

# Conspicuous Consumption of the Elite: Social and Self-Congruity in Tourism Choices

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## Abstract

This paper relies on social and economic psychology to explore how the travel choices of Portuguese citizens, with different status levels in their daily lives, perceive and adopt different conspicuous travel patterns because of public exposure. To account for the moderated role of public exposure on conspicuous travel patterns, 36 Portuguese citizens were interviewed. Q-methods were applied to explore the varying senses of conspicuous travel choices among citizens with different levels of public exposure, both individually and relative to each other. Complementary qualitative methods were applied, in order to explore how the interviewees construct tourism conspicuous meanings that match their social or self-representations. The results suggest that social contexts moderate the ways in which individuals perceive and experience conspicuous travel. Further, the results show that public groups with higher exposure tend to prefer subtle signals of conspicuousness, in order to differentiate themselves from the mainstream.

## Keywords

conspicuous travel, social status, conformity, hedonic value, social contexts, public exposure, Q-methods

## Introduction

Human behavior is driven within social patterns. Although tourism drives human beings to quite different standards of behavior and social experiences, it remains a form of socially driven behavior (Crouch 2013). Tourism motivations that may lead to different patterns of choices are mostly categorized in terms of intrapersonal and interpersonal motivations. McIntosh, Goeldner, and Ritchie (1995) distinguish four categories of motivation: physical, cultural, interpersonal, and status and prestige. In Veblen (1899), status and prestige refers to the status levels that tourists wish to display in order to enhance their social image. This is mostly achieved by choosing conspicuous tourist destinations or experiences (Crouch 2013). The connection between conspicuous consumption and status has been clear since the work of Leibenstein (1950), who found that social status can be enhanced by consuming as others do (bandwagon) or consuming differently (snob). This presupposition has been demonstrated by various authors in different fields. In tourism, these effects have been studied by Correia and Kozak (2012), among others. Conversely, it may be assumed that status plays a critical role in the context of human lives, where individuals of a higher status tend to display their superiority or their conformity with others.

Existing research shows that travel choices are influenced by the desire of tourists to enhance their self-identities and social identities, although in some circumstances tourism

choices are driven more by status superiority than the desire of self-enhancement (Sirgy and Su 2000). This raises a question concerning the level of conspicuousness and luxury of destinations. This does not only include the question of cost, for the search for status is transversal to all human beings, regardless of income levels. So far, research focusing on how people construct destination meanings that enact their self or social representations has been limited (Wang and Morais 2014), although some research highlights the fact that tourism choices, mostly with respect to tourism activities, play a critical role in constructing and reproducing identities (Pudliner 2007; Echtner and Prasad 2003; Urry 2002; Hibbert, Dickinson, and Curtin 2013, among others).

The conspicuousness or inconspicuousness of destinations derives from the destination's image. The image comprises a number of cues that relate to the destination's clientele or to the destination's symbolic value (Sirgy and Su 2000). Social and self-identities relate to the match (or

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mismatch) between the destination itself and tourists' beliefs regarding whether traveling to that destination will enhance their social status (Sirgy and Su 2000). As such, it may be assumed that travel choices are moderated by the level of status or pleasure that tourists are seeking to achieve. It is on the basis of this stated knowledge that the central question addressed in the present research arises: "Under what conditions do private/public self and social identity construct and moderate travel choices?" This research uses an exploratory qualitative analysis to reach an understanding of what destination/experience cues (visibility or conspicuousness) are likely to activate tourists' social status or self-identity (personal pleasure).

The present study explores how and to what extent the innate need for status influences travel behavior, both in those who deal with their public status every day and in those with similar purchasing power but who are less exposed. Status and conspicuous consumption are related, so this research also explores how the public status that people confront in their daily lives moderates their need to travel. This research uses a snowball convenience sample of 36 Portuguese citizens, 27 of whom can be classed as members of a "public exposed group" (of famous and public persons). The remaining group, composed of ordinary individuals of similar economic levels, is introduced to control for the heterogeneity of perceptions and meanings that each group tends to express. The study tests how these different groups perceive conspicuous destinations and experiences, both internally and outwardly. Content analysis was used to understand how the participants perceive conspicuous tourism and how they engage in it.

## Status and Conspicuous Travel Choices

Veblen (1899) was one of the first researchers to state that consumer behavior is mostly driven by the wish to communicate possessions and identities (Belk 1988). This display of status is commonly referred to as conspicuous consumption (Woodside 2012), and is assumed to be a privilege exclusive to the upper social classes. The term "conspicuous consumption" refers to socially signaled consumption that sustains or enhances an individual's social position. After Veblen, other authors have developed research in this area that explores the forms of social behavior that are motivated by people's desire to imitate or to distinguish themselves from others (Leibenstein 1950). This is the so-called snob or bandwagon effect. Vigneron and Johnson (1999) advanced the view that aside from the bandwagon or snob effect, individuals may opt for conspicuous consumption to enhance their self-esteem. These authors also advanced the view that persons with a high public consciousness are more likely to adopt conspicuous signaling consumption than others, whereas persons with high levels of private consciousness may adopt conspicuous consumptions patterns with subtle signals, as these are driven by their own pleasure (Berger and Ward

2010). Conversely, Rucker and Galinsky (2008) show that low social level can increase the willingness of consumers to pay for status-related products.

Furthermore, economic psychology establishes that conspicuous consumption is inherent to the human condition, as high levels of status desires will lead individuals to be more prone to making conspicuous choices, whatever the price of the product (Woodside 2012). These social desires may lead persons to sacrifice the necessities of life in order to be able to afford a certain amount of what is considered a suitable amount of "wasteful consumption." This is a very common form of behavior (Woodside 2012). Schor (1999) suggests that consumer spending is mostly driven by a comparative process, whereby individuals try to stay within the norms of their reference group. Following Duesenberry's (1949) snob and bandwagon effects, Schor (1999) shows that Americans tried to "keep up with the Joneses" during the 1950s and 1960s, and are nowadays more likely to establish comparisons with the upper middle class and the rich, thereby enhancing their social status through the snob effect.

