RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON STATUS-DRIVEN VS. DESIRE-DRIVEN PURCHASES OF LUXURY GOODS

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Manuscript Info	*Abstract*
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This study investigates the differential impact of social media influencers on status driven versus desire driven luxury purchases.The research problem addresses the evolving landscape of luxury consumption, wheretraditional marketing paradigms are being reshaped by the pervasive influence of social media personalities.Utilizing a quantitative methodology, this study surveyed 41 participants to gather insights into their motivations for luxury purchases and their perceptions of influencer content. Key findings indicate a nuanced influence of social media influencers, primarily fostering an aspirational desire for an elevated lifestyle rather than directly driving purchases.Furthermore, the study reveals a strong inclination towards intrinsic motivations for luxury consumption, such as self-reward, over extrinsic pressures like social approval. These conclusions highlight the importance for luxury brands to craft influencer marketing strategies that resonate with consumers\' internal desires and aspirations, moving beyond overt product promotion. The implications suggest a shift towards more authentic,lifestyle oriented content in the luxury sector,emphasizing personal fulfillment over mere status signaling.

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Introduction:-

Chapter 1: Introduction

Luxury consumption isn't what it used to be. It's no longer confined to glass storefronts, limited-edition drops, or exclusive clubs. Today, luxury lives on our screens—woven into Instagram stories, YouTube vlogs, and TikTok reels. Social media has opened the gates, not by making luxury more affordable, but by changing how it's perceived. The image of luxury is now shaped by influencers who, unlike traditional celebrities, are often self-made, digitally native, and deeply connected to their audiences (Creevey, 2022; Jin, Muqaddam, & Ryu, 2019).

This shift brings two distinct motivations into sharper focus: status-driven and desire-driven consumption. Status-driven purchases are about signaling wealth, exclusivity, or social rank. Desire-driven purchases are more personal, tied to emotional satisfaction, identity, and self-expression (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2016; Wang, 2022). These two drivers shape not just what consumers buy, but why they buy and that "why" matters even more when luxury is filtered through the lens of social media.

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Influencers sit right at the heart of this evolution. They bring luxury closer while making it feel more aspirational than intimidating. They blur the line between what's relatable and what's aspirational. Whether it's a lifestyle vlog or a stylized product reel, influencer content doesn't just show a brand, it builds a mood, a feeling, a story (Liu & Zheng, 2024; Yu et al., 2023). That emotional storytelling is often more persuasive than a polished ad campaign, especially when it's paired with authenticity and a strong sense of personal style (Feng et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2025).

Still, there's a gap in the conversation. Most research talks about how influencers affect consumer behavior, but few studies look closely at how that impact differs depending on whether someone is driven by status or desire. Do both groups respond equally to influencer credibility? Does visual content hit harder for one group over the other? What emotional levers matter most? These are the questions this paper explores; through a comparative lens focused on status-driven versus desire-driven luxury buyers (Zhang, 2019; Dinh et al., 2024).

This research holds significant implications for both academic understanding and practical application. Academically, it contributes to the literature on consumer psychology, luxury marketing, and social media influence by providing a more granular understanding of motivational drivers. Practically, the findings will equip luxury brands with actionable insights to refine their influencer marketing campaigns, ensuring that their messaging aligns with the specific motivations of their target audiences. By understanding whether consumers are primarily driven by status or desire, brands can tailor their collaborations, content, and communication strategies to maximize engagement and conversion

Understanding Luxury Purchases:-
Luxury products are more than just goods, they're psychological tools. They help people project who they are, or who they want to be. For some, luxury is about recognition. A designer bag or limited-edition sneaker becomes a way to communicate status, taste, and social belonging (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2016; Wang, 2022). These are the status-driven consumers. They watch for brand signals, exclusivity, and price tags that set them apart.

Desire-driven consumers look at luxury differently. They're not as concerned with how others see them. Instead, they're motivated by how the product makes them feel, elegant, empowered, pampered, or emotionally fulfilled (Dubois, 2021; Wang, 2024). The value lies in the experience, the craftsmanship, or the story behind the brand.
Zhang (2019) breaks this down using psychological frameworks like self-congruence and emotional attachment. Status-driven buyers tend to lean on luxury for external validation. Desire-driven buyers use it for internal alignment. These differences are subtle but important, especially when trying to understand how marketing strategies land differently depending on the buyer's mindset.

Social Media Influencers: Role in Modern Marketing:-
In the past, luxury brands leaned on celebrities to deliver their message. Think Hollywood stars in magazine spreads or athletes with exclusive endorsement deals. But that playbook doesn't work the same way anymore. Today, it's influencers; many of them self-made, who drive engagement, shape trends, and move products.

Influencers are seen as more authentic, more relatable, and often more trusted than traditional celebrities (Liu & Zheng, 2024; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Their content feels organic, even when it's sponsored. A YouTube "get ready with me" video can feature a luxury lipstick without feeling like an ad. A casual photo on Instagram can inspire thousands of followers to covet a $1,000 handbag simply because of how effortlessly it's styled.

Jin, Muqaddam, and Ryu (2019) call this phenomenon "Instafame." It's a new kind of influence—one built not on legacy but on connection. Dinh et al. (2024) expand on this by showing how influencers create FOMO, social comparison, and even materialistic behaviors, especially in younger audiences.

