan.

Components	Category	Sub-Category	Illustrative examples
Identity	Possessions	<i>Hedonic</i>	<p>“Yeah, I think so because it is enjoyable like browsing online catalogues and actually spending money on new things. But the money, after I have to pay my credit card, is not that enjoyable [...].” (Respondent 3, Hong Kong)</p> <p>“Well, I like to shop so much and I think I do have a sense in fashion that is why I well starting from very young age like 14, 15 I went out to shop for clothing for skin products, for hair products so much yes and I think appearance is so important.” (Respondent 9, Hong Kong)</p> <p>“I really like to shop, and I buy a lot of clothes, but a lot of my clothes are actually the same type, like really short top or some miniskirts like that.” (Respondent 10, Hong Kong)</p> <p>“Yeah because when I go shopping, I feel happy and satisfied. I don’t go to expensive stores because I want to buy my favourite things, not expensive things. Cheap things are ok for me. I don’t need expensive things.” (Respondent 2, Japan).</p> <p>“Yes, I love shopping. It’s just so fun. I also go window-shopping...” (Respondent 7, Japan)</p> <p>“Yes, I love shopping. It’s very satisfying. Yesterday I shopped on Zara online and I felt really good...” (Respondent 11, Japan)</p>
		<i>Self-expression</i>	<p>“Yes, to a certain extent because I actually want to show people that I am kind of good at sport, so I try to wear clothes that look sporty, so I do not have to explain it every time.” (Respondent 3, Hong Kong)</p> <p>“Yeah, I think so because of a lot of my clothes they are really colourful so people can definitely say that I am not only like black or white type of person.” (Respondent 10, Hong Kong)</p> <p>“I like street fashion because I really love playing sports. I always played sports in school and it made me more interested in brands like Nike or fila, like more sporty fashion. It makes me use it. I would never use it like a pink fluffy scarf because it doesn’t reflect me.” (Respondent 1, Japan)</p>

4.2 Analysis of the luxury part of the framework

This part of the analysis will focus on social values, namely prestige and conspicuousness and how they are related to young adults' identity in Hong Kong and Japan.

4.2.1 Prestige values in relation to conspicuous consumption

According to Wiedmann et al. (2007) a person may use a prestige brand to conform to the majority opinion of a membership group when forming attitudes (Wiedmann et al., 2007). A prestige seeking behaviour is a result of multiple motivations, but in particular the motives of sociability and self-expression. One of the more common motivations is *snob effect* which “takes into consideration the personal and emotional desires when purchasing or consuming prestige brands, but it also influences and is influenced by other individuals’ behaviours” (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999, p. 9). A snob is a person with an exaggerated respect for high social position or wealth and aims to associate with people with high social class. Further, they look down on those who are socially inferior (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). This behaviour can be seen in some of the interview. The respondents were asked if they think someone would have been treated differently if they had a bad or poor appearance. One of the respondents replied:

“I think so, especially in university. Because I see it happen a lot. We have a girl in class that dresses like an old person. She’s not fashionable or dress a little childish. When my friends see girls like that, they try not to get closer with them or talk with them. This happens a lot in my university.” (Respondent 8, Japan)

This behaviour of being resentful, can be explained by the prestigious values one has because he or she does not want to be seen with, in this case, a girl with poor fashion. As explained above, a person may use a prestigious brand to conform with a social group. This indicates that respondent 8’s friends only interact with girls of similar fashion or status. Thus, luxury branded products can serve as a symbolic sign of group membership (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Further, Belk (1988) explains that consumption of products is a way to express one’s belonging to a social group. Respondent 8 was also asked if she thinks certain brands can make a good impression on the surroundings and replied *“Yes, I think so. Wearing brands can show they are able to buy expensive things. They will be more popular socially”*. An explanation for this kind

of conspicuous behaviour can be that the individual is more concerned with what others think (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). The respondent continued by giving another example:

“I have a friend that was going to have a date with an older guy. He seemed to be kind of rich and she thought a lot about what she would wear to her date. She didn't want to be seen as the type who wears H&M or forever 21. She wanted to use brands that could be impressive. I think that is a good example to show that you are not in a low state.”

(Respondent 8, Japan)

This is a form of self-consciousness which can be described as a consistent tendency of a person to direct attention inward or outwards (Fenigsten, Scheier & Buss, 1975). There are two kinds of self-conscious persons, one is more concerned with how they appear publicly to others, while the other is more concerned privately, for example, they are more focused on the person's inner thoughts and feelings (Fenigsten et al., 1975). In this case, it is clearly shown that the respondent's friend is the first kind of self-conscious person since she focuses on what the other people think of her.

The other respondents also discussed the impact brands can make on one's surroundings and several of them argued that brands have a great impact. The young adults', accordingly, put emphasis on visible possessions and Wong and Ahuvia (1998) discuss how an essential belief of materialism is that success, both one's own and others', can be measured by the visible things one possesses. A good way to demonstrate success for a materialist is through luxury goods that convey prestige and enhance the owner's appearance. On the other hand, a respondent argued that she does not think that brands have an influence on one's surroundings. *“No i don't”* (Respondent 7, Japan).

Respondent 7 was then asked if fashion can play a role when wanting to enter a certain group of friends. *“No totally not, you can wear whatever you want”*. The respondent continued with *“However some of them think it's important especially to the women who live in the richer areas”*. A reason for this can be that these individuals are trying to confirm with the prestige groups, or they try to be distinguished from non-prestige reference groups (Vigneron & Johnson 1999).

