ANTECEDENTS TO CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION OF LUXURY FASHION GOODS BY MIDDLE-INCOME BLACK SOUTH AFRICANS

BY

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ABSTRACT

South Africa is increasingly becoming an important market for luxury goods brands. This is mainly due to the country's growing middle-income consumer segment which is considered to be upwardly mobile. As a result, South Africa has become an attractive destination for luxury goods brands. Signalling theory suggests that luxury brands – in consumer goods categories such as clothing and cars, are perceived as status symbols and consumed for their status credentials. Furthermore, there is adequate literature claiming that black South Africans exhibit a heightened interest in conspicuous consumption compared to other racial groupings. However, there is limited research addressing the factors driving middle-income black South Africans to consume luxury fashion brands conspicuously. Therefore, there was a need for this study to generate new knowledge in this area of research. Consequently, this study was concerned with investigating the antecedents to conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by middle-income black South Africans. This study employed a survey questionnaire approach and a quantitative methodology for primary data collection. Data was gathered from a sample of 182 respondents across South Africa and analysed using structural equation modelling (SEM) through SPSS and Mplus software. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test model fit as well as reliability and validity of measurement instruments while path modelling was used to test hypotheses adopted by this report. Five (5) of the eight (8) hypotheses in this study were supported by statistical results; although, three (3) hypotheses were not supported. Among the major findings made by this report was that social class signalling (SCS) positively influenced conspicuous consumption (CC) while conspicuous consumption (CC) was not predicted by status consumption (SC). This study concluded that conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by middle-income black South Africans was motivated by social factors. This report's key recommendations were for marketing professionals to imbue overt status cues in their brand campaigns to drive consumption of luxury fashion goods. Future studies could investigate whether or not the findings of this study are applicable across racial demographics in South Africa.

Keywords: Conspicuous consumption, luxury, fashion, middle-income, black South Africans

DECLARATION

I, **Lebohang Mthombeni**, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Lebohang Mthombeni

Signed at: **JOHANNESBURG**

On the ...**4TH** ... day of ...**MARCH**... 2021

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my loving and supportive parents – Phumzile and Mafika Ndlovu. I am eternally grateful for the role you have played in my life. I love you.

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I would not have completed this thesis without many unsung heroes' kindness and support - thank you all.

To Nelisa – Sthandwa sam', we did it!

To my supervisor, Dr Saruchera, thank you for not giving up on me.

To The Great Nkulunkulu - you are my Conqueror, Saviour, and the Greater Who lives in me. Thank you, Lord, for bringing me this far. I give you all the glory!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study was concerned with exploring the antecedents which influence the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by black middle-income South Africans. This chapter sets out the study's context and discusses critical aspects that informed the researcher's approach to the study. The purpose of the study is initially discussed in this chapter. After that, the study's background is addressed comprehensively to demonstrate the literature that influenced this inquiry. Furthermore, this chapter draws from various literature to identify gaps in the theory that informed this study's problem statement. The research objectives and research questions that focus on this study are also articulated in this chapter. Subsequently, the study's significance is discussed to demonstrate the implications and potential impact of the study. Also, the delimitations and definition of terms used in this study are discussed. A section on assumptions made in this study concludes this chapter.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that drive middle-income black South Africans[1] to consume luxury fashion items conspicuously.[2] Additionally, this study explored the nature of the relationship between middle-income black South Africans and the luxury clothing brands they wear and their motivations for such consumption. Specifically, the study investigated the role of social class signalling and status consumption in explaining the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion brands. The mediating mechanism of bandwagon effect and snob effect underlying the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion products were explored among South African middle-class consumers.

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[1] For the purposes of this research, there is no precision on various definitions of middle income black South Africans. However, a description of this group of people is demonstrated in the study. It ranges from occupation to income and education to consumption, through to subjective self-identification.

[2] For the purposes of this research luxury generally refers to flashy clothes, shoes, handbags, fine furs and expensive cars to mention a few. However, Luxury has morphed beyond high price points and iconic labels, and instead now revolves around everything from uniqueness to experiences which involves high spending and costs.

1.2 Background of the Study

Since the dawn of South African democracy in 1994, there has been an increase in the African middle-class population (Southall, 2007). Before this, the apartheid government in South Africa had formulated and enforced legislation that prevented most black people from ascending to high-income professions and acquiring middle-class status (Rivero, Du Toit & Kotze, 2003). In this view, Nieftagodien and Van der Berg (2007) demonstrate how the Apartheid system created an asset deficit among black people. Nieftagodien and Van der Berg also claim this deficit has led to middle-income black South Africans displaying different consumption patterns than their white counterparts in post-democratic South Africa.

Southall (2007) asserts that abolishing the apartheid system in 1994 resulted in the transfer of political power to the African National Congress (ANC). Consequently, an enabling environment was created for the imminent rise of an African middle class. To address the socio-economic imbalances of Apartheid, the new South African government introduced and established policies such as BEE and Affirmative Action. As a result of these interventions, black people were for the first time employed in positions that were previously reserved exclusively for white people (Rivero et al., 2003). These policies led to increases in the income and earning capacity of black people, and as a result, black people in South Africa were able to afford houses in previously white suburbs, luxury items such as expensive cars and clothing (Nieftagodien & Van der Berg, 2007).

A study conducted by UCT Unilever Institute (2013) concluded that the African middle class's growth had reached 4 million in 2012 from a base of 1.7 million people in 2004, with their collective spending power surpassing that of their white counterparts reaching R400 billion per annum. In South Africa, most of the African middle-class population is situated in Gauteng (Burger, Burger & van der Burg, 2003; Wolfhard, 2010). Although Gauteng accounts for less than 2% of South Africa's total surface land, it contributes 34% of its GDP, with Johannesburg being its economic hub (Statssa, 2017).

Hurst and Roussanov (2007) make a case for status consumption and race. Hurst and Roussanov argue that black people engage in conspicuous consumption activities and spend more money and resources on status consumption than their white counterparts. Wolfhard (2010) confirms this by demonstrating that compared to their Caucasian counterparts, black South African consumers spend on average 35-50% more on conspicuous and visible consumption. Furthermore, this scholar avows that black South African consumers earn less than their white counterparts on average. Nevertheless, they spend more money on the conspicuous consumption of goods in categories such as clothing and spend less on health care services, recreational activities, and housing than their white peers. This trend is consistent across the different black South African consumer segments. However, it is more prevalent among the younger demographic who have a materialistic outlook and have a high preference for designer clothing (Bevan-Dye, Garnett & de Klerk; 2012).

With regards to the consumption of luxury goods, Teimourpour, Hanzaee, and Teimourpour (2013, p. 182) identify several factors that influence how people value and consume luxury goods, namely; "functionality, uniqueness, quality, social value, conspicuous value, prestige value, individual value, self-identity value, materialistic value and hedonic value". These motivating factors of luxury goods consumption will vary when examined under different consumer segments and countries (Shukla, 2008). Some of these factors have been studied more than others, with conspicuous and status consumption motives among those with limited literature (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). South Africa is considered a key growth market for global luxury brands seeking expansion on the African continent, yet there is insufficient knowledge on the consumption behaviour of luxury goods brands in the country (Deloitte, 2014; Steihler, 2017). Despite the notion that many black South African middle-class consumers enjoy conspicuous luxury brands (Resnick, 2015, this observation has received limited research attention. Thus, this research study seeks to generate knowledge regarding the conspicuous consumption behaviour of luxury fashion goods in South Africa, particularly among black middle-income South Africans.

1.2.1 Problem Statement

Black South African middle-income earners[3] have a heightened demonstration of conspicuous luxury fashion consumption (Resnick, 2015). This group is becoming an increasingly important demographic to marketers in terms of the products they sell and how they reach and communicate with this consumer segment (UCT Unilever Institute, 2013). This demographic is also growing in size and purchasing power, meaning it is an integral part of the country's financial well-being from a GDP and tax contribution perspective (Steyn, 2013). This consumer segment's needs and consumption behaviour are continually evolving, and marketers are not adapting quick enough to adequately satisfy these demand spaces (UCT Unilever Institute, 2013). Therefore, understanding this consumer segment's consumption behaviour and their purchase motives is imperative to the success and growth of brands targeting this target market in South Africa (Babu, 2015).

There is sufficient literature on conspicuous consumption as a construct and its implications concerning racial groups across different societies the world over. For instance, black, coloured and Hispanic people have been shown to display higher conspicuous consumption levels than other races as they also have a greater need for status and social class signalling (O'Cass & Frost, 2002; Souiden, M'Saad & Pons, 2011). However, there is limited literature on how, in an emerging market like South Africa, black Africans relate to conspicuous consumption in different luxury goods categories (Burger et al., 2003). There is also significant research that demonstrates that luxury goods in categories such as fashion, cars, and jewellery are perceived as status symbols and considered suitable channels for status signalling and conspicuous consumption (Michaelidou & Dibb, 2006; Souiden et al., 2011). Luxury goods consumption motives are characterised into internal and external categories (Wiedmann, Hennigs & Siebels, 2009). The external motives fall within the purvey of this study. Therefore, there is a need for further research to be conducted on how external motives of luxury goods consumption apply to different cultural settings (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). Shukla (2008) posits that "brand

[3] This group in other literature are referred to as the middle-class (Resnick, 2015; Stiehler, 2017)

antecedents on consumers' conspicuous consumption will be different when examining the different product and demographic target segments".

Furthermore, the nature and characteristics of the African middle-class and middle-income construct have been adequately studied within the South African context (Ndletyana, 2014; Visagie, 2014). However, there appears to be a limited amount of research exploring the relationship among the antecedents of conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods among the African middle-class or black middle-income earners (Steihler, 2017).

Therefore, the relationship between the antecedents to the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods among middle-income black South Africans was investigated by this study. To achieve this, the study explores the relationship between social class signalling, status consumption, bandwagon effect, snob effect and conspicuous consumption among South African consumers belonging to the middle-income black demographic in South Africa.

1.2.2 Research Objectives

a) To identify ways in which middle-income black South Africans relate to the conspicuous consumption of luxury clothing brands.
b) To examine the motives that influence the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by middle-income black South Africans.
c) To explore factors that drive the conspicuous consumption of luxury clothing brands among middle-income black South Africans.

1.2.3 Research Questions

a) How do middle-income black South Africans relate to the conspicuous consumption of luxury clothing brands?
b) How do social class signalling and status consumption influence conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by middle-income black South Africans?

c) How do the bandwagon effect and snob effect of luxury products, directly and indirectly, explain the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion products among middle-income black South Africans?

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study was necessary because of nuanced differences in how black and white consumers consume goods (Nieftagodien & Van der Berg, 2007). Nieftagodien and Van der Berg (2007) also argued that South Africa's political history is the reason for the nuances in the consumption behaviour among the different racial groups. Scholars such as Kaus (2013) have argued that black people spend more money on status-laden clothing brands than Caucasian counterparts. However, there is currently insufficient research to unpack the dynamics of what drives this nuanced conspicuous behaviour among black middle-income consumers in South Africa. More research needs to be conducted to determine the brand antecedents that black consumers in South Africa regard as status conferring (Bevan-Dye, Garnett & de Klerk, 2012).

It is also worth noting that different regions around the world have nuanced factors that drive status consumption. In other words, what works in a particular country may not work in another. Therefore, it is valuable to understand the factors driving conspicuous and status consumption relevant to a given country (O'Cass & Frost, 2002).

Based on the above discussion, the following were expected crucial contributions from this study;

- Offer relevant insights to improve marketing strategies targeted at middle-income black South Africans.
- Provide marketers with current trends about conspicuous consumption behaviour by middle-income black South Africans.
- This study sought to illuminate the relationship between the constructs of social class signalling, bandwagon effect, and snob effect and status consumption within the context of conspicuous consumption.

- This study's outcomes could provide recommendations that could lead to more effective marketing strategies, thereby increasing sales of luxury fashion brands in South Africa when implemented.

Understanding the antecedents to the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods brands by black middle-income South Africans is essential because it will generate fresh perspectives and knowledge in this field of study.

1.4 Delimitations

The scope of this study was narrow. The study was based on the black middle-income earners' conspicuous consumption behaviour concerning luxury fashion goods. The study included black middle-income South African consumers who have previously purchased a luxury clothing item and those who intended to purchase such items in the future. Furthermore, this study was limited to the black middle-income demographic residing in South Africa. This study's focus was only on consumption factors related to consumer behaviour and did not include factors related to companies' marketing strategies and activities, which may also influence the consumption behaviour of middle-income black South Africans. In this context, this study prioritised the demand side instead of the supply side of a typical transaction between a business and consumers. This study was undertaken in South Africa and relied significantly on secondary sources of information.

1.5 Definition of Terms

Conspicuous Consumption: Conspicuous consumption is the consumption of products or brands associated with status to be noticed by others. It is used to signal one's wealth, success or social class status to others.

Luxury Fashion Goods: Luxury fashion goods are prestigious clothing items characterised by premium price, exclusivity and high quality. Luxury fashion goods are also status symbols.

Middle-income Black South Africans: The black middle-income consumer is a demographic with a professional skillset and employed in white-collar jobs. They also occupy the middle tier of total income distribution in South Africa.

Bandwagon Effect: The consumption of luxury fashion items to conform to society and signal one's status affiliation to a particular social group.

Social Class Signalling: Social class refers to the prestige or importance attributed to the station or ranking they occupy in society.

Status Consumption: Status consumption refers to the consumption of status-laden luxury fashion goods to improve or enhance one's perceived status.

1.6 Assumptions

The assumptions made by this study are articulated in the following section.

- It was assumed that the sample of consumers used in this study would be a genuine representation of the black middle-income population in South Africa.
- It was assumed that respondents would be truthful in their responses and provide accurate information.
- It was assumed that the study's findings would be valuable to companies seeking to understand and offer products and services to black middle-income South African consumers.
- An assumption was made that this study's findings would contribute towards conspicuous consumption literature in South Africa.

1.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the context, purpose and background of this study were introduced. The problem statement, research objectives and research questions expressed what this study set out to accomplish. A section on the study's significance was followed by an explanation of the delimitations of this report. Finally, the terms used in this study were briefly defined and articulated in this chapter. The following chapter explores in detail the literature reviewed by this study and the conceptual model and hypotheses adopted.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This study was concerned with investigating the antecedents to the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by black middle-income South Africans. This chapter introduces the key concepts in the literature on motives, attitudes, and influences to conspicuous luxury fashion goods consumption by black middle-income South Africans. The chapter explores internal and external antecedents to the consumption of luxury goods. The study focused on the external factors that influence luxury goods' consumption and considered why these factors were especially prioritised by black middle-income South Africans. Specifically, the study explored the interrelationships among social class signalling, status consumption, bandwagon effect and snob effect in predicting the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods.

The literature in this chapter establishes motives influencing black middle-income South Africans to engage in conspicuous consumption – particularly which of luxury fashion goods. Attitudes to this consumer's choices around fashionable brands, key influences relating to their conspicuous consumption, and how they conducted their consumer decision-making process was explored. Based on the literature reviewed in this section, it was apparent that black middle-income South Africans could have a common approach to consuming luxury fashion goods. A conceptual model of the antecedents of conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by black middle-income South Africans was developed. A section explaining how the study's hypotheses were developed concludes this chapter. The above summarises how the following section addressed the research objectives and research questions established by this study, namely; to discuss and explore the motives and factors that influence the conspicuous consumption of luxury clothing brands by middle-income black South Africans. In addition, this section discussed how middle-income black South Africans relate to the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion brands.

2.2 Luxury Fashion Goods

Luxury fashion goods are generally defined as designer-branded clothing items (Souiden et al., 2011). Luxury fashion goods are comprised of clothing items such as shoes, dresses, trousers, jackets and t-shirts (O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2013). Souiden et al. (2011) expand the definition of luxury fashion goods to include accessories such as jewellery, sunglasses, watches and handbags. Luxury clothing items may be worn for purposes of relaxation, working or socialising (Michaelidou & Dibb, 2006). However, luxury fashion items may also be worn for symbolic or representational purposes such as status signalling, self-expression and conspicuous consumption (O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2013; Wiedmann et al., 2009). Designer brands of luxury fashion goods include but are not limited to - brands such as Hugo Boss, Armani, Gucci, Louis Vuitton and Dolce & Gabbana (Mehrabi & Zahedi, 2016; Souiden et al., 2011).

Wiedmann et al. (2009) assert four key dimensions that characterise how consumers perceive luxury goods: financial value, Functional value, Individual value, and Social value. These dimensions are explored in detail below.

2.2.1 Financial Value

Financial value refers to the price of a luxury product. Setting a high price for a product may make that product appear to be more prestigious and desirable as most people have come to associate premium prices with luxuriousness and premium quality (Dubois, Laurent & Czellar, 2001; Mehrabi & Zahedi, 2016).

2.2.2 Functional Value

Wiedmann et al. (2009) posit that functional value comprises three attributes: usability, quality, and uniqueness. Usability is the extent to which a product fulfils the consumer need it was created for. Usability may be likened to the utilitarian value of a product: a product's ability to work properly, aesthetic appeal, and durability. Regarding functional value, consumers expect a product to work reliably and consistently (Teimourpour et al., 2012). Quality is the degree to which a product is superior to similar products in the same category. Quality is inclusive of product attributes such as the superiority of materials used in manufacturing the product, craftsmanship and product performance (Wiedmann et al., 2009). Luxury products are perceived as superior performance and quality compared to non-luxury goods (Dubois et al., 2001; Mehrabi & Zahedi, 2016). Uniqueness refers to the exclusivity and rarity of a product. Unique goods are not easily accessible and attainable relative to non-luxury goods. Due to their unique attributes that often come at a premium price, one may use luxury goods to distinguish themselves from those who may not afford luxury goods (Mehrabi & Zahedi, 2016). The uniqueness value is also referred to as the Snob effect (Shukla, 2012).

2.2.3 Individual Value

The Individual value dimension addresses the personal and subjective values of consumers regarding their consumption of luxury goods. Individual value is characterised by three components, namely, "self-identity value, hedonic value and materialistic value" (Wiedmann et al., 2009, p. 643). Self-identity value refers to a luxury product's symbolic properties to the extent that it enables consumers to express themselves and their unique personality through the luxury products they consume (Teimourpour et al., 2012). It is the degree to which a product's perceived imagery is congruent with oneself and identity. In this context, consumers seek to consume luxury goods whose brand identity and perceived personality match the consumer. Due to their symbolic properties and brand imagery, luxury goods are generally perceived as better conduits of self-expression and validators of self-identity than non-luxury goods (Mehrabi & Zahedi, 2016; Liu, Li, Mizerski & Soh, 2012). According to Wiedmann et al. (2009), hedonic value addresses the emotional benefit a consumer receives when consuming a luxury fashion item. The positive emotional benefits attributed to luxury fashion goods may range from a consumer feeling beautiful, pleasure and enjoyment (Mehrabi & Zahedi, 2016). Luxury goods are generally perceived to offer superior emotional benefits to non-luxury goods (Dubois et al., 2001). Materialism is defined as the degree to which consumers place importance on material possessions (Wiedmann et al., 2009). Wiedmann et al. (2009) also argue that materialism relates to how consumers believe that material possessions impact improving life quality. Therefore, luxury goods may be perceived as goods that improve one's level of happiness and personal fulfilment (Teimourpour et al., 2012).

2.2.4 Social Value

This dimension addresses the degree to which luxury goods confer social benefits to consumers; that is, the positive outcome one receives from society when wearing luxury fashion goods (Mehrabi & Zahedi, 2016). Social value is the consumption of luxury fashion goods to display one's wealth and social status to others. It also means associating oneself with a high-status social class group – a phenomenon referred to as the Bandwagon effect (Shukla, 2012). According to Wiedmann et al. (2009), the social value dimension comprises two components: conspicuous value and prestige value. Wiedmann et al. also claim that conspicuous value is the visible consumption of luxury goods for their social benefit. The social benefits derived from consuming goods conspicuously are related to the positive reactions one gets from society in response to their wearing of luxury goods and not from the goods themselves (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014). Thus, luxury goods are perceived as goods that give social benefits. Prestige value in luxury goods is defined as status-conferring; that is, goods perceived to be of high status (Wiedmann et al., 2009). The status connotations associated with luxury goods are perceived as transferrable to the person wearing the luxury items. Thus, luxury goods are perceived as status-conferring and can improve one's social status among other people (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014; Teimourpour et al., 2013).

