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## A Comparative Study of American and French Fashion Conspicuous Consumption Habits on Instagram

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A Comparative Study of American and French Fashion Conspicuous Consumption  
Habits on Instagram

By  
Hannah Jane Corson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford  
May 2018

Approved by

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## ABSTRACT

As social media has become an integral part of every day communications, consumers have begun to conspicuously consume through the Internet. One social media platform, Instagram, puts a central focus on media sharing and allows its users to post photos and videos to their profiles. This makes Instagram an ideal place for Internet users to put their belongings on display. However, a user's nationality and cultural upbringing could influence how one utilizes this platform to conspicuously consume.

To determine if this were true, Instagram photos from American and French users were analyzed to find any potential discrepancies. Fashion items were the focus of the study. As photos were collected, it was noted if the user was American, French, or neither, if the user was male or female, and if a fashion item was present in the post. If present, it was decided if the item was being worn, if a fashion brand was tagged in the photo, if a brand name or logo was visible, if a brand related hashtag was used, if a fashion brand was mentioned in the photo caption, and if the aesthetic of the outfit was street style or more luxurious.

It was revealed that both American and French Instagram users vary little from one another in terms of how they conspicuously consume using the platform. Despite major cultural differences, these two nationalities are shown to be more similar than not. Also, the two countries have very similar habits to that of other nations around the world.

The results make it apparent that Americans and the French have similar habits, but are unable to determine the exact personal, social, or cultural motives

behind how these Instagram users conspicuously consume. While these users may not differ in how they act, the reason behind the action may differ immensely. Further research should be completed to discover this information.

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## CHAPTER 1

### **Theoretical Development**

#### **Introduction**

The development of the Internet now allows for consumers to create and share content like never before. Social media has become an integral part of most peoples' lives and creates an outlet for users to let others know not only the things that they do, but also the things that they have. In particular, media sharing platforms like Instagram provide a way for consumers to post a photo of their favorite purse or new pair of shoes with only the push of a button.

This practice, commonly known as conspicuous consumption, is not new; however, the use of social media to conspicuously consume is relatively new. Because businesses now rely heavily on social media marketing efforts and the two-way dialog between brands and consumers online, it is more important than ever to understand consumers' conspicuous consumption habits and how they present the brand name items that they own to others. Previous research has determined that conspicuous consumption can stem from desires to display one's social status, reflect one's self-image, or enhance one's self-esteem. In addition, one's cultural upbringing could explain a consumer's conspicuous consumption habits (Souiden, M'Saad, & Pons, 2011). This leads to the question: is it possible that two nationalities would conspicuously consume on social media differently? To find out, research was



completed to determine discrepancies in American and French conspicuous consumption habits on Instagram. Because Instagram relies on photos and videos for content, fashion items were chosen to be the focus of the research due to the high visibility and common use of clothing.

The study was done through the collection of Instagram photos from both American and French users as well as users from other countries. As the posts were accumulated, they were analyzed for traits like if a fashion item was present, if a brand was tagged or mentioned in any way, and if clear brand names or logos were visible. This information made it possible to find any significant differences between the United States and France. Also, it could be determined if there were any major differences between the two countries and the rest of the world.

## **Social Media**

### Defining Social Media

In 2004, the Internet was revolutionized through the conception of Web 2.0. This new platform ensured that content and applications were no longer simply published by some individuals, but were modified continuously by anyone who used the Internet. The World Wide Web was no longer a one-way dialog. Internet users could now collaborate and participate in the creation of content like never before. Blogs, wikis, and collaborative projects were the basis of Web 2.0, as well as for the evolution of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

With Web 2.0 came the widened popularity of the term User Generated Content. While User Generated Content was technically available before the creation of Web 2.0, the further development of technology, change in economic climate, and

growth of a digital generation have given User Generated Content a more updated definition. Coined in 2005, User Generated Content is generally applied to any content that has been created and made publically accessible by an end user. More specifically, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) states that User Generated Content must possess the following qualities:

... first, it needs to be published either on publically accessible website or on a social networking site accessible to a selected group of people; second, it needs to show a certain amount of creative effort; and finally, it needs to have been created outside of professional routines and practices (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009, p. 61).

The exclusion of e-mails and instant messages applies to the first condition, while simple replications of previously existing content are excluded from the second condition. Lastly, content influenced by a commercial market is an exception to the third condition (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Through the creation of Web 2.0 and the development of User Generated Content, social media has been aptly defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61).” These applications have taken over the practice of online communication and have made way for intense two-way conversations between Internet users about private topics, public issues, products, brands, and services (Baumöl, Hollebeek, & Jung, 2016).

