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Investigating the Progenitors of Conspicuous Consumption and the Mediating

Bharti Shukla
Symbiosis International University
Dr. Suchita Jha
suchita.jha@siib.ac.in

Symbiosis International University
Dr.Chanakya Kumar
School of Business, Indira University

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Abstract

This study attempts to understand the dynamics of conspicuous consumption, a practice of acquiring goods and services primarily for display or to publicly demonstrate wealth or social status, providing a framework for understanding the antecedents of such irrational consumption in contemporary society. Drawing on the Conspicuous Consumption Theory, we develop a conceptual model, which we test with data from a sample of consumers (n = 452), using structure equation modeling and moderated mediation analysis. Literature has associated egoist motivation, a behaviour driven by self-interest, with status enhancement or personal gratification. This study tests egoist motivation as a mediating factor. While extant literature has documented various antecedents of conspicuous consumption, there is surprisingly little insight into whether the person who *recommends* the product influences the purchase decision. We aim to fill this gap by adding and authenticating the role of influencers on conspicuous consumption into the existing knowledge. Results reveal that Influencer Credibility, Desire for Uniqueness, Sense of Pride, and Peer Connect each positively affect conspicuous consumption, and each variable is also mediated by Egoist Motivation. This understanding of the conspicuous behavior of consumers will not only help marketers frame policies but will also help them understand the rise in material footprint globally, addressing the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 12).

1. Introduction

In the present society, material goods often become determining factors in what a person's social standing is in contemporary society. People often make assumptions and value judgments about other people based on the material possessions they have. Economists like Smith and Marx have earlier defined that people often buy products for social standing in society and not for the value they get from the product or service. While in contemporary markets, there is an increase in inconspicuous consumption (Eckhardt et al., 2015), conspicuous consumption remails a central and highly visible aspect of consumer culture. Originally conceptualized by Thorstein Veblen in the theory of the Leisure Class (1899), conspicuous consumption refers to the practice of acquiring goods and services primarily for display or to publicly demonstrate wealth or social status (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996). For Veblen, the act of consumption is a visible declaration of one’s place within the hierarchy. Yet, as societies evolved, so did the motivations behind such overt displays of wealth. Need for uniqueness is perhaps one of the most sophisticated evolutions from Veblen’s concept (Anning-Dorson & Tackie, 2025). Later scholars recognized that consumers often seek distinction rather than mere resemblance (C. Campbell, 2017). Individuals purchase goods that distinguish them from the masses (Wallace et al., 2020). And therefore, consumer’s choice for limited edition watch or designer handbag is less about wealth and more about expressing individuality through scarcity (Bennett & Kottász, 2013). This quest of distinctiveness naturally intertwines with a sense of pride that accompanies the possession of status-laden goods (Anning-Dorson & Tackie, 2025). Pride, as (Panchal & Gill, 2020) suggest, operates both as an internal validation and as a social display. The consumer’s pride and uniqueness derive meaning precisely because they exist within a broader social matrix of belonging and aspiration (Bellezza & Berger, 2020). Here emerges the desire to be part of a high-status social group, an enduring motivation that connects individual indentiy to collective prestige. Social Identity Theory says individuals seek affiliation with groups that enhance their self-esteem (Cheng et al., 2024). Hence, the pride derived from ownership is

not only self-directed but also socially anchored. Conspicuous consumption thrives in the gaze of others, and it is through peer influence that status meanings are continuously reinforced and contested (Di & Su, 2024). The social comparison mechanism described by (Srivastava et al., 2025) reveals how individuals gauge their own status relative to their peers. In contemporary contexts, social media amplifies this dynamic (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018; Casais et al., 2025; Taylor & Strutton, 2016). The peer group extends beyond physical proximity to digital communities, normalising such conspicuous consumptions.

Recent work highlights that such status-driven displays continue to flourish in modern consumption environment, particularly as social media amplifies individuals' ability to showcase possessions and lifestyles to broad audiences (Bainotti, 2024). Classic theories establish that egoist motivations, means the desire to enhance one's self-image, signal superiority, or gain social recognition, are the central to conspicuous consumption (Chakraborty & Chattaraman, 2025; Chipp et al., 2011). Veblen's framework is inherently rooted in egoism which is also supported by contemporary research, demonstrating how status signaling, materialism, and psychological self-enhancement shape visible luxury consumption (Kurysheva & Vernikov, 2024). However, while egoist motivation is acknowledged conceptually, empirical research examining egoistic motivation as a mediating mechanism remains limited. Existing studies on conspicuous behavior have primarily focused on purchase intention in digital space(Liu, 2022; Pop & Zsuzsa, 2020; Tiwari et al., 2024) rather than on understanding how and why consumers' underlying motivations are activated. Amplification of such consumption is also because of growing use of social media. Social media influencers, who are the digital personalities on social media with a highly involved follower base and engagement, are proven to be more influential than traditional celebrities (Wang, 2025). SMIs have reshaped the ways in which consumers evaluate brands, form aspirations and interpret status cues (van der Harst & Angelopoulos, 2024). Influencers curate lifestyles that often incorporate luxury, exclusivity, and social prestige, making them powerful agents of symbolic and identity-based consumption. Existing studies on influencers have majorly focused on purchase behaviour and impulsive buying (Gopakumar & Dananjayan, 2024). However, it would be interesting to study influencer credibility and its role in conspicuous consumption. Testing influencer credibility as an antecedent will not just fulfil a research gap and give new insight to the existing literature, but it will also demonstrate how effectively these influencers impact such irrational behaviour. This study is needed to understand the effectiveness of influencer's communications and its psychological impact on the followers. The study will also help to understand central focus of egoist motivation on conspicuous consumption. The findings can hence be applied on creating awareness concerning impact of status-driven consumptions and the role of ethical monitoring on influencer's persuasive communications.

