

Status, Self-Worth, and Luxury Consumption: The Mediating Role of Self-Esteem Among Malaysia's T20 Consumers

Nurfareena Zahari^{1*}, Muhammad Asyraf Mohd Kassim¹, Wan Mashumi Wan Mustafa¹, Muhammad Safizal Abdullah¹

¹Faculty of Business and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Padang Besar, Perlis

*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800266>

Received: 19 August 2026; Accepted: 24 August 2026; Published: 01 September 2026

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of status conformity on conspicuous consumption behaviour among Malaysia's T20 consumers, with self-esteem examined as a mediating factor. Drawing on Veblen's Conspicuous Consumption Theory and Maslow's Motivational Theory, the research explores how external social pressures and internal psychological drivers interact to shape luxury consumption. A survey of 180 respondents, selected through stratified multi-stage sampling across Selangor, WP Kuala Lumpur, and WP Putrajaya, was conducted at authorised service centres of premium car brands. Data analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) reveals that status conformity significantly influences both conspicuous consumption behaviour and self-esteem, while self-esteem itself significantly drives conspicuous consumption. Mediation analysis further indicates that self-esteem partially mediates the relationship between status conformity and conspicuous consumption. The demographic profile shows that middle-aged, highly educated professionals and business owners dominate luxury consumption within the T20 group. These findings underscore the dual role of external conformity pressures and internal self-esteem mechanisms in driving conspicuous consumption. The study contributes to theoretical advancement by integrating socio-psychological perspectives and provides practical implications for luxury marketers and policymakers, highlighting the need for strategies that recognise both social belonging and self-image reinforcement in shaping affluent consumer behaviour.

Keywords: Status Conformity, Self-Esteem, Conspicuous Consumption, T20 Consumers, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Conspicuous consumption has become a defining characteristic of modern consumer behaviour, especially among affluent groups. This behaviour involves purchasing goods and services not solely for their utility, but as a means of signalling status, wealth, and prestige to others (Veblen, 2017). In Malaysia, the growing affluence of the T20 income group has led to a surge in demand for luxury products, including premium vehicles, branded fashion, and exclusive lifestyle experiences. For these consumers, the act of consumption serves as a tool for status and symbolic communication. As material goods increasingly serve as expressions of self-worth and societal value, understanding the underlying motivations of such consumption becomes vital.

One key factor influencing conspicuous consumption is the desire for status conformity. Status conformity refers to the tendency of individuals to align their consumption choices with those of their desired social groups or reference groups (Assimos et al., 2019). Consumers in collectivist cultures, such as Malaysia, may feel compelled to conform to perceived status norms to gain social approval or avoid criticism (Wai & Osman, 2019; Ting et al., 2018). For T20 consumers, status conformity may manifest through the purchase of goods that are associated with success or social superiority. This need for alignment with societal expectations may not only influence consumer decisions but also shape internal perceptions of self-worth, especially when external validation is derived from owning status-related products.

Another essential aspect to consider is self-esteem, which reflects an individual's overall evaluation of their own value (Leonard et al., 1995). Research has shown that self-esteem can be influenced by social comparisons and material possessions, particularly when individuals seek validation through external symbols of success (Lee et al., 2020). In this context, the consumption of luxury goods like premium vehicles may serve to enhance self-esteem, especially when such consumption aligns with the expectations of one's reference group. Thus, self-esteem may play a mediating role, connecting the influence of status conformity with the tendency to engage in conspicuous consumption behaviour.

This study aims to explore the relationship between status conformity and conspicuous consumption among Malaysia's T20 consumer group, with a specific focus on self-esteem as a mediating variable. While prior studies have investigated the roles of factors such as brand consciousness and peer influence, limited research has examined how status conformity, when internalised, may shape self-perception and drive conspicuous consumption behaviour (Wai & Osman, 2019; Ting et al, 2018). By narrowing the focus to these three core variables, which are status conformity, self-esteem, and conspicuous consumption behaviour, this study intends to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of luxury consumption within Malaysia's high-income demographic.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To address the gaps identified in the literature, this study formulates the following research objectives based on the hypotheses:

- To examine the significant effect of status conformity on conspicuous consumption behaviour.
- To examine the significant effect of status conformity on self-esteem.
- To examine the significant effect of self-esteem on conspicuous consumption behaviour.
- To determine the mediation effect of self-esteem on the relationship between status conformity and conspicuous consumption behaviour.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Underpinning and Supporting Theories

This study utilises Veblen's Conspicuous Consumption Theory as the underpinning theory, and Maslow's Motivational Theory as a supporting theory.

Veblen's Conspicuous Consumption Theory

Veblen's Conspicuous Consumption Theory highlights how individuals engage in consumption not merely for utility but to display wealth and gain social recognition, driven largely by status conformity. According to Veblen (2017), people emulate the consumption patterns of those in higher social strata to signal belonging and acceptance within desirable social groups. This emulation is motivated by a desire to conform to the norms and expectations of one's reference group, using visible possessions as markers of success and social standing (Topcu, 2018). In doing so, individuals seek to align themselves with perceived elite circles, projecting an image of affluence and prestige to gain approval and elevate their status within society.

