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Branding and Social Identity in Consumer Decisions and Retail Consumption in South Africa post covid-19 lockdown

Makhathini, Silindile Charmaine

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Branding and Social Identity in Consumer Decisions and Retail Consumption in South Africa post covid-19 lockdown.

Silindile C. Makhathini

2392940

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Management Strategic Marketing - (MMSM)

Johannesburg, 2023

DECLARATION

I, Silindile Makhathini, 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 Management Strategic Marketing (MMSM) in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Silindile Makhathini

Signed at……

On the ……

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Prof Thomas Dorson Anning for the supervision, the past 2 years have been the most difficult of my life, but he didn't give up on me. He remained resolute and demanded high standards until I managed to fulfil what I started. Thank you for the many chances given sir.

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I dedicate this Thesis to my children, Aphiwe and Thando Makhathini – Always believe in the power of education and strive for excellence. To my husband my rock, mother and granny who are my pillars, thank you for always being by my side, your support and patience means a lot. You were there when it got tough along the journey. This marks an end of an era, and I can't wait to see what God has in store for me next.

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To God be the glory.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

Consumer behavior continues to evolve, a phenomenon accentuated by various factors, notably the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Globally enforced lockdowns mandated by governments compelled individuals to seek new survival strategies, prompting shifts in their purchasing patterns. The restrictions on movement necessitated a surge in online shopping. Additionally, the pandemic fostered panic-driven bulk purchases, as consumers sought means of survival without adequate information on the duration of the crisis (Loxton et al., 2020).

1.2 The study background

1.2.1 *The effects of COVID19 lockdowns on product purchase decisions;*

This background thus delineates the purpose of this study, focusing on consumer behavior, a fundamental aspect of strategic marketing (Lim et al., 2023). Recent years have witnessed a growing body of research on consumer behavior, spurred by factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitating an enhanced understanding of consumer trends to adapt to evolving market dynamics. Notably, consumer behaviour alterations have been instigated by global events, including hurricanes, wars, political, socio-economic changes, and pandemics, all of which impact human life (Lim et al., 2023).

The objective of this research is to comprehend the relationship between brand choice and social identity, seeking to determine if these constructs drive consumer consumption during COVID-19 lockdowns and elucidate the decision-making processes consumers employ when purchasing products.

1.2.2 *Considerations of other consumer behaviour variables that contribute to the complexity of understanding consumers with practice;*

This study aims to investigate the under-researched areas, specifically social identity, and its impact on brand choice. The objective is to comprehend these relationships and assess the repercussions of changes imposed by lockdowns. Furthermore, the study seeks to understand the influences of these changes within marketing practices and brand building, with the goal of constructing brands with solid and relatable identities. Ultimately, the aim is to determine whether a consumer's social identity correlates with their brand choice. Brands play a significant role in a consumer's personal and social life, and understanding how consumers identify with brands at a more personal and profound level specifically, the relationship between social identity and brand choice—is a crucial aspect explored in this paper, representing an area currently understudied in marketing.

Consumer brand identification is influenced by how a consumer perceives themselves in relation to the brand image and identity conveyed through a brand's online advertising and overall communication with consumers (Raimondo et al., 2022; Graham and Wilder, 2020).

1.2.3 *The contribution to the body of work through researching under researched areas;*

Group dynamics and relationships are inherently political and layered, contributing significantly to an individual's sense of belonging, behavior, and choices. In this study, social identity is operationalized in its literal sense, given its broad and multi-layered variables. It is defined by assigning meaning to various factors such as gender, race, age, education, culture, religion, political affiliation, and others. For the purposes of this study, social identity was operationalized by posing questions regarding an individual's understanding of social identity, probing its application areas, examining their behavior within

groups, and investigating the impacts on their brand choices, particularly during purchasing decisions (Sobande, 2020; Raimondo et al., 2022).

The COVID-19 lockdowns necessitated new approaches to purchasing products, leading consumers to consider alternatives they may not have contemplated before the pandemic, prompting a shift in purchasing patterns. Similarly, brands had to adapt by revising strategies and implementing various updates in marketing approaches to engage customers remotely. This paper posits that the COVID-19 restrictions resulted in new shopping patterns and a surge in online buyers, proposing that brand choice is influenced, if not driven, by social identity, especially in the context of evolving consumer decisions during the pandemic.

1.3 Assumptions

Moreover, the assumption is that consumers predominantly opt for brands with which they can easily identify. If there is a resonance of social identity with a brand, the proposition is that brand choice will result in a positive online purchasing experience, particularly due to the constraints imposed by the lockdown period. Sobande (2020) delves into a social identity narrative, asserting that consumers are cognizant of their identity, engage in identity politics, and critically analyze branding issues, including mistakes made by brands. Sobande explores the concept of "woke-washing" and raises questions about the relationship between disingenuous brands and their involvement with identity politics, contending that such associations negatively impact brands.

The relationships consumers form with brands are deeper than commonly perceived, especially in the current era characterized by strong consumer voices on social media. Influencers appeal to consumers based on identity and self-branding, aligning with their target audiences. Consumer identity narratives are shaped by the content they consume, whether deemed politically correct or not. Consumers are drawn to individuals they can

associate with, admire, and follow-on social media, or influencers whose lifestyles are aspirational to them (Wang and Feng, 2022).

Brands play a significant role in a consumer's life, reflecting an individual's identity and influencing the branding of products sold in stores. The design and values communicated by brands should align to attract the target market's identity psychology, aiming for genuine brand resonance. There is also a growing interest in the performance of identity and personal branding by consumers (Wang and Feng, 2022).

1.4 Context of the study

The economic data from South Africa indicates that the SA economy was largely driven by consumption. This implies that South Africans were consumers who consumed more products rather than being producers of products. Consumption outweighed the production of goods and services, and skills produced, which was the reason for slow economic growth. However, consumption numbers were still on the rise, indicating that consumers were spending (Statistics SA, 2022). The paper explores variables hypothesized to contribute to the final decision for a product purchase, specifically brand choice and a consumer’s social identity, to understand the buying decisions of South African consumers and the relationship.

There is a growing expectation for businesses and brands to understand challenges faced by consumers and socio-economic challenges that are part of the communities they serve. Sustainability in business and societies will thrive if all stakeholders are coherent and work hand in hand for a common goal. This paper proposes that this can be achieved if marketers understand the growing voice of a consumer, ensure a correlation between brand and target consumer to enable meaningful marketing communication messages that will resonate at a much deeper and personal level with consumers. This psychological process, part of consumer behavior, will enable effective branding and marketing

strategies that will grow businesses and ensure future business sustainability (Lemon, 2016; Hagenbuch, 2020).

The idea was also to scrutinize ecommerce or online retail consumption for the same period to establish whether the pandemic influenced changes or different buying patterns for consumers, which the study aimed to investigate. The presumption is that online buying is now part of the mix in terms of stores. The study aims to present insights on whether social identity and brand choice identity align and understand its drivers of brand choice and ultimately purchasing decisions (Statistics SA, 2021; Statistics SA, 2022).

In conclusion, marketing, as a social science, is constantly evolving, and the challenge for marketers is to keep up with advancing trends and understand how consumers behaved. Marketing is a practice centred on people, and understanding the fundamentals is key, which is how people behave (Lim et al., 2023). The study proposes that marketers have a much bigger responsibility to society because products are sold to people, and must be sustainable as they are part of society (Raimondo et al., 2022).

Consumers who are not given a platform or an opportunity to identify with brands lose interest, and brands run the risk of being accused of woke-washing if there is no consistency in their brand identity (Sobande, 2020). Nguyen et al. (2012) explored the perceptions of targeted and non-targeted customers, their behaviours, feelings, and characteristics, and how the two groups responded to marketing tactics when marketing messages and nuances were targeted to them. This study proposes that individuals who are clear about who they are, their identities, choose brands that they can identify with and ultimately base their product purchasing decision based on how they perceive their chosen brand and how the brands perceive them as part of their social constructs.

1.5 Problem statement

1.5.1 *Main problem*

Business environments and market conditions are volatile due to shifts in consumer behavior trends and the influence of social media, creating space for disgruntled consumers to cause brand damage (Lim et al., 2023). This problem is worsening and becoming unpredictable as consumers constantly changing. Past societal issues have shaped brand narratives, and the challenge faced by brands is navigating communication plans that represent their target markets and building personas that match these. The contamination of communication through trends has a devastating effect on brands, largely based on identity politics seen through social media trends and the growing voice of consumers (Sobande, 2022).

Mishra and Bakry (2021) argue that the consumer relationship with a brand is fluid, changing over time as people evolve. Consumer changes are rapid, forcing brands and marketers to continuously adapt strategies, posing a challenge. This adds complexity to understanding consumer behavior and further fragments target groups, increasing consumer segments that need to be targeted.

Brand narratives are now strongly driven by consumers who co-create products and adverts suitable to their identity needs. This is evident in the growth of commentary about brands. Consumer demands are growing, and their critical voices are now loud and strong on social media, with more consumers gaining internet access, a global phenomenon (Graham & Wilder, 2020; Wang and Feng, 2022).

Consumers have become more vocal and almost dictate brand narratives; this cannot be solely planned and controlled by marketers. Brands that do not pay attention to understanding social issues and their impact on the communities

they are trying to serve are threatened and could lose value because consumers tend to punish them with their wallets by not selecting them in their purchasing decision process.

There is also a risk that brands could be deemed as woke-washing by using Black social injustice issues and ideas to promote products without contributing to social change. This research paper, however, highlights some of the topical social justice issues that impact consumer identity and brands. Moreover, it explores consumer culture and narratives driven by past societal issues, such as narratives addressing social reform issues like Black Excellence, Strong Black Women, and Mother, Black Lives Matter, which started as movements for change against racism towards black people. These issues impact marketing, particularly brands, as they are perceived to be an extension of the culture or a part of society. Consumers now demand authenticity from brands, and the expectation is that brands should at least take a stand to defend or be sensitive to social challenges. If there is no authenticity, the risk or threat posed by the lack of participation or understanding will ultimately affect the business bottom line (Sobande, 2020; Wang and Feng, 2022).

The research problem is that as consumers evolve they now make exclusive decisions. This is due to the rise of ecommerce and digital marketing which limits branding and marketing activities in-store.

1.5.2 *Sub-problems*

The sub-problem explored in this study is the disparity between a brand's identity and an individual's identity, which poses a threat to product purchases and ultimately brand loyalty. Consumers are inclined to refrain from purchasing products from companies that do not represent or include them in their advertising; people demand much more from brands (Mishra & Bakry, 2021).

Brand clutter poses a real issue for marketers in retail, and retailers are meticulous in selecting brands, sometimes limiting access to markets for SMEs. The question here is the understanding of why South Africans choose and prefer international or European brands over locally produced products, often due to perceived quality. This study aims to ascertain whether there is a relationship between a consumer's personal social identity and the perceived brand identity and whether this drives brand choice. South Africans are brand-conscious, and there is a growing prevalence of luxury European brands in the South African market and these brands are linked to certain identities. These luxury brands and products are purchased due to quality, brand prominence, or status consumption. However, this study aims to demonstrate that there is a much deeper psychological and behavioural issue influencing this behavior, suggesting a correlation between personal and social identity issues with every purchasing and consumption decision (Kauppinen-Räisänen, Björk, Lönnström, & Jauffret, 2018).

Brand success is determined by repeat purchases, ultimately leading to brand loyalty. Consumers seek brand resonance at a much deeper level. Marketing communication messages should reflect this and target consumer identity, providing solutions to their problems in the messaging. Consumer decisions are based on various factors, including product, price, and psychological needs, whether directly or indirectly considered (Rather, 2018; Mishra & Bakry, 2021).

1.6 Objectives of the study

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the relationship between an individual's social identity and brand choice identity among online shoppers.
2. To determine the relationship between an individual's social identity and their product purchase decisions.
3. To assess the influence of brand choice identity on an individual's product purchase decision.

1.7 Significance of the study

The study is significant as its objective is to comprehend the consumer perspective concerning social identity and brand choice identity, contributing to the existing body of work, and offering a fresh perspective to branding theory, particularly in the understudied realm of social identity. Moreover, it underscores the importance of brand architecture, emphasizing ethical branding and the need for a new perspective to align brand identity, thereby enhancing, and adding a layer to modern marketing approaches (Ahmad, 2017; Puente-Díaz & Cavazos-Arroyo, 2017; Syed Alwi, et al., 2017; Mishra & Bakry, 2021).

The study aims to scrutinize social identity and brand choice, testing hypotheses to understand the relationship between these constructs and ultimately assessing whether these variables impact product purchase decisions. The relevance of branding is heightened with the surge of ecommerce and digital marketing. Consumers now make exclusive purchase decisions without the influence of in-store marketing and promotions. While online shopping offers convenience to consumers, it poses a paradox for marketers. This study suggests that strong brands with high resonance will be chosen during purchasing decisions. Marketing influence has shifted from physical stores to online purchases, as consumers spend more time online, interacting with family and friends, shopping, or planning future purchases (Brand Management, 2019; Zhang, Kashmiri, & Cinelli, 2019; Graham & Wilder, 2020).

P&G held a market leadership position in brand management dating back to the early 1940s. Major corporations like P&G and Unilever have expanded their global marketing teams and departments over the years, staying abreast of marketing trends and investing substantial budgets in creating structures and departments. This demonstrates that these multinationals plan, placing value and time in understanding consumer behavior and crafting brand strategies to build sustainable brands that have endured for many decades due to the emphasis

placed on marketing and brand management (Brand Management, 2019; Schroeder, 2015).

Furthermore, businesses invest significantly in market research to comprehend the constantly evolving and ever-changing consumers, enabling correct segmentation and targeting, as these strategies must evolve to keep pace with changing consumer preferences. Consumer research is an invaluable tool for businesses to gain a deep understanding and perspective, enabling them to appeal to the needs of consumers and truly resonate with them through the right marketing communication and relevant touch points.

