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THIS IS MY SCENT: UNDERSTANDING INCONSPICUOUS SENSORY POSSESSIONS THROUGH PERFUME CONSUMPTION

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Abstract

The important roles that possessions play in consumer identity construction and projections have been well researched and demonstrated in consumer culture theories. Past literatures mainly focused on material possessions which consumer utilised as extended selves. With the uprising trend of sensory marketing, researchers have started to focus on the influence of sensory and inconspicuous objects on consumers. In fashion consumption, researchers had focused on how material possessions such as garments and accessories are used as fashion statements. However, as an important category of fashion products, perfume is rather neglected due the human biological characteristics of olfaction as well as the associated cultural characteristics. Aiming to fill this research gap, the research question of this thesis was designed as "how consumers choose their favourite scents to be incorporated as a part of their identities", in order to discover and understand the association between scents as inconspicuous sensory possessions and consumer identity as well as extended selves.

The research aims to focus on the phenomenon that consumers wear perfume to express and complete their identities and self-concepts. Therefore, it adopts the subjectivism and constructionism paradigms, and applies the philosophical position of hermeneutics and interpretivism. The data was collected through seven semi-structured interviews. The informants were chosen based on regular perfume usage and general favour towards perfumes.

The findings show the uniqueness of perfumes as fashion products and discover in depth understandings of the cultivation and utilisation of scents meanings. Consumers learn about the social norms of scents through socialisation in cultural groups, or public olfactory codes, and develop their own scent perspectives, interpretations, and preferences in cultural environments. The scent meanings are utilised by consumers to project idiosyncratic identities but at the same time blend in by indicating belongingness to cultural groups. Through personal experience, consumers develop subjective perspectives and standards of scents, which are not only used to examine their own projections of selves, but also to perceive and evaluated others' expressed images. That is, scents are communication tools for consumers to express and reflect who they are and who they want to be. Moreover, the data unveils various ways which consumers utilise perfumes to extend selves as well as the signification in identity construction. The classification of perfumes not only indicates the meanings of the perfumes as possessions and how scents are utilised to extend selves, but also implies the development of identity construction.

The findings of this thesis can be summed as four main takeaways: (1) the rich meanings of scents despite the marginalisation of the sense of smell, (2) the powerful role of scents as inconspicuous sensory possessions in identity construction and projection, (3) the association and representation of the three types of perfumes and various self-concepts, and (4) the circular process of scent meaning cultivation and utilisation which further provides a glimpse of a broader view of the utilisation and development of possession meanings in identity construction. The takeaways not only provide a thorough view of scents as inconspicuous sensory possessions in identity construction, but also can be implemented widely into such as sensory marketing and fashion marketing.

Keywords scent, sensory marketing, possession, sensory possession, inconspicuous possessions, identity

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1 Introduction

1.1 Research objectives and questions

As consumers, we purchase, possess, and use products in our daily lives. Through the products as well as the way of utilisation, our consumer identities are shaped and projected. Past literatures have established theories and concepts of the various roles of material goods in construction and signification of consumer identities. More specifically in the field of fashion consumption, the signification is more salient and straightforward to understand as that fashion has always been a common way of expressing identities and personalities for others to perceive (Tokatli, 2018). Also, it is also a prevalent way for such as brands or designers to promote their ideas. Past literatures in the field have focused on how fashion products, especially garments, are consumed and utilised as fashion statements by individuals. As a significant part of fashion consumption, perfuming is an unforeseeable part by which people utilise scents to covey personal styles and express self images. However, compared to other categories of fashion products, perfumes are peculiar due to the the invisibility and unnecessity of scents. In the ancient days, perfumes were primarily used to maintain good hygiene and social orders, but in the modern days they are used more for social functions as fashion items (Low, 2006; Reinarz, 2014). With rich social meanings such as the represented luxuriousness and stereotypical impressions, perfumes are considered and utilised as an extra layer to enhance the overall fashion style. Moreover, the biological characteristics of smells being unavoidable and inconspicuous make perfumes more effective and influential unconsciously. However, on the other hand, the biological characteristics of smells are complicated because of human's intuitive nature which leads to the lack of constructed universal cultural standards of interpretations and descriptions. Hence, smell as a sense has been relatively ignored in social life for centuries, and the current focus of sensory marketing is primarily on the visual and the verbal (Canniford, Riach, & Hill, 2018).

Existing research of fashion consumption has studied consumers deeply to understand the associations of identity projects, possessions, and behaviours. For examples, McCracken and

Roth (1989) discussed about how garments are used as languages for expressions, Parmentier (2016) focused specifically on the rich symbolic meanings of high heels, and Cwerner (2001) researched the sociology of wardrobes, where clothes are being stored instead of being worn. As a significant part of the fashion products, perfumes are less studied than garments. It is neglected and under-researched within the field (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011). Therefore, as the sociology of smells is suggested to be developed as an important part of the sense, perfume should be studied as an essential part of consumer culture which could be further developed and applied in sensory marketing and fashion marketing (Largey & Watson, 1972).

Focusing on the phenomenon of perfuming as a kind of fashion statements, this thesis aims to understand "how consumers utilise sensory, inconspicuous possessions to express identities". The question is researched through perfume consumption. Building on existed consumer culture theories of possessions, extended selves, self-concepts, and identities, the research started from understanding consumers' choices and uses of perfumes. The goal of this research is to find out how people determine their preferred scents and the underlying reasons why certain scents are considered as their own, and ultimately reveal how scents represent consumer identity and self-concepts.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

From the next section, the thesis will start from reviewing past literatures of consumer culture theories specifically related to identity, as well as research regarding scents and sensory marketing, and fashion marketing in order to construct the theoretical background as a fundamental view of scents as fashion products and possessions in relation to consumer culture and identity. Then, in the methodology section, the research paradigms and philosophical assumptions are demonstrated, followed by explaining data collection and data analysis methods. Afterwards, the findings emerged from the collected and analysed data are displayed in a synthesised manner. In the following sections, the findings are discussed and linked back to existing literatures and theories, and further derived into theoretical and managerial implications. Finally, conclusion, limitations, and possible further research directions are discussed and suggested.

2 Literature review

2.1 Identity construction

2.1.1 Identity

Identity is the subjective perception of an individual about who he or she is (Ahuvia, 2005). Consumer identity is related to the core selves such as places of origin, memories, and past experience. To gain a better understanding of the conceptualisation of identity, consumer research has brought Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital in to view. An individual accumulates cultural capital through socialisation, education, and upbringing. Both generalised and field-specific cultural capital attribute to the conceptualisation of selves and construction of identities (Seregina & Schouten, 2017). In addition to the core selves, we expand to include items that we feel attached to as extended selves, including people, places, and objects. Consisted of several levels of group affiliation within socialisation such as individual, family, groups, and communities, the self has thus extended to reach a larger scale (Belk, 1988). Miscellaneous identities developed from different phases of human lives and cultural fields can emerge, constructing a continuously adjusting identity. Although identity is multiple and flexible, a satisfactory identity should be comprehensible and manageable (Seregina & Schouten, 2017).

2.1.2 The continuous process of identity construction

Due to the increasing availability of unlimited variety of resources, individuals are able to freely define who they are. Thus, identity construction has become a continuous complex project for individuals in the contemporary world (Seregina & Schouten, 2017). Identity construction is fundamentally a combination of the expression of how the individual perceive and acknowledge oneself as, the image of the group they belong to, and the ways of how they are perceived by others (Seregina & Schouten, 2017). Individuals gain skills and knowledge of the symbolic meanings and boundaries of a cultural group through socialisation. Therefore,

characteristics developed from personal background and the cultural environment such as clothing, accent, and appearance can not only help with distinguishing an individual from others but also indicate a group identity and express belongingness (Belk, 1988).

2.1.3 Possession

As indicated by the notion of "we are what we have", possessions are a part of self and also support the construction and development of identity. People utilise possessions to express, maintain, and enhance their selves (Belk, 1988). As souvenirs in which store memories and feelings that associate our past experience, possessions provide nostalgic feelings and reflect our processes of growing and change (Belk, 1988). They are important identity anchors in expressing and extending selves to the embedded symbolic meanings of personal experiences, values, and belongingness (Bardhi et al., 2012). Ahuvia (2005) further suggested the beneficial functions of loved objects as possessions in terms of supporting identity constructions by resolving identity conflicts symbolically. The objects help with emerging different aspects of self, such as past and present, and further project the ideal identity by deriving the emotional power (Ahuvia, 2005). Possessions as the extended self provides a personal archive for an individual to reflect personal histories and the process of change (Belk, 1988). Moreover, consumers use products in the marketplace to reflect their self-concepts through the associated image of stereotypical or generated users (Sirgy, 1982). It is common for consumers to express own identities or the identities they want others to conceive through fashion consumption (Tokatli, 2018). We wear garments, accessories, and perfumes to represent who we are. The fashion objects we possess, the purchasing process, the usage, and how we encounter, can all be the ways to extend selves.

In addition to concrete objects such as body parts and personal belongings, human possessiveness could be expanded to a larger scale that contains intangibles such as personal space, experiences, and ideas. Additionally, the tendency of decreasing emphasis on material possessions in contemporary consumption had caused the rising focus on intangible and inconspicuous possessions. Among various extended self categories, places, ideas, and experiences are considered to be some of the most significant ones (Belk, 1988). The

possessiveness of intangible objects are acquired through gaining knowledge and controlling the object. For example, the more familiar and in control we feel of a space, the stronger the sense of owning and belonging as our personal space would be.

Scent is a frequently utilised tool for creating aesthetic environments and also marking the boundaries of personal spaces (Low, 2006). We control our personal spaces by applying preferred perfumes or fragrances to portray aesthetic ideals and create a sense of belonging and familiarity. In contrast, when we are surrounded by others' perfumes, it is very likely for us to feel being contaminated, especially when we dislike the smells. The contamination of smells was also proposed by Goffman (1971, cited in Belk, 1988) as one of the six modes of interpersonal contamination. Belk (1988) further demonstrated that the symbolic sense of being contaminated could become notably strong when we involuntarily acquire possessions that have been intimately associated with other people. As smells are usually regarded to be exceptionally personal, unpleasant odours such as body smells and flatus, or sometimes strong perfumes that started to become disgusting are some generally encountered smell contaminators of personal space. In addition, the effect of contaminating could be exceptionally strong since that smells are only able to be mitigated instead of completed avoided. As an intangible possession that plays an important role in identity construction, maintenance, and extending selves, smell is a worth discussing part in consumer culture. In order to understand the functions and contributions of smells in regards of identities, it is going to be reviewed from various aspects in the following sections.

2.2 Scents

2.2.1 The sense of smell

For a clear discussion of the sense of smell, I would like to start from clarifying the terms related to smell used in this thesis. "Smells" is used as a general and neutral term for all kinds of smells, including "scents", which is restrictedly used for nice and pleasant smells, and "odours", which is specially used for indicating bad and unpleasant smells.

Viewing from the nature of human's biological system, olfaction transfers signals to the brain differently from other senses by having the most direct connection to memory and emotion. There are only three synapses between olfactory nerves and the hippocampus, where memories are stored (Krishna, 2012; Hoffmann, 2013). Similarly, the connection between the olfactory nerves and amygdala, the part in a brain which has a primary relation to processing emotions and emotional memories, is also close by having only two synapses in between (Lin, Cross, & Childers, 2018). That is to say, emotional responses are fundamentally associated with the smell (Canniford, Riach, & Hill, 2018). The biological nature of the sense of smell cause immediate and strong responses that last relatively longer than other senses do.

In additions to eliciting immediate, automatic, and less controllable emotion responses and storing the experience to memory, smells can also trigger past memories of previously encountered episodes, or nostalgia (Canniford, Riach, & Hill, 2018). The anatomical nature of human cause the olfactory-encoded information to last longer than information encoded with other senses. Equivalently, memory acquired through scents shows flatter forgetting curves than memory acquired through other senses do. It enable us to distinguish previously encountered smells among other smells although not being able to identify precisely by the names of the smells. Moreover, humans are able to recognise up to 10,000 different scent combinations (Krishna, 2012). As a result, consumers' conceptualisation and preferences of scents become more complicated as the multiple included systems and processes in the evaluation of smells. For example, unpleasant smells are processed more quickly than pleasant smells, which leads to more immediate physical and emotional responses (Damhuis, 2006).

Besides the biological associations between olfaction, emotion, and memory, culture plays another important role in influencing people's perceptions towards smells. In Damhuis's study (2006), people from different cultures showed distinguishable responses and ways of conceptualisation towards fragrances. According to her findings, eastern consumers tended to hold a holistic point of view to evaluate a certain fragrance as a harmonious combination of multiple notes, while western consumers tended to be rather analytical and were satisfied

with an outstanding and intense floral scent. In addition to cultural backgrounds, factors such as expectations, the level of familiarity, and past experiences related to a smell can also influence the perceived pleasantness, which is possible to further affect emotions. Damhuis (2006) provided an example of how personal experience affects olfactory preferences. People having fear of dental care due to bad experiences tend to have negative attitude towards the scent of clove. Since the main component of clove, eugenol, is often found in dental clinics because of zinc oxide eugenol cement, a temporary filling material (Bendre et al., 2016). Another characteristic of olfaction that makes it distinctive from other senses is that, in general cases, it cannot be turn off because we have to breathe. Without the opportunity to avoid or filter certain smells, we are obliged to experience and be influenced by smells. Smell is ubiquitous and constant (Ehrlichman & Halpern, 1988; Lin, Cross, & Childers, 2018; Low, 2005; Hoffmann, 2013).

The biological and cultural factors have made olfactory perceptions significantly personal and unique among individuals. The perceptions are accumulated through experiences throughout an individual's life and act as a private archive which store memories that can be traced back freely. Being capable of evoking emotions and memories directly, scents and odours can also influence consumer decisions and behaviour. In the studies of sensory marketing, the utilisation of smells on the managerial levels are experimented and highly discussed. The smells are applied as subconscious triggers in order to affect consumer perceptions and impression of a brand or product and therefore enhance engagements. For example, the Westin hotels chain utilise their signature scent of white tea with geranium and freesia to reemphasise their characteristics and features in order to further reinforce engagement and loyalty (Krishna, 2012).

2.2.2 Marginalisation of olfaction

However, olfaction has been long neglected both by people in daily life as well as academia. From the biological point of view, the cause of neglect and marginalisation of olfaction could be ascribed to the decreasing human's sharpness of smell during the process of evaluation and the increasing importance and reliance of sight (Hoffmann, 2013; Low, 2005). The strong

connection between olfaction and animal instinct has also made the function of olfaction believed to be rather regressive and less important to the progression of human cognition. Beyond the physical level, smelling is connected to barbarity and social taboos, which further contributed to the marginalisation and atrophy of olfaction (Hoffmann, 2013; Ehrlichman & Halpern, 1988).

On a cultural level, the marginalisation of olfaction can also be well seen through the lack of epithets and adjectives specifically and exclusively designated to descriptions of smells. It led to the inability of accurately describing smells. We borrow names and adjectives which are originally used for other senses in order to portray smells. Take some of the basic categories of scent notes used in perfumes as examples, floral, oriental, fresh, and woody are all originally used for describing other things. Also, the widely used words for describing smells are mostly borrowed: sweet is originally used for taste, soft is originally a haptic word, and green is borrowed from visual description (Low, 2005). Interestingly, it is a rather universal phenomenon that existed in multiple cultures and languages.

The fact of borrowing epithets from other senses to describe smells consists several levels. We use objects or adjectives which has commonly shared definitions to signify the related abstract concepts of smells. For instance, we use green to indicate the fresh smells in spring when plants are starting to grow or the types of smells usually found in the forests. It can be more complicated as the descriptions being constructed and developed through miscellaneous historical events. For example, as floral scents usually considered to be feminine and sweet, it is also related to divinity and a state of grace in the ancient times. Flowers, floral crowns, and decorations were frequently used in religious events. As time goes by, the related aspects had merged together and symbolised senses of youth, beauty, and freshness (Classen, et al., 1994). Yet, the understanding and imagination of people towards the descriptive vocabularies is exceptionally depending on subjective perceptions, resulting in the possibility of tremendously varied interpretations (Hoffmann, 2013). That is, we could have different impressions of fruity or sweet, and different standards of what is too sweet or too mild based on our personal backgrounds and related experiences. For example, oriental and spicy, two commonly seen adjectives for scents, are both rather generalised and vague, which could be

perceived very differently by, for instance, people who have visited Asia and those who have not. The lack of exclusive epithets make a smell difficult to be captured and rationalised, which is therefore hard to be discussed and have a shared, universal standard and definition (Canniford, Riach, & Hill, 2018).

