

# Socio-Cultural Perspectives in Luxury: Looking Back to Look Forward

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## Abstract

This article presents a brief on the evolution of research in the luxury domain, track its progress over time and across various disciplines. In doing this, it understands the multitude of shifting historical, cultural and social narratives that have shaped the concept of luxury. Based on the PRISM guidelines for review articles, this paper provides a systematic review of the growing yet still fragmented scholarship on socio-cultural perspectives of luxury consumption. It examines and presents the various socio-cultural motives that influence the desire for luxury and initiates the debate on the more emerging and contemporary understanding of social motives shaping luxury consumption. Subsequently a future research agenda is detailed.

**Keywords:** Luxury, Evolution, Social, Cultural, Historical, Literature Review

## Introduction

From time immemorial, historians, sociologists and researchers have been studying the luxury concept and issues related to its consumption. Luxury has since always been deep-rooted in our society; however, contemporary luxury has become a fundamental and figurative characteristic of the consumption society today (Cristini, Kauppinen-Räsänen, Barthod-Prothade, & Woodside, 2017). Luxury industry covers a broad spectrum of categories, from fashion to food, wine and spirits, from cars and yacht to hotels and from art to luxury experiences, wellness and lifestyle (BCG Altgamma, 2019; D'Arpizio et al. 2019).

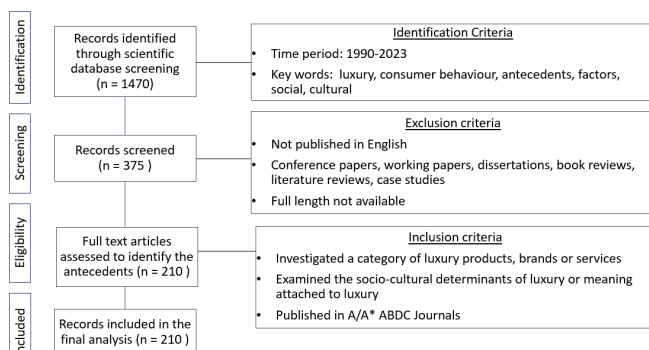
In order to understand the ever-evolving sphere of luxury, one needs to understand the multitude of shifting cultural and social narratives that have shaped the concept of luxury. It is also important to understand the interplay between the historical factors that have influenced these interpretations and the ongoing evolving global trends shaping consumers desires and expectations. In that regard, this article presents a brief on the evolution of research in the luxury domain, track its progress over time and across various disciplines and provide further insights into the theoretical foundations for this domain. In its analysis of luxury, the present article also explores the rich tapestry of social needs and

consequences that make luxury a deeply social phenomenon. While examining the interaction amid social needs and contemporary luxury consumption, this perspective is aligned with the view that although consumers indulge in luxury consumptions for varied reasons such as to seek hedonic and aesthetic needs (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2009) and to satisfy identity motives (Mazzocco, Rucker, Galinsky, & Anderson, 2012) social needs are, without a doubt, a primary motive underlying consumers' desire for luxury (Dubois, 2020). We conclude with recommendations for future research.

## Research Methodology

To provide collective insights into the different socio-cultural theoretical perspectives of luxury, a systematic literature review (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003) was undertaken. This study adopted the well-recognised PRISM guidelines for review articles (Moher et al., 2009), which included the four-step process of identification (keyword database search), screening (scholarly filtration), checking for eligibility, and the inclusion of articles to get the final list of articles for analysis. Figure 1 details the review methodology used for this study. To source the studies, an extensive search was conducted on Scopus and Wen of Science databases. These databases cover research published by renowned publishing groups like Emerald, Elsevier, Sage, Routledge and Wiley. Along with this the reference lists of the identified studies were also scanned to ensure that all notable studies and articles relevant to the study were included. Following keywords were used to identify the studies: 'luxury' AND 'consumer behaviour' OR 'antecedents' OR 'factors' OR 'social' OR 'cultural'.

