

DECORATIVE CONSUMPTION AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC ANTECEDENTS: REVELATIONS FROM A STUDY ON WRISTWATCHES AND HOUSES AMONG COLOMBO OFFICE WORKERS

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Abstract

Modern day man engages in vicarious consumption patterns in order to showcase wealth, enhance prestige and embrace others' attention through Conspicuousness, Exclusiveness and Emulation. Yet, too little attention has been devoted to this obtrusive consumer desire in Sri Lanka and elsewhere in the world. In light of this, the purpose of this study was to provide a basis to what the authors denote as 'Decorative Consumption' and to examine the impact of socio-demographic determinants in terms of Conspicuousness, Snobbism and Conformism. This paper reports the outcomes of an exploratory survey conducted on 250 employees working within Colombo city limits, under different socio-demographic segments: age, gender, sector, religion and monthly income, employing the cases of wristwatches and houses. Results highlighted that 'sector' has a strong impact on the decorative consumption of wristwatches, as it is prone towards decorativeness in all three dimensions; conspicuousness, snobbism and conformism. 'Age' and 'religion' could influence through conspicuousness and snobbism whereas 'monthly income' could influence through conspicuousness and conformism. In the case of houses, 'religion' appeared prone towards decorativeness in all three dimensions, while 'age' and 'monthly income' are prone to decorative consumption through conspicuousness and snobbism, and 'sector' is prone only through snobbism.

Key Words: Conformism, Conspicuousness, Snobbism, Exhibitionist Urge, Decorative Consumption, Houses, Wristwatches, Colombo-Sri Lanka

JEL Codes: C72, D69, D83, D110, D120

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INTRODUCTION

In many circumstances people quest for ostentatious ownership of goods and services not merely for their use; and at times, they tend to procure expensive items by paying much attention to good's ceremonial efficacy where the underpinning of consumption is driven through non-use forms of consumption patterns that are speculated to be extravagant, luxurious, unique and popular among the community we live in. This obtrusive behavior of man has made him reach to a point where, he pays more attention to 'what is being consumed' rather than 'why it is being consumed for'.

It is this 'exhibitionist nature' of consumption, which is referred to by the authors as 'Decorative Consumption'. It has three different 'roots': (a) Conspicuousness, [buying expensive things to showcase wealth], defined in literature as 'Veblen Effect'; (b) Conformism, defined as 'Bandwagon Effect', reflecting the urge to buy expensive things for being recognized among peers; and (c) Snobbism or buying expensive things to be exclusive over and above others, defined in literature as 'Snob Effect' (Liebenstein, 1950), which cause decorativeness in consumption.

Decorativeness can be uni-dimensional, bi-dimensional or tri-dimensional based on the combination of association of these three causal effects: conspicuousness, snobbism and conformism.¹ Moreover, it precisely depicts the intuitive motives behind the 'lavish demand' leading to purchase of high priced goods and services such as designer wear, branded wristwatches, sports cars, designer handbags, big houses or even liquor. It is this 'decorativeness' common to all three 'push-effects' for expensive purchase of goods and services, which is subject to examination in this research.

This study focuses on the tendencies of decorative consumption patterns under different socio-demographic cohorts among the employees within Colombo city limits. Two cases, namely: wristwatches and houses were chosen for the study, as both are being utilized as visible or rather positional goods as means of felicitous illustration of wealth, exclusiveness and attention over and above their use as a time-keeping device (with regard to wristwatches) and as a shelter for habitation (with regard to houses). Furthermore, the former represents a removable/portable item and the latter represents a fixed asset constituting a relatively larger investment.

Even though a number of research studies on the conspicuousness of wristwatches and houses could be found in literature (Perera, Mudalige & Patabandige, 2013; Searle, 2011; Frank, 1999; Rucker & Galinsky, 2009; Mitchell and Epstein, 1959),

¹ Uni-dimensional when a single 'root' causes exhibitionist consumption, bi-dimensional or tri-dimensional when two or three such root causes respectively get involved.

not many could be found to have focused on the bandwagon and snob effects of the decorativeness. Moreover, many scholars have researched on status consumption and related phenomena in terms of the attributes, reference groups and motives of such behavior (Fan & Burton, 2002); but none has examined decorative consumption in terms of the procurement of wristwatches or houses and socio-demographic drivers behind it. No studies of this nature have so far been conducted pertaining to the Sri Lankan market either.

