

# **Expensive Happiness: The Impact of Luxury Consumption on Happiness Levels**

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**Abstract**

Shopping and consumer goods have increased availability of designer brands and luxury goods in recent years. The result of choice and spending behaviours in the Irish population has developed desires and prohibitive cost spending on designer goods. The current study will test the hypothesis that purchasing luxury goods increases happiness levels in Irish society. The study tests previous literature on concluding that media influences and anxieties are the motivations for compulsive and luxury spending. Correlational analysis reveals no positive relationship existing between happiness and luxury purchasing. Overall the study indicates other factors such as materialism and generational characteristics which may influence our intention to improve happiness with luxury spending.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years Industrialisation and globalisation introduced new markets and gave way to new lavish lifestyle choice for consumers. Through new production and availability of goods for consumers with the ease of access now for credit cards and financial loans, consuming goods has become an economic, social and cultural activity within society (Hjarvard,p. 46 2004).

Consumerism effects individuals within society through symbolic representation of material items. People symbolise their social positioning and form their identities based on societies understanding of their social status positioning (Lambert, 2005). Clothes for example, symbolize how people want their position to be identified, the elite or aristocracy wear expensive pearls to express their successfulness and wealth. These identities distinguish individuals or groups from one another in society. Symbolic representation of luxury items or expensive lifestyles may symbolize feelings of happiness and accomplishment (Kath, 2000, p. 18). Individuals who do not fit into this expensive lifestyle endure feelings of social exclusion effecting mental health and wellbeing for individuals (Yu, Jing, Ting Su, Zhou, & Nguyen, 2016).

Our current society has not come a far distance from this way of living. Through the frequent uses of social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram, young adults and adolescence are constantly in competition with each other's perceived success. Social bloggers and influencers are encouraged to participate in social media advertising which has a considerable influence on young teens purchasing tendencies (Kamal, Chu, & Pedram, 2013). Celebrities also used in advertising media promote the designer brand and expensive goods to directly influence consumers purchasing. Each advertisement aims to benefit the consumer and promote happiness in their lives. Young adolescence who purchase these expensive goods, promote their identities and status using the goods or wearing the goods through pictures and posts shared with friends on social media (Hjarvard,p. 47 2004). This competitive world online damages self-esteem of those who cannot afford these goods and leave individuals feeling social excluded and striving to own these materialistic purchases with the intention to higher their social status and reach happiness (Kath, 2000, p. 8). This raises the questions on how

happy we are really if we drive the latest most expensive car or how happy are we for wearing the latest Gucci shoes.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Buying behaviours**

Shopping is a hobby or activity that many people participate in for many distinct reasons. Happiness is malleable in that it has different arousals for individuals. Markets however aim to attract arousal for consumers to encourage buying (Mogilner, Aaker, & Kamvar, 2012). The motives for purchasing items are triggered from the needs and wants for retail products. Humans have a basic need to eat and therefore purchase food to give feelings of pleasure. Others have subconscious and conscious urges to shop in response to advertisements and in response to materialistic tendencies that influence shopping (Singh, 2016).

Culturally, many countries influence each other's consumer societies. Globalization has influenced societies in Japan, Europe and the United States. Previous research indicated that compulsive buying behaviours are increasing among college students of all social-economic backgrounds, as participants income did not affect the compulsive buying behaviours reported. The research found that in comparison to males, females were more likely to engage in compulsive buying, of the female's younger women were more likely than older women (Roberts J. , 2000).

### **Feelings associated with purchasing**

In their study Manuel Otero-López and Villardefrancos (2013) identified there was a correlation between high scores in variables with feelings of importance and success with increasing levels of anxiety. Anxiety among college students may be present when trying to conform with college classmates with an attempt to feel accepted by peers. This anxiety was found to develop into depression which resulted in the risk of participating in addictive buying actions. With present negative feelings such as the fears of not being accepted by peers, an individual's tendency to engage in addictive buying increased. Depression was named as the main feeling contributing to the addiction of buying. The study found by holding a personal belief in materialism as important, this increased the incline to engage in addictive buying. Therefore, it can be said with reference to the literature that college students participate more

in compulsive buying than older women, as college students are competing with fashion clothing to fit in or keeping up with trends among peers.

In support of this research, Tatić and Činjurević (2016) described how compulsive buying was influenced by low levels of self-esteem among female students in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The study found that females with elevated levels of negative affect such as feelings of guilt and fear were significantly more likely to engage in acts of compulsive buying.

Individuals that experience these negative feelings attempt to improve their social status through buying material goods to symbolise and place value on them items to mediate their feelings of low mood. However, this technique of improving one's mood through purchasing material goods is not always successful and may exaggerate negative affect. Feelings of depression and anxiety influence one's tendencies to engage in shopping behaviours compared to retail sales and promotions. Bushra (2014) found that when individuals make purchases to alter their social status they do regret it later. The study concluded that post-purchase regret was positively resulted by compulsive buying behaviour influenced from an individual's strong values of materialism.

## **Materialism**

Consumer psychology is altered with values of materialism a person cherishes. Materialism is a value that drives the enjoyment and encourages one's engagement in shopping. Luxury branded items and the latest model of mobiles and technology are preferred by the materialist consumer as purchasing the latest mobile phone constructs their ideas of the self, based on the brands purchased. Financial success with materialist values influence male and female shoppers to construct their identities on materialist purchases (Singh, 2016).

With the expansion of trade and the flourishing luxury designers, fashion clothing, jewellery and accessories along with cars and technology increased the availability of luxury goods. Japan in comparison the US is reported as the most materialistic country with twice as many luxury branded stores such as Louis Vuitton, Chanel and Cartier. Through the industrialization, luxury brands aimed their advertisements to the wealthy who could afford designer brands.

## **Experiential purchasing**

In comparison to luxury purchases, experiential buys do not always induce more happiness than materialistic purchases Yu, Jing, Ting Su, Zhou, and Nguyen (2016), in their findings,

individuals that compare themselves to internalized standards of themselves found happiness through materialistic purchases that symbolize their status. It can be identified from the literature that our internal perception and self-actualizing tendencies can directly influence our happiness when deciding between experiential and materialistic purchases.