Because of the immense growth in the use of social media, eight specific categories now exist: blogs, microblogs, social networks, media sharing sites, social book making and selection sites, forums, analysis sites, and effective worlds (Saravanakumar & SuganthaLakshmi, 2012). These general classifications can be further broken down based on the two primary aspects of social media: media research, which includes social presence and media richness, and social processes, which includes self-presentation and self-disclosure (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

The first of these concepts relating to media research, social presence, references any acoustic, visual, and physical contact that can be conceived from an application. Levels of intimacy and immediacy that are found between the users of the application influence the amount of social presence that a medium has. Mediated (phone) and asynchronous (e-mail) communications are generally lower in social presence than interpersonal (face-to-face) and synchronous (live chat) communications. These higher social presence channels in turn create a higher amount of social influence. Media richness also applies to the theory of media research and is based on the idea that all communication strives for the end result of a “resolution of ambiguity” and the “reduction of uncertainty.” Essentially media richness can be determined by the amount of information that can be transmitted in a given time period through a certain medium, as well as the effectiveness of the medium in resolving ambiguity and reducing uncertainty (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Self-presentation falls under the umbrella of the theory of social processes and insinuates that people have a need to influence others’ impressions of them.

This need stems from the drive to gain rewards. Also, people generally strive to mold others' impressions to be consistent with that of one's own perceived identity. This notion is in line with the concept of self-disclosure. Self-disclosure occurs as social media users make a conscious or unconscious disclosure of information about one's self that aligns with the image that the user would prefer to be seen by other users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

These dimensions create a classification system represented in the table found in Appendix 1. Levels of social presence and media richness can be measured as low, medium, or high, while levels of self-presentation and self-disclosure are measured as low or high. On one end of the spectrum, low social presence and media richness in combination with low self-presentation and self-disclosure can be found in collaborative sites, like Wikis. On the other hand, high social presence and media richness as well as high self-presentation and self-disclosure are found commonly in virtual social worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

### Instagram

In 2010, Instagram was launched (Manikonda, Hu, & Kambhampati, 2014). Instagram is classified as a media sharing site, which can be defined as an application that allows users to upload photos, videos, and audio files that can be accessed anywhere. Generally, these sites possess social features, like profiles, comments, and messaging (Saravanakumar & SuganthaLakshmi, 2012). While Instagram allows its users to share various short updates with their followers, like Twitter, the primary focus of the platform is to share photos, similar to content communities such as Flickr. Current facets of the Instagram application include an

in-app camera, filters for photo manipulation, streams of photos, and personal profiles. Through the profiles, users have the ability to write captions for their shared photos, create hashtags for searchability, tag other users and locations in posts, follow other users, send private messages, and leave comments and “likes” on any public photo. More recently, Instagram has developed the option for users to post “stories” that are only visible for twenty-four hours, as opposed to the standard photos that remain on one’s feed until otherwise deleted. While Instagram profiles can be left entirely public, it is possible to make a profile private only to one’s followers and allow others to follow strictly by request (Manikonda, Hu, & Kambhampati, 2014). This unique combination of features sets Instagram apart from many other popular social media sites, which in turn has led to the application becoming a major success worldwide.

As of April 2017, Instagram was host to over 700 million active monthly users, with 250 million of these users actively using the “story” feature every day. Additionally, over 95 million Instagram posts are made daily (Osman, 2018). Most of the 700 million users tend to post once per week to their personal feeds and like to share specific locations on each post (Manikonda, Hu, & Kambhampati, 2014). Overall, the most common age group found on Instagram is 18-29 year olds, seeing as 59% of this population has a profile. Also, a vast majority of Instagram users, a whopping 80%, are found outside of the United States (Osman, 2018).

### Implications of Social Media

Generally, word of mouth is considered to be the most effective marketing tool (Qualman, 2010). This is due to the fact that modern consumers are more likely

to consider products and brands that they have heard about from other users in their social circle as opposed to marketing materials from the brands themselves (Baumöl, Hollebeek, & Jung, 2016). While word of mouth can be powerful, it does have shortcomings. Firstly, word of mouth can be slow to spread. Also, information can be easily changed. Lastly, as more people are added to the chain of communication the latter recipients may become entirely disconnected from the original source of information. All of these drawbacks can minimize the efficiency of word of mouth; however, social media has provided a solution (Qualman, 2010).

Consumers that have become networked are no longer passive recipients of information. Now, social media users are capable of creating, modifying, and exchanging content related to brands and products with other users anytime and anywhere (Baumöl, Hollebeek, & Jung, 2016). Communications through Social Media are fast, global, and less likely to get distorted. In addition, those who receive information down the line are able to see the original communicator's profile in order to establish a sense of credibility (Qualman, 2010).