Maslow's Motivational Theory

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides a psychological foundation for understanding conspicuous consumption, particularly through the lens of esteem needs. Once basic and social needs are fulfilled, individuals seek self-worth through both external validation (e.g., respect, recognition, and status) and internal self-respect (Maslow & Lewis, 1987; Mustofa, 2022). Conspicuous consumption becomes a mechanism for fulfilling these esteem needs, especially the lower level, by signalling success and gaining admiration from others (Veblen, 2017). This

perspective complements Veblen's theory, suggesting that luxury consumption is not merely a display of wealth but also a way to achieve psychological satisfaction through perceived social value and self-enhancement.

Integration of Veblen's Conspicuous Consumption Theory and Maslow's Motivational Theory

Thorstein Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption offers a foundational lens through which to understand the socio-economic motivations behind luxury consumption. Veblen (2017) emphasised that individuals, particularly those in higher income groups, engage in the public display of wealth through the acquisition of visible goods and services to signal status and superiority. This behaviour is not rooted in the functional value of the items, but in their symbolic power to communicate one's place in the social hierarchy (Topcu, 2018). According to Veblen, such behaviour stems from a desire to emulate the consumption patterns of those perceived to be in a higher social class. In doing so, individuals conform to social expectations and norms that define success and prestige through material symbols, especially in societies where status is closely tied to visible wealth.

Complementing this perspective, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides psychological insight into why individuals are motivated to display wealth through consumption. After fulfilling physiological, safety, and social needs, individuals are driven by esteem need, which is the desire for recognition, respect, and self-worth (Maslow & Lewis, 1987; Mustofa, 2022). Maslow categorises esteem into two types: lower-level esteem, which relates to external validation such as status and recognition, and higher-level esteem, associated with self-respect, competence, and autonomy (Oh, 2021). Conspicuous consumption, therefore, can serve as a means of fulfilling the lower level of esteem needs, where individuals seek to gain acceptance and admiration from others by aligning their lifestyle with aspirational social standards (Navy, 2020).

When viewed together, Veblen's and Maslow's theories offer a comprehensive understanding of conspicuous consumption behaviour, especially among affluent consumers. Veblen's concept of status conformity explains the external social forces that drive individuals to consume luxury goods, while Maslow's framework elucidates the internal psychological motives, especially esteem-related needs, that make such consumption satisfying. Luxury goods serve as tools not only for signalling group membership and status but also for enhancing one's self-image and sense of self-worth (Veblen, 2017; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Therefore, the integration of these theories reveals how status conformity and esteem need inadvertently influence conspicuous consumption, where individuals seek to conform to societal ideals to gain respect from others while reinforcing their self-esteem through the ownership and display of luxury goods.

Status Conformity

Status conformity refers to the tendency of individuals to align their consumption with the norms and expectations of their desired social or reference groups, particularly through the acquisition of luxury goods (Balabanis & Stathopoulou, 2021; Assimos et al., 2019). In the context of conspicuous consumption, status conformity acts as a key driver, as individuals seek to signal social status, sophistication, and success by visibly consuming high-end products (Veblen, 2017; Siepmann et al., 2022). This desire is often reinforced through symbolic status goods, such as premium cars or designer brands, which act as tangible indicators of social rank (Sahin & Nasir, 2021; Ting et al., 2018). For some consumers, especially in collectivist cultures, conformity to group consumption norms becomes a form of social validation and identity (Topcu, 2018). Phenomena like the bandwagon effect further illustrate how brand popularity enhances perceived social belonging, motivating individuals to conform through visible consumption of widely recognised luxury goods (Bahri-Ammari et al., 2020; Niesiobędzka, 2018).

At the psychological level, status conformity is closely linked to self-esteem, as consumers often seek social approval and group acceptance to enhance their self-worth (Bicchieri & Dimant, 2022; Oh, 2021). Individuals derive esteem both from external perceptions and from projecting an ideal self-image, often through the display of symbolic material goods (Kessous & Valette-Florence, 2019; Klabi, 2020). Ultimately, status conformity shapes not just what consumers decide to purchase but the reason behind their purchase to align with social norms, boost self-esteem, and express a socially validated identity.

Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour

Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour refers to the act of acquiring goods or services primarily to display social status, rather than for their functional use (Veblen, 2017; Sahin & Nasir, 2021). Veblen's theory of the leisure class posits that individuals engage in conspicuous consumption to project wealth and superiority, often emulating the lifestyles of higher-status groups to gain social acceptance, a phenomenon known as status conformity (Assimos et al., 2019; Topcu, 2018). In this context, consumption becomes a social signal, reflecting not only one's economic status but also their desire to belong to a perceived elite circle.

In addition to external pressures, self-esteem can significantly influence conspicuous consumption behaviour. Drawing from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, individuals often pursue social recognition and self-worth through the acquisition of luxury goods (Maslow & Lewis, 1987; Mustofa, 2022). The act of conforming to elite consumption norms may enhance self-esteem by reinforcing one's image of success and social value (Oh, 2021; Klabi, 2020). For Malaysia's T20 consumer group, whose spending power enables frequent engagement in such behaviours, conspicuous consumption behaviour becomes both a reflection of status conformity and a pathway to self-esteem enhancement.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of their self-worth or self-concept (Leonard et al., 1995; Rosenberg, 1965; Fairlamb, 2022). In consumer research, self-esteem plays a significant role in shaping purchasing behaviour, as individuals often use products to construct and reinforce their self-image (Grover, 2021; Hart et al., 2021). Acquiring material goods, especially luxury items, can boost self-esteem by aligning self-perception with an idealised self-concept, particularly through self-gifting or symbolic consumption (Lee et al., 2020; Park, 2018). This behaviour reflects a desire to maintain or elevate one's self-worth, further establishing SE as a key factor in consumer decision-making and motivation.