Arguing these findings Carter and Gilovich (2010) studied material purchases in relation to experiential purchases. Individual satisfaction decreases over time following the increase in happiness following material purchases. In comparison consumers find the decision making more difficult in purchasing material items and enjoy the less effort in choosing experiential purchases. Participants also revealed that with material purchases if they found out the material item purchased was at a lower price the initial satisfaction decreased. Corresponding with Roberts J. (2000), consumers are in competition with one another when it comes to materialistic expensive purchases. Consumers are concerned with better options of their products in which they purchase not so much in terms of comparing the two options simultaneously, rather comparing their own product to someone else's. Socially comparing an older version of an iPhone with someone who has the latest version or comparing a car features with a neighbour's car, the social comparison diminished the satisfaction and value for one's material purchase (Carter & Gilovich, 2010). In analysing consumption, Ma, Yang, and Roesse (2012) found that material purchases that were used for experience such listening to a cd album, individuals were less likely to be dissatisfied with the reduction in price compared to if the cd album was left on a shelf.

### **Age**

To purchase or engage in buying behaviour one needs money or value to purchase items. Attitudes towards money differ across cultures and ages (Gandelman & Porzecanski, 2013). People with a vast amount of money display this wealth through purchasing luxury goods symbolizing their power and superiority to others. Research suggests that older people value money in comparison to younger generations who are more likely to overspend and spend more on luxury branded items such as designer clothing to impress peers and to identify with a higher social class they wish to fit in. These prestige goods are used by individuals to identify with a desirable social status and encourage values of materialism inflicted on society (Khare, 2014).

In their study Hudders and Pandelaere (2012) focuses on how consuming luxury brands affects the well-being of materialistic versus less materialistic consumers. Their findings show that high materialistic consumers benefit more from luxury consumption such as than low materialistic consumers, however focusing on goals with materialistic views leads to a decline

in a person's well-being. There was a significant difference on positive affect between participants aged below and over 40 years of age. While materialism has a negative impact on positive affect for young respondents, it has no significant impact on positive affect for older respondents. In contrast with (Bushra, 2014) the two findings suggest that stressors such as anxieties can influence values of materialism, however it can take the position that values of materialism be the cause for anxiety. Materialism is core value in forming self-identities in adolescence to cope with the stresses.

In their research Roberts, Manolis and Tanner Jr (2006) found that family structure is related to values of materialism. Older adolescent with divorced parents tend to associate happiness with materialistic goods more often than those who do not have divorced parents. The compulsive buying acts as a mediator for happiness and stressors of the divorce on adolescence. Young adolescence did not place emphasis on material objects when in comparison to older adolescents who reported as viewing other people's worth through expensive material goods. This research can be linked to previous (Khare, 2014), both research supports that materialism grows with autonomy as older adolescence and college students have been introduced and have access to credit and debit cards enabling them to consume materialistic goods, a value central to their lives.

### **Luxury brands**

While expressing their self-concept through shopping and purchasing material goods, competitiveness happens among peers and people within society. Luxury brands are desirable and attractive for consumers, the importance consumers give to brands develops their shopping activity (Singh, 2016). Among UK secondary school pupils Sweeting, Hunt, and Bhaskar (2012) researched consumerism and how it effects the wellbeing of adolescence. In their findings, 59% of students reported that brand names were important and made them feel cool, with two-thirds of students preferring clothes with designer labels. More than half of the students strongly agreed that brand named clothing mattered to them. Results of this study with are consistent with findings in which older adolescents and young adults have a higher importance associated with designer labels.

In their study on south Korean female college students Yoo and Lee (2009) contrasted the counterfeit goods with genuine luxury goods. Individuals choose luxury brands as they have purchased genuine goods in the past and feel luxury goods represent their social status and reflects their self-image. On the other perspective, consumers who hold materialistic values

who enjoy fashion trends that also want to reflect their self-image will also choose counterfeit or genuine brands based on their income and affordability.

### **Social exclusion**

Luxury goods are used to enhance one's self-enhancement and image when they compare their possessions to others (Tak, Pareek, and Rishi, 2017). In line with Carter and Gilovich (2010) it is evident that people in society are comparing themselves and possession with one another for self-enhancement, rather than enjoying the purpose of the material goods themselves. Possessions are now being used to reflect achievements in one's life as younger adults are using luxury items in a hurry to display their social standing. Individuals experience high emotions when purchasing luxury branded items due to the prohibitive costs. For compulsive shoppers, the costly items reduce the anxieties of the compulsive disorder resulting in an enhanced self-esteem (Khare, 2014). Purchasing luxury brands at costly amounts can result in financial difficulties for individual. Anxieties and worries may emerge and have bad repercussions for individuals and families. Financial debt may become an issue for society and its members.

Exploring the perceptions on luxury brands in Hong Kong and Canada Joy, Sherry Jr, Annamma, Wang, and Chan (2012) found that luxury branded items of clothing and watches were purchases many individuals desired to own as they reflected an elite status. One participant reports wearing a branded Polo shirt not only categorises you in the upper-class sport that the elite play, however it carries with it the social and emotional attitudes people associated with the luxury brand. In comparing luxury brands a Rolex watch does not have the same prestige that a Patek Phillippe watch carries as Rolex is readily available to buy where only the most knowledgeable and rich can own a Philippe watch. A participant of the study explains, by owning a Patek Phillippe watch would enhance his status among his male friends.

Louis Vuitton is among one of the most luxury brands for consumers and celebrities. Louis Vuitton luggage sells itself on exclusive heritage and quality and limits its designs for availability appealing to the wealthy elite who can afford such luggage (Joy, Sherry Jr, Annamma, Wang, & Chan, 2012). Art and heritage linked to luxury items appeal to customers as jewellery such as pearls and diamonds make consumers feel elegant and expensive. Studying Indian consumers and luxury brand bags found that Louis Vuitton was more targeted by the young status seeking consumers, with older consumers preferring brands as Fendi as they appreciate the history and quality associated with the brand. It is recognisable that the new generations in India want the luxury branded items for reputation and prominence in

comparison to older generations who enjoy the art and heritage of luxury brands (Debnath, Khan, and Chakrabarti, 2016).

### **Mental health**

Advertisements use celebrities and public figures to enhance the desirability of their luxury brands. In China, individuals reportedly experienced feelings of rejection from the advertised brands, due to the symbolic representation of superiority and power the advertisement portrayed. In the luxury brand advertisements, cars, watches, jewellery, bags and clothing were advertised. Jiang, Gao, Huang, DeWall, and Zhou (2014) reported that feelings of social exclusion and rejection were taken from the people in the advertisements. A crucial factor of sensitivity to rejection was contrasted in relation to the respondents and found people who looked at the advertisements who were sensitive to rejection effected life satisfaction compared to those who were not sensitive to rejection. Corresponding with the findings of Maneul Otero-Lopez and Villardefrancos (2013), social excluded individuals in society feel the need to buy these advertised luxury brands to mediate the stressors associated with the feelings of rejection (Jiang, Gao, Huang, DeWall, & Zhou, 2014). Stressors and feeling of social exclusion are subjected to effect ones' mental health and wellbeing. The 'good life' aspiration for members of society is associated with owning luxury brands such as Rolex watches and expensive cars such as BMW. This term the 'good life' is socially constructed by cultures around the world. In Spain, Taiwan and the US, European cars such as BMW were associated with living the 'good life' (Zinkhan and Prenshaw, 1994).