This study adopted the above dimensions as a definition of luxury goods: financial value, functional value, individual value, and social value. This definition was relevant to the purposes of this study.

The below model (Figure 2.1) illustrates the antecedents of luxury goods;

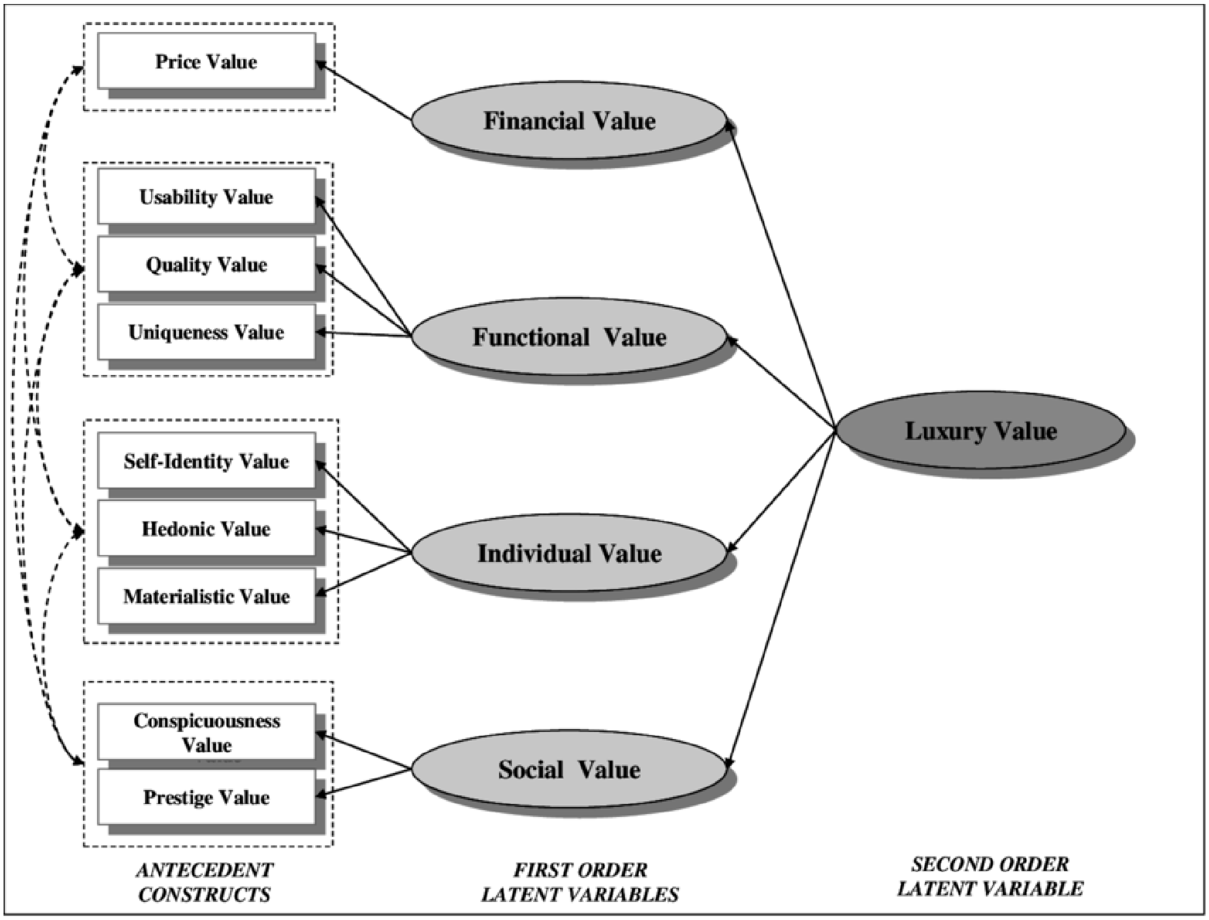


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Model: Determinants of consumer's luxury value perceptions

Source: Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebels (2009)

2.3 Middle-income Black South Africans

Middle-income consumers are broken up into three categories: low emerging middle-income, emerging middle-income, and realised middle-income (Bureau of Market Research, 2016). This research focuses on all three income groups among black South Africans. This group comprises male and female black South Africans with a household income of R7,168 - R 57,333 per month, are highly ambitious and work in white-collar professional jobs[4] (Bureau of Market Research, 2016; Stiehler, 2017). This group is financially secure; however, it does not own the means of

[4] This group in other literature are referred to as the middle class (Resnick, 2015; Stiehler, 2017)

production in an economy. This category does not perform manual labour and is further characterised by their lifestyle, world view and behaviour (Mattes, 2015).

This group comprises professional individuals who are educated and possess specialised skills and therefore are employed in white-collar professions. This group's characteristics are that they are employed on a full-time basis in a corporate organisation; some are small/medium-sized business owners. They have a tertiary qualification, possess a professional skillset, are aspirational, consumer-oriented, empowered and urban (Southall, Burger & McAravey, 2014). This study adopts an income measurement tool called Household Income and Expenditure Trends and Patterns developed by the Bureau of Market Research (BMR). The BMR is a research entity within the University of South Africa (UNISA). Its Household Income and Expenditure Trends Patterns study, which is the same study adopted by this research, is widely accepted in the South African corporate sector with financial institutions such as Standard Bank using the same BMR study (Standard Bank, 2016).

Mattes (2015) describes middle-income earners as a population group that occupies the middle strata of a nation's total income distribution; on average, their collective earnings are between the low-earning and high-earning income groups. The idea of earnings between the low-earning and high-earning income groups is a central characteristic that defines middle-income black South Africans in this study. According to the BMR (2016), the total household income distribution in South Africa comprises three household income group categories: low income, middle income, and upper-income households. Low-income households make up 62% of total South African households, households in the middle-income group segment makes up 32% of South African households, and the upper-income household group is 6% of the total household income population in South Africa. The lowest-earning income group in South Africa has a household income of less than R1,584 per month, and the highest-earning income group in the same country has a household income of above R196,668 per month (BMR, 2016). This study adopted the income group segmentation tool developed by BMR (2016) to identify black middle-income South Africans.

The characteristics of middle-income black South Africans have been similarly articulated in the study conducted by UCT Unilever Institute (2013). Although the Institute termed this group 'the middle class'. This research does not involve class theory. This research is particularly interested in the demographic and psychographic characteristics of middle-income black South Africans.

Middle-income black South Africans share the same characteristics as the middle-class individuals articulated by Ndletyana (2014). This scholar defined the middle-class population as educated, possessed specialised skills, and employed in white-collar professions.

The characteristics of middle-income black South Africans are similarly articulated in a more expanded perspective of the middle class given by Burger et al. (2015), where the scholars indicate that there are two types of African middle class – established middle class as well as an emerging middle class. The established African middle class is more senior individuals, more established in their careers, and has high household asset accumulation levels. According to Burger et al. (2015), this group also has similar characteristics to their white counterparts. On the other hand, the emerging African middle class is younger and still in the early stages of their careers with relatively low levels of household asset accumulation. Although these scholars used the term middle class, this group's characteristics are similar characteristics that define middle-income black South African consumers used in this study.

For the South African market, Visagie (2014) highlights the nuanced differences of what constitutes the middle-income earners' population compared to other countries in the world. This scholar argues that due to the high levels of inequality in South Africa, households that fall within the middle-income levels of the country's total income distribution earn below the universal median of middle-class income. A household income classified as inferior in other parts of the world is considered middle class in South Africa. Therefore, the author argues that in South Africa, there are two types of middle-class households – low and upper-middle class. Based on 2008 prices, the lower middle class comprises mainly black households with a maximum income of R4,560 per month, while the upper-middle class is overwhelmingly white and earn a maximum of R40,000 per month (Visagie, 2014). However, middle-income black South Africans, as adopted in this study, fall under three categories, the low-emerging, emerging and the realised middle-income groups. What was important in this study about this middle-income group was their capacity to afford and consume luxury fashion goods. The future growth of the luxury goods sector in South Africa will come from the middle class, or what this study refers to as middle-income South Africans (Steinfield, 2015; Stiehler, 2017).

This research postulated that middle-income black South Africans are not different regarding their location and residences from what other scholars have termed the middle-class population. Their residential characteristics are identical. Southhall et al. (2014) state that the middle-class population in South Africa are situated in urban areas, with the majority residing in Western Cape and Gauteng, with Johannesburg having the highest population of this consumer group.

This study adopted the nuanced definition of the middle-income black South African instead of the African middle class to avoid the class construct's contestations. Class is quite challenging to quantify in South Africa.

The below table illustrates the total household income distribution in South Africa by income group.

Table 2.1: South African Household Income and Expenditure Trends and Patterns

	LOW INCOME		MIDDLE INCOME			UPPER INCOME		
Income Groups	Lowest Income group	Second Lowest Income Group	Low Emerging Middle	Emerging Middle	Realised Middle	Emerging Affluent	Affluent Earning	Wealthy
Monthly Income	<R1,583	R 1,584 - R 7,167	R 7,168 - R 16,417	R 16,418 - R 33,333	R 33,334 - R 57,333	R 57,334 - R 123,417	R 123,418 - R 196,667	R 196,668+
Yearly Income	<R 19,001	R 19,001 - R 86,000	R 86,001 - R 197,000	R 197,001 - R 400,000	R 400,001 - R 688,000	R 688,001 - R 1,481,000	R 1481,001 - R 2,360,000	R 2,360,001+
# of S.A. Households (%)	62%		32%			6%		

Source: Bureau of Market Research (2016)

2.3.1 Middle-Income Black South Africans and their Relation to Conspicuous Consumption of Luxury Fashion Goods

Middle-income black South Africans demonstrate distinctive spending patterns compared to their white counterparts, with the former spending more money on accumulating material possessions such as luxury goods and household assets (Wolfhard, 2010). Kaus (2013) expanded this view by arguing that conspicuous consumption behaviour varies across racial groupings in different countries, with certain racial groups demonstrating more conspicuous consumption activity than others and vice versa. In South Africa, for example, this scholar claims that even though black households earn on average less income than their white counterparts – with the mean income of white households being three times higher than black households, black people still spent 30-50% more money on conspicuous consumption than white households.

Burger et al. (2015) posit that middle-income black South Africans display more conspicuous consumption than their white counterparts because different racial groups have different ways of expressing their position in society, with black people placing more value and importance on social status. Consequently, middle-income black South Africans consume status symbols to convey their economic position and social status to other black people in their social group (Burger et al., 2015; Wolfhard, 2010). According to Charles, Hurst and Roussanov (2009), black people prefer displaying conspicuous consumption through fancy clothes, jewellery and cars as these consumption categories are perceived to be the most visible when interacting with others and therefore considered to be suitable symbolic channels for signalling one's economic and social status to others. Such consumption tendency is high among emerging market consumers due to the susceptibility to interpersonal influence (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014).

Kaus (2013) asserts that conspicuous consumption is socially contingent. That is to say, racial groups with high levels of economic inequality demonstrate heightened levels of conspicuous consumption compared to racial groups where there is more economic equality among its members. Chai, Kaus and Kiedaisch (2019) posit that conspicuous consumption is more prevalent in racial groups where the average household income is relatively lower than racial groups with a high mean household income. Burger et al. (2015) argue that there are intra-group nuances to conspicuous consumption within social groups. Burger et al. also avow that conspicuous consumption decreases as the average income of a reference or racial group increases. In other words, black middle-income South Africans are likely to demonstrate less conspicuous consumption as more black people acquire middle-income status. The degree to which black middle-income South Africans display conspicuous consumption of luxury goods is correlated to inequality levels among other black people in South Africa (Charles et al., 2009; Kaus, 2013).

Nieftagodien and Van der Berg (2007) claim that most black people reach middle-class status with an asset deficit. That is to say; they have not acquired sufficient household assets like furniture and appliances. Burger et al. (2015) argue that assets are acquired simultaneously as the conspicuous consumption and accumulation of status brands. This, the scholars claim, is because the black middle-income South Africans are vulnerable and carry a social burden to catch up to their white counterparts, who, due to being previously advantaged by the now banished apartheid system, have made significant progress in the accumulation of household assets and other lifestyle expenditures such as luxury clothing. Kaus (2013) argues that as a matter of priority, the black middle class in South Africa spend more money on conspicuous consumption of luxury goods than on asset accumulation due to the social burden to demonstrate their success to others. However, Nieftagodien and Van der Berg (2007) make a case for trade-offs, suggesting that conspicuous consumption happens after the asset deficit phase has been addressed. On the other hand, Burger et al. (2009) posit that the black middle class or middle-income South Africans spend more money on household assets and consumption of luxury fashion goods than their white counterparts, even at the risk of acquiring personal debt. The accumulation of household assets, as well as luxury goods, can happen simultaneously.

In the same view, Charles et al. (2009) assert that due to black consumers spending more money on status goods despite their limited financial means, there is an opportunity cost to their conspicuous consumption. As a result, black households spend less money on education and healthcare than white households (Chai et al., 2018). Black middle-income South Africans also save less money than their white counterparts. Furthermore, black middle-income South Africans' future spending ability is compromised due to their conspicuous consumption activities (Moav & Neeman, 2012).

Future conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods among middle-income black South Africans is expected to be driven by Generation Y consumers – often referred to as Millennials (Bevan-Dye et al., 2012). This cohort is highly educated and skilled, thereby significantly improving their career prospects and earning capacity (De Klerk, 2020). De Klerk (2020) also asserts that Generation Y consumers exhibit high levels of conspicuous consumption. Unlike their predecessors, who perceive international luxury brands as superior to locally manufactured brands for conspicuous consumption, Generation Y consumers prefer proudly South African luxury brands and are highly patriotic. The black Generation Y cohort makes up 83% of the total Generation Y population in South Africa and 24% of the total South African population (Bevan-Dye et al., 2012).

The above literature helped this research understand the nuances of how black Africans in South Africa relate to conspicuous consumption. However, it was not clear from the literature reviewed above why black middle-income earners within the South African context engage in conspicuous consumption, particularly regarding luxury fashion goods. Therefore, this study was concerned with identifying the key antecedents that influence luxury fashion goods' conspicuous consumption among middle-income black South Africans. This gap in the literature is what this study has addressed.

Figure 2.2 depicts the conspicuous consumption behaviour of black middle-income South Africans vs white middle-income South Africans.

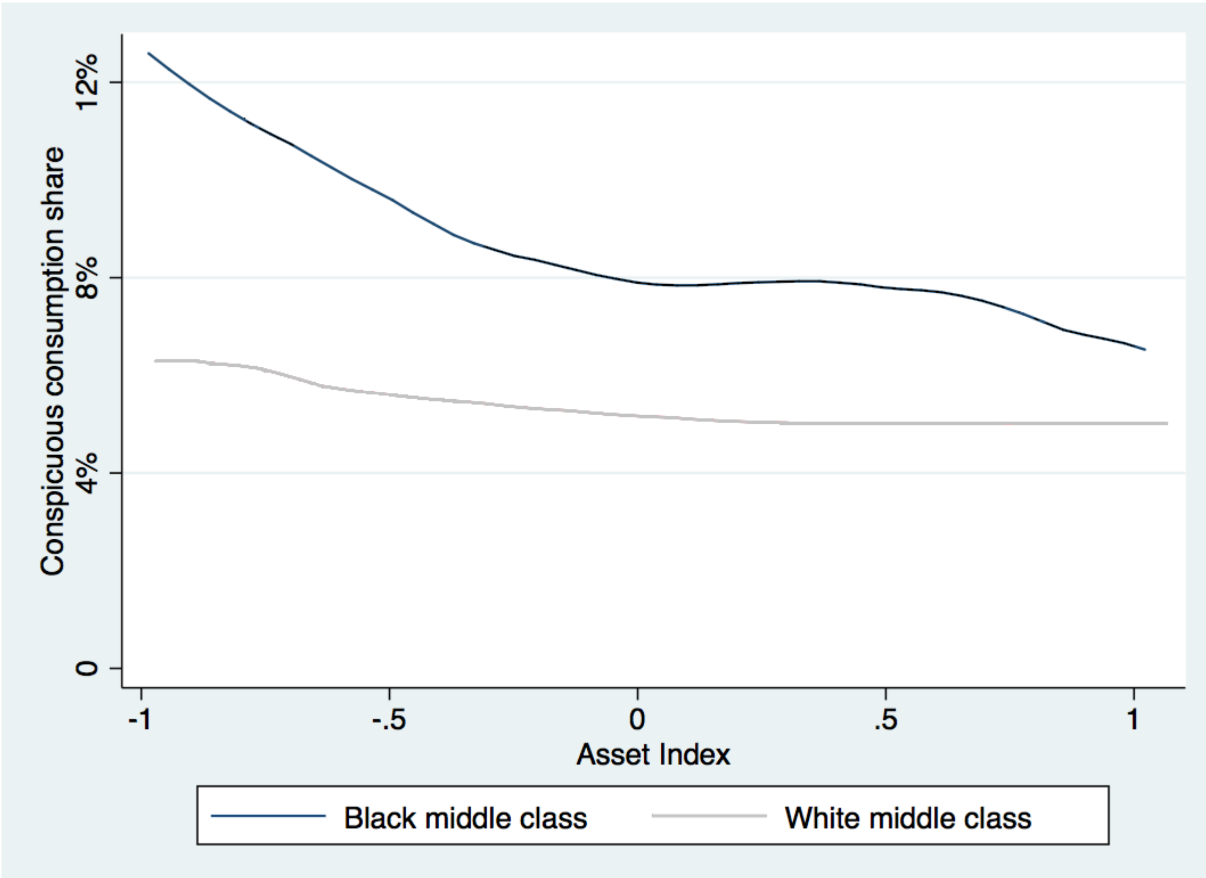


Figure 2.2: Conspicuous consumption shares of black and white middle-class households by asset index.

Source: Burger, Louw, Pegado and Van der Burg (2015)

2.3.2 Internal and External Antecedents to Consumption of Luxury Goods

The underlying motives that lead to luxury and status goods' consumption may be characterised into two categories – internal and external factors (Shukla, 2012; Souiden et al., 2011; Teimourpour et al., 2013; Wiedmann, Hennigs & Siebels, 2009). This view is corroborated by Eastman and Eastman (2015). Eastman and Eastman (2015) also posit that internal factors refer to the hedonic value consumers derive from luxury status brands. Some scholars argue that this is the emotional benefit consumers receive from consuming luxury brands and includes personal rewards such as sensory pleasure and fulfilment (Wiedmann et al., 2009). On the contrary, external factors have no emotional benefit consumers receive from consuming luxury brands and does not include personal rewards such as sensory pleasure and fulfilment.

2.3.3 Internal Motives

Scholars such as Eastman and Eastman (2015) assert that the internal motives to status consumption of luxury goods comprise three categories: hedonic, perfectionist and self-concept. Eastman and Eastman also claim that hedonic motives occur when one consumes luxury status goods due to the emotional benefits of consuming those goods. In this context, consumers buy luxury brands for their sensory and emotional qualities and not for their functional benefit. These consumers place a high level of value on the emotional benefits they get from luxury brands to the extent that they are even prepared to pay a premium price for the emotional benefit received from luxury brands (Amatulli & Guido, 2012).

The perfectionist motive may be likened to the degree to which a luxury good is perceived as premium quality relative to non-luxury brands (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). Quality is defined as the extent to which a product is perceived to have enhanced features or superior characteristics and attributes relative to other products in the same category (Hudders, 2012). Some consumers are motivated to consume luxury status brands due to their perceived superior quality. These consumers consume luxury status brands because they believe such brands are of superior quality. Therefore, their consumption is motivated by the view that they want the very best product quality for themselves (Amatulli & Guido, 2012).

The third and final internal motive for status consumption is self-concept and self-reward. In this context, people consume status brands to validate their identity and reward themselves for their achievements (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). Self-concept referrers to one's self-image and identity (Bruwer, 2017; Chernev et al., 2011). Some consumers will purchase status-laden brands as a means to enhance how they perceive themselves. These consumers believe they can express their unique identity through status brands; therefore, they seek to consume status brands whose symbolic imagery is consistent with their self-image. This image congruency between product and self enables the consumption of status brands as an extension of one's self-identity (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014).

The internal factor is purely motivated by the consumer's personal satisfaction, and it is not influenced by social or external factors (Mehrabi & Zahedi, 2016).

