

Conspicuous consumption on Instagram: Representations of wealth and popular culture on social media

Instagram'da gösterişçi tüketim: Sosyal medyada zenginlik temsilleri ve popüler kültür

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Abstract

Conspicuous consumption is not merely an economic behavior. Today, with the influence of digital media, conspicuous consumption is a way for individuals to present their social status and lifestyle. This study aims to reveal how conspicuous posts are represented on social media. Specifically, content shared by digital content creators on visually-oriented platforms like Instagram is analyzed within the context of conspicuous consumption and popular culture. Using document analysis, a qualitative research method, the study examines the Instagram posts of four prominent digital content creators in Türkiye within the framework of Baudrillard's concepts of hyperreality and simulation, and Debord's theory of the spectacle society. The findings reveal that popular culture plays a significant and effective role in the construction of individuals' digital identities through social media, and how these identities are reproduced through conspicuous representations. The study's significance lies in revealing how conspicuous consumption is presented on social media platforms through Instagram posts.

Keywords: Social Media, Popular Culture, Conspicuous Consumption

JEL Codes: D12, M31, Z13

Öz

Gösterişli tüketim, yalnızca ekonomik bir davranış biçimi değildir. Günümüzde dijital mecraların da etkisiyle gösterişçi tüketim artık bireyin sosyal statüsünü ve yaşam tarzını sunma biçimidir. Bu çalışmada, sosyal medyada gösterişli paylaşımların nasıl temsil edildiğini ortaya koymak amaçlanmıştır. Özellikle Instagram gibi görsel ağırlıklı mecralarda dijital içerik üreticileri tarafından paylaşılan içerikler, gösterişçi tüketim ve popüler kültür bağlamında ele alınarak analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden doküman analizi tekniği kullanılarak Türkiye'de öne çıkan dört dijital içerik üreticisinin Instagram paylaşımları, Baudrillard'ın hipergerçeklik, simülasyon kavramı ve Debord'un gösteri toplumu kuramı kapsamında incelenmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular, popüler kültürün sosyal medya aracılığıyla bireylerin dijital kimlik inşasında önemli ve etkin rol oynadığını ve bu kimliklerin gösterişli temsillerle nasıl yeniden üretildiğini ortaya koymuştur. Instagram'da paylaşılan gönderiler çerçevesinde gösterişçi tüketimin sosyal medya mecralarında ne şekilde sunulduğunu ortaya çıkarması bu çalışmayı önemli kılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Medya, Popüler Kültür, Gösterişçi Tüketim

JEL Kodları: D12, M31, Z13

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Introduction

Consumption today has become not only an economic issue but also a cultural and social one. People consume not only to meet their needs but also to acquire more than they require (Karaboğa, 2018, p. 7). Consumption should not be limited merely to the overproduction or overconsumption of goods. Consumption itself has become a purpose and a need. People consume not only to satisfy their necessities but also for the pleasure that consumption provides. The desire to consume can never be fully satisfied because it constantly generates new wants (Senemoğlu, 2017, p. 83). Firat et al. (2013) conceptualize consumption as a socially constructed and culturally embedded process shaped by symbolic meanings, social practices, and identity formations. Duman (2016, p. 32) draws attention to the fact that consumption and consumer culture are key concepts for understanding contemporary societies, stating that consumption has now become an ideological concept reflecting lifestyle, individual identity, and worldview, rather than merely a means of acquiring goods. In a study conducted by Altun Erdoğan (2025), attention was drawn to the relationship between consumption and happiness, and it was noted that an increase in income expands opportunities for consumption.

The process of identity construction for the individual is being reproduced within digital media environments. In this context, Baudrillard's concepts of simulation and hyperreality provide an explanatory theoretical framework. According to Baudrillard (2011), in contemporary society, representations—simulacra—have replaced reality itself. Social media platforms have become hyperreal spaces where individuals present not their actual lives, but fictionalized segments of life. The individual has become an object of spectacle. This situation is further deepened by Guy Debord's (1996) theory of the society of the spectacle. On social media, individuals' lives have now turned into a stage, and in this digital stage, the individual presents not only products but also their social status, taste, and lifestyle as a spectacle through conspicuous consumption.

