

Luxury Unboxed: How Gender, Identity & Screens Shape What We Flaunt

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Abstract

This study examines how social media, gender, and identity interact to influence the purchase of luxury products, paying particular attention to the psychological phenomena known as the ostentation effect. Luxury has evolved beyond ownership to become a social signaling tool in the current digital era, when social media sites like Instagram and TikTok control everyday interactions. This behavior is largely driven by the ostentation effect, which is the desire to own expensive and distinctive objects in order to show off one's status. But how people interact with luxury is also influenced by things like gender identity and cultural norms.

This article investigates how subtle societal forces, such as gender standards and online influence, determine luxury tastes through a structured survey administered to a sample group of 80 young people. The results indicate that, contrary to conventional wisdom, luxury consumption is not always gendered; both men and women show interest in luxury goods, despite the fact that the kinds of goods and advertising tactics they encounter frequently vary. Furthermore, many respondents acknowledged that luxury helps them portray who they are—or who they desire to be—indicating that identity expression is a significant factor in consumer behavior.

With many participants acknowledging that they were influenced by what they saw online, even to the extent of extending budgets or feeling under financial strain, social media appeared as a potent amplifier of conspicuous consumerism. In the meantime, those who are sick of trends are starting to gravitate toward more subdued kinds of luxury, which are characterized by long-term value and less branding.

In summary, this study demonstrates how luxury spending is closely related to cultural, psychological, and digital factors by fusing theory with empirical data. It demonstrates how our perceptions and purchases of luxury are influenced by our desired perceptions of ourselves as well as how the environment around us supports those perceptions.

Introduction

Nowadays, luxury consumption is more than just an economic decision; it's a cultural and psychological statement at a time when looks frequently speak louder than words. Whether it's a designer purse with lots of logos or a precisely made minimalist watch, luxury items have a special place in how individuals express their individuality, status, and sense of style. This essay examines three potent forces—gender, identity, and the impact of social media—in an effort to comprehend the underlying reasons behind luxury consumption.

Luxury spending was once thought to be a sector largely occupied by women, but contemporary trends show that men are just as involved. The way society defines gender roles and expectations has a significant impact on how people view and interact with luxury. Identity is also important; people frequently purchase

luxury goods to reflect who they are or wish to be, using luxury as a means of self-expression.

The digital realm, where sites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have turned luxury into public performance, sits on top of these social and intimate aspects. Celebrities, influencers, and regular people all display carefully manicured lifestyles, inspiring others to strive for comparable standards. The ostentation effect—the desire to buy pricey, unusual objects merely for their visibility and status value—has increased as a result.

We surveyed 80 young people to test these theories in practice, carefully gauging the ways in which cultural norms, social media exposure, and gender identity affect their perceptions and choices toward luxury. In addition to bridging the gap between theory and practice, this study provides insight into how contemporary customers view luxury in a world that is changing quickly.

Keywords: Ostentation, Ostension, Jenny Ponzio, Norbet Elias's, Jean-Pascal Daloz, Darwiche, Frank Darwiche, George Washington, Joseph Manc, Mount Vernon, Law of demand, Social media, Social comparison, Instagram, TikTok, Thorstein Veblen, Youtube, FOMO, Superman, Barbies, Subtle art of not giving a fu*k, Mark manson

Literature Review

• Without Partaking of the Follies of Luxury and Ostentation

Joseph Manca's study paper, "Without Partaking of the Follies of Luxury and Ostentation," explores the ethical and philosophical aspects of economic conduct with a particular emphasis on George Washington's architecture for Mount Vernon. The Scottish Enlightenment ideas of virtue over luxury are reflected in Washington's dedication to simplicity. The study highlights the conflict between individual aspirations and societal values by examining how societies view and react to displays of wealth. By examining Washington's decisions, it shows how social norms and ethical frameworks influence attitudes toward consumption, illuminating the ongoing discussion over the influence of luxury on moral and civic virtue.

