

CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION IN SPORT - DO ATHLETES BEHAVE CONSPICUOUSLY?

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Abstract: Conspicuous consumption is constantly evolving due to the availability of goods and the technology development. People have many opportunities to express their values, beliefs, and personalities through product and price is no longer the main factors determining whether a product is suitable for conspicuous consumption. With the development of social networks such as Instagram, the influence of recommendations by influencers are gaining momentum. By consuming similar products (and brands) as those consumed by influencers, consumers seek to demonstrate their similarity to influencers and thus join a particular social group. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between influencer marketing and the perception of sports products as conspicuous and to specify the purchasing behavior for sportswear. Primary data were collected using an online questionnaire focusing on Generation Z (n = 240) and in-depth interviews (n = 10). The questionnaire was based on previous studies of conspicuousness and status consumption and included a set of 22 statements. Data were processed using a factorial analysis in which statements were grouped into several main factors. These factors were examined through regression analysis, with the explanatory variable being the tendency toward conspicuous consumption. Although, the quantitative data analysis did not reveal a tendency toward conspicuous consumption of sports products, the qualitative analysis supports this relationship.

Keywords: conspicuous consumption, social status, influencer marketing, sportswear

JEL Classification: M31, M37

INTRODUCTION

In today's society, it is easier than ever to consume ostentatiously. This is mainly due to the development of social media, which allows consumption and presentation in real-time (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019), allowing for greater visibility of consumption, which is an important aspect of conspicuous consumption (Heffetz, 2011). Since Veblen's (1899) conceptualization of conspicuous consumption as the luxury products consumption, other factors have been added to the price factor. Consumers also show their values and personality through their consumption (Solomon, 2018). Thus, conspicuous products are not only high-priced, but also allow consumers to express personality traits, lifestyles, and experiences that place them in a particular social group (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018; 2019; O'cass & McEwen, 2004; Yang & Mattila, 2016).

Brand can significantly influence consumer behavior, as it helps define values in the minds of consumers and determines a company's position in the market (Kardes et al., 2015). Almasi & Dadaneh (2017) have demonstrated that there is a relationship between brand personality and brand equity in sportswear. According to Cao (2014), sports brands in particular can express consumers' social values and symbolize freedom, life, and power, for example. Compared to everyday clothing, sportswear is characterized by several other attributes related to its purpose. For example, it meets specific consumer needs – in outdoor sports such as hiking, basic needs include warmth and dryness. Most sports are also about feeling comfortable and safe (Ağaç & Sakarya, 2014).

Generation Z is the generation born between 1995 and 2010 (Kamenidou et al., 2018; Kardes et al., 2015; Patsiaouras, 2010). At the same time, this generation has just started to enter the labor and consumer market and is beginning to shape their behavior. As mentioned earlier, the development of conspicuous consumption is closely linked to the development of social networks. Generation Z has grown up alongside social networks (such as Instagram and Facebook) and therefore has a strong tendency to engage in conspicuous behavior. They communicate the most on various social networks while building strong relationships with their surroundings (Solomon, 2018; Yussof et al., 2018). It is also where they get inspiration and information about new trends and styles. Their role models include celebrities as well as internet stars who have become famous through their work in social media – influencers (Gundová & Cvoligová, 2019; Solomon, 2018).

Influencer marketing is a form of advertisement of products and companies that have become an essential part of online marketing in recent years as a modern and popular form of promotion (Ozuem & Willis, 2022). Influencers' popularity is affected not only by the quantity or quality of their posts but also by their authenticity and personality (Casaló et al., 2020). Influencer marketing is also a very effective form of marketing. Gundová & Cvoligová (2019) confirmed in their research that almost 70% of respondents have bought products based on an influencer's recommendation in the past.

This research aims to investigate the tendency of athletes and sportsmen or sportswomen to be conspicuous in their sportswear purchasing behavior in relation to their Instagram use and their influenceability of influencer marketing (Ozuem & Willis, 2022; Gundová & Cvoligová, 2019; Solomon, 2018).