The respondents further discussed whether they would use a product more or less if the product became popular in their surroundings. Most of the respondents replied that they would use it less. This is the answers from two of the young adults from Japan:

“I would use it less. Maybe it’s a bit contradicting but I just don’t want to be like those around me. I always want to be a minority.” (Respondent 5, Japan)

When you look at the world outside of Japan, I think uniqueness is more important. It's a good thing to show that you are unique. So now I have changed so I would use it less because I want to be different from others. I think Japanese in general want to use like others, but I don't.” (Respondent 1, Japan)

These answers can be connected to the snob effect that refers to status sensitive consumers who come to reject certain products when they are consumed by the general mass of people since products that are of limited supply have higher value. Further, the state of scarcity on products has a greater impact on demand if people perceive these products as expensive or unique. According to psychologists, this behaviour is in alignment with an individual's need for uniqueness. This need is the outcome of a social comparison process where an individual's goal is to try to be different from other individuals (Vigneron & Johnson 1999).

Table 15- Prestige values influence young adults’ engagement in conspicuous consumption in Japan and Hong Kong.

Dimensions	Category	Sub-Category	“Illustrative Examples”
Conspicuous Consumption	Prestige Values	<i>Impressing Surroundings</i>	<i>“Yes, I think some of the brands can actually show like the social status of you as a person, for example, some guys in the class whenever they have a presentation, they will wear their Gucci shoes. I think they think that they are more confident wearing some good brands and they can actually show off that yeah, they have that kind of money. I would say that a brand like especially the rich brand just is actually if you use that people might see you differently so I think some of the girls or people they really like to use the rich brand to showcase “yeah I am a good person with money” so yeah but I do not know I do not like brands. Yes, I do see that some types of friends’ circles, they dress similarly.”</i> (Respondent 10, Hong Kong)

“Yeah, there are actually a lot and some of the influencers like on Instagram they actually use the fake products to get the followers and they will introduce the fake products as the new ones, so it is quite funny seeing it in Hong Kong. Everyone knows that it is fake but then they insist that “it is real it is real” then okay. I think it is one of the niches that she wants to, she wants to be famous but then she is not the really pretty type so she has to find another niche to use luxury products to get more following but then when people find out then it does not really end good for her.”
(Respondent 10, Hong Kong)

“Yes, I do. The first impression is really important. If I never pay attention to my fashion people will consider me as poor or a nerd. I think that head to toe Gucci is bad. Just having a Gucci t-shirt is fine. But having Gucci shoes, jacket and cap is too much.” (Respondent 5, Japan)

“I think so, maybe not like clothing. But if you buy like Starbucks coffee and walk to class, that’s fashionable, I think. It’s not about the coffee itself but its appearance of you holding the cup. So many of my friends prefer buying coffee from expensive stores rather than convenience stores.” (Respondent 1, Japan)

“Yes, I think so. Wearing brands can show they are able to buy expensive things. They will be more popular socially.”
(Respondent 8, Japan)

*Stay fashionable
but not follow
the trends*

“I would use it less because I don’t like that everyone wears the same.” (Respondent, 10, Japan)

“I would not use it so much; I want to feel unique.”
(Respondent 2, Japan)

“No, I would use it less because well I mean I do not want to be lame I do not want to be part of the big group [...]oh sneakers you know a lot of guys they are crazy about sneakers they have to get like I do not know because I am not really into that but for certain. Time you can see literally everyone on the street are wearing that particular sneaker and then I would think no way I would buy that.”
(Respondent 9, Hong Kong)

“I would use it less because I do not want to be the same like everybody.” (Respondent 10, Hong Kong)

4.2.2 Conspicuousness value in relation to conspicuous consumption

Wiedmann et al. (2007) describes that the conspicuousness of a product is positively related to its susceptibility to a reference group. As mentioned earlier in prestige values, a few respondents replied that luxury products can help one become more socially popular. Similarly, as mentioned in success and accomplishments, respondent 10 from Hong Kong stated that it is common for Hongkongers not to befriend people who dress poorly. According to (Souiden, M'Saad & Pons, 2011) materialism is connected to social status seeking behaviour and therefore also conspicuous consumption. This may be one of the reasons why young adults' in Hong Kong and Japan engage in conspicuous consumption. Since, as mentioned earlier, acquiring and owning luxurious products could help one fit in the society (Wiedmann et al., 2007).

Further, all six of the respondents from Japan are from prestigious universities like Aoyama Gakuin University, Keio University and Kansai Gaidai University where they are surrounded by rich students. This can be an explanation to why many Japanese students engage in conspicuous consumption and might feel that they have to live up to a certain standard. One respondent discussed the following:

“My university in Keio, there are many girls so we guys must pay attention to what we wear. The guys who I hang out with never care about fashion but when he started in university, he started to pay attention because we were surrounded by many girls. We don't want bad impression on girls.” (Respondent 5, Japan)

Aoyama Gakuin is considered as one of the fanciest private universities in Tokyo and every year Japan hosts a beauty contest where the winners are usually from Aoyama Gakuin. As respondent 1 from Japan explained: *“My university is called the most fashionable university in Japan”*. This may influence one to engage in conspicuous consumption in order to fit into the stereotype of the university. Since many cosmetic companies sponsor pageants at these major universities, it puts a label on the university with an emphasis on beauty, which could put pressure on the students to uphold the university's image (Murai, 2016).

On the contrary, most of the Hong Kong respondents went to public universities and they discussed how the students mostly did not pay much attention to what they wore to university. It was also discussed that it depends on which university one goes to in Hong Kong:

“Yeah, I think especially for those people you meet in HKBU I do not know they just wear the hall dormitory t-shirt all the time which I would say fashion disaster, I do not understand it. I mean if you go to like Hong Kong university if you go to yes, I would say the university of Hong Kong the scene is totally different but yeah I would say in Baptist university people look like they wear a uniform.” (Respondent 9, Hong Kong)

Respondent 9 believes that conspicuousness depends on the university and the area you are located around. Based on the young adults’ answers it seems like certain universities require or pressure certain ways of behaviour that lead to the pursuit of possessing certain items. This can be seen, as mentioned before, in Aoyama Gakuin University.

