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## Luxury Goods as Status Symbol in Nigeria

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Dobra luksusowe jako znak statusu w Nigerii

**Abstract:** In many countries around the world, globalization has intensified hyper-consumerism not only among successful people but also among young people, encouraging individuals to use luxury goods as tools for self-expression and distinction. Nigeria's socio-economic situation – characterized by sharp inequalities, a young population, a wealthy diaspora, and a growing urban elite – further reinforces the symbolic power of luxury. This article analyzes how the consumption of luxury goods functions as a visible indicator of social status in contemporary Nigeria. The article is based on the literature on the subject, ethnographic observations in the digital environment conducted between 2015 and 2025, and an exploratory survey. The research draws on Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption, Bourdieu's trans-substantialization, Lipovetsky's shift towards experience, and Social Identity Theory. The results of the study indicate that Nigerians increasingly rely on luxury products to signal their membership in high-status groups and gain access to the privileges associated with elevated social position. Social media platforms serve as key arenas for showcasing a luxurious lifestyle, reinforcing status competition and shaping popular notions of success. Respondents associate luxury with quality, prestige, recognition and social advancement, while also using it to reward themselves

and satisfy their emotional needs. In Nigeria, buying luxury goods has become an important way of expressing who you are and where you are going. It shows the changes taking place in society and the economy but also reveals the tension between people's dreams and their everyday lives.

**Keywords:** luxury; luxury goods; Nigeria; social status

**Abstrakt:** W wielu krajach na świecie globalizacja nasiliła hiperkonsumpcjonizm nie tylko wśród ludzi sukcesu, lecz także wśród młodzieży, zachęcając do wykorzystywania dóbr luksusowych jako narzędzi wyrażania siebie i wyróżnienia. Sytuacja społeczno-gospodarcza Nigerii, charakteryzująca się ostrymi nierównościami, młodą populacją, bogactwem diaspory i rosnącą elitą miejską, dodatkowo wzmacnia symboliczną siłę luksusu. W artykule przeanalizowano, w jaki sposób konsumpcja dóbr luksusowych funkcjonuje jako widoczny wyznacznik statusu społecznego we współczesnej Nigerii. Artykuł bazuje na literaturze przedmiotu, obserwacjach etnograficznych w środowisku cyfrowym prowadzonych w latach 2015–2025 oraz na ankiecie eksploracyjnej. W badaniach oparto się na koncepcji konsumpcji ostentacyjnej Veblena, transsubstancjalizacji Bourdieu, przesunięciu Lipovetsky'ego w kierunku doświadczenia oraz teorii tożsamości społecznej. Wyniki wskazują, że Nigeryjczycy w coraz większym stopniu polegają na produktach luksusowych, aby sygnalizować przynależność do grup o wysokim statusie oraz uzyskać dostęp do przywilejów związanych z podwyższoną pozycją społeczną. Platformy społecznościowe służą jako kluczowe areny do prezentowania luksusowego stylu życia, wzmacniając rywalizację o status i kształtując popularne wyobrażenia o sukcesie. Respondenci kojarzą luksus z jakością, prestiżem, uznaniem i awansem społecznym, a jednocześnie wykorzystują go do samonagradzania się i zaspokajania potrzeb emocjonalnych. W Nigerii kupowanie dóbr luksusowych stało się ważnym sposobem wyrażania tego, kim się jest i dokąd się zmierza. Pokazuje to zmiany zachodzące w społeczeństwie i gospodarce, ale też odsłania napięcia między marzeniami ludzi a ich codziennym życiem.

**Słowa kluczowe:** luksus; produkty luksusowe; Nigeria; status społeczny

## INTRODUCTION

Globalization has reshaped nearly every aspect of human life – economy, politics, culture, society, and technology (Judijanto & Aslan, 2024). Its reach transforms local cultures, customs, and values across countries (Sagheer et al., 2023). While greater openness and improved communication have expanded opportunities for economic and cultural development, they have also accelerated cultural homogenization, threatening the diversity of local traditions, languages, and customs (Mazurkevych et al., 2024). Materialism is widely regarded as a trait strongly shaped by globalization (Mattelart, 1989). It is often defined as the pursuit of happiness through the acquisition and possession of luxury goods (Swinyard et al., 2001).

Young people are especially influenced by global culture, often embracing global hiper-consumerism as a route to self-advancement (Gautam, 2021). This happens even in remote or economically disadvantaged communities (Kopytoff,

1994). Luxury brands reinforce these patterns by drawing on diverse cultural references and circulating multidirectional luxury influences (Armitage & Roberts, 2021). This global orientation among youth aligns with research showing that young consumers express a growing independence in their fashion, consumption, and lifestyle choices, shaped by wider cultural flows (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006).

