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The Digitalisation of Social Capital: “Conspicuous Consumption on Instagram”¹

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Abstract

Jean Baudrillard states, the theoretical equivalence of body and objects as signs is actually, ‘buy; you will be at peace with yourself’ (Baudrillard, 2014). Baudrillard’s phrase ‘buy, and you will be at ease in your body’ has given way to ‘buy and share, you will

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be at ease in your body'. This research aims to investigate whether displaying purchased luxury goods on Instagram is a type of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899) that may structure a new form of social capital and reputation capital as suggested by Pierre Bourdieu. We argue that this new form of social capital is a digital capital that serves to shape a contemporary reputation capital. The study involves 354 social media users and the data were gathered through an online survey. Our findings reveal that there is insufficient evidence of a relationship between high reputation capital and high social status; however, the aforementioned consumption type depicts reputation capital as a contemporary method of social capital.

keywords: social media, social capital, reputation capital, conspicuous consumption, Instagram.

Résumé

La Digitalisation du Capital Social: « Consommation Ostentatoire sur Instagram »

Selon Jean Baudrillard l'équivalence théorique du corps et des objets en tant que signes est sous la forme suivante : « achète, tu seras en paix avec toi-même. » (Baudrillard, 2014) Cette phrase de Baudrillard a cédé sa place à la suivante : « achète et partage, tu seras en paix avec toi-même. Cette étude vise à déterminer si l'affichage sur Instagram des produits de luxe achetés est un type de consommation ostentatoire (Veblen, 1899) susceptible de structurer une nouvelle forme de capital social et de capital de réputation, comme le suggère Pierre Bourdieu. Nous soutenons que cette nouvelle forme de capital social est le capital numérique qui sert à façonner le capital réputationnel contemporain. L'étude implique 354 utilisateurs de médias sociaux et les données ont été recueillies via une enquête en ligne. Nos résultats révèlent qu'il n'y a pas suffisamment d'éléments pour prouver l'existence d'une relation entre le capital de réputation élevé et le statut social élevé, mais le type de consommation susmentionné montre que le capital de réputation est une nouvelle forme de capital social.

mots-clés: réseaux sociaux, capital social, capital de réputation, consommation ostentatoire, Instagram.

Öz

İtibar Sermayesinin Dijitale Dönüşümü: “Instagram’da Gösterişçi Tüketim”

Jean Baudrillard’ın ifadesine göre göstergeler olarak beden ve nesnelerin teorik eşdeğerliği aslında ‘satın al, kendinle barışık olursun’ şeklindedir (Baudrillard, 2015). Baudrillard’ın ‘satın al, kendinle barışık olursun’ sözü, yerini ‘satın al ve paylaş, bedenle barışık olursun’ sözüne bırakmıştır. Bu araştırma, satın alınan lüks ürünleri Instagram’da göstermenin, Pierre Bourdieu’nün önerdiği gibi yeni bir sosyal sermaye ve itibar sermayesi kalıbını yapılandırabilecek bir gösterişçi tüketim (Veblen, 1899) türü olup olmadığını araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu yeni sosyal sermaye kalıbının, çağdaş bir itibar sermayesini şekillendirmeye hizmet eden bir dijital sermaye olduğunu savunuyoruz. Bu çalışma 354 sosyal medya kullanıcısı ile gerçekleştirilmiş olup, veriler çevrimiçi bir anket aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Bulgularımız, yüksek itibar sermayesi ile yüksek sosyal statü arasındaki ilişkiye dair yeterli kanıt olmadığını ortaya koymaktadır, fakat adı geçen tüketim türü, itibar sermayesinin ve sosyal sermayenin yeni bir şekli olduğunu göstermektedir.

anahtar kelimeler: sosyal medya, sosyal sermaye, itibar sermayesi, gösterişçi tüketim, Instagram.

Introduction

Introduced into sociology by Pierre Bourdieu, the concept of social capital is defined as the entirety of relationships in a society (Bourdieu, 2014). Defined in terms of social capital, reputation capital is specified as a type of capital through which members of professions establish connections with exclusive groups and acquire a reputation. Today, this type of capital does not only exist for members of professions and members of exclusive groups, but also for individuals on social media who connect through luxury consumption as a medium for acquiring reputation. In this internet era, these individuals exist on social networks, where reality is contested, and an attempt to gain status by creating alternate avatar personalities on such platforms has become a reality. In addition to economic and cultural capitals, the shared images and information brings reputation capital to the individuals as part of social capital; and as an extension, develops a digital capital. As Bourdieu said; "Inevitably, the representations partaking within the practices of individuals and groups is the vital part of their social reality. A class is as much defined by its perceived existence as its own existence (Bourdieu, 1984. p. 564, cited by Çeğin & Göker, 2015. p. 17). Today's social reality, perceived existence and class formation through digital representation exist on social media. The represented and perceived existence of individuals is formed through what they purchase and display on social media platforms. What makes this formation visible are the shared images. As Paul Ricoeur states in *Time and Narrative*: "Narrative only configures that which lacks conformity. This means that narrative gives form to that which is not formed (un-formed) (Ricoeur, 2007, p. 140). In this sense, as affirmed by Ricoeur, Instagram, the social media platform where images are predominantly shared, are visual forms of narration shaping the un-formed, because these are the foremost platforms where form can be altered, changed to the utmost and represented differently.

Social Capital

Social capital is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. These relationships may exist only in the practical state, in material and/or symbolic exchanges which help to maintain them" (Bourdieu, 1986 cited by Williams, 2019, p. 2711). According to Bourdieu, social capital is a term that refers to the resources that possess as an outcome of social relationships and connections. In order to obtain economic and social advantages, these resources may encompass opportunities, support, information and knowledge that can be leveraged.

