

POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF INSTAGRAM USAGE ON CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION OF PREMIUM LUXURIOUS FASHION PRODUCTS AMONG BULGARIANS

Zhechev, V., Sekulova, D.

Vladimir Zhechev / University of Economics – Varna, Faculty of Management, Department of Marketing, Address: 77 Knyaz Boris I Blvd, Varna, Bulgaria. Email: vladimir.zhechev@ue-varna.bg

Daniela Sekulova / University of Economics – Varna, Faculty of Management, Department of Marketing, Address: 77 Knyaz Boris I Blvd, Varna, Bulgaria. Email: sekulova.daniela@outlook.com (corresponding author)

Abstract

In the days when the notion of “keeping up with Joneses” is stepping back to “keeping up with the network”, it is of great importance to seek an understanding of how classical theories and thoughts (such as Veblen’s conspicuous consumption theory from 1899) are potentially affected as a result of the development of social media (SM). Nowadays, social media catalyses conspicuous consumption while expanding what is considered a social group and social classes and fuelling the aspirant group influence and social comparison. This paper provides a theoretical framework of the conspicuous consumption school of thought and characteristics of premium luxury fashion goods. It traces deep-rooted consumption patterns from Bulgaria’s background and argues the potential underlying motives of conspicuous consumption. It further investigates consumer behaviour and addresses the existing gaps in the extant academic literature by discussing the results of an online survey among 130 respondents (53.1% of the respondents were 25 years of age or less, and 46.9% were above 25). The main objective of the paper is to study the relationship between variables of conspicuous consumption, the symbolic value of images displayed online, social media intensity and the fulfilment of social needs in the context of Instagram as a selected social media. The study data demonstrate that Instagram intensity fosters social comparison, which leads to an increased need for uniqueness. Younger individuals and females, in general, have the desire to project a conspicuous image online, and they would most likely post their luxurious premium fashion products online. Our findings confirm that social media fosters social comparison, resulting in an increased need for differentiation, uniqueness and social conformity. The findings add to a growing body of literature on social media and substantially to our understanding of Bulgarian customers’ perception of premium luxury fashion products.

Implications for Central European audience: The paper builds on extant literature in the field of conspicuous consumption, which is a common phenomenon in post-socialist countries. It provides a custom methodology for studying the conspicuous display of fashion items on Instagram, which is one of the most used communication media on a regular basis among young people in CEE (Eurostat, 2022) and the second most popular social media in

Europe (Statcounter, 2022). The distribution of global social media users accounts for 5.7% in Central Europe and 5% in Eastern Europe (Statista, 2022). The results can be used by companies in the sector, new entrants, influencers, opinion leaders, etc.

Keywords: Conspicuous consumption; branding; luxury fashion

JEL Classification: M3, M37

Introduction

Social media is rapidly becoming one of the most time-consuming daily activities. This revolutionary change has affected both marketing communication and branding strategies. Along with social media popularity, luxury goods are among the most resilient and developing industries, continuously sustaining growth and revenues. According to BoF-McKinsey State of Fashion (2022) and Bloomberg Intelligence BI (2023), despite the highly challenging macroeconomic and geopolitical situation and overall uncertainty, such as the Russo-Ukrainian War, COVID-19, costs of inflation, expected recessionary conditions, the luxury goods market grew back to 1.15 trillion EUR in 2021, growing another 19%–21% in 2022 (Bain & Company, 2023). The war in Ukraine has had a limited direct effect on the financial performance of luxurious brands with light asset impairments and write-downs, considering the ceased operations in Russia. However, the luxury powerhouses show no sign of slowing down, demonstrating the resiliency of the luxury consumer. In fact, LVMH's brands in the fashion & leather category grew by 18% compared to the first quarter of 2022 (Luxury Tribune, 2023; Seeking Alpha, 2023)

There are no other factors that dominate modern popular culture as much as fashion and SM. Essentially, fashion on its own is a form of expression of one's personality and a central component of almost all daily events (O'Cass & Frost, 2002). On the other hand, SM serves as an arena for the projection of one's favourable image and lifestyle achieved with the display of fashion goods. It could be deduced that luxurious clothing dominates as the easiest and most important way to portray wealth and success (Lewis & Moital, 2016; Siepmann et al., 2022), while SM is the most accessible form of communicating with others and obtaining affirmation. Involvement in SM means engagement with extended social groups and various classes, and thus, the publicity is on a significantly larger scale than offline. The sense of achievement and identity is not only quantified by SM usage intensity and the number of followers but also the audience reaction and validation is instant in the form of likes and comments (Podoshen et al., 2011). The audience reaction is particularly important and valid for material and conspicuous goods, for which product satisfaction results from audience reaction (Wong, 1997). Consequently, social needs such as the pursuit of status and prestige, and the desire for demonstration derived from social comparison are also inflated. All of this results in conspicuous consumption, whereas all consumption now has the chance of becoming such based on the content displayed by users and their online engagement (Madzunya et al., 2021).

Conspicuous consumption has been a widely discussed topic in the academic literature. Prior research has thoroughly investigated mainly the relationship between conspicuous online consumption and self-esteem (Burnasheva & Suh, 2020; Kar Wai & Osman, 2019; Selçuk Eti, 2022), Facebook usage and narcissism (Neave et al., 2020; Niesiobędzka & Konaszewski, 2021; Taylor & Strutton, 2016), social media intensity (Shayeb & Deeb, 2023;

Halil, 2019; Pellegrino et al., 2022; Thoumrungroje, 2018), social status and symbolic products in the context of status consumption (Aagerup & Nilsson, 2016; Garcia et al., 2019; Husain et al., 2022) and luxury consumption (Creevey, 2021; Madzunya et al., 2021; Wang & Griskevicius, 2013).

However, gaps in the literature have been identified to the best of the authors' knowledge and based on an extensive theoretical review. Firstly, considerable attention has been paid to the impact of Facebook (Davenport et al., 2014; Niesiobędzka & Konaszewski, 2021; Taylor & Strutton, 2016; Wallace et al., 2020) as a selected social media on the conspicuous consumption; nevertheless, relatively little research has been conducted regarding the photo-sharing social media – Instagram, despite its growth: worldwide, the most downloaded app in the 4th quarter of 2021, and second-most downloaded in the 1st quarter of 2022 (Briskman, 2022; Forristal, 2022). Secondly, although extensive research has been devoted to conspicuous consumption in affluent, post-affluent, capitalist and developing societies, rather less attention has been paid to research of countries with a socialist past, neglecting cross-cultural differences and traditional consumption patterns, particularly in countries such as Bulgaria. The Bulgarian market for luxury goods and, specifically, fashion goods has been rapidly growing in recent years and has yet to be studied in depth. According to Statista (2022), the revenue in the luxury goods market for 2021 amounted to 311.3 million USD in comparison with 198.30 million USD in 2016, with luxury fashion being the largest segment with 109.3 million USD.

In view of the existing gaps, the article aims to examine the impact and potential effect of Instagram usage on the conspicuous consumption of premium luxury fashion products among Bulgarian consumers. Therefore, the paper is organized as follows: It opens with a review of the literature on conspicuous consumption of luxury goods and the nexus with Bulgaria's historical and cultural background. Various viewpoints are put into critical discussion; nevertheless, the main focus is on historical and modern perspectives, aiming to outline that certain social needs and behaviour related to status consumption and social comparison are both universal for human nature but also easily affected by the development of social media. Afterwards, the study methodology and implemented data analyses are presented and practical implications are discussed in detail and also summarized in tabular form. Furthermore, the luxury fashion perceptions of various stakeholders are comparatively discussed. Finally, the paper ends with key findings, practical implications and suggested needs for future research.