**Figure : Review Methodology**



Source: Compiled by authors

This review focused on studies published since 1990. However, the seminal studies, published before 1990, related to the concept of luxury and its consumption were also included. A preliminary screening excluded conference papers, working papers, dissertations and book reviews, and only full-length articles with original conceptual or empirical insights were considered (Lopez-Duarte et al., 2016). Herein, studies from non-peer-reviewed sources and articles not written in English language were also excluded. In the eligibility phase selection was restricted to research articles that: (a) investigated a category of luxury products, brands or services; (b) examined the socio-cultural determinants and/or patterns of; and/or meaning attached to luxury practices and consumption; and (d) were published in Association of Business Deans Council, Australia (ABDC) ranked journals at the time of retrieval or at the time of publication. Accordingly, 210 research papers were shortlisted for the review and reference.

## Evolution of Research in Luxury and Luxury Consumption

Luxury is a complex and dynamic phenomenon that dates back to centuries. It's been said that the roots of luxury go "back to the dawn of humanity"; oldest theories about material possessions being traced to human's obsession with immortality, self-preservation and after life (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Luxury has been inherent to multitudes of ancient narratives such as Egyptian, Roman and Chinese civilizations (Kapferer, 2009). The most ancient societies considered luxury as a means for spiritual and material elevation. Objects, such as precious jewels, food, weapons, horses, ships etc., found in the ancient tombs show their belief in the relationship between wealth, power, and social class.

The concept of luxury encompasses a broad scope of perspectives, varying from philosophical, political, moral, cultural, social, individual and economic. It has been subjected to a wide range of debates and discourses regarding "fundamental questions about existence, cultural myths, rituals, social order, identity and experience, institutional environment, goods, services, and brands and the creation and maintenance of a consumer culture and the

systems that support it” (Gurzki, 2020). The concept of luxury has been constructed within the cultural and social dimensions of the societies undergoing historical and economic development. With time and as new ways of living emerged, luxury evolved and its concept underwent

substantial changes. Interestingly though, throughout the time, luxury has been associated with the essence of a society, societal values and norms and, highlighting the influence of luxury and its consumption on the social order and social stratification (Kapferer, 2009). Table 1 summarizes the phases of evolution of research in luxury.

**Table . Evolution of Research in Luxury**

	Before 16 <sup>th</sup> Century The Beginning of Luxury	16th Century - 18 Century Rise of Trade and Commerce	19th Century - Early 20 Century Emergence of Consumer Society	Late 20th Century to Present Global Luxury Industry
Context	Politics and Morality	Economic and Social	Economic and Social	Socio-cultural
Focus areas	Normative aspects of luxury consumption and its harmful effects on society	De-moralisation of luxury Positive consequences of luxury trade on economy and society Consumption practices of the nobles Increased focus towards aesthetics, personal expression	Emerging luxury industry Modern consumer society Emerging middle class Democratisation of luxury	Global luxury industry Emerging economies like India, China Digitisation and Ecommerce Millennials and Gen Z Socio-cultural value dimensions of luxury
Meaning attributed to luxury	Lust, sin, lasciviousness, superfluity, immoral	Individual and social wellbeing, refinement, status signifier, personal expression	Luxury became more private and a means for social imitation and distinction	Means for status consumption Hedonist, personalised

## The Beginnings of Luxury

Studies have indicated towards earliest perceptions of luxury primarily being negative. The historical context of luxury was associated with arguments which were predominantly normative and related to luxury's role for the people and the society at large. Classical writings on luxury reflect the anxieties revolving around maintaining the social order and a strong powerful nation (Berg & Eger, 2003). Pursuit of luxury was seen in the form of self-indulgence, greed or desire for power; opulence considered an unnatural and uncontrollable desire and a peril for individuals and societies (Berry, 1994, as cited in Gurzki, 2020).

Early Greek, Christian and Latin thoughts associated luxury with futility, sin, an overcoming of natural life and considered luxury as a threat to the society and a danger to the economy (Berry, 1994). With the spread of Christianity, especially in the 14th century, luxury was compared with

lust, sexuality and lasciviousness and was looked upon as a deadly sin (Berry, 1994). Romans also discussed the political dimension of luxury. Thinkers like Cicero and Seneca viewed the use of wealth for personal indulgence as immoral and detrimental for society.