Conspicuousness was shown throughout the interview, for instance, respondent 1 from Japan stated that *“One of my friends is really poor and lives alone in Tokyo. But she really wanted a 20.000-yen bag and she couldn’t afford it, but she still bought it.* This behaviour is known as conspicuous consumption as this friend really wants the product but cannot actually afford it. One explanation to why people from poorer standards look for luxury standards can be that luxury goods might increase one’s self-esteem or help one feel some kind of social belongingness (Vohra, 2016; Wiedmann et al., 2007). Another respondent described:

“I think many people buy designer bags because they will look richer. Sometimes I see girls with designer bags, but they are very young, like 18 or 19. They don’t have money, but they still buy. If they were like 28 or 25 it would be fine. But I feel like 18 or 19 is a little too young. I think they buy because their parents are rich, or they have sugar daddies. Some of my friends get designer bags from sugar daddies.” (Respondent 11, Japan)

It seems like the young adults’ experience a lot of social pressure which leads the young adults to consume conspicuously and also to take extreme measures such as getting products from sugar daddies. This behaviour is similar to the “One-Cut-Above-the-Rest Mentality” where consumers are “obsessed with the idea of wanting to make others say ‘Wow! That guy’s really

something!” (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). The young adults’ in Hong Kong and Japan may be seeking this acknowledgement from their surroundings and may therefore do anything to achieve their attention. Another respondent from Hong Kong discussed engagement in conspicuous consumption:

“I would say yes because I have some, my best friends from university they, I think they buy like 1 or 2 designer bags every season yeah like I was affected by them and I really wanted to buy the latest Dior’s summer..Chloé but I did not, it was like 2 000 euros. But I did not, I am glad I did not, even though I can afford it, but I did not.” (Respondent 9, Hong Kong)

This young adult also felt social pressure to consume luxurious items but managed to not engage in conspicuous consumption. Overall, the respondents from Hong Kong did not display as much conspicuousness in their answers and when discussing engagement in conspicuous consumption they did not put as much emphasis on social pressure as the Japanese respondents. This might be explained by the fact that the Hongkongers went to universities that did not press a lot on luxury items.

Further, there are two major reasons why people consume conspicuously, these are to be recognized by peers and to achieve higher social status (Vohra, 2016). Social display is one of the more reasons for why young adults consume conspicuously which can be seen below. One can observe that these respondents chooses to use luxury brands instead of regular brands:

“It depends on the levels of..like you go to school or the bar or the annual dinner for the common is totally different. Just mix and match, not just one brand. Like Hermes, Balenciaga, Louis Vuitton, Gucci.” (Respondent 4, Hong Kong)

“I don’t wear any specific brands. I got a lot of brands like Kenzo, Prada or Boss. But yeah, I guess Boss. My jacket that I always wear is from Boss.”
(Respondent 5, Japan)

Table 16- Why young adults' in Japan and Hong Kong engage in conspicuous consumption.

Dimensions	Category	Sub-Category	Illustrative examples
Conspicuous Consumption	Conspicuousness	<i>University dictates fashion standards</i>	<i>“My university in Keio, there are many girls so we guys must pay attention to what we wear. The guys who I hang out with never care about fashion but when he started in university, he started to pay attention because we were surrounded by many girls. We don't want bad impression on girls.” (Respondent 5, Japan)</i>
		<i>Social Pressure</i>	<i>“One of my friends is really poor and lives alone in Tokyo. But she really wanted a 20.000-yen bag and she couldn't afford it, but she still bought it. She said the environment is like, the fact that she lives in Tokyo and goes to Aoyama Gakuin university, it makes her like, I got to buy this, or I got to have fashionable bags so I can be friends with them or something similar. It happens.” (Respondent 1, Japan)</i>
			<i>“...But some people that are from poorer standards will look for the luxury standards...” (Respondent 5, Japan)</i>
			<i>“I think so [consume conspicuously to impress others], a lot of my girlfriends they like to use some brands like big brands for their bags after they graduated from Uni just to show they are now an adult they are mature.” (Respondent 10, Hong Kong)</i>
		<i>Social display</i>	<i>“I think they do. Most of them in general. For example, when I walk around in Shibuya or Shinjuku I always see many girls wearing Gucci bags or Louis Vuitton bags. They always try to flex [showoff] with it. Even my friends who are girls, at least have one Gucci or Louis Vuitton bag. My impression with them is that girls in general in Japan care about high brands.” (Respondent 5, Japan).</i>
			<i>[...] I read some economics books. It is like always we buy the product for letting others know that we are able to buy those things..yeah.” (Respondent 6, Hong Kong)</i>

4.3 Cultural factors and updated theoretical framework

The original framework (figure 3) was changed after the empirical findings in two main ways. First, possessions were repositioned and second, culture was added. Initially, it was thought that possessions through conspicuous consumption had a major role in the forming of one's identity, because of two reasons: the young adults' either identify with these items, or because they consume them because their identities are based on the products they own. Thereof, possession was placed in the middle of the theoretical framework between *Conspicuous Consumption* and *Identity*. However, the results of the empirical data shows that the major role in forming their identity was instead the societal pressure that surrounds them daily, specifically focusing on their image and how they present themselves to others. Possession was therefore repositioned to the original place, together with the other five components.