This Study is guided by the Conspicuous Consumption Theory, which has proposed Desire for Uniqueness, Sense of Pride, Desire to be part of a High-status social group, and Peer Influence are the major antecedents of such conspicuous behaviour (Kumar et al., 2022a). Along with these factors, our study incorporates social media influencers' credibility in the theoretical framework and tests egoist motivation as a mediating mechanism, hence setting the novelty and adding two new constructs in the existing body of literature. In order to achieve this, our study aims to address the following research questions:

RQ 1. Based on Conspicuous Consumption Theory, what are the antecedents that affects Conspicuous Consumption?

RQ 2. How does Egoist Motivation mediate the relationship between Conspicuous Consumption and its antecedents?

This understanding offers a holistic explanation of conspicuous behaviour and contributes to the existing literature by testing the role egoist motivation and influencer credibility. Practically, it provides insights for brands and marketers concerning how influencers and social cues shape consumers' status-driven decisions.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

The story of conspicuous consumption usually begins with Thorstein Veblen's 1899 study of 'wasteful' luxury purchases as visible proof of pecuniary strength (Watkins, 2019). In Veblen's logic, the power of such consumption lies precisely in its excess which means buying beyond necessity, demonstrating one's ability to burn the surplus resources (Trigg, 2001). Over more than a century of research, it has evolved from Veblen's classic theory of status signalling to a more nuanced understanding of the psychological and social drivers that triggers conspicuous consumption (Patsiaouras & Fitchett, 2012). Conspicuous consumption refers to the purchase and display of goods and experiences primarily to signal wealth, status, or identity to others, rather than to satisfy purely functional needs (Hammad & El-Bassiouny, 2024). Table 1 highlights established definitions of conspicuous consumption. Over the time, scholars from various domains have extended this idea beyond aristocratic elites, showing that middle and lower income consumers may also emulate such patterns to signal status and desired group membership. While the literature has identified several key drivers of conspicuous consumption, there is a gap in understanding how this conspicuous consumption had evolved in this time of mass media exposure and social media.

Conspicuous Consumption Theory

The concept of conspicuous consumption, first coined by Thorstein Veblen (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996), is deeply rooted in the idea that people acquire costly goods to display wealth and social status. This theory advocates that such consumption carries associated prestige, and people are often willing to pay premium prices for products that are functionally similar but socially superior (Charoennan & Huang, 2018; Chaudhry, 2022a; Zhang et al., 2024). While conspicuous consumption is most prominent in developed countries, its impact on consumption patterns is significant wherever it is prevalent (Gupta et al., 2023). Notwithstanding critiques of the theory-particularly relating to the focus on luxury goods and the top-down approach framework, it remains influential in understanding consumer behavior, extending beyond the rational economic models (Sillaman, 2023). This theory is highly relevant for testing the hypotheses of the present research, which focuses on a psychological and social factor of conspicuous consumption.

Table 1
Approximations to Conspicuous Consumption

References	Definitions
(Patsiaouras & Fitchett, 2012)	"Conspicuous consumption refers to the competitive and extravagant consumption practices and leisure activities that aim to indicate membership to a superior social class"
(Watkins, 2019)	Conspicuous consumption refers to the purchase, consumption, or use of goods to wastefully signal self-identity, wealth, status, and prestige rather than to satisfy utilitarian needs or the real needs of consumers
(O'Cass & Frost, 2002)	"Conspicuous consumption involves expenditures made for purpose of inflating the ego"
Source : Author's own compilation	

Definitions of conspicuous consumption emphasizes on visible or publicly consumption of commodities or services. (Jaikumar et al., 2018) said that people choose visible goods that convey their identity and are status driven. These consumptions are made to manage impressions. Across studies, conspicuous consumption is linked to motives such as status, social recognitions, self-esteem or lifestyle maintenance. (Burnasheva & Suh, 2020) suggests that low social self-esteem people who live among high social class will consume more conspicuously in order to fit into the group. Also, status oriented consumers are more willing to pay for visible logos, visual cues and recognizability (Urumutta Hewage et al., 2021). Recent research shows that social media channels intensify such consumptions by making display convenient and measurable through likes and comments (Bai & Liu, 2025). Literature also discusses 'extended' conspicuous consumption, which means consumers does visual consumptions not only for personal status signalling but also for their partners, children, pet, or family members (Belk, 2014; McNeill & Graham, 2014). Research has also shown that prosocial behaviour can lead to conspicuous purchase of green or sustainable products, establishing a kind of trend in social signalling (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2024; Le et al., 2025). Global brands trigger's identity affiliations through material possession, cosmopolitan vibe and tangible luxury (Casais et al., 2025).

The existing literature on conspicuous consumption often establishes that uniqueness is a strong motivator of irrational consumption (Sands et al., 2022). Philip et al., (2021) reported that the more a consumer esteems the motive to be different from the others, the more he will use luxury not in order to blend in with the crowd but to standout from the crowd. This desire for differentiation often stems from a need for self-enhancement and validation, as individuals seek to demonstrate their superiority through their consumption choices (Anggarawati et al., 2023). Karakavak & Özbölük, (2023) further highlighted that social comparison plays a crucial role here, as individuals compare themselves to others and strive to differentiate themselves through exclusive and luxurious possessions. In this way, exclusive consumption becomes a competitive cycle where one can never have enough of anything truly unique and special. Hence, the desire for uniqueness is a significant factor influencing egoist motivation and conspicuous consumption behavior among consumers. Similarly, pride can substantially trigger egoistic motivation and conspicuous consumption (Kumar et al., 2022b; Tracy & Robins, 2007). Based on the discussion of Anggarawati et al., (2023) and Kumar et al., (2022), it can be implied that pride partially motivates individuals to engage more

in conspicuous consumption for the purpose of raising self-esteem and status in society. This pride is often linked to feelings of accomplishment or superiority, pushing individuals to seek out luxury goods to enhance their self-image and project success to others (Charoennan & Huang, 2018; Nefedova, 2024). (Fan et al., 2024; Gupta et al., 2023) found that those who feel a strong sense of pride are more inclined to engage in competitive consumption, striving to outdo others in terms of luxury and exclusivity. Social comparison amplifies this behaviour wherein individuals with a strong sense of pride use their possessions to signal their status and how they are superior compared to others (Desmichel & Rucker, 2024).