In the literature review conducted on the subject, several studies have been identified. Öztürk (2022) examined the transformation of consumer culture through social media applications using semiotic analysis. Akgün (2024) analyzed conspicuous consumption in the posts of virtual influencers on the Instagram platform using semiotic analysis. The study concluded that conspicuous consumption is presented as a popular lifestyle in the posts of virtual influencers. Bahçecioğlu (2022), on the other hand, investigates the presentation practices of female users on social media platforms within the context of conspicuous consumption. Casais et al. (2026) conducted a study on the effects of social media on luxury consumption. The study revealed that consumer use of social media, along with factors such as social self-esteem and expectations of high social returns, increased demand and interest in luxury products. Lu et al. (2024) addressed the potential impact of social media on consumer behavior. Their study found that individuals' self-presentation on social media platforms, i.e., how they portray themselves, influenced their consumption behavior. Another study on this topic was conducted by Dinh and Lee (2024). Their research focused on the impact of social media influencers on individuals' purchasing decisions. According to the findings influencer posts are a significant factor in influencing followers' preferences. In other words such posts cause followers to compare themselves to others. Content produced on social media regarding any product or brand can lead individuals to desire access to luxury goods. Park and Chun (2025) who also conducted research on this topic addressed the impact of social media on young consumers. In a study conducted on participants who purchased luxury goods, it was determined that influencer social media posts affected young people's desire to buy luxury goods. Looking at the studies conducted, it is seen that most focus on consumer culture while studies specifically focusing on social media are limited. This study which examines how conspicuous consumption is represented on social media and how popular culture is reproduced on today's digital platforms is important because it analyzes the posts of digital content creators and uses document analysis as its methodology. Previous studies on this topic have focused on consumer behavior and virtual influencers. That is these studies mostly examine the impact of social media content on consumers. This study however examines how conspicuous consumption is presented through the posts of digital content creators on Instagram. Visual and linguistic elements are analyzed in conjunction with popular culture. The originality of this study lies in its examination of the representational forms of the posts, rather than consumer reactions.

This study reveals how ostentatious posts are represented on social media platforms. The aim is to examine how wealth and a luxurious lifestyle are represented on social media platforms, which consumption patterns are emphasized through ostentatious posts, which elements of popular culture are reflected, and what meanings are conveyed by the linguistic and visual elements in these posts. The study is conducted within the framework of Baudrillard's concepts of hyperreality and simulation, and Debord's theory of the spectacle society. This study utilizes document analysis, a qualitative research

method, and focuses on Instagram. Accordingly, the posts of four different content creators on Instagram were examined.

Determining how luxury lifestyles are featured on Instagram constitutes the main problem of this study. The four fundamental questions identified in the study are as follows:

1. How are wealth and luxurious lifestyles represented on Instagram?
2. What consumption patterns are revealed through ostentatious posts in the analyzed content?
3. What elements of popular culture are reflected in the selected Instagram posts?
4. What meanings do the linguistic and visual elements in the analyzed posts convey?

Literature review

Consumer culture

There are many definitions and explanations regarding consumer culture. Kula (2012, p. 509) stated that consumption is thought to be an intermediary term between production and destruction. In other words, consumption functions as a bridge between producing and depleting. Therefore, consumption gives meaning to production, but also brings the product to its end. İlter (2019, p. 468) stated that through their adopted consumption habits, people construct both social order and meanings. Topay and Erdem (2019, pp. 163-164) drew attention to the fact that today, consumption has turned into a need in itself, rather than merely meeting a necessity. Elmasoğlu (2017, p. 29) stated that people are able to express themselves and gain status through consumption. Karakaş (2001, p. 12) expressed that instincts inherent in human nature – such as increasing, decreasing, discovering new things, meeting needs, generating needs, acquiring, and giving – are determining factors in the initiation and development of consumption. Tan (2019, p. 195) stated that consumption carries the meaning of attributing excessive importance to objects and possessing these objects. Mutlu (2012, p. 308) explained consumer culture as the fact that modern societies have become differentiated in terms of status and segmented in terms of markets. Mutlu stated that here, individual tastes reflect not only the social positions of individuals but also the social values and individual lifestyles of consumers. As can be understood from these statements, according to Mutlu, in modern societies, consumption preferences indicate the values individuals hold and the way they live their lives. Therefore, consumption is not only an individual but also a social indicator.

Consumer culture is not a phenomenon exclusive to developed market economies. Through globalization, and the influence of technology and media, it has reached even small settlements. Therefore, consumption has transformed into an act that is not only meant to meet a need but also carries symbolic meanings (Köroğlu, 2014, p. 267).

In today's consumer society, Baudrillard (2012, p. 15) states that there is a reality of consumption and abundance, noting that people no longer relate to other individuals, but rather to objects that almost surround their environment, and that the act of consumption has turned into a process guided by statistical data. Objects are glorified by mass media. This reveals the guiding power of consumer culture over the individual.