### **Conspicuous Consumption**

Generally speaking, conspicuous consumption occurs when one purchases and uses luxury items that are intended to be purchased by specific groups of consumers (Souiden, M'Saad, & Pons, 2011). However, this definition seems to neglect several very important facets of the concept including the purpose behind the consumption. Consumers tend to consume conspicuously when they seek to uphold or to boost their reputation in society. A consumer's reputation is often referred to as his or her social status, or the "relative ranking of members of each

social class in terms of specific status factors (Souiden, M'Saad, & Pons, 2011, p. 332).” Every class consumes in order to appease the need for status achievement and tends to recognize wealth, power, and prestige as the primary status factors (Souiden, M'Saad, & Pons, 2011). They can attain this through publically signaling their affluence to others through their possessions (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Specific brands are considered to be symbolic brands that contribute not only physical benefits, but also symbolic benefits like the demonstration of wealth and prominence in society. In cultures that place high value on economic and social standing, consumption of symbolic brands is extremely common. Consequently, the brands consumed by an individual in these societies imply much about his or her identity. One's identity isn't strictly limited to personal traits and beliefs, but additionally group membership. Brands serve as a token of membership and consumers act as representatives of various groups (Souiden, M'Saad, & Pons, 2011).

Conspicuous consumption not only brings light of consumers' status and group association to others, but also inflates their egos to create a better self-image (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). According to Rosenberg and Pearlin, social status has a positive effect on self-esteem in individuals and while there is limited additional research there is likely a positive connection between social status and self-concept. This is due to the idea that consumers have a need for social compliance and as this compliance is achieved a greater sense of self-concept is acquired. Eastman, Goldsmith, and Flynn describe conspicuous consumption as “the motivational process by which individuals strive to improve their social standing through

conspicuous consumption of consumer products that confer or symbolize status for both the individual and surrounding others (Souiden, M'Saad, & Pons, 2011, p. 331).” What this definition lacks is the notion that those who conspicuously consume also do so to satisfy personal and emotional desires.

While some purchasing decisions can be made to comply with social standards or groups, other decisions are guided by the need to project a particular self-image (Souiden, M'Saad, & Pons, 2011). Leibenstein sheds light on the “snob effect” that is apparent when consumers make purchasing decisions to be unique. A need for uniqueness occurs as consumers give personal meaning to brands and products that can have a different meaning for others and it can also stem from the creation of new ways of self-expression. While luxury items are more likely to be consumed for this purpose, non-luxury products can be conspicuously consumed in order to be unique or to conform (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006).

While the desires of consumers drive their consumption tendencies, the brands and their conspicuousness play a major role in helping to shape an individual's identity or sense of success and prestige. Studies have concluded that there is a link between one's self-image and the image of the brands he or she consumes. This link can be referred to as “self-image congruity” (Souiden, M'Saad, & Pons, 2011, p. 331). Not only does conspicuously consuming a certain brand contribute to the image that the consumer wants to display, but it also supplements the brand's image. Greater conspicuousness of consumption is a large factor in determining the strength of a brand and the economic standing of a company. In particular, fashion brands tend to have specific statuses attached to them due to the



fact that clothing is an extremely visible representation of individuals' consumption patterns (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Visually conspicuous products, like fashion items, are more likely to be conspicuously consumed by those trying to portray a unique image or fit into a social group. Schiffman and Kanuk believe that for an item to be visually conspicuous it must be "easily noticed" or even verbally conspicuous through being "highly interesting" and "easy to describe" (Souiden, M'Saad, & Pons, 2011, p. 330-1).

With these additional concepts in mind, a more pinpointed definition of conspicuous consumption is:

The purchase of visually conspicuous brands that may enable consumers to reflect their social status, convey their self-image, and boost their self-esteem (Souiden, M'Saad, & Pons, 2011, p. 331).

This definition most accurately depicts the idea of conspicuous consumption for the purposes of this study.

### **Hofstede Dimensions**

Conspicuous consumption occurs all over the world, but the way it is perceived and consumer motivations are bound by culture (Souiden, M'Saad, & Pons, 2011). A country's Hofstede dimensions reflect the social and cultural environment of the society and include the aspects of: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence (Country Comparison, n.d.). While all of these aspects play an important role in the cultural make up of a country, power distance, individualism, and

masculinity will shed the most light on a population's propensity to consume conspicuously as well as why they do so.

Power distance is measured by the expectations and acceptance of a population that power is unequally distributed (Country Comparison, n.d.). A high power distance is signified by the likelihood that those in a society won't dispute a system that affords little flexibility in social standing. The primary reason for conspicuous consumption in high power distance cultures is the need to impress upon peers that one is actually making upward moves in ranking (Souiden, M'Saad, & Pons, 2011). Individualism refers to the interdependence maintained among a society's members. Countries with a high degree of individualism tend to have citizens with an "I" mentality as opposed to a "we" mentality (Country Comparison, n.d.). Currently, there is no conclusive evidence that individualistic and collectivistic societies conspicuously consume differently; however, those in individualistic cultures may be more eager to do so out of concern for their impressions on others, reflection of individual achievement, and reinforcement of self-image and self-esteem. Additionally, materialism has a negative correlation to the values of collectivism (Souiden, M'Saad, & Pons, 2011). Masculinity in a country is gauged by its residents' desires for competition, achievement, and success. Societies that are considered to be masculine want to be the "best" at what they do, while feminine cultures are dominated by a need to care for others and create a high quality of life without necessarily standing out from the crowd (Country Comparison, n.d.).