1. MATERIAL AND METHODS

In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 Generation Z respondents who use Instagram and play sports. This part of the research was an introduction to the conspicuous consumer behavior of athletes and their behavior on Instagram. Based on the results the questionnaire for the quantitative research, which was created based on the literature review, was modified. The characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1.

Tab. 1: In-depth interview sample.

Respondent	Gender	Age	Sports Activity	Instagram Use
1	Man	22	Hockey	Daily
2	Woman	21	Gym	Daily
3	Woman	24	Swimming	Daily
4	Woman	22	Nothing regular	Daily
5	Man	20	Athletics	Daily
6	Man	23	Athletics	Daily
7	Woman	20	Athletics	Daily
8	Woman	20	Athletics	Daily
9	Woman	22	Athletics	Daily
10	Man	22	Soccer, gym	Daily

Source: Own data

A questionnaire in quantitative research contained 25 statements that focused on conspicuous and status-related consumption of sports goods based on previous studies (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006; Assimos et al., 2019; Riquelme et al., 2011; Mai & Tambyah, 2011). These statements were adapted to the topic of sports goods consumption. In addition, influencer marketing questions were also included in the questionnaire. All statements in the questionnaire were arranged on Likert scale with values from 1 to 7, where 1 meaning absolute disagreement with the statement and 7 representing absolute agreement with the statement. A summary of the statements and the statistical values of the individual statements in the questionnaire survey can be found in Table 2.

Tab. 2: Statements in the questionnaire.

Variable (statements)	Mean	Median	Modus	Mode Freq.	St. Dev.
Sportswear quality is important to me.	5,76	6	7	86	1,27
Sportswear brand is important to me.	3,7	4	4	60	1,67
Sportswear made of eco-friendly material is important for me.	2,72	3	2	59	1,44
I buy branded, high quality and more expensive sportswear.	4,69	5	5	54	1,64
I prefer a particular brand of sportswear and footwear.	4,94	5	6	66	1,82
I enjoy buying branded sportswear.	5,24	6	7	73	1,71
I am attracted to branded and quality sports products.	5,17	6	6	62	1,69
The clothes I mostly wear indicate a lot about how well I'm doing in life.	2,9	3	1	59	1,55
When I choose a sports brand, I often consult my family and friends.	3,06	3	1	56	1,71
I usually buy a sportswear brand that I think others will approve.	2,56	2	1	92	1,67
When I make a branded sportswear purchase, I share it on Instagram with my followers.	1,41	1	1	191	1,05

When I buy the same brand as the people around me, I feel like I belong to the same group.	2,24	2	1	109	1,57
The branded sportswear I purchase helps me make a good impression on those around me.	3	3	1	72	1,77
Purchasing branded sportswear gives me social recognition.	2,31	2	1	105	1,56
I like to buy branded sportswear and footwear because I want to be socially recognized.	2,02	1	1	134	1,49
I like to buy branded sportswear and footwear to make a good impression.	2,55	2	1	97	1,73
I adapt my behavior to the social group I belong to.	3,82	4	5	52	1,93
Buying branded sportswear gives me a symbol of social status.	2,28	2	1	106	1,47
Buying branded sportswear gives me prestige and importance.	2,26	2	1	109	1,53
I notice brands more when the influencer directly uses.	3,47	3	1	54	1,91
I have been inspired by a sports brand that influencers mentioned on their Instagram account.	3,55	4	1	58	1,93
I can associate influencers with a specific sports brand because they promote it on their Instagram account.	3,61	4	1	64	2,13
I assume the influencers have experience with the product or brand being promoted.	4,71	5	Multiple	52	1,94
I trust influencers so much that I would purchase the sports product brand they mentioned on their Instagram account.	3,32	3	1	66	1,93
The opinion of an influencer is more trustworthy to me than that of a salesperson in a store.	2,87	3	1	79	1,74

Source: Own data

A total of 240 respondents participated in the survey. Respondents were interviewed electronically and data collection has been proceed during March and April 2022. Generation Z respondents in the questionnaire were asked in the age categories 15-20 and 21-25. Although, Generation Z includes even younger population, only respondents who are legally able to earn their own income and participate in the labor market (15+ years) were deliberately addressed. The composition of respondents is shown in the Table 3.

