

**THE SYMBOLIC CONSUMPTION AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH
LUXURY BRANDED CLOTHING AMONG RHODES UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how Rhodes University (RU) students construct identity through the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothing and the role played by reference groups in the consumption behaviour. The study employed the Social Identity Theory (SIT) as a theoretical framework which explains the underpinnings of the cognitions and behaviour with the use of group processes (Trepte, 2006). The central principle of SIT lies in individuals classifying themselves and others into in-group (reference groups) and out-group social categories respectively. There has been a gap in the literature pertaining to a full understanding of the identity construction process through symbolic consumption of luxury brands in South Africa (Reed, 2002). The significance of the study is to provide a foundation for an enhanced theory of consumer behaviour in this context. This study employed a qualitative research approach. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used, and a total of 12 undergraduate and postgraduate students were interviewed. The chosen data collection method was semi-structured in-depth interviews and data were analysed using thematic analysis.

The findings of the study revealed that participants consume luxury branded clothing for both functional and symbolic purposes. Various factors emerged that influence the choice of the symbolic consumption behaviour such as income, buying frequency, spending patterns, perceptions and habits around retail shopping and the shopping experience. In addition, results indicated that reference groups (celebrities, family and peers) play a significant role in the symbolic consumption and construction of identity among the participants. In addition, the results also indicated that the RU participants engaged in a 'save to spend' technique whereby they save their pocket money so that they spend it on their favourite luxury branded clothing when they leave for the holidays. There was a common reference group that emerged from the study, namely the peer in-group. The influence of reference groups on youth consumers in South Africa may assist with marketing strategies that can be employed when targeting the Generation Y. Additionally, results indicate that luxury branded clothing have an impact on identity construction within the South African context. The respondents tie their identity to their luxury branded clothing as an indication of 'who they are' and as an extension of the 'self'.

Keywords: symbolic consumption, identity construction, luxury brands, reference groups

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List of abbreviations

RU	Rhodes University
SIT	Social Identity Theory

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces consumption and the importance of studying consumer behaviour. The chapter will also outline the history of consumer behaviour in a South Africa context. In addition, symbolic consumption will be defined and how it relates to identity construction. This introduction will provide a base for the arguments that inform this research.

1.2. Context

The concept of consumption has acquired a lot of attention within the social sciences, with debates centred around its meaning and significance. This is possibly due to the assumption that all behaviours that people engage in are directly or indirectly linked to consumption (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). The significance of studying consumer behaviour lies in enhancing the researchers' understanding of the psychological, sociological and economic factors that influence human behaviour (Mowen, 1995). Consumer behaviour studies focus on the processes involved in acquiring, consuming, and disposing of goods and services (Mowen, 1995). Consumer Psychology is the study that "deals with activities directly involved in selecting, obtaining, and using products, services, and ideas to satisfy needs and desires, including decision processes that precede and follow these actions" (Davis & Palladino, 1995, as cited in Apruebo, 2005, p.1). Consumer Psychology is an applied branch of psychology that focuses on consumer behaviour and it employs theoretical psychological applications to understanding consumers. Understanding consumers from a psychological perspective helps in understanding the mind and behaviour of consumers when making purchases.

Consumer behaviour is a relatively young discipline in social sciences research. In South Africa, the study of consumer behaviour became a legitimate field for academics to study during the 1960s. This is the period that marketers and economists developed expertise within the behavioural sciences (du Plessis, & Rousseau, 2007). During the 1970s consumer behaviour emerged as a discipline on its own without borrowing concepts from other disciplines and applying the fundamental concepts to consumer behaviour (du Plessis, & Rousseau, 2007). Researchers started developing models of consumer behaviour that assist in explaining consumer behaviour. Nowadays, the study of consumer behaviour has become a full-grown research discipline that assist in understanding purchasing decisions and behaviour (du Plessis, & Rousseau, 2007).

Consumer psychology researchers can focus on areas such as symbolic consumption. Symbolic consumption refers to the “consumers’ tendency to focus on a product’s immaterial qualities instead of physical or visible attributes in their purchase decisions” (Peltonen, 2013, p. 9). With symbolic consumption, products play important psychological and social aspects in the consumers’ lives, that extends beyond just satisfying immediate needs (Wattanasuwan, 2005). The significance of understanding the symbols attached to products is that it provides insight into consumer behaviour. The symbols convey messages to both those who use them as well as those who see them. The symbolic notion of products is important to note because the postmodern consumer has a quest for meaning and identity, and the importance of social relationships are more than just the material characteristics of a product (Knag, 2012). This study seeks to explore the meanings that Rhodes University (RU) students attach to luxury branded clothes they consume.

When an individual is consuming products symbolically, certain processes may take place, such as the process of a change in identity. Consumer identity is thought of as being ever-changing and dynamic because of the on-going interaction between the individual and the society (Peltonen, 2013). Identity is thus defined as a holistic impression of oneself, which is a combination of self-image, self-esteem and individuality (Peltonen, 2013). Goods consumed by individuals help to define identity, therefore, the role played by goods becomes an important driver of consumption behaviours. When individuals consume goods in order to construct identity, they might be worried about issues such as representation, visibility and perception of others (Salmon, 2008). This leads to individuals comparing themselves with others or looking for a group to fit in. These groups are known as reference groups. A reference group can be used by a consumer as a framework for personal identification or a group that can be used to classify others (Salmon, 2008). Therefore, reference groups influence the behaviour and lifestyles of consumers.

The present study aims to investigate the role that symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothes may play in the construction of RU students’ identity and the role played by reference groups in the consumption process.

1.3. Research problem

A study by Euromonitor International (2016) has shown a significant growth in the demand for luxury goods within the African continent. The growth has been attributed to the increase in the number of millionaires (those whose net worth is over \$1 000 000) within the African continent, who have money to spare and spend on luxury products (Euromonitor International, 2016). South Africa is regarded as a well-positioned country, that serves as a gateway to Africa's untapped luxury market (Euromonitor International, 2016). The availability of infrastructure in South Africa makes it a country of choice for consumers who are looking for quality luxury products within the African continent (Euromonitor International, 2016). Despite the economic downturn experienced worldwide and in South Africa, the luxury product market remains stable because of the growth in the emerging class (Euromonitor International, 2016). According to Dlodlo (2014) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) Unilever Institute (2013), the period 2004 to 2013 has seen a significant increase in the number of the black middle class in South Africa who have become a target for luxury products. In particular, the black middle class population grew from approximately 1.7 million in 2004 to 4.2 million in 2013 (UCT Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing, 2013). The reason for the rise in numbers might be due to the increase in credit availability, education, the introduction of the Black Economic Empowerment Programme by the government and economic growth (UCT Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing, 2013). In addition, there has been an increase in luxury brand boutiques such as Louis Vuitton, Porsche and Burberry, making it easier for the local consumers to purchase international brands (Dlodlo, 2014).

The increase in the consumption of luxury products in South Africa is indicative of how possessions are becoming an important aspect in the lives of consumers. According to Dlodlo (2014), in South Africa, the relevance of fashion (specifically clothing) is indicated by the symbolic properties and accessibility of the fashion to a majority of consumers. Marketers and consumer researchers have found that individuals consume 'lifestyle' products mainly because of the symbolic properties the products possess (Elliott, 1999). The notion that individuals consume products not only for utilitarian benefits but also for symbolic meaning has permeated marketing literature since the 1950s (Levy, 1959; Solomon, 1988). This means that consumers consume product as a way of communicating both social status and position to society around them especially those who are socially significant to them (Piacentini, & Mailer, 2004). Therefore, symbolic consumption of products plays two significant roles namely the outward

construction of the social world, and second the inward construction of self-identity (Elliott, & Wattanasuwan, 1998).

It has been found that Generation Y also spend two-thirds of their income on clothing (Mafini, Dhurup, & Mandhlazi, 2014). The consumption of luxury fashion (clothing) brands act as a way to gain appreciation among others, especially peers (Giovannini, & Thomas, 2015). Therefore, Generation Y in South Africa provides a lucrative market because it is a competitive generation that experiments quite a lot with fashion (Motale, 2015). According to Mafini and Dhurup (2014), there is limited research on the consumption patterns and the influence of reference group on Generation Y. Empirical research on Generation Y in South Africa has focused primarily on shopping preferences (Mandhlazi, 2013; Mafini, 2014) spending powers (Duffett, 2015; Koutras, 2006; Marais, 2013), gender differences (De Klerk & Leus, 2016); social media use (Bolton, 2013; Dlodlo, 2013; Jordaan, 2013; Rodney, 2016) and decision-making styles (Mafini, 2014 Mandhlazi, 2012).

The current study is informed by the need to gain insight into the consumption behaviour of university students in terms of luxury clothing brands, how the consumption processes influence identity construction and the role played by reference groups in both consumption and identity construction. The significance of gaining such insight stems from the position that although majority of university students are unemployed, they still opt to construct identity through the consumption of luxury branded clothing.

1.4. Study site and context (RU)

The study is conducted at Rhodes University, thus making it the narrow context of the study. RU is an institution of higher learning situated in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. RU is a 112-year-old and considered relatively just small university that currently has more than 7000 students (Mabizela, 2016). Of the total student population, 26% are postgraduates, and 20% are international students from 40 countries around the world (Mabizela, 2016). This makes RU a dynamic and multicultural institution. Students are involved in a variety of intellectual, social, cultural and sport activities whereby they meet and interact with each other (Mabizela, 2016). As the students interact at different levels, the researcher assumes that they form groups according to their similarities and differences, therefore engage in different reference groups. These groups are important because they influence consumption patterns as well as identity. Once individuals feel that they belong to a certain group, they may form an emotional attachment to the group as well as valuing them immensely. University students form part of the Generation Y, a generation of social consumers who are an attractive market

for status products, where peer groups influence how they receive or reject brands. It is a generation that have more money to spend than consumers of the same age group in previous generations (Amaldas, & Chiweshe, 2015). Therefore, it is important to understand their values, beliefs, likes and dislikes in order for marketers to capture the attention of this generation. Therefore, conducting a study at RU will help in gaining insight of how students at a small university relate and influence each other in their consumer behaviour.

1.5. The importance of Social Identity Theory (SIT)

This study is framed within the context of Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tafjel, 1982). SIT is a “social-psychological theory that attempts to explain cognitions and behaviour with the help of group processes” (Trepte, 2006, p. 256). The central principle of SIT is that individuals classify themselves and others into in-group (reference groups) and out-group social categories. Individuals show discrimination to out-group and solidarity within groups, aiming to achieve positive self-enhancement and self-esteem (Trepte, 2006). The use of luxury branded clothing is linked to the ‘self’ because the brands help consumers to achieve goals that are motivated by the self (Escalas, & Bettman, 2005). For example, brands can be used for self-expression, either privately or publicly (as mentioned earlier). Additionally, brands can be used as tools for social integration or connecting to the past (Escalas, & Bettman, 2005), as well as helping individuals through transitions (e.g. from adolescence to adulthood) (Arnett, 1997).

1.6. Research aims

The primary aims of the study are: firstly, to explore the role that reference groups play in the symbolic consumption patterns of university students. Secondly, to explore the impact of reference groups in the identity construction of university students.

1.7. Significance of the study

This study aimed to make contextually relevant contributions within the field of consumer psychology. Research within the area of symbolic consumption and identity construction has been conducted to a great extent in the Western countries, however there has been little focus in South Africa and on university students (Bevan-Dye, Garnett & De Klerk, 2011; Reed, 2002). Thus, research concerning identity construction through symbolic consumption in a South African university context attempts to fill the gap in the research literature. This study may provide marketers with insight on how the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothing assist in the construction of identity among university students. By identifying prominent reference groups in this study, the results may possibly assist with marketing strategies targeting the Generation Y consumers in South Africa.

1.8. Research methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used in recruiting respondents. Twelve students, consisting of 7 undergraduate and 5 postgraduate students, participated in this study. The data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. An interview guide was prepared based on the literature reviewed. The interviews were conducted over two months, from the beginning of September 2015 until the end of November 2015. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour each. The study used thematic analysis as a data analysis method. In particular, thematic analysis is a method which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants (Braun, & Clarke, 2006).

1.9. Definition of terms

Symbolic consumption refers to the consumers' tendency to focus on a product's immaterial qualities instead of physical or visible attributes in their purchase decisions (Peltonen, 2013).

Identity refers to the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is (Leary, & Tangney, 2012).

Generation Y refers to individuals born between 1980 and 1994 in South Africa (Kotler, 2003).

Reference groups are "any group that serves as a reference point for an individual in the formation of his or her beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour" (du Plessis, 2003, p. 369).

Luxury brands are defined in the current study as social markers that resemble one's status in society (Vigneron, 2006).

1.10. Structure of dissertation chapters

The thesis comprises of six chapters. Chapter 1 gives the general background of the study. It highlights the research problems, the study site and context, research aims and significance of the study. It also highlights the methods of the study and definition of the key terms.

Chapter 2 provides a review of literature on consumption and factors that influence consumer decision-making in South Africa.

Chapter 3 focuses on the factors influencing luxury brand consumption, the role of reference groups in consumption behaviours and the factors influencing identity construction among the youth. This part of the thesis will also discuss the theoretical framework that shapes this study. The arguments in this chapter formed the basis of the research aims and assumptions of the study.

Chapter 4 discusses the methods, procedures and techniques used in this study to collect and analyse data and present results. The research aims of the study is presented in this chapter. The chapter also outlines the research design and its justification. This chapter will also outline the sampling techniques used, methods of data collection, interpretation of data as well as quality criteria for this research. Ethical assurances of this research process are presented, including the justifications.

Chapter 5 will provide the findings of this study and the analysis of the findings guided by the SIT as the theoretical framework of the study. The themes of the study are guided by the aims of the study. The first theme explores the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothing among participants, the second theme focuses on processes of identity construction through the symbolic consumption of luxury clothing brands within the South African context, the third theme addresses the role played by reference groups in the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothes among RU participants and lastly, the study explores the impact of reference groups on the identity construction of participants.

Chapter 6 provides the conclusion on the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothing among participants, identity construction as well as the role that reference groups play in the symbolic consumption and identity construction. The chapter also highlights some strengths and limitations of the study together with the recommendations for future research into luxury clothing consumption research.

CHAPTER 2: CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING

2.1. Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the consumer decision-making in order to provide the foundation that forms the basis of this research.

2.2. Consumer decision-making

According to Erasmus (2013), consumer decision-making is an important part of consumer behaviour, especially for marketers who are interested in influencing consumers. Consumer decision-making provides a structure to theory and research; provides a conceptual framework; and specifies variables influencing decisions (Erasmus, Boshoff & Rousseau, 2001). Therefore, consumer decision-making is a problem-solving activity that encompasses both external and internal variables (du Plessis, & Rousseau, 2007).

The consumer decision-making process usually consist of five stages but Erasmus (2013) breaks down the consumer decision-making process into three stages. These stages are inputs (influencing factors), processing (need recognition, information search and evaluation of alternatives) and outputs (purchase and post-purchase evaluation). Inputs involve information gathering by a consumer about a product as well as the factors that influence the consumer's decision-making process (Erasmus, 2013). During this process, consumer decisions can be influenced on an internal (e.g. personality, attitude, motives, perception) or external level (e.g. marketing-related factors, market-related factors or socio-cultural factors). The processing stage is whereby a consumer realises a need or a problem which leads to the consumer paying more attention to product information (Erasmus, 2013). With need recognition, a consumer evaluates whether he or she urgently needs to make a purchase depending on the importance of the product (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2006). The importance or urgency of a product will then determine the extent of searching for pre-purchase information. During the evaluation of alternatives, consumer shortlist products to choose the best out of the available options (Erasmus, 2013).

In the output stage, a consumer makes a decision to make a final purchase as he or she has already reviewed all the alternatives and came to the final decision point (Solomon et al., 2006). This is the point when a consumer reflects on the experience of purchasing a product. A consumer can be either satisfied or dissatisfied with the product purchase (Solomon et al., 2006). During this stage, a consumer may experience cognitive dissonance (Erasmus, 2013). Cognitive dissonance refers to the feeling of discomfort after committing to a purchase.

Consumers who buy very expensive products (Erasmus, 2013) usually experience cognitive dissonance. To decrease cognitive dissonance, a consumer might search for information about a product, consult with people who have experience in using the product or apply a defence method to validate the purchase (Solomon et al., 2006). More on consumer decision-making will be discussed below.

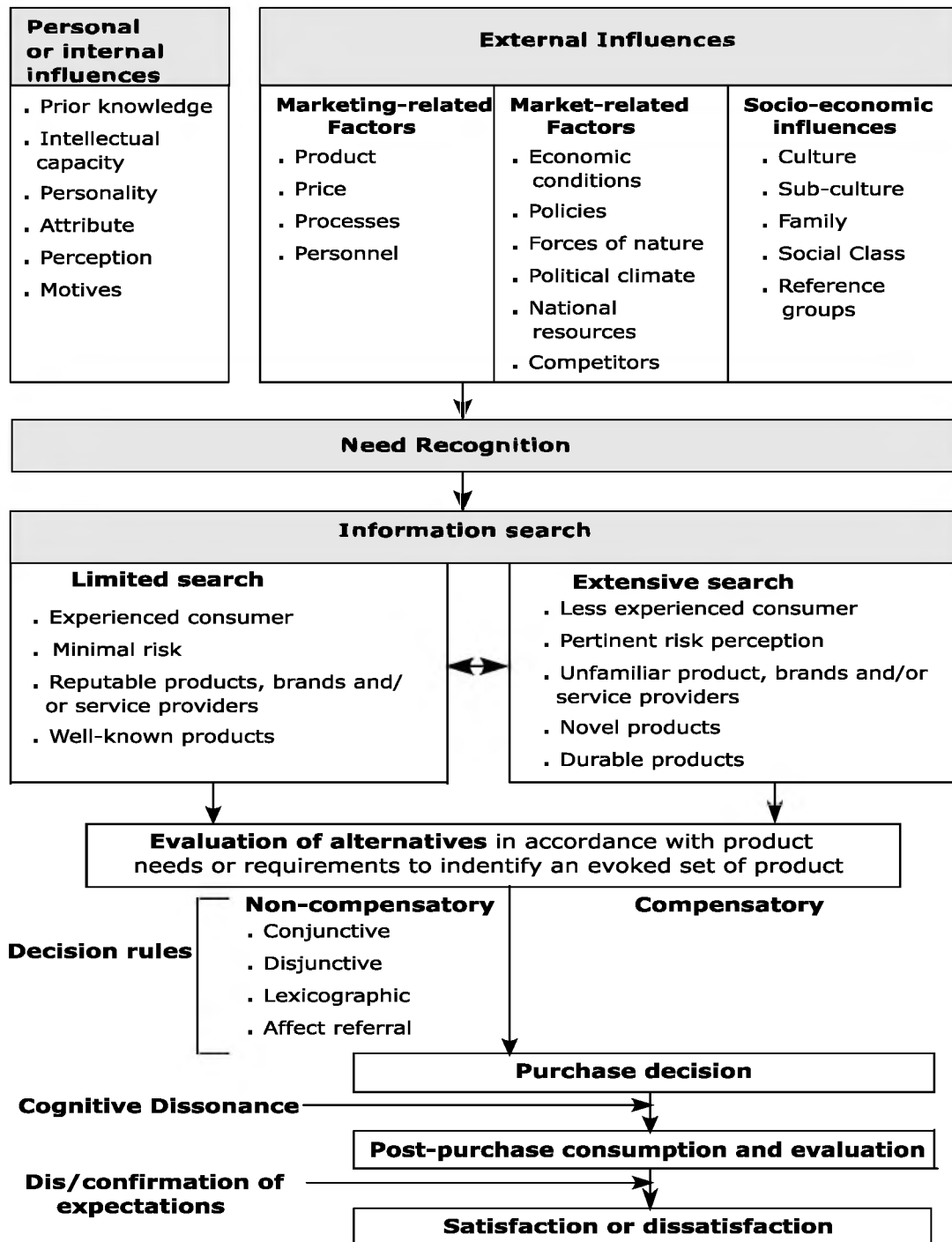


Figure 1: The consumer decision-making process (Erasmus, 2013)

The variables mentioned above influence decision-making in a very complex process, see for example du Plessis, and Rousseau (2007) and Jansson-Boyd (2010). However, it should be noted that consumer characteristics, product category and context of decisions influence the degree of complexity of decisions (Erasmus, 2013). Figure 1 below provides an overview of a continuum of complexity of consumer decision-making.