• measuring marketing's impact on business outcomes, particularly in the context of the evolving digital landscape

The study examines how to quantify marketing's influence on business results, with a focus on the changing digital environment. It looks at the best ways for marketers to prove their worth, receive funding, and stay accountable. The paper covers important approaches and methods, such as data-driven analytics, marketing mix modeling, and multi-touch attribution, for precisely linking marketing initiatives to observable outcomes. It emphasizes how crucial it is to match marketing KPIs with corporate goals in order to make sure that marketing initiatives support growth and revenue. In the end, the report offers insights into the best ways for marketers to demonstrate their efficacy and preserve their strategic influence inside businesses.

• The Digital Age of Ostentation and the Evacuation of Depth Frank Darwiche's research article

"The Digital Age of Ostentation and the Evacuation of Depth," explores how digital media has made self-presentation into an ostentatious display that prioritizes surface over content. According to Darwiche, the self is created in the digital sphere through carefully chosen acts and images, which results in a loss of spirituality and depth. Based on philosophical ideas, the paper argues that this change leads to a new way of being in which spectacle takes the place of authenticity and the infinite richness of life is reduced to shallow depictions. The study urges a reconsideration of how digital culture affects spirituality and human identity.

• OSTENTATION IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: CULTURE AND ELITE LEGITIMATION

Jean-Pascal Daloz's research article, *Ostentation in Comparative Perspective: Culture and Elite Legitimation*, explores how elites in various civilizations justify their position by showcasing their riches. Daloz investigates how cultural circumstances influence the need for and type of ostentation, building on Veblen's idea of conspicuous spending. By pointing out that in industrialized countries, status may be upheld without overt demonstrations, he juxtaposes Veblen's perspective with Norbert Elias's criticism. Daloz contends that although public displays of wealth may decline in some situations, they may continue or change in others, reflecting various cultural justifications for elite legitimacy.

• Social Comparison of Luxury Brands: Impact of Ostentation and Media Habits

The study identifies four crucial elements that might help luxury fashion firms create successful marketing plans: self-assessment, peer evaluation, self-improvement, and self-enhancement. It shows that social comparison and media have a close relationship, indicating that marketers might leverage media-driven comparisons to sway Indian consumers' decisions. Customers frequently display luxury goods to improve their reputation and compare themselves to others. Additional factors including materialism, social identity, self-concept, and purchasing points should be investigated in future studies. Deeper insights could be obtained with a more comprehensive demographic and geographic approach. In a market that is dynamic and diversified, marketers and policymakers will be better able to comprehend luxury brand consumption and make more educated judgments if this research is expanded.

• Obliteration, Ostension, Ostentation: The Visibility of the Sacred Body in Catholic Culture

Jenny Ponzo examines how Christian-Catholic art depicts the sacred body using three regimes—obliteration, ostension, and ostentation—in her paper *Obliteration, Ostension, Ostentation: The Visibility of the Sacred Body in Catholic Culture*. Hollow or dressable statues are examples of abstract representations that obliterate core details. By employing iconic or indexical techniques, Ostension exposes internal features such as flesh or remnants. These displays are amplified by ostentation, which emphasizes traditional imagery to elicit powerful emotional reactions. The conflict between the ineffability of the sacred and the yearning for its material expression is highlighted by these regimes, which mirror moral and cultural thresholds.

Gender, Identity, and the Psychology Behind Luxury Consumption

We must first comprehend the role that gender and identity play in the consumption of luxury items before we can discuss the ostentation effect.

First of all, despite the stereotype that women prefer luxury products, males enjoy purchasing them just as much and gender has no bearing on this. However, identity plays a big part in this. Celebrities tend to spend more money on luxury goods, especially when compared to lower-income households, but they are much less likely to do so because of the lack of monetary value and the fact that some households earn less money annually than luxury goods. It serves as a means of self-expression in addition to being a requirement for members of affluent society.