Similarly, Frank and Levine (2006) argue that expenditure spillover effects start from the bottom: that is, when the richest engage in certain forms of behavior, the class immediately below will follow. This chain effect persists, giving rise to what Sirgy and Su (2000) describe as the ideal social self-image (where people sacrifice necessities to obtain what they think may give them the status needed to be recognized as members of the class in which they wish to belong). In fact, possessions and behaviors act as signals of identity (Berger and Heath 2007; among others), and function as a fence or a bridge in interpersonal interaction. People consume in order to classify themselves as well as to communicate with others (Douglas and Isherwood 1978; Holt 1995), and they use consumption to form inferences about the social identities, preferences, and social class of others (Belk, Bahn, and Mayer 1982; Burroughs, Drews, and Hallman 1991; Holt 1995).

The definition of conspicuous consumption is closely related to status-driven behaviors. According to Bourne (1957), this is a multidimensional construct that comprises two values—exclusiveness and visibility—which moderates reference-group influence on consumer decisions. Subsequently, Bearden and Etzel (1982) operationalized exclusiveness as the distinction between luxury and necessity, and visibility as the distinction between public and private consumption. Richins (1994) categorized visibility as the differentiation between the public and private meanings of possessions and consumptions. As such, only visible consumption may ensure the desired level of recognition, where products are recognized as status-signaling or conspicuous (McCracken 1988; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Escalas and Bettman (2005) show that persons tend to flag their social identity on different levels and in different ways. As income and wealth are not sufficient to define social class, education and culture also moderate status-driven behaviors. Brooks

(2001) suggests that educated elites tend to reject traditional status symbols, preferring subtle signals that are visible only within their own social groups (Berger and Ward 2010).

In the field of tourism research, research into status-driven consumption is very scarce (Correia and Moital 2009), despite the existence of evidence suggesting that travel choices are mostly moderated by status (Todd 2001; Riley 1995; Correia and Kozak 2012). This suggests that while tourists may not, in some cases, be comfortable with traveling, they may still participate in tourist activities due to the associated status of those activities. It is a matter of consensus that luxury consumption is related to prestige brands or destinations (Weber and Dubois 1995), where prestige is the benchmark for measuring the level of status that luxury consumption and tourism may bestow on consumers. On the other hand, status is the consequence of prestige-worthy behavior that could also be explained by the romantic ethic, that is, the need to engage in ideal rather than utilitarian consumptions (Campbell 2005). Further, possessions and behaviors play an important role in interpersonal interaction (Berger and Ward 2010). Consumption is therefore the bridge or the fence to approaching or distinguishing social groups (Berger and Ward 2010). Tourism choices are not exceptions, and tourists tend to choose in accordance with their self or social identities (Crouch 2013).

Status also lies in tourists' ability to travel and in the tourism destinations themselves (Riley 1995). Destination attributes are regarded as referents of status for particular destinations: these include its distinctiveness, uniqueness, and worldwide recognition (MacCannell 1976). Tourists' attitudes, adventurism, and spontaneity in particular (as well as windfall opportunities of time and money) are also status conferents (Coleman 1983). The frequency and variety of travel experiences are perceived as instances of status differentiation (Crompton 1979). Crompton argues that conspicuous potential disappears with frequency of exposure. In other words, when the number of people visiting a tourist attraction increases, the status of the destination tends to decrease, since rarity is lost with the increase in the number of people undertaking the relevant behavior. Furthermore, repeat visits to the same destination become commonplace, and thus the destination becomes less worthy of status consideration (Crompton 1979).

Correia and Kozak (2012) demonstrate that status-seeking behavior may persist even in repeat visits, whether for the purpose of conformity (to be in a place where most of the people are—the bandwagon effect) or to differentiate (visiting the same destination but in a different manner—the snob effect). Tourism is also driven by interpersonal and intrapersonal axes. At least the following three values may be invoked to explain conspicuous consumption in general and conspicuous tourism in particular: conformity, snobbism, and hedonic value (Correia and Kozak 2012; Correia and Moital 2009; Kapferer 1998; Tsai 2005; Vigneron and Johnson 1999; Wiedmann, Hennigs, and Siebels 2009; Zhou and Wong 2008).

These values were previously referred to using different terminology, but, even if some slight differences can be discerned, their essential meaning remains the same. Above all, the main values describing conspicuous consumption (whether relating to products or tourism) are conformity, snobbism, and hedonism. Conformity and snobbism rely on interpersonal influence being conferent of status by peer group acceptance or emulation (Mason 1993). Conformity refers to the behaviors or attitudes that conform to social norms, in strict accordance with peer-group membership (Kotler 1965). Thus, through destination choice, tourists conform to the opinion of their peer groups. Social compliance leads tourists to the same places that the majority goes to or recommends. What Leibenstein (1950) calls the bandwagon effect refers to the desire of people to purchase a commodity in order to conform to the behavior of those people they wish to be associated with, in order to be fashionable or stylish. Therefore, individual demand for a destination tends to increase when many others also demand that destination.

