

Dark Luxury: The Emergence of Digital Invisibility as a Status Signal in the Age of AI Surveillance

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Abstract - The basis of luxury branding has been the high visibility, aspirational communication, and wide digital interactions to develop the perception of desire and social status. Nevertheless, the blistering development of the artificial intelligence-powered surveillance, algorithmic advertising, and massive data tracking is changing the way consumers engage with the brands in the virtual space. As people grow more conscious of the fact of data gathering and niche marketing, attitudes towards privacy, exclusivity and control of personal information are beginning to balance out towards consumer attitudes. Here, the idea of dark luxury is developing, where exclusivity can be enhanced using regulated online image and minimal exposure online instead of complete exposure.

This study looks at the potential of low levels of digital presence to become a new form of status in current luxury consumption. The article examines the consumer perception of the brands that deliberately limit their presence online (or remove accessibility or the use of algorithms) to preserve exclusivity. The structured questionnaire was used as primary research to address the target market of young consumers who are conversant with luxury markets and digital environments. The survey targets the consumer perception of the digital privacy, brand visibility, exclusivity and desirability.

This study aims at knowing whether consumers relate less digital exposure with higher prestige and authenticity in luxury brands. Through these analyses, the research will help to develop a growing body of literature concerning the ways in which the luxury branding tactics can be changed to reflect a growing concern regarding digital saturation, surveillance technology and the importance of privacy in contemporary consumer society.

Keywords: Dark Luxury, Digital Invisibility, AI Surveillance Culture, Digital Scarcity, Status Signaling, Luxury Consumer Psychology.

1. INTRODUCTION

The fast development of artificial intelligence and data-driven technologies has created the digital environment that is a place of uninterrupted surveillance and exposure. Algorithms are currently used to monitor consumer trends, target marketing

messages and anticipate buying trends between online applications. Though this hyper-connected ecosystem is convenient and efficient, it has increased the issues of privacy, data surveillance and digital footprints. With people becoming more conscious of the fact that their online behavior is tracked and commodified, there has been a rising concern with privacy and managed visibility. Here, digital invisibility is slowly becoming a form of social differentiation, especially among consumers who are highly technology users and yet aware of what it may entail.

Visibility is a traditional mechanism of luxury consumption according to which the status, prestige and self-identification are expressed. In the past, the aspirational value of luxury products has been strengthened with the help of logos, brand presents, and sharing on social media. The digital age is however transforming these dynamics. Exclusivity may no longer be signified by open and visible show and should be signified by discriminating involvement and prevented access to lessen its meaning especially to the younger consumers who were brought up in a culture of constant online exposure. This change has led to the development of the so-called dark luxury, according to which prestige is connected with discretion, privacy, and less traces in the digital world. Within this system, the less visible experiences or brands in the mainstream digital world might be viewed as more exclusive and desirable.

It is against this backdrop that the current study seeks to determine the possibility of perceived exclusivity of luxury brands when reduced online presence is used among the young consumers. The study aims to find out how perceptions of luxury value are determined by attitudes to privacy, AI surveillance, and online presence by targeting digitally native luxury consumers. The study of such a connection helps to inform some of the emerging debates at the nexus of luxury marketing, digital culture, and technological surveillance, as well as to provide understanding of how luxury brands can reposition themselves in an age where controlled digital absence might serve as a status signal on its own.

2. OBJECTIVES

- To examine the emergence of Dark Luxury and how it is serving as a new status signifier in the digital era.

- To test the hypothesis that luxury products perceived as exclusive and desirable due to their of limited exposure to digital media.
- Research Question To understand how privacy, anonymity, and modern luxury consumption are connected with the lives of Gen Z and young millennials.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Koay and Lok (2025) assess how the Dark Triad personality factors-Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy can affect the intention of consumers to buy fake luxury products. Based on the moral disengagement theory and trait activation theory, the paper presents the idea that some personality characteristics may make a person defend unethical consumption behavior. The researchers identified that moral disengagement mediates the association between Machiavellianism and psychopathy and consumers buying intentions of counterfeit luxury goods using a survey of 205 consumers and the data being analyzed with the use of partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Also, the descriptive norms were observed to mediate the indirect correlation between psychopathy and the intention to purchase in terms of moral disengagement, meaning that the social factors may reinforce such behavioral dispositions. The research is relevant to the current body of knowledge by identifying the combined effect of personality traits and social norms on unethical consumer behaviours in the luxury market and recommends that the knowledge of such psychological variables could be used to devise measures to tackle the increasing problem of fake luxury consumption (Koay and Lok, 2025).

