

Conspicuous or Inconspicuous Consumption? Consumer's Goal Framing Perspective on Purchase Intentions of Fashion-Branded NFTs in the Virtual World

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Introduction. Fashion-branded NFTs (non-fungible tokens) are types of NFTs created by luxury and fashion brands that have captured the public's intrigue and transformed the fashion industry by providing new technological possibilities to engage consumers in virtual communities. Increasing luxury and fashion players (i.e., Gucci, Louis Vuitton, and Nike) are incorporating NFTs as unique digital assets to certify the authenticity and uniqueness of digital products available for sale and exchange (Joy et al., 2022). The unique characteristics of NFTs (i.e., scarcity, ownership, financial value, uniqueness, etc.) are intertwined with the concept of luxury and fashion, which is rooted in the desire to signal social status and self-expression through the possession of luxury goods suggested by the theory of the leisure class (Veblen, 1899). The theory of the leisure class laid down the foundations of conspicuous consumption (CC), which emphasizes possessing expensive products to symbolize social, economic, status, and cultural capital to create a distinctive self-image and appearance (Truong et al., 2008). Despite much of the literature documented on conspicuous consumption associated with luxury and fashion, increasingly researchers and marketing practitioners have been discussing a trend toward inconspicuous consumption (IC) for years (Kilsheimer Eastman et al., 2022; Eckhardt et al., 2015), which is characterized by self-defense (avoiding guilt, and shame with loud purchase) and self-enhancement (feeling of happiness and illustrating good taste) (Makkar & Yap, 2018). Nevertheless, limited knowledge about whether fashion-branded NFTs purchasing in the virtual environment is conspicuous or inconspicuous consumption from consumers' motivational perspectives. Therefore, we employed intrinsic and extrinsic goal-framing derived from self-determination theory (SDT) to understand (a) the role of various motivational factors in explaining consumers' psychological mechanisms that drive their purchase intentions of fashion-branded NFTs and (b) the distinction between conspicuous and inconspicuous purchases of fashion-branded NFTs, particularly when consumers encounter various types of goal achievements.

Literature Review. According to Self-determination theory (SDT), the goal-framing perspective is to understand the individuals' reasons for behaving, and it has been primarily concerned with examining the motivations of individuals' behavioral regulations (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Under SDT umbrella, two types of goals have been identified (Vansteenkiste et al., 2007), (a) extrinsic goals reflect one's external signs of motivation and outward-oriented focus, such as financial success, status, and attractive appearance; (b) intrinsic goals reflect people's inherent and inward-oriented motivation, such as self-directed pleasure. Corresponding to two types of goals, inconspicuous consumption (IC) encompasses two dimensions, which are (a) the extrinsic motivation goal of enjoying privacy in consumption, and (b) the intrinsic motivation goal of experiencing a sense of elite (Kilsheimer Eastman et al., 2022). However, Shao et al., (2019) argued that extrinsic motivation goals are highly associated with conspicuous consumption, and

intrinsic motivation goals enhance consumers' inconspicuous consumption. Specifically, according to previous studies, extrinsic goals are characterized by an appealing appearance in the virtual world (i.e., attractive appearance), an expectation of gaining appropriate profit in the future (i.e., perceived investment economic value), and a motivation to improve one's social symbolizing status (i.e., status consumption) (Eastman & Eastman, 2015; Puustinen et al., 2013; Shao et al., 2019). Intrinsic goals are characterized by individual psychology growth, including one's hedonic experiences of buying fashion-branded NFTs without pleasing others (i.e., self-directed pleasure) and pursuing differences relative to others, to express self-image (i.e., perceived need for uniqueness) (Tsai, 2005; Ruvio et al., 2008), which are high associated with inconspicuous consumption (Shao et al., 2019). Therefore, we proposed the following hypotheses:

H1 Attractive appearance (AA) positively affects conspicuous consumption (CC).

H2 Perceived investment economic value (PIEV) positively affects conspicuous consumption (CC).

H3-H4 Status consumption (SC) positively affects conspicuous consumption (CC) (H3) and elite (H4) of inconspicuous consumption (IC).

H5(a)-(b) Perceived need for uniqueness of NFTs (PNU) positively affects inconspicuous consumption (IC) of (a) elite and (b) privacy.

H6(a)-(b) Self-directed pleasure (SD) positively affects inconspicuous consumption (IC) of (a) elite and (b) privacy.

H7 Conspicuous consumption (CC) positively influences the purchase intention (PI) of fashion-branded NFTs.

H8(a)-(b) Inconspicuous consumption (IC) — (a) elite and (b) privacy — positively influence the purchase intention (PI) of fashion-branded NFTs.

Methods. The online survey was developed to measure all the variables using a 7-point Likert scale adopted from the existing scales in January 2024 on Prolific (Dodds et al., 1991; Eastman et al., 1999; Kilsheimer Eastman et al., 2022; Puustinen et al., 2013; Ruvio et al., 2008; Shao et al., 2019; Truong et al., 2008; Truong & McColl, 2011; Tsai, 2005). Finally, a total of 341 responses were used in the final analysis. Approximately 51% of participants were male and 49% were female. Most participants were born between 1981 and 1996 (49.6%), White or European (67.7%). We performed model estimation and path analysis by PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2019).

Results. The measurement model was assessed successfully (Hair et al., 2019). Then, the bootstrapping method was used to estimate the significance of the path coefficients to test hypotheses. Results of the model confirmed that AA significantly positively impacted CC (H1: $\beta = 0.31, p < .001$), but interestingly, PIEV significantly negatively impacted CC (H2: $\beta = -0.09, p < .05$). Results confirmed H3 and H4, SC significantly positively impacted both CC and elite of IC (H3: $\beta = 0.62, p < .001$, H4: $\beta = 0.27, p < .001$). In addition, PNU significantly positively impacted the elite of IC but negatively impacted the privacy of IC (H5a: $\beta = 0.28, p < .001$, H5b: $\beta = -0.23, p < .001$). Surprisingly, self-directed pleasure (SD) significantly negatively impacted the elite of IC but positively impacted the privacy of IC (H6a: $\beta = -0.14, p < .05$, H6b: $\beta = 0.37$,

$p < .001$). In terms of CC and IC, both CC and elite of IC significantly positively impacted purchase intention (PI) (H7: $\beta = 0.35$, $p < .001$, H8a: $\beta = 0.20$, $p < .001$). However, the privacy of IC negatively impacted purchase intention (PI) (H8b: $\beta = -0.13$, $p < .05$).

Conclusion and Implication. The study contributes to the existing literature by connecting the conspicuous and inconspicuous consumption and self-determination theory on goal framing and extending the existing theoretical context to fashion-branded NFTs. In addition, the study bridges the gaps in the controversial argument between Shao et al. (2019) and Kilsheimer Eastman et al. (2022) on the context of fashion-branded NFTs. Interestingly, the study confirms the important role of extrinsic goals and conspicuous consumption in fashion-branded NFTs purchasing intention, shedding light on valuable insight for branding and marketing practitioners in understanding the underlying psychological drivers of consumers and tailoring their strategies to effectively target and engage their desired audience on fashion-branded NFT purchasing.

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