2.3.4 External Motives

According to Eastman and Eastman (2015), external factors motivating the status consumption of luxury brands are social and purely concerned with the social benefits one gets instead of emotional benefits or self-reward. Eastman and Eastman (2015) also posit that three components characterise external motives of status consumption: conspicuous consumption, bandwagon effect, and snob effect.

Conspicuous consumption – at times, referred to as the Veblen Effect, is the ostentatious, public flaunting of one's social status and wealth (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). Veblen theory states that wealth and status are abstract constructs and cannot be observed. In other words, they are intangible (Han et al., 2010). Therefore, due to its unobservable nature, the demonstration of wealth requires a tangible and observable outlet or channel to become visible (Kaus, 2010). O'Cass and Siahtiri (2013) argue that for conspicuous consumption to occur, expensive goods and services are consumed as a means to give one's wealth and status a tangible and visible form. O'Cass and Siahtiri (2013) also defined conspicuous consumption as the public consumption of expensive goods to signal one's status and wealth to others (Amatulli & Guido, 2012; Shukla, 2012). In this context, expensive goods are consumed for their symbolic properties rather than their utilitarian value. Conspicuous consumption may also be conducted to enhance perceptions of one's social status, among others. Conspicuous consumption is concerned with how one seeks to achieve and display social status by signalling their wealth to others through the symbolic associations imbued in the expensive goods they consume (O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2013).

The bandwagon effect is an external motive of status as well as the conspicuous consumption of luxury goods. A bandwagon effect is a form of status consumption, whereby luxury items are consumed to gain entry or acceptance into certain prestigious social class groups (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). Bandwagon consumers are concerned with being socially accepted and belonging to prestigious social class groups they identify with and seek association with (Shukla, 2012). As a result, bandwagon consumers use luxury status goods to associate themselves with their preferred social class groups. Thus, these consumers look for luxury goods that carry symbolic ques related to the people they seek to associate with. Bandwagon consumers use luxury goods to signal their status and affiliation with specific groupings of people in society (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). For bandwagoners, belonging to prestigious social groups is a success measure (Lertwannawit & Mandhachitara, 2012). These consumers conspicuously consume status goods to gain social approval and signal their group affiliation and status to others (Hudders, 2012).

The snob effect is a motive of status, and conspicuous consumption characterised under external antecedents (Eastman & Eastman, 2015; Shukla, 2012). Hudders (2012) defines the snob effect as a consumer's need for exclusivity. This scholar asserts that snobs consume status goods that are inaccessible to many people as a means to fulfil their need for individuality and premium status. Snobs tend to consume more expensive status goods. This is because the price is usually a barrier to goods being widely adopted by the majority. Thus, snobs are prepared to pay more for certain rare and exclusive luxury brands to signal their distinction and out-of-reach social status to others (Eastman & Eastman, 2015).

External motives are concerned with the social benefits derived from status consumption instead of internal or personal benefits. Therefore, whether one is consuming luxury status goods in order to identify with a particular social group or to express one's status – this consumption behaviour is fundamental of a social nature, symbolic and conducted for signalling purposes – which is also referred to as conspicuous consumption (Amatulli & Guido, 2012; Eastman & Eastman, 2015; Teimourpour et al., 2013).

This study explored these external motives of luxury goods consumption related to conspicuous consumption, which is this study's focus. Furthermore, these external factors have not been adequately addressed in research studies (Dubois & Ordabayeva, 2015; Eastman & Eastman, 2015). The below figure illustrates the antecedents of status consumption.

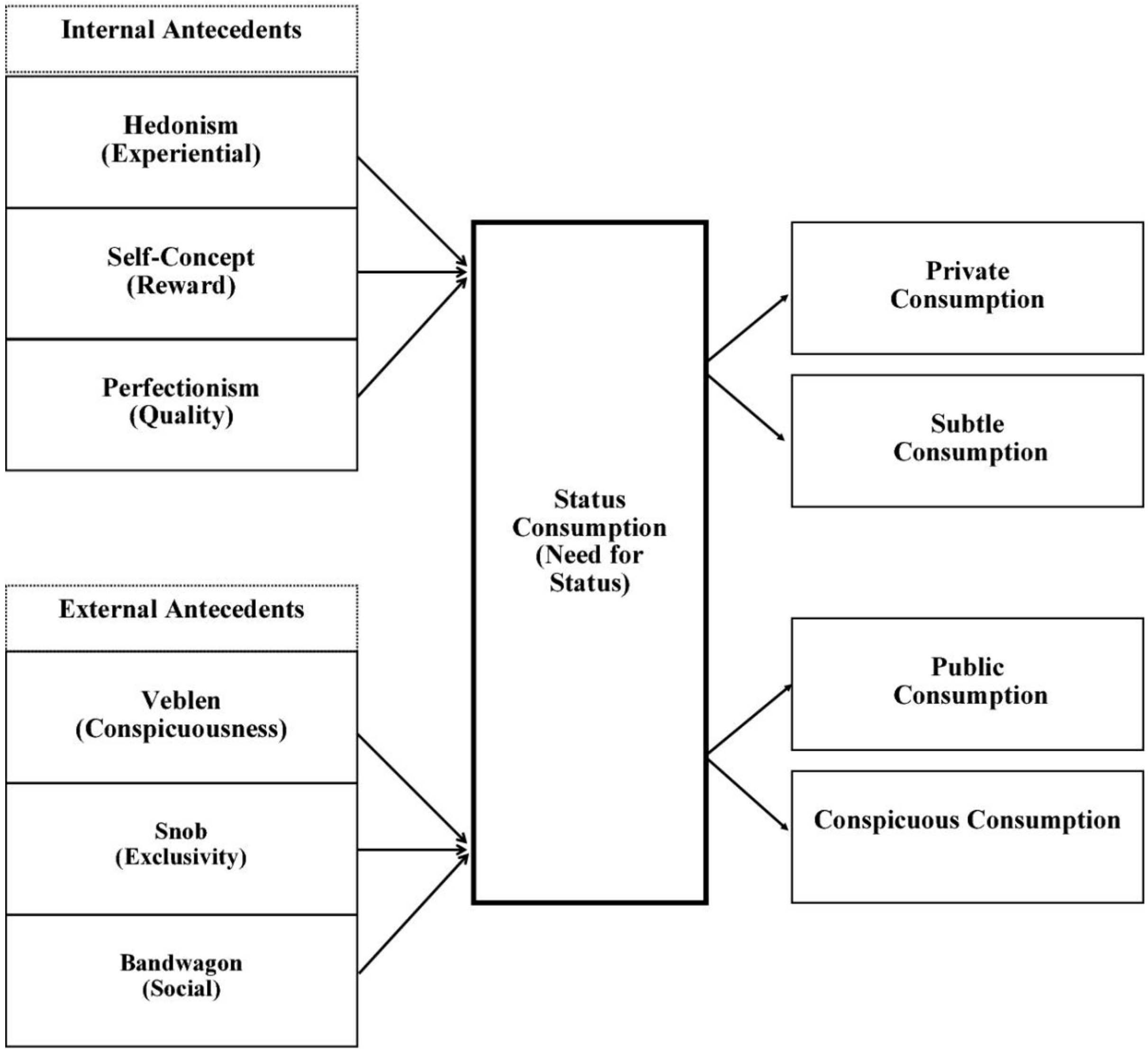


Figure 2.3: Conceptual Model of Status Consumption

Source: Eastman and Eastman (2015)

2.3.5 The relevance of this model to the study

The above model conceptualised the antecedents of status consumption and explored the internal and external motives thereof. These internal and external motives are consistent with the ones explored in this study under the context of conspicuous consumption. Furthermore, the above model identified conspicuous consumption as an external motive of status consumption, whereas this study identified status consumption as an external motive of conspicuous consumption. The above model's external motives and variables are similar to those used in this study, and hence, they were adopted to address the aims, objectives, and research questions under inquiry in this study. The above model informed the motives of conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by middle-income black South Africans explored in this study. Also, the above theoretical model influenced the conceptual model developed by this study.

2.4 Conceptual Development

The conceptual basis of social class signalling, status consumption, bandwagon effect, snob effect, and conspicuous consumption is explained in the following sections.

2.4.1 Social Class Signalling

Social class can be characterised as the station one occupies in society relative to others (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Martin & Cote, 2019). It is the degree of prestige associated with an individual based on their ranking in society; this social ranking varies from relatively low, middle and upper social class statuses (Kraus, Piff, Denton, Keltner, & Rheinschmidt, 2012). Scholars have contended that social class is determined by a combination of one's education, income, and professional vocation (Bjornsdottir & Rule, 2017; Martin & Cote, 2019; McMullin & Cairney, 2004). Scholars such as Kraus et al. (2012) assert that social class is determined by the resources one possesses, these range from economic and social resources. Savage et al. (2013) argue that social class is determined by social and cultural capital. These scholars also assert that the former is related to one's social connections: This could be as an outcome of their careers, wealth, family heritage or the neighbourhoods they live in. Cultural capital, on the other hand, is related to the social activities one participates in; these include the types of music one listens to, the type of clothes one wears, one's spiritual and religious views as well as one's leisure activities (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). Anderson and Kilduff (2009) also argue that cultural capital is concerned with one's worldview and the external factors that inform it. These factors determine one's social class status (Savage et al., 2013).

So as one seeks membership into a social group, they would be motivated to consume luxury brands that validate and signal their inferred membership to a particular social class (Dubois et al., 2001). This applies to both luxury products with prominent as well as subtle brands cues. The degree to which one is 'loud' or 'quiet' about their consumption of luxury and status-laden brands is influenced by the social class group's consumption culture or aspire to be a part of. In essence, all social class groups participate in conspicuous consumption. However, there are differences in each social group segment's type of status goods (O'Cass & Frost, 2002; Souiden et al., 2011).

Social class may also influence how people are perceived by others of a different social class (McMullin & Cairney, 2004). For example, low social class people may be perceived as having low intellect and self-esteem, while those of a higher social class status have high intellect and higher self-esteem (Martin & Cote, 2019). It is also possible to deduce one's social class status from one's material possession such as cars, houses and clothing (Kraus et al., 2012). In addition, social class status may influence how people behave, especially concerning the consumption of status brands (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). Thus, consumers concerned with social class status tend to consume status-conferring brands conspicuously to signal their social class status to others, especially those of relatively lower social class status (Han et al., 2010).

Furthermore, Han et al. (2010) state that there are three kinds of luxury goods consumers concerning social class status. The first kind is for wealthy individuals. Han et al. (2010) also avow that people belonging to this elite social class group may demonstrate conspicuous consumption. However, they do so in a subtle manner compared to people in lower social class groups. These individuals prefer the prominence of brand ques on their clothing to be 'quiet' or subtle; they seek subtle brand status cues on their clothing that are only recognisable by other members of their elite social class group. This group of consumers is at the highest level of the social class hierarchy and is an inspiration to those in lower groups so far as social class status (Souiden et al., 2011). The second group of luxury goods consumers within social class contexts are also rich and have high social class status. However, these individuals prefer 'loud' or prominent brand cues (logos, brand names) on their clothes (Han et al., 2010). The scholars claim this group requires recognition and prefers to flaunt their wealth and social class by conspicuously consuming status-laden brands to signal to people of a lesser social class that they have 'arrived'

– that is, they have achieved financial and material success. This group identifies strongly with social class status, and the signalling thereof if very important to them (Souiden et al., 2011). The final group, the scholars conclude, aspires to one day be part of a higher social class demographic. However, they cannot readily afford authentic luxury brands associated with high social class groupings and are therefore prone to consume counterfeit luxury status brands to display and signal their social class aspirations and desired class association to other members of their social class group. Ordabayeva and Chandon (2010) posit that people who are of low social class status are more prone to engage in conspicuous consumption as they seek to compensate for their lack of occupying a higher social class group and consume status goods to give an impression that they are of higher social class status. These social class groupings demonstrate how brand prominence on luxury goods and the signalling thereof is used to associate or disassociate with certain social class groups (Han et al., 2010). This is due to luxury fashion goods having a high entry barrier due to their high price, thereby making these goods prohibitively expensive to access by people belonging to relatively lower social class groups (O'Cass & Frost, 2002). Thus, consumers may elect to use luxury fashion goods to visibly establish their perceived ranking in society (Martin & Cote, 2019).

2.4.2 Status Consumption

Han et al. (2010) define status as the prestige or perceived importance of a person. Han et al. also state that status is how society assigns value or importance to an individual or a group of people, thereby giving one who possesses status a sense of power (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). Status can also be thought of as success, wealth, power, among other prestige-associated factors (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). These factors qualify one as having attained a level of status (Souiden et al., 2011). Furthermore, status is a social construct, an idea, it is intangible, and to give it form, it must be displayed by way of evidence. As such, expensive possessions and prestigious non-durable goods and experiences are among the various way's status may be portrayed or demonstrated (Han et al., 2010; Moav & Neeman, 2012).

On the other hand, Bevan-Dye et al. (2012) distinguish between social class status and status consumption. These scholars avow that social class status is conferred by material possessions, income levels, vocation, etc. In contrast, status consumption is centred on consumer purchase behaviour where one desires to acquire status by accumulating status-laden-brands and status symbols. So, status consumption is the acquisition of goods that are perceived to be prestigious and conferring status to those in possession of them (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Furthermore, Eastman and Eastman (2015) draw contrasts between status consumption and conspicuous consumption by arguing that the former is concerned with enhancing one's status through status-conferring brands and may be conducted for internally motivated or externally motivated purposes. Status consumption may also be conducted for self-reward and personal emotional benefits without displaying one's status. In addition, status consumption may be conducted for external benefits related to how others perceive one's social status. On the other hand, conspicuous consumption is only concerned with "the tendency for individuals to enhance their image through overt consumption of possessions, which communicates status to others" (Eastman & Eastman, 2015, p.7).

Amatulli and Guido (2011) expand the definition of status goods to have high craftsmanship levels, luxuriousness, premium price, rarity, exclusive availability and aesthetic appeal. Furthermore, status and luxury goods have recognisable symbolic references associated with them, which act as identifiers of opulence and prestige. According to Bevan-Dye et al. (2012), these brand identifiers serve to signal the brand's high-ranking and desirable status. These scholars also establish a positive relationship between status consumption and conspicuous consumption, claiming that for the former to take place successfully, it must be conducted in conjunction with the latter as conspicuous consumption is what will signal one has acquired image and status to others (Moav & Neeman, 2012; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Invariably, people's status connotations attach to luxury goods are perceived to be transferred to the individual wearing the clothes (Amatulli & Guido; 2011). For example, if an item of clothing is expensive and has prestigious social class connotations and success associations, the individual wearing that item is perceived as successful, wealthy and of high social class standing too (Teimourpour et al., 2013).

Status goods are prevalent within consumer goods categories such as luxury clothing, expensive cars and jewellery (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). The scholars assert that durable goods do a better job at displaying status than non-durables. An expensive item of clothing may be displayed several times on many different occasions than an expensive holiday or body massage, which is intangible and may not be reused to signal one's status to others (Rayo & Becker, 2006; O'Cass & Frost, 2002).

There are also differences in how various racial groups engage in status consumption, with black people demonstrating higher status consumption levels than their white counterparts (Hurst & Roussanov, 2007; Wolfhard, 2010). In South Africa, it is the younger demographic of African middle-income earners, which will sustain this racial skew of status consumption into the future (Bevan-Dye et al., 2012).

2.4.3 Bandwagon Effect

Factors that motivate and influence the purchase and conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion items vary. In exploring these motivating factors, Kaskanakis and Balabanis (2014) identify two primary constructs: the bandwagon effect and the snob effect. Bandwagon consumers will demonstrate luxury goods' visible consumption to identify with a particular reference group in society (Hudders, 2012). Similarly, these consumers have an emotional need for social connections and recognition; they seek social status and desire to belong to a community or social group associated with having the social status they possess and aspire to. This causes them to assimilate and conform to social groups' behavioural patterns they seek association and approval from (Gangadharan et al., 2015). Bandwagon consumers have financial means and can afford luxury brands. Another common characteristic among bandwagon consumers is that their luxury goods consumption is more conspicuous (Hudders, 2012). They are also influenced by their peers and use conspicuous consumption of luxury goods in order to get the approval and acceptance of their social group members; that is to say, they purchase status-laden luxury goods brands because others in their reference group do so as well (Hudders, 2012; Kaskanakis & Balabanis, 2014; Sun, 2011).

Bandwagon consumers are more interested in social group acceptance and affiliation. Status approval by their peers is important to this group, and aspects such as product price and functional utility are less likely to be a primary concern if it promises social group membership (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). Social group affiliation is a priority for bandwagon consumers; they seek symbolic status cues such as prominent logos in their luxury goods (Han et al., 2010). These product cues act as status signals of social group membership, and because conspicuous consumption is visible, it is, therefore, a preferred method of luxury goods consumption for bandwagon consumers (Eastman & Eastman, 2015).

Brands that are unpopular and highly recognisable as status symbols will not be consumed by bandwagon consumers (Han et al., 2010). This group derives value and importance from the popularity and social acceptance of luxury brands among their peers. In a study among British consumers, Kaskanakis and Balabanis (2014) found that consumers who were status-driven and susceptible to normative influence enjoyed luxury goods' bandwagon effect.

2.4.4 Snob Effect

According to Eastman and Eastman (2015), the snob effect refers to consumers who demonstrate conspicuous luxury goods consumption to differentiate themselves from other people. As opposed to bandwagon consumers and their need for social group conformity, snob consumers need uniqueness and seek to disassociate themselves from others through luxury brands that are unattainable by others (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012).

Amatulli and Guido (2011) postulate that, some of the attributes of luxury and status goods are scarcity, exclusivity, and premium price. Therefore, snob consumers use these characteristics of luxury goods as the basis to express their uniqueness and distinguish themselves from the majority (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). Similarly, snob consumers need to signal their elitism to others and consume luxury goods out of reach and inaccessible to ordinary consumers (Wiedmann et al., 2009). This inaccessibility may be due to the product being so costly that many cannot afford it. However, it may also be inaccessible due to its limited availability and exclusivity. Snob consumers enhance their perceived social status by consuming luxury brands that are only accessible by a few people, not the majority. To that extent, snobs are prepared to pay more money for luxury goods than most luxury goods consumers (Hietanen, Mattila, Sihvonen & Tikkanen, 2018; Sun, 2011).

Snobs signal their elite status, non-conformity and uniqueness by exercising conspicuous consumption (Hietanen et al., 2018). This is done as a means to visibly display their snobbishness and elite social status (Kaskanakis & Balabanis, 2014). For the snob consumer, the popularity of a luxury brand diminishes its value, and as a result, snobs will cease to consume a luxury brand or product when many other consumers start owning it. The low-popularity, premium price, and exclusivity of a luxury brand increase its value and desirability among snobs to satisfy their need for uniqueness and disassociation from the majority (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). To that end, it is not uncommon for snobs to consume luxury goods with subtle brand cues, which are only recognisable to other snobs (Han et al., 2010). Snobs prefer luxury brands for purposes of satisfying their need for uniqueness insofar as those brands are only worn by a few people (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014).

2.4.5 Conspicuous Consumption

There is good literature on the theory of conspicuous consumption (Dubois & Ordabayeva, 2015). Scholars generally agree that this theory is characterised by the symbolic consumption of status-laden brands for signalling purposes (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Burger et al., 2015). For instance, Teimourpour et al. (2013) describe conspicuous consumption as the act of consuming goods in order to send a signal to others about one's social status. Teimourpour et al. also argue that conspicuous consumption benefits are derived when individuals feel a sense of satisfaction when others positively react to their displayed wealth. These scholars conclude that satisfaction is not inherent in the goods themselves but rather in the meaning consumers attached to luxury goods. This phenomenon is also referred to as the Veblen effect – the act of consuming status-laden goods to signal one's wealth and prestige to others (O'Cass & Frost, 2002).