In terms of tourism, holidays in popular destinations where many others go are perceived as being able to confer the level of compliance tourists seek within their peer groups, and also relate to prestige-worthy behavior, which is able to confer status. Snobbism refers to uniqueness and distinctiveness. Tourists who exhibit snobbish behavior wish to be different and exclusive; the desire to differentiate and distance themselves from the “common herd” is a driver of this behavior. Here, demand decreases if the tourist concerned recognizes that others are consuming the same commodity or increasing their consumption. In tourism, experiences that are out of the ordinary (exclusivity) or unique travel experiences (uniqueness) give tourists a sense of prestige, conferring status through a perceived increase in their social standing and the sense that others will be impressed. Both these interpersonal values may be regarded as antecedents of a behavior that is mostly driven by the desire for social status (consequent). Social status refers to the social recognition / uniqueness or the conformity of tourist behavior that others may confer upon a certain tourist (Kapferer and Bastien 2009). Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) argue that every person has a self-conception that they seek to enhance through the consumption of goods as symbols. Mason (1981, 1984) posits the view that the pursuit of status is the most important motive in conspicuous consumption, and that this motive exists across all social classes (Eastman, Goldsmith, and Flynn 1999).

Consumers tend to purchase conspicuous products in order to express personal distinction and establish social identity (Batra et al. 2000). Hedonic value refers to an essential element that individuals perceive in forming their own hedonic experience, which is self-determined (Snell, Gibbs, and Varey 1995). Pleasure has been considered to be the primary motivator for people's behavior (Dube and Le Bel 2001). Emotional and affective values, like aesthetic beauty and excitement, are essential characteristics of conspicuous goods (Wiedmann, Hennigs, and Siebels 2009). People tend

to buy goods to satisfy their own hedonic requirements (Dubois and Laurent 1995; Tsai 2005). Dubois and Laurent (1996) maintain that an increasing number of consumers purchase conspicuously, primarily in order to gratify themselves rather than to impress others. This tendency is more obvious in people with high personal orientation (Vigneron and Johnson 1999). Hedonic value and social status should be regarded as consequents, for while hedonic value refers to the functional value of the consumptions or leisure experiences, social status refers to the social value of these commodities.

## Methodology

In order to elicit the most relevant facets of conspicuous travel choices of Portuguese public exposed individuals, and as a result of the exploratory nature of our study, qualitative methods were adopted. The research aims to assess Portuguese public exposed individuals' perceptions of conspicuous travel choices. Public exposed individuals are people who exert a significant influence on several facets of society, ranging from the arts, music, movies and television, sports, culture, politics, religion; this group even includes Socialites, who have no defined careers apart from looking beautiful and attending the right events. Because of the status of these individuals, they were very difficult to reach, and it was an even more complex task to convince them to participate in this research. According to Fink (1995), snowball sampling is the best way to obtain participants for this kind of study. Snowball sampling is a type of non-probability sampling that ensures purposiveness rather than random sampling (Miles and Huberman 1994). The method consists of asking individual participants to invite other colleagues of the same group to participate as well (Hauck and Stanforth 2007). Theoretical sampling considers unique combinations of case profiles, across a range of four to seven attributes (Woodside et al. 2005), and recommends five to eight interviews per cell (McCracken 1988; Woodside, MacDonald, and Burford 2005).

In this study, 27 public exposed individuals were interviewed. There were nine in each social group, plus an additional nine-person control group, comprising ordinary people, to account for heterogeneity. By doing this, we assumed that public exposed individuals perceive tourism differently from ordinary people; moreover, within this group, we predicted that there would be different perceptions (Musicians, Reporters, and Socialites). Therefore, we were able to identify four different groups: our sample contains nine Musicians, nine Reporters working for social and fashion magazines, nine Socialites, and nine ordinary individuals. Despite the recommendations of McCracken (1988) and Woodside, MacDonald, and Burford (2005), this sample is only representative of the respondents' behavior. When the research was carried out, the Celebrity respondents were the most famous people in the fields of Portuguese music,

magazines, and among socialites. The Musicians group included pop and rock stars, some of whom were internationally renowned. In the Reporters group, we selected those who work on TV or gossip and fashion magazines, and the Socialites were invited on the basis of their visibility in these magazines over the past year. The group of ordinary people mostly consisted of people with considerable experience of traveling abroad, such as professors, pilots, and entrepreneurs, all of whom had very similar levels of purchasing power as the public individuals. This allowed us to collect tourism experiences, because in Portugal, tourism abroad is only available for a very restricted sector of the population (in 2012 Portuguese tourists in foreign countries represented 2.3% of the total inhabitants; INE 2013). As we wished to conduct research that included the most famous people at that time, the number of interviews was necessarily limited, because of the problem of accessibility.

The interview guide was based on "a progressive and humanistic approach" (Guba and Lincoln 1994), moving from topic to topic in order not to disorientate respondents. Accordingly, the aims of the research were as follows: (1) to analyze how the interviewees define conspicuous experiences in a tourism context; (2) to depict how individuals with a high socioeconomic status and different levels of public exposure, interests, and opinions perceive conspicuous tourism; (3) to understand to what extent conspicuous travel choices relate to public or private self-identity; (4) to account for heterogeneous perceptions across the groups.

The interview script was divided into three sections: The first section characterized the participants' tourism experiences and invited the interviewees to describe a conspicuous tourism experience in geographical and personal terms. The second section invited the interviewees to talk about their previous experiences of conspicuous tourism. The third section, quantitative in its essence, aimed to get participants' overall perceptions of conspicuous values tourism experiences and travel choices. The four perceived values of conspicuous tourism—conformity, snobbism, social status, and hedonic value—were measured with relevant items adapted from the existing literature. A five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "totally disagree" to "totally agree" was used in order to test the respondents' heterogeneous perceptions of tourism conspicuousness. The last section dealt with the respondents' social profile. The interview script was pre-tested among a total of five students and professors and, as the interview was performed in Portuguese, a translated version of the interview was pretested among five English tourists in Portugal, and then retranslated to ensure that the meanings of constructs were not lost across the translation procedures. Most of the interview was an unstructured narrative, aiming to elicit information about tourism conspicuous perceptions that are relevant to Portuguese public individuals (see Denzin and Lincoln 2011). On average, each interview lasted about 1.5 hours. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed into English. Interviews were chosen as the most

appropriate technique for getting a holistic interpretation of the interviewees' perceptions, including their past and present contexts and their travel choices. A content analysis of each interview was carried out in order to identify the major themes or clusters appearing in the texts (Miles and Huberman 1994).