The need and urge to belong to a high-status social group serve as strong driving forces in both egoist tendencies and conspicuous consumption behavior of consumers (Duffy et al., 2022; Majczak, 2023). It has been found from studies by (Philip et al., 2021) that people who have the desire to enter higher social classes have a more pronounced tendency to engage in conspicuous consumption with a view to signaling membership in such groups and gaining approval from society. Studies by (Chaudhry, 2022b) further confirm this hypothesis by purporting that individuals with a strong desire to belong to a high-status group are more likely to show consumptive behavior that is status-oriented with visible luxury items.

It seems, finally, that the motivation of egoism and conspicuous consumption behavior among consumers is set essentially by the need to belong to an elite social group. Peer influence is another well-documented factor in conspicuous consumption behavior, particularly among younger demographics (Dai & Singh, 2020; Di & Su, 2024). Peer pressure can lead to egoistic motivations, where individuals feel compelled to conform to the consumption patterns of their peers to gain acceptance and approval (Chu Lo et al., 2021; Jinkins, 2016). This pressure often results in conspicuous consumption, as individuals purchase luxury items to fit in and demonstrate their social status. The social comparison further enhances this behavior; consumers driven by peer influence are found to be more engaged in competitive consumption by outcompeting others with luxury and exclusivity (Chai et al., 2019).

Building on the principles of the of conspicuous consumption, the present integrates Desire for Uniqueness, Sense of Pride, Desire to be part of a high-status social group and peer influence to explain conspicuous consumption in presence of a mediating factor. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Desire for Uniqueness has a positive impact on conspicuous consumption.

H2 : Sense of Pride has a positive impact on conspicuous consumption.

H3 : Desire to be part of a high-status social group has a positive impact on conspicuous consumption.

H4 : Peer Influence has a positive impact on conspicuous consumption.

Influencer Credibility

The digital marketplace has revolutionized how consumers perceive, evaluate, and purchase products. Within this ecosystem, influencers have emerged as the new opinion leaders whose persuasive power stems not merely from reach but from credibility. As traditional advertising loses its persuasive appeal dua to consumer fatigue and skepticism, the credibility of influencers has become the new agency of

persuasion. Credibility, defined through trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness, functions as the foundational mechanism through which digital influence translates into behavioural outcomes such as conspicuous consumption.

In recent years, scholars have emphasized that influencer credibility is not an abstract quality but an experiential one. It is perceived through the ongoing interactions between influencers and followers. Followers feel they 'know' these influencers personally, what(Horton & Richard Wohl, 1956) termed parasocial relationships. It means one sided yet emotionally meaningful bond that mimic genuine social connections. The influencer credibility does not merely drive purchase intention; it activates the consumer's deeper need for self-validation and social recognition. Studies linking influencer credibility with luxury consumption consistently demonstrate that consumers' attitudes towards conspicuous goods are shaped by the extent to which they perceive influencers as trustworthy (Shamim & Islam, 2022). Parallel to this, credibility also manifests as a trigger for impulsive consumption, a form of unplanned, emotionally charged purchasing (Shao, 2024). However, research has also shown that sponsored content can erode perceived credibility, leading consumers to question the influencer's motives (Schorn et al., 2022). A good number of studies have tested the relationship between influencer credibility and impulsive buying. However, there remains a dearth in understanding the relationship between influencer credibility and conspicuous buying. Hence, we argue that:

H5 : Creditability of Influencer has a positive impact on conspicuous consumption.

The mediating role of Egoist Motivation

When driven by egoism, consumers are likely to engage in conspicuous consumption in an attempt to improve their self-image and, to a greater extent, their status in the opinion of others (Chakraborty & Chattaraman, 2025). The motivation for such consumption often contains a self-focused, egoistic element. Ego defence is classified as an extrinsic motivation for consumers, serving to enhance self-image or fulfil aspirations regarding appearance through the consumption of luxury items. Similarly, the purchasing motivation known as Introjected Regulation involves acting to protect the ego and boost self-esteem, often by emulating the consumption patterns of highly followed influencers. Moreover, when followers engage in upward social comparison with influencers' perceived success and glamorized lifestyles, both positive and negative comparison triggers. Therefore, the inherent high credibility of the influencer validates the products they endorse as legitimate tools for achieving these egoistic, self-enhancing goals.

Desire for uniqueness is shaped by an internal driver which is egoistic motivation. The need to stand out from the crowd comes from an internal desire for self-enhancement and unique recognition. It is an ego driven effort to buy products that will elevate and validate self-importance and superiority. Not all visible consumptions are altruistic, when backed by egoistic motivation, such desire transforms into a social validation and a self-centred need of admiration (Birch et al., 2018; Wenjia Jasmine et al., 2025). Hence, need for uniqueness is not for the sake of self-expression rather it is a mean to elevate ego to feel exceptional.

As pride is double-edged emotion, it can inspire growth or ignite ego (Shahid et al., 2024). In context of conspicuous consumption, pride itself does not always lead to material display. It also depends upon the underlying motivation. Egoistic motivation channelises one's pride through visible consumption (Tracy & Robins, 2007). At the core of these behaviors is egoistic motivation—the internal drive to fulfill one's desires, often at the expense of others (Chernov & Gura, 2024). Indeed, Harriger-Lin et al., (2020) and Kumar et al., (2022) provide supporting evidence that egoistic-driven individuals attach greater importance to material possessions for securing status and recognition in society. Therefore, our study proposes the following hypothesis:

H6: Egoist Motivation mediates the relationship between the credibility of influencers, Desire for Uniqueness, Sense of Pride, desire to be part of a high-status social group, Peer influence and conspicuous consumption.