## France

Out of 120 points, France scores 68 in terms of power distance. This measure is fairly high compared to other countries and may be so because of the emotional dependence children develop towards their parents. As they grow, this dependence becomes more focused on teachers and eventually their work superiors. Also, French citizens have always somewhat accepted an amount of power inequality and have allowed government and business to hold the majority of power in their society. This can even be seen through the fact that Paris, the most influential and dominant city in France, is the heart of the country's road grid (Country Comparison, n.d.). With this in mind, it could be conceivable that the French may conspicuously consume more freely than lower power distance countries and may do so to impress their social standing upon their peers.

As for individualism, France holds a score of 71, which makes it a dominantly individualistic society. Children are developed by their families to remain emotionally independent from the groups of which they belong, and in turn the French are inclined to be more concerned with their own and their family's well being over others. France proves itself to be very unique in the way that it remains individualistic while possessing a higher power distance. This can be demonstrated by the idea that French citizens remain fairly dependent on organizations that hold a much more impersonal power over their life, while striving to become independent of groups that have a stronger impact on more personal matters (Country Comparison, n.d.). An individualistic society like France will be more likely

to conspicuously consume due to the need for uniqueness and to improve upon one's self-image and esteem.

France is considered to be a somewhat feminine country and scores 43 out of 120 on the masculinity scale. The French believe in focusing on quality of life over personal success and it can be seen through their 35 hour work weeks, five weeks of holiday each year, and welfare system known as *securité sociale*. However, upper class citizens are generally more feminine than those in a lower class, which is a dynamic not seen anywhere else in the world (Country Comparison, n.d.). Because of the variances in values held by different classes, it could be possible that the upper class and lower class in France would have different conspicuous consumption habits. Upper class could be less likely to consume conspicuously, but more likely to do so to fulfill personal and emotional needs rather than social needs. Those in a lower class would be more likely to have conspicuous consumption habits in order to establish their achievements to others.

### The United States

The United States ranks fairly low on the power distance spectrum with a score of 40. Hierarchy is created as a matter of convenience and those who rank higher than others in organizations are accessible in order to exchange information with subordinates. Everyone tends to consult others both formally and informally. This cultural environment makes it very apparent when there is social injustice and inequality and creates room for Americans to speak up when power is abused (Country Comparison, n.d.). In light of this, there may be a lesser need for these consumers to advertise their social standing through conspicuous consumption.

A score of 91 proves the United States to be a highly individualistic society. Americans tend to look after themselves and direct family members only with little reliance on authoritative entities. This leaves members of the society with difficulty developing deep, meaningful friendships even though they are capable of holding conversations with those they don't know or business partners. When they do hold conversations and exchange information with other members of the same organization, they continue to put on a self-reliant front (Country Comparison, n.d.). Those who live in the United States could be more likely to limit conspicuous consumption to brands and products that improve upon one's uniqueness and self-esteem as opposed to those meant to signify group membership.

Americans score 62 in terms of masculinity, which is high in comparison to other countries. Throughout school and into the workplace, one is expected to complete every task to the best of his or her ability. This leads to "winner takes all," "can do," and "live to work" mentalities, which supplements the idea that achievements are the measurement of one's worth (Country Comparison, n.d.). Although previous dimensions of the United States' culture point to a very personal motive for Americans' conspicuous consumption habits, high masculinity may provide more of a socially bound motive.

### **Overview of Current Research**

While some cross-cultural studies have been performed to determine conspicuous consumption habits of certain nationalities with regard to fashion items, there were no studies found comparing the United States and France. Also, no studies were solely focused on conspicuous consumption habits found on

Instagram. This study aimed to discover how Americans and the French use Instagram to conspicuously consume and determine if there were any significant differences between the two nationalities. Seeing as France and the United States have fairly different cultures, specifically in terms of power distance and masculinity, it was reasonable to assume that there would be some discrepancies in the countries' conspicuous consumption habits. To uncover these potential variances, Instagram post samples that had a focus on fashion were collected over a period of time and analyzed using SPSS. The overall goal of the study was to provide fashion companies with a sense of how American and French consumers use Instagram to promote their favorite brands.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Study – Random Sampling of Instagram Posts**

In this study, a random sampling of Instagram posts was drawn in order to discover specific posting habits of users from both France and the United States. The primary goal of this study was to determine if these habits signified a major difference between how the two nationalities conspicuously consume. Before collecting the samples, predictions were made regarding the outcome of the research.