In light of this, the present study explores the impact of socio-demographic facets (Age, Gender, Religion, Sector and Monthly Income) on decorative consumption of wristwatches and houses based on the three dimensions: conspicuousness, snobbism and conformism, among employees in Colombo.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical reasoning

‘Conspicuousness’ is a phenomenon which is being widely followed in today’s society, and we need not go far to observe such consumption patterns which showcase the superfluous wealth of modern day man. However, not many theories have been proposed in the extensive research conducted on the phenomenon of ‘Conspicuous Consumption’ indicating a solid basis on which people conspicuously consume. Thorstein Bunde Veblen coined the concept of ‘Conspicuous Consumption’ in his globally renowned book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* in 1899. According to him, ‘Conspicuous Consumption is the consumption of choice of articles/goods as an evidence of wealth’ (p.43) and he theorizes that, ‘Indulgence in such consumption patterns is to unroll one’s pecuniary strength’ (p.34). Therefore, it is evident that the higher the price of such goods, the more valuable and aristocratic they would be to the consumer. Studies also show that to specific groups, conspicuous consumption means the ostentation of wealth with symbolic items to gain recognition or status (Chen et al. 2008; Kastanakis and Balabanis, 2014), high self-concept (Sirgy 1982, Kastanakis and Balabanis, 2014) and uniqueness (Tepper-Tian et al. 2001). Reviewing contemporary pertinent literature, Scheetz (2004) defines the concept of conspicuous consumption to be ‘Any consumption behavior where wealth is showcased to others when the good is publicly being consumed’ (p.14).

With regard to the extreme consumer behavior of man, various other scholars have offered insights on buyer motivation to consume, further shedding light on conspicuous consumption behavior in two other aspects known as ‘Snob’ and ‘Bandwagon’. In fact, Duesenberry (1967) has modernized Veblen’s work and developed his own theory labeling the ‘demonstration’ or ‘bandwagon’ effect. In essence, this effect is an attempt to ‘keep up with the Joneses’ in order to preserve

one's self-esteem (McCormick 1983). Contrary to McCormick, Mason (1981) brings in line expressive modern day consumption behavior, which he calls the 'snob' effect. He further asserts his theory to be 'A Reverse Theory of Bandwagon Effect'. Leibenstein (1950) claims that 'All three types of consumer behavior i.e. Conspicuousness, Snobbism and Conformism fall into non-functional demand as the purpose involving in Conspicuousness (Veblen Effect), Snobbism (Snob Effect) and Conformism (Bandwagon Effect) lies on external factors other than the qualities inherent to the commodity' (p.189).

As stated in his work, bandwagon effect is the extent to which the demand for a commodity is increased due to the fact that others are also consuming it. He further explains such behavior as 'Getting in to the swim of the things' (p.189). By the snob effect he refers to the extent to which consumer demand decreases owing to the fact that others are also consuming the same commodity. On the other hand, by the Veblen effect he refers to the phenomenon of conspicuousness where people increase demand in response to its higher price. Having said all that, it is very important to give attention to Leibenstein's special statement in his article where he states that the reasoning behind his approach does not imply that his distinction is necessarily the "correct" one, but only that it is found useful in his analysis (p.189).

Overview of empirical research

Empirical evidence shows that certain demographic groups are more prone to engage in status consumption. Spero and Stone (2004) proves that middle-aged consumers spend more on larger conspicuous products while younger consumers spend more on smaller conspicuous products such as clothing, and as justified by Sundie et al. (2011) men are found to be more conspicuous than women. As per the findings of *Young Professionals' Conspicuous Consumption in Clothing* (Lewis and Moital, 2016), it is noted that, young professionals wear expensive clothing, as it is the easiest way to portray wealth and success. Further, this study has found that low conspicuous individuals are more likely to be within the older age band, married with children and paying a home mortgage while medium and high conspicuous individuals fall within the middle age band (Lewis and Moital, 2016). As demonstrated by Bian and Forsythe (2012) and Sauer and Teichmann, (2013), age of the consumer influences the motives of conspicuous-goods purchasing and influences identity-based motives. According to findings of Belk, (1988); Erikson, (1963); Wooten, (2006), regarding the 'Identity Development Process', especially late adolescents (16–25 years) have the need to align with their peer group. As noted by Gil et al., (2012), it is seen that adolescents purchase what their peers consume. In contrast to this presumption, Erikson, (1963); Sheldon & Kasser, (2001) shows that young adults (26–39 years) as well as middle-aged adults (40–59 years) have a stronger sense of their own identity