Although some studies have explained the desire for uniqueness (Kumar et al., 2022b), pride of possession (Kumar et al., 2022b), need for social connectedness (Kumar et al., 2022b), and peer influence(Varma et al., 2022) and its role on conspicuous consumption, there still remains a lacuna as far as studying these factors from virtual influencers context with an egoistic motivation acting as the mediating factor within the framework of conspicuous consumption. The proposed conceptual model is depicted in Fig. 1. Drawing on the theory of Conspicuous Consumption, we contend that Influencer Creditability (Liu, 2022), Desire for Uniqueness (Kumar et al., 2022b), sense of pride (Kumar et al., 2022b), desire to be part of the high-status social group(Kumar et al., 2022b) and Peer-influence(Varma et al., 2022) leads to Conspicuous consumption. Furthermore, we propose that egoist motivation(Pop & Zsuzsa, 2020) has a significant mediating effect on these relationships.

3. Methodology

Sample and Procedure

The sampling technique adopted was Purposive sampling as the study required only those respondents who follow micro-influencers and take their advice for purchase decisions (S. Campbell et al., 2020). Within the context of Conspicuous Consumption, purposive sampling is a widely accepted technique (C. Campbell, 2017; Tiwari et al., 2024; Varma et al., 2022). An online survey was conducted to collect the data in a span of 5 months (May 2024 to September 2024). To ensure that the data is collected from suitable respondents and the feedback of the survey is reliable, qualifying questions *(i. Do you follow the recommendations of micro-influencers for your luxury product purchase decisions? ii Have you made any Luxury product purchase in the last 6 month)* were asked at the initial stage of the questionnaire (Sreejesh et al., 2014). The data collected through the survey was from 950 respondents. After a detailed data cleaning process (applying qualifying criteria and removing incomplete and ineligible data), a final set of 452 responses was finalized for further analysis. This data was solicited through various platforms like social media, emails, professional networks, and appropriate forums. Participation was strictly by choice, and no incentives were offered. Additionally, to address the ethical concerns, informed consent was obtained from the respondents. Table 2 represents the demographic details of participants.

Table 2
Sample Characteristics

Demographics	**Numbers*(N = 452)***	**Percentage**
Gender		
Male	210	47
Female	239	53
Other	3	1
Age (Years)		
18–29	214	48
30–49	187	42
50+	27	6
Occupation		
Govt/private employee	108	24
Homemaker	98	22
Self-employed	112	25
Student	88	20
Unemployment	46	11
Income Slabs (Annual Household Income in INR)		
Up to ₹2,50,000	109	25
₹2,50,001 - ₹5,00,000	108	24
₹5,00,001 - ₹10,00,000	87	20
₹1000001 and above	76	17
NA	72	16
Source : Author’s own calculation		

Instrument Design and Measures

The questionnaire for this study was meticulously designed to assess the intricate relationships between influencer credibility, desire for uniqueness, sense of pride, desire to be part of a high-status social group, peer influence, egoist motivation, and conspicuous consumption. Age, occupation, gender, level of education, and location were used as control variables. The subject matter experts (SMEs) from the domain of consumer behavior and marketing were approached to review the questionnaire based on the literature.

The purpose and scope of the study were explained to SMEs, and suggested changes were incorporated. This process confirmed the face validity of the questionnaire.

Utilizing a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) (Sheng et al., 2023), the questionnaire comprises 35 items spread across six sections, each addressing a specific construct. The first section gathers demographic information, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the respondent profile. Subsequent sections delve into the constructs of interest: Influencer Credibility (5 items), Desire for Uniqueness (5 items), Sense of Pride (5 items), Desire to Be Part of a High-Status Social Group (5 items), Peer Connect (5 items), and Egoist Motivation (5 items). Each item is adopted from an established scale (table of items and sources provided in annexure). Each question is designed to capture important aspects of these topics, such as trust in influencers, the need to stand out, the pride that comes from owning luxury items, social aspirations, peer pressure, and the motivations behind showy consumption. This organized approach ensures that we gather detailed information about what influences consumer behavior, allowing for thorough analysis using AMOS.

This questionnaire consisted of 35 items obtained from related past studies after a thorough process of evaluation. The table in the annexure consists of scales adopted to measure the variables and their source.

4. Data Analysis and Results

Before doing structural equation modeling, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to verify the fit between the collected data and the theoretical model. This step is important to confirm the proposed causal relationships between latent and observed variables, ensuring the reliability and validity of the model (Hancock & Mueller, 2001). Several fit indices were calculated using AMOS 26 software. The results are reported in Table 3. The examination of the model reported a satisfactory goodness of fit ($\chi 2$ = 1147,203 df = 0.539, p = .000, $\chi 2/df$ = 2.128, AGFI = 0.855, SRMR = 0.035, RMSEA = 0.049, CFI = 0.947, TLI = 0.942, PClose = 0.491)

Table 3
Fit Indices

Fit Indices	**CMIN/DF**	**AGFI**	**NFI**	**TLI**	**CFI**	**RMSEA**	**SRMR**
Recommended Value	≥ 3.000	≥ 0.80	≥ 0.90	≥ 0.90	≥ 0.90	≤ .06	< 0.08
Measurement Value	2.128	0.855	0.906	0.942	0.947	0.049	0.035
Source : AMOS Output							

Composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha were used to assess the reliability of the measurement scales. The CR (Table 4) and Cronbach's alpha (Appendix A) values of all factors were higher than the suggested value of 0.7, supporting the reliability of the scale (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010). Further, we examined the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs; as reported in Table 4,. In this, the first examined the standardized factor loadings (reported in Appendix A), and the results reported that all the items representing the constructs loaded (estimates (β)) into the constructs exceeding the

recommended threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). The AVE value of all seven constructs was above the suggested value of 0.5, thus indicating good convergent validity; further, all the constructs' AVEs were greater than that of the correlation between the constructs. Also, showing the square root of the AVE value is greater than the correlation between the constructs, thus confirming a satisfactory discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

In this study, Harman's Single-factor test was used via exploratory factor analysis (EFA) across seven factors simultaneously to examine common method bias (CMB). The result indicates that no distinct factor emerged, and the single factor accounted for 44.028% of the variance, falling under the prescribed threshold of 50 percent, as proposed by (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Table 4
Validity Analysis

DU	**CR**	**AVE**	**DU**	**SP**	**CI**	**DHS**	**PC**	**CC**	**EM**
	0.911	**0.674**	**0.821**						
SP	0.893	0.627	0.642***	**0.792**					
CI	0.895	0.631	0.728***	0.742***	**0.794**				
DHS	0.897	0.635	0.743***	0.665***	0.719***	**0.797**			
PC	0.890	0.62	0.386***	0.474***	0.474***	0.448***	**0.787**		
CC	0.927	0.719	0.612***	0.648***	0.699***	0.563***	0.467***	**0.848**	
EM	0.900	0.644	0.564***	0.730***	0.617***	0.579***	0.454***	0.633***	**0.802**

*Note: CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted CI= Credibility of Influencer, DU=Desire for Uniqueness, SP=Sense of Pride, DHS= Desire to Be Part of a High-Status Social Group, PC=Peer Connect (PC) EM=Egoist Motivation, CC=Conspicuous Consumption, *** P < 0.001*

Source: Authors own calculation

Structural Model

After confirming the measurement model, the study analysed the model using the structural equation modeling (SEM) technique with the maximum likelihood estimation method with bootstrap 5000, as shown in Fig. 2. SEM was preferred over the PROCESS macro because it allows the use of latent constructs measured by multiple indicators and explicitly accounts for measurement error. In contrast, the PROCESS macro operates only with observed variables. Therefore, when constructs are measured using multi-item scales, SEM provides a robust result. In this model, the study considered the Credibility of Influencer (CI), Desire for Uniqueness (DU), Sense of Pride (SP), Desire to Be Part of a High-Status Social Group (DHS), and Peer Connect (PC) as the first-order exogenous variables. Egoist Motivation (EM) as a mediator and Conspicuous Consumption (CC) as an endogenous variable.

The model test results supported satisfactory goodness of fit indices (χ2 = 1248,204 df = 528, χ2/df = 2.364, CFI = .946, TLI = .941, RMSEA = 0.050, SRMR = 0.037). Further, the study examined the path estimates. As shown in Table 5, the results reported that Peer Connect (PC) has a positive impact on Conspicuous Consumption (CC) (PC ◊ CC = 0.163, SE = .0.052, p = 0.02), Similarly Credibility of Influencer (CI) (CI ◊ CC= .356, SE = 0.047, p = 0.00), Sense of Pride (SP) (SP◊ CC= .120, SE = 0.046, p = 0.01), Desire for Uniqueness (DU) (DU ◊ CC= .134, SE = 0.029, p = 0.00) had positive impact on Conspicuous Consumption (CC) .But desire to be part of a high-status social group (DHS) had no impact (DHS ◊ CC= .-0.014, SE = 0.035, p = 0.689) on Conspicuous Consumption (CC).

Table 5
Path estimates

Dependent Variable		Independent Variable	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Inference
CC	<---	PC	0.163	0.052	3.17	0.002	Supported
CC	<---	DHS	-0.014	0.035	-0.40	0.689	Not Supported
CC	<---	CI	0.356	0.047	7.56	***	Supported
CC	<---	SP	0.12	0.046	2.593	0.01	Supported
CC	<---	DU	0.134	0.029	4.57	***	Supported
Source: Author's own calculation, *** *P < 0.001*							

Mediation Effect

Table 6
Mediation Effect

Parameter	Estimate	Lower	Upper	P
PC–>EM–>CC	0.041	0.009	0.099	0.004
DHS–>EM–>CC	0.022	-0.002	0.072	0.089
CI–>EM–>CC	0.029	0.001	0.084	0.039
SP–>EM–>CC	0.11	0.039	0.207	0.003
DU–>EM–>CC	0.02	0	0.057	0.048
Source: Authors own calculation				

In addition to the above-mentioned direct path estimates examination, the study also examined the mediation effects of Egoist Motivation (EM) and tested the same using the bootstrap procedure (n = 5000)

