
Expressing Passion Can Make Luxury Consumers Seem More Authentic



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Consumers can mitigate the negative social consequences of wearing luxury items by publicly revealing their passion for the products or brands.

The recently concluded and Emmy-nominated American television series “Succession” charted the dynastic struggles of the obnoxiously rich (and just plain obnoxious) Roy family. But despite the characters’ ultra-wealthy status, they’d be far more likely to sport an understated look – think **logo-less baseball caps** and **muted pantsuits** – than a monogrammed designer bag or flashy haute couture outfit.

This fashion encapsulates the “**quiet luxury**” or “**stealth wealth**” trend, where moneyed consumers with **high cultural capital** or knowledge about luxury products opt for subtle, toned-down high-end fashion items instead of the in-your-face logos that were **all the rage in the 1990s**. A major factor driving the current prominence of this aesthetic is that individuals who

conspicuously consume luxury products could be perceived as managing impressions or seeking status, and, as a result, may be judged as inauthentic. This perception compels certain individuals to turn to the concept of quiet luxury.

But is there a way for consumers who have this fear to eschew quiet luxury and proudly don their luxury purchases without suffering the negative social consequences? In our [paper](#), recently published online in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, we propose that explicitly displaying a passion for luxury products or brands can help individuals mitigate the social costs associated with luxury consumption, while still letting them reap the advantages.

Express yourself

Research shows that individuals benefit from consuming luxury goods, which are characterised by their high price, exclusivity and often conspicuous nature. Such luxury consumers **stand to enjoy** higher status, preferential treatment and compliance from others. However, as previously mentioned, these benefits often come with a hefty social price that can dissuade luxury consumers from confidently wearing these items.

In our series of pilot studies, we found that many luxury consumers are passionate about luxury products or brands. However, many opt to conceal this passion from others – particularly those less close to them, such as their co-workers and social media followers – as they are concerned about receiving negative judgments from their peers.

Some individuals may work in industries where luxury consumption is frowned upon or be worried about receiving backlash from friends who perceive their consumption habits as being excessive or ostentatious. Indeed, the luxury consumers in our pilot studies believed that displaying and expressing a passion for luxury goods would make them seem snobby, pretentious and materialistic.

We then conducted a series of experiments to determine whether publicly expressing a passion for luxury would help (rather than hurt) luxury consumers by making them appear more authentic. Participants were presented with a series of statements or scenarios in which a luxury consumer either did or did not reveal a passion for a luxury brand or product. They were then asked for their perceptions of the luxury consumer's

authenticity, warmth, trustworthiness and status, and if they would be interested in getting to know more about that person.

As predicted, our findings showed that luxury consumers who disclosed a passion for luxury were viewed as more authentic, warm and trustworthy than those who did not, while still benefitting from the status boost associated with consuming luxury items. Participants also demonstrated greater interest in knowing more about a luxury consumer when they expressed a passion for luxury.

Additionally, luxury consumers who were public about their passion were perceived as pursuing luxury for intrinsic motivations – such as deriving genuine enjoyment and pleasure from an appreciation of the fine craftsmanship involved in creating the items – rather than chasing the extrinsic benefits of luxury consumption.

Implications for consumers and luxury brands

Our study makes several theoretical and practical contributions. For starters, it proposes a simple and straightforward solution for alleviating the negative social ramifications of luxury consumption: expressing a passion for the product or brand. This behaviour can lead to positive interpersonal outcomes without undermining the status benefits of luxury consumption, allowing luxury consumers to have their cake and eat it, too.

Our findings also contribute to emerging research on passion expression, which has previously been studied in [the realm of work](#), and extend it to the luxury goods space. Additionally, we offer practical insights for luxury brands to leverage the results of our research.

During economic downturns, like the one we are currently experiencing, overtly parading the expensive nature of luxury items in marketing campaigns can be viewed as tone deaf and attract backlash. Instead, luxury labels could direct their marketing efforts to engaging with their existing customers by encouraging them to express their passion for the brand and its products.

As an example, many luxury labels place a strong focus on high-quality craftsmanship and heritage in their marketing initiatives. Hermes, for instance, recently organised [a travelling showcase](#) where people could get an inside look into how its iconic leather handbags are made, and even flew

in craftspeople from their workshops in France to demonstrate skills such as saddle stitching and silk printing. Patek Philippe also runs a series of [global exhibitions](#) that spotlight the brand's craftsmanship and storied heritage.

Luxury labels can nudge customers to share content online that expresses their passion for the brand and its products. This can be achieved by talking up the craftsmanship, heritage and other associated virtues, or by "liking" social media pages and sharing their own content that signals their passion for the brand – a marketing strategy that isn't centred on an item's high price tag. Take Christian Louboutin's [#somethingrouge social media campaign](#), which encouraged customers to post photos of themselves wearing the fashion house's iconic red-soled shoes. The brand then chose the best images and reposted these on their Instagram page.

This results in a win-win scenario: Luxury brands can promote their products and foster better engagement with their target audience, while luxury consumers can take steps towards mitigating the negative social effects of partaking in conspicuous luxury.

Find article at

<https://knowledge.insead.edu/marketing/expressing-passion-can-make-luxury-consumers-seem-more-authentic>

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About the research

"[Expressing passion for luxury enhances perceived authenticity](#)" is published online in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*.