Robert Bocock (2009, p. 58) draws attention to the fact that today's understanding of consumption has changed. Consumption no longer merely means meeting physical needs. It has turned into an experience that also encompasses individuals' mental processes, emotions, and quests for identity. Even if the modern consumer is not physically active, they are mentally constantly engaged. Therefore, consumption has become a process of mentality and meaning production. Kellner (1992, pp. 14-77) stated that consumer goods are parts of a method through which people construct their sense of identity via the use of symbols within consumption patterns (as cited in Bocock, 2009, p. 59). In this context, Kellner points out that consumption is not merely an economic activity but also a tool for identity construction.

Ivan Illich (1990, pp. 59-60) emphasized that in consumer culture, the needs of individuals are shaped not by personal preferences, but rather by the influence and direction of advertisements, expert opinions, and various professional groups. According to Illich, in modern society, consumers act not out of their real needs, but according to the needs taught and marketed to them. This situation perpetuates consumption and creates a continuous cycle of needs.

Ostentation and luxury living in popular culture

With the development of the Internet, the spectacle of popular culture and consumption practices have become intertwined. The luxury lifestyle is reflected in social media environments by being given an aesthetic appearance. On platforms such as Instagram, where visually oriented posts are shared, ostentation has become a norm. Popular culture finds a highly effective representation on social media platforms, as it is a cultural structure that encourages consumption and shapes individuals' daily life practices. Therefore, especially platforms such as Instagram and YouTube have become spaces where luxury lifestyles are showcased. Individuals, through ostentatious posts, take on the representation of a certain lifestyle. Mutlu (2012, pp. 251–253) defines popular culture as the beliefs, practices, and objects widely shared within a society. According to Mutlu, in reality, popular culture does not necessarily have to be the common culture of all the people. The fact that popular culture products (TV series, films, media content, etc.) contain a wide variety of themes shows that the audience or consumers are divided and differentiated according to characteristics such as age, gender, and class.

There are two main perspectives on popular culture. Those who adopt a positive approach to popular culture argue that it is what the public wants and that what is popular is correct, while those who adopt a negative approach argue that popular culture is corrupting and creates false consciousness (Şahin, 2005, p. 165).

The concept of conspicuous consumption was first used by Thorstein Veblen. Veblen explained the concept of conspicuous consumption in his work, 'The Theory of the Leisure Class'. According to Veblen, an individual's living standards are shaped by the spending norms of the society or class to which they belong. Factors such as gaining prestige and being appreciated by the social environment lead individuals to conspicuous consumption (2005, pp. 82-83). It refers to the purchase and display of luxury and expensive goods by individuals in order to attain social status. Today, this display is largely carried out through social media. This form of consumption represents a deliberate effort to construct an image (Varol, 2022, p. 46). Eckhardt et al. (2015) discuss the changing meanings of luxury consumption, suggesting that contemporary forms of consumption are not always overtly conspicuous. When Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption is adapted to the contemporary digital environment, the upper-class individuals in his framework can be understood as those who set examples for others and are imitated within society. Today, this role is assumed by social media influencers. Influencers display their luxury lifestyles, brands, and products on platforms such as Instagram, thereby forming a digital upper class. Users who follow, admire, and attempt to imitate these influencers seek to adopt their consumption habits. Consequently, conspicuous consumption behavior is disseminated and reproduced through social media (Ünlü & Filan, 2021, p. 43).

Previous studies have also emphasized the relationship between consumption and status display. Mason (1981, p. 42) argues that conspicuous consumers are motivated by the desire to display wealth and gain prestige, although these motivations are not always explicitly acknowledged (as cited in Campbell, 1995, p. 46).

Regarding digital environments Thoumrungroje (2014, p. 12) emphasized that the intensity of social media use affects individuals' tendency to consume status symbol products. Çelik (2016) also noted that the effect of social media on luxury consumption may change, but factors such as age play an important role here.

Guy Debord's (1996) concept of "society of the spectacle" provides a strong theoretical foundation for the subject. Debord argues that the masses, dominated by modern production conditions, now perceive life as a vast accumulation of spectacles. In modern society, representations have replaced real experiences. Today, visibility has become central to social relations, and social media has transformed individuals' lives into objects of observation.

Jean Baudrillard's (2011) concepts of simulation and hyperreality are quite functional in this context. According to Baudrillard, simulation actually presents an event or object as if it were real. Baudrillard defines simulation as signs that are not real themselves but represent something. From this perspective, content on social media often transforms into the construction of a hyperreal identity. Instagram is one of these platforms. For example, luxury venues, brands, clothing, or accessories featured on Instagram are aestheticized rather than realistic.