1 Literature Review

1.1 Conspicuous consumption as a phenomenon

Originally, economic scholars pioneered establishing theories regarding buyer behaviour (Marshall, 1890; Menger, 1950). Marshall's *Principles of Economics* (1890) overlooks matters of symbolism and preferences and identifies consumption as solely determined by the law of supply and demand. Such utilitarian views in economics suggest that consumers' spending decisions occur rationally, consciously and independently of other market forces and actors. As Kotler (1965) noted, the Marshallian model provides a theoretical analysis of only a limited spot of the "black box". However, Veblen's (1899) approach towards neoclassical Marshallian

terms is somewhat different – economic consumption is not motivated and limited to essential needs or instinctive intentions but rather to social norms. In *Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen (1899) was the first to coin the term conspicuous consumption, described as an attempt to inflate the ego and attain envy by portraying wealth and status with the acquisition and display of goods (Lewis & Moital, 2016). He suggested that “pecuniary emulation” is a behaviour that strives to mimic the consumption of higher social classes (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). Subsequently to the work of Veblen (1899), Keasbey (1903) also highlighted that the prestige value of the product is related to purchase decisions, and Woods (1960) provided evidence that products have a role as symbols due to the importance of social and psychological influences on consumer decision making. Alternatively, Duesenberry (1949) argued that a person’s utility is dependent on relations and comparison with others. Ultimately, households are exposed to different consumption patterns of their reference groups, which are often desired to be duplicated. The phenomena are described as “demonstration effects”. McMurry (1944) also confirmed the notion that psychological factors, mainly “feelings of inferiority”, such as economic comparison and social status, are decisive factors in buying behaviour. Leibenstein (1950) furthered the idea of the effect of external factors on perceived utility by demonstrating it comprehensively. Implementing it on a demand curve, he was able to convey actions such as “Veblen”, “snob” and “bandwagon” effects: the bandwagon effect refers to the extent to which the demand for a commodity is increased since others (especially members of reference social groups) are also consuming the same commodity (Leibenstein, 1950, p. 189). Bandwagon is also known as an attempt to preserve one’s self-esteem (McCormick, 2016; Page, 1992; Patsiaouras & Fitchett, 2012), whereas a “snob” is a type of consumer who increases consumption as the price of the product increases. The “Veblen” effect on consumers is the increase in demand as, consequently, the product price increases. The perceived conspicuous value of the product is based on price as a prestige indicator. Several scholars have also confirmed that the perceived utility of a product is also a result of network externalities (Corneo & Jeanne, 1997; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Katz & Shapiro, 1985; Liebowitz & Margolis, 1998) and social values (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999).

Later, Veblen et al. (1982) found that luxury goods consumed in public were more likely to be conspicuous goods. Numerous measurement schemes have included conspicuousness as a critical dimension of luxury brand consumption (Dubois et al., 2001; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999).

Much of the current literature on luxurious conspicuous consumption pays attention to the effect of social media and the increase of such types of consumption as a result of the extensive role of SM (Burnasheva & Suh, 2020; Madzunya et al., 2021; Niesiołbiedzka & Konaszewski, 2021; Taylor & Strutton, 2016; Thourmrungrorje, 2018; Krause et al., 2019).

1.2 Conceptualization of luxury products, value of conspicuous consumption and social comparison on SM

The term “luxury” embodies many concepts and its meaning cannot be defined unambiguously. As Kapferer stated in 1997, “What is a luxury for some is just ordinary for others”. Therefore, the measurement of luxury could be highly subjective (Ko et al., 2019; Oh et al., 2011). To define luxury and its characteristics, extensive studies have been conducted on the perceptions and attitudes of consumers towards luxury brands (Becker et al., 2018;

Bilge, 2015; Heine, 2010; Kapferer, 1997; Ko et al., 2019; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Vigneron and Johnson (1999) developed a scale that measures the degree of luxuriousness of a brand, called the Brand Luxury Index (BLI), which consists of three non-personal-oriented perceptions (conspicuousness, uniqueness and quality) and two personal-oriented perceptions: hedonism and extended self (Ko et al., 2019). The conceptualization of the attributes of luxury consists of 3 key elements: the objective (material), the subjective (individual) and the collective (social) (Berthon et al., 2009). Conspicuousness is a crucial dimension in measuring the consumption of luxury brands (Dubois et al., 2001; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999) since the motivation for such consumption (the most commonly accepted theory) originated from Veblen. Since conspicuous goods, also called "Veblenesque" goods (Wong, 1997), are generally prone to visual display or overt usage, the consumption of mainly luxury products and services is often called "conspicuous consumption" (Gierl & Huettl, 2010, p. 226; O'Cass & Frost, 2002).

Luxurious products are among the most important means of displaying the current status and class and the aspiring one in society – "luxury is the apparition of the ruling classes" (Kapferer, 1997). Social class is defined as "the difference in status between an individual and others in social life, which depends on one's material resources and one's self-perception of one's status in society" (Chen et al., 2022). Generally, humans are "social animals", participation in groups is psychologically satisfactory and the pursuit of status is a universal motive. In fact, the desire for distinction and recognition has a place in Maslow's (1943) well-known hierarchy of needs (Govier, 1994; Sahin & Nasir, 2021). Furthermore, social desire is not limited to participation in a class or group; distinction and acknowledgement are also predominant (Assimos et al., 2019; O'Cass & Frost, 2002). Some customers employ the symbolic value of luxury fashion goods to improve their self-perception, project a favourable and desirable image, or validate their current one (Chatterjee et al., 2023; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, p. 1402). Individuals in the high social class use conspicuous consumption to differentiate themselves from other social groups, particularly individuals in lower classes, whereas the latter consume conspicuously to project materialistic success based on their reference group (Mazzocco et al., 2012). The higher the people view their social class, the more they desire status and material success, regardless of their perceived social class belongingness (Wang & Griskevicius, 2013).

1.2.1 Luxury fashion brand segments

Scholars find classifying and establishing theories regarding the levels and segments of luxury brands to be challenging, considering the fact that brands evolve and might change over time, or a brand might simultaneously be part of different categories (Kapferer, 1997; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). Nevertheless, Kapferer (1997) and Silverstein and Fiske (2003) attempted to differentiate various fashion brands based on attributes, relations between a brand's aura (intangible values such as creativity, heritage, prestige, excellence and quality) and price. Luxury brands could be segmented into: haute couture fashion (supreme luxury), ready-to-wear (aspirational luxury), diffusion segment (accessible luxury), bridge segment (premium luxury) and mass market (high street and fast fashion).

Firstly, haute couture fashion is the highest and most exclusive segment, characterized by pure creation, unique work and craftsmanship. This segment is widely known as the supreme

luxury segment, also defined by Kapferer (1997) as “griffe”. A vital characteristic of “griffe” is that it could transform into a brand, but it is not possible to transform a “griffe” into a haute couture brand. Secondly, the ready-to-wear segment is characterized by standardized sizes and small series, with high quality and high price. In addition, the diffusion segment has more comprehensive production volumes than ready-to-wear and retail availability, thus expanding the target audience. The bridge segment is the link between high-end and mass-market; it is also known as the premium fashion segment, or *masstige*, meaning that it commands a premium over ordinary products; they are priced below conventional luxury goods, but they still offer prestige, symbolic benefits and trendy designs, often known as “luxury for the masses” or “prestige for the masses” (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014; Ho et al., 2023). Finally, the mass market segment is related to fast fashion, which is accessible and affordable.

For the purpose of this research, we focus our attention on one segment – the premium segment (bridge segment), because it is an example of the tendency of “*masstige*” (the intersection of exclusivity and mass consumption) when luxury consumers are not restricted to the classical elites, but rather to the younger base that is well-paid, modern and well-informed about luxury fashion trends (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). The main drivers of this particular segment are globalization, wealth creation in emerging markets and, most importantly, social media, which enables users to be constantly “in touch” with global brands, consumption patterns and trends.

1.3 Conspicuous consumption and social media

Social media (SM) is not only an integral part of Internet usage but also a significant aspect of daily life for many people. In fact, on average, in 2022, internet users spent 147 minutes per day on social media and messaging apps, an increase of more than half an hour since 2015 (Guardian, 2022; Statista, 2022). With active participation in SM platforms, the means of connection, social needs and online/offline behaviour have changed. Online users are involved in extended groups to appeal to hundreds of users' opinions, lifestyles and projected images (Hill & Hult, n.d., pp. 90–121). While a typical offline social network has approximately 125 connections (Hill & Dunbar, 2003), an online one equals a relative number of 300 “friends” for teenage users of Facebook (Taylor & Strutton, 2016). Besides, users also engage with the content posted by people who are not known personally but serve as inspiration or so-called “influencers” (see 1.3.1). Therefore, exposure to reference groups and aspirant social classes is on a far bigger scale than without SM participation. Furthermore, profiles are often idealized, highlighting mostly positive attributes (Hill & Dunbar, 2003; Taylor & Strutton, 2016). These foster contemporary “keeping up with the Joneses” competition and thus peer pressure. Conspicuous consumption is also closely related to social comparison (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004). SM settings comfort and encourage such comparison (Cao et al., 2016; Kar Wai & Osman, 2019; Thoumrungroje, 2014; Widjajanta et al., 2018). Some findings suggest that with an increase in the intensity of SM usage, people tend to make irrational choices and be more narcissistic (Davenport et al., 2014; Singh et al., 2018; Taylor & Strutton, 2016; Thoumrungroje, 2014). Users are also more cautious towards the symbolic value of a product since all consumption can be conspicuous depending on one's usage of SM (Kar Wai & Osman, 2019; Yenicioglu & Suerdem, 2015). For instance, posting a purchase on social networks is a type of conspicuous showing off since the demonstration of wealth is public on a large scale (Duan & Dholakia, 2017). Niesiołędzka

and Konaszewski's (2021) findings confirm that using Facebook increases the acquisition of goods with external signals of prestige and status. In addition, the satisfaction of using a product due to the audience reaction is straightforward since the accumulation of admiration is instant and quantified via likes and comments (Taylor & Strutton, 2016). Chen et al. (2022) found that users are likely to emphasize their identity through conspicuous consumption in order to maintain their status on SM. On the other hand, Jensen Schau and Gilly (2003) asserted that Facebook posts reflect an idealized self and may not reflect the person's material reality (Wallace et al., 2020). SM has significantly modified the understanding of traditional conspicuous consumption theory, as all consumption now has the possibility of becoming conspicuous based on how individuals make use of SM (Madzunya et al., 2021; Yenicioglu & Suerdem, 2015).