Content analysis was used in order to interpret the interviewees' verbalizations (Jennings 2010), since it provides detailed information that allows for interpretation on various levels and according to different contexts. The set of statements derived from the literature was assessed by means of empirical exploratory research—the Q-Method. This method allows for the exploration of the subjective dimensions of any issue, where a number of different viewpoints may arise, in order to depict the shared views of the respondents (McKeown and Thomas 1988). The study combined quantitative and qualitative approaches (Brown 1996) in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the meaning of conspicuous travel choices via the four values outlined in the literature—snob and bandwagon effect (social identity) and hedonic value, which refers to the tourist's self-identity. A qualitative factor analysis was performed, with each of the 36 participants required to sort 32 statements taken from the literature. Other research using the Q-method proposes a sample of 30 (Brown 1996), but with a sample of 36 it is possible to achieve the same results. The Q sorting process required each participant to classify how each statement reflected their own subjectivity, ranging from “totally agree” (5) to “totally disagree” (1). The Q-factor analysis clustered respondents rather than variables (Stenner, Cooper, and Skevington 2003). Persons with the same point of view on the values of conspicuous travel choices were grouped into the same cluster. A factor loading was determined for each Q sort, expressing the extent to which it is associated with each factor. The number of factors in the final set depends on the variability in each of the elicited Q sorts (Brown 1996). This set of factors was then rotated, and examined from different angles. This rotation was performed in accordance with a statistical principle. The interviews were used to gain a deeper understanding of the subjective opinions depicted in the factor analysis.

## Results

From the data generated in this study, a total of three factors emerged for interpretation, each with an eigenvalue greater than 1.5. Two factors emerged for the Musicians group, suggesting that travel choices assumed two different forms. These two factors together explained 59% of the study variance. For the Reporters group, two factors also emerged, with eigenvalues of 4.9 and 1.6, together explaining 72% of the total variance. The same happened in the Socialites group (where two factors emerged, accounting for 63% of the total variance) and in the Ordinary group, where two factors had eigenvalues of 3.4 and 1.8, together accounting for 53% of

the total variance). In each of the groups, between 80% and 100% of the respondents load at least one of the three groups. The two distinct viewpoints of musicians regarding their travel choices, extracted through the Q sorts, rely on Hedonic values or self-fulfillment (Factor 1) and social identity, wherein a bandwagon effect is more than evident (Factor 2). This is illustrated in Table 1.

Factor 1 (with an eigenvalue of 3.8): The musicians featured strongly within adventures and experiences; they make travel choices to pamper themselves. They prefer unique destinations where they do not run the risk of being recognized or censored. They prefer destinations with fame and prestige. Although they prefer unique destinations, they do not avoid the places where most of their friends go. This suggests that they are more concerned with consuming tourism in private rather than as a status product to gain the respect of others, or with the photos that are taken to show to others as evidence that they have been there.

Factor 2 (with an eigenvalue of 1.57): Status travel choices for musicians are in conformity with those of their family and friends. They satisfy their wish for social emulation by following the recommendations of friends and family, or they go to the places where most of the others go. They disagree with traveling to places where their friends have never been, suggesting that they achieve social conformity through the “keeping with the Joneses” bandwagon effect (Leibenstein 1950).

This diversity of viewpoints clearly demonstrates that tourists interpret their travel choices in a very personal way. Whereas musicians search for pleasure and the emulation of their family, reporters, who are not so public exposed in their daily lives, distinguish two factors in their personal perspectives on conspicuous travel choices: Factor 1 (hedonic, with an eigenvalue of 4.9) represents the hedonic view that relies on total agreement with sharing knowledge of their travel experiences with others, whether through conversation or photographs. Traveling to unique destinations and developing new friendships are their way of having conspicuous experiences when traveling. The total disagreement with buying shirts, with traveling to familiar destinations, and with going to places where their friends want to go, suggests that they are only concerned with their own pleasure, and not with the public signaling of their choices. Either talking or taking photographs is their way of documenting holiday experiences, and this is not done to gain status but because of their jobs (Reporters). Factor 2 (social identity, with an eigenvalue of 1.6) suggests full conformity with their families and friends, as suggested by their total agreement with spending a good time with the family or accepting the recommendations of their peers (see Table 2).

In contrast, Socialites understand the *bandwagon effect* as the way to be in conformity with their family and friends (Factor 1, with an eigenvalue of 4.25). Considerations of *social status* and social identity lead them to a very publicly exposed and conspicuous way of traveling (Factor 2, with an

**Table 1.** Distinguishing Statements by Factor for Musicians.

Items	Factor 1		Factor 2	
	Q-Sort Value	Z-Score	Q-Sort Value	Z-Score
6 Visit a place where I could maximize my experience	2	1.8		
11 The holidays are my gift, my way of pampering me	2	1.38		
5 I like adventures and risk situations	2	1.35		
4 I like to travel to places to where very few people travel	1	0.53		
22 When on vacation I like to have a good time without being censored	0	0.38		
23 When I choose my holiday destination I look for places where I will not be recognized	0	0.21		
2 I like to visit places with fame and prestige	0	0.1		
24 To take pictures and show them to others	0	-0.21		
8 I always choose destinations that I have not visited yet	-1	-0.71		
19 To gain others' respect	-2	-0.8		
9 I like to visit fashionable destinations	-2	-1.33		
25 I always bought a T-shirt with the name of the place where I have been	-2	-1.89		
30 The holidays are a way of achieving my dreams			1	0.76
32 Visiting a destination my family and friends recommend			2	1.37
13 Going to places my friends want to go			0	0.28
1 I like to visit places where my friends have never been			-1	-0.074
Eigenvalues	3.8		1.57	
% Explained variance	42		17	
Composite reliability	0.952		0.941	