With its emphasis on self-expression, globalization elevates individuality, encouraging the use of goods beyond functional needs and fostering luxury consumption. Luxury items convey prestige, signalling success, status, and power (Grossman & Shapiro, 1988). Academic interest in luxury has grown, focusing on decadence, excess, inequality, and conspicuous consumption (Akarsu & Seçilmiş, 2023). Although luxury is deeply embedded in Western and increasingly Asian and Latin American contexts, it is generally less associated with Africa (McNeil & Riello, 2016). Emerging research, however, suggests that Nigerians have embraced luxury consumption to a significant degree (Aksoy & Abdulfatai, 2019). Recent studies identify socioeconomic factors as key drivers. These include income, family size, religion, gender, pricing, psychological variables, and brand perception (Iwegbu & Anjorin, 2022). Other work highlights the role of social status along with demographic factors, showing its strong influence on perceptions and purchasing of international luxury fashion brands (Akinfotire & Karaduman, 2016). Yet, a research gap remains regarding luxury goods as markers of social status and privilege. This study investigates how Nigerians use luxury products to signal actual or aspirational status, a topic gaining attention amid visible displays of wealth by certain groups, including pastors often linked to corruption (Casciano, 2022).

The main research question is: How do Nigerians perceive the ownership of luxury products as an indicator of high social status and a means of accessing associated privileges? This is supported by a set of following sub-questions:

1. What social meanings do Nigerians attach to the ownership and display of luxury products?
2. How does luxury consumption influence social recognition and acceptance in Nigerian society?
3. To what extent does the possession of luxury goods affect how individuals are treated or respected by others in Nigeria?
4. What motivates Nigerians to purchase luxury products – functional value, personal satisfaction, or social status?
5. How do demographic factors (e.g. income, education, gender, and age) influence Nigerians' perceptions of luxury ownership and social standing?
6. How do social media platforms facilitate or amplify the public display of luxury consumption in Nigeria?

This study is guided by the following hypotheses:

H1 (Main Hypothesis): Nigerians perceive the ownership of luxury products as an indicator of high social status and as a means of accessing the privileges associated with that status.

H2: The frequency and visibility of luxury consumption on social media positively correlate with individuals' desire for social recognition.

H3: Younger and middle-class Nigerians are more likely to engage in conspicuous luxury consumption as a means of upward social signalling than older or wealthier individuals.

H4: Exposure to luxury content on digital platforms reinforces aspirational consumer behavior among Nigerian social media users.

This research uses a qualitative, interpretivist mixed-methods approach (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019) to explore how luxury consumption acts as a visible marker of social hierarchy in contemporary Nigeria. The methodology includes a literature review, digital ethnographic observation, and a survey. The survey was directly linked to the article's hypotheses.

A core methodological element of this research is digital ethnography; a method employed to explore social questions within digitized spaces. It includes various forms such as ethnography of virtual environments (virtual ethnography), cyberspace ethnography, ethnography of new media, online ethnography, and social media/new media ethnography (Forberg & Schilt, 2023; Kaur-Gill & Dutta, 2017). It is gaining popularity as contemporary researchers navigate a cultural landscape where online activities and practices have become normative and integrated into everyday life (Bluteau, 2021). The lead researcher has focused on social media platforms as spaces where conspicuous consumption and social distinction are enacted. Over a ten-year period, the lead researcher systematically observed Nigerian users' activity on such platforms as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, YouTube, and X.

The unit of analysis consisted of publicly available posts, profiles, and hashtags referencing luxury goods or status-oriented behavior. Using purposive sampling, the study targeted high-engagement accounts (5,000+ followers) and trending luxury-related content (e.g. #NaijaLuxury, #RichKidsofNigeria, #LagosLifestyle). Weekly monitoring captured images, captions, hashtags, and comments illustrating conspicuous consumption. Field notes and screenshots documented recurring themes. Posts were coded by visibility and forms of symbolic expression to trace dominant narratives of prestige and aspiration.

To triangulate findings from the literature review and digital ethnography, an online survey titled "Luxury Consumption and Social Status in Nigeria" was conducted using Google Forms. The questionnaire was explicitly constructed to

operationalise the four hypotheses (H1–H4) and the main research question on how Nigerians perceive luxury ownership as an indicator of high social status and a gateway to associated privileges.

The survey consisted of five sections (A–E):

Section A captured demographic information (age, gender, education, occupation, approximate annual income in naira).