Luxury brands have been quick to adapt. Some now work with micro-influencers to tap into niche desire-driven markets. Others collaborate with digital-only virtual influencers like Lil Miquela to project exclusivity through futurism and high design (Wiley et al., 2025). Benevento (2025) shows how these influencer campaigns also build momentum; amplifying visibility through networks and algorithms.

What this really means is: the way luxury is marketed is no longer one-size-fits-all. The effectiveness of influencer marketing depends on how well it aligns with the consumer's underlying motivation, status or desire.

Influencer Recognition and Source Credibility:-
When it comes to trusting an influencer's recommendation, credibility is everything. Consumers don't just look at the product, they look at who's talking about it and why they should listen. The classic trio of credibility; expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, plays a central role in shaping how consumers feel about both the influencer and the brand they're promoting.

In the context of luxury fashion, Suganya and Bawa (2023) found that influencer credibility has a direct impact on consumer purchase intentions. When an influencer is seen as knowledgeable and stylish, their opinion carries weight. But trust matters just as much. Followers want to believe that the recommendation is genuine—not just a paid plug. And while physical attractiveness shouldn't be the only factor, it still significantly boosts perceived authenticity and influence, especially in visual-first platforms like Instagram.

The effect of credibility isn't uniform across consumer types. Status-driven buyers often respond more strongly to authority and prestige. They're drawn to influencers who align with high-end aesthetics and exclusivity. In contrast, desire-driven consumers are more influenced by emotional connection and perceived sincerity. For them, trust and relatability outweigh polish. This split is crucial to understand when matching influencers with specific luxury audiences.

Perception of Influencers vs. Traditional Celebrities:-
While both influencers and celebrities endorse luxury brands, consumers don't see them the same way. Influencers are often seen as more authentic, while traditional celebrities carry an image of prestige and distance. This distinction shapes not only how audiences respond to endorsements, but how they interpret the luxury brand itself. Gräve (2017) examined how followers perceive influencers versus celebrities and found that influencers generally rank higher in trust and perceived accessibility. Their lives seem more "real," and their content feels more grounded, even when they're showcasing luxury goods. Celebrities, by contrast, represent aspiration in the traditional sense: untouchable, iconic, and often idealized.

Perceptions also vary by demographic. Younger consumers; especially Gen Z, tend to gravitate toward influencers because they value authenticity and inclusiveness. Older consumers may still see celebrities as more credible, particularly when it comes to heritage luxury brands. Income levels also shape perception: those with higher disposable income may still lean into the prestige attached to celebrity-endorsed products, while aspirational buyers may feel a stronger connection to influencers who appear more relatable.

Impact of Influencer's Visual Presentation on Consumer Perception:-
An influencer's personality isn't just in what they say, it's in how they look, move, dress, and interact. Visual presentation matters, especially in luxury. Whether it's the aesthetics of a curated feed or the energy they bring on camera, these cues shape how audiences perceive credibility and style.

Argyris, Muqaddam, and Miller (2019) explored this in depth and found that extroversion and bold visual style can significantly enhance an influencer's perceived credibility, particularly when those traits match the expectations of the audience. This idea, known as personality-audience matching, is especially relevant in luxury marketing where image projection plays a big role. For example, a luxury fashion brand might benefit more from partnering with a stylish, assertive influencer whose personal brand radiates confidence than with someone more understated—even if both have similar follower counts.

Importantly, the way influencers present themselves also influences whether they appeal to status-driven or desire-driven consumers. Status-driven buyers often look for aspirational signals in how influencers dress, pose, and curate their visuals. Desire-driven consumers, however, may respond more to warmth, playfulness, or artistic storytelling- something that feels personal rather than staged.

Influencer Marketing and Impulse Buying Behavior:-
Impulse plays a surprisingly big role in luxury purchases, particularly online. Social media platforms are built to capture attention quickly and convert it into action. In this environment, the credibility of the message and the emotional tone of the content can push consumers toward unplanned purchases, especially when trust and desire are already established.

Shamim and Islam (2022) found a clear link between influencer trust and impulsive buying behavior. The more emotionally resonant and credible the message, the more likely consumers were to make a quick purchase. This pattern was more pronounced in desire-driven buyers, who are often guided by emotional cues and immediate gratification. Status-driven consumers, while not immune to impulse, are more calculated, they seek purchases that align with their long-term image and social standing.

This distinction helps explain why product hauls, unboxing videos, and limited-time discount codes can be especially effective with desire-driven audiences. These strategies rely on emotional momentum and the fear of missing out; powerful psychological triggers that influencers are uniquely positioned to activate.

Neuroscientific Insights into Consumer Emotional Responses to Luxury Brands:-
What happens in the brain when we see luxury products endorsed by influencers? Neuroscience offers some answers, and they're surprisingly revealing. Using EEG (electroencephalography) to track real-time brain activity, researchers have begun mapping how emotional and attentional responses to luxury branding change depending on who's doing the endorsing.

Pozharliev et al. (2015) found that just being exposed to luxury products in the presence of others, especially admired by others, can increase attention and emotional engagement. When the endorser is someone the consumer follows or admires, like an influencer, this effect is amplified. The brain pays more attention, and emotional resonance goes up.

