



## HOW SELF-ESTEEM AND SENSE OF BELONGING DRIVES CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

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### ABSTRACT

*In order to prevent overconsumption, it is crucial to understand the causes of conspicuous consumption. The purpose of this study is to determine how self-esteem (SE) and a sense of belonging (SOB) relate to conspicuous consumption (CC). With an average age of early 20s in the Jakarta and Java region, 127 representatives of Generation Z are surveyed to collect data. Results revealed that both Self-Esteem and Sense of Belonging were strongly correlated with Conspicuous Consumption, according to correlation and regression analysis. We suggest for young adults to not purchase goods or items impulsively to avoid conspicuous consumption rather than displaying one's wealth. Limitation and future research are discussed in context of the study's findings.*

**Keywords:** Identity, Luxury Brand, Self-Esteem, Sense of Belonging, Conspicuous Consumption

### 1. Introduction.

"I don't do fashion, I am fashion." One of the quotes from a well-known French fashion designer, Coco Chanel, whose name is now associated with one of the most exclusive fashion labels, Chanel, demonstrates how fashion is today created by individuals rather than being followed by the masses. Numerous studies have examined how closely a person's wardrobe reflects their identity. As each outfit tells a tale connected to a culture somewhere that helps identify an origin and a society that one represents (Johnson and Koech), fashion has a deeper significance that has cultural values in its application in addition to just serving as a depiction of identity. There are many different things that affect how someone dresses, including culture, compared with the results from society and family groups, the environment, the media, current fashion trends, and individual personalities (Tajuddin, 2018). All aspects of fashion, encompassing clothes, accessories, shoes, and footwear, have quite a volatile, transient quality to them, yet they can simultaneously serve as a cultural "identity" component (Pozzo, 2020). In his paper, Efremov et al., (2021) shows that clothing is a form of self-expression and personality that is used to complement some of the shortcomings in a person to achieve spiritual or psychological balance. The use of fashion as a means of self-expression, as a representation of a culture or of particular traits, or both, has an impact on how a person fits into society.

Some studies have verified that fashion is a form of self-expression and represents the cultural identity of people. According to Thao (2021), the way people dress shows who they are in society and allows them to

portray a message. Moreover, fashion and culture tend to be inseparable since the clothing that people wear is influenced by the customs that exist in society (Tajuddin 2018). However, as fashion continues to evolve and become more diverse as the times do, the clothing that people choose to wear is subject to societal and cultural views (Stolovy, 2021) which means fashion is not a seeking, anticipated representation of a reinterpreted traditional value that serves some purpose or aim. Instead, what makes people automatic is a vivid and revitalizing idea deserving of being depicted for society's approval (Anyanwu and Chiana, 2022). Ga-Eun Oh (2021) argue through his research that consumers frequently purchase and use well-known brands to boost their self-esteem and be perceived as belonging to a high social class. Since one can tell who in society is based on their clothing, people of high social standing make sure that others are aware of their position by dressing in luxury labels (Maketivilia, 2018) which are thought to be distinguished by a high price point justified by excellent quality, workmanship, exclusivity, and a sense of rarity (Aycock, 2021).

Nowadays, clothing is used to display one's wealth and social status. Individuals who wear well-known or branded clothes are often perceived as belonging to a higher social class. Changes in the concept of fashion in terms of meaning cause problems that arise involving the community. The urgency of people to appear and look attractive by wearing branded clothes causes excessive consumption. It appears that conspicuous consumption is a form of consumer's desire to demonstrate social status and impress people with their possessions by acquiring luxury items (Dantas & Abreu, 2020). This issue has detrimental effect on society, especially for Generation Z who is currently considered as the biggest consumer group (Grigoreva et al., 2021). Spending money to buy expensive clothes is probably done because of the desire to be accepted and respected in society through a position that is usually characterized by wealth. In this study, consumption behavior in buying clothes is affected by self-esteem and sense of belonging which leads to conspicuous consumption.