On the other hand, people tend to have a consistent interpretation towards unpleasant smells. Essentially, smells help with gaining information of physical conditions and act as alarming signals that trigger human instinct to avoid danger and eating certain things (Damhuis, 2006). Stinks can indicate bad hygiene, poor medical conditions, or rotten food (Hoffmann, 2013). Yet, sociologists and anthropologists suggest that smells are possessed by humans beyond a biological property and has become a cultural act due to the associations with meaning and symbolic values (Low, 2005; Hoffmann, 2013). The olfactory social norms are developed and shared by individuals. As one of the senses that play an essential role in developing and processing cognition and judgement, olfaction helps us to identify the social signs and information conveyed by smells (Hoffmann, 2013). When the physical reaction is opposite to conscious explanations and justifications, the dynamic interaction of cultures plays a significant role that complicates the interpretations and symbolic meanings of the smell to the individual (Cerulo, 2018).

2.2.3 Social norms and the Cultural aspect of smells

The common knowledge of scents are developed from a certain cultural group to become social norms and shared values. Individuals in the group learn the interpretations through explicit and implicit rules and therefore become able to classify whether a scent socially acceptable or not (Damhuis, 2006). Therefore, olfactory sensations has become a part of collective group practice instead of being a simply subjective and personal act (Hoffmann, 2013). Cerulo (2018) studied the public codes and social norms of scents and suggested that smells are able to indicate people's sociocultural locations such as age, education, gender, occupation, race and social class. Therefore, scents, or more specifically perfumes in the study, are a part of the cultural landscape.

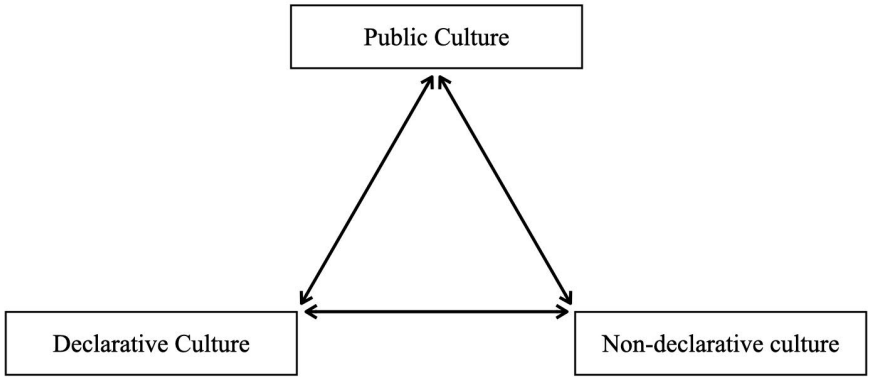

Figure 1. Cultural Triangle. Adapted from Lizardo (2017).

Cerulo (2018) discussed scents as a cultural landscape more closely by adopting the cultural triangle proposed by Lizardo (2017) (see *Figure 1.* above). In the cultural triangle, the culture can be classified into three types: public culture, non-declarative culture, and declarative culture. Public culture is widely shared common knowledge of what the things are in a certain context which other two types of culture refer and symbolise. Based on Bourdieu's (1990) notion of habitus and Giddens's (1984) concept of practical consciousness, Cerulo (2018) further explained non-declarative and declaration cultures and how they are acquired. Non-declarative culture is acquired through experience of repeated exposures or constant activities slowly. For smells, non-declarative culture may include direct and symbolic connections between smells and specific emotions, places, and groups of people. The smells become social mediums that symbolise the cultural codes from the knowledge inside a group. In contrast, declarative culture are instructions of the reality, which can be acquired and accumulated quickly due to the lower required amount of exposures and experience. As a top-down process, people apply the symbolic meanings in a declarative culture consciously and relatively slowly. We use it as knowledge to justify and classify smells from different groups rationally as a reasoning process and refer to the public cultural codes. Non-declarative cultural being in line with automatic cognition and declarative culture alining with deliberate cognition, corporately consist the olfactory sense-making process and understanding of social meanings.

2.2.4 Conventional interpretations and meanings of scents

There are long-established stereotypical interpretations of smells that have already existed for centuries in human history and thus have been particularly influential to people's interpretations. The stereotypes are originated from historical events and development as well as the commonly marketed images of the smells. Among the interpretations, some of those demonstrate physical conditions such as age, health conditions, and living environment; while others are socially constructed and used for identification of cultural groups such as gender, class, and ethnicity (Low, 2005). In the following sections, the public olfactory codes will be reviewed from perspectives of gender, social class and status, and marketed images of smells.

Smells are highly gendered, as males and females are supposed to smell differently. Quoted by Low (2005), "men are supposed to smell of sweat, whisky and tobacco…while women, presumably, are supposed to smell 'good': clean, pure, and attractive" (Synnott, 1991). The quote reveals the existing gender impressions of the types of smells that are usually considered to be masculine as well as the prejudicial image of that females are required to be clean and pure. The impressions had made it common for marketers to embed woody and spicy scents in male targeting products, and floral or fruity scents, which are often perceived to be sweet and pure, into female targeting products. The images of the types of scents are extracted from the stereotypical public perceptions to highlight the characteristics and targets of the products and reinforced by the marketing and advertising activities. Although the gendered impressions towards scents have become olfactory social norms and public olfactory codes, the ways of utilisation and application of the scents differ. The gendered scents support individuals in building images and identities that express who they are, meeting social and cultural expectations, as well as portraying the ideal selves. Some utilise the scents embedded with the stereotypical and marketed image to enhance their personality and original image, while others use scents that are contradicting to their perceived image to show who they really are. The growing trend of women wearing gender neutral or men's perfumes to enhance chicness and fierceness epitomises the attempt of expressing the true selves and blurring the conservative gender boundaries.

Due to the associations between smells and personal hygiene, etiquette, and living habits, an individual's social status is reflected through the possessions of smells (Canniford, Riach, & Hill, 2018). Historically, certain scents were only used by royal families and nobles. Therefore, perfumes strengthened the link between royalty and divinity. The expensive and precious ingredients further emphasised the glory of kings as well as represented the ideal of luxury. The peak of the association between royalty and perfumes was during the era of Louis XIV, the perfume king. The royal members used perfumes to differentiate themselves from people in lower classes. Moreover, it was common for them to have perfumers at the courts to take care of how the different scents were applied on different body parts, also known as "olfactory wardrobes" (Reinarz, 2014). This is also a historical evidence of that perfume has been incorporated as a part of the expression of fashion style and identity. Moreover, the smells of spaces, or ambient smells, provide important messages for identification and impression. Different cities or parts of cities may have distinct characteristics of smells due to the activities happening there (Classen et al., 1994). For example, the smell of incense may indicate a temple nearby and the sweet smell of soap reminds people of Lush immediately. In Canniford, Riach, and Hill (2018), the olfactory impression of Paris is mentioned to be a combination of coffee, cheese, and oil paints. On the other hand, odours may indicate not only poor condition of human body and health, but also bad living conditions of houses and geographical regions (Hoffmann, 2013). In addition to geographical locations, social locations, especially race and class, attribute meanings to scents significantly. Smells indicate living habits, cultural traditions, and religions of certain groups, which further provide ample information that improve judgements of whether an ethnic group is relevant (Low, 2005; Hoffmann, 2013). Social statuses can be indicated by possessed smells, especially unpleasant and repulsive ones. However, although that different cultural groups interpret smells differently and have different collections of common scents, and that body odours are usually considered as unpleasant smells in most of the cultures, Damhuis (2006) proposed that there are rarely a universally pleasant or unpleasant smell except for those trigger immediate human physical repulsions. Besides, the social status reflected by smells include not only social ranks but also occupations (Hoffmann, 2013). Although people in different social locations are all familiar with the public codes of smells, their own locations and statuses

influence and determine the way they interpret, select, and apply scents. Moreover, the usage of scents is not only based on the environment or group to which an individual belongs, but also the individual's self identification (Cerulo, 2018).

Influenced by marketers' chronic and significant contribution to public olfactory codes such as the gendered information and times, places, and situations of use, people are familiar with characteristics and underlying social meanings of the scents. In Cerulo's study (2018), most participants in the experiment were able to identify correctly the perfume notes and the messages that manufacturers' intend to send. Hence, scents and perfumes are widely used as communication tools by marketers. There are three ways widely used by them to send messages to target customers. First, they utilise the characteristics of scents notes from the basic scent categories to indicate the origin in nature as well as the socially developed public olfactory codes. As the aforementioned example in the gendered smell section shows, different scents are used to attract customers of different genders. Secondly, they used words and images to tell stories in order to evoke customer's imagination of the products. For example, a well known fragrance house, Atelier Cologne, includes few sentences to tell a short background story alongside with the introductions and pictures of the ingredients of each perfume. The stories not only demonstrate the inspirations and ideas of how the perfumes are created, but also create vivid ambiences as virtual experiences. Thirdly, prices and places of sale are chosen for targeting certain groups of customers. For example, perfumes sold in drugstores or beauty aisles in supermarkets are widely accessible and affordable, often targeting younger customers who are bound to get notices. In contrast, luxury perfumes, or termed as evening elegance by Cerulo (2018), are designed for special and important occasions. They are also priced to be more expensive to financially restrict the perfumes to customers with higher economic capital.

2.2.5 Interpretation, preferences, and consumer identity

Olfaction is an essential element of building one's lifestyle, rituals, and behaviours. More importantly, scents are used as an important element in identity construction (Hoffmann, 2013). Smells are closely associated with identity because of the nature of living and

breathing (Classenet al., 1994). Although people are able to recognise the public olfactory codes in a shared way, the sense-making and meaning association vary among individuals and situations. That is, individuals have own interpretations of the smells and utilise olfactory codes in various ways (Cerulo, 2018).

Interpretations of smells are highly subjective and dependant on personal understandings of the surrounding world, which are derived from previous olfactory experiences and expectations (Damhuis, 2006; Low, 2005). More specifically, the cultural capital of smells is gained from sensory and sensual capacities, education, and socialisation differently among individuals (Low, 2005). In other words, individuals' experience of smells are idiosyncratic due to one's social and sensory roots in different cultural backgrounds (Damhuis, 2006). As mentioned, ambient smells provide important messages of certain spaces. For individuals, the smells help with identifying, imagining, and recreating spaces, and most importantly, hinting belongingness (Canniford, Riach, and Hill, 2018). Scent preferences and tastes are also developed through the consecutive process of being exposed to olfactory stimuli and acquiring related knowledge. Since that cultural meanings are produced, reproduced, and maintained in the social world, the preferences change over time as new scent preferences are constantly formed from the continuously altering surrounding environment (Low, 2005; Damhuis, 2006).

Because of the distinctive common scents and characteristics of possessed smells of different cultural groups, smells provide us information to identify different individuals, and are further utilised to symbolise the concepts of "oneness" and "otherness" (Low, 2005). It is significant for human affiliate process and enhances the sense of belongingness (Hoffmann, 2013). The immediate perceptions of smells, or termed as "smellscapes", hint an individual of the resemblances or differences of smells so that he or she could define whether they are from the same cultural group or not (Low, 2005). The function of othering derives into one of the most influential and common social information embedded in smells, which is called social differentiation (Hoffmann, 2013). Since that smells are capable of reflecting an individual's social background such as gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, and taste, people are categorised according to the characteristics of the smells (Canniford, Riach, & Hill, 2018;

Hoffmann, 2013). In addition, smells can also help with identifying the state of emotions, elevating interactions among people (Hoffmann, 2013).

2.2.6 The use of perfume and scents

In the social world, it has become natural for consumers to conceive others' images and identities through their possessed smells. Beyond the moral baseline of not to stink, we want ourselves to smell pleasant before interacting with others (Low, 2006). Perfuming is a way for individuals to control and present identities through scents (Largey & Watson, 1972). We use perfumes to deliberately express our taste, styles, and personalities by choosing different kinds and amount of scents to apply. In addition to symbolising identity and social class, scents are used to symbolise expectations such as being appropriate and professional in certain occasions. It is also possible for us to unconsciously demonstrate our pasts and cultural backgrounds through chosen perfumes, whereas perfumes represent not only the past that has constructed us as who we are, but also provide a way to recreate nostalgia (Belk, 1988). For example, in the west, perfumes are widely used by both women and men, while in the east, they are considered to be more feminine (Largey & Watson, 1972). Moreover, smells as our second skin is possible to be more influential in conveying messages and perceiving impressions whereas smells can reach others faster than visual appearances, and can not be avoided.

However, as a significant part in fashion industry, perfume is less studied compared to other categories. In the field, consumers have been studied a lot to understand associations between such as behaviours, identity projects, and possessions. For examples, McCracken and Roth (1989) discussed about clothes as social languages, Parmentier (2016) focused on the rich social meanings of high heels, and Cwerner (2001) researched the sociology of the wardrobe, where clothes are being stored instead of being worn. The two most primary reasons which make perfume different from other fashion items are that, perfumes are invisible when we are wearing them, and it is not compulsory for us to wear perfumes. Beyond the standard needs, the perfumes we buy and wear tend to be ones that we love or at least like, manifesting more of our tastes and preferences. Hence, perfumes can be further utilised as loved and desired

objects not only reflect identities and social relationships, but also solve identity conflicts (Ahuvia, 2005). In terms of incorporating perfumes in identity construction, Damhuis (2006) classify perfume consumer to two general categories, image-conscious consumers and self-conscious consumers. She suggested that image-conscious consumers purchase a perfume in order to mirror the advertised image on themselves, while self-conscious consumers pay more attention to the formula of scents and made their purchases based on expressing their essence through those.

The invisibility and unnecessity of wearing perfumes as fashion items as well as the distinct characteristics of olfaction compared to other senses have make perfume special and different from other fashion possessions. It is a distinguished area which has been neglected and under-researched by existed studies of fashion consumption (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011). As the sociology of smells suggested to be developed as an important part of the senses, perfume should be studied as an important part concerning sensory and fashion marketing (Largey & Watson, 1972). Additionally, as a prospering field of marketing research, sensory marketing studies currently tend to have a focus more on the marketers' side. Smells as a part is less studied from a consumer's perspective and on an individual level, such as how an individual choose and utilise scents in showing their self-images.

The review of academic literatures reveals a gap between the phenomenon of perfume consumption and the existing studies. From the research questions of "how consumers choose their favourite scents to be incorporated as a part of their identities", the study aims to understand how a sensory and inconspicuous possession of scents is chosen, and how it is associated and utilised in consumer identity construction.

3 Methodology

3.1 Philosophical assumptions

As the research aims to focus on the phenomenon that consumers wear perfume to express and complete their identities and self-concepts, it is straightforward that consumers all have their own perceptions towards scents. A scent could be interpreted and imagined differently depends on personal backgrounds and experiences which lead to miscellaneous perceptions and biases. The fact is in coherence with the interpretivist way of thinking, in which argued that the same action can be interpreted differently by people (Schwandt, 1998). However, on the other hand, shared meanings and stereotypes of smells are socially constructed. For instance, floral scents are commonly connected to being elegant, fruity scents are linked to being energetic and sweet images, and woody scents are thought to be more masculine or mysterious. Therefore, the research adopts the subjectivism and constructionism paradigms, assuming that the reality as a mixture of social construction and social discourse. Humans are social actors who use existed symbols but also create new symbolic meanings (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Applying the philosophical position of hermeneutics and interpretivism, the study focuses on how the meanings of scents are used and created by consumers which influence consumer behaviour in relation to perfuming (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

3.2 Data collection

In order to understand the phenomenon through experiences and perceptions of individuals, the research data was collected through seven semi-structured interviews via online video calls, during which informants shared their experiences and opinions of using and owning perfumes. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed for further analysis. The data was analysed through phenomenological methods in order to understand subjective experiences of individuals. The goal was to discover and make sense of the relations between how people think and feel, and how they act and behave (Van Manen, 2007).

