

# Narcissism, Personality Traits and Conspicuous Consumption of Brand in Youth

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to investigate the relationship among Narcissism, personality traits and conspicuous consumption of brands in youth. This used quantitative research design with a sample consisting of 50 Men and 50 Women. The age ranged between 18 – 22 years. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants. The findings revealed that there was a relationship among conspicuous consumption and traits of personality. It was also uncovered that there are gender differences in conspicuous consumption of brands, narcissism and personality traits. Further it was concluded that narcissism is positively associated with conspicuous consumption of brands. Narcissism was likely to be a positive predictor of conspicuous consumption of brands and personality traits are likely to be a predictor of conspicuous consumption of brands.

## 1. Introduction

Recent happenings i.e. increased number of shopping malls and brands, in the world making our youth more conscious regarding conspicuous consumption and global consumer behaviour have drawn attention to the role that possessions and their value play in our lives. Many economies have found themselves in precarious situation because of overspending and overconsumption (Segal & Podoshen, 2013). Even after the turn of the century many men and women remained expensively unhealthy for the consumption of brands and remained immobile showpieces (Hargreaves, 2002). Today, there is a viscous cycle of consumption that permeates every facet of society that is increasingly perpetuated on American young adults between the ages of (18-25) (Muhammad, 2012). In recent years, a shift in the values linked to luxury has occurred. Changes in consumers' interest in, and perception of, branded products have significantly modified markets' structure (Allen, 2007).

Since consumers' decisions about brand choice are guided by self-image, it is suggested that consumers will choose products whose images are congruent with their own (Sirgy, 1982; Ross, 1971). self-image, it is suggested that consumers will choose products whose images are congruent with their own (Sirgy, 1982; Ross, 1971). Self-image is the mental picture, generally of a kind that is quite resistant to change, that depicts not only details that are potentially available to objective investigation by others (height, weight, hair color, etc.), but also items that have been learned by that person

about himself or herself, either from personal experiences or by internalizing the judgments of others. Entitlement, self-focus, self-absorption but also persistent need to impress others are among defining characteristics of narcissism.

Narcissism has received increased attention in the past few decades as a sub-clinical individual divergence with important everyday consequences, such as self-enhancement in perceptions of

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one's own behavior and attributes. Narcissism is self-centredness arising from failure to distinguish the self from external objects, either in very young babies or as a feature of mental disorder.

Narcissism is part of a normal developmental phase and reflects the universal need during early childhood, and later in life, to be loved. However, there are many possibilities of being rejected in the course of this developmental phase and this experience will leave the individual with a narcissistic vulnerability (Cunningham & Darke, 2010). Narcissism is a good predictor of luxurious purchases (Cunningham & Darke, 2010). Narcissists utilize purchase of luxury products for protection of their fragile selves and in order to maintain and strengthen their greatly exaggerated self-view (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). Contemporary longitudinal studies demonstrate that this perverse self-love (Holmes, 2001) is undergoing continuing rise, perfectly matching the growing consumerism of the day. Given that conspicuous consumption may be defined as spending for the purpose of ego inflation and self-aggrandizement, one can expect that narcissists will often and readily use conspicuous consumption as a relatively inexpensive (it pays only with money) way to obtain so depleted self-respect.

Personality is defined as the set of habitual behaviors, cognitions and emotional patterns that evolve from biological and environmental factors. Traits are dimensions of personality that influence in a particular way a person's thoughts, feelings and behaviors. They are also assumed to be a contributing factor to the consistency in the expression of such thoughts, feelings and behaviors across situations and over time (Carducci, 2009). Trait define nature of personality, and, as a result, can be used to distinguish among individuals in the manner in which individual differences are expressed (Carducci, 2009).

Personality traits postulates that people naturally deal with different situations and interact with their environment in different ways. Personality traits may also be key indicators of other facets of an individual's life (Ali, 2018). It consists of five distinct dimensions, which offer essential guidelines for the design of an individual's personality. (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

Men and women having traits like extraversion and conscientiousness tend to be more conspicuous as they possess the quality of persistence regarding brands and use them persistently. Secondly, individuals being extravert engage with the external world and experience enthusiasm and other positive emotions by using brands and feel confident. Whereas, narcissists possess neuroticism as they possess tendency to emotionally react to any negative feelings regarding them.

The symbolism of luxury brands conveys to a large extent human personality trait. However, luxury brands differentiate from their peer brands and build a competitive advantage with a unique combination of specific personality facets, which cannot be captured with the existing brand personality concept (Vigneron & Johnson 2004, p. 490).