According to Souiden et al. (2011), conspicuous consumption refers to the purchase and use of goods bearing prominent brand cues. The prominence of brand cues is seen to signal one's wealth and social status to others and improve one's perceived social status and positive image. This study's definition is adopted as it is more holistic and addresses other motives relevant to middle-income black South Africans. On the other hand, Kaus (2013) draws parallels between conspicuous consumption and visibility, suggesting that the latter is part and parcel of the former. Similarly, the visibility factor qualifies consumption as conspicuous because conspicuous consumption is to display one's wealth or social status to other people (Han et al., 2010). Thus, luxury consumer brands across various categories are perceived as prestigious and suitable symbolic conveyors of one's self-image and status (Burger et al., 2015). Therefore, this necessitates luxury branded goods to be consumed conspicuously to either signal one's wealth and social status, identify or associate oneself with a particular social group, or distinguish oneself from others (Charles et al., 2009; Han et al., 2010).

In South Africa, Bevan-Dye et al. (2012) posit that the middle class or middle-income population perceive imported luxury goods to be of a higher status than locally manufactured brands and, as a result, tend to prefer imported status brands for conspicuous consumption. More so, Han et al. (2010) argue that wealth in and of itself cannot be displayed and that in order to exhibit one's wealth, a person would need a channel or a means to convey the evidence of their wealth. This, the scholars claim, justifies the symbolic role of the accumulation of material possessions as signals of financial success and one's station in life. According to Dubois et al. (2001), conspicuous behaviour and luxury goods consumption take two (2) forms. The authors also elaborate that these forms are; those who purchase an item because of its popularity and those who purchase products because of their scarcity. These distinctions further highlight the role of bandwagon and snob effects in conspicuous consumption behaviour among luxury patrons. In other words, the accessibility of a brand may encourage adoption through mass distribution while at the same time, discourage consumption due to eroding exclusivity (Souiden et al., 2011). In both instances, the types of luxury products one consumes send a signal to others about one's self-image and social status (Amaldoss & Jain, 2005). It is within this context that this study adopted conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods.

2.5 Conceptual Model and Hypothesis Development

2.5.1 Conceptual Model

The relationship between the constructs used in this study needed to be tested. Thus, a conceptual framework was developed, as illustrated in figure 2.4 below. The conceptual framework addressed the antecedents of conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods and was informed by the study's research objectives, research problem, and research questions. The research under study explored five (5) variables, namely: social class signalling, status consumption, bandwagon effect, snob effect and conspicuous consumption as the outcome variable. The hypothesised relationships among the variables are depicted in Figure 2.4.

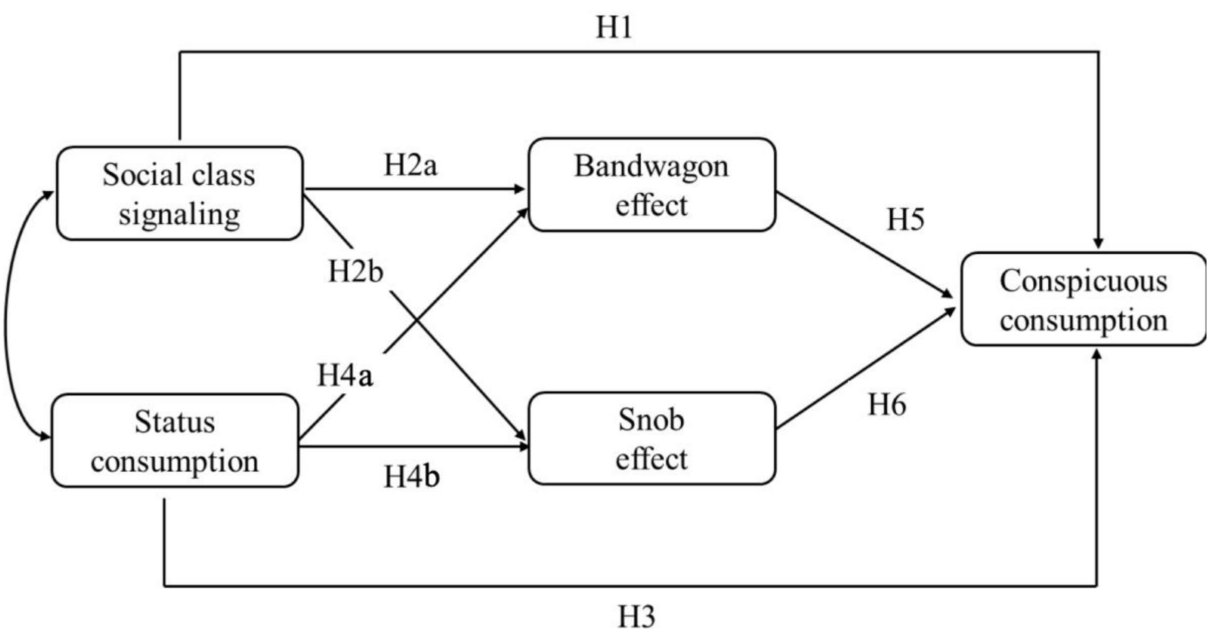


Figure 2.4: A conceptual model of the antecedents to the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by black middle-income South Africans

2.5.2 Hypothesis Development

This chapter hypothesised that the key concepts, factors and attitudes that influence conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by black middle-income South Africans were often external.

These external factors were prioritised in this study because external factors seemed to outweigh internal factors for conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods. Thus, this research explored five (5) conceptual variables, namely – social class signalling, status consumption, bandwagon effect, snob effect and conspicuous consumption as the outcome variable. This study hypothesised that the variables mentioned above positively related to the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by middle-income black South Africans.

2.5.2.1 Social Class Signalling and Conspicuous Consumption

According to Ordabayeva and Chandon (2010), the social class construct is an essential driver of conspicuous consumption. These scholars claim that social class distribution is proportional to the conspicuous consumption of luxury and status goods. That is to say; people will engage in conspicuous consumption in a manner that is relative to the social class group they occupy. The unequal distribution of social class influences how the various social class groupings engage in conspicuous consumption (Dubois & Ordabayeva, 2015). This argument stems from the notion that everyone aspires to improve their social class standing. Therefore, those at the bottom of the social class hierarchy have a greater need to improve their social class position than those who already occupy higher social class positions (Kraus et al., 2012). These consumers, it is argued, are playing catch-up to those occupying a higher social class status than them (Han et al., 2010). In this context, luxury goods' conspicuous consumption is perceived as a social class equaliser (Burger et al., 2015).

Kaus (2013) argues that conspicuous consumption is socially contingent. Kaus also asserts that in South Africa, for example, where black Africans live under extreme levels of inequality and due to this, consumers in this segment and the lower social class groups they relatively occupy have greater motivation for conspicuous consumption to the extent that they spend 30% - 50% more on conspicuous consumption compared to their white counterparts. People in lower social class groups are generally dissatisfied with the social class group they occupy and seek to compensate for this class deficit by consuming status-laden brands that improve their social class ranking (Ordabayeva & Chandon, 2010; Wolfhard, 2010). This is because the visible possession of luxury and status goods is associated with upward mobility in the social class strata (Kaus, 2013). Bloch and Desai (2004) conducted a study that found that rural communities in India engaged in conspicuous consumption during wedding ceremonies to signal their social class status to fellow community members. Interestingly, this study is that families in poor communities were so motivated to be perceived as “better than” to the extent that they would incur debt to have a lavish wedding to impress fellow neighbours on their supposed high social class status. Based on this discussion, it was therefore hypothesised that;

H1 *⇒ Social class signalling positively influences the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by middle-income black South Africans.*

2.5.2.2 Social Class Signalling and Bandwagon Effect

It was mentioned in a previous section of this chapter that social class signalling is the degree to which individuals seek to convey their ranking and level of importance in society to others (Martin & Cote, 2019). Three (3) widely accepted segments define social class rankings: lower class, middle class, and upper class (Kraus et al., 2012). These social class segments vary in importance, with the middle and upper-class groups ranking higher in importance and aspirational value (Han et al., 2010). Social class signalling is desired to the extent that it affirms one’s membership to a social class group – be it middle or upper class (Savage et al., 2013). This is because the bandwagon effect refers to the desire to belong to and identify with a particular reference group (Shukla, 2012). In other words, individuals in this context seek to be part of a social group insofar as that group is classified in terms of social class status. These individuals have a desire to belong; they want to be part of a community. However, they are only interested in being part of communities that affirm and validate their desired ranking in society (Han et al., 2010). As a result, these individuals conform to behaviours commonly associated with the reference group they seek association with (Eastman & Eastman, 2015).

In practical terms, if a group of highly successful people are known to wear certain luxury brands, a person interested in social class signalling may choose to wear the same brands to gain acceptance and membership of that group. However, he/she would only do so if the brands they chose to wear reflected their reference group affiliation and, more importantly, their elite social class ranking (Tsai, Yang & Liu, 2013). In this instance, social class status is how people in a reference group relate to each other and those outside their reference group. One is accepted and identified as a member of a reference group in terms of the social class ranking they are perceived to occupy (Han et al., 2010). Therefore, luxury brands are preferred based on their popularity among reference group members and social class associations. Luxury brands are consumed visibly to display brand cues imbued with social class connotations (Kraus et al., 2012). A study conducted by Han et al. (2010) explored the role status brands had on conspicuous consumption and found that the motivations for social class signalling had a positive impact on the bandwagon effect. This is the extent to which the bandwagon effect is sought in the pursuit of social class signalling.

Thus, it was expected that social class signalling would positively influence the bandwagon effect of luxury fashion products among South African middle-income consumers. Consequently, the following hypothesis was proposed;

H2a *⇒ Social class signalling positively influences the bandwagon effect of luxury fashion goods by middle-income black South Africans.*

2.5.2.3 Social Class Signalling and Snob Effect

Social class signalling is motivated by the desire to display one's social class status to others (Kraus et al., 2012). This implies that there are individuals to whom status and social recognition are essential. These individuals are only interested in signalling their social class ranking to the extent that it affirms their uniqueness and sets them apart from the majority (Shukla, 2012). In other words, people who desire to convey their social class status need individualism and non-conformity. This snob effect motivates such people to be drawn to social class signalling (Hietanen et al., 2018). Such individuals are interested in others being aware of their social status, which happens to be aspirational and unattainable to many.

The display of one's prestigious social rank is pursued as a means to reflect their non-conformity and elitism (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). For example, one may elect to buy a luxury jacket which happens to be one of only 5 in the country, specially imported from Italy. The jacket's rarity would serve as a symbol of exclusivity to convey one's elite status and public perception of being among a privileged few. It would not be uncommon for this individual to suddenly lose interest in the jacket once it became widely available to the general public. This is because the jacket in question would no longer serve its purpose of distinguishing one from others (Han et al., 2010). In this instance, elitism and prestige are sought to the extent that they set one apart in society, more importantly, affirm one's perceived social ranking as an upper-class individual (Wiedmann et al., 2009). This is how social class signalling relates to the snob effect. Therefore, it was hypothesised that;

H2b *⇒ Social class signalling positively influences the snob effect of luxury fashion goods by middle-income black South Africans.*

2.5.2.4 Status Consumption and Conspicuous Consumption

Dubois and Ordabayeva (2015) posit that one of the primary functions of status consumption is signalling purposes. That is to say, people engage in the visible and public consumption of status-laden brands to convey their importance or wealth to others. Another perspective to status consumption is to view it within the context of luxury brands as being status-enhancing goods (Dubois & Ordabayeva, 2015). In other words, the status connotations people attach to luxury brands are perceived to be automatically extended to the person consuming those brands, thereby enhancing their status (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). Furthermore, this acquired status is amplified and signalled or "broadcast" to others through conspicuous consumption due to the Veblen effect (Teimourpour et al., 2013; Wiedmann et al., 2009).

Thus, luxury goods are a preferred consumer goods category for status signalling purposes due to their symbolic properties (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). These symbolic properties include, but not limited to, status characteristics such as wealth, importance, power, success, social class, prestige, among others (Sharma & Alter, 2012). Individuals seeking to signal their status to others would consume luxury goods perceived to contain these status-enhancing attributes (O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2013). In this context, the type of consumption demonstrated is concerned with maximising the visibility of status-laden brands, so they are most noticeable and recognisable by others (Dubois & Ordabayeva, 2015). For example, if one sought to display their wealth to others, they would consume expensive luxury fashion brands perceived to be worn by wealthy people (Moav & Neeman, 2012).

For status consumption to occur, the status-laden brands concerned often have prominent brand ques (logos, brand names) to ensure they are visible and recognisable to other people (Moav & Neeman, 2012). Therefore, status-seeking individuals do not purchase and consume luxury goods for their practical and functional benefits; instead, they do so for the symbolic connotations attributed to those luxury status-laden brands (O'Cass & Siahtiri, 2013). Souiden et al. (2011) conducted a research study in Tunisia and Canada, which investigated branded fashion accessories' conspicuous consumption. Their study discovered that the more an individual sought status, the more they desired conspicuous consumption. This demonstrated that status consumption is an influencing factor in conspicuous consumption. The need to show off one's importance and status to others is likely to influence South African black middle-income consumers' conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion products. Given the preceding discussion, this study hypothesised that;

H3 *⇒ Status consumption positively influences the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by middle-income black South Africans.*

2.5.2.5 Status Consumption and Bandwagon Effect

Status consumption is linked to the bandwagon effect (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). This implies that consumers who desire to be recognised by their peer group members are interested in consuming luxury goods to affirm their perceived importance to themselves and others. These individuals do not consume luxury goods is isolation (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). Furthermore, they consume luxury goods insofar as they are perceived to be status symbols. A key aspect of this peer group affiliation is a common need for status (Goldmisth & Clark, 2012). Goldmisth and Clark (2012) also assert that group members use status as a means to relate to one another. Therefore, these consumers are attracted to status-conferring brands insofar as they are commonly worn by other members of their peer group (Wiedmann et al., 2009). In this context, not only is a luxury brand worn for its status attributes but, it is also worn because other members of a peer group one seeks association with wear it (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). For example, a consumer in this instance may remark, “I wear this particular brand because successful people wear it, and I want to be associated with them. So, if I want to be perceived as successful and be affiliated with successful people, I must wear the same clothes. The brands I choose must have symbolic success connotations”. Tsai et al. (2013) conducted a study that researched Chinese international students based in America and their snob and bandwagon preferences regarding luxury goods. These scholars also found that Chinese students who are drawn to collectivism and want to associate with a particular peer group chose to buy status brands to express their support and membership among colleagues they share commonalities with.

A luxury brand’s status credentials serve as a qualifying criterion for social group membership in this context. One’s need for group affiliation is a motivating factor for consuming status-laden brands (Goodrich & Mangleburg, 2010). Thus, the more a consumer desires status, the more they would be susceptible to luxury fashion goods' bandwagon effect. In light of this view, the following hypothesis was made;

H4a* ⇒ *Status consumption positively influences the bandwagon effect of luxury fashion goods by middle-income black South Africans.

2.5.2.6 Status Consumption and Snob Effect

Status credentials may be obtained through brand distinctiveness (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). Consumers interested in acquiring status may do so by wearing luxury brands that seek to set them apart from others (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). As mentioned in a previous section of this chapter, snob consumers are motivated by non-conformity and exclusivity (Hietanen et al., 2018). These consumers attribute prestige to a brand insofar as it is unavailable to most people. A product has snob attributes when perceived as more expensive, unique, and difficult to access via limited distribution (Tsai, Yang & Liu, 2013). Tsai, Yang and Liu (2013), in their study exploring snob preferences among Chinese students in the United States of America (USA), also found that students who were motivated by the snob effect preferred rare, status-laden luxury goods in order to affirm their individuality and distinguish themselves from the typical American public.

In this context, status is acquired by consuming luxury brands that are perceived to be exclusive (Hietanen, 2018). For example, a consumer may elect to wear an expensive brand worn only by a select few who can afford it. The mere fact that only a few people can afford the brand confers upon the consumer the status of being wealthy and privileged. In this instance, the consumer would also be perceived to belong to a particular group of a fortunate few. Status consumption is, therefore, not an end in itself; it is acquired as a means to distinguish oneself from the majority (Han & Kiatkawsin, 2019). Accordingly, a consumer may perceive a premium price as status-conferring and, as such, procure the item as a means to validate their snobbishness to themselves and others (Uzgoren & Guney, 2012). To that end, symbolic brand cues are used to convey their snob status. Thus, the following hypothesis was advanced;

H4b* ⇒ *Status consumption positively influences the snob effect of luxury fashion goods by middle-income black South Africans.

2.5.2.7 Bandwagon Effect and Conspicuous Consumption

According to Shukla (2012), the bandwagon effect is an important factor influencing the conspicuous consumption of goods. This is because the reference social group with which affiliation is sought would be perceived to possess and exude specific status characteristics such as wealth, success, importance, power, influence and prestige, to name a few (Han et al., 2010; Lertwannawit & Mandhachitara, 2012). Therefore, individuals seeking social group acceptance and association purchase and consume goods that visibly display the status symbols attributed to the social group they seek to be affiliated with (Hudders, 2012). Social reference groups, especially those with status characteristics, have a common understanding of the status symbols and connotations ascribed (Gangadharan et al., 2015).

The need for group affiliation fosters a social group mentality where people consume luxury and status-laden goods solely because others in their social group do so (Scaini & Navarra, 2015; Shukla, 2012). However, this group membership is driven by a need to be seen. Conspicuous consumption is a method used by bandwagon consumers to demonstrate their social group membership to peer group members (Mehrabi & Zahedi, 2016). In this instance, the Veblen effect is how bandwagoners relate to one another (Teimourpour et al., 2012). To bandwagoners, the degree to which brand ques are prominent and recognisable to others is critical in their quest to gain social acceptance. In two (2) notable studies conducted by Eastman and Eastman (2015) as well as by Shukla (2012), the bandwagon effect was found to influence luxury goods' conspicuous consumption positively. Based on the reviewed literature, the following hypothesis was developed;

H5 *⇒ Bandwagon effect positively influences the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by middle-income black South Africans.*

2.5.2.8 Snob Effect and Conspicuous Consumption

The snob effect influences the conspicuous consumption of luxury goods (Mehrabi & Zahedi, 2016). Snobs have a high preference for rare status brands which are only available to a few people. The Veblen effect is very attractive to snobs to the degree that it satisfies their need to be publicly differentiated (Lertwannawit & Mandhachitara, 2012). Snobs place a high value on their uniqueness, so much so they want to be publicly admired for it (Hudders, 2012). To that end, snobs seek a visible channel to express their distinguished attributes publicly. The public display of their snobbishness is as essential to them as their need for differentiation (Gangadharan et al., 2015). Therefore, snobs are motivated to consume luxury fashion brands conspicuously to satisfy their need to be publicly distinguished from the masses (Han & Kiatkawsin, 2019). Han and Kiatkawsin (2019) also conducted a study that argued that snobs would cease to consume a luxury brand – conspicuously or subtly when that brand became widely consumed as that would diminish their perceived exclusive status. Drawing from the above discussion, this study hypothesised that;

H6 *⇒ Snob effect positively influences the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by middle-income black South Africans.*

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a theoretical context of conspicuous consumption. The literature reviewed demonstrated how motives and factors attributed to conspicuous consumption could influence black middle-income South Africans in their consumption of luxury fashion goods. Also, this chapter demonstrated how this consumer segment related to the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods. The conceptual model developed in this section established how key constructs such as; social class signalling, status consumption, bandwagon effect, and snob effect could influence black middle-income South Africans to consume luxury fashion goods conspicuously. Thus, eight (8) hypotheses were advanced, which were predicted to answer the research objectives and research questions set out by this study. These hypotheses required testing. The following chapter explains the mode of enquiry adopted by this study in testing its hypotheses.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to identify and describe the research methodology of this study. The research methodology is generally the procedure or technique used to identify, select, process, and analyse information about a topic (Bryman, 2012). Bryman (2012, pg. 46) also asserts that "a research method is simply a technique for collecting data. It can involve a specific instrument, such as a self-completion questionnaire or a structured interview schedule". Research methodology may also be defined as a "combination of techniques used to enquire into a specific situation" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 2015, p.47). Moreover, research methodology is related to selecting a research approach and ensuring that the research aims and objectives are credible (Ates, 2008). The method of enquiry adopted by this study was discussed in the following section.

3.2 Research Philosophy

In conducting research, a research philosophy is a belief about how data about a phenomenon or subject should be gathered, analysed and used (Creswell, 2013). According to Dudovsky (2016), a research philosophy is critical and essential because it distinguishes between the epistemology and doxology of a study. The former relates to what is known as accurate, and the latter is related to what is believed to be accurate. Also, a research philosophy encompasses the thinking behind any study's conduct (Uher, 2015). Research philosophy is generally characterised into four (4) categories: pragmatism, positivism and realism, and interpretivism, to mention a few (Meredith, Raturi, Amoako-Gyampah & Kaplan, 1989).