Furthermore, culture is a social product and it is a crucial part of the structure of a society. Even though culture is of great importance the term is complex and has many definitions. One way to describe culture is as the lifestyle of a society (Altugan, 2015). Common elements of culture are ethnic or national origin, religion, gender, education, age, family and status (Altugan, 2015). During the process of the interviews the authors realised that there was a missing piece in the YACCI framework. Then, by further analysing the answers of the respondents it was clearly demonstrated that culture, such as national origin, family relations and status, of the respondents had a major impact on their answers. Cultural factors such as values and belief systems influence people's decisions. This means that culture also affects consumer behaviour (Işıl, Firat & Kutucuoğlu, 2013). This new insight revealed that it is important to acknowledge the cultural factors when trying to understand what influences young adults' identity and conspicuous consumption behaviour in Japan and Hong Kong. As a result, an additional part namely cultural factor was added to the old framework and thereof creating an updated framework.

In the next two sections we illustrate cultural factors which directly affects identity and conspicuous consumption. By so doing, we further unpack those cultural factors that belong to Japan and Hong Kong separately.

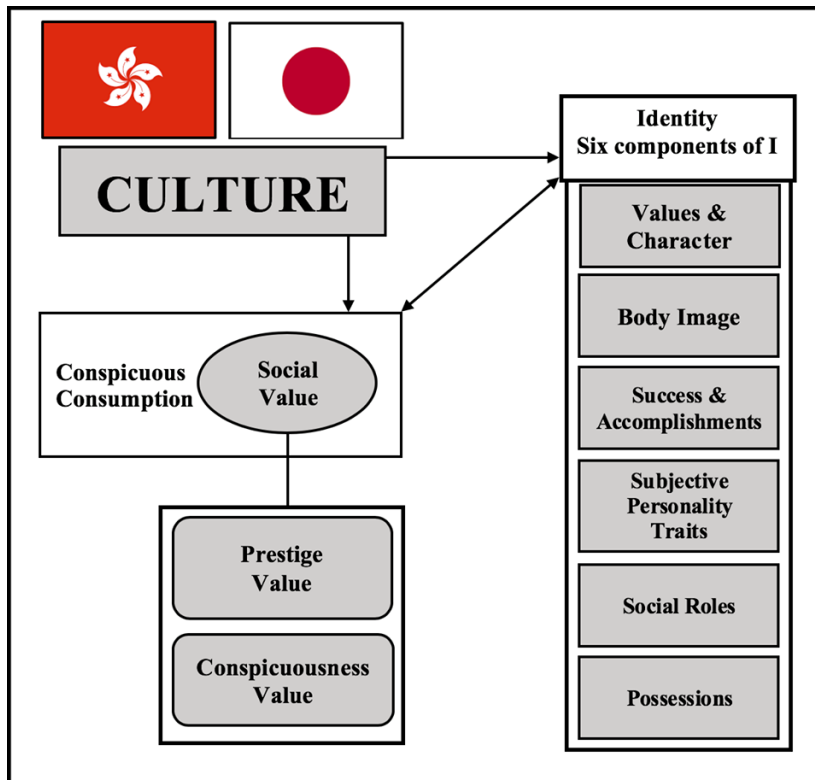


Figure 4- Young Adults Conspicuous Consumption and Identity (YACCI) updated framework.

4.3.1 Cultural factors affecting identity in Japan

Considering the meaning of culture, it is reasonable to expect that young adults' conspicuous consumption behaviour in Japan is strongly affected by the Japanese culture (Haghirian et al., 2011). One cultural factor that was acknowledged during the interview was the fixation Japanese young adults' have with their overall image. Japanese are very aware of how they are presenting themselves to the public, whether it is for a date or to a grocery store. It is very unlikely that you see a Japanese with flip flops or messy hair outside of their homes (Li, 2019).

"I got to wear cosmetics whenever I go out, like even if it's to the grocery store. I don't even see my friends or people who know me, but I still wear make-up and nice clothing. I want to look cool maybe." (Respondent 1, Japan)

Moreover, Japanese are taught at a young age to never bother or give someone inconvenience with their own problem which may be one of the reasons for why they are very cautious of how others perceive them. As a result, Japanese tend to pay an extraordinary amount of attention to how they present themselves (Li, 2019). One example could be that they do not want to have a bad image. When the respondents were asked if they would buy a counterfeit product, many of

the respondents replied that they would not because it has a negative effect on their image. Respondent 7 from Japan explained, *“Oftentimes Japanese people think it’s not cool to have a fake one at all”*. They would instead try to improve their image in different ways such as buying expensive luxury brands. Further, respondent 11 explained *“They try to look nicer or rich. They want to have higher status.”*

One of the most famous words in Japan is *sumimasen*, meaning “sorry”, which is used every day by Japanese. This word carries great meanings, is versatile and is utterly important when trying to build interpersonal relationships. This word appears to be commonly used when addressing people of a higher status as it is one way of showing respect (Sandu, 2013). Japanese are always aware of their hierarchical position in any social setting (Hofstede-insights1, n.d.) which can also be seen in how they present themselves in public. As mentioned earlier, having a bad appearance for example being untidy or unclean is seen as being rude because your looks are a visual representation of yourself. This is very important especially at the workplace as having a professional outfit shows you have respect for the job (Li, 2019). This may explain why Japanese always try to look their best even when going to school or to the grocery store.

“Japanese always do their hair even for school but western don’t seem to care if they go to school looking messy. I think it’s mostly because Japanese want to look good and impress and show that you are not a messy person. In Japanese history if you look messy you are not respectful. So maybe it has to do with culture. That’s why they always try to look good.” (Respondent 8, Japan)

Consequently, this may explain why young adults’ in Japan consume conspicuously which is in accordance with the statement of Japanese being characterized as image-conscious consumers (Synodinos, 2001).