After learning how gender and identity relate to the purchase of luxury items, we must now comprehend how ostentation affects luxury goods purchases.

"The desire of people to possess a unique or rare item that has a high value" is the definition of the ostentation effect. According to the law of demand, demand rises when prices decline. When so many people can purchase something, it is no longer distinctive or rare since everyone has it or can afford it.

This is why those who engage in ostentation are drawn to luxury products.

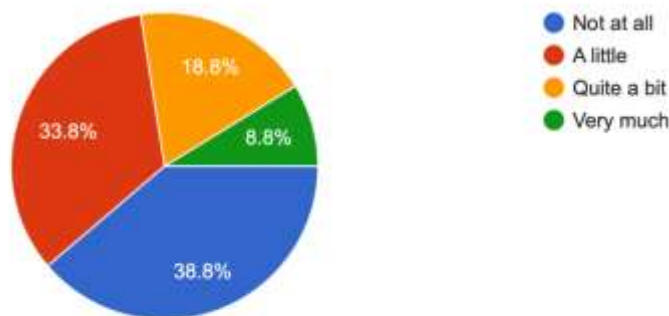
However, based on our poll of about 80 people, this is true both in theory and in practice. It asks individuals questions in a subtle way without them realizing it. The queries that were asked were:

Do you feel pressure to present yourself a certain way (in terms of clothing, style, or lifestyle) based on your gender or identity?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Quite a bit
- ☐ Very much

Do you feel pressure to present yourself a certain way (in terms of clothing, style, or lifestyle) based on your gender or identity?

80 responses



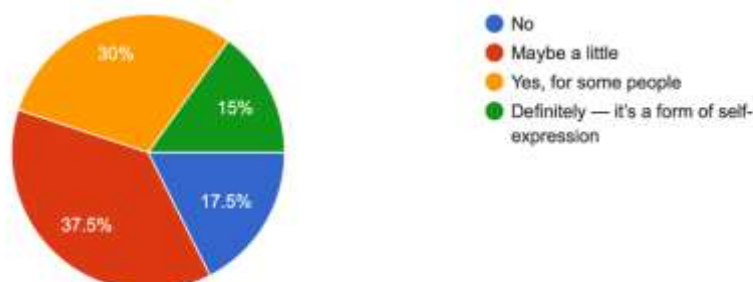
Whether gender influences how people express themselves is gently tested by this question. Sixty-four percent of respondents concur that a person's gender has a significant influence on how they express themselves.

Do you believe luxury items help people express who they are or who they want to be?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe a little
- ☐ Yes, for some people
- ☐ Definitely — it's a form of self-expression

Do you believe luxury items help people express who they are or who they want to be?

80 responses



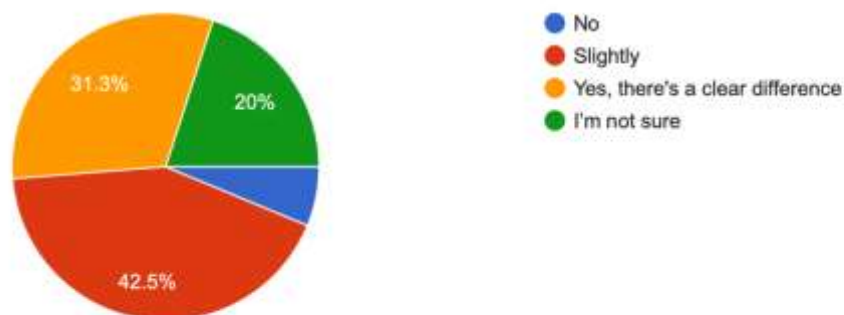
This quietly monitors whether purchasing fancy goods results in identity theft, making those who aren't wealthy appear wealthy. More than 82% of respondents concur that purchasing luxury goods brings them closer to their ideal or role model.