This supports a key insight of this paper: status-driven consumers often engage in what's called passive buying; they collect signals, evaluate social cues, and then make high-impact purchases. Desire-driven consumers, on the other hand, are more emotionally triggered. Their purchases are often tied to mood, identity, or the emotional payoff of owning something beautiful or exclusive.

Influencer marketing taps directly into these neural pathways. Emotional content activates the desire system, while high-status signaling appeals to the brain's reward centers associated with social approval. Understanding this dynamic helps explain why different consumers respond in such different ways to the same campaign.

Chapter 2: Challenges and Limitations:-
While the influence of social media on luxury consumption is widely acknowledged, studying it in the context of status-driven vs. desire-driven motivations presents several challenges; both in theory and in practice.

Blurred Boundaries Between Status and Desire; One of the biggest challenges is that the distinction between status-driven and desire-driven consumption isn't always clean. Consumers don't fit neatly into boxes. Someone might buy a luxury watch both to enjoy its craftsmanship and to signal success. Motivations often overlap, shift with context, or evolve over time. This makes it difficult to isolate the psychological drivers behind each purchase or clearly attribute influence to one type of motivation.

The Subjectivity of Perceived Credibility; Influencer credibility, defined in terms of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness, is highly subjective. What one audience sees as authentic, another may dismiss as staged. Visual style, tone of voice, or even follower count can skew perceptions. This subjectivity becomes especially tricky when comparing across different demographics, cultures, or regions, where standards of beauty, authority, or trust vary significantly.

Rapidly Changing Social Media Algorithms; The platforms themselves are unstable variables. Instagram, TikTok, YouTube - each has its own recommendation engine, algorithmic bias, and content format that evolves constantly. A campaign that performs well today may tank tomorrow due to changes in reach, engagement patterns, or content saturation. This volatility limits the reliability of longitudinal data or cross-platform comparisons.

Lack of Access to Proprietary Data; Most real-world influencer campaigns, especially in luxury, are run behind closed doors. Brands rarely disclose internal performance metrics, such as sales conversion, exact audience breakdown, or sentiment analysis. As a result, much of the research relies on self-reported surveys, simulations, or inferred behavior, which may not capture the full picture. It also restricts the ability to test hypotheses on real purchase data.

Cultural and Economic Bias; Luxury is experienced differently depending on geography, income level, and cultural background. A Gen Z consumer in India may view an influencer's luxury purchase as aspirational, while a consumer in France may see it as performative or excessive. The perception of luxury, status, or self-fulfillment is deeply context-dependent. This introduces bias when generalizing findings across global markets.

Influencer Fatigue and Market Saturation; With thousands of influencers promoting luxury products, audiences are becoming more skeptical. Influencer fatigue, where users feel overwhelmed or disengaged from branded content is a growing concern. Consumers can spot inauthenticity faster, and their tolerance for repetitive messaging is shrinking. This saturation blurs the impact of individual influencers and makes it harder to measure effectiveness accurately.

Challenges in Neuroscientific Validation; Although neuroscience tools like EEG provide fascinating insights into attention and emotion, they're limited by sample size, lab conditions, and interpretation complexity. Emotions are nuanced and influenced by dozens of variables. Translating brainwave data into consumer behavior, especially across different psychological motivations, involves assumptions that may not always hold true outside the lab.

These challenges don't undermine the value of studying influencers or luxury psychology, they just call for caution and nuance. Future research will need to design smarter, more context-aware models that account for emotional complexity, market diversity, and digital unpredictability. As social media and luxury continue to evolve side by side, so must the frameworks we use to study them.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Results:-

This chapter brings together the quantitative data collected from the primary survey and the theoretical perspectives drawn from existing literature to understand how social media influencers shape luxury purchases across two different motivations, status-driven and desire-driven.

Participants and Procedure:-

This study surveyed a sample of 41 participants, ranging in age from 16 to 34, with the majority falling between 18 and 25 years old. Respondents were recruited online through personal networks, student communities, and social media platforms such as Instagram and LinkedIn. The sample was diverse in gender, with a near-equal split between male and female participants and a small proportion identifying as non-binary or preferring not to say.

Participants came from a mix of educational and professional backgrounds, including students, early-career professionals, and individuals in creative fields such as design, media, and marketing. Most respondents reported being active on social media daily and followed at least one luxury or lifestyle influencer. This demographic was chosen intentionally to reflect a population likely to engage with both influencer content and luxury consumption patterns—whether aspirational or actual.

The procedure involved an anonymous online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The survey consisted of 15 core items, including Likert-scale questions designed to assess respondents' motivations for purchasing luxury goods (e.g., self-reward vs. social approval), their attitudes toward influencer marketing, and the likelihood of buying products endorsed by influencers. Additional items gathered demographic data and social media usage patterns to better contextualize responses.

To ensure clarity and consistency, all survey questions were pre-tested with a small pilot group before full distribution. Participation was voluntary, and all respondents provided informed consent before beginning the questionnaire. The data was cleaned, coded, and analyzed using Python, with key variables constructed to represent desire-driven and status-driven motivations as well as influencer impact.