Moreover, all the cultural aspects that affect identity and conspicuous consumption as discussed above, has been gathered and illustrated in figure 5 below. There are nine different cultural factors in relation to conspicuous consumption identity among young adults in Japan.

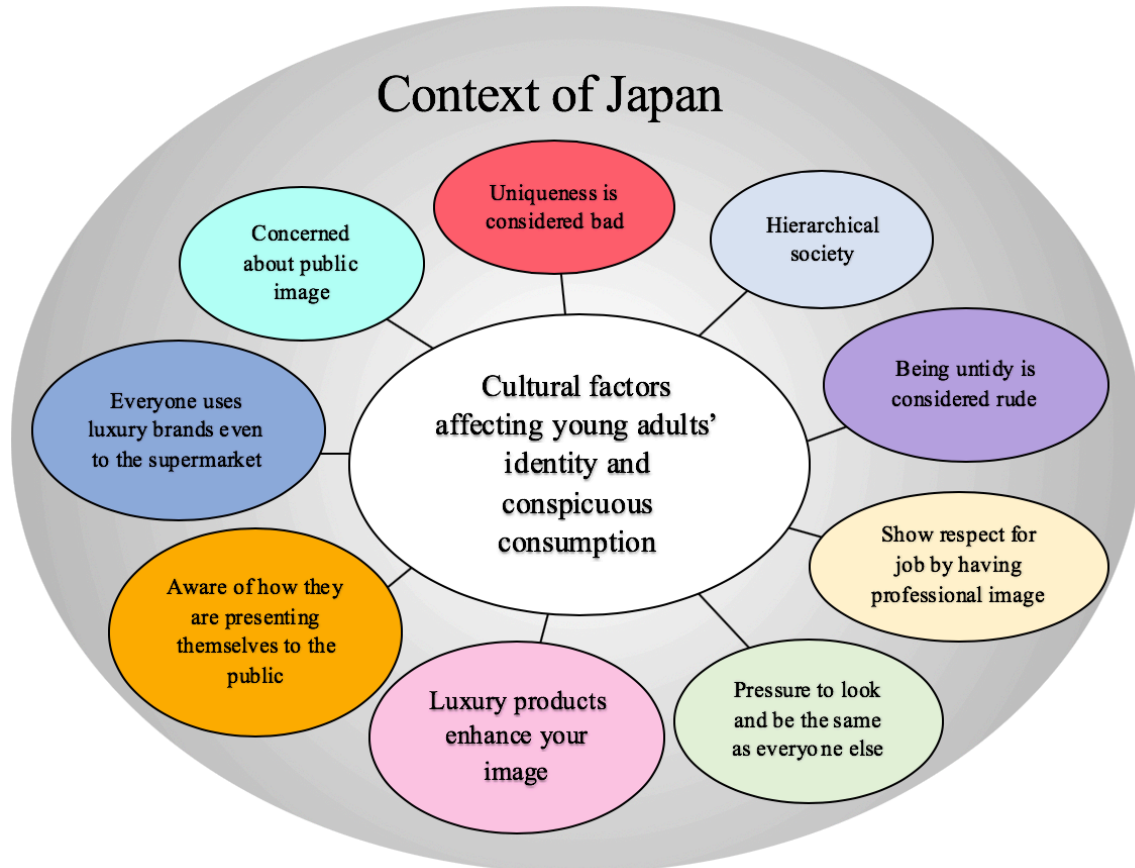


Figure 5- Nine cultural factors affecting identity and conspicuous consumption in young adults in Japan

4.3.2 Cultural factors affecting identity in Hong Kong

As discussed earlier, Hong Kong has a complex background that impacts their identity in several ways, for instance, some in the city identify as Chinese while others do not. Thus, the culture of Hong Kong can be explained as a fusion of both Western and Eastern cultures, specifically Britain and China (Erni, 2010).

Confucian values highly influence the city and it is displayed in several ways such as their strong sense of social hierarchy, especially, in regard to family and workplace. Further, there is a strong respect for age and, as earlier discussed, “face” (Hinsbergh, 2020). Considering that Hong Kong is a society that is described as being success oriented and driven there is a need to ensure success and it can take form in different ways such as spending many hours at work or for students getting high scores or ranking. Accordingly, social status and personal worth is determined by both one’s wealth and one’s educational attainment (Hofstede-insights2, n.d.). The empirical findings confirm that appearance is a way for the young adults’ in Hong Kong to

demonstrate their success. It was also evident that the young adults' in Hong Kong were a product of their environment in regard to the emphasis put on educational attainment in the city. All of the respondents from Hong Kong either attended university or had already graduated from university and are working full-time, as can be seen in table 1. Respondent 6 argued that a reason for education being extremely important in Hong Kong is a product of the city once being an industrial society. Further, because their parents experienced those industrial times, they stress a lot on education and believe that education is the key for success and receiving higher social status.

Hong Kong has prospered through hard work and became one of the wealthiest cities in the world which has resulted in the people becoming materialistic and wealth conscious. Considering the city's wealth consciousness there is a huge market in Hong Kong for luxury fashion and other noticeable status symbols (Hinsbergh, 2020). The respondents' argued how Hong Kong is a city highly influenced by materialism:

"[...] I mean like buying luxury products is one way to do that to prove yourself you are wealthy but in Asian countries like the first question you asked me how my parents bring me up like all the time they tell me "you are the worst I have ever seen, you are so, I do not know" well so that kind of thing your mother always belittle you so you have a feeling like if you grow up like that you have a feeling to "okay I have to do something to prove myself" like okay "now mum look at me I can afford this Chanel bag so I have my self-worth" I think this is, like buying luxury products in Asia is one way to like build your self-worth." (Respondent 9, Hong Kong)

Thus, the interviews confirm the fact that being materialistic is common in Hong Kong as it is a part of the city's culture. Respondent 9 above discusses how possessions of luxury products are a way of building one's self-worth and as mentioned above it is common in Hong Kong to determine one's personal worth by the wealth one possesses (Hofstede-insights2, n.d.). It seems as though those who display their wealth are being admired in Hong Kong rather than them viewed as boasters.