1.8 Delimitations of the study

Numerous marketing theories and constructs exist, and the challenge was to narrow the study down to the relevant information required. While these constructs aren't necessarily novel, the purpose is to reframe them within the context of multiple generations, test their applicability, and contribute to marketing theory. Marketing, as a science, differs in practice and has evolved over time, introducing new principles that may not have existed a decade ago, such as digital, ecommerce, and social media marketing.

This study emphasizes the importance of understanding and integrating these modern methods, theories, and strategies with traditional marketing approaches that remain relevant in choosing a strategy to market a brand, product, or service. The study introduces complexity within the social sciences, proposing that constructs like self-identity and social identity should correlate with brand identity to influence consumer decisions. Furthermore, it provides a different narrative for segmentation and understanding consumers to achieve true brand resonance.

Social media access has provided people with a platform to hold brands accountable. Consumers in South Africa have become more socially conscious, demanding that brands do the same. This presents an opportunity for brands to

grow by aligning with their target markets but also poses a threat due to the historical impartiality of the country. The study is quantitative, targeting Johannesburg and Durban residents with a certain level of education or currently registered at a University. It will be shared on online to assess interest and whether consumers take time to contribute to knowledge. Delimitations may involve obtaining the right numbers and ensuring the quality of information in terms of responses.

The growing consumer voice cannot be ignored, as consumers become more vocal. Brands must navigate this space with caution regarding what this means and whether their brand identity and promise are authentic to consumers who scrutinize brands and communication, demanding more from companies. These themes are not mutually exclusive; this study aims to delve deep into the impact of branding, hopefully confirming a relationship between identity constructs and consumer emotions, ultimately providing knowledge about what consumers deem important from brands that are part of their lives and the type of brand communication they respond to when purchasing products.

For research purposes, the following elements will be excluded within the context of the variables in this study, though references will be made:

1. Brand substitution
2. Brand loyalty
3. Brand equity
4. Return on investment (ROI)
5. Customer strategies, as the focus is on unpacking the motivation for consumption
6. Customer loyalty, as it relates to customer value
7. Customer relationship management strategies, as this study purely focuses on consumers and consumption.

1.9 Definition of terms

Branding is a process of positioning brands in the minds of consumers to create competitive advantage by use of logos and trademarks on product packaging or marketing materials relating to a particular brand. (ButoracovÁ ŠIndleryovÁ, 2020)

Brand management defines the management of consumer perceptions for the brand and the positioning of brands in the minds of a consumers to gain competitive advantage (ButoracovÁ ŠIndleryovÁ, 2020; Kaewpramkusol, 2019)

Brand clutter is a state of multiple of overloading consumers with multiple brand messages, visuals and words that do not relate to their needs or fall within their purchase consideration, decisions and ultimately consumption choice (Khamis, 2019).

Brand value is creating business value through the execution of effective marketing strategies to position the brand as a consumption choice for consumers. This is measured through brand specific measures like brand awareness, consumer interaction and ultimately sales yielded from the product (Mendez, 2016).

Brand awareness is a term that relates to the degree in which consumers can identify the brand trademark or logo on packaging and differentiates the brand from competitor brands. This has evolved to more than just logos to what the brands stand for in terms of personality and identity (ButoracovÁ ŠIndleryovÁ, 2020).

Brand identity is the image that is created for products and it is communicated through tag lines and hashtags. These are statements that are associated with brand to assert its identity in society. These messages also communicate the

brand personality and appearance, this is done by colour, design, font, copy, slogans applied in the communication designs (McGowan, 2017; He, 2012).
Corporate identity relates to the company or corporate branding. This is a brand identity created for the recognition of the company brand which sometimes differs from company brands or products branded for easy consumer identification (Watkins, 2016; Puente-DÌaz, 2017; Giovanis, 2017).

Self-identity reflects the way in which one sees themselves, within a marketing context consumer's identification process varies, people identify differently in society and consumers are challenging social stereotypes that relate to gender, race, and sexual preference. Consumers identify with groups in society according to classifications or society groups represented, religion, sports, political etc. (Watkins, 2016; Puente-DÌaz, 2017; Giovanis, 2017).

Social identity is defined as an individual's self-concept that comes from being a member of a social group. This remains under explored in marketing because of the racial or racism connotations however the minority groups are growing and they demand to be represented by their favourite brands (Mishra & Bakry, 2021).

Consumption is the rate at which products or services are consumed and measured within a specified period through specified means like purchase (Iqani, 2015).

1.10 Assumptions

The first assumption is that brand identity and consumers' social identity should align with a brand's identity to yield successful marketing strategies and meaningful approaches to marketing campaigns. The study proposes that brands true to their identity, and those with shared identities with their target markets, are likely to appeal to the conscious needs of consumers, achieving true resonance. These brands will remain at the forefront of consumers' minds and are likely to

be considered and selected during purchase decisions (Khodabandeh & Lindh, 2020; Raimondo et al., 2022).

The second assumption relates to product consumption, suggesting that branding drives consumer purchase decisions because consumers prefer brands they trust, those familiar to them, and those they associate with and resonate with. Brands encompass more than just signs and logos; when branding is executed effectively, brands yield high value and are trusted by loyalists, representing items that bring quality, values, and exclusivity, elevating their social status and how they identify within relevant communities. Marketing professionals must therefore possess a deeper understanding of their markets and the ability to comprehend consumer needs, including identity issues faced by their target markets. These issues could compromise future value creation and the customer lifetime value of the brands and customers they are responsible for.

Thirdly, the assumption is that consumers resonate more with brands or companies with strong social identity strategies. This is easily observable with the rise of social media or influencer marketing communication, ultimately improving product or brand choices during purchases and brand consumption.

Lastly, the assumption is that brand loyalty is built through strong branding strategies implemented by marketers. However, the context of market position or representation will yield to brands that deeply understand their consumers, segment their markets by positioning communication to address consumer pain points, and, most importantly, resonate with consumers at the core of who they are as individuals and the communities they belong to (Fatma, 2016).

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Marketing strategy by defined as a firm's plans and goals to gain market share and competitive advantage against its competitors (West et al., 2006). Whilst marketing operational plans involve the planning and execution of the 7 P's of marketing to customers which are namely; Product, Price, Place, Promotion, and Processes, People & Physical evidence. Planning a good marketing mix requires a thorough analysis of the target market and segmentation. A marketing strategy, if well executed, will consider a vigorous marketing mix that is designed for a particular segment in mind (West et al., 2006; Mohd, et al., 2022).

Mohd, et al. (2022) further explores the different definitions of a marketing strategy, firstly poses that target markets determine the firm's position through their course of action and asserts with another definition that a strategy is successful when a product is aligned to the target market and finally surmises with the Kolter definition of a marketing strategy, a value generation for customers and shareholders. This research I grounded in marketing theory and aims to add to the body of marketing knowledge by delving deeper into consumer behavior variables that are under researched. Thus beyond the operational and strategic planning processes, marketing strategy requires insights that are grounded in market research for a strategy to be successful (West et al., 2006).

The paper focuses on consumer behaviour theory and hypotheses other variables that are under in marketing theory. Consumer behaviour is highly researched in many instances when drastic economic shifts and patterns occur, for example economic recessions, acts of God etc. Yeoman, I. (2013) posited the importance of consumer behavior studies in the sphere of revenue management for tech savvy consumers and concluded that consumer behaviours have not been jettisoned, there ought to be more studies relating consumer behaviour. In the context of this study the global shift that was researched was the effects of the COVID19 global pandemic, to study if there had been a shift in consumer

behaviour and more importantly in consumer purchase decisions and an individual’s social identity structure and how that relates to consumer behaviour studies and their arrival at product purchase decisions.

Social identity theory has been a part of consumer behavior and branding studies since the 1970s. However, contemporary research papers examined for this study indicate that it remains an understudied subject, with significant gaps in marketing theory regarding how social and personal identity theory impact brand performance, product purchases, and consumption. In fact, Sohaib & Wu (2023) argue that brand equity is not solely driven by product purchases; their study demonstrated that constructs such as brand love, brand experience, and brand engagement contribute to the success of a product (Raimondo et al., 2022).

Consumer social identity influences the value system, ideas, and belief systems that individuals are born into and adopt within society and communities. Brands are integral to people's lives and often play a role in their upbringing. People may grow, evolve, and make choices, but they often reflect back on brands that have shaped their upbringing. Consumers are integral parts of society, prompting marketers to pay more attention to issues that may not directly impact internal brand identity. More research should be conducted to explore the inward effects on brands, such as the influence of social identity on brand identity. If the assumption is that brands are part of the communities they serve, marketers should understand broader societal issues and find relevant ways to resonate and communicate with consumers (Rather, 2018; Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2018).

Identity performance and self-branding are constructs proposed in this study that potentially drive consumer behavior and brand choice. Thus, the study posits that self-narratives determine brand choice, and repeat purchases among consumers will ultimately be driven by brand love, determined by a consumer's cognitive and self-congruity with a particular brand (Sohaib & Wu, 2023; Wang & Feng, 2022).

This paper explores the relationship between a consumer's social identity and brand identity and its effects on brand choice. Self-identity defines how a consumer views themselves, their image or brand association and more importantly, the study seeks to explore the real drivers of brand affinity. The assumption is that consumers behave differently in social groups, aiming to understand whether social identity within groups could potentially influence brand prominence. The paper argues that signalling behaviour in social groups should be a focal point in brand management studies (Raimondo et al., 2022; Graham & Wilder, 2020; Wang & Feng, 2022).

2.2 Definition of topic or background - Theoretical review

2.2.1 *Social identity Theory*

Social identity guides individuals' behavior within a group, encompassing common identifiers and, most importantly, belief systems. Social issues and narratives affecting consumers as a group play a part in the homogeneity factors influencing consumer behavior in marketing. People are integral parts of societies and social groups, and certain brands resonate with specific groups through narratives, whether positive or negative. Negative narratives can unite people against a brand, holding it accountable for lacking authenticity, a phenomenon termed "woke-washing" (Sobande, 2020).

Sobande (2020) focuses on the woke-washing of brands, addressing the threatening effects of brands adopting fake identities and riding trends for popularity. However, the study falls short in providing necessary guidance for understanding new consumer behavioural issues and narratives shaping brands. Importantly, it fails to address brand resonance guidelines to assist marketers in navigating a constantly changing consumer landscape and gaining a deeper personal connection to understand the reasons driving brand choice.

Brands are integral to society, and different social groups resonate differently with branding nuances, depending on a brand's narrative (Raimondo et al., 2022).

Consumers tend to form groups or align with negative sentiments about opposing groups, especially when circumstances push them to default to their social groups. The expectation is that social identity serves as the unifying factor challenging the status quo, and brand-consumer identity is a salient construct this research aims to test. Social identity represents a person's view of themselves in relation to a group, with a crucial focus on understanding how these identities relate to branding theories and address the complex and understudied issues of social identity (Raimondo et al., 2022; Graham & Wilder, 2020).

Recent times have witnessed various social issues related to brands driving socio-political movements, such as 'Black Lives Matter' and 'Me Too,' among others. Consumers hold brands accountable for ignoring or being silent on these issues, terming inauthentic responses as "woke-washing" (Sobande, 2020). Guj (2023) argues that women are developing and building their social identities on social media, emphasizing the salience of social identity. Marketers should be part of this process, understanding consumer segments at a deeper level with authenticity and empathy for social identity narratives and conversations.

As individuals advance and develop stronger identities and ideologies, this impacts communities and groups, shaping a social narrative that constructs the future of brands and consumption choices, ultimately influencing brand choice and consumer purchase decisions. Marketers bear a significant responsibility in understanding and participating in social identity narratives and conversations, as brand narratives shape society through storytelling. Building good stakeholder relationships requires alignment between brand and consumer identity for business sustainability, brand love, equity, and resonance with consumers (Sohaib & Wu, 2023; Guj, 2023; McGowan, 2023).

Consumers grapple with various issues, including identity, sexual identity, personal values, heritage, cultural issues, and defining their future in a constantly changing world, as observed in South Africa. Osakwe et al. (2020) make a case about brand orientation, building, and identity of SMEs, identifying brand identity

as a resource that can shift customer attitudes. This study suggests that identity issues are related and should be examined simultaneously. The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of how brand identity, personal identity, and social identity relate and how these variables impact the branding process and, ultimately, consumer consumption decisions. Brands, created to meet consumer needs and satisfaction, are an integral part of society, necessitating a more profound understanding of consumer behavior and an exploration of why social and consumer identity issues matter in today's rapidly evolving society (He, 2012; McGowan, 2017; Osakwe et al., 2020).

Numerous macro-economic factors, including political and social issues, influence consumer and social identity. Recently, the global pandemic, COVID-19, has become a significant factor related to social well-being in the macro-economic perspective. This pandemic was abrupt, with no globally implemented economic plans to address its effects and the strain it posed on global economies. It forced businesses to change or evaluate their strategies, ultimately impacting the way consumers make decisions and the choices they make for their families and households.

2.2.2 *Brand identity*

This paper proposes that consumers resonate with brands and companies that understand their social identity, essentially achieving congruence between a brand's identity, corporate identity, and an individual's or consumer's identity (Mishra & Bakry, 2021). Brand identity is sometimes reflected in a company's corporate social responsibility strategies, which ultimately shape the future of companies and products in the market (Fatma, 2016; Singh, 2019; Giovanis, 2017).

Consumers actively engage with brands online through social media, enhancing their ability to communicate and influence brand and social narratives. The impact of online communication is increasingly evident, allowing brands and consumers

to share stories for resonance. Social media has empowered consumers with greater communication power and content creation capabilities (Watkins, 2016).