Key Findings from the Data:-

The results suggest a clear divergence between the motivations that drive luxury consumption and the influence that social media exerts on each type.
- Desire-driven motivations, centered on self-reward, emotional gratification, and personal identity; scored higher among respondents. The average Reward/Treat Score was 3.39, indicating that many consumers associate luxury with self-care and self-expression.
- In contrast, status-driven motivations, purchases made to impress peers or seek approval, had a lower average score of 2.10, implying that social signaling is not the primary driver for most participants in this sample.

● When it comes to influencer impact, the average response was 3.07, reflecting a moderate level of influence. Influencers clearly have an effect, but they are not universally persuasive.

Most importantly, the correlation matrix revealed two essential insights:
● The correlation between status-driven motivations and influencer impact was moderate and positive (0.447). This suggests that consumers who are motivated by social approval are more likely to be influenced by what they see on influencer pages.
● The relationship between desire-driven motivations and influencer impact was weak and near zero (0.09). This points to the limited role influencers play in triggering genuine, intrinsic desire for luxury products.In short, while people may buy luxury goods for themselves, it's the status-oriented buyers who are more susceptible to influencer persuasion.

Distribution of Reward/Treat Score (Desire-Driven Motivation):-
This histogram shows that most participants lean toward the higher end of the scale, with a visible peak at scores 3 and 4. A significant number of respondents marked 4 (Agree), with relatively few scoring at 1 or 2. This suggests that desire-driven motivations, like self-reward, emotional satisfaction, or personal gratification, are common among the surveyed group. Many participants see luxury purchases as something meaningful or personally fulfilling, rather than purely performative. This trend reinforces your earlier finding that the mean score was 3.39, indicating a moderate to strong emotional or self-focused connection with luxury goods. It aligns well with existing literature (e.g., Dubois, 2021; Wang, 2024), which suggests that modern consumers often buy luxury to feel something, not just to be seen.

Distribution of Reward/Treat Score
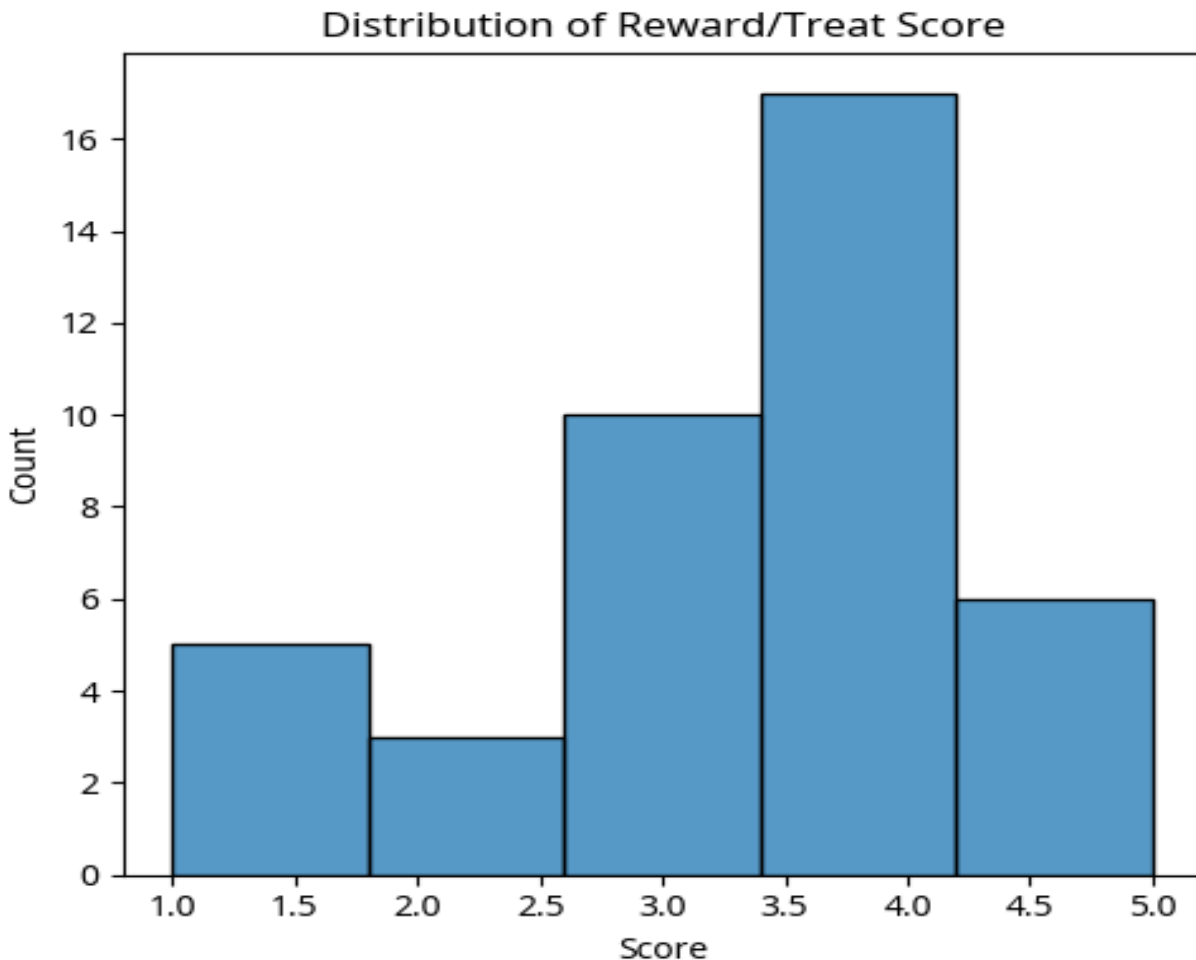
Distribution of Social Approval Score (Status-Driven Motivation):-
In contrast to the desire-driven scores, this histogram skews heavily toward the lower end. Most responses fall at 1 (Strongly Disagree) or 2 (Disagree), and very few people score a 4 or 5. This distribution supports the notion that status-seeking is not the dominant driver for most respondents in your sample. This confirms the mean Social Approval Score of just 2.10, pointing to a general disinterest in buying luxury goods to fit in or impress others. While status-driven buying certainly exists, it's not as prevalent among your respondents; who may represent a more emotionally connected or purpose-driven consumer group.This is important because it highlights the gap between how luxury is traditionally positioned (as a status symbol) and how younger, digitally-savvy consumers may actually engage with it.


