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FEATURE ARTICLE
The Allure of Luxury Items

In a world brimming with opulence and exclusivity, the allure of luxury goods and extravagant purchases continues to captivate the human imagination. High-end fashion, luxury brands, exquisite accessories, and lavish vacations embody a realm of excess that entices consumers across Fiji. As a consumer advocacy body, the Consumer Council of Fiji delves into the motivations behind purchasing luxury items while shedding light on the importance of consumer protection within this intriguing domain.

The Psychology of Luxury Consumption:

1. **Status Symbol and Social Signalling:** Luxury items stand as symbols of prestige and social status, granting individuals a sense of accomplishment and recognition. They serve as visible markers of wealth, power, and success, allowing people to distinguish themselves in a competitive society, where status is on wide display on Facebook and Instagram. One delightful scenario involves a classic fashion dilemma: should you strut around in a locally crafted \$20 t-shirt that supports the 'buy Fijian made' initiative, or splurge a princely sum of \$150 for a similar shirt just because it carries a designer name? It's like deciding between a thrifty stroll through the flea market or embarking on a glamorous shopping spree at a boutique with iced coffee on tap. The choice is yours to make.

2. **Experiential Value and Emotional Gratification:** Beyond their materialistic nature, luxury purchases often offer unique experiences and emotional rewards. Ownership of a luxury item, or spending thousands on a single purchase can evoke feelings of pleasure, exclusivity, and gratification, enhancing one's self-esteem. Indulging in an expensive weekend getaway at a local resort and posting pictures of it for weeks to come, exemplifies how luxury items provide more than mere material possessions.

3. **Perceived Quality and Craftsmanship:** Renowned for their superior craftsmanship, attention to detail, and utilization of high-quality materials, luxury goods inspire confidence in consumers. The belief that these products offer better performance, durability, and longevity

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compared to their mass-produced counterparts drives individuals to invest in these high-end options. Consider being at the crossroads of buying a car. On one hand, you have the allure of a Lexus, a luxurious chariot designed for those who prefer their wheels to be laced with sophistication and prestige. On the other hand, there's the trusty Toyota, a reliable companion that dutifully shuttles you from point A to B without any unnecessary frills. Both options will get you where you need to go, but the splendor and the dent in your wallet that comes with the Lexus experience is something to consider.

The Councils' Concerns

1. Counterfeit Products and Brand Protection: Within the Fiji retail sector, counterfeit luxury items have become a much more serious threat. Despite fake branded products, such as "abibas," "Klevin Kilne," and "CuGGi" hitting local markets, there are many others which are much more difficult to differentiate, such as fake android phones. This is why the Council advocates for more consumer protection measures such as stricter regulations, authentication processes, and public awareness campaigns that are crucial in combating the sale and purchase of counterfeit goods.

2. Misleading Advertising and Unrealistic Expectations: Elaborate marketing strategies employed by luxury brands often create heightened expectations and aspirations among consumers. Consider the captivating power of social media, where scrolling through the glamorous lives of others can plant a seed of desire that whispers, "You need this too." It's like a virtual window-shopping spree that tricks our minds into believing that our lives will magically transform if we possess the same lavish trinkets and extravagant goods. The Consumer Council advocates emphasis on the importance of transparency, honesty, and accurate representation in advertising to prevent deception and disappointment.

3. Ethical Production and Sustainability: The production of luxury goods sometimes involves unethical practices, including exploitative labour conditions or environmental harm. The Council emphasizes the need for increased transparency, fair trade practices, and sustainable sourcing within the luxury industry.

4. Financial Responsibility and Predatory Lending: The allure of luxury can lead individuals to engage in impulsive spending or fall victim to predatory lending schemes. For instance, consider the tempting call of a lengthy hire purchase agreement for the latest smartphone; by the time it's fully paid off, a newer model emerges, enticing you into another cycle of perpetual upgrades. The Council continues to carry out awareness aimed at educating consumers about responsible financial choices, promoting financial literacy, and speaking out against exploitative lending practices.

The purchase of luxury and expensive items is a complex phenomenon driven by psychological, social, and emotional factors. While indulging in these purchases offers moments of joy and self-expression, it is essential to exercise prudence and spend within your means. By striking a balance between the allure of luxury and being responsible consumers, individuals can make informed decisions while enjoying the rewards of their investments without undue harm or deception.