In your opinion, are men and women marketed luxury goods differently?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Slightly
- ☐ Yes, there's a clear difference
- ☐ I'm not sure

In your opinion, are men and women marketed luxury goods differently?

80 responses



This monitors whether society recognizes that luxury lacks a brand and whether purchasing luxury goods is still seen as a female-only hobby. More than 95% of respondents concur that luxury goods are less likely to be purchased by men than by women, and that men and women's products are advertised differently.

Do you think your gender identity affects what luxury items you are expected or encouraged to own (e.g., watches vs. bags)?

- ☐ No
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Yes, it influences what I'm drawn to
- ☐ Yes, and I feel limited by it

Do you think your gender identity affects what luxury items you are expected or encouraged to own (e.g., watches vs. bags)?

80 responses



This investigates cultural or internalized gender and luxury expectations. More than 75% of respondents concur that society has an unconscious influence.

To sum it up, people still believe that gender influences their decision to buy luxury products, and that doing so not only makes them feel more like their role model but also gives them a luxurious experience while being within their means.

Influence of Social Media and Digital Platforms on Luxury Consumption

By giving people a platform to showcase their money and prestige through carefully chosen material, social media increases ostentation. Luxury goods and experiences are promoted by both users and influencers, encouraging a culture of ostentatious consumerism. Because people want to live the lifestyles they see online, this visibility might cause materialistic impulses, social comparison, and envy. The financial ramifications of digital ostentation are thus highlighted by the possibility that some users will take on debt in order to meet these imagined standards.

By displaying opulent lifestyles, social media has increased ostentation and heightened the impacts of social comparison. Influencers on social media sites like Instagram and TikTok showcase expensive goods and events, inspiring followers to compare themselves and strive for comparable statuses. This phenomena, which has its roots in Thorstein Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption, is driven by materialism and FOMO. Even at the expense of financial pressure, studies show that exposure to such content can enhance the desire for luxury goods. As a result, status signaling has become a public performance on digital platforms, impacting social norms and consumer behavior.

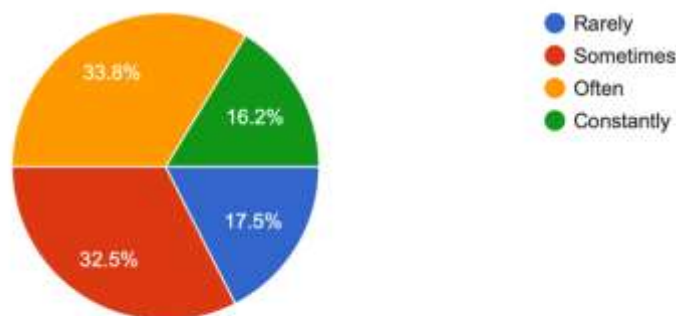
Let's see how our poll illustrates the truth of this subject. The questions that follow are meant to gently work on the subject without the human mind being aware of them. They are followed by what they are testing covertly and what conclusions their responses are offering.

How often do you notice influencers or celebrities showing expensive lifestyles online?

- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Constantly

How often do you notice influencers or celebrities showing expensive lifestyles online?

80 responses

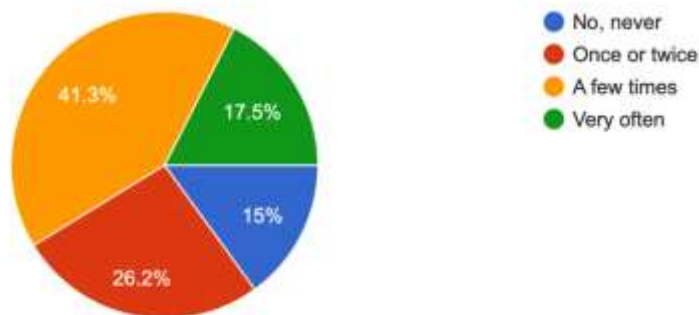


Have you ever wanted to buy something because you saw it online (e.g., on Instagram, TikTok, YouTube)?