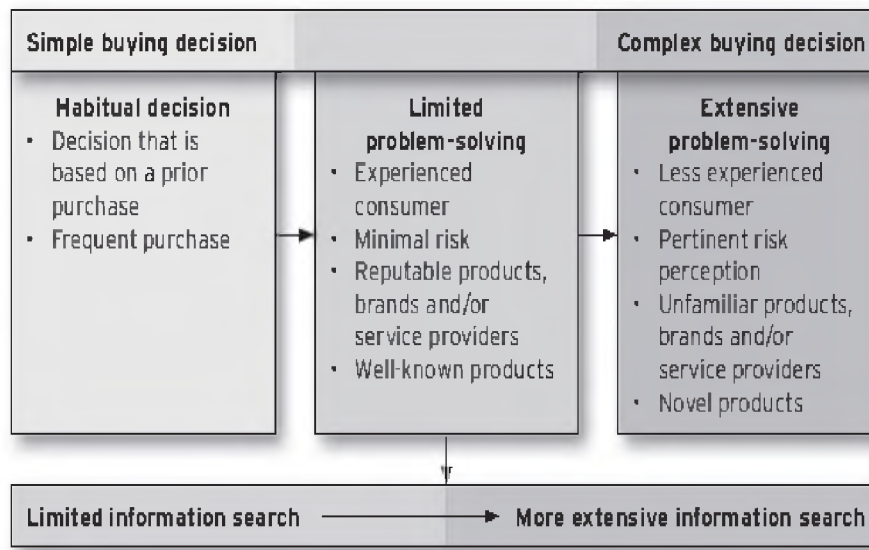


Figure 2: Simple versus complex buying decisions (Erasmus, 2013).

Consumer decision-making models were developed in particular context, time (1960s and 1970s) and social situations (Erasmus, 2013; Erasmus, et al., 2001). For these reasons, it is important to note that decision-making models have been criticised for being based on the assumption that consumers are rational and that they follow a generalised process (Erasmus, et al., 2001). As noted in Figure 1, consumers can make use of *decision shortcuts*, which may be based on potential losses and gains as it pertains to risk perception. Regardless of the complexity of the decision-making process, there are various variables that have been identified as influencing consumers. These include either group factors (external or environmental) such as culture, opinion leaders, reference groups and family, or individual (internal) factors such as learning, motivation, memory, personality, emotions, attitude and self-concept (Du Toit, & Erdis, 2013; Rousseau, 2007; Solomon, 2008). Both groups of factors have an impact in every step of the consumer's decision-making process.

2.2.1. External influences

2.2.1.1 Cultural influences

Culture refers to “a set of learned beliefs, values, attitudes, habits, and forms of behaviour that is shared by a society and is transmitted from one generation to the next by members of that society through language and symbols” (Rousseau, 2007, p. 47). The beliefs and values that are worth striving for are the cultural values. People within a cultural group share these cultural values. South Africa experienced a major shift within the political arena in 1994, whereby there was a move from a minority rule to a true democracy (Rousseau, 2007). The move birthed moderate stability within businesses and consumer confidence. South Africa as a nation is guided by the notion of Ubuntu, which encourages togetherness (Rousseau, 2007). The fundamental idea behind Ubuntu entails that a person can only be a person through other people. This renders the country Afrocentric and hence values inclusiveness or shared group orientation (Koutras, 2006). Afrocentric nations such as South Africa value African behaviours in terms of sociocultural, political, economic and marketing practices. The opposite of the Afrocentric nations are the Eurocentric nations. These nations are argued to value Western cultures and their focus is on individualism, self-esteem, self-interest (Rousseau, 2007). A culture adopted by individuals within a country is likely to guide their consumption behaviour.

The significance of consumer goods does not come in their utilitarian value and commercial value only, it is also in their ability to carry and communicate cultural meaning (Keller, Halkier, Wilska, & Truninger, 2017). For example, clothing, food, and adornment act as a means of expressing the cultural meaning of consumer goods (Witkowski, 2016). The cultural meaning of consumer goods resides in the culturally constituted world, which means that what individuals experience is shaped and constituted by the beliefs and assumptions of his or her culture. According to McCracken (1988), culture provides the ‘lens’ through which all phenomena are seen. Furthermore, culture is the ‘blueprint’ of human activity, which determines how the world will be fashioned by human effort. The material objects of a culture, for example clothes, substantiate the cultural categories. The cultural principles are substantiated by material culture in general and consumer goods. Cultural categories and cultural principles work together; goods cannot signify one without signifying the other (McCracken, 1988). For instance, clothing cannot only show the difference between high and low social classes but they also symbolise the nature of difference that is supposed to exist between these categories.

McCracken (1988) outlined two instruments that act to transfer cultural meaning from the world to the goods. The first instrument is that of advertising. Using the Meaning Transfer

Model, McCracken (1988) suggested that celebrities play an important role in moving cultural meanings from goods to consumers through endorsement. Celebrities collect cultural meanings from the society and portray them to the consumers through the media whilst they are building their celebrity identities in the process (Roy, 2016). Meaning transfer is very important in an advertisement because failure to transfer meaning may lead to the consumer failing to decode (translate) the message successfully (Roy, 2016). It is important for the consumer to be able to decode the message successfully because they are essential participants in the process of meaning transfer (Roy, 2016). Advertisements, according to Mihalcea and Cătoiu (2008), locates the general cultural symbols desired to offer meaning. This means that advertisements act as a way of explaining the cultural meanings that brands carry. Advertising integrates the characteristics of a product with aspects such as-symbols, meanings, images, and feelings.

According to McCracken (1988), the second instrument that is used to transfer cultural meaning from the world to goods is the fashion system. One way used to transfer meaning within the fashion system is when products are associated with established cultural categories and principles (Roy, 2016). Alternatively, transferring meaning within the fashion system is through a radical reform. Those who exist at the margins in the society often influence the radical reform of meaning. These people redefine cultural meanings even though it is done through negative processes.

Sources of meaning are dynamic and numerous and so are the agents who make the gathering and transfer of meaning to consumer goods. According to McCracken (1988), agents within the fashion system exist in two categories; namely designers and fashion journalists/social observers. Notable contemporary examples of social observers are bloggers. Bloggers have become the fashion industry's newest and most reliable trendsetters and brand ambassadors. (Hsu, & Tsou, 2011). Bloggers publish the latest trends of new products, making their followers aware of the modern trends. They tend to influence consumer-purchasing decisions as well (Hsu, & Tsou, 2011).

Additionally, the movement of meaning can take place from the consumer good to the consumer. This usually happens through a powerful and versatile tool, which manipulates the cultural meaning, termed the symbolic action or possession ritual (Rocha, da Rocha, & Rocha, 2016). According to McCracken (1988), a ritual allows individuals to affirm, evoke, assign, or revise the conventional symbols and meanings of the cultural order. In the form of rites of passage, the ritual moves an individual from one cultural category of a person to another (Rocha et al., 2016). An example would be of a teenager moving to adulthood. With this

movement, people might change their consumption behaviour. One can include rituals in the meaning transfer from the consumer good to the consumer in four ways (Rocha et al., 2016). These are exchange (gift-giver selects a gift that has the meaningful properties that he or she wishes to see transferred to the receiver), possession (allow a consumer to own a product but the consumer has no full ownership of the product), grooming (rituals that we conduct repeatedly to draw meaning from products that are perishable in nature), and divestment rituals (can be used either to erase the meaning associated with the previous owner of a product or dispensing of a product) (Rocha et al., 2016).

Apart from culture in general, there are several sub-cultures that exist within South African context (based on ethnicity, geographic, religious, social, and nationality) that have values, beliefs and customs that set them apart from other members in the society (Rousseau, 2007). A sub-culture is a distinct cultural group that exists as an identifiable segment within a larger, more complex society (Blythe, 2013). Sub-cultures consist of age, geography and ethnic identity. Ethnic sub-cultures are based on language, religion and ethnicity (Rousseau, 2007). According to Rousseau (2007), South Africa consists of a relatively young population that has a different lifestyle from the older population. This means that the young population, such as the ones in this study, have their own culture and sub-cultures that shape consumption behaviour.

2.2.1.2. Social influences

Consumers are influenced socially from the face-to-face communications they engage in daily (Rousseau, 2007). These communications can be with friends, family, neighbours or peers. It is from these communications that consumers seek the opinion of others. Consumers tend to seek advice and information from friends and other social groups through the word-of-mouth (Rousseau, 2007). The person to whom consumers seek the advice and information is an opinion leader (Rousseau, 2007). Opinion leaders possess the expertise and knowledge about a product so consumers find them useful in guiding their purchasing behaviour (Rousseau, 2007). An opinion leader does not necessarily have to be a well-known celebrity or prominent person; it can be a friend, a neighbour or a relative as long as they have the knowledge about a product (Rousseau, 2007). Opinion leaders usually have the same demographics and lifestyle as their followers because they belong to the same group (Koutras, 2006). Depending on the product, a consumer can be an opinion leader for a product whilst being a follower for another product (Rousseau, 2007). In South Africa, it is argued that using opinion leaders in

advertisements must be executed with caution because consumers might not identify with the opinion leader the way the marketers want them to (Rousseau, 2007).

2.2.1.3. Economic demand factors

Economic demand factors refer to the “potential purchasing power of a consumer, based on the availability of money or constraints placed on the consumer by lack of money or creditworthiness” (Rousseau, 2007, p. 262). The availability of money could be in the form of an income. Therefore, income becomes a major factor that affects the consumption behaviour of students (Li, 2010). Li (2010) conducted a study to understand the actual condition of university students’ consumption. The study was conducted on 1 457 students from several universities from the east, middle and west of Shandong Province in China. A mixed method approach of interviews and questionnaires was used on a sample of students aged between 18 and 25. Li (2010) argued that the sources of expense affect the consumption manners and habits of university students. Li (2010) used the urban development level and monthly family income as the research data for the study. In response to a question on how much financial support the students had received from family, friends or relatives in the past year, the students indicated that majority of their income was from their families (74, 3%). The remaining 25, 7% indicated friends and relatives as their source of financial support.

Li (2010) also investigated how much the university students earned by working part-time jobs or by engaging in other income-generating activities in the past year. Majority of the students (79, 4%) indicated that they did not earn much. Only 16, 3% of the university students indicated that they get a decent amount from their part-time jobs. Those who received a decent amount from the part-time jobs tended to spend more than those who did not. Most of the students did not earn much from their part-time jobs implying that they need help from family. These findings indicate the importance that family support has in the university students’ consumption behaviours with regard to finances. However, Yun (2007) suggested that university students should look for other ways of earning an additional income if they want to consume more. The university students were also asked to indicate how they spend their income. Most of the university students indicated that they spend a large percentage of their income on living necessities, followed by fashion, social intercourse, amusement and leisure and lastly learning material. Li’s (2010) study is important for comparative purposes with the current study to find whether there is a common trend among students in terms of their sources of income and how they (the students) spend their income. The study will also find which other factors besides income that influence the consumption of luxury clothing brands by RU

students. Norvilitis, et al. (2006) regard factors such as age, personal traits and knowledge as determining the way in which college students spend their money.

The economic demand factors can also affect the social class to which individuals belong. Schiffman and Kanuk (2004, p.372) define social class as “the division of members of a society into a hierarchy of distinct status classes so that members of each class have relatively homogeneous status and members of all other classes have either more or less status”. Blythe (2013) adds that social class is more a reflection of the existence of a set of sub-cultures based on: 1) the educational level, 2) the occupational requirements and 3) the economic power of an individual member. Individuals who belong to a similar social class are less likely to relate with people from other social classes. People prefer mixing with members of the same class. Different social structures exist in different countries and people in different social classes have different behaviour (Peter, & Olson, 2008; Rousseau, 2007).

In South Africa, a very small part of the population belongs to the upper class, more belong to the middle class and the majority belong to the lower class (Koutras, 2006). A triangular shape depicts the class structure in South Africa (Koutras, 2006). This often exerts influence consumption patterns of certain individuals because of the need to belong to a certain class. As mentioned earlier, individuals consume certain products to symbolise their social standing in society because such products are associated with a certain social class (e.g. luxury brands). According to Steinfield (2015), luxury brands possess powers to divide the social world and those who feel they belong to a certain group form their own social group. Despite the socio-economic status, South Africans are particularly astute about quality (IOL Lifestyle, 2015). According to IOL Lifestyle (2015), South Africa has five products that signal status. These are radio, clothing, education, television set and mobile phones. Previous studies suggested that research must be conducted on university students (Generation Y) to find out whether they exhibit similar attitudes and behaviours.

Kang and Park (2016) argued that consumers whose main goal is to improve personal value of the self and expressing their identity tend not to allow economic barriers to hinder their consumption. There are few options that consumers can adopt to accommodate their luxury consumption choices such as the use of credit cards. Roberts and Jones (2001) view college students as a generation raised in a credit card society. Access to credit cards lead to the students spending substantial financial resources on luxury brands (Roberts, & Jones, 2001). These researchers administered questionnaires to a sample of 406 private college students in Texas. Robert and Jones (2001) found that there had been much research done before on the use of credit cards for compulsive buying but none focused on college students. Therefore, Robert

and Jones (2001) used a Money Attitude Scale (MAS) to measure students' money attitudes. Four factors were measured; namely power-prestige, retention-time, distrust and anxiety.

The study found that a significant relationship between compulsive buying and credit card use among college students exists. Students spent more in shops with a credit card logo than a shop without a logo (Roberts, & Jones, 2001). Roberts and Jones (2001) also found that credit cards debt has many consequences on students post-schooling. Of the four factors measured, power-prestige had the strongest relationship with credit card spending (Roberts, & Jones, 2001). In other words, students engage in compulsive buying because they want to display power and prestige to others.

Another study conducted by Sidoti and Devasagayam (2010) investigated the reasons behind the growing use of credit cards among college students (ages 18 – 24) in the 16 states of the United States of America (n = 335). Out of the 335 students, 26% possessed five or more credit cards and the remaining number had two to four credit cards. Most of the respondents obtained their credit cards through their parents prior to coming to college (Sidoti, & Devasagayam, 2010). Sidoti and Devasagayam's (2010) study found that students with high materialistic attitude and those who admire people with expensive luxury items tend to misuse credit cards (Sidoti, & Devasagayam, 2010). The students indicated that they use credit cards to buy materialistic products that improve their public self-image. In addition, Sidoti and Devasagayam (2010) found that students' level of happiness was determined by their material possessions hence the abuse of credit cards. However, Sidoti and Devasagayam (2010) pointed out how the misuse of credit cards leads to debt and in turn debt leads to stress and subsequently worry among students therefore, potentially leading them to stay out of debt.

Power and prestige (status) seem to be common factors that influence the consumption of luxury brands because a person of status is mostly ranked highly than others (Nelissen, & Meijers (2011). This means that status is one of the most driving factors in the consumption of luxury brands (Han, Nunes, & Drèze, 2010). Consumers accumulate luxury possessions as a way of seeking status and moving up the social scale (Blythe, 2013). This makes the individuals who accumulate luxury possessions status seekers. Status seekers are individuals who engage in visible consumption as evidence of their superior rank (Eastman, & Eastman, 2011). Status seekers also possess a need for respect, power and entitlement (Nelissen, & Meijers, 2011). Kaus (2013) argued that there is a relative increase in status consumption in South Africa, especially among the Black middle class. As noted by Lee, Kim, Pelton, Knight and Forney (2008), clothes act as a way of communicating social distinctions such as status of

an individual in a society. In addition, luxury branded clothes consumption can act as a way of increasing one's status (Saad, 2007). Bagwell and Bernheim (1996) suggested that consumers purchase high priced products to communicate their wealth and social status.

2.2.1.4. Reference groups

Reference groups are groups that individuals identify with and serve as a reference point for individuals in their lives in terms of beliefs, attitudes and behaviour (du Plessis, 2003; Rousseau, 2007). Examples of reference groups include entertainment figures, sports heroes, political leaders, virtual groups, family and peers (Makgosa, & Mohube, 2007). In South Africa, family members, peer groups, and role models have a strong influence on consumer behaviour, according to Cant, Brink and Brijball (2006). It has been argued that reference groups influence a great deal of consumer decisions, nevertheless, the type and strength of this influential power might vary from product to product (Makgosa, & Mohube, 2007). Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2013) maintained that there are certain aspects that make consumer reference groups vary such as the type of membership that exists in the group, the strength of the social tie, the type of contact and the attraction of the group.

Consumers tend to purchase products or brands that help them to fit in the reference group or gain approval within the group (Du Toit, & Erdis, 2013). The importance of reference groups is in the significant role that the groups can have when an individual establishes a sense of belonging, self-verification, and self-enhancement in terms of brand attitudes and purchasing behaviour (du Plessis, 2003). Also, "consumers form associations between reference groups and the brands they use and transfer these meanings from brand to self by selecting brands with meanings relevant to an aspect of their current self-concept or possible self" (Escalas, & Bettman, 2005, p. 379). Reference groups guide consumers as to what is desirable or what are not desirable products to purchase (Bristol, & Mangleburg, 2005). Therefore, from a consumer behaviour perspective, reference group influence is the influence reference groups have on consumer's purchase decisions (Childers, & Rao, 1992). In the current times, reference groups exist both in our physical and digital world. Reference groups as social groups that an individual belong, are influenced by one's social context (Rousseau, 2007). According to Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (2002), the impact of social groups on the way people perceive themselves and others around them cannot be understood without taking into consideration the broader social context in which they function, for example, tertiary students.

As mentioned above, one example of a reference group that influence consumers is that of family. Family acts as a primary reference group and is regarded as the most powerful in

influencing consumer decision-making (Blythe, 2013). This may be because individuals have contact with the family on almost a daily basis, which may not be the case in some other reference groups. According to Cant et al. (2006), of all the groups that influence consumer behaviour, the family is usually the primary influencer. The importance of family in influencing consumer behaviour lies in the fact that members from the same family tend to consume homogeneous products as they purchase together. In other words, members of the family influence each other when buying products (Rousseau, 2007).

Family members can therefore play different roles within the household in terms of purchase decision-making (Rousseau, 2007). A family member can act as an information seeker who possesses some expertise in obtaining and evaluating product information (Rousseau, 2007). This individual is someone with access to information within the family (Blythe, 2013). Additionally, there can be an influencer within the family who offers help and advice about purchasing or consumption of products but might not have direct involvement with the purchase (Blythe, 2013). Children within a family often play the influencer role, whereas the parent is a decision-maker or the decider and has the final say about product purchase (Rousseau, 2007). However, studies have shown marked variations in these roles among different families (Blythe, 2013).

Another role is that of the purchasing agent or buyer (Blythe, 2013). This individual purchases a product on behalf of other family members. Consumers are also regarded as the end users of the product (Blythe, 2013). If the end users of the product are not satisfied with a product, there may be an influence to change the brand used by the family to suit the needs of that particular family member(s) (Rousseau, 2007). However, the family roles in the decision-making often vary depending on the product class and the relative influence of the family. The current study aims to explore and establish reference groups that influence the students' consumption of luxury branded clothes. Koutras (2006) view the extended family as the most dominant in South Africa however, there has been a decline in their dominance, especially in the urban areas, making the nuclear family a more attractive alternative.

