



Original Article

Social benefits of luxury brands as costly signals of wealth and status

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Abstract

Drawing from costly signaling theory, we predicted that luxury consumption enhances status and produces benefits in social interactions. Across seven experiments, displays of luxury — manipulated through brand labels on clothes — elicited different kinds of preferential treatment, which even resulted in financial benefits to people who engaged in conspicuous consumption. Furthermore, we tested preconditions in which the beneficial consequences of conspicuous consumption may arise and determined the proximate mechanisms underlying them. The present data suggest that luxury consumption can be a profitable social strategy because conspicuous displays of luxury qualify as a costly signaling trait that elicits status-dependent favorable treatment in human social interactions.

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1. Introduction

Contemporary consumer culture can be characterized by its primacy on material expenditure as a means of establishing and defining social relationships (de Botton, 2004; Frank, 1999; Miller, 2009; Schor, 1998). According to Verdict Research Co.'s (2007) Global Luxury Retailing report, global expenditure on luxury products will hit \$450 billion a year by 2012. (Of particular relevance to the present research, branded clothing alone accounts for 41.9% of that amount.) Even impoverished people in developing countries, who cannot afford food and shelter on a daily basis, are willing to pay a premium for branded products (Van Kempen, 2004). Why are people so keen on wearing brand-labeled clothes and owning other luxury-branded products to pay a premium for them?

The answer appears to be to gain social status. Status is defined as a higher position compared to others on some dimension (e.g., academic or athletic skill, physical attractiveness or wealth) that is deemed important by society (Hyman, 1942). In economics, it has long been recognized

that the subjective utility derived from expenditures that deliver no functional benefits may accrue from their merits as signals of social status (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984; Hirsch, 1976). The preference for more expensive over cheaper yet functionally equivalent goods has been famously referred to as conspicuous consumption by Thorstein Veblen (1899/1994). Psychological research has confirmed that the desire for status is an important force driving the market for luxury goods (Dreze & Nunez, 2009; Griskevicius et al., 2007; Haselton, Mortezaie, Pillsworth, Bleske-Rechek & Frederick, 2007; Mandel, Petrova & Cialdini, 2006; Rucker & Galinski, 2008, 2009). From an evolutionary perspective, it has been argued that the human preference for luxury consumption originates from a universal tendency for signaling traits that might increase status (Cummins, 2005; Miller, 2009; Saad, 2007), a tendency shared by other social primates (e.g., de Waal, 1982).

Still, a comprehensive evolutionary account of conspicuous consumption not only requires proof that mental adaptations — in the heads of consumers — for displaying status traits also instigate luxury expenditures, but also requires proof that displays of wealth trigger mental adaptations — in the heads of perceivers — which ultimately guarantee that conspicuous consumption as a status-signaling strategy actually produces fitness benefits (for a similar argument, see Campbell, 1995). This is particularly relevant since it is not necessarily true that

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The Washington Post

Speaking of Science



2016 Nobel Prize in physics awarded for revealing 'the secrets of exotic matter'



By **Rachel Feltman** October 4 at 9:30 AM

David J. Thouless of University of Washington, F. Duncan M. Haldane of Princeton University and J. Michael Kosterlitz of Brown University were awarded the 2016 Nobel Prize in physics on Tuesday for discoveries of "topological phase transitions and topological phases of matter." All three laureates were born in Britain, but now conduct their research at universities in the United States.

Most matter exists in the states we see every day: gases, liquids and solids. But at extremely low or high temperatures, matter can start to behave strangely. The three laureates have used advanced mathematical modeling to demonstrate some of the strange properties that can arise in unusual states of matter. In cold layers of atoms so flat they can be considered two dimensional, you can find superconductors — materials that electrical current can flow through with no resistance from the particles therein — and superfluids, where frictionless vortexes can spin forever without slowing down.

Using topology — the study of changes that occur step-wise, the properties that remain intact when an object is stretched, twisted or deformed but not if it is torn apart — the three researchers helped reveal the stunningly strange behaviors of these exotic states of matter. From a topological standpoint, a bagel, a cinnamon bun and a pretzel are distinguished only by the number of holes they contain.

