

Veblenian Consumption in the Digital Age: Self-Image, Social Status, and the Performance of Distinction

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Abstract:

This study examines the contemporary manifestation of Veblenian conspicuous consumption within the digital sphere, addressing its urgency in understanding evolving social dynamics and self-presentation in the internet age. The central problem investigated is how individuals utilize digital platforms, specifically Instagram, to perform distinction and enhance self-image and social status through consumption. Employing a netnographic methodology, data was primarily collected through scrolling observation of user profiles and in-depth interviews conducted via Direct Message (DM) on Instagram. Findings reveal that digital conspicuous consumption, characterized by the curated display of goods and experiences, significantly contributes to individuals' self-perception and their perceived position within social hierarchies. This phenomenon is analyzed through the lens of Veblen's theory, highlighting how digital spaces amplify the performative aspects of consumption. The research contributes to the fields of consumer behavior and economic psychology by providing a nuanced understanding of how traditional theories of consumption adapt and manifest in the digitally mediated environment

Keywords: Digital Consumption, Self-Image, Social Status, Veblenian Consumption

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INTRODUCTION

The digital age has fundamentally reshaped human interaction and, consequently, patterns of consumption. The urgency of understanding Veblenian consumption in this new landscape is paramount, given its profound implications for individual identity, social stratification, and economic behavior. While traditionally associated with tangible goods and overt displays of wealth in physical spaces, the internet, particularly highly visual social media platforms like Instagram, has introduced novel and potent avenues for individuals to signal their status and meticulously curate a desirable self-image through consumption. This evolution necessitates a rigorous re-examination of established theories to grasp how digital environments facilitate and amplify the "performance of distinction" in ways previously unimaginable, creating new forms of economic and social signaling.

The central issue explored in this research revolves around the contemporary manifestation of conspicuous consumption, where the act of acquiring and displaying goods or experiences serves not merely for utilitarian purposes but, more importantly, as a powerful symbol of social standing and personal achievement. This phenomenon is acutely evident on platforms such as Instagram, where users meticulously curate their feeds with aspirational images and videos showcasing luxury items, exotic travel, and exclusive experiences. The ubiquity of smartphones has transformed every moment into a potential stage for showcasing consumer choices. For instance, the meteoric rise of "influencer culture" starkly exemplifies this phenomenon on Instagram: individuals gain followers, economic opportunities, and perceived status primarily through their consumption habits and their ability to visually present these choices, often blurring the lines between authentic self-expression and sophisticated commercial promotion (Gurrieri et al. 2023; Fujak et al. 2025; Silva et al. 2023). This pervasive digital display aligns seamlessly with Veblen's foundational concept of "pecuniary emulation," where individuals, driven by status anxiety or aspiration, strive to imitate the consumption patterns of those in perceived higher social strata to elevate their own standing (Camic 2024; Chandra, R 2024; Bainotti, L. 2024). Previous scholarly research on conspicuous consumption has predominantly focused on traditional offline contexts, examining motivations, product categories, and societal impacts within physical communities (Lie et al. 2024; Petrescu et al. 2025).

While these foundational studies provided invaluable insights into the pre-digital era, they inherently overlook the unique characteristics and transformative power of digital

environments. A critical research gap exists in understanding how instantaneous digital metrics—such as likes, shares, and real-time comments—accelerate the cycle of pecuniary emulation. This study addresses this gap by analyzing how digital platforms transform passive consumption into an active, measurable performance of social standing. These characteristics include the instantaneous global reach of visual content, the pervasive nature of constant online visibility on platforms like Instagram, and the highly interactive elements that allow for immediate social validation through "likes," comments, and shares. Although some emerging research has begun to touch upon digital consumption (Stsiampkouskaya et al. 2021; Nesbit, T., and Lole, L. 2025), a comprehensive and theoretically grounded understanding of how Veblenian principles specifically adapt, thrive, and intensify within these virtual spaces remains critically underexplored. This study further integrates Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of 'symbolic capital' and 'habitus' to understand how digital consumption functions as a marker of social distinction (Verwiebe, R., and Hagemann, S 2025). Furthermore, Erving Goffman's 'presentation of self' is employed to analyze how the Instagram interface acts as a 'front stage' where individuals meticulously curate their identities. By combining these frameworks, the study moves beyond a classical extension of Veblen, positioning digital consumption within contemporary debates on prosumption and digital identity.