reported in Table 6. The mediation effect of Egoist Motivation (EM) between Peer Connect (PC) and Conspicuous Consumption (CC) reported statistically significant (PC◊EM◊CC = 0.041, lower-CI = 0.009, upper-CI = 0.099, P = 0.004). Similarly the mediation effect of Egoist Motivation (EM) between Credibility of Influencer (CI) (CI◊EM◊CC = 0.029, lower-CI = 0.001, upper-CI = 0.084, P = 0.039), Sense of Pride (SP) (SP◊EM◊CC = 0.011, lower-CI = 0.039, upper-CI = 0.207, P = 0.003), Desire for Uniqueness (DU) (DU◊EM◊CC = 0.02, lower-CI = 0.000, upper-CI = 0.057, P = 0.048), But no mediation effect was found between desire to be part of a high-status social group (DHS) and Conspicuous Consumption (CC) (DHS◊EM◊CC = 0.022, lower-CI = 0.002, upper-CI = 0.072, P = 0.089).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the study provide a comprehensive view on how influencer credibility (Liu, 2022) relates to the desire for distinctiveness or uniqueness (Kumar et al., 2022b), and a sense of pride (Kumar et al., 2022b); the desire to belong to a high-status social group (Kumar et al., 2022b); peer relationships (Varma et al., 2022); and conspicuous consumption, with egoistic motivation as a mediator. The result of the study reveals that the influence of credibility and conspicuous consumption have an intense, positive correlation, supporting the hypothesis that credible influencers are effective triggers for consumers who acquire social status through their purchases. This was based on previous studies, which clarify the relevance of trust in influencer advertising; conversely, it shows that influencer credibility fosters self-focused motivations among consumers to engage in conspicuous consumption as a strategy to augment their self-concept and their stand in society (Belanche et al., 2021; Garg & Bakshi, 2024). Interestingly, the desire for uniqueness and feelings of pride were also found to serve as a significant driver of conspicuous consumption, meaning that consumers use luxury goods as expressions of uniqueness and self-esteem. This finding is in line with previous research that connects self-enhancement motivations to consumer behavior (Kumar et al., 2022b; Ruvio, 2010; Tracy & Robins, 2007). However, our study adds depth to this understanding as it shows that egoistic motivation mediates this relationship; in other words, the need to differentiate oneself or show pride is strengthened by personal, egocentric desires. Such a finding presents a new perspective on how egoistic motivations increase conspicuous behavior, thus expanding the scope of inquiry on conspicuous consumption.

This study further presents another important factor concerning peer connections that influences conspicuous consumption. Consistent with social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), our results indicate that individuals influenced by peer pressure engage in luxury consumption to mirror the behaviors of their social circles, aiming to achieve social validation and acceptance. This finding is particularly relevant as it underscores the social dynamics in conspicuous consumption, where egoistic motivations act as a mediator, reinforcing the desire to attain social alignment through visible luxury items.

Contrary to our initial hypothesis, aspiration for membership in a high-status social group did not show a significant direct influence on conspicuous consumption. This finding is inconsistent with related studies, which argue that social status aspirations are a primary driver of conspicuous consumption (Varma et al., 2022). A more plausible explanation would be that modern consumers, particularly the younger generations, value authenticity and similarity over status symbols, thus reducing the direct effect of high-

status aspirations on conspicuous behavior. Although there was no direct relationship, the mediated effect through egoist motivation remained significant, suggesting that although high-status aspirations may not directly lead to conspicuous consumption, they still indirectly influence behavior through personal motivations. Previous studies have mainly focused on the direct effects of influencer credibility, distinctiveness, and social factors on consumer behavior (Belanche et al., 2021; Garg & Bakshi, 2024; Liu, 2022); however, our study extends this understanding by showing that egoistic motives enhance the influence of these constructs on conspicuous consumption. From the study, it is evident that influencers play a critical role in triggering such consumption. It is hence a matter of concern and needs further analysis on how these influencers are setting irrational trends and impacting overproduction, over consumption and improper disposal. Also, the study proposes that egoist motivation is the central focus between the antecedents and conspicuous consumptions. Such psychology is not just harmful for one's own self but also to the society at large.

From the study, it's quite evident that this is a social phenomenon. A person's evaluation of self-worth is based on the level of visible and luxury consumption (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). Social media being a catalyst to such consumption, cannot be neglected (Wallace et al., 2017). A recent investigation found that high social media exposure and having a parasocial relationship with influencers has high influence on one's purchase decisions (Chen & Lu, 2024). To address this phenomenon of Conspicuous consumption, we recommend a holistic framework. After a critical analysis of the literature, reports and blogs, we identified three stems on which such conspicuous behaviour lies. The cause and solution both appear to arise from the same sphere, hence we propose a framework integrating these 3 spheres i.e. Society, Social-Media and Self-Esteem (3Ss), as shown in Fig. 3. We should engage social media sites to actively promote content that highlights sustainable consumption and authentic self-expression rather than materialistic display. We can do this by urging influencers to endorse mindful consumption and by promoting features that promote meaningful interactions instead of conspicuous displays of wealth. The society is the community level, which may include public awareness campaigns and education programs aimed at promoting a culture of valuing intrinsic qualities such as creativity, kindness, and community engagement over material as status symbols. Lastly, improving self-esteem in Individuals is essential, since low esteem often is the reason for the craving of external validation through conspicuous consumption. This can be achieved by mental wellbeing, programs and workshops, empowering people to seek value from themselves rather than material things. Altogether, this comprehensive approach seeks to minimize the psychological and social drivers of conspicuous consumption, promoting healthier, more sustainable consumer behaviour.

However, it is interesting that a growing body of literature is addressing the rise of inconspicuous consumption, also termed as minimalist luxury or quit luxury as a contrast to the traditional conspicuous consumption. Individuals with independent self-construal consume conspicuously and intent visible purchases. On the other hand, interdependent self-construal individuals prefer subtle expression of status. This rise of inconspicuous consumption in parallel challenges traditional conspicuous consumption paradigm.

Source : Author's own

To conclude, this research interrogates the prevailing belief that aspirations for social status are invariably a primary influence in conspicuous consumption. Rather, it uncovers that social validation may be progressively anchored in authenticity and relatability, superseding conventional affiliations with high-status groups and the mediating role of egoistic motivation in such conspicuous behaviour.

6. Implications

Theoretical & Social Implication:

Knowledge of conspicuous consumption patterns will contribute to the promotion of the circular economy, where status symbols are not only expensive goods but also durable goods, ethically sourced, and minimal in their environmental impact. This shift will help support SDG 12 by reducing pressures placed on the environment due to overconsumption and will help in positively managing natural resources. By aligning status and luxury with sustainable values, society can cultivate a culture of "conspicuous sustainability," where the drivers of prestige fuel demand for products and services that support long-term ecological balance, minimize waste and achieve efficient use of resources. The 3Ss i.e. Society, Social-Media and Self-Esteem framework solution provided by the study will help in better understanding of conspicuous consumption, establishing a novel contribution to the existing literature. It also explains how such behaviour can be controlled and made more sensible towards nature. These findings are valuable to decision makers dealing with human psychology or sustainability.

