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Self-Monitoring as a Predictor of Status Consumption: The Moderating Role of Financial Well-Being Among Young Indian Adults

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Abstract: Within contemporary consumer environments, material acquisitions often function as tools for identity construction and social signalling, particularly among young adults navigating impression management and financial autonomy. The present study examined whether self-monitoring predicts status consumption among young Indian adults and whether subjective financial well-being moderates this relationship. A quantitative, cross-sectional design was employed with a sample of 83 participants aged 18–30 years using standardized measures of self-monitoring, status consumption, and financial well-being. Pearson correlation and hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. Results indicated a small but statistically significant positive correlation between self-monitoring and status consumption ($r = .24$, $p < .05$), while financial well-being demonstrated a stronger positive association ($r = .34$, $p < .01$) and emerged as a significant predictor ($\beta = .31$, $p = .004$). The interaction effect was not statistically significant ($p = .258$), indicating no moderation. The model accounted for 15% of the variance in status consumption. These findings suggest that perceived financial security plays a more substantial independent role than impression-management tendencies in shaping status-oriented consumption among young adults.

Keywords*:* *Self-Monitoring, Status Consumption, Financial Well Being*

1. Introduction

In contemporary consumer culture, purchasing has transcended its utilitarian roots, functioning increasingly as a means of identity construction and social signalling. While classical economic models emphasized functional decision-making, modern psychological frameworks highlight symbolic motivations. Belk’s (1988) concept of the “extended self” positions material possessions as markers of identity, acquired to complete or project a desired social persona (Dittmar, 2005). In stratified societies, this symbolic function often manifests as status consumption—the tendency to acquire goods that convey prestige and visibility (Veblen, 1899/1994). For young adults navigating identity formation, such consumption may serve a compensatory role, bridging the gap between present circumstances and aspirational identities (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982).

The extent to which individuals engage in such signalling is shaped by the personality trait of self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974), which reflects sensitivity to social cues and regulation of public self-presentation. High self-monitors, often conceptualized as social "chameleons," strategically use consumption for impression management (Goffman, 1959; DeBono & Snyder, 1989), whereas low self-monitors remain guided by internal values. However, existing literature largely overlooks the resource-based constraints that determine whether such impression-management motives translate into actual consumption behaviour.

To address this, the present study incorporates subjective financial well-being (SFWB) as a key psychological resource. Unlike objective income, SFWB reflects perceived financial security and freedom from distress (Prawitz et al., 2006). Drawing on Scarcity Theory (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013), financial strain may limit cognitive bandwidth, prioritizing survival over discretionary identity signalling. Thus, while high self-monitors may possess the motivation for status consumption, low SFWB may inhibit its enactment, whereas high SFWB may facilitate it.

Despite the relevance of these frameworks, their integration within the Indian context remains limited. India presents a unique "well-being paradox," characterized by economic growth alongside rising psychological distress among young adults (Sapien Labs, 2025). Additionally, most models of status consumption are rooted in Western, individualistic contexts, whereas India's socio-cultural environment places greater emphasis on social influence (Phadtare, 2026). This raises questions about the conditions under which financial anxiety may override social approval motives. Further, the increasing prevalence of social media intensifies pressures for digital status signalling, particularly within the context of economic precarity and gig-based employment among youth (JIER, 2026).

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the joint influence of self-monitoring and subjective financial well-being on status consumption among young Indian adults. It aims to (1) assess the predictive relationship between self-monitoring and status consumption, (2) examine the role of subjective financial well-being in prestige-oriented purchasing, and (3) test whether subjective financial well-being moderates this relationship.

1.1 *Hypotheses*

H1: Self-monitoring will positively predict status consumption among young Indian adults.

H2: Subjective financial well-being will positively predict status consumption.

H3: Subjective financial well-being will moderate the relationship between self-monitoring and status consumption, such that the association will be stronger for individuals with higher perceived financial security.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 *Conceptual Foundations of Status Consumption*

Early economic models conceptualized consumption as a rational, utility-maximizing process. However, perspectives from consumer psychology and sociology emphasize that consumption also serves symbolic and identity-related functions. Belk's (1988) "extended self" framework posits that possessions become integral to one's identity, such that acquiring or losing symbolic goods carries psychological significance. Similarly, Veblen's (1899/1994) concept of conspicuous consumption highlights how visible spending signals social status, later reframed as an individual-level motivation to acquire prestige goods (Eastman et al., 1999).