and therefore place less emphasis on the expectations of peer groups proving that young and middle aged adults prefer to be unique. According to Bian and Forsythe (2012), consumers intend to purchase brands that possess characteristics representing their identity. Furthermore, as proven by results, the young consumers use luxury brands as a “quality indicator” notifying that people pay attention to intrinsic characteristics of a good and utility when purchasing status goods (Sun, 2013).

According to Sauer and Teichmann (2013), although the influence of gender on conspicuousness has to date received little attention, women are overrepresented in clusters that favor the hedonic value of luxury. As justified by Hennigs et al., (2012) and Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebels, (2009), women have a more positive attitude and a higher purchase intention towards luxury brands than men. They further prove that additionally, for female consumers, luxury brands provide more uniqueness, status and hedonic value than non-luxury brands. However in contrast, Sundie et al. (2011) state men were more conspicuous than women and Lewis and Moital (2016) assert that there was no significant difference across gender found in their findings on conspicuous consumer behavior.

Ning and Mc Aleer (2016) in their research of ‘Theravada Buddhism and Luxury Fashion Consumption’ argues that, a status gap does not actually exist in Thai society, as everyone is a follower of Buddha, so that each individual has already obtained equality in the religious and ephemeral world. Thus, as proven in their study Buddhist Religiosity steers consumers away from such consumption patterns towards real utilitarian aspects of products than the symbolic, snobbish or conformist aspects of consumption through means on simplicity, equality, belief of impermanence and mindfulness.

Mo (2009) in his consumer research on “Chinese Status Consumption and its Segments” proves that, Buddhist practice and Status/Luxury consumption has a negative relationship. Consequently, Zhang and Jolibert (2003) reason out the negative relationship between Buddhist Religiosity and luxurious consumption patterns by stating that Religious values lead to a consumption preference towards utilitarian products but not towards other extreme ends. Stillman et al. (2012) in their study of “The material and immaterial in conflict” proves that, higher levels of spirituality correspond to a decreased desire to consume material goods in a conspicuous manner. Their findings further show that people who reported having spiritual experiences have a decreased desire to spend lavishly for visible consumer goods. Correlational work has found that placing a low value on material possessions is related to decreased use of possessions for self-aggrandizing purposes, such as conspicuous consumption (Christopher, Marek, & Carroll, 2004). Moreover, as Yokokawa (2010) has attempted to apply Buddhist philosophy and practice in his study on ‘Theories of Conspicuous Consumption and Waste’ he asserts that it is

important to avoid greed and desire in order to refrain from Conspicuous Consumption. In short, prior work suggests that materialism is a likely candidate to mediate the relationship between spirituality and conspicuous consumption.

On the other hand, a study on the Korean-Canadian community found that religious people from developing countries tend to be materialistic, relying on material goods to increase their social status (Cleveland and Chang, 2009). This finding can be used to argue that attitudes towards luxury brands serve an important social function in establishing and maintaining a social identity. Japanese Buddhism is more of a supporter of modern consumption patterns with expensive and elaborate funerals (Japan's third largest industry) and temple tourism (Watts and Loy, 1998). They further show that, throughout the Buddhist world, both East and West, mainstream Buddhism is usually a supporter of the present drive for material wealth and spiritual sanctification through conspicuous consumption. From massive donations to temples and monks for religious blessing in Southeast Asia, to 'meditative consumerism' in expensive retreats and ritualistic paraphernalia in the West, to the rise of new schools which teach that material gain is a sign of spiritual blessing; Buddhism seems highly specious as a practice for personal and social transformation of our present economic and social injustices (Watts and Loy, 1998).