1.3.1 Conspicuous consumption on Instagram

Instagram is a photo-sharing mobile application that allows users to take and upload pictures and videos instantly, share "stories" (photos and videos visible only for 24 hours), apply filters to them and interact with other users by commenting and "liking" content. In 2022, social media introduced shopping options and reels (15-second multi-clip videos with audio, effects and new creative tools) to the platform (Instagram, 2022). With approximately 1 billion active users per month, Instagram is the fourth most-used social media platform in the world and the second in Europe (Statcounter, 2022). The average daily time spent is 53 minutes per day (SMPERTH, 2022; We Are Social, 2022).

SM and, in particular, Instagram are important topics attracting academic attention due to their impact on many aspects of modern society (Caliandro & Graham, 2020; Krause et al., 2019). Previous studies have found evidence for a shift in consumer behaviour and augmented impulse buying – the entertainment and stimulus of visual elements in Instagram usage have diminished the evaluation step of the decision-making process (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Shahpasandi et al., 2020; Triwidisari et al., 2018). SM and its algorithms continuously revolutionise digital advertising, branding, customer engagement and visual and mass communication elements by providing valuable and in-depth data (Ancillai et al., 2019; Bailey et al., 2021; Dhun & Dangi, 2022; Dolega et al., 2021; Gkikas et al., 2022). As a result, industries are reshaped and retailers and brands adapt and change their business models, strategies and production lines.

"Insta" fame has become a topic profoundly discussed since the rise of Instagram in recent years. Micro-celebrities, SM influencers (SMIs), opinion leaders and content or fashion creators (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015) are some of the labels for people who can engage with a large pool of followers (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015), yield profits through paid editorial content (Abidin, 2016; Jin et al., 2019), capitalize on their personal brand (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015; Lair et al., 2016; Marwick, 2015). The investments in influencer marketing are on large scales for luxury fashion brands in particular – for the third quarter of 2021, approximately 1.4 billion USD was spent on influencer marketing in Europe (Statista, 2021). Instagram has been the most popular platform in recent years, and this is foreseen to continue through to at least 2024 (Oberlo, 2022). SMIs are also "regarded as trusted tastemakers in one or several niches" (de Veirman et al., 2017). Data further suggest that due to the "perceived sociability" and

trustworthiness, SMIs are preferred over traditional celebrities in the digital marketing context (Marroncelli & Braithwaite, 2022; Jin et al., 2019). Nevertheless, SMIs also embrace status symbols, material possessions and idealized looks while behaving conspicuously (Marwick, 2015). It is arguable whether SMIs actually “influence” their followers or, followers tend to believe that the displayed possessions are attainable due to the relatively likeable image, and thus, followers are motivated by envy to essentially imitate the SMIs (Jin et al., 2019). Findings suggest a relationship between Instagram envy and higher levels of conspicuous consumption (Krause et al., 2019). Besides envy, studies show that other key socio-psychological motivational factors for users to follow SMIs include consumerism, materialism, creative inspiration and the urge to own what they usually cannot (Lee et al., 2022; Jin et al., 2019; Marwick, 2015; Muqaddam & Jin, 2018; Nabi & Keblusek, 2014).

Based on the above, the following research hypotheses are formulated.

H1: Instagram usage is positively associated as a means for validation of needs for ostentation and signalling.

H2: Instagram usage is positively associated as a means for differentiation.

H3: Instagram usage is positively associated as a means of social conformity.

H4: There is a positive relationship between Instagram usage intensity and conspicuous consumption of premium luxury fashion goods.

1.4 Conspicuous consumption in Bulgaria

As previously stated, conspicuous consumption is not a new phenomenon in human nature; in fact, it could be dated back to aristocratic elites, industrialization and capitalism (Page, 1992). Although substantial research has been devoted to conspicuous consumption in affluent, post-affluent, capitalist and developing societies, somewhat less attention has been paid to the research of post-socialist countries, neglecting cross-cultural differences, and more specifically in Bulgaria. There are some ethnographic studies related to the overall consumption pattern of post-socialist countries, but with a focus groups of countries such as East European, post-Soviet ones, etc. (Berdahl, 2006; Crăciun & Lipan, 2020; Ger & Belk, 1996; Greenberg, 2006; Ost & Ost, 2009).

Consumption is relatable to economic systems. Thus, consumer patterns, perceptions and desires are deeply rooted in culture and social structures as consequences of history. From a consumption point of view, the “empty shelves” of socialist days in Bulgaria and the transition to consumerism could be argued to be a reason for a tendency to conspicuous consumption. “Empty shelves” refers to the great scarcity of goods and the redirection of privileges to loyal groups, reinforcing a hierarchical structure. Western fashion brands were solely limited to either hard-currency shops (so-called “Corecom”) or the shadow market. These goods and knowledge of Western popular culture were objects of high status and differentiation (Bar-Haim, 1987). The “Corecom” shop was perceived as a ruthless comparison of Western goods with local ones (Zlateva, 2018). As Ger and Belk (1996) described, shortages of consumer goods were the norm and shopping opportunism – waiting in long lines and using connections – became standard, while clerks with access to goods became “powerful figures”. To this day, many children of socialist Bulgaria are still vividly telling stories of proudly owned Levi’s jeans or leather jackets. The restrictions on

consumption during socialism escalated consumerism during post-socialism when various new products were introduced to the Bulgarian market. With the influence of foreign mass media, immigration and the export of popular culture, the post-socialist Bulgarian society began speaking the multinational language of status via acquiring fashionable goods. Individuals viewed shopping as a leisure pursuit and more exclusively in terms of “their relative success in gaining access to high levels of consumption” (Lury, 1996, p. 49). Because of this finding, the Bulgarian consumption behaviour from the past might also be in transition. Essentially, the post-socialist consumption patterns and perceptions, such as the scarcity and “empty shelves”, the restrictive social norms, lack of social mobility, wealth inequality and idealisation of specific classes and cultures, could be argued to be resulting in the conspicuous consumption of today’s society (Creed, 2002). Current practices of demonstrating status via goods are rooted in socialist experience (Sredl, 2004; Stec, 1992). Similarly, exposure to idealised social groups is accelerated by mass media; SM and consumerism and conspicuousness are fuelled by the wide availability of goods and the desire to “keep up with the Joneses”. According to Statista (2022), the market for luxurious goods in Bulgaria accounts for 312 million USD in 2021, with the luxury fashion segment accounting for 104 million USD. In the context of the research into conspicuous consumption, we have examined the topic from various perspectives in qualitative empirical studies, such as the political economy of social status and conspicuous consumption (Sedlarski, 2019), perceived human happiness, subjective well-being, social class and relative income (Sedlarski, 2018), consumerism (Krasteva-Blagoeva, 2018), social media’s impact on fashion (Petkova, 2018). In terms of SM and conspicuous fashion consumption on the Bulgarian market, to the best of the authors’ knowledge, the research is somewhat limited.

H5: Users utilize the symbolic value of luxurious fashion goods.

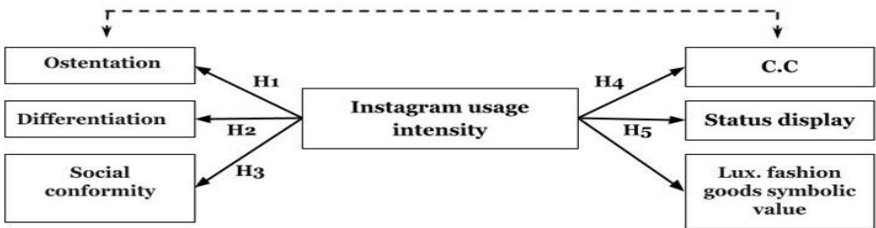
2 Methodology

The data collection took place via online surveys from April to May 2022. The snowball sampling technique was implemented. Since the link to the survey was distributed via messaging applications and SM (Instagram), participants were asked to continue the process and identify others who met the research criteria through referrals. The design of the survey was adopted and further expanded by Sahin and Nasir (2021) and selected dimensions from the scale of conspicuous consumption compiled by Marcoux et al. (1997) as well as characteristics from the Brand Luxury Index (BLI). The survey was structured by implementing a Likert-type scale to measure the selected variables. The respondents assessed the extent to which they agreed with each item and statement on a seven-point Likert-type scale. The type of scale was selected because the parametric methods and data transformation led to more in-depth analysis (Mircioiu & Atkinson, 2016).