Conspicuous Consumption generally refers to the expenditure on luxuriousness on a lavish scale in an attempt to enhance one's self-esteem and social prestige and consumption of luxury items (e.g., jewelry, cars, etc.) targeted toward upmarket (i.e., upscale) and specific segments of consumers. It is expected that different sets of consumers would have different perceptions of the level of luxury for the same brands, and that the overall luxury level of a brand would integrate these perceptions from different perspectives. These are the five key luxury dimensions that must be established or monitored for creating a lasting luxury brand.

According to Veblen's theory, individuals rival the consumption patterns of others who are higher up in the hierarchy than them. Veblen continued that hierarchies are created through the fact that there is surplus and therefore status becomes important, making consumption indispensable in order to hold one's great name with Persistent need to awe others are among the challenging qualities of narcissism this delineates narcissistic inclinations in a person (Veblen, 1899). He stated that there are two main ways in which someone is able to display

wealth. One of them is through extensive leisure activities and the other through lavish expenditure on consumption and service.

Even after the turn of the century many consumer decisions about brand choice are guided by Traits of personality that influence in a particular way a person's thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Contemporary longitudinal studies demonstrate that this perverse self-love (Holmes, 2001) is undergoing continuing rise, perfectly matching the growing consumerism of the day. Given that conspicuous consumption may be defined as spending for the purpose of ego inflation and self-aggrandizement, one can expect that narcissists will often and readily use conspicuous consumption as a relatively inexpensive (it pays only with money) way to obtain depleted self-respect. A correlational study was done by Ushakova (2017) to explore the phenomenon of conspicuous consumption in Russia from a totally new perspective - the perspective of young generation of consumers. Thus, the aim of the research was to examine the interdependence between narcissism and conspicuous consumption in young generation of Russian consumers.

The primary data was collected through a self-conducted questionnaire and the results proved the strongest relationship between narcissism and conspicuous consumption. Young generation was proved to be more narcissist due to which they did more conspicuous consumption. Previous research by Pilch & Górnik-Durose (2017) showed that narcissism is reflected in materialistic tendencies and money-related attitudes. It was examined relationships of both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism with materialism, money attitudes, and consumption preferences in a nonstudent sample. The results showed that the two types of narcissism are equally associated with materialism and a tendency to conspicuous (public) consumption. The results suggested that not only grandiose, but also vulnerable narcissists may be prone to excessive consumption which showed that both types of narcissist do extra conspicuous consumption. Predictive relationship between narcissism and materialism, and the attitude towards conspicuous consumption was studied. In another study by Velov, Gojković and Đurić (2014) using a sample of high school students (aged 16–18). The data indicated that materialism was a significant predictor of the attitude towards conspicuous consumption, quite in line with some previous research. In spite of a significant correlation between narcissism and materialism, narcissism was not a significant predictor of the attitude towards conspicuous consumption.

The researchers Mumtaz, Zafar and Kausar (2016) conducted a research to investigate relationship in narcissistic tendencies, conspicuous consumption on brands and self-image in women. Results showed that conspicuous consumption on brands mediates the relationship between narcissistic tendencies and self-image in women. Women had higher level of narcissistic tendencies and tendency to consume on brands. All the above-mentioned researches depict the connection between the variables. The researches show the relationship between the study variables. In the light of previous literature, it has been observed that there is a relationship among Narcissism and Conspicuousness of brands. It also indicated that personality traits had influence on brand consciousness in Young generation.

### ***Hypothesis***

- There is likely to be a relationship among narcissism and traits of personality.
- There is likely a relationship among conspicuous consumption and traits of personality.
- Narcissism is likely to be positively associated with conspicuous consumption of brands.
- Narcissism is likely to be a positive predictor of conspicuous consumption of brands.
- Personality traits are likely to be a predictor of conspicuous consumption of brands.
- There are likely to be gender differences in conspicuous consumption of brands, narcissism and personality traits

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

The study was conducted in Lahore city, using purposive sampling technique; since the sample was drawn from a private university of Lahore. The sample was consisting of young Men and Women of age 18 to 22

### 2.2. Instruments

*2.2.1. Demographic sheet:* Demographic variables of the study were age, socioeconomic status, monthly income, family system, pocket money and kind of conspicuous brand placed at the highest priority.

*2.2.2. The Narcissistic Personality Inventory – 16 (NPI-16, 2006):* The Narcissistic Personality Inventory – 16 constructed by Daniel Ames in 2006. (NPI-16, 2006) measure narcissistic tendencies. The NPI involves 16-item and the scale had an  $\alpha$  of .65. Items are in the form of narcissistic and non-narcissistic statements. The response format of the measure was computing proportion of responses consistent with narcissism.

