

Luxury Purchases



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Synonyms

Conspicuous consumption; Luxury goods

Definition

Luxury goods are those items that are not critical to basic survival and well-being. Items that are essential to survival and well-being are frequently inexpensive, and excess amounts of such items are of little use or value. For example, excess food that will spoil before it can be eaten has very little utility. In contrast luxury items are typically expensive. The extra expense affords prestige and status, often perceptible via the items' branding or design, but does not typically provide commensurate utilitarian value. As such, the utility of luxury items, being the status gains they provide, do not exhibit the same diminishing marginal returns as nonluxury goods.

Luxury Purchases

Luxury purchases are a multibillion-dollar industry (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2017). Consumers of luxury goods may explicitly report that their willingness to pay premium prices for these goods stems from an apparent belief in their superior quality. Compelling cross-cultural evidence, however, suggests that desires for status and exclusivity drive expensive consumer luxury purchases (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2021). In the context of sexual and romantic relationships, the visible purchase and display of luxury belongings, sometimes termed conspicuous consumption, has apparent signaling value. These signals target opposite sex prospective mates and same sex competitors.

Luxury Purchases and Opposite-Sex Signaling

Conspicuous consumption of luxury goods may be used by both sexes to signal their mate value to prospective opposite-sex mates. Men primed with mating motives, especially those tending to follow a short-term mating strategy, will choose to purchase more luxury items (in a laboratory experiment) after being primed with photos of attractive women. This effect does not transfer over to long-term mating contexts (Griskevicius et al., 2007; Sundie et al., 2011). For men, luxury purchases may therefore signal their wealth and status to women they are courting for a short-term liaison. Such women may be seeking indicators of wealth for (short-term) investment potential. Women

seeking long-term relationships may be less impressed by male displays of luxury, as such displays may demonstrate a man's desire to expend substantial resources on himself, resources which then cannot be channeled into her or their future offspring.

Women may also use luxury purchases to signal their mate value to *deter* unsuitable mates. Across a series of experimental studies, women were more likely to choose to present themselves with luxury items when they believed their prospective audience comprised mainly undesirable men they did not want to date, but not when they believed they were signaling to mostly desirable prospective partners. Men with lower income levels also reported being less interested in asking women out if they presented with luxury items, than with nonluxury items (Wang et al., 2018). Women may therefore use luxury items as a signal of their expected investment standards to deter men not able to meet those standards. Alternatively, luxury product signaling by women may be an indicator that they are already satisfactorily partnered and not worth pursuing by someone who cannot exceed the luxury already on display (see below).

Luxury Purchases and Same-Sex Signaling

For women, a conspicuous display of luxury products may serve as a signal to other women of mate commitment and devotion. Women displaying luxury goods are perceived by other women to have more devoted partners. Women also indicate being less likely to try and poach another woman's partner if that woman is displaying luxury possessions. This effect reverses, however, if the potential mate-poachers believe that the women herself, rather than her partner, purchased these luxury goods (Wang & Griskevicius, 2014). A woman displaying luxury possessions may therefore be seen as displaying the wealth and

resources provisioned to her by her partner, a signal of his willingness and ability to invest in their relationship. When this signal is undermined by explicit information that the woman purchased these goods herself, it may be viewed as an indicator that her partner is not invested in their relationship, making him an appealing target for mate poachers.

Cross-References

- [Conspicuous Consumption](#)
- [Male Sexual Attraction Tactics: Display of Resources](#)

References

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