Families also play a significant role in socialising children. Parents guide their children when making purchases especially on how to select and interpret product information (Hsu, & Chang, 2008). The guidance usually transpires when parents are co-shopping with their children. According to Roberti (2014), co-shopping of parents and children is an informal way of teaching children specific consumer skills about brands or product. Children perceive parents to be knowledgeable and they observe parental consumption behaviour (Park, & Lessig, 1977).

Hsu and Chang's (2008) study (n= 576) focused on how family communications patterns and lifestyles influence the purchasing decisions and patterns of young adults. The respondents' ages ranged from 18-26 years. Family communication was found to be a tool that allows and encourages young adults to discuss freely and make evaluations with family before making purchasing decisions and patterns (Hsu, & Chang, 2008). Abraham (2011) pointed out that family exerts an influence in personality characteristics, attitudes, values and the decision-making processes involved in purchasing goods. The influence becomes positive when there is effective communication between family members.

Celebrities are another form of reference group that significantly influences consumer behaviour. Celebrities are a group of people that marketers mainly engage to influence the consumption behaviour of, especially the youth (Young, & Pinsky, 2006). Several studies including Boon and Lomore (2001) and Surana (2008) stated that, apart from family and peers, young people form secondary attachments with celebrities. Babu and Latha (2014), and Khan and Lodhi (2016) found that consumers tend to be attracted to celebrities, which in turn makes the celebrities a powerful marketing tool to most consumers. Khan and Lodhi (2016) in their study focused on how celebrities influence purchase decision on face care products. Khan and Lodhi (2016) viewed celebrity endorsement as having an impact on a consumer's buying behaviour. Celebrity endorsement is defined as "a way of brand communication through which celebrities endorse the brand by transferring their personality, status in the society" (Khan, & Lodhi, 2016, p. 105). When consumers purchase the products celebrities endorse, or own, they feel as if they are in the same class as them because they are able to afford and possess what these celebrities have (Villamor, 2015). As with the Meaning Transfer Model mentioned earlier, meaning transfer takes place from the celebrities to the consumers. Celebrity endorsers are most likely to induce positive feelings toward a brand than non-celebrity endorsers (Nyarko, Asimah, Agbemava, & Tsetse, 2015). Therefore, "consumers take the possession of these advertised commodities in order to transfer these meanings to themselves in the creation of their own identity and image" (Yurdakul-Şahin & Atik, 2013, p. 67). The consumers try to purchase products to imitate a celebrity because they trust the celebrity (Khan, & Lodhi, 2016). An example of celebrities that are influencing consumer the most is Kim Kardashian and her husband Kanye West. The two got married in 2014 and they are regarded as a powerful celebrity couple in the entertainment industry (Cohen, 2015). Kim Kardashian is a reality television personality, actress, socialite, businesswoman and model. Kim Kardashian and her family appears on a reality television series *Keeping up with the Kardashians* (Cohen, 2015). She has become an influential online and social media personality with millions of followers

on Instagram and Twitter. Kim, together with her sisters, own a variety of clothing and make-up products whilst Kanye West is a hip-hop artist, songwriter, producer, fashion designer and entrepreneur (Cohen, 2015). Kanye West was one of the top 100 most influential people in the world in 2005 and in 2015 (Cohen, 2015).

Boon and Lomore (2001) maintained that celebrity influence in the transition phase of an individual to adulthood is as a result of individuals often forming secondary attachments with celebrities. Yurdakul-Şahin and Atik (2013) conducted a study aimed at exploring the effects of local and global celebrities on young people. The study was conducted in Izmir, Turkey on students from a private university (n=195). The students wrote anonymous essays about their favourite celebrity and the impact that the celebrity has on the students' consumption habits. The study established five main themes consisting of the role played by local and global celebrities in influencing the university students. The five themes were physical attractiveness, personality, ideology, success and values-lifestyles (Yurdakul-Şahin, & Atik, 2013). The study found that physical attractiveness is not the only reason for the positive evaluations given to celebrities; personality traits, success, values and lifestyles also play an important role. However, the two most influential characteristics of the celebrities (on the students) out of the five were success and values-lifestyles (Yurdakul-Şahin, & Atik, 2013). The students indicated that they like identifying themselves with celebrities (both local and global), whom they perceive to be successful regardless of their field. The celebrities emerged as people who shape the students' habits, practices and daily lives (Yurdakul-Şahin, & Atik, 2013). In terms of values-lifestyles, the students indicated that they are influenced by how celebrities possess values and how these values are represented in terms of lifestyle. The values-lifestyles were found to be very important factors in the popularity of global celebrities than local celebrities (Yurdakul-Şahin, & Atik, 2013). The aforementioned effects that celebrities exert on the students shape the success or failure of celebrity endorsements.

2.2.2. Internal influences

Apart from external factors, individual factors or internal factors also influence consumer decision-making. The characteristic of each individual consumer influences consumer behaviour.

2.2.2.1. Perception

Perception differs among individuals, which means that individuals have different experiences of the world. These experiences start from what we think, filtered by our senses and moderated by our previous experiences (Blythe, 2013). Therefore, Arnould, Price, and Zinkhan, (2004, p. 296) define perception as a “process by which people select, organise and interpret sensory stimuli into a meaningful coherent picture”. For instance, in the context of the current study, the way students view a particular brand.

A study by Ayupp, Ling and Tudin (2013) emphasises the importance of consumer perception by arguing that consumers’ perception is an internal factor that should be monitored since it is the basis for which the consumers judge whether the product is worth the tag of ‘luxury’. The perceptual process has three steps (Blythe, 2013), that will be discussed briefly. The first step is attribution. When consumers first hear about the existence of a favourite luxury brand on the market, they attribute certain characteristics to it, based on the cues received (Blythe, 2013). The second step is expectancy. Within the marketing framework, expectancy leads consumers to believe that a popular luxury brand is better than a counterfeit brand despite the design being the same (Blythe, 2013). The last step is affection which relates to emotional responses. Affection is an irrational response or an instinct that leads to someone liking or disliking a certain brand (Blythe, 2013). An example of how consumers respond irrationally or choose to like or dislike a brand is by choosing a brand colour. Kaya and Epps (2004) stated that colour-emotion association differs from one culture to another or from one country to another. In particular, a certain colour might symbolise different meanings and interpreted differently in different countries/culture (Kaya, & Epps 2004; Kurt, & Osueke, 2014). For example, bright colours symbolise and convey high quality in China yet in the UK they are associated with low quality (Blythe, 2013). Consequently, context plays an important role in colour choice (Amsteus, Al-Shaabab, Wallin & Sjöqvist, 2015). Colours have a strong effect on perceptions, emotions and feelings (Hemphill, 1996; Kaya, & Epps, 2004). Colours are often used as fashion statements to consumers who are into luxury brand consumption.

Kaya and Epps (2004) conducted a quantitative study to examine college students' colour-emotion associations, referencing colour samples from the standardized Munsell Color System. They also investigated the reasons for students’ emotional reactions to each colour. The study

was conducted on a public institution in the Southeast (n = 98) (Kaya, & Epps, 2004). Twenty-two emotions were found to overlap and some having the same meaning (Kaya, & Epps, 2004). The participants in this study showed positive colour-emotions association with the principal hues (79, 6%), intermediate hues had 64,5% and achromatic colours 29,2% (Kaya, & Epps, 2004). The colour green received many positive responses because of its association with relaxation, calmness, peace and comfort. The students associated green with nature, outdoors and springtime among other things (Kaya, & Epps, 2004). Amsteus et al. (2015) stated that blue was previously associated with high quality, attractiveness, freshness, effectiveness, neutrality and trustworthiness. Blue had positive emotional responses as well because the participants associated it with water, beach, ocean and the sky that provide them with comfort, peace and hope (Kaya, & Epps, 2004). Blue was not only associated with positive emotion; it was associated with negative emotions as well such as depression because the students indicated that blue reminds them of dark and night skies (Kaya, & Epps, 2004). Colours were associated with symbols through objects and physical space. The colour red-yellow was associated with Halloween, blue-green was associated with cool mints and toothpaste, and red was associated with Valentine's Day (Kaya, & Epps, 2004).

For achromatic colours, some respondents associated black with power and reminded them of nice sports cars, some felt sophisticated when wearing black fashion and clothing, some associated it with richness and wealth, whilst some respondents argued black reminded them of funerals and darkness (Kaya, & Epps, 2004). Therefore, black was associated with both positive and negative feelings. In a study on low involvement, private, inexpensive products, black was associated with powerfulness and expensiveness (Amsteus, et al., 2015). This contradicted Amsteus et al.'s (2015) assumption that black would be associated with dirt and grime. White was associated with purity, with being simple, with innocence, with peace and being clean (Kaya, & Epps, 2004). On the negative side, white was associated with emptiness, loneliness, boredom and void. Gray did not have any positive responses; it was associated (in a negative way) with boredom, confusion, loneliness and tiredness because it resembles bad weather, sadness and depression among other things (Kaya, & Epps, 2004).

The study conducted by Amsteus et al. (2015) highlighted the lack of influence of past experiences on the choice of a new product. They concluded that the experience with a product in the new context is not influenced by the past hence consumers rely on their general associations with the product. In addition, Akcay (2012) and Pantone (1992) conducted studies on the influence of colour, ethnicity and gender on teenage marketing revealed that black colour

is the most popular amongst both genders when making purchasing choices. Therefore, one's gender is crucial when making colour choices.

Colour brings pleasure through dimension of sight whereas texture gives an experience of pleasure through touch or feel (De Klerk, & Lubbe, 2008). De Klerk and Lubbe (2008) suggested that if a consumer is satisfied with the colour and texture, they would not look for any other qualities in a product. Colour is important because it is the most visible element of a product and plays a role in the evaluation and assessment of the quality of a product. (De Klerk, & Lubbe, 2008). De Klerk and Lubbe (2008) conducted a study investigating the role that the aesthetic experience plays when female consumers evaluate clothing products. In particular, De Klerk and Lubbe (2008) conducted a qualitative study with data gathered from unstructured interviews and focus groups with a sample of 15 female adult professionals. The study found that two dimensions of the sensory experience play a significant role when women are choosing quality clothes (De Klerk, & Lubbe, 2008). These two dimensions are sight and touch, which speak to colour and texture.

In addition, Haataja (2011) aimed at exploring the attitude of young people towards luxury brands and conducted a qualitative study to get the answers. Haataja (2011) conducted 12 in-depth interviews with participants aged 18-26. Respondents of Haataja's (2011) study mentioned that luxury brands should be of high quality and high price. In addition to Haataja's (2011) study findings, Sun (2011) suggest that consumers value not only high quality and high price, but reliability brands as well. The respondents also highlighted that they buy luxury products as a symbol of social status and wealth. They mentioned that buying their luxury brands leaves them with a positive feeling (Haataja, 2011). The respondents emphasised the importance of quality when buying luxury products because as students, they do not have much money to waste and they are expected to be financially self-sufficient (Haataja, 2011). Buying quality will thus help them in saving their finances because they do not have to buy luxury products so often. Jacoby and Olson (1985) suggest that quality is important when purchasing a luxury product because it draws consumers to purchase a product. Consumers interested in the quality of luxury brands are likely to regard luxury brands as those that exhibit superior characteristics and presentation compared to that of normal goods (Sun, 2011).

2.2.2.2. Learning

Learning refers to a change in behaviour resulting from experience. The behaviour changes as an individual acquires information and experience (Rousseau, 2007). In particular, consumers learn through acquiring information and experience from product use, which makes consumer learning an important aspect in the consumption process. Schiffman and Kanuk (as cited in Rousseau, 2007, p. 186) define consumer learning as “the process by which individuals acquire purchase and consumption knowledge and experiences they apply to future related behaviour”. In this current study, learning is regarded as important because the students are believed not born preferring luxury branded clothes, but they are habits learned as they grew up.

According to Joubert (2010) group factors (as explained in section 2.1.1 above) such as culture, friends, family, social class, reference groups and opinion leaders influence consumer learning as consumers learn from these encounters and experiences. This indicates the importance of external influence on consumer learning. For the learning process to occur, consumers will be stimulated for motivation to occur. After motivation, the learning process begins (Joubert, 2010). The consumer will then act in response to the stimulus after exposure for several times (Blythe, 2013). Furthermore, reinforcement will occur whereby stimulus will increase repetition of the same response in future. When the responses are repeated, learning will occur (Blythe, 2013). Learning is important for this study because the students make repeat purchases for their luxury branded clothes and they are influenced by reference groups in their learning process.

2.2.2.3. Motivation

Motivation is defined as the reason that drives a consumer to develop a purchasing behaviour (Hawkins, Best, & Coney, 2004). There are various theories that exist to explain why consumers engage in certain consumption behaviours. An example is the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs, which explains how human motivation is based on five needs (Botha, 2013). These needs are physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs and self-actualisation needs and are arranged in a hierarchy. Any consumption behaviour can satisfy at least one need (Hawkins et al., 2004). However, Ward and Lasen (2009) argued that individuals can simultaneously desire and search for more than one need at a time and may well prioritise them differently and within each stage. The terms needs and motivation are often used interchangeably because when a need is recognised and experienced as a drive state, it is referred to as motivation (Hawkins et al., 2004). Nelson (2011) argued that needs are the strongest motivators for consumers to spend their money. The current study will unpack the needs that consumption of luxury branded clothes satisfy among RU students.

Individual needs such as values influence consumer behaviour. There are six value orientations according to Werner (as cited in Botha, 2013). These are; the theoretical person, the economic person, the social person, the power person, the religious person and the aesthetic person. Consumers may have more than one value orientation that influences their consumption behaviour and some value orientations may be stronger than others (Botha, 2013). The theoretical person values knowledge and deeper meanings of products, the economic person is driven by the utility motive and prefers to see evidence for money, the social person values the relationship with others, the power person values the position of power and prefers to have superior choices, the religious person has a consumption behaviour that is shaped by spiritual foundations and the aesthetic person values beauty (Botha, 2013).

Consumers who value or have a need for the position of power tend to engage in consumption choices that bring out their superiority. This form of consumption, according to Lee and Seidle (2012), has an element of narcissism in that it involves a belief in one's superior qualities. Lee and Seidle (2012) argued that narcissism is a personality trait that has both cognitive and motivational elements. People who consume luxury-clothing brands often view themselves as superior to those who do not afford. This is so because they consume the luxury branded clothes in order to receive admiration from others. According to Dunning (2007) and Jansson-Boyd (2010), individuals with narcissistic tendencies wish others to regard them as special and superior and they purchase expensive products viewed by many as highly desirable. If a narcissistic individual sees results such as admiration by others, from the consumption of luxury brands, they are motivated to keep buying the luxury brands.

Kang and Park (2016) conducted a qualitative study on the perfection of the narcissistic self. The researchers conducted focus group discussions and in-depth interviews to people aged between 20- 50 years. Kang and Park (2016) distinguished between overt narcissistic orientation and covert narcissistic orientation. Overt narcissism on the one hand, "permits grandiosity that leads to direct expression of exhibitionism, self-importance, and a preoccupation with attention and admiration from others" (Kang, & Park, 2016, p. 3814). Covert narcissism on the other hand, bears uncertain feelings of grandeur, lack of self-confidence and vague feelings of depression (Kang, & Park, 2016). Kang and Park's (2016) study found that narcissistic orientations play a significant role in luxury brand consumption. Those with overt narcissism orientation consider themselves as high class as shown by the products they consume. People with covert narcissistic orientations show signs of vulnerability; therefore, they use the consumption of brands in a compensatory behaviour (Kang, & Park, 2016). Additionally, people with covert narcissistic orientations were found to be

interested in creating their own ideal images and develop a self-concept systematically (Kang, & Park, 2016). Kang and Park's (2016) study found that narcissistic consumers tend to purchase luxury brands even if they face with financial constraints. This is interesting and the current study focuses on students who are likely to have financial constraints because they live off their parents' income. Overt narcissistic consumers prefer genuine products, pay high prices for brands, have a strong brand relationship, and they avoid counterfeit products (Kang, & Park, 2016).

2.2.2.4. Memory

Memory, as described by Botha (2013) is the total accumulation of all information received from experiences, stimuli and learning. Memory has three stages, which are sensory memory, short-term memory and long-term memory (Hawkins et al., 2004). Sensory memory processes information for a few seconds (Botha, 2013). The information is then either retained to continue to the next stage or released because it is not important (Botha, 2013). Short-term memory has limited capacity and therefore stores information for short time. Long-term memory has a high capacity to store information and is relatively permanent (Botha, 2013). An individual's memory is what will help consumers to make current and future purchase decisions and to learn further in the future. This suggests that a consumer's memory plays a vital role in the consumption process (Manley, 2013). Marketers should consider marketing tools that can be easily remembered by consumers.

2.2.2.5. Personality

Blythe (2013) refers to personality as an attribute that makes an individual unique. The enduring characteristics distinguish one consumer from another. According to Dos Santos (2013), an individual possess two fundamental characteristics of personality; consistency or endurance and similarities or differences. The underlying characteristic behind consistency and endurance is that consumers can exhibit the same characteristics or tendencies over a long period (Do Santos, 2013). However, due to life experiences, a consumer's personality can change. The change is necessitated when a consumer goes through a transition phase such as giving birth or leaving home for college (Noble, & Walker, 1997). Secondly, personality reflects consumer similarities and differences. The focus on similarities explores how consumers as a group exhibit similar characteristics whereas the focus on differences explores why consumers exhibit differences in their personalities (Dos Santos, 2013). There are four theories that explain consumer personalities (Dos Santos, 2013) but are not going to be discussed in-depth. The first theory is the psychodynamic viewpoint, which seeks to understand a consumer's internal processes and characteristics that influence one's identity (Dos Santos,

2013). The second theory is the trait viewpoint that suggest the influence of a consumer's behaviour by his or her unique, innate pattern of traits (Dos Santos, 2013). The third theory is the biological viewpoint that explains how a consumer's internal processes, traits and ways of thinking are inherited through deoxybonucleic acid (DNA). Lastly, the socio-cognitive view suggests that a consumer's personality is influenced by the way he or she thinks (Dos Santos, 2013). Through psychographic elements, such as personality, marketers will be able to measure the motivation behind consumer behaviour and can understand consumer behaviour.

2.2.2.6. Emotions

Emotions are defined as strong, relatively uncontrolled feelings that affect behaviour (Hawkins et al., 2004). Within consumer research, emotions are characterised by positive or negative evaluations. Consumers seek positive emotions most of the time. Many products use emotion arousal features for their primary benefit, for example, using excitement and fun in advertisements to arouse emotions (Hawkins et al., 2004). Even though consumers seek positive emotions, that is not always the case with some products, they have negative emotions, hence marketers often try to reduce or prevent negative emotions in their products. This is usually done through the use of advertisements that trigger the emotional reactions of joy and warmth. Additionally, the repeated exposure of consumers to positive emotion-eliciting advertisements may increase brand preference (Hawkins et al., 2004). Emotions are argued to be strongly linked to perception, needs, motivation and personality because they can arouse an individual to satisfy a goal (Manley, 2013).