"In the world of topology, changing from a normal conductor to a superconductor might be the equivalent of a bagel transforming into a bun," The Guardian reports. To be perfectly honest, the bagel metaphor doesn't make it all that much

BY JOHN STEINBECK

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Of Mice and Men



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OF MICE AND MEN

A FEW MILES south of Soledad, the Salinas River drops in close to the hillside bank and runs deep and green. The water is warm too, for it has slipped twinkling over the yellow sands in the sunlight before reaching the narrow pool. On one side of the river the golden foothill slopes curve up to the strong and rocky Gabilan mountains, but on the valley side the water is lined with trees—willows fresh and green with every spring, carrying in their lower leaf junctures the debris of the winter's flooding; and sycamores with mottled, white, recumbent limbs and branches that arch over the pool. On the sandy bank under the trees the leaves lie deep and so crisp that a lizard makes a great skittering if he runs among them. Rabbits come out of the brush to sit on the sand in the evening, and the damp flats are covered with the night tracks of 'coons, and with the spread pads of dogs from the ranches, and with the split-wedge tracks of deer that come to drink in the dark.

There is a path through the willows and among the sycamores, a path beaten hard by boys coming down

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Araby

JAMES JOYCE

[1882-1941]

North Richmond Street, being blind, was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers' School set the boys free. An uninhabited house of two storeys stood at the blind end, detached from its neighbours in a square ground. The other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces.

The former tenant of our house, a priest, had died in the back drawing-room. Air, musty from having been long enclosed, hung in all the rooms, and the waste room behind the kitchen was littered with old useless papers. Among these I found a few paper-covered books, the pages of which were curled and damp: *The Abbot*, by Walter Scott, *The Devout Communicant*, and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*. I liked the last best because its leaves were yellow. The wild garden behind the house contained a central apple-tree and a few straggling bushes under one of which I found the late tenant's rusty bicycle-pump. He had been a very charitable priest; in his will he had left all his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister.

When the short days of winter came dusk fell before we had well eaten our dinners. When we met in the street the houses had grown sombre. The space of sky above us was the colour of ever-changing violet and towards it the lamps of the street lifted their feeble lanterns. The cold air stung us and we played till our bodies glowed. Our shouts echoed in the silent street. The career of our play brought us through the dark muddy lanes behind the cottages, to the back doors of the dark dipping gardens where odours arose from the ashpits, to the dark odorous stables where a coachman smoothed and combed the horse or stilled music from the buckled harness. When we returned to the street

"Didn't she say that?"

"Yes. I heard her."

"O, there's a . . . fib!"

Observing me the young lady came over and asked me did I wish to buy anything. The tone of her voice was not encouraging; she seemed to have spoken to me out of a sense of duty. I looked humbly at the great jars that stood like eastern guards at either side of the dark entrance to the stall and murmured:

"No, thank you."

The young lady changed the position of one of the vases and went back to the two young men. They began to talk of the same subject. Once or twice the young lady glanced at me over her shoulder.

I lingered before her stall, though I knew my stay was useless, to make my interest in her wares seem the more real. Then I turned away slowly and walked down the middle of the bazaar. I allowed the two pennies to fall against the sixpence in my pocket. I heard a voice call from one end of the gallery that the light was out. The upper part of the hall was now completely dark.

Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.

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The Desolate Wilderness

. "The Desolate Wilderness." Wall Street Journal, New York, N.Y., 2002., <http://ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/398890214?accountid=14518>.

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Abstract

The next day they went on board, and their friends with them, where truly doleful was the sight of that sad and mournful parting, to hear what sighs and sobs and prayers did sound amongst them; what tears did gush from every eye, and pithy speeches pierced each other's heart, that sundry of the Dutch strangers that stood on the Key as spectators could not refrain from tears. But the tide (which stays for no man) calling them away, that were thus loath to depart, their Reverend Pastor, falling down on his knees, and they all with him, with watery cheeks commended them with the most fervent prayers unto the Lord and His blessing; and then with mutual embraces and many tears they took their leaves one of another, which proved to be the last leave to many of them.