Section B explored perceptions of luxury and social status through open questions and 5-point Likert scales (e.g. “Luxury products represent success and high social standing in Nigeria”; “Owning luxury items makes others perceive someone as more influential or respected”).

Section C focused on motivations and meanings of luxury consumption (e.g. “What are your main motivations for purchasing or desiring luxury goods?”, “Please describe what owning luxury products personally means to you”).

Section D examined the role of social media and visibility (e.g. “How often do you see Nigerian social media users post luxury-related content?”, “To what extent do Nigerians use luxury goods to display the social class they aspire to rather than their actual class?”).

Section E included statements probing intergenerational differences and attitudes towards exaggerated online lifestyles.

The sample ( $N = 27$ ) consisted of Nigerian adults aged 18 and above, recruited through purposive and snowball sampling among Nigerian diaspora in Poland and the United Kingdom and their wider networks. Respondents included students, professionals and civil servants with educational levels ranging from secondary to postgraduate and income brackets from below NGN 350,000 (USD 240) to above NGN 3,000,000 (USD 2,055) per year. Dukeh (2025) highlights that Nigeria’s average monthly income varies widely by seniority, industry, region, and informal sector participation. Income distribution is highly unequal: a senior oil and gas manager earns NGN 2,000,000 (USD 1,371) plus bonuses, while an entry-level retail or hospitality worker averages NGN 40,000 (USD 27). The 2024 official minimum wage is NGN 70,000 (USD 48), with the overall average across formal and informal sectors around NGN 80,000–NGN 120,000 (USD 55–USD 82) (National Bureau of Statistics, 2025). The informal economy, which includes side businesses, weekend hustles, and unregistered trade, significantly supplements household income and is often unrecorded. Diaspora remittances, from an estimated 17 million Nigerians abroad totalled some USD 23 billion in 2024 (Ekanem, 2024). The survey is clearly exploratory and non-representative; it does not aim at statistical generalisation but at illuminating patterns and meanings that can be interpreted alongside the qualitative materials and the broader theoretical framework (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This study acknowledges several limitations. First, the digital ethnographic approach relied on publicly available data, which may not fully capture private or less visible forms of consumption. Second, sampling bias could arise because social media users tend to be younger, urban, and more technologically literate than the broader population. Third, the interpretive nature of qualitative analysis means that findings are context-specific and not generalizable in a quantitative sense. The survey, while offering valuable insights, involved a limited number of participants, which restricts the range of perspectives. Their results should be viewed as provisional, especially when the survey reach an unknown audience and when voluntary participation may lead to self-selection of biased respondents, as was the case in this study (Andrade, 2020). Additionally, because the researcher has been immersed in Nigerian online spaces for an extended period, researcher subjectivity may have influenced interpretations. These limitations are acknowledged and managed through methodological transparency, reflexivity, and triangulation.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) as its principal theoretical framework for examining the relationship between luxury consumption and social status in Nigeria. The theory posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. Through the processes of social categorization, social comparison, and positive distinctiveness, people define who they are, evaluate their position relative to others, and seek to maintain a favourable social identity.

In the Nigerian context, this framework helps explain how individuals use luxury consumption as a symbolic means of identity formation and social differentiation. Luxury goods – such as designer clothing, cars, and high-end lifestyles – serve not only as economic assets but as visible markers of belonging to, or aspiring toward, higher-status groups. Such consumption practices enable individuals to affirm in-group membership and distinguish themselves from perceived out-groups, reinforcing existing hierarchies of prestige and privilege.

Social media amplifies this process by providing public arenas for social comparison and recognition. Online platforms function as digital stages where Nigerians display and negotiate their social identities through material success and conspicuous consumption. In line with Tajfel and Turner's (1979) assertion that group members strive for positive distinctiveness, these displays reflect attempts to achieve symbolic superiority and social validation. In this way, social stratification in Nigeria is understood not only as a structural or economic phenomenon but also

as a psychological and symbolic process, sustained through identity-based consumption. By situating luxury consumption within the framework of Social Identity Theory, this study conceptualizes status signalling as a performative expression of belonging, aspiration, and differentiation within an evolving social hierarchy.