- ☐ No, never
- ☐ Once or twice
- ☐ A few times
- ☐ Very often

Have you ever wanted to buy something because you saw it online (e.g., on Instagram, TikTok, YouTube)?

80 responses

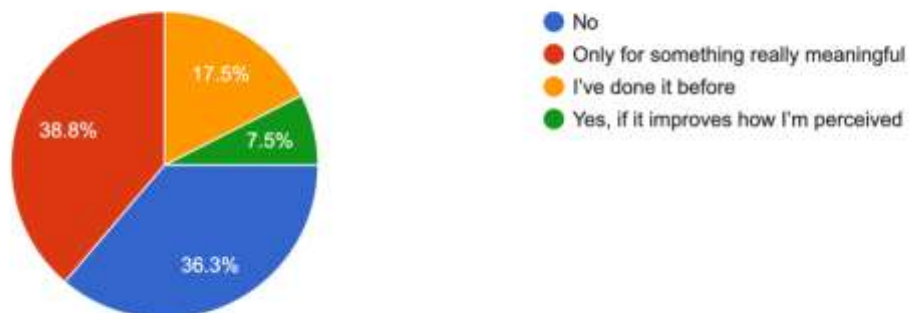


Would you ever stretch your budget or take on debt for a fashion/lifestyle item?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Only for something really meaningful
- ☐ I've done it before
- ☐ Yes, if it improves how I'm perceived

Would you ever stretch your budget or take on debt for a fashion/lifestyle item?

80 responses



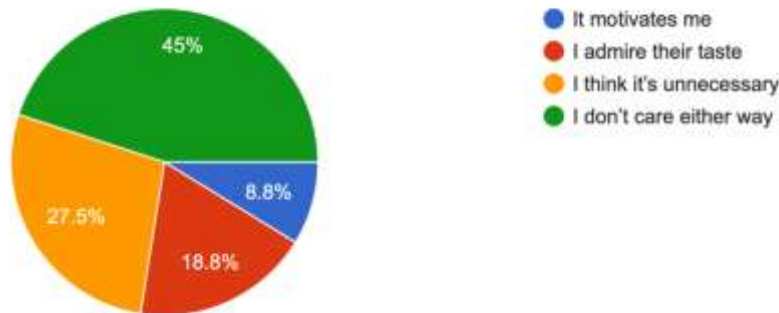
How do you feel about people who show off luxury items online?

- ☐ It motivates me
- ☐ I admire their taste

- ☐ I think it's unnecessary
- ☐ I don't care either way

How do you feel about people who show off luxury items online?

80 responses



It is evident from examining all of the aforementioned questions and responses that over half of the population has, at some point, unknowingly fallen into the trap of social media's ostentation-promoting influence.

Through influencers and natural material, social media quietly promotes luxury, making it difficult to distinguish between sponsored and real endorsements. Influencers frequently display expensive goods in natural environments, projecting an idealized yet approachable image. This strategy emphasizes subtle elegance and exclusivity without overt branding, which is in line with the "quiet luxury" trend. These deceptive marketing techniques have the power to change customer attitudes and actions, increasing the accessibility and desirability of luxury for a wider range of people.

Quiet Sophistication vs. Loud Statements: The New Face of Luxury

Consumer behavior is changing significantly in the luxury industry. Quiet luxury and showy consumerism have become the two main trends.

We talked about luxury as we discussed social media, its impact on luxury consumption, and the ostentation effect.

However, what precisely is luxury? Quiet luxury is a way of living that emphasizes exclusivity and discriminating taste without resorting to overt displays of wealth. It is defined by subtle elegance and sophisticated consumption.

The long-lost sibling of ostentatious consumerism is quiet luxury, which rebels against the ostentation effect. Overt consumption is Thorstein Veblen, a sociologist, coined the phrase in 1899 to describe the display of economic power through the purchase of luxury items.