On the other hand, various factors impact individuals spending on luxury goods. For instance, individuals may purchase expensive goods because they

feel the quality and components which made them essentially superior. Nevertheless, these purchases typically entail concerns beyond the quality of the goods, such as the desire to satisfy societal status and prestige motivations. Therefore, buying high-priced services and products has been identified as conspicuous consumption (Sundie et al., 2011).

In social capital, Bourdieu contended that people's capacity and access play a remarkable role in conspicuous consumption. Individuals who have higher social capital are more likely to have information about luxury services and goods. Also, these individuals may have social networks that allow them to acquire these luxury products for reduced cost. In contrast, social capital refers to an individual's network of social connections and contacts, which may be exploited to acquire benefits and chances in society. These two terminologies are connected in the sense that conspicuous consumption may be used to create or reinforce social capital. People seeking social attention may choose to expose their wealth, which can lead to the establishment of new social relationships and the strengthening of old ones. On the other hand, others with less social capital may be excluded from these networks and may lack the ability to engage in conspicuous expenditure.

Bourdieu also argued that the pursuit of conspicuous consumption may be viewed as a sort of cultural capital, which refers to people's knowledge, abilities, and attitudes that are valued in a certain social situation. The capacity to participate in conspicuous consumption may be viewed as a sign of cultural capital as well as a way to promote one's social position and cultural sophistication in specific situations. Theoretically, the relationship between social capital and conspicuous consumption may be suggested, since it pinpoints the significance of social networks and interactions in the acquisition and display of wealth and status.

Instagram and Facebook are social media platforms which enable their users to share images and access collections of images grouped under different keywords. The process of uploading images and grouping them under word groups to show which products people use, like and follow, has created and spread the luxury consumption on these platforms. These are platforms where it is believed that a new socialization process has been evolving and displaying luxury consumption can help achieve a social status.

In the status perceptions of women and men, the differences in the people who consume conspicuously are still lacking in the literature (Siepmann et al., 2022). However, (Roux et al., 2017) showed that males and females have varied values on luxury. In social context, previous research demonstrated that males have greater tendency to consume luxury goods (Verdugo & Ponce, 2020). Holthoff and Scheiben's (2019) study found that males are more status-worthy than females. Our study also gives an insight on these demographic differences

as well as whether conspicuous consumption may form a reputation capital, resulting in a digital capital through displaying luxury purchased goods on Instagram.

People have utilized social media for a variety of purposes over time. People use Instagram to easily communicate (Manikonda & Kambhampati, 2014), gain likes (Diefenbach & Anders, 2022), respect (Roth & Zawadzki, 2018) and a sense of belonging (Wong et al., 2019). Thus, users began to use these social media platforms to follow one another, create personalized content and display a status they feel they belong to. Through this status, it can be suggested that they create a social capital followed by a digitally structured reputation capital in which they exchange socially constructed images. This reputation capital is displayed through these images which is an explicit representation of wealth, thus luxury products.

As part of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social capital, our study seeks to investigate how luxury goods contribute to reputation capital resulting in a digital capital which can be considered a new type of social capital on social media platforms through Thorstein Veblen's theory of 'conspicuous consumption.'. A second objective of the research will be to assess the relationship between the use of Instagram, social capital resulting in digital reputation capital.

Literature Review

Baudrillard and the Consumer Society

According to Baudrillard, what is consumed is no longer just a material good. Consumption is the end outcome of a person's interaction and relationship with a material good. People's daily lives, the ties all people have with each other, their cultural lives, and social relations turn into consumption (Du & Hu, 2022). The communication system is regarded to be what produces the consumer society. The media, in Baudrillard's perspective, support this communication system. According to him, nothing in the market constitutes an entity. The signs make up the products in the market and are the real bought signs (Ajvazi, 2022).

Baudrillard (2015) describes the desire for an object as "the manifest presence of surplus (...) luxurious sense of being already in the Land of Cockaigne" (Baudrillard, 2015, p. 17). The satisfaction and the culture of belonging created by owning an object or owning a common object as others, this 'luxurious sense' is presented on social media by sharing images. The individual who buys an object does not only photograph it but also lists it with a hashtag to show other buyers what they have purchased; thus, becomes a member of a group of individuals who use, photograph and document that object. Baudrillard explains the consumer's relationship with objects as:

"The consumer no longer relates to a particular object in its specific

utility, but to a set of objects in its total signification. The shop-window, the advertisement, the manufacturer and the brand name, which here plays a crucial role, impose a coherent, collective vision, as though they were an almost indissociable totality, a series. This is, then, no longer a sequence of mere objects, but a chain of signifiers, in so far as all of these signify one another reciprocally as part of a more complex super-object, drawing the consumer into a series of more complex motivations" (Baudrillard, 2015, p. 18)

As individuals purchase objects, they become included in a group where other individuals buy the same object and gravitate towards the cluster of objects in that group. The special benefits coming from requirement and use, along with its universal meaning on social media, are the image of reputation and status gained while consuming a product.