The application of Social Identity Theory extends beyond conceptual framing to guide the study's methodological approach. The emphasis on group identity and social comparison informs both the choice of research methods and the interpretation of findings. This study employs a qualitative, interpretive design that integrates digital ethnographic observation of social media content with semi-structured interviews. Digital ethnography captures how Nigerians use online spaces to express and negotiate social identity through visible consumption practices, while interviews provide insight into the meanings and motivations underlying these behaviors. The combination of these methods allows for a comprehensive understanding of how identity, aspiration, and status are performed and perceived within everyday contexts. Thus, the research design directly reflects the theoretical premise that luxury consumption functions as both a social and psychological strategy for achieving positive distinctiveness and reinforcing one's place within Nigeria's stratified society.

## DEFINITIONS OF LUXURY GOODS AND BRANDS

Merriam-Webster defines *luxury* both as abundance or great comfort and as something pleasurable but non-essential. Its synonyms are hedonist, epicure, and bon vivant. They reflect the breadth of the concept (Csaba, 2008). Historically, the term carried negative connotations: from Old French *luxurie* ("sinful self-indulgence") and Latin *luxus* ("excess, extravagance"), later conflated with *luxuria* ("lust, dissipation") (Brun & Castelli, 2013; McNeil & Riello, 2016). Only from the seventeenth century onward did luxury take on a more positive meaning, associated with escape, pleasure, and aspiration (Berthon et al., 2009).

Luxury is subjective and context-dependent (Kemp & Dłużewska, 2023), shifting with time, experience, and emotion, and extending beyond price (Akinfotire & Karaduman, 2016). Luxury goods derive value not only from function but from symbolism, rarity, and the emotions they evoke. Kapferer et al. (2014) link luxury to perceptions of scarcity and a minimal price threshold. Parguel et al. (2016) note that price visibility itself shapes perceptions of exclusivity. Pricing is therefore an "art", relying on brand heritage and emotional resonance rather than cost (Dahlhoff & Zhang, 2020). Luxury functions as an economic, cultural, and symbolic marker. It is attractive because it suggests craftsmanship, care, limited supply, and social

recognition (Cornell, 2002). It connotes beauty and sensory pleasure (Kapferer, 1997) and historically has been tied to ruling elites.

Luxury contrasts with necessities, whose demand grows more slowly than income (Varian, 1992). Berry (1994) argues that luxury implies cultural refinement and pleasure rather than utility. It is thus a multidimensional and evolving concept (Trigg, 2001; Berthon et al., 2009). Globalisation has amplified its reach, making brands like Chanel, Ferrari, Hermès and Louis Vuitton globally recognisable (Brun & Castelli, 2013). More discreet “insider” brands, like Avinton, Gardois, and Herend remain niche. Luxury spans high cost, exclusivity, refinement, rarity, and ostentation (Dehoorne & Theng, 2015) and embodies both product and cultural narrative (Lipovetsky, 2003). Its study requires interdisciplinary perspectives (Bauman, 2009); one clear example is the way luxury is increasingly defined by sustainability and durability through long-term environmental care, cultural preservation, and responsible community-centered tourism (Kemp & Dłużewska, 2024).

Luxury consumption dates back to ancient civilizations, where rare materials signified divine power and elite status (McNeil & Riello, 2016). In Africa, Mali’s wealth, especially under Mansa Musa, exemplified luxury as political and spiritual authority (Oumardit Hasseye & Abbou, 2021). Modern luxury blends exclusivity, craftsmanship, symbolism, and emotional experience (Gummerus et al., 2024), with consumers seeking memorable, affective encounters (Han et al., 2010). While today largely material and status-oriented, luxury once held sacred significance now mostly lost (Lipovetsky & Roux, 2003). Still, it retains an aura of mystery and aspiration (Akinfotire & Karaduman, 2016), with visibility and display remaining central (Dehoorne & Theng, 2015).

## SIGNALLING SOCIAL STATUS AND LUXURY

Veblen’s Theory of the Leisure Class (1899) defines “conspicuous consumption” as emulating higher groups through visible waste, where luxury gains value from display, not utility (Veblen, 1925). This “provocative distinction” attaches beauty and honour to expensive goods, making public displays central to signalling achievement (Bauman, 2009). Bourdieu shifted this logic toward symbolic value, arguing that post-1950s distinctions rely on socially produced taste, with luxury objects functioning as “object-signs” (Heilbrunn, 2018). Baudrillard (1968) likewise sees luxury as simulation, while Bourdieu’s “transubstantiation” explains how branding elevates ordinary items (Bourdieu, 1984). Later theorists show contemporary luxury blends qualitative, ostentatious, and emotional dimensions (Lipovetsky & Roux, 2003), shifting toward experience (Lipovetsky in Dehoorne

& Theng, 2015), yet still reinforcing hierarchy through selective access (Bastien & Kapferer, 2008).