One of the primary functions of social networking sites is to enable users to engage in ongoing interaction within social communities (Ellison et al., 2007, p. 1165). These platforms allow users to create personal profiles and establish connections with others (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 63). Moreover, they

facilitate the visibility and circulation of conspicuous consumption through lifestyle- and consumption-oriented content.

Social networking sites provide environments in which individuals can present their images, behaviors, and posts according to their own preferences (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011, p. 82). Social media, in this sense, renders such consumption practices visible.

Kellner (2013, p. 19) states that media utilizes technological capabilities to attract audience attention and generate profit, producing visually rich and striking content. This situation observed in traditional media is also evident in social media. Social media users produce spectacle-oriented content in order to attract attention, increase advertising revenue, and generate income. They share aestheticized content to gain likes, shares, and followers. The exaggerated presentation of luxurious lifestyles has transformed social media into a medium of spectacle, and users themselves have become part of this spectacle.

Research method

In this study, document analysis, a qualitative research method, was used. Forster (1994) listed the stages of document analysis as follows (as cited in Sak et al., 2021, p. 233):

- Accessing the documents
- Examining and checking the authenticity of the documents
- Establishing a system for coding and categorization
- Analyzing the data
- Using the obtained data

Corbin and Strauss (2008) stated that document analysis is a systematic method of data collection and interpretation used in qualitative research. This method, which can be applied to both printed and digital documents, enables the researcher to derive meaning from document contents and to develop an in-depth understanding of the subject (as cited in Kırıl, 2020, p. 173). Yıldırım and Şimşek (2021, pp. 189-190) define document analysis as the systematic examination of written materials containing information about the phenomena under investigation. They further note that document analysis can be employed either as a standalone data collection method in qualitative research or in combination with other data collection techniques. Accordingly, they emphasize that document analysis constitutes a significant source of information that should be utilized effectively in qualitative research.

Document analysis is a research method that enables the systematic and rigorous examination of written documents (Wach & Ward, 2013, p. 1). During the implementation of document analysis, the analytical process should be conducted in a careful, transparent, and systematic manner (Bowen, 2009, p. 38).

This study aims to reveal how conspicuous consumption is represented on social media. Therefore, document analysis was deemed appropriate for analyzing publicly accessible content. Document analysis allows for a systematic examination of existing content.

This research is limited to content shared on the social media platform Instagram. The limited number of digital content creators in the sample (4 creators, 8 posts) allowed for analysis within the framework of a qualitative research approach. Only photo-based posts were included in the study to systematically examine visual representations. Videos, stories, and Reels content were not included. No interviews were conducted with content creators or their followers. Therefore, no data regarding the reception processes of the posts examined in this study were obtained. The reason for selecting four content creators for this study is to compare different forms of conspicuous consumption. Eight posts were chosen, with two posts from each creator. The aim here is not to evaluate based on a single post.

Visual and written posts from specific user profiles reflecting wealth and a luxurious lifestyle within the selected sample were examined in detail through document analysis. During the analysis process:

- Social media users who share content on Instagram, one of the social media platforms, related to ostentatious and luxury lifestyles have been identified.
- The visual and written content shared by these users has been analyzed in the context of conspicuous consumption, popular culture, and representation theories.

In this study, purposive sampling was employed as the sampling technique. The posts on the social media accounts of the content creators examined in the research are public and accessible to all users. Nevertheless, ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Identifying information

regarding the relevant accounts was removed, and the content creators were pseudonymized as K1, K2, K3, and K4 in the analysis.

The sample was selected from digital content creators on Instagram who have more than 100,000 followers—referred to as social media influencers—and who regularly produce content, attract attention with their luxury lifestyles, and engage in conspicuous consumption practices. A total of eight posts were selected, two from each of the four digital content creators' accounts. These posts on the Instagram platform were examined and analyzed within the framework of themes such as the form of wealth represented, the presentation of venues, the brands and products featured, the emphasis on lifestyle, elements of popular culture, the linguistic style of expression, and visual techniques. The analysis portion of the research examined only the photographs included in the posts. In addition, the primary criteria for selecting the publications included their direct relevance to the research questions, their suitability for detailed visual and linguistic analysis, and their richness in data.

The diversity of consumer elements represented, the visibility of aspects such as product, brand, and status, and the visual and textual analyzability of these elements are the criteria considered in creating the dataset. Furthermore, the examination of four different content creators within the scope of the research allowed for the analysis of similarities and differences between different accounts. Therefore, the research is not based solely on the content of a single creator. Selecting two posts from each content creator aimed to prevent the research from relying solely on the content of a single creator. In selecting these two posts, not only the number of posts but also their relevance to the research questions and the richness of the data were considered. Care was taken to ensure that the two selected posts from the content creators provided rich data for analysis. For example, attention was paid to ensuring that the posts included multiple elements simultaneously, such as brand, product, location, luxury consumption, and visual presentations.