In their study titled "Nucleus accumbens response to gains in reputation for the self-relative to gains for others predicts social media use", (Meshi et al., 2013) have conducted a study on the brain MR scans of individuals who believe they gain reputation by receiving likes on Facebook. According to this study, a neurological experiment was conducted on 31 individuals between the ages of 19-31 which focused on Nucleus Accumbens; a region of the brain that is associated with cognitive notions such as motivation, pleasure and reward. The study revealed that a positive correlation was observed in the subjects who believed that their reputation was positively affected by receiving likes. It is intriguing to observe how positive social media comments affect the brain, and therefore the body, because it reveals to what extent an individual is affected by the 'like' culture. Being liked brings reputation; reputation brings 'likes'. Tamir and Mitchell (2012) studied the consistency of such outcomes to investigate whether the same brain areas are activated when one has the chance to divulge information about themselves. According to their study, subjects alternated between revealing their thoughts and ideas and speculating about the beliefs and opinions of another individual while undertaking functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scanning. Furthermore, analyses revealed that "self-disclosure" had reward value for both parts. Although the act of self-reflection alone was sufficient to activate brain areas linked to rewarding outcomes, these effects were amplified by the knowledge that one's thoughts would be shared with another person, suggesting that people find opportunities to share their own thoughts with others to be particularly rewarding.

Bourdieu, Social Capital and Reputation Capital

Pierre Bourdieu (2014) categorizes various types of capital found in a society. Accordingly, along with economic and monetary capital, cultural and symbolic capitals also exist in societies. While Bourdieu describes economic capital as resources that can be transformed into money, he explains cultural capital

as methods for obtaining educational and social gains. The author identifies the types of capitals as fundamental social forces and defines the difference between social capital and symbolic capital as:

“Firstly, economic capital, in various kinds; secondly, cultural capital or better, informational capital, again in various kinds; and thirdly two forms of capital that are very strongly correlated, social capital, which consists of resources based on connections and group membership, and symbolic capital, which is the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate” (Bourdieu, p. 4, 1987, cited by Ben Fine p.102, 2001).

According to Claridge (2018) and Toyon (2022), the term ‘social capital’ refers to a concept that has its origins in the structural social capital theory of connections. Toyon (2022) stated that in 1986, Bourdieu outlined social capital as a pragmatic theory for investigating how cultural, economic, symbolic, and human capital all interact as instruments for institutionalization of inequality. For Bourdieu, the public sphere encompasses a wide range of domains including education, sports, arts, and culture. Individuals who dwell in these domains have various struggles, power relations and adjacencies. Thus, the mentioned struggle is the struggle to own the values generated by the field. Therefore, these values are called ‘capital’ (Dikkol, 2020). Bourdieu’s social capital theory is basic to the ability to mobilize the cultural and economic resources of the family or individual. Thus, social capital analyses are always focusing on the “class” and the “status” analyses (Mikiewicz, 2021).

In his article titled Bourdieu’s Social Capital: From Distinction to Extinction, Ben Fine (2001) states that Bourdieu’s social capital concept can leap across one social science to the next and that it is a flexible concept. According to the author, in the Bourdieu-like sense, social capital itself is a form of social capital and other types of capitals. As ‘social capital based on group memberships and connections’ can be associated with displaying luxury consumption on social media to gain reputation through likes of the other luxury product users, this new type of social capital can be identified as a digital capital. At this specific point, it is important to underline that Bourdieu’s concepts of gained experience and cultural achievement have also been developed on social media. By sharing social capital contents based on group memberships and connections, a new achievement is built up and a new way of social capital is formed. A new and specific type of capital, also pointed out by Ben Fine, presents itself as a different and new way of social capital through luxury consumption posts shared on social media.

By photographing and sharing a pair of luxurious sunglasses, shoes, or a bag that they have purchased on Instagram, the individual reveals their wealth and believes that they have elevated their social status; by listing the name of the purchased product under the image, the individual shares the social capital which they have displayed and accumulated within the luxury consumers group with

other sharers. From a Marxist perspective, Ben Fine underlines the statement referring to the necessity for the exposure of capitalist wealth for its capital's sustainability. According to the author, wealth is a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2014). The author has utilized the following quotation to demonstrate that Bourdieu derives from Marx when identifying how symbolic capital and wealth transform into social capital:

"The members of the professions(...)find in smart sports and games, in receptions, cocktails and other society gatherings not only intrinsic satisfactions and edification but also the select society in which they can make and keep up their 'connections' and accumulate the capital of honourability they need in order to carry on their professions. This is only one of the cases in which luxury, 'a conventional degree of prodigality', becomes, as Marx observed, 'a business necessity' and 'enters into capital's expenses of representation' as 'an exhibition of wealth and consequently as a source of credit'" (p. 107).

Social media communities are the exclusive community where reputation capital is accumulated as a distinct form of social capital. By belonging to the community of luxury consumers, the user increases their social capital. In other terms, this result is a credit generated by wealth exposure. As this credit increases, the user's reputation capital also increases. A second concept that contributes to the formation of this credit is the culture of conspicuous consumption that has gained momentum on social media.

Social Media, Consumer Culture and Conspicuous Consumption

Dağtaş (2011) reaffirms that, from a demand-based framework, consumer culture can proceed into the process of distinguishing social groups. In the article, where the group defining factor of products produced and used at home or at a certain time and or by a group is pointed out, it is mentioned that individuals are diverging from requirement-based consumption, and that consumption is becoming based on the need for stratification. As of January 2023, Facebook with 2.96 billion and Instagram with 1.35 billion users are the biggest leading social media channels where the culture of stratification is being organized for displaying one's belongings as a medium for prestige and a sign of status (Statista, 2023). As mentioned earlier, Baudrillard defines consumer culture as a new type of socialization and there is a need to treat consumer culture that is emphasized by Baudrillard as a new way of socialization. Consumer culture and the efforts to expose consumption in order to gain reputation brings Thorstein Veblen's theory of Conspicuous Consumption. Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption is related to consumption made for ostentation and impressing others. Consuming for the purpose of enhancing one's social standing or displaying one's prestige to others is an example of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899).