Theoretical frameworks related to branding aim to provide marketers with insights into a consumer's cognitive and psychological states or behaviours. This paper asserts that social identity strategies are often overlooked and should be prioritized to better understand consumers, leading to value creation for marketers and businesses. Marketers craft brands to convey messages about products, strategically positioning them to appeal and attract consumers using logos and packaging. Successful product positioning involves considerations such as correct pricing, timely availability, and alignment of product attributes with the brand and its identity (Brand Management, 2019; Puente-Díaz & Cavazos-Arroyo, 2017; Schroeder, 2015).

Sohiab & Wu (2023) suggest that brand equity is influenced by various variables, including relatively new constructs such as brand love, which is under-researched but evolving in marketing theory, alongside brand experience and engagement. The study demonstrates that these constructs impact a consumer's culture, self-expression, individuality, and social status. Mishra & Bakry's (2021) review makes a compelling case for brand-consumer alignment in terms of identity, emphasizing the need for congruence between a brand's identity and a consumer's personal identity. If brands can appeal to consumers in dimensions such as aesthetics, entertainment, and education, as proposed in the study, this will enhance brand love and positively impact brand equity (Mishra & Bakry, 2021; Sohaib & Wu, 2023).

2.2.3 *Product purchase decision*

Malhotra and Ramalingam (2022) explore the impact of product purchase decisions within the context of the Indian nation, investigating the mediating role of national identity and consumer guilt. Grounded in social identity theory (SIT), their study establishes a positive relationship between product purchase decisions and national identity. This underscores the significance of SIT in

marketing theory, as the study's hypotheses are validated, revealing that consumers are significantly influenced by factors intrinsic to their core identity. Whether or not consumer guilt mediates this relationship, the study participants demonstrate a patriotic inclination towards products produced domestically as opposed to imported ones.

Product purchase decisions are multifaceted, influenced by various macro and microeconomic conditions shaping consumer behavior. While marketers can leverage the traditional 4 Ps of marketing, their control is limited, especially in the face of dynamic economic circumstances (Merlino et al., 2021).

In a study by Merlino et al. (2021) focusing on milk consumption, drivers of product purchase decisions were investigated, particularly in the choice between freshly pasteurized and UTH processed milk. The research identified diverse factors influencing these decisions, with motivations differing between the two groups. Variables such as price, taste, family size, age, health consciousness, consumption habits, and place of purchase were significant determinants. This highlights that product purchase decisions are rarely dictated by a single factor, emphasizing the necessity of considering multiple variables contingent on the nature of the product and the specific study context.

2.3 Empirical review

Social identity theories, examined for the purpose of this study, posit that social identity functions within the framework of comparing one's personal identity to that of the group to which one belongs or identifies. This theory suggests that social identity operates within the paradox of evaluating the identities of in-groups versus out-groups. In this process, individuals measure resonant identities, even if they include negative constructs of out-groups, which contribute significantly to a person's strong identity within their in-group (Tragakis, 2006; Mishra & Bakry, 2021; Oniku & Anthonia, 2022).

Brands are integral to communities and social identity constructs, which, despite their seeming complexity, define the core of an individual. These constructs encompass various factors such as age, education, social class, and cultural identities related to language, ethnicity, and tribe. The literature review introduces other constructs like acculturation, exploring the assimilation of different cultures and influences as people increasingly travel and reside in areas beyond their homelands (Rudd, 2010; Tragakis, 2006).

Social identity theory is contextualized within the comparison of social groups, impacting an individual's psychological state, and contributing to their personal identity. Consumers may resonate with different group identities, forming personalized identities that define who they are. The complexity of social identity constructs arises from multiple layers and variables, such as the evolving landscape of sexual identities, where consumers identify beyond traditional male or female classifications.

Social identity, as a construct, is complex and subject to various translations or interpretations. For this study, social identity is broadly defined as a person's own identity and its relation to the group to which they belong or identify. Marketers face the challenge of understanding and resonating with an ever-evolving human population. As education levels rise, communities increasingly view brands as part of their identity, necessitating marketers to align brand identities with target markets and create personas that resonate with customers. This paper emphasizes the importance of comprehending group identities within an individual's social identity, acknowledging the impossibility of understanding each person's identity individually. Social identity serves as a mediator, providing insights for marketers to position effective strategies and drive brand choice (Sohaib, 2023; Mishra & Bakry, 2021; Harris-Lagoudakis, (2023).

While brand choice and product purchase decisions are influenced by numerous factors, this study introduces a novel approach by presenting social identity as a variable that is under-researched due to its nuanced nature. Despite the

complexity attached to it, marketers need to understand other variables contributing to the complexity of marketing, particularly in comprehending the identity of their primary target market. Whether the hypotheses test positively or not, the study advocates exploring social identity issues and dissecting social identity constructs, especially in the era of social media and the increasing influence of influencer marketing, where influencers capitalize on identity constructs to drive brand choice and resonate with audiences (Farivar & Wang, 2022).

2.3.1 *Brand Choice*

A profound comprehension of consumer behavior is essential for fostering brand loyalty and influencing brand choice. Recent research advocates further exploration of constructs like brand love, self-congruity (linked to social identity), and brand engagement to unravel factors enhancing brand equity (Mishra & Barky, 2021; Sohaib & Wu, 2023). In the face of educated and discerning consumers, demands for value creation have surged, leading to the co-creation of brand narratives via social media to mirror individual identities (Mishra & Barky, 2021; Sohaib & Wu, 2023).

Brands risk losing consumers without genuine alignment and personal connections, resulting in avoidable market share losses. Strategies for achieving resonance, including understanding the authentic drivers of consumer connection, are crucial (Botha et al., 2020). The theoretical framework underscores the significance of comprehending the motivations behind product consumption.

Qasim (2017) emphasizes the pivotal role of social identity in shaping consumers' environmental perceptions and food choices. Social identity acts as a driver of consumer purchase intention, influencing preferences for businesses aligning with their social groups (Castro et al., 2018; McGowan et al., 2017).

Corporate identity strongly influences consumers' product choices, creating an association between product brands and the perceived quality and trustworthiness of corporate or company brands (Giovanis & Tsoukatos, 2017; Puente-DÌaz & Cavazos-Arroyo, 2017). The paper proposes that when a consumer's social identity correlates with a brand, the brand becomes an integral part of the individual's life, fostering brand loyalty and equity (Sohaib, 2023).

Brands like Nike exemplify the successful integration of identity and values. By actively participating in social movements and promoting positive narratives, Nike has built an identity around social consciousness and progressiveness. This strategic alignment with societal values contributes to Nike's brand success, evident in its substantial sales figures (Hashem, 2021).

Nando's South Africa adopts a humorous approach to addressing political news, leveraging social identity conversations to build brand awareness and loyalty. However, navigating social consciousness and identity in advertising remains a debated topic, as evident in the controversies surrounding various brands (McGowan, 2017).

Consumer demands for brands to represent them in advertising have led to a shift in marketing strategies, particularly in addressing marginalized groups. However, the authenticity of brands in aligning with consumer identities is scrutinized to avoid accusations of "woke-washing." Marketers are urged to find congruency between consumer and brand identities to foster positive responses and achieve brand resonance (Ordenes et al., 2019; Sobande, 2020; Sohaib, 2023). Harris-Lagoudakis, K. (2023) flags the effects of online shopping channels on brand choice, product exploration and price elasticity’s, the paper cites the many driving forces of product purchase decisions.

Responsible marketing, grounded in understanding social identity narratives, is proposed as a pathway to sustainability, fostering long-term engagement and loyalty. Aligning brand and consumer identities is crucial for consumer loyalty,

benefiting both society and shareholders (Hagenbuch & Mgrdichian, 2020). This research aims to contribute to the field by examining the interplay between social identity and brand choice identity in driving product purchase decisions and proposing ways to educate consumers about the importance of identity alignment for resonance (Goldsmith & Clark, 2012; Qasim et al., 2019; Sobande, 2020; Sohaib, 2023).

2.3.2 *Conceptual framework*

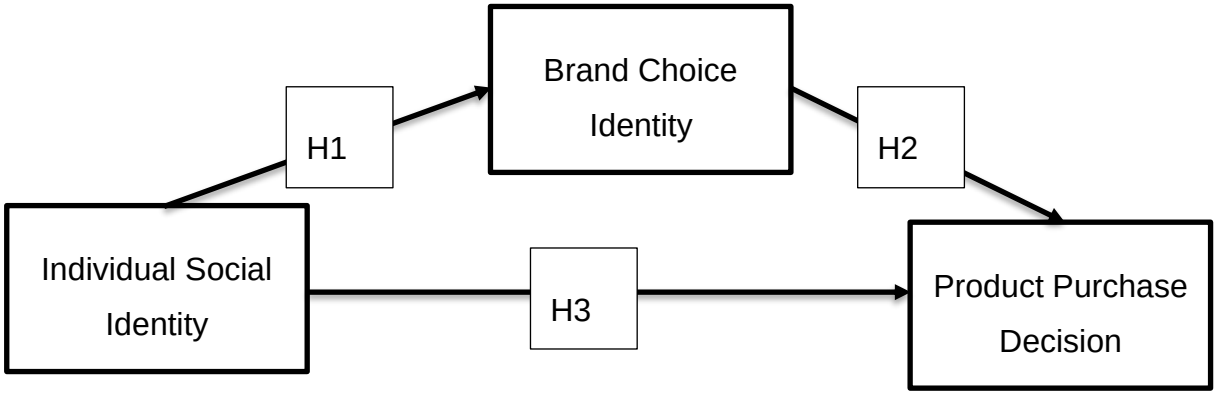


Figure 2-1: The proposed conceptual model

2.4 Hypothesis development

2.4.1 *Individual social identity and brand choice identity*

The primary hypothesis posited in this paper asserts that social identity has a positive impact on brand choice identity. Brand identity, encapsulated in a narrative, shapes a brand's personality, significantly influencing how consumers perceive their social and personal identities in relation to the brand. Therefore, this paper contends that there exists a symbiotic relationship between a consumer's personal identity, their social identity, and a brand's identity. This hypothesis is firmly rooted in social identity theory, which underpins theories

concerning an individual's identity, their affiliation with in-groups, and the individual's self-perception (Baumeister, Scherer, & Wangenheim, 2015; Sohaib, 2023).

Baumeister, Scherer, & Wangenheim (2015) delves into the perception of service offerings for customers based on brand ownership and non-ownership. The study aimed to assess whether branding influences the attitudes of customers, regardless of brand ownership. Certain hypotheses were validated, indicating that customers affiliated with a brand require more service and respond more positively to new offerings than those not associated with the brand. This paper introduces the social identity construct as a catalyst for brand choice, particularly in the context of online purchasing decisions that are often made without direct exposure to advertisements. This aspect remains understudied in contemporary marketing theory.

The hypothesis posits that social identity exerts a positive influence on brand choice identity, suggesting a profound connection that prompts consumers to select a brand subconsciously, viewing it as an integral part of their identity. This, in turn, diminishes the likelihood of brand switching. Brand choice, according to this perspective, is steered by factors beyond the brand's visual appeal, encouraging marketers to delve deeper into these underlying influences. By validating this hypothesis, the research contributes to the development of studies around social identity constructs, emphasizing their personal and non-political influence on consumer behavior (Oniku & Anthonia, 2022). The study therefore hypothesizes that;

H1: Individual social identity positively influences brand choice identity

2.4.2 *Individual social identity and product purchase decision*

Individual social identity is posited to exert a positive influence on product purchase decisions. Product consumption ensues when a consumer opts for a specific brand over others, and this study asserts that aligning an individual social

identity with a brand identity enhances the likelihood of a consumer choosing that brand. The deeper resonance between the consumer and the brand, driven by brand love, is proposed to be a key factor in fostering brand equity (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020; Sohaib, 2023).

In line with the call for brand behavior studies by Raimondo et al. (2022), who emphasize the global citizenship of consumers, the classification of brands becomes crucial, especially in the context of national and international brands. The study delves into the impact of consumer identity signalling concerning major and minority groups, aiming to discern the effects on brand prominence. The findings indicate that social groups indeed play a role in brand prominence, with lower brand identification observed when a minority group uses a brand relative to the majority group. This underscores the validity of the proposition that social identity positively influences product purchase decisions. It is hypothesized that;

H2: Individual social identity positively influences product purchase decision

2.4.3 *Brand choice and product purchase decision*

Brand choice serves as a pivotal metric for the success of any marketer, as it culminates in equity through product purchases. However, it is imperative to delve beyond the conventional factors of affordability or price and comprehend the nuanced drivers that operate within the consumer's subconscious and psychological state. This paper posits that individual social identity characteristics come to the forefront when consumers exhibit non-price-sensitive behavior. Marketers need to grasp these variables, as they wield significant influence when consumers navigate their choices. Attributes such as social class and status are intricately connected to consumption motivations, encompassing factors beyond affordability and disposable income, price elasticity’s as elucidated in the works of Botha et al. (2020) and Harris-Lagoudakis, K. (2023). The study hypothesizes that;

H3: Brand choice identity positively influences product purchase decision

2.5 Conclusion of Literature Review

The literature review chapter extensively explored the intricate relationship between social identity and consumer behavior, with a focus on brand choice and product consumption. Various studies, including those conducted by Mishra & Barky (2021) and Oniku & Anthonia, (2022), highlighted the crucial role of social identity theories in understanding how individuals perceive and engage with brands. The review provided a comprehensive examination of the complex dynamics surrounding social identity constructs, emphasizing factors such as age, education, cultural backgrounds, and emerging constructs like acculturation.

Moreover, the review shed light on the evolving nature of social identity in contemporary society, revealing how individuals now embrace diverse and intricate identities, including those related to sexual orientation, gender, and ethnicity. It underscored the profound impact of these intricate social identity constructs on brand resonance and, consequently, consumer choices. The exploration of social media and influencer marketing as prominent avenues for communicating social identity further highlighted the changing landscape of consumer-brand interactions.