More specifically, social self-esteem, which is how individuals perceive their value and competence in social interactions, has been closely linked to conspicuous consumption. Research indicates that individuals with low social self-esteem are more likely to engage in status-driven purchases as a means of compensating for feelings of social exclusion or a perceived low social standing (Arslan, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2020). Luxury goods provide symbolic means of gaining acceptance, projecting confidence, and enhancing perceived status (Liang et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2022).

The Relationship between Status Conformity, Self-Esteem, and Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour

The interaction between 'Status Conformity', 'Self-Esteem', and 'Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour' can be explained through Veblen's (1899) Conspicuous Consumption Theory and Maslow's (1943) Motivational Theory. Veblen's theory posits that individuals engage in visible consumption to signal wealth, prestige, and social standing. In this context, status conformity refers to the alignment of one's consumption patterns with the norms and expectations of a desired social group, enabling individuals to display socially valued symbols that affirm their membership and standing within that group. This public display not only fulfils social expectations but also reinforces self-esteem by providing external validation and recognition.

Maslow's Motivational Theory further clarifies the psychological underpinnings of this relationship, particularly through the esteem needs. Self-esteem serves as a psychological mechanism that mediates this relationship, where individuals motivated by the desire for validation, recognition, and a positive self-image may pursue conspicuous consumption as a way to satisfy this need. This study contributes to the literature by exploring these dynamics in the specific context of premium vehicle purchase in Malaysia, an area that has not been extensively studied.

Research Gaps

Despite the growing body of literature on 'Status Conformity', 'Self-Esteem', and 'Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour', there remain significant gaps in understanding these dynamics. While some studies have explored

the influence of other factors, such as brand consciousness and peer influence on conspicuous consumption behaviour, there is limited research focusing specifically on how status conformity influences conspicuous consumption behaviour in Malaysia. Additionally, the role of self-esteem as a mediator between status conformity and conspicuous consumption behaviour is underexplored, particularly in the context of luxury purchase by the T20 consumer group. This study addresses these gaps by providing empirical evidence on the relationships between these variables, offering new insights and understanding into the T20 consumer group's luxury purchase behaviour.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the relationships between status conformity, self-esteem, and conspicuous consumption behaviour among the T20 consumer group in Malaysia. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. The quantitative approach enables the systematic examination of hypothesised relationships and provides a robust framework for statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014).

Sample and Data Collection

The target population for this study comprises 775,764 T20 households in the Central Region of Peninsular Malaysia, which includes Selangor (539,699 households), WP Kuala Lumpur (223,014 households), and WP Putrajaya (13,051 households) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022). Based on G*Power analysis, a minimum of 153 participants was determined to be necessary for the study. However, to ensure a more robust sample, a total of 180 respondents were targeted using stratified sampling to ensure representativeness across the three states.

The states served as the criteria for stratification, with the number of participants from each state calculated proportionally to their respective household populations. As shown in Table 1, the stratified sampling approach resulted in 106 participants from Selangor, 44 from WP Kuala Lumpur, and 3 from WP Putrajaya.

Table 1. Stratification of Respondents

Strata	No. of Estimated Population	Proportionate Ratio*	Minimum Respondents for Each Strata	Actual Respondents for Each Strata
Selangor	539,699	$539,699 / 775,764$	~106	122
WP Kuala Lumpur	223,014	$223,014 / 775,764$	~44	51
WP Putrajaya	13,051	$13,051 / 775,764$	~3	7
Total	775,764	1.0	153	180

This study adopted a multi-stage sampling approach to address the wide geographical coverage across Selangor, WP Kuala Lumpur, and WP Putrajaya, combining probability and non-probability methods to achieve both representativeness and feasibility. In the first stage, a comprehensive list of authorised service centres for the top five premium car brands, which are Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Volvo, Lexus, and Porsche, was compiled using official brand websites, yielding 15, 11, 6, 3, and 2 centres respectively. Simple random sampling via a ballot box method was then employed to select 10 service centres for Mercedes-Benz and BMW, 4 for Volvo, 2 for Lexus, and 1 for Porsche. In the second stage, data collection at each selected service centre involved convenience sampling, recruiting customers per location after obtaining permission from centre managers. This strategy allowed for unbiased selection of locations while ensuring practical and efficient access to participants.

Measurement Instruments

The questionnaire consisted of three sections: demographic information, constructs measuring ‘Status Conformity’, ‘Self-Esteem’, and ‘Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour’. Each construct was measured using a Likert scale, with items adapted from existing validated scales in the literature. The measurements of variables in this study are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Research Instruments

Constructs	Sources	Number of Items
Status Conformity	Chung & Fischer (2001)	8
Self-Esteem	Truong & Mccoll (2011)	10
Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour	Chaudhuri et al. (2011)	12