2.2.2.7. Attitude

An attitude is a learned predisposition that a consumer should behave in consistently favourable or unfavourable way towards a situation, event or object being offered on the market (Manley, 2013). An attitude is made of three components namely: the affective component, the cognitive component and the behavioural component. Affective component refers to the feelings that people have towards a product and the feelings are used to assess consumers' all-encompassing favourable or unfavourable attitude towards objects (Mpinganjira, 2013). Because context is important when evaluating products, one's affective reaction to a product may change as a situation changes (Hawkins et al., 2004). The cognitive component consists of a consumer's belief about an object (Hawkins et al., 2014). It is one's knowledge and perception acquired by direct contact or through other sources of information (Mpinganjira, 2013). The knowledge and perceptions are either informational or evaluative beliefs. Informational beliefs are associated with product attributes whereas evaluative beliefs are associated with product benefits (Mpinganjira, 2013). The reason for the consumption of luxury branded clothing by

RU students might possibly be due to the positive experiences gained from consuming the brands. The behavioural component refers to how one responds to a product (Hawkins et al., 2004). This will result in a consumer choosing whether to buy or not to buy a product. A positive behavioural intention results in a positive attitude towards a product whereas a negative behavioural intention result in a negative attitude towards a product (Hawkins et al., 2004). The study of consumer's attitudes has received considerable attention because it is indicative of how consumers view a certain product and how improvements can be made.

2.2.2.8. Lifestyle

Lifestyle refers to the actions, activities and interests of a consumer (du Plessis, 2003). It also refers to how a consumer enacts his or her self-concept (Hawkins et al., 2004). A consumer's past experiences, innate characteristics and current situation determines the lifestyle he or she leads. An addition to the aforementioned determinants, Sheth and Mittal (2004), consider lifestyle to be determined by:

- One's personal characteristics (personality, race, gender and age);
- One's personal context (reference groups, culture, and institutions);
- One's emotions and needs.

One's lifestyle shapes their consumption behaviour. This enables marketers to segment and analyse products according to the consumers' lifestyle (du Plessis, 2003). Lifestyle plays significant role in the lives of the targeted consumer group for this current study. The study is measured on the micro level in terms of lifestyle measures. Micro level focuses on attitude and behaviours with respect to a specific product or category (Hawkins et al., 2004). The current study focuses on luxury clothing brands, which makes it a specific product focus. There has been a significant change in terms of the lifestyle patterns in South Africa. Therefore, if marketers are aware of the kind of lifestyle their consumers lead, they will be able to understand their market dynamics better, uncover new opportunities and improve advertising communications based on the targeted consumer (du Plessis, 2003). For example, the middle black class (also known as the Black Diamond) has expanded, is now status conscious and tend to reflect status in the use of products (Du Preez, & Visser, 2003). This information will guide what marketing strategies the marketers need to employ because lifestyle involves both individual and influential factors (Wu, 2003). According to Du Preez, and Visser (2003) clothes are the third highest status item among the black middle class in South Africa (8, 2%), cell phones come second (10, 2%) and cars are at the top (65, 3%) (Du Preez, & Visser, 2003). This indicates that clothes are a symbol of status within the South African society (Du Preez, & Visser, 2003).

2.3. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to provide an overview of the variables influencing consumer behaviour. While consumer decision-making models have been criticised for assuming that consumers make rational decisions in a generalised process, the variables discussed in this chapter provides a structure for this research. Rather than discussing the causal laws of consumer decision-making (which is beyond the scope of this research), this chapter attempted to highlight the subjectivist approach, as suggested by Erasmus et al. (2001). The subjectivist approach is aligned with a social constructivist paradigm (discussed further in section 4.3.1.). In other words, these variables provide a framework for the meaning of behaviour in a perceptual world (Erasmus, et al., 2001).

CHAPTER 3: LUXURY BRANDS AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

3.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion of the existing literature on consumption, identity and reference groups. The overview of the literature helps in creating the theoretical context of research. The theoretic framework of this study is based on the social identity theory. A brief history of consumption will then be presented, followed by factors influencing consumer decisions. The literature on symbolic consumption will also be discussed. The construction of identity through the consumption of luxury brands will be presented.

3.2. The historical background of consumption

The purpose of this section is to show the trends that have taken place over the years. The fundamental idea behind the influence of consumerism on the development and expression of individual identities, with regard to marketing strategies and interventions is discussed. Having a background knowledge of the history of consumption helps one to appreciate how the study of consumer behaviour has reached the stage it is today and the reasons behind the rapid growth of consumer society that is witnessed today (Jansson-Boyd, 2010).

The great transformation in the Western society is important because it was not just about industrial revolution but also consumer revolution (McCracken, 1988). Therefore, the history of consumption brought about great transformation in the field of social sciences. According to McCracken (1988, p.139), consumer research “promises the opportunity to create new perspectives, sources of data, and theoretical concepts”. It is important to note that the history and development of consumerism is closely linked to the history and development of a given society (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). In addition, McCracken (1988) stated that there are three moments that stood out in the history of consumption; each illustrating new patterns of production, exchange and demand. The first episode was of the consumer boom in the sixteenth century. The noblemen in the sixteenth century spent most of their fortune on expensive food and clothing, and there was social competition among the noblemen for royal favour. This social competition made the noblemen slaves of competitive consumption (McCracken, 1988; Witkowski, 2016).

The eighteenth century marked the second episode in the history of consumption. It is in this century that the consumer society emerged and the modern consumer culture began (Witkowski, 2016). This period marked the beginning of purchasing for the ‘self’ instead of purchasing for the family as was in the sixteenth century (McCracken, 1988). In addition, the

number of markets increased giving consumers many choices. Noblemen were no longer the only ones who could participate in consumption, the working class also joined in during the eighteenth century. The participation of the working class and other social groups in the consumer revolution led to the first period of mass consumption (Witkowski, 2016). According to McCracken (1988, p. 17), “consumption was beginning to take place more often, in more places, under new influences, by new groups, in pursuit of new goods, for new social and cultural needs”. Thus, consumption was becoming a major activity. The eighteenth century was also marked by a major development in the field of marketing. The availability of marketing strategies (such as advertising) exposed consumers to a large volume of information (McCracken, 1988; Jansson-Boyd, 2010).

Exposure to a lot of information and the pressure to promote available products then led to a shift in the world of the consumer, from traditional preferences and tastes to more market-oriented preferences and tastes (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). Therefore, consumer learning became important because of the increase in goods on the market. Consumer learning process made it possible for the consumer to process the information they got from marketers, make a distinction between fashionable and unfashionable goods, and be aware of the message that is sent by their purchases (Witkowski, 2016). In the eighteenth century, goods began to carry status meaning as well as an expression of social identity. McCabe (2015) argued that consumption in the current era has its roots in eighteenth century England. It is in the eighteenth century where the fashion role models (fashionistas) were born. The ‘fashionistas’ were mostly French women of high power and influence, emulated by most Parisians (Okonkwo, 2007).

The nineteenth century did not experience any ‘consumer boom’ because the transformation that happened in the consumer society from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century had become a permanent social fact (McCracken, 1988). Possessions continued to be associated with positive values in the nineteenth century (Witkowski, 2016). The nineteenth century was also characterised by the emergence of department stores and was termed the ‘golden age’ of the department store (Bell, & Hollows, 2016). These stores allowed the middle class to purchase status through the ownership of luxury and/or frivolous goods (Page, 1992). The combination of exposition, department stores, chain stores and film contributed to the new purchase process (Witkowski, 2016).

Subsequently, consumers were exposed to several persuasive and informational stimuli without any expectations that the stimuli would result in immediate purchase (McCracken, 1988). Consumers’ response to stimuli led to an increase in impulsive buying by the middle class,

thereby, consuming for status. Department stores became a decisive agent, which contributed actively to the consumption culture rather than just a reflection of changing consumer patterns (Page, 1992). Consumers could learn the arts and skills of their vital new role as consumers within the department store (Okonkwo, 2007). In the nineteenth century, fashion became an important contributor to economic growth and outward appearance continued to be a display of wealth and social status (Okonkwo, 2007). The consumption for outward appearance and display of wealth is what is referred to as conspicuous consumption.

Therefore, conspicuous consumption is not a modern-day phenomenon, it has a long and complex history including different forms of consumers (Szmigin, 2003). Conspicuous consumption is the display of wealth through specific consumption pattern (Mason, 1981). Thorstein Veblen in 1899 introduced the theory of conspicuous consumption into the field of marketing (Bagwell, & Berheim, 1996). Veblen proposed that items such as clothes, jewellery, furs and wives demonstrated one's wealth (Szmigin, 2003). In his studies on social factors influencing consumption, Veblen (as cited in Bagwell and Berheim, 1996) found that social surroundings affect consumer purchases and thus the concept of conspicuous consumption began to take form. This dated back to even the tribal times. During the tribal times, men possessed women and slaves as a display of status (Page, 1992). Regarding the current era, what has changed is the people and kind of materials that one possesses but the game of ostentatious ownership has not changed (Page, 1992). The winners in this game of ostentatious ownership still are awarded with status and prestige (Page, 1992). Just like in the early history of consumption, when only the aristocratic elite had the opportunity to play the game, the introduction of industrialisation allowed the middle class to be part of the game of conspicuous consumption (Page, 1992). According to McCracken (1988), the history of conspicuous consumption is important to the society because it is aligned with the way that the consumer society is expanding.

The mid 1950s through to the 1970s marked an era of widespread conspicuous consumption practices in America (Patsiaouras, & Fitchett, 2012). During these periods, businesses and organisations were struggling to meet the ever-growing demand for status-based products. Marketers and advertisers had to change their product promotion style to suit the consumer's intellectual taste (Patsiaouras, & Fitchett, 2012). The transformation that occurred in the 1960s caused the rearrangement of social stratification as well as emergence of new reference groups (Patsiaouras, & Fitchett, 2012). During this period, a significant increase in advertising was noted because of the increase in consumer spending (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). Politicians joined in the drive to promote conspicuous consumption by highlighting the benefits of living in a

consumer society (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). Wong and Ahuvia (1998) maintained that conspicuous consumption focuses on the socioeconomic differences among individuals within a community. Therefore, the influence of others and status consumption becomes the drive behind conspicuous consumption (Wong, & Ahuvia, 1998).

3.3. Luxury brands

The luxury market constitutes the largest economic activity in the world, according to Danziger (2004). As noted by Wiedmann, Hennigs, and Siebels (2009), it is important to understand the reasons why consumers buy luxury branded products, what their understanding of luxury is and how their perception of luxury affects their consumer behaviour.

There is no clear definition of 'luxury' (Wiedmann et al., 2009). The meaning is more subjective and multidimensional rather than objective. The definition depends on the mood and experience of the consumer (Wiedmann et al., 2009). Luxury brands definition can also differ depending on one's social, cultural and historical partialities (Dekhil, Boulebech, & Bouslama, 2017). Consequently, luxury can be defined from either an economic or social perspective. From an economic perspective, luxury is defined in terms of the price-quality relationship; the higher the price and quality, the more luxurious the brand is (Wiedmann et al., 2009). Therefore, luxury brands become exclusive and rare. From the social perspective, luxury is a social marker that resembles one's status in society (Vigneron, 2006). However, these perspectives should not be regarded as mutually exclusive. Thus, consumers perceive luxury as having characteristics such as financial (price), functional (usability, quality and uniqueness), individual (self-identity, hedonic and materialistic) and social (conspicuousness and prestige) (Shen, Vel, & Khalifa, 2016). The aforementioned perception of consumers about luxury formed the base of the definition for luxury in this study. Some consumers might consider the consumption of luxury brands to be an indication of a higher social status, perhaps due to the exclusivity of such products (Vigneron, 2006). In addition, luxury products bring esteem to the owner as well as allowing consumers to satisfy psychological and functional needs (Wiedmann et al., 2009). However, research has indicated that luxury brands score higher in socio-psychological and symbolic needs than functional needs (Jain, Khan, & Mishra, 2017).

Additionally, luxury brands help consumers to express their 'self' (Vigneron, 2006). Peshkova (2013) argued that consumers who purchase luxury goods may believe that they gain perceived conspicuous value, unique value, social value, hedonic value or perceived quality value.

Vigneron and Johnson (2004) developed a framework which consist of the dimensions needed for a long-lasting luxury brand. The application of the framework depends on an individual and is not a 'one size fits all' framework. Perceived conspicuousness, perceived uniqueness, perceived extended-self, perceived hedonism and perceived quality or perfection are the five dimensions that explain the perceptions for luxury brands among consumers. These five dimensions separate a luxury brand from a non-luxury brand (Vigneron, & Johnson, 2004).

1. Perceived conspicuousness

Perceived conspicuousness focuses on the influence of reference groups on the consumption of luxury brands (Vigneron, & Johnson, 2004). Reference groups have an impact mainly on publicly consumed luxury products; therefore, the consumption of luxury brands may be important to individuals in search of social representation and position (Vigneron, & Johnson, 2004). This means that societal ranking has an impact on the brands consumed by an individual.

2. Perceived uniqueness

According to Vigneron and Johnson (2004), consumers' preferences are enhanced by the scarcity or limited supply of products. This means that the rarer or scarce a product is, the more the desire or preference for it. The consumers will be in search for the 'need for uniqueness' (Vigneron, & Johnson, 2004). Tian, Bearden and Hunter (2001, p. 52) defined the need for uniqueness as "the trait of pursuing differentness relative to others through the acquisition, utilisation, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's self-image and social image". Need for uniqueness becomes important because of its ability to enhance one's self- image, and social image through the consumption of unfamiliar products (Vigneron, & Johnson, 2004). These unfamiliar products are difficult to find and expensive compared to other brands, for example, luxury branded clothes. Individuals with higher stable needs for uniqueness also prefer greater differentiation from others on a more consistent basis (Tian et al., 2001).

A study by Ruvio (2008) investigated the consumer's need for uniqueness using the consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) theory and the need for uniqueness (NFU) theory. Ruvio (2008) suggested that people use products and brands as a way to express individuality and uniqueness. The two theories mentioned above assume that individuals demonstrate uniqueness within public norms to avoid social isolation or disapproval, which result in uniqueness disposition. Ruvio (2008) engaged in two studies; Study 1 (n = 140) found a positive correlation between attitude to social comparison information (ATSCI) and CNFU as well as between the need for social approval from peers and CNFU. The results from study 1 suggested that people with a

high level of CNFU perceive themselves to be more unique than their peers. Study 2 (n= 241) found a positive correlation between the need for social approval from friends and public self-consciousness. A positive relationship between CNFU and subjective and objective unique behaviours (Ruvio, 2008) was also established. Ruvio's (2008) study highlighted the importance of the social environment in expressing individual uniqueness through possessions. Possessions will act as a tool for assimilation and differentiation. The desire for uniqueness lead consumers to purchase luxury brands which help them to establish a unique personal identity (Ruvio, 2008). Ariely and Levav's (2000) study also found that consumers as possessing the drive to differentiate themselves and have a strong need for uniqueness.

Additionally, Park, Rabolt and Jeon (2008) investigated the determinants of young South Korean consumers (n = 319) in their consumption of foreign luxury fashion brands. Park et al. (2008) found that luxury brands satisfy the consumer's need for uniqueness because they are scarce and the scarcity value enables consumers to differentiate themselves from others. The findings by Park et al. (2008) also suggested that Korean consumers purchase luxury brands for what the luxury brands symbolise; for instance, status. As noted by Keller (2003), one of the key drivers for consumer behaviour is that of fulfilling symbolic needs. Symbolic needs are desires for products that display a consumer's success in public, such as luxury brands and cars (Keller, 2003). Furthermore, local cultures or local sentiments may affect the purchase of global luxury brands (Park et al., 2008).

3. Perceived extended-self

Luxury brands can be used not only as a way of distinguishing an individual from the rest but also as an attempt to integrate the symbolic meaning into their own identity (Vigneron, & Johnson, 2004). Belk (1988) refers to the use of possessions as a form of identity as 'extended self'. Consumers thus use luxury brands to communicate their lifestyle, which in turn attracts their membership to a certain group (Vigneron, & Johnson, 2004). Luxury brand consumers are materialistic consumers and use brands to evaluate success of others and themselves as well. Consumers who are concerned with social acceptance and conformity with wealthy reference groups may value possessions that are more socially visible and expensive (Vigneron, & Johnson, 2004). Ayupp, et al. (2013) conducted a study (n= 393) on the factors that influence Generation Y Malaysian students to purchase luxury products. The respondents were aged between 20-24 years. The students indicated that they spend money on personal luxuries rather than experiential luxuries or luxury home products. They buy luxury branded products to enhance self-image as well as display their social standing and prestige (Ayupp et al., 2013).

4. Perceived hedonism

In addition to the functional utility, certain products possess emotional value such as sensory pleasure, aesthetic beauty and excitement (Vigneron, & Johnson, 2004). Consumers interested in luxury brands but are not susceptible to interpersonal influence are hedonic type of consumers (Vigneron, & Johnson, 2004). Hedonic consumption relates to pleasure. In consumer behaviour, it refers to the pleasurable aspects of consumption, for example the appearance of clothing rather than its ability to keep out the cold (Blythe, 2013). Therefore, hedonic consumption is driven by the 'fun' a consumer has in consuming the product. Hedonic consumption "relates to the multi-sensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one's experience with products or services" (Hirschman, & Holbrook, 1982, p.92). This essentially is the completeness that comes from experiencing product consumption. Hsee and Tsai (2008) added that all consumers want to maximise the happiness that comes with consumption. This means that consumers look for pleasure, fantasy and motive aspects when consuming products (Arnold, & Reynolds, 2003). Blythe (2013) lists some of the products that are hedonic as follows; fashion wear, cosmetics, hairdressing and many service industries. Additionally, clothing consumption is triggered by emotional and psychological motivations (Kang, & Park-Poaps, 2010). Hedonic consumption includes also consuming products not only for what they can do, but for what they mean, which can be equated to symbolic consumption.

In order to understand the needs of the consumers, marketers must be aware of the hedonic consumption motivations (Arnolds, & Reynolds, 2003). One of the motivations is psychological needs that fall into either personal or social motives. Personal motives include role-playing, self-gratification, learning about new trends and sensory stimulation (Arnold, & Reynolds, 2003). Social motives include social experiences, peer group attractions, status, and pleasure of bargaining (Arnold, & Reynolds, 2003). Furthermore, in order to fulfil hedonic needs, Westbrook and Black (1985) suggested that there three fundamental reasons why people shop: 1) to acquire a product, 2) to acquire both a desired product and provide satisfaction with non-product-related needs, and 3) to attain goals not related to product acquisition. In terms of symbolic consumption, the researcher assumes that consumers seem to be shopping to acquire both a desired product and to provide satisfaction with no product-related needs.

Arnold and Reynolds (2003) argued that the past few years has seen an increase in the interest by researches to study hedonic consumption because of the emotions attached to shopping for pleasure. Arnold and Reynolds (2003) conducted a mixed method study to investigate the hedonic reasons why people shop. For the qualitative part of the study, six broad themes were found namely 'adventure shopping,' 'social shopping,' 'gratification shopping,' 'idea

shopping, 'role shopping,' and 'value shopping' (Arnolds, & Reynolds, 2003). For the quantitative part of their study (n= 251), a self-administered questionnaire containing the 23 hedonic motivation questions was used. The study found positive correlations between flow and adventure shopping was positive (Arnold, & Reynolds, 2003). The study also found that there was a substantial time distortion that happened when the consumer is adventure shopping (Arnold, & Reynolds, 2003). That is, consumers tend to lose track of time because the consumption state is sufficiently pleasant. Adventure shopping and gratification shopping's correlation with time distortion was significantly higher than with other hedonic motivations (Arnold, & Reynolds, 2003).

Furthermore, aesthetic appeal related positively with all the hedonic motivations because the retail atmosphere plays an important role in influencing a wide variety of emotions and behaviours that are related to shopping (Arnold, & Reynolds, 2003). Arnold and Reynolds (2003, p.86) defined aesthetic appeal as "an appreciation of the physical design or appearance of the mall habitat, and is based on the premise that some consumers notice and enjoy the physical elements of the retail environment". This means that aesthetic appeal is centred around the physical features of a store and how consumers experience the features whilst shopping.