Many people are worried about how others will perceive them in addition to their own self-identity, which note by Trang and Selassie (2020) that it makes the tendency to identify themselves based on how they want to be perceived by others. Many studies explained the relationship between self-esteem and consumption, in which Eastman et al. (2018) stated the identity that is created then shapes the social identity to get verification and avoid the drop of self-esteem in society. They can achieve this, for example, by consuming or displaying things that represent achievement in relation to the wounded portion of their sense of self. A study from Stuppy et al. (2020) notes that in order to avoid a drop in self-esteem, consumers choose what they consume based on what they anticipate about their perception of themselves. Eastman et al. (2018) in their research explain that through consumption of products, consumers who may be conspicuous and who confer or symbolize status for individuals and important people around them are motives for status consumption to increase social status. They emphasized that in this case, rather than for the function, people purchase products for symbolic of wealth or exclusivity. The majority of the time, consumers associate products and brands with prestige based on the qualities of the objects themselves, hedonistic ideals, and interactions with other people (Sahin, 2021). Moreover, previous literature suggests consumption is used to describe status among upper-class individuals (Wang et al., 2020) and a striking relationship between self-esteem and consumption (Neave et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2018).

### ***Self-Esteem***

Self-esteem refers to how a person values and perceives themselves. According to (Topçu, 2018), the cognitive elements of self-esteem refer to self-acceptance and confidence in one's capabilities and achievements. This will help the individuals to evaluate positive or negative reaction to their self. Furthermore, as mentioned by Oztek and Cengel (2020), an individual who valued himself/herself negatively will struggle with his/her negative emotion and tends to be self-contradictory by venting to low-level activities that can be carried out immediately.

### ***Belonging***

A sense of belonging is considered an important factor in self-esteem. It is an emotion when someone feels secure by being accepted into a group of people. Consumers who feel excluded will seek validation and acceptance from others and it might change their consumption behavior to adjust to with his/her associative group (Argan, et al., 2022). Liu and Huang (2018) mentioned that young people pay great attention to other people's views in their social life, it is indicated by concrete actions to seek belonging and gain recognition from others such as conspicuous consumption.

## Conspicuous Consumption

Conspicuous consumption is often referred to as consumers practice by purchasing products with the purpose of showing a person's wealth (Sahin & Nasir, 2021). It is associated with a theory of the Veblen Effect, which implies the tendency of consumers to purchase luxury goods to achieve social status or a situation when a demand of a product increases as the price increases. Adolescents tend to indulge in conspicuous consumption to have a sense of belonging in social group, shape their self-confidence, and gain prestige (Kolańska-Stronka & Gorbaniuk, 2022). Moreover, Assimos, et al., (2019) also stated that conspicuous consumption is a way for an individual to increase social prestige and impress others by acquiring possessions that display a certain social status.

### *Conceptual Framework*

Based on our observations and findings, much of the research indicates the relationship between self-esteem and conspicuous consumption. Little is known about this hypothesis among Generation Z. Therefore, in this research, the researchers developed a hypothetical model (Fig.1). The purpose of this model is to show a link between self-esteem and its effect on conspicuous consumption among generation Z, determine how self-esteem exerts a direct impact on sense of belongingness, on the other hand, also leads to conspicuous consumption. The conceptual model and hypotheses are presented.

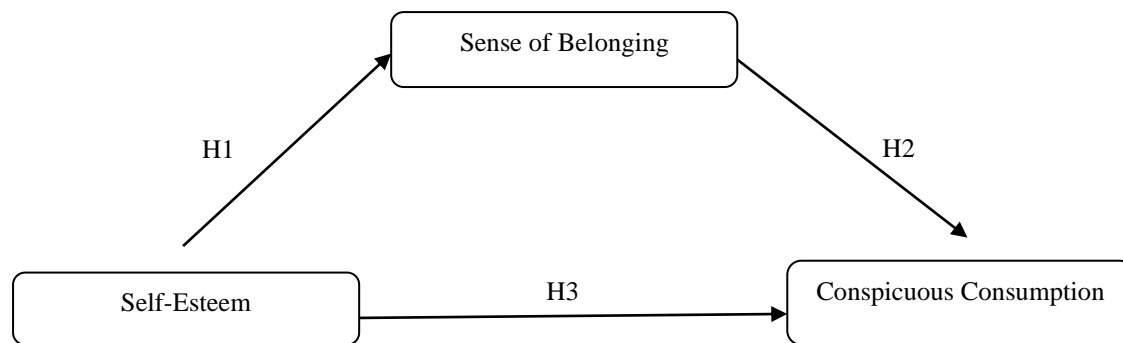


Figure 1: Hypothetical Model

Based on the review of some literature, the following hypotheses can be derived:

H1: Self-esteem positively relates to a person's sense of belongingness

Previous study has mentioned that a person's self-esteem depends on the degree to which she judges that she is worthy of being accepted and respected by others (Perry & Lavins-Merillat, 2018). It shows that if a person feels worthy and accepted by others, she will experience an enhancement in self-esteem, whereas if she feels rejected by society, it will decrease her self-esteem. Thus, we hypothesized the relationship between sense of belonging and conspicuous consumption:

H2: A person's sense of belonging positively influences conspicuous consumption

Next, As argued by Oh (2021) in his article, lack of acceptance and respect among individuals can trigger a need or desire for status and acceptance through conspicuous consumption. Moreover, consumers seek validation from others by buying luxury goods in a conspicuous manner. They believe that acquiring goods that other people desire creates a sense of belonging (Olsson, 2020). Therefore, if a person seeks a sense of belonging and gain recognition from others, they might feel a need to purchase goods in a conspicuous manner. Hence, our third hypothesis is as follows:

H3: A person's level of self-esteem has an influence on the emergence of a person's conspicuous consumption

Furthermore, previous studies showed that to avoid the drop of self-esteem, people tend to spend more in buying products (Stuppy et al., 2018). If a person is at a low self-esteem level, he consumes more in buying high-priced

goods to increase his self-esteem which will make conspicuous consumption appear. In the present study, we adopt this view to be tested.

## 2. Method

### *Sample*

We choose to gather individuals with a wide range of attributes, including age, gender, and educational level, to be responders on a survey about conspicuous consumerism and its associations with self-esteem and belonging. A person's self-esteem and sense of belonging have been found to influence the appearance of conspicuous consumption, and when a person's self-esteem is low, they will behave more consumptively to hide their imperfections in order to thrive in the environment (Vindiani, 2019; Ramadhan, 2014). We collected samples using online questionnaires that were disseminated via Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp. There were 127 responses to the poll, 81 of whom were female (64.3%), 44 of whom were male (34.9%), and one respondent (0.8%) preferred not to mention. The majority of respondents (80.2%) were between the ages of 17 and 20; 17.5% were older than 20; and the remaining 2.4% were under 20. With a percentage of 89.7%, university students make up almost 90% of the respondents. Workers compose the next largest group, at 7.1%, with students making up the remaining respondents.

In this study, the respondents' responses to a questionnaire with five possible answers are represented using a Likert scale. The survey method consists of 15 questions in total.

Table 1. Likert Scale

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Score</b>
Strongly agree	5
Agree	4
Nearly agree	3
Disagree	2
Strongly disagree	1

### *Procedure*

For collecting the data required, we initially conduct a survey on the subject of our research in order to get the essential data. We applied for permission from the academic lecturer standing as the research supervisor when the questionnaire was finished. Following permission, we began seeking out respondents to share survey forms using online platforms, such as sharing in WhatsApp groups or direct messaging with each person. In addition, the researcher makes the form available for free to anyone interested to participate in a survey via Instagram stories. We give the respondents a brief explanation of conspicuous consumption and other components in the survey they must complete.

In the first section, the participants' answered basic personal information, including age, gender, and status/occupation. The questions that follow are divided up into three categories: self-esteem, sense of belonging, and conspicuous consumption. Respondents were already required to complete each question honestly, including their thoughts and emotions. Approximately 5 minutes are needed to complete the survey. Researchers pledge that they will only utilize the anonymous, confidential information and data they collect for their own research.

### *Measurement*

The survey measures the participant's reaction to questions that are divided into three components, which are self-esteem, sense of belonging, and conspicuous consumption, in order to determine how much of an impact self-esteem and belonging have on conspicuous consumption in a person. There are only five possible responses to each question: strongly agree, agree, nearly agree, disagree, and strongly disagree, denoted by the numbers 1 to 5.