The literature review also delved into the role of social consciousness and corporate identity, drawing insights from real-world examples such as Nike and Nando's. It examined how brands aligning themselves with societal issues and using humour and social commentary to engage consumers effectively. Additionally, the chapter underscored the importance of responsible marketing and how maintaining consumer loyalty through a nuanced understanding of social identity narratives can lead to positive outcomes for both brands and the broader communities they serve. Overall, the literature review has laid a solid foundation for the subsequent hypotheses and research propositions, urging marketers to navigate the intricate landscape of social identity for sustained success.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework employed in the present study. The discussion is organized into various sections, encompassing research philosophy, research approach, research strategy, research method choice, research time horizon, research techniques and procedures (population, sample size, and sampling method, data collection procedures, data collection instruments, pre-testing of the questionnaire), statistical data analysis and interpretation, validity and reliability, and ethical considerations. Each section is elaborated upon in subsequent parts of this chapter. A concluding section offers a summary of the key elements discussed.

3.2 Research philosophy

Academic studies have been undertaken to guide researchers in selecting appropriate research designs tailored to the specific context of their study. In the current academic inquiry, the chosen research method aligns with the nature of the study. Abutabenjeh & Jaradat (2018) present philosophical worldviews associated with various research designs, proposing the most suitable worldview for each type of study. Notably, three primary philosophical worldviews are outlined:

1. Post-positivist worldview – suited for quantitative studies
2. Social constructivist worldview – apt for qualitative studies
3. Pragmatist worldview – fitting for mixed-methods studies

In the context of this study, which is purely academic, the chosen philosophical approach aligns with the post-positivist worldview, often synonymous with the scientific method, particularly suitable for exploring cause-effect relationships (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018). This approach was selected to comprehensively

understand the correlation among variables and to test the presented hypotheses. To efficiently collect data from respondents, a survey method was employed, making the cross-sectional method the most appropriate for the study's objectives.

3.3 Research approach

The research approach undertaken for this study involved use of quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between product purchase decisions, social identity, and brand choices. A structured survey with carefully crafted questions derived from existing literature and theories was distributed to a representative sample. This survey collected numerical data, allowing for statistical analysis to identify patterns, correlations, and trends.

3.4 Research strategy

The research strategy used in this cross-sectional study centred on quantitative data collection through an online survey using the Qualtrics platform. This survey employed standardized measures derived from established 5-point and 7-point Likert scales, ensuring ease of testing reliability and eventually allowing statistical analysis to be conducted and interpreted correctly. In the data analysis phase, the study investigated the underlying factors or latent variables contributing to observed correlations within the dataset.

3.5 Research method choice

The design of this study is inherently quantitative, necessitating the collection of data to ensure active participation and the allocation of sufficient time to garner accurate responses from consumers.

3.6 Research time horizon

The pilot was conducted in the first two weeks of October 2023, and the data obtained was analysed during the subsequent week. The reliability of the research instrument was determined to be 0.60. Insights gained from the pilot study informed adjustments to the questionnaire in terms of logical flow and validity of the content. The primary data collection phase spanned six weeks, commencing from the last week of October 2023 and concluding in the first week of December 2023.

3.7 Research techniques and procedure

3.7.1 *Data collection – population, sample, sampling method, procedure for data collection*

3.7.1.1 Population

The target population for this study were consumers who resided in South Africa who were studying or held some level of education or currently studying and located either in Gauteng or KwaZulu Natal. The study targeted University of the Witwatersrand students but was not limited to University of the Witwatersrand students, it was distributed to over 20,000 students and the responses were very sporadic and the survey link was also shared online with targeted group from Durban University of Technology. This was due to low responses from Wits however this ultimately provided an added dimension to the study.

The inclusion criteria used was:

- Students of any race and gender, employed or unemployed, ages between 18 and 54 purely because first year students start around 18 years of age and post graduate students can be 54 years or older.

Income was not a primary target although it was measured because the study also measured online purchasing because the study intention was to also measure and assess the perception that higher income groups shop online more frequently compared to low-income groups.

Participants had to have some of education or at least be studying towards a qualification. The assumption was that the level of social identity consciousness and the understanding of branding identity narratives are related to education. The assumption was if population was educated or studying towards a qualification, they would have socially conscious and select brands with a much deeper meaning rather than purely basing the decisions squarely on the 4P's of marketing.

3.7.1.2 Sample

The sample size was calculated on the Raosoft software that is used for calculating sample size. The population numbers were the latest Wits population statistics and the system indicated that the sample size doesn't change much for population over 20,000. The calculated sample size was 381 at a confidence level of 95 but also indicated a 269-sample size at a 90% confidence level.

3.7.1.3 Sampling Method

A convenience sampling was used for this study, where participants that were targeted were asked to share the survey link with their contacts provided, they were either qualified professionals or students. The sample size for the study was 250-300 respondents to assess quantitative data effectively. Ultimately 261 responses were received of which only 221 were used for data analysis, this is due to the omissions, gaps, and errors during the completion of the survey.

Employing a quantitative approach, the study adopted a cross-sectional research design to investigate the relationship between participants' understanding of social identity and brand choice constructs.

3.7.1.4 Procedure for data collection

An introductory letter was attached to beginning of the survey explaining the purpose of the survey and assured the respondents of confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from the participants before they responded to any one question.

An electronic version of the modified questionnaire was developed on Qualtrics, an online platform for conducting surveys and then distributed to the targeted population through their official university emails. The questionnaire remained open and accessible for two months for data collection, after which it automatically closed. The response rate and reminders were sent to those that had not responded to increase participation. The survey platform was regularly checked to monitor responses and data collection and to ensure that data was recorded accurately and consistently.

After the data collection period, data was downloaded from the platform and saved onto a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and stored on a password protected desktop and laptop and saved on One Drive a Microsoft cloud services for storage.

3.7.2 Data collection instrument

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from studies conducted in the UK and US (Graham and Wilder, 2020; Raimondo et al., 2022) It was adapted and customised to suit the objectives of this study and target the population of this research.

The questionnaire was structured into four distinct sections, labeled A to D, designed to collect comprehensive data on demographic details, the impact of COVID-19 on consumer product purchases, online shopping behaviors, brand preferences, and aspects of social identity. The content and objectives of each section are elaborated below:

Section A:

This section was focused on gathering demographic information. This section explored respondents' online shopping habits and brand preferences through nine closed-ended questions. The format included five binary "yes" or "no" questions for basic information verification, while the remaining four questions interrogated the respondents online shopping behaviors and brand preferences, utilizing a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5).

Section B:

This section aimed to understand the consumer purchasing behaviors in the aftermath of the COVID-19 lockdown, examining store preferences, product types, and the determinants of brand selection. It comprised eight questions, also employing a 5-point Likert Scale for responses, which spanned from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5), to gauge participants' opinions.

Section C:

This section of the questionnaire was aimed at assessing the consumer’s social identity. This section examined the participants' understanding, alignment with personal identity, peer influence, and expectations of brand congruence. It featured 12 questions on a 7-point Likert scale to measure the extent of agreement or disagreement, with "1" indicating "Strongly Disagree" and "7" indicating "Strongly Agree".

Section D:

This final section collected additional demographic information, such as age, gender, income, education, and employment status, and examined how brand choices influence product purchasing decisions. It contained a total of 10 questions, five of which focused on demographic details and the other five on product purchase decisions influenced by brand choices.

Following the questionnaire's development, it underwent validation by a supervisor. Subsequent approval led to a pilot study being conducted with a randomly selected group of students from the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, to test the questionnaire's effectiveness and reliability.

3.7.3 How reliability and validity was built into the data collection process

To ensure the reliability and validity of this study on product purchase decisions, social identity, and brand choices, several robust measures were implemented. A questionnaire pre-testing phase was initiated, involving the administration of the research instrument to a selected group of students who provided feedback and responses. Insights gained from the pilot study facilitated refinement of the questionnaires, resulting in enhanced clarity and relevance. Additionally, valuable expert input was sought from my supervisor, who critically reviewed the research instrument and provided insightful suggestions. Pre-testing on a limited sample size enabled the identification and rectification of potential ambiguities in the questions. Furthermore, random sampling techniques were employed to minimize selection bias, ensuring a more accurate representation of the broader population of interest. These strategies collectively contributed to the trustworthiness and rigor of the data collection process.

3.7.4 Pre-testing of questionnaire

A pilot study was undertaken with a randomly selected group of 40 participants to assess the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. The primary objectives were to identify and address potential challenges, refine the methodology, and enhance the overall quality of the research questions before embarking on a larger-scale investigation. An electronic version of the questionnaire was developed on Qualtrics, an online survey platform, and then distributed to the sample for the pilot study. The questionnaire was open and accessible for a 2-week data collection period, after which it automatically closed. The obtained Cronbach's alpha value of 0.60 relative to the benchmark of 0.70, this was considered acceptable for reliability. The acceptable Cronbach's alpha threshold of 0.60 was met, as recommended by Taber (2018). Following the pilot, some questions were adjusted for content, meaning, and language, as most respondents were not native English speakers.

3.8 Statistical Data analysis and interpretation

Before commencing data analysis, a thorough cleaning process was conducted, and completeness checks were performed on the dataset using Microsoft Excel. Incomplete cases were subsequently removed. Additionally, the dataset underwent scrutiny for outliers and inconsistent responses, leading to their exclusion.

The data were then exported to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for statistical analysis. Continuous variables were presented with mean and standard deviation (SD), while categorical data were expressed in frequency and proportion. Results were visually presented through graphs and tables in the respective sections.

Prior to engaging in inferential data analysis, normality checks were conducted on the response variables using graphical methods.

To assess the construct validity of the measurement instrument, factor analysis was employed, examining whether observed variables effectively measured the intended underlying constructs. Hypotheses formulated at the study's outset were tested using linear regression analysis. The results, along with graphical representations, were included to support the presented data. Statistical significance was set at a p-value < 0.05.

3.9 Validity and reliability

The research instrument underwent testing to ensure reliability, signifying the potential for replication over time with consistent results. The acceptable Cronbach's alpha threshold of 0.60 was met, as recommended by Taber (2018). Cronbach's alpha serves to measure the shared variance or covariance among the items comprising an instrument. In the quantitative research context, the assessment of validity and reliability is crucial for ensuring high-quality research (Taber, 2018). A sample of 40 responses was subjected to validity testing using SPSS, resulting in a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.60, deemed acceptable according to Taber (2018). The study's reliability was further assessed, with all variables achieving Cronbach's Alpha scores exceeding the acceptable 0.60 and reaching 0.70, as indicated in Table 3-1 below.

Table 3-1: Cronbach's Alpha Figures

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No of Items
Brand choice	.622	.628	8

Social identity	.666	.658	9
Product purchase decision	.748	.711	13

3.9.1 Validity

3.9.1.1 External validity

External validity the degree to which the findings are obtained from the population can be generalised and used in other situations (Bryman et al., 2014). Population validity was applied in this study, a sample size was drawn to test the hypothesis. A convenience sampling approach was used in this study.

3.9.1.2 Internal validity

Measures if the results are trustworthy and if the results are not influenced by other factors. Various scales were used to test internal validity for example a 5 point Likert scale and a 7 point Likert scale were used in the study to measure similar questions and to check for consistencies in the study.

Statistical analysis of validity and reliability is explained in Chapter 4.

3.10 Ethical considerations in the methodology

Throughout the process, ethical considerations were prioritised, ensuring that participants provide informed consent and that their privacy and confidentiality were protected.

3.11 Conclusion

The literature review indicated research gaps, previous research found that there is a positive relationship to an individual's social identity and group they belong to. Social identity is treated or viewed as a construct that exists within a group context. The hypothesis made in this paper is social identity will have a positive effect in consumer purchase decisions. This study undertakes to prove this and moreover answer a pivotal research question about the constructs that are named in this study.

The second construct that is measured in brand choice which is covered immensely in marketing theory, the objective for this study was to understand the relationship between brand choice and product purchase decisions, the assumption was that this would correlate with the theory reviewed and would ultimately have a positive relationship. Brand choice related questions were posted and factors that ultimately drive brand choice were probed like brand trust, quality, the influence of groups and their identity to understand whether the relationship or hypothesis would be positive.

Consumer voice is rapidly increasing whilst they continue to evolve over time, with education and social awareness, there a high demand placed on marketers as consumers require resonance from meaningful brands and shop for value. This study proposes a multi-dimensional view of social identity and brand choice identity constructs to create a competitive environment and sustainability for brands (Goldsmith, 2012; Khodabandeh, 2020; IWar Chux, 2017; Kunkel, 2017; McGowan, 2017).

4. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.7 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the survey results that was conducted to determine the factors that lead to consumer purchase decisions. The purpose of this study was to research and document the relationship between social identity, brand choice identity, and the product purchase decisions made by South African consumers amid the COVID-19 lockdown. Descriptive statistics, denoted as Mean ± SD, and cross-tabulations were employed to analyze the socio-demographic data. Factor analysis and linear regression were implemented to examine relationships. The statistical findings in this study are poised to address the following research questions:

1. *What drives the consumer brand choice decisions?*
2. *Does a consumer's social identity and brand choice drive product purchase decisions?*
3. *The study also examined the relationship between social identities, brand choice and product purchase decisions or assess whether there was a positive relationship between those variables or not.*

4.8 Data screening

An electronic questionnaire was distributed to the University of the Witwatersrand students which included commerce, medical and law cohorts. Out of the targeted 20000 students, 261 responded to the survey and only 221 respondents refused to participate in the study (Table 4-1). One questionnaire set was incomplete and considered invalid and removed from the study.

Table 4-1: Summary on data collection

	Numbers (Percentages)
No of targeted respondents to whom the questionnaire was sent	20,000
No of response received	261

No of invalid (Incomplete) responses	40
No of valid responses	221
% of responses received	1.3%
% of valid responses against questionnaire	84,6%

4.9 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The results of the demographic analysis are presented in Table 4-2 below. Approximately 65.8% of the respondents had a minimum of 5 years of experience in project management and had actively participated in infrastructure projects within the province. This indicates their significant experience, making them well-versed in encountering cost and time overruns in previous projects, rendering them adept at responding to the survey questions.