5. Perceived quality

Quality plays an important role in buyer decision to purchase a brand. Luxury brands are believed to be of superior quality than non-luxury brands (Vigneron, & Johnson, 2004). Therefore, consumers may perceive more value from a luxury brand because they may assume that it may possibly have a greater brand quality and reassurance (Vigneron, & Johnson, 2004). Highly priced products attract consumers who value quality because higher prices are perceived to be an indication of superior quality (Vigneron, & Johnson, 2004). Aqeel's (2012) study on influential factors that leads to the consumption of luxury fashion brands among Saudi women (n = 20), found quality to be the most influential, followed by the need for uniqueness and then emotional value. Aqeel's (2012) findings contradict previous studies (e.g Khabiri, Shomali, Razeghi, & Darvishvand, 2012; Latter, & Marchegiani, 2010) who found emotional value, followed by need for uniqueness and lastly quality as factors influencing luxury consumption.

3.3.1. Meanings attached to brands

A brand can be defined as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, that is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (Kotler, 1997, p. 443). Furthermore, branding is defined as “the creation of an image that adds informational or impressionistic content to the products it is applied to, allows premium-priced symbolic content to be brought to the mass market” (Dolfsma, 2008, p. 9). Luxury branding is important for a brand’s sustainability and it is the source of a luxury brand’s wealth. For purposes of this study, luxury branding is defined as the term, name, symbol, design or a combination of these that identifies and differentiates the luxury brand from competitors (Okonkwo, 2007). Luxury branding ensures that a consumer that interacts with the luxury brand is satisfied (Okonkwo, 2007). However, the consumers also play an important role in luxury branding because branding is inhabitant in the mind of the consumer. Through branding, consumers form luxury consumers form strong attachments to brands.

According to Du Toit and Erdis (2013), brands were originally developed as labels of ownership and their history dates back to centuries ago when cattle owners would use branding to identify their livestock. Branding was popularized in the U.S. in the mid to late 1800s (Strizhakova, et al., 2008). Since the early 1900s, U.S. consumers have been well acquainted with the concept of branded products (Strizhakova et al., 2008). In contrast to U.S. consumers, that is, consumers in transitioning economies with developing consumer cultures (e.g., Russia and the former Soviet Bloc, China, and Africa) have only recently been exposed to a multitude of branded products (Strizhakova et al., 2008). Consumers within the transitioning economies are beginning to learn more about brands and consumption in the global world, especially the youth who drive brand growth and expansion in these economies (Strizhakova et al., 2008). According to Du Toit and Erdis (2013), brands have evolved to encompass identity. This means that brands affect the personality of a product or a company.

Within the field of marketing, brands are the essence of marketing, and they originated together with the introduction of packaged goods. Brands have since evolved into something more creative and corporate. (Du Toit, & Erdis, 2013; Strizhakova, Coulter, & Price, 2008). It is now a form of identification for companies; setting them apart from competitors. Consumers are not the only constituencies who worry about the state of their branded products; firms also thrive to make sure that their products stand out, necessitating the products to be unique in the eyes of the consumer (Keller, 2003; Strizhakova et al., 2008). It is the setting apart that is found in

brands that make consumers choose one brand over the other (Du Toit, & Erdis, 2013). Furthermore, there are various ways in which branded products act as a way to communicate aspects of one's identity. They can communicate either an individual's identity or group identity. According to Strizhakova et al. (2008, p. 83), "branded products are also a source of group-identity, because they can provide an association with other users or owners of a particular brand". Branded products reflect an individual's social ties such as family, friends, and brand communities. Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1991) concur with the notion of branded clothes as a reflection of social ties by saying that consumers use clothing as a flexible means to communicate identity as different fashion brands are seen more appropriate in different situations.

From the consumer's perspective, brands help in the facilitation of product identification, communicates the product's features and benefits, assists the consumer in the evaluation of the product's suitability and quality and reduce risk for consumers in the shopping process (Du Toit, & Erdis, 2013). For retailers and marketers, creating and building brand awareness, reaching consumers' minds and encouraging them to develop a preference for the brand are important steps in ensuring a successful product brand (Keller, 2003). Van Eck, Grobler and Herbst (2004) stated that brands create a form of trust between the organisation and the consumer, it takes away uncertainty or risk that a customer could feel is associated with the item and is more of a psychological promise than a palpable item. This means that the absence of risk is something that one cannot touch or feel but it is psychological in nature. According to Blythe (2013), consumers learn about products to reduce risk. In so doing, the consumer's decision-making process becomes less complex and limited problem-solving is used. Consumers may use knowledgeable individuals to guide them if they possess less knowledge about a product, e.g. friends (Blythe, 2013). Ross and Harradine (2004) found that consumers are becoming brand conscious and they establish their brand preferences between the ages 15 and 25.

Consumers attach meanings to brands when making a purchase and this influences purchasing decisions. According to Park, Jaworski and MacInnis (1986) one of the factors that influence the selection of a brand is consumer needs. Consumer needs can be functional, symbolic or experiential. Functional needs are the needs that motivate the search for products that solve consumption-related problems (Park et al., 1986). Symbolic needs are desires for products that fulfil internally generated needs for self-enhancement, ego-identification or group membership (Park et al., 1986). A brand with a symbolic concept is designed to associate the individual with

a desired group, role or self-image (Park et al., 1986). Experiential needs are desires for products that provide sensory pleasure, variety or cognitive stimulation (Park et al., 1986). Both experiential and symbolic needs have their roots in the self-concept theory, which suggests that the self is formed through consumption (Guo, Hao, & Shang, 2011).

Sørensen and Thomsen (2006) designed an analytical framework to explain the relationship between symbolic consumption and identity construction in terms of movement between stable and transitional phases of identity in a consumer's life. This transition is known as the 'rite of passage' according to Van Gennep (as cited in, Sørensen & Thomsen, 2005). Sørensen and Thomsen (2006) argued that the consumption of a certain object can be a source of identity construction aimed at conveying a message about or to the consumer. The framework explains the type of identity-related meanings that consumption takes during a consumer's encounter with an object or practice (Sørensen, & Thomsen, 2006). An object or practice might possess either a private or a common symbolic meaning. The private symbolic meaning is ideographic and less institutionalised than the common symbolic meaning of products (Sørensen, & Thomsen, 2006). The common symbolic meaning resides in aspects such as consumption stereotypes and it is a part of culture's common knowledge. Thompson and Hirschman (as cited in Sørensen & Thomsen, 2005) view a post-modern consumer as one with a free selection of meanings and thus construct their identities in so many ways. This makes Sørensen and Thomsen's (2006) analytical framework important because it considers how a product can add to the consumer's construction of identity in different ways.

Sørensen and Thomsen's (2006) framework explains stages involved in transition-related consumption. Symbolic consumption of an object, can take a public signal value or private signal value, public experiential value or private experiential value (Sørensen, & Thomsen, 2006). Public signal value occurs when symbolic consumption is felt by the consumer to communicate something about them as an individual but is common in the public realm (Sørensen, & Thomsen, 2006). A consumer can purchase luxury clothes to communicate their identity. The communication will be familiar among the group of people who influence the consumer's buying behaviour (reference groups) (Bearden, & Etzel, 1982). There has been a shift from focusing mainly on the 'traditional' reference groups such as family to a virtual form of reference such as Instagram (Bevan-Dye, 2015).

Private signal value is located in the 'private' domain where others cannot easily recognise the meaning of a symbolic purchase (Sørensen, & Thomsen, 2006). Private values of an object are subjective meanings that an object holds for an individual where the owner's personal history

might play an important part (Richins, 1994). For example, individuals might consume luxury brands as a reminder that they are now mature (no longer an adolescent) but not necessarily communicating it to the reference groups. The common experiential value takes place when symbolic consumption adds to one's sense of self and the meaning of the symbolic consumption resides in the public domain (Richins, 1994). The purchase of a luxury brand is often informed by the need to communicate status and appreciate quality to others. Private experiential value occurs when individuals experience discomfort with a brand but would not say it to others because no one had the same experience, therefore, the experience resides in the 'private' domain.

Consumers often communicate a transition period through the type of brands they consume. This could possibly be the case with the respondents in this study. As noted by Waterman (1993), the most extensive identity development occurs during college years. Therefore, there is a progressive strengthening of identity that take place when one moves from adolescence to adulthood (Waterman, 1993). It is a sensitive period that lead to consumers forming enduring aesthetic preferences that they maintain for the rest of their lives, according to Holbrook and Schindler (1994). To prepare for the maintenance of the imprinted preferences, identity continues to evolve throughout the adulthood stage. Waterman (1993) mentioned that college environments are conducive when it comes to considerations of identity issues.

Noble and Walker (1997) identified two roles played by symbolic possessions during these transitional periods. These are; filling the role that family, friends and other personal relationships once held in the extended life and facilitation of the establishment of a new identity (Noble, & Walker, 1997). Noble and Walker (1997) collected data from two high schools and one major university in the Southwestern Metropolitan area. The respondents were divided into three groups; preliminal, postliminal and liminal groups (Noble, & Walker, 1997). There was greater discrepancy between actual and ideal selves in the liminal stage than the other two stages (Noble, & Walker, 1997). Possessions were found to be a symbol of relationships in both liminal and postliminal groups. The possessions acted as an emotional support when students tried to adapt to the new environment and persevere through the challenges of the new role (Noble, & Walker, 1997). Possessions were also found to be important in symbolising a new role.

The respondents in the liminal group indicated that they value symbols of the new role more than those in the postliminal group do (Noble, & Walker, 1997). Noble and Walker's (1997) study confirmed findings from previously conducted studies (for example, Arnould, & Price,

2000; Belk, 1992). These studies found that meaningful possessions, especially those associated with relationships, assist people through a difficult transition (Noble, & Walker, 1997). Furthermore, the liminal group indicated higher identity reconstruction than postliminal group but the preliminal group had the highest score. Noble and Walker's (1997) study also demonstrated the importance of symbolic consumption during one's life stages, especially during college years.

3.3.2. The significance of brands in conspicuous consumption

As mentioned above, Solomon (1983) also stated that consumers purchase clothing or items for their symbolic meaning, image reinforcement or psychological satisfaction. Brands allow the bringing of conspicuous consumption to the marketplace, where consumers pay more than is necessary, for a product and any practical need that the product might serve (Dolfsma, 2008). The consumer may view a branded product to be of superior quality, even if it might not be true. Subsequently, consumers of brands will display the ability to pay for extra quality, and thus engaging in conspicuous consumption (Strizhakova, et al., 2008). As stated earlier, quality has been one of the key determinants for the purchase of branded products, even if it means paying a higher price (Aqeel, 2012; Mandlazi, 2011; Strizhakova et al., 2008). Branded products in both developed and developing countries signify quality to the extent that consumers in the developing countries often prefer non-local brands because they are perceived to be of higher quality (Strizhakova et al., 2008). Thus, across countries, quality appears to be an important component of the essence of branded product (Strizhakova et al., 2008). This possibly explains why Strizhakova et al. (2008) found that consumers in the developing countries prefer non-local brands, that is because they serve as a status symbol and give an 'origin cachet' among reference groups (Friedman, 1990). Apart from quality, dependability of the branded products also plays an important role (Holt, Quelch, & Taylor, 2004; Strizhakova et al., 2008). The use of branded clothing is also linked to the self because the brand can assist consumers to achieve goals that are motivated by the self (Escalas, & Bettman, 2005). For instance, brands can be used for self-expression, either privately or publicly (as mentioned earlier).

Consumption is not an individual matter but it is intertwined within the social, moral and interpersonal dimensions of people's lives (Dolfsma, 2008). These dimensions shape an individual's consumption preferences. People's consumption patterns are guided by the behaviours and lifestyles of various dimensions through the means of socialisation and enculturation (Dolfsma, 2008). Once a consumer is socialised into the consumption of brands, it implies that brands depict one's social status. The consumption of brands will then be linked

to high social status. Clothing brands that serve as status symbols are high-involvement products.

Based on the above, the first research aim was formulated for examination in the study, which was to “*explore the symbolic consumption of branded clothing among Rhodes University students*”.

3.4. Identity and Identity construction

Identity is a fundamental aspect of the human condition that speaks of who one is (Belk, 1988). Identity formation starts early in one’s life and continues to develop as one grows (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). Burke and Stets (2009, p.3) in their definition of identity stated that “identity is a set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person”. The overarching idea underlying Burke and Stets (2009) is that an individual possesses multiple identities because of the different roles that they occupy. However, these identities tend to be shared by members of the society (Burke, & Stets, 2009), and they are also applicable to virtual online environments (Schau, & Gilly, 2003; Jansson-Boyd, 2010). The self can be actively created by an individual. Belk (1988) uses the terms ‘self,’ ‘self-concept,’ and ‘self-identity’ as synonyms for how a person subjectively perceives who he or she is. However, every individual has a self-image of who they are and this is the self-concept (Manley, 2013).

Self-concept has been conceptualised as having more than one component (Sirgy, 1982). This means that it is a multidimensional construct that enable consumers to evaluate themselves in various social situations (Khare, & Handa, 2009; Sirgy, 1982). Baumeister (1987) described self-concept as the concept of knowing oneself, which provides a better way or a platform to understand oneself in a way through their lifestyle, a way of communication, aspirations and goals. It is the concept that an individual has of themselves as a physical, social, and spiritual or moral being. Swaminathan, Page and Gürhan-Canli (2007, p. 250) go on to argue that “the self-concept connection is based on consumers’ desires to express their individuality and their self as distinct from others”. This is indicative that consumers tend to separate themselves from others, thereby gaining self-enhancement in the process. Consumers do this with luxury clothing brands; for instance, purchasing *Guess* clothing brand, which represents young, fun and style. According to Banister and Hogg (2003), self-concept comprises of four dimensions:

- Actual self – how an individual sees him/herself;
- Ideal self – how an individual would like to see him/herself;

- Social self – how some individual feels others see him/herself;
- Ideal social self – how an individual would like others to see him/herself.

Self-concept affects consumption and consumption in turn affects self-concept (Khare, & Handa, 2009). This means the symbolic consumption of products help with enhancing the self-concept by using the products to communicate characteristics to the consumer and others. The communication of the self through product consumption is a necessity for self-image and social survival (Khare, & Handa, 2009). Additionally, possessions have become part of a social image that consumers wish to portray to others (Khare, & Handa, 2009). The consumers view themselves as similar to people who use the same products. Firat (1991) suggested that consumers must construct and maintain multiple selves for different roles played in life. Additionally, Khare and Handa (2009) suggested that it is important for marketers to understand the impact self-concept and social self-concept have on the purchase decisions.

Hawkins et al. (2004) referred to the self-concept and social self-concept as the interdependent and independent self-concepts. The independent self-concept is based on predominant Western culture which has an emphasis on personal goals, achievements and desires (Hawkins et al., 2004). However, the interdependent self-concept may be based on the Asian (or non-Western) cultural beliefs that value the interconnectedness of human beings (Hawkins et al., 2004). Furthermore, the interdependent self-concept values family, cultural and social relationships (Hawkins et al., 2004). Individuals with an interdependent self-concept define themselves in terms of social roles, family relationships and commonalities with other members of their group (Hawkins et al., 2004). As with Asian cultures, South Africa as a country with a culture that values Ubuntu tends to possess a lot of interconnectedness within its people. Therefore, consumers use brands to facilitate the image re-defining processes that they engage in and brands enable the consumer to fit his or her self-concept (Khare, & Handa, 2009). Brands thus, becomes an extension of the self and a way of self-realisation and identification according to O’Cass and Frost (2002).

Self-identity is the subjective representation an individual has of himself or herself involving individual, relational or group levels. However, Burke and Stets (2009) viewed identities as either objective or subjective. Objective identities are relatively stable, for example, mother and daughter whereas subjective identities are more transitory fluid, for example, lawyer and athlete (Burke, & Stets, 2009). Consumers tend to identify with all the categories, but not all categories will be central to their self-definition. Therefore, identity theory seeks to explain

“the specific meanings that individuals have for the multiple identities they claim; how these identities relate to one another for any one consumer; how their identities influence their behaviour, thoughts and feelings or emotions; and how their identities tie them in to society at large” (Burke, & Stets, 2009, p. 3). Notwithstanding that identity is synonymous with an individual, it is difficult to separate the individual from the society since the individual exists within a social structure.

According to Burke and Stets (2009), there are three bases for identity; role identities, personal identities and social identities. Role identities are the internalised meanings of a role that individuals apply to themselves (Burke, & Stets, 2009). For example, teachers can regard themselves as ‘mentors’ or a ‘friend’ whilst playing the role of a teacher. Culture and individuals’ distinctive interpretation of the role determines the meanings given to a role (Burke, & Stets, 2009). Personal identities are the set of meanings that differentiate an individual and make them unique rather than as a role holder or a group member (Burke, & Stets, 2009). According to Burke and Stets (2009), personal identity meanings are based on internalised characteristics that serve to define and characterise them as unique individuals. Social identities refer to a person’s identification with a social group (Burke, & Stets, 2009). A social group is a set of individuals who share the same views as members of the same social category (Burke, & Stets, 2009).

Regarding social identities, Erikson’s (1986) identity model was adopted by many researchers within the field of Psychology to explain the construction of identity. According to Erikson (1986), identity development is not only a psychological process, but also a process that considers any form of one’s social interaction with other individuals. The groups to which individuals belong in society provide them with social identity. Social identity allows one to feel psychologically attached to a group and having some attributes in common with fellow members (in-group members) and being different from other social groups (out-group members) (Tajfel, & Turner, 1979). The psychological attachment to groups can also take place in the consumption of certain products.

3.4.1. The extended self

The concept of extended self was introduced by Belk (1988) to explain how some products are used to signal important aspects of one's self to others. The discussions of consumer identity in the postmodern context is incomplete without including the concept of extended self. The concept helps one to understand an individual's attachment to a possessed object, and how an individual defines him or herself (Belk, 1988). The extended self consists of the self plus possessions (Hawkins et al., 2004). In particular, this means that individuals define themselves in part by their possessions (Belk, 1988). The possessions not only become part of one's self-concept but rather, they also become part of one's self-identity (Hawkins et al., 2004).

Possessions become part of one's extended self for a variety of reasons. One reason could possibly be the memories and feelings that come with the product or it can be a representation of relationships (Hawkins et al., 2004). The meaning and value of some possessions become embedded if they are used over a long period (Hawkins et al., 2004). Possessions also tend to help consumers in their major life transitions such as leaving home for tertiary institutions, first job or for a marriage (Hawkins et al., 2004). Additionally, possessions can be part of the self in three ways. First, through appropriating or controlling an object for personal consumption (Belk, 1988). The consumer manipulates a product especially nondurable products to be part of self. Second, possessions become part of self by creating the possessions. Buying a product becomes a way of creating it because the buying power of money contributes to the sense of self (Belk, 1988). Money gives consumers a power to acquire or reject purchasable products, thereby shaping our extended selves. Third, possessions become part of self by knowing the products (Belk, 1988). All of a consumer's possessions is argued to become part of the extended self because they become a 'second skin' that others see us (Belk, 1988). This means that possessions also become part of one's identity because people identify the possessions with you.

3.5. Theoretical framework

The messages communicated by branded clothes are of importance to an individual's associates, and therefore may help in establishing membership to certain groups or to signal aspiration to belong to a certain group (Sowden, 2009). In order to understand the role that the consumption of luxury branded clothing plays in the construction of an individual's identity, the Social Identity Theory (SIT) theoretical framework was used. SIT is a "social-psychological theory that attempts to explain cognitions and behaviour with the help of group

processes” (Trepte, 2006, p. 256). The underlying principle of SIT is that individuals classify themselves and others into in-group (reference groups) and out-group social categories.