**Table 2.** Distinguishing Statements by Factor for Reporters.

Items	Factor 1		Factor 2	
	Q-Sort Value	Z-Score	Q-Sort Value	Z-Score
16 I like to talk about my travel experiences with other people	2	1.75		
30 The holidays are a way of achieving my dreams	2	1.27		
4 I like to travel to places to where very few people travel	1	0.53		
24 To take pictures and show them to others	1	0.4		
18 Developing close friendships	1	0.33		
25 I always bought a T-shirt with the name of the place where I have been	0	-0.17		
5 I like adventures and risk situations	0	-0.19		
7 I like to visit familiar destinations where I can feel at home	-1	-0.58		
8 I always choose destinations that I have not visited yet	-1	-0.63		
13 Going to places my friends want to go	-2	-1.13		
17 Being entertained			2	1.37
15 Visiting a place where I could spend good time with family			2	1.37
12 I like to visit destinations recommended by my family and friends			2	1.49
Eigenvalues	4.909		1.567	
% Explained variance	55		17	
Composite reliability	0.966		0.889	

eigenvalue of 1.547). Such attributes as outrageous spending, outstanding quality, prestige, and luxury are determinants of their choices (Table 3).

With respect to ordinary people's perspectives on conspicuous travel choices, two distinct influential factors emerged. Through the lenses provided by the typical Q sorts,

the nature of these relationships within the tourism setting may be interpreted (Table 4).

Factor 1 (with an eigenvalue of 3.4367): Status is a dominant theme that emerged for ordinary people. They signal their travel choices with T-shirts and the outstanding quality of familiar destinations. This factor is polarized in their positive

**Table 3.** Distinguishing Statements by Factor for Socialites.

Items	Factor 1		Factor 2	
	Q-Sort Value	Z-Score	Q-Sort Value	Z-Score
32	Visiting a destination my family and friends recommend	2	1.33	
20	Developing close friendships	2	1.33	
17	Being entertained	2	1.29	
11	The holidays are my gift, my way of pampering me	2	1.16	
5	I like adventures and risk situations	1	0.65	
15	Visiting a place where I could spend good time with family		2	1.47
24	To take pictures and show them to others		2	1.81
27	In holidays I prefer outstanding quality		2	1.46
26	While on holidays I tend to exaggerate on spending		1	0.91
3	Prestige and luxury are determinant for my vacation choice		1	0.91
Eigenvalues		4.25	1.547	
% Explained variance		47	16	
Composite reliability		0.96	0.889	

**Table 4.** Distinguishing Statements by Factor for Ordinary People.

Items	Factor 1		Factor 2	
	Q-Sort Value	Z-Score	Q-Sort Value	Z-Score
7	I like to visit familiar destinations where I can feel at home	2	1.08	
26	In holidays I prefer outstanding quality	1	0.54	
25	I always bought a t-shirt with the name of the place where I have been	0	0.09	
11	The holidays are my gift, my way of pampering me	-2	-0.91	
28	I like to talk about my travel experiences with other people	-2	-0.91	
30	The holidays are a way of achieving my dreams	-2	-0.91	
9	I like to visit fashionable destinations		2	1.12
27	In holidays I prefer outstanding quality		1	0.45
2	I like to visit places with fame and prestige		1	0.76
13	Going to places my friends want to go		-2	-1.8
Eigenvalues		3.4367	1.7939	
% Explained variance		38	15	
Composite Reliability		0.889	0.952	

and negative statements. Self-fulfillment and pleasure are not an issue for them, and this is in accord with a very collectivist view of Portuguese culture (Correia, Kozak, and Ferradeira 2010). Factor 2 (with an eigenvalue of 1.79): Snobbism places outstanding quality, prestige, luxury, and fashionable destinations as critical determinants of travel choices. This signals their conspicuousness when traveling to places where their friends are not able to go.

## Discussion

We have considered some results of the research, specifically the emergence of the distinctive factors of conspicuous travel choices, discussed by means of Q-methods. We will now enhance that discussion by exploring the interview responses. Transcripts were kept by interviewees to capture their original perceptions. Qualitative analysis allows for in-depth

perception of the meanings of conspicuous travel choices according to social groups. When the interviewees were asked, "What is the most conspicuous travel experience you can remember?" their answers enlightened us as to what they valued the most. Some excerpts from the interviews are included below, describing the interviewees' experiences inside and outside of Portugal.

The Musicians seemed to value conformity with their family (four out of the nine respondents refer to family, and five refer to the companionship of their wife) or with their companion, in scenery in which they could have fun without being censored (two out of nine refer to being uncensored, whereas three refer to anonymity). They tended to spend too much money (five out of nine mention expensiveness, and four refer to outrageous spending) and to taste the local gastronomy (three out of nine). Gastronomy emerged as a theme in all the groups, suggesting that the Portuguese prizing of

“good gourmet” experiences very highly is an engrained cultural value. The destination could be in Portugal or abroad: the places where the musicians had experienced their most conspicuous holidays were Alentejo, a rural and restful plain where they could remain anonymous, the Algarve, a destination recognized worldwide for its sun and sand and gastronomy, and elsewhere (e.g., Brazil or the Orient).