Several ancient philosophers had authored arguments in support of these sentiments against luxury. Socrates, while discussing the essential elements of a just society, declared the desire for luxury as the cause for was and the evils of the society. Plato was strongly distrustful of luxury and famously proclaimed that wealth and extravagance were the roots of corruption, thus should be subjected to legal and fiscal regulations (Berry, 1994, as cited in Gurzki, 2020). He considered indulgence in luxury as “self-interestedness” which can become the cause for envy, conflict and hostility in the society and political unrest (Gurzki, 2020). Aristotle and Epicurius were also critical towards the desire wealth and luxury .

Spanning the Middle Ages to early modern period and late modern era, luxury was subjected to social and political criticism, root cause being excess consumption and its non-necessity. Sumptuary laws were prescribed that restrained luxury, extravagance, possessions and behaviour specifically regulating inordinate expenditures on apparel, food, furniture, shoes, etc (Berry 1994)

Through anxieties over the morality of luxury extended from the Middle Ages to early modernity, a closer look would help reveal some intellectual counter views as well; that admire and give conditional approval to luxury and indulgence. Philosophers and thinkers like Plato and Socrates as well, though highly critical of extravagance, recognised luxury to be a crucial and inevitable feature of the civilized society .

#### Luxury with the Rise of Commerce and Trade

Early modern period, around the 16th century saw the growth of trade and commerce. Luxury, which was so far being symbolised as sin, got demoralised, with discussion now moving towards economic trade and consequences for the society (Berry, 1994). The consumption practices of the aristocrats and ruling class in England, led to the emergence of a consumer society (McCracken, 1990). There was an increased focus on individual possessions that communicated social standing of the noble. The social distance between the nobility and subordinates increased, with the upper-class defining fashion and value of luxury (McKendrick et al., 1982). Taxation and sumptuary laws were used to maintain power and control and to restrict the consumption of luxury largely to the nobility and political authorities (Kroen, 2004).

It was around the 17th century, with the trade routes being established and emergent bourgeois sentiment, that luxury started losing the negative overtone and there for a growing inclination for opulence . Enlightenment age and the French and American Revolutions in the late-18th to the mid-19th centuries, undermined the authority of the monarchy and laid the foundation for a major shift in the luxury connotations. Luxury was now considered more than just a marker for status and power of the leading classes and aristocracy, and democratised to consumers, so anyone with access to resources could selectively engage in luxury

consumption and reconstruct one's social identity (Kapferer, 2009). With increased social and financial mobility, the society transitioned from feudal to a commercial one, that challenged the prevailing social stratification, on the basis of genetic lineage, and existing definitions of class (Berry, 1994).

The “central tradition” created by the classic economists was poorly suited to the philosophers around this time. Adam Smith with his writings on liberalism enthusiastically praised trade and luxury as the engine of economic growth . Mandeville (1724) demonstrated that luxury was inseparable from flourishing states and propagated the moral paradox of 'Private Vices, Public Benefits', economic viewpoint that pursuit of self-interest and material gains simulate economy and bring about social prosperity. With his argument about “moderate” luxury, David Hume provided a philosophical rationale for the compatibility of moral virtue with enjoyment of luxury and beneficial interaction between these two concepts . His view legitimised pursuing one's own interests and desires and emphasised that the role of public policy should be to constructively channel these desires towards promoting overall well-being, instead of condemning them (Berry, 1994, as cited in Gurzki, 2020).

Sombart (1967) related the intensification of luxury in the society to growing acknowledgment of the capitalistic system and to the emerging new middle class who valued their self-esteem and their position in the changing society. Berry (1994) and Berg & Eger (2003) both supported Sombart's views and advocated the transition of luxury, from one with negative connotations to one with positive benefits on production, trade and society in general. Berry called it as 'the de-moralization of luxury', a precedence of the economic benefits of luxury over its moral implications.

Consumerism was growing to become a key feature of this modern society wherein consumption was emerging as a means to create status and identity (Slater, 1997). These developments in 18th century brought a radical transformation in the western society that had a significantly influenced the notion of luxury and luxury as a concept and also and in its most tangible representation representations of products and services.

## **Luxury and the Emergence of a Consumer Society: 19th Century and Early 20th Century**

The nineteenth century marked the beginning of the modern luxury industry. There was rapid industrialisation in Europe and a large-scale production of goods made them more affordable and accessible and it became easier to ship exotic luxuries across countries and continents. Economic growth and expanding international trade led to the expansion of the middle class and a surge in consumption. With rising prosperity and boosting social and economic conditions, fashion industry developed rapidly. Luxury became a full-fledged industry with several niche and specialised sectors with launch of many valuable brands that we know today.