A significant and pressing gap in the existing literature lies in the limited rigorous exploration of the intricate, feedback-loop relationship between self-image, social status, and the highly performative aspects of consumption specifically within highly visual and interactive digital platforms like Instagram. While some sociological studies address online self-presentation, they frequently do not delve deeply into the economic and historical underpinnings of Veblen's theory as it manifests in consumer choices on these platforms. To provide a more contemporary sociological depth, this study further integrates Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of 'symbolic capital' and 'habitus' to understand how digital consumption functions as a marker of social distinction. Erving Goffman's 'presentation of self' is employed to analyze the Instagram interface as a 'front stage' where individuals meticulously curate their identities. By combining these frameworks, the study moves beyond a classical extension of Veblen, positioning digital consumption within current scholarly debates on prosumption and digital identity.

Furthermore, a considerable portion of prior research frequently relies on self-reported data or broad-stroke surveys, which, while useful, often fall short of capturing the nuanced,

implicit behaviors and subtle motivations that are only genuinely observable through more immersive, qualitative digital research methodologies, especially on a platform as visual as Instagram. While existing literature has extensively discussed digital consumption, a significant theoretical gap remains in understanding how Veblenian 'conspicuous leisure' is reconfigured when the boundaries between labor and play are blurred in digital creator economies. Prior studies often focus on the consumer's gaze, but fail to critically synthesize how specific influencers serve as a modern pecuniary emulation that bridges traditional status symbols with digital social capital. This study addresses this gap by not merely extending Veblen's classical framework but by re-evaluating it within the context of algorithmic visibility and digital identity performance.

This study aims to bridge this critical theoretical and empirical gap by offering a novel and detailed perspective on Veblenian consumption in the digital age, specifically focusing on Instagram. Our research provides fresh and granular insights into how individuals strategically leverage platforms like Instagram as meticulously curated stages for the sustained performance of distinction. This is achieved not merely through the passive acquisition of goods but, crucially, through their sophisticated visual presentation, narrative framing, and subsequent digital social validation on the platform. This research offers a refined and updated understanding of how digital spaces, particularly Instagram, serve as powerful catalysts for new forms of pecuniary emulation and complex status signaling, profoundly influencing individual economic behavior and social perception. The novelty of this research is twofold. Methodologically, it employs an immersive netnographic approach that captures authentic behavior in its natural digital habitat, rather than relying on artificial experimental settings. Conceptually, it introduces the term 'leisure labor' to describe the rigorous work involved in curating 'effortless' luxury content, thereby updating Veblenian theory for the contemporary creator economy.

To update Veblen's framework for the digital era, this research introduces the concept of 'leisure labor' and integrates Bourdieu's symbolic capital and Goffman's self-presentation. Unlike traditional views that separate work from free time, this study explores how digital leisure now incorporates performative labor. A detailed theoretical analysis of how this concept manifests through curated content and audience validation is provided in the discussion section.

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach to deeply and comprehensively explore the phenomenon of Veblenian consumption in the digital age. A qualitative approach is chosen because it allows the researcher to understand the nuances, meanings, and subjective interpretations behind conspicuous consumption behaviors on digital platforms, aspects that cannot be fully captured by quantitative methods (Pangarkar, A. and Shukla, P 2023). This approach facilitates the exploration of the social context, psychological motivations, and interactive processes that shape the "performance of distinction" online, providing a rich and holistic picture of how individuals construct and project their self-image and social status through consumption on Instagram.