From the findings of Sun's (2013) 'Consumption of Luxury Fashion Brands' it is evident that, financial ability strongly influences respondents' luxury consumption and further, respondents who have a better job or/and have another source of income are more likely to purchase luxury fashion branded products. Findings from Vijayakumar and Brezinova (2012) with special reference to Low middle Income and Poor in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, bring to light the fact that income is main determinant of the amount to be allocated but sex and age have insignificant impact on the amount to be allocated for social status or the conspicuous nature of consumer behaviour. In addition, studies show that, conspicuousness continues to be more significant in affluent societies (Hirsch 1976; Podoshen et al, 2011), where higher educated and wealthier individuals have stronger conspicuous signaling needs (Amaldoss and Jain 2005). The findings further prove that poor people are also enthusiastic to have conspicuous consumption to signal that they are better off than before. As Rucker and Galinsky (2009) suggest, high-powered individuals have a stronger preference for quality appeals, while low powered individuals, who are generally younger than high-powered individuals, have a stronger preference for status appeals.

Considering the handful of research conducted in Wristwatches, Searle (2011) asserts that, people tend to buy "replica" wristwatches in order to showcase their status and get along with peers as they cost much less than a Rolex or an Omega. He further shows that,

Consumers are motivated primarily by price, seeking to capture the status qualities of legitimate goods and are willing to sacrifice the functional qualities and this unbundling of status and functional utilities, and subsequent lower price, allow status-conscious consumers to maximize their utility (p.18).

Findings from ‘Occupational Prestige and Social Status’ by Mitchell and Epstein (1959) show that, Wrist Watches are one of the most conspicuously-consumed items personal jewelry. They further assert that, one in four people wear watches as a status symbol. Further, a Patek Philippe wristwatch is one of Frank’s (2009) most compelling arguments for status consumption, which is marketed not as a good, but rather an heirloom. According to his study, wrist watches are a very important part in a person’s life and are considered assets, for which differentiation, feelings of achievement, best quality, being expensive and having great looks are important parameters (Frank, 2009).

Marx once stated:

A house may be large or small; as long as the neighboring houses are likewise small, it satisfies all social requirements for a residence. But, let there arise next to the little house a palace, and the little house shrinks to a hut.

(Marx, 1847, p.22).

According to findings of Perera, Jayasinghe-Mudalige and Patabandige (2012), both the status and utilitarian functions of housing are important in conspicuous behavior of people. It shows that, a person owns a big modern house not only to showcase wealth but also to necessitate the intrinsic value of the House. Moreover, results show that ‘House owners struggle to create social opportunities and to distinguish themselves from others by having a modern and ostentatious house’. According to results acquired, Muslims and Tamils are highly motivated by Veblen effect whereas Sinhalese are more attracted towards the snob effect or towards the uniqueness of houses. Findings also show that the Veblen Effect is highly correlated with income, education and profession of the respondents, whereas the Snob effect would be significantly associated with the place of living, particularly among the urban residents, and a significant correlation also was found between respondents’ gender and the snob effect (Perera, Jayasinghe-Mudalige and Patabandige, 2012, p.121).

METHODOLOGY

This study incorporated an exploratory online survey based on a questionnaire which was conducted on 250 employees within the Colombo city limits on the basis of different socio-demographic cohorts, namely; age, gender, religion, sector and

monthly income.² The study was conducted using the non-probabilistic Snowball Sampling technique, adapted from Lewis and Moital (2016), where sampling is based on finding research subjects through recommendation: i.e., one subject gives the researcher the name of another, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on (Vogt, 1999).

Required information was collected through a closed-ended questionnaire supported by Google forms. The questionnaire was designed to highlight both favorable (positive) and unfavorable (negative) aspects of the three dimensions related to decorative consumption.³ Twenty-three questions in total: eleven for Conspicuousness (including anti-conspicuousness), five for Snobbism (including anti-snobbism) and seven for Conformism (including anti-conformism), were used to explore patterns of decorative consumption and their affiliations to socio-demographic factors on a 1 to 5 Likert Scale (1=Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree).⁴