While the study initially collected 258 responses, only 221 were subjected to analysis to derive the results. Of the total responses, 37 were deemed inaccurate due to errors, incompleteness, or gaps. To ensure data accuracy, only complete responses were utilized in the analysis. The ensuing survey results are presented in this chapter to delineate the study's scope and derive insights from the collected data.

Geographical information regarding the participants' locations in South Africa is also provided to offer a comprehensive understanding of their distribution. The aim was to gain insights into the participants' geographic locations and enhance the overall contextual understanding of the study.

There were no statistically significant differences ($p > 0.05$) in the gender, education, age group and income levels of the respondents on how the respondents came up the product purchase decisions, viewed their social identity and how they made brand choices.

Table 4-2: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Province – Geographic location		
Gauteng, Johannesburg	166	75.1
KwaZulu Natal, Durban	55	24.9
Gender		
Female	84	38.0
Male	136	61.5
Non binary.	1	.5
Age Group		
18-24	43	19.5
26-34	69	31.2
36-44	77	34.8
45-54	32	14.5
Education		
Matric	69	31.2
Diploma/Degree	48	21.7
Post graduate/Masters	100	45.2
PhD	4	1.8
Income		
Below R15 000	49	22.2
R16 000 – R25 000	29	13.1
R26 000 – R35 000	66	29.9
R36 000 – R50 000	35	15.8
Above R51 000	42	19.0
Online shopper status		
Yes	130	58.8
No	54	24.4
Neutral	37	16.7
Online shopper frequency post lockdown		
Never	30	13.6
Not often (at least once)	89	40.3
Neutral (at least 2 times)	29	13.1

Often (3- 5 times)	39	17.6
Very often (more than 5)	34	15.4

4.9.1 Geographic location of the participants:

Over half of the study participants were in Gauteng, as the primary focus of the survey was on students and professionals residing in this province. However, to enrich the analysis and incorporate additional perspectives, the survey link was also disseminated to participants residing in KwaZulu-Natal Province.

There were statistically significant differences in the brand choices ($p = 0.021$), product purchase decisions ($p = 0.020$) and individual social identity ($p = 0.046$) depending on the location of the respondents. The respondents in Gauteng had a statistically significant higher mean score for Brand choice compared to those in KwaZulu-Natal. The respondents in Gauteng had a statistically significant higher mean score for product purchase decisions compared to those in KwaZulu-Natal. The respondents in KwaZulu-Natal had a statistically significant higher mean for individual social Identity compared to those in Gauteng.

4.9.2 Education in the context of social identity

In this study, measuring education is crucial due to the foundational principles of the social identity theory, which hinge on understanding how individuals behave within specific groups they identify with. The level of education serves as a significant determinant of one's status and consciousness within these social contexts.

4.9.3 Income in the context of brand choice identity;

Income plays a pivotal role in providing spending capacity. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend the diverse groups and their behaviors in relation to brand choice identity. This understanding helps ascertain whether the significance of various

product categories or the perceived importance of a product influences the outcomes.

4.9.4 Gender

In social identity studies, gender constitutes an integral component of the construct definition. This paper acknowledges gender as a significant classification in the formation of groups. The exploration aimed to understand whether gender identities beyond the conventional male and female categories would emerge, and if so, the goal was to quantify their representation.

4.9.5 Age

Understanding age groups was imperative, given that the sample encompassed both students and professionals. This exploration sought to ascertain whether age might exert influence on the results, particularly due to the assumption that younger respondents might not be as attentive to issues of social identity.

4.9.6 Online Shopper Status and Frequency

The study's title focuses on evaluating whether COVID-19 altered people's product purchasing behaviors, especially in the context of online buying. The investigation delved into whether the pandemic influenced online buying habits and sought to understand the proposed hypotheses within the framework of online purchasing. Additionally, the study examined the frequency of online shopping per month post the COVID-19 lockdown.

4.9.6.1 Online Shoppers

There were statistically significant differences between those that considered themselves as online shoppers and those that regarded themselves as non-online shoppers with regards to brand choices ($p = 0.004$), product purchase

decisions ($p < 0.001$), however, there were no statistically significant difference ($p = 0.341$) in the Individual Social Identity between the online shoppers and non-online shoppers.

With reference to Brand choices, the online shoppers had a statistically significant ($p = 0.006$) higher mean than the non-online shoppers. With reference to the product purchase decisions the online shoppers had higher means compared to the non-online ($p = 0.001$) and neutral ($p = 0.004$) shoppers. The neutral shoppers had a statistically significant ($p = 0.046$) lower means compared to the non-online shoppers. Other pairs were not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$).

4.9.6.2 Frequency of shopping online

There were statistically significant differences in the brand choices ($p = 0.001$), product purchase decisions ($p < 0.001$) when considering the frequency of shopping online, however, there were no statistically significant difference ($p = 0.360$) in the Individual Social Identity mean scores when considering the frequency of shopping online.

With reference to Brand choices, those who always shopped on online had statistically significant higher mean scores compared to those that never shopped online ($p < 0.001$) and those that sometimes shopped online ($p = 0.005$).

With reference to Product Purchase Decisions (PPD), those that never shopped on online had statistically significant lower mean scores compared to those that always shopped online ($p < 0.001$) and those that shopped online most of the times ($p = 0.007$). Those that always shopped on online had statistically significant ($p = 0.003$) higher mean scores compared to those that sometimes shopped online. Other pairs were not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$).

4.10 Factor Analysis

Factor analysis served as a tool in this study to unveil underlying dimensions impacting consumer preferences. Its application was instrumental in market segmentation and enhancing comprehension of the factors influencing product choices. The primary constructs/variables under investigation included product purchase decisions, brand choice, and social identity.

4.11 Descriptive statistics

Composite scores for the three constructs were calculated and subsequently analysed, with the results presented in Table 4-3 below. The product purchase decision exhibited a mean score of 3.0 ± 0.6, individual social identity scored 3.0 ± 0.7, and brand choice had a mean score of 4.0 ± 0.7. The table further confirms the normal distribution of composite scores based on skewness and kurtosis. The proximity of all values to zero suggests that the data for each construct was normally distributed.

Table 4-3: Composite scores for product purchase decision, brand choice and social identity.

	Brand Choice	Product Purchase Decision	Social Identity
Mean	3.6782	2.7626	3.0792
Std. Error of Mean	.03998	.04440	.04923
Median	3.6250	2.7692	3.0714
Mode	3.25	3.15	2.86
Std. Deviation	.59436	.66008	.73179
Variance	.353	.436	.536
Skewness	-.315	-.090	-.229
Std. Error of Skewness	.164	.164	.164
Kurtosis	.261	-.459	.429
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.326	.326	.326
Range	3.38	3.38	3.93
Minimum	1.63	1.08	1.00
Maximum	5.00	4.46	4.93

4.11.1 Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test:

The suitability of the data for factor analysis was evaluated using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) (Table 4-4) measure of sampling adequacy, yielding a KMO value of 0.80. Generally, a KMO value exceeding 0.6 is deemed acceptable, and a higher value indicates more favourable conditions for factor analysis. The obtained KMO value of 0.80 in this analysis reflects favorable conditions, affirming the appropriateness of the data for employing this technique.

Table 4-4: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.804
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2874.529
	Df	595
	Sig.	.000

Furthermore, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was conducted to examine the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix, suggesting no relationships between variables conducive to structure detection. The resulting chi-square value was 2874.53, with a significance level of $p < 0.0001$. A significant p-value (typically < 0.05) supports the rejection of the null hypothesis, signifying the presence of relationships between variables. In the analysis, the chi-square value was significant at $p < 0.0001$, providing evidence against the assumption of a completely unstructured correlation matrix.

Additionally, all diagonals of the anti-image correlation matrix were above 0.7. Finally, the communalities, as shown in Table 4-5 below, were all above 0.6, further affirming that each item shared common variance with other items. Given these comprehensive indicators, factor analysis was considered suitable for all 38 items.

Table 4-5: Summary for factors related to Product Purchase Decision, Brand Choice, and Individual Social Identity

	Factors	Diagonal Anti-image Correlation	Communality after Extraction	Mean	SD	Factor Loading
Item	**Component 1: Product Purchase Decision (PPD)**					
1	Covid-19 lockdown changed my buying habits, I now purchase my products from various places (physical retail stores, online - via websites & Apps, Broker etc.)	.674	**.383**	3.036	1.1113	-
2	Shopping is easier when purchasing known brands because I know and trust the quality of those products.	.428	.582	3.873	1.0235	.530
3	Covid-19 lockdown changed my purchase behaviour. Please indicate the frequency in which you purchased the below products since the lockdown (1 least frequent - 5 most frequent). - Groceries – Food & cleaning items	.418	.617	3.923	1.0262	.481
4	Covid-19 lockdown changed my purchase behaviour. Please indicate the frequency in which you purchased the below products since the lockdown (1 least frequent - 5 most frequent). - Electronics – Cellphones, Wi-Fi routers	.457	.626	3.747	1.1197	.434
5	Covid-19 lockdown changed my purchase behaviour. Please indicate the frequency in which you purchased the below products since the lockdown (1 least frequent - 5 most frequent). - Financial products - Insurance, Loans etc.	.453	.546	3.208	1.11879	.521
6	Covid-19 lockdown changed my purchase behaviour. Please indicate the frequency in which you purchased the below products since the lockdown (1 least frequent - 5 most frequent). - Take aways – Uber eats, Directly , Mr D etc.	.516	.476	3.896	1.1132	.473
7	Covid-19 lockdown changed my purchase behaviour. Please indicate the frequency in which you purchased the below products since the lockdown (1 least frequent - 5 most frequent). - Furniture - Household or office equipment	.487	.464	3.584	1.2463	4.59
8	Please indicate product types that you now frequently purchase online (1 least frequent - 5 most frequent). - Groceries – Food & cleaning items.	.529	.450	4.158	1.2311	.407
9	Please indicate product types that you now frequently purchase online (1 least frequent - 5 most frequent). - Electronics – Television, Laptops, Cellphones, Tablets, Wi-Fi routers	.473	.570	3.910	1.2288	.407
10	Please indicate product types that you now frequently purchase online (1 least frequent - 5 most frequent). - Financial products - Insurance, Banking products – credit cards, loans etc.	.417	.558	2.670	1.3600	.407
11	Please indicate product types that you now frequently purchase online (1 least frequent - 5 most frequent). - Take aways – Uber eats, Mr D, Retailer online etc.	.414	.607	2.629	1.3843	.445

12	Please indicate product types that you now frequently purchase online (1 least frequent - 5 most frequent). - Furniture - Household or office equipment etc.	.484	.570	3.226	1.3696	.478
13	When making purchase decisions in store or in general, please indicate the importance of buying branded items to you	.673	**.277**	2.507	1.2563	.407
Item	**Component 2: Brand Choice (BC)**					
1	In general, how often do you buy branded items?	.707	**.301**	3.032	1.6525	.448
2	Please rate the product category according to their branding importance to you? (1. Least important - 5 Most important) - Groceries – Food & cleaning items	.641	.487	2.452	1.3993	.453
3	Please rate the product category according to their branding importance to you? (1. Least important - 5 Most important) - Electronics – Cellphones, Wi-Fi routers	.568	.481	2.629	1.5039	.420
4	Please rate the product category according to their branding importance to you? (1. Least important - 5 Most important) - Financial products - Insurance, Loans etc.	.639	.419	3.443	1.4749	.484
5	Please rate the product category according to their branding importance to you? (1. Least important - 5 Most important) - Take aways – Uber eats, Mr D etc.	.548	.506	2.262	1.3396	.420
6	Please rate the product category according to their branding importance to you? (1. Least important - 5 Most important) - High valued items – Furniture, Vehicle, Estate/ surburb	.666	.418	2.385	.9153	.420
7	Please rate the importance of purchasing branded products when purchasing online or via Apps.	.691	.656	2.348	1.0139	.420
8	When buying online (groceries, clothes etc.), do you always purchase the same brands that you would purchase in store?	.681	**.348**	2.421	1.1279	.586
Item	**Component 3: Individual Social Identity (SI)**					
1	My choice of brand is influenced by my identity and brands that are chosen by people I trust i.e. family or friends?	.435	**.383**	3.140	1.1806	.645
2	I understand social identity and this impact on my brand choice.	.507	.582	1.995	1.0766	.460
3	My social identity is an extension of the community I belong in.	.423	.617	2.480	1.2848	.704
4	My social identity is aligned with people of the same culture I choose to identify with.	.491	.626	2.819	1.6135	.689
5	I shop and buy from brands that align to my personal identity	.436	.546	3.095	1.6110	.733
6	Purchasing high-valued branded items improves my social identity.	.445	.476	3.131	1.5509	.695
7	Social identity issues do not concern me and the brands I choose to purchase.	.608	.464	2.674	1.4687	.516
8	The branding of products is important especially when buying online since products are not there physically.	.406	.450	3.986	1.8476	.720
9	I purchase only brands I trust whether online or at a physical store.	.619	.570	3.412	1.3875	.472

10	Brand identity is important to help me identify the brands I like or brands that are meaningful to me.	.584	.558	3.516	1.4097	.623
11	Brand resonance is important to me, I only buy brands I resonate with.	.461	.607	3.588	1.3408	.743
12	Brands should be judged by consumers by the value and impact they contribute to society or social identity issues.	.501	.570	3.561	1.2512	.755
		.501				
		.763				