### **Media influences**

Increasing technology and the influence of media, social media is an excellent marketing approach for luxury brands to persuade consumers. Using celebrities through social media advertising influences purchasing tendencies of luxury goods for young teens and adults as they aspire to identify with their preferred celebrity or public figure (Tak, Pareek, and Rishi, 2017).

Social media heavily influences the values on materialism and luxury item desires among frequent users most commonly adolescents and young adults. Social media users in America and Arab countries are influenced through values of materialism to purchase luxury brands. In the Arab countries users reported more time spent on social media and reported a higher monthly income compared to Americans, thus reportedly predicted values of materialism and were strongly influenced through social media to purchase luxury branded

fashion. Kamal, Chu and Pedram (2013) These findings are considerably important as the young generation who are highlighting materialist values and are keen to fit in with fellow peers and college groups are increasing anxieties and negative affect for the younger society (Bushra, 2014). These anxieties supplied with financial debt credit buying will indeed have a negative effect on mental health and well-being of society.

### **Geographical location**

Evident from the literature, luxury purchasing behaviours differ across individual societies and geographical locations. The literature has highlighted differences in consumer behaviours in South Korea, America and Arab countries. In support of differences cross culturally, in their study Gandelman and Porzecanski (2013) identified happiness levels are more unequal in countries which have high inequalities of income. The study indicated that in 113 countries surveyed, people with high income were happier because they had the financial ability to consume more however, satisfaction in areas of family life and social inclusion was also a contributing factor in comparison to low income individuals. Therefore, suggesting differences in happiness levels comparing geographical locations, high income countries have overall balanced happiness levels compared to low income or developing countries.

Tests of spatial happiness were measured by Requena (2016) in analysing rural and urban participants across 29 countries. Findings suggest that living standards in the country side increased subjective well-being, higher than participants of urban locations in developed countries.

Despite the growing influences in the consumer world, limited research has been done to investigate the happiness levels following consuming luxury goods and designer branded expensive purchases. The present study aims to identify if happiness increases following consumerism of luxury material goods. The purpose of the study will assist to identify do purchasing luxury expensive items such as designer clothes, jewellery, shoes and watches make us feel emotionally happier about our lives. The current study will test the hypothesis that happiness levels increase following purchasing luxury items.

## **METHODS**

### **Design**

Quantitative research design was conducted to investigate the relationship between the consumerism of luxury goods and happiness levels. The criterion variable is consumerism of luxury goods with the predictor variable being happiness as the hypothesis predicted that levels of happiness would increase with purchasing luxury goods. Questionnaires were used in the correlational design. Data for the study was drawn from 202 participants with 195 overall valid responses.

### **Participants**

The convenience sample of participants consisted of 149 females to 46 males. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 68 with the modal age of 26. Participants were invited to complete the survey voluntary online, through google forms with the link advertised through social media Facebook and Instagram.

### **Materials**

Two questionnaires were distributed online using google forms and completed by the participants. Google forms was used to conduct the questionnaire design the questionnaire and to collect responses. Geographical questions were used at the beginning of the questionnaire to gather data on personal information and participant environment used to compare urban and rural differences. The first questionnaire subtracted from Arora (2017) measured participant purchasing behaviours of luxury goods. Personal fashion luxury goods measured include handbags, watches, jewellery and clothes. The questionnaire was a mix of 36 questions and statements first identifying patterns of buying tendencies such as 'how often you buy luxury brand fashion products?' and 'I would purchase luxury goods if it involved the risk of financial debt'. Other measure's included statements and questions to gather data on materialistic values and self-esteem such as 'I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others' and 'I buy a luxury brand for satisfying my personal needs without any attempt to make an impression on other people'. The (Arora, 2017) questionnaire was originally used to collect data in India, the current questionnaire language was altered to comprehend the questionnaire by participants in Irish society. 10 questions were also replaced to gather data on social media influences an important aspect to this study. 198 was a high score recorded which can be

interpreted as an individual who places significant value on materialistic goods and who is a frequent purchaser of luxury goods. The lowest score of 93 can suggest that individuals are less likely to hold significance or be frequent purchasers of luxury goods (Arora, 2017).

The second questionnaire was the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire developed by Michael Argyle and Peter Hills (Wright, 2017). This survey was used in the current study containing 29 questions and statements including 'I don't feel particularly pleased with the way I am' and 'Life is good'. High scores of 160 indicate participants are overall extremely happy with their lives correlating positive marriages, health and goal attainment. Low scores of 62 however are low indicators of overall satisfaction with life, signposting individuals see themselves in situations worse than they truly are. The mean calculated score of 123 can be interpreted that most participants are moderately happy with life consistent with the average person who takes the questionnaire (Wright, 2017).

Strength of agreement was also measured for both questionnaires using a 7-point scale response ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree. Reverse scoring was then used to measure the Oxford happiness responses. Both luxury goods and happiness questionnaires were compared to correlate the findings of happiness levels following expensive luxury purchases. Please see appendix 1 for full breakdown of questionnaire.

### **Analysis**

Total scores were computed for the luxury goods consumption questionnaire and the happiness questionnaire. Correlations were analysed between the two scores from each questionnaire using SPSS version 24. Frequencies and descriptive analysis was carried out to compute data for individual question responses and in comparing groups such as gender and age comparisons.

### **Procedure**

Both questionnaires were completed using google forms online. Participants were assigned with instructions on indicating their strength of agreement. Two questionnaires were combined into one form. A link to complete the questionnaire was posted on social media to advertise to participants. 3 weeks was the total time which allowed for sufficient responses. Questionnaires were extracted to an excel document and inputted into SPSS version 24. Recoding of questions was completed to allow for rapid identification of long questions. Any responses aged below 18 years were removed from the data. Reverse scoring was then preformed for the happiness questionnaire. Total scores were computed for each individual questionnaire to run descriptive

for mean scores. Both luxury goods and happiness questionnaires were compared to correlate their relationship. Individual questions were then statistically run to find total scores which could be compared to contrasting questions within the questionnaire.

### **Ethical issues**

Five responses were received from under 18 years which were removed from the data as they were unable to provide consensual agreement. Anonymity was also considered for participants as names and identifiable questions were excluded from the study to protect individual identity.