Status Conformity is measured using an 8-item scale adapted from Chung and Fischer (2001), which assesses the extent to which individuals align their consumption choices with the expectations and preferences of their social group. Self-Esteem is evaluated through a 10-item scale adapted from Truong and McColl (2011), focusing on individuals’ overall self-worth and self-perception concerning their social identity. Finally, Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour is assessed using a 12-item scale adapted from Chaudhuri et al. (2011), which examines the tendency to purchase and own a premium vehicle as a means of signalling wealth, prestige, and social status.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to test the hypothesised relationships and the mediating effect of self-esteem. PLS-SEM is suitable for this study due to its ability to handle complex models and its robustness with smaller sample sizes (Hair et al., 2019). PLS-SEM was used to assess the structural model (inner model) and measurement model (outer model).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Analysis

The age distribution of the T20 consumers in Table 3 shows a strong representation of individuals in the middle adulthood stage. The largest age group is the 35–44 years category, which constitutes 40% of the sample. This suggests that premium consumption, particularly in luxury vehicles, is most prominent among individuals in their peak earning years, who are likely to have greater financial stability. The next largest group, aged 25–34 years, makes up 30% of the respondents, indicating that younger professionals in the T20 bracket are also actively engaging in conspicuous consumption as a means of establishing social identity and signalling success. Meanwhile, the 45–54-year-old group represents 20% of the sample, reflecting a continued interest in luxury consumption among mature professionals. In contrast, only 10% of respondents are 55 years and above, suggesting that older individuals may place less emphasis on visible consumption compared to younger cohorts.

Table 3. Demographic Findings

Demographic Variables	Category	Frequency (n = 180)	Percentage (%)
Age	25–34 years	54	30%
	35–44 years	72	40%

	45–54 years	36	20%
	55 years and above	18	10%
Education Level	Bachelor’s Degree	90	50%
	Postgraduate Degree	54	30%
	Diploma/Technical	27	15%
	High School	9	5%
Occupation	Professionals/Managers	81	45%
	Business Owners	54	30%
	Senior Executives	27	15%
	Others	18	10%
Monthly Household Income	RM15,000–RM20,000	72	40%
	RM20,001–RM25,000	54	30%
	RM25,001–RM30,000	36	20%
	Above RM30,000	18	10%

The education profile shows that the majority of T20 consumers possess higher education qualifications, with 50% holding a Bachelor’s degree and 30% holding postgraduate degrees. This indicates that luxury consumption is strongly associated with individuals who have attained advanced education and are likely to occupy higher-status occupations. A smaller proportion of respondents (15%) have Diplomas or Technical Certificates, while only 5% have a high school education, underscoring the role of educational attainment in accessing higher income brackets and enabling conspicuous consumption.

The occupational distribution further reinforces this trend, with 45% of respondents working as professionals or managers, and another 30% identifying as business owners. Senior executives account for 15% of the sample, while 10% fall under the “others” category, reflecting a smaller group engaged in varied high-income occupations. These findings suggest that conspicuous consumption is closely linked to employment positions that provide both disposable income and opportunities for social signalling.

In terms of household income, 40% of respondents fall within the RM15,000–RM20,000 range, indicating that a significant share of T20 consumers are at the entry point of the top income bracket. Another 30% earn between RM20,001–RM25,000, while 20% report incomes between RM25,001–RM30,000. Only 10% of the respondents have household incomes exceeding RM30,000, highlighting that while the T20 group is affluent, the majority are concentrated in the lower to mid-tier levels of the top income segment.

Overall, the demographic profile of the T20 consumers reveals that younger and middle-aged, highly educated professionals and business owners dominate conspicuous consumption behaviour in Malaysia. Their economic resources, coupled with the desire to signal success, underpin the acquisition of luxury goods, particularly premium vehicles, as symbols of prestige and social identity.

Assessment of Measurement Model

The assessment of the measurement model involved evaluating the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the constructs. This step is crucial to ensure that the constructs are accurately measured

by their respective indicators. The outer loadings of the indicators were examined to assess indicator reliability. As shown in Table 4, all outer loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that the indicators are reliable and strongly correlated with their respective constructs (Hair et al., 2019). For example, the outer loadings for the indicators of ‘Status Conformity’ ranged from 0.77 to 0.85, demonstrating that these items reliably measure the construct. Similarly, ‘Self-Esteem’ and ‘Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour’ also exhibited strong outer loadings, supporting the robustness of the measurement model.

Table 4. Outer Loadings

Indicator	Status Conformity	Self-Esteem	Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour
SC1	0.802		
SC2	0.784		
SC3	0.761		
SC4	0.773		
SC5	0.841		
SC6	0.815		
SC7	0.786		
SC8	0.824		
SE1		0.813	
SE2		0.801	
SE3		0.825	
SE4		0.784	
SE5		0.798	
SE6		0.812	
SE7		0.846	
SE8		0.829	
SE9		0.774	
SE10		0.832	
CCB1			0.814
CCB2			0.842
CCB3			0.805
CCB4			0.837
CCB5			0.821
CCB6			0.833

CCB7			0.802
CCB8			0.819
CCB9			0.848
CCB10			0.829
CCB11			0.812
CCB12			0.845

Notes: Indicators with loadings below 0.70 were deleted.

Composite reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were assessed to evaluate the internal consistency and convergent validity of the constructs. As presented in Table 5, the composite reliability values for all constructs exceeded the threshold of 0.70, indicating high internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019). Specifically, ‘Status Conformity’ had a composite reliability of 0.902, while ‘Self-Esteem’ and ‘Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour’ had values of 0.915 and 0.928, respectively. The AVE values for all constructs were above 0.50, indicating that the constructs captured a sufficient amount of variance from their indicators (Hair et al., 2019). These results confirm the convergent validity of the measurement model.