"...yeah but for Asian people especially I think like some..like Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore people are like you are nothing without a luxury bag. I think it is about the culture because I think in Western countries the education like encourages self-

expression and they are very positive like “oh you are awesome the way you are” so you do not have to do anything to please others so I think with that thinking you do not have to like prove yourself in any means.” (Respondent 9, Hong Kong).

The respondents were also asked if they think it differs in Western countries, as many of them have studied in Western countries. The young adults argued that the conspicuous behaviour seen in the East lays in the Asian culture and differs from Western countries:

Similarly, to Japan, a context of Hong Kong in regard to identity and conspicuous consumption was created. As mentioned above, the cultural factors that affect young adults’ identity and conspicuous consumption is gathered and illustrated in figure 6 below. There are nine different cultural factors in relation to conspicuous consumption identity among young adults in Hong Kong.

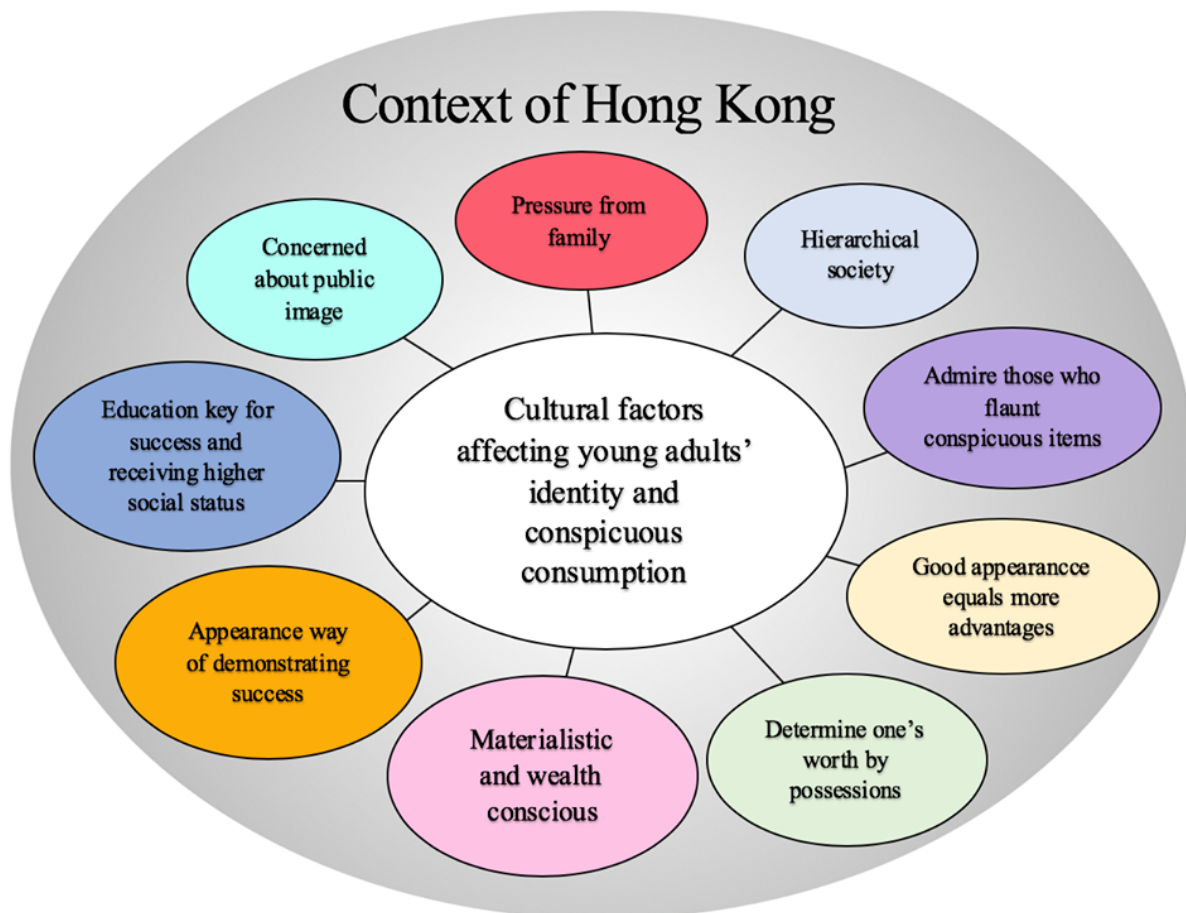


Figure 6- Nine cultural factors affecting identity and conspicuous consumption in young adults in Hong Kong

5. Conclusion

The following chapter presents a conclusion of this thesis followed by possible research implications. Furthermore, the chapter ends with a critical review and provides suggestions on future research.

To conclude, the aim of this thesis was to explore what influences young adults' identity in regard to conspicuous consumption behaviour in Hong Kong and Japan. The theoretical framework was created to help facilitate the research question by providing relevant information about what influences young adults' identity in relation to their engagement in conspicuous consumption. The framework consisted of six components of "I" and social value, however, during the process it was realized that the young adults' answers were repeatedly influenced by cultural factors. This new insight about culture resulted in an additional component in the theoretical framework namely *culture* which was positioned as an external factor. The theoretical framework made it possible to thoroughly examine the different components and gain an overview of the young adults' identity and conspicuous consumption behaviour. Identity is a complex term thereof it is necessary to thoroughly explore different areas that influences one's identity. By including all of the components in the framework it functioned as a valuable guideline to explore and understand young adults' identities in Hong Kong and Japan.