Posts from the content creators identified for this study were collected by the researcher on June 19, 2025.

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The thematic categories created as a result of document analysis techniques are grouped under a total of 6 headings: represented wealth, presentation of the venue, brand and product, highlighted values, linguistic expression and visual representation. Therefore, the categories included in the research were developed during the data analysis process, and a data-driven classification was applied.

To conduct the analysis, the visual and textual elements of the eight posts were first examined in detail. Meaningful data units related to the research questions were identified. Accordingly, codes were created in terms of consumer objects, brands, products, places, luxury lifestyle elements, status, descriptive texts, and visuals. Then, final codes applicable to all eight posts were developed. Thus, categories were not predetermined but created as a result of the systematic examination of the data. In the place presentation category, the representation of places such as hotels, restaurants, or vacation spots was analyzed, while in the brand and product category, how brands and products associated with luxury were featured in the content was analyzed. The emphasized values category encompassed social and cultural values such as status, privilege, prestige, and lifestyle highlighted in the content. In the linguistic expression category, the forms of expression and concepts used in textual elements were examined. The visual representation category, on the other hand, focused directly on visual emphasis. These six basic categories were systematically applied to all eight posts.

In the coding process visual and linguistic elements were first identified and coded. Related codes were brought together. Then categories were created for the represented entity, the presentation of the space, the brand and product, the emphasized values, linguistic expression and visual representation. Brand labels and collaboration statements were evaluated as brand visibility. Luxury spaces, automobiles, clothing and accessories were considered in the context of status and conspicuous consumption.

The study was conducted by a single researcher. The findings were interpreted as Baudrillard's concepts of simulation and hyperreality and Debord's concept of spectacle. Furthermore, a direct relationship was established between the research information and the theoretical framework.

This study was conducted based on the principles of validity and reliability. Accordingly, data collection and analysis techniques were designed in line with the research questions, and a current literature review on the subject was conducted. The introduction, methods, findings, conclusion, and

discussion sections were structured to ensure methodological coherence. Evaluations were made based on the findings obtained through the application of document analysis techniques. Content creators were selected using purposive sampling with specific criteria. Document analysis was applied systematically and content creators with different accounts were classified and analyzed under similar categories. Thus, the validity and reliability of the study were ensured.

In this study, the sample selection, data collection, and coding processes were applied systematically. Therefore, qualitative reliability was enhanced. The criteria for selecting content creators and posts were clearly defined. The data collection date and dataset were recorded. In accordance with ethical principles, identifying information was removed and the content creators were pseudonymized as K1-K4. Posts were thoroughly reviewed before the final categories were determined and the categories were subsequently created. After the categories were established, all 8 posts were reviewed again. This ensured consistency in the coding process. Indeed, the systematic approach to the analysis process ensured the validity and reliability of the study.

Findings

Table 1: Analysis of K1's Posts

1. Post	Represented Wealth	Exclusive and expensive venue
	Presentation of the Venue	Maldives, beach, palm trees, sunset, and the natural setting of the venue
	Brand and Product	Hotel name clearly stated
	Highlighted Values	Family and romance, tranquility, and social status
	Linguistic Expression	Sincere narration
	Visual Representation	Fashion and personal style
2. Post	Represented Wealth	Exclusive and expensive venue far from accessibility, luxury holiday destination
	Presentation of the Venue	Dubai, a metropolitan representation of wealth
	Brand and Product	Tag and collaboration statement used
	Highlighted Values	Romance and freedom
	Linguistic Expression	An attempt made to engage with the content
	Visual Representation	Romantic couple image

How wealth and luxury lifestyle are represented on social media has been examined under the heading of "represented wealth." Luxury objects, expensive brands, cars, and vacations have been evaluated under the category of representation of wealth. In Table 1, K1's posts have been analyzed within the framework of the subject of the study. The two visuals show that the representation of wealth is made through vacation, luxury, and romance. Images have been shared from the Maldives and Dubai, both of which are luxury holiday destinations. Therefore, expensive and exclusive venues have been preferred.

The posts were examined to determine if they contained any sponsored content. This included aspects such as collaboration tags or brand tagging. In the first visual, it is clearly stated that the hotel name is mentioned; Although it appears to be a personal memory, it has in fact been determined to carry the nature of indirect advertising. In the second image, it is understood that the phrase collaboration is used and that the content is produced within the scope of collaboration.