## RESULTS

To explore the relationship between shopping luxury brands and levels of overall happiness, correlation analysis was used. The study correlates findings on shopping behaviours and happiness scores. The results showed that purchasing luxury goods dose not lead to greater overall happiness. It is evident there is no relationship in this study between shopping luxury goods and happiness levels due to the negative correlation found. Therefore, the hypothesis was not supported that consuming luxury goods leads to overall greater happiness.

### Correlation analysis

Correlations were conducted to test the robustness of the scores between luxury goods purchases and happiness levels in male and female participants. With reference to the findings there is a large negative correlation between the two variables for males ( $r=-.090$ ,  $n=38$ ,  $p>.05$ ) and a moderate negative correlation for females ( $r=-.090$ ,  $n=133$ ,  $p>.05$ ) indicating that happiness dose not increase with the consumerism of luxury goods in either male or females.

Correlation analysis was also carried out to test purchasing happiness levels among rural and urban areas following luxury purchases. Rural areas were found to have a higher positive relationship ( $r=.288$ ,  $n= 26$ ,  $p>.05$ ) in comparison with urban areas ( $r=-.153$ ,  $n=146$ ,  $p>.05$ ) however there is non-significant findings between the two variables in rural areas indicating that there is a no relationship between luxury shopping and happiness levels, consistent with urban findings.

Evidence of a negative relationship between purchasing luxury brands and happiness levels was also evident in age groups. Comparisons were run between the ages of young (18-30 years) and older (31-69 years) to identify impact on happiness luxury brands have on different generations. Findings of the correlations indicate there is zero relationship between the two variables for young participants ( $r=-.042$ ,  $n=97$ ,  $p>.05$ ) and older ( $r=-.185$ ,  $n=67$ ,  $p>.05$ ) participants. No relationship exists between happiness levels and purchasing luxury goods.

### Happiness and luxury behaviour

The below table 1 shows the overall score result of questionnaire 1 measuring luxury purchasing behaviour. Evidence can show the minimum score participants received was 93.0 indicating low levels of purchasing behaviour with the maximum score of 198.0 of high purchasing behaviours. Out of 181 participants 136.7 is the mean score computed, thus reporting more participants result in purchasing luxury goods just below the middle range of minimum and maximum scores on luxury purchasing behaviour.

**Table 1: Showing scores on purchasing behaviour of luxury goods**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Luxury	181	93.00	198.00	136.6906	20.21835
Valid N (listwise)	181				

Below in table 1.1, Happiness levels are shown. The maximum happiness score resulted in 160.0 indicating very happy, with the lowest score of 62.0 representing participants who are not happy. The mean score computed illustrates that 123.0 represents the average number of participants who are relatively satisfied with life.

**Table 1.1: Displaying overall scores on happiness levels**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Happiness	178	62.00	160.00	122.9831	19.47981
Valid N (listwise)	178				

Overall happiness scores shown for rural and urban areas indicate a slight increase in happiness levels for rural participants. The mean result of happiness scores for rural areas total to 130 compared to urban area totals of 121. Rural areas have achieved outcomes of higher results indicating they are happier than urban participants. A breakdown of maximum and minimum scores for rural and urban differences can be visualized below in table 1.2.

**Table 1.2: Happiness scores for rural and urban participants**

Location		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Rural Area	Happiness	26	79.00	155.00	130.4615	17.77466
	Valid N (listwise)	26				
Urban Area	Happiness	152	62.00	160.00	121.7039	19.52476
	Valid N (listwise)	152				

## Geographical location

Descriptive statistics were carried out to explore income levels and purchasing luxury expensive goods. Findings from the results indicated men purchase luxury branded items more frequently than women, 8.7% of men purchase luxury branded goods weekly in comparison to 0.7% of women. Monthly men (26.1%) out purchased women in greater amounts (3.4%) on luxury goods. When investigated in earnings men dominated women in earnings with 8.7% of men earning €61,000- €80,000 in comparison to 1.3% of women.

When comparing urban and rural areas in table 2, 2.4% urban respondents reported incomes of €61,000-€80,000 with rural areas reporting 6.9% of the same incomes however, had greater responses choosing 'prefer not to say' (17.2%) than urban respondents (8.4%). Evident in the findings the highest percentage of average participants from both rural (34.5%) and urban (39.8%) areas had incomes in the €21,000-35,000-income bracket.

**Table 2: Incomes for rural and urban locations**

Location			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Rural Area	Valid	<€20,000	5	17.2	17.2	17.2
		€21,000-€35,000	10	34.5	34.5	51.7
		€36,000-€45,000	6	20.7	20.7	72.4
		€46,000-€60,000	1	3.4	3.4	75.9
		€61,000-€80,000	2	6.9	6.9	82.8
		Prefer not to say	5	17.2	17.2	100.0
		Total	29	100.0	100.0	
Urban Area	Valid		3	1.8	1.8	1.8
		<€20,000	33	19.9	19.9	21.7
		>€81,000	5	3.0	3.0	24.7
		€21,000-€35,000	66	39.8	39.8	64.5
		€36,000-€45,000	26	15.7	15.7	80.1
		€46,000-€60,000	15	9.0	9.0	89.2
		€61,000-€80,000	4	2.4	2.4	91.6
		Prefer not to say	14	8.4	8.4	100.0
		Total	166	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.1 below contrasts the purchasing luxury goods between urban and rural areas. Rural areas purchase more frequently than participants in urban areas. A higher percentage of 28.9% urban area respondents report to never purchasing luxury items in comparison to 17.2% of rural areas. Nearly double (13.8%) of rural participants reported purchasing luxury branded items monthly compared to urban participants (7.8%). In a total number of 114 young (18-30 years) respondents from both locations, 28 reported to never purchasing luxury items, with 15 respondents purchasing every month.

**Table 2.1: Illustrating how often respondents purchase luxury goods in rural and urban areas**

Location		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Rural Area	Valid	Every 3 months	5	17.2	17.2	17.2
		Every week	1	3.4	3.4	20.7
		Monthly	4	13.8	13.8	34.5
		Never	5	17.2	17.2	51.7
		Once a year	9	31.0	31.0	82.8
		Twice a year	5	17.2	17.2	100.0
		Total	29	100.0	100.0	
Urban Area	Valid		1	.6	.6	.6
		Every 3 months	16	9.6	9.6	10.2
		Every week	4	2.4	2.4	12.7
		Monthly	13	7.8	7.8	20.5
		Never	48	28.9	28.9	49.4
		Once a year	43	25.9	25.9	75.3
		Twice a year	41	24.7	24.7	100.0
		Total	166	100.0	100.0	

### Age comparisons

Young participants reported a slight increase in numbers to purchasing luxury goods in comparison with older participants. In table 2.2 older participants reported a higher percentage (32.4%) of never purchasing luxury goods compared to the young age group (24.6%). 27.2% of young participants indicated they purchased more frequently within every three months compared to older participants (13.5%), with older participants scoring higher on less frequent goods purchased on a yearly basis (29.7%).