Shukla et al. (2025) are focused on the changing situation of luxury consumption under the impact of globalization, digital transformation, and shifting consumer expectations. According to the study, luxury is no longer focused on the conventional conspicuous consumption but on a more subtle level including the inconspicuous luxury, experiential luxury and digitally mediated consumption. According to the authors, there are three key areas that influence the future of luxury research: the rise of different luxury identities, the adoption of sustainability and ethical consumption, and the increasing influence of digital technologies. The study highlights that social media, artificial intelligence and online platforms are reshaping consumer engagement with luxury brands and that sustainability and ethical issues are growing in power as a purchasing factor. Also, the research reports a conflict between exclusivity and increased accessibility in online markets. The scholars suggest a research agenda of the future, which would stimulate the

research of the cultural differences between luxury perceptions, the impact of technology on luxury experiences, and the changing meaning of exclusivity in current consumer markets (Shukla et al., 2025).

Leppala (2025) explores the phenomenon of how new luxury brands can establish brand authority and remain exclusive in the extremely digitized and hyper-connected markets. With the qualitative research design, the study will use six semi-structured interviews with professionals in the field of luxury branding, marketing, and client experience whose analysis will be carried out using the Gioia methodology. It is also shown that new and luxurious brands can build prestige without any historical ground without the need to have a history of an emotional brand identity, aesthetic consistency, and cultural alignment. Another aspect that is brought out in the study is the fact that exclusivity in the digital age is now regulated by means of restricted access as opposed to total absence of digital platforms. Invitation-only campaigns and private clienteling, selective storytelling, and content distribution by tier, among other strategies, assist in preserving brand prestige and interacting with audiences on the internet. Also, the study indicates that selective and well-filtered digital visibility provides brands with the possibility to find a balance between visibility and exclusivity. The paper finds that the digital platform need not be a threat to the luxury positioning provided the brands can manage their online presence in the right way, focusing on symbolic restraint, emotional richness, and controlled communication in maintaining the desirability and authority in contemporary luxury markets.

Russell W. Belk looks at the way in which digital technologies are altering the concept of traditional materialism and status consumption. The paper states that as the world turns ever more digital, the consumption of physical possessions is being slowly displaced with symbolic and experiential consumerism. Social status is greatly influenced by the digital identities, presence on the internet, and virtual ownership. The study emphasizes the fact that technology has introduced novel ways of social signaling and identity building and that status is no longer presented in terms of visible luxury products but also in terms of digital actions and internet presence.

Maja Leban, Yuri Seo, and Benjamin Voyer discuss the way in which people perform and communicate luxury consumption through social media like Instagram. Their study concludes that rich influencers and micro-celebrities build digital identities of luxury by using edited materials, narration, and personal branding. The research states that the practices of collecting, curating, and lurking among luxury content followers on the Internet are identified. These results establish that social media



has turned into a strong platform to show and make meaning out of luxury status, and is now a way of consuming luxury not as an individual possession but as digital content to be presented.

Nitesh Raj explores the use of artificial intelligence in allowing luxury brands to customise online behavioural advertising in real-time. The paper describes that AI-based technologies gather and process all kinds of data about consumers to send the most personalized marketing messages to them, addressing their preferences. The results indicate that personalization enhances consumer interactions, brand engagement, and purchase intention in case of luxury consumers. Nonetheless, the study also cites the increasing concerns in the area of data collection, privacy and surveillance of consumers in digital marketing contexts.

Cho and Cho (2025) research the increasing luxury consumption and its movement towards the aspect of inconspicuous consumption rather than conspicuous display, also known as stealth wealth or quiet luxury. The paper examines the effect that psychological and social motives like privacy, elitism, connoisseurship, the desire to be unique, and self-defense has on consumers condition to use subtle luxury signals. Based on the survey results of 425 high-end clients who spend over USD 20,000 each year on luxury products, the study discusses the mediating purpose of social connectedness on the formation of these consumption preferences. The results indicate that the luxury shoppers who are well off are moving towards low profile luxury items that may indicate status by using subtle indicators that can only be known by members of an elite community. The article brings out the fact that privacy, elitism, connoisseurship, and necessity of uniqueness were key factors affecting the consumption of inconspicuous luxury and that social connectedness enhances those associations by supporting status in closed circles. Self-protection was however not established to play a significant mediating role. The study fills the research gap on luxury consumption by demonstrating that inconspicuous consumption is not conspicuous consumption working in reverse but a type of strategic signalling of status as high-status consumers seek exclusivity in selective social groups.