Empirical evidence demonstrates that consumers strategically use visible luxury goods to signal status (Han et al., 2010), particularly under conditions of social comparison and competition (Ordabayeva & Chandon, 2011), with such behaviours observed across socio-economic groups (Charles et al., 2009). A key distinction within this domain is between aspirational signalling and compensatory consumption: the former reflects the projection of a desired identity, whereas the latter addresses self-discrepancies or threatened self-worth (Dittmar, 2005). Consistent with this, self-threat has been shown to increase preference for symbolic brands (Mandel et al., 2017), aligning with self-completion theory (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982).

Despite robust evidence for identity-based consumption motives, most studies implicitly assume financial freedom, leaving the role of perceived financial security relatively underexplored.

2.2 *Self-Monitoring and Impression Management in Consumer Behaviour*

Mark Snyder (1974) defined self-monitoring as the extent to which individuals regulate behaviour based on social cues. High self-monitors adapt to situational expectations, whereas low self-monitors prioritize internal consistency.

This aligns with Erving Goffman (1959), which views social interaction as performance where consumer goods act as tools for impression management.

Research shows that high self-monitors are more responsive to brand symbolism and public consumption contexts (DeBono & Snyder, 1989; Lalwani & Shavitt, 2009). They adjust product choices based on audience and context (Shavitt et al., 1992) and show stronger preference for prestige brands (Batra et al., 2000). In contrast, low self-monitors focus on intrinsic product attributes.

However, most research assumes stable economic conditions and does not account for situational constraints. Trait Activation Theory suggests that traits are expressed when situational cues permit. Thus, self-monitoring may lead to status consumption only when contextual conditions—such as financial security—allow it.

2.3 *Subjective Financial Well-Being and Perceived Economic Constraint*

Traditional measures of financial capacity rely on objective indicators like income, but psychological research emphasizes subjective financial well-being (SFWB).

Prawitz et al. (2006) define SFWB as perceived financial security, satisfaction, and freedom from anxiety. Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir (2013) argue that scarcity narrows cognitive focus, prioritizing immediate financial concerns. Supporting this, financial strain reduces cognitive bandwidth and planning ability (Mani et al., 2013).

From this perspective, low SFWB may suppress discretionary status consumption. However, compensatory consumption theory suggests the opposite: financial insecurity may increase status consumption to restore self-worth (Dittmar, 2005).

This creates a theoretical ambiguity—financial strain may either constrain or amplify status consumption—highlighting the need to examine its interaction with personality traits.

2.4 *The Indian Context: Aspirational Visibility and Economic Volatility*

Most research on status consumption and self-monitoring is based on Western contexts. Emerging economies like India present a different landscape marked by rapid urbanization, expanding consumer markets, and increased digital visibility.

Indian young adults experience both greater access to global brands and uncertainty in employment and income stability. Recent reports by Sapien Labs (2025) indicate higher psychological distress among young adults, suggesting subjective strain may be significant.

In such contexts, heightened social comparison through digital media may intensify impression-management motives alongside financial uncertainty. However, research has rarely examined how these factors interact, particularly among Indian youth.

2.5 *Integrative Framework: Toward a Moderated Model*

The literature reveals three keys but disconnected domains:

(1) status consumption as identity expression,

(2) self-monitoring as a predictor of impression management, and

(3) subjective financial well-being as a contextual factor.

Drawing on Trait Activation Theory, this study proposes that subjective financial well-being acts as a moderator. While high self-monitors are predisposed toward status signalling, the extent to which this translates into actual consumption depends on perceived financial security.

Under high SFWB, self-monitoring tendencies may be fully expressed. Under low SFWB, financial constraints may suppress or alter this relationship.

By examining this interaction among Indian young adults, the study aims to move beyond direct-effect models toward a more context-sensitive understanding of personality and economic influences on consumption behaviour.

3. Methodology

3.1 *Research Design and Analytical Framework*

The present study is situated within a post-positivist epistemological framework, which assumes that while an objective social reality exists, it can only be approximated through systematic, probabilistic inquiry. In line with this orientation, a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design was adopted to examine relationships among self-monitoring, subjective financial well-being (SFWB), and status consumption.

A quantitative approach was appropriate given the study's objective of testing statistically significant associations among individual difference variables. The cross-sectional design enabled assessment at a single time point within young adults aged 18–30 years. As no variables were experimentally manipulated, the correlational framework ensured ecological validity by capturing naturally occurring variations in personality traits and perceived financial conditions. While causal inference is limited, the design is suitable for examining contemporaneous relationships.