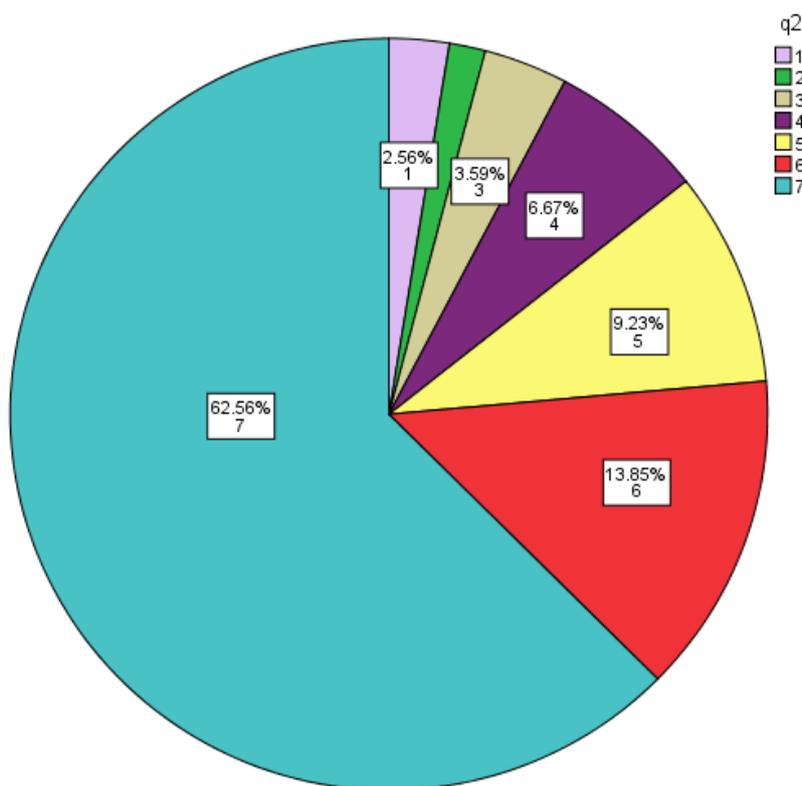
**Table 2.2: Indicating how often luxury goods are purchased in comparison between young (18-30 years) and older (31-69 years) participants.**

Age groups		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Young	Valid		1	.9	.9	.9
		Every 3 months	13	11.4	11.4	12.3
		Every week	2	1.8	1.8	14.0
		Monthly	15	13.2	13.2	27.2
		Never	28	24.6	24.6	51.8
		Once a year	27	23.7	23.7	75.4
		Twice a year	28	24.6	24.6	100.0
		Total	114	100.0	100.0	
older	Valid	Every 3 months	8	10.8	10.8	10.8
		Every week	2	2.7	2.7	13.5
		Never	24	32.4	32.4	45.9
		Once a year	22	29.7	29.7	75.7
		Twice a year	18	24.3	24.3	100.0
		Total	74	100.0	100.0	

### Experiential experiences

Responses from individual questions were also evaluated to investigate responses. Percentages below are responses chosen by the participant on their strength of agreement to the statement 'I would prefer a holiday in comparison to an expensive material purchase'. Each point on the scale ranges from 1-7 shown in figure 1, with 1= strongly agree and 7=strongly disagree and 4= neutral response.

Shown in the figure 1 below we can see 62.56% of respondents reported a strong agreement indicated by choosing number 7 on the scale in comparison to 2.56% who chose response 1 indicating they prefer an expensive material good in comparison to a holiday (1= strongly disagree) to the statement. The indication for experiential experiences is preferred by respondents here over materialistic luxury brands.



**Figure 1: Pie chart illustrating the % of participants who prefer holiday purchases compared to purchases of luxury goods**

\*scale of agreement ranging from 1-7 indicate responses: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree somewhat, 3=disagree, 4=undecided, 5= agree, 6= Agree somewhat, 7= strongly agree

## Social media

The influences of social media on purchasing luxury goods to increase happiness is displayed in table 3. Strength of agreement for participants ranges from 1 to 7, number 4 indicates neutral agreement indicating the participant is undecided with the question or statement given. In table 3, 81.3% of participants selected the response 1,2 and 3, indicating they are not strongly influenced to purchase a luxury product advertised on social media if a social blogger recommended it. As displayed in table 3, the highest percentage of respondents strongly disagreed (1) to social media influences on purchasing luxury goods (49.7%).

**Table 3: Percentage of participants who would purchase a luxury product if a Social Blogger recommended it on social media**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	96	48.7	49.7	49.7
	2	37	18.8	19.2	68.9
	3	24	12.2	12.4	81.3
	4	21	10.7	10.9	92.2
	5	11	5.6	5.7	97.9
	6	1	.5	.5	98.4
	7	3	1.5	1.6	100.0
	Total	193	98.0	100.0	
Missing	System	4	2.0		
Total		197	100.0		

\*scale of agreement ranging from 1-7 indicate responses: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree somewhat, 3=disagree, 4=undecided, 5= agree, 6= Agree somewhat, 7= strongly agree

### Counterfeit goods

When calculating the percentage of participants who would not purchase counterfeit luxury goods, 26.9% of responses would strongly agree indicating response 7 (strongly disagree), not to purchase counterfeit luxury goods in comparison to 11.9% opted for response 1 (strongly agree) indicating they would purchase counterfeit goods. However, when asked if counterfeit goods resembled genuine luxury goods table 3.1 confirms 24.3% of young participants would purchase counterfeit that resembled luxury than that of 31.1% of older participants.