**H1:** American Instagram users post more photos with visible brand names and/or logos than French Instagram users.

**H2:** French Instagram users post more photos with a luxury fashion aesthetic than American Instagram users.

### **Procedure**

Over the course of 14 days, photos were collected on Instagram. To find photos that related to the research topic, the search parameters #ootd (OOTD = outfit of the day), #whatiwore, New York, New York, and Paris, France were utilized. Despite a variance in primary language in each country, Instagram users all over the world use hashtags in English. #ootd and #whatiwore are used very often by those on Instagram and when searched tend to lead one to posts focused on fashion. On the other hand, searching a specific location will not generate posts with a particular

subject highlighted in the photo, but pictures taken in the marked area. Searching locations like New York City and Paris aided in the collection of data from both French and American Instagram users. In addition, all searches were completed between the hours of 12:00 and 15:00 central standard time to ensure that users in both the United States and France were awake and posting on social media.

Once a search term was entered, a random number generator was used to gather ten samples from each search. This led to the collection of 40 photos per day for 14 days, or 560 photos total. To create a set of data that was accurate, certain photos were excluded from the research. If the photo chosen was posted from an account that didn't belong to an individual, but rather a store, "inspiration" account, or some other impersonal page, it was thrown out. Photos of subjects other than fashion or a person wearing clothing, such as animals, architecture, or food, were not included. Lastly, if a photo was posted of a person other than the actual owner of the account, it was excluded from data collection.

After determining that the photos were from a personal account, depicted some form of fashion item, and showed the actual owner of the page rather than a friend, family member, or stranger, the nationality of the user was noted. To infer the nationality of each user, information had to be accumulated from the user biography, tagged locations, and language spoken. If a user's nationality remained unclear after assessing all three of these criteria, he or she would be placed in the "other" category.

Lastly, it was observed how the consumer presented the fashion item(s). The items could be worn or only photographed. A brand name or logo could be shown or



not shown. Particular brands could be tagged within the photo or tagged in the caption to provide others with a link to the fashion brands depicted. Similarly, brand related hashtags could be used to link the photo to searches regarding a certain brand. In addition, it was noted if the fashion was generally considered to be “street style” or if it was more luxurious.

## **Results**

After the data was collected, all information was processed using SPSS and Chi-Square Tests of Independence to determine if there were any significant relationships between one’s nationality and his or her habits when posting fashion items on Instagram. Overall, 560 photos were collected with 213 from American Instagram users, 87 from French users, and 260 from users in other countries. The first round of Chi-Square Tests performed included only the data from American and French Instagram users. A second round of tests were completed to see if there was a variance in habits between both the American and French Instagram users as compared to those in other countries.

When comparing only the Americans and the French, it appears that there is a relationship between nationality and gender ( $\chi^2(1)=4.195, p=0.041$ ). While a majority of both the American and French Instagram posts came from females, with 77% of American posts belonging to females and 65.5% of French posts belonging to females, the male to female ratio was significantly higher in France. Similarly, 78.1% of posts from those in other countries were from females and only 21.9% were posted by males; however, when these results are included in analysis it points

to a non-significant relationship between nationality and gender ( $\chi^2(2)=5.899$ ,  $p=0.052$ ).

Although there seems to be a connection between one's nationality and gender when only comparing Americans and the French, there is no connection between one's nationality and whether or not they are wearing the fashion items featured in a post ( $\chi^2(1)=0.207$ ,  $p=0.649$ ). Actually, for both countries only a very small amount of posts featured fashion items that were not being worn. Of the American posts, only 7 of the 213 included unworn fashion items. Also, only 2 of the 87 French posts had unworn fashion items. When all nationalities are considered, evidence cannot support a relationship between one's nationality and whether or not fashion items are worn in an Instagram post ( $\chi^2(2)=5.776$ ,  $p=0.056$ ). Additionally, only one out of 260 posts in the "other" nationality category featured unworn fashion items. It should be noted that the extremely small sample sizes in these particular data sets might affect the results of the Chi-Square Tests of Independence.

It can also be determined that there is no relationship between one being American or French and whether or not a fashion brand name, symbol, or logo is visible in an Instagram post; therefore, H1 can be rejected ( $\chi^2(1)=0.014$ ,  $p=0.907$ ). A large majority of both American and French Instagram users post fashion items without a name, symbol, or logo visible in the photo. 86.9% of American posts and 87.4% of French posts did not include a visible indicator of a specific fashion brand. In addition, there is no significant correlation between one's nationality and visibility of a brand name, symbol, or logo in an Instagram post when all

nationalities are analyzed ( $\chi^2(2)=0.014$ ,  $p=0.993$ ). 86.9% of those in the “other” category did not post visible indicators of fashion brands.

Evidence regarding Americans and the French does not support a connection between one’s nationality and if a fashion brand is tagged in his or her Instagram photos ( $\chi^2(1)=0.384$ ,  $p=0.535$ ). While many posts did not include a tag, it wasn’t uncommon for both American and French Instagram users to tag fashion brands in their posts. Americans had at least one fashion brand tagged in 31.9% of the posts collected, and the French tagged brands 35.6% of the time. When the “other” category is added into analysis, the lack of connection between nationality and whether or not a brand is tagged is maintained ( $\chi^2(2)=2.844$ ,  $p=0.241$ ). In total, 26.9% of posts from the “other” category had at least one brand tagged.