The initial interview structure was based on my previous research project for the qualitative business research methods course. During the research project, one experimental interview had been conducted. The informant of the interview was chosen due to her own habits of to pondering and reflecting on her own behaviours. The particular characteristics made the gathered information especially valuable, where as the reflection of her own experiences was thoughtful and insightful (Van Manen, 2007). After a closer analysis of the interview transcript, I was able to classify the information of her perfuming acts in everyday life and emerge it into several possible research themes. After literature review, I was able to connect the themes with existing literatures, such as perfumes as possessions, the utility of perfumes, the cultural meanings, as well as some newly emerged themes such as buying perfumes as gifts, and how personal experience affects the using habit. Building on the research project, a more concrete and thorough interview guide was developed for this thesis.

The interview guide was formed by open-ended questions in order to acquire information of personal preferences, experiences, and the usage of perfume in general (Arsel, 2017). The questions were designed to give spaces for informants to talk freely, bring out research concepts naturally, and also provide opportunities for emerging potential new themes. The interview guide was reviewed and improved after conducting every two to three interviews in order to reassure that the questions were asked in the most suitable way in obtaining thorough information. Potential probing questions were also listed in the interview guide and adjusted accordingly to prevent missing out valuable data. The data was decided to gather from informants who fit the criterion of being young women in their twenties who use perfumes, in order to build an insightful study with a proper scope.

The amount of interviews were seven in total. All interviews were conducted in June and July of 2020. The informants are young women between the age of twenty-four and twenty-eight, two from Taiwan and five for Finland. More detailed information of the informants are shown in *Table 1*. The informants were introduced and chosen to be interviewed based on their regular uses of perfumes. The two interviews with Taiwanese informants were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, and the five interviews with Finnish informants were conducted in English. To take a step further and create comfortable interview environments for informants,

which is beneficial for understanding them more thoroughly regarding the topic, the original plan for interviews was to take place in informants' homes where they feel most at ease and relaxed, or perfume stores where informants would be able to point out perfumes and introduce the behind stories, the uses, and choosing criteria with more flexibility. However, due to the global pandemic situation, the plan had to be adjusted and interviews were conducted online through video calls. Different online meeting platforms were used and chosen based on informants' preferences and for their convenience. The advantages of the change were that informants could still be in their homes and feel even more relaxed through the calls, and that the time schedules had become more flexible than the original plan. Through video calls, informants were still able to gather their currently owned perfumes in from of the camera and introduce them, which reached the same purpose as the original interview design. In the interview, the names of perfumes were asked for further information such as product introductions and appearance that can be obtain online afterwards. Knowing the perfumes that were mentioned in the interviews helped with not only connecting informants descriptions and opinions, but also more detailed data analysis afterwards.

3.3 Data analysis

All the interview audio was recorded by iPad for transcribing and analysing. The two interviews conducted in Mandarin Chinese were first transcribed in the same language, then translated into English for further analysis. All transcripts were read through several times in order to gain familiarity and obtain as profound understandings as possible. Afterwards, the transcripts were written into memos in a storytelling manner. Through the memos, each informant's story was organised into a more comprehensive and structured way, highlighting the interesting insights and reducing redundancy. Then, the paragraphs of stories were classified by topics, which followed the interview guide design, in order to compare the differences and similarities among informants. By doing so, the data was organised more synthetically and new themes were able to pop out. Under the themes, similarities and differences among informants were compared and analysed, in order to find out the underlying intensions and patterns, and further linked back to theories.

The data analysis process was circular, meaning that the initial transcripts were gone back to several times even at later stages of analysis when writing memos and comparing informants. After comparing the informants and writing the outcomes into a comprehensive piece which could be seen as a draft of the findings section. The piece then had been read and taken notes for finding hidden connections between each theme and linking back to existing literatures. From the themes emerged from the interviews, the main focus shifted from only concentrating on defining a perfume that consumers would recognise as “my smell” to the signified meanings in selves of perfumes that are used in different ways and classified as representations of different parts of identity and self-concept.

Name	Nationality	Gender	Age	Time	Duration	Platform
Shelly	Taiwan	Female	25	13.6.2020 5pm	1 hr 2 mins	Facetime
Lisa	Taiwan	Female	26	18.6.2020 4pm	59 mins	Facetime
Ella	Finland	Female	27	19.6.2020 2.30 pm	46 mins	Skype
Hanna	Finland	Female	28	13.7.2020 4pm	35 mins	Teams
Laura L	Finland	Female	28	16.7.2020 6pm	37 mins	Google hangouts
Anni	Finland	Female	24	29.7.2020 3.15pm	54 mins	Facebook Messenger
Laura W	Finland	Female	25	30.7.2020 10am	43 mins	Google hangouts

Table 1. List of Interviews

4 Findings

4.1 Scent and perfume preferences

4.1.1 Perfume as a unique category of fashion products

Perfumes are considered to be important accessories for completing fashion styles. It is an extra layer and the second skin that enhances the overall aura of a person. Scents are able to bring up feelings, emotions, memories, moods, and comfort. Hence, they are widely used to create aesthetic and enjoyable environments. Viewing from a consumer culture perspective, the act of perfuming can be explained as creating the control of personal space and setting invisible boundaries. Furthermore, the invisibility and unnecessity of perfumes make the category unique among fashion items. Smells are effective and powerful as being unavoidable unless people hold the breaths. It is the human nature to react to smell instantly, and the reactions to smells are therefore instinctive and intuitive. Also, comparing to other categories of fashion items such as shoes and bags, perfumes tend to be more personal and intimate. As a result, people are more sensitive when smelling others' strong perfumes. It leads to the feeling of invasion and contamination of personal spaces, especially when they smell the perfumes involuntarily. And the feeling of contamination happens upon smelling both pleasant and unpleasant smells. In addition to biological reactions, unknown and unfamiliarity also lead to mental disagreement and conflict against smells. In this section, I'm going to elaborate the findings emerged from interviews regarding the use of perfumes and scents, and the relations to consumer culture.

4.1.2 Personal space and boundary

Scents applied on body are utilised to aesthetically create a mobile personal space which a consumer not only possesses but also controls. The possessiveness of the created personal space is affected by the level of control. Consumers control the scents through choices of perfume as well as timings and amount of applying. Hanna uses Be Delicious by DKNY, the

green apple, as her “study perfume” as she used to wear it everyday when she was studying for the university entrance exam. Although she doesn't use it regularly nowadays, she would use it when she needs to be focused on productive work. Because it reminds her of the memories and makes her feel like studying even with just a few sprays in the air. Past studies has also shown that scents as possessions are used to create atmospheric textures as extend selves which protect consumers from mental threat and invasion (Tian & Belk, 2005). In Tian & Belk’s (2005) study which focused on the possessions in workplace, one of their informants used aroma therapy devices in the office to create boundaries of a not disturbed private space. Slightly different from mentioned in Tian & Belk’s (2005) study that scents are used to mark physical boundaries in workplace, perfumes are used by informants in this study to set up rather intangible personal spaces, enhancing certain feelings such as confidence in a mental way and bringing our certain moods.

4.1.3 Olfactory cultural capital and preferences of perfume and perfuming

The informants’ have learnt about perfumes and personal perfume preferences through education and upbringing, which are highly related to their first perfumes and perfume journeys. Also, through numerous trials and errors, they understand the details of perfumes such as scent notes, brands, and perfumers. In addition to learning about perfumes as objects and products, consumers gathered knowledge of perfuming through the same process. That is, the knowledge of smells, also known as olfactory cultural capital, is accumulated through experiences, especially through upbringings. The perceptions are influenced and the preferences of smell are thus constructed. That is, consumers learn about the social and public olfactory codes through a series of exposures in the living and cultural environments in the process of socialisation and under the non-declarative culture and rules (Lizardo, 2017). Another significant source from which consumers learn about rules of perfuming is the marketplace. Consumers are influenced unconsciously by marketing messages, hence most of the time they are not able to clearly describe how they learn about the knowledge. To the informants, the knowledge feels to be built-in and they just naturally know the pervasive rules. For instance, some informants mentioned that in their understandings, lighter perfumes

are used for daytimes and stronger ones are for evenings, which comes naturally to them without the need to think deeply.

Perfume preferences and general smell preferences can be similar for some consumers. Some informants would search for perfumes with scents which they are familiar with and like in daily lives. In this case, the familiar smells remind them of past pleasant experiences and create a sense of belonging. However, others who have distinguished smell and perfume preferences would not search for the liked smells in perfumes. A possible cause of the fact is that perfumes tend to fail to recreate some smells in the environment, which are usually nature smell such as the ocean or forest smells. In addition to experiencing physically, some informants learn about perfumes through online information and reviews. Ella would go to Fragrantica, an online encyclopaedia of perfumes, to learn more about the detailed introduction as well as the reviews and recommendations from other consumers.

4.1.4 Public olfactory codes

Consumers use scents as cues to metaphorically indicate the cultural groups they belong to and show how they want others to perceive themselves as at the same time. Under the public olfactory codes, they use perfumes that are considered to be socially appropriate to blend into different situations and occasions. It is said that people use fashion styles to situate themselves into place and time (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). For the informants, the social appropriateness they consider when choosing perfumes can be mainly classified into age appropriateness and situation appropriateness. However, at the same time, they want to show their uniqueness and personal characteristics through perfuming.

Age appropriateness is one of the biggest consideration of the informants when choosing perfumes. They want to wear perfumes with scents that are aligned with their self-perceived age identity. Although most of them got their first perfume when they were teenagers, they didn't wear perfumes frequently and regularly then, as it is considered not suitable for high school students to wear perfumes to school. This is similar to that students prefer not to wear suits to college campus as they don't want to be perceived as older or "kids wearing adult

garb" (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Now in their twenties, the informants do not want to wear perfumes that smells too young or too old. Ella would not want to wear some scents now because they make her smells older although she likes them. "I know there are of course types of perfumes that are like, ok I will wear them when I'm 60 or 70. Like it's a bit like opera going, older lady kind of scent […] I know that they are not bad, and I like them, but I'm not gonna wear them right now.", said Ella. Similarly, Hanna doesn't like musk because it makes perfumes smell like old people. Laura W wouldn't wear her first perfume nowadays despite it brings back memories because it is too teenage- and candy-like. It can be led from the fact that the informants all tend to be quite young and in the transition from students to young professionals, in which they don't want to be perceived to be too young and incompetent. This fact is different from Barak et al.'s (2001) argument proposing that it is a universal desire that people want to be young and youthful.

Age identity is a primary element when evaluating age appropriateness. It is a consumer's self-perceived age, consisted of chronological age and cognitive age. Compromised among biological, psychological, and sociological dimensions, the perception is influenced by the roles as well as experiences in the social environment (Kohlbacher et al., 2011; Kaufman et al., 2002). Prior research argued that chronological age stands for the actual self and cognitive age stands for the ideal self. Between the two, cognitive age is more easily activated and influential to consumer behaviours because it is one of the most important element of a consumer's age role self-concept, which a consumer feels as oneself (Barak et al., 2001; Chang, 2008; Sirgy, 1982). Age identity relates not only to use of perfume regarding age appropriateness, but also to the selection of perfumes to represent and extend self because of standing for different self-concepts, which will be further discussed in following sections.

Following the idea of categorising garments by functions into such as work wear, school wear, leisure wear, sportswear, perfumes can be categorised into occasions of use. Most of the informants categorise their perfumes into day and evening uses. For them, the way of categorising perfumes was built in by the long lasting market messages and the culture it has shaped. For example, it is a wildly accepted and applied culture of not wearing heavy

perfumes during day time when going to school and work, and wearing more intense perfume as a part of dressing up for evening events.

The abstract ideas and relations scents signify are shared by the majority of consumers. For example, floral scents are often connected with femininity and elegance, while fruity scents are connected with freshness and energy, and wooden scents are connected with masculinity and tranquility. Consumers utilise the socially and culturally constructed meanings to build and improve images, as well as to represent various situational selves. Lisa chooses more intense floral scents to enhance her work image of being competent when attending important board meetings. Shelly wears fruity scents for a girls' night out to bring out her brightness and cheerfulness. Perfumes helps Ella to transition herself between the work self and a more relaxed off-work self. She uses the same light perfume from Fragonard for basic office days, but on Fridays when she is going for drinks after work she would uses a special one, such as Coco Mademoiselle by Chanel, which she perceives as fancier and more luxurious. That is, perfuming is utilised as fashion discourses that imply abstract ideas such as gender relations, sociocultural locations, and personal traits (Thompson & Haytko, 1997).

Since perfuming is often viewed as a part of dressing up for work or special events such as a night out, informants tend to not wear perfumes when they stay at home or only be around the house. Usually Ella wears perfumes when she leaves the house, but since currently she does home office, She hasn't been really wearing perfumes. She mentioned in the interview that when she was wearing some perfume one day, her boyfriend was surprised and asked her where she was going. Also, when the informants are in the country side or going to summer cottages for getaways and holidays, they tend to not wear any perfumes. In a sense, the notion of connecting wearing perfumes to dressing up brings up formality, which is opposite to relaxing and thus unfit to the home self and holiday self.

Although perfuming is considered to be an etiquette of keeping oneself smells good, it is still thought to be inappropriate for some situations. For this concern, the informants sometimes don't wear any perfume at all even though they use perfumes every day. Laura L and Laura W don't wear perfumes when they go training since they don't think perfumes are suitable as

a part of sportswear. Laura L doesn't wear any perfume when she goes Brazilian Jujitsu training. Because in her opinion, it would be weird to have perfume on when she has to get very close to others during practicing. Additionally, the scents would fade away because of sweating and showering after practice. Most of the informants described the disliked or unpleasant smells to be pungent and stingy. When talking about disliked smells, Anni mentioned the scent of rose. The scent itself is not bad in her opinion, but she thinks that the scent is used in many products and is overly done that almost makes her feel faked and artificial. Also, even for good scents, if they stick on her for too long, they get worse. Putting themselves in others' positions, the informants think that it is impolite to wear strong perfumes in crowded places. They would choose lighter perfumes or not wearing any perfume at all when they take public transportation such as trains and metro, especially when the carriages are packed. They know that there are people who don't like scents and it may be nice to not have any scent in crowded places.

4.1.5 Playfulness and uniqueness of using perfumes

Perfumes are less salient compared to garments in a sense that people can only smell when being close enough. Combined with the ambiguous olfactory standards, the feature causes the public perceptions toward others' perfumes to be rather ambiguous. The public perception tend to remain on the level of being whether pleasant or unpleasant, rather than more detailed characteristics of the scents. Encountering others' perfumes, the pleasantness is usually determined by the intensity and concentration of a smell. When Lisa thought about how her perfumes smell to others, she thought that people can't really tell the scents, they only know whether she was wearing a strong perfume or not. The fact has also been proved by Yeshurun & Sobel (2010), arguing that pleasantness is the primary emerged dimension when it comes to using verbal descriptors to describe smells.