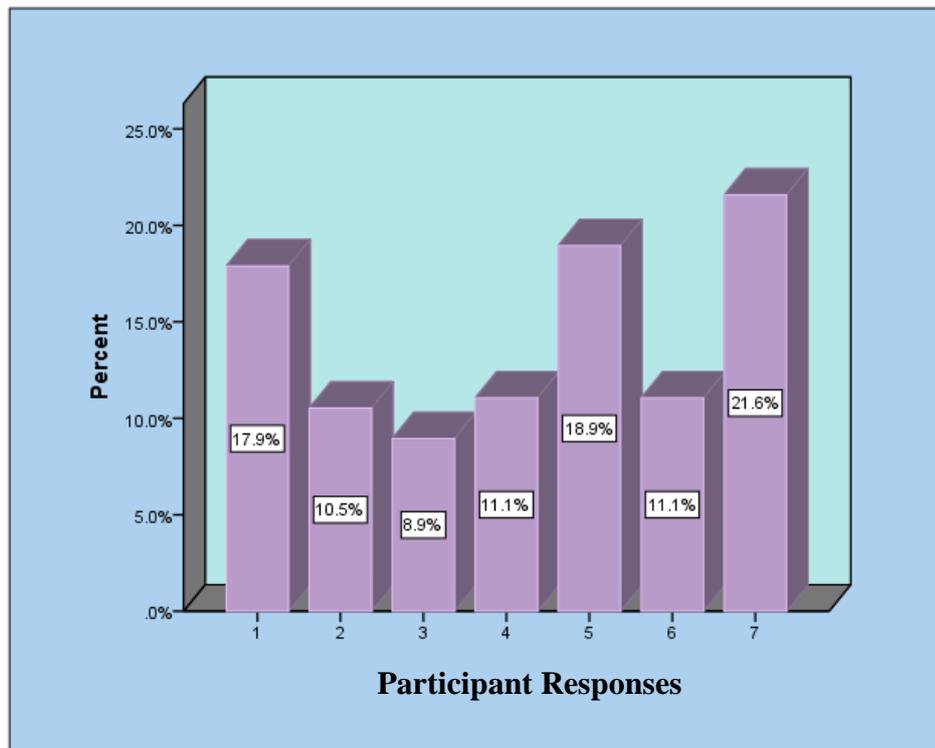
**Table 3.1 Percentage of participant responses to purchasing counterfeit goods that resemble luxury brands between young and old age groups**

Age groups			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Young	Valid	1	28	24.6	25.2	25.2
		2	8	7.0	7.2	32.4
		3	13	11.4	11.7	44.1
		4	18	15.8	16.2	60.4
		5	17	14.9	15.3	75.7
		6	13	11.4	11.7	87.4
		7	14	12.3	12.6	100.0
		Total	111	97.4	100.0	
	Missing	System	3	2.6		
Total		114	100.0			
older	Valid	1	13	17.6	17.6	17.6
		2	5	6.8	6.8	24.3
		3	7	9.5	9.5	33.8
		4	13	17.6	17.6	51.4
		5	13	17.6	17.6	68.9
		6	15	20.3	20.3	89.2
		7	8	10.8	10.8	100.0
		Total	74	100.0	100.0	

\*scale of agreement ranging from 1-7 indicate responses: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree somewhat, 3=disagree, 4=undecided, 5= agree, 6= Agree somewhat, 7= strongly agree

### Purchasing effects on mood

Frequencies were carried out to evaluate how purchasing goods is resulted from participants experiencing bad mood. Strength of agreement shown in figure 1.2 for participants ranges from 1 to 7, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. Figure 1.2 illustrates the responses to the statement ‘When in a bad mood, purchasing goods improves my mood’. More frequently, 51.6% participants responded to numbers 5,6 and 7 representing agreement to the statement. Responses ranging from 1-3 resulted in 37.3% of the participants indicating disagreement. Therefore, a greater percentage of participants purchase goods with the intention to improve their mood.



**Figure 1.2: Percentage of respondents who tend to purchase goods to improve their mood**

\*scale of agreement ranging from 1-7 indicate responses: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree somewhat, 3=disagree, 4=undecided, 5= agree, 6= Agree somewhat, 7= strongly agree

### Post purchase regret

Post purchase regret responses can be seen in table 4 with 41.6% of overall participants agreeing of feelings of guilt following purchases which are expensive. Agreement is expressed by participants who picked responses 5, 6 and 7 on the scale of agreement, with a cumulative 39.5% of participants choosing responses 1,2 and 3 indicating disagreement to the statement ‘I feel guilty following expensive purchases’. Contrasting differences between young and older participants in feelings of guilt following expensive purchases as 14.7% young people strongly agree to feel guilty in comparison to 16.4%. Older people (31-69 years) slightly feel guiltier following expensive purchases than their younger participants.

**Table 4: Participants who feel guilty following purchasing expensive luxury brands**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	30	15.2	15.8	15.8
	2	18	9.1	9.5	25.3
	3	27	13.7	14.2	39.5
	4	36	18.3	18.9	58.4
	5	30	15.2	15.8	74.2
	6	20	10.2	10.5	84.7
	7	29	14.7	15.3	100.0
	Total	190	96.4	100.0	
Missing	System	7	3.6		
Total		197	100.0		

\*scale of agreement ranging from 1-7 indicate responses: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree somewhat, 3=disagree, 4=undecided, 5= agree, 6= Agree somewhat, 7= strongly agree

## **DISCUSSION**

The main objective of this study predicted that purchasing luxury goods increases happiness levels within participants. The results of this study indicated that the hypothesis was not supported, revealing that purchasing luxury goods such as designer shoes, bags, jewellery, watches and clothes did not increase happiness levels in participants. In the study of Kath (2000, p. 18) symbolic representation of luxury items symbolizes feelings of happiness and social status however, a gap in previous literature was evident concerning the levels of happiness following the purchase of luxury goods. The findings of the present study consistent with the previous literature suggest no positive relationship between the two variables exist, indicating luxury goods did not make individuals any happier in their lives.

### **Feelings associated with luxury brands**

Consistent with previous literature, findings in this study revealed that over half of the participants presented levels of agreement that when in a bad mood, shopping improves their mood. The correlation between purchasing luxury goods and happiness levels was negative indicating that although participants may have the perception that their happiness levels increase following a shopping trip, results of this study indicate no such relationship. While happiness levels do not increase, feeding materialistic desires or wishes may perceive to make individuals that have strong materialist values happier (Hudders and Pandelaere, 2012). Perhaps participants may have subconscious anxieties they are unaware of which may encourage shopping behaviours, with the aim to mediate these anxieties such as keeping up with fashion trends of peers we may feel purchasing goods will make us feel socially included and thus increase our happiness levels (Manuel Otero-López and Villardefrancos, 2013). However, consistent with the findings of Bushra (2014) that attempting to improve happiness through purchasing goods does not always induce happiness.

