

## **Black urban professionals' motivation for conspicuous and status clothing brand consumption**

Adele Cronje and Bertha Jacobs

Department of Consumer Science, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

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### **Background and Theoretical Framework**

Since the abolishment of the Apartheid regime, the implementation of new reconstruction and development programs aimed at re-balancing economic inequalities played a key role in the social and economic changes taking place in South Africa (Tangri & Southall, 2008). Black consumers now had spending power and social mobility due to higher-paying professional positions and could actively participate in the economy and spend money on luxury items and branded goods (e.g. clothing) (Da Silva, CNBC, 2010). The prominence and prestige associated with brands are used by consumers to communicate their importance and social standing in society and also provide them with a sense of accomplishment (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Previously, the constructs of conspicuous and status consumption were used interchangeably but later research proved these constructs to be empirically different (O'Cass & McEwen (2004). Conspicuous consumption underlines the display of wealth through the consumption of luxurious products and services (Trigg, 2001). While Status consumption is imbedded with a social element. Consumers, who are motivated to enhance their social position and status by acquiring status symbols, are very much attuned to the views of others (Dittmar, 1992). The theoretical framework was adapted from the two-factor Conspicuous and Status Consumption model suggested by O'Cass and McEwen (2004) and also directed the study.

The purpose of this study was to empirically investigate the motivational factors for conspicuous and status clothing brand consumption of Black urban professionals (Buppies) in the South African emerging market. More specifically the study explored the differences in Black urban consumers' clothing brand consumption in terms of motivational factors related to conspicuous consumption (communication of belonging, status demonstration, ostentation) and status consumption (normative receptiveness: value expressiveness and utilitarian influences, high self-monitoring) across different professions.

### **Method**

To investigate the factors that motivate Buppies to engage in conspicuous and status consumption, a survey research design was followed. The sample consisted of 246 Black urban consumers, between the ages of 24 and 36 years, living in Gauteng (an urban metropolitan) and currently working in professional positions. Non-probability sampling methods (purposive and snowball) were employed. Data were collected through a pre-tested self-administered questionnaire developed from existing reliable scales. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  indicated a high reliability (between 0.76 and 0.87) for factors and an allowable reliability for high self-monitoring ( $\alpha = .60$ ). MANOVAs permitted the comparison of means for the dependent variables (communication of belonging, status demonstration, ostentation, value expressiveness and

utilitarian influences, high self-monitoring) across the independent variable (profession) significant at  $p < 0.0001$ . *Post hoc* Bonferroni tests ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) were calculated to ascertain exactly where the differences in the means across various professions occur. To compare conspicuous and status consumption across profession, six groups of related professions were created.

### Results

The *post hoc* Bonferroni test showed mixed support in terms of motivational factors for conspicuous consumption in terms of professions. The means for communication of belonging and status demonstration across the six groups of professions differed significantly but no significant differences for ostentation were evident. The professional groups who are mostly influenced by communication of belonging and status demonstration were Financial, Banking and Corporate as well as Education, Research and Health Care. Findings indicated that although Buppies do enjoy being part of a group, they are not ostentatious in nature and do not necessarily desire to flash their wealth to their reference group through status brands. In terms of status consumption across profession, all three motivational factors (value expressiveness, utilitarian influences and high self-monitoring) were significant at  $p < 0.0001$ . Interestingly, individuals in Education, Research and Health Care professions were significantly more motivated by value expressiveness probably to match their self-image to that of the social world where those in the Legal profession were more inclined to be motivated by utilitarian influence. This might be due to strict dress codes including more corporate 'uniforms' such as business suits, making them less inclined to enhance their image to associate with a specific group. In terms of high self-monitoring, the findings showed that in general Buppies are motivated by high self-monitoring tendencies especially those in Retail, and Marketing Management professions as well as those in Education, Research and Health Care professions.

### Conclusions

Profession proved to be reliable motivational indicator to engage in status consumption and to some extent for conspicuous consumption. Individuals tend to build their identity around what they do for a living or their profession which refers to their achieved identity and dress practices can be linked to the position someone holds in a workplace. With a better understanding of what motivates consumers to purchase clothing brands with associated status retailers and marketers can plan in terms of product assortment, positioning and marketing strategy. Demographic variables such as professions can provide them with ways to segment markets and position status products accordingly.

### References

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