In both visuals, it was determined that the framing and use of light were generally professional and that the backgrounds in the scenery were clearly displayed.

Social media users, particularly content creators, produce spectacle-oriented content to attract attention, increase advertising revenue, and generate income. In doing so they disseminate aesthetically curated content designed to maximize likes, shares, and follower engagement. The exaggerated representation of luxury lifestyles has consequently transformed social media into a medium of spectacle in which users themselves become both producers and participants.

In this study, the content creator coded K1 stands out with their posts about their spouse and child. Luxury consumption, family, and romantic relationships are represented on this account.

Table 2: Analysis of K2's Posts

1. Post	Represented Wealth	A venue with a private pool, a holiday in nature
	Presentation of the Venue	A holiday venue with a private pool in Sapanca, an aesthetic of a luxurious living space
	Brand and Product	Brand not explicitly stated
	Highlighted Values	Luxury and personal comfort within nature
	Linguistic Expression	Casual and ironic language
	Visual Representation	Presents an aesthetic visual
2. Post	Represented Wealth	Cannes Film Festival, high-level social status
	Presentation of the Venue	An exclusive venue in Cannes, night shot
	Brand and Product	No clear brand tag
	Highlighted Values	Elegance and global recognition
	Linguistic Expression	Simple and brief narration
	Visual Representation	Woman positioned at the center of the frame

The two images shared by K2 are visually curated, with the selection of locations and clothing contributing to the representation of a luxurious lifestyle.

In Table 2, the posts shared by digital content creator K2 on Instagram have been examined. In the first visual, an image from a venue intertwined with nature in Sapanca has been shared. A representation of wealth is conveyed through the depiction of comfort and natural luxury. The modern glass doors opening from the interior to the exterior create the impression of a luxurious living space. K2's posts do not contain direct collaboration tags from brands. The woman figure positioned in the center of the frame appears almost like a silhouette together with the lighting.

In the second visual, an image from the Cannes Film Festival has been shared. In the background, one of Cannes' exclusive venues has been used, emphasizing spatial elegance. The highlighted values include grandeur, elegance, and prestige. Elements such as K2's pose, the voluminous structure of the dress, and the lighting used have created a stage-like aesthetic.

Unlike other accounts, K2's posts represent conspicuous consumption through luxurious content shared in nature.

Table 3: Analysis of K3's Posts

1. Post	Represented Wealth	Yacht, jewelry such as earrings, rings, and bracelets; clothing choice
	Presentation of the Venue	Upper deck of a large yacht in the open sea
	Brand and Product	No direct brand tag
	Highlighted Values	Comfort, self-confidence, exclusive lifestyle, elegance, luxury holiday
	Linguistic Expression	Simple language
	Visual Representation	The sparkle of the dress worn and the composition of the yacht
2. Post	Represented Wealth	Exclusive travel, luxury hotel
	Presentation of the Venue	Hotel pool
	Brand and Product	Luxury hotel
	Highlighted Values	Simple and exclusive lifestyle
	Linguistic Expression	Descriptive yet impressive language
	Visual Representation	A pose on a sun lounger overlooking the pool

An analysis of the images suggests that the posts depict luxury and wealth through visual elements such as yacht settings, stylish clothing, and jewelry functioning as status symbols. K3's posts from her Instagram account have been analyzed within the framework of the identified themes. The findings obtained are presented in Table 3. In the first visual, a representation of wealth in terms of financial power is presented. Wealth is made visible through the vacation style, the means of transportation used, the jewelry, and the clothing. The shooting on the upper deck of a large yacht in the open sea creates the perception of a lifestyle that is difficult to access. It has been observed that K3's posts do not contain direct collaboration tags from the brands. Valuing oneself, the concept of a luxury holiday, comfort, and an exclusive lifestyle are among the highlighted values.

In the second visual, wealth is represented through the experience of an exclusive trip. A hotel with high architectural aesthetics has been chosen, presenting a serene atmosphere. The name of the hotel of stay is stated in the post. This account showcases the content creator's simple yet sophisticated lifestyle. K3's posts suggest that luxury and consumerism are presented through clothing and accessories.

Table 4: Analysis of K4's Posts

1. Post	Represented Wealth	Luxury restaurant and gastronomic exclusivity
	Presentation of the Venue	Dim lighting, specially presented plates, and the elite nature of the venue
	Brand and Product	A worldwide luxury restaurant, brand specified
	Highlighted Values	Aesthetics, taste, and exclusivity
	Linguistic Expression	Short and simple
	Visual Representation	Food presented as art
2. Post	Represented Wealth	Brand-based wealth, sports car, speed, and exclusivity
	Presentation of the Venue	Istanbul Park race track
	Brand and Product	Brand directly tagged
	Highlighted Values	Power, speed, exclusivity, and mastery of technology
	Linguistic Expression	Attention-grabbing narration
	Visual Representation	Yellow car, K4 posing in front of the car in a relaxed and confident manner

An analysis of K4's posts suggests the portrayal of a lavish lifestyle, emphasizing themes of luxury and wealth.