Table 4-6**: Initial Loadings**

Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
BC1	**.293**	**.301**
BC2	.359	.487
BC3	.432	.481
BC4	.361	.419
BC5	.452	.506
BC6	.334	.418
BC7	.309	.656
BC8	**.319**	**.348**
PPD1	**.326**	**.383**
PPD2	.572	.582
PPD3	.582	.617
PPD4	.543	.626
PPD7	.547	.546
PPD8	.484	.476
PPD9	.513	.464
PPD10	.471	.450
PPD11	.527	.570
PPD12	.583	.558
PPD13	.586	.607
PPD14	.516	.570
PPD15	**.327**	**.277**
SI1	.565	.577
SI2	.493	.477
SI3	.577	.589
SI4	.509	.502
SI5	.564	.553
SI6	.555	.512
SI7	**.392**	**.360**
SI8	.594	.606
SI9	**.381**	**.343**
S10	.416	.420
S11	.539	.618
S12	.499	.615
S13	.499	.479
S14	**.237**	**.175**

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

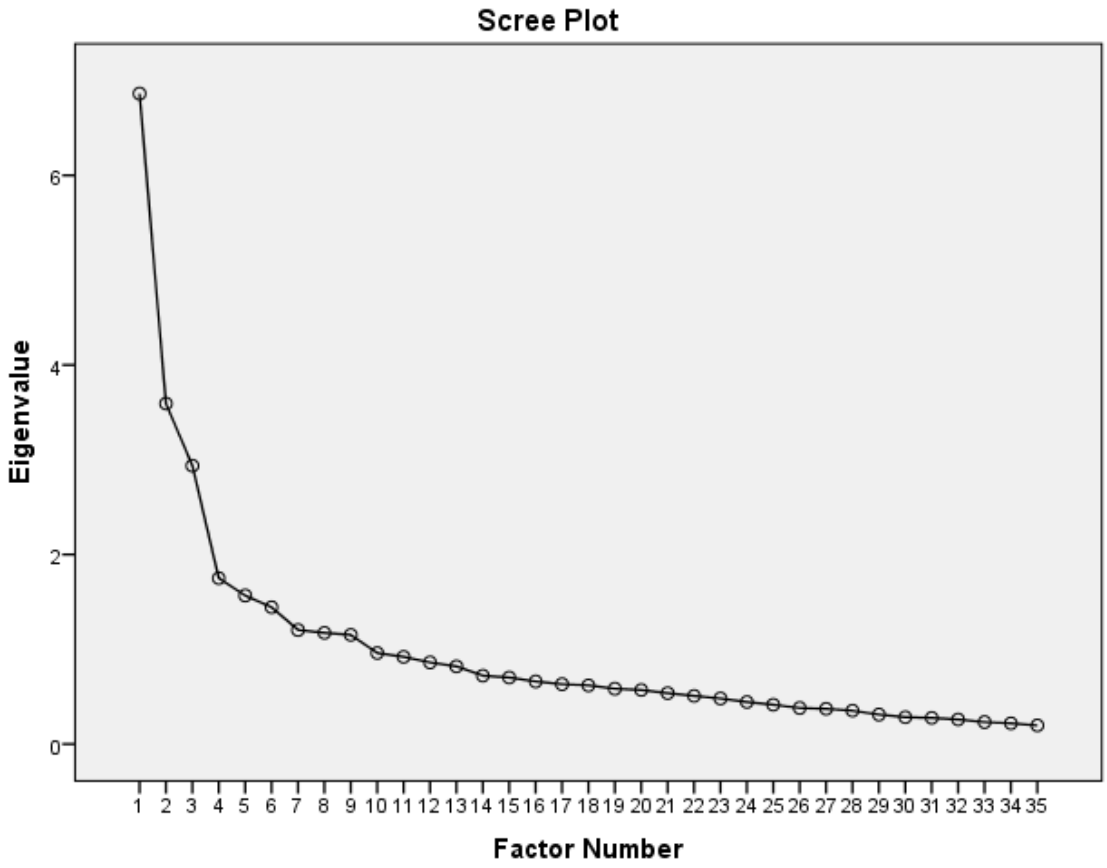


Figure 4-1: The Scree plot

4.11.2 Total variance explained

Principal components analysis was employed because the primary objective was to identify and calculate composite scores for the factors. The initial eigenvalues revealed that the first three factors accounted for 39%, 14%, and 7.6% (totaling 60.54%) of the variance, respectively. Factors four through seven exhibited initial eigenvalues ranging from 1.7 to 1.1, explaining 7.6%, 5.6%, 4.2%, and 3.7% of the variance, respectively (refer to Table 4-7). The scree plot (Figure 4-1) further validated the extraction of seven components with eigenvalues greater than 1.

Table 4-8 shows the factor loadings of the different items. Seven items across the constructs had initial loadings of less than 0.4 (refer to Table 4-6), and these were eliminated from the list of items under the constructs. There was some rearrangement of

the items under the main variables, indicating that some items were placed under the wrong constructs.

Table 4-7: Table showing the total variance explained

	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
Factor	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	6.863	19.608	19.608	6.373	18.209	18.209	4.248	12.138	12.138
2	3.592	10.264	29.872	3.116	8.902	27.112	3.309	9.453	21.592
3	2.937	8.391	38.263	2.465	7.042	34.154	2.178	6.224	27.815
4	1.750	5.000	43.263	1.225	3.499	37.653	1.698	4.851	32.667
5	1.567	4.478	47.740	1.111	3.175	40.828	1.580	4.515	37.181
6	1.444	4.125	51.865	.926	2.646	43.474	1.386	3.961	41.142
7	1.203	3.438	55.304	.720	2.056	45.530	1.125	3.213	44.355
8	1.173	3.352	58.656	.680	1.942	47.472	.978	2.793	47.148
9	1.152	3.291	61.947	.550	1.573	49.045	.664	1.896	49.045
10	.961	2.746	64.692						
11	.920	2.628	67.321						
12	.861	2.461	69.782						
13	.820	2.342	72.124						
14	.722	2.063	74.187						
15	.702	2.006	76.192						
16	.660	1.887	78.079						
17	.632	1.805	79.884						
18	.619	1.769	81.654						
19	.584	1.668	83.321						

20	.571	1.630	84.952						
21	.538	1.536	86.488						
22	.508	1.452	87.940						
23	.481	1.374	89.314						
24	.443	1.266	90.581						
25	.415	1.186	91.767						
26	.381	1.087	92.854						
27	.371	1.061	93.916						
28	.352	1.006	94.922						
29	.311	.890	95.812						
30	.283	.809	96.620						
31	.276	.788	97.408						
32	.260	.742	98.151						
33	.232	.662	98.813						
34	.219	.626	99.438						
35	.197	.562	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Table 4-8: Factor Loadings

Rotated Factor Matrix[a]

	Factor								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
SI1	.645								
SI2	.460								
SI3	.704								
SI4	.689								
SI5	.733								
SI6	.695								
SI7	.516								
SI8	.720								
SI9	.472								
PPD2		.701							
PPD3		.737							
PPD7		.702							
PPD9		.636							
PPD10		.604							
PPD12		.673							
S10			.623						
S11			.743						
S12			.755						
S13			.654						
BC5				.598					
PPD4				.729					
PPD11				.688					
BC3					.594				
BC4					.613				
BC6					.609				
PPD13						.522			
PPD14						.618			
BC2							.674		
PPD1							.509		
BC7								.779	
BC8								.446	

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.[a]

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

4.11.3 Reliability Test Results

Table 4-9 presents Cronbach's Alpha for the three constructs under consideration in this study. The Cronbach α values for the constructs ranged between 0.62 and 0.75. The product purchase decision had an alpha value of 0.75, exceeding the threshold of 0.7, thus confirming the questionnaire's validity and reliability. However, brand choice and Individual social identity exhibited Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.62 and 0.67, respectively.

Table 4-9: Reliability Scores

Code	Constructs	Reliability	# of Items
PPD	Product Purchase Decision	0.75	13
BC	Brand Choice Identity	0.62	8
SI	Individual Social Identity	0.67	9

Testing the Hypothesis using the Linear Regression Model

Linear regression analysis is a statistical technique used to explore the relationship between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables. The primary aim of this method is to identify the most suitable linear equation that accurately represents the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. By establishing this regression model, it becomes possible to predict or estimate the value of the dependent variable based on the values of the independent variables, making it invaluable for forecasting purposes. Linear regression analysis sheds light on how each independent variable contributes to variations in the dependent variable, enabling the identification of statistically significant predictors that meaningfully influence the outcome. Additionally, linear regression is instrumental in conducting hypothesis testing regarding population parameters, such as verifying if the coefficients of the independent variables significantly deviate from zero.

Table 4-10 shows the summary of statistically significant results.

Table 4-10: Summary of results table:

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Significant (p-value)
Product Purchase Decision	Brand choice	0.001
	Social Identity	0.165
Brand Choice	Frequency of online shopping	0.038
	Income	0.017
Social Identity	Gender	0.027
	Income	0.016

4.12 Factors affecting Product Purchase Decisions (PPD)

4.12.1 Model summary

The model summary provides a comprehensive overview of the linear regression analysis, encapsulating key statistics that gauge the model's fit to the data. In this analysis, the R-squared value, a measure of the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variables, was found to be 0.482. This indicates that approximately 48.2% of the variability in the dependent variable can be accounted for by the model. The adjusted R-squared value, adjusting for the number of predictors in the model, was 0.20, further considering the model's complexity. The F-statistic, a measure of overall model significance, was statistically significant at $p < 0.0001$, suggesting that the model provides a better fit than a null model with no predictors. The p-value for social identity was higher than 0.05, scored 0.165 which was the only variable that was insignificant statistically. However collectively, the metrics contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the model's explanatory power and its significance in capturing the relationships between the independent and dependent variables in the study. The Durbin-Watson was 2.236, showing that there is a relationship between

consecutive residuals not explained by the independent variables included in the model.

4.12.2 Interpretation of the coefficients of the table:

A positive beta coefficient (0.258) indicates a positive relationship between Brand choice and Product Purchase Decision. As Brand choice increases, the Product Purchase Decision is expected to increase by approximately 0.258 units. The t-value of 3.589 and the very low p-value ($p < 0.001$) suggest that brand choice is a significant predictor of the consumer product purchase decision, providing evidence against the null hypothesis that there is no effect. Therefore, the result indicates that changes in brand choice have a meaningful and statistically significant impact on the product purchase decision in the regression model.

The negative beta coefficient (-0.225) indicates a negative relationship between whether one is an online shopper and the product purchase decision. As status of one online shopper increased by one unit, the product purchase decision is expected to decrease by approximately 0.225 units. The negative t-value of -3.494 and the low p-value (0.001) suggest that this relationship is statistically significant, providing evidence against the null hypothesis that there is no effect. Therefore, the result indicates that changes in status of the online shopper had a meaningful and statistically significant impact on the product purchase decision in the regression model.

All other independent variables included in the model were not statistically significant predictors of the dependent variable.

4.13 Factors affecting Brand Choice:

4.13.1 Model Summary:

The model summary provides a comprehensive overview of the linear regression analysis, encapsulating key statistics that gauge the model's fit to the data. In this study, the R-squared value of 0.36 was obtained, showing that about 36% of the variability in the dependent variable can be accounted for by this model. The adjusted R-squared value, adjusting for the number of predictors in the model, was 0.10 (10%), further considering the model's complexity.

Of the eight independent predictors, only two variables, online_shopping_2 ($p = 0.038$) and Income ($p = 0.017$), were statistically significant predictors of the brand choices that consumers make. Other independent variables were not statistically significant predictors ($p > 0.05$) of brand choice. There was a positive beta coefficient (0.076), showing a positive relationship between Brand choice and frequency of online shopping. As frequency of online shopping increased by one unit, the brand choice is expected to increase by approximately 0.076 units. The t-value of 2.083 and the very low p-value ($p = 0.038$) suggest that frequency of online shopping is a significant predictor of brand choice, providing evidence against the null hypothesis that there is no effect. Income was a statistically significant predictor ($p = 0.017$) of brand choices that consumers make in the processing of purchasing a product.

4.14 Factors affecting Social Identity:

4.14.1 Model Summary:

The model summary provides a comprehensive overview of the linear regression analysis, encapsulating key statistics that gauge the model's fit to the data. In this study, the R-squared value of 0.28 was obtained, showing that about 28% of the variability in the dependent variable can be accounted for by this model. The

adjusted R-squared value, adjusting for the number of predictors in the model, was 0.04 (4%), further considering the model's complexity.

Of the nine independent variables tested, only two—gender ($p = 0.027$) and income ($p = 0.016$)—were statistically significant predictors of the social identity of consumers. Other independent variables were not statistically significant predictors ($p > 0.05$) of brand choice. There was a positive beta coefficient (0.224), showing a positive relationship between social identity and the gender of the consumer. As gender changes from male to female, the social identity increases by approximately 0.224 units. The t-value of 2.227 and the very low p-value ($p = 0.027$) suggest that gender was a significant predictor of social identity, providing evidence against the null hypothesis that there is no effect. Additionally, income had a positive coefficient of 0.103 with a p-value of 0.016. Income was a statistically significant predictor ($p = 0.016$) of the social identity of consumers.

4.15 Assumption checks

In evaluating the validity of the linear regression model, three crucial assumptions—normality of residuals, homoscedasticity, and linearity—were examined. The normality of residuals, which indicates whether the distribution of residuals follows a normal distribution, was assessed using both a histogram (refer to Figure 4-2 below) and a Q-Q plot (refer to Figure 4-3 below). The inspection revealed that the residuals closely approximated a normal distribution, thus supporting the assumption of normality.