Distribution of Social Approval Score
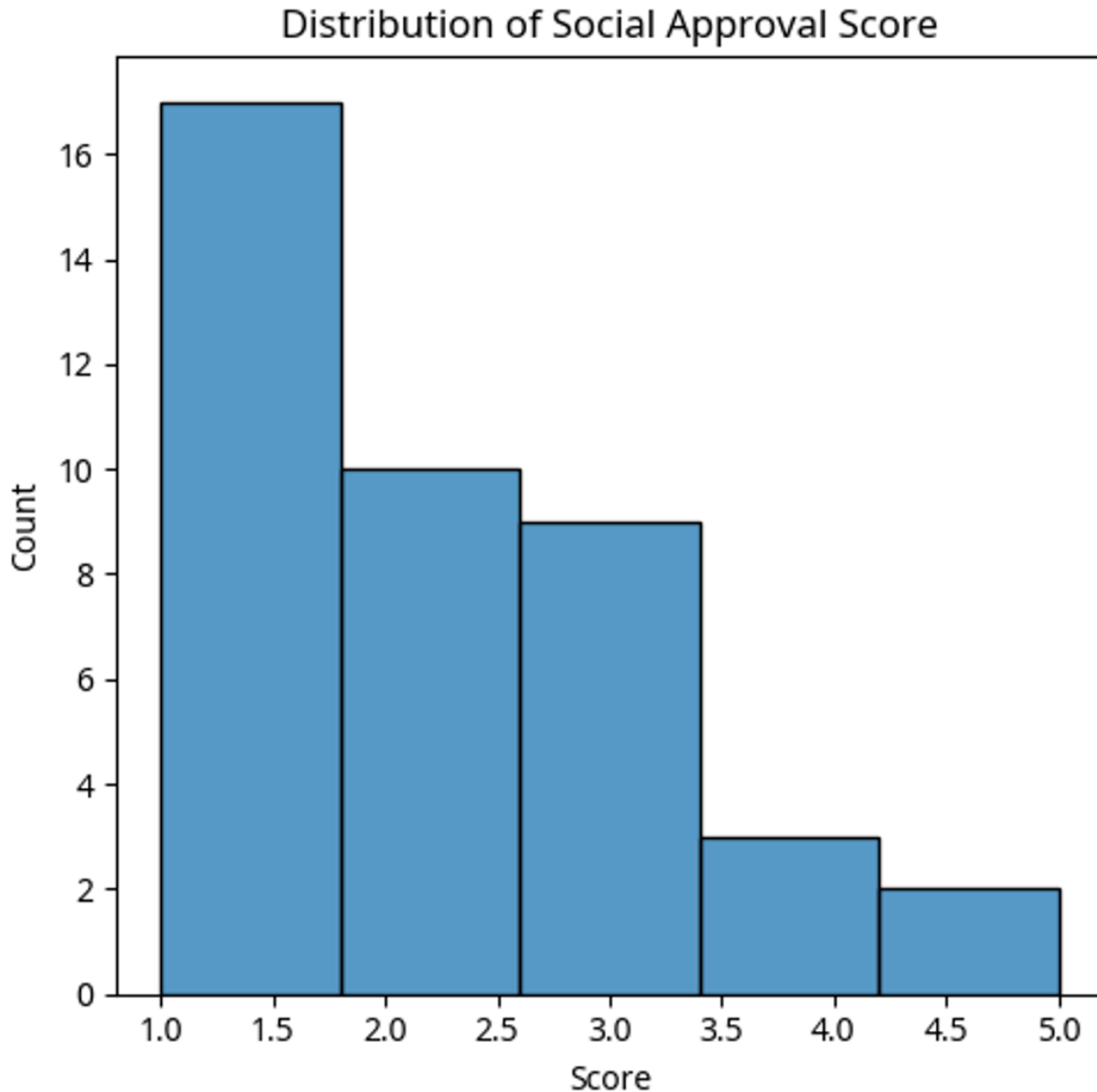
Distribution of Influencer Purchase Likelihood:-
Here, we see a somewhat balanced curve centered around 3 (Neutral), with a visible lean toward 3 and 4. There's a slight drop-off at 1 and 2, and fewer respondents marked the extremes. This shows that influencer marketing does have an effect, but it's not overwhelming or universal.