Research around this time looked towards more practical considerations of modern consumer societies. With the emergence of the middle-class society, consumption became a means for the pursuit of both social imitation and distinction (Bourdieu, 1990; Simmel, 1904). Verley (2006) introduced the idea of 'semi-luxury', Berg (2005) examined the evolving features of luxury and discussed luxury as the 'new consumer goods' for the growing middle class. 'Democratization of luxury' (Lipovetsky & Roux, 2003) become a major trend and brands moved beyond targeting wealthy consumers and launched new product lines and brand extensions to cater to this middle-class consumer.

The evolution of this industry also saw a shift in the manufacturing and trade of luxury products and many studies tried to capture this. The initial emphasis was on Asia as a major supplier of luxury goods internationally (Donzé & Fujioka, 2017). The craft sector in Europe flourished to cater to the new needs of the emerging middle classes (Berg, 2005). Early 19th century saw France and UK emerge as major manufacturers and exporters of luxury goods to the US market (Donzé & Fujioka, 2017).

## **Luxury in the Late 20th and Early 21st Century**

The global luxury industry emerged in the 1980s and 1990s with family-owned businesses becoming more professionalised and global, evolving into big luxury conglomerates (Gurzki, 2020). These global luxury groups

became more accessible to consumers, by diversifying their portfolio both horizontally and vertically (Kapferer, 2009), and they now cater to diverse sectors like fashion, jewellery, cosmetics, wine and spirits, watches, hospitality and media (Som & Blanckaert, 2015). This era has parallelly seen a rise of consumer spending. This upsurge in spending and luxury consumption was driven by increasing demand from high growth emerging economies such as China and India (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Marketing became a dominant business paradigm by the latter half of 20th century, and market and customer orientation has taken precedence (Firat & Dholakia, 2006). Growth of ecommerce and rising share of online luxury purchases has further brought a structural change in the traditional bonds between consumer and suppliers (Gurzki, 2020). Increasing penetration of experiential consumption, online luxury, second-hand luxury, rental luxury and such newer forms of consumption have further reinforced the social and public value of luxury and have resulted in emergence of new consumer segments which increasingly diverse in terms of culture and socioeconomic profile (Czellar, Dubois & Laurent, 2020).

Along with this, the changing society and its evolving values have also contributed to the change in luxury demand and its consumption. Some of the leading sociological factors driving change in the market are - the younger consumer entering market, changing family structure, and rise of the female consumer (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003; Kapferer, 2009).

In line with these developments, 2000s has seen studies building on the perspective of how social dynamics shape consumption practices. and examined the concepts like status consumption (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004), signalling (Han et al., 2010) and the need for conformity or uniqueness (Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). The research includes a focus on luxury marketing, strategy (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009), line extensions (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003), masstige concept (Truong, McColl, & Kitchen, 2009), value dimensions (Wiedmann et al., 2009). Research has also highlighted the influence of cultural background on luxury consumption (Chadha & Husband, 2010).

The above section provides a brief historical outline of the

evolution of luxury through time. This section is on no account exhaustive but it gives and understanding of the predominant schools of thought.

### Social Perspective of Luxury Consumption

Research in luxury consumption is infused with social motives. Following the work of Veblen (1899) and Simmel (1904/1957), research describes luxury consumption as a social phenomenon and places the quest for status, social comparison, improving social standing and creating

affiliation or disassociation from others, the core social reasons behind customers' desire for luxury (Wang, 2022; Kim, Park & Dubois, 2018; Gao et al., 2016; Dubois & Ordabayeva, 2015; Ordabayeva & Chandon, 2011; Amaldoss & Jain 2005). Below we synthesise this large body of work that builds on the idea that luxury consumption is a socio-cultural phenomenon and examines the interaction amid social needs and contemporary luxury consumption. Table 2 summarize the key socio-cultural perspectives of luxury consumption.