Research philosophy is a critical aspect of research methodology as the researcher's assumptions would be captured in the philosophy (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). This would then influence the research strategy and methods (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014).

As argued above, there are various types of research philosophies; this study's research philosophy is positivism. Gary (2013) defines positivism as a research paradigm concerned with investigating reality utilizing a scientific process. Therefore, this study adhered to the philosophical assumptions of positivism as stipulated by Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) in the following manner; the researcher was independent of the reality being observed or studied – that is, investigating the drivers of conspicuous consumption about luxury fashion goods among black middle-income South Africans. The researcher remained objective in his approach to the study and was not biased or influenced by his belief system or world view. The research explored a causal relationship between the constructs and variables under study: social class signalling, status consumption, bandwagon effect, snob effect, and conspicuous consumption.

Furthermore, the theory of acquiring knowledge was deductive, which involves the quantitative testing of hypotheses. This study also approached the sample population to enable inferences to be drawn regarding the wider population represented by the sample group using a quantitative research method. It is within this context that this study used the adopted research philosophy.

3.3 Research Strategy

A research strategy is a plan of action detailing how the researcher intends to collect information for a study (Bryman, 2012; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Research strategies "are plans and the procedures for research that span the steps from broad assumptions and detailed methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation" (Creswell, 2014, p. 3). This entails determining how the data is acquired, logically arranged and synthesised (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

There are various ways of gathering data and making sense of phenomena (Babbie, 2013). The three (3) dominant methods of collecting information in social sciences are qualitative research, quantitative research and mixed methods research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). For this study, a quantitative research method was adopted. The following section explains quantitative research's nature and justifies why this approach was used in this study.

To adequately address the research problem and objectives identified by this study, a quantitative research method was deemed suitable. The quantitative research process is concerned with collecting and quantifying data (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Bryman, 2012). As this study sought to determine the correlation between variables, Hair, Money, Samouel and Page (2007) assert that quantitative research is a suitable method of inquiry for analysing and validating stated variables. Also, quantitative research is preferred in the objective collection and analysis of data (Creswell, 2014; Kumar, 2014). Therefore, qualitative research would not have been appropriate for this study due to its subjective nature and inability to test hypotheses and variables scientifically (Kumar, 2014).

A quantitative approach enabled the researcher to administer and record the survey's questions quickly and answers to/from respondents. This was an important consideration due to the relatively large sample of respondents used by this study. This resulted in the generalizability of the data results as per the statistical analysis output – a process undertaken only under a quantitative approach. In other words, it can be assumed that the outcome of this report could apply to the entire black middle-income population of South Africa at the time this study was conducted. It is for these reasons that this study adopted a quantitative research method.

3.4 Research Design

Generally, a research design is defined as the overall strategy that a researcher undertakes to integrate the study's various elements (Bryman, 2012; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). Therefore, a researcher relies on the research design in fulfilling a study's research objectives and research questions. Research design helps collect, measure and analysing data. In other words, it serves as a guide in executing research and the data analyses thereof (Bryman, (2012). Saunders et al. (2012) define research design as a strategy that guides researchers in addressing research objectives and questions. Leedy and Ormrod (2015, p. 76) argue that "the research design provides the overall structures for the procedures, the data the researcher collects, and the data analyses the researcher conducts. Simply put, the research design is planning". Research design comprises five (5) components: cross-sectional, longitudinal design, case study, comparative study, and quasi-experimental designs (Bryman, 2012).

A cross-sectional approach was used to achieve the research objectives set out by this study. A cross-sectional study is conducted in order "to collect a body of quantitative or quantifiable data in connection with two or more variables, which are then examined to detect patterns of association" (Bryman, 2012, p. 58). Kumar (2014, p. 134) asserts that a cross-sectional study is "also known as one-shot or status studies and are the most commonly used design in the social sciences". This study was concerned with investigating the drivers of the phenomena whereby black middle-income South Africans exhibit heightened conspicuous consumption patterns – mainly luxury fashion goods. Data was collected from suitable respondents within a fixed period using a survey questionnaire. Although this study collected data from individuals of different age groups, it still presented an overall "picture" of the broader black middle-income population in South Africa when this study was conducted.

Furthermore, the conceptual model hypothesised by this study sought to address the study's research questions – as articulated in chapter one (1). However, as stipulated in chapter two (2) of this study, those hypotheses needed to be tested scientifically and objectively for this study to have scholarly merit. Therefore, a cross-sectional, quantitative research methodology was adopted as it was best suited to answer the research objectives and research questions of this study mentioned in chapter one (1).

3.5 Sampling Design

One is generally not concerned with extracting data from the entire demographic population being investigated (Bryman, 2012; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Thus, a strategic guiding framework must get quality data from the population in question without necessarily collecting data from every member (Kumar, 2011). Kumar (2011) also posits that this framework guides researchers to select the people from whom data will be collected. This is referred to as a "sample design;" it is concerned with how a sample population will be selected. In the probable instance where a researcher is unable to collect data from every single person in a population under study, then sampling techniques can be relied upon (Collins, Onwuegbuzie & Jiao, 2007). Furthermore, it is generally accepted that people who share the same demographic profile would have common attributes that apply to them as a collective (Gray, 2013). It would not have been feasible for this study to collect data from every single middle-income black South African; therefore, a sampling approach was deemed appropriate.

3.5.1 Sampling Design Process

Sampling design involves a multi-stage process that requires careful consideration at each stage of the process. There are five (5) steps to this process, beginning with defining the population to ultimately selecting the population sample.

The below figure depicts the sampling design process, which influenced this study. This study used aspects of this process.

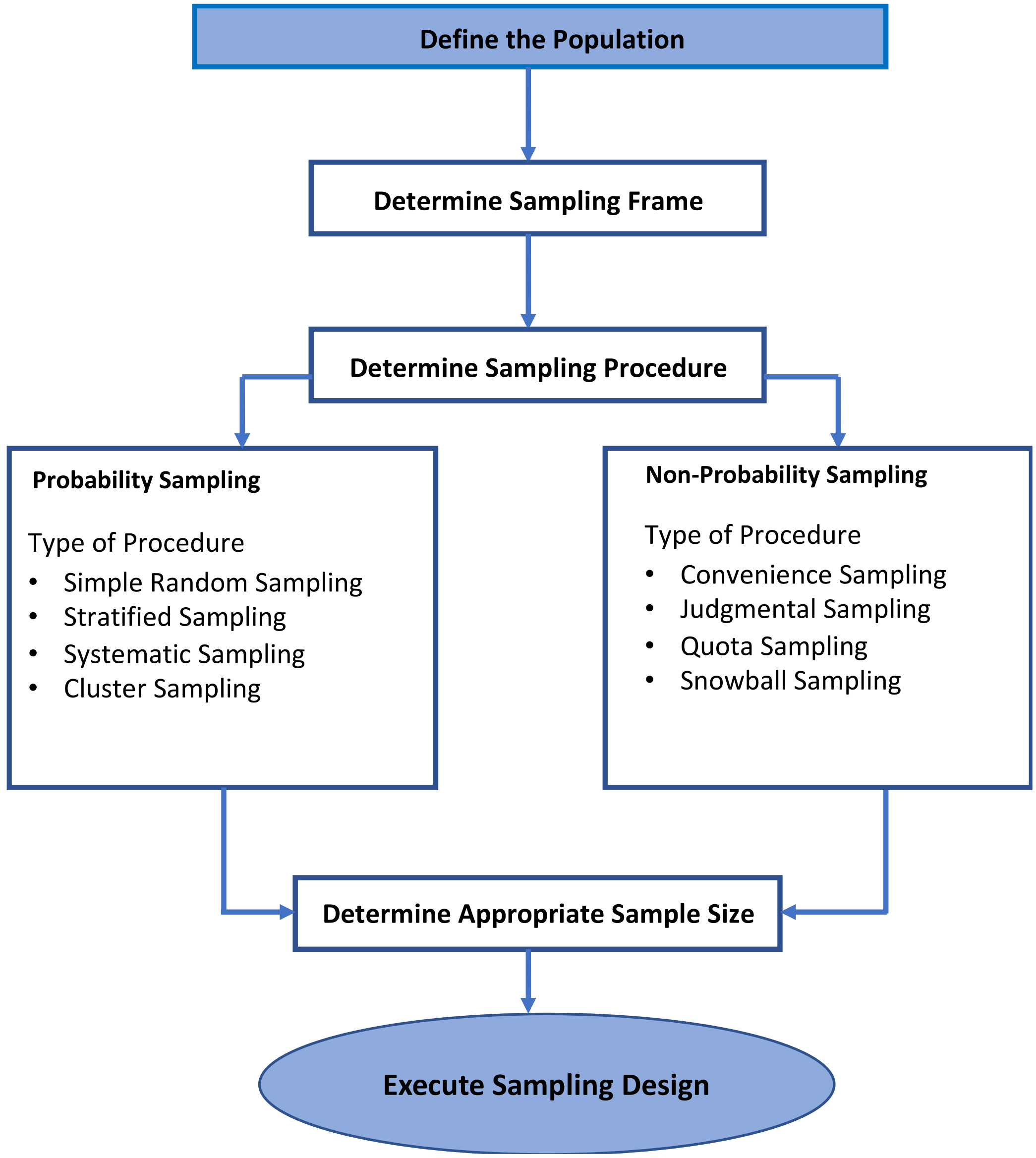


Figure 3.1: Steps in the Sampling Design Process

Source: Churchill and Iacobucci (2004)

The above steps depicted in figure 3.1 are discussed below.

- **Define the target population:** This phase sought to identify the ideal audience and respondents for this study. This initial phase was concerned with establishing respondents' demographic and psychographic characteristics (i.e., their racial profile, gender, aspirations, motivations, vocation, income, etc.). The target population for this study were black middle-income South Africans, and according to the Bureau of Market Research (2016), middle-income households make up 26% of the total South African population. Further information on this section is discussed later in this chapter.

- **Determine Sampling Frame:** This phase was concerned with the researcher asking the question, “where will I find suitable respondents for this study?” The researcher had to identify where and how respondents would be reached. This involved describing which sample units would be used – i.e., individuals, organisations, and households. For example, the researcher approached individuals in their places of work. The researcher had to compile a list of suitable companies to approach to access respondents for this study. Details on this are revealed later in this chapter.
- **Determine the Sampling Procedure:** This phase involved the researcher deciding between randomly selecting respondents – where potential respondents had equal prospects of being selected to participate in the study (probability sampling) or using a non-randomised method of selecting respondents – where potential respondents had unequal prospects of being selected to participate in the study (non-probability sampling).
- **Determine the Appropriate Sample Size:** An appropriate sample size needed to be determined. This study used the Raosoft sample size calculator to determine that 385 respondents would be a suitable sample size for this study. More details on this are discussed at a later stage.
- **Execute Sampling Design:** Having established some of the steps mentioned above, the researcher proceeded with executing and applying the chosen sampling design.

The most critical aspect of the sample design was that the desired data be obtained. In other words, great care was taken in ensuring that the right respondents for the study were identified and reached. This was an essential part of addressing the research questions and objectives appropriately. Failure to do this may have resulted in gathering data that did not add value to the research and ultimately, unusable (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2004).

3.6 Target Population

Black men and women residing in South Africa, who were employed and earning a household income of R7,168 - R 57,333 per month, were the target population chosen for this study. The targeted population consisted of people who have bought a luxury clothing item in the past or intended to purchase such an item in future. The research also focused on the motivating factors driving this population's decision-making process when purchasing luxury clothing brands for conspicuous consumption.

The population was selected based on their suitability to address the subject explored by this study – Antecedents to the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by black middle-income South Africans. The chosen populations were black African men and women who resided in South Africa and were of middle-income status; that is, they occupied the middle strata of the total income distribution in South Africa. This study adopted an income and expenditure measurement tool developed by the Bureau of Market Research (2016) to identify the chosen target population.

This population was highly ambitious and aspirational and represented South Africa's black middle-class segment (Ndletyana, 2014). Furthermore, this group comprises professionals, educated, urban, and specialists in their chosen vocations (Burger et al., 2015). Some of these individuals were employed in corporate South Africa, while others were entrepreneurs (Southall et al., 2014).

To generate the knowledge set out by this study, black middle-income South Africans who consumed luxury fashion brands and those who intended to consume such items in the future were selected. This population was chosen due to their heightened propensity to consume luxury fashion goods conspicuously, as articulated in chapter two (2) of this study. Furthermore, due to their middle-income status, this study assumed that this population could afford luxury fashion goods.

3.7 Sampling Frame and Size

This study necessitated that a sizable sample population be used. This was for the research hypotheses to be tested in a manner that would achieve a high level of generalizability – that is, the extent to which the report's findings could be generalized to apply to the entire research population (Myers, 2000). Therefore, a sample population size of 182 respondents was sufficient for the study and appropriate for the adopted data analysis tool. It is worth noting that the survey was sent out to 896 respondents, of which 450 clicked on the electronic survey link emailed to them. Of the 450 respondents, only 182 completed the survey.

A sample is defined as a part of a larger population group (Farrokhi & Hamidabad, 2012). This study got its sampling frame from middle-income black South Africans who earned a household income of between R7,168 - R 57,333 per month. According to the Bureau of Market Research (2016), these individuals represented the middle-income population in South Africa - which was the focus of this study. This sample frame was also inclined to display more conspicuous consumption than other racial groups in South Africa (Burger et al., 2015). To that end, Southall (2016) described this sample frame by asserting that "'obvious affluence', or 'conspicuous consumption', is one of the behaviour traits most commonly ascribed to the black middle class[5]".

The research sample was drawn from the broader South African business community. This included organisations in corporate South Africa that employed black professionals, industry "bodies", or organisations representing various black professionals' interests in South Africa. This included organisations such as the Black Management Forum (BMF), Africa Women Chartered Accountants (AWCA), Start-up CEO Capital Advisory (SUCA), Association of Black Securities and Investment Professionals (ABSIP) and other business organisations throughout South Africa which the researcher had access to. Some employees and members of the above-mentioned organisations are classified as middle-income based on the definition adopted by this study.

Achieving credible and acceptable research outcomes requires the chosen sample to represent the broader population being investigated (Bryman, 2012). To determine the sample size, this

[5] Other studies refer to this group as middle-class individuals. This study refers to the same group of individuals as middle-income earners.

study used a Raosoft online sample calculator where a confidence level of 95% and a 5% margin of error were employed. As a result of this calculation, this study determined a sample size of 385 participants based on an estimated total population size of 6,000,000 people. A Raosoft calculator is a tool used to determine the number of people to be used in a survey to gather data that is most representative of the target population.

3.8 Sampling Method

According to Kumar (2014, p. 382), sampling is "the process of selecting a few respondents from a bigger group to become the basis for estimating the prevalence of information of interest to you". Bryman (2012, p. 187) defines a segment as "the population selected for investigation. It is a subset of a population". Leedy and Ormrod (2015, p. 212) assert that "the researcher will usually not study the entire population of interest. Instead, he or she will collect a subset, or sample, of the population".

This study adopted a non-probability sampling approach. As such, convenience sampling was used as it enabled the researcher to reach research respondents in a manner that was most accessible to the researcher (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2015). Convenience sampling also empowered the researcher to select respondents based on their suitability to carry out the study's purpose (Farrokhi & Hamidabad, 2012). This included, but not limited to, selecting respondents based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. Therefore, a convenience sampling method was adopted as it enabled the researcher to sample individuals that were most relevant to the research questions under investigation.

Table 3.2: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Gender	Professional Occupation	Education	Race	Location	Sampled Population
Male Female	Blue-collar professionals	Tertiary	Black African	South Africa	182

3.9 Questionnaire/Instrument Design

A questionnaire is a form (physical or electronic) containing a set of questions addressed to a predetermined group of people to populate (Bryman, 2012). It is a tool to gather information from a population sample that can be presented statistically. Questionnaires may be close-ended or open-ended depending on the nature of the study being conducted and the information required (Kumar, 2014). Kotler and Armstrong (2012, p. 117) avow that “the questionnaire is by far the most common instrument, whether ad- ministered in person, by phone, by e-mail, or online”. Due to the quantitative nature of this study, a self-administered, semi-structured online survey questionnaire was developed.

This study used a questionnaire as a data-gathering tool. The questionnaire's content was guided by the literature reviewed in chapter two (2) of this study. In addressing this study's objectives, scales for the questionnaire were sourced and adapted from various studies. Items to measure social class signalling were adapted from Souiden et al. (2011), whose study investigated consumer motivations for purchasing branded fashion accessories in Canada. Status consumption scales were adapted from O’Cass and Frost (2002) whose study researched status-laden brands' effects on conspicuous consumption. Bandwagon effect and snob effect scales were adapted from Hudders (2012), whose study investigated the internal and external consumer motives for purchasing luxury brands. Conspicuous consumption scales were adapted from Wiedmann et al. (2009), whose study was also concerned with researching consumer perceptions and motives for purchasing luxury brands.

Bryman (2012, p. 658) asserts that online data collection entails “surveys that can be administered by email and via the Web”. Regarding surveys conducted via the web, the questionnaire is emailed to respondents. However, Web surveys, on the other hand, require the respondent to be channelled to an online platform or website where the questionnaire will be populated and answered (Evans & Mathur, 2005). As this study required 180 respondents, a Web survey was a more appropriate data collection method. Surveys are a preferred research instrument, especially when large sample populations are required, as was the case in this study

(Evans & Mathur, 2005). Online surveys are also becoming increasingly popular for data collection and analysis (Kumar, 2014).

To test the variables stated in this study, the questionnaire comprised two (2) sections, sections A and B, which were preceded by an introductory section explaining the purpose of the research and respondents' requirements. Section A required respondents to fill in their personal information such as respondents' racial profile, employment status, and household income level. This information was collected in order for the researcher to identify and qualify suitable respondents for this study. Sections B tested the research hypotheses: social class signalling, Bandwagon effect, Snob effect, Status consumption, and Conspicuous consumption as the outcome variable. There were seventeen (17) measurement items for all five (5) variables. As guided by Bradburn, Sudman and Wansink (2004), the questionnaire was designed in a manner that sought to meet the objectives of the study, questions were selected in a manner that sought to best capture the information required by this study, and the format of the survey was designed to be most user-friendly for respondents. All instructions and questions in the research instrument were communicated clearly and concisely to ensure respondents' ease of comprehension (Colosi, 2006). A 5-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. This study was concerned with gathering data from middle-income black South Africans as defined in previous sections of this study.

The below table demonstrates the number of instruments used to measure the variables under study.

Table 3.3: Variable Measuring Instruments

Variable	Instruments
Conspicuous Consumption	4
Social Class Signalling	3
Bandwagon Effect	4
Status Consumption	3
Snob Effect	3

Source: Developed for this study

3.10 Procedure for Data Collection

According to Kumar (2011), there are fundamentally two (2) data collection methods – primary and secondary data collection. Kumar also posits that primary data collection refers to the researcher gathering first-hand data from respondents. Examples of primary data collection methods include questionnaires, interviews and observations (Creswell, 2013). On the other hand, secondary data collection involves the collection of data from sources other than first-hand respondents; this includes, but not limited to, data sources such as archives and documents (Bryman, 2012; Kumar, 2011). This study adopted a primary data collection approach through the use of an electronic survey.

For this study's purpose, an email was sent out to the management team at Start Up CEO Advisory (SUCA), Black Management Forum (BMF), and other business organisations relevant to the study requesting official access to their membership and employee database. The email sought to introduce the researcher, state his objectives and outline the study's purpose and the assistance required from the respective business organisation.

Once access to employees and membership databases had been granted, an initial recruitment email was sent to 10 prospective respondents whose permission was sought to participate in this study. After that, a pilot phase was conducted with the same respondents to test the feasibility of the self-administered research questionnaire and identify any shortcomings in the instrument (Colosi, 2006; Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). After the pilot study, the questionnaire was sent out to the rest of the sample group respondents.

Notification emails were sent out to respondents three days after the questionnaires were sent to them. This sought to get the respondent's confirmation of having received the questionnaire. A week after this, a follow-up email was sent out to respondents reminding them to complete the survey questionnaire if they had not done so already.