Tab. 3: Sample of respondents from the questionnaire (n = 240).

		Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Gender	Women	129	53,75
	Men	111	46,25
Age	15-20	105	43,75
	21-25	135	56,25

Source: Own data

Factor and regression analyzes were used to evaluate the data. The aim of the factor analysis was to form factors from the battery of statements used in the questionnaire. These factors were then examined for their association with conspicuous consumption using regression analysis. The statistical programs Statistica and Gretl were used for these analyzes.

2. RESULTS

The respondents of the quantitative and qualitative research were mostly people who exercise regularly. The majority of respondents use Instagram daily (71%), using it mainly as a source of entertainment and relaxation, communication, and as a source of information, ideas, and inspiration. More than 80% of respondents said that they follow influencers related to sports. The qualitative research showed that respondents trust professional sports influencers more than amateur sports influencers who promote a brand. They often consider these collaborations as financially motivated and do not trust them. Conversely, they describe collaborations with professional athletes as more trustworthy and some would buy a brand based on a recommendation. The data from the quantitative study shows that up to half of the respondents are inspired by a brand they have seen on the influencer's Instagram Feed.

Although, respondents confirm the popularity of Instagram and the impact of influencers on their purchase behavior, respondents tend to reject the purchase of sports goods for the purpose of self-promotion and to increase their social status. When choosing sportswear, they primarily value the quality of the product, but brand and brand experience also play a role. The values of the statements on materialism and ostentation consumption show that consumers do not tend to engage in ostentatious consumption (the mean value for the statement "I like to buy branded sportswear and footwear to make a good impression and impress others", which directly targets conspicuous consumption, was 2,55 and modus of 1). However, qualitative research suggests that, after reflecting on the issue for some time, respondents are willing to admit tendencies towards conspicuous consumption in their consumption behavior (for instance "Sometimes I buy a brand cloth just to fit in").

Subsequently, the statements defining conspicuous consumption were removed (for further use in regression analysis) and the remaining 23 statements were subjected to factor analysis. Each statement was arranged into one of the 5 factors, see Table 4.

Tab. 4: Results of the factor analysis.

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
With sportswear, quality is important to me.	-0,326714	0,634836	0,009660	0,107049	0,176580
When it comes to sportswear, the brand is important to me.	0,341592	0,733355	0,067232	-0,152962	-0,028212
With sportswear, it is important to me if it is made of eco-friendly material.	0,047111	0,039014	-0,019142	-0,774525	0,106313
I buy branded, high quality and more expensive sportswear.	0,040994	0,792709	-0,020813	-0,031046	0,164019
I prefer a particular brand of sportswear and footwear.	0,012985	0,773514	0,100490	-0,047450	0,065295
I enjoy buying branded sportswear.	0,292468	0,702869	0,274476	-0,011340	-0,141575
I am attracted to branded and quality sports products.	0,277060	0,762746	0,183879	0,174810	-0,025660
The things I wear a lot say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.	0,621883	0,236999	0,106027	-0,117742	0,104982
When I choose a sports brand, I often consult my surroundings.	0,168860	0,085216	0,132339	-0,022112	0,808092
I usually buy a sportswear brand that I think others (my friends,	0,600921	0,050788	0,057792	0,012974	0,477397