Laeder (2018) argues that users' posts on social media platforms, especially Instagram, typifies society's increasingly obsessive consumer culture. The images shared on social media, that document luxury consumption especially, utterly serve the purpose of gaining prestige. The user's desire to provide proof for the objects they consume by using hashtags, enables them to be included in a group with other luxury consumers and believe that they are gaining a reputation. Güleç (2015) remarks on how methods of exposing luxury consumption are ways to gaining individual satisfaction and that its transformation into a search for social status was criticized by Veblen. Considering Veblen's examples of conspicuous consumption, despite being dated back in the 1800s, it is possible to suggest that the effort for gaining reputation through luxury consumption and exposing it to other members of the society increasingly continues. The recent study by Soncu and Çelik (2022) identified that individuals can consider social media platforms, particularly Instagram, as a means of presenting themselves and also that users share their photos in line with this perception. According to the analysis conducted, it has been discovered that the users display behaviors matching the social class upper class to which they belong or the class upper class to which they aspire (Soncu & Çelik, 2022). In their study it has been proven that individuals illustrate conspicuous consumption instances in Instagram. Nevertheless, in this direction, individuals design their personal profiles with attention and care, they choose the posts and content they have prepared to share on their Instagram profiles in accordance with their identities, and shape their consumption habits accordingly.

Social media has not only facilitated the visual documentation of conspicuous consumption but has also empowered consumers who aspire to attain a similar social status through the consumption of luxury products, allowing them to showcase these acquisitions on digital platforms. Each word, each image documenting consumption is accumulated; and collectively, they bring reputation to the user who consumes luxury products.

The Digitalisation of Reputation Capital

In her book *The Female Eunuch*, Germaine Greer (2006) defines the female body as a bearer of men's economic and social capital. According to Greer, the jewelry worn by a woman at a social gathering adds to the formation of her male partner's economic capital and the value of her body is thus determined. Today, this social capital is not the result of masculine dominance, but rather a digital capital, forcing women to manipulate and self-impose measures upon their own bodies. Now, women accumulate their social capital outside the boundaries of masculine dominance but within the oppression limits of capitalist dominance introduced by social media. Despite being unaccompanied by a man, now, the consumption on social media independently raises women's reputation and contributes to their social capital. Body politics may generally be spoken and written about the female body but the number of men who document their eco-

conomic capital on social media through the objects they purchase, who expose their wealth to be used as a resource for credits and strive towards transforming their social capital into their reputation capital is too large to be overlooked. The medium for displaying this transformation are no longer society gatherings, but are social media platforms.

Along with being a field for consumerism, social media are currently at the position of the habitus that feeds the economic capital, makes room for the new formation of social capital, that is reputation capital, and redounds to social experience and inclinations.

The problematic nature of visibility and reality of reputation capital gained on digital platforms, presents itself as another aspect of this study. As expressed by Bourdieu and Marx, exposure of wealth being a resource for credits and its transformation into social capital is not the same as it is observed in real life or as it is presented on social media. As previously stated by Greer, the female body decorated with jewels, the jewels being the visible part of a man's economic capital and reputation since they were purchased with his money, can be seen in social life. However the wealth or luxury consumption featured on social media are no more than a frame displayed to followers by digital platforms. There still may be a question mark when considering whether a luxury product, purchased and featured on social media, actually belongs to a particular user; however, with their created social capital and social identity, the individual continues to develop a digital capital for the purposes of gaining reputation and to create a digital reputation capital through the images and photographs they share. Similar to reputation capital, digital capital has also become a part of social capital and included itself within the concept of capitals.

Hypothesis Development

The art of conspicuous consumption has been established as focused on possessing, sharing and show of physical assets, however, in contemporary societies, there is shift of focus from the concrete towards abstract symbolism (Siepmann et al., 2022). As luxury goods become more and more accessible, they lose value as symbols of prestige vis-a-vis social capital (Kim, 2018), hence, rich consumers look for other ways to display status. Based on this, new luxury consumption behaviors have arisen (Dubois et al., 2021), leading scholars to delve into the realm of examining alternate abstract status symbolism, as well as acknowledging the significance of experience as status symbols (Kim, 2018).

Due to the accessibility of mobile devices and smartphones, the social media provides a platform for quick and observable propagation of information (Beall et al., 2020), which enables sharing of luxury products, consumption and consumers' every day before and after experiences, with the public in real time (Siepmann et al., 2022). Social media, therefore, allows people to successfully

deal with reality that experience based consumptions are more difficult to observe than physical goods (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018; Luna-Cortés, 2017; Wirtz et al., 2020). The art of conspicuous consumption of goods and experience helps to show behavioral action on social media (Siepmann et al., 2022). Consumers are engrossed with luxury products on social media to improve, maintain, and achieve self-harmony, and indicate status (Bazi et al., 2020). Social status is increased through interchange of information among strangers because the observable social media-enabled consumption of luxury experience provides fresh prospects for self-exhibition and self-presentation (Siepmann et al., 2022). In this light, four hypotheses have been developed.