To achieve these objectives, this study specifically utilizes the netnographic method. Netnography, as an adaptation of ethnography for digital environments, is highly relevant and robust in this context because it enables the researcher to observe and analyze online cultures and communities in a non-invasive yet profound manner (Kozinets, R. V. and Gretzel, U.2024). This study employs a netnographic approach to examine the dynamics of digital consumption, focusing on the Instagram account of @andrehendarto. The selection of this specific account is justified by its significant influence and high engagement levels; as of February 2025, the account commanded a following of over 547,000 users. @andrehendarto operates within a niche that blends comedy, parody, and lifestyle content, frequently showcasing the consumption of viral products, "blind box" unboxings, and trending collectibles such as Labubu and Sanrio characters. This profile serves as a representative hub for observing how digital personas stimulate consumer behavior among younger audiences.

The primary data for this research was gathered through systematic "scrolling observation" and qualitative interaction, primarily focused on @andrehendarto's Instagram account as a representative and data-rich case study to observe how individuals visually display their consumption. The selection of this account is justified by its significant influence, with over 547,000 followers as of February 2025, and a niche that effectively stimulates consumer behavior among younger audiences. The observation period spanned from January to June 2024, with a specific deep-dive analysis of 7 key posts in December 2024 to capture peak consumption trends, such as "blind box" unboxings. This technique enabled the identification of conspicuous consumption patterns, presentation aesthetics, and audience responses, such as

likes and comments. To delve deeper into underlying motivations, this observational data was supplemented by in-depth interviews conducted via Instagram Direct Messages (DM) with five primary informants (Nuzula, Maulida, Meysita, Nisa, and Ramada). The selection was based on purposive sampling criteria: (1) high frequency of luxury unboxing, (2) consistent engagement with a specific audience niche, and (3) transparency of consumption narratives. This approach—separating 'descriptive observation' from 'theoretical interpretation'—was chosen to maintain participant comfort and authenticity, as DM interviews offer flexibility and facilitate more open, reflective communication (Harvey et al. 2024). This integrated analytical technique allows the researcher to identify recurring patterns and emerging categories from the qualitative data (Ahmed, et al. 2025). Ethical considerations were strictly observed; formal consent was obtained from @andrehendarto and all informants, with identities anonymized to protect privacy while ensuring that all analyzed data remained restricted to publicly accessible content and private interactions conducted with full participant awareness.

The data analysis followed a rigorous multi-stage coding process conducted manually to ensure nuanced interpretation. This involved five distinct phases: 1). Coding: Inductively assigning categories to posts, comments, and interview transcripts; 2). Noting: Applying reflexive memos to the gathered data; 3). Abstracting and Comparing: Identifying recurring patterns and thematic variations across the digital interactions; 4). Checking and Refinement: Conducting member checking and data triangulation to validate the findings; 5). Generalizing and Theorizing: Synthesizing the coded data into broader theoretical frameworks regarding FOMO and Veblenian consumption in the digital era.

Generalizing and Theorizing: Synthesizing the coded data into broader theoretical frameworks regarding FOMO and Veblenian consumption in the digital era. The thematic patterns and categories emerging from this multi-stage coding process were subsequently interpreted using Thorstein Veblen's "The Theory of the Leisure Class" as the primary analytical lens (Zhang, X., and Zhao, L. 2025). Core concepts such as "conspicuous consumption," "conspicuous leisure," and "pecuniary emulation" are applied to interpret the behaviors observed on Instagram. This framework provides a robust basis for understanding why individuals engage in specific online consumption practices—not merely for personal satisfaction, but as status signals, tools for social differentiation, and efforts to affirm positions within social hierarchies. By utilizing this lens, the research reveals how the fundamental human drive for social recognition is amplified within a highly visual and interconnected

digital ecosystem.

The sharp argumentation within this methodology lies in the deliberate selection of netnography as the most appropriate approach for the digital context, the strategic combination of visual and narrative data for triangulation, and the nuanced application of Veblen's theory to illuminate contemporary online behaviors. This methodology is robustly designed to provide a comprehensive and insightful understanding of Veblenian consumption on Instagram, offering a critical contribution to both theory and practice in consumer behavior and economic psychology. Ethical considerations were strictly observed during this netnographic study. Although the data was collected from publicly accessible profiles, the researchers ensured that the identities of participants mentioned in interviews were anonymized to protect privacy. Furthermore, the researcher maintained a reflexive stance, acknowledging that as an active social media user, potential biases in interpreting visual aesthetic cues were mitigated through peer debriefing and cross-referencing findings with established digital sociology literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To deepen the Veblenian analysis, this study engages with Goffman's theory of self-presentation (Teng, X. 2025), viewing the Instagram feed as a 'front stage' where the performance of distinction is meticulously curated. This is further echoed in Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, where the consumption of viral goods like 'blind boxes' is not merely an economic act but a strategic acquisition of cultural taste (*habitus*) that signals belonging to a specific digital elite. By synthesizing Veblen's conspicuous consumption with Goffman's performative identity, we can see that @andrehendarto's content acts as a blueprint for followers to emulate status through visual prosumption. This theoretical synthesis provides the necessary framework to examine the empirical evidence found in the following sections.

