



Research Article

# Evidence for two facets of pride in consumption: Findings from luxury brands

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## Abstract

This paper documents the multifaceted nature of pride in consumer behavior. Drawing on recent psychological research on pride, we provide evidence for two separate facets of pride in consumption. In a series of studies, we propose a model wherein luxury brand consumption and pride are systematically interrelated. Whereas authentic (but not hubristic) pride leads to a heightened desire for luxury brands, hubristic (but not authentic) pride is the outcome of these purchases, and is the form of pride signaled to observers by these purchases. Further, we show that these effects are generally exacerbated for those low in narcissism. These findings shed new light on why consumers purchase luxury brands, highlighting a paradox: these purchases may be sought out of heightened feelings of accomplishment (and not arrogance), but they instead signal arrogance to others (rather than accomplishment).

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One of the authors of this article was having lunch with a colleague who had in his possession a stylish pair of white sunglasses, their frames highlighted by a thin strip of aqueous blue trim. The author thought the glasses attractive, so he asked his colleague if he could wear them. After putting them on, he noticed how they felt nearly weightless and fit snugly on the bridge of his nose. Curious to see how he looked in the sunglasses, the author asked his colleague if he could be excused from the table to examine himself in front of a nearby mirror. His colleague acquiesced, and, on his way there, the author noticed several patrons glance at him the way people sometimes do when an arresting object catches their eye. The author felt a familiar emotion rising inside him, one that made his posture more erect and his gait more confident. The author stood before the mirror and admired how the glasses complimented his features. He imagined himself

wearing the glasses while strolling down a promenade in the warm glow of the Southern California sun. When the author returned to the dining table, he returned them to his colleague. To his surprise, he did so with some reluctance as he could still apprehend the delicious feeling of superiority he experienced when he wore them and the secret pleasure he derived from seeing the covetous glances of observers as he passed by. The sunglasses were manufactured by Prada.

What is it that consumers feel when they adorn themselves with products that speak in the silent language of luxury, exclusiveness, and extravagance? Undoubtedly, one of the emotions experienced in such situations is pride. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines pride as “a high or overweening opinion of one’s own qualities, attainments, or estate, which gives rise to a feeling and attitude of superiority over and contempt for others.” This definition is consistent with ancient Greek and Biblical thought condemning “excessive pride,” or “hubris”. Studies show that this form of “hubristic” pride is associated with narcissism and other undesirable outcomes such as aggression and hostility, interpersonal

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problems, relationship conflict, and prejudice against out-groups (Ashton-James & Tracy, 2012; Tracy & Robins, 2007; Tracy, Cheng, Robins, & Trzesniewski, 2009). But pride has another face, one which is experienced as a byproduct of hard work and successes. This “authentic” form of pride can promote perseverance at difficult tasks, empathy toward out-groups, and contribute to the development of a genuine and deep-rooted sense of self-esteem (Ashton-James & Tracy, 2012; Tracy & Robins, 2007; Williams & DeSteno, 2009).

The present research examines the two faces of pride as they pertain to consumer motivation and behavior. First, we show that the two kinds of pride have independent effects on consumption, qualifying past research in consumer behavior that has treated pride as a unidimensional construct. Second, we show that the two kinds of pride can also be differentially activated by the usage of brands. Third, by integrating these two findings, we highlight an interesting paradox; namely, that while consumers are motivated to purchase luxury brands because of heightened feelings of one facet of pride, a different facet is experienced from using such brands. This finding contributes to research on pride more generally because it documents for the first time that what is often thought to be an adaptive form of pride (authentic pride) can give rise to another, presumably less desirable, form (hubristic pride). By showing this effect, we illustrate how the distinct forms of pride can in fact be related through the act of consumption. Finally, we show that trait narcissism moderates these effects.