The analysis consists of reliability statistics, validity analyses, as well an independent T-test in order to determine whether there was a difference between the means of the grouping variables taken into consideration. In terms of reliability statistics, Cronbach's alpha is equal to 0.927(10 items); the high value indicates higher agreement between items. Furthermore, the validity analyses show Pearson correlation accounting for $r=0.752$, which shows moderate to good correlation with a significance value (2-tailed) of <0.05 .

The theoretical framework allows the design of a conceptual model (Figure 1). The model is derived from the literature review and the identified gaps, such as limited research into the potential effects of Instagram on conspicuous consumption among Bulgarians, the lack of research into the consumption of luxurious premium fashion goods in Bulgaria and the impact of Instagram on conspicuous consumption. It illustrates the relationship and formulated hypotheses among conspicuous consumption, the social effect of conspicuous consumption and Instagram, social conformity, the symbolic value of luxurious fashion goods and Instagram usage.

Figure 1 | Conceptual model for exploring relationship between SM usage and conspicuous consumption



Note: Data collected by authors
Source: Authors

3 Findings

3.1 Conspicuous consumption

3.1.1 Conspicuous consumer demographic profile

In order to evaluate and describe the demographic profile of conspicuous consumers, an independent T-test was conducted to determine whether there was a difference between the means of the grouping variables taken into consideration, such as age (25 or less, above 25), income (under 1000 EUR, above 1000 EUR) and gender (female/male) and variables regarding conspicuous statements. Based on Levene's test for equal variances $F(128) = 0.924$ and with significance level $p = 0.338 > \alpha = 0.05$, the assumption of equal variance has not been violated and the assumption is tenable; therefore, equal variances were assumed and the data failed to reject $H_0 (\sigma_1 = \sigma_2)$. For respondents under 25 or less and above 25, there was not a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of age and level of conspicuousness (significance value = $0.547 > p = 0.05$).

However, there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of age and the demonstration of conspicuousness (significance value = $0.007 < p = 0.05$), whereas people above 25 were more prone to conspicuousness since respondents in this age group had posted an image online displaying luxurious fashion item that they own more often in comparison with respondents aged 25 or less. The reason for this finding might be the assumption that people of higher age have higher income, which enables them to consume more premium luxury fashion goods. In order to explore whether there was an interrelation

between the two variables (age and income), the interactions between them were examined via a contingency table. 30.0% of the respondents above 25 years of age indicated to have more than 1000 EUR monthly income, while 16.2% of respondents under 25 years of age indicated higher income. This confirmed that income is a factor in conspicuous consumption. The sample group under 25 years old demonstrated more desire to consume conspicuously, yet they had not displayed their luxurious fashion possessions online; it could be argued that the reason for this is that they do not own a luxurious fashion product, yet they desire to own one and display it on their SM. Furthermore, more respondents in the sample above 25 years of age have income above 1000 EUR, which enables them to both consume and display conspicuously online.

An independent T-test was further conducted to determine whether a difference exists between the mean scores of females and males and their level of conspicuousness. Based on Levene's test for equal variances $F(128) = 2.977$, the significance level was $p = 0.087 > \alpha = 0.05$; therefore, equal variances were assumed and the data failed to reject $H_0 (\sigma_1 = \sigma_2)$. For female respondents and males, there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of gender and level of conspicuousness (significance value = $0.025 < p = 0.05$), with a confidence interval of 95% from 0.106 to 1.549. The null hypothesis was rejected and confirmed that females are more likely to post online on Instagram when they buy/own luxurious fashion.

In addition, it could once again be concluded that income is a factor in conspicuous consumption of luxurious fashion products since females have a slightly higher income (23.8%) in comparison with males (22.3%).

3.1.2 Social effect of conspicuous consumption and Instagram

The following table summarizes the hypotheses derived in order to demonstrate whether there is a correlation between Instagram usage intensity (daily usage, occasional usage) in regard to the need of ostentation and signalling, differentiation and social conformity as social needs previously confirmed by academic literature as needs related with conspicuous consumption.

Table 1 | Hypothesis testing and analysis

Hypothesis		Supported/ Unsupported	Comments
H1	Instagram is positively associated as a means for validation of needs for ostentation and signalling	Supported $p = 0.003 < \alpha = 0.05$	The perceived social value/ego is of great importance, as well as the symbolic value of luxurious fashion products. Visible brand logos and brand names are perceived as symbols of higher social class by highly conspicuous respondents.
		The data rejected $H_0 (\sigma^2_1 = \sigma^2_2)$	
H2	Instagram usage is positively associated as a means of differentiation	Unsupported $p = 0.074 > \alpha = 0.05$	Comparing the means of the selected categories, the need for differentiation and uniqueness is the highest with a mean of 3.93; social conformity is slightly below with a mean of 3.69. Therefore, the social media setting is comforting for social comparison.
H3	Instagram is positively associated as a means of social conformity	Unsupported $p = 0.00 < \alpha = 0.05$	
H4	There is a positive relationship between Instagram usage intensity and conspicuous consumption of premium luxury fashion goods	Unsupported $p = 0.547 > \alpha = 0.05$	For respondents with daily activity on Instagram (N=94, M=3.27, ST=1.779) and occasional activity (N=36, M=2.39, SD=1.300), there was not a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of Instagram activity and level of conspicuousness. Based on the means, users with daily activity are more prone to conspicuous consumption.

Note: Data collected by authors

Source: Authors

2.3 Symbolic value of luxurious fashion goods

As indicated, the perceived symbols of the high social class of luxurious fashion products are mostly high-quality materials, such as leather or silk (30.8%), a visible brand logo of a premium luxury brand (26.6%), brand name (23.1%), and lastly perceived uniqueness, such as aesthetics or design.

Based on the cross-tabulation analysis, the respondents with the highest level of conspicuous demonstration of luxurious fashion products on Instagram define the *visible brand logo* and the *brand name* as symbols of higher social class. On the contrary, respondents who disagreed with the statement and thus are less likely to demonstrate and post any luxurious fashion possessions on Instagram are associated with more subtle symbols of status and luxury such as high-quality materials, which cannot be as easily recognized. Respondents with higher income indicated high-quality materials (e.g., leather, silk) as a fashion brand element, which indicates and signals a high social class (19.2%). It is also worth mentioning that 24.8% of the respondents' products and brands that provide prestige and privilege are more valuable.

4 Discussion

The generated insights and essential conclusions from the research contribute to the current knowledge, and some of the findings are consistent with the theoretical framework introduced in the literature review. The survey results both negate and support some of the derived hypotheses. It was predicted that with the increased usage of Instagram, the conspicuous consumption of luxurious premium fashion products would increase; thus, conspicuous consumption will be positively affected by Instagram usage intensity.

Firstly, there were distinctions between the two age groups, their attitudes and desire to consume and behave conspicuously, and the actual display of conspicuous consumption on Instagram. The findings confirmed that people above 25 years of age are more prone to display and post their luxurious fashion possessions online; in fact, they admitted they had posted such images ($m = 4.16$). The younger individuals, on the contrary, demonstrated that they only have the desire to project a conspicuous image online, and they would most likely post their luxurious premium fashion products online if they owned any. The bridge between those differences, as anticipated, was the “income” factor. As Chen et al. (2022) noted, *objective social class* is based on one’s income and educational level, occupation, etc., while *subjective social class* is based on the individual’s perception. People above 25 years of age also had a monthly income of more than 1000 EUR, while those under 25 earned less than 1000 EUR. Moreover, as confirmed by previous studies (Burnasheva & Suh, 2020; Lewis & Moital, 2016; Niesiołędzka & Konaszewski, 2021), the younger generation is more affected by Instagram to positively demonstrate attitudes towards conspicuous consumption if they actually had the opportunity to own such luxurious items and were not monetarily restricted.

In addition to the demographic aspects, the findings corroborated previous results (Dubois et al., 2001; Selçuk Eti, 2022; Wang & Griskevicius, 2013) that women display more luxurious premium fashion goods and express more desire to do so than men. The female respondents also had higher monthly income, confirming the relationship between status consumption and income.