The first time I visited Cacela in the Algarve was six years ago, in a bright summer. I was with my present companion. *I don't know how much I spent...* The fish and seafood were exquisite but I guess the highlight was swimming all the way across Ria Formosa! *I still remember the velvet touch of the water on my body...*

Maybe Macau, in the 90s, with my wife. The smells, the popular streets, a first contact with the Taoist philosophy, but also the contrasts between the two cultures (western and eastern) which in those days converged in their original organic laws. I tasted the flavors of the local gastronomy, I spent an outrageous amount of money, much more than I usually spend when visiting European countries. It was good to walk around town without being recognized...

I enjoy the Alentejo coastline. I love deserted places and outstanding sceneries, where I can enjoy my family companionship and have a good time being myself, feeling relaxed and uncensored.

Therefore, the emulation of family and hedonic value drove their desires to have a conspicuous experience, as shown in the above excerpts from their narratives.

In the Reporters group, the perceived hedonic value was more closely related to learning and social knowledge. Snobbism or conformity was not as evident as in other groups. The excerpts analysis suggests a certain reminiscence of their normal occupation—journalism—as in their daily life they are forced to write gossip stories about other people's lives. While on holiday, they looked for learning and knowledge of local cultures (five out of nine refer to cultures, and four refer to knowledge):

India, for one week, with friends, €3,000. I remember the visit to Taj Mahal, a beautiful world heritage icon, and the social differences . . . so manifest, so shocking . . . the will to help everybody and everywhere and the total incapacity to do so.

New York, with friends, a five star hotel in Times Square. One week, three thousand euros . . . it was like living in a movie . . . the imaginary [scene] of Starbucks [Cafe], the snow, lights everywhere, Christmas celebrations.

A week in the Azores Islands: 12 hours in S. Miguel; two days at Pico Island and the rest of the time at Terceira Island. I went with my sister. I spent around €4000 on these trips, not including the accommodation. My experiences: boat trip from one island to the other, wandering about S. Miguel to visit furnas [natural steam boilers that emerge from the soil, where the local

inhabitants cook special traditional dishes]; the local festivities at Terceira island, the gastronomy, beautiful landscapes in general, but specially Terceira, the visit to the grouts.

The group of Socialites was more likely to associate conspicuous tourism experiences with being recognized and with gaining popularity. An analysis of the transcripts reinforces the social importance of tourism for this group, as well as its associated status, since they photographed (in three out of nine cases) everything, to show to others. Recognition is associated with photos (in four out of nine cases), as stands out from their interviews:

Three weeks alone in Serra da Estrela. I intended to be isolated so I would enjoy a more special experience. Actually, in that way, you “live” all the different aspects of a destination and you absorb its energy . . . and it also becomes easier to understand the host community. I don't remember how much I spent, but I was recognized by everybody, it was very gratifying!

So many: Cuba, my husband, our friends found it too basic; I made a lot of friends for life, I saw their houses, I went to private parties in their homes, I tried their food and dishes.

I enjoy doing sports, but photography is my hobby. . . . Food and beverages, the friendliness of the residents, they recognized me and were really welcoming . . . that's what really struck me.

Ordinary people were looking for exquisite experiences, with these being experiences they perceived as the most conspicuous. Striking sceneries, different cultures, and contact with natives (as well as good gastronomy) were the main drivers of their conspicuous touristic experiences, where hedonic (five out of nine interviewees refer to striking scenery) and snobbism (four out of nine interviewees refer to uniqueness) drove what they expected would confer social recognition upon them. This is illustrated by the following transcripts:

Our holidays in the Maldives, we stayed in a bungalow in an atoll; striking scenery, I guess it was paradise.

We went to the north of Portugal, we passed by small villages where we could appreciate the people, their habits, the exquisite gastronomy, the unique scenery, striking natural parks in a very relaxing ambience.

The different ways of perceiving these conspicuous tourism experiences was even more evident in the participants' definitions when they were asked, “How do you define a conspicuous tourism experience?” The transcripts by social group reinforce how they perceived conspicuous tourism experiences that, if not yet lived through, relied on imagination.

For these Portuguese social groups, conformity with family and friends' expectations was the primary motivation for engaging in conspicuous tourism experiences, this being a



sign that the social value of tourism prevailed in deciding their holiday destinations. This is in accordance with the collectivist cultural value of Portuguese society, as suggested by Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions. The influence of family and friends on leisure decisions is also corroborated by research by Reis and Correia (2013a, 2013b), who posit this as the major interpersonal facilitator to participation in leisure activities. Although the strong presence of some cultural values was more than evident for the Musicians, family always came first at the time of choosing their dream holiday (six out of nine refer to family, and three refer to friends). They aimed to get away from the common social etiquette or code that normally inhibited them, in order to have fun with their companions without being censored (four out of nine interviewees refer to being uncensored on their speeches). Furthermore, the destination did not matter to them, as long as they could remain anonymous (in four out of nine cases) in a pleasant place where they could have fun with their friends or family. Excerpts from their interviews provide compelling evidence for these conclusions:

A conspicuous trip always presupposes transcendence. A manner of going out of our normal way of being in our daily lives and, in that sense, a trip becomes essentially our own opening onto the world outside.

Fundamentally, the company of my family and my friends; when you're in good company, the destination and conspicuous perks become irrelevant.

Any destination, as long as it is with my family, and in a place where I won't be recognized.

Non-planned trips, the taste of adventure.

For this group, comprising those who are used to dealing with crowds, their holiday preferences were focused on being with their family outside the influences of their popularity; unplanned destinations without frills, in contrast with the Reporters, who tended to persist in relating conspicuousness with destinations full of history, and with experiences capable of providing them the hedonic pleasure of learning about other cultures. One reporter said,

Locations that are politically safe, hot climate, nice beaches. Different cultures, and experiences of tasting the food and learning about the way of life of the inhabitants of a certain place.