Public perceptions and social norms have developed into "dress codes" of proper outfits for different occasions. The rules to some degree constrain the freedom and flexibility of consumer's playfulness and uniqueness of dressing. For example, Thompson & Haytko (1997) address the dress codes of garments by discussing about the dominant style in a

college campus. The dominant style which was considered to be appropriate typically includes informal garments such as blue jeans and sweatshirts. People wearing suits to class would usually be linked to “fraternity boys”, considered to be inappropriate and somehow ridiculous. In other words, informal garments has become the proper way of dressing in colleges although not formal as suits, which implies the fact that a way of dressing may be considered as proper in one occasion but inappropriate in another. However, the “dress codes” of perfumes are less salient and not as well-constructed compared to garments. For a perfume, generally it would only be considered by most people as inappropriate when the scent is too strong, but not perceived as being rude when it is too mild. For this particular reason, although the informants tend to unconsciously comply the public olfactory codes to avoid being strange, rude, or inappropriate, they still have the freedom and flexibility to play with the scents. They can interpret scants in own perceptions and use them to represent different aspects of identities and selves. By wearing scents that are aligned with and connected to their personalities and images, they project and extend their selves. As a result, they are able to still be themselves and maintain personal characteristics. They pursue a balance between blending in with others and being still distinguishable. It is frequently mentioned by the informants that they don’t want to smell like others. Anni considers herself as not a girly girl so she prefer floral perfume mixed with woody and darker undertones. Laura W doesn’t want her perfume to be over the top as she doesn’t consider herself as a loud person. So she likes to wear lighter perfumes in smaller amount to express the certain image. Laura L considers perfuming as a part of her femininity and incorporated it in enhancing the sex-role self. As the examples show, perfumes as fashion items enable consumer to individuate and create social affiliation and bonds, which further indicate their selves (Thompson & Haytko, 1997).

4.1.6 Scents representing different self-concepts

Consumers use perfumes to make statements of who they are and who they want to be, projecting and manifesting various self-concepts. When a scent is chosen in purpose of projecting the actual self, its traits are in line with who the consumers are, representing such as personalities, characteristics, and personal histories. When a scent is expected to express

the goal they want to achieve and the image they want others to perceive them as, it has to match the ideal self image. Sometimes, people want to show only parts of their identities based on different situations. When the informants are looking for new perfumes, they want to find ones that can be used to represent a part of identity or self-concept that is yet able to be expressed by currently owned perfumes. Therefore, the informants tend to have clear ideas of what kinds of new perfumes they are looking for. Laura W is looking for a winter perfume as she considers most of her perfumes to be summery. Lisa is looking for a unisex or men's perfume to enhance her chicness and coolness whereas the perfumes she currently has tend to be more feminine.

The way that people associate scents with images are highly influenced by the long constructed public olfactory codes such as whether a scent is suitable for a situation, and the stereotypical user groups, including such as age, gender, and occupations. Consumers consider the appropriateness of scents and make their decisions under the social rules. However, instead of convincing others, perfuming is rather self-satisfactory that explains and reflect to our own selves. It is a way to resolve identity conflicts manage different aspects of identities.

4.2 Acquiring perfumes

The informants acquire perfumes mainly in two ways: purchasing themselves and receiving as gifts. The purchase process of perfumes usually includes looking for information beforehand, searching and trying in stores, combined with the analysis of own preferences. The knowledge of perfumes such as scent profiles, brand stories, perfumer history can all contribute to the meanings of the perfume to a consumer. It also affects the level of control, which is crucial to the possessiveness of perfumes. The purchase process of a product, including learning, researching, and buying, can be seen as the creation of an object, which becomes a possession and contributes to the sense of self. The longer the purchase process, the more a consumer invests to an object, and the more valuable the product becomes in terms of meanings and possessiveness to the consumer (Belk, 1988).

4.2.1 Important information

Understanding a perfume and making purchasing decision, the most important information consumers consider is the scent itself, the price, and the appearance. Personal scent preference is the foremost consideration of consumers when choosing which perfume to purchase or use. They wouldn't consider buying a perfume they don't like only because of good quality or affordable price. Equally, if a consumer likes a perfume very much, other factors such as price and appearance become less important. The most preferred way to know about scents and whether it smells good is to try perfumes on skin in person. Since olfaction perception is highly subjective and sensation based. The informants want to not only smell the scent itself but also experience how it changes over a period of time. Therefore, it is common for them to go perfume sniffing in physical stores, most often in department stores and tax-free stores in airports or on cruise ships.

The best way for Ella to try perfumes is to have small samples that she can use for a short period of time. By doing so, she would be able to understand how the scent is and changes on her skin. Therefore, she owns a discovery set from her favourite perfumer, Fragonard, consisted by several most popular scents of the brand. She would decide which one to buy in the regular size after trying all of them for a period of time. Also, likes towards perfume can come slowly. Laura W found her favourite perfume, Aqua di Gioia, through multiple times of in-store smelling and exploring for perfumes. She always went to the store on cruise ships to smell perfumes, and it was the one she always was drown into. It is thought to be the best to understand a perfume thoroughly before making any purchase decisions. Moreover, since perfumes are used to emphasise personal characteristics, consumers tend to like more special and unique perfumes. Ella is recently more invested in niche and unique perfumes that not as much owns by the majority of consumers. If Anni knows that a perfume is a scent which not so many people have, she would want to buy it. She doesn't want to smell like "a thousand other girls". It is an act of othering, in attempt to send a "not-I" message and indicate the belongingness to a certain cultural group (Low, 2005; Damhuis, 2006).

Price is mainly considered in the way by appraising the price quality ratio by the informants. To evaluate the perfume quality, the primary determining element is the scent longevity, followed by frequency of use and level of uniqueness. Perfumes which last longer on skins require less frequent re-applying, which leads to a longer use of a single bottle. Therefore, it is reasonable and acceptable to the informants that Eau de Parfums are more expensive than Eau de Toilettes. Ella thinks it is ridiculous for a regular sized Eau de Toilette to cost over 100 euros. She thinks that it's the brand she'd be paying for. To her it's a waste of money, because she would have to spray it on a few times if she wants it to last all day. And for the price, she has higher expectations. As the informants are either young professionals or university students, they tend to have limited budgets and be more sensitive to price (Lin & Xia, 2012).

Also, the informants wouldn't invest on expensive perfumes which they know they are not going to use frequently. It is more likely for Anni to buy a perfume which she knows that she would use every day. Moreover, a perfume that can be used everyday should be suitable to most occasions and fit consumer personalities and images. Perfumes are big investments not only in terms of price, but also in terms of the nature of smells which is being particularly personal and intimate. For a perfume that doesn't match the images, an individual would have to keep it for a long time before finishing or give it out to others.

Beautiful perfume flacons usually intrigue consumers' curiosity to smell. Consumers would imagine the smells by the visual appearance such as designs and colours of flacons. For example, yellow or orange bottles usually make people think of citrusy scents. The coloured impressions are also connected to preferences and purchase decisions. Hanna cannot imagine herself wearing a perfume that is sprayed out from blue flacon so she wouldn't consider buying a blue perfume. Laura L thinks that evening perfumes are usually in darker colours such as dark purple. Another important aspect of perfume appearance is the shape. It is observed in consideration of practicality, such as whether a perfume can stand on a surface properly or not. Furthermore, the appearance also indicated the used of the perfume, for example, flacons with more complicated and luxurious decorations and designs are usually associated more intense scents and evening events. That is, different shapes, colours, and

materials of perfume flacons indicate scent characteristics, uses, and stereotypical user groups.

A product's appearance signifies its aesthetic value, symbolic meanings of its function and quality, as well as product category (Creusen & Schoormans, 2005). Colours as visual information affect perceptions of smell characteristics (Yeshurun & Sobel, 2010). Therefore, it is common for marketers to express the associated scents through colours of the flacons. Moreover, as hue, brightness, and saturation of colours are possible to indicate the strength and intensity of scents, they can also imply the category and use, where as higher scents are usually for day use and more intense scents are usually for evening use (Yeshurun & Sobel, 2010).

4.2.2 Struggles with scent descriptions

The difficulties and struggles of describing perfumes were brought up multiple times in the interviews. As smell being very sensation-based and idiosyncratic, the lack of olfaction-specific epithets and adjectives leads to the difficulty of connecting verbal and literal descriptions to the actual smells. Laura L thinks that people can not describe smells clearly. Similarly, Ella thinks that describing smells is such a tough job that even herself, with a good nose, cannot describe them well. Moreover, it is sometimes hard to understand other's descriptions of smells for the same reasons. However, it is still possible for the informants to learn about new perfumes through scent descriptions from friends, advertisements, product introductions, and online reviews. The reliability of descriptions depends on the source, especially discussions with friends. The closer the friends who share about smells are, the more reliable their descriptions would be. Since close friends who know each other well are more likely to understand the subjective and personal reasons behind descriptions. Furthermore, the way of describing also influences how well it can be understood. Most of the informants find practical descriptions more understandable as they are able to imagine the scents from smells they have already known. For example, if a scent is described to Ella as an ocean smell, she would be confused about what that should smell like, but if it is describes as smelling like bananas, she would be able to imagine because she knows the exact smell of

bananas. If she sees the perfume which have been described and introduced to her, she would be very willing to smell it and examine whether it smell exactly like how her had imagined. However, discussion with friends about perfumes are more likely to remain at a more general stage of feelings instead of going deeply into the technical and sophisticated details of scent notes and perfume types.

The details of perfumes are usually learnt through product introductions including perfume types and scent notes. Perfumes are labelled into types such as Eau de Parfum, Eau de Toilette, and Eau de Cologne to indicate the intensity and longevity of scents, and categories such as floral, fruity, and woody to indicate the traits of a scents. In the product introduction of a perfume, there is usually a label of the perfume type and a scent profile showing the scent notes and ingredients. Consumers usually see product introduction as objective information for initial understandings of perfumes. As perceiving and processing product information provided on label and introduction being a crucial part of the decision making process, the choice of words and terms become extremely influential on consumer evaluation and judgement (Dimara & Skuras, 2005; Swahn et al., 2012). Research has proved that visual and verbal context has influences on olfactory perception (Herz & von Clef, 2001). For example, the wine industry has establish a sensory language to communicate in advertisement, on bottle labels, on menus, in stores with consumers. It provide information such as production locations, certifications, and characteristics of a kind of wine by which consumer are able to evaluate the quality, the taste, and whether it suits personal preference (Dimara & Skuras, 2005; Swahn et al., 2012).

In addition to product introduction provided by producers and marketers, some informants would look for online reviews and recommendations on websites such as Fragrantica to obtain opinions also from consumer's perspective. It would be use as references and plan for perfumes they would like to try in stores next time. Ella goes to the website and search for perfumes she's already had and liked. By checking out the "people also like" section, she gets to know about similar perfumes that she might like. However, the detailed information of scent profiles and official introductions are more beneficial for analysis of own preferences.

By searching for liked perfumes, consumers are able to find out the common traits of their liked perfumes and thus constructs a guideline of perfume preference.

It is argued that verbal labels may be more powerful to olfactory perception than to vision. However, scents are not scalar like visual information such as colours, they can only be judged by terms and categories (Engen, 1997, as cited in Herz, 2003). Moreover, prior studies showed that the lack of exclusive olfactory epithets and universal standards results in the difficulty of describing smells. The difficulty makes it hard to discuss and verbally or literally introduce perfumes in an effective and efficient way (Canniford, Riach, & Hill, 2018; Low, 2005). Therefore, literal and verbal descriptions are more helpful for initial understanding of perfumes. Consumers are able to get a vague outline of the scent but still prefer to smell perfumes in person.

Although the informants prefer trying perfumes in physical stores, in-store services, especially introducing perfumes, are not considered to be particularly helpful due to the disadvantages of olfactory descriptions. When they are shopping for themselves, they prefer trying independently by themselves. They concentrate on the feelings they get upon smelling and consider their own use of perfumes. However, they tend to appreciate the service more when they are buying perfumes as gifts for others. The preferences of the perfume-purchasing experience vary depend on the purposes of buying, for own uses or for others. For own uses, consumers are usually certain about the target. But when buying for others, consumers want to be less subjective and need to be consulted more. They focus more on objective information of the products themselves.

4.2.3 Gift-giving

Perfume is a popular choice of gifts due to the luxuriousness, closeness, and uniqueness, which at the same time make the choosing a suitable one an exceptionally difficult task. Gift givers share personal tastes and styles through the chosen perfumes, which are included in the social self-concept that they show to others. The given gift also represents the perceptions of the gift giver towards the recipient. It is a way to communicate the social self by conveying

messages such as “I want you to think about me in this way.” When choosing perfumes as gifts for others, the informants try to be less subjective and consider factors other than personal preference more. Laura L would ask the staff about differences among several perfumes and take the advice into consideration. Gift-giving is a social interactions of exchanging personal values which symbolises the relationship (Chen & Kim, 2013). However, it is argued that gift-giving is more of a self-gratifying and self-satisfying act by which the gift giver extend the self. It is rather self satisfactory for gift givers as they convey and share messages about the social self (Belk, 1988). A gift becomes emotionally significant to both giver and recipient when more time and effort are investing in selecting (Chen & Kim, 2013).

In addition to telling the recipient that: “you are like this in my eyes”, the gift also shows how good the giver understands the recipient. It is argued that although being an extended self of the gift giver, to be successful, a gift also has to fit the recipient’s identity (Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995). Through successful gifts, which are usually considered to be good and suitable by the gift givers and recipients, gift recipients are able to know about how they are perceived by others, how they are known, and how they are expected to be. Therefore, they can learn about the images they have shown to others and discover new aspects of identities which haven’t been known before. Perfumes as gifts provide chances for us to learn about perfumes that we didn’t think we would like, which is similar to the in-store consult with staff. It gains the knowledge of our perfume preferences in general as well as the specific perfumes. Together it increases the control of the scents we wear and personal spaces, which further increases the sense of possessiveness.

4.2.4 Shopping with friends

It is common for informants to go perfume shopping with friends. Some informants would ask for friends’ opinions when buying perfumes in addition to trying and deciding on their own. Friends offers valuable opinions and suggestions of scents and whether they are in line with the shopper’s image. It is a way of knowing whether a perfume fits the social self. By consulting friends, the risk of making wrong purchase decision and ending up buying an

unsuitable perfume is decreased, and the enjoyment of purchase as well as the social needs are increased (Kang & Park−Poaps, 2011a). The act can be referred as social shopping for fashion, defined by Kang & Park−Poaps (2011b) as the consumer behaviour of which consumers interact verbally and nonverbally with other people when purchasing fashion products. It increases consumer satisfaction towards the purchased product itself as well as the purchase experience (Kang & Park−Poaps, 2011a).

It is popular among the informants to share perfumes in a set with a group of friends with different scent preferences. The perfume sets are usually travel sets sold in tax-free stores or gift sets sold during discount seasons in department stores. Since the sets are usually sold in special occasions or locations, they become souvenirs for trips or special events. Additionally, visiting tax-free stores is a big part of travel experience. The informants would always check for perfumes they have already known with better prices and travel sets that are thought to be good deals. The primary purpose of buying together and sharing the same gift set is not getting discounts, except for other types of promotions such as buy one get one free. In addition, in gift sets, perfumes are usually smaller than regular sizes, which consumers can acquire trial purchases to try out the scents for a longer period of time at lower costs and understand the scent thoroughly before deciding whether to buy regular-sized ones. Therefore, this is different from group buying, which people buy products together to reach a higher quantity and therefore gain bargaining power (Jing & Xie, 2011; Wang, et al., 2013).

4.3 Perfume journey

A perfume journey is the history of an individual acquiring and using perfumes, during the process, he or she learns and develops own perfume preference. It is a long process consisted of numerous trials and errors. Laura L used to like to collect a lot of perfume samples to try out and display on the shelves. But as she has developed and figured her own preferences, she no longer collects the testers now. Beginning with the first perfume, which acts as a significant anchor of perceptions towards perfumes, it marks the path of how a consumer has travelled to the current status of perfuming (Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995).

Most of the informants received their first perfumes when they were teenagers as birthday or Christmas gifts from family members, usually from mothers. As the starting points of their perfume journeys which were embedded with pleasant memories, most informants like their first perfumes and had repurchased or would consider repurchasing the perfume. Besides, first perfumes as gifts received from family members have meanings of such as intimacy and expectations. We value gifts received from loved ones as they hold a part of the extended selves of the gift givers (Belk, 1988).