Conspicuous Consumption on Social Media and Real Life

Regardless of recent significant economic turmoils, the global luxury sector's worth has risen, increasingly, to over 1.2 trillion Euros (d'Arpizio et al., 2019), which reflects a wave of democratization of luxury (Siepmann et al., 2022). In today's society, luxury goods are more inexpensive and accessible to more people (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2018; Siepmann et al., 2022). The luxury sharing-economy has caused a fall of exclusiveness and rise of availability and ubiquity of luxury goods due to increased imitation (Siepmann et al., 2022). Kim & Jang (2014) found that the younger generation primarily share experiences visiting and using luxury goods and services to symbolize the lifestyle they desire, hence as a new system of conspicuous consumption aimed towards expression of oneself. Thus, sharing of luxury experiences may be as significant as luxury goods, which may reflect social behavior (Kim, 2018). Therefore, we hypothesize that a connection exists between sharing and conspicuous consumption of products and experiences on Instagram, and people's desire for public display of luxury goods and experiences as follows:

Hypothesis 1: The desire to show off luxury products to followers on Instagram ($\mu Q1$) has a significant correlation with people's desire to show off luxury products to people around them ($Q2$).

$$h1 \Rightarrow \mu Q1 = Q2.$$

Reputation Capital and Social Acceptance

Contemporary studies indicate that consumers frequently share experiences on social media as well as physical purchases, which causes non-status outcomes, such as likability, trustworthiness, and attraction, resulting in social acceptance and/or envy due to being viewed as self-reliant (Lin et al., 2018). The resulting envy and acceptance may be non-threatening, compassionate or kind, because people tend to accept consumers who share experiences rather than physical consumptions (Lin et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2019). Therefore, we theorize that the people who seek to improve reputation on social media tend to share luxury products on Instagram to improve acceptance.

Hypothesis 2: The desire to share luxury products on Instagram to improve reputation capital ($\mu Q4$) has significant correlation with people's desire to share luxury products on Instagram to gain acceptance (Q5).

$h2 \Rightarrow \mu Q4 = Q5$.

Conspicuous Consumption, Reputation and Social Capital

Conspicuous consumption and perception of status should be studied based on their correlation to self (Topçu, 2018). Such consumption, the-self and personality are significantly connected, and conspicuous consumption is affected by self-worth (Siepmann et al., 2022). People with higher influence due to social capital are not inclined to demonstrate such status or capital to others (Siepmann et al., 2022), and considering how self-worth is linked to such influence, people with higher self-worth are unlikely to participate in redemptive consumption (Siepmann et al., 2022). Analogously, self-worth causes greater desire to display status and participate in conspicuous consumption (Topçu, 2018).

Self-realization also has significant effects, as people in secure social status attain an unmistakable level of self-realization, which has been acknowledged as the utmost essential reason for luxury travels (Siepmann et al., 2022). Equally, materialistic people's lives are focused on gaining, conspicuously consuming and display of luxury goods (Siepmann et al., 2022; Zakaria et al., 2020). Tajfel and Turner (2001)'s notion of Social Identity Theory postulates that people act in correlation with the identity desired by members of their cluster, thus, materialistic people ascribe higher social status to people who display luxury goods within the group, and therefore to people who share luxury goods on Instagram (Siepmann et al., 2022). Pursuant to these discoveries, we speculate that people with high self-worth will not have high reputation capital on Instagram, because they hardly desire to show-off luxury goods. Therefore, we hypothesize that there is a significant link between desire to gain reputation capital through display of luxury lifestyle on Instagram and desire to increase social capital.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant correlation between sharing luxury products and consumptions on Instagram to increase the number of followers ($\mu Q7$) and an increase in social capital because of sharing luxury products and consumption on Instagram (Q10).

$h3 \Rightarrow \mu Q7 = Q10$.

Conspicuous Consumption and Gender Effects

There are very few studies into variances in gender-based perception status for conspicuous consumption. Nevertheless, research indicates that gender affects consumers' luxury standards, and their relevant motivation for consumption of luxury are considered as the ultimate representation of gender characteristics (Roux et al., 2017; Siepmann et al., 2022). Segal & Podoshen (2013) posit

that men tend to be more covetous and disposed to conspicuous consumption in comparison to women, and display more propensity towards social consumption of luxury products (Verdugo & Ponce, 2020). Overall, men are perceived as more proficient and deserving high status than women, who are seen as friendlier, in agreement with Holthoff & Scheiben (2019), whose findings show that conspicuous activity results in greater perceived social status for male than female consumers. While women who display luxurious lifestyles are assumed to be of greater status than men who live luxurious lives (Holthoff and Scheiben, 2019). Consumption of luxury stems from female emphasis on experience and pampering and male focus on prizes and social status (Yeoman, 2011; Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2019), hence we assume men are less likely to display conspicuous consumption of luxury goods and experience on social media than women, and hypothesize as follows:

Hypothesis 4: Sharing of luxury products, jewelry and services on Instagram (Q6) is significantly affected by gender (μ Gender).

$h_4 \Rightarrow \mu$ Gender = Q6.

Methodology

The study was conducted through quantitative methodology. The survey of this study was administered to social media, particularly Instagram users living in Northern Cyprus and Turkey. Upon receiving the ethical approval from the university the research was administered in, it was converted into a survey on Google Forms and administered online. Participants were informed about the study in the survey consent form before taking the survey. The survey then was distributed through each participating researcher's social media accounts. Furthermore, each researcher personally sought out volunteers and had them complete the survey. The study obtained balanced data by recording the participants' age, educational backgrounds, and socioeconomic circumstances.

Sample and measures

The study participants are social media users sampled by Snowball Sampling technique to ensure bracketing and enhanced pollination. Primary data were collected via an online survey adapted from Çelik (2016) and administered to 354 participants and after eliminating missing data we had 353 responses. The survey consisted of 22 descriptive questions and 10 Likert-scaled questions to test the hypotheses.