### *Data Analysis*

The study adopted a Green's (1991) procedures to estimate the relationship hypothesized in the current model. Based on the number of variables, the Green's approach gives answers about the number of respondents required for a research. The sample size for the coefficient of determination is  $N \geq 50 + 8m$ , where  $m$  is the number of predictors in the model ( $R^2$ ). In this study, there are 3 variables, so we need to at least have 74 respondents for the data analysis. The objective of this research is to determine whether low self-esteem influences someone to behave consumptively or vice versa, and how it relates to conspicuous consumption behavior. This research also focuses on the study to determine whether a person's sense of belonging to their environment will have an effect on conspicuous spending and purchases.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### *Measurement Validation*

In this research, we use SmartPLS 3 (Ringle, et al., 2015) as our tools to measure both the validation and structural modelling. First, we conduct reliability and validity test. SOB1 was deleted after first running the PLS Algorithms because the indicator loading was far below 0.70. Then, we use Cronbach's Alpha to evaluate the reliability. Cronbach's Alpha for each instrument are Conspicuous Consumption = 0.782; Self-Esteem = 0.776; and Sense of Belonging = 0.834. Alpha  $\geq 0.70$  are considered as acceptable and at satisfactory level of reliability (Taber, 2017). Moreover, the results of the test also showed that composite reliability were above 0.70, indicating that the variables used in this analysis are valid and reliable (Table 2). Next, average variance extracted (AVE) values for all variables were above 0.5 and squared root of AVE was greater than the correlation between latent variables (Table 3). It shows that the convergent and discriminant validities of each construct are adequate. In addition, we use VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) in multicollinearity tests (Table 4) to determine the correlation between the independent variables in the regression model. Our multicollinearity results indicated that there is no collinearity among the variables, or the variables are uncorrelated with one another ( $VIF < 5$ ).

Table 2. Reliability and Validity Test

Variables	Items	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Conspicuous Consumption	CC1	0.593	0.782	0.824	0.851	0.540
	CC2	0.819				
	CC3	0.780				
	CC4	0.579				
	CC5	0.855				
Self-Esteem	SE1	0.758	0.776	0.785	0.848	0.529
	SE2	0.695				
	SE3	0.618				
	SE4	0.810				
	SE5	0.742				
Sense of Belonging	SOB2	0.784	0.834	0.845	0.889	0.667
	SOB3	0.841				
	SOB4	0.811				
	SOB5	0.829				

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

	Conspicuous Consumption	Self-Esteem	Sense of Belonging
Conspicuous Consumption	0.735		
Self-Esteem	0.732	0.727	
Sense of Belonging	0.720	0.553	0.816

Table 4. Multicollinearity test - Collinearity Statistics (VIF)

CC1	CC2	CC3	CC4	CC5	SE1	SE2
1.603	2.005	2.020	1.232	2.207	1.655	1.330
SE3	SE4	SE5	SOB2	SOB3	SOB4	SOB5
1.282	1.849	1.680	1.679	2.025	2.011	1.834

### PLS Path Modeling and Hypotheses Testing

In SmartPLS, we performed PLS-SEM algorithm and bootstrapping analysis by using 95% as the significant level to find the standard error and p value for each variable. The first hypothesis was Self-esteem positively relates to a person's sense of belongingness. The result of bootstrapping analysis (Table 5) displayed that ( $\beta = 0.553$ ,  $SE = 0.070$ ,  $t = 7.862$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). It indicates that self-esteem positively affected a person's sense of belonging. Our second hypothesis was A person's sense of belonging positively influences conspicuous consumption. The result showed that sense of belonging ( $\beta = 0.454$ ,  $SE = 0.061$ ,  $t = 7.461$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) is significantly affected conspicuous consumption. The third hypothesis was person's level of self-esteem has an influence on the emergence of a person's conspicuous consumption. The results implied that self-esteem ( $\beta = 0.481$ ,  $SE = 0.068$ ,  $t = 7.098$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) positively influences the emergence of a person's conspicuous consumption. Since all the P-values  $< 0.05$ , it can be said that all hypotheses are significant. These hypotheses testing was also supported by the R square value of .679 ( $R^2 = 0.679$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.672$ ) and .31 ( $R^2 = 0.306$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.299$ ). It explained 68% of variance in conspicuous consumption and 31% in sense of belonging.