Mothers play an important role in development of perfume preferences. In addition to the fact that it is usually the mothers who give the first perfumes as gifts, mothers' uses of perfume also has great influences on the informants' perfume journeys. Family is the primary cultural group where consumers accumulate perfume related knowledges, also referred as the field-specific cultural capital of scent and perfumes. The interviews show that mothers' perfumes are highly influential to the informants' learning processes and preferences of perfumes. Although the informants wouldn't necessarily prefer the same perfumes as their mothers have had, they've learnt about what they like and don't like through mothers' perfumes. Laura W has learnt through her mother's perfumes that she doesn't like some Chanel perfumes. She thought that the type of smell is not her. Laura L is the only informant who had expressed clearly that she didn't like her first perfume, which she got from her family as a gift. The perfume was chosen to be her gift because of the name of it as well as the perfumer, Laura Biagiotti, which is same as hers. Although names are viewed as consumer possessions which contribute to the attachment a consumer would have towards products having the same names or letters in them, Laura L didn't like it because of the scent (Belk, 1988). She remembers nothing about the perfume except from that she didn't like it and the bottle was beautiful. Family is the fundamental stage of socialisation and individualisation. As highly influenced by family, it is possible to track the individuality of family members from perfume collections and journeys (Cwerner, 2001).

As consumers utilise perfume as a tool to bring back memories and nostalgic feelings from certain periods of time, they would also buy new perfumes for new challenges and changes in lives to highlight commemorative events so they can recall the related memories in the future.

For example, Shelly bought herself her first perfume when entering college, and Laura W is planning to buy a new perfume since she is starting a new job. A new scent supports the construction of a new identity and enhance the sense of competence. Therefore, in addition to memorialising experience and life achievements, the perfumes are also possessions which help with the role transitions (Tian & Belk, 2005; Schouten, 1991).

4.4 Perfume collection

Perfume collection in this research is seen as an assemblage of consumer self-concepts and images from which they choose to be and express in various situations. All of the informants have their own perfume collections with more than one perfume at the moment. They choose different perfumes to use depend on different occasions to express their multiple and flexible identities. The expressed image not only consist of the social and cultural meanings of a scent, but also the mood and emotion the scent brings to the consumer. Different characteristics of perfume may signify the belongingness of different cultural group. For instance, Lisa uses strong perfumes to show that she is competent at work. Ella likes perfume that represents a certain type of person she wishes to become. Anni wants to find a perfume that makes her smells like tidy and organised. The change of preference throughout the perfume journey is a process of continuously adjusting of identity. Though trials and errors, miscellaneous identities emerge into one. In Cwerner (2001), the author referred the wardrobe as "a safely stored pool of identity tokens" from which consumers choose their changes of self expressions and presentations. He further argued that clothing has been contributory for shaping consumer self-concepts. Clothes in the wardrobe reflect and defines the development of self-concepts and can be viewed as a kind of sartorial biography (Cwerner, 2001).

4.5 Four types of perfume collection and owners

By similarity and size, perfume collections can be classified into four types, which indicates different stages of the development of the emergence of multiple and situational self-concepts

and identities. Owners of these for types of perfume collections are named as content self-discoverer, malleable persister, versatile adapter, and curious explorer.

A *content self-discoverer* has a small collection of similar perfumes and tend to have a clear, coherent image, or the different images which have emerged to one identity. The actual self may be already very close the ideal self. They've already found the right perfumes that they want to stick to for a long term. A *malleable persister* has a big and similar perfume collection and may have one clearer image that tends to be flexible, or several images that tend to be consistent and coherent. The characteristics of the perfumes in the collection share the same traits and are chosen for various situations in order to adjust the image in order to follow the social rules and public olfactory codes. Also, the perfumes are chosen based on the consumer's feelings or in order to create certain emotions and moods.

A *versatile adaptor* has a small, different perfume collection and may have few specific and distinguishable images for situations which are clearly classified. He or she may belong to different cultural groups that are distinguishable. A *curious explorer* tends to have a big and different perfume collection. The identities are likely to be more complicated, consisted by more diverse self-concepts and situational images.

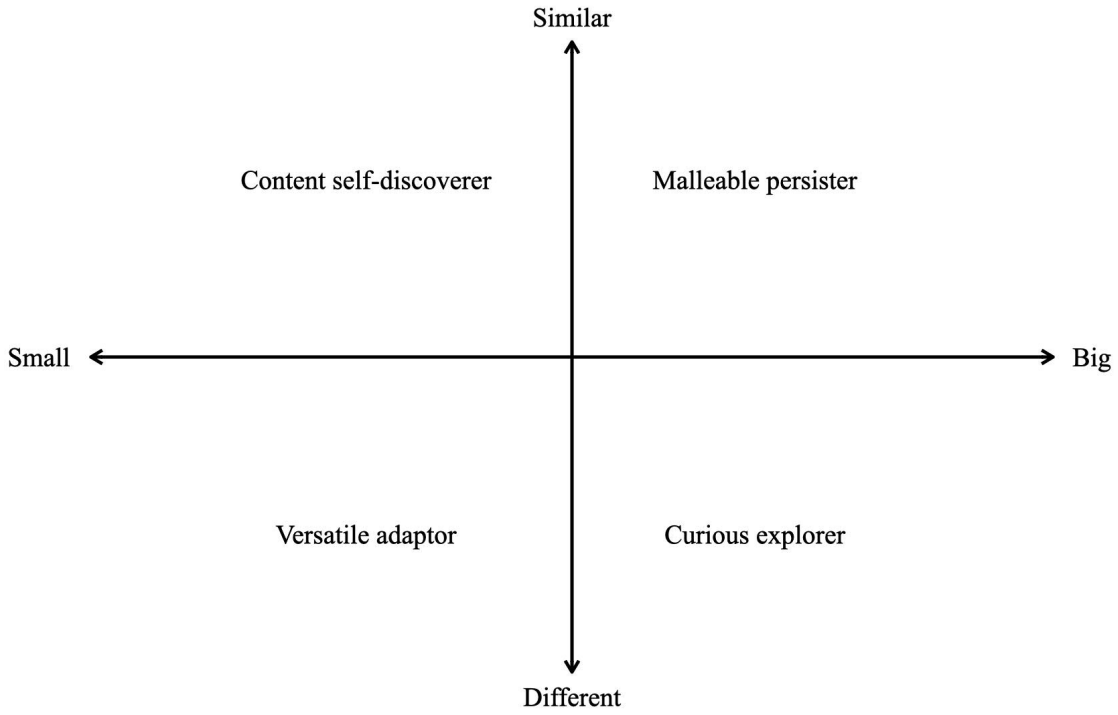

Figure 2. 4 Types of Perfume Collection Owners by Collection Size and Similarity

For people who have perfumes with a wide range of characteristics or scent categories in the collection, the situational self images vary more and the possibility of conflict increases. They may have very different situational selves for different occasions. They possibly belongs to several cultural groups that are not necessarily similar to one another, so they use more perfumes that are different to express the group identities. The informants tend to still in the process of finding the right and dream perfume, which can be viewed as that they are still in search of their ultimate ideal selves.

4.6 The right perfume, the dream perfume, and the signature perfume

Since people don't have to wear perfumes like other fashion items such as clothes. When they chose to wear them, they choose those that are meaningful rather than randomly selected. Scents represent various roles that a consumer plays, indicating tastes, needs, and the sense of belonging to cultural groups (Cwerner, 2001). Back to the messages scents are able to convey, perfumes leave stronger and more meaningful impressions to others. It can influence others unconsciously even without them paying attention to it since smells can be encountered unintentionally without being seen. Therefore, perfumes should be chosen more carefully. Beyond the biological level, a perfume can further indicates the social aspect which implies group affiliations and roles and personal idiosyncratic ideals. Therefore, it has the whole set of functions to extend the self.

In the beginning, the terms of right perfume, dream perfume, and signature perfume were used rather randomly to refer the informants' favourite perfumes which they consider as "their smells" with merely any differences. However, the interviews and a closer data analysis revealed some major differences between the three types of perfumes. It is possible to have all three types of perfume in one's perfume collection. The right perfume is the one that consumers would consider as "this is me", the perfume that reflect the actual self. The dream perfume is the one that people would think that "this it what I want to be". It represents the ideal self. The signature perfume is the scent that would make others think

“this is her” upon smelling. Finding the signature perfume is a shared goal which the informants want to pursue.

4.6.1 The right perfume

The right perfume is the most simple and straightforward category. It is usually chosen to be an individual’s favourite one from the current perfume collection. Some of the informants described a right perfume as the one they always repurchase after finishing, others considers it as the one which is flexible and suitable for all occasions. However, repurchased perfumes do not necessarily equal to right perfumes. The right perfume is perceived as the closest representation of the actual self within a perfume collection. It represents the actual self, including personality and image, in a genuine and intuitive way. Since the actual self is an already constructed and developed identity that a consumer is familiar with the most. The individual knows what they are and how to express through scents.

Moreover, it is possible for a consumer to acknowledge more than one perfume to be right as the perfumes could respectively match different aspects of identity. As a part of the identity, a consumer is comfortable with wearing the scent and considers it as a representation of the actual self. The several perfumes stand for multiple situational selves in the current collection of discovered and identified self-concepts. The right perfumes are also considered to be right because the consumer feels safe to wear them to all kinds of events. The safeness includes not affecting others negatively and feeling comfortable herself. An individual would be comfortable with wearing it to everywhere and in from of all kinds of people. For the informants who have smaller collections of perfumes, they right perfumes are more flexible that can be used every day. To Anni, the right perfume should be simple be particular that she can use every day. Laura L uses her day perfume for work and evening perfume for fancier or evening events without further classifying the events in details.

Informants who have already have right perfumes that they would use or have used for a long time are still open to new perfumes. They would go perfume shopping with friends or smell new perfumes when passing by a store. When deciding whether to buy a new perfume, they

would look back to their perfume collections to see whether they have already have similar ones. Perfume is luxurious and they want to make good investments. They don't need an additional perfume to express an image which has already been expressed by a right perfume. But they are still willing to tryout new perfumes and have some unexpected discovery of new parts of identities. In a way, they never stop looking for new perfumes because of their continuous curiosity. Ella describes herself as always looking for new perfumes in a way that she likes the sensation of finding new things.

4.6.2 The dream perfume

Consumers usually have ideas of how the dream perfume should be like, such as the scent categories and characteristics. It is flexible and unlimited as the consumers can dream for whatever they want. However, a deeper analysis revealed that the dream perfume is rather a concept of the ideal of preferences and expectations on oneself instead of a specific bottle of perfume. The idea of the it remains on the level of certain traits, for example, a perfume brand or series. It is constructed through experiences throughout the perfume journey and other types of exposures to perfumes. In the interviews, informants mentioned about their self expectations such as "I want to be competent" and "I don't like to be look like shabby". They are general directions of how a consumer wants to improve and maintain. The expectations were described in a general way without pointing out the specific details of how they would do to achieve them. Thus, the idea of dream perfumes indicates a direction of preferences which they have learnt from their past perfume journeys. Consumers still need to go through long processes of scent smelling and experiencing in order to find the dream perfume. As in the ideal self-concepts, consumers tend to be aware of their self expectations which they have derived from past experiences and knowledge of themselves, but they will still need to test out different ways to approach the ideal.

4.6.3 The signature perfume

Comparing to the right and dream perfume, the signature perfume is much more complicated in meanings and what it represents. It can be interpreted as how an individual are recognised

as by others, the image an he or she has been showing to others, as well as the best versions he or she wants to become. The signature perfume can be viewed as the final version of the emerged identity of the actual self, social self, and the ideal self. It should fit the individual's preference and self perceived identities, the ideals and self expectations, as well as the social image he or she has been showing to others.

The biggest difference between a signature perfume and a dream perfume is that, alongside with self expectations and ideals, consumers add in and utilise public olfactory codes and develop a dream perfume into a signature perfume. They take others' opinions and the public olfactory codes such as age and role appropriateness into consideration and evolve the ideas of dream perfumes to signature perfumes. In other words, the signature perfume signifies the adapted ideal self, which is also referred as the social ideal self. The adaption to social codes are not only about an individual fitting into public expectation to blend in with the majority, but also about feeling comfortable in the cultural environment. After all, consumers still want to preserve their idiosyncratic uniqueness by wearing personally iconic scents. Sometimes it is hard for the informants to rationalise why they like a scent. The reason could simply be that the scent is agreeable to them and they feel comfortable upon smelling. Similarly, an individual should be comfortable with an image or identity to be chosen to apply.

On a practical level, the process for a perfume to become a signature perfume is highly related to the frequency of use. Regardless of the cultural aspect of signature perfumes as possessions, a perfume would be considered to be one's signature if the individual wears the scent regularly. Lisa has been using similar intense perfumes since the first day she entered the office, as a consequence, her colleagues would recognise her by the strong scents. In a way the intenseness has already become her signature. However, from her own point of view, the perfumes are not yet her signatures.

It is possible for a person who has a signature perfume which others can recognise her as to be still seeking for the right and dream perfume. In this case, the signature perfume represents more of the social self, but cannot fully project the ideal self at the same time. As mentioned, Lisa is known for her strong perfume by people around her. She has also repurchased and

considers to repurchase some perfumes in her perfume collections. However, she doesn't consider any of the perfume in her collection to be the perfect one for her. She is still trying new perfume with distinctive characteristics and from different categories, in order to find her signature perfume. For others, a signature perfume can stand for the ideal social self, which is the emerged version of the social and ideal self. Hanna considers the same Lancôme perfumes that she has been using since she was 15 years old as her signature perfumes. She has grown with the perfumes and the scents match her identity really well. To her, the perfumes are of high qualities and light enough for day wear. They are age appropriate and not overly girly. The perfumes have been included in her daily routine and she is satisfied with her current situation so she would not search for new perfume purposely. She is content with her current state of identity and how it is represented by her signature perfume. Moreover, informants want to have one signature perfume instead of various similar perfumes that they can't fully relate. It is the final goal and it is difficult to find a signature perfume. The discover and realisation of identity is similar finding a favourite scent, you can only know it when you encounter it.

Since consumers tend to have multiple situational self-concepts. The perfumes represents the different aspects and conflicts. Ideally, when the aspects of identity and self-concepts are emerged, the perfumes become similar, or eventually become the same one. It is a long process of finding and discovering the combination of the ideal social self and actual self. The ultimate goal of a perfume journey is to find a signature perfume that represent the person which others would immediately think of the person upon smelling. Moreover, a consumer can have multiple signature perfumes that are used for various situations. That is, a consumers can has several ideal social selves for different occasions. Ella's goal is to find her signature perfume that everyone would say "this is Ella!" but at the same time she is too curious to have only one signature perfume. Right perfumes are getting closer towards the dream perfume, and from a dream perfume, to which the social considerations and public codes are added in, it then become a signature perfume. When they find a right perfume that they are comfortable of using it for all situations, that is closer to the signature perfume. Different aspects of identities eventually emerged into a flexible one that is the most comfortable and easily manageable for the consumer. The accumulated cultural capital

further shapes the ideal into a socially acceptable and appropriate image that is expressed by the signature perfume.

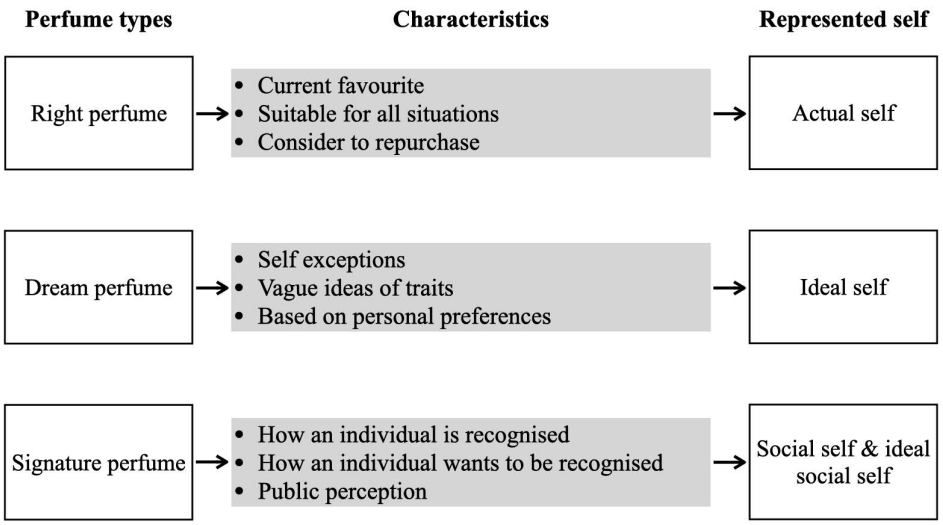

Figure 3. 3 Types of Perfumes and the Represented Selves

4.7 Tensions among right perfume, dream perfume, and signature perfume

These three types of perfume can exist in one perfume collection at the same time, meaning that a consumer can have all three types of perfume in the perfume collection at the same time. However, in order to gain a more through and concrete view of the types, they are discussed more deeply on two dimensions.