The average score of 3.07 reflects a moderate level of influence, suggesting that influencers can nudge consumer behavior, but only if the message or context resonates. Combined with the earlier correlation findings (where

influencer impact aligned more with status-driven motivations), this supports the idea that influencer marketing is more persuasive when it appeals to social signaling or lifestyle aspiration, rather than deeper personal connection.

Distribution of Influencer Purchase Likelihood
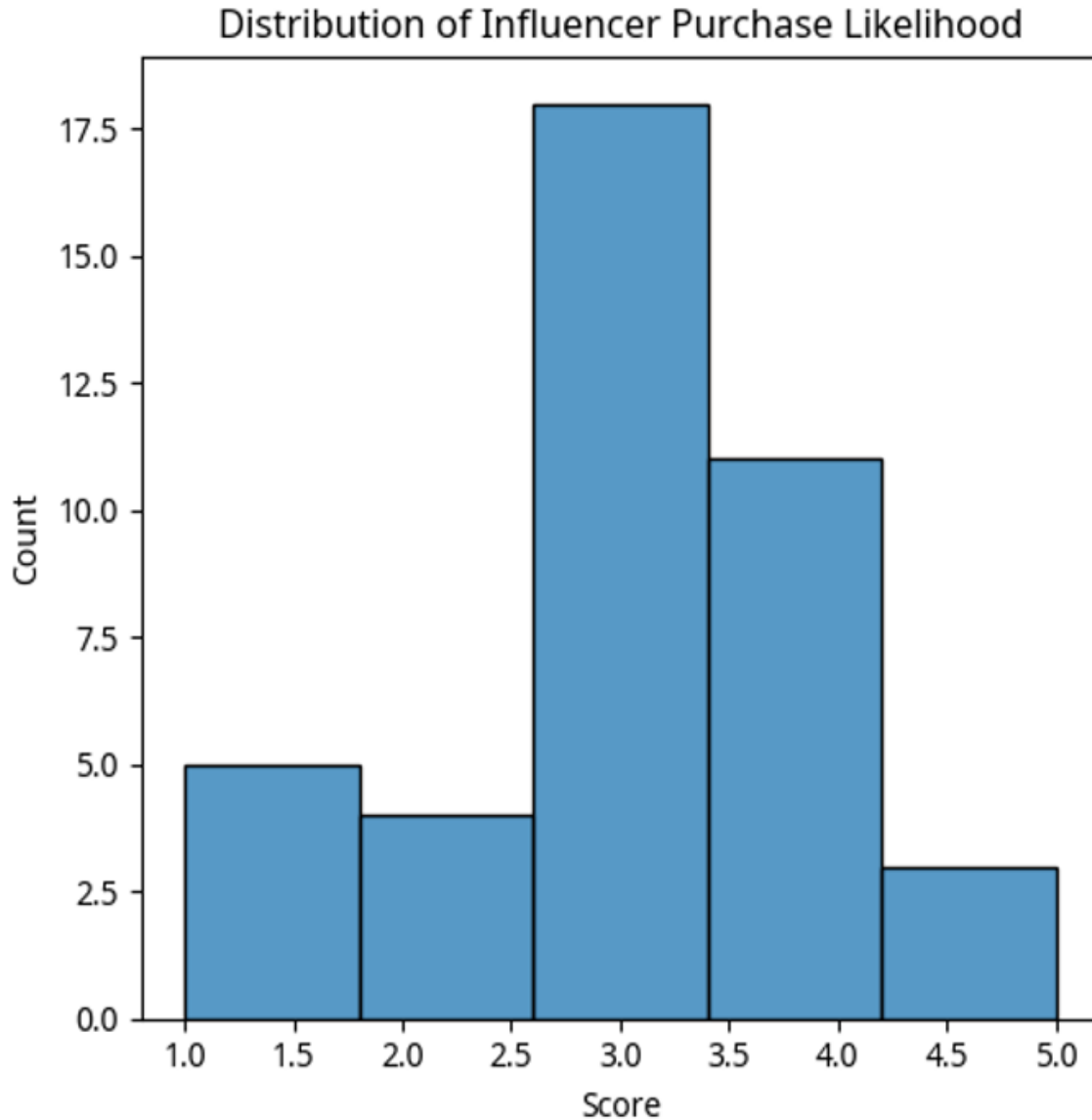
Synthesis with Literature:-
These findings line up with several key academic insights:
● Suganya & Bawa (2023) demonstrated that influencer credibility; built through trustworthiness, style, and perceived expertise, has a stronger effect on status-driven consumers, who look for social proof before purchasing.
● Shamim & Islam (2022) and Dinh et al. (2024) both highlight that emotionally engaging influencer content (especially tied to lifestyle aspiration and peer comparison) tends to drive impulse purchases rooted in the need for validation.
● Zhang (2019) emphasizes how intrinsic motivations (like emotional connection or self-alignment) are less easily influenced by external messaging, which is reflected in the weak correlation found in your primary data.
● The visual and aesthetic presentation of influencers, explored by Argyris et al. (2019), plays into aspirational appeal more than emotional resonance, further confirming their stronger pull on status-driven audiences.