Full Text

Here beginneth the chronicle of those memorable circumstances of the year 1620, as recorded by Nathaniel Morton, keeper of the records of Plymouth Colony, based on the account of William Bradford, sometime governor thereof:

So they left that goodly and pleasant city of Leyden, which had been their resting-place for above eleven years, but they knew that they were pilgrims and strangers here below, and looked not much on these things, but lifted up their eyes to Heaven, their dearest country, where God hath prepared for them a city (Heb. XI, 16), and therein quieted their spirits.

When they came to Delfs-Haven they found the ship and all things ready, and such of their friends as could not come with them followed after them, and sundry came from Amsterdam to see them shipt, and to take their leaves of them. One night was spent with little sleep with the most, but with friendly entertainment and Christian discourse, and other real expressions of true Christian love.

The next day they went on board, and their friends with them, where truly doleful was the sight of that sad and mournful parting, to hear what sighs and sobs and prayers did sound amongst them; what tears did gush from every eye, and pithy speeches pierced each other's heart, that sundry of the Dutch strangers that stood on the Key as spectators could not refrain from tears. But the tide (which stays for no man) calling them away, that were thus loath to depart, their Reverend Pastor, falling down on his knees, and they all with him, with watery cheeks commended them with the most fervent prayers unto the Lord and His blessing; and then with mutual embraces and many tears they took their leaves one of another, which proved to be the last leave to many of them.

Being now passed the vast ocean, and a sea of troubles before them in expectations, they had now no friends to welcome them, no inns to entertain or refresh them, no houses, or much less towns, to repair unto to seek for succour; and for the season it was winter, and they that know the winters of the country know them to be sharp and violent, subject to cruel and fierce storms, dangerous to travel to known places, much more to search unknown coasts.

Besides, what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wilde beasts and wilde men? and what multitudes of them there were, they then knew not: for which way soever they turned their eyes (save upward to Heaven) they could have but little solace or content in respect of any outward object; for summer being ended, all things stand in appearance with a weatherbeaten face, and the whole country, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage hew.

If they looked behind them, there was a mighty ocean which they had passed, and was now as a main bar or gulph to separate them from all the civil parts of the world.

This editorial has appeared annually since 1961.

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I Have the Whole World in My Hands ...
Now What?: Power, Control, Responsibility
and the Baby Boomers in Stephen King's
Fiction

PATRICK McALEER

"This is your promise that things may be different ... that there may yet be rest. Even salvation." (Stephen King, *The Dark Tower* 829)

THROUGHOUT THE STEPHEN KING CANON, HIS CHARACTERS, IN their attempts to right various wrongs and conquer the many conflicts that they face, display a tendency to destroy those who are to be protected and ruin what is to be saved despite any intentions for bravery or reprieve. As individuals, families, towns, and even civilizations fall and crumble in King's fiction, it seems as if the characters written into these stories actually enable and even accelerate the destruction that King's Constant Reader repeatedly witnesses. An example of this general idea is found in *Pet Semetary* as David A. Oakes bluntly notes, regarding this tale in which a grieving father indirectly causes the death of his wife and trusted neighbor, that, "In Louis's efforts to restore his family, he destroys the very thing he seeks to preserve" (106). Yet, what is important to note regarding this reference is that Louis Creed, much like the characters of Father Callahan from *'Salem's Lot*, Roland Deschain from the *Dark Tower* series and even Paul Edgecombe from *The Green Mile* (to name just a few), is placed within a fragile position of power—represented by Creed's access to the Micmac burial ground and thus the ability to

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Patrick McAleer, ABD at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, currently teaches Composition and Literature at Inver Hills Community College in Minnesota. He is the author of *Inside the Dark Tower Series: Art, Evil and Intertextuality in the Stephen King Novels* (2009) and *The Writing Family of Stephen King: A Critical Study of the Fiction of Tabitha King, Joe Hill and Owen King* (2011). He also currently co-chairs the Stephen King Area of the Popular Culture Association's Annual National Conference, and has contributed scholarship on *Stephen King for Critical Insights: Stephen King*, edited by Gary Hoppenstand, and *The Films of Stephen King*, edited by Tony Magistrale.