In line with Veblen's view that status stems from wasteful display, marketing reinforces exclusivity through premium pricing. Consumers often select high-priced goods over equally functional alternatives because elevated prices create "snob appeal" and satisfy status needs (Han et al., 2010).

Nigeria's extreme inequality intensifies these dynamics. A narrow elite controls disproportionate wealth while most citizens face low or unstable incomes (Oxfam, 2018). Growth of the middle class – anticipated by McKinsey (Fiorini et al., 2025) – has expanded luxury demand. Nigeria now hosts a small but rising affluent group (AfrAsia Bank, 2018; McKinsey & Company, 2014). The ultra-rich remain limited: 7,200 millionaires, 20 centimillionaires, and 3 billionaires in 2025, a 47% decline since 2015 (Henley & Partners, 2025). For this aspirational class, luxury goods offer visible markers of distinction amid stark inequality.

## SIGNALLING SOCIAL STATUS AND LUXURY IN NIGERIA

Nigeria's large population of close to 232 million (UN Data, 2025) and the GDP growing at a rate of 3.46% GDP growth in Q3 2024 underpin luxury demand (OD4A, 2025). The luxury sector does not require widespread prosperity. It requires: high-net-worth individuals, upwardly mobile young consumers, urban elites, diaspora wealth inflows (Chen et al., 2022). Nigeria has all of these.

The middle class expanded by over 600% between 2000 and 2014, reaching 4.1 million households (Standard Bank, 2014), then stabilised at about 21% of the population between 2011–2016 (World Bank, 2019). More than half of Nigerians are under 30 (PP, 2025). Many are image-conscious (Oloruntoba-Oju, 2007) and globally mobile (Onesimus, 2022).

Status signalling also parallels educational strategies. Studies show elites and middle-class Nigerians use Western schooling as institutional and symbolic capital to secure advantage (Ayling, 2021). Like luxury goods, Western degrees function as scarce markers of recognition and privilege. In 2024, according to the World Bank, 96,702 Nigerians studied abroad (NISER, 2024). The trend puts pressure of traditional norms and values as well as the economy. The Central Bank of Nigeria reports that Nigerians spent USD 28.65 billion on foreign education between 2010 and 2020 (Tolu-Kolawole, 2022).

Digitally connected youth are familiar with Western lifestyles and brands (Omokhabi, 2023). Nigeria's luxury goods market reached USD 1.3 billion in 2022 (Statista, 2023). Lagos and Abuja host boutiques like Polo Avenue, Alara, and

Temple Muse, stocking Gucci, Balenciaga, Louis Vuitton, and Versace. Luxury now extends to weddings, hospitality, and real estate. The multi-million-dollar wedding industry illustrates this shift (Maigari, 2023). This industry largely serves some 90,000 high-net-worth individuals, who represent less than 1% of the population (AfrAsia Bank, 2018). Weddings and lifestyle events are heavily displayed online (Tayo, 2017). The 2025 wedding of Mr Eazi and Temi Otedola cost USD 10–15 million across Monaco, Dubai, and Iceland (Taylor, 2025). It shows how elites use globally staged events to signal status.

Rapid luxury growth stems from marketing, middle-class expansion, youth culture, and digital access. Lagos, which is dubbed “the Los Angeles of Africa” (Eytan, 2017), hosts celebrities, gated estates, and heavy champagne consumption. Over 640,000 bottles of champagne imported in 2022 (Ripples Nigeria, 2023). Elite women run multimillion-dollar firms (Micah, 2024). Nigeria’s richest individuals, like Folorunsho Alakija (USD 1.1 billion) and Aliko Dangote (USD 23.5 billion), represent less than 0.005% of the population (United Nations, 2024). The number of millionaires in Africa is projected to grow by 65% over the next decade (Henley & Partners, 2025b).

Luxury dominates social-media visibility. Up to 55% of lifestyle content on major Nigerian accounts features luxury goods, attracting hundreds of thousands to millions of views (Thuy, 2025). Kidd Waya’s reels done in collaboration with Uriel attract some 5 million views (@kiddwaya, 2023); Temi Otedola’s reels draw up to 4.7 million views (@temiotedole, 2024); DJ Cuppy posts generate some 3.3 million visits (@cuppymusic, 2024); and Hilda Baci attracts some 2.4 million visitors (@hildabaci, 2025). Earlier examples include Paddy Adenuga, the Mbadiwe Twins, and Adama Indimi (Tayo, 2017).