Table 5. Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis		Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P Values
H1	Self-Esteem $\rightarrow$ Sense of Belonging	0.553	0.565	0.070	7.862	0.000
H2	Sense of Belonging $\rightarrow$ Conspicuous Consumption	0.454	0.455	0.061	7.461	0.000
H3	Self-Esteem $\rightarrow$ Conspicuous Consumption	0.481	0.481	0.068	7.098	0.000

### Discussion

The purpose of this research is to find the factors that affect a person's conspicuous consumption. In this research, we use three variables which are self-esteem, sense of belonging, and conspicuous consumption. The proposed model hypothesized and examined how one's sense of self-worth and belonging affected their spending habits, which resulted in conspicuous consumption. This study discovered that people's sense of self-esteem and belonging has a positive impact on how much they spend on goods to preserve their existence in society. Self-esteem positively relates to a person's sense of belonging. It means that a person who has high self-esteem, most likely will be more confident in their social life and feel accepted by others. The result supported by Afroz and Tiwari (2021), they mentioned that an increase in level of self-esteem occurred when a person feels supported by his or her group. Our findings add to the literature on a person's sense of belonging had a positive influence on conspicuous consumption. This result showed that the more a person feel the need to be accepted in his group, he will try to seek recognition from others through conspicuous consumption or spending money to buy luxury goods. This conspicuous consumption behavior usually occurs among adolescence because at that age, they tend to have a high desire to make themselves as attractive as possible to be accepted in their social group (Luckyta, 2019). Moreover, a study by Zhang et al., (2022) also highlighted that students with conspicuous identities will try to gain prestige to differentiate themselves from other social groups that indicated by their high levels of consumption. One major finding concerns regarding the consumption that a person spent. Luckyta (2019) in his study explained that adolescents engage in the majority of consumer activity, according to

reality, because they want to appear young and fashionable. In addition, formal institutions, such as schools, place a premium on appearance. This adds to the literature on a person's level of self-esteem had relation on their spending habit and can lead to conspicuous consumption. Our research demonstrates that the lower a person's self-esteem, the more he will try to boost his self-esteem by increasing consumption in luxury goods.

#### 4. Conclusion and Implications

##### *Implications*

From the theoretical perspective, one of the most important contributions of this study is its finding on the relationship between self-esteem, sense of belonging, and conspicuous consumption. All variables are significant and influence each other's, which shows that young adults compensate for their low self-esteem and retain a sense of belonging by engaging in conspicuous consumption. By focusing on the factors that cause generation Z to engage in conspicuous consumption, we also found that young adults view their consumption as an indicator to determine a person's social position. They increase their consumption of luxury items to be recognized by their peers and to achieve a higher social status in society. They also compete for ownership of such goods, which leads to overconsumption. Moreover, young adults tend to consume goods that do not hold any practical value. Therefore, it is recommended for young adults to not purchase goods or items impulsively, avoid conspicuous consumption, and only purchasing goods that they truly need rather than displaying one's wealth. On the other hand, since the demand of luxury consumption increases, it will benefit the luxury goods industry and leads to higher income.

##### *Limitation and Future Research*

This study has several limitations. First, most of the respondents of the survey are female (>50%) and may lead to gender bias. The result of the study with the limited number of male respondents may lead to the notion that female tends to engage in conspicuous consumption rather than male. So, further research is needed to provide evidence that gender could be an important mediator variable in analyzing conspicuous consumption. Second, the sample used in the study is small and may not represent the entire generation Z population. Most of our respondents are students that reside in Jakarta and Tangerang. In order to have more in-depth research regarding the factors that drives conspicuous consumption in generation Z, future researcher could add other variables such as advertising and social media since both plays a huge role in influencing consumer decision making and increasing desire to engage in conspicuous consumption. Furthermore, future researchers could also add more samples to provide data that can represent the population by reaching generation Z in others region.

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