**Table 2. Key Social Perspectives Explaining Luxury Consumption**

Key Perspectives	Dimensions	Key Takeaways	Recent Contributions
Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII)	Normative Susceptibility - Value Expressive / Social Adjustive	Consumers' tendency to comply to social norms, to enhance image, gain acceptance and approval in group settings	Wang et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2022; Eastman et al., 2018, Jain & Khan, 2017, , Katsunari's & Balaban is (2014)
	Normative Susceptibility - Utilitarian Perspective	Consumers' tendency to conform to others' expectations to receive rewards and evade any negative consequences	
	Informative Susceptibility	Consumers' tendency to seek information from others in purchase decisions.	
Status Consumption	Symbolism	Consumers' desire to signal rank, image, prestige, elitism and status	Wang et al., 2022; Gao et al., 2016; Dubois & Rabeea, 2015
	Power	Social status is accompanied by perception of power, competence, envy in interpersonal contexts	Gao et al., 2016; Wong & Shavit, 2010; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008
	Social mobility	Shift in individual's position within the social hierarchy	Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2020; Price et al., 2018; Dubois & Rabeea, 2015; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008; Orcas and Frost, 2002
	Create affiliation and distinction	Consumers' desire to affiliate with differentiate from lower class consumers or dissociative social groups	Eastman et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2018; Mazzocco et al., 2012

*Source: Compiled by author*

### Social Status

Consumers need for status has since always been seen as a strong force behind their desire for luxury (Dubois, Jung & Ordabayeva, 2021; Dreze & Nunez, 2009). Across domains, research has described purchase, use and consumption of goods and services as a means to gain social

status (Eastman, Goldsmith & Flynn, 1999). Status refers to the respect, admiration and importance afforded to a person by others and is considered as a fundamental human goal (Anderson, Hildreth & Howland, 2015). This notion of status is built on the presumption of a hierarchal structure within the society, and refers to an individual's position within that structure or society (Dubois & Ordabayeva,

2015; Dreze & Nunes, 2009). This way an individual's social motives are based on his or her actual or desired position in the society (Dubois, 2020). Status has been defined as "an expression of evaluative judgment that conveys high or low prestige, regard, or esteem" (Donnenwerth & Foal, 1974, p. 786). Social status is accompanied by perception of power, competence, success, admiration and even envy in interpersonal contexts (Dubois, 2020; Wong & Shavitt, 2010; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008; Eastman, Goldsmith & Flynn, 1999).

While examining the social and cultural structure, Bourdieu (1990) gave a broader concept of capital and their theory serves as an inspiration even for contemporary discussions on class and status, culture and lifestyle (Paalgard Flemmen, Jarness, & Rosenlund, 2019). Bourdieu addresses how individuals compete for social positions within cultural spheres which give rise to different social structures and generalized capital as a resource which can take on "both monetary as well as non-monetary, and tangible as well as intangible forms" (Anheier, Gerhards, & Romo, 1995). Capital is thus distinguished between – economic or financial resources, cultural capital (longstanding character, outlook and habitus acquired by means of socialising, acquired tastes, preferences, knowledge and education) and social capital (actual and potential resources that can be mobilised by means of memberships in social communities). Studies have shown how individuals mobilise types and amounts of capital to maintain social status within their cultural sphere.

Dubois and Ordabayeva (2015) have called upon the need to study social status as a crucial construct in social research and have highlighted how luxury consumption helps consumers navigate social hierarchies. They have discussed that consumers can have varying views on the nature of status, and they adapt their luxury consumption practices according to the social context around them. Whether status is ascribed (i.e., predetermined), or can be achieved (i.e. attained through merit); this has a significant impact on their preferences and consumption patterns (Dubois, 2020). Accordingly, people engage in 'status-advancement' strategies to advance their social position, or 'status-maintenance' strategies to maintain their social

standing; highlighting the dual nature of status goals (Kim, Park & Dubois; 2018). Similarly, depending on the social strata, people use horizontal or vertical signals as a differentiation strategy (Ordabayeva & Fernandes 2018).