Managerial Implication:

The findings of this study are of great practical importance for marketers, particularly in luxury, fashion, and lifestyle, as conspicuous consumption is characteristic of these markets. First, this knowledge can help marketers design their campaigns sensitively to egoist-type motivation and facilitate them in utilizing such motives that are proven to be powerful mediators. When product messaging is tied in with those ego-driven motivations, brands have a basis to build more impactful campaigns that speak to what the consumer is looking for. Brands may curate social media communities or exclusive product launches that help consumers feel connected with like-minded peers while furthering individual expression through unique offerings.

7. Limitations and Future Research

Although the current study has several implications, it also has certain limitations that can be considered for further research. Firstly, the scope of the study is to understand the factors leading to conspicuous behavior by consumers. However, a more specific study can be done by narrowing the selection criteria of respondents. This study has tested egoist motivation as a mediating variable; however, a study can be done to test egoist motivation as an independent variable as well. A potential avenue for future research involves conducting this study in the context of developed and underdeveloped countries. Also, more mediating variables like gender, income, industry, education, personality traits, etc can be explored and researched. Another scope of research could be conducting a longitudinal study to understand the evolution of such

behavior over a period of time. Diverse approaches like ethnographic or ethnographic study can be applied to understand this phenomenon from a different perspective.

Declarations

8.1 Ethical Approval Statement: The study adhered to the ethical standards outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Data were collected using an online survey, and informed consent was obtained electronically from all participants before participation. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was voluntary and anonymous, with confidentiality of responses ensured.

The protocol was approved by Ethical committee of Indira University, Pune.

8.2 Consent to participate: All participants were fully informed about the objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the study. Informed online consent to participate was obtained from each participant prior to the completion of the survey. Participation was voluntary, and participants retained the right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. No participants under the age of 18 years were involved in this study.

8.3 Consent to Participate declaration: Not applicable

8.4 Consent to Publish: Not applicable

8.4 Data Availability : All data supporting the findings of this study are available within the paper and its Supplementary Information.

8.5 Disclosure Statement: No potential conflict of Interest was reported by the author(s)

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Author Contribution

B.S. did ideation, screening, writing, data collection, formating and compliling, and S.J. did proofreading, reviewing, and supervision, C.K. did data analysis and result. All authors reviewed the manuscript.