The findings regarding the posts shared by digital content creator K4 are presented in Table 4. In the first visual, a type of wealth represented through food has been identified. The image presents the promotion of one of Istanbul's exclusive restaurants.

The brand is directly stated.

In the second visual, a representation of wealth based on performance and brand has been conveyed. The image features a sports car and was taken at a special race track such as Istanbul Park. Mercedes-Benz AMG has been directly tagged. Therefore, the analysis identifies it as a sponsored, collaboration-based post.

It has been determined that K1 shares posts based on family, K2 on nature experiences, and K3 on fashion, while K4 shares posts based on wealth and status, such as sports cars and luxury restaurants.

A comparative analysis of four content creators reveals that wealth is represented on social media platforms through different elements. The study found that some content creators represented luxury and wealth through luxury venues, travel, and clothing. Others presented luxury and wealth through cars or accessories. K1 prioritized family and vacations in their posts. K2 focused on vacations. K3 included clothing and accessories in their posts while K4 shared content related to cars. All four content creators presented luxury and wealth through exclusive venues or vacation experiences. K3 shared their experiences with hotels and luxury vacations via Instagram. K1 included vacation experiences in places like the Maldives and Dubai in their posts. In contrast, luxury was not directly presented in K2's posts. K4, on the other hand, shared sports cars presenting them as a status symbol. Indeed, in K3's posts, elements such as clothing, jewelry, and yacht are used together. In other words, luxury and wealth are presented directly. When examining the posts of the four content creators it was determined that in some posts ostentatious consumption is presented alongside family and emotional relationships. While family is prominent in K1 individual appearance dominates in K3, K4, and K2. Another difference between the content creators is the mention of commercial communication and sponsorship status. K1 and K4 directly include advertising and collaboration tags in their posts. Content creators K2 and K3, on the other hand, do not directly include collaboration tags. However luxury consumption elements such as locations, clothing, and accessories are presented indirectly. Looking at the visuals included in the posts of the four content creators it is clear that all the visuals were professionally photographed and shared with their followers.

Looking at the posts overall, popular culture elements are not directly displayed. For example romantic relationships and family are prominent in K1, youth and entertainment in K2, beauty and personal appearance in K3, and brands and cars in K4.

This study examines how four digital content creators present wealth and luxurious lifestyles through various experiences in their posts. Luxury is made visible through experiences such as private venues sports cars, and clothing. The second question of the study is which consumption patterns are visible through these ostentatious posts. Here consumption patterns are presented not only through product purchases but also through vacations, restaurants, and lifestyle. Overall, the findings indicate that elements of popular culture such as status and branding are incorporated into the posts. Regarding linguistic and visual elements, the use of short phrases and eye-catching visuals is particularly noticeable.

Discussion and conclusion

This study examines how wealth, represented through ostentatious posts on Instagram, a social media platform, is reproduced within the context of consumer culture and popular culture. The posts of four digital content creators were examined and analyzed in terms of visual and textual elements. Findings were obtained from 8 posts and evaluations were made based on these posts.

According to the findings from the 8 posts analyzed, conspicuous consumption is becoming increasingly common on Instagram. Luxury venues, expensive products, and vacation destinations are presented in an attention-grabbing manner on Instagram. From the perspective of viewers, these presented lifestyles become desirable images. The findings indicate that the shared content is spectacle-oriented. These spectacle-oriented representations are consistent with Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality and Debord's concept of the spectacle society.

An analysis of the posts reveals that K1 shares photos of luxury venues. These luxury venues are used as status symbols. One of the values emphasized by being in such places is social status as being in such locations is a sign of prestige. The clear mention of the hotel name in the images the explanation of sponsorship and the professional presentation of the content suggest that these posts were created to generate interaction and commercial gain. K2's posts do not explicitly mention a brand name. The choice of venue itself functions as a form of luxury branding. While a prominent brand label is not visible in K2's posts the clothing and posture directly evoke fashion and luxury. K3's posts also feature poses on a yacht. K3's posts represent high economic status. There is no direct brand label in K3's posts. However the elegant and eye-catching dress, jewelry, and yacht itself demonstrate a brand value. The use of the word "Gold" in K3's posts, indicating a color choice also functions as a symbolic reference to wealth. The dress color and architectural details in K3's posts are impressive to followers. One of K4's posts examined focuses on the presentation of food in a luxury restaurant. The artistic presentation of the food enhances the perception of quality. K4's posts aim for universal visibility through the use of short simple English captions.