Building on the work of Dubois and Ordabayeva (2015), Eckhardt and Bardhi (2020) have explored and highlighted the shift in status-based consumption in the emerging domain of liquid consumption in modern marketplace. Globalisation, marketisation and digitisation have produced newer "social order" where "experiences and inconspicuous consumption are more valued than conspicuously owning material objects" (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2020). Possession, ownership and specifically conspicuous consumption have since always been seen as key sources of status, esteem and prestige (Bauman, 2000). In the contemporary era of modernity, liquidity and acceleration, traditional structures of society are undergoing rapid transformation, on technical, economic and even cultural front, increasing the pace, fluidity and scale of change in society and daily life (Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019). Existing class hierarchies and elites still exist and matter however the indicators for status and distinction have become ephemeral and are fast changing (Price et al., 2018). Middleclass is engaging in newer practices for social mobility (Thompson et al., 2018). Acquisition of right kind of knowledge, culture, tastes and consumption practices are fast becoming newer vehicles of status as against conspicuousness and economic position (Vikas et al., 2015). Eckhardt and Bardhi (2020) have highlighted how the dynamics of liquid consumption are giving rise to newer forms of luxury with a growing appreciation for tastes, flexibility and non-ownership. Subsequently they have emphasised the need for individuals to develop flexible skill sets and resources; embrace liquid identities, and ability to draw in audience; in order to indicate status and maintain social position.

### **Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence**

Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII) has been recognized as a prominent determinant of his or her attitude, aspirations, values, norms behavior (Bearden,

Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989). Several theoretical models and frameworks have used interpersonal influence, to pursue various consumer research objectives (Ford & Ellis, 1980; Moschis, 1976; Witt & Bruce, 1972; Stafford, 1966). Literature suggests social norms, peer and reference groups influence an individual's judgements and decisions (Mourali et al., 2005; Bearden and Etzel, 1982). Individuals trend to be susceptible to others' opinions (Netemeyer, Bearden, & Teel, 1992) and seek recognition, respect and acceptance in groups (Phua, 2010; Bearden & Etzel, 1982). The reference group for these individuals can be a real or hypothetical person or group that has a significant bearing on their potential evaluations and behaviour (Park & Lessig, 1977).

CSII follows the work on influenceability by McGuire (1968). It is observed as a general behavioral tendency that varies across individuals. Consumer's susceptibility to interpersonal influence has been defined as "... the need to identify with or enhance one's image in the opinion of significant others through the acquisition and use of products and brands, the willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions, and/or the tendency to learn about products and services by observing others or seeking information from others." (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989). They further elaborate how this tendency of individuals determines celebrities and other prominent spokespersons being used for endorsements and representation of product consumption in social situations.

Social psychologists and consumer behaviorists who have studied these interpersonal and group dynamics have observed that interpersonal influence is a multidimensional construct, with normative and informational dimension (Netemeyer, Bearden, & Teel, 1992; Bearden & Etzel, 1982). Normative influence indicates an individual's disposition to comply to social norms in pursuance of acceptance and approval in group settings (Khare, 2014). This tendency to enforce one's position in the eyes of relevant others reflect the value expressive dimension of normative influence (Bearden and Rose, 1990).

Another dimension of normative influence is utilitarian

influence which refers to a person's effort to live up to other's expectations in order to receive rewards and evade any negative consequences of non-conformity, such as disassociation from an important group (Kropp et al., 2005). Hence a consumer's susceptibility to normative influence motivates them to make consumption decisions that they feel significant others would approve of (Netemeyer, Bearden, & Teel, 1992). There is a social pressure felt by consumers to observe and follow the behavior and choices of their friends, relatives and significant others and abide by the expectations of the social institutions and their rules, also referred to as their subjective norm (Paul et al., 2016). Several studies have indicated a positive relationship between subjective norms and luxury purchase intention (Jain, 2020; Jain & Khan, 2017; Shukla, 2012). Goffmann (1959) described these perceptions of social value and outer-directed consumption preferences under the phenomenon of 'impression management' (Nwankwo, Hamelin & Khaled, 2014). Consumers who are susceptible to gain approval and positive feedback from others work on their social-adjustive attitude to regulate their self in the social environment (Jiang, Cui, & Shan, 2022). Such individuals can get overly concerned about other's opinion of them and develop a social anxiety (Jiang, Cui, & Shan, 2022).

The informational dimension of interpersonal influence refers to a person's predisposition to observe or eagerly seek information, to enhance their knowledge such as about product and brand evaluation and choice, and other consumption patterns; from knowledgeable others (Netemeyer, Bearden, & Teel, 1992; Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Park & Lessig, 1977;).