The questionnaire was administered to respondents using Qualtrics. Qualtrics is an online data collection software that enabled the researcher to design the survey questionnaire on its platform and send it to respondents. Qualtrics was chosen for this study due to its ease of use by both the researcher and respondents alike; it is also free to use. The research data was collected from respondents within two months.

3.11 Data Analysis

Bryman (2012, p. 13) describes data analysis as “the application of statistical techniques to the data that have been collected”. Data analysis is concerned with processing data using a statistical approach (Byrne, 2016). In this process, data is systematically organised to be comprehended in a meaningful and logical manner (Kumar, 2011). It is worth noting that when data is collected from respondents, it is captured as large amounts of information, sometimes referred to as raw data. It is challenging to make sense of the information gathered (Neuman, 2012). Therefore, the information has to be reduced and synthesized into logical fragments for ease of understanding (Bryman, 2012). This structured approach to organising information is called data analysis (Byrne, 2016; Neuman, 2012). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p. 428) argue that “data processing is the process of coding data at different scales of the extent and entering into the computer for analysis using numerical codes”. Data needs to be put through a series of data processing steps in order to determine patterns, trends or correlations in the data (Kumar, 2014).

This study made use of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). SEM is a multivariate statistical technique used for analysing the correlations between observed and unobserved variables (Hoyle, 1995). SEM has various statistical applications to perform factor Analysis and Path Analysis (Bowen & Guo, 2012; Marsh, Wen, Nagengast & Hau, 2012). SEM draws together confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and Path Modelling and has been widely adopted among business and marketing professionals (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Therefore, SEM empowers researchers to test and analyse theoretical models and test the causal relationship between variables (Lomax & Schumacker, 2010). Furthermore, it accounts for any errors in measurements (Farrell, 2009). It is for these reasons that this study adopted SEM.

Data analysis was an important phase of this research study. It entailed approaching the data holistically in a manner that told a story and gave meaning to the data (Kent, 2015). In other words, data analysis in this study was about getting the most value out of a dataset. This involved several steps: systematically capturing the data, classifying it, calibrating and interpreting the data, and eventually incorporating the results into the research findings (Kent, 2015; Kumar, 2014).

This study used the following step-by-step process in analysing and interpreting the data gathered; firstly, data was coded onto Excel; then, data was imported onto SPSS and Mplus software. Thereafter, descriptive statistics analysis was conducted; this was followed by confirmatory factor analysis. Path modelling was the final step in this process.

As expounded by Bryman (2012), the researcher ensured that the data analysis techniques employed were appropriately matched against the research variables.

3.12 Reliability and Validity

This study aimed to achieve adequate reliability and validity for it to be deemed credible (Bryman, 2012). The below section explains the validity and reliability components of this study.

3.12.1 Reliability

Reliability is concerned with whether or not a research instrument is able to achieve the same results every time it is applied under the same conditions (Bryman, 2012; Noble & Smith, 2015). This is further corroborated by Kumar (2014) who asserts that reliability is concerned with the consistency and stability of a research tool. In other words, the more consistent a research instrument is, the more reliable it is (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Tavakol and Dennick (2011) also posit that the more reliable a study is deemed to be, the more valid it is. This study used Cronbach's alpha test (Cronbach α), the composite reliability test (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) test. The respective tests are as follows: social class signalling ($\alpha = 0.85$, CR = 0.85, AVE = 0,65), status consumption ($\alpha = 0.78$, CR = 0.77, AVE = 0,53), bandwagon effect ($\alpha = 0.77$, CR = 0.77, AVE = 0,46), snob effect (α = 0.82, CR = 0.82, AVE = 0,60), and conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion brands (α = 0.85, CR = 0.86, AVE = 0,60). These reliability tools were discussed in detail in Chapter four.

3.12.2 Validity

Validity refers to the integrity and "soundness" of a research study. The research can correctly apply the methods undertaken and ensure that the study's scales are accurately captured and adequately contribute to achieving the research goals (Noble & Smith, 2015). Bryman (2012, pg. 171) argues that "validity refers to the issue of whether an indicator (or set of indicators) that is devised to gauge a concept measures that concept". Validity is concerned with the degree to which an instrument correctly measures that which it was intended to (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

According to Bryman (2012), there are several ways to establish a study's validity, namely, measurement validity, internal validity, external validity, and ecological validity. These are further discussed in detail below.

Bryman (2012) posits that if a measure is unstable and unreliable, then it ceases to be valid. Leedy and Ormrod (2015, p. 251) define a study's internal validity as "the extent to which its design and the data it yields to allow the researcher to draw accurate conclusions about cause-and-effect and other relationships within the data". Internal validity is related to the causal relationship between variables. External validity, on the other hand, is concerned with the generalizability of the research results. This is the degree to which the research results are representative of the broader population concerned, beyond the sample population used in a particular study (Noble & Smith, 2015). Bryman (2012) asserts that ecological validity is concerned with whether the scientific findings of a study reflect ordinary people's day-to-day lives in their natural habitat.

Neuman (2007) cautions that perfect levels of reliability and validity are unattainable. However, the methodology adopted by this study endeavoured to achieve the highest degree of reliability and validity.

3.12.2.1 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity is a subset of construct validity which refers to the degree to which a construct's measure is correlated to other measures of the same construct (Bryman, 2012). Carlson and Herdman (2012) state that convergent validity seeks to demonstrate that two (2) measures that measure the same thing are connected. For this study, convergent validity was evaluated by ensuring the CFA's factor loadings were all significant and loaded on their respective underlying construct. Also, all the factor loadings approached or exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70. All the composite reliability scores of each construct were greater than 0.75. Overall, all the criteria successfully contributed to the achievement of convergent validity.

3.12.2.2 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity is a subset of construct validity concerned with using the same method to measure different constructs and arriving at scores that are not correlated (Carlson and Herdman; 2012). It is the opposite of convergent validity as the measures used are not related to each other. According to Bove, Pervan, Beatty and Shiu (2009, pg. 702), "discriminant validity is assessed by comparing the shared variance (squared correlation) between each pair of constructs against the average of the AVEs for these two constructs". To assess for discriminant validity, this study used Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Inter-construct Correlation Matrix was also used, and Shared Variance (SV) to check whether discriminant validity existed.

3.13 Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted in one country - South Africa. Within this country, most respondents were living in the city of Johannesburg, Gauteng, as it was very convenient for the researcher. The exclusion of many people living outside of this area may have given this study a more balanced perspective. It is possible that had this study broadened its scope to include respondents residing in other cities within South Africa, more valuable insights regarding the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods may have been obtained. Furthermore, this study focused on a specific racial and income group profile in its population - black middle-income

South Africans, which does not consider individuals that fall outside of this population segment. This narrowed scope may have limited this study's ability to contribute more meaningfully towards the body of literature about the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods in South Africa.

3.14 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are critical when conducting research (Bryman, 2012). This study observed all the ethical considerations and protocols about data collection, namely; getting participant consent before conducting the study, ensuring that respondents were not manipulated or forced to participate in the study and that no respondents were harmed or at risk, while participating in the study (Creswell, 2013; Kumar, 2011). The confidentiality and anonymity of the data were also considered. The below table (figure 3.4) demonstrates the ethical considerations undertaken by this study.

Table 3.4: Ethical Considerations

Ethical Consideration	Application to this study	Guiding Source(s)
Informed Consent	Research respondents used in this study gave their full consent. This was obtained before participating in the survey. Respondents were informed about the nature of the research and what was expected of them, and their risks before participating in the study. Furthermore, the researcher has a signed copy of the consent sheet wherein respondents consent to participate in the study.	Bryman (2012)
No Pressure on Respondents to Take Part	Respondents were informed that there were no disadvantages or penalties if they chose not to participate in the study. Also, respondents were informed that they were at liberty to choose not to answer any questions. They also had the option to withdraw from the study if they so wished without any repercussions.	Bryman (2012)
Assurance Not to Harm Respondents	Care was taken not to harm respondents in any way. The researcher ensured the best of his knowledge and ability that the research experience was not harmful to respondents.	Bryman (2012)
Privacy	Confidentiality and anonymity of the data must always be adhered to. Respondents were informed that the data shall be safely stored and that no unauthorised persons would have access to it. Furthermore, respondents were informed that their personal information should be protected and not misused or misrepresented. The confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were assured for the protection of their identities.	Bryman (2012) Ghauri and Gronhaug (2002)

Source: Drawn from multiple sources

3.15 Chapter Summary

Chapter three (3) identified and described the research methodology of this study. The following components of a research method were discussed and elaborated on in this section. These included; research philosophy, research design as well as sampling design. A section on instrument design and data collection techniques was also discussed in this chapter. A discussion on data analysis followed this. Also, a section on validity and reliability was discussed in detail. The chapter also presented a section on this study's limitations, followed by ethical considerations, which concluded this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Research setting and data collection

The research was conducted in South Africa, an important emerging market in sub-Saharan Africa with a well-developed retail market and a high representation of local and global luxury fashion brands. This research context was selected to determine the various reasons consumers indulged in luxury fashion products' conspicuous consumption. With increasing disposable incomes across many emerging markets, including South Africa, due to growing new middle-income households, urbanisation and global integration of markets, it was beneficial to understand how consumers in this research context consumed luxury fashion brands.

Through the online survey, 896 potential respondents were reached by way of email, of which 450 clicked on the survey link emailed to them. However, some did not complete the survey in full. After removing the incomplete and non-pertinent responses, 182 compelling cases were retained for subsequent data analysis. This represents a response rate of 20.3%, which is lower than the average response rate of 25% for email surveys (Sheehan, 2006). This study's response rate was deemed valid as the 25% acceptance rate is based on averages (Sheehan, 2006). Furthermore, this study's 20.3% response rate was close enough to the acceptable average of 25% and was therefore admissible. This study’s lower than average response rate may have been influenced by the fact that data was collected during December 2020 and January 2021, when most employees are inaccessible due to having taken annual leave from work and without access to their personal and work emails.

In total, 51.76 per cent of the sample are females, and 46.47 per cent are males. A little over half the total sample was between the ages of 25 and 34, representing 50.59%, and the second-largest respondent's ranged between the ages of 18 -24 years. This demonstrates that respondents in this study were predominantly millennials who intend to consume luxury fashion products. Moreover, many of the respondents reported that their highest education was a diploma, with about 24% of respondents reporting matric (24.14%) and master's degree (24.95%). More than half the respondents earned between R7,168 and R16,417 (59.76%). This is consistent with the majority of black middle-income consumers described by BMR. The second-largest income group earned between R16,418 and R57,333, representing 31.36% of respondents, with only 8.8% of respondents indicating that they earned more than R57,333 as gross monthly income. Again, these income groups appropriately place the respondents in the middle-income categories in South Africa. All the respondents were black South Africans, as those who indicated a different race were screened out before the analysis. Most of the respondents were single (70%), and only a few married respondents (19.41%), comparatively. More than half the respondents were derived from the Gauteng province, the province that boasts of the commercial capital of South Africa, Johannesburg.

Table 4.1: Summary of Descriptive Statistics (N = 182)

Factors	Frequency	%		Frequency	Frequency	%
Gender				**Province**		
Male	79	46.47		Eastern Cape	3	1.76
Female	88	51.76		Free State	3	1.76
Prefer not to say	3	1.76		Gauteng	115	67.65
Age				Kwazulu-Natal	29	17.06
18 – 24	37	21.76		Limpopo	3	1.76
25 – 34	86	50.59		Mpumalanga	6	3.53
35 – 44	32	18.82		Northern Cape	0	0.00
45 – 54	10	5.88		North West	1	0.59
55 – 64	1	0.59		Western Cape	10	5.88
65 and above	4	2.35				
Education				**Employment status**		
Matric	43	24.14		Employed (public sector)	19	50.30
Diploma	41	28.20		Employed (private sector)	63	2.43
Bachelor's degree	63	22.31		Self-employed	36	8.11
Master’s degree	16	24.95		Unemployed	46	9.94
PhD	1	0.59		Retired	5	16.43
Other	6	3.53				
Gross monthly income				**Marital status**		
R7,168 – R16,417	101	59.76		Married	33	19.41
R16,418 – R33,333	33	19.53		Single	119	70.00
R33,334 – R57,333	20	11.83		Divorced	5	2.94
R57,334 and above	15	8.88		Separated	1	0.59
				Never married	12	7.06

Note: Difference in the frequencies is due to missing data

4.2 Measures

The study adapted scales from previous literature where these scale items have already been validated. The use of previously validated scales in other contexts further enhances their cross-country validity and improves the scales' reliability in unique cultural contexts. All the items used in this study were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "5 = strongly agree." First, *social class signalling* – defined as one's prestige and ranking in society (Martin & Cote, 2019), was measured with three (3) items derived from Souiden et al. (2011), whose study investigated consumer motivations for purchasing branded fashion accessories. For example, "wearing luxury clothing brands improves my social class status," and "I believe social class status may be acquired by wearing luxury fashion brands."

Also, s*tatus consumption* – which is described as the extent to which status-laden brands "transfer" their status connotations to individuals wearing them and thereby enhancing the social status of those individuals (Moav & Neeman, 2012; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004), was measured with three (3) items obtained from O'Cass and Frost (2002) whose study researched the effects of status-laden brands on conspicuous consumption. For example, "To me, a clothing item (product) is more valuable if it has status," and "I believe that luxury brands' prestige and status are transferred to me when I wear those brands." Moreover, the scale developed by Hudders (2012), whose study investigated the internal and external consumer motives for purchasing luxury brands – was used to measure the *bandwagon effect* with four (4) items. According to this scholar, the *bandwagon effect* is when someone purchases luxury goods to conform to and "fit in" with a particular reference group. Some of the items include "I prefer wearing luxury brands which are popular among my social group," and "I tend to buy luxury brands that make me look good among my social group." The *snob effect* was also measured with three (3) items from the scale validated by Hudders (2012). Snob consumers consume luxury items to signal their exclusivity and differentiate themselves from others (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). Some of the items include: "I only wear exclusive luxury fashion brands that a few people like myself own," and "To me, it is important that the luxury brands I wear set me apart from others." Finally, the c*onspicuous consumption of luxury fashion products* – described as the consumption of luxury goods displaying prominent brand cues to signal one's wealth, status and success to others (Han et al., 2010), was measured with four (4) items adapted from the scale by Wiedmann et al. (2009) - this study was concerned with researching consumer perceptions and motives for purchasing luxury brands. For example, "It is important that others know me as somebody who wears expensive luxury fashion brands," and "I prefer that the logo of the luxury fashion brands I wear be visible to others." Table 4.2 provides all the measurement scales with the items and their standardised loadings.

In previous chapters of this study, it was demonstrated how the research objectives and research questions of this report were answered. In other words, it was argued how middle-income black South Africans related to the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods and the motives and factors that influenced this peculiar behaviour were examined. These motives, it was presented, were based on external and social factors as opposed to internal and hedonic factors. The literature reviewed highlighted the constructs linked to conspicuous consumption: social class signalling, status consumption, bandwagon effect, and snob effect. Based on this, a conceptual model was developed from which eight (8) hypotheses were formulated. The below section demonstrates how these hypotheses were tested and the statistical results thereof.

4.3 Analysis

Structural equation modelling that follows the two-step approach by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was used to assess this study's proposed hypotheses. According to Anderson and Gerbing (1988), a structural path model can only proceed from a successful assessment of the psychometric properties used in the study's analysis. Hence, a confirmatory factor analysis designed to determine the scales' measurement properties were performed first before structural equation modelling. The measurement and structural path models were performed through a complete information maximum likelihood model with robust errors using *Mplus* (8.3) as the modelling technique (Muthén & Muthén, 2017).

4.3.1 Measurement model

The validity of the measurement model was assessed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The determination of the goodness of fit of the CFA model was assessed through multiple indicators: X^2 (chi-square), X^2/df (chi-square to the degree of freedom index), TLI (Tucker-Lewis index), CFI (comparative fit index), RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation), and SRMR (standardised root mean square residual). Browne and Cudek (1993) recommend that model fit is satisfactory when the indices are ≥ 0.90, X^2 /df range between 2 and 5, and RMSEAS ≤ 0.08. Modification indices were implemented during the scale items' measurement assessment to ensure that those loaded poorly were eliminated. In contrast, those items that required covariation were implemented to ensure a good fit of the measurement model.

Based on these thresholds, the measurement assessment shows that the goodness of fit assessment produces excellent fit of the data: X^2 = 123.43, df = 109, X^2/df = 1.13, RMSEA = 0.03, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.99, SRMR = 0.04. Following satisfactory model assessment was achieved, the analysis proceeded to determine the reliability and validity of the scales used in the study

Each construct in the measurement model achieved appropriate internal consistency and composite reliability scores to conclude that the constructs are reliable. For reliability, the study used Cronbach's alpha scores which were above the threshold of 0.60. Composite reliability scores were also above the minimum threshold of 0.70 (see Table 4.2). Furthermore, the validity of the scales was assessed through convergent and discriminant validity.

First, each of the scale items' standardised factor loadings was significant and above 0.60, and the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct all exceeded the 0.50 threshold except the AVE for bandwagon effect at 0.46 (see Table 4.2). The achievement of these criteria at both the item level and construct level provide evidence of convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Second, following Fornell and Larcker, the constructs' discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square root of the average variance extracted for each construct with any paired correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 4.3 show that the square root of the average variance extracted for each factor exceeds the inter-construct correlations. These statistics confirm the presence of discriminant validity of the constructs (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.2: Measurement scale with source

Construct and items	Loadings	α	CR	AVE
Social class signalling **(**Souiden et al., 2011)		0.85	0.85	0.65
I believe that social class status may be acquired by wearing luxury fashion brands.	0.77			
Wearing luxury clothing brands improves my social class status.	0.90			
In my opinion, it is possible to infer one's social class status by the luxury clothing brands they wear.	0.74			
Status consumption **(**O'Cass & Frost, 2002)		0.78	0.77	0.53
To me, a clothing item (product) is more valuable if it has status.	0.80			
In my opinion, luxury fashion brands have higher status and prestige compared to non-luxury brands.	0.63			
I believe that luxury brands' prestige and status are transferred to me when I wear those brands.	0.75			
Bandwagon effect **(**Hudders, 2012)		0.77	0.77	0.46
I prefer wearing luxury brands that are popular among my social group.	0.72			
Before purchasing a luxury clothing item, it is important to know what my peers think of that brand.	0.65			
I usually keep up with luxury fashion trends by watching what others buy and wear.	0.65			
I tend to buy luxury brands that make me look good among my social group.	0.69			
Snob effect (Hudders, 2012)		0.82	0.82	0.60
To me, it's important that the luxury brands I wear set me apart from others.	0.79			
I'm prepared to pay more money for rare and exclusive luxury brands.	0.72			
I only wear exclusive luxury fashion brands that are owned by a few people like myself.	0.81			
Conspicuous consumption (Wiedmann et al., 2009)		0.85	0.86	0.60
I wear luxury fashion brands in order to signal my status and affluence to others.	0.74			
It is important that others know me as somebody who wears expensive, luxury fashion brands.	0.86			
I prefer that the logo of the luxury fashion brands I wear be visible to others.	0.77			
I wear luxury fashion brands to impress other people.	0.72			

CFA fit: X^2 = 123.43, df = 109, X^2/df = 1.13, RMSEA = 0.03, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.99, SRMR = 0.04
α = Cronbach's alpha, CR = Composite reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extract

Table 4.3: Construct correlations and descriptives

#	Constructs	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1	Social class signalling	2.90	1.23	**0.81**				
2	Status consumption	2.94	1.48	0.59	**0.73**			
3	Bandwagon effect	2.51	1.02	0.42	0.52	**0.68**		
4	Snob effect	2.99	1.38	0.35	0.69	0.54	**0.77**	
5	Conspicuous consumption	2.19	1.13	0.50	0.56	0.50	0.40	**0.77**

Notes: All correlations are significant at $p < 0.001$; Square root of average variance extracted (AVE) are on the diagonal and in bold

4.3.2 Assessment of structural models

After successfully estimating the measurement models, the structural model was used to evaluate the conceptual model's hypothesised relationships. The SEM model was assessed using the maximum likelihood estimation method. The fit statistics of the structural model produces excellent indices: $X^2 = 125.11$, df = 110, $X^2/df = 1.14$, RMSEA = 0.03, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.98, SRMR = 0.04; confirming that the model fits the data very well. Table 4.4 summarises the standardised path coefficients and the t-values for the respective direct effects hypothesised in the conceptual model.