The central analytical framework was moderation. The study examined whether the relationship between self-monitoring and status consumption varies as a function of subjective financial well-being. This rationale is informed by Trait Activation Theory, which posits that personality traits are expressed behaviourally when situational conditions permit their activation. Accordingly, SFWB was conceptualized as a contextual boundary condition influencing the expression of impression-management motives.

To test both main and interaction effects, hierarchical multiple regression (HMR) was employed. In Step 1, centered self-monitoring and centered SFWB were entered to estimate main effects. In Step 2, the interaction term (Self-Monitoring × SFWB) was introduced to assess additional explained variance. Mean-centering reduced multicollinearity and facilitated interpretation of conditional effects. Moderation was evaluated through change in explained variance (ΔR^2). All analyses were conducted using SPSS with statistical significance set at $\alpha = .05$.

Given the reliance on self-report data, potential common method variance was acknowledged. This was mitigated through the use of validated instruments, structured scale ordering, and assurances of anonymity. However, the cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation, and the use of non-probability sampling restricts generalizability.

3.2 *Participants and Sampling*

The final sample comprised N = 83 young Indian adults aged 18–30 years, representing a developmental stage characterized by identity exploration and increasing financial autonomy. The gender distribution included 59.0% male, 39.8% female, and 1.2% who preferred not to disclose. Participants included undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as early-career professionals from diverse backgrounds. Only complete responses were retained for analysis.

Participants were recruited using convenience and snowball sampling through digital platforms, including university networks and social media. Although participants were drawn from multiple regions in India, the sample was predominantly urban and semi-urban, limiting broader generalizability.

Eligibility criteria required participants to be aged 18–30 years, currently residing in India, and to provide informed consent. Incomplete responses were excluded, and data were screened for inconsistencies prior to analysis.

The sample size is consistent with exploratory correlational research. Based on Jacob Cohen, a sample of approximately 80 participants is adequate to detect medium effect sizes in regression analyses at $\alpha = .05$ with acceptable statistical power. However, smaller interaction effects may not be reliably detected.

3.3 *Measures*

Self-monitoring was assessed using the Revised Self-Monitoring Scale (Lennox & Wolfe, 1984), a 13-item Likert-type instrument measuring behavioural adaptability and sensitivity to social cues. Status consumption was measured using the Status Consumption

Scale (Eastman & Goldsmith, 1999), a five-item measure assessing motivation to purchase goods for social prestige. Subjective financial well-being was assessed using the InCharge Financial Distress/Financial Well-Being Scale developed by Prawitz et al. (2006), an 8-item instrument measuring perceived financial security and distress.

Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's α) within the present sample (N = 83) was .79 for self-monitoring (acceptable), .62 for status consumption (modest), and .90 for financial well-being (high). The relatively lower reliability of the status consumption scale is likely due to its limited number of items; however, it was retained due to its theoretical relevance.

3.4 *Procedure and Ethical Considerations*

Data collection followed institutional ethical approval and was conducted through an online survey platform. Participants provided informed consent prior to participation. No personally identifiable information was collected, and anonymity was maintained.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections: demographics, self-monitoring, status consumption, and financial well-being. This structure minimized response bias and cognitive carryover effects. The survey remained active for four weeks, with an average completion time of 12–13 minutes. Required-response settings ensured no missing data, and responses were securely stored for analysis.

The study adhered to the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association. Participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time. No deception was used, and confidentiality was strictly maintained.

3.5 *Statistical Analysis*

Data were screened to ensure compliance with regression assumptions. No missing data were present. Outliers were assessed using standardized residuals and Cook's Distance. Normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were evaluated through visual inspection, and multicollinearity was assessed using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), with values below 5 considered acceptable.

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and Pearson correlations (r) were computed for all variables. Moderation analysis was conducted using hierarchical multiple regression, with predictors mean-centered and the interaction term entered in the second step. A significant change in R^2 (ΔR^2) indicated moderation, with statistical significance set at $\alpha = .05$

4. Results

4.1 *Sample Characteristics*

The final sample consisted of 83 participants. Of these, 59.0% were male (n = 49), 39.8% were female (n = 33), and 1.2% preferred not to disclose their gender (n = 1). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 30 years (M = 22.02, SD = 2.39).