Table 5. Composite Reliability and AVE

Constructs	Composite Reliability	AVE
Status Conformity (8 items)	0.902	0.658
Self-Esteem (10 items)	0.915	0.672
Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour (12 items)	0.928	0.689

Discriminant validity was assessed using two criteria: the Fornell and Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The Fornell and Larcker criterion compares the square root of the AVE for each construct with the correlations between constructs. As shown in Table 6, the square root of the AVE for each construct is greater than its correlations with other constructs. For example, the AVE square root for ‘Status Conformity’ (0.811) is higher than its correlations with ‘Self-Esteem’ (0.571) and ‘Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour’ (0.603). This indicates that each construct shares more variance with its indicators than with other constructs, confirming discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 6. Fornell and Larcker Criterion

Constructs	Status Conformity	Self-Esteem	Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour
Status Conformity	0.811		
Self-Esteem	0.571	0.820	
Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour	0.603	0.589	0.830

The HTMT ratio was also used to assess discriminant validity. As indicated in Table 7, all HTMT values are below the threshold of 0.85, further confirming that the constructs are distinct from one another (Henseler et al., 2015). The highest HTMT value observed was 0.72 between ‘Self-Esteem’ and ‘Conspicuous Consumption

Behaviour', which is well within the acceptable range. These findings reinforce the discriminant validity of the measurement model.

Table 7. HTMT Ratio

Constructs	HTMT
Status Conformity & Self-Esteem	0.681
Status Conformity & Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour	0.702
Self-Esteem & Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour	0.720

Assessment of Structural Model

The structural model was evaluated to examine the relationships between the constructs and to test the hypotheses. This assessment includes the evaluation of multicollinearity, path coefficients, indirect effects, and the model's explanatory and predictive power. Multicollinearity was assessed by examining the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for the constructs. As presented in Table 8, all VIF values are below the threshold of 5, indicating that multicollinearity is not a concern in this model (Hair et al., 2019). For example, the VIF values for Status Conformity, Self-Esteem, and Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour are 1.38, 1.41, and 1.44, respectively. These results suggest that the constructs are not excessively correlated and that the structural model can be reliably interpreted.

Table 8. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

Constructs	VIF
Status Conformity	1.383
Self-Esteem	1.412
Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour	1.436

The path coefficients were analysed to test the hypothesised relationships between the constructs. As shown in Table 9, all path coefficients are positive and significant at the $p < 0.01$ level. Specifically, the relationship between Status Conformity and Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour is significant (path coefficient = 0.457, t -value = 7.545), indicating that higher conformity to social status is associated with greater conspicuous consumption. Similarly, Status Conformity has a significant positive effect on Self-Esteem (path coefficient = 0.519, t -value = 8.230), and Self-Esteem significantly influences Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour (path coefficient = 0.481, t -value = 7.119).

Table 9. Path Coefficients

Path	Coefficient	t-value	p-value
Status Conformity → Conspicuous Consumption	0.457	7.545	<0.001
Status Conformity → Self-Esteem	0.519	8.230	<0.001
Self-Esteem → Conspicuous Consumption	0.481	7.119	<0.001

These findings support the proposed hypotheses and demonstrate the critical role of both status conformity and self-esteem in influencing conspicuous consumption behaviour among T20 consumers. The path coefficients for the structural model are illustrated in Figure 1.

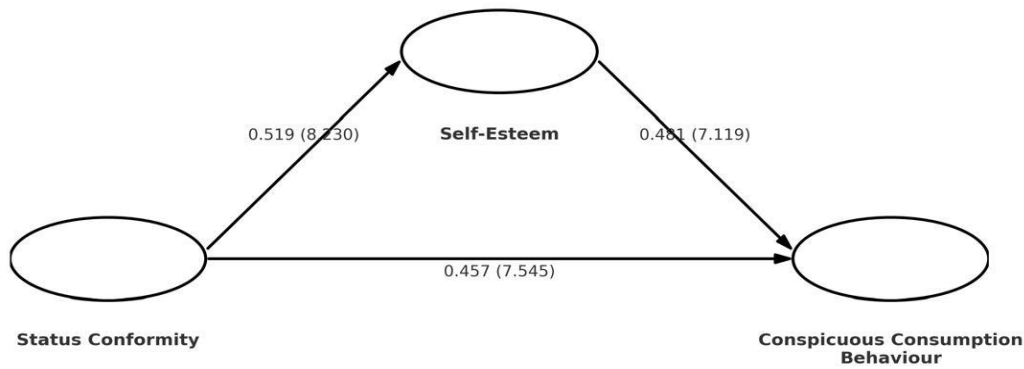


Figure 1. Structural Model

The indirect effect of Status Conformity on Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour through Self-Esteem was also examined. As indicated in Table 10, the indirect effect is significant (coefficient = 0.243, t-value = 6.545, $p < 0.001$), confirming that self-esteem mediates the relationship. This finding highlights the importance of psychological mechanisms, such as self-esteem, in explaining how external social conformity pressures shape luxury consumption practices.

