Evidence For Two Faces of Pride in Consumption: Findings From Luxury Brands

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This paper shows that consumers experience two different facets of pride (authentic and hubristic) from consumption, but that these are activated differentially by luxury and non-luxury brand acquisition. Further, we examine how both momentary and chronic feelings of each pride facet can shape consumers’ desire to purchase different brands, and how inferences about these feelings in others can shape interpersonal judgments.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

What is it that consumers feel when they adorn themselves with products that speak in the silent language of luxury, exclusiveness, and extravagance? Undoubtedly, one of the emotions experienced in such situations is pride. The Oxford English Dictionary defines pride as “a high or overweening opinion of one’s own qualities, attainments, or estate, which gives rise to a feeling and attitude of superiority over and contempt for others.” This definition is consistent with ancient Greek and Biblical thought condemning “excessive pride,” or “hubris”. However, recent research in psychology (e.g., Tracy and Robins 2007) has identified two distinct facets of pride.

The first cluster (authentic pride) includes words such as “accomplished” and “confident,” and fits with the pro-social, achievement-oriented conceptualization of pride. The second cluster (hubristic pride) includes words such as “arrogant” and “condescending,” and fits with a more self-aggrandizing, egotistical conceptualization. If people prone to experiencing hubristic pride are motivated to self-aggrandize and inflate an artificially positive sense of self, then they may be particularly motivated to consume luxury brands. Luxury brands convey a sense of status, wealth, and achievement (Chadha and Husband 2006; Mandel, Petrova, and Cialdini 2006), and thus may be a shorthand way of informing others (and the self) of one’s high status, accomplishments, and even perfection. For such persons, luxury brand purchases can bolster their self-image in the absence of authentic achievement. They may use the purchase and display luxury brands as one way of maintaining these artificially inflated self-representations. In contrast, individuals prone to experiencing authentic pride should have less need for luxury brands, given that it is tied to actual hard work and achievements.

Study 1 employed a one factor design where 214 participants were randomly instructed to write a story about themselves in an episodic recall task (e.g., Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee 2003) where they felt either snobbish (hubristic pride condition), accomplished (authentic pride condition), or a typical day (control condition). Results revealed that those primed with hubristic pride exhibited a significantly greater willingness to pay extra for luxury brands (M=3.47) than those primed with authentic pride (M=2.91, p=.03), or those in the control group (M=2.88, p=.02). The latter two conditions did not differ statistically. However, this study does not rule out the possibility that hubristic pride results in a generalized heightened desire to purchase all products, and treats each of the pride facets as only induced feelings, when research shows they are also chronic, dispositional states as well (Tracy and Robins 2007).

Study 2 utilized a survey design with 149 participants. All completed the Tracy and Robins (2007) Authentic and Hubristic pride scales, followed by unrelated items, and then their desire to purchase 3 luxury brands (Rolex, Lexus, Armani) as well as 3 non-luxury brands from the same category (Timex, Hyundai, Old Navy). Results showed that while hubristic pride was positively related to a desire to purchase luxury brands (β =.42, p=.02), the relationship between trait authentic pride and a desire to acquire luxury brands was not significant (β =.30, p>.20). When the brands were non-luxury, however, the relationship between hubristic pride and a desire to consume disappeared (β =.11, ns), and again there was no relationship between authentic pride and a desire to consume (β =.09, ns).

Study 3 examined each facet of pride as a consequence, rather than an antecedent, of consumption. We tested the possibility that consumers will be more likely to experience a heightened feeling of hubristic pride from consuming a luxury rather than a non-luxury equivalent of the same product. However, their feelings of authentic pride should not be as strongly influenced by the brands they consume. 120 participants completed a survey that utilized a 2 (brand: luxury vs. non-luxury) x 2 (pride: authentic vs. hubristic) mixed experimental design, with the first factor manipulated between subjects and the second a repeated measures factor. The first factor was manipulated using an episodic recall task, where participants wrote a brief story about themselves involving a luxury (or non-luxury) brand. Results revealed the predicted brand x pride interaction (p=.01). Consistent with our hypothesis, while authentic pride was not affected by whether the product was a luxury (M=4.99) or non-luxury brand (M=4.69), people felt significantly more hubristic pride when they wrote about themselves consuming a luxury (M=3.24) than a non-luxury (M=2.22) brand (p<.001).

Finally, Study 4 investigates the possibility that observers infer authentic and hubristic pride in others as a result of the product choices they make. We also propose that when people infer that a consumer experiences heightened hubristic pride, they may consequently assume that the consumer is also less prosocial. This prediction is based on the link between hubristic pride and various anti-social qualities (Tracy et al. 2009). 52 females participated in a study where they read a story actually completed by a former undergraduate student about her life in 5 years time, which was manipulated to contain a number of luxury or non-luxury brands. A mixed design ANOVA revealed the predicted brand x pride interaction (p<.001). Inferences of authentic pride were not affected by whether the products owned by the story’s author were luxury (M=5.69) or non-luxury brands (5.73), but participants inferred that the author felt significantly more hubristic pride when she consumed luxury (M=4.10) rather than non-luxury (M=2.65) brands (p<.001).

Results also showed that participants in the luxury condition judged themselves as more hubristic (M=5.69) or non-luxury brands (5.73), but participants inferred that they felt significantly more hubristic pride when they wrote about themselves consuming a luxury (M=3.79) or a non-luxury (M=2.22) brand (p<.001).

This research provides the first evidence of the two-faced nature of pride in consumption settings. Further, we show that pride can serve both as an antecedent and consequence to consumption, provide the first evidence of which we are aware that people’s inferences of others’ pride experiences are shaped by their consumption preferences. Furthermore, these inferences are associated with decreased attribution of prosocial personal qualities in the consumer.

REFERENCES