acquaintances, neighborhood) will approve of.					
When I make a branded sportswear purchase, I share it on Instagram with my followers.	0,521328	-0,114665	0,038152	-0,313327	0,440569
When I buy the same brand as the people around me, I feel like I belong to the same group.	0,716884	-0,055886	0,137757	-0,124700	0,199761
The branded sportswear I purchase helps me make a good impression on those around me.	0,800321	0,250584	0,144785	0,106414	0,016996
Buying branded sportswear gives me social recognition.	0,833673	0,086389	0,027996	0,008173	0,017942
I like to buy branded sportswear and shoes to make a good impression.	0,809464	0,182889	0,129494	0,104610	0,056925
I adapt my behavior to the social group I am in.	0,411288	0,030542	0,020011	0,600578	0,128544
Buying branded sportswear gives me prestige and importance.	0,832241	0,082487	0,081353	0,016690	0,062365
I notice more brands that the influencer directly uses actively (goes running, working out, ...).	0,060666	0,181515	0,623252	0,062870	0,375274
I've been inspired by a sports brand that an influencer mentioned on their Instagram account.	0,023147	0,204846	0,728080	0,019837	0,260146
I can associate influencers with a specific sports brand because they promote it on their Instagram account.	0,174218	0,169140	0,741213	0,119287	0,085901
I assume the influencer has experience with the product or brand being promoted.	-0,023415	0,064901	0,778647	0,126342	-0,075024
I trust some influencers so much that I would purchase the sports product brand they mentioned on their Instagram account because of their promotion.	0,165828	0,013981	0,791316	-0,110215	0,030617
The opinion of an influencer is more trustworthy to me than that of a salesperson in a store.	0,262820	0,001245	0,648837	-0,286049	-0,145647

Source: Own data

The individual factors from the factor analysis were named:

1. brand quality – characterized by perceived quality and brand experience,
2. social recognition and perception by society– the need for social recognition and prestige,

3. inspiration by influencers – the impact of the presentation of products by influencers,
4. society and sustainability –the adaptive behavior in different social groups and the tendency toward ecological behavior,
5. recommendations from the community – the influence of the closer surroundings.

These factors were then used as explanatory variables in the regression analysis. "I like to buy branded sportswear and shoes to impress the people around me and make a good impression." was chosen as the explained variable.

Tab. 5 Regression analysis

Model 2: OLS using observations 1-240					
Dependent variable: Impressing people and making impression					
	coefficient	std. error	t-ratio	p-value	
const	2,02083	0,0485359	41,64	1,03e-110	***
brand quality	1,28295	0,0486373	26,38	2,52e-072	***
social recognition and perception by society	0,134424	0,0486373	2,764	0,0062	***
Inspiration by influencers	0,0859430	0,0486373	1,767	0,0785	*
Mean dependent var.	2,020833		S. D. dependent var.	1,493215	
Sum squared resid.	133,4288		S. E. of regression	0,751915	
R-squared	0,749616		Adjusted R-squared	0,746433	

Source: Own data

As seen in the regression model (Table 5), the conspicuous behavior of sportswear consumers is influenced by factors brand quality, social recognition and perception by society, and inspiration by influencers. The main influence have the factors brand quality and social perceptions by society, which are also statistically most significant. The importance of these factor in sportswear shopping behavior is confirmed also in qualitative research, therefore it's not a surprise, it plays a role also for conspicuous consumption. Also the factor social recognition and perception by society was assumed, given that in this research social networks are taken as a prerequisite for the development of conspicuous consumption.

CONCLUSION

This study proves the impact of influencer marketing on Generation Z in general, 95% of respondents were Instagram users and 80% of respondents follow an influencer related to sports. Even though consumers mainly consider quality and brand when buying sportswear, this study proved that influencer marketing is a source of inspiration and information.

One of the objectives of this study was to examine the relationship between influencer marketing and the perception of sports products as conspicuous. In the quantitative study, this relationship could not be proven as the respondents mostly denied the intention to buy sportswear for conspicuous purposes. However, in the qualitative research, respondents admitted that they tend to buy products to demonstrate their social

status and to fit into a certain social group. This type of conspicuous behavior, according to the analysis, is most influenced by brand quality as well as by social recognition and perception by society.

As suggested by Ozuem & Willis (2022) and Gundová & Cvoligová (2019), this study confirmed influencer marketing as an effective and attractive way of advertising for younger generations. It also confirmed the importance of brand in consumer product choice (Kardes et al., 2015).

The limitation of this study is the reluctance to admit the conspicuous behavior intentions in such a short questionnaire. This suggests that a qualitative study is a better way to investigate conspicuous consumption, thanks to a deeper connection with the respondents.

This research is a preliminary research, therefore its purpose was to test the statements for further research on conspicuous consumption.

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