Research Gap

The majority of available studies on luxury branding are aimed at making luxury brands more visible on social media, with influencers and online marketing in order to create brand value and involvement. Simultaneously, the research findings on quiet luxury and inconspicuous consumption primarily focus on low-profile product design or low profile branding as a status signal. Nonetheless, minimal research has been done on

digital invisibility as a luxury strategy- in which brands voluntarily diminish online presence, limit online access, or avoid a mass digital presence to maintain exclusivity.

In the age of AI surveillance, algorithmic following, and hyper-visibility on online platforms, it is not clear that diminished digital visibility can be used as a contemporary status symbol and enhance the performance of luxury exclusivity. Thus, the study fills this gap by exploring the perceptions of consumer regarding the concept of digital invisibility and the possibility of promoting the exclusivity and desirability of luxury brands under the condition of limited online visibility.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study is designed in the form of a quantitative descriptive research project that follows the concept of digital invisibility as a possible status indicator in the luxury branding in the framework of the rising AI-based surveillance. The study is aimed at the perception of luxury brands with minimal digital presence and the contribution to the perception of exclusivity and prestige by consumers.

Data Sources

The research is founded on both the primary and secondary data.

Primary Data:

Primary data was obtained by way of guided survey by a structured questionnaire to young consumers who are conversant with luxury or aspirational luxury brands. The survey was designed to capture the information about consumer perceptions on digital privacy, exclusivity, and engagement with luxury brands.

Secondary Data:

Secondary data was collected based on past studies, academic journals, and academic articles covering the topic of luxury branding, status signaling, digital privacy, and digital surveillance in consumer behavior. Such sources served to form the conceptual knowledge on the topic, and to design the questionnaire.

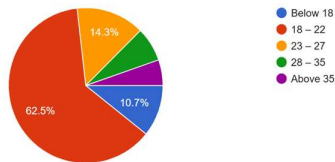
Data Collection Method

The questionnaire survey comprised of 10 questions through which an online questionnaire was administered to gather data. The questions were all multiple choice in nature, and the respondents were able to use the options that represented their

opinion or behavior in the best way possible. The questionnaire was constructed to include consumer attitudes on digital presence, perceptions of exclusiveness in the luxury brands and awareness of digital monitoring in the new online context.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

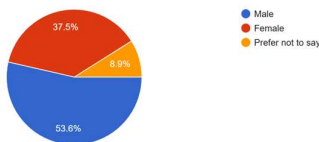
1. Age Group
56 responses



Interpretation:

The majority of the respondents are in the 18-22 age range comprising 62.5% out of the total 56, 14.3% in the 23-27 and 10.7% in the 28-35 and above 35 age ranges respectively. This indicates that the research is mostly representative of the opinions of young consumers who are very active online.

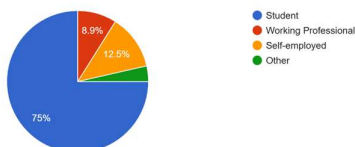
2. Gender
56 responses



Interpretation:

Among the respondents, 53.6 out of 56 are male and 37.5 are female and 8.9 did not specify their gender. This means that the sample is somewhat more male, but in general also covers the views of a variety of gender groups.

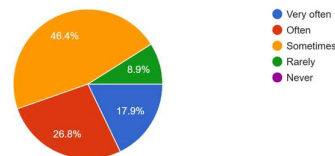
3. Occupation
56 responses



Interpretation:

Students constitute the biggest proportion of 75% out of the 56 respondents, 12.5% are self-employed, 8.9% are working professionals and a small percentage under the other occupations. This shows that the research is largely representative of students and youthful views.

4. How often do you notice luxury brands on social media platforms?
56 responses



Interpretation:

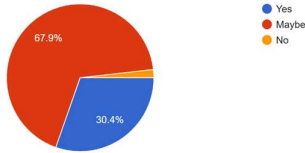
Out of the 56 respondents, 46.4% occasionally follow social media luxury brands, whereas 26.8% do it regularly and 17.9% frequently. This is because only 8.9% of them tend to notice them rarely, and no one said they never noticed them. This shows that people tend to see luxury brands on the social media.



Interpretation:

Out of the 56 respondents, 48.2 percent are neutral on whether luxury brands should be highly visible in social media with 37.5 percent of the people agreeing with it and 8.9 percent strongly agreeing with it. A low percentage do not agree or even strongly agree. This indicates that, as much as most consumers believe in the social media exposure, a significant percentage of them do not strongly feel that luxury brands should be very visible on social media.