As mentioned earlier, Belk (1988) stated that one’s possessions reflect one’s identity and one’s identity in turn reflects who one is. It is against this backdrop that the researcher employed the SIT to explain how possessing luxury-branded clothing helps in reflecting whom an individual is. Tajfel and Turner (1979) argued that groups provide an individual with a source of pride and self-esteem, as well as a social identity that provides a sense of belonging in the world. To maintain or increase the self-image, members attempt to enhance the status of their group while holding prejudicial beliefs towards out-groups (Tajfel, & Turner, 1979). This leads to the exaggerated differences between groups, increased perceived homogeneity in the members of the out-group, stereotyping and attribution biases. Tajfel and Turner (1979) concluded that individuals develop an ‘us and them’ perspective because of this social categorisation, which can lead to antagonism between groups.

SIT helps to explain identity in psychology at a conceptual level and it stresses the sociality of the construct in at least three ways. First, social identity is a relational term, defining who we are as a function of our similarities and differences with others (social categorisation). Second, social identity is shared with others and provides a basis for shared social action (social identification). Third, the meanings associated with any social identity are products of our collective history and present (social comparison). Social identity is therefore an aspect that links one to the social world (Burke, & Stets, 2009). It provides the pivot between the individual and society. In addition, SIT does not only focus on an individual’s membership to a single social group but to various social groups. According to Kang, Sklar, and Johnson, (2011) SIT is suitable for research that is focuses on group-based identities.

Social identity is “the part of the individuals’ self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, & Turner, 1982, p.24). This social-psychological construct comprises three components: cognitive, evaluative and affective (Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999). First, the cognitive component entails self-categorisation of community membership through individuals; they identify similarities with other members of the same group and differences to members of other groups (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006b). This component relates closely to the community marker consciousness of kind. Second, the evaluative component refers to the assessment of the community and one’s

membership, that is, group self-esteem (Ellemers et al., 1999). Third, the affective component encompasses the positive emotions experienced by individuals based on their perceived sense of belonging to the group, and positive emotions towards other group members (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). In order to characterise membership, including all three components of social identity is essential. A social identity is the part of one's self-concept that results from one's perceived membership in a group.

Unlike Burke and Stets (2009) who focused on three forms of identity, most social identity theorists focus on two broad classes of identity that define different types of self. These are personal identity and social identity. In other words, a person's identity is defined both by oneself (person identity) as well as by others (social identity). Personal identity speaks more of the defining of self in terms of idiosyncratic personal relationships and traits whereas social identity defines self in terms of group membership (Hogg, & Vaughan, 2002). Focusing on social identity paves a way to understand how groups influence identity among RU students since they are likely to belong to certain groups within the institution.

SIT applies also to studies that involve the concept of self-identification. Tajfel and Turner (1979) who proposed the SIT postulated that within the framework of SIT, individuals are categorised, identified and compared against each other. Categorisation means that individuals are placed into categories e.g. students (Myers, 2002). With identification, individuals associate themselves with certain groups (in-groups) to gain self-esteem. Lastly, there is always a comparison with other groups (out-groups) and individuals are likely to be biased towards in-groups (Myers, 2002). People will tend to then strive to maintain positive self-esteem by comparing their in-group to out-group, regarding the in-group to be more superior to the out-group (Myers, 2002). In-groups are often characterised by similarities among members. Individuals exhibit discrimination against out-group and solidarity with in-groups, aiming to achieve positive self-enhancement (Treppe, 2006). Being in the in-group means that one sees things from the group's perspective (Burke, & Stets, 2009) and makes them feel better (Myers, 2002). The SIT postulates that individuals strive to derive a positive social identity because of their membership (Ellemers et al., 1999). This proposition is further extended to suggest that the functionality of groups shape their members' social identification with these groups (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004).

According to Burke and Stets (2009), it is assumed that members of the same group think alike and act alike. Being in the same group make the individuals' thoughts homogeneous. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), the SIT is based on three assumptions. These assumptions are:

- Individual strive to enhance or maintain their self-esteem; they strive for a positive self-concept.
- Social groups or categories and the membership of them are associated with positive or negative value connotations; social identity may be positive or negative according to the evaluations of those groups that contribute to an individual's social identity.
- The evaluation of one's group is determined with reference to specific other groups through social comparisons in terms of value-laden attributes and characteristics.

From the above assumption, Tajfel and Turner (1979) derived the following three theoretical principles:

- Individuals strive to achieve or to maintain positive social identity.
- Positive social identity is based largely on favourable comparisons that can be made between the in-group and some relevant out-groups; the in-group is differentiated from the out-group.
- When social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive either to leave their existing group and join some more positively distinct group and/or to make their existing group more positively distinct.

The first two theoretical principles are the most relevant to the current study because there is no physical interaction amongst most of the students who consume luxury branded clothing within the university; the only common denominator amongst the students is their purchasing behaviour. Burke and Stets (2009) attest to this and they say that with social identity, individuals do not need to interact with other group members in order to think and act the same. The identification of the group is enough to activate similarity in perceptions and behaviour among group members. The notion of in-group and out-group gives individuals the sense of 'us' versus 'them'. Those outside the group will be identified and evaluated negatively whilst those in the group are identified and evaluated positively. However, belonging to an in-group tend to promote an in-group bias (Myers, 2002). In-group bias is the favouring of one's own group (Myers, 2002). For example, consuming a certain luxury clothing brand will make people see that brand as superior compared to any other brand. There is also prejudice that goes

with belonging to a certain group. As Myers (2002) proposed, if one's social identity is important, he or she feels more strongly attached to a group and he or she is likely to react prejudicially to threats from other groups.

There are two reasons identified by Burke and Stets (2009) as to why individuals want to belong to particular groups. The first reason is for self-enhancement. This is the desire to seek positive information about the self. The other reason is the need for uncertainty reduction. Uncertainty reduction is when an individual joins a group so that they will be able to guide their own behaviour as well as others' and thus facilitating predictability over one's environment (Burke, & Stets, 2009). Self-enhancement and uncertainty reduction could possibly be high amongst university students because they want to have a sense of belonging to other students. This may lead students to choose a group where to belong (in-group) and which one not to belong (out-group).

3.5.1. Social categorisation

Social categorisation arises when individuals categorise the world around them in relation to themselves, especially how they perceive others and objects they come across (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). There are two forms in of social categorisation; person perception and object perception. According to Jansson-Boyd, (2010, p. 56), person perception is "often affected by people's material possessions" and by the perception of others. Object perception is influenced by marketing and advertising. Additionally, the way in which individuals are categorised can lead to depersonalisation of individuals (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). This means that individuals become a representative of what they possess instead of being individuals in their own right (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). Social categorisation enables the distinction between the in-group and the out-group. The group in which an individual belongs (in-group) will be determined by their possessions, such as clothing brands. In addition, consuming brands similar to an in-group and avoiding the ones consumed by out-groups, consumption becomes symbolic in that it becomes an indicator of group membership (Chan, Berger, & Van Boven, 2012). Moreover, brands and products could be a true representation of what a person is like (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). As noted by Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977), an important characteristic of an in-group is that groups mark their identities communicatively by using distinctive characteristics such as a dress code. Damhorst's (1999) argue that a dress can reflect one's everyday patterns. What one wear becomes important because it is his source of identity. Alpers and Gerdes's (2006) research confirmed how products could be a true reflection of what a person like. They found that

individuals could match cars to their owners correctly just by imagining the kind of an individual who could drive a certain brand of a car.

3.5.2. Social comparison

Social comparison refers to how people learn about themselves by comparing similarities and differences to others such as reference groups (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). The comparison is driven by the need to maintain a positive self-esteem over others. The positive self-esteem makes one to have a sense of belonging to a certain group (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). However, Brewer (1991) argued that the motivation behind group comparisons is not about self-esteem but rather it is about achieving optimal distinctiveness or reducing the uncertainty of social reality. Social comparison takes place within an in-group whereby individuals associate themselves with certain groups (Myers, 2002). According to Belk (1988), items such as clothing, jewellery and grooming does not only distinguish an individual from others and express an individual's sense of being; they also indicate group identity and express a sense of belonging to a group. This shows that purchasing certain products makes an individual feel that they belong to a certain group as well as genuinely providing group membership (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). For example, an individual might purchase a Levi's jean to show that they belong to a certain 'class' within the society. Keller (as cited in Cătălin and Andreea, 2014) recognises self-expressive function of brands as one of the most important characteristics of brands.

Belk (1988) emphasised the importance of knowing meanings that people attach to brands when studying consumer behaviour, which is aligned with the Meaning Transfer Model discussed in the previous chapter. A meaning attached to brands is the symbolic role played by possessions in the consumer's lives, which might shape one's identity (Cătălin, & Andreea, 2014). Cătălin and Andreea (2014) conducted an experiment (n = 108) to test the ability of brands to act as tools for self-expression and to determine if a brand can act as a compliance stimulus for the desired lifestyle. Respondents were divided into two groups; the first had to think of brands relevant to themselves and the second were to give brands relevant to their friends. Cătălin and Andreea (2014) found that brands play an important role in value expression when brands converge with the perceived personal identity. They also found that the brand and not the product is the one that must be congruent with identity (Cătălin, & Andreea, 2014). Brands thus help create a social identity and the desired lifestyle (Cătălin, & Andreea, 2014). Aligned with this, Huang (2009) stated that consumers purchase brands because of the underlying meanings carried by the brands and how they are viewed in the social context. Therefore, understanding how people interpret clothing and how different groups of

people make different judgements about the same brand of clothing is critical to fashion companies (Auty, & Elliott, 1998).

3.5.3. The role of consumption in the construction of identity

According to Dolfsma (2008) and Starr (2004), consumption relates to identity in several ways. Firstly, it serves as a material reflection of preferences. Secondly, consumption signals how individuals perceive themselves and how they want to be perceived by others (Dolfsma, 2008; Starr, 2004). Thirdly, it can establish access to social circles. Access to social circles can be important in identity formation in that an individual will be aware of what they consume (Dolfsma, 2008). For instance, consumption of luxury branded clothing assist people in expressing their identity. Using consumption to establish identity is evident when goods are consumed not just for their concrete attributes but also as a symbol of lifestyle and social place (Dolfsma, 2008). Since identity and lifestyle are shaped by consumption, the actual act of consumption enables individuals to differentiate themselves socially (Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009). This means that identity-related possessions are crucial for enacting the associated identity (Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993). Therefore, fashion and clothing preferences may provide insight into individuals' personality and the type of an individual exactly they are (Chamil, 2011). Omair (2009) added that people use dresses to communicate to others in social gatherings of their significant place in their social system. To substantiate, Sirgy (1980) proposed that the consuming behaviour of an individual might be directed toward furthering and enhancing his self-concept through the consumption of goods as symbols.

Based on the literature presented above, the current research aimed to *“Explore processes of identity construction experienced in relation to patterns of consumption at RU within the South African context.”*

3.6. Reference groups

This section elaborates on reference groups as an external variable to consumer decision-making (as mentioned in section 2.2.1.).

3.6.1. Types of reference group influence

Reference groups are a major social group from which consumers receive information or benchmark the consumption behaviours (Walters, & Bergiel, 1989). Reference group influence are classified into three categories (Yang, He, & Lee, 2007). These three are; informational, value expressive and utilitarian. Informational influence is the tendency to accept information from others as evidence about reality (Yang, et al., 2007). Informational reference groups assist to 1) search information from opinion leaders or from a group with the appropriate expertise; and 2) assist the individual to make an inference by observing the behaviour of others (Yang et al., 2007). However, sources of high credibility increase conformity by followers especially in advertisements. Informational influence does not need contact between an individual and the reference group, the individual uses the credibility from others to make consumption choices (Yang et al., 2007).

Value expressive influence is according to Bearden and Etzel (1982, p. 184), “characterised by the need for psychological association with a person or group and is reflected in the acceptance of positions expressed by others”. Psychological association with respected referrals enhances self-esteem and self-concept by providing a model on which to base one’s own behaviour. The association takes form in two ways (Bearden, & Etzel, 1982). Firstly, it attempts to be similar to the reference group and secondly, is having an attachment or liking for the reference group (Bearden, & Etzel, 1982). Value-expressive influence depends on whether the referent possesses the desired characteristics or esteem roles within the reference group (Yang et al., 2007). This means that the response to the value-expressive influence is out of feelings and not desires to be associated with the group (Bearden, & Etzel, 1982). Marketers use value-expressive groups by using famous people in advertisements to attract the people who admire the reference group (Yang et al., 2007).

Utilitarian influence refers to the compliance of an individual with a reference group to avoid punishment and to achieve rewards (Bearden, & Etzel, 1982). An individual should meet the expectations of others to avoid the punishments (Bearden, & Etzel, 1982). The utilitarian influence is similar to normative influence because they both have the conformity influence (Yang et al., 2007). This means that one is expected to purchase products that comply with the

expectations of others and other members of the group should see and approve of the product (Yang et al., 2007). The occurrence of all these forms of influence means that individuals have to check themselves when making purchasing choices (Yang et al., 2007).

According to Mangleburg, Doney and Bristol (2004) peers may be one of the earliest groups by which individuals learn to deal with the world outside the family. Shopping with peers is a fun activity and reduces a risk of buying products that will be socially unacceptable (Prasad, 2009). Makgosa and Mohube (2007), conducted a study (n= 101) among university students in Botswana, to explore how peer influence affects product purchase decisions among young adult consumers. Makgosa and Mohube (2007) defined peer influence as the extent to which peers exerts influence on the attitudes, thoughts and actions of an individual. The study focused on informational and normative peer influence on four types of products. The four types of products that the researchers focused on are; sunglasses (public luxury), cell phone (private luxury), shoes (public necessity) and toothpaste (private necessity).

Makgosa and Mohube (2007), found that the products that are consumed in public (sunglasses, shoes) are likely to attract more peer influence than products consumed privately (toothpaste, cell phone). This indicated that young people consult their peers and live to their expectations regardless of whether the product is exclusively or commonly owned (Makgosa, & Mohube, 2007). Purchasing the right product gathers greater acceptance from the peer groups and reduce the risk of rejection from them (Khare, & Rakesh, 2010). Normative influence was greater for sunglasses (public luxury) than for cell phones (private luxury). Normative influence is regarded as greater under conditions of high rather than low visibility (Makgosa, & Mohube, 2007), which was evident in their study. Shoes (public necessity) attracted more informational and normative influence than toothpaste (private necessity) among young adults because shoes are consumed in the eyes of the peers (Makgosa, & Mohube, 2007). Makgosa and Mohube (2007) stated that future research could address the influence of other types of reference groups on the individual consumption behaviour such as family and celebrities. The current research focused on the influence of the abovementioned types of reference groups (family, peers, celebrities) on the consumption of luxury branded clothing. Additionally, Makgosa and Mohube (2007) recommended future research to focus on brands familiar amongst young adults.

3.6.2. Reference group classification

There has been an increase in groups such as the elite, young and better educated within the South African population (Rousseau, 2003). The emergence of these groups brought about powerful reference groups especially among the black population (Rousseau, 2003). Within the membership (associative), groups are primary and secondary groups; formal and informal groups (Rousseau, 2003). Classification into these groups depends on the degree of participation. Primary groups are groups where interaction is on face-to-face basis, with greater frequency and on intimate levels (Rousseau, 2003) whereas secondary groups are impersonal and formalised. Formal groups are groups of colleagues with whom an individual meet daily, for instance, at work or at university whereas informal groups are family, peer groups or sports groups which individuals meet occasionally (Rousseau, 2003). Informal groups such as peers and family are considered the most influential reference groups (Rousseau, 2003) and are the groups that an individual is psychologically involved with (Mihalcea, & Cătoiu, 2008).

Aspirational groups are either anticipatory aspirational groups or symbolic aspirational groups (Rousseau, 2003). Anticipatory aspirational groups are groups that an individual anticipates joining some time in future and the individual will be having direct contact with the group, for example, superiors at work, celebrities etc (Rousseau, 2003). Symbolic aspirational groups are the “groups to which an individual is not likely to belong, even though he or she accepts the group’s beliefs and attitudes” (Rousseau, 2003, p. 371). Escalas and Bettman (2003) have found that the use of a brand by aspiration groups leads to the formation of associations by consumers about brand transfer even if they are not yet members of the aspiration group. Dos Santos (2013) added a third form of reference groups which is the dissociative reference groups. Dissociative reference groups are the reference groups that a consumer does not wish to be associated with (Dos Santos, 2013). An example would be students who wear no name brands of clothing. A consumer will avoid purchasing or consuming products that the dissociative reference group consumes to show that there is no association with the group (Dos Santos, 2013).

Rousseau (2003) suggested that consumers relate to reference groups in two ways. A consumer can either belong to or aspire to belong to a reference group. An example of a reference group that consumers may belong to is family and an example of a reference they aspire to belong is an elite sports club (Rousseau, 2003). From a consumer behaviour perspective, reference groups are a pool of information and influence and they are important to consumers (Rousseau, 2003). Reference groups also allow comparison between an individual’s attitude and that of the reference groups. They (reference groups) also influence individuals to adopt attitudes and

behaviours that are consistent with the norms of the groups (Makgosa, & Mohube, 2007). Additionally, belonging to a reference group does not require one to be aware of the actual group (Singer, 1990). Rousseau (2003) proposed that the influence of a reference group to an individual's purchasing behaviour depends on quite a few things; the first one is the individual's attitude towards the group. The reference groups' influence on the attitude will come up from the discussions that we have with the participants as presented in Chapter 4. Second, the nature of the group plays an important role (Rousseau, 2003). The nature of the group will be an in-group versus an out-group and how both groups influence consumption patterns of the students. Furthermore, the nature of the product also plays a significant role (Rousseau, 2003). For this study, the focus was on luxury branded clothing.

Bearden and Etzel, (1982) and Solomon (2008), extended the influence of reference groups to whether the consumer uses the product publicly or privately and whether the product is a luxury or a necessity. This is aligned with earlier discussion of public and private symbolic brands (section 3.3.). As mentioned, publicly consumed goods are easily noticeable than privately consumed goods, making the publicly consumed goods to be more conspicuous (Solomon, 2008). Unlike necessities, not everybody owns luxuries and they tend to be more conspicuous. Solomon (2008) argued that reference groups have more influence on products that are socially conspicuous or visible to others rather than privately consumed products. Consumers tend to get feedback from reference groups about their consumption patterns. Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that positive social feedback is a crucial source of one's ego. Solomon (2008) confirmed Bearden and Etzel (1982) assertions about public and private luxuries and public and private necessities of product conspicuousness.

Publicly consumed luxuries are products consumed publicly but are not commonly used or owned. These products are exclusive and prone to more peer influence (Bearden, & Etzel, 1982). Examples of the socially conspicuous (Solomon, 2008) or publicly consumed luxury products (Bearden, & Etzel, 1982) are living room furniture and clothing. Publicly consumed luxuries are exclusive, conspicuous and susceptible to peer influence because they are consumed in public (Childers, & Rao, 1992). The privately consumed luxuries are products that require purchases that are more discretionary and there is no observation when consuming them. Whilst owning the product conveys a message about the owner, the private nature of the consumption generates familial influence (Childers, & Rao, 1992). Publicly consumed necessities are products that are commonly observed when being consumed and are commonly

owned, for example, wristwatches (Bearden, & Etzel, 1982; Childers, & Rao, 1992). These products are likely to attract lower levels of peer influence because most individuals own them (Childers, & Rao, 1992). Privately consumed necessities are neither observable nor exclusive because they are consumed out of public view and used by everybody, for example, mattresses (Childers, & Rao, 1992). These products are not socially relevant and are highly unlikely to be influenced by peers (Bearden, & Etzel, 1982). One characteristic that is common amongst public and private, and luxury and necessity products is that they all carry symbolic meaning about an individual (Bearden, & Etzel, 1982).