## Conceptual background

### *The two faces of pride*

Psychologists have long noted that pride is a multifaceted construct (e.g., Tangney, Wagner, & Gramzow, 1989), in part because it has been theoretically linked to markedly divergent psychological outcomes, ranging from the positive, such as achievement and altruism, to the negative, including relationship conflict and aggression (Kernberg, 1975; McGregor, Nail, Marigold, & Kang, 2005; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Empirical findings from several lines of research support a two-facet account of pride as consisting of distinct authentic and hubristic components (see Tracy & Robins, 2007). The first component (authentic pride) includes words such as “accomplished” and “confident,” and fits with the prosocial, achievement-oriented conceptualization of pride. The second component (hubristic pride) includes words such as “arrogant” and “conceited,” and fits with a more self-aggrandizing, egotistical conceptualization. Results from several studies (e.g., Ashton-James & Tracy, 2012; Tracy & Robins, 2007; Tracy et al., 2009) suggest that authentic pride is the prosocial, achievement-oriented facet of the emotion, whereas hubristic pride is the more anti-social and aggressive facet. More recently, hubristic pride has been related to narcissistic self-aggrandizement, and is speculated to be experienced by some people as a way of suppressing insecurities and thereby coping with implicit feelings of shame (Tracy, Cheng, Martens, & Robins, 2011). Empirically, the two facets of pride are

distinct, typically having only a small positive correlation (at around  $r = .10$ , Tracy & Robins, 2007).

Pride has a distinct nonverbal expression that is reliably recognized by children and adults across cultures, and individuals spontaneously display this expression in response to status and success worldwide (Shariff & Tracy, 2009; Tiedens, Ellsworth, & Mesquita, 2000; Tracy & Matsumoto, 2008; Tracy & Robins, 2008; Tracy, Robins, & Lagattuta, 2005; Tracy, Shariff, Zhao, & Henrich, 2013; Williams & DeSteno, 2009). These findings suggest that experiencing and displaying pride in response to a culturally defined success is universal, making it reasonable to assume that pride can be a reflexive response to the consumption of brands that signify success and achievement, of which luxury brands are one exemplar. There is a small body of work examining pride in a consumer context as either an antecedent or consequence of consumption (e.g., Aaker & Williams, 1998; Griskevicius, Shiota, & Nowlis, 2010; Hung & Mukhopadhyay, 2012; Louro, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2005; Mukhopadhyay & Johar, 2007; Patrick, Chun, & MacInnis, 2009; Ramanathan & Williams, 2007; Wilcox, Kramer, & Sen, 2011; Winterich & Haws, 2011), but all of these studies treat pride as a unitary construct, and none have examined pride in the context of luxury brand consumption.

To address these gaps in the literature, we focus on luxury brand consumption, because such brands are explicitly marketed to appeal to consumers’ desire to signal their accomplishments, success, or social superiority (e.g., Mandel, Petrova, & Cialdini, 2006)—desires that are part of the pride experience (Tracy & Robins, 2007). An examination of the relationship between luxury brand consumption and pride is important because demand for luxury goods is strong and rapidly growing, with \$200+ billion in annual sales in 2012 (Bain and Company, 2012). Hence, gaining an understanding of the factors that influence consumers to continue purchasing such brands should be of considerable interest to marketers. On the other hand, a number of writers have lamented the growing obsession among some consumers to acquire luxury brands, particularly when they cannot reasonably afford them (Frank, 1999; Manning, 2000). For those interested in helping consumers better regulate their expenditures and avoid potentially crippling debt, it would also be useful to gain insight into the psychological factors that motivate consumers to buy products that can make their lives economically precarious even if they gain momentary satisfaction from purchasing them.

### *Pride as a consequence of luxury consumption*

As the opening story in our paper illustrates, we can experience pride from consumption, and this emotion might be particularly intense when we use luxury brands. In fact, the belief that one will feel (at least temporarily) heightened positive affect following consumption more generally is a significant motivator for purchases (Isen, 1984; Luomala & Laaksonen, 1999; Richins, 2004; Tice & Bratslavsky, 2000) and may underlie socially and personally dysfunctional behaviors like impulsive and compulsive shopping (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998). Given that pride is multifaceted, it seems reasonable to speculate that consumers may not experience both facets with equal intensity following luxury brand usage. Luxury brands are associated with status, wealth,

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