Identity development (Eriksson, 1950) and *Conspicuous Consumption* (Veblen, 1899) are two distinct theories used in this thesis, however, during the interview it was discovered that they were intertwined in many different ways. Conspicuous consumption in this thesis focuses on the ostentation of wealth of young adults in Hong Kong and Japan, while identity development covers the lack of identity of the young adults. This was due their identity being socially and culturally restricted. According to the empirical data it was evident that younger adults in Hong Kong and Japan in their younger years (in elementary). The children seem to have no opportunity to experience role confusion (Elkind, 1970) because the culture teaches them from a young age to be equal and not to be unique since it is not socially accepted. They are thrown into an educational system where they are encouraged to kill their uniqueness and those who do not become outcasts. When these younger kids enter their young adult lives, they may suffer from a lack of uniqueness. The previous restraints drive the needs of the young adults to become

unique. This affects the overall identity of younger adults in Hong Kong and Japan since their way of expressing themselves is mostly focused on the extended self.

Extended self is defined by Mittal's (2006) as the self-created by external objects which one surrounds oneself with. Thus, one may be able to experience lack of self when things are stolen from one or if possessions are not allowed, for example, the requirement of wearing school uniforms which is ubiquitous in Japan and Hong Kong. Further, Mittal (2006) argues that who you are is integrated with what you consume which explains the reason for why younger adults engage in conspicuous consumption to "create" their identity. Consequently, this has resulted in young adults in Hong Kong and Japan to engage in conspicuous consumption to help them express their unique identity that was stigmatised in their early adulthood. The young adults' conspicuous consumption behaviour is, however, both rooted in them wanting to be unique and them feeling the need to retain social membership as it makes the young adults feel both belongingness and confidence.

Further, the results indicate that the young adults' in Hong Kong and Japan believe that their identity is mostly formed by their values and character. Successively, their values were deeply rooted in their culture and their family values. This is related to them being from Confucian cultures which put emphasis on social roles and public perceptions as central to one's identity (Wong & Ahuvia 1998). The young adults experience social pressure to keep up with the people in their surroundings, through their appearance and overall image. Considering image and impressing people in your surroundings is extremely important for the young adults in Hong Kong and Japan, since it pressures some of them to take extreme actions in order to fit in the society.

Moreover, even though possessions were repositioned in the theoretical framework, it still has an important part in the identity creation. However, it is still important to note that it is not the driving force that makes young adults in Hong Kong and Japan engage in conspicuous consumption. Further, earlier research studies have shown that possession is a way to prove one's self identity and the results confirm this statement. In the interview the young adults displayed that possession still plays a meaningful part of their identity and the underlying reason for it seems to be that possessions help them describe themselves and to maintain a certain image (Mittal, 2006). This contradicts the low value the young adults put on possession as being part of their identity. These results were also unexpected as Confucian societies often stress on

publicly visible possessions as it helps contribute to their image of being successful (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998).

In summary, the young adults' identities are highly influenced by the society that surrounds them. The results of the societal pressures force them to keep up with a certain standard of image which affects their conspicuous consumption behaviour. The young adults did not fancy luxury brands as much as anticipated, and instead they put more emphasis on buying luxury items as means for communicating a certain self-image. These items visibly communicate their self-image but also their belongingness to the culture.

5.1 Research implications

In the introduction and problem discussion of this thesis, the luxury consumption market was discussed. It was explained as a rising market, due to the economic growth and changes in social classes (Eriksson, Hall & Pettersson, 2012; Wadsten, Henriksson & Henriksen, 2018; Kradschnig, 2015). The research on identity and conspicuous consumption of East Asian societies, specifically, among young adults in Japan and Hong Kong is one of the lesser-explored fields. Instead, a great amount of research has been done on identity and conspicuous consumption patterns of Western societies which differ from East Asian societies. Thus, there was a theoretical need to better understand what influences young adults' identity in regard to conspicuous consumption behaviour in Japan and Hong Kong which was the aim of this research. To study this phenomenon a theoretical framework was therefore created. The theoretical framework was then used in order to collect data about young adults' identities and conspicuous consumption behaviour in Japan and Hong Kong. This study has contributed to further understanding of underlying factors that influence young adults' identity. It was found that social pressure and cultural factors mostly influence the young adults' identity in Japan and Hong Kong which in turn impacts the young adults' conspicuous consumption behaviour. The finding from this study can further be used by future researchers in the field of identity and conspicuous consumption behaviour in Asia.

5.2 Critical review & future research

The authors of this research have some suggestions for further research, due to the limitations and learnings of this study. Firstly, since the authors had a time constraint this research is limited. A greater time span would have allowed the researchers to investigate the subject of

what influences young adults' identity and conspicuous consumption behaviour in Hong Kong and Japan more in depth. Secondly, if the authors had received additional time it would have been possible to conduct a larger data sample. Due to the small sample size the findings are not fully representative of the young adults in Hong Kong and Japan. Lastly, the language barriers limited the authors to get in depth information from certain respondents as some had limited English proficiency. This resulted in a smaller information source since it led to a lot of room for interpretation which could not be used in the analysis.

However, this thesis provides valuable insights about young adults' identities and conspicuous consumption behaviour which can be used as a base for further research. Proposal for future research can be to adopt a quantitative approach in order to make the results more generalizable, since this study has a qualitative approach. Further, the majority of the respondents in this data collection were females thus it could be favourable to engage a larger sample of males which would result in a better gender equalization. Lastly, the results of this thesis indicate that culture highly influences the young adults' identity and behaviour in Hong Kong and Japan. Thus, future research could focus more on the underlying factors to why culture is important which can help understand the young adults even more.