4.7.1 Personal - social dimension

Perfumes in general are considered to be especially intimate personal belongings and possessions that extend selves. Still, the three types of perfume can be compared on a personal-social dimension by the signified self-concepts and meanings. Right perfume is chosen to represent self-perceived concepts of the actual self, which is highly personal and originated from self cognition and identification. The choice is extremely subjective as an individual chooses a liked perfume or perfumes to symbolise who he or she really is and without the need of considering others' opinions. The connection between scents and signified meanings are idiosyncratically perceived and interpreted. In other words, a scent would be chosen due to a special link to personal memories, which others may not feel and connect in the same way. For example, Hanna has been using the same perfumes, which she considers as her right perfumes, since she was a teenager. The perfumes are embedded with special and exclusive meanings to her, which would never be the same to others. Correspondingly, dream perfumes are designated by self expectation, which is also originate from self cognition. With realisation and recognition of the actual self, the ideal self is derived as an enhanced and improved version an individual expects to become. Again, the expectations are highly related to personal experiences and perceptions, and people merely take others' perceptions into consideration. Conversely, a big part of determining a signature perfume is social concern, including public perceptions such as appropriateness in different cultural environments and occasions. It is a statement and fashion discourse that communicates the identity, symbolising cultural affiliations such as social roles and images

others are expected to perceive. Therefore, this is the type which incorporates public olfactory codes the most.

However, the understandings and interpretations of public olfactory codes can differ enormously among people. That is, it is possible for a person to utilise the codes in one way, and others would perceive and interpret in totally another, especially when they had grown up in very different cultural groups. Consumers evaluate and understand others by their own standards constructed throughout their upbringings and education. The notion is similar to the idea of "templates" brought out by Mittal (2006). He argued that people use own "templates" to view themselves and others, and assume others' would use the same templates to perceive them. For example, if a consumer use physical appearance as the template to view himself or herself, he or she would judge others by their physical appearances, and assumes others to view him or her by the same standard. But the reality is that every individual has an own template, and the way of viewing others would never be the same. As for perfumes, one may evaluate perfumes by different characteristics of scents, while others may only judge the scents by intensity. It is what Lisa mentioned in the interview. She pays attention to utilised different perfume traits to enhance the sense of being competent or elegant, while others can only tell whether she is wearing strong scents or not. One of the solutions Mittal (2006) proposed was to choose objects that are more powerful in visibly change and reflect the actual self in order to bring the social self closer to the actual self. However, the solution cannot be adequately applied to or does not work as effectively for perfumes based on the findings demonstrated in precious sections. As scents are inconspicuous and sensory, it is difficult to reach the expected outcome of visibly utilising the material objects. Moreover, the idea of bringing the social self close to the actual self is conflicted with the preciously mentioned goal of consumers finding signature perfumes. The direction is opposite to pursuing the ideal social self that meet with both self and public expectations. However, on the other hand, there is still a possible way to resolve the tension through perfumes. Perfumes that were acquired as gifts, especially those turned out to be very much favoured, are able to communicate and indicate the similarities and differences between images perceived by oneself and others. Whereas gifts from important others show a picture of how the social self is perceived by others. The favoured or successful gift perfumes demonstrate an alignment of

self-perceived image and others-perceived social self, which provides an individual hints and directions of incorporating the ideal social self-concepts into the search of a signature perfume.

4.7.2 Current status - future expectation dimension

Perfume journey show the process of development and change of personal perfume preferences and history from past to present. From the same perspective, the right perfume, dream perfume, and signature perfume demonstrate the current status and expectations for the future. Right perfumes project the current stage of actual self. It is expected to be in line with what an individual actually is. Defining whether a perfume is a right perfume, the traits of a perfume are usually evaluated as “me” or “not me” without thinking much about whether the “not me” parts are related to personal ideals or not. Dream and signature perfumes, on the other hand, stand for goals an individual wants to reach but has not yet become. Studies showed that people use their favourable images to increase and maintain the positivity of self-concepts (D’Argembeau, Lardi, & Van der Linden, 2012). Moreover, Markus & Nurius (1986) proposed the idea of possible future self as representations of an individual’s hope, which is resulted from own feelings, thoughts, and behaviours. It is an ongoing process that people reflect back and evaluate upon themselves. Accordingly, they plan to improve and bring out future states (Stets & Burke, 2003). Building on the actual self, the ideal self and the social ideal self are better versions that maintain the currently favoured images self-expected improvements.

In addition, the desired image or ideal self-concept can be influenced by others’ expectations. Through interactions and communications with others, consumers are able to receive feedback from others that help them to reexamine and reevaluate their current expectations on themselves. That is, social interaction is as well valuable in terms of gaining opinions from different perspectives on top of self-reflection. It is argued that the feedback can be congruent or incongruent with one’s self-concept, and the way or reaction depends highly on the relationship (Markus & Wurf, 1987). This also explains why comments from important others such as close friends and families are more valued by the informants. They ask for

friends' opinion when buying new perfumes, and tell their thoughts of friends' perfumes as well. Although it is proved that people tend to seek for confirmatory feedback that is congruent to their self-concepts, they may also take incongruent feedback into consideration of forming the ideal self-concept. No matter how they may react, the feedback provides opportunities to review and reinterpret the selves (Markus & Wurf, 1987).

From another perspective, a right perfume symbolises an already constructed and relatively stable part of identity. To an individual, it feels safe and conformable showing and using this identity. Moreover, a right perfume can be flexible to represent several aspects of the identity. As a result, right perfumes are considered to be appropriate for most situations. This is also a significant reason for a perfume is chosen to be a right perfume from the perfume collection. As previously mentioned, a dream perfume is a broad direction of perfume preferences instead of a specific goal of a particular bottle of perfume. To find a dream perfume, consumers have to explore and try more perfumes more adventurously. It is a long and difficult process especially for the reason that scents needed to smell in person to be understood thoroughly. Moreover, the signification of a scent to an ideal self-concept is unstable, and even the ideal self-concept is changeable. It explains why most of the informants find it difficult to decide a signature perfume and would be always curious to try out new perfumes.

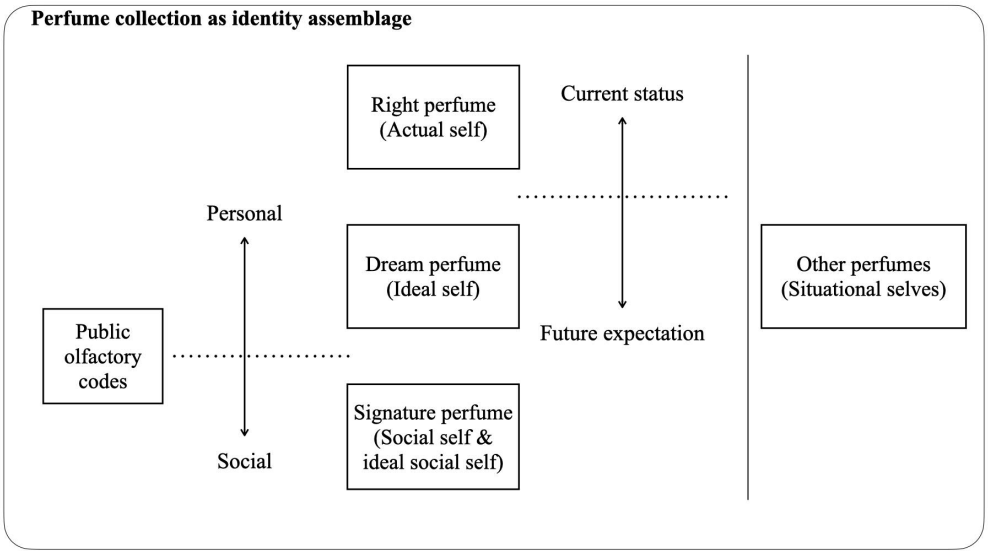

Figure 4. Tensions among Perfume Types

5 Discussion

Perfume is a unique category of fashion products because of its invisibility and unnecessity, as well as the being exceptionally intimate and private. It is considered to be an extra layer, the second skin, and a fashion statement to express personal images. Perfumes are powerful in creating and gaining control of personal spaces as they are able to bring out emotions and memories. People are sensitive and react intuitively when smelling others' perfumes as smells tend to be unavoidable and the human biological nature. Others' strong perfumes lead to the feeling of invasion and contamination of personal spaces, especially when involuntarily smelled. Moreover, the unknown and unfamiliarity of smells lead to mental disagreement and conflict against smells.

Perfumes are used to represent consumer identities and incorporated in identity construction. They wear perfumes that they like and consider to congruent with who they are. The interpretation and utilisation of scents are idiosyncratic. The two primary components of interpreting scents are the subjective views gained from personal history and experiences, and public olfactory codes that are socially constructed and communicated by marketers. Through exposures in culture environments, consumers learn about the social meanings symbolised by different scents. A consumer learns about perfume through his or her own perfume journey, which is the personal history of knowing, acquiring, and using perfumes. It indicates the process of change in perfume preferences, tastes, and identities. It is worth highlighting the social aspect of perfuming in addition to being utilised as fashion statements that express self-concepts. The meanings of perfumes as gifts and gift-giving contributes rich meanings to perfumes for individuals including both gift givers and recipients. For gift givers, it is a way to communicate the social self as well as telling the recipient how he or she is perceived. For the recipients, the perfume received as gift is not only embedded with pleasant memories but also help with gaining understandings of themselves.

Combining the individual and social interpretations of scents, consumers derive their own perceptions and preferences toward scents and perfumes and incorporate them into identity construction. It can be said that consumers refine their perfume preferences through perfume

journeys, which evolve to their current perfume collections. Perfume collection signifies the assemblage of identities, whereas each perfume is used to represent a situational identity, such as being at work, in front of different people, and for different occasions. That is, consumer identity changes through experiences and life events, and turn into the current assemblage of various situational identities and self-concepts. One of the most important findings is how perfumes represent various self-concepts. Within a perfume collection, perfumes are classified into three types, right perfumes, dream perfumes, and signature perfumes. A right perfumes represent the actual self, which a consumer considers to be the "real me". A dream perfumes stands for the ideal self which is the consumer's self-set goal and ideal. A signature perfumes indicates the social self that others perceive a consumer as, and the social ideal self the consumer wants others' to perceive he or she as. Also, perfume collections are also classified into four types based on the amount and similarity of perfumes, indicating the status of consumer on their identity construction process and characteristics of identities. Through perfumes, the abstract ideas of self-concepts and identities are understood in a more concretised and direct way.

5.1 Theoretical implications

5.1.1 The Meanings of Scents

Through collecting and analysing data, the rich meanings of scents to young consumers were revealed. In the first part of theoretical implications, I am going to start from discussing the meanings of scents and further incorporate these meanings into a more holistic view of discussing meanings of possessions in identity construction. First, the meanings of scents can be cultivated socially in cultural environments and social groups or individually by consumers themselves. The social meanings of scents are also known as public olfactory codes, which are developed and long constructed in human history and culture, and are therefore prevalently used by the majority of people to interpret scents and signify different cultural groups. Consumers obtain the knowledge of olfactory cues and public olfactory codes, which afterwards developed into olfactory cultural capital, through two main ways — exposures to smells and marketed messages. When consumers are exposed to smells, they

learn about the connections between the smells per se, the emotions, as well as the origin of the smells. Consumers learn about whether it is appropriate to wear a perfume to certain occasions through interactions and feedback from others of the possessed scents. Marketed messages are usually sent through advertisements, product packages, featured celebrities, and so on, usually in non-verbal forms. For example, for perfume flacons, brighter colours are associated with lighter scents and for daytime, and darker colours are associated with more intense scents and for special occasions such as formal events or parties. These non-verbal messages influence consumer perceptions more effectively as they are usually the initial contact or information to obtain when consumers are starting to know a product. After learning about the public olfactory codes, consumers tend to gain the ability of interpreting and recognising smells and the signified social meanings (Low, 2005). The culture of perfuming and using scents can therefore classified to be non-declarative, which is argued by Cerulo (2018) to be acquired through experience of repeated exposures or constant activities slowly. In a broader sense, experiences gained social environments take a crucial part in the development of smell perceptions and preferences.

In addition to the social aspect of scent meanings discussed above, my findings show that the interpretations are profoundly idiosyncratic, and it is significant to the cultivation of scent meanings on an individual level. The individually developed and defined scent meanings are closely related to consumers' subjective interpretations which is derived from their personal experience and history, as well as the process of acquiring and constructing olfactory cultural capital and self-perceived images. Possessiveness is one of the most significant elements which contributes to the development of scent meanings to an individual in terms of identity construction and projection. It is primarily determined by the level familiarity, understanding, and control. Familiarity is derived from exposures to scents and related experiences. Echoes to Cwerner's (2001) point of the importance of family as the primary stage of socialisation in accumulating cultural capital, my finding shows that consumers' perfume preferences and journeys are highly influenced by family members, especially in cases when their first perfumes were received from them. This also explains why smells associated with childhood memories are usually considered as pleasant smells which triggers nostalgic feelings. Familiar scents tend to have positive influence on consumers for the embedded memories of

pleasant experiences, and are therefore used recreate scenes and improve moods. The level of understanding can be increased by obtaining information of perfumes as products, such as scent notes and ingredients. Consumers feel more in control when wearing and being surrounded by familiar scents. For newly encountered scents, the level of control is increased through understandings. The understandings of scents are commonly increased through knowing important information such as ingredients, how they smells like, and how they change overtime. After acquiring perfumes, consumers control scents by deciding the timing and amount of use. This not only complements Belk's (1988) idea of the importance of knowledge in relation to possessiveness and control of intangible objects but also brings it to a more emotional level. As consumers gain possessiveness of scents, the scents are used to create personal boundaries. Different from the findings in Tian & Belk's (2005) study where ambient scents are use by an informant in office to create boundaries of a private space, the personal space set up by wearing perfumes is mobile. The exposures, experience, and use of perfumes of a consumer are together referred as a perfume journey. During perfume journeys, consumers learn about social cues and construct own meanings through experiences and exposures of smells, and therefore develop own preferences, utilisation, and interpretation of perfumes.

Because of the rich meanings of scents, perfumes are utilised to project and communicate self images and extend selves. Social referencing is a common way of projecting and communicating the selves in fashion consumption. Consumers indicate affiliation to reference groups by purchasing, possessing, wearing fashion products. The affiliation of referencing cultural groups as well as emotional and non-utilitarian characteristics of perfuming lead to the association between perfume consumption and luxury consumption. Luxury consumption is commonly considered to be emotional about enjoyment, desire, and indulgence rather than necessity (Zhang & Kim, 2013). Apart from functional utilities, luxury goods bring psychological benefits such as esteem and prestige to consumers (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004; Husic & Cicic, 2009). However, luxury consumption is conspicuous, through which consumers publicly show brand logos and iconic designs of possessed luxury goods, in order to make the carried economic and cultural capital perceived by observers. It is the the prestige and the indicated wealth and social status that makes consumers willing to pay more

for luxury goods than for other products with equivalent functionality for (Truong & McColl, 2011). On the other hand, perfuming is by nature inconspicuous. It is difficult for the majority of consumers to recognise the brands of perfumes upon smelling due to the inconspicuousness of scents. Despite the similarities of being emotional, the way of social referencing in perfuming is recognisably different from luxury consumption. In perfuming, scents are used to affiliate with cultural groups by indicating and enhancing the belongingness, while luxury goods usually reference higher social status and signify wealthiness (Makkar & Yap, 2018; Vigneron, & Johnson, 2004). Since the olfactory cues can only be recognised and decoded by observers with specific cultural capital, they therefore symbolise the concepts of "oneness" and "otherness" when consumers indicate group affiliations (Berger & Ward, 2010; Low, 2005; Hoffmann, 2013). More specifically, the findings showed that consumers use the cues to signify social locations and personality traits based on public impressions of stereotypical user groups. However, most people tend to perceive others' possessed scents only to be pleasant or unpleasant, although it is argued that people are able to categories smell characteristics and the reflected social background of others (Canniford, Riach, & Hill, 2018; Hoffmann, 2013). The unpleasantness is usually triggered biologically by physical repulsions or mentally by unfamiliarity and unknown, which is subjectively depending on personal experience. This finding echoes with Damhuis's (2006) argument that there are rarely a universally pleasant or unpleasant smell except for those trigger immediate physical repulsions. Due to common difficulty for human to identify scents, it can be argued that wearing scents carries more meanings the consumers themselves than to others. The fact reemphasises the hedonic values related to emotions and feelings of inconspicuous sensory consumption.