A ‘Decorativeness Index’ was developed by the authors, to quantify the decorativeness tendencies. It would yield a separate index (Conspicuous Index, Snob Index and Conformity Index) for each of the three different dimensions of decorativeness when survey responses of each individual respondent pertaining to each relevant dimension are taken into consideration. The formulation was such that the decorativeness, in each of its three dimensions, would be measured by taking into consideration the ranks assigned by the respondents on questions which are positively decorative (higher ranks indicating his or her greater Conspicuousness, Snobbism or Conformism for those aspects tested by such questions) as well as negatively decorative (higher ranks assigned indicating Anti-Conspicuous, Anti-Snobbish or Anti-Conformist tendency, as the case may be). The Anti-decorative effects, as reflected in the relevant responses, were reciprocated (in other words, the relevant rank given by the respondent for each such anti-decorative oriented question was subtracted from 6) before averaging the responses to arrive at each of the three indices.

The so developed Decorativeness Index (DI_{ij}) of j^{th} dimension for i^{th} respondent developed by the authors is depicted below:

$$DI_{ij} = [\text{Sum of Positive ranks} + \text{Sum of } (6 - \text{Negative ranks})]_{ij} / n_{ij}$$

² n = 250, age range 15 – 60 years, 117 men and 133 women, 131 Buddhists and 119 Non-Buddhists, 135 private and 115 public and monthly income 0 – 200,00 and above

³ Conspicuousness vs Anti-Conspicuousness, Snobbism vs Anti-Snobbism, and Conformism vs Anti-Conformism

⁴ Refer Annexure-1 and Annexure-2 for the complete set of survey questions

Where, i stands for individual respondent, while $j = 1, 2$ and 3 signifying Conspicuousness, Snobbism and Conformism, respectively; and

n_{ij} = number of questions on j^{th} dimension for i^{th} respondent

In this formulation of Decorativeness Indices DI_{ij} would take values between (and inclusive of) 0 and 5; the higher the DI_{ij} value estimated for any particular decorativeness dimension for any given respondent, the greater being his or her decorativeness tendency vis-à-vis that particular dimension of decorativeness; and vice-versa ⁵.

Descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis using SPSS (version 20.0) were deployed as analytical techniques in examining the research aims.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the case of wristwatches (See Table 1), results revealed that age has a significant effect on aspects of conspicuousness ($F = 15.817, p < 0.05$) and snobbism ($F = 5.563, p < 0.05$) when considering wristwatches. Moreover, there is a downward trend on decorative consumption of wristwatches in terms of conspicuousness and snobbism, as employees grow older [Younger employees between the age group of 15 – 30 are more inclined towards conspicuousness ($\bar{x} = 3.756$) and snobbism ($\bar{x} = 2.733$)].

Considering the reflection of Decorative Consumption in the socio-demographic factor gender, the results affirmed that, there is a significant effect only on snobbism ($F = 4.403, p < 0.05$) even though we expected the gender to have significant effects on conspicuousness and conformism. Quite unexpectedly, males appear to possess a higher tendency ($\bar{x} = 2.672$) to wear expensive wristwatches and to showcase their uniqueness than females ($\bar{x} = 2.396$).

Religion shows having a significant effect on conspicuousness and snobbism when purchasing wristwatches. However, it does not appear significantly associated with conformism. Hindus ($\bar{x} = 3.792$) and Buddhists ($\bar{x} = 3.750$) show greater tendency to wear wristwatches in order to showcase their pecuniary strength, even though Buddhism and Hinduism advocate simplicity and mindfulness in consumption. However, in the case of being exclusive (snobbism), Hindus ($\bar{x} = 2.753$) and Muslims ($\bar{x} = 2.628$) showcased a higher tendency relative to other religions.

It is evident that, sector of employment plays an important role in the decorativeness of wristwatches as it is prone to be decorative in all three dimensions, namely,

⁵ This index could also be formulated such that $0 \leq DI_{ij} \leq 1$. For this, it suffices to divide the numerator in the formula for DI_{ij} by $5(n_{ij})$ rather than by n_{ij} .

conspicuousness ($F = 84.183$, $p < 0.05$), snobbism ($F = 12.421$, $p < 0.05$) and conformism ($F = 4.745$, $p < 0.05$). Results further revealed that employees in the private sector engage in more decorative consumption patterns through engaging in conspicuous ($\bar{x} = 3.854$), snobbish ($\bar{x} = 2.736$) and conformist ($\bar{x} = 3.557$) behavior than those in the public sector. It is possible that the necessity to involve in pecuniary consumption patterns to get socialized (owing to more social gatherings, meetings, parties, etc) directs them more towards decorative consumption patterns.