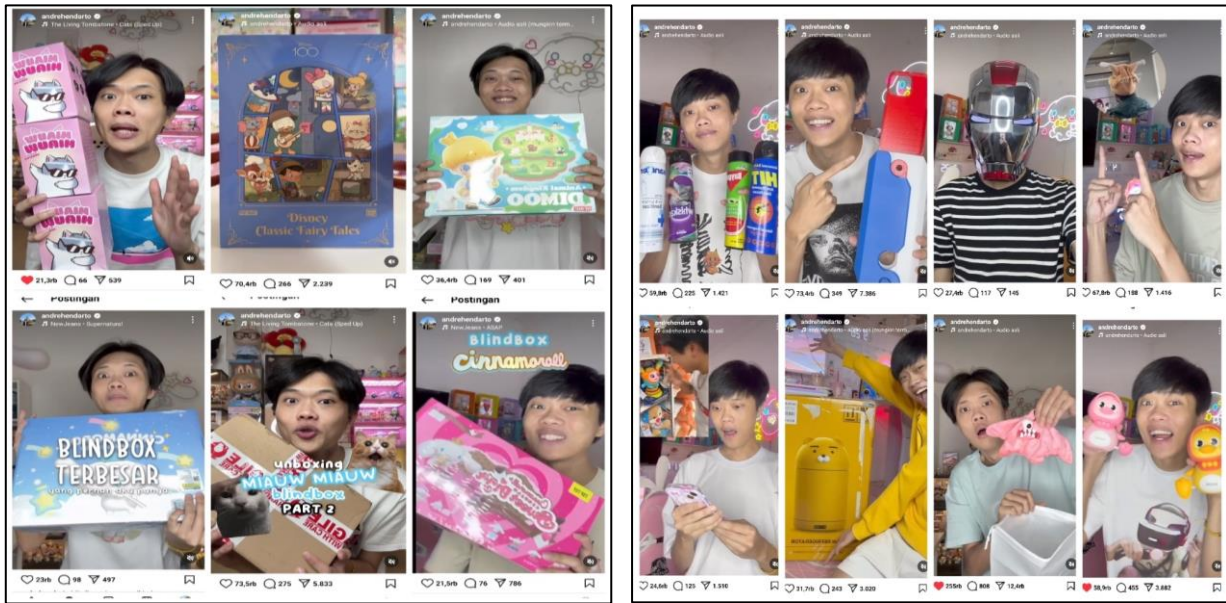
The Curated Performance of Distinction and Digital Pecuniary Emulation

This study delves into how Veblenian conspicuous consumption in the digital age manifests as a meticulously curated performance of status. The central problem investigated was how individuals use digital platforms, specifically Instagram, to perform distinction and enhance their self-image and social status through consumption (Taylor, A., & Carlson, J. 2025). Our netnographic scrolling observation of public accounts, including the representative

case study of the profile @andrehendarto, shows a consistent and deliberate pattern. The analysis reveals that these unboxing activities are not merely descriptive displays of luxury goods, but a strategic exhibition of 'pecuniary strength.' By transforming a private act of acquisition into a public spectacle, the creator signals a surplus of financial capacity that transcends utilitarian needs. In the digital age, the symbolic value of an object is only fully realized once it is validated through social interaction metrics (likes and comments), effectively turning private wealth into public social capital. This performance serves as a digital proxy for Veblen's 'canons of reputability,' where the object's functional value is secondary to its ability to prove the owner's exemption from industrial labor. This shift indicates that consumption is no longer a terminal act but a productive one; the 'unboxing' process functions as a ritual of authentication, where the audience's engagement acts as the final seal of social status. Consequently, the influencer does not just consume the product, but 'produces' a status narrative that is tradable for digital influence and perceived social superiority.