### **Post-purchase regret**

Feelings associated with post-purchase regret in this study were consistent with the research of Bushra (2014). Similar the findings of this study showed that participants felt guilty following purchases of expensive luxury goods. Post-purchase regret and happiness levels can be contrasted to say levels of happiness may be reduced due to the feelings of guilt and regret following expensive purchases. In addition, financial worry could contribute to the decreasing

levels of happiness following prohibitive cost spending on luxury materialistic goods. With support of previous findings, individuals on low incomes who purchase costly luxury goods may find themselves in financial debt to keep up with social status or self-image, however the disposable income available following luxury purchasing may lead to sacrifice in spending on food and utilities generating financial stresses on the individual (Hjarvard, p. 46 2004).

Findings in the current study found that older participants (31-69 years) are more inclined to feel guilty following expensive luxury purchases compared to the younger participants. Younger participants (18-30 years) were also more frequent purchasers of luxury goods than older participants. With reference to Khare (2014) this difference of post-purchase regret may be understood as younger people in comparison to older individuals are less likely to value money or not be tied to financial responsibilities such as mortgages and child rearing reducing the guilt from costly spending.

### **Social exclusion**

Responses in this study identified that participants whom reported greater incomes also had high rates of luxury goods purchases. Findings indicated that individuals earning more money engaged more in buying designer branded goods. Contrasting with previous literature Joy, Sherry Jr, Annamma, Wang, and Chan (2012) propose these luxury branded goods may be used to reflect a symbol of wealth or an elite status among high earners within society. When comparisons were carried out in this research regarding income, males scored higher in earnings than female participants. Results denoted that men compared to women engaged in buying luxury goods more frequently every week than women. Perhaps with the considerable difference in income between male and female earnings identified in the study, inequalities are apparent and may have a negative effect on the wellbeing and affect social inclusion with females in society as implied by Yu, Jing, Ting Su, Zhou, and Nguyen (2016).

As the results have found that purchasing luxury goods dose not increase happiness levels, it is possible that purchasing luxury goods generates inequalities between people earning different incomes as some members of society may not have disposable income to fund luxury purchases in comparison to high earners who do. Social exclusion thus increases the likelihood of mental health problems due to an unequal society (Gandelman & Porzecanski, 2013).

### **Age differences**

It is clear from the findings, there are more young people purchasing luxury goods in comparison with not purchasing luxury goods. It can be assumed with support of Bushra (2014)

that younger generations are increasingly purchasing luxury goods to look ‘cool’ or ‘fit in’ with peers or society. In line with Sweeting, Hunt, and Bhaskar (2012) we can articulate that brand names matter to young adults as they place importance to them, with over 10% of the young adult’s purchasing luxury goods every month. As no correlation was shown to increase the happiness of young adults, materialism is a possible characteristic contributing to the high figures of luxury purchases among participants of 18-30 years. Consistent with Hudders and Pandelaere (2012) the findings show these young adults are more inclined to purchase designer brands which may be influenced by materialistic values such as owning the latest designer tracksuit or new Gucci trainers.

The negative effects of materialist values such as anxiety, are affecting young people and may have mental health outcomes in the future for a growing Irish population. Young participants in the study were also less likely to purchase counterfeit luxury goods consistent with Yoo and Lee (2009) genuine luxury goods represent social standing that young adults of this study are clearly aspiring to achieve. It can be said that genuine luxury goods with brand names are preferred to counterfeit goods for self-image and importance for the younger participants (Sweeting, Hunt, and Bhaskar, 2012).

### **Experiential experiences**

Findings from the study suggest that participants overall prefer to purchase experiential experiences in comparison to luxury products. Although overall scores were high for purchases of luxury goods when asked preference over two thirds prefer a holiday in comparison to a material luxury purchase. Adding to Roberts J. (2000), this study identifies when compared with experiential purchases individuals are more inclined to choose experiential options such as holidays. Choosing a holiday may differ between individuals who hold materialistic values and those who don’t, it is positive to see from the results that participants prefer to spend money on culture knowledge and tranquillity experiences of holidays in comparison to luxury material purchases.

### **Geographical location**

Geographical locations were also consistent with the literature to have effects on purchasing tendencies of luxury goods and happiness outcomes (Gandelman & Porzecanski, 2013). The percentage of participants in rural areas that responded to ‘prefer not to say’ earnings were double that of urban respondents, it could be said that a reluctance to disclose earnings could be an option to conceal excessive income.

Greater frequencies in purchasing luxury goods was also consistent in rural locations compared to urban respondents and could be explained with Carter and Gilovich (2010) that luxury goods may be used to symbolize personal achievements and income through purchases of prohibitive costs. In addition, high income families and individuals may choose to live in rural areas of Ireland in comparison to urban areas. Alternatively, the higher percentage of rural locations purchasing luxury goods more frequently than urban locations may be a result of high earners simply appreciating the heritage or quality of luxury brands with the funds available to do so (Debnath, Khan, and Chakrabarti, 2016).

Highlighting differences in total happiness scores in rural and urban locations, overall outcomes resulted in participants in general were quite happy and satisfied with their lives however, rural participants had a higher mean score of 130 in happiness levels compared to rural participants scoring 121. With reference to the findings, perhaps income acts as an extraneous variable impacting the outcome scores of happiness levels for participants in rural and urban areas (Singh, 2016).

### **Media influences**

Previous literature on media influences showed a substantial outcome on individuals purchasing behaviours influenced by the media and advertisements (Tak, Pareek, and Rishi, 2017). Although 15 respondents from the 193 responses in this study would be influenced to purchase goods advertised by a social blogger, most respondents would not be persuaded by an online influential icon. Irish society can be therefore contrasted with the study of Kamal, Chu, and Pedram (2013) on Arab societies that are heavily influenced by the media to purchase luxury goods. The results of this study do not indicate that individuals are influenced by social media in purchasing luxury goods. These findings are positive as the growing media influencers and bloggers show to have no alarming influence on participants of this study, also participants are not swayed easily to conform to media pressures using bloggers to purchase advertised goods (Jiang, Gao, Huang, DeWall, and Zhou, 2014).

### **Implications**

It is positive to see that the study implies that as individuals we do not achieve our happiness in purchasing expensive material goods. The study may indicate other non-material experiences which may induce happiness in our lives.

In conclusion this study has identified that our happiness dose not increase as we purchase luxury goods. As discussed earlier in the study, the spread of globalisation has

influenced the choice of fashion brands available to consumers and has contributed to consumer luxury buying. The study has highlighted young generations are purchasing more luxury brands, although no relationship exists with raising happiness levels the study suggests that materialist values such as social status and self-image is dominant in younger populations which may be problematic for societies mental health in the future. The study has highlighted how incomes and luxury spending are greater in different geographical locations which may indicate the economic inequalities of rural and urban populations.