Table 10. Indirect Effect

Indirect Path	Coefficient	t-value	p-value
Status Conformity → Self-Esteem → Conspicuous Consumption	0.243	6.545	<0.001

The explanatory power of the model was assessed using R^2 and f^2 values. As presented in Table 11, the R^2 value for Self-Esteem is 0.561, indicating that status conformity explains 56.1% of the variance in self-esteem. The R^2 value for Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour is 0.691, suggesting that status conformity and self-esteem together explain 69.1% of the variance in conspicuous consumption. The f^2 values indicate large effect sizes, with Status Conformity having an f^2 of 0.341 on Self-Esteem and 0.332 on Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour. These results demonstrate the substantial impact of status conformity and self-esteem on luxury consumption.

Table 11. Coefficient of Determination and Effect Size

Constructs	R^2	f^2
Self-Esteem	0.561	0.341
Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour	0.691	0.332

Predictive relevance was assessed using Q^2 values, as shown in Table 12. The Q^2 values for Self-Esteem (0.179) and Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour (0.372) are both above zero, indicating that the model has good predictive relevance. This means that the model can accurately predict the outcomes of the constructs, reinforcing the robustness of the findings.

Table 12. Predictive Relevance

Constructs	Q^2
Self-Esteem	0.179
Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour	0.372

Hypothesis Testing

Research Objective 1: To examine the significant effect of status conformity on conspicuous consumption behaviour among T20 consumers in Malaysia

H1: Status conformity significantly influences conspicuous consumption behaviour.

The analysis shows a significant positive relationship between status conformity and conspicuous consumption behaviour (path coefficient = 0.457, $p < 0.01$). This finding suggests that as the desire for status conformity increases, consumers are more likely to engage in conspicuous consumption behaviour. Within the T20 consumer group, this tendency is particularly evident, as these individuals often seek to signal prestige and align with prevailing social standards through the ownership of premium vehicles. This finding reinforces Veblen's (2017) theory of conspicuous consumption, which posits that individuals consume luxury goods not only for their utility but also as a visible display of social standing.

Research Objective 2: To examine the significant effect of status conformity on self-esteem among T20 consumers in Malaysia

H2: Status conformity significantly influences self-esteem.

The results indicate a significant positive relationship between status conformity and self-esteem (path coefficient = 0.519, $p < 0.01$). This finding suggests that as the tendency to conform to social status increases, consumers experience a higher sense of self-esteem. In the context of T20 consumers, aligning with social standards and expectations through visible consumption may enhance feelings of self-worth and social validation. This outcome aligns with the view that individuals often derive their self-esteem from external recognition and the reinforcement of social identity through status-oriented consumption (Balabanis & Stathopoulou, 2021).

Research Objective 3: To examine the significant effect of self-esteem on conspicuous consumption behaviour among T20 consumers in Malaysia

H3: Self-esteem significantly influences conspicuous consumption behaviour.

The analysis demonstrates a significant positive relationship between self-esteem and conspicuous consumption behaviour (path coefficient = 0.481, $p < 0.01$). This finding suggests that higher levels of self-esteem are associated with a stronger tendency to engage in conspicuous consumption. For T20 consumers, possessing premium vehicles may serve as a means of affirming self-worth and projecting a positive self-image to others. This supports the argument that self-esteem acts as a motivational factor in driving consumption decisions, where individuals use visible possessions to reinforce personal identity and gain social recognition (Nguyen et al., 2020; Arslan, 2019).

Research Objective 4: To determine the mediation effect of self-esteem on the relationship between status conformity and conspicuous consumption behaviour

H4: Self-esteem mediates the relationship between status conformity and conspicuous consumption behaviour.

The mediation analysis reveals that self-esteem partially mediates the relationship between status conformity and conspicuous consumption behaviour (indirect effect = 0.243, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that status conformity not only has a direct influence on conspicuous consumption but also operates indirectly by enhancing individuals' self-esteem, which in turn motivates them to engage in conspicuous consumption. Among T20 consumers, conformity to social status norms may elevate self-esteem by reinforcing feelings of social recognition and personal worth, thereby strengthening their inclination toward visible consumption of premium goods. This finding aligns with the notion that self-esteem serves as a psychological mechanism linking social pressures to consumer behaviour (Wang et al., 2022)

Cultural Context of the Findings

The findings should also be interpreted within Malaysia's socio-cultural context. As Malaysia is generally characterised by relatively collectivist social orientations, consumption decisions may be influenced not only by individual preferences but also by expectations, approval, and comparisons within relevant social groups. In such a context, visible luxury products such as premium vehicles can function as socially recognisable symbols of achievement, success, and group standing. This cultural orientation may help explain the significant positive relationship observed between status conformity and conspicuous consumption behaviour, as T20 consumers may use luxury consumption partly to align themselves with socially valued standards of success.

Collectivist tendencies may also provide additional context for the mediating role of self-esteem. When social recognition and group acceptance contribute to an individual's evaluation of self-worth, conformity to socially recognised consumption standards may reinforce feelings of achievement and social validation. Consequently, self-esteem may represent an important psychological mechanism through which external status expectations are translated into conspicuous consumption behaviour. However, collectivism was not directly measured in the present study; therefore, this cultural interpretation should be regarded as contextual rather than as an empirically tested effect. Future research could explicitly examine cultural orientation as a moderator to determine whether the relationships identified in this study vary according to consumers' levels of collectivism or individualism.

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on conspicuous consumption by integrating status conformity and self-esteem into a single explanatory framework. While previous research has examined brand consciousness, peer influence, and materialism, this study highlights how status conformity directly shapes conspicuous consumption behaviour and, at the same time, operates indirectly through self-esteem. The findings extend Veblen's Conspicuous Consumption Theory by showing that the act of luxury consumption among Malaysia's T20 consumers is not only motivated by a desire to signal social standing but is also reinforced by enhanced feelings of self-worth.