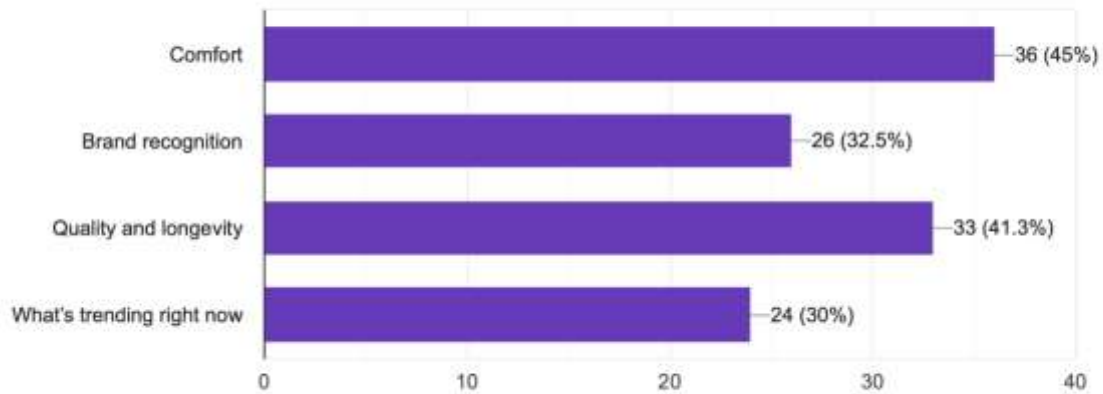
Before we discuss what dominates the market most it's important to review our results, when asked to the general public about this.

When choosing clothes or accessories, what do you usually prioritize?

- ☐ Comfort
- ☐ Brand recognition
- ☐ Quality and longevity
- ☐ What's trending right now

When choosing clothes or accessories, what do you usually prioritise ?

80 responses

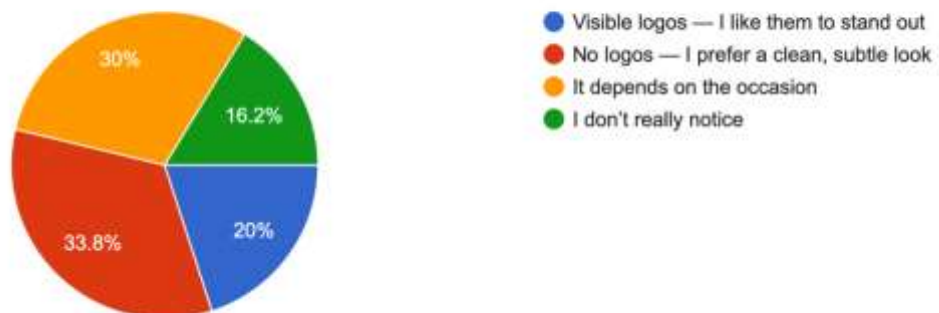


Do you prefer items with visible logos or ones with a simple, no-logo look?

- ☐ Visible logos — I like them to stand out
- ☐ No logos — I prefer a clean, subtle look
- ☐ It depends on the occasion
- ☐ I don't really notice