4.2 *Descriptive Statistics*

Descriptive statistics for the primary study variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 83)*

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max
Self-Monitoring	22.19	8.26	3	54
Status Consumption	18.87	5.43	5	35
Financial Well-Being	45.83	16.01	8	80

All variables demonstrated adequate variability, supporting further inferential analysis.

4.3 *Reliability Analysis*

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Internal Consistency Reliability of Study Measures*

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
Self-Monitoring	13	.79
Status Consumption	5	.62
Financial Well-Being	8	.90

The Self-Monitoring and Financial Well-Being scales demonstrated acceptable to excellent reliability. The Status Consumption scale showed marginal reliability.

4.4 *Preliminary Analyses*

Pearson's product–moment correlations were computed to examine the relationships among self-monitoring, financial well-being, and status consumption (see Table 1).

Self-monitoring was positively correlated with status consumption, $r(81) = .241$, $p = .028$. Financial well-being was also positively correlated with status consumption, $r(81) = .337$, $p = .002$. The correlation between self-monitoring and financial well-being was not statistically significant, $r(81) = .154$, $p = .165$.

These findings suggest that individuals higher in self-monitoring and financial well-being tend to report greater status consumption.

Table 3. *Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 83)*

Variable	1	2	3
1. Self-Monitoring	—		
2. Status Consumption	.241*	—	
3. Financial Well-Being	.154	.337**	—

Note. $p < .05$. $p < .01$.

4.5 *Moderation Analysis*

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether financial well-being moderated the relationship between self-monitoring and status consumption. Predictor variables were mean centered prior to creating the interaction term to reduce multicollinearity.

Step 1: Main Effects

In Step 1, self-monitoring and financial well-being were entered as predictors of status consumption. The model was statistically significant, $F(2, 80) = 7.06$, $p = .001$, explaining 15.0% of the variance in status consumption ($R^2 = .150$).

Financial well-being was a significant positive predictor of status consumption, $B = 0.104$, $SE = 0.035$, $\beta = .307$, $t = 2.95$, $p = .004$.

Self-monitoring showed a positive but non-significant effect, $B = 0.127$, $SE = 0.068$, $\beta = .193$, $t = 1.85$, $p = .068$.

Step 2: Interaction Effect

In Step 2, the interaction term (Self-Monitoring × Financial Well-Being) was entered into the model. The addition of the interaction term did not significantly improve the model, $\Delta R^2 = .014$, $\Delta F(1, 79) = 1.30$, $p = .258$.

In the final model:

- Self-monitoring: $B = 0.107$, $SE = 0.071$, $\beta = .163$, $t = 1.52$, $p = .133$
- Financial well-being: $B = 0.107$, $SE = 0.035$, $\beta = .315$, $t = 3.02$, $p = .003$
- Interaction term: $B = 0.004$, $SE = 0.003$, $\beta = .121$, $t = 1.14$, $p = .258$

Because the interaction term was not statistically significant, financial well-being did not moderate the relationship between self-monitoring and status consumption. The final model explained 16.4% of the variance in status consumption ($R^2 = .164$).

Table 4. *Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Status Consumption (N = 83)*

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Step 1					
Self-Monitoring	0.127	0.068	.193	1.85	.068
Financial Well-Being	0.104	0.035	.307	2.95	.004
Step 2					
Self-Monitoring	0.107	0.071	.163	1.52	.133
Financial Well-Being	0.107	0.035	.315	3.02	.003
SM × FWB	0.004	0.003	.121	1.14	.258

Model Fit:

Step 1: $R^2 = .150$, $F(2, 80) = 7.06$, $p = .001$

Step 2: $R^2 = .164$, $\Delta R^2 = .014$, $\Delta F(1, 79) = 1.30$, $p = .258$

Assumption Checks

Collinearity diagnostics indicated no concerns regarding multicollinearity. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.024 to 1.091, well below the recommended threshold of 10, and tolerance values were above .90. Condition indices were below 2, indicating stable parameter estimates.

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

- **H1:** Self-monitoring significantly predicts status consumption.
  → *Partially supported* (significant in correlation; marginal in regression).
- **H2:** Financial well-being significantly predicts status consumption.
  → **Supported**.
- **H3:** Financial well-being moderates the relationship between self-monitoring and status consumption.
  → **Not supported**.