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Appendix 1- Consent form

Introduction of the topic:

We are doing our bachelor's thesis in International Business and Marketing. We want to use this interview to better understand young adults' identity in Japan and Hong Kong in regard to consumption. We have sent you a consent form that we will read out loud

Data storage:

All interview transcripts will be stored in confidence and in accordance with the Data Protection Act as well as the university's general data protection guidelines. If you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of *your* interview transcript.

Anonymity:

Any data that the researcher extracts from this project for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstance, contain names or reveal your identity.

Have you understood the conditions provided and do you agree with it?

Please answer with: I agree, or I disagree as well as your name and today's date.

Appendix 2- Interview guide

General questions:

- Can you tell us what your gender and age is?
- Do you work?
- Do you pay for everything yourself or do you get money from parents? If the answer is yes, how much money monthly?
- How much money do you monthly spend on products such as clothing, shoes, and accessories?
- Can you describe a little about your background: Did you grow up in a poor, average, or wealthy household?
- Growing up, did you feel your parents were comparing you to cousins or your friends when it comes to performance in school, sports, appearance, etc.? Did they, for example, ever compare the way you look and dress to others?

Main questions:

1. Can you describe a little about yourself and your personal style so that we can get an image of who you are? E.g. introvert, extrovert, do you like to dress edgy or classy?
2. Do you enjoy shopping? If yes, why? If not, why not? What type of stores do you enjoy shopping in, cheap or expensive ones?
3. Do you consider the status of a product before buying it? If yes, why? If not, why not?
4. Do you think there are many people in your surroundings for example in university that consume conspicuously? If yes, please describe some. (Conspicuously consumption means buying expensive things, for example, designer bags that you don't really need just to impress others and achieve a higher social status.)
5. Is being fashionable, or attractive important to you? - If yes, how would you want other people to describe your image when they see you for example; elegant, cool, sophisticated, laid back, fancy, etc. - If not, why not?

6. Do you feel that people notice or comment on your appearance often? - Do you think that brands and certain products can make a good impression on your surroundings?
7. How do you think society perceives others based on their clothing? - Do you think fashion can play a role when wanting to enter a certain group of friends? If yes can you give an example?
8. Do you keep up with the newest fashion trends? If yes, why? If no, why not?
9. What brands do you use for more special occasions, for example when going out for dinner, events, or parties?
10. When a product that you own becomes more popular in your surroundings, would you use it more or less? Could you explain why more or less?
11. Do you think fashion is more important in university compared to high school? If yes, why? If not, why not?
12. Do you think someone would have been treated differently if they had a bad or poor appearance in for example junior high or high school?
13. Why do you think people buy luxury branded products? Do you think many young adults buy a product solely because of its brand? If yes, why do you think they do it?
14. Do you think there are many students in your university who use counterfeit products? If yes, why do you think they buy them? If not, why don't you think they would buy counterfeit products?
15. Have you bought a counterfeit product, or would you consider doing it? If not, why not?
16. Do you think luxury clothing has any value in creating and expressing one's identity?

17. How many luxury branded products do you own? Are there any brands that you would like to own more of but can't afford?

18. Do you think people in Asian countries care more about how they look than people in Western countries and why?

In order to build the identity pie-charts of the respondents' identity Mittal's (2006) model was used and explained to the respondents.

This model shows how identity, one's "I", is constructed by six components. These components are basic elements, and everyone has their own build-up of these components in order to form their "I". For example, Bodies may play no role or minimal role in one individual's identity while it may be a huge part for another individual's identity. We want you to look at this model and construct your own identity in percentages depending on what you feel is more important to your identity. For example: "Kevin" defines his "I" by giving each component the following percentage: 20 % his body, 40 % values and character, 10 % success and competence, 15 % social roles, 5 % his traits, and 10 % possessions.

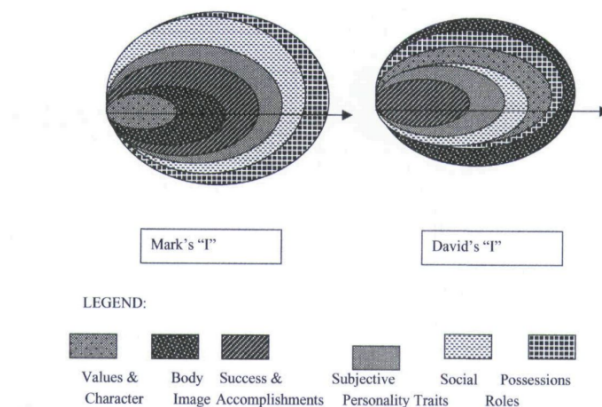


Figure 1. Using components to define the self

Definitions of each component:

1. Value & Character - Values are basically defined as goals in lives that one tries to achieve. Character is defined as someone's behaviour, for example, when it comes to tempting situations such as "whether or not to return the excess change the cashier gave" you.

2. Body image - Relationship between one's body and "I", how much of your physical body that you associate with your identity. For example, Body shape, weight, look and facial appearance.
3. Success & Accomplishments - How you view your competence and success in life affects your own belief of your ability to succeed which in turns affects your self-esteem. For example, material success, career success, skill and competence in specific activities, or accomplishments in life.
4. Subjective personal traits - How much of your identity are reflected by your personal traits Kind of personality, such as shy or rational, sentimental, mature, brave, calm etc.
5. Social roles - How much of your identity do you think is based on the social roles such as your age, sex, race.
6. Possessions - Are the things we both own and possess and how one shows their inner "I" to others through their possessions.