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Figures

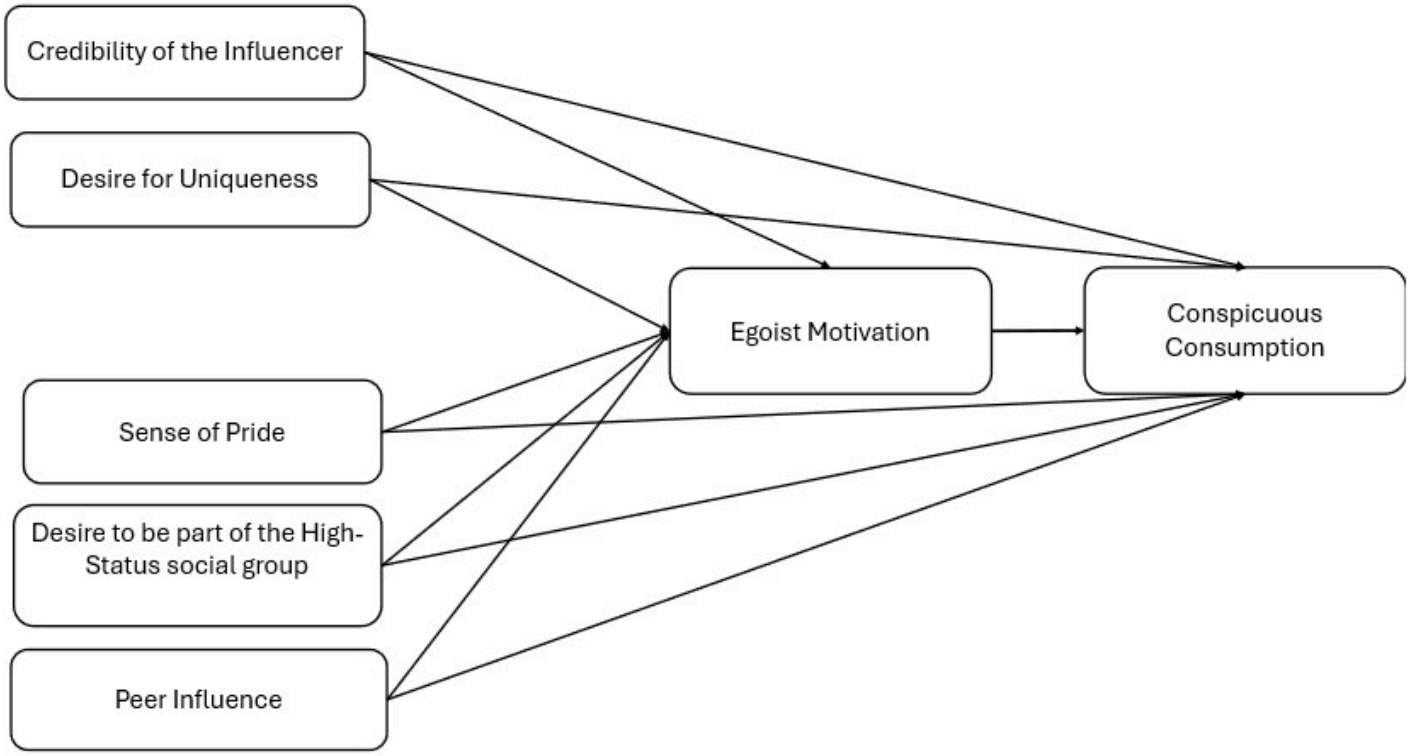


Figure 1

Proposed Conceptual Model

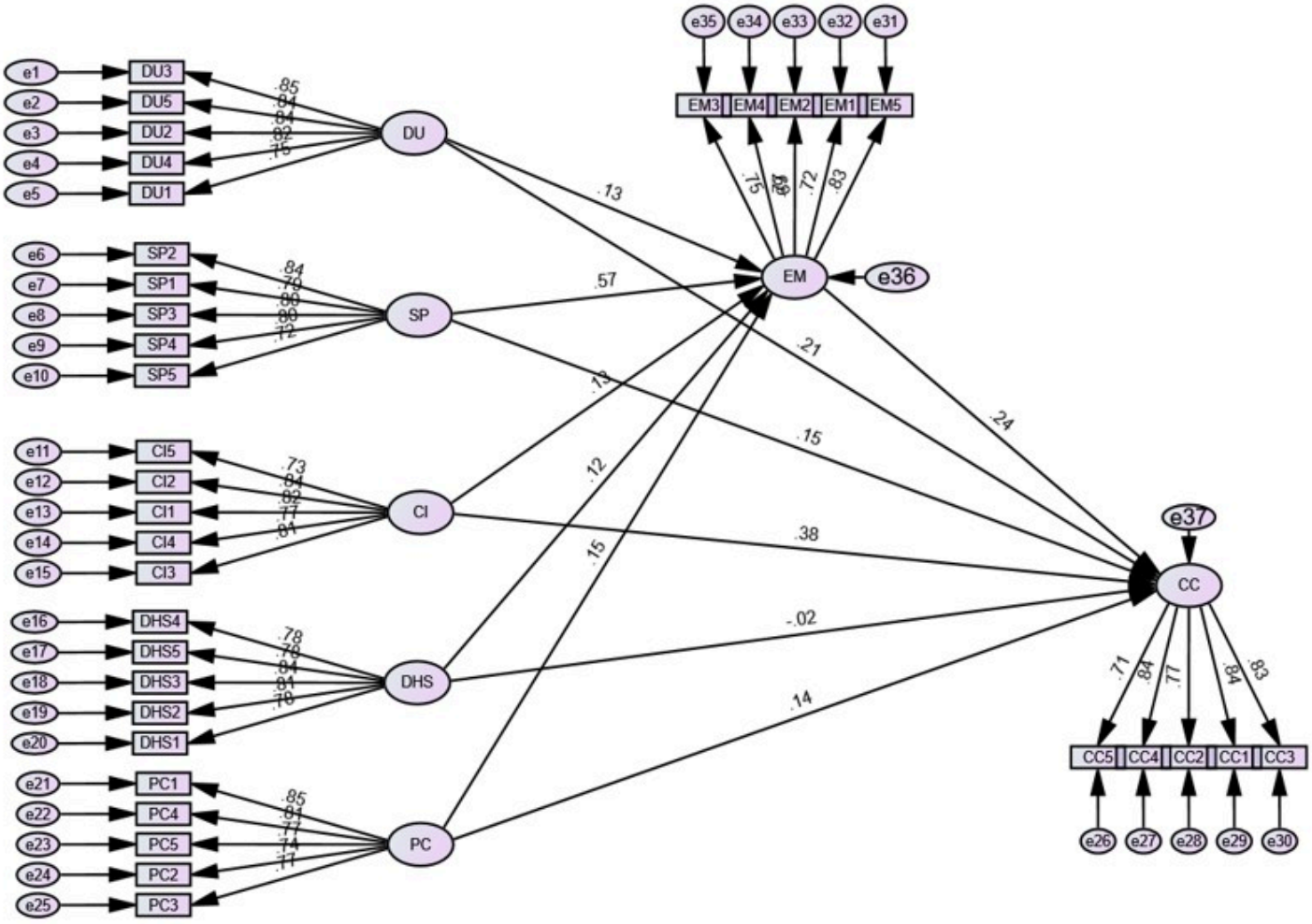


Figure 2

Path estimates diagram

Source: AMOS Path Estimate Output Diagram

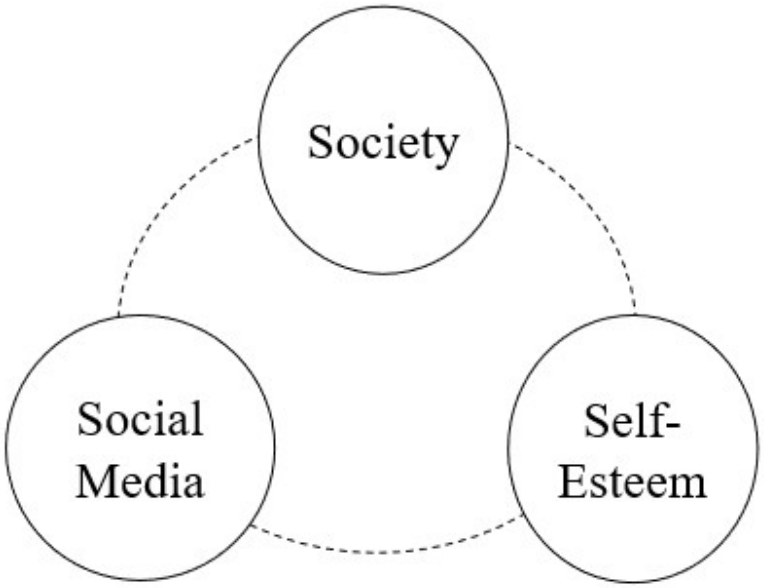


Figure 3

3s Framework for Conspicuous Consumption.

Source : Author's own

Supplementary Files

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- Annexure.docx