5. Discussion

5.1 *Overview of Findings and Theoretical Relevance*

The present study examined the psychological and economic determinants of status consumption among young Indian adults by integrating impression management and financial psychology frameworks. The findings indicate that while self-monitoring and subjective financial well-being (SFWB) are both associated with status consumption, they operate as parallel influences rather than an integrated mechanism. The expected moderation effect was not supported, suggesting that impression-management motives and perceived financial security function independently.

5.2 ***Self-Monitoring and Status Consumption (H1)***

Consistent with Mark Snyder (1974), self-monitoring demonstrated a positive bivariate association with status consumption, supporting the dramaturgical view of consumption as impression management. However, the loss of significance in the regression model indicates that self-monitoring alone does not independently account for status consumption when financial perceptions are considered. This suggests that while individuals may be motivated to manage social impressions, the enactment of status consumption is contingent upon perceived financial capacity.

5.3 ***Financial Well-Being as a Primary Predictor (H2)***

Subjective financial well-being emerged as the strongest predictor of status consumption. This aligns with the scarcity framework proposed by Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir (2013), which posits that financial security frees cognitive resources for non-essential, identity-driven expenditures. The findings suggest that status consumption is shaped less by objective income and more by perceived financial confidence. In the Indian context, this reflects a psychological threshold, where individuals engage in prestige-seeking behavior only when they feel financially secure.

5.4 ***Absence of Moderation (H3)***

The hypothesized moderation effect of SFWB was not supported. This finding is theoretically informative. First, it suggests that impression-management pressures may operate independently of financial perceptions in contemporary digital environments. Second, the results support an additive rather than multiplicative model, where personality-based motives and financial perceptions function in separate domains. Third, consistent with Robert Wicklund and Peter Gollwitzer (1982), compensatory consumption processes may counterbalance expected moderation effects at the aggregate level.

5.5 ***Socio-Cultural Interpretation: The Indian Context***

Within the Indian context, the findings reflect a balance between aspirational visibility and financial prudence. While self-monitoring aligns with reputational concerns and social evaluation, financial well-being acts as a psychological constraint on behavior. This suggests a “rational aspiration” pattern, where young adults pursue prestige but calibrate their consumption based on perceived economic security.

5.6 *Applied Implications*

- Clinical and Counseling Contexts: Status-oriented consumption may be more closely linked to financial perceptions than personality traits. Interventions addressing financial anxiety and perceived security may be more effective than focusing solely on impression-management tendencies.
- Economic and Policy Contexts: Consumer behavior appears sensitive to perceived financial stability. Policies that reduce economic uncertainty may influence aspirational consumption patterns by enhancing subjective financial confidence.

The findings indicate that status consumption emerges from the coexistence of impression-management motives, identity signaling processes, and perceived financial security. The absence of moderation refines theoretical models by supporting an additive framework, in which personality and economic perception independently shape consumer behavior.

6. Conclusion

The present study investigated whether self-monitoring and subjective financial well-being predict status consumption among young Indian adults, and whether financial well-being moderates this relationship. Integrating impression management and financial psychology perspectives, the study aimed to provide a contextually grounded understanding of aspirational consumption.

The findings offer three key conclusions. First, self-monitoring was positively associated with status consumption at the bivariate level, indicating that individuals sensitive to social cues are more inclined toward prestige-oriented purchasing. However, this effect diminished in the multivariate model, suggesting that impression-management tendencies do not independently drive behavior when financial perceptions are considered.

Second, subjective financial well-being emerged as the most consistent predictor. Individuals who perceived themselves as financially secure reported higher levels of status consumption, indicating that perceived financial confidence plays a central role in enabling identity-signaling behavior.

Third, the hypothesized moderation effect was not supported. Rather than a multiplicative interaction, the findings support an additive model in which self-monitoring and financial well-being function as parallel influences. One shapes the motivation for identity signaling, while the other determines the perceived capacity to enact it.

Within the Indian socio-cultural context, these findings reflect a dynamic interplay between aspirational consumerism and financial caution. While social and digital environments intensify impression-management pressures, financial self-perceptions act as a critical psychological boundary. Overall, the study contributes to consumer psychology by demonstrating that status consumption is shaped by both personality and financial subjectivity, but not by their interaction. It refines theoretical assumptions by suggesting that economic perception operates as an independent pathway rather than a moderating condition. In sum, status consumption among young Indian adults is best understood as a psychologically mediated behavior situated at the intersection of identity performance and perceived economic security.

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