Research in luxury propose that CSII has a prominent role in luxury consumption contexts (Kastanakis&Balabani, 2012; O'Cass& Frost, 2002; Bearden & Etzel, 1982). An individual's personal and cultural values, family and demographics have an important bearing on their luxury consumption behavior (Kapferer& Laurent, 2016). Interpersonal influences motivate consumers to conceptualize a positive image or self-identity at a group or social level (Khare, 2014; Shukla, 2010) and have a significant impact on their status consumption (Weidmann,



Hennigs, & Siebels, 2009; Tsai, 2005). Consumers with a high concern for “social acceptance, conformity and group norms” (Eastman et al., 2018), place a high value on luxury (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). The social symbolic value of luxury (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004) allows individuals to associate with relevant others (Weidmann et al., 2009), and also disassociate non-prestige reference groups (Christodoulides et al., 2009; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

### **Discussion and Future Research Directions**

The world of luxury has seen a nuanced but continuous evolution; catalyzed by shifting socio-cultural currents, emerging technologies, varying economic and demographic trends and a new age of consumerism with changing values, aspirations and lifestyles. The scope of luxury consumption itself has broadened within and beyond the conventional luxury classifications, with consumers investing in domains like parenting, education, health and green living in pursuit of status and cultural capital (Dubois, Jung & Ordabayeva, 2021). With the rise of experience economy, the lines between luxury products and services are getting blurred, paving way for luxury customer experiences (Fuchs, 2023). Increasing digitisation has changed the nature of self as well as replaced many physical categories - like books, cards, money, photographs, music and film records; and even services like retail stores, banking, offices; with their digital parallels (Belk, 2020). Along with this, the emergence of collaborative consumption (Botsman & Rogers, 2010) has further resulted in a fundamental restructuring of the consumer market, shift in the values and norms affecting the notion of luxury and new bases for pursuing luxury (Belk, 2020). Additionally, luxury is not just isolated and enclosed in luxurious contexts, instead it is getting integrated in everyday lived experiences of consumers (Bauer, von Wallpach, & Hemetsberger; 2011). Another defining characteristic of the luxury narrative in the last decade is the growing influence of sustainability and ethical practices (Lubin & Esty, 2010). The new age luxury consumer is a conscious and an immensely informed global citizen.

Furthermore, luxury industry is witnessing a growing shift in the type of luxury consumer. Political and economic

changes around the world is flourishing the markets with consumers who have attained a social position and status through their skills, abilities, efforts and economic progress (Czellar, Dubois & Laurent, 2020). This new age luxury consumer is younger, more connected and a global consumer (Thomsen et al., 2020), with a rather unconventional view of what luxury stands for and is redefining consumerism by envisaging new meaning of goods and services.

This landscape of profound changes affects the luxury concept and gives rise to new forms of consumption (Frenken & Schor, 2017). And these will continue to influence luxury consumption patterns for years ahead. And as these tough global environments continue to prevail, luxury players have to face up new challenges and need to access what lies ahead for this market on global scale.

This article reviews the multitude of societal and cultural narratives that have shaped the meaning of luxury over time and across disciplines. It examines the various socio-cultural signifiers of luxury consumption. It understands a consumer's quest for status, and how meaning attached to luxury consumption practices vary according to the cultural and social environment of the consumer.

This study aims to delve into the conceptual ideas, discussed here, and initiate the debate on the more emerging and contemporary understanding of social motives shaping luxury consumption. Changing basis of social hierarchies, evolving landscape of status and distinction and the emerging affluent consumer groups offer additional avenues for future research. A rapidly growing market for luxury services and luxury experiences further opens exiting research streams into consumers' social aspirations. Our focus is gradually shifting from one's possessions to one's accomplishments; the notion of status getting more closely associated with an individual's achievements and their cultural capital (Belk, 2020). Research needs to focus on this growing appetite for a less materialistic notion of luxury. Additionally, research needs to investigate the socio-psychological perspectives of luxury in the new emerging contexts social media. Literature suggests that meaning attributed to luxury

consumption vary with across generational contexts (Bharti, Suneja, & Chauhan, 2022). Research needs to investigate the emerging generation Z in terms of their symbolic and socio-psychological motivations and what luxury means to them in this era of digital and sharing economy. Finally, studies need to update the scales used to investigate luxury (such as status consumption) in the emerging consumer contexts.

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