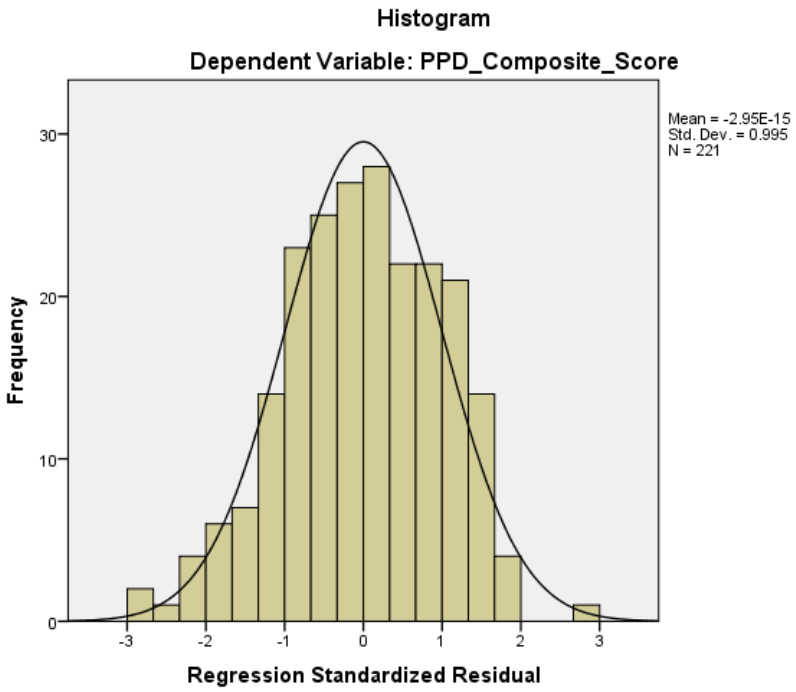


Figure 4-2: The histogram showing that data was normally distributed

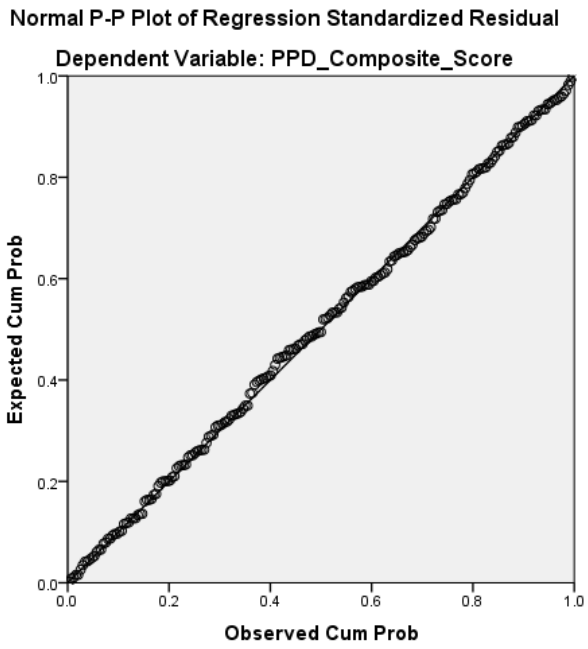


Figure 4-3: The QQ-Plot proving that the PPD data was normally distributed

Homoscedasticity, which assumes that the variance of the residuals remains constant across all levels of the independent variables, was confirmed by examining a plot of residuals against predicted values. Visual inspection indicated a consistent spread of residuals across the range of predicted values, confirming homoscedasticity (refer to Figure 4-4 below). Additionally, the linearity assumption, suggesting a linear relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables, was evaluated using scatterplots of observed versus predicted values. These visualizations demonstrated a clear linear trend, providing evidence in favour of the linearity assumption. The fulfilment of these three crucial assumptions enhances the reliability of the linear regression results and supports the robustness of the model for drawing meaningful inferences.

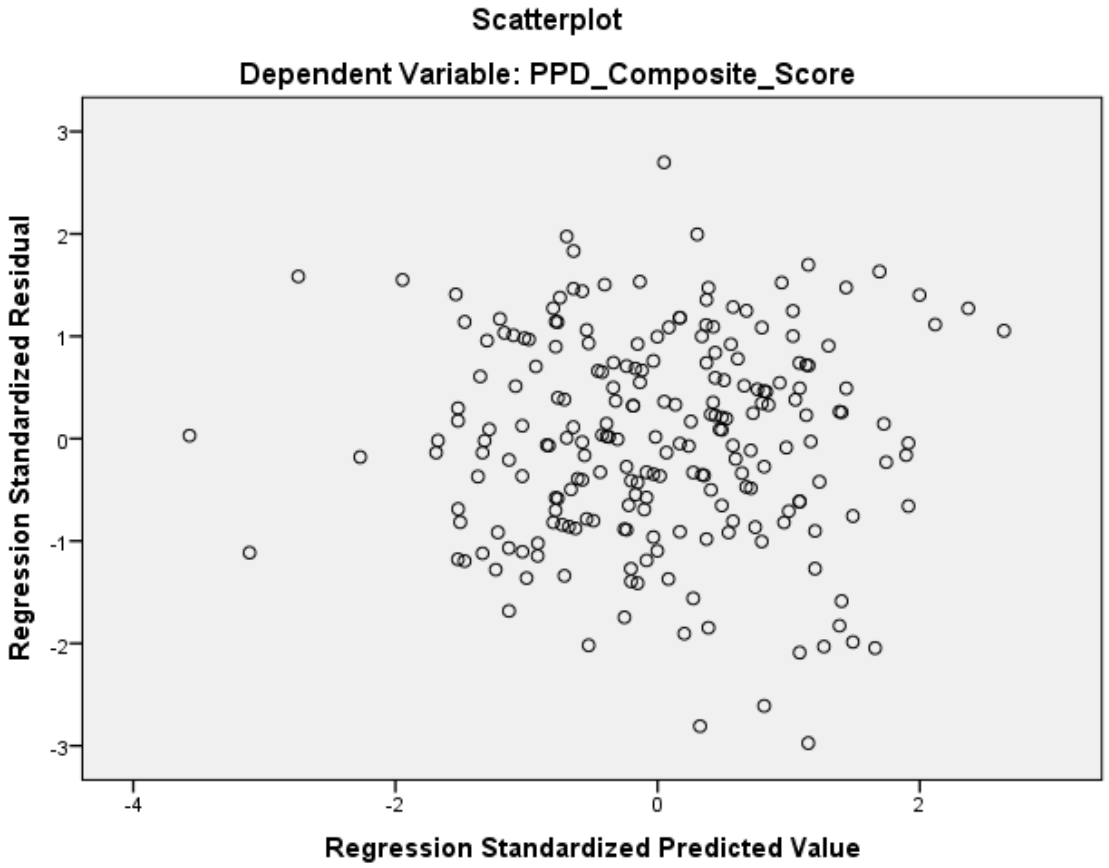


Figure 4-4: Graph showing homoscedasticity of the composite score of Product Purchase Decision

4.16 Conclusion

In conclusion, the linear regression analysis suggests that brand choice and whether or one was an online shoppers had some impact on the product purchase decisions made by the consumers. However, social identity did not have any impact product purchase decisions made by the consumers. The demographic factors did not have any effect on the product purchase decisions made by the consumers suggesting that other factors not included in the model be important. These findings contribute to the understanding of factors that affect the consumer decisions to purchase the products, based on the brand choice. Social identity seems to have no effect on the decisions the consumer makes on the purchase of the product.

5. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The study aimed to comprehend the determinants of product purchase decisions, especially during the lockdown imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper posits that the independent variable, product purchase decisions, is positively influenced by the dependent variables—brand choice and social identity. The research delves into examining the relationship and correlation among brand choice identity, social identity, and product purchase. Additionally, the study incorporates other variables such as age, gender, education, and location for a comprehensive exploration of these factors.

5.2 Summary Results:

5.2.1 Demographic profile of respondents;

61.5% of the respondents were predominantly female, while 38% were male. The age groups ranged from 25-24 to 35-44. Most participants held either a university degree or diploma in terms of their education level. Notably, 31% were still pursuing a qualification. The indication of income correlated with the levels of education; 31% of the students reported Matric as their highest qualification, seemingly aligning with the 22.2% of households with an income below R15, 000 per month. Conversely, 29.9% indicated an income between R26, 000 and R35, 000 per month, and 19% of participants earned over R50, 000 per month, as indicated in Table II. Although income was not the primary focus of this study, there appeared to be a correlation between income and online shopping, particularly among frequent online shoppers.

5.2.2 Results

Demographic variables can also be categorized as social identity construct, people are defined by their demographics and formulate their personal identity

based on the demographics, this study showed positive relationships amongst variables and moreover some demographic variables as well. Age reflected a positive relationship with income with a 0.00 significance value and 0.08 for location. Education and income were significant with a 0.00 sig value.

5.3 Individual social identity positively influences brand choice identity

Social identity constitutes a crucial component of an individual's self-concept, emphasizing its significance in consumer behavior studies. While personal identity has received substantial attention, there exists a theoretical gap concerning social identity, particularly in the context of brand choice. Literature reviews have identified this gap in marketing theory, underscoring the need for studies on consumer behavior, especially focusing on social identity within the era of influencers. The influence wielded by influencers in shaping groups and driving brand choice, along with effectively positioning products for sale, remains an underexplored area (Mishra & Barky, 2021; Farivar & Wang, 2022).

In a similar vein, Mishra and Barky (2021) conducted a study delving into multiple social identification models, cantering on the acceptance of another group's religious and cultural aspects. Their research compared groups with similar and dissimilar social identities, scrutinizing the impact on their identification or non-identification with a product, ultimately influencing purchase decisions. While their conceptual framework aligns with the current study, this paper primarily focuses on religion (Muslim & Islam) and culture in operationalizing social identity, examining specific groups of interest. For instance, a study comparing two groups' responses to a Barbie dressed in a hijab evoked distinct emotions, showcasing that minority groups within a social context require representation. This qualitative study underscores the necessity for a more focused exploration of social identity theory, especially concerning brands targeting such consumers.

This paper operationalizes social identity as a construct differently. The primary objective was to assess participants' understanding of social identity as a broad construct and whether they view it as an extension of themselves. While participants demonstrated understanding, no correlation with product purchase decisions was identified. The viewpoint suggests that numerous factors influence product purchase decisions during this process.

The results in Table XI indicate the impact of social identity on brand choice identity. The score highlighted in the analysis is 0.097. Since this figure greater than 0.05, there is no evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

5.4 Individual social identity positively influences product purchase decisions

The second hypothesis builds upon the first hypothesis, aiming to test the positive influence of social identity on product purchase decisions. Existing literature underscores the multifaceted nature of drivers affecting product purchase decisions, with the actual product playing a pivotal role (Merlino et al., 2021). Factors such as price, family size, features, benefits, and promotional strategies contribute to decision-making. This complexity challenges the notion of reducing product decisions to a single benefit, as evidenced in previous studies that may have shown correlations, particularly in qualitative research where constructs and related variables are explicitly defined and explained to participants (Raimondo et al., 2022; Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020; Sohaib, 2023).

Contrary to expectations, this study's hypothesis was proven to be negative, indicating no correlation between social identity and product purchase decisions, with results at 0.14. These findings align with theories acknowledging the multitude of driving factors influencing product purchase decisions. However, participants demonstrated a general awareness of social identity, addressing the study's objectives. Notably, social identity questions exhibited the highest

standard deviation, signifying heightened variability among respondents. The bell curve peaked significantly for social identity, indicating its high significance. This suggests a promising avenue for future exploration and investment, positioning social identity as a valuable consideration in evolving marketing theory.

5.5 Brand choice identity positively influences product purchase decisions

The theory of brand choice identity posits that the robustness of a brand plays a pivotal role in steering product purchase decisions, a proposition validated by the outcomes of this study. The positive hypothesis was substantiated, affirming that investments in cultivating brand identity contribute significantly to brand strength. A potent brand stands as a formidable asset within an organization's arsenal. Previous research supports the assertion that various brand-related factors wield considerable influence over consumers' product choices, fortifying their enduring presence in consumer consciousness and, notably, fostering brand equity for organizations (Mishra & Barky, 2021; Sohaib & Wu, 2023; Botha et al., 2020).

This study further establishes that the strength of brands, irrespective of the product category, exhibits a positive and substantial correlation with product purchase decisions. The observed correlation is unequivocally positive, marked by a score of 0.00, falling below the 0.05 threshold. Consequently, a conclusive inference can be drawn that brand choice exerts a positive influence on consumers' product purchase decisions.

5.6 Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to augment the existing body of marketing theory, meet the criteria for a Master of Management in Strategic Marketing, and propose avenues for future research. The study's results affirmed one hypothesis while refuting the other two. Regardless of the specific outcomes, the study

underscored the significance of considering various factors, adopting a holistic perspective in comprehending consumers, recognizing the potency of active listening, and aligning with the communities within the marketing purview.

A diverse range of variables was scrutinized and measured in this study, revealing correlations. However, further investigations with a larger sample size and extended over time are imperative for enhanced accuracy and absolute validity in understanding consumer behavior, encompassing facets such as social identity, brand choice identity, and brand strategies (Schroeder, 2015; Watkins, 2016).

This paper accentuates the vital role of consumer behavior theory and underscores that brands represent one of the most influential assets for organizations. The alignment of a brand's identity with that of the target consumers is deemed pivotal in strategic marketing. Ultimately, brands permeate our society, influencing our thoughts, product preferences, and purchasing power.

Consumers wield significant influence in marketing dynamics, shaping brand narratives and co-creating with brands. This paper adopts a distinctive yet authentic approach to address critical issues surrounding the characteristics that constitute one's identity construct. It prompts contemplation about brand expectations, particularly concerning social matters. Brands, as social citizens, are integral to our daily lives.

The onus is on marketers to humanize brands, fostering resonance and integrating them into people's lived experiences. While the study's findings may not be ground breaking, they contribute to the understanding that brand choice remains a pivotal driver of product purchases. This insight, albeit familiar, reaffirms the enduring relevance of brand and marketing investments in driving revenues for firms and cultivating a robust brand equity.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of consumer behavior, the interplay between product purchase decisions, social identity, and brand choices stands as a complex and dynamic nexus. The journey through this research has sought to unravel the intricate relationships that shape how individuals engage with products, construct their social identities, and make choices that extend beyond mere utility. The discussion and recommendations derived from this study are imperative to reflect on the core objectives that guided the exploration.