In contrast, the Socialites related conspicuousness to holidays paid for by others (two of the respondents refer to offered holidays), and reported favoring those travel experiences capable of giving them the sense of social status that drives their lives; parties (according to two respondents) and social recognition (three respondents explicitly assumed the need for social recognition, whereas only two refers to social needs) drove their perceptions of conspicuousness:

Zanzibar, with my girlfriend, at a local lodging. I would engage on some sort of photography work and travel writing, in order to share it with my friends.

Any paradisiacal place, an offered trip, no "spending money" whatsoever.

Ordinary people chose instead to differentiate themselves from others; for this group, it emerged that experiencing thrills and adventures in a pleasant and exquisite destination were the most valued perceptions of conspicuous tourism:

The trip that will make me feel in heaven, open my mind, be myself, enrich myself, and make me feel like a real person.

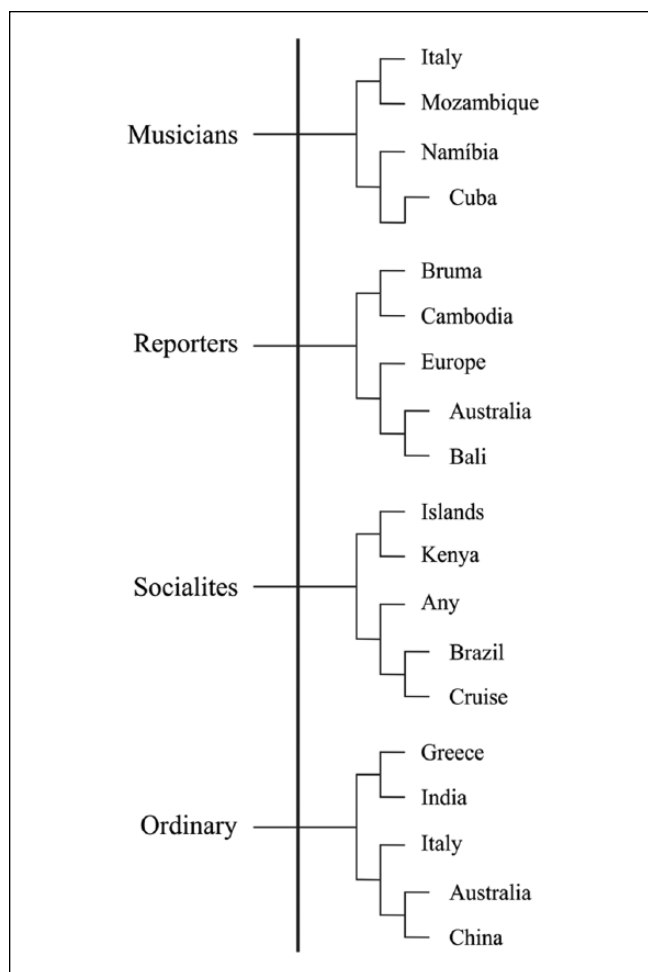
Striking, breathtaking scenery, staying at a very comfortable place . . . maybe in a palace, those that are now used as hotels, a destination where I can learn more about different peoples and cultures.

Riley (1995) contends that conspicuousness is perceived more in the manner of traveling than in the destination chosen. To some extent, this was corroborated by the results of this study, since for most of the participating social groups, the destination was not the most relevant attribute in defining conspicuous holidays. In fact, the content topics amounted to a total of 307, of which 126 referred to a destination or destination attributes. Nevertheless, in order to assess the level of conspicuousness afforded to different destinations, the participants were asked: "What were the destinations you would choose to have a conspicuous experience?"

A cluster analysis by social group was performed, based on a Pearson correlation. Figure 1 illustrates which destinations the participants related to conspicuousness. The results are not surprising: Asia, Africa, or Europe (for cultural purposes) were reported as the most conspicuous destinations for Portuguese tourists. This may suggest that external stimuli are effective, such as the promotional activities carried out by Portuguese travel agencies. Furthermore, this proves that conspicuousness concerns not only the manner of traveling, but also the destinations chosen, as previously shown by Correia and Kozak (2012).

This result, although exploratory in nature, shows quite clearly that conspicuous travel choices have different meanings, and that most of these meanings relate to people's status and social position. Furthermore, there is a clear tendency for people to seek escape from their everyday lives, and this has also been identified in other research as being the essence of holidays (Pearce and Lee 2005). The results show that the more publicly exposed people are, the less likely it is that their decision will be motivated by seeking higher status.

Overall, the findings show that the respondents were primarily looking for conformity, in particular with their families. This is probably because their occupations involve spending a great deal of time away from their families, which they wished to compensate for as far as possible while on holiday. Looking for family esteem and recognition, they



**Figure 1.** Destinations to have a luxury experience chosen by social group.

perceived conspicuous tourism as a way of obtaining pleasure for themselves (hedonic value) by having fun in a place where the weight of being a public figure did *not* condition their attitudes. However, while the findings show that one of the primary motivations was to have a good time with their families, the data also indicates their recognition that tourism is a demonstration of status and wealth. These perceptions assume quite different weights in different social groups.

The Musicians, on average, tended to value snobbism less than conformity, this being the main driver of their holiday decisions. Although in interviews they revealed the desire for social recognition, this social recognition mostly relied on conformity with their families. Furthermore, they also tended to devalue the hedonic value of luxury experiences, whereas the Reporters presented unusual preferences that emphasized the hedonic value of their holidays above all else. Almost half of the Reporters tended to perceive holidays as a non-snobbish pursuit, while the other half perceived holidays as an activity of nonconformity. Whether they perceived tourism luxuries as a snobbish or a conformity experience, for the

Reporters, luxury tourism scarcely resulted in hedonic pleasure more than improved perceived social status. Conformity was also a shared value that drove them to seek luxury experiences; this emulation of their peer groups relates particularly to their families, as the qualitative data demonstrate. Socialites were the snobbiest group, and their distinctive attitude focused on gaining social status and pleasure. Being different from others is what drove most of their attitudes to tourism. Surprisingly, it is the group of ordinary people that most valued the status that the holidays conferred on them, whether by assuming a snobbish attitude or a conformist one. The study suggests that for ordinary people, the social value of their holidays is as important as their own pleasure.