Table 1: Tendencies of Decorative Consumption - Wristwatches

Socio-Demographic Facet		Dimensions of Decorative Consumption		
		Conspicuousness	Snobbism	Conformism
AGE	15 - 30	3.756	2.733	3.444
	30 - 45	3.273	2.399	3.455
	45 - 60	3.216	2.226	3.496
	Significance of Age	0.000**	0.004**	0.915
GENDER	Male	3.594	2.672	3.444
	Female	3.419	2.396	3.472
	Significance of Gender	0.070	0.037*	0.783
RELIGION	Buddhism	3.750	1.333	3.583
	Hinduism	3.792	2.753	3.433
	Muslim	3.366	2.628	3.576
	Christianity	2.994	1.921	3.369
	Other	3.121	2.355	3.516
	Significance of Religion	0.000**	0.000**	0.756
SECTOR	Public	3.087	2.278	3.343
	Private	3.854	2.736	3.557
	Significance of Sector	0.000**	0.001**	0.030*
MONTHLY INCOME	0 - 49,000	3.741	2.637	3.656
	50,000 - 99,000	3.583	2.541	3.286
	100,000 - 149,000	3.422	2.443	3.527
	150,000 - 199,000	3.079	2.333	3.257
	200,000 & Above	3.587	2.754	3.641
	Significance of Monthly Income	0.001**	0.492	0.002*

Note: Results were computed using alpha = 0.05 (95% Level of Confidence)

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$

Considering monthly income of employees, results reveal that such income is more prone to decorative consumption in terms of conspicuousness ($F = 5.081$, $p < 0.05$) and conformism ($F = 2.907$, $p < 0.05$) and that both the employees in the lowest income band and those in the highest income band are prone to similar patterns. This might be due to the possibility that the lowest income earners imitate the highest income earners' consumption patterns as a means of pretending to be rich.

In the case of houses (See Table 2), age has a significant effect on aspects of conspicuousness ($F = 3.206$, $p < 0.05$) and snobbism ($F = 3.733$, $p < 0.05$). However, it does not appear significantly associated with conformism. Employees between the age group 30 – 45 are more inclined towards decorative consumption of houses in terms of conspicuousness ($\bar{x} = 3.130$) whereas younger employees (between the age group of 15 – 30) are more inclined towards snobbism ($\bar{x} = 2.886$). Further to that, findings clearly show that there is a downward trend towards decorativeness of houses in terms of snobbism, as employees grow older.

Considering the Decorative Consumption patterns pertaining to gender; the results affirmed that, there is a significant effect only on snobbism ($F = 4.058$, $p < 0.05$) and conformism ($F = 10.741$, $p < 0.05$) even though we expected gender to have a significant effect on conspicuousness. The results show quite contradictory tendencies where males appear possessing a higher prevalence to live in a luxurious house (a) to showcase their uniqueness ($\bar{x} = 2.870$) and at the same time (b) to conform to others' choices on having a similar house ($\bar{x} = 2.671$). Given both the cases, results reveal that males are more decorative than females.

Quite unexpectedly religion has significant effects on all three dimensions, conspicuousness ($F = 3.497$, $p < 0.05$), snobbism ($F = 5.695$, $p < 0.05$) and conformism ($F = 2.797$, $p < 0.05$). Christians and Muslims show more prevalence to decorative consumption in terms of conspicuousness ($\bar{x} = 3.233$ and $\bar{x} = 3.184$) and snobbism ($\bar{x} = 2.750$ and $\bar{x} = 2.581$) depicting their exhibitionist urge to showcase pecuniary strength and to become exclusive. However, in the case of being conformist Christians ($\bar{x} = 2.919$) and Buddhists ($\bar{x} = 2.887$) showcased a higher tendency relatively to other religions. According to the findings it is clear that, as a whole, Christians are more prone to decorativeness as they showed higher tendencies towards all three dimensions, whereas Hindus seemed to be the least decorative of all as they indicated weakest in all three dimensions.