### **Limitations and future research**

This study adds to the body of research on awareness of shopping behaviours and the effects purchasing luxury goods affects our mental health. The study has investigated happiness levels post purchasing of luxury goods in which previous studies have focused on feelings that inflict and drive purchasing behaviours (Tatić and Činjarević, 2016). Participants in this study intended to improve their mood following purchasing goods however, it is evident no such relationship of happiness were found.

The study has highlighted that other factors may influence our tendency to purchase luxury goods such as our income or to increase social status (Mehrdadi, Sadeghian, Direkvand-Moghadam, & Hashemian, 2016). Young and old age groups were studied in the current paper compared to previous research focusing solely on targeted age brackets (Sweeting, Hunt, and Bhaskar, 2012).

Highlighting limitations to this study aims to resolve the limitations that would be beneficial for future research. Improper representation of larger generalisations is evident in the small sample size of the study, especially regarding the small sample size of rural participants. Larger sampling size should be conducted to provide greater generalization of the hypothesis. The study was conducted under a brief period which focused on short term happiness levels. A longitudinal study may be beneficial to gather more information on long-term effects of purchasing luxury goods on happiness levels. Personal circumstances in different individuals are subject to change and can sway outcomes of happiness levels. Environments during the survey may be stressful or challenging for the respondent, providing a controlled calm or exciting environment may affect the stability or increase outcomes of happiness levels. As the current study has magnified on luxury goods, purchasing general goods may direct future research.

**Overall conclusions**

Overall, interesting to identify that although we may sense that purchasing expensive handbags and shoes make us happier, happiness in this case may be derived from non-material causes such as family life or goal attainment. Values factors such as academic achievement or job satisfaction may influence happiness levels on individuals in comparison to material goods. Relationships and social aspects such as intimate relationships and socializing with friends may be the sources which improve overall happiness within our lives.

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## Appendix I

### Luxury Brand Questionnaire

1. Where do you live?

Rural/Urban

2. What is your ethnic or cultural background?

3. Gender

Male/Female

4. What is your age?

5. Status

Self-employed

Full-time employment

Part {time employment

Student

Homemaker

Retired

Fulltime employment, part-time student

6. Annual earnings

<€20,000

€21,000€35,000

€36,000€45,000

€46,000€60,000

€61,000€80,000

>€81,000

Prefer not to say

7. Do you buy luxury fashion branded products such as Versace, Armani, Gucci, Chanel, Prada Calvin Klein (CK), Rolex, Diesel, Christian Dior, Tommy Hilfiger, Dolce and Gabbana, Hugo Boss, Guess, etc?

Yes/No

8. How often do you purchase Luxury fashion branded products?

Every week

Monthly

Every 3 months

Twice a year

Once a year

Never

9. I think a luxury brand with a high price means good quality compared to other brands.

10. I would prefer a holiday in comparison to an expensive material purchase

11. I think investment in luxury brands are worth the retail price

12. I am willing to pay a premium price for limited edition luxury goods

13. I have less desire towards luxury brand products when lots of people consumed the same product as me

14. It is mostly up to me whether or not I purchase luxury brands

15. I will purchase luxury brands in the future

16. In my opinion luxury brands are useless

17. I would purchase a luxury product if a Social Blogger recommended it on social media

18. In my opinion luxury brands are old fashioned

19. I would not purchase counterfeit luxury branded items

20. I would buy counterfeit products if they resembled the genuine luxury product

21. I am inclined to evaluate the quality and performance of a luxury brand myself rather than listen to other opinions.

22. I would like to purchase luxury products that users advertise or post on social media

23. I would buy a luxury product because of the brand name even if I did not like the taste or characteristics of the product

24. I would purchase luxury goods if it involved the risk of financial debt

25. For me luxury goods are a symbol of social status

26. My choice of luxury brand depends on whether they reflect how I present myself to others and not how others see me

27. I would be happier if I could afford to buy more things
28. It sometime bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I would like
29. I have all the things I really need to enjoy life
30. I buy a luxury brand for satisfying my personal needs without any attempt to make an impression on other people
31. I purchase luxury branded items for myself to celebrate an occasion that I believe significant to me
32. When in a bad mood, purchasing goods improves my mood I usually buy only the things I need
33. Buying things give me a lot of pleasure
34. I feel guilty after purchasing expensive items
35. My satisfaction would decrease for a luxury product if someone passed a negative comment or disliking towards it
36. I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others
37. I usually keep up with style changes by watching what others buy and following social media bloggers
38. I post my expensive purchases and luxury buys on my social media account for others to see
39. I would ask other people's opinions before purchasing luxury goods
40. I feel happy for a long time following expensive purchases of luxury brands
41. Before purchasing a product it's important to know what my friends think of different brands or products
42. I would not purchase goods if they were not in style or fashion
43. I cherish my luxury goods and keep them for many years

### **Oxford Happiness Questionnaire**

1. I don't feel particularly pleased with the way I am. (R) \_\_\_\_\_
2. I am intensely interested in other people. \_\_\_\_\_
3. I feel that life is very rewarding. \_\_\_\_\_
4. I have very warm feelings towards almost everyone. \_\_\_\_\_
5. I rarely wake up feeling rested. (R) \_\_\_\_\_

6. I am not particularly optimistic about the future. (R) \_\_\_\_\_
7. I find most things amusing. \_\_\_\_\_
8. I am always committed and involved. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Life is good. \_\_\_\_\_
10. I do not think that the world is a good place. (R) \_\_\_\_\_
11. I laugh a lot. \_\_\_\_\_
12. I am well satisfied about everything in my life. \_\_\_\_\_
13. I don't think I look attractive. (R) \_\_\_\_\_
14. There is a gap between what I would like to do and what I have done. (R) \_\_\_\_\_
15. I am very happy. \_\_\_\_\_
16. I find beauty in some things. \_\_\_\_\_
17. I always have a cheerful effect on others. \_\_\_\_\_
18. I can fit in (find time for) everything I want to. \_\_\_\_\_
19. I feel that I am not especially in control of my life. (R) \_\_\_\_\_
20. I feel able to take anything on. \_\_\_\_\_
21. I feel fully mentally alert. \_\_\_\_\_
22. I often experience joy and elation. \_\_\_\_\_
23. I don't find it easy to make decisions. (R) \_\_\_\_\_
24. I don't have a particular sense of meaning and purpose in my life. (R) \_\_\_\_\_
25. I feel I have a great deal of energy. \_\_\_\_\_
26. I usually have a good influence on events. \_\_\_\_\_
27. I don't have fun with other people. (R) \_\_\_\_\_
28. I don't feel particularly healthy. (R) \_\_\_\_\_
29. I don't have particularly happy memories of the past. (R) \_\_\_\_\_