## Conclusion and Implications

Tourism is somehow allied with conspicuousness, whether through tourists' attitudes or the destinations they visit. Either way, defining conspicuous tourism becomes fundamental to understanding this market niche, since the subjective nature of the meaning of conspicuousness is difficult to express. Riley (1995) proposes that conspicuousness relates more closely to the manner of traveling than to destination choice. This was confirmed to some extent in the present study, since most of the participants across the social groups reported that the destination was not the most important attribute. However, according to Correia and Kozak (2012), conspicuousness is also found in selected destinations, and our participants also conformed to this proposal, as it was possible to draw overall conclusions about those destinations perceived to be conspicuous. The present study used a snowball convenience sample of 36 Portuguese people, comprising 27 Celebrities; these were famous and public figures grouped into the three clusters of Musicians, Reporters, and Socialites. The fourth group was composed of ordinary people, and was included to reinforce how different the perceptions of Celebrities were as compared to the perceptions of ordinary people. Mixed methods allowed us to assess the perceptions and experiences according to social group, and the four values outlined in the existing literature were also depicted: conformity, snobbism, social status, and hedonic value.

Our results illustrate destinations perceived as conspicuous, and conform to the results of Correia and Kozak (2012). In general, Asia, Africa and Europe are (for cultural purposes) the most conspicuous destinations for Portuguese public individuals. Regarding the first objective, *to analyze how they experienced conspicuousness in tourism*, since for these individuals, conspicuousness is in the manner of traveling rather than in the destination they are traveling to, the four groups showed different perceptions: while on holiday, the Musicians (who are in the spotlight on a daily basis) preferred to be with their families and away from the pressure of their popularity. The Reporters related conspicuousness with historical and cultural destinations capable of providing them the hedonic pleasure of learning about other cultures,

customs, and civilizations. The Socialites related conspicuousness to holidays paid for by others, and enjoyed travel experiences that gave them the sense of social status that drives their lives, whereas ordinary people related conspicuousness to differentiation, a differentiation that needed to be perceived when they got back home via the photographs they could show to their friends and family.

The second objective, *to assess how they perceived conspicuous tourism*, was also answered: the Musicians, on average, perceived conformity as very important in devaluing snobism. Emulation of family and hedonic value drove their desire for a conspicuous experience. The Reporters focused on hedonic pleasure rather than on social values. Yet, for this group, the hedonic value was more closely related to learning and social knowledge; neither snobism nor conformity was evident. Socialites proved to be the snobbiest group among the public group: their distinctive attitude to conspicuous tourism involved seeing it as a way of gaining social status and pleasure. In fact, they associated conspicuous tourism experiences with being recognized and with gaining popularity. Nevertheless, the snobbiest group overall was that of ordinary people, who tended to relate conspicuousness with exquisite and different experiences.

Furthermore, the findings also revealed differing perceptions of conspicuous tourism. The results offer evidence that when choosing their own holidays, privacy drives the decisions of tourists, even though they are aware and understand conspicuous tourism as a way of improving social standing. In fact, conspicuous tourism relies on intrapersonal values rather than on interpersonal ones, at least for individuals who deal with fame and status on a daily basis. For them, conspicuousness is "to be with their families in quiet and private resorts, where quality and hedonic value prevail." In contrast, ordinary people perceived conspicuousness as the most different, exquisite and thrilling tourism experience.

The results show that the interviewees perceive and understand conspicuous tourism as a way of improving social standing, but, above all, when it comes to their own holidays, it is privacy that leads their decisions. These research findings support the role of social class and public exposure in travel choices and status hierarchies. Despite the importance of wealth and income in determining status, this research reinforces the evidence that interpersonal or intrapersonal factors intervene more on status choices than income and wealth. This research contributes to the body of knowledge in a topic that is still scarce in the tourism literature, namely, the topic of status and conspicuous tourism choices. Following the research of Ross (1971) and Wang and Morais (2014), the next step will be to explore how public/private exposure moderates conspicuousness travel choice patterns. The results are also critical with respect to social marketing segmentation, as they suggest that persons with high levels of public exposure are more likely to travel to inconspicuous destinations, whereas those with low public exposure prefer to travel to conspicuous destinations or, at least, to

upper-scale destinations where they are treated like "royalty" irrespective of their social position (Riley 1995). Furthermore, the methods used are also new to tourism research, with the Q-method that is used to explore and identify subjective judgments in social sciences. Applications of this method in tourism are, however, limited. The main advantage of this method is its ability to combine the strengths of quantitative and qualitative approaches in assessing social subjective topics.

Our results, exploratory in nature, indicate that the status and social position of an individual reveals different meanings of conspicuousness in tourism. Furthermore, the heterogeneity of the perceptions gathered suggests that the lower the social status of individuals, the thirstier they are in the search to increase their status while on holiday. This means that the higher status people have, the less likely it is that their decision will rest upon seeking more. Moreover, the findings show that there is a clear tendency for the higher-status persons to run away from their usual lives, confirming that this is the essence of holidays (Pearce and Lee 2005). Nevertheless, the present research has focused only on a small sample of Portuguese individuals: the results are therefore limited and cannot be generalized. A further limit on the present study is that some of the public individuals are not renowned internationally, which may lead to different interpretations of tourism inside and outside Portugal. The need for additional studies is evident, in order to assess the relevance of conspicuous tourism and consumption among other nationalities, in broader and more diversified groups, and within different cultural, social, and economic contexts.

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