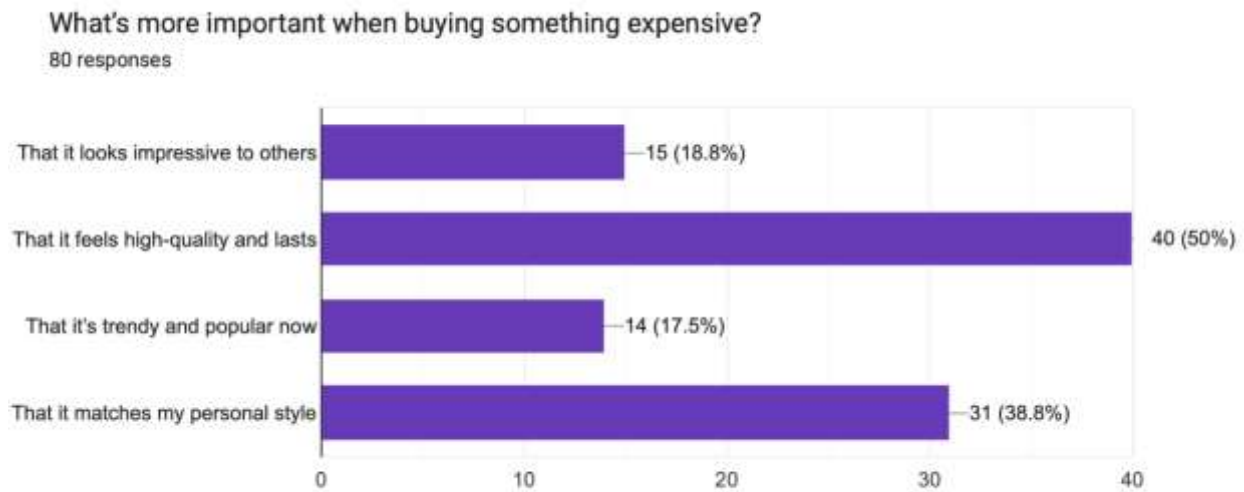
Do you prefer items with visible logos or ones with a simple, no-logo look?

80 responses



If you could choose only one of these, which would you pick?

- ☐ A trendy designer item with logos
- ☐ A quiet, high-end piece with no logos
- ☐ Something stylish but affordable
- ☐ Something functional and timeless



Without realizing it, the majority of people have fallen into the trap of conspicuous consumption. There is diversity in the luxury market. Quiet luxury is becoming a powerful countertrend, particularly among legacy wealth holders, buyers who care about sustainability, and customers who are sick of overt branding, even though showy consumption is still common in areas where consumers are more recent to acquire wealth.

The Secret Forces Behind Luxury: Why We Purchase What Shines

We had some questions or possibly a realization that really hit home when we learned all of these things.

1. Even if it causes them pain and takes away from their true selves, people want to feel special, unusual, and different from others. To be perceived as more fun, cool, and like their ideal self, people purchase clothing from luxury labels. In actuality, though, they might be content wearing secondhand clothing. Because their friend owns a large mansion, they may be using the money from their health insurance to purchase a home, but what if they eventually need that insurance?
2. We've all heard the saying "the grass is always greener on the other side" at some time in our lives, and social media perpetuates this idea. Everyone likes to flaunt their new phones, clothes, and shoes, even though they would prefer and prefer their old ones.
3. People still believe that Superman is for guys and Barbies are for girls because of Orthodox. However, what is the true cost of that? Why can't males enjoy Barbie and girls prefer Superman? As a result, they are compelled to behave more like their gender than like themselves. Similar to this, people of all ages are frequently advised what to wear, when to wear it, and how to dress. This is unfair, isn't it?
4. What makes caviar different from rice? Everyone can afford rice, regardless of their size, but not everyone can afford caviar. That is the unique quality of caviar. It will no longer be special if everyone begins consuming caviar. But you want something more distinctive after you've finally had caviar. This isn't actually about rice or caviar; rather, it's about the human propensity to seek out unique items that no one else has, only to seek out even more obscure items after obtaining them.
5. in this competition to be sexier, funnier, and cooler. We no longer know what our true goals are. In his book *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a Fu*k*, Mark Manson once wrote: "You are always told to be happier, but in thinking so you subconsciously believe you are not already happy because people who

are happy don't want to be more happy, so don't try." We can all relate to this in some way. We lost sight of our true desires in the rush to outdo others.

These issues are all connected. What people perceive, how they feel about themselves, what other people think of them, and what gives them a sense of power or inclusion all have an impact on them. This can occasionally cause them to overspend, feel guilty, or lose sight of their true style.