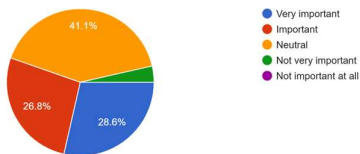
6. If a luxury brand is less visible online, would it appear more exclusive to you?
56 responses



Interpretation:

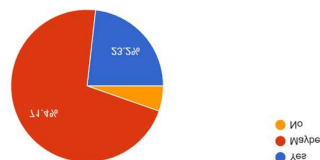
The information reveals that most of the interviewees (67.9) are not so sure whether the reduced online presence would make a luxury brand seem more exclusive, and 30.4% are sure it would. The percentage that did not agree was very low. This implies that exclusivity can be a result of limited visibility but not all consumers are confident about the effect of the former.

7. How important are privacy and limited access when you think about luxury products?
56 responses



Interpretation:

According to the responses, the aspects of privacy and limited access have a moderate influence on how the consumers view luxury products. Those who found it very important are 28.6 percent and the ones who felt that it is important are 26.8 percent and the majority (41.1 percent) of people were neutral. This means that privacy is important but it might not be a determining factor to every consumer.



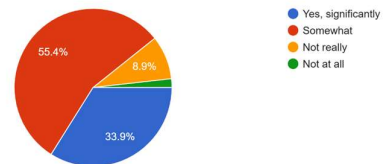
8. Would you be more interested in a luxury brand that is advertised less online?
56 responses

Interpretation:

The majority of the respondents (71.4%p) responded with Maybe to a question on whether they would become more interested in a luxury brand that is not too advertised online. Of 23.2 percent indicated definite interest, and very few replied in

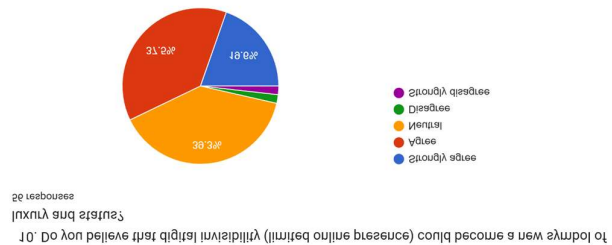
the negative. This implies that the minimal advertisement would arouse inquisitiveness and possible interest of con

9. Do concerns about data tracking and AI surveillance affect how you interact with brands online?
56 responses



Interpretation:

The results indicate that the fear of data tracking and AI monitoring affect the ways a number of consumers engage with the brands online. Most (55.4) of them said that it somewhat influences their behavior, with 33.9% of them indicating that it influences them significantly. This brings out the fact that privacy and data protection are issues that must be taken into consideration during internet brand engagement.



Interpretation

The findings indicate that most of the respondents felt that digital invisibility has the potential to be a status symbol and a sign of luxury. 39.3% of them were neutral, 37.5% agreed, and 19.6% strongly agreed with the statement. The percentage of disagreement or strongly disagree was very low. This implies that a large number of consumers would be ready to believe that the small online presence would build exclusivity and prestige of luxury brands.

6. FINDINGS

Luxury brands are very prominently featured in social media, yet the consumer does not have a strong feeling that luxury cannot be preserved without high digital presence.

The low level of digital presence can promote a feeling of exclusivity since a significant number of respondents stated that reduced promotion and controlled presence can make a brand seem more status symbolic.

Privacy and going digital unnoticed are becoming new status symbols and most consumers are becoming conscious of AI spying and connect less digital availability with greater exclusivity.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- To sustain the exclusivity, luxury brands must restrict excessive online exposure and selective online exposure to sustain exclusivity.
- Luxury consumers require high level of consumer privacy and clear data protection of the brands, which would build trust.
- Luxury brands have the opportunity to develop luxurious digital experiences, including the members-only platforms and simultaneously exclusive releases.
- Marketing communication must emphasize on small storytelling and artistry instead of mammoth promotion.
- Brand perception to digital visibility, privacy and exclusivity is also changing and should be learned by the brands continuously.

8. CONCLUSION

Luxury is becoming more technologically adapted and responsive to the digital culture, as well as more conscious of the surveillance under AI. Conventionally, the basis of luxury consumption was based on visibility and conspicuous consumption to depict wealth and status. Nevertheless, in the modern digital world where the presence on the Internet is extremely surveilled and easily available, exclusivity can also become a more tightly regulated visibility and digital privacy.

The creation of digital invisibility as a possible status marker among young luxury consumers has been noted in this study. With the increasing anxiety over privacy, data tracking and over surveillance, and the rising issue of online overexposure, consumers might start to desire experiences and brands which are privative, selective and with restricted online traceability. In this respect, the vision of dark luxury is a move towards the open status signaling and more nuanced, clandestine forms of prestige.

Such a changing perception of consumers is essential to luxury brands aiming to keep up with the era of digital transformation and AI surveillance. Luxury brands can manage to balance digital interaction with exclusivity and privacy, which would allow them to adjust their strategies to be desirable and representative in a world that is more transparent and data-driven than ever.

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