*2.2.3. Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI, 2006):* The ten-item personality inventory is a 10-item personality inventory constructed by Samuel Gosling in 2006 which measure 5 personality traits. The scale had a good reliability. It is a Likert scale and each item scored from 1 to 7.

*2.2.4. Brand Luxury Index (BLI, 2004):* Brand Luxury Index (BLI, 2004) designed by Vigneron and Johnson's in 2004 to measures luxury seeking consumer behavior. The Brand Luxury Index is a multi-dimensional scale consisting of five dimensions i.e. perceived conspicuousness, perceived uniqueness, perceived quality, perceived extended self and perceived hedonism which are further divided into 4 dimensions. BLI involves 20 items consisting of pairs of bipolar adjectives where one adjective describes the minimum and maximum level and each scored from 1 to 7 with the reliability of .82.

### 2.3. Procedure

After getting the permission for data collection from the concerned authorities of the universities, the participants were young men and women of 18-22 years were selected from a private university of Lahore. Informed consent of participation in the research was taken from the participants. They were briefed about the purpose of the research and were assured that the information obtained through the questionnaires would be kept confidential and will be used for research purpose only. The questionnaires were filled in individual setting. They were also requested to respond to each and every item carefully. Moreover, they were requested to ask any queries they have regarding the test. Confidentiality assurance was provided to each and every individual. No teacher, parent or guardian were allowed to be with the participant during the assessment process to make the participants feel comfortable and provide the correct response.

## 3. Results

Table 1 shows equal percentage of sample in terms of gender (i.e., 50% women & 50% men). Two income groups were derived on the basis of less than and more than 500,00 which shows a slight difference in the percentage of i.e. Less than 64% & more than 36%. In brand priority clothing had highest percentage of 46%, shoes show 13%, automobiles show 9%, food shows 18% and cosmetics shows 14%. Age had 20.20 and SD of 1.30. Pocket Money had two categories in which category 1 i.e. 10,000- 15,000 has 56% and category 2 i.e. 15,000-20,000 has 44%. Family system included groups of joint and nuclear. Nuclear shows 72% and joint shows 28%.

Table 1.

*Demographic Variables of the sample (N=100)*

Variables	M	SD	f	%
Age	20.20	1.30		
Gender				
Men			50	50%
Women			50	50%
Parent income				
Less than 500,000			64	64%
More than 500,00			36	36%
Brand priority				
Clothing			46	46%
Shoes			13	13%
Automobiles			9	9%
Food			18	18%
Cosmetics			14	14%
Pocket money				
10,000-15,000			56	56%
15,000-20,000			44	44%
Family system				
Nuclear			72	72%
Joint			28	28%

Table 2 revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between narcissism and conspicuous consumption. Statistically significant negative relationship was indicated between narcissism and three personality traits i.e. agreeableness, conscientiousness and emotional stability and significant positive relationship with extraversion. No significant relationship was found between narcissism and two personality traits i.e. emotional stability and openness to experience. Whereas, statistically significant negative relationship is indicated between conspicuous consumption and one personality traits i.e. emotional stability no relationship was indicated between conspicuous consumption and four personality traits i.e. agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness and openness to experience.

Table 2.

*Correlations among study variables**(N=100)*

Variables	1	2	3	3	4	5	6	7
Narcissism	-	.21*	-.24**	-.24**	-.20*	-.13	-.07	.21*
Extraversion	-	-	.23**	.23**	.47***	.26**	.34***	-.05
Agreeableness	-	-	-	-	.41***	.52***	.48***	-.04
Conscientiousness	-	-	-	-	-	.68***	.72***	-.17
Emotional stability	-	-	-	-	-	-	.83**	-.23**
Openness experience	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.17
Conspicuous consumption	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

The result of table 3 shows that Narcissism in step I explained .045% variance in Conspicuous consumption,  $F(1,98) = 4.57, p = .03$ . Narcissism is the predictor of Conspicuous Consumption. Results showed that Narcissism is the significant predictor of Conspicuous consumption. In step II personality traits showed .112% variance in Conspicuous consumption,  $F(5, 93) = 1.94, p = .08$ . personality traits are the predictor of conspicuous consumption. Results showed that personality traits do not predict conspicuous consumption.

Table 3.

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis (N=100).*

Predictors	Block 1	
	Conspicuous Consumption	
	$\Delta R^2$	<i>B</i>
<b>STEP 1</b>	.045	
Narcissism		.21*
<b>STEP 2</b>	.112	
Extraversion		.03
Agreeableness		.17
Conscientiousness		-.00
Emotional stability		.33
Openness experience		.02
Total		0.43

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 4.