Childers and Rao (1992) extended Bearden and Etzel's (1982) study to a cross-cultural study involving U.S.A and Thai families. The study examined the influence of reference groups on individuals' product and brand purchase decisions. Childers and Rao (1992) also assessed the stability of the observed relationships over time. Another aim of Childers and Rao (1992) study was to replicate and extend the study in a different cultural context and observing the stability and relationships over time. In addition, they examined the influence of parents on purchasing decisions and assessing the stability of the basic theoretical approach across different types of group influence (Childers, & Rao, 1992). The study found that the degree to which peers influence an individual is significantly higher for public than for private products and brands within nuclear families than with extended families (Childers, & Rao, 1992). The difference might lie in the way in which family members influence purchasing behaviours; with nuclear families, the level of influence of the immediate family members is low whilst in extended families there are a large family who influence an individual (Childers, & Rao, 1992).

The researchers also investigated whether an individual purchased the same products, as the parents did, known as intergenerational influence (Childers, & Rao, 1992). The study found intergenerational influence, which involves the transfer of brand loyalty from parents to their children to be an important determinant of brand preferences. Unlike U.S.A. families, the distinction between necessities and luxuries was seemingly not as pronounced for Thai families because they have a traditional family structure where parents have a strong influence (Childers, & Rao, 1992). Childers and Rao's (1992) study found private necessities to be attracting the greatest amount of intergenerational transfer because they are inconspicuous products (Childers, & Rao, 1992). Extended families indicated to be more into public consumption than nuclear families. This might be so because with extended families, brands consumed by parents have a strong influence on their children (Childers, & Rao, 1992).

Eze, Chin and Lee (2012) conducted a study on the role of reference groups in the purchase of designer label apparels in Malaysia. The focus of their study was on the roles of key reference groups (peers, siblings, parents, and celebrities) in the purchase of designer label apparels (Eze et al., 2012). They made use of convenience sampling for this study (n=248) questionnaires were administered successfully through personal administration. Majority of the respondents in this study were between the ages 19-22 and were Diploma holders or undergraduates. Eze et al. (2012) found that reference groups have significant effects on the consumer's purchasing decisions for designer apparels. The effects were at varying degrees. Celebrities influenced the most, followed by siblings, parents and lastly peers (Eze et al., 2012). The findings contradicted previous studies (e.g Makgosa, & Mohube, 2007), which found peers to be more influential in the purchasing decisions of designer apparels. The four variables considered in the study failed, however, to provide an explanation of what leads to consumer purchase decisions.

Hammerl, Dorner, Foscht and Brandstätter (2016) conducted a quantitative study (n=215) in Australia to find examine the role played by self-brand connection and reference groups in attributing symbolic meanings to brands. Ages of the participants ranged from 16 to 61 years. Participants in this study were asked to fill in a questionnaire indicating a group they belong to and a group they aspire to belong to. The results of the study indicated strong self-brand connection with an in-group brand. Self-brand connection is the association of the brand to the 'self' (Hammerl et al., 2016). The researchers also extended the findings of Escalas and Bettman (2015) to this study and found that consumers may adjust their beliefs about a brand depending on their self-brand connection and the influence of reference groups (Hammerl et al., 2016). Additionally, consumers may change beliefs if the consumer-brand-group relationship is not balanced. This happens because consumers have a need for consistent relationships, especially with their reference groups (Hammerl et al., 2016).

3.6.3. The social power of reference groups

In addition to the influence possessed by reference groups, they also possess social power. Social power is the capacity to change an individual's actions by making them do something, regardless of whether they do it willingly or not (Solomon, 2008). The social power manifests in different forms. These forms illustrate the degree to which people exert power over another, and whether the influence continue having effects in the absence of the source of power (Solomon, 2008). The first form of power is referent power. Referent power often takes form when an individual admires the qualities of a person or a group and tries to imitate the referent's behaviour (Solomon, 2008). An example would be of imitating the choice of clothing or cars that the referent group likes. According to Solomon (2008, p. 431) "referent power is important

to many marketing strategies because consumers voluntarily modify what they do and buy to identify with a referent”. The second form of power is that of information power. With information power, one can exert power because they already know something that others need to know (Solomon, 2008). Magazine editors and bloggers, who use information they possess to influence consumer opinion by virtue of their access to ‘exclusive’ information, usually possess this form of power.

The third form of power is legitimate power, which is described as ‘power granted’. For instance, the power granted to police officers, soldiers and sometimes professors by virtue of social agreements (Solomon, 2008). This form of power tends to consumer when used in marketing products to add an aura of legitimacy to the presentation of the product (Solomon, 2008). An example would be using a doctor wearing a white coat in an advert. The fourth form of social power is expert power. Expert power is often associated with an individual who possesses knowledge and experience about a content area (Rousseau, 2003; Solomon, 2008). Expert power leads to individuals desiring to buy a product because an individual person that they consider to have more knowledge and experience on the product has bought them the product. For example, if a member of the family, peer or celebrity is knowledgeable about a certain brand of perfume, one is likely to consume it as well. In addition, a person or group as a means to provide positive reinforcement possesses what is termed reward power. This happens through complimenting clothes or praising a child’s choice (Rousseau, 2003). It is assumed by the researcher (in this study) that university students might complement each other on their choice of brands, leading to reward power. There is also coercive power that involves social or physical intimidation of one individual by another. These forms of power that reference groups possess shape the buyer’s decisions to purchase certain products (Rousseau, 2003).

The literature reviewed regarding reference groups assisted in formulating the third research aim of the current study, namely: *“exploring the role that reference groups play in the symbolic consumption patterns of university students.”*

3.7. Generation Y consumers

The youth (Generation Y) consists of individuals born between 1980 and 1994 (Kotler, 2003). Generation Y consists of people who consider themselves to be ‘cool’ and people with a strong sense of identity and self-expression (Pesquera, 2005; Valentine, & Powers, 2013). Members of Generation Y have been described as individualistic, well-educated, technologically savvy, sophisticated, mature, and structured (Syrett, & Lammiman, 2003). It is argued that it is a generation that has grown in a consumption-driven society making it important for marketers to know the factors that influence such a generation (Martin & Turley, 2004). In the South African context, the youth form the largest group of consumers in the economy because they have a lot of money at their disposal than any other group in the society (Mafini, et al., 2014). The majority of the youth’s purchases is made on clothes, shoes, jewellery, sporting equipment entertainment, health and beauty aids and food (Barbagallo, 2003). Additionally, Chaston (2009) argue that the youth spend money on fast-foods. As mentioned earlier, these purchases demonstrate wealth according to Veblen, and a sense of belonging according to Belk (1988).

According to Szmigin (2003), young consumers now possess the ability to read between advertisements because of the politics of celebrities, fashion and novelty that they follow. Additionally, these young individuals do not just read adverts but they now read them quicker than before (Szmigin, 2003). This makes them to be easily aware of the message the advertisement is putting across. Young consumers are even becoming producers themselves, creating their identities through consumption of esoteric labels (Burger, Louw, Pegado, & Van De Berg, 2014; Szmigin, 2003). Additionally, Burger et al. (2014) found that younger members of the middle class in South Africa spend much on conspicuous consumption in order to express their identity. This means that brands can embody, inform and communicate desirable consumer identities.

According to Schau, 2000, p. 50) “identity directly translates into consumption, and that consumption is capable of revealing identity”. Since consumers multiple identities and different roles, they use different types of products to represent them (Jansson-Boyd, 2010; Solomon, 1983). As noted by Hall (1997) identity is dynamic and is influenced by one’s relationships, reference groups and socio-cultural environment. Additionally, when individuals reach adulthood they tend to incorporate such aspects as feelings, what motivates them, political beliefs, religious beliefs, physical appearance, age and material possessions to describe themselves (Ditmar, 1992; Jansson-Boyd, 2010), thereby enhancing in the formation of their identity. This incorporation into different categories, lead to people assigning

themselves to groups (social categorisation) or forming groups according to similarities and differences that exist between them (social comparison). Generation Y consumers tend to behave in a way that exhibit their personal achievements (e.g. affording luxury clothing brands) within the categories as a way of expressing identity. Schade, Hegner, Horstmann and Brinkmann (2016) referred to the motivations by the young adults to demonstrate their identity and personal achievement with the term 'active mastery'. This means that the young adult consumers would have familiarised with their identity and striving to maintain it.

3.7.1. Brand conscious consumers

Brand consciousness is the "degree to which a consumer is oriented towards buying well-known branded products", as defined by Lee, Kim, Pelton, Knight, Forney (2008, p. 29). In particular, brand conscious consumers are those who pay attention to brand names and are interested in buying well-known brand names (Yasin, 2009). A report by McKinsey (2015) on the rise of the African consumer argued that African consumers are brand conscious, demand for quality products, want latest fashion and they enjoy a modern shopping experience. Of the whole population, the youth are more brand conscious than the general population. The consumption of luxury branded products by the Generation Y in South Africa is an indication that they are a brand conscious generation. Teimourpour and Hanzae (2011) argued that Generation Y consumers are brand conscious consumers who use well-known, expensive products to symbolise their status. In addition, Bhattacharyy and Biswas (2016) argued that brand conscious means that a person has a maximum awareness and usage of the brand. This means that a person can recall and recognise a brand, as well as know how to utilise the brand. Brand conscious consumers possess maximum awareness of brands because as noted by Nia and Zaichkowsky (2000), the more original products people own, the more familiar they are with the attributes and qualities of such products. Milan and Mittal (2017) conducted a study on consumer preference for status symbolism of clothing in Czech Republic. The study found that status plays a significant role in consumer behaviour especially to individuals who are status or brand conscious and publicly self-aware. These individuals prefer clothing imbued with status symbolism (Milan., & Mittal, 2017).

Furthermore, brand consciousness helps in examining the consumption attitudes of consumers because brands play an important role in the psychological pre-purchase process (Nelson, & McLeod, 2005). An individual's consumption attitude is assessed by examining their brand consciousness. Individuals with a high level of brand consciousness also have a high level of conspicuous consumption motivations. Additionally, brand conscious consumers view high

prices as a signal of high quality. According to Khare and Rakesh (2010), there is a positive correlation between spending more on clothing and being a brand conscious consumer.

Khare and Rakesh (2010), in their study, investigated the determinants of fashion clothing involvement amongst the Indian youth (n = 319). Khare and Rakesh (2010) adopted O' Cass' (2000) scale using constructs such as consumption involvement, product involvement, advertising involvement and purchase decision involvement to understand the importance of fashion clothing in the college students' lives. The study found a limited experience of Indian youths to global fashion clothing brands because the brands were introduced recently in India and some stores do not stock the brands (Khare, & Rakesh, 2010). The results indicated that for the few brands that are available in Indian shops, the college students purchase them because of high quality. The college students placed value in fashion clothing leading to their high involvement in fashion clothing (Khare, & Rakesh, 2010). The results from the study by Khare and Rakesh (2010) are indicative of how the youths are brand conscious and they are not limited by factors such as the income levels. They tend to choose luxury clothing brands because clothing is argued to be one of the high-involvement product according to Solomon (1986).

Consumers often feel the pressure to pretend to be brand conscious and opt for counterfeit products. Counterfeits are a cheaper version of the genuine brand but have lower quality in terms of performance and durability (Wilcox, Kim, & Sen, 2009). According to Commuri (2009, p. 87) "counterfeits address the limitation of purchasing power because they typically cost a fraction of what the genuine items cost". Counterfeit products can act as a way to redefine social identity when it is impossible to do so using original products (Phau, & Teah, 2009). Counterfeit consumers can be either a victim to deceptive counterfeits or a willing participant to counterfeits (non-deceptive). Phau and Teah (2009) in their study (n = 202) found that consumers may possess the desire to own luxury brands to impress others but due to the expensive nature of luxury brands they resort to counterfeits, thus contradicting conventional brand conscious consumer behaviour. Therefore, value conscious and status-seeking consumers indicated that they purchase counterfeit luxury products in Phau and Teah's (2009) study. The status-seeking consumers buy the counterfeit luxury products to satisfy their status seeking needs (Phau, & Teah, 2009).

3.7.2 Brand consumption among the youth in South Africa

The increase of new luxury brands in the market is a response to an increase in the South African market. In South Africa, the youth consumer culture is having a considerable influence on youth identities in various contexts (Noble, Haytko, & Phillips, 2009). College-aged or university individuals are part of the youth in South Africa and they are often experiencing the freedom of staying away from home for the first time, and thus have specific wants and needs as consumers (Noble et al., 2009). This means that college students have free will to make choices regarding what they consume.

The following tables (Table 1 and 2) shows the top clothing brands according to the youth (aged 8-23) of South Africa survey by Sunday Times in 2014.

Table 1:

Luxury clothing brands consumed by the youth in South Africa (International)

Coollest clothing brands in 2014 (overall)	Percentage votes (%)
1. Nike	17.38
2. Adidas	15.59
3. Guess	11.91
4. Sissy Boy	7.01
5. Puma	6.41

Table 2:

Luxury clothing brands consumed by the use in South Africa (local)

Coollest South African clothing brands	Percentage votes (%)
2014	
1. Identity	19.75
2. Urban	12.49
3. Aca Joe	10.94
4. Legit	10.43
5. Ama Kip Kip	9.09

Adapted from: Sunday Times Generation Next Survey (2014)

Table 1 above shows the most preferred brands among the South African youth and the percentage of the youth that prefer the brands, according to a study by Sunday Times in 2014. The study analysed the influence of products and people in the lives of South Africa's youth and what they consider to be 'cool'. The sample consisted of over 5 000 youths. The 2015 Student Village Student Spend Survey also conducted a survey that indicated that university students in South Africa buy expensive items such as branded clothing, electronics, tickets for concerts (Student Village, 2015). The survey investigated the students' behaviour and perceptions in terms of money and credit. The study was conducted on 3030 students in various tertiary institutions in South Africa. South African university students indicated that they spend more than an average South African.

Ismail, Massod and Tawab (2012) conducted a study (n = 200) exploring why consumers prefer international brands to local brands. The qualitative study was conducted in Karichi, Singapore and the focus was on the youth (age 16 – 24) of Singapore. The factors mentioned by Ismail et al. (2012) found that country of origin, price, reference groups, brand name, availability, advertising campaigns and consumer ethnocentrism influence consumers' preference of local versus international brands. The study found that there was a general bias towards international brands to local brands. The international brands are consumed mainly as a status symbol and for their quality (Ismail et al., 2012). The study also found that international branded products were consumed in order for one to fit in a social group because of peer pressure that is high among the age group (Ismail et al., 2012). Country of origin of the brands did not have significant influence on the consumer preference of local versus international luxury brands. This was because respondents indicated that they did not check which country the product came from before purchasing (Ismail et al., 2012).

3.7.3 Some factors that shape the branded clothing consumer

Several factors are regarded as key determinants in shaping the personality and expectations of a luxury consumer in the twenty-first century. Gaining an understanding of these factors provides an insight into current consumer behaviour and acts as a guideline for future consumer behaviour (Okonkwo, 2007). Okonkwo (2007) outlines some of the factors and this study engaged with five of the factors that are considered applicable to this study. These are:

1. The rapid growth of technology

The growth of technology has allowed consumers to have all the information they need about a product from just a click of a button. This allows consumers to have the independence to choose brands since the brands are readily available in the public domain. The freedom of

choice of brands has contributed to 'shopping-on-the-go' expectation and 'brand-hopping' from consumers (Okonkwo, 2007). Shopping-on-the-go relates to shopping online and anywhere one is and brand-hopping speaks of how a consumer can move from one brand to another in no space of time.

2. Increase in individual consumer wealth and wealth-creation opportunities

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, there were just a minor segment of luxury consumers, but there has been an emergence of a mass of wealthy individuals around the globe (Okonkwo, 2007). This is possibly because of the increase in the social, economic and technological breakthroughs. These breakthroughs have made it easy for individuals to make money at a young age and they tend to spend less on necessities and more on luxuries such as fashion and travel (Okonkwo, 2007). There has been a replacement of the traditional aristocratic consumers by the newly wealthy consumers who spend mostly on luxuries (Okonkwo, 2007).

3. Media saturation and information overload in the marketplace.

According to Okonkwo (2007), the twenty-first century has seen an increase in competition of retailers argued to be screaming for the same consumer. This has led to what is termed the information overload in consumers as each retailer tries to sell products through advertisements. Retailers face challenges as their information should contain messages that bears meaning to consumers as consumers choose messages and brands that carry a meaning (Okonkwo, 2007). Therefore, retailers need to know the importance of brand essence for them to survive (Okonkwo, 2007). Brand essence sets apart a brand from competitors and should have a rich meaning. For the brand to have a rich meaning, it should possess intangible emotions that consumers experience when consuming the brand.

4. The changing retail environment.

Retailers have availed replica brands to consumers who cannot afford the expensive luxury brands. This availability of replica brands leads to the increase in conspicuous consumption because replica brands come at a cheaper price than the original ones (Okonkwo, 2007). Replica brands or counterfeit brands are the non-genuine products that imitate those of the trademark owner (Mallor, 2007). It is argued that buying replica clothing brands, for instance, leaves consumers with money to spend on other expensive luxury products such as jewellery (Okonkwo, 2007). In their study on the consumer intention to buy original brands versus counterfeits, Triandewi and Tjiptono (2013) found price to be the main factor why consumers prefer buying counterfeit goods to original goods. Additionally, they found consumers in the

developing countries to be the highest consumers of the counterfeit products (Triandewi, & Tjiptono, 2013).

5. The rise in consumer credit and payment options.

The use of credit cards and other payment options has allowed consumers independence and higher spending power on luxury goods (Okonkwo, 2007). An increase in consumer credit has been noted in the last decade and this increase seems to help retailers keep afloat (Okonkwo, 2007).

It has been noted that member Generation Y have associated their life with technology since it has shaped the way the digital generation learns and the way they process information (Partridge, & Hallam, 2006). Findings of a study by Partridge and Hallam (2006) show that the youth of today follow the current fashion trends and they believe that media has the great impact and it is the major trendsetter for developing the fashion. The youth are status conscious; what they wear shows their social status, which is attributed to their appearance. A study by Hattingh, Russo, Sun-Basorun, and Van Wamelen (2012) found that consumers in the African continent tend to have shifted from consuming cheap, low-quality unbranded products to consuming quality and branded products. Multinational companies are noticing this trend and are now expanding into South Africa. For example, the Spanish retailer Zara opened its doors in South Africa in 2011 (Hattingh et al., 2012).

Rapid technological changes make it crucial to examine the consumer behaviour of Generation Y continuously. The Generation Y is attracted to a wide variety of media, regularly using blogs, reviews, and social networks to openly express their interests and feelings (Hershatter, & Epstein, 2010). Social media has allowed brands and designers to connect with the public in an instant. Social media content also shapes consumer behaviour and marketing strategies, for example, it is estimated that over 500 million people are interacting with social media (Ostrow, 2010). The exposure of Generation Y to various forms of media gives them options in terms of which method of shopping to use (Peter, & Olson, 2010). The choice of a consumer to purchase either in-store or online is called consumer purchase mode, according to Peter and Olson (2010). Besides the convenience offered by shopping online, there are many other factors that influence the consumer purchase mode choice by consumers.