- Even on a neurological level, Pozharliev et al. (2015) showed that emotional attention spikes when individuals are exposed to admired endorsers. This supports the idea that influencer-triggered emotional engagement plays a bigger role in extrinsic motivations.

Patterns from Campaigns and Consumer Profiles:-
The research also suggests patterns in consumer profiles most likely to be swayed by influencers:
- Status-driven consumers: Often younger, highly active on social media, and motivated by visibility, they respond strongly to exclusive drops, brand collaborations, and high-status endorsements. They are more likely to follow influencers who portray aspirational lifestyles and social validation.
- Desire-driven consumers: Typically more brand-aware and experience-focused, they may follow influencers but are less likely to be swayed by them unless the content goes beyond aesthetics, into storytelling, heritage, or personal value. These consumers are more loyal to brand essence than to the messenger.Real-world campaigns confirm this split. High-end fashion labels like Dior or Balenciaga often partner with high-status influencers to target status-driven consumers. In contrast, niche brands like Aesop or Loro Piana rely more on sensory-focused storytelling and subtle visuals that speak to desire-driven buyers.

Summary of Findings:
Influencer marketing shows a stronger connection with status-driven luxury consumption than with desire-driven motivations. The emotional appeal and visual credibility of influencers tend to reinforce social comparison and the pursuit of external validation, rather than fostering deep, intrinsic desire. While influencer marketing is clearly effective, its impact is not uniform across all consumer types. Desire-driven buyers are less responsive to aspirational content alone and may require more immersive, emotionally grounded brand experiences, ones that highlight craftsmanship, authenticity, and personal connection rather than just image or lifestyle.

Chapter 4: Implications for Marketers
The results of this study carry clear implications for how luxury brands should approach influencer marketing. While social media influencers undeniably shape consumer behavior, their effectiveness varies significantly depending on the underlying motivation behind luxury purchases. Brands that want to stay relevant in this rapidly evolving landscape need to go beyond blanket influencer partnerships and instead build strategies that account for psychological nuance.

Strategy Suggestions for Luxury Brands:-
One-size-fits-all influencer campaigns no longer cut it. The findings show that desire-driven consumers, who seek emotional fulfillment and personal connection with luxury goods, are less swayed by influencer aesthetics alone. These consumers respond more to brand storytelling, craftsmanship, and meaningful content that goes deeper than lifestyle flexing.

For these segments, brands should:
- Collaborate with influencers who can speak authentically about product quality, design, and heritage.
- Use long-form content formats—such as YouTube vlogs, behind-the-scenes footage, or personal testimonials—to create immersive brand narratives.
- Highlight the emotional and experiential value of luxury products, especially through collaborations with creators who value artistry, identity, and subtlety.

In contrast, status-driven buyers are more susceptible to high-impact visuals, aspirational cues, and social proof. These consumers look for signals that reinforce exclusivity and social prestige.
To reach them effectively, brands should:
- Focus on aspirational influencers with strong visual aesthetics and a high follower count.
- Time posts around product drops, exclusive events, or collaborations that project scarcity and hype.
- Leverage features like limited-time stories, countdowns, and "only for members" content to enhance the fear of missing out (FOMO) and drive impulse purchases.

Influencer Selection and Campaign Design:-
Choosing the right influencer is no longer just about follower count or brand fit; it's about aligning the influencer's personal brand with the type of motivation the campaign is targeting.
● If the goal is to connect with desire-driven consumers, brands should prioritize micro- and mid-tier influencers with strong authenticity, deeper engagement, and content that's emotionally resonant. Think of creators who integrate luxury products into personal routines, emotional milestones, or value-driven narratives.
● For status-driven consumers, brands should invest in macro- and celebrity-level influencers who symbolize success and social aspiration. These influencers create immediate recognition and deliver prestige by association, making them ideal for campaigns built around visibility and image.Additionally, virtual influencers are emerging as a unique asset, especially for Gen Z and digital-first luxury consumers. These AI-generated personas can be programmed to reflect brand values perfectly and offer consistency in style and tone, although they're better suited for status-oriented campaigns than emotionally grounded ones.

Positioning for Deeper Impact:-
Ultimately, influencer marketing should not just push products; it should amplify the emotional, cultural, and symbolic meaning behind luxury. The more marketers understand what drives their specific audience, whether it's inner fulfillment or external recognition—the more targeted and effective their campaigns will be.
A few closing takeaways for deeper impact:
● Segment campaigns not just demographically, but psychographically, based on why people buy, not just who they are.
● Use a dual-track strategy: one stream for building long-term emotional loyalty (desire-driven), and another for creating short-term buzz and social clout (status-driven).
● Monitor influencer credibility regularly. Consumers are quick to detect inauthenticity. Brands should work only with creators who genuinely connect with the brand's ethos.By tailoring influencer strategy to consumer motivation, luxury brands can cut through the noise, connect with intention, and build relationships that go beyond the feed.

Chapter 5: Result:-
This chapter synthesizes quantitative findings, theoretical perspectives, and real-world marketing insights to explain how social media influencers shape luxury purchasing behavior based on consumer motivation, specifically, the contrast between status-driven and desire-driven consumption.