*Independent Sample t-Test indicating differences in Young Men and Women (N = 100)*

Variables	Men		Women		<i>T</i>	<i>P</i>	95 % CL		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Narcissism	30.10	17.50	20.34	10.20	3.40	.00	4.07	15.44	0.68
Extraversion	27.76	23.82	39.84	66.08	-1.21	.22	-31.79	7.63	0.24
Agreeableness	27.00	43.79	55.76	87.84	-2.07	.04	-56.43	-1.08	0.41
Conscientiousness	30.44	33.80	35.46	32.37	-.75	.45	-18.15	8.11	0.15
Emotional stability	26.28	27.89	35.00	30.54	-1.49	.13	-20.33	2.89	0.29
Openness experience	21.58	20.24	26.44	20.15	-1.20	.23	-12.87	3.15	0.24
Conspicuous consumption	87.84	13.21	78.04	20.90	2.80	.00	2.84	16.75	0.56

Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ;

CI = Confidence Interval; LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit; M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation

In Table no.4 the result showed significant difference in narcissism and conspicuous consumption whereas only one personality trait showed significant differences among males and females i.e. Agreeableness. Results indicate that the hypothesis was partially supported.

#### 4. Discussion

The study plans to discover the relationship between Narcissism, personality traits and conspicuous consumption of brands in youth. The study in particular aimed to explore the relationship between these three variables. Findings deduced are discussed in this chapter in

the light of existing literature. These discoveries proposed that there is a relationship between narcissism and conspicuous consumption and there is a partial relationship between personality traits, narcissism and conspicuous consumption.

First hypothesis was that there is likely to be a positive relationship between narcissism and conspicuous consumption of brands. From the findings it is revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between narcissism and conspicuous consumption. These findings show consistency with the previous literature, there was a correlational study done by Ushakova (2017) to explore the phenomenon of conspicuous consumption from a totally new perspective. The aim of the research was to examine the interdependence between narcissism and conspicuous consumption and the results proved the strongest relationship between narcissism and conspicuous consumption.

Second hypothesis was also consistent with the previous literature i.e. narcissism is a significant predictor of conspicuous consumption. In the previous literature a research done by Pilch & Górnik-Durose (2017) showed that narcissism is reflected in conspicuous consumption. It was examined relationships of both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism with consumption preferences. The results showed that the two types of narcissism are equally associated with a tendency to conspicuous consumption. The results suggested that not only grandiose, but also vulnerable narcissists may be prone to excessive consumption.

Third hypothesis was that there are gender differences in narcissism, personality traits and conspicuous consumption of brands. Results revealed significant gender differences in narcissism, personality traits and conspicuous consumption. These results are supported by previous literature like there is a study conducted by Mumtaz, Zafar and Kausar (2016) in which it was investigated that there is relationship in narcissistic tendencies, conspicuous consumption on brands. Results showed that Women had higher level of narcissistic tendencies and tendency to consume on brands.

Hypothesis with personality traits as a predictor of conspicuous consumption and association with narcissism and conspicuous consumption were partially supported as few traits showed partial association with conspicuous consumption but no prediction was indicated in the results. The rejection of these hypothesis can be attributed to the fact that narcissist do not like to highlight their narcissistic tendencies openly so they did not report their exact feeling which produced inconsistent research with previous literature.

#### *4.1 Conclusion and Implications*

Social psychology provides a great deal of explanation for conspicuous consumption based mainly on Social psychology theories. On the whole results calculated, supported our hypotheses that narcissism is positively related to conspicuous consumption and is a significant positive predictor of conspicuous consumption. And three personality traits had a significant negative relationship with narcissism whereas, one personality trait had significant positive relationship with conspicuous consumption. The study also highlighted gender differences in narcissism, personality traits and conspicuous consumption. The study will assist young men and women in understanding the narcissism related to conspicuous consumption of brands and then dealing with them. It will can help the people to learn the role of personality traits in narcissism and conspicuous consumption in more detail. Conspicuous consumption of brands is followed by a significant amount of wastage of money on part of youth; understanding the causes, defenses used by youth who do conspicuous consumption of brands would lead the tendency to consume lessen.

#### *4.2 Limitations and Suggestions*

The correlational nature of this study precludes making any casual statements. Longitudinal study should be concluded to find the cause and effect relationship among the variables. The

relationship of conspicuous consumption should be assessed with different variables. Only young men and women were included as their shopping habits and narcissistic demands are comparatively tougher than older adults. The study should be conducted with older adults as well and investigate the differences in the relation to the variables under study. Young men and women from private institutes were embraced in a single group. To assess the effect of narcissism and personality traits in conspicuous consumption of brands, they can be studied together. To increase the reliability of the scale sample size could be increased.

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