The rules and codes of perfuming is rather ambiguous due to consumers' difficulty of identifying scents. However, the fact enables consumers to wear and interpret scents freely and flexibly. Consumers choose scents that are distinctive to others in order to emphasise personalities and characteristics as long as the scents are physically and socially appropriate. For example, the informants do not want to smell like "a thousand other girls" and therefore search for uncommon and niche perfumes. It is claimed that the constantly shifting and vague meanings of fashion product lead to the absence of reliable rules (Davis 1985, cited in

Cwerner, 2001). The playfulness of scents utilisation not only complements Cwerner's (2001) statement of wardrobe as experimentation of body and dress in an olfactory facet, but also echoes to the idea of consumers' need for uniqueness proposed by Tian, Bearden, & Hunter (2001). In the study, they defined consumers' need for uniqueness as the consumer behaviour of consuming goods in order to pursue differentness in developing social images and self-concepts. Consumers resist conformity and differentiate themselves from the majority in groups by consuming novelty and personalised goods. Among the three behavioural manifestations the authors further conceptualised, "avoidance of similarity" explains what I found from the informants the best. It refers to the loss of interest in goods that become common and normal in a group. However, the informants' preference towards special and unique perfumes appears to be less rebellious compared to Tian, Bearden, & Hunter's (2001) examples of avoidance of similarity. The informants would not purchase popular and common perfumes even if they like it really much. For the informants, wearing special perfumes is a way to be recognisable while blending in. Additionally, the playfulness of using scents mentioned in the findings can also contribute to uniqueness.

In the accumulation and development of personal perception of scent meanings, it is also important for a consumer to understand how the expression utilising scents is perceived. Through social interaction, consumers communicate, project, and express social selves by scents, and obtain feedbacks from others. The feedbacks help consumers with reviewing and reexamining the way of expression, such as whether it is appropriate or whether the signification is perceived properly as expected. For perfumes, in addition to receiving comments from others, one of the most common way of social interaction in perfume consumption is gift-giving. Gift-giving is viewed as way of extending selves. Through which, both givers and recipients communicate symbolic meanings of perfumes and perceptions of self-concepts (Belk, 1988). According to my findings, the interaction of extending selves is two-way instead of solely self-gratifying for gift givers, which stated by Belk (1988). For gift givers, gifts are chosen carefully for the signification of their personal tastes and understandings of recipients. That is, consumers convey their social selves through giving gifts. Due to the symbolised intimacy and luxuriousness, perfumes as gifts enclose more information of self images and field-specific knowledge. As a result, when choosing scents as

gifts, consumers tend to aim for becoming more unbiased by relying more on objective information and public codes instead of their own subjective views, in order to find suitable gifts. As gift recipients, feedback and reactions from others provide good opportunities to reflect and adjust the expression of the social self or image. Although it is argued that gifts are considered to be unsuccessful when the represented identities and images are incongruent with recipients' self-perceived images and thus don't fit their identities (Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995), my findings showed that it is not completely the case for perfume as gifts. Although consumers sometimes don't like the perfumes they received as gifts, they don't considered the perfumes as unsuccessful. Instead, the experience is viewed as a chance to review their ways of expression and also discover new identities. Therefore, opinions and feedback from close friends and families are found to be more valuable and trustable as the sources are more reliable. They would consider the opinions before purchase deciding whether to buy and also after purchase deciding the timings and amounts of use. This is aligned with Markus & Wurf's (1987) idea of the importance of others' feedback to reflecting and reviewing selves. Another form of social interaction in perfume consumption is shopping together with friends. Except from the benefits to making good and quick purchase decisions, the opinions as well help consumers to understand how their social images are perceived. Consumers consider the opinions in order to reach the balance point among different self-concepts. They want to find scents that not only represent the actual self, but also the constructed social self. Shopping perfumes together with friends also contributes to gaining special meanings and scent understandings. In addition, since it is common for a few friends to split a perfume set, shopping together is also a way of minimising the cost of exploring and trying new perfumes. Although I see shopping together as a social interaction, my findings do not show too much evidence of increasing enjoyments and satisfaction as in the definition of social shopping stated by Kang & Park−Poaps (2011a; 2011b). This can be explained by the fact that scents as inconspicuous products contributes more to the individual work of identity construction.

It is a circular process of developing own perspectives of scent meanings, utilising scents to extend selves, obtaining feedback, and reviewing the way of interpreting and utilising scents. As consumers adjust or add new meanings to the already constructed interpretation of scents

after reviewing, they gain more understandings of scents as well as themselves. The circular process takes place in a perfume journey countless times and therefore the perfume journey evolve over time (see Figure 5. below) As time passes, consumers may not continue to use previously owned and liked perfumes as frequently and regularly as before since the perfumes no longer fit the current identity anymore. The perfumes are used mainly for the purpose of recreating and remembering past scenes and events. As expressions of selves, scents should be aligned with the current identity. However, as perfumes being fashion products, the influence of fashion trends cannot be completely overlooked in the change of scent preferences during perfume journeys.

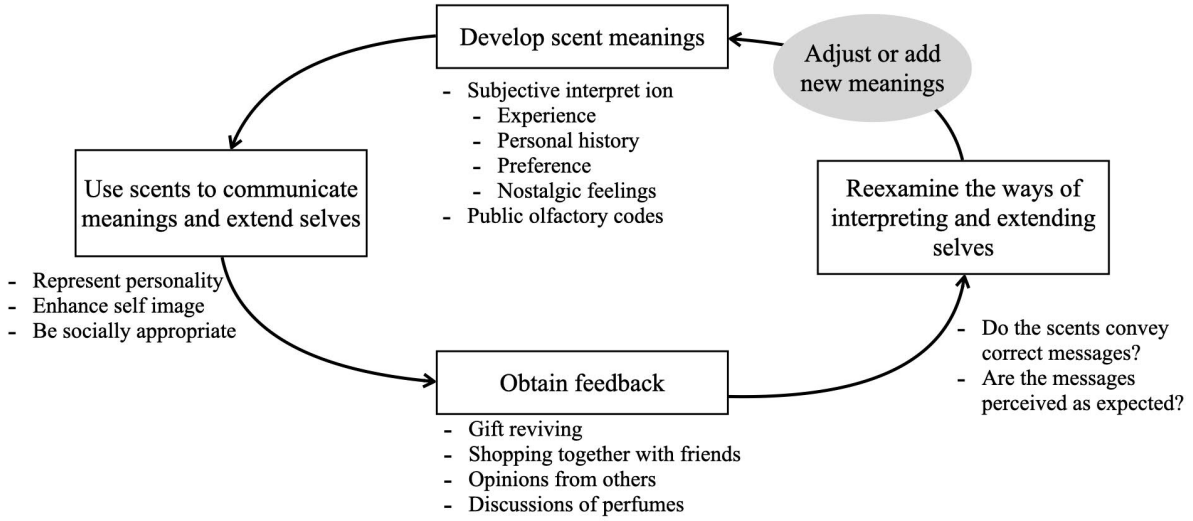

Figure 5. The Circular Process of Scent Meanings Development

The meanings and interpretations of scents are also used to perceive and evaluate others. This idea is demonstrated as the tension between personal and social dimensions in the findings. That is to say, consumers develop subjective interpretations and meanings of scents, which is viewed as "templates" stated by Mittal (2006). The templates are used not only in deriving self-concepts and constructing identities, but also to perceive and interpret others' messages conveyed through scents. Consumers from similar social or cultural groups may have developed similar templates, but it is still possible for templates to vary based on personal history. Linking the idea back to the act of gift giving, gift givers' use their own templates to view and read the messages expressed by the recipients. Therefore, gifts are selected based on

the meanings to the givers rather than to the recipients. This also explains the argument proposed by Belk (1988) that gift-giving is rather self-gratifying for the gift giver as both the gift and the recipient are the gift giver's extended self.

Building on the circular process of developing and utilising scent meanings, a more generalised view of the utilisation of possessions and the meanings in identity construction can be derived (see *Figure 6.* below). Identity construction is an ongoing work during which consumers continuously understand and develop selves through experiences (Alvesson, Lee Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008). Same for perfumes as consumers develop perfume collections through the journeys of encountering, possessing, and utilising perfumes. Through perfume journeys the construction and changes of consumer identity is symbolised. Same as shown in the changes of perfume collections, which are seen as identity assemblages, in perfume journeys, identities usually evolve with age and life stages. This finding complements Reed II, Forehand, Puntoni, & Warlop's (2012) statement that identity changes over time because of ageing and different life stages. Inconspicuous and sensory possessions become souvenirs of important life events, chosen for the purpose of recreating the scenes and moods in the future. Although not typically perceived visually, they can be more powerful and effective than material objects in reaching these purposes due to comparatively direct emotional connections between the objects and symbolised meanings. Among the senses, smell is particularly effective because of olfactory cues' ability of evoking more emotional and detailed autobiographical memories (Krishna, 2012).

As a result, an adjusted and more generalised figure showing the circular process of the development and accumulation of meanings of possessions in identity construction is derived as *Figure 6.* In the figure, a noticeable part is the function of resolving identity conflicts that possessions acquired new or adapted meanings can achieve. Younger consumers around the age of 20 to 30 are usually encountering big life changes as adjusting to new roles. Therefore, it's highly possible to face identity conflicts when transforming and evolving to new identities related to the change of age, roles, and life stages. To resolve the conflicts, consumers would have to adjust between old and new identities, as well as constructed social selves and the social ideal selves. Ahuvia (2005) proposed that consumers utilities

possessions in attempt to resolve identities conflict in three major ways — demarcating, compromising, and synthesising. The author further pointed out that love objects are usually utilised as demarcating and synthesising solutions. Although the study focused on material possessions, scents as inconspicuous possessions also work in similar ways. Scents can be used as synthesising solution to recreate nostalgic feelings and memories from the past, and emerging the experiences into current identity. For example, some consumers utilise scents embedded with strong nostalgic feelings to merge past identities into current identities. These perfumes are usually no longer in regular use and therefore preserve past memories effectively. On the other hand, scents can also be used a demarcating solution. Others may completely discontinue using this kind of scents or repurchasing previously possessed scents in order to move on and evolve to new identities. It is worth highlighting that this thesis brings out a new perspective in addition to existing literatures of how loved objects provide also compromising solutions to resolve identity conflicts. Since consumers are able to realise the relations and differences among various self-concepts through symbolisations of possessed scents, the scents resolve conflicts in situations such as balancing between the constructed social image other perceive and the ideal social image an individual want others to perceive. Although the constructed image may not be completely identical to the ideal social image, it is unlikely for consumer to totally eliminate the characteristics of that certain image. Instead, they would try to incorporate the characteristics into the ideal of self expectation, and ultimately derive to a social ideal self-concept.

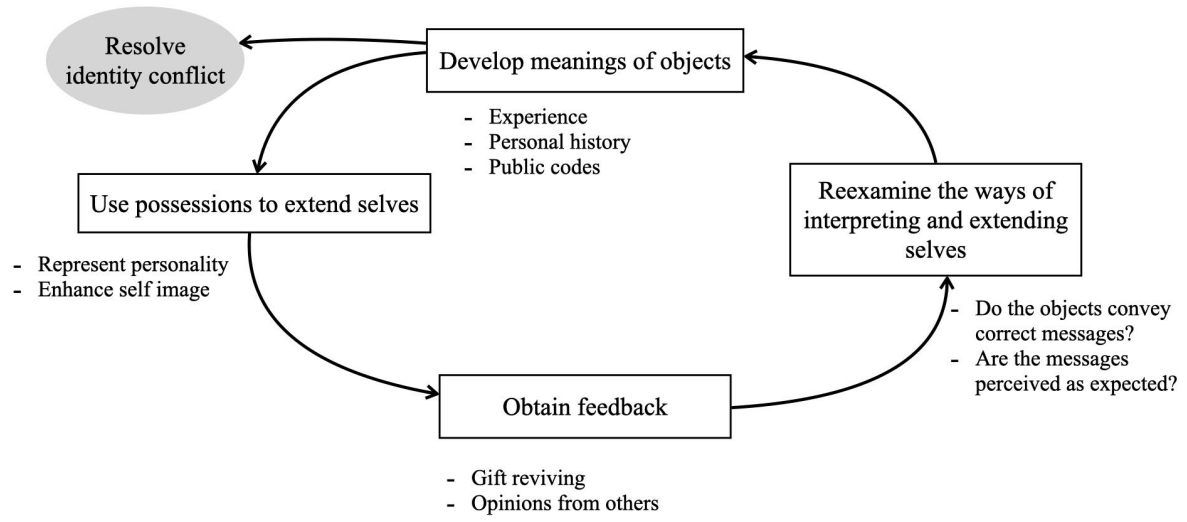

Figure 6. The Circular Process of Meanings of Possessions

5.1.2 Perfume as possessions

The second part of the theoretical implications focuses and digs deeper in to perfumes as possessions. Perfumes as fashion possessions are used as statements to express and communicate meanings to others. Although not being perceived visually, scents still communicate meanings to others and consumers themselves as other types of fashion products do, even more emotionally (Belk, 1988; McNeill & Moore, 2015). The emotional nature and unavoidability of smells make perfumes as inconspicuous and sensory fashion possessions more intimate and personal, and the communication of images and identity more effective. To consumers themselves, perfumes as sensory possessions not only extend selves symbolically but also help with transforming the selves to a desired form (Belk, 1988; Ahuvia, 2005). To others, scents communicate personal images, self-defined ideals, and group affiliation. For example, in workplaces, people wear perfumes that makes themselves look more confident in order to enhance the professional images. In a general sense of wearing perfumes, consumers moderate the intensity of possessed scents to avoid invading others' personal spaces. Furthermore, consumers pay attention to being socially appropriate when using scents by choosing perfumes based on suitability for situations and occasions.

A perfume collection is viewed as an identity assemblage of a consume in which each perfume respectively represents a self-concept or situational identity. Moreover, since a perfume collection indicates the perfume journey of a consumer, it also reflects personal experience, history, and the process of change. That is, perfumes as collected objects act as reminders of their acquisition as well as related memories, and the collected objects therefore become possessions of experience (Belk, Wallendorf, & Holbrook, 1991). Although this finding echoes to the idea of wardrobes as personal biographies proposed by Cwerner (2001), it is worth noting that different from wardrobes, the idea of perfume collection focuses more on the abstract aspect of scents instead of perfume bottles. First, perfumes are not necessarily placed together, unlike the fact that garments are often stored in wardrobes. More importantly, due to the inconspicuous and sensory nature of scents, whether a perfume is considered to be a part of the perfume collection is completely determined by the consumer

subjectively. As a result, in addition to currently owned perfumes, consumer may also classify previously owned perfumes as a part of his ore her perfume collection for the signification of personal history. It can be viewed as a similar idea to loved objects which play special roles in consumers' self understanding and reflecting process (Ahuvia, 2005). Emerged from my findings, perfumes in perfume collections can be further classified into three types based on the relations between perfumes and identities. Moreover, different characteristics and types of perfume collections also indicate the stages of consumer identity construction and development. From another perspective, as projections of identities, perfumes and perfume collections demonstrate clearer and more concrete views which help with understanding the relations and differences among self-concepts. Through exploring scents in perfume journeys and renewing perfume collections, consumers reevaluate and make sense of their self perceived images as well as their ideal goals.