The results showed statistical significance that respondents with higher income (more than 1000 EUR) believe posting luxurious fashion products would signal higher social class and also brands that provide prestige and privilege are more valuable. These findings support the previous finding of Keasbey (1903), who highlighted that the *prestige value* of the product is solely related to purchase decisions.

Notwithstanding the lack of statistical significance of H4 (There is a positive relationship between Instagram usage intensity and conspicuous consumption of premium luxury fashion goods), the findings based on the means of respondents with daily activity on Instagram were significantly higher ($m = 4.28$) in comparison with ones with occasional activity ($m = 2.44$) are in complete agreement with the tendency of increasing time spent per day on social media and messaging apps (Statista, 2022).

Social externalities influence different social needs and behaviour in the context of conspicuous consumption, defined as “*Veblen*”, “*snob*” and “*bandwagon effects*”. The hypotheses regarding how Leibenstein’s needs were affected by Instagram were not supported statistically. Nevertheless, comparing the means of the selected categories, the

need for differentiation and uniqueness is the highest with a mean of 3.93; at the same time, social conformity is slightly below ($m = 3.69$); therefore, the common ground for “*snob*” and “*bandwagon effects*” is *social comparison*. This is in agreement with previous research (Cao et al., 2016; Kar Wai & Osman, 2019; Thoumrungroje, 2014; Widjajanta et al., 2018), which has shown that the SM setting is a comforting social comparison.

These results demonstrate an intriguing controversy. While the respondents would display their luxurious fashion possessions online because of the desire for uniqueness, a large proportion admitted that they would also buy luxurious fashion items because they have seen a person they follow post it online. The controversy could be interpreted as the impact of Instagram usage, resulting in distorted notions about reality online. What is rather significant is that the same controversy is also valid with conspicuous consumption. While respondents disagreed with the statement that they display luxurious fashion possessions on Instagram because they want to “show off” ($m = 3.02$), it was also confirmed that they would most likely post a luxurious fashion possession when they buy or own one ($m = 3.77$). It is essential to bear in mind the possible bias in these responses.

This inevitably raises questions about what might be the possible underlying reasons for such a controversy: on the one hand, *the theory of uniqueness* (Fromkin & Snyder, 1980) confirms the current findings that “the perception of extreme similarity of self to others leads an individual to seek a behavioural strategy that gives him/her a greater sense of uniqueness”; on the other, Instagram provides a setting for *extended social groups* and consequently exaggerated social comparison, meaning that individuals might consume conspicuously in order to project material success while replicating the actions of their aspiring reference group. Hence, it could conceivably be inferred that individuals might not even realize and indeed be aware of what needs (ostentation, differentiation, conformity) they strive to fulfil with the display of luxurious fashion possessions online.

The role of the *aspiring reference group* is clearly crucial, and it also confirms that the role of the SM influencer is not just to be a content creator or a trendsetter, but it is rather one of the main drivers for social comparison and opinion leadership in the general SM setting nowadays. Thus, the already stated findings of this study are valuable not only from a practical point of view for luxury fashion brands but also for SM influencers. The main goal for both the shareholders is to deeply understand the consumers/followers – in particular, how their emotions and social and psychological motivations on consumer decision-making are affected by SM. Having this understanding, SM influencers can easily communicate and display conspicuous goods and create organic traffic via hashtags and mentions of premium luxury brands. By better understanding the correlation between *rooted cultural consumer perceptions*, conspicuous consumption and SM, they can better engage with their followers and enhance their online presence and content created. Brands can also take needed action in order to differentiate the brand identity from conspicuous consumption in order to balance between exclusivity, wider recognition and brand loyalty (Fetais et al., 2022).

Concerning *symbolic value*, the respondents with the highest level of conspicuous demonstration of luxurious fashion products on Instagram defined a visible brand logo and brand name as symbols of higher social class. As confirmed in the academic literature, those symbols are characterized by their direct visibility recognition. For conspicuous consumers, the *perceived social value/ego* is of great importance, as well as the ability of the brand logo and the brand name to signal a consumer’s success quickly. On the contrary, respondents

who disagreed with the statement and thus are less likely to demonstrate luxurious fashion possessions on Instagram are associated with more subtle symbols of status and luxury, such as high-quality materials and perceived uniqueness, which cannot be as easily recognized online since their symbolic value is instead associated with their functionality. Depending on whether luxurious brands want to target this particular segment of highly conspicuous customers, they can adapt their *social media presence* and *e-commerce channels* by visualizing and communicating the brand logo more. Brands could also change their product lines by following particular trends, such as the "logomania trend". *Logomania*, also known as *maximalism*, is the overt use of bold and/or aggressive logos on apparel. The distinctive features of a particular premium fashion brand, such as logos, rather than the quality or craftsmanship, attract consumers who are in pursuit of status and social ranking. The associations of the visible brand logo and the brand name as a luxury symbol enable companies to maintain high-profit margins easily. What is more, the easily recognized logos attract new consumers and thus provide "entry" towards higher and more expensive high-end product lines or upscale brands. The limitations of all-over print lie in the risk of increased counterfeit luxury since the printed logos are easily replicated, as well as overconsumption and excessive production – vital problems related to sustainability.

Overall, we have arrived at the following findings and their potential practical implications:

Table 2 | Summarization of key findings and potential practical implications

Key findings	Practical implications and meaning
The demographic profile of the Bulgarian conspicuous consumer is females above 25 years of age with gross monthly income above 1000 EUR. Respondents below 25 years of age demonstrated the desire to project a conspicuous image online, stating that they would most likely post their luxurious premium fashion products online.	Identified characteristics of the Bulgarian conspicuous consumer's profile. Findings provide directions for segmentation and enable marketers' better understanding of customer behaviour.
The respondents agree and believe that high social status could be perceived based on online presence and activity on Instagram, i.e., posting luxurious fashion products may signal higher social class.	Understanding the correlation between rooted cultural consumer perceptions, conspicuous consumption and SM, SM influencers and luxury brands can better engage with their followers and enhance and increase their online presence and content created.
The findings based on the means of respondents with daily activity on Instagram were significantly higher ($m = 4.28$) in comparison with ones with occasional activity and presence.	Valuable from a practical point of view for luxury fashion brands, but also for SM influencers – deciding on SM and/or advertising campaign frequency and intensity.
Social needs for differentiation and uniqueness are satisfied with the utilization of social media usage, while a large proportion of individuals admitted that social conformity is also an important part of their online activity.	Luxury fashion management and branding could benefit by identifying the potential customer value factors, building retail strategy, adapting the social media presence and accelerating and/or sustaining the growth of e-commerce channels.
Bulgarians associate high-quality materials (30.8%), visible brand logos of premium luxury brands (26.6%) and brand names (23.1%) as symbols and characteristics of luxurious fashion goods that are able to signal one's success and achievements.	

Note: Data collected by authors

Source: Authors

As discussed previously, consumerism and conspicuousness are rooted in the *Bulgarian past socialist experience* (Sredl, 2004; Stec, 1992). As our findings suggest, the exposure to idealised social groups is currently accelerated by mass media; SM and consumerism and conspicuousness are fuelled by the wide availability of goods and the desire to “keep up with the Joneses”. The market size for luxurious goods in Bulgaria is quite considerable. Therefore, luxury fashion management and branding could benefit from the results of this study by identifying the potential customer value factors that influence brand relationships and behaviour intentions. Based on this, entry strategies could be developed, taking into consideration the specifics of cultural and historical background. In addition, the findings of this study may benefit retail strategists in CEE by enabling better positioning, insights for shopping experience personalization, customer engagement and promotions.

This study also provides a custom methodology for studying conspicuous displays of fashion items on Instagram, which can be implemented for replica studies in CEE, given some historical and cultural similarities.

The paper may also serve as a ground for further studies and investigation since the findings add to the growing body of literature on social media and substantially address the gap in the literature regarding our understanding of customers' perception of premium luxury fashion products.

Conclusion

This paper underlines the importance of seeking an understanding of the impact of SM on the conspicuous consumption of luxurious fashion products. The study's objectives were achieved and the findings provided comprehensive results. The data obtained from an online survey among 130 respondents (53.1% of respondents were 25 years of age or less and 46.9% were above 25; females were 61.5% and males were 38.5% of the sample) fill existing gaps in the literature. Younger individuals and females, in general, have the desire to project a conspicuous image online and they would most likely post their luxurious premium fashion products online. Findings confirmed that social media fosters social comparison, resulting in an increased need for differentiation, uniqueness and social conformity. This demonstrated a controversy, which supported the theory of uniqueness (Fromkin & Snyder, 1980) but also provided understanding regarding the potential rationale – extended social groups and exaggerated social comparison. In addition, the majority of the respondents stated that they would most likely post a luxurious fashion possession when they buy or own one (conspicuous act); nevertheless, the underlying motive is not admitted to be the need to “show off” (conspicuous act) to others. Finally, our findings showed that the respondents with a higher level of conspicuous consumption online perceived a visible brand logo and brand name as symbols of higher social class due to their ability to easily signal a consumer's success, while the ones with a lower level of conspicuous consumption online utilize more subtle symbols of status and luxury such as high-quality materials and perceived uniqueness.