In addition, the study broadens the application of Maslow's Motivational Theory, particularly the esteem needs dimension, by empirically demonstrating that luxury consumption satisfies both external validation and internal self-perception. By positioning self-esteem as a mediating psychological mechanism, this research provides a more nuanced understanding of how social conformity pressures interact with internal drivers to shape consumer behaviour.

Future theoretical work should expand this framework by exploring other potential mediators, such as social identity, material values, or cultural orientation, which may further clarify how social norms influence luxury consumption in collectivist contexts. Moreover, longitudinal studies could strengthen the causal understanding of how conformity and self-esteem evolve alongside changing social and economic conditions.

Practical Implications

The findings provide several actionable implications for luxury brand managers operating in Malaysia and other emerging Southeast Asian markets. First, managers should recognise that luxury consumption may simultaneously fulfil social-signalling and self-enhancement functions. Rather than positioning luxury products exclusively as symbols of superiority, wealth, or comparison with others, marketing communications can combine status appeal with narratives of personal achievement, craftsmanship, quality, professional accomplishment, and meaningful self-expression. For premium automotive brands, for example, campaigns could portray vehicle ownership as recognition of personal milestones or achievement while retaining the exclusivity and prestige traditionally associated with luxury brands.

Second, luxury brands can develop customer experiences that strengthen consumers' sense of belonging without encouraging excessive social comparison. Exclusive owner communities, networking events, personalised

services, and loyalty programmes can provide recognition and social connection while emphasising shared interests and individual accomplishment. This approach may be particularly relevant in emerging Southeast Asian markets where social relationships and group affiliation can play an important role in consumer decision-making.

Third, the significant mediating role of self-esteem suggests that managers should carefully consider the psychological messages embedded in status-oriented marketing. Campaigns that imply that consumers are inadequate, unsuccessful, or socially inferior without ownership of a luxury product may intensify unhealthy dependence on material possessions for external validation. An ethically balanced strategy would therefore preserve the aspirational qualities of luxury branding while framing the product as an expression or celebration of existing achievement rather than as a prerequisite for personal worth or social acceptance.

Finally, luxury brands could integrate socially responsible forms of prestige into their positioning strategies. Sustainability initiatives, community contributions, responsible innovation, and meaningful brand experiences can provide alternative sources of distinction beyond purely material displays of wealth. Such positioning may enable luxury brands to maintain exclusivity and status appeal while associating prestige with personal values, responsible achievement, and positive social contribution. These strategies may be particularly valuable for luxury brands seeking long-term relationships with affluent consumers across culturally diverse Southeast Asian markets.

LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSION

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, this study employed a cross-sectional research design in which data on status conformity, self-esteem, and conspicuous consumption behaviour were collected at a single point in time. Although the PLS-SEM results demonstrate significant relationships among the constructs, the cross-sectional design does not establish temporal ordering or causality. Therefore, the observed relationships should be interpreted as associations consistent with the proposed theoretical framework rather than definitive evidence of causal effects. Future studies should employ longitudinal designs that measure consumers at multiple points in time to examine whether changes in status conformity are followed by changes in self-esteem and subsequent conspicuous consumption behaviour.

Second, the study relied on self-reported questionnaire responses, which may be affected by social desirability, recall error, and common method bias, particularly because status-oriented consumption and self-esteem involve personally and socially sensitive evaluations. Future research could complement survey responses with qualitative interviews to obtain deeper insights into how consumers interpret status, social approval, and self-worth in their luxury purchasing decisions. Researchers could also use behavioural tracking, transaction histories, actual purchase records, or observed ownership behaviour to compare stated motivations with actual consumption patterns. Combining self-reported measures with longitudinal and behavioural evidence would provide stronger validation of the relationships identified in the present study and improve understanding of how status conformity and self-esteem influence luxury consumption over time.

Third, the study focused exclusively on T20 consumers in Malaysia's central region (Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, and Putrajaya), which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other contexts. Future research could investigate whether the identified relationships persist in diverse cultural or socio-economic settings, such as among affluent consumers in other countries with varying cultural orientations toward status and luxury consumption, or among different income groups.

Finally, although this study highlights the mediating role of self-esteem, other psychological or social mechanisms may also be at play that influence the relationship between status conformity and conspicuous consumption behaviour. Future research should investigate these additional mediators or potential moderators, such as social identity or cultural values, to develop a more comprehensive framework of conspicuous consumption behaviour.