No relationship can be determined between one being American or French and whether or not his or her Instagram posts include a fashion brand related hashtag ( $\chi^2(1)=0.015$ ,  $p=0.902$ ). Utilizing a fashion brand related hashtag was less common among American and French Instagram users than tagging a brand in a photo, but not uncommon. Roughly a quarter of all posts included some form of fashion brand related hashtag, with 23.5% of American posts and 24.1% of French posts including at least one hashtag. Again, no connection can be inferred between nationality and the use of fashion brand related hashtags when all nationalities are included ( $\chi^2(2)=4.898$ ,  $p=0.086$ ). Slightly less posts, 16.2% in total, from those in other countries used a hashtag.

The posts collected do not reflect a significant relationship between whether one is American or French and whether or not one mentions a specific fashion brand

in the caption of his or her posts ( $\chi^2(1)=1.349, p=0.245$ ). A very small amount of posts included mention of a brand in the caption. Only 18 out of 213 American posts and 4 out of 87 French posts did so. It seems to be much more common for Instagram users to tag the brand in the picture itself or add a fashion brand related hashtag. This trend is reflected all over the world because only 20 out of the 260 posts from other nationalities mentioned a fashion brand in the caption. No connection can be made between nationality and mention of brands in a caption when all nationalities are taken into account ( $\chi^2(2)=1.348, p=0.510$ ).

Lastly, H2 can be rejected as it appears that the nationality of Instagram users cannot be linked to the style of clothing in a post when only American and French data is analyzed ( $\chi^2(1)=1.319, p=0.251$ ). Street style clothing is an overwhelmingly more popular choice amongst both American and French Instagram users seeing as 90.1% of American posts and 94.3% of French posts feature a more casual look. Other nationalities followed the same trend with 90.4% of posts picturing street style outfits. When every country is considered, there is no apparent relationship between nationality and style of clothing in a post ( $\chi^2(2)=1.413, p=0.493$ ).

## CHAPTER 3

### **General Discussion**

In order to discover fundamental differences between American and French consumers and how they conspicuously consume using Instagram, I focused on the Instagram posts themselves. I figured that the best indicator of how those in these two countries utilized the social media platform was to analyze their posting habits over the course of a couple weeks. Considering that the cultures of the United States and France are different in terms of power distance, individualistic tendencies, and masculinity, I assumed that methods of conspicuous consumption would vary significantly.

As I collected Instagram posts, I quickly realized that both American and French Instagram users had very similar posting habits. In fact, when analyzing posts from those in countries other than the United States and France, I saw the same patterns continued. Almost every measurement taken for each variable and each nationality was extremely similar to the variables of the other nationality categories.

Although these congruencies were obvious, the motives behind each post and how each user conspicuously consumed were much less obvious. Due to the impersonal nature of most Instagram posts, I was unable to infer much about why one was posting what they were posting and their drive or lack there-of to draw

attention to brand names. Sometimes it was clear that the Instagram user was a lifestyle or fashion blogger. In these cases, posts in which they conspicuously consumed could be in part because of a sponsorship or some other partnership with a fashion brand; however, there was no way to be sure. Other users were definitely not considered to be bloggers. While I could be fairly certain that they were not associated with certain brands in any way, a motive for conspicuous consumption was not made apparent through the posts.

Despite a lack of known motives, it is clear that American and French Instagram users are not all that different in terms of conspicuous consumption habits. Not only are they not significantly different from one another, they are very similar to every other nationality in terms of their posting habits. Most commonly, Instagram users wear the clothes that are the focus of the post, tag the brands in the photo, utilize fashion brand related hashtags, and opt for a more street style aesthetic.

### **Recommendations**

My data collection revealed to me just how frequently conspicuous consumption occurs on Instagram. It also made it apparent that those in the United States and France have very similar, if not indistinguishable, habits concerning how they use Instagram to consume conspicuously. With this information in mind, I can recommend to fashion brands that they should not only utilize Instagram on their end, but also take advantage of how consumers post.

Because over a quarter of all American and French Instagram users tag the brands they wear in their Instagram posts, brands could create incentive for these

tags. Tags lead other users directly to fashion brand profiles, essentially becoming free advertising. For example, brands could offer a discount to one user every day, or even every week, who has tagged that brand in his or her posts. Similarly, about a quarter of American and French Instagram users use fashion brand related hashtags. Brands could offer some sort of recognition for users who place a brand hashtag in the caption of their photos. This recognition could be a re-post of a user's Instagram photo on the brand's profile. The exposure would allow for the user to gain more followers and "likes." In return, more users would potentially use the brand related hashtag. According to my findings, many users are prone to tag and hashtag fashion brands; therefore, creating incentive to do so may make these habits even more common.