Acknowledgement

Funding: No special funding.

Conflicts of interest: The authors hereby declare that this article was not submitted or published elsewhere.

References

- Aagerup, U., & Nilsson, J. (2016). Green consumer behaviour: being good or seeming good? *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 25(3), 274–284. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-06-2015-0903>.
- Abidin, C. (2016). Visibility labour: Engaging with Influencers' fashion brands and #OOTD advertorial campaigns on Instagram. *Media International Australia*, 161(1), 86–100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X16665177>.

- Ancillai, C., Terho, H., Cardinali, S., & Pascucci, F. (2019). Advancing social media driven sales research: Establishing conceptual foundations for B-to-B social selling. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 82, 293–308. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.INDMARMAN.2019.01.002>.
- Arriagada, A., & Ibáñez, F. (2020). “You Need At Least One Picture Daily, if Not, You’re Dead”: Content Creators and Platform Evolution in the Social Media Ecology. *Social Media and Society*, 6(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120944624>.
- Assimos, B. M., de Rezende Pinto, M., Leite, R. S., & de Andrade, M. L. (2019). Conspicuous Consumption and its Relation to Brand Consciousness, Status Consumption and Self-Expression. *BBR. Brazilian Business Review*, 16(4), 350–368. <https://doi.org/10.15728/BBR.2019.16.4.3>.
- Bailey, A. A., Bonifield, C. M., & Elhai, J. D. (2021). Modelling consumer engagement on social networking sites: Roles of attitudinal and motivational factors. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 59, 102348. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.JRETCONSER.2020.102348>.
- Bain & Company. (2023). Renaissance in Uncertainty: Luxury Builds on Its Rebound. Retrieved May 2023 from <https://www.bain.com/insights/renaissance-in-uncertainty-luxury-builds-on-its-rebound/>
- Bar-Haim, G. (1987). The Meaning of Western Commercial Artifacts for Eastern European Youth. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 16(2), 205-226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241687162004>.
- Bearden, W. O., & Etzel, M. J. (1982). Reference group influence on product and brand purchase decisions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9(2), 183–194. <https://doi.org/10.1086/208911>.
- Becker, K., Lee, J. W., & Nobre, H. M. (2018). The concept of luxury brands and the relationship between consumers and luxury brands. *Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, 5(3), 51–63. <https://doi.org/10.13106/jafeb.2018.vol5.no3.51>.
- Berdahl, D. (2006). New directions in the study of postsocialist consumption. *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 24 (2), 10–12.
- Berthon, P., Pitt, L., Parent, M., & Berthon, J.-P. (2009). Aesthetics and Ephemerality: Observing and preserving the luxury brand. *California Management Review*, 52(1), 45-66. <https://doi.org/10.1525/cmr.2009.52.1.45>.
- Bilge, H. A. (2015). Luxury Consumption: Literature Review. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 18(1), 35-55.
- Briskman, J. (2022). Sensor Tower's Q4 2021 Data Digest: Worldwide App Downloads Totaled 36.1 Billion Last Quarter. Sensor Tower. <https://sensortower.com/blog/q4-2021-data-digest/>.
- Burnasheva, R., & Suh, Y. G. (2020). The influence of social media usage, self-image congruity and self-esteem on conspicuous online consumption among millennials. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 33(5), 1255–1269. <https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-03-2020-0180>.
- Business of Fashion, & McKinsey. (2022). The State of Fashion 2023: Resilience in the Face of Uncertainty | BoF. Retrieved May 2023, <https://www.businessoffashion.com/reports/news-analysis/the-state-of-fashion-2023-industry-report-bof-mckinsey/>.
- Bloomberg Intelligence (2023) Big luxury goods most resilient on China wait: 5 charts for 2023. Retrieved May, 2023, from <https://www.bloomberg.com/professional/blog/big-luxury-goods-most-resilient-on-china-wait-5-charts-for-2023/>,
- Caliandro, A., & Graham, J. (2020). Studying Instagram Beyond Selfies. *Social Media + Society*, 6(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120924779>.

- Cao, X., Guo, X., Vogel, D., & Zhang, X. (2016). Exploring the influence of social media on employee work performance. *Internet Research*, 26(2), 529–545. <https://doi.org/10.1108/INTR-11-2014-0299/FULL/PDF>.
- Chen, J., Gao, J., Liu, Z., Luo, Y., Chen, M., & Bu, L. (2022). Luxury in Emerging Markets: An Investigation of the Role of Subjective Social Class and Conspicuous Consumption. *Sustainability*, 14(4), 2096. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14042096>.
- Corneo, G., & Jeanne, O. (1997). Conformism, snobbism, and conspicuous consumption. *Journal of Public Economics*, 66, 55–71.
- Crăciun, M., & Lipan, Ș. (2020). Introduction: The Middle Class in Post-socialist Europe: Ethnographies of Its “Good Life”. *East European Politics and Societies*, 34(2), 423–440. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325420902509>.
- Creed, G. W. (2002). Anthropology of East Europe Review (Consumer) Paradise Lost: Capitalist Dynamics And Disenchantment In Rural Bulgaria. *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 20(2), 119-125.
- Creevey, D., Coughlan, J., & O'Connor, C. (2021). Social media and luxury: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 24(1), 99-129. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12271>.
- Chatterjee, S., Chaudhuri, R., & Vrontis, D. (2023). Masstige marketing: An empirical study of consumer perception and product attributes with moderating role of status, emotion, and pride. *Journal of Business Research*, 155, 113401. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.JBUSRES.2022.113401>.
- Davenport, S. W., Bergman, S. M., Bergman, J. Z., & Fearington, M. E. (2014). Twitter versus Facebook: Exploring the role of narcissism in the motives and usage of different social media platforms. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 32, 212–220. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.12.011>.
- de Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: the impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising*, 36(5), 798–828. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2017.1348035>.
- Dhun, & Dangi, H. K. (2022). Influencer Marketing: Role of Influencer Credibility and Congruence on Brand Attitude and eWOM. *Journal of Internet Commerce*, 22(1), 28-72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332861.2022.2125220>.
- Djafarova, E., & Bowes, T. (2021). 'Instagram made Me buy it': Generation Z impulse purchases in fashion industry. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 59. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102345>
- Dolega, L., Rowe, F., & Branagan, E. (2021). Going digital? The impact of social media marketing on retail website traffic, orders and sales. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 60, 102501. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.JRETCONSER.2021.102501>.
- Duan, J., & Dholakia, R. R. (2017). Posting purchases on social media increases happiness: The mediating roles of purchases' impact on self and interpersonal relationships. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 34(5), 404-413. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCM-07-2016-1871>.
- Dubois, B., Laurent, G., & Czellar, S. (2001). Consumer rapport to luxury: Analyzing complex and ambivalent attitudes. *HEC Research Papers Series 736*, HEC Paris.
- Duesenberry, J. S. (1949). Income, saving, and the theory of consumer behavior. Harvard University Press.