Strategies and Solutions

Humans are impacted by these issues, whether they are conscious or subconscious, and how long will it take us to find a solution? Finding the answer isn't the only issue, though; putting it into practice and applying it to our everyday lives is as well. To everyone who has read this far, let's do our best to address these issues, first with ourselves and then with others.

The most crucial aspect of this is raising awareness of digital issues. People frequently believe what they see on social media, but they frequently forget that we are all human and that we are in pain. Although pain is unavoidable, we have power over how we respond to it. Therefore, the next time you browse Instagram, read tales, or view images of other people, keep in mind that not everything is real and, more importantly, that everyone is unique.

Instead than following the latest trends, wear what makes you feel good. You don't need to restrict yourself based on your gender or identity; all you need to do is express yourself. Trends and luxury are ever-evolving; what's popular today might be out of style tomorrow, and what was once considered a luxury might become commonplace. Air conditioning is a great example of this; it was once thought of as a luxury but is now a commonplace item found in every home. However, what makes you happy, satisfied, and boosts your self-esteem would continue to do so.

The phrase "Buy something you can wear for 5 years, not just for 5 likes" serves as a helpful reminder to prioritize significance and quality over fleeting social approval. Social media nowadays frequently causes people to feel under pressure to dress flamboyantly and trendy in order to gain attention or acceptance from others online. However, a lot of these things soon become outdated or break down after a few wears. Rather, spending money on classic, well-made items is beneficial for the environment as well as your pocketbook. Compared to quick fashion, these products are more durable, feel better, and frequently express personal flair. It's important to dress for oneself in the long term, not for the attention of others.

Fashion and luxury ought to be about individuality rather than gender roles. It's antiquated and restrictive to think that some things are exclusively for males and others are exclusively for women. A smart bag or a stunning watch has significance, purpose, and design, not gender. People express themselves more confidently when they are allowed to pick what speaks to them rather than what society thinks they should. Stereotypes don't determine good taste; rather, it's characterized by quality, sincerity, and the way something makes you feel.

In a world full of nonstop shopping content and influencer "haul" videos, encouraging deliberate buying is refreshing. Influencers can utilize their platform to showcase one well-picked item that genuinely adds value, whether it's high-quality, sustainable, or profoundly important, rather than showcasing twenty trendy products. This change lessens the urge to spend more all the time just to stay up to date and encourages followers to choose quality over quantity. It's a more intelligent and deliberate approach to influencing contemporary consumer culture, where influence may be utilized to encourage better decisions in addition to selling.

Conclusion

The study explores the ethical and philosophical aspects of economic conduct, focusing on George Washington's architecture for Mount Vernon. It highlights the conflict between individual aspirations and societal values, and the influence of luxury on moral and civic virtue. Digital media has made self-presentation into an ostentatious display that prioritizes surface over content, with cultural circumstances influencing the need for and type of ostentation. Social comparison of luxury brands is influenced by ostentation and media habits, with four crucial elements helping luxury fashion firms create successful marketing plans: self-assessment, peer evaluation, self-improvement, and self-enhancement.

Gender and identity play a significant role in the consumption of luxury goods, with both genders and individuals enjoying them equally. The ostentation effect, which refers to the desire to possess a unique or rare item with high value, is influenced by the law of demand. However, societal expectations and gender identity do not affect the purchase of luxury goods. Social media has increased ostentation by promoting luxury goods and experiences through influencers and users, leading to materialistic impulses, social comparison, and envy.

The luxury industry is experiencing significant changes in consumer behavior, with two main trends emerging: quiet luxury and showy consumerism. Quiet luxury emphasizes exclusivity and discriminating taste without overt displays of wealth, while showy consumerism is still common in areas where consumers are more recent to acquire wealth. Raising awareness of digital issues is crucial, and fashion and luxury should be about individuality rather than gender roles.

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