Nigeria’s elite, or rather the children of the super-rich, are a source of intrigue and obsession within the British media (Azeez, 2016; Scene TV, 2018; Taylor, 2025). They are seen as a new breed of consumers, jetting in from Lagos to live an extravagant life in London. Along the way, they are seen acquiring expensive properties, private education and attend the most exclusive nightclubs. DJ Cuppy’s Marie-Antoinette-themed graduation party reportedly cost the price of more than one Lamborghini (Azeez, 2016).

Digitalisation has reshaped traditions, especially weddings (Nwagbara, 2025). Weddings now mix global celebrity aesthetics with tradition (Akanle et al., 2021; Fagbola, 2019; Norman, 2021). Extravagance is exemplified by Folarin Alakija’s 2017 USD 6 million Blenheim Palace wedding, featuring one million roses, a 12-foot cake, and Robin Thicke (Fitzmaurice, 2017; Idowu, 2017). In 2019, Zahra Buhari received 30 Louis Vuitton boxes worth GBP 120,000, delivered in 30 cars

(Sahara Reporters Hausa, 2019). Gift making displays allow suitors to signal wealth limited only by the prospective groom's financial capacity (Sunusi, 2023).

Nigeria's luxury real-estate boom mirrors this trend. The sector is projected to grow by 6.91% between 2025 and 2029, reaching nearly USD 4 trillion (Statista, 2025). Diaspora Nigerians account for over 30% of premium property purchases (Gbonegun, 2025). Prices in Ikoyi rose 20–35% from 2020–2023; Banana Island up to 40% (Nigeria Property Centre, 2023). Over 65% of new Lagos projects are luxury developments (Knight Frank, 2024). High-end housing has become a key status symbol (Gbonegun, 2025).

Private jets further illustrate elite distinction. Nigeria is Africa's second-largest aviation market (Oji & Abili, 2024); Nigerians spent USD 6.5 billion on private jets in 2014 (Shadare, 2021). Owners include bankers, oil executives, and pastors (Campbell, 2019; Nsehe, 2011). Forbes reports that John Suleiman is just one of several Nigerian preachers that has a private jet proving that despite the tough economic realities, wealthy Nigerians are free to travel in class if they so choose (Nsehe, 2011).

Alcohol consumption also differentiates class. General drinking is widespread and inexpensive (Dumbili, 2013; World Health Organization, 2022), but premium champagne and cognac serve as elite status symbols. Nigeria consumed 752,879 bottles of champagne in 2011 (Umukoro, 2013). Prices range from NGN 80,000 to NGN 650,000 (USD 55–USD 446) per bottle (Nairaland, 2011). Don Jazzy once showcased a GBP 1.2 million Gout de Diamants bottle (Abimboye, 2013). Champagne sales grew 115% between 2011 and 2016 (Comité Champagne, 2019), before a 24.2% drop in imports by 2018, though high-end consumption persisted. Premium brands like Moët and Chandon, Gout de Diamants, and Armand de Brignac remain visible, demonstrating how Nigerians use luxury alcohol to signal prestige (Comité Champagne, 2019).

Occasionally, ostentatious displays of luxury are looked down by some as crude manifestations of recently acquired wealth. Muhammadu Buhari, President of Nigeria, has shown his admiration for Mark Zuckerberg, founder and CEO of Facebook, contrasting his lifestyle with some Nigerians' notorious wealth display. During their meeting in September 2016, Buhari said:

Nigeria has always been identified as a country with great potentials for growth, especially with our youthful population, but now we are moving beyond the potentials to reality. I am impressed by your simplicity in sharing your knowledge and wealth with those with less income. (Olowookere, 2016)

## LUXURY CONSUMPTION AND SOCIAL STATUS IN NIGERIA: EVIDENCE FROM AN EXPLORATORY SURVEY

### Research design and sample

#### *QUANTITATIVE PATTERNS: PERCEPTIONS, MOTIVATIONS AND VISIBILITY*

Although the small sample does not allow for sophisticated statistical testing, the structure of the questionnaire provides a quantitative window onto how respondents position luxury in relation to social hierarchy. The Likert-scale items in Section B directly reflect H1, asking to what extent luxury products are seen as markers of success, high social standing and preferential treatment. Items in Sections C and D capture the visibility of luxury consumption, perceived peer recognition and the influence of social media, thereby speaking to H2–H4.

Across the scale questions, respondents used the full range of response options (from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* or equivalents such as *no influence* to *very strong influence*). This indicates that attitudes toward luxury are not uniform even within a relatively homogeneous, urban and educated group. Some participants endorsed strong links between luxury and status. For example, one respondent summarised the meaning of luxury as “respect and affluence”, while another associated luxury consumption with “better treatment by others”. These views align with the main hypothesis (H1) that ownership of luxury products functions as an indicator of high social status and as a means of accessing privileges.