The findings show that social class signalling has a significant positive influence on conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion products ($\beta = 0.28$, t-value = 2.62, $p < 0.05$), and bandwagon effect ($\beta = 0.23$, t-value = 2.46, $p < 0.05$), confirming H1 and H2a. This result suggests that consumers who desire to signal their social class to others are more likely to be attracted to the fashion products and brands that enable them to achieve this goal conspicuously. Similarly, consumers attracted to the bandwagon effect will be influenced by the social class signalling effect that fashion products can afford. However, no significant influence exists from social class signalling on the snob effect of fashion products – H2b ($\beta = -0.17$, t-value = -1.36, $p > 0.05$), suggesting no such significant association exist between social class signalling and snob effect of luxury apparel consumption.

With regards to H3, the findings also reveal that status consumption does not predict conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion products (β = 0.32, t-value = 1.18, $p > 0.05$). However, status consumption has significant positive influence on both bandwagon effect – H4a (β = 0.66, t-value = 7.72, $p < 0.001$), and snob effect – H4b (β = 0.87, t-value = 7.82, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that consumers with a need for status will consume luxury fashion products because of their bandwagon and snob effects equally. Hence, the findings provide evidence in support of hypotheses H4a and H4b.

Table 4.4: Structural model results of hypothesis testing

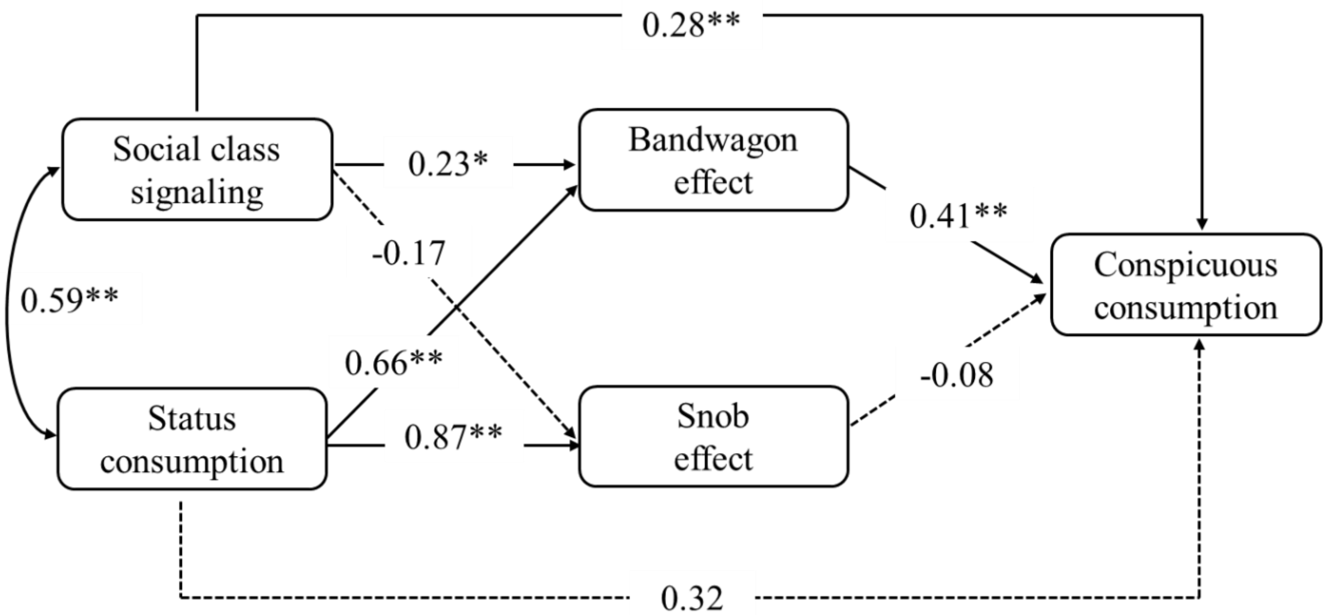
Hypothesised relationship			**Standardised coefficient**	**T-value**		**Hypotheses**
Social Class Signalling (SCS)	→	Conspicuous consumption (CC)	0.28	2.62**	H1:	Supported
Social class signalling (SCS)	→	Bandwagon effect (BWE)	0.23	2.46*	H2a:	Supported
Social class signalling (SCS)	→	Snob effect (SE)	-0.17	-1.36	H2b:	Not supported
Status consumption (SC)	→	Conspicuous consumption (CC)	0.32	1.18	H3:	Not supported
Status consumption (SC)	→	Bandwagon effect (BWE)	0.66	7.72***	H4a:	Supported
Status consumption (SC)	→	Snob effect (SE)	0.87	7.82***	H4b:	Supported
Bandwagon effect (BWE)	→	Conspicuous consumption (CC)	0.41	2.66**	H5:	Supported
Snob effect (SE)	→	Conspicuous consumption (CC)	-0.08	-0.44	H6:	Not supported

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$

SEM fit: X^2 = 125.11, df = 110, X^2/df = 1.14, RMSEA = 0.03, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.98, SRMR = 0.04

Abbreviations: SCS = social class signalling, SC = status consumption, BWE = bandwagon effect, SE = snob effect, CC = conspicuous consumption.

The study also proposed that consumers who desire the bandwagon effect of luxury fashion products will purchase these products for their conspicuous appeal – H5. The findings support this prediction by confirming the significant positive influence of the bandwagon effect on conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion products (β = 0.41, t-value = 2.66, $p < 0.01$), confirming hypothesis H5. Lastly, it was proposed that the snob effect of luxury fashion products will lead to the conspicuous consumption of these products where consumers will desire to show-off these products to others - H6. The findings do not support this assertion. The results show that snob effect does not significantly influence the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion products (β = -0.41, t-value = 2.66, $p < 0.01$). Figure 4.1 depicts a summary of the SEM results.



Notes: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

—— Path coefficient significant

------ Path coefficient not significant

Figure 4.1: Summary of the structural model results

The model also shows that both bandwagon and snob effects are introduced as intervening factors between social class signalling and status consumption and conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion products. The following section provides a brief explanation of the findings of the mediation model.

4.3.3 Assessment of mediation effects

Given that mediation effects are contained in the conceptual model, the study used the advanced bootstrapping method to confirm mediation (Preacher & Hayes 2008). The benefit of using the bootstrapping method for testing mediation is that it has robust relative power in determining and comparing individual effects (Xie, Batra, & Peng, 2015). The analysis used the bootstrapping bias-corrected confidence interval procedure in structural equation modelling with a 95% confidence interval and 5,000 samples. The analysis also calculated the individual effects of each mediator. The total effects, total indirect effects and the specific indirect effects were also determined. Table 4.5 highlights the findings of the mediation analysis.

Table 4.5: A mediation analysis

Paths	Standardized estimate	t-value	BCCI lower (2.5%)	BCCI upper (2.5%)
Direct effects				
SCS → CC	0.28	2.02*	-0.04	0.47
SC → CC	0.32	0.91	-0.19	1.13
Specific indirect effects				
SCS → BWE → CC	0.10	1.52	-0.00	0.24
SCS → SE → CC	0.01	0.17	-0.04	0.22
SC → BWE → CC	0.27	2.04*	0.02	0.54
SC → SE → CC	-0.07	-0.27	-0.66	0.19
Total indirect effects				
SCS → CC	0.11	1.11	0.00	0.34
SC → CC	0.20	0.66	-0.52	0.61
Total effects				
SCS → CC	0.39	4.07**	0.18	0.56
SC → CC	0.52	5.10**		

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, Abbreviations: BCCI = Bias corrected confidence intervals; SCS = social class signalling, SC = status consumption, BWE = bandwagon effect, SE = snob effect, CC = conspicuous consumption.

The findings show that consistent with the direct effects model; the mediation model also shows that social class signalling directly influences the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion apparel ($\beta = 0.28$, t-value = 2.02, $p < 0.05$). Also, the total effects of social class signalling model on conspicuous consumption is significantly positive ($\beta = 0.39$, t-value = 4.07, $p < 0.01$). Further, the total effects of status consumption model on conspicuous consumption is significantly positive ($\beta = 0.52$, t-value = 5.10, $p < 0.01$). However, the results confirm that only bandwagon effect exerts significant indirect effects between status consumption and conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion products ($\beta = 0.27$, t-value = 2.04, $p < 0.05$).

The findings suggest that the influence of status consumption on conspicuous consumption works best when consumers are susceptible to the effect of bandwagon consumption. However, the bandwagon effect did not exert an indirect effect between social class signalling and conspicuous consumption. Table 4.5 presents a summary of these results. Similarly, the snob effect did not exert mediating effects between either social class signalling or status consumption and conspicuous consumption.

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the statistical results of the data analysis conducted by this study. It was explained how data collection was done, and the descriptive analysis of respondents was also expounded. The measures of the five (5) constructs used in this study's conceptual model, and hypotheses were provided. A section on how the report's data was analysed and the findings thereof conclude this chapter. Five (5) hypotheses were supported, and three (3) were not significant. Concerning the research objectives set out by this report, The study found that social class signalling and bandwagon effect were how middle-income black South Africans positively related to luxury fashion goods' conspicuous consumption. However, these consumers were not motivated by status consumption nor bandwagon effect in their conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods. The following chapter discusses the findings of this report in detail.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter was concerned with discussing the study's findings and providing clarity thereof. The results of the statistical analysis were explained in detail. This section also provided insights into all eight (8) hypotheses of this study. This chapter was intended to give meaning to the results of each hypothesis and draw inferences where applicable. A holistic assessment was provided based on the results discussed in the previous chapter.

5.2 Discussion of the findings from hypothesis testing

5.2.1 $H_{1:}$ Social class signalling (SCS) and conspicuous consumption (CC)

The first hypothesis of this study focused on the relationship between social class signalling and conspicuous consumption. It was predicted that the former positively influences the latter. The prediction was confirmed by the statistical results depicted in table 4.5 of this study, wherein the relationship between social class signalling and conspicuous consumption was significantly supported ($\beta = 0.28$, t-value = 2.62, $p < 0.05$). These results are consistent with previous studies' empirical findings where it was confirmed that social class signalling positively influences conspicuous consumption of luxury brands (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008; Souiden et al., 2011). This suggests that consumers who desire to display their social class status are motivated to conspicuously consume luxury fashion brands among South Africans. This could be because people belonging to certain social class groups are associated with wearing certain brands. The study further confirms that individuals desire that their social groups know the types of luxury fashion products they consume to communicate their self-worth and status. Therefore, one's social class ranking may be determined by the visible display of the type of luxury brands they wear.

5.2.2 H_{2a} Social class signalling (SCS) and bandwagon effect (BWE)

The results of this study confirm that social class signalling has a positive influence on bandwagon effect ($\beta = 0.23$, t-value = 2.46, $p < 0.05$). These results are similar to the findings of other studies, including Wiedmann et al. (2009). This suggests that people who place importance on demonstrating their ranking and prestige in society are motivated to do so because they have an inherent need to belong to a peer group they identify with.

Therefore, they conform and assimilate to the expected behaviours among members of their peer group. In other words, people who desire to display their social class standing to others are motivated to do so by the ideals of conformity and fitting-in to a social group. In practical terms, these individuals wear luxury fashion brands that are commonly worn and recognised by their peer group to signal to others that they are indeed members of a privileged and elite social class group. The finding supports the view that individuals who place a high value on their ranking in society and who wish to communicate their social standing to others prefer to do so by wearing luxury brands that other members of their reference group wear. This behaviour of assimilation reinforces and validates their membership to a particular social class.

5.2.3 H_{2b} Social class signalling (SCS) and snob effect (SE)

It was predicted by this study that social class signalling leads to the snob effect. This hypothesis assumed that people with a desire to display their social class ranking and the station they occupied in society were interested in distinguishing themselves from others. The results of this study did not support this hypothesis ($\beta = -0.17$, t-value = -1.36, $p > 0.05$). This finding suggests that to signal their social class status to others, these individuals do not rely on their sense of uniqueness and exclusiveness to achieve that goal. The previously mentioned hypothesis results may explain this – i.e., SCS positively influences BWE. In other words, the degree to which individuals wish to display their social class status by satisfying their need for community and belonging as opposed to being motivated by a need for uniqueness or setting themselves apart from others in order to achieve the objective. This is contrary to studies conducted by scholars such as Steinfield (2015), who concluded that luxury goods consumers maintain their elite social class status by consuming exclusive brands which distinguish them from others. Although the study cited above did not reach statistical significance, the argument it advances is worth noting.

5.2.4 H_3 Status consumption (SC) and conspicuous consumption (CC)

This hypothesis focused on the relationship between status consumption and conspicuous consumption; that is to say, to what degree does status consumption influence conspicuous consumption? As presented in chapter four (4), the results of the structural equation model show that status consumption does not support conspicuous consumption ($\beta = 0.28$, t-value = 2.62, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that status consumption is not a requirement for conspicuous consumption to occur.

This finding contradicts previous empirical findings from scholars such as O'Cass and McEwen (2004) as explained in chapter two (2) of this study. They found that status consumption positively influences conspicuous consumption. The contrasts in findings between this study compared to the one cited above could be due to differences in demographics – the study cited above was limited to a young student population, whereas this study focused on predominantly working professionals. Furthermore, this study's results, as depicted in table 4.5 ($\beta = 0.27$, t-value = 2.04, $p < 0.05$), demonstrate that for status consumption to positively influence conspicuous consumption, the bandwagon effect is required as a mediating factor. This means consumers need to be susceptible to being influenced by – and interested in impressing their peer group to consume status brands for conspicuous consumption purposes.

5.2.5 H_{4a} Status consumption (SC) and bandwagon effect (BWE)

This study predicted that status consumption leads to the bandwagon effect. This hypothesis was supported by the statistical results of this study ($\beta = 0.66$, t-value = 7.72, $p < 0.001$). This outcome is in line with other studies' theoretical views that investigated the relationship between the same variables (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). This implies that consumers who desire to enhance their perceived status and image are influenced by their need to belong to a peer group. As a result, these individuals wear status-laden brands imbued with symbolic connotations and are commonly worn by the reference group they wish to be associated with. For example, a person who is interested in status consumption in this context may say, "wealthy people wear certain luxury brands; therefore if I want to be perceived as being rich, then I too must wear the same brands as they do – which will qualify me as being one of them".

5.2.6 H_{4b} Status consumption (SC) and snob effect (SE)

The study concluded that status consumption positively influences the snob effect. This was the outcome and finding of this study, which concluded that the relationship between these variables is supported ($\beta = 0.87$, t-value = 7.82, $p < 0.001$). This is not surprising as the same conclusion was reached by similar studies conducted by various scholars, including Kastanakis and Balabanis (2014). These results imply a positive causal relationship between consuming status-laden fashion brands and the need for exclusivity and uniqueness. In other words, one may demonstrate his/her perceived status by wearing rare and exclusive luxury fashion brands which are not accessible to others.

In practical terms, one may wear expensive and exclusively available luxury brands which are only affordable and accessible by a few. This will intern confer upon that person the status of privilege and elitism. Being one of a privileged few is a status that is aspirational to many as it affords one a lifestyle that is perceived to be peculiar and sought after. To that end, it is possible to acquire the said status by consuming brands that are so exclusive they distinguish the person wearing them from the majority. This is why a person who desires status would consume luxury brands that are rare and laden with status credentials.

5.2.7 H_5 Bandwagon effect (BWE) and conspicuous consumption (CC)

This study hypothesised a positive relationship between the bandwagon effect and conspicuous consumption. This hypothesis was supported by the results of the statistical analysis conducted by this study ($\beta = 0.41$, t-value = 2.66, $p < 0.01$). Other theoretical studies corroborate these findings. For example, Eastman and Eastman (2015) concluded that the relationship between the bandwagon effect and conspicuous consumption is significant.

The results imply that consumers who need to belong to a peer group will have to demonstrate "evidence" of their membership to that particular social group. This evidence must be displayed in such a manner that it is recognisable and identifiable by others. Therefore, the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion brands is suitable for this purpose as it is visible by nature, thereby enabling others to validate one's membership in a social group. This is because conformity is a primary requirement of the bandwagon effect (Shukla, 2012), which in this instance, is demonstrated by the public display of the luxury brands one wears.

5.2.8 H_6 Snob effect (SE) and conspicuous consumption (CC)

The results of this study concluded that there is a negative relationship between snob effect and conspicuous consumption ($\beta = -0.41$, t-value = 2.66, $p < 0.01$). In other words, the snob effect does not lead to the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion brands. This means the prediction made by this study regarding the relationship between the snob effect and conspicuous consumption was not supported. These results are contrary to studies conducted by scholars such as Kastanakis and Balabanis (2014), who – through the results of their study, concluded that the snob effect had a significant impact on conspicuous status consumption (0.537).

Through this study's results, it is evident that consumers who have a desire for exclusivity and want to distinguish themselves from others are not interested in doing so by publicly displaying their uniqueness through conspicuous consumption of luxury brands. However, the opposite is true as consumers motivated by the snob effect prefer "quiet" and subtle brand cues in the luxury fashion items they wear (Han et al., 2010). This means that consumers interested in the snob effect desire to consume luxury fashion brands but are not motivated to do so by showing it off to others.

5.3 Chapter Summary

The objective of this study was to investigate the factors that influence the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by black middle-income South Africans. The study utilised social class signalling, status consumption, bandwagon effect, and snob effect as crucial factors in a predictive model to explain the variance in fashion luxury products' conspicuous consumption among South African consumers. The findings supported five (5) of the eight (8) hypotheses proposed in this study. The three (3) hypotheses that were not supported related to hypothesized relations between social class signalling (SCS) and snob effect (SE), status consumption (SC) and conspicuous consumption (CC) and finally, snob effect (SE) and conspicuous consumption (CC). Social class signalling (SCS) was found to positively influence both conspicuous consumption (CC) and the bandwagon effect. In addition, status consumption (SC) was confirmed to support the snob effect (SE) as well as the bandwagon effect (BWE). Finally, the relationship between the bandwagon effect (BWE) and conspicuous consumption (CC) was supported.

Furthermore, a mediation analysis was conducted in a post hoc analysis which found that the bandwagon effect (BWE) served as a mediating mechanism through which status (SC) operate to influence conspicuous consumption (CC). Specifically, while status consumption does not directly influence conspicuous consumption, status consumption is indirect through the bandwagon effect. For status consumption to influence conspicuous consumption, consumers must desire their bandwagon influence that accompanies luxury fashion products. However, the snob effect did not mediate status consumption and social status signalling to explain conspicuous consumption. Social class signalling independently exerted a strong direct influence on conspicuous consumption. This suggests that social class signalling on its own is a sufficient driver of conspicuous consumption but not status consumption. Status consumption works best through the bandwagon effect to explain conspicuous consumption among the South African consumers in this study

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

6.1 Introduction

Following the results and discussion presented in the previous chapter, this chapter concluded the study. In so doing, this section discussed the study's broader implications within a theoretical and practical context for both academic and marketing practitioners. No study is without shortcomings, and this study was no exception. Thus, the limitations of this study were also presented. Finally, a section on the recommendations made by this study concluded this chapter.

6.2 Conclusions of the study

This study investigated the factors that influence conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion brands among black middle-income South Africans. In answering the objectives and research questions of this study, it was proven that conspicuous consumption (CC) of luxury fashion goods by middle-income black South Africans was predicted by social class signalling (SCS), $\beta = 0.28$, t-value = 2.62, $p < 0.05$, and bandwagon effect (BWE), $\beta = 0.66$, t-value = 7.72, $p < 0.001$. However, it was also proven by this study that conspicuous consumption (CC) was not predicted by status consumption (SC), $\beta = 0.28$, t-value = 2.62, $p < 0.05$, nor was it predicted by snob effect (SE), $\beta = -0.41$, t-value = 2.66, $p < 0.01$.

As indicated earlier in this report, South Africa is increasingly becoming an important growth market for luxury goods industries, and yet, there is currently insufficient knowledge within this field of study – particularly within the context of luxury fashion goods and the conspicuous consumption thereof (Eastman & Eastman, 2015; Steihler, 2017). Therefore, this report also sought to generate knowledge within this field of study and contribute to the body of literature, which is an area in need of further expansion and development.