- D'Arpizio Claudia, Levato Federica, Prete Filippo, & Joëlle de Montgolfier. (2023). Renaissance in Uncertainty: Luxury Builds on Its Rebound | Bain & Company. Retrieved April, 2023, from <https://www.bain.com/insights/renaissance-in-uncertainty-luxury-builds-on-its-rebound>.
- Eurostat. (2022). Eurostat: Regions in Europe, 2022 interactive edition. Retrieved April, 2023, from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/regions/#making-use-of-the-internet>.
- Forristal, L. (2022). TikTok was the top app by worldwide downloads in Q1 2022 |. TechCrunch. Retrieved May, 2023 from <https://techcrunch.com/2022/04/26/tiktok-was-the-top-app-by-worldwide-downloads-in-q1-2022>
- Fromkin, H. L., & Snyder, C. R. (1980). The Search for Uniqueness and Valuation of Scarcity. *Social Exchange*, 57–75. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4613-3087-5_3.
- Fetais, A. H., Algharabat, S. R., Aljafari, A., & Rana, N. P. (2022) Do Social Media Marketing Activities Improve Brand Loyalty? An Empirical Study on Luxury Fashion Brands. *Information System Frontiers*, 25, 795-817. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-022-10264-7>.
- Garcia, S. M., Weaver, K., & Chen, P. (2019). The Status Signals Paradox. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 10(5), 690–696. [https://doi.org/10\(5\) 690-696](https://doi.org/10(5) 690-696).
- Ger, G., & Belk, W. R. (1996). I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke: Consumption escapes of the "Less Affluent World". *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 19, 271–304. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00411411>.
- Gierl, H., & Huettl, V. (2010). Are scarce products always more attractive? The interaction of different types of scarcity signals with products' suitability for conspicuous consumption. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 27(3), 225–235. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2010.02.002>.
- Gkikas, D. C., Tzafilkou, K., Theodoridis, P. K., Garpis, A., & Gkikas, M. C. (2022). How do text characteristics impact user engagement in social media posts: Modelling content readability, length, and hashtags number in Facebook. *International Journal of Information Management Data Insights*, 2(1), 100067. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.JJIMEI.2022.100067>.
- Govier, T. (1994). Is It a Jungle Out There? Trust, Distrust and the Construction of Social Reality. *Dialogue*, 33(2), 237–252. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217300010519>.
- Greenberg, J. (2006). Noć Reklamoždera: Democracy, Consumption, and the Contradictions of Representation in Post-Socialist Serbia. *PoLAR*, 29, 181.
- Guardian.(2022). Social media marketing. Retrieved May, 2023, from <https://guardian-marketing.com/social-media-marketing-2/>.
- Halil, I. (2019). The Impact of Conspicuous Consumption in Social Media on Purchasing Intentions. *İşletme Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 3, 2176–2190.
- Hearn, A., & Schoenhoff, S. (2015). From Celebrity to Influencer: Tracing the Diffusion of Celebrity Value across the Data Stream. *A Companion to Celebrity*, 194–212. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118475089.CH11>.
- Heine, K. (2010). The personality of luxury fashion brands. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 1(3), 154–163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20932685.2010.10593067>.
- Hill, C. W. L., & Hult, G. T. M. (n.d.). International Business: Competing in the Global marketplace. (12th ed., pp. 90–121). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Hill, R. A., & Dunbar, R. I. M. (2003). Social network size in humans. *Human Nature*, 14(1), 53–72. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12110-003-1016-y>.

- Husain, R., Ahmad, A., & Khan, B. M. (2022). The role of status consumption and brand equity: A comparative study of the marketing of Indian luxury brands by traditional and social-media. *Global Business and Organizational Excellence*, 41(4), 48–67. <https://doi.org/10.1002/JOE.22156>.
- Ho, F. N., Wong, J., & Brodowsky, G. (2023). Does masstige offer the prestige of luxury without the social costs? Status and warmth perceptions from masstige and luxury signals. *Journal of Business Research*, 155, 113382. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.113382>.
- Instagram. (2022). About Instagram. Retrieved April, 2023, from <https://about.instagram.com/>.
- Siepmann, C., Holthoff, L. C., & Kowalczyk, P. (2022). Conspicuous consumption of luxury experiences: an experimental investigation of status perceptions on social media. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 31(3), 454–468. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-08-2020-3047>
- Silverstein, M. J., & Fiske, N. (2003). Luxury for the Masses. *Harvard Business Review*, 81(4), 48–59.
- Jensen Schau, H., & Gilly, M. C. (2003). We are what we post? Self-presentation in personal web space. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30(3), 385–404. <https://doi.org/10.1086/378616>.
- Jin, S. V., Muqaddam, A., & Ryu, E. (2019). Marketing Intelligence & Planning Instafamous and social media influencer marketing Article information: For Authors. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 37(5), 567–579. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-09-2018-0375>.
- Kapferer, J.-N. (1997). Managing luxury brands. *Journal of Brand Management*, 4(4), 251–259. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51127-6_11.
- Kapferer, J.-N., & Michaut-Denizeau, A. (2014). Is luxury compatible with sustainability? Luxury consumers' viewpoint. *Journal of Brand Management*, 21(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2013.19>
- Kar Wai, L., & Osman, S. (2019). The Influence of Self-esteem in the Relationship of Social Media Usage and Conspicuous Consumption. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 9 (2), 335–352. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v9-i2/5549>.
- Kastanakis, M. N., & Balabanis, G. (2012). Between the mass and the class: Antecedents of the “bandwagon” luxury consumption behavior. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(10), 1399–1407. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.10.005>.
- Katz, M. L., & Shapiro, C. (1985). Network externalities, competition, and compatibility. *The American Economic Review*, 75(3), 424–440.
- Keasbey, L. M. (1903). Prestige value. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 17(3), 456–475.
- Ko, E., Costello, J. P., & Taylor, C. R. (2019). What is a luxury brand? A new definition and review of the literature. *Journal of Business Research*, 99, 405–413. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.08.023>.
- Kotler, P. (1965). Behavioral models for analyzing buyers. *Journal of Marketing*, 29(4), 37–45.
- Krasteva-Blagoeva, E. (2018). Approaching Consumer Culture: Global Flows and Local Contexts. Cham: Springer.
- Krause, H.-V., Krasnova, H., & Buxmann, P. (2019). Keeping Up with the Joneses: Instagram Use and its Influence on Conspicuous Consumption. International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS) Proceedings. Munich, Germany.

- Lair, D. J., Sullivan, K., & Cheney, G. (2016). Marketization and the Recasting of the Professional Self. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 18(3), 307–343. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318904270744>.
- Lee, J. A., Sudarshan, S., Sussman, K. L., Bright, L. F., & Eastin, M. S. (2022). Why are consumers following social media influencers on Instagram? Exploration of consumers' motives for following influencers and the role of materialism. *International Journal of Advertising*, 41(1), 78–100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2021.1964226>.
- Leibenstein H. (1950). Bandwagon, Snob, and Veblen effects in the theory of consumers' demand. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 64(2), 183–207. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1882692>.
- Lewis, A., & Moital, M. (2016). Young professionals' conspicuous consumption of clothing. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 20(2), 138–156. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-04-2015-0034/FULL/PDF>.
- Liebowitz, S. J., & Margolis, S. E. (1998). Network effects and externalities. *The new Palgrave dictionary of economics and the law*, 2, 671–674.
- Lury, C. (1996). Consumer culture. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers university press.
- Luxury Tribune. (2023). LVMH: first quarter of 2023 up +17%. Retrieved May, 2023, from <https://www.luxurytribune.com/en/lvmh-first-quarter-of-2023-up-17>.
- Madzunya, N., Viljoen, K., & Cilliers, L. (2021). The effect of Instagram conspicuous consumptive behaviour on the intention to purchase luxury goods: A developing country's perspective. *South African Journal of Information Management*, 23(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/SAJIM.V23I1.1267>.
- Marcoux, J.-S., Filiatrault, P., & Chéron, E. (1997). The Attitudes Underlying Preferences of Young Urban Educated Polish Consumers Towards Products Made in Western Countries. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 9(4), 5–29. https://doi.org/10.1300/J046v09n04_02.
- Marroncelli, R., & Braithwaite, N. (2022). #insta-fashion: How the Digital Revolution Has Affected Celebrity Culture and the British Fashion Retail Landscape. *Fashion Practice*, 14(1), 124–150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17569370.2020.1794321>.
- Marshall, A. (1890). Principles of Economics, 8th ed.(1920). London: Macmillan.
- Marwick, A. E. (2015). Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy. *Public Culture*, 27(1(75)), 137–160. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2798379>.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370.
- Mazzocco, P. J., Rucker, D. D., Galinsky, A. D., & Anderson, E. T. (2012). Direct and vicarious conspicuous consumption: Identification with low-status groups increases the desire for high-status goods. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 22(4), 520–528. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2012.07.002>.
- McCormick, K. (2016). Duesenberry and Veblen: The Demonstration Effect Revisited. *Journal of Economic Issues*, 17(4), 1125–1129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00213624.1983.11504194>.
- McMurry, R. N. (1944). Psychology in selling. *Journal of Marketing*, 9(2), 114–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224294400900203>.
- Menger, C. (1950). Principles of Economics, trans. New York: The Free Press.
- Mircioiu, C., & Atkinson, J. (2016). A Comparison of Parametric and Non-Parametric Methods Applied to a Likert Scale. *Pharmacy* 2017, 5(2), 26. <https://doi.org/10.3390/PHARMACY5020026>.