Other respondents, however, downplayed the status dimension or explicitly re-framed luxury in more personal terms. One participant wrote that luxury “does not much [matter] because I grew affluent. Luxury is normal for me”, while another stressed that “as long as I like it, I worked hard and purchased it, it feels good and gives me a sense of accomplishment... I do not worship the item”. These answers suggest that for some higher-income or more cosmopolitan respondents, luxury has been normalised and integrated into everyday consumption, echoing global debates about the “democratisation” of luxury.

Section C provides additional quantitative insight into motivation. Respondents could select multiple pre-defined reasons such as “to express my social status or success”, “to reward myself or feel good”, “to fit in with peers or social circles”, “to appear aspirational or progressive” or “for quality and craftsmanship”. While the distribution across these categories varies between individuals, the presence of all options in the dataset demonstrates that luxury is simultaneously used for status signalling, self-reward, peer conformity and appreciation of quality. This

multiplicity resonates with Lipovetsky and Roux's argument that contemporary luxury combines ostentatious, qualitative and emotional dimensions rather than serving only as a status marker.

Finally, Section D links the survey to H2 and H4 by quantifying exposure to and perceived influence of social-media displays of luxury. The items ask how often respondents see Nigerian users posting luxury-related content, how strongly such displays shape their ideas of "high status" and to what extent Nigerians use luxury goods to display an *aspired* rather than *actual* class position. Responses span the whole scale from "rarely" to "constantly" and from "not at all" to "very strongly", confirming both the ubiquity of such content and the perception that online platforms function as arenas where social hierarchy is visualised and negotiated. Even without precise percentages, the pattern of scale use reinforces the qualitative evidence from digital ethnography that social media intensifies status competition and aspirational consumption among Nigerian users.

### *QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS: MEANINGS AND NARRATIVES OF LUXURY*

The open-ended questions in Sections B and C invite respondents to define luxury in their own words, to describe what makes a brand "luxurious", to name specific brands and to explain what owning luxury products personally means to them. A thematic reading of these answers reveals several recurring motifs that illuminate the symbolic work luxury performs in contemporary Nigerian life.

#### *LUXURY AS QUALITY, RARITY AND CRAFTSMANSHIP*

Many respondents define luxury first in terms of exceptional quality and scarcity rather than price alone. They describe luxury as "something rare or special", "detailed and precise", "made out of top-notch quality materials" or "anything that brings comfort and increases one's social strata". Brands cited as paradigmatically luxurious – including Louis Vuitton, Hermès, Chanel, Porsche, Rolls-Royce, La Mer, and Patek Philippe – are associated with meticulous workmanship, durability and a carefully curated brand heritage. This emphasis echoes Kapferer's concept of luxury as a combination of superior quality, aesthetic excellence and controlled rarity.

#### *LUXURY AS SUCCESS AND SOCIAL RECOGNITION*

At the same time, respondents frequently frame luxury as a symbol of success or status. Some state explicitly that luxury ownership signals that one has "arrived" or moved into a higher social echelon, while others link it to "respect and affluen-

ce” or to “better treatment by others”. In several narratives, luxury is portrayed as a visible reward for overcoming hardship or achieving upward mobility – “a small reward for my hard work” or an object that “adds a little bit of beauty to my daily routine” and marks progress. These accounts strongly resonate with Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption and Han et al.’s findings on brand prominence as a tool for communicating status.

### *LUXURY AS SELF-REWARD, WELLBEING AND AESTHETIC PLEASURE*

A third theme complicates a purely status-driven interpretation. Several respondents stress that they buy luxury goods primarily for themselves, not for others. For them, owning luxury products means “enjoying items that feel special, thoughtfully made, and long-lasting” and “appreciating quality, craftsmanship, and the feeling of treating myself to something exceptional that I truly value”. Others claim, “I like beautiful things but I don’t lust after the typical »luxury« products”, suggesting a selective engagement with status brands. This aligns with arguments that contemporary luxury increasingly serves emotional and experiential functions, providing comfort, beauty and a sense of self-care, even as it continues to signal distinction.

### *AMBIVALENCE AND NORMALISATION OF LUXURY*

A smaller set of responses expresses ambivalence towards luxury as a status symbol. One participant notes that luxury is “normal” due to an affluent upbringing, while another emphasises that luxury consumption should not lead to “worship[ping] the item”. This suggests that for some respondents situated closer to Han et al.’s “patrician” segment, overt status signalling is downplayed in favour of understatement or personal enjoyment. Such ambivalence also reflects the tension between traditional communal values and the hyper-individualised ethos of global consumer culture discussed earlier in the paper.