With regard to decorative consumption patterns between private and public sector, there is a significant effect only on snobbism ($F = 7.993$, $p < 0.05$) even though it was expected to have an impact on the other two dimensions as well. Out of the two sectors, private sector employees ($\bar{x} = 2.900$) seem to be more engaged in decorative consumption patterns than those in the public sector ($\bar{x} = 2.513$).

It is possible that the necessity to involve in lavish consumption patterns is to get highlighted among their colleagues. Among other possibilities, owning an unusual house in order to escape from guiltiness to hold parties at home might be a case. But, warrants further research.

Table 2: Tendencies of Decorative Consumption - Houses

		Dimensions of Decorative Consumption		
Socio-Demographic Facet		Conspicuousness	Snobbism	Conformism
AGE	15 - 30	2.786	2.886	2.414
	30 - 45	3.130	2.678	2.667
	45 - 60	2.850	2.424	2.326
	Significance of Age	0.042*	0.025*	0.112
GENDER	Male	3.009	2.870	2.671
	Female	2.789	2.592	2.274
	Significance of Gender	0.058	0.045*	0.001*
RELIGION	Buddhism	2.780	2.887	2.460
	Hinduism	2.704	2.101	2.125
	Muslim	3.184	2.702	2.581
	Christianity	3.233	2.919	2.750
	Other	2.524	1.583	1.750
	Significance of Religion	0.008*	0.000**	0.027*
SECTOR	Public	2.955	2.513	2.439
	Private	2.838	2.900	2.478
	Significance of Sector	0.312	0.005*	0.755
MONTHLY INCOME	0 - 49,000	2.427	2.405	2.246
	50,000 - 99,000	2.589	2.663	2.231
	100,000 - 149,000	2.911	2.602	2.361
	150,000 - 199,000	3.109	2.776	2.586
	200,000 & Above	3.193	3.185	3.059
	Significance of Monthly Income	0.015*	0.048*	0.121

Note: Results were computed using alpha = 0.05 (95% Level of Confidence)

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.001

When taking income into consideration, results demonstrate that income could be more prone to decorative consumption in terms of conspicuousness ($F = 3.275$, $p < 0.05$) and snobbism ($F = 2.907$, $p < 0.05$) and that the employees in the higher income bands (with a monthly income over 150,000 rupees) are prone to lavish consumption patterns. It is understood that, the more you earn the more likely you are to own a luxurious unique house to showcase status.

CONCLUSION

The study enabled the development of an ‘index’ which could possibly assign a measurable value for an individual consumer’s decorativeness in consumption, which paved the way for examining decorative consumption patterns among Colombo office workers using the cases of wristwatches and houses. An index estimated above 2.5 would mean ‘above average decorativeness’, and vice versa; and greater index value estimated for any consumer over another with regard to any particular dimension of decorativeness would indicate greater decorativeness in the former’s consumption drive than that of the latter.

The study also enabled examining separately the push-factors behind exhibitionist consumption. This permitted identification of fundamental behavioral differences and affiliations pertaining to different socio-demographic cohorts.

The research suggests that there is a significant tendency to use wristwatches as a “show-casing device” by their purchasers over and above their “time-keeping” use. Quite expectedly, younger employees were found more “decorative” in purchasing wristwatches. However, Buddhists and Hindus were found more conspicuous than other religious groups, which was an unexpected indication of Buddhists and Hindus not following the philosophy of simplicity inherent to such religions. Among other curious revelations were the decorativeness in men vis-à-vis women, and in low income employees over middle income ones.

The former could possibly be a result of women wearing other jewelry to showcase themselves while men has no others than their wristwatch as jewelry, and the latter may be a demonstration of over-expenditure compared to incomes by low-income earners, possibly funded through debts. Understanding the drivers behind such tendencies, which are not adequately revealed through this research, warrants in depth analysis as such kind of understanding might be relevant and useful in defining and pitching fiscal incentives and welfare programs in the economy.