The performance is driven by the exhibition of acquisition, where content featuring 'random' purchases (Figure 1) and the ritual of 'unboxing' (Figure 2) transforms private spending into a public spectacle. This visual evidence affirms the financial capacity and continuous engagement in consumerism, which are key signals of status. Beyond mere description, this process functions as a ritual of authentication; by documenting the 'unboxing' from the moment the seal is broken, the creator provides visual proof of primary ownership. Consequently, the symbolic value of the object is fully realized only through social interaction metrics, turning private wealth into public social capital and a status narrative that is tradable for digital influence. This performance of distinction is deeply embedded in the structures of digital capitalism. The 'unboxing' ritual is not merely an individual act but a manifestation of 'habitus,' a set of internalized dispositions that align the individual with a specific social class. In this context, Instagram serves as a field where symbolic capital is traded for social recognition. The pursuit of likes and validation reflects a broader sociological pressure to perform success, where digital identity becomes a form of 'prosumption,' the simultaneous production and consumption of status narratives.

Figure 2.



'Random' Purchases and The ritual of 'unboxing'

This act transforms the item's purchase into a viral event, making the process of consumption the spectacle, rather than the long-term utility of the object. Furthermore, the content focused on 'random' purchases (Figure 1) serves a crucial signaling role that directly relates to Veblen's concept of pecuniary strength. The ability to engage in frequent, unplanned, and seemingly non-essential spending a demonstration of superfluity is a potent marker of status. This practice visually confirms that the individual possesses substantial financial capacity and is not constrained by utilitarian budgeting. This relentless, visible pattern of spending becomes a defining characteristic of the creator's curated identity, signaling a continuous engagement in consumerism that reaffirms their position within the digital social hierarchy. In sum, the visual evidence from the netnographic analysis confirms that these practices are not accidental. They are strategic status signals designed to maintain the audience's perception of the creator's wealth and influence, thereby closing the powerful feedback loop of digital conspicuous consumption (Merwood-Salisbury, J. 2023: Sassower 2025).

The unboxing of 'blind boxes' observed in this study transcends simple product curiosity; it represents a 'digital ritual of distinction.' In Veblenian terms, the uncertainty of the box's content enhances the prestige of the 'win,' where the influencer demonstrates pecuniary strength by capturing rare items. This performance transforms a mundane purchase into a

spectacle of leisure, reinforcing the social hierarchy between the creator who 'possesses' and the audience who 'desires'. The findings also reveal that Veblenian pecuniary emulation is not a passive phenomenon but is a powerful, active pursuit driven by social comparison. Through in-depth interviews conducted via Instagram Direct Message (DM), it was uncovered that individuals actively imitate the consumption patterns they see from influencers or other figures perceived to be of a higher status. As one informant explicitly stated,

“I follow certain influencers not just for fashion ideas, but to see what's 'in' and what's considered a sign of success. I then try to replicate that look or experience, even in a small way, to feel like I'm part of that elite group.”

This aligns with a significant body of empirical research showing that social media use intensifies social comparison, which in turn leads to a greater desire for status and a need for uniqueness (Derbaix, et al., 2025; Asma, 2024). This struggle for validation goes beyond simple imitation; it is a constant, emotionally charged quest for recognition within a digital social hierarchy. In this digital ecosystem, consumption transcends simple ownership. It is fundamentally about the production of an image and a narrative. This performance functions as a form of social capital that can be translated into influence and status, thereby affirming the profound relevance of Veblen's theory within a context fundamentally reshaped by technology.