### *SOCIAL MEDIA, ASPIRATION AND IMAGINED CLASS MOBILITY*

Open responses in Section D underscore the role of digital platforms in shaping aspirations. Participants note frequent exposure to posts featuring luxury cars, designer fashion, international travel and high-end experiences, and some acknowledge that these displays shape their own understanding of what counts as success in Nigeria. While not all respondents admit to direct imitation, many perceive that

Nigerians “use luxury goods to display the social class they aspire to rather than their actual class”, reinforcing the idea that online spaces have become key arenas for performing aspirational identities, in line with H2 and H4 and with the study’s Social Identity Theory framework.

## LINKING THE SURVEY TO THE HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Taken together, the quantitative scales and qualitative narratives offer a nuanced, though preliminary, picture of how Nigerians in this small sample relate luxury to social status. The findings can be read against the study’s hypotheses and research questions as follows:

**H1** (luxury as an indicator of high social status and access to privileges) is *partially supported*. Several respondents clearly associate luxury with success, respect and differential treatment, and the survey items directly capturing these perceptions elicited affirming responses. At the same time, other participants foreground quality or self-reward, indicating that status is a central but not exclusive meaning.

**H2** and **H4** (social media visibility, recognition and aspirational behaviour) are *consistent* with the survey material. Respondents report frequent exposure to luxury-related content and acknowledge that such displays contribute to their mental image of “high status” and, for some, to desire for similar goods. This pattern echoes the digital ethnography, where Nigerian social media feeds are saturated with symbolic displays of wealth, lifestyle and mobility.

**H3** (younger and middle-class Nigerians as especially prone to conspicuous consumption) cannot be robustly evaluated given the small, non-representative sample and the absence of systematic cross-tabulation. Nonetheless, the presence of students and early-career professionals who explicitly frame luxury as aspirational or as a means of “fitting in” with peers suggests that age and class position remain important analytical dimensions to be explored in larger future studies.

In relation to the main research question and its sub-questions, the survey shows that Nigerians in this exploratory sample attach multiple meanings to luxury ownership: it is at once a marker of success, a tool of social recognition, a source of personal pleasure and an arena in which online and offline identities are negotiated. These findings provide an empirical bridge between the theoretical discussion of luxury and social stratification and the subsequent section’s broader discussion of how Nigeria’s specific socio-economic context amplifies the visibility and symbolic weight of luxury consumption.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article has examined how luxury goods and services function as potent markers of social status in contemporary Nigeria, situating the phenomenon within both global theories of luxury and the specific socio-economic conditions of a rapidly transforming African society. The evidence presented is drawn from literature, digital ethnography, and an exploratory survey. It demonstrates that luxury consumption in Nigeria is not merely an aesthetic or hedonic preference but a deeply embedded social practice through which individuals negotiate identity, prestige, and belonging. In line with Social Identity Theory, Nigerians use luxury goods as symbolic resources to position themselves within a competitive and highly stratified social order, signalling both achieved status and aspirational mobility.

Nigeria's demographic profile is a young, urbanising, globally connected population. This amplifies the visibility and symbolic power of luxury. Social media acts as a crucial arena where status is performed, validated, and broadcast to vast audiences. In this digital environment, luxury goods become more than physical objects; they become performative signs of success, modernity, and global citizenship. This dynamic particularly nurtures aspirational consumption among younger and middle-class Nigerians, corroborating the study's hypotheses regarding the role of visibility, digital influence, and social recognition.

At the same time, the Nigerian context introduces specific nuances. The country's uneven wealth distribution, the cultural premium placed on public display, and the strategic use of luxury in weddings, property, travel, and lifestyle events intensify the status-signalling function beyond what is typically observed in European markets. Luxury consumption often bridges perceived gaps in privilege, offering individuals a symbolic shortcut to social acceptance, prestige, and elevated treatment.

The findings also highlight a paradox: while luxury consumption expresses upward aspiration, it reveals underlying structural constraints in social mobility. The popularity of symbolic consumption reflects both opportunity and insecurity. It offers access to global culture but limited access to institutional pathways of advancement.

Overall, this study confirms that luxury has become a powerful cultural language through which Nigerians articulate identity, ambition, and social belonging. It opens important pathways for future research on locally produced luxury, digital cultures, and the evolving political economy of status in Africa.

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