Another note for fashion brands is that they can generally expect American and French consumers to behave the same way in terms of how they conspicuously consume their brand on Instagram. Therefore, if a company wants to utilize an incentive to promote brand related hashtag use or tagging of the brand, they may see similar results as far as how both Americans and the French react. In addition, my findings suggest that if a social media marketing incentive is successful in the United States, France, or both, a brand may be able to use the same incentive in the same way all over the world.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Throughout the course of my research, I encountered a number of limitations. The first of which was that interpretation of each post and how it should have been coded varied slightly in regard to some variables. In particular, it was

sometimes difficult to distinguish street style from luxury style. It is possible for someone to wear a more casual outfit that is from a high end, luxury brand like Gucci or Prada. On the other hand, it is possible for one to wear an outfit from an unknown or less expensive brand and make it appear to be luxurious. What one sees as street wear and luxury wear could be drastically different from another person's viewpoint. Additionally, determining someone's nationality was challenging at times. I encountered cases where an Instagram user was born in one country, but moved to the United States or France later in life. Because they seemed to have lived in the United States or France for a significant period of time, it was hard to determine if they should be considered American, French, or "other." If they had spent a period of their life in their home country, it could skew their conspicuous consumption habits; yet, if they had lived in the United States or France long enough, they could have adopted the cultural norms of that country. Unfortunately, there was no way to be certain if this was the case. In the future, it should be determined what constitutes a post being coded as street style or luxury style, and also what exactly it means to be American or French.

Another factor that could have contributed to error was that I was unable to identify each Instagram user's motive for conspicuous consumption. Instagram posts rarely provide insight into the purpose of the post and it is essentially impossible to know what personal, social, or cultural drivers are at play for every individual. Although I was able to collect data on how Americans and the French use Instagram to conspicuously consume, I was disappointed to not be able to uncover the answers as to why they post the way that they do. Also, it was unclear as to how



many posts came from Instagram users that had some form of partnership with particular brands. Sometimes bloggers are sent free merchandise so that they will post about it; however, these bloggers often don't distinguish what is an advertisement from what is not. If posts that were created in conjunction with a brand sponsorship or partnership were included in the data set, it could have slightly altered the results. If this study were to be conducted again, I would include a survey that would include questions relating to Instagram posting habits, posting motivations, and self-reflection. This survey would be administered to a sample of both American and French Instagram users. On a similar note, many of the posts I found throughout sampling were posted by fashion bloggers. These users are enthusiastic about fashion and may not have posting habits that are representative of an entire population. This sampling error may have been avoided through some form of methodological change that could be implemented in future research.

Lastly, SPSS results could have been incorrect for some variables due to small sample sizes. Specifically, the variable regarding whether or not Instagram users were wearing the fashion items featured in their posts yielded extremely small results for those not wearing the items. To solve this issue, a new study could be sure to include a larger overall sample size to ensure that each variable had a sufficient amount of data.

## **Conclusion**

Through data collection and analysis, it became clear that American and French Instagram users utilize the platform to conspicuously consume in the same ways. Also, Americans and the French appear to possess very similar habits to that

of the rest of the world. With this in mind, fashion brands should exploit consumers' tendencies to conspicuously consume on Instagram by wearing the clothing, tagging the brand in the photo, and using brand related hashtags. They can do so through offering small incentives for Instagram users who post content including the brand's merchandise, a brand tag, and/or a brand hashtag. Furthermore, these incentives can be standardized for both Americans and the French. By encouraging their consumers to conspicuously consume through Instagram, fashion brands can increase their exposure to potential new customers while minimally increasing or maintaining their current marketing budget.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 – Social Media Classification Table

Table 1. Classification of Social Media by social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

## Appendix 2 - American Instagram Post Examples



**skyevictoriano** • Follow  
Greenwich Village

skyevictoriano | 🍁

geeluv310 Yesss...soooo New York in the middle of the street 😍😍 #slay

108rockstarguitars 🎸 Love it! What's your fav band?!

hellyeahbelyea Yes color scheme. 😍

wareiskyle My favorite place 🍷

kittycat\_23 I FREAKING LOVE YOU

skyevictoriano @geeluv310 love it here! 🍷

skyevictoriano @108rockstarguitars The Beatles 🎸🍷

skyevictoriano @hellyeahbelyea okayyy 🍷🍷

skyevictoriano @wareiskyle I felt most at home here! Lol. 🍷

skyevictoriano @kittycat\_23 aw thanks Cat! Let's go be extraaaa in a new city! 🍷

♡ 💬

314 likes

FEBRUARY 22

Add a comment...



**ayeshaerkin** • Follow  
Austin, Texas

ayeshaerkin I wore this same ~look~ last year in NYC but didn't know how to #mirrorselfie and was frankly too lazy/slightly shy about "over sharing" on social media. LAZYSHY NO MORE - I got a lotta clothes and a big ass mirror 🤪👩

ayeshaerkin .

#slowfashion #sustainablestyle #consciousfashion #todayslook #mirrorpic #normcore #ootd #ootn #wiwt #vintagestyle #vintagefahion #posttheordinary #whatiwore #fromwhereistand #mystyle #streetstyle #atxstreetstyle #atxfashion #postitforaesthetic #pursuepretty #outfitshare #todayiamwearing

♡ 💬

223 likes

MARCH 2

Add a comment...