REFERENCES

1. Arslan, G. (2019). Mediating role of the self-esteem and resilience in the association between social exclusion and life satisfaction among adolescents. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 151, 109514.
2. Assimos, T., Kargaki, M., & Papastathopoulou, P. (2019). The role of status consumption in luxury consumption behaviour: Evidence from Greece. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 51, 114–121. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.05.020>
3. Bahri-Ammari, N., Coulibaly, D., & Mimoun, M. S. B. (2020). The bandwagon luxury consumption in Tunisian case: The roles of independent and interdependent self concept. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 52, 101903.
4. Balabanis, G., & Stathopoulou, A. (2021). The price of social status desire and public self-consciousness in luxury consumption. *Journal of Business Research*, 123, 463–475. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.10.034>
5. Bicchieri, C., & Dimant, E. (2022). Nudging with care: The risks and benefits of social information. *Public choice*, 191(3), 443–464.
6. Chaudhuri, R. H., Mazumdar, S., & Ghoshal, A. (2011). Conspicuous consumption orientation: Conceptualisation, scale development and validation. *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, 10(4), 216–224.
7. Chung, E., & Fischer, E. (2001). When conspicuous consumption becomes inconspicuous: The case of the migrant Hong Kong consumers. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 18(6), 474–487.
8. Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
9. Department of Statistics Malaysia (2022). Basic Amenities Survey Report 2019. <https://ringgitplus.com/en/blog/personal-finance-news/dosm-household-income-and-expenditure-reports-2019-key-highlights.html>
10. Fairlamb, S. (2022). We need to talk about self-esteem: The effect of contingent self-worth on student achievement and well-being. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, 8(1), 45.
11. Grover, S. (2021). Self-esteem and consumer behaviour: A review and future research agenda. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 20(5), 1110–1123. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.1967>
12. Hair, J. F., Risher, J. J., Sarstedt, M., & Ringle, C. M. (2019). When to use and how to report the results of PLS-SEM. *European business review*, 31(1), 2–24.
13. Hart, W., Richardson, K., & Tortoriello, G. K. (2021). Revisiting the interactive effect of narcissism and self-esteem on responses to ego threat: Distinguishing between assertiveness and intent to harm. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(7-8), 3662–3687.
14. Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2015). A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 43(1), 115–135. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-014-0403-8>
15. Kessous, A., & Valette-Florence, P. (2019). “From Prada to Nada”: Consumers and their luxury products: A contrast between second-hand and first-hand luxury products. *Journal of Business Research*, 102, 313–327.
16. Klabi, F. (2020). To what extent do conspicuous consumption and status consumption reinforce the effect of self-image congruence on emotional brand attachment? Evidence from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Marketing Analytics*, 8(2), 99–117. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41270-020-00073-9>
17. Lee, C. K., Lee, S., & Kim, J. (2020). Luxury consumption, self-congruence, and self-esteem: Evidence from South Korea. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 32(5), 1163–1180. <https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-08-2019-0517>
18. Leonard, W. M., Lawrence, F. R., & Speers, M. A. (1995). Self-esteem and consumer behaviour: An integrative perspective. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 10(3), 567–578.
19. Liang, S., He, Y., Chang, Y., Dong, X., Zhu, D., 2018. Showing to friends or strangers? Relationship orientation influences the effect of social exclusion on conspicuous consumption. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 17 (4), 355–365.
20. Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370–396. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>
21. Maslow, A., & Lewis, K. J. (1987). Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *Salenger Incorporated*, 14(17), 987–990.

22. Mustofa, A. Z. (2022). Hierarchy of human needs: a humanistic psychology approach of Abraham Maslow. *Kawanua International Journal of Multicultural Studies*, 3(2), 30-35.
23. Navy, S. L. (2020). Theory of human motivation—Abraham Maslow. *Science education in theory and practice: An introductory guide to learning theory*, 17-28.
24. Nguyen, W., Ownsworth, T., Nicol, C., & Zimmerman, D. (2020). How I see and feel about myself: Domain-specific self-concept and self-esteem in autistic adults. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 913.
25. Niesiobędzka, M. (2018). An experimental study of the bandwagon effect in conspicuous consumption. *Current Issues in Personality Psychology*, 6(1), 26-33.
26. O'Cass, A. and McEwen, H. (2004) Exploring Consumer Status and Conspicuous Consumption. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 4, 25-39.
27. Oh, G. E. G. (2021). Social class, social self-esteem, and conspicuous consumption. *Heliyon*, 7(2).
28. Park, H. J. (2018). The impact of luxury consumption on self-esteem and life satisfaction. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 9(2), 99–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20932685.2018.1434012>
29. Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400876136>
30. Sahin, O., & Nasir, V. A. (2021). Symbolic consumption and status-seeking: Insights from luxury fashion brands. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 61, 102561. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102561>
31. Siepmann, C., Dholakia, N., & Viswanathan, M. (2022). Conspicuous consumption and status conformity in emerging markets. *International Marketing Review*, 39(3), 532–551. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-06-2021-0176>
32. Ting, H., de Run, E. C., Cheah, J. H., & Chuah, F. (2018). Consumer attitude towards luxury fashion brands: Evidence from Malaysia. *Journal of International Business and Entrepreneurship Development*, 11(1), 63–82. <https://doi.org/10.1504/JIBED.2018.089022>
33. Topcu, A. (2018). Status consumption and luxury goods: A cross-cultural comparison. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 9(3), 187–202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20932685.2018.1435457>
34. Truong, Y., & McColl, R. (2011). Intrinsic motivations, self-esteem, and luxury goods consumption. *Journal of retailing and consumer services*, 18(6), 555-561.
35. Wai, L. K., & Osman, S. (2019). The influence of self-esteem in the relationship of social media usage and conspicuous consumption. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 9(2), 335-352.
36. Wang, Z., Yuan, R., Liu, M. J., & Luo, J. (2022). Luxury symbolism, self-congruity, self-affirmation and luxury consumption behavior: a comparison study of China and the US. *International Marketing Review*, 39(2), 166-206.
37. Veblen, T. (2017). *The theory of the leisure class*. Routledge. (Original work published 1899). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315126621>