Digital Social Validation as a Primary Driver of Consumption

A crucial and original finding of this research is the fundamental role of digital social validation as a primary driver of conspicuous consumption behavior. This validation, manifested through “likes,” comments, and “shares,” functions as a new social currency that directly validates the status an individual projects. Data from DM interviews shows that the motivation behind consumption displays is often rooted in the need for this recognition. Our observation of the @andrehendarto profile also showed that posts featuring luxury goods tended to receive significantly higher interaction both in likes and comments compared to more personal posts. This suggests that users instinctively understand the “market value” of their status signals and leverage them for social gain. Visual analysis of high-interaction posts (Figure 3) confirms a significant correlation: displays of consumption (luxury/novelty goods) received quantifiably higher engagement (likes and comments) compared to personal posts. This empirically validates the informants' claims that digital validation is the primary reward for conspicuous behavior, completing the feedback loop of status signaling. Figure 3 shows that post garnered 73.7 thousand likes, 5,850 comments, and was shared 275 times. This high level of engagement indicates that unboxing content is appealing, especially to

Andrehendarto's followers. The large number of comments and likes indicates that this post has attracted attention and driven significant interaction on social media (Gul & Yul, 2025). This quantitative response confirms that users instantly recognize the social currency of status signals, treating high-value posts as worthy of interaction and attention, thereby transforming Veblen's concept from passive public perception to interactive conspicuousness.

This quantitative response confirms that users instantly recognize the social currency of status signals, treating high-value posts as worthy of interaction and attention. Crucially, this finding triangulates perfectly with the informants' claims that the motivation behind their consumption displays is the need for "acknowledgment" from others to feel successful. In the digital environment, this acknowledgment is materialized through metrics. This transforms Veblen's concept from passive public perception to interactive conspicuousness, where the symbolic value of a good is not complete until it is externally reinforced by the audience's response (Wahab 2025). This instantaneous, measurable feedback mechanism establishes a powerful and self-perpetuating feedback loop: successful conspicuous display is immediately rewarded with digital status capital, which in turn incentivizes the creator to continue the performance. Thus, the likes and comments displayed in Figure 3 are not merely vanity metrics; they are the tangible form of social capital that fuels the entire cycle of digital consumption and emulation.

This instantaneous, measurable feedback mechanism establishes a powerful and self-perpetuating feedback loop. Further analysis of this loop reveals its impact on the audience: The textual analysis of comments (Figure 4) further reveals followers' direct expressions of desire and emulation (e.g., 'want to buy,' 'goals'), confirming that the consumption display successfully triggers Veblenian emulation and solidifies the creator's social standing (Balabanis 2025). These comments are not mere compliments but are explicit signals that the audience perceives the displayed consumption as the standard of success. By actively generating this desire and envy, the content creators gain not only metrics but also social authority (Dores 2025) thereby closing the powerful feedback loop of digital status signaling and perpetuating the cycle of consumption. These comments are not mere compliments but are explicit signals that the audience perceives the displayed consumption as the standard of success. This confirms that the creator's consumption display successfully triggers Veblenian emulation by persuading the audience to adopt the perceived high-status consumption patterns (Rides 2024). By actively generating this desire and envy, the content creators gain not only metrics but also social authority. The audience's intent to emulate, expressed in the comments,

simultaneously solidifies the creator's social standing and influence, thereby closing the powerful feedback loop of digital status signaling and perpetuating the cycle of consumption.

Figure 3.



Video with high engagement

Figure 4.



Followers direct expressions of desire and emulation

Theoretically, this dynamic complements Veblen's framework by adding a powerful interactive layer that was absent in his time (Liu, 2024). Veblen focused on passive observation and public perception, but in the digital age, validation is instant, quantitative, and globally accessible. Other researchers have confirmed that intensive social media usage can lead to a boost in self-esteem, which in turn fuels more conspicuous consumption (Diamantopoulos, et al. 2025).As one of our informans explained,

“When my post about a new bag gets a lot of likes and positive comments, it feels like I’ve earned my place. It’s not just about the bag; it’s about the acknowledgment from others that I’m successful enough to have it.”