To that end, this study reviewed existing literature to answer the research questions posed. Also, a theoretical model was developed and adapted from studies conducted by scholars who are regarded as authorities in this field of study (Eastman & Eastman, 2015; Wiedmann, Hennigs & Siebels, 2009). The conceptual model developed by this study (Figure 3) assisted in generating hypotheses that needed to be tested among black middle-income South Africans to verify their truthfulness and applicability. The quantitative research method adopted by this study and the chosen survey instrument was explored in chapter three (3). The results of this report are presented in Chapter four (4) and five (5). These results were also discussed further in this section. The report's findings are intended to assist those interested in understanding why black middle-income South Africans consume luxury fashion brands conspicuously.

6.3 Implications

The findings of this study have both theoretical and managerial implications. The eight (8) hypotheses generated by this study were not supported entirely. The report's statistical results did not support three (3) of the eight (8) hypotheses made. The implications of these results are discussed in detail in the below section.

6.3.1 Theoretical implications

This study was concerned with examining the antecedents that influence the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by black middle-income South Africans. As with most studies of an academic nature, there was an expectation that the knowledge generated by this report would contribute to the existing body of literature in this field of study. Thus, this report presented a unique perspective in the field of conspicuous consumption. The conceptual model developed by this study had eight hypotheses, namely; social class signalling (SCS) and conspicuous consumption (CC), social class signalling (SCS) and bandwagon effect (BWE), status consumption (SC) and snob effect (SE), status consumption (SC) and bandwagon effect (BWE), bandwagon effect (BWE) and conspicuous consumption (CC). The empirical findings of the study supported these five (5) hypotheses. However, the following hypotheses were not supported, namely, social class signalling (SCS) and snob effect (SE), status consumption (SC) and conspicuous consumption (CC), snob effect (SE) and conspicuous consumption (CC). As demonstrated in previous chapters, there are nuances regarding the consumption behaviour of different racial groupings in society (Nieftagodien & Van der Berg, 2007). This report's findings contributed to the body of knowledge regarding how black middle-income South Africans relate to the constructs mentioned above.

Besides, the hypotheses developed by this study were characterised as external factors influencing conspicuous consumption, as opposed to internal factors. The application and outcome of these factors vary based on the cultural and demographic context under which they are conducted (Shukla, 2008). This report demonstrated how these external factors were applicable within a South African context. Furthermore, as indicated in chapter two (2), the luxury goods industry is comprised of multiple product segments. This report contributed to how conspicuous consumption manifests itself within the luxury fashion goods segment in South Africa.

6.3.2 Managerial implications

In addition to its theoretical value, this report also has practical implications for marketing practitioners and industry professionals. This study's results are expected to add value to marketing practitioners working in the luxury goods industry, especially those interested in establishing and growing luxury fashion brands in South Africa. As mentioned in previous chapters, South Africa is becoming an increasingly important market for luxury goods brands (Steihler, 2017). It was also mentioned earlier in this report that the black middle-income consumers are the engine that will drive the South African economy's growth (Steyn, 2013). Therefore, it is imperative for marketers interested in the growth prospects that the South African market promises to understand the South African black middle-income consumer's psyche and decision-making motives.

The first practical implication for marketers is to appreciate that South Africa has an active luxury fashion goods consumer base and that black middle-income earners are an essential segment of the market. Marketers, therefore, ought to ensure their marketing strategies are well crafted to resonate with the black South African consumer. Secondly, black middle-income South African consumers place a high value on conspicuous consumption. Marketers of luxury fashion brands could benefit from this by ensuring their brand communications and messaging reflect the needs and desires of the black middle-income consumer in South Africa – ie., the need to be respected and admired by others.

There is value in brand communications that depict an aspirational lifestyle that consumers could identify with. This study suggested that marketing practitioners could extract value in the consumer's need to display their social class status to others through the fashion brands they adorn conspicuously – i.e., SCS and CC. This need for social class signalling is also influenced by one's peer group. The use of brand ambassadors and influencers in marketing campaigns presents marketers with an opportunity to benefit from these linkages – i.e., SCS and BWE. The findings of this study also implied that when it came to status consumption, people consumed luxury goods not for purposes of "showing off" – i.e., SC and CC. However, status consumption (SC) was driven by the need to "fit-in" (BWE) with one's peers as well as distinguishing oneself from others (SE). To that end, marketers need to successfully build luxury fashion brands that are perceived to be status symbols and therefore, status-conferring. Marketers must appreciate that a brand's symbolism is a crucial criterion that consumers consider when purchasing luxury fashion items.

Essentially, marketers could extract value from this study by positioning their brands to be perceived as tangible conduits of status. In this context, these luxury fashion brands would be perceived to offer consumers status-related benefits such as success, wealth, privilege, prestige, uniqueness - beyond their functional or utilitarian value. These are the practical implications of conspicuous consumption. However, all of this has to be done in a manner that resonates particularly with the needs of the black middle-income consumer living in South Africa.

The managerial implications discussed in this section were intended to benefit marketers in building luxury fashion brands that command strong brand equity and consistent growth in volume sales within the South African market.

6.4 Limitations

No study is without limitations, and this report is no exception. While this report explored antecedents of conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by black middle-income South Africans, it did not consider other variables that could have been applicable in addressing the research questions posed by this study. It was explained in previous chapters of this report that the conspicuous consumption of luxury goods may be characterised into two (2) categories – i.e., internal and external motives. The external motives were not explored in their entirety in this study, and the internal motives were not explored at all. Some of these external and internal motives included financial value, usability value, quality value, self-identity value and hedonic value. There is an opportunity for these variables to be explored by future studies within the context of conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by black middle-income South Africans.

In addition, the demographic profile of respondents used in this study was limited to black Africans who were middle-income earners. The affluent consumer segment was not considered, although they may very well be active participants of conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods. Also, other racial groups residing in South Africa were not considered by this study. The implications thereof are that this report does not give a complete picture of the demographic nature of conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods in South Africa, even though other racial groups may be a lucrative market for luxury clothing, this study did not consider them.

Furthermore, this study was limited to South Africa. It would be interesting to understand how this study's findings apply to other emerging markets in Africa. This study was also limited to one (1) segment of the luxury consumer goods category. This study did not consider other luxury goods segments, such as cars and jewellery. However, it was mentioned in previous chapters of this report that consumers consider these categories for conspicuous consumption purposes. Finally, this report was limited to consumers' consumption behaviour; it did not explore the extent to which marketing activities by luxury fashion brands influence conspicuous consumption.

6.5 Recommendations for future research

The limitations outlined in the previous section (6.5) necessitated that future research be conducted in the areas identified. It is recommended that future research be conducted, which takes into consideration external motives of conspicuous consumption, which were not explored by this study, namely, financial value, usability value and quality value. It is crucial to understand how external motives, in their broader sense, influence conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods in South Africa. In addition, a separate study ought to be conducted, which explores the internal motives of conspicuous consumption among black middle-income South Africans. These internal motives include constructs such as self-identity and hedonic value, among others. The upper-middle-class and affluent consumer segments of black South Africans are an attractive demographic for future research. There is an opportunity to investigate whether this group of consumers practice conspicuous consumption and the motives thereof. Since this group of people are considered high-income earners, it is assumed that they could afford luxury fashion goods.

Future research needs to be conducted beyond the scope of black middle-income South Africans. There are other racial groups in South Africa, and it would be interesting to see whether the conceptual model adopted by this study is applicable across racial demographics in the country. A study of this nature would give a broader perspective into the nature of conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion brands in South Africa. This study's conceptual model ought to be applied in other African countries to test its robustness and repeatability. Africa is an important market for luxury fashion goods, and understanding how consumers from different countries related to conspicuous consumption would be a valuable exercise, especially for practitioners interested in growing their luxury brands in Africa. The same argument could be made for luxury goods segments outside of fashion; this area needs to be investigated to understand how categories such as jewellery and cars are acquired for conspicuous consumption purposes. This report has demonstrated the antecedents of conspicuous consumption from the perspective of consumer behaviour. An important area for future research is focused on the marketing efforts of luxury fashion goods companies. In other words, do marketing initiatives used by luxury goods brands influence conspicuous consumption? In conclusion, conspicuous consumption is an area of study that requires further scholarly investigation, particularly in an emerging market such as South Africa.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Introduction

Good Day,

My name is Lebohang, and I am a master's student in the Masters in Management in Strategic Marketing at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating the drivers of conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods.

This research project aims to examine the factors that influence middle-income black South Africans to consume luxury fashion items conspicuously. The research is titled: Antecedents to the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by black middle-income South Africans.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to answer an online survey. This activity will involve answering whether you agree or disagree with the statement. The questionnaire should take around ten minutes.

You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research, and there are no penalties for not participating. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The survey will be completely confidential and anonymous and will not be asking for any identifying information, and the information you give to me will not be disclosed to anyone else. Should you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, you may stop the survey or resume another time. By completing and submitting this online survey, it is deemed as consensual.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher: Lebohang Mthombeni, 1408126@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor: Dr Fanny Saruchera, fanny.saruchera@wits.ac.za

Section A: General Information

The following section pertains to your personal information. Please indicate your answer by marking (X) in the block that best corresponds to your answer or fill in the provided spaces where appropriate.

A1. Please indicate your gender

Male	
Female	
Prefer not to say	

A2. Please indicate your racial profile

Black	
White	
Coloured	
Indian	
Other (specify)	

……………………………………………………

A3. Please indicate your highest academic qualification level

High School	
Diploma	
Degree	
Post Graduate Degree	
Other (specify)	

……………………………………………….

A4. Please indicate your age category

25-35	
36-45	
Other (specify)	

A5. Please indicate your occupation

Employed – formally	
Self-employed	
Unemployed	

A6. Please indicate your monthly household income

R0 – R 7,167	
R7,168 – R16,417	
R16,418 – R33,333	
R33,334 – R57,333	
R57,334 and above	

Section B

For each of the following statements, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement by making a mark (X) on the corresponding number in the 5-point Likert scale below, where **1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree.**

B1. Conspicuous Consumption

	1	2	3	4	5
I wear luxury fashion brands in order to signal my status and affluence to others.					
It is important that others know me as somebody who wears expensive, luxury fashion brands.					
I prefer that the logo of the luxury fashion brands I wear be visible to others.					
I wear luxury fashion brands to impress other people.					

B2. Social Class Signalling

	1	2	3	4	5
I believe social class status may be acquired by wearing luxury fashion brands.					
Wearing luxury clothing brands improves my social class status.					
In my opinion, it is possible to infer one's social class status by the luxury clothing brands they wear.					

B3. Bandwagon Factor

	1	2	3	4	5
I prefer wearing luxury brands which are popular among my social group.					
Before purchasing a luxury clothing item, it's important to know what my peers think of that brand.					
I usually keep up with luxury fashion trends by watching what others buy and wear.					
I tend to buy luxury brands that make me look good among my social group.					

B4. Status Consumption

	1	2	3	4	5
To me, a clothing item (product) is more valuable if it has status.					
In my opinion, luxury fashion brands have higher status and prestige compared to non-luxury brands.					
I believe that the prestige and status associated with luxury brands is transferred to me when I wear those brands.					

B6. Snob Factor

	1	2	3	4	5
To me, it’s important that the luxury brands I wear set me apart from others.					
I’m prepared to pay more money for rare and exclusive luxury brands.					
I only wear exclusive luxury fashion brands that are owned by a few people like myself.					

APPENDIX B – ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS - NOTICE

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Lebohang and I am a master's student in Strategic Marketing at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating the antecedents of conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion goods by middle-income black South Africans under the supervision of Dr Saruchera. The aim of this research project is to investigate the influencing factors that contribute to middle-income black South Africans displaying conspicuous consumption behaviour when consuming luxury fashion goods.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in answering a self-administered online questionnaire. This activity will involve answering whether you agree or disagree with the statements by filling out a 5-point Likert scale, where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=strongly Agree and will take around 10 minutes.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project, you will not receive any direct benefits from participation and there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The survey will be completely confidential and anonymous and will not be asking for any identifying information, and the information you give to me will not be disclosed to anyone else. Should you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, you may stop the survey or resume another time.

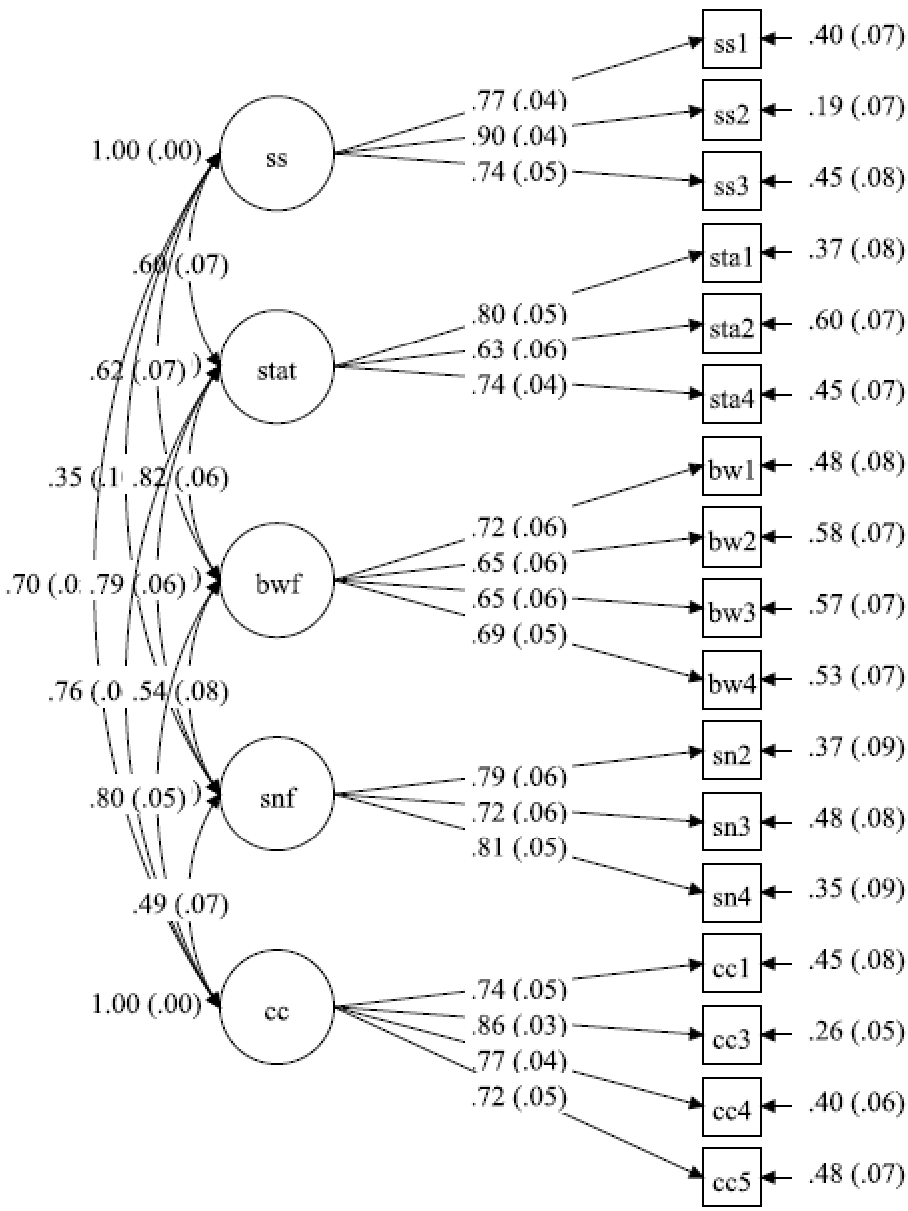
If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. The data collected from this research project will be stored in a password protected hard-drive and will be kept for 5 years. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrec-medical.researchoffice@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,
Lebohang Mthombeni

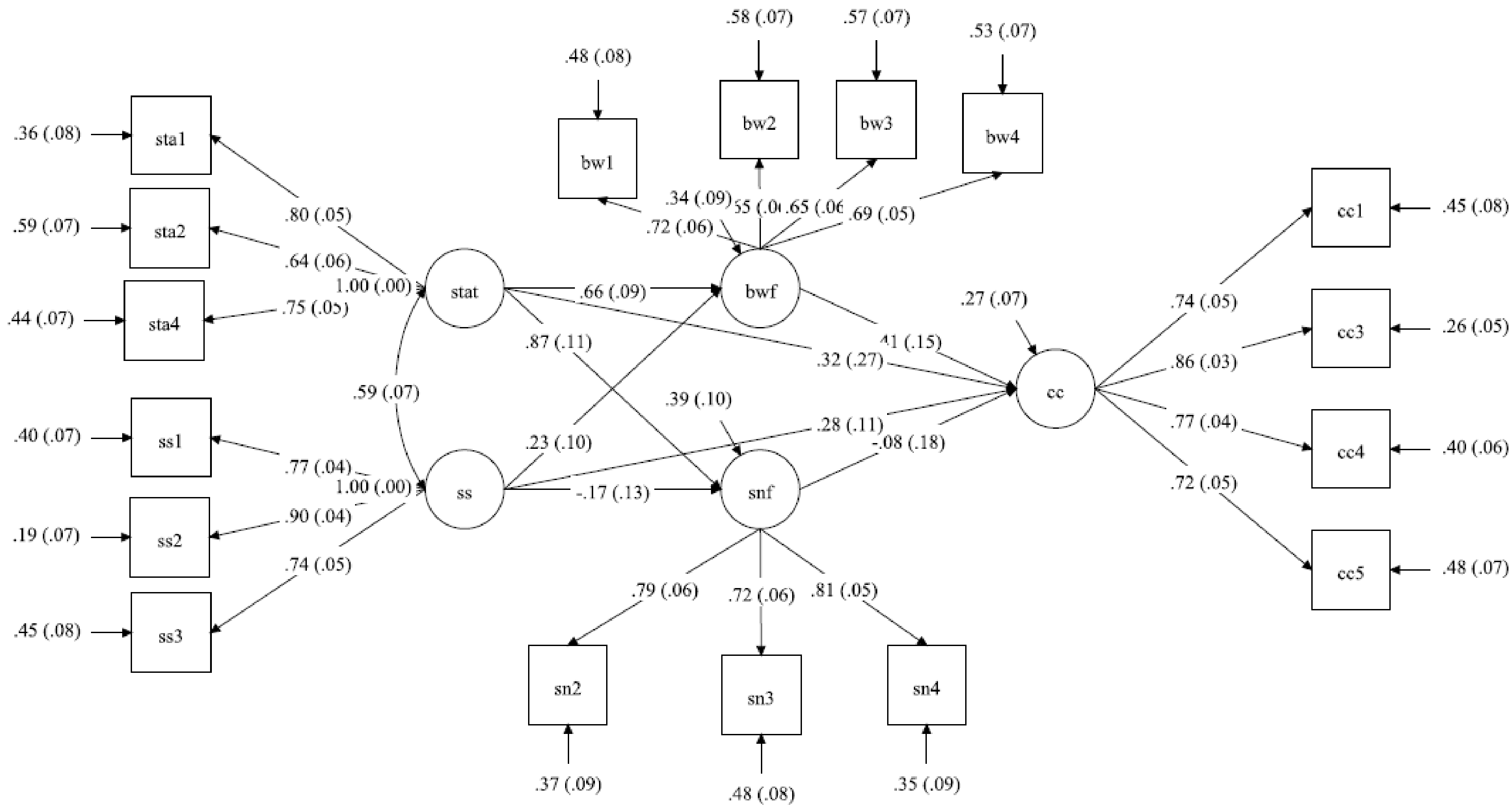
Researcher:
Lebohang Mthombeni, 1408126@students.wits.ac.za, 073 431 1127

Supervisor: Dr Fanny Saruchera, fanny.saruchera@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX C – MPLUS CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS RESULTS (CFA)



APPENDIX D – MPLUS SEM RESULTS



APPENDIX E – CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

To whom it may concern:

This is to certify that the manuscript/research project detailed below has been proof-read and language-edited.

Best Regards,

I.T. Innocent (B.A. Eng.)
Professional Language Editor

****

Manuscript Title:

ANTECEDENTS TO CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION OF LUXURY FASHION GOODS BY MIDDLE-INCOME BLACK SOUTH AFRICANS

Author:

Lebohang Mthombeni

Issued on:

4 March 2021

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