Data Analysis

The study data are analyzed to test the hypothesis using T-Tests, to compare the mean scores of two variables, as follows: h_1 , h_2 and h_3 are tested using Paired Sample T-Test to examine statistical evidence that the mean differ-

ence between paired dependent variables significantly differs from zero (0). h_4 is tested using Independent Sample T-Test to examine statistical evidence that the mean difference between independent and dependent variables significantly differs from zero (0).

To confirm the validity of the questionnaire, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient Matrix is used to create a correlation matrix. The test is valid with correlation coefficient (r) ≥ 0.250 and significance level (α) < 0.05 (see Appendix 1). Cronbach's alpha value, $\alpha = 0.861$, confirms that the survey is reliable. See Appendix 2 for detailed Cronbach's alpha values.

Findings and Discussion

Test for hypothesis 1: The results show a slightly high correlation, $r = 0.642$, between the desire to show off luxury products to followers on Instagram and people's desire to show off luxury products to people around them. However, the t-Test shows that there is no significant evidence to support the hypothesis, $p = 0.543 > \alpha$; hence h_1 is invalid and rejected.

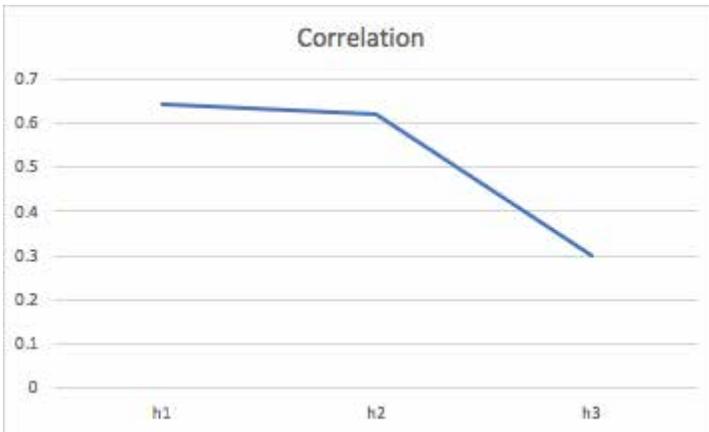
Test for hypothesis 2: The results show a slightly high correlation, $r = 0.620$, between the desire to share luxury products on Instagram to improve reputation capital and desire to share luxury products on Instagram to gain acceptance. However, the t-Test shows that there is no significant evidence to support the hypothesis, $p = 0.718 > \alpha$; hence h_2 is invalid and rejected.

Test for hypothesis 3: The results show some correlation, $r = 0.302$, between sharing luxury products and consumption on Instagram to increase the number of followers and an increase in social capital because of sharing luxury products and consumption on Instagram. The t-Test shows that there is significant evidence to support the hypothesis, $p = 0.000 < \alpha$; hence h_3 is valid and accepted.

Table 1. Paired Samples Correlations Table

Hypothesis Tests		Number of Responses	Correlation Coefficient	Significance
Pair 1	Desire to display luxury products on Instagram	353	0.642	0.000
	Desire to display luxury products to others			
Pair 2	Desire to share luxury products on Instagram to improve reputation capital	353	0.620	0.000
	Desire to share luxury products on Instagram to gain acceptance			
Pair 3	Desire to share luxury products and consumption on Instagram to increase followership	353	0.302	0.000
	Desire to increase social capital by sharing luxury products and consumption on Instagram			

Table 2. Paired Samples Correlations Chart



Test for hypothesis 4: The Independent Sample T-Test result shows that there is significant evidence that users’ gender affects sharing of luxury products, jewelry and services on Instagram, $p = 0.031 < \alpha$.

Table 3. Hypothesis Test Results Table

Beta	Standard Deviation	T- Values	P-Values
Hypothesis 1	0.96038	-0.610	0.543
Hypothesis 2	1.02921	-0.362	0.718
Hypothesis 3	1.57813	-11.534	0.000
Hypothesis 4	0.97127	2.163	0.031
$\alpha = 0.05$ (95% confidence rate)			

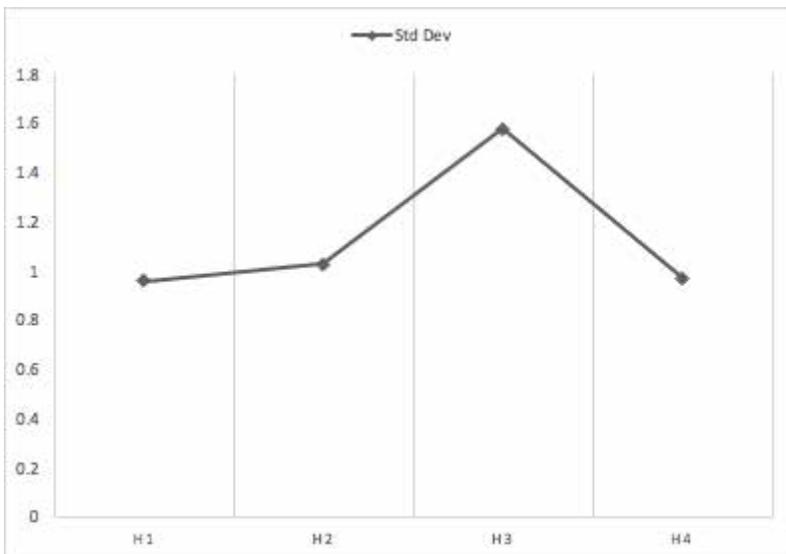
Table 4. Standard Deviation Chart from Hypothesis Testing Results