Across all the subtopics explored in this study, one theme stands out clearly: influencers hold significantly more persuasive power over status-driven consumers than desire-driven ones. The data revealed a moderate positive correlation between influencer impact and status-driven motivation, while the connection between influencer content and desire-driven purchasing was weak. This distinction is further reinforced by prior research. For instance, Suganya and Bawa (2023) found that consumers who care about social standing are more responsive to influencers perceived as credible, stylish, and authoritative. These traits act as external validators, something that status-driven buyers prioritize.

Desire-driven consumers, in contrast, operate on a different wavelength. They are less interested in social approval and more focused on emotional value, personal connection, and self-expression. This helps explain why influencer content that relies heavily on aesthetics or social proof doesn't resonate as deeply with this group. Instead, they're more responsive to storytelling, authenticity, and ethical alignment, elements that are harder to convey through traditional influencer formats.

The comparative analysis suggests that influencers are naturally positioned to appeal to status-driven buyers. Much of influencer content is curated, aspirational, and public-facing—designed to be seen and shared. This aligns well with the psychology of consumers who view luxury goods as social signals. Whether it's a sleek unboxing video, a branded photoshoot in Milan, or a luxury haul post, these formats feed into the desire for social recognition and lifestyle aspiration. Status-driven consumers, especially younger audiences active on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, are drawn to this content because it mirrors the kind of social capital they aspire to accumulate.

On the other hand, desire-driven consumers are harder to influence using conventional influencer strategies. They follow influencers, yes—but they tend to value depth, consistency, and emotional connection over flash. For this group, content needs to go beyond the product. They're interested in the craftsmanship behind the item, the story it

tells, or how it fits into their identity or values. Emotional storytelling, ethical branding, and understated elegance work better here than loud luxury cues. Influencers who share personal reflections, slow-paced reviews, or behind-the-scenes brand experiences tend to build more trust with these consumers.

The literature further supports these distinctions. Researchers like Jin, Muqaddam, and Ryu (2019) have shown that "Instafamous" influencers- those who rise to prominence through visually driven platforms, tend to have stronger pull among status-oriented audiences. Likewise, studies by Liu and Zheng (2024) and Yu et al. (2023) suggest that influencer relatability boosts engagement, but especially when tied to identity projection and social comparison. Meanwhile, brands that target desire-driven buyers often avoid overt influencer marketing entirely, opting instead for slower, more meaningful brand storytelling.

From these findings, two distinct consumer profiles begin to emerge. The status-driven buyer is younger, image-conscious, and highly active online. They gravitate toward influencers who embody success, exclusivity, and visual polish. Their purchases are influenced by what's trending, what feels aspirational, and what confers social validation. The desire-driven buyer, on the other hand, is typically more selective and introspective. They are emotionally connected to brands and purchase luxury as a form of self-reward or personal meaning. They trust influencers who appear genuine, thoughtful, and consistent, not necessarily famous or flashy.

In summary, influencer marketing works, but not in the same way for everyone. Its strongest impact lies in fueling status-driven consumption, where social comparison and prestige are core drivers. For brands aiming to tap into desire-driven markets, influencer campaigns need to be rethought. Flashy aesthetics won't be enough. What's required is depth, authenticity, and emotional clarity - because desire-driven buyers are not just buying a product, they're buying meaning.

Chapter 6: Conclusion:-

This study set out to explore how social media influencers impact luxury consumption, specifically distinguishing between status-driven and desire-driven motivations. The findings demonstrate a clear divergence: while both motivations are relevant in luxury markets, influencer marketing aligns more strongly with status-driven consumption. Influencers, particularly those with polished aesthetics and aspirational lifestyles, effectively trigger social comparison, reinforce prestige signals, and drive purchases linked to external validation. In contrast, desire-driven consumers—those seeking emotional satisfaction, self-expression, or personal meaning—show a weaker connection to influencer promotions. Their motivations are more internal and less susceptible to the visual persuasion strategies typically used by influencers.

The research question—To what extent do social media influencers affect status-driven vs. desire-driven luxury purchases?—is answered with nuance. Influencers do have an impact on both groups, but their influence is more potent and measurable among status-driven consumers. These individuals are more likely to respond to credibility cues like trustworthiness and style, and more inclined toward impulse purchases driven by curated content. Desire-driven buyers, however, require a different approach; one rooted in authenticity, brand storytelling, and emotional resonance.

That said, the study is not without its limitations. The sample size was relatively small (n = 41), and responses were self-reported, which introduces potential bias. The demographic was skewed toward younger, digitally literate consumers, meaning the insights may not generalize to older or less digitally engaged populations. In addition, the evolving nature of influencer culture and social media algorithms poses a challenge to long-term applicability. Finally, while the correlation analysis offers strong directional insights, it does not prove causation.

Future research should build on these findings by incorporating larger, more diverse samples and including qualitative methods such as interviews or digital ethnography. It would also be valuable to explore long-term effects, how repeated exposure to influencers affects brand loyalty or shifting motivations over time. Moreover, studies could examine the effectiveness of emerging influencer types, such as virtual influencers or AI-generated personas, on different luxury buyer profiles.

In a market where identity and image are deeply intertwined, the influence of social media is undeniable. But as this research shows, how that influence works, and whom it works on - depends on far more than just the product being sold.

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