Instagram is not merely a tool for sharing content; consumer culture is reproduced on such platforms. On Instagram, a social media platform, individuals use their accounts not only as individual users but also for profit. The accounts of the digital content creators examined in this study, generally represent wealth and luxury lifestyles through exclusive venues, expensive brands, and luxury vacations. Content related to vacations, travel, and luxury restaurants is presented as experience-oriented consumption. Elements such as jewelry, sports cars, invitations, and events are represented as brand and status-oriented consumption. The study also observed that elements of popular culture—such as fame, beauty, youth, romance, style, and branding—are reflected through the posts made. When the posts are examined in general, it is seen that individuals are constantly directed towards consumption. The findings obtained reveal significant similarities and differences when compared with the findings of previous empirical studies on the subject. For example, Kaya (2020) showed in her study that social media influencers encourage individuals to consume through their posts. This finding is parallel to the visibility of conspicuous consumption and lifestyle representations in the Instagram posts examined in the present study. Kaya's study focused on the role of social media influencers in encouraging consumption behavior. In the present study, however, how conspicuous consumption is represented in Instagram content is examined. The findings obtained in this study show that digital content producers not only encourage consumption but also make visible the lifestyle and status meanings of consumption. This finding is similar to the evaluations in Bahçecioğlu's study conducted in 2022. Bahçecioğlu's study examined the presentation of elements such as home decoration and home arrangement within the context of conspicuous consumption. The common point of the aforementioned studies is that consumption practices are transformed into a social spectacle. Indeed, Bahçecioğlu's study examined the domestic presentation practices of housewives. This study on the other hand focuses on the representations of luxury and wealth by digital content creators on Instagram. Similarly Akgün (2024) also examined the Instagram posts of virtual influencers within the framework of conspicuous consumption. Akgün's findings are consistent with the findings of this study in terms of the representation of conspicuous consumption as a lifestyle on Instagram. While Akgün's study focused on virtual influencers the present study examines the representations of digital content creators. Overall, the current study appears to support previous findings regarding the visibility of consumption on social media. Furthermore, its focus on the lifestyle and representational aspects of conspicuous consumption expands the existing literature.

The study highlights luxurious settings and expensive products in the visual elements examined. From a linguistic perspective, it reveals a reflection of an attractive and appealing lifestyle. Within the scope of 8 posts examined, Instagram can be defined as a platform that makes conspicuous consumption visible.

The study also revealed in the examined Instagram posts that elements of popular culture such as fame, beauty, youth, romance, style, and branding are reflected through shared content.

It is necessary to raise user awareness regarding the accurate perception of lifestyles displayed on Instagram. Awareness should be created that Instagram posts do not always reflect reality.

Awareness projects should be developed to prevent ostentatious and luxurious lifestyles from being perceived as the sole criterion for success. Studies should be conducted on the psychological and cultural implications of representations of luxury and wealth on Instagram.

This study contributes to the literature by revealing how conspicuous consumption is represented and produced on social media platforms in the context of posts analyzed on Instagram. In this study,

Baudrillard's concepts of hyperreality and simulation, and Debord's theory of the spectacle society are discussed through the lens of a widely used and current platform like Instagram. This allows for the interpretation and evaluation of these theoretical frameworks within the context of Instagram based on the findings obtained.

This study offers significant implications for content creators, media professionals, and the advertising industry by identifying how digital content producers reproduce consumer culture through representations of luxury and wealth.

Based on the findings from 4 different content creators and 8 posts examined in this study, the following recommendations are made for influencer management, digital marketing, luxury brand building, and brand communication:

- Luxury brands should consider not only follower count but also the target audience and the way content is presented when selecting content creators.
- In the context of brand communication, credibility should be prioritized over excessive consumption and ostentation. Content creators can maintain their credibility with followers by clearly stating their commercial collaborations.
- Instead of constantly showcasing luxury consumption, contextually appropriate visuals can be preferred in content.
- Brands wishing to collaborate with digital content creators can examine the influencers' past posts for other brands to see how they represented those brands. In this way, brands can determine the influencers' representation styles in advance and act accordingly.
- Content related to luxury venues, expensive products, and travel provides visibility for the brand. However, the use of overly ostentatious consumption elements in content can lead to negative consequences. For example, this can cause the brand to be perceived as a symbol of wealth.

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