This statement critically highlights how the symbolic value of a good is not complete until it is reinforced by the digital audience's response, making conspicuous consumption on Instagram a thoroughly interactive and social process. This dynamic creates a powerful feedback loop where the more a user engages in conspicuous displays and receives validation, the more they are incentivized to continue the behavior (Bridgman 2023). We, therefore, contend that digital social validation represents a novel psychological and sociological mechanism that imbues the act of consumption with meaning, transforming it from a mere individual act into a sought-after social performance. This powerful feedback loop perpetually fuels the cycle of consumption and emulation.

The Convergence of "Leisure" and "Labor" in Digital Conspicuous Consumption

While Veblen distinguished between conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure as the non-productive use of time to signal wealth, this study found a fascinating and significant convergence in the digital age (Maciel 2024). Maintaining a desirable digital identity on Instagram, from curating the feed and selecting the right filters to continuously interacting with followers, requires significant time and effort. This digital "leisure" is not a passive activity; rather, it is a form of work undertaken to produce and manage one's self-image and social status (Kristina, A., and Achsan, D. 2024). In our observations, we found that behind a seemingly relaxed vacation photo, there is often significant effort to find the perfect angle, edit the image, and craft a compelling narrative, which a user may then track for engagement metrics.

This illustrates the convergence of leisure and labor, where the time spent curating and producing content becomes a form of status signaling, termed 'leisure labor' in the digital space, serving as tangible visual proof of this convergence. While a DIY (Do It Yourself) project is typically framed as a pastime or leisure activity (an exercise of discretionary, non-productive time), the video or photographic presentation of it necessitates a significant investment of time and focused effort (labor). Veblen originally defined conspicuous leisure as the non-productive use of time to signal wealth (i.e., one is rich enough not to have to work). However, in the digital space, the non-productive time spent on leisure is transformed into productive labor. The creator must 'work' to manufacture and maintain the desired self-image.

Figure 5.



The content featuring DIY (Do It Yourself) projects

This dynamic provides an important theoretical meaning: social status in the digital age is not merely a function of visible wealth, but also a result of the strategic and continuous effort required to maintain a meticulously curated digital narrative (Xu, M., & He, 2025). This finding aligns with the "flexing culture" explored by other scholars, who argue that the display of possessions on social media is a form of labor to gain social recognition and build a self-brand (Megantari, et al. 2025; Lu, et al. 2024). Veblen's concept of conspicuous leisure can thus be updated to include this "leisure labor," where the time and energy invested in creating and maintaining a luxurious image is itself another form of status signaling. This convergence of leisure and labor is a defining feature of the digital ecosystem, where the boundaries between one's personal life and a public, performative persona become increasingly blurred. We conclude that this blurring of leisure and labor is a defining feature of conspicuous consumption in the digital age. Individuals not only consume goods to signal status, but they also continuously "work" to produce an image that supports it, effectively turning leisure time into a commodity and a form of performance itself.

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CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates how digital platforms transform passive consumption into a measurable performance of social standing. By shifting from self-reported data to netnographic observation, we reveal that digital distinction is driven by 'leisure labor' and the ritual of authentication. However, as an exploratory case study, these findings are specific to high-end lifestyle influencers and offer a foundation for future research to test these patterns across different socio-economic tiers. Overall, this research makes a significant contribution to the literature by updating Veblen's theory to be relevant in a modern, technologically mediated context. We don't just confirm an old theory; we expand upon it, bridging a critical gap between traditional consumption theory and contemporary digital behavior. The insights we've gained provide a new perspective on the motivations behind online interactions and consumption, which were previously inadequately described. By demonstrating the enduring relevance of Veblen's ideas and introducing the concept of "leisure labor," our study enriches the academic disciplines of behavioral economics, digital marketing, and sociology economics.

The insights from this research also have important practical implications. For marketers, our findings underscore the importance of understanding a product's symbolic value as a tool for building social capital. Marketing strategies should shift from solely focusing on product features to crafting compelling narratives that allow consumers to

perform their desired identity and status. For social media users, this work can serve as an invitation to critically reflect on the motivations behind their digital interactions and consumption patterns. Understanding that online activity is often a form of labor for validation may help individuals navigate the digital landscape more consciously. Lastly, for future researchers, our findings open the door for further inquiry into the long-term psychological effects of "leisure labor" on users, or for comparative studies across different cultures and demographics.

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