From the inception of this study, the primary objectives were twofold. Firstly, the aim was to dissect the factors influencing product purchase decisions, recognizing the multifaceted nature of these determinants. Secondly, the study delved into the realm of social identity and brand choices, endeavouring to understand the nuanced interconnections between how individuals perceive themselves in societal contexts and how these perceptions shape their preferences for specific brands.

6.2 Summary of Findings

The findings of the three hypotheses proposed in this paper led to the rejection of two out of three hypotheses, with only one hypothesis yielding positive results. The study, therefore, concluded that there is no correlation between social identity and brand choice. Furthermore, no correlation was identified between social identity and product purchase decisions. However, a significant correlation was found between brand choice and product purchase decisions.

Notably, social identity questions exhibited the highest standard deviation, surpassing all variables, and the bell curve peaked at the highest point for social

identity. This signifies high significance, suggesting that this variable is worth investing in and merits future consideration in marketing theory.

Moreover, this paper brought to light additional demographic relationships and variables related to the study, which could be further explored in future marketing research:

i. Brand choice results unveiled a correlation between income and online shopping, particularly among frequent online shoppers.

ii. Social identity results indicated a positive relationship between age and income, with a p-value of < 0.001, and a value of 0.08 for location. Additionally, education and income were found to be significant with a p-value of 0.001.

6.2.1 Conclusions regarding objective 1

Objective 1 aimed to investigate the relationship between social identity and brand choice identity among online shoppers. The hypothesis posited a positive influence of social identity on brand choice identity, but upon testing, the hypothesis was found to be null and was subsequently rejected. The perspective emerged that product purchase decisions are influenced by a multitude of factors considered throughout the decision-making process. Nevertheless, the results pertaining to brand choice revealed a correlation between income and online shopping, especially among those who engage frequently in online shopping.

6.2.2 Conclusions regarding objective 2

The second objective aimed to establish the relationship between social identity and product purchase decisions. The corresponding hypothesis, proposing that

social identity positively influences product purchase decisions, was tested and found to be null, leading to its rejection. The results aligned with existing theories emphasizing the numerous influencing factors in product purchase decisions. Nevertheless, participants expressed a general awareness of social identity, addressing the issues outlined within the study's objectives.

6.2.3 Conclusions regarding objective 3

To evaluate the impact of brand choice on product purchase decisions, a positive correlation with a score of 0.00, which is less than 0.05, was observed. Hence, the conclusion can be drawn that brand choice has a positive influence on product purchase decisions. The third objective aimed to examine the influence of brand choice on product purchase decisions, with Hypothesis 3 proposing that brand choice identity positively influences product purchase decisions. The correlation for this hypothesis was positive, supporting the conclusion that brand choice indeed has a positive impact on product purchase decisions.

6.3 Implication of the results

There were various implications denoted from the study, although the variables were not tested for these implication these are worth noting.

- Managerial implications of the study;
  Brand choice results unveiled a correlation between income and online shopping, particularly among frequent online shoppers. The managerial implication for marketing managers is the opportunity that is highlighted by the study to market to high income earners online. Budgets should thus be allocated to online advertising when targeting higher LSM/SEM groups.

- Theory implications
  The results from the study showed that brand choice has a positive influence on product purchase decisions. The study tested various product

categories and brand choice still had a positive effect on purchase decisions. The preposition was that the more expensive the product was the more brand choice matters however the percentage was high for all product categories. The theory implication for this result is that further research is required to assess consumer behaviour relative to various product categories.

- Policy implications

Identity matters most importantly where decisions are made that impact the majority people in a country. Although social identity was studied in this paper as a marketing construct, potentially there are implications that impact policy particularly around the distribution of products. The bell curve was high particularly for social identity, this indicates that issues of social identity matter particularly to black South Africans, this should be a consideration for policy development.

6.4 Recommendations

6.1.1 The initial recommendation suggests that universities allocate funds for consumer research, specifically focusing on social identity. The study results strongly suggest a high likelihood that the social identity variable is valuable and merits future consideration in marketing theory. Social identity, beyond being a political construct associated with identity politics and often intertwined with racial connotations, also plays a crucial role in shaping consumer identity within the context of marketing or consumer behavior. To delve deeper into this aspect, a mixed-methods study is proposed, incorporating qualitative approaches such as consumer focus groups and interviews with marketing professionals.

6.1.2 Secondly, there is an opportunity for an additional qualitative study that empowers consumers to articulate their social identity by defining key

variables that resonate with them. This study could involve participants selecting brands exhibiting similar identity traits and subsequently comparing these results with those of their social groups. Additionally, an examination of out-groups, such as a gender-based comparison, could provide insights into which brand identities hold significance for females as opposed to their male counterparts.

6.1.3 Thirdly, another recommended study would concentrate on consumer brand choice. The primary objectives would involve assessing the strength of the relationship between consumers and their lifelong chosen brands in comparison to a competing brand of choice. Industries such as financial services, including banks and insurance companies, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), retail, and automotive should allocate funds to explore a study of this nature, specifically aimed at investigating potential brand switches. This paper examined brand choice across various product categories to evaluate the robustness of a selected brand. Such research endeavours should be financially supported by institutions prioritizing customer loyalty.

6.5 Limitations and Suggestions for future research

While this study has illuminated critical insights, the limitations inherent in this study are recognised. Through this exploration, the aim was not only to enrich the academic discourse but also to offer pragmatic recommendations that resonate with marketers, researchers, and individuals navigating the dynamic landscape of consumer behavior in the South Africa context.

i. Another study is warranted to assess a larger and more diverse group or sample size within the population to enhance accuracy. Additionally, conducting longitudinal data testing over a period of time is essential for ensuring absolute validity.

ii. While this study employed a quantitative approach, it is noteworthy that prior research addressing social identity tended to adopt qualitative or mixed-methods approaches. Operationalizing complex variables like social identity often requires methods that acknowledge the intricate and subjective nature of these constructs.

iii. The study faced time constraints, attributable to its academic nature and limited participation from Wits students. Improved results could have been achieved with additional resources, such as funding, allowing for extended timeframes and participant compensation. A longitudinal study is thus recommended to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior, encompassing aspects like consumer, social identity, brand choice identity, and brand strategies.

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8 APPENDIX A

Actual Research Instrument – Questionnaire

SURVEY

Please answer the following questions according to the guidelines below. The questionnaire is strictly for research purposes. This questionnaire divided into 4 four sections and the survey measures the responses through a 5- point and 7 point Likert scale to understand the degrees of approvals and disapprovals.

Survey Questionnaire

The following questionnaire is divided into 4 sections. The first section is section A – D

Section A: General information

This section assess general information of the participants to set the scene and ease into the research questions, questions about demographics will be at the end.

A1. Are you currently residing in Gauteng, Johannesburg?

Yes	1
No	2

A2. Do you consider yourself an online shopper?

Yes	1
Maybe	2
No	3

A3. Have you bought anything online in the last three months?

Yes	1
No	2

A4. How often do you buy branded items online?

Never	1
Not often (only once)	2
Neutral (2 times)	3
Often (3-5 times)	4
Very often (more than 5 times)	5

A5. Please rate the products according to their branding importance to you? (1. Never, 2. Rarely, 3. Sometimes, 4. Often and 5. Always)

SQ.1	Groceries – Food & cleaning items	1	2	3	4	5
SQ.2	electronics – Cellphones, Wi-Fi routers	1	2	3	4	5
SQ.3	Financial products (Insurance)	1	2	3	4	5

SQ.4	Take aways – Uber eats, Directly , Mr D etc.	1	2	3	4	5
SQ.5	High valued items – Furniture, Vehicle, Estate/ surburb	1	2	3	4	5

Section B.

This section measures the influences of the consumer purchases.

B1. The lockdown changed my buying habits, I purchase my products from various places - physical retail stores, online - via websites & Apps, Broker.

Strongly disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neutral	3
Agree	4
Strongly agree	5

B2. Shopping is easier when purchasing known brands because I know and trust the quality.

Strongly disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neutral	3

Agree	4
Strongly agree	5

B3. Please indicate the frequency in which you purchased the below products during lockdown?

(1. Never, 2. Rarely, 3. Sometimes, 4. Often and 5. Always)

SQ1	Groceries – Food & cleaning items	1	2	3	4	5
SQ2	electronics – Cellphones, Wi-Fi routers	1	2	3	4	5
SQ3	Financial products (Insurance)	1	2	3	4	5
SQ4	Take aways – Uber eats, Directly , Mr D etc.	1	2	3	4	5

B4. Please indicate the product type and the frequency of your online purchases during the lockdown?

(1. Never, 2. Rarely, 3. Sometimes, 4.Often and 5 Always)

SQ1	Groceries – Food & cleaning items	1	2	3	4	5
SQ2	Electronics – Television, Laptops, Cellphones, Tablets, Wi-Fi routers	1	2	3	4	5
SQ3	Financial products (Insurance, Banking products – credit cards, loans etc)	1	2	3	4	5

SQ4	Take aways – Uber eats, Mr D, Retailer online etc.	1	2	3	4	5

B5. Please indicate the importance of purchasing branded items that period.

Never important	1
Unimportant	2
Depends on the product	3
Important	4
Always important	5

B6. Please online purchases made during this period, please rate the importance of branded products to you in general.

Never important	1
Unimportant	2
Depends on the product	3
Important	4
Always important	5

B7. Did you purchase the same brands that you usually purchase when you are buying in store?

Strongly disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neutral	3
Agree	4
Strongly agree	5

B8. Purchasing branded items is important to me as this relates to my status in society.

Strongly disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neutral	3
Agree	4
Strongly agree	5

B9. Branding determines the level of trust and quality that I place on a product.

Strongly disagree	1

Disagree	2
Neutral	3
Agree	4
Strongly agree	5

B10. When choosing a brand, I am influenced by brands that were frequently chosen by my family and friends?

Strongly disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neutral	3
Agree	4
Strongly Agree	5

Section C

Social Identity

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement by ticking the corresponding option in the 7-Point- Likert scale below:

	Social Identity Statement	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Somewhat Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Somewhat Agree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
SQ1	I understand my social identity and this aligns with how I make life choices.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SQ2	My social identity is an extension to the society and community I belong to.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
SQ3	My identity relates to how I connect with people of the same culture from the same community I grew up in.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SQ4	My social identity aligns with the way of life in relevant communities, this includes stores where products are sold.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SQ5	I think one gains respect from society or peers when purchasing high valued branded items.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

SQ6	Social identity issues do not concern me, I know who I am regardless.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

C2. Branding choice and identity importance.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement by ticking the corresponding option in the 5-Point- Likert scale below:

	Statement	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
SQ1	The branding of products is important especially when buying online since products are not physically.	1	2	3	4	5
SQ2	I only purchase only brands I trust whether online or at a physical store.	1	2	3	4	5
SQ3	Brand identity is important to help me identify the	1	2	3	4	5

	brands I like or brands that are meaningful to me.					
SQ4	Brand resonance is important to me – I only buy brands I resonate with.	1	2	3	4	5

Section D

Purchase Decision based on Brand identity

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement by ticking the corresponding option in the 5-Point-Likert scale below:

	Statement	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
SQ1	I purchase most brands that I grew up using at home where I grew up.	1	2	3	4	5
SQ2	I trust brands that were visible at home or during my socialization/community/ school.	1	2	3	4	5
SQ3	Brands have no meaning to me, provided that my needs are met by a product and I get the benefits.	1	2	3	4	5

SQ4	Only product features and benefits matter to me not brands.	1	2	3	4	5
SQ5	Branded ensures trust and guarantees the quality of the product.	1	2	3	4	5

D6. Gender

Male	1
Female	2
Gender- neutral	3
Prefer not to say	4

D7. Age Category

18-24		1
25-34		2
35- 44		3
45-54		4
55-64		5

65+		6

D8. Educational level

Matric (Tertiary student)	1
Diploma	2
Degree	3
Post-Graduate/ Masters	4
PHD/ Doctoral	5

D9. Current Employment Status

Student	1
Employed	2
Self-employed	3
Unemployed	4
Retired	5

D9. Please indicate your net income below

Below R15,000	1
R16,000 – R25,000	2
R26,000 – R35,000	3
R36,000 – R50,000	4
Above R50,000	5

The end! Thank you very much for your participation.

9 APPENDIX B

Consistency matrix

Marketers are grappling with ever changing consumer identities which poses a challenge when targeting and clustering customer segments.					
Sub-problem	**Literature Review**	**Hypotheses or Propositions or Research questions**	**Source of data**	**Type of data**	**Analysis**
Social identity remains understudied in marketing and this leaves a gap as consumers continue to evolve and have become more vocal with their brand choices and needs.	Oniku & Anthonia (2022); Sohaib & Wu, (2023); Guj, (2023); Mc Gowan, (2023).	**Social identity positively influences brand choice identity**	Survey research - Questionnaire Statistics SA (2022)	Note the type of data, e.g. nominal, ordinal, etc	The method used is a correlation study to test a relationship between social identity and brand choice identity.
Social identity is complex and is not uniform but should be understood to gain deep insight about the consumer relationship as this impacts on groups whether positively or negatively and affects brand choice decisions.	Mishra & Barky, (2021); Tragakis, (2006);	**Social identity positively influences product purchase decisions**	Survey research - Questionnaire Statistics SA (2022)		The method used is a correlation study to test a relationship between social identity and brand choice identity.
Understanding what consumers are looking for from brands, the identity alignment and whether brand choice and social identity influence product purchase decisions.	Mishra & Barky, 2021; Sohaib & Wu, (2023); Harris-Lagoudakis, K. (2023).	**Brand choice identity positively influences product purchase decisions**	Survey research - Questionnaire Statistics SA (2022)		The method used is a correlation study to test a relationship between social identity and brand choice identity.