Table 5. T-Values Chart from Hypothesis Testing Results

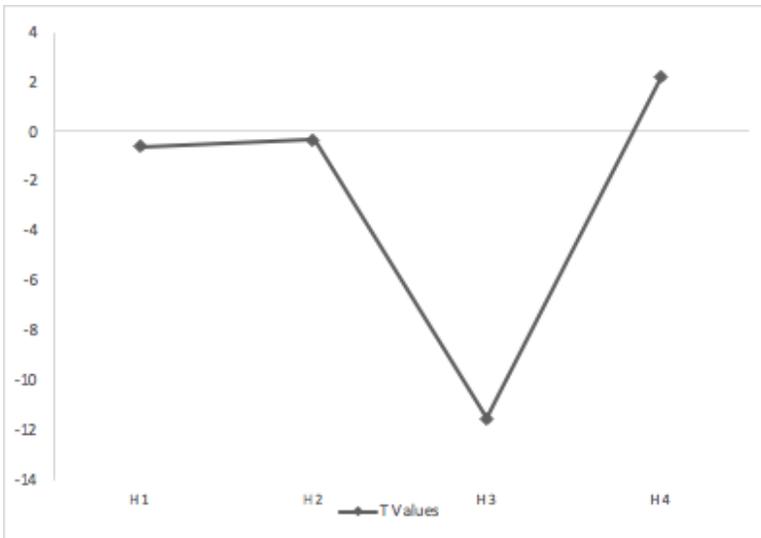
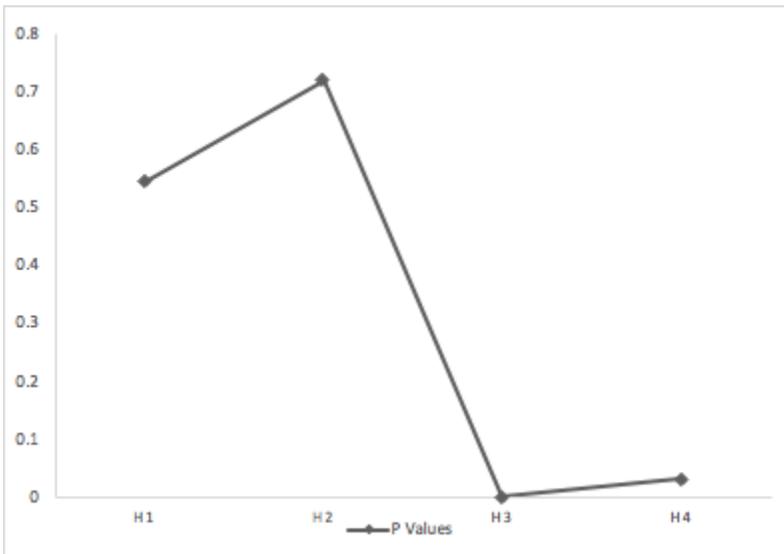


Table 6. P-Values Chart from Hypothesis Testing Results



There are indicators towards democratization of luxury (Siepmann et al., 2022), which suggests that luxury goods have become less exclusive and cheaper to more people (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2018; Siepmann et al., 2022), leading to decrease in exclusiveness, improved availability, and ubiquity of luxury goods

(Siepmann et al., 2022). However, we have found no significant evidence to confirm notions by Kim & Jang (2014) and Kim (2018) that young people tend to share luxury in reflection of social behavior, despite the high correlation. While evidence exists that the display of conspicuous consumption on social media encourages non-status effects resulting in social acceptance (Lin et al., 2018) and has high correlations with the display of conspicuous consumption on social media to enhance reputation capital, there is insufficient evidence to prove that the desire to display luxury products on Instagram to improve reputation capital has significant effects on desire to display luxury products on Instagram to gain acceptance.

There are indications that conspicuous consumption, the-self, and perception of social status are linked to, and affected by, self-worth (Topçu, 2018; Siepmann et al., 2022). People with high social capital may not be inclined to display influence or reputation capital, and people with relatively high self-worth are unlikely to participate in display of conspicuous consumption (Siepmann et al., 2022), unlike people with relatively low self-worth (Topçu, 2018). These are in agreement with our findings showing high correlation between display of luxury products and consumption on Instagram to increase followership and an improvement in social capital due to display of luxury products and consumption on Instagram. We found sufficient evidence to prove that the desire to gain reputation capital through display of conspicuous consumption is connected to the desire to increase social capital. There are indications that gender affects consumers' luxury standards, and the motivation for conspicuous consumption are ultimate expressions of gender characteristics (Roux et al., 2017; Siepmann et al., 2022), as confirmed by our findings that there is sufficient evidence that gender affects desire to display luxury products on Instagram. Women who display luxurious products and consumption gain greater social status than men who live in luxury (Holthoff & Scheiben, 2019), in concurrence with our findings that men are less likely to display conspicuous consumption of luxury products and experience on social media than women. The user practices in both researches reveal that conspicuous consumption may be exposed on social media to secure a higher status in the society.

Previous literature in Turkey explores user practices on conspicuous consumption from various approaches. The results of a previous study by Efendioğlu (2019), demonstrate that individuals who post on social media may consume to affect others or to show off, and they are influenced by each other. Although the inclination towards spending has positive impact on conspicuous consumption (Koroğlu and Demir, 2022), Çelik (2016), reveals that social media shares do not differ in age, income, and education level when displaying conspicuous consumption on social media, which indicates that especially income may not always be related with conspicuous consumption; on the contrary, it may be related with gaining a social status. Hız (2011) points out that Veblen's conspicuous consumption cannot only be assigned to leisure class nowadays, as many individuals spend above their needs to appear more prestigious with a view to gain status.