The research also suggests that there is a significant tendency to own/live in a house as a “show-casing device” by their purchasers over and above their mere purpose of gaining shelter for habitation. Quite unexpectedly, younger employees were found more “decorative” in terms of snobbism. Such behavioral patterns showcase

youngsters' preference towards rare expensive things, even though it is a very big investment for an employee in the age band of 15 – 30.

While employees earning higher monthly incomes showcased a higher tendency towards decorativeness in houses in terms of conspicuousness and snobbism, lower income earners showcased the opposite. Such results could be owing to budget constraints inclusive of other important expenses undergone by low-income earners such as basic needs for a daily living.

The results revealed a curious tendency towards decorativeness in men vis-à-vis women, as they showed a higher preference towards both the effects snobbism and conformism than women. It is therefore evident that, men spend more on luxurious houses to be exclusive and to get peers' attraction even though females are generally believed to be more exhibitionists.

The results of this research could be considered useful for professionals in the fields of architecture, interior designing and planning as this reveals interests and intuitive behind owning luxurious houses among employees under different socio-demographic cohorts and it would particularly help architects to understand the drivers and the purposes behind building big houses to perform a perfect job on their task.

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ANNEXURE- 1

Statements used on Likert Scale to explore Decorative Consumption patterns and Socio-Demographic affiliations in the case of wristwatches

Veblen Effect	
Conspicuousness	Anti-Conspicuousness
1. Wearing an expensive watch openly displays wealth and social status 2. The consumption decision of the wristwatch is based on non-utilitarian aspects such as brand and ability to illustrate wealth	1. Wristwatch is only a time piece 2. Wearing a wristwatch is a headache 3. The consumption/purchase of a wrist watch is based on purchasing power, high durability and only the basic functions of the watch
Snob Effect	
Snobbism	Anti-Snobbism
1. The purchasing/consuming decision of a wristwatch is based on the limited edition 2. Wearing an expensive unique watch makes you exclusive as your peers cannot afford one 3. People wear expensive watches to be unique among the rest	1. The purchasing/consuming decision of a wristwatch is be based on the popularity of the watch your peers 2. You prefer to wear a wristwatch which is similar to your peers/colleagues 3. You are attracted to common expensive watches
Bandwagon Effect	
Conformism	Anti-Conformism
1. The purchasing/consuming decision of a wristwatch is based on the popularity of the watch among your peers 2. Wearing an expensive watch helps you to be the center of attraction 3. You are attracted to common things 4. Wearing a luxurious, expensive watch endorsed by a celebrity is in your wish list	1. The purchasing/consuming decision of a wristwatch is based on its uniqueness and the limited edition 2. Wearing a branded watch which is unique enhances your confidence as no one wears a similar watch

ANNEXURE - 2

Statements used on Likert Scale to explore Decorative Consumption patterns and Socio-Demographic affiliations in the case of Houses

Veblen Effect	
Conspicuousness	Anti-Conspicuousness
1. You prefer a modern big mansion which showcases your status	1. The size of house does not matter as long as it provides shelter
2. The purchase /consumption of a house is based on its potential to signal wealth and enhance social status	2. The consumption/purchase of a house is based on the worth (value for money) of the house
3. Living in a luxurious house will uplift your living standards and showcase your stature in the society	3. Living in a luxurious big house is a headache
4. Big houses openly display how rich a person is	4. Excessive spending on houses to showcase wealth is a waste of money and an utter stupidity
Snob Effect	
Snobbism	Anti-Snobbism
1. You prefer a big house with unique architecture	1. The purchasing/consuming decision of a big house is based on the popularity of its features among your peers (such as the size and number of floors)
2. The purchasing/consuming decision of a house is based on the extremely unusual architecture of the house as you are attracted to rare things	2. You prefer to own a luxurious house similar to your friends' houses
3. You prefer to own a unique extravagant house because no one else in the neighborhood owns one	3. You are attracted to big houses because they are common in the community you live in
Bandwagon Effect	
Conformism	Anti-Conformism
1. You prefer a big house which is similar to that of your peers	1. You prefer a luxurious house which is very unique
2. The purchasing/consuming decision of a big house is based on the size of the neighboring and my peers' houses	2. Your demand for a big house will increase if no one else in the neighborhood owns a similar house
3. Social influences affect your desire to have a luxurious house	