- Muqaddam, A. A., & Jin, S. (2018). "Is Instafamous More Trustworthy Than Traditional Celebrities?" the Mediating Effects of Social Presence With Instagram Influencers and the Moderating Effects of Self-Discrepancy on Consumers' Attitude Towards Luxury Branding. *American Academy of - Advertising. Conference. Proceedings*(pp. 147-147).
- Nabi, R. L., & Keblusek, L. (2014). Inspired by Hope, Motivated by Envy: Comparing the Effects of Discrete Emotions in the Process of Social Comparison to Media Figures. *Media Psychology*, 17(2), 208-234. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2013.878663>.
- Neave, L., Tzemou, E., & Fastoso, F. (2020). Seeking attention versus seeking approval: How conspicuous consumption differs between grandiose and vulnerable narcissists. *Psychology & Marketing*, 37(3), 418–427. <https://doi.org/10.1002/MAR.21308>.
- Niesiobędzka, M., & Konaszewski, K. (2021). Narcissism, activity on Facebook, and conspicuous consumption among young adults. *Current Issues in Personality Psychology*, 10(1), 21–31. <https://doi.org/10.5114/cipp.2021.108751>.
- Oberlo. (2022). Top Influencer Marketing Platforms. Retrieved January, 2023, from <https://www.oberlo.com/statistics/top-influencer-marketing-platforms>.
- O'Cass, A., & Frost, H. (2002). Status brands: Examining the effects of non-product-related brand associations on status and conspicuous consumption. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 11(2), 67–88. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420210423455/FULL/PDF>.
- O'Cass, A., & McEwen, H. (2004). Exploring consumer status and conspicuous consumption. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 4(1), 25–39. <https://doi.org/10.1002/CB.155>.
- Oh, H., Godey, B., Pederzoli, D., Aiello, G., Donvito, R., Chan, P., Singh, R., Skorobogatikh, I. I., Tsuchiya, J., & Weitz, B. (2011). Brand and country-of-origin effect on consumers' decision to purchase luxury products Brand and country-of-origin effect on consumers' decision to purchase luxury products. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(10), 1461-1470. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.10.012>.
- Ost, D., & Ost, D. (2009). The Invisibility and Centrality of Class After Communism. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society IJPS*, 22, 497–515. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10767-009-9079-3>.
- Page, C. (1992). A history of conspicuous consumption. *ACR Special Volumes*.
- Patsiaouras, G., & Fitchett, J. A. (2012). The evolution of conspicuous consumption. *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, 4(1), 154-176. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17557501211195109>.
- Pellegrino, A., Abe, M., & Shannon, R. (2022). The Dark Side of Social Media-Effects of Social Media Content on the Relationship Between Materialism and Negative Consumption Behaviors. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 28(13), 870614. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.870614>.
- Petkova, L. (2018). New Models of Social Networks Impact on Fashion. *Yearbook of Sofia University*, 30(1).
- Podoshen, J. S., Li, L., & Zhang, J. (2011). Materialism and conspicuous consumption in China: A cross-cultural examination. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 35(1), 17–25. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1470-6431.2010.00930.x>.
- Sahin, O., & Nasir, S. (2021). The effects of status consumption and conspicuous consumption on perceived symbolic status *The Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 30(1), 68-85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2021.1888649>.

- Sedlarski, T. (2018). Happiness economics: the social nature of human happiness. *Yearbook of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Sofia University*, 15(1), 173–205.
- Sedlarski, T. (2019). Political Economy Of Social Status-Economic And Socio-Psychological Effects Of Status Competition On 'Winner-Take-All' Markets. *Yearbook of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Sofia University*, 17(1), 211-277.
- Selçuk Eti, H. (2022). The Relationship Between Women's Self-Confidence, and Conspicuous Consumption Tendency on Social Media The Relationship Between Women's Self-Confidence, and Conspicuous Consumption Tendency on Social Media. *OPUS-Journal of Society Research*, 19(46), 289–297. <https://doi.org/10.26466/opusjr.1091941>.
- Shahpasandi, F., Zarei, A., & Nikabadi, M. S. (2020). Consumers' Impulse Buying Behavior on Instagram: Examining the Influence of Flow Experiences and Hedonic Browsing on Impulse Buying. *Journal of Internet Commerce*, 19(4), 437-465. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332861.2020.1816324>.
- Seeking Alpha. (2023). Macroeconomic and geopolitical risks to consider. Retrieved May, 2023 from <https://seekingalpha.com/article/4545314-lvmh-macroeconomic-and-geopolitical-risks-to-consider>.
- Singh, S., Farley, S. D., & Donahue, J. J. (2018). Grandiosity on display: Social media behaviors and dimensions of narcissism. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 134, 308–313. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2018.06.039>.
- SMPERTH. (2022). 2023 Instagram Statistics - Everything You Need to Know from SMPerth. Retrieved January, 2023, from <https://www.smp Perth.com/resources/instagram/instagram-statistics/>.
- Sredl, K. C. (2004). "Balkan Barbie": Women and Consumer Culture in Post-Socialist Croatia". Association for Consumer Research. Conference of Gender, marketing and Consumer Behavior, Valdosta, GA: Association for Consumer Research.
- Statista. (2021). Influencer marketing spend of fashion luxury brands Europe 2021. Retrieved January, 2023 from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1295351/miv-fashion-luxury-brands-influencer-marketing-europe/>
- Statista. (2022). Social Media Statistics & Facts. Retrieved January, 2023 from <https://www.statista.com/topics/1164/social-networks/#dossierSummary>.
- Statista. (2022). Internet usage in Central and Eastern Europe. Retrieved January, 2023, from <https://www.statista.com/study/31628/internet-usage-in-eastern-europe-statista-dossier/>.
- Statcounter. (2022). Stats Europe, Social Media Statcounter Global Stats. Retrieved January, 2023, from <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/europe>.
- Stec, L. (1992). Review of How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed, by S. Drakulić. *NWSA Journal*, 4(3), 398-400.
- El Shayeb, M., & El-Deeb, S. (2023). The mediating effect of luxury perception on the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention of luxury jewellery brands. *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*, 18(1), 28-57. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJIMA.2023.128149>.
- Taylor, D. G., & Strutton, D. (2016). Does Facebook usage lead to conspicuous consumption? *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 10(3), 231–248. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-01-2015-0009>.

ARTICLE

- Thoumrungroje, A. (2014). The Influence of Social Media Intensity and EWOM on Conspicuous Consumption. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 148, 7–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.SBSPRO.2014.07.009>.
- Thoumrungroje, A. (2018). A Cross-National Study of Consumer Spending Behavior: The Impact of Social Media Intensity and Materialism. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 30(4), 276–286. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08961530.2018.1462130>.
- Triwidisari, A., Nurkhin, A., & Muhsin, M. (2018). The Relationships Between Instagram Social Media Usage, Hedonic Shopping Motives and Financial Literacy on Impulse Buying. *Dinamika Pendidikan*, 12(2), 170–181. <https://doi.org/10.15294/dp.v12i2.13565>.
- Veblen, T., & Galbraith, J. K. (1973). *The theory of the leisure class* (Vol. 1899). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Vigneron, F., & Johnson, L. W. (1999). A Review and a Conceptual Framework of Prestige-Seeking Consumer Behavior. *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, 1, 1-15.
- Wallace, E., Cairnes, J. E., Buil, I., & Catalán, S. (2020). Facebook and luxury fashion: self-congruent posts and luxury purchase intentions. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 24(4), 571-588. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-09-2019-0215>.
- Wang, Y., & Griskevicius, V. (2013). Conspicuous Consumption, Relationships and Rivals: Women's Luxury Products As Signals to Other Women. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(5), 834-854. <https://doi.org/10.1086/673256>.
- We Are Social. (2022). More than 5 billion people now use the internet. Retrieved January, 2023, from <https://wearesocial.com/au/blog/2022/04/more-than-5-billion-people-now-use-the-internet/>.
- Widjajanta, B., Senen, S. H., Masharyono, M., Lisnawati, L., & Anggraeni, C. P. (2018). The impact of social media usage and self-esteem on conspicuous consumption: Instagram user of Hijabers Community Bandung member. *International Journal of eBusiness and eGovernment Studies*, 10(2), 1-13.
- Wong, N. Y. C. (1997). Suppose You Own the World and No One Knows? Conspicuous Consumption, Materialism and Self. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 24, 197–203.
- Woods, W. A. (1960). Psychological dimensions of consumer decision. *Journal of Marketing*, 24(3), 15–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224296002400303>.
- Yenicioglu, B., & Suerdem, A. (2015). Participatory New Product Development-A Framework for Deliberately Collaborative and Continuous Innovation Design. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 195, 1443–1452. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.06.442>.
- Zlateva, N. (2018). Brutalnite istini za sotsa: Defitsitni stoki i Korekom [Златева, Н. (2018). Бруталните истини за соца: Дефицитни стоки и Кореком]. Retrieved May, 2023 from <https://www.flashnews.bg/brutalnite-istini-za-sotsa-defitsitni-stoki-i-korekom/>

The research article passed the review process. | Received: 2 February 2023; **Revised:** 29 May 2023; **Accepted:** 22 June 2023; **Available online:** 31 October 2023; **Published in the regular issue:** 30 May 2024.