Individuals mainly engage in conspicuous consumption to gain social status and prestige, possess valuable things, and consume brands for their appearance (Koçak, 2017). Koçak (2017)'s research also sheds light on how young people in particular, have the feeling of social status based on the worth of what they consume, besides the consumption of necessary goods and services.

In another study, Özbek & Güçer (2022), validates that conspicuous consumption on social media significantly affects social capital. Similarly, in our study, there is sufficient evidence for conspicuous consumption on Instagram in order to gain more followers, thus, to gain more social capital. Eckhardt & Bardhi, (2020) identifies the relationship between gaining attention and likes, shares, and followers. The authors point out the emergence of attention capital on social media which is linked to attention and visibility. Cheung (2014) also reveals that Instagram users ingratiate to gain more followers. The results of our study also give an insight into how gaining social status has a correlation with gaining followers on Instagram. A recent study by Şahin and Nasır (2022) similarly manifests that conspicuous consumption is linked to the perception of symbolic status, which corroborates our findings in terms of user practices in the region.

There is an attempt to gain social capital through conspicuous consumption in order to increase followers on Instagram and our study contributes to the literature by establishing a relationship between a new type of social capital and conspicuous consumption on Instagram. This new type of social capital transforms to digital capital which may be accepted and perceived as the new form of social capital in the internet era.

Conclusion

Integrating Baudrillard's theory of consumption with Veblen's theoretical framework paths a way for a more comprehensive understanding of how social media has become a field of conspicuous consumption. This type of consumption reveals reputation capital as a novel form of social capital. With their online persona on the internet, individuals photograph what they consume and generate a reputation represented on social media with their consuming habits and inclinations. The perceived entity's social media presence and calculation of its digital capital is explicit as an outcome of this research.

Our findings in this research reveal that the display of luxury products and consumption on Instagram to increase followership is linked to an increase in social capital due to the display of luxury products and consumption on Instagram. There is sufficient evidence that the desire to gain reputation capital through the display of conspicuous consumption is affected by the desire to increase social capital. There are indications that gender affects consumers' luxury standards, and the motivation for conspicuous consumption is the ultimate expression of gender characteristics on Instagram. Men are less likely to display conspicuous

consumption of luxury products and experiences on social media than women. Thus, it can be suggested that Instagram may facilitate the formation of social capital and individual digital capital.

According to the findings, it has been observed that there is a link between digital reputation and sharing luxury products. The concerned user strives to increase their reputation in the digital world. There may be a belief that their digital reputation will improve if they post images of luxury products and locations on their Instagram profiles. Consequently, there is sufficient evidence to prove a link between the desire to increase digital reputation through increasing followers and exhibiting conspicuous consumption. Correlations to increase this kind of new digital capital were found on Instagram as the fundamental reason for people's luxury postings and conspicuous consumption. This consumption type depicts digital capital as a contemporary method of social capital that serves to shape a contemporary reputation capital.

For further research, the socio-psychological effects of digital capital together with its repercussions should be investigated, as well as the possibility of luxury consumption on other emerging social media platforms, which is specified by brand hashtags and images as a source of credit, transforming into reputation capital.

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Ethics Committee Permission

The ethics committee approval required for the conduct of the study was granted by the Eastern Mediterranean University Board of Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee on 06.05.2022 with the reference number ETK00-2022-0134.

Author Contribution Statement

The authors contributed to the manuscript as follows: first author, design of the study; all authors, literature review; second and fourth author, data collection; fifth author, analysis and interpretation of the results; third author, drafting the manuscript.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendices

Appendix 1

		Correlations										
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Total
Q1	Correlation (r)	1	.642**	.374**	.489**	.426**	.508**	.283**	.230**	.375**	.364**	.684**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Q2	Correlation (r)	.642**	1	.413**	.496**	.405**	.542**	.274**	.347**	.407**	.432**	.723**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Q3	Correlation (r)	.374**	.413**	1	.485**	.396**	.367**	.301**	.287**	.318**	.303**	.637**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Q4	Correlation (r)	.489**	.496**	.485**	1	.620**	.474**	.332**	.303**	.362**	.376**	.729**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Q5	Correlation (r)	.426**	.405**	.396**	.620**	1	.525**	.285**	.371**	.310**	.367**	.693**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Q6	Correlation (r)	.508**	.542**	.367**	.474**	.525**	1	.309**	.418**	.404**	.443**	.728**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Q7	Correlation (r)	.283**	.274**	.301**	.332**	.285**	.309**	1	.368**	.462**	.302**	.610**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
Q8	Correlation (r)	.230**	.347**	.287**	.303**	.371**	.418**	.368**	1	.411**	.403**	.625**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
Q9	Correlation (r)	.375**	.407**	.318**	.362**	.310**	.404**	.462**	.411**	1	.391**	.662**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
Q10	Correlation (r)	.364**	.432**	.303**	.376**	.367**	.443**	.302**	.403**	.391**	1	.641**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
Total	Correlation (r)	.684**	.723**	.637**	.729**	.693**	.728**	.610**	.625**	.662**	.641**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Appendix 2

Questions	Item-Total Statistics			
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q1	33.4051	54.554	.597	.846
Q2	33.3739	54.195	.646	.842
Q3	33.8697	54.205	.526	.852
Q4	33.4844	53.455	.648	.841
Q5	33.4646	54.141	.605	.845
Q6	33.2436	54.469	.655	.842
Q7	34.4278	53.382	.473	.859
Q8	34.2068	54.335	.510	.854
Q9	33.9660	54.811	.568	.848
Q10	33.4589	55.698	.549	.850