Clothes in wardrobes stand for various roles consumers perform and indicate cultural group affiliation (Cwerner's, 2001). My findings take a step further to discuss about the signification of perfumes in association with different self-concepts and also in identity construction. In investigation of the underlying reasons why consumers define perfumes as "my scents", I managed to discover and clarify some primary features and representations of perfumes to consumer self-concepts. As a result, right perfume, dream perfume, and signature perfumes are emerged as three primary types of perfumes that are considered as "my scents" in a perfume collection which represent self-concepts respectively. As the most straightforward type of "my scent", right perfume is the closest projection and representation of the actual self. It is an already constructed part of identity that is already constructed and reflects real personalities. Consumers are usually familiar with the self-concepts and clear about what and how to express. Moreover, this aspect usually tends to be more flexible and comfortable for consumers. In the continuous process of identity construction, consumers constantly look for new perfumes that are expected to be not overlapping with already possessed ones, in order to express selves that are not yet represented. Instead of a specific bottle of perfumes, consumers usually tend to have a rather more vague goal of new perfumes they are searching for. This type of perfumes are classified as dream perfumes. Dream perfume is the type that reflects the desired and pursued self, which is an imaginary fantasy

of who the consumer wants to become (Hirschman, & Holbrook, 1982). Since it is the goal of self expectation, it depends more on self-interpreted meanings more than public olfactory codes. It is relatively more personal and private, which takes less consideration of other's perceptions. Also, due to the emotional aspect of pursuing an ideal self-concept, the pursue of dream perfumes can be viewed as hedonic (Hirschman, & Holbrook, 1982; Makkar & Yap, 2018). As mentioned, my findings revealed that the idea of a dream perfume is rather an abstract and vague concept of the ideal and expectations on oneself instead of specific elements or exact bottles of perfumes. Consumers still need to go through long processes of scent smelling and experiencing in order to find the dream perfume. Equally in identity construction, consumers tend to be aware of their self expectations which they have derived from past experiences and knowledge of themselves when building ideal self-concepts, but they still need to test out different ways to approach the ideal. A signature perfume projects the social selves which consumers wish others to perceive, which makes it less private and more social compared to the other two types. The social self tends to be already constructed, which is the image which a consumer has been showing to others. For perfumes, when a consumer wears a scent frequently, it would eventually be recognised by others as "his/her scent", which signifies the social image that has been shown. Furthermore, if a perfume is used to enhance the social self into a more desired form, it represents the ideal social self. Consumers incorporate public olfactory codes and perceptions into the fantasy of desired images in order to transform the social self into the social ideal self. Usually the social ideal self includes not only consumers' self-expatiation and the desired self, but also makes the consumer appears to be appropriate and suitable for specific cultural environments.

5.1.3 Collecting

Generally, a perfume collection refers to the perfumes a consumer owns. Although in past literatures, Belk, Wallendorf, & Holbrook (1991) saw systematic selectivity in acquiring objects important to the act of collecting, in this thesis, the determining element of whether a perfume belongs to one's perfume collection is completely consumers' subjective recognition. That is, the essential key is wether a consumer consider one perfume belongs to his or her collection. One of the most important reasons why systematic selectivity plays a

less powerful role in terms of collection of perfumes is that consumers acquire perfume in various ways. The ways of acquisition and related experiences contribute significant meanings to a perfume, and therefore determine whether it is included as a part of the perfume collection. The two most common ways for consumer to acquire perfumes are purchasing on their own and being received as gifts from others, and become possessions afterwards. For the perfumes that are purchased by consumers themselves, the purchasing process including searching, smelling, trying, and in-store experiences is highly influential on the meanings of the perfume to the consumer. The perfumes that are received as gifts provide chances for the recipient to understand how he or she is perceived by others and therefore review the way of expression. Both ways contribute to the meanings of scents significantly to the consumers. Since each experience of acquiring perfumes is unique, it leads to idiosyncratic meanings and interpretation of scents of perfume from consumers. This is essential to whether a consumer recognise a perfume as his or her own. As demonstrated in the findings, perfume consumers are classified into four types based on how their perfume collections are formed in terms of total amount and similarity. The classification not only indicates perfume preferences and usage, but also reflects the status of identity construction and development in corporation of perfumes as extended selves. Moreover, the way of classification can also be applied to a wider scale of fashion possessions. However, it is crucial that the similarity of items should be carefully defined. In this study, the similarity is primarily decided by the informants themselves, evaluating their own perfumes based on scent characteristics and use. The evaluation is consisted of a consumer's subjective and objective views. The subjective views include idiosyncratic interpretations and uses resulted from the subjective nature of olfaction; while the objective views include the ingredients and scent notes of perfumes labelled on scent profiles. The definition of similarities of perfumes as well as other categories of fashion products is worth to be further researched and discussed because the classification not only help with obtaining better understandings of fashion consumption, but also provide a more concretised viewpoint of consumer identity development. The four types of collectors are not on a spectrum of the completion of identity construction and development process, but different ways and divisions of identity construction. The categorisation helps with understanding the status and consumers and further inferring consumer behaviour.

5.2 Managerial implications

5.2.1 Scent marketing and branding

Sensory marketing is defined as “marketing that engages the consumers’ senses and affects their perception, judgement and behaviour” (Krishna, 2012). In more practical words, marketers use inconspicuous triggers to arouse senses in order to appeal consumers (Krishna, 2012). Scent marketing more specifically focuses on the use of scent as olfactory cues and should be shed light on especially because of the unique characteristics of the sense of smell. Olfactory cues are argued to be the most effective among all senses due to human anatomical nature and the fact that scent memory is the most impactful of all the senses (Spence et al., 2014; Krishna, 2012; Hoffmann, 2013). This is also shown in the findings that consumers are able to remember smells encountered long time ago and recall the memories. Due to the advantages, scents are currently utilised in scent marketing primarily in two ways, ambient scents and product scents. The main purposes are to leave more powerful impressions and enhance the bond with consumers in a sensory way, which inconspicuously and unconsciously affect consumer behaviours. Improving the bond with consumers will further increase customer awareness and loyalty, which ultimately leads to long-term relationships between a brand and its customers.

The idea of scents representing different consumer self-concepts can also be implemented into branding approaches. It is also coherent with cultural branding proposed by Holt (2004), in which a brand promotes an innovative ideology and let customers experience its identity myth by purchasing the products and services. A successful cultural branding needs to break though the cultures and connect with people emotionally and socially (Holt, 2002; 2016). As the core idea of cultural branding is to build a brand identity and communicate it with customers by designing marketing and branding activities in a coherent way, ambient scents used in retail spaces and iconic product scents not only create aesthetic atmospheric environments but also communicate important messages to customers. That is, same as that a signature perfume represents an individual’s social ideal self, signature scents of a brand

communicate the ideal brand images to customers. Especially for fashion brands that have perfume departments, the signature scent becomes an olfactory logo which has similar function as, for example, classic designs for garments and accessories. Spence et al. (2014) also highlighted the importance of marketers to identify a signature scent that is pleasant and congruent with brand identity in order to take advantage of scent marketing. The authors provided an example of the distinctive white tea with geranium and freesia scent which is popularised by the Westin Hotel chain. The scent is so strongly associated with the hotel environment as well as the experience that customers can purchase the scent to recreate the experience at home (Krishna, 2012).

Ambient scents, or olfactory atmospherics, are usually used in retail spaces as sensory cues to create aesthetic environments, in purpose of enhancing communication, customer in-store experience, and customer relationship. In order to do so, it is important that the scents leave positive impressions to customers. Shown in findings, instant impressions of scents are mostly determined by the perceived pleasantness. Same as perfumes, the perceived pleasantness of an ancient scents is also highly related to its applied intensity. This echoes with the idea Leenders, Smidts, & El Haji's (2019) proposed that scent intensity is a crucial variable of ambient scents utilised in retail spaces. Although mentioning the ambiguity and difficulty of defining and measuring scent intensity in past studies, the authors demonstrated that overly high levels of scent intensity indeed lead to unpleasantness and negative perceptions. Moreover, it is crucial for the selected ambient scents to be congruent with brand image and identity. Similar to how scents influence perceptions towards people, the congruency of applied ambient scent and characters of a store or brand affects the cognitive processing of the scent, which further influence consumer behaviour. For example, the same ambient scent may have different effects on consumer when applied in a book store and a clothing store (Leenders, Smidts, & El Haji, 2019). Moreover, olfactory cues that are easier to process are more likely to increase purchase and sales (Herrmann, et al., 2013). The same ideas of utilising olfactory cues and considering intensity and congruency with identities of scents also applies to the selection of product scents. Some informants mentioned that unpleasant product scents would immediately reduce their intention of buying. For example, artificial rose scents would make Anni associate with bad product quality and lose interest of

the product. This is also a good example of Krishna's (2012) claim that product scents increase impressions and associated information of the product. The traits and intensity of the used scents influence not only product memory but also perceptions and assumptions of product characteristics and quality. Therefore, marketers should carefully choose product scents, based on the characteristics of the target customers such as age group, gender, and personality, as well as the price range and product image.

For consumers, the search of scents is a long trial and error process including smelling and understanding scents. The findings revealed the benefits of trial rounds in perfume purchasing processes. The complexity of scents in terms of being idiosyncratically perceived and evolving over time makes the purchasing and decision making processes more difficult and requires more time for consumers. Consumers value experiencing and trying scents before making purchasing decisions considering the nature of that scents change over time, the suitability of the scents to own personalities and images, and the relatively high prices of perfumes. Therefore, trials are important for consumers to experience scents and find the ones that are congruent with the identity they intend to express. It is becoming common for perfumers such as Diptyque and Atelier Cologne to offer discovery sets consisted of several small-sized best sellers that provide opportunities for consumers to try out the scents for longer periods of time at lower costs. It is one of the most preferred way of trying new scents according to the informants. Although it is a common way to go to a physical store to smell different perfumes, the possibility of mixing impressions and perceptions of perfumes is rather high. In physical stores such as department stores and tax-free stores, all kinds of perfumes are displayed together and various scents are mixed in the air. It can become overwhelming and lead to olfactory fatigue consumers smell perfumes one after another without taking breaks. In addition, for well-known fashion brands, the perfumes are usually sold in bigger sizes, whereas the smallest size is commonly 50 ml. The size increases the cost of trying for longer period of time which causes consumers's hesitation of buying, especially for younger consumers such as the informants of this research. This is also one of the reasons why the informants tend to buy in tax-free stores and split sets with friends. Therefore, due to the main reasons, it is beneficial for perfume manufacturers or niche perfumers to offer

discovery sets or other types of options for trial purchases, especially when they target younger customers.

6 Conclusions

6.1 Research summary

Inconspicuous and sensory possessions are less studied category of in past literatures of possession and extended selves as most consumer culture studies have discussed about material possessions as extend selves in consumer identity construction. Specifically in fashion marketing, researchers have focused on mainly garments as fashion possessions and statements in relation to consumer culture studies. Nonetheless, olfaction is an under researched field compared to other senses in sensory marketing. As the previously pointed out research gap between existing literature and current phenomenon, this thesis managed to unveiled the important role of perfumes as inconspicuous and sensory possessions in relation to consumer identity and self-concepts, as well as the importance of idiosyncratic interpretation and utilisation of olfactory cues in identity construction. Perfumes have stronger power and influence on consumers due to more intuitively and immediately communicated symbolic meanings. The process of knowing, learning, interpreting, and utilising perfumes is very sensation based, leading to the ability of consumers giving idiosyncratic meanings to perfumes beyond the limitations of physical functions.

Also, consumers use different perfumes in their own collections to represent and reflect different aspects of identities and self-concepts. In addition, symbolised and demonstrated by perfumes, the process of change and emerge of consumer identity is understood in a more concrete way. This study further reveals that instead of collectively represent an identity and being picked intuitively and arbitrarily, perfumes are in fact classified into categories to represent different aspects of identities. By the parts of self they signifies, perfumes are classified into the real perfumes, dream perfumes, and signature perfumes. The major takeaway of this study is the representation and signification of these different types of perfume within a consumers perfume collection to aspects of identities and self-concepts. The

perfumes are also used to resolve identity conflicts. The evolving process of perfume journey and preferences demonstrates the construction and development of identity. A consumer starts from using different perfumes to represent different self-concepts and changes towards the ultimate goal of finding a signature perfume indicates the final flexible identity emerged from multiple identities and self-concepts. It is an always ongoing circular process of cultivating and utilising scent meanings, which echoes with the continuous process of identity construction. Through scents, consumer identity are projected, communicated, reflected, and adjusted, which not only takes significant part in constructing and completing identities, but also signify the important role of inconspicuous sensory possessions in consumer identity development.

6.2 Limitations and future research directions

6.2.1 Data collection

Due to the special global pandemic situation started from the year of 2020, all interviews were conducted online through video calls instead of taking place in informants' homes as originally planned. Although the adjustment improved the flexibility of time schedules of interviews, the disadvantage compared to having interviews in person remains rather uncertain. For future research, interviews may take place in informants' homes or physical perfume stores, where different perfumes can be shown and smelled during the interview. Informants' homes are more suitable for collecting more detailed and personal data such as subjective interpretations and perfume journeys, while physical stores are suitable for data related to purchasing, such as important information that affects decision-making. Since this thesis focuses more on the consumers' idiosyncratic interpretations of scents, informants' homes are more suitable for the interview design. Due to the scope of the research, the backgrounds of the informants are rather homogeneous, which leads to the limitations of discovering general insights of perfume consumers at all ages and genders. Also, with only two Taiwanese informants and five Finnish informants, the data was not sufficient for making comparisons between cultures of the two countries. The research therefore focused on the perfuming culture of young women. As shown in literature review as well as the findings, the

cultural environment an individual grew up in has significant influence on the subjective perceptions and interpretations of smells. Therefore, in order to understand more about the public olfactory codes in different cultural environments, future research can broaden the scope and collect data from various cultural groups based on age, geographic locations, sociocultural locations, genders, and so on.

6.2.2 Scent marketing

Existing research has studied how colours affect perceived smell intensity in food packaging (see Zellner & Kautz, 1990), and this study has slightly touched upon how perfume appearance affects consumers' perceptions of the scents from the perspective of valued information for purchase decision making. It is worth understanding the facet in a more systematic way, particularly the relation of flacon design not only to scent intensity and use but also inconspicuous messages marketers attempt to send.

During the process of reviewing existing literatures, it was found that the research of scent marketing is mainly focused on ambient scents used in retail spaces and the relations between used scents and consumer behaviour (see Herrmann et al., 2013; Krishna, 2012; Leenders, Smidts, & El Haji, 2019; Spence et al., 2014). Although some studies showed that it is better for grocery stores to implement no ambient scents as there is no positive influences in terms of improving sales or consumer experience, ambient scents can be important to more specified stores such as clothings stores and boutiques. In Lin, Cross, & Childers (2018), the authors argued that scent marketing crosses the ethical line as consumers has no opportunities to filter the smells and prevent themselves from being affected emotionally, even if the original goal is to enhance customer experience. The choice of used scent in store is particularly difficult as the subjective nature of smell interpretation. Mentioned as examples, fashion or other kinds of boutiques tend to be more specialised and have more distinguished target customer groups with clearer characteristics, which in a way is easier for selecting the applied ambient scent in retail spaces. How scents can be incorporated in branding approaches and improving customer experience is a worth researched direction.

During the research, there was a growing curiosity of whether olfactory perceptions can be measured in a quantified way, and whether there is a universal standard of smells and public olfactory codes that can be defined and demonstrated in a clearer way. Clarifying and standardising public olfactory codes can not only contribute to consumer culture studies but also understand perfumes more in the field of fashion consumption. It is also interesting to compare olfactory public codes to fashion public codes. Fashion public codes are long studied and researched, while olfactory public codes still remain a neglected field currently. It is a worth researched topic that whether fashion public codes and the social meanings of garments can be also apply to perfumes.

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