**xosloane** • Follow  
Miami Beach, Florida

xosloane pro tip; don't wear floor length pants in the pouring rain 🌧️👤 side note, this black turtleneck has hands down been one of my most worn pieces this winter!!! If you don't have one, you need one!!

xosloane .  
...#style #whatiwore #ootd  
#currentlywearing #travelblogger  
#personalstyle #instastyle #miamibeach  
#miami #travel #miamistyle #iamgia #ootn  
#lifestyle #personalstyle #kotd #zara  
#bloggerstyle #streetstyle #streetwear  
#fashion #fashionista #chanel  
#fashionblogger #trends #trendy #style  
#styles #travel #styleblogger

\_\_sunny1212 Nice one 🥰

streetcharm 🙌🙌

li\_diana nicely done!

katamad beauty 🌸



299 likes

FEBRUARY 21

Add a comment...



### Appendix 3 – French Instagram Post Examples



**\_littleflow** • Follow  
Escalier Prunelle

**\_littleflow** ✕ Colorful  
Bonne soirée 🌙  
📸 by @\_greyswan\_

« Rêves ta vie en couleur , c'est le secret du bonheur »

#pull#pink#pimkiexme#streetlook#ootd#lyon#france#outfit#streetstyle#outfit#inspo#croixrousse#tenuedujour#outfitinspiration#moda#style#streetwear#girl

Load more comments

**\_littleflow** @malielola merci beaucoup 🙏  
**\_littleflow** @victoriamelodie merci beaucoup 😊

**\_littleflow** @orma21 merci beaucoup ma bichette tu es trop gentille ❤️❤️

571 likes  
MARCH 12

Add a comment...



**\_romanebrn** • Follow  
Aix-en-Provence, France

**\_romanebrn** Street 📸  
J'avais encore mon ancienne couleur de cheveux mais je voulais vous montrer mon jean @prettylittlething ✨  
#look #prettylittlething #ootd #denim #street #aixenprovence

Load more comments

lima\_mds Ton jean est trop top !  
kikiramab J'aime trop le jean ❤️❤️❤️  
leamoutier J'adore ton jean 😊😊  
hellora\_d Jolie ✨  
maymaryb ❤️😍😍😍😍😍  
coralie.laly Canon le look 😍❤️

estelleromeo Tes cheveux me font rêver 😊  
victoiregdr C'est vrai que tes cheveux sont ouf! Je veux les même, moi ils ne poussent pas 😊😊


1,571 likes  
FEBRUARY 21

Add a comment...





prettylittlething  
goldengoosedeluxebrand  
lketoknow.ft.europetion





 **laselfishs** • Follow  
Strasbourg, France

laselfishs Sunglasses 😊 #labase .  
.  
#sunglasses #strasbourg #laselfish  
#fashionblogger #fashion #quay #pink  
#rosegold #mode #photooftheday  
#instagood #styles #pink #beautiful #love  
#stylish #instafashion #swag #fashionista  
#accessories #ootd

    
**50 likes**  
FEBRUARY 21  
Add a comment... 

## Appendix 4 - "Other" Instagram Post Examples



**laura\_eguizabal** • Follow  
Mauritius

laura\_eguizabal Happy In paradise! #moda #fashion #style #estilo #streetstyle #look #lookoftheday #outfit #outfitoftheday #instagram #instagramers #instadaily #instaphoto #instalike #ootd #isla #island #mauricio #relax #paradise #maurices

Load more comments

laura\_eguizabal @nagorealaiza 🙌

laura\_eguizabal @barbarapola 🍷

laura\_eguizabal @paquibegines 😊😊

laura\_eguizabal @sahar.maleki\_ 😊😊

laura\_eguizabal @soul\_0612 💖💖💖

laura\_eguizabal @call\_me\_queen\_d 🙏🙏🙏

laura\_eguizabal @mariapisancor 🙏🙏🙏

laura\_eguizabal @tiffsinclair 😊😊😊

laura\_eguizabal @aquenti.iovas 🙌

♡ 🔍

3,664 likes

MARCH 5

Add a comment...



**itsemilyjames** • Follow  
Brighton

itsemilyjames defo not an accurate representation of what I wore today #allthelayers 📷🌤️

View all 46 comments

itsemilyjames @alexc serruys thanks Alex! 😊

itsemilyjames @saraviktorie thank you! @topshop and @missguided are my favssss 🍷

itsemilyjames @hhannahaps was so fun seeing you on Saturday! 🙌

itsemilyjames @curlyjosephine 🙌🙌🙌

itsemilyjames @laurenrosebell thank you lauren! 😊

itsemilyjames @aashleyparish Ohh thanks Ashley! 🙌

itsemilyjames @eleanorjadore thank you 🙌

♡ 🔍

338 likes

MARCH 1

Add a comment...