A study (n = 150) comparing online and offline shopping in Rourkela, Odisha was conducted by Gupta (2015). Gupta (2015) found the 18-25 age group to be involved in online shopping than any other age group citing the familiarity of this age group with technology (Gupta, 2015). There was a significant difference across gender, with the females shopping online more than

the males shop. Of the products that consumers prefer to shop online, clothing was the least preferred to shop online because the consumers cited that they prefer to feel and try the clothes before buying (Gupta, 2015). According to North, Mostert and du Plessis (2003), one barrier to consumers not purchasing online is the fact that clothing is a so-called touch and feel product. Grewal, Gopalkrishnan, and Levi (2004) argue that the characteristics of goods such as fit and quality are difficult to present online yet they are important in consumer decision making. This leads to consumers having a lower willingness-to-pay for products online as compared to traditional stores (Kacen, Hess, & Chian, 2013). For the same reason, Yörük, Dündar, Moga, and Neculita (2011) also mentions that groceries and clothing as the most unsuitable items for online purchases. Peter and Olson (2010) agrees that brick-and-mortar stores still dominate over online stores because they allow consumers to shop effectively, compare product offerings, and experience the products directly. Gupta's (2015) study provides guidance in understanding why consumers prefer one form of purchase to the other. TimeTrade (2015) conducted an in-depth study on 1029 consumers exploring their perception and behaviour around retail. The study found that consumers (more than 70 percent) generally still prefer the brick-and-mortar model to online shopping because of the personal experience gained from a physical store.

According to Miller and Lamas (2010), the mostly used social media by consumers are Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Online social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) have played an important role in transforming consumers from being invisible and quiet to a noisy, public collective (Paterson, 2012; Zaglia, 2013). Miller and Lamas (2010) added that over 11 million consumers use more than 70% of many social media platforms to purchase different products and services, to provide rich information about certain products and to share comments with fellow consumers (Sema, 2013). In addition to Facebook, posting information on Instagram and Twitter could encourage friends to do the same thing or use their information to make decisions (Sema, 2013). Recommendations by friends or connections on social media also could help consumers in decision-making. Those recommendations could help brand attitudes, purchasing attitudes, and advertising attitudes. The better reviews a product gets, the more attractive it is for consumer purchasing (Sema, 2013). In addition, consumers form brand communities around social networks (virtual world) and these brand communities are called brand-related online communities. Consumers will exchange information and knowledge about brands (Zaglia, 2013). Within the brand-related online communities "group members act as if the community is meeting in a physical public space, with shared rules, values and code of behaviour" (McWilliam, 2000, p. 46).

According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 412) a brand community is "a specialised, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand". Within a brand-related online community, consumers share their interest for a brand, exchange information and knowledge, or they simply express their affection for this specific brand (Zaglia, 2013). The brand-related online community is guided by rules, values and code of behaviour similar to what happens in the physical space. Brand-related communities maintain their unity because of their common interest; the brand (Muniz, & O'Guinn, 2001). Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) argued that the consciousness of kind is the most important element within a brand community. This is when members feel a sense of connection towards each other. These individuals remain connected because of a common interest, for example, interest in luxury brands. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) added that brand-related communities form around brands that are of a strong image, that have a rich history and that are publicly consumed.

Another source of information for consumers who use the internet are blogs. Blogs refer to weblogs and they are an author's personal journal that act as source of information to internet users (Penttala, & Saarela, 2012). Bloggers (individuals who write blogs) are social observers who study and document new social developments (Penttala, & Saarela, 2012). Formerly, blogs used to be a trend and opinions sharing space but they have become a respectful business tools used to achieve many goals (Penttala, & Saarela, 2012). For example, companies contract bloggers to advertise their brands on their platform. The contract may be a marketing tool for companies in different industries, ranging from clothing, shoes and women accessories to wine producers and airway companies (Penttala, & Saarela, 2012). Additionally, bloggers influence consumption and inspire trust, making them more significant as a communication tool. Since university students are a generation of technology, they tend to considerably follow bloggers for fashion ideas (Penttala, & Saarela, 2012). The students view bloggers as opinion leaders who have credible information about brands that they acquired over time. Bloggers therefore, become a form of reference for students especially when purchasing high-involvement products.

3.8. Identity influence among the youth consumers

Group characteristics are known to be of influence to the interactions that occur between people. All groups, according to Myers (2002) have one thing in common; interaction. The interaction amongst group members does not necessarily have to be physical; simply feeling and perceiving to be a member of a group is sufficient to think and act as one (Myers, Abell, Kolstad, & Sani, 2010). Groups possess the power to influence purchasing decisions of an individual; therefore, it is important for marketers and retailers to understand group dynamics (Dos Santos, 2013). According to Mowen (1995), groups influence buying in two general ways. The first way is that they influence the purchases made by an individual consumer, that is, luxury branded clothes. The second way is when members of a group sometimes should make decisions as a group, such as who are their out-group. In addition, group size, the physical proximity of group members, the degree of harmony and unity within the group, the group's communication patterns, their social control and their decision-making processes are some of the group characteristics that influence interaction between groups. (Dos Santos, 2013). Group decision-making processes influence the type of products purchased by respective group members. For example, if individuals within a group indicate that they can only buy a Guess brand, every individual in that group tend to just comply and buy the brand. Brands are believed to play many roles when it comes to group decision-making and choice behaviour (Erdem, Swait, & Valenzuela, 2006). The group decision-making processes are also influenced by the degree of unity and harmony within a group, communication, group size and all the other characteristics aforementioned.

Luxury branded products are a source of group-identity, because they can provide an association with other users or owners of a brand. A study by Subhani, Hasan, & Osman, (2011) showed that having fashionable clothing portrays a sense of belonging or an impression before other people. Additionally, the consumption of brands expresses who one is and the group that he or she aligns him or herself with, fulfilling both psychological and social needs. Subhani et al. (2011) also found that the way in which an individual dress is considered a way to represent one's social status (Subhani et al., 2011). Uusitalo (1995) also argue that people use objects that are capable of self-expression to differentiate themselves from others. Adopting the latest fashion trends makes one look trendy and stylish amongst the youth, thereby wanting to associate themselves with a certain group. Additionally, one's confidence to join a certain group is boosted by the way, in which they dress (Subhani et al., 2011). Boli and Elliott (2008, p. 543) argue that "individuals must consciously construct their identities to build (or discover) authentic selves, and the identities they construct must be unique". Therefore, owning a certain brand will increase the chances of one to belong to a certain brand community. Belonging to

the brand community will increase one's confidence within that brand community and help to shape one's identity (Subhani et al., 2011). People tend to look at their in-groups more favourably whether consciously or unconsciously and overlook the negative characteristics of the in-group (Salmon, 2008).

This section of the literature assisted in formulating the last research aim for examination for this study, which was to “*explore the impact of reference groups in the identity construction of university students*”.

3.9. Conclusion

Existing literature provides with a basis to understand the symbolic consumption behaviour and how consumers use the consumption of luxury branded clothing to construct identity. This chapter also outlined what reference groups are and the various roles that reference groups play in influencing the symbolic consumption behaviour. The literature helped in shaping the discussions of the researched topic and the theoretical base that underpins the current study. Therefore, this section helped in identifying gaps in the literature.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the methods employed in the current study on symbolic consumption of branded clothing and identity construction among RU students. A qualitative research methodology was chosen because it allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon investigated. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews to gather data on the experiences of RU students in terms of their consumption of luxury branded clothing and identity construction. The section will discuss the research aims, research design, unit of analysis and sampling procedure, data collection method, interpretation of material collected, quality criteria (validity and reliability of the research), and ethics.

4.2. Research Aims

This research is located in the field of the consumer psychology. The research focused on exploring the experiences of university students' symbolic consumption of branded clothing and identity construction, as well as the role played by reference groups in influencing their consumption behaviour. Therefore, the study aims to explore:

- The symbolic consumption of branded clothing among Rhodes University students
- The processes of identity construction undertaken by Rhodes University students in relation to patterns of consumption within the South African context.
- The role that reference groups play in the symbolic consumption patterns of Rhodes University students.
- The impact of reference groups in the identity construction of Rhodes University students.

4.3. Research design

The research design is the plan created to be followed in order to answer the research's aim and objectives, and to provide the framework needed to resolve specific problems (Burns, & Grove, 2003). The present study adopted an exploratory qualitative research method, using the social constructionism paradigm. Stake (1995) maintained that the qualitative approach is inductive. An inductive approach which is a 'bottom up approach', in which the researcher generates meanings from the data collected in order to identify patterns that build a theory was employed. Through the inductive approach, "plans are made for data collection, after which the data are analysed to see if any patterns emerge that suggest relationships between variables" (Gray, 2014, p. 17). The inductive approach required the researcher to be constructive when

interpreting the information. Additionally, under the inductive approach, attempt to establish patterns, consistencies and meanings of the gathered data is utilised (Gray, 2014).

Mason (2002) argued that qualitative research allows researchers to explore dimensions of the research participants' social world, their experiences, imaginings and the significance of how meanings are generated. The significance of the qualitative approach is to enhance the exploring of the social world of RU students as well as the significance of the meanings generated from the consumption behaviour. Additionally, the qualitative approach brings out the participant's interpretation of meanings (TerreBlanche, & Durrheim, 1999). This means that qualitative research explores participants' ideas from an emic perspective. Therefore, a qualitative approach allows for the examination of human behaviour and the context in which it occurs (Salkind, 2009). The context can be in the social, either cultural or political (Myers, 2009; Salkind, 2009). Different behaviours may occur in different contexts so it is important to understand the effects of context to certain behaviours.

4.3.1. Research paradigm

The research paradigm followed, as described by Neuman (2006) is a 'worldview' or a set of assumptions of how things work. Research paradigm originated from the Greek word *paradeigma*, which means *pattern* and was first used by Thomas Kuhn (1977) to denote a conceptual framework shared by a community of scientists, which provided them with a convenient model for examining problems and finding their solutions (Terre Blanche, & Durrheim, 1999). There are a variety of definitions for paradigm. One such definition is by Kuhn (1977), who defines a paradigm as a research culture that has a set of beliefs, values and assumptions that a community of researchers have in common regarding the nature and conduct of research. In general, a paradigm is a whole system of thinking (Neuman, 2006). There are three dimensions to paradigms (Terre Blanche, & Durrheim, 1999). These three are ontology, epistemology and methodology (Terre Blanche, & Durrheim, 1999). Ontology entails a worldview or shared understanding about reality and what can be known about it (Terre Blanche, & Durrheim, 1999). There are two contracting positions within the ontological approach. On the one hand, there is objectivism, which assumes that there is independent reality, whilst on the other, constructionism which assumes reality as a product of social processes (Neuman, 2006). Epistemology is the study of our view of reality, knowledge and the meaning ascribed to our reality (Tennis, 2008). Researchers who aim to discover laws concerning human behaviour usually adopt this worldview. Epistemology consist of two broad positions; positivism and interpretivism-constructivism (Tennis, 2008). For positivists, social

reality is stable and knowledge of them is additive. Interpretivism-constructivism views the world as constructed, interpreted, and experienced by people in their interactions with each other and with wider social systems (Merriam, 1998). The methodology is a system of methods that specifies how a researcher go about studying what he or she believes to be known (Terre Blanche, & Durrheim, 1999). The quantitative methodology is underpinned by the positivist approach whereas the qualitative methodology is underpinned by the interpretivist epistemology and constructionist ontology. These aforementioned paradigms guided the study as to which methods to engage in the research.

This study adopted the social constructionism paradigm, which is associated with the post-modern era in qualitative research (Schwandt, 1994). Social constructionism, according to Sarantakos (2013) focuses on the firm belief that in practice, there is neither objective reality nor objective truth, reality is constructed. Social constructionism is “a perspective which believes that a great deal of human life exists as it does due to social and interpersonal influences” (Owen, 1995, p.161). Within the social constructionist paradigm, individuals construct meaning from their experiences and interactions (Sarantakos, 2013; Silverman, 2000), and all other aspects of humanity are created, maintained and destroyed through interactions with others except for the inherited and developmental aspects (Owen, 1995). Social constructionism was deemed appropriate for this study as it has its roots in a variety of areas, which include social history, hermeneutics and social psychology (Owen, 1995). Gray (2014) and Reed (2002) maintained that the social constructionism paradigm is useful for consumer research focusing advertising, lifestyles, fashion, sub-cultures and gender because it provides a useful perspective for any research that implicates some study of the self.

Social constructionism rejects the general assumptions about the social world that are dominant in social groups and allows an individual to construct their own world from how they perceive the actual world (Galbin, 2014). Additionally, social constructionism attempts to explore the degree to which people are individual and collective, the same as others or different from them (Owen, 1995). Social constructionism views individuals as having separate bodies but thoughts and emotion are shared amongst individuals. This means humans are part of shared collective aims, values and experiences (Galbin, 2014). From the shared collective aims, values and experiences, an individual then construct their social reality (Galbin, 2014). Therefore, reality and relationships are important within the social constructionist paradigm (Sarantakos, 2013). Sarantakos (2013) is also of the view that there is no single structure that exists in the social world but rather multiple structures interwoven with each other. These multiple structures

determine what influences the consumption behaviour of students and the construction of identity.

4.3.2. The type of study

There exist mostly three types of research designs that can be followed throughout the method of collecting adequate data. These are explanatory, descriptive and exploratory research studies (Burns, & Grove, 2003). The choice of the most appropriate study depends mostly on the objectives of the study.

Explanatory studies provide casual explanations of phenomena being investigated (Burns, & Grove, 2003). Descriptive studies document the phenomenon of interest in the real situation (Sarantakos, 2013). Burns and Groove (2003) define exploratory studies as research conducted to gain new insights, discover new ideas, and for increasing knowledge of the phenomenon. An exploratory qualitative approach was undertaken for the current study, which places emphasis on discovery of new ideas and insights within explorative research. According to van Wyk (2015) exploratory studies are suitable for exploring a phenomenon of which very little research has been conducted. Research conducted by Bevan-Dye et al. (2011), supports this as they found that there is limited research on students' consumer behaviour in South Africa. Results of exploratory studies are not necessarily generalisable to a larger population but provide a better understanding of the sample being examined (Burns, & Grove 1999).

4.4. Unit of analysis and sampling procedure

This section discusses the underlying major unit of analysis of the study. In addition, an explanation of how the participants for the study were selected will be discussed. This will be explained in the sampling section. The sampling section will also include an explanation on the inclusion criteria adopted in the study.

4.4.1. Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis in general becomes important when the researcher begins to draw a sample with which to work (Bless, & Higson-Smith, 1995). Unit of analysis is what the study is analysing (Bless, & Higson-Smith, 1995). For the current study, the unit of analysis is the constructed accounts of experiences of buying luxury branded clothing and the decision-making processes as well as the identity construction aspects that are involved in these accounts. Combining the data collected from each student provided the researcher with the accurate picture of the symbolic purchasing choices and behaviours of the sample.

Additionally, the researcher investigated the context in which the brands are consumed and what drives the actions of the students to purchase the luxury branded clothing.

4.4.2. Sampling

The sampling technique of this study does not employ the mathematical constructs of probability, therefore, do not ensure representativeness (Sarantakos, 2013). Furthermore, due to the exploratory nature of this study, a non-probability convenience sampling technique was utilised (Bryman, 2011). The researcher is not necessarily interested in representativeness but is interested in getting information that would reveal certain aspects of symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothes and construction of identity among university students. Qualitative researchers use the relevance of subjects to a research topic rather than representativeness when selecting a sample (Neuman, 2006; Sarantakos, 2013), hence the choice of non-probability sampling technique. A non-probability sampling method refers to “any kind of sampling where the selection of elements is not determined by the statistical principle of randomness” (Ulin, Robinson, Tolley, & McNeill, 2002, p. 31). Non-probability sampling is mostly used in exploratory research and qualitative analysis (Sarantakos, 2013).

Convenience sampling does not use expert judgement in selecting a representative sample but the selection criteria depend on the ease of obtaining the sample (Battaglia, 2011). For the current research, the ease of obtaining the sample was key because of the limitation of resources; it was simple, economical, quick and convenient to interview students who are at the same university as the researcher. Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006), share the same sentiment by stating that convenience sampling is suitable when the sample is easily accessible, such as students at institution and where it is impossible to identify all the members of a population. Even though the convenience sampling approach does not allow for generalisations, it fits well with the aim of the study to gain a deeper understanding of the role of symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothing in identity construction as well as the role that reference groups play in the consumption behaviour.

A sample size of 12 participants, who engage in the consumption of luxury branded clothes, was chosen for this study. According to Fuerst, McAllister, Van de Wetering, and Wyatt, (2011), 12 participants represent a large enough sample to obtain saturation point in a qualitative study. Saturation is when the researcher no longer discovers any new themes from the data that is collected (Mason, 2002).

4.4.2.1. Inclusion criteria

Although participants were chosen in a non-random manner, inclusion criteria were implemented to ensure that the participants will be able to address the aims of the study. The inclusion criteria are ideal to ensure that the participants in the study are the ones that the study is aimed at. The inclusion criteria consisted of individuals who: 1) study full-time at Rhodes University, 2) consume luxury branded clothing, 3) are prepared to discuss their decision-making processes and are personally responsible for the selection decision, 4) can communicate in English, and 5) must have given consent to participate in the interviews. The participants should be between the age of 18 and 29 and rely on parents and family for their income. A table with the description of participants is appended as Appendix A.

These criteria were chosen because students who consume luxury branded clothing might possess more knowledge about brands than those who do not consume them. The ability of the participants to speak in English ensured that there will not be a language barrier between the researcher and the participants. The sample consisted of 8 female students (67%) and 4 male students (33%).

4.5. Data collection method

4.5.1. Research instrument

With a qualitative approach, the best method for data collection is with focus groups, in-depth interviews or observations. (Bryman, 2011). Of the three methods of data collection that have been mentioned, in-depth interviews are the most common method of data collection (Sarantakos, 2013). According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), researchers working with interpretive and constructionist paradigms favour the use of interviews and observations as methods of qualitative data collection. According to Sarantakos (2013), there are five characteristics of in-depth qualitative interviews are as follows: first, qualitative interviews are naturalistic because they aim to study reality as it is and as it manifests in everyday life events. Second, interviews ascertain aspects of personal experience as displayed in everyday life, therefore they treat life as a process (Sarantakos, 2013). The third characteristic is that there is openness in qualitative research. This means that interviews do not stick to a strictly standardised approach but they allow adjustments to be made as required by the research and interviewers engage in an open discussion with the respondent (Sarantakos, 2013). Fourth, there is flexibility in conducting qualitative research; the researcher follows the course that emerges through the interview. Primacy of the respondent is the fifth characteristic of

qualitative interviewing. This means that respondents are treated as experts who provide valuable information. Respondents are also regarded as important as the researcher and not just a source of data. The final characteristic is that of reflexivity. Qualitative interviews allow researchers to reflect upon their subjective approach to the world and consider the implications of the knowledge they produce for social life.

For this study, which adopted a constructionist approach, semi-structured in-depth interviews were ideal. Semi-structured interviews provide in-depth information pertaining to participants' experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic (Berg, 2007). Semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate method for obtaining personal beliefs, opinions and they allowed participants the freedom to express their views on the symbolic consumption and identity construction through luxury branded clothing (Kvale, 1996). Using the guidance of the literature review, an interview guide was prepared to give guidance and structure to the interview (See Appendix B).

The researcher prepared the interview guide to include characteristic, behavioural and attitudinal questions. The questions guide the respondents on how they construct their social reality in terms of symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothing and how identity is constructed thereof. The characteristic questions focused on the favourite luxury clothing brands that the students consume, why they consume them and why consume a particular brand. This helped in finding the popular brands among student. The characteristic questions were guided by the literature on conspicuous consumption. Conspicuous consumption is regarded as a most critical determinant of consumer behaviour (Trigg, 2001).

The behavioural questions were based on the role that reference groups play in the choice that the students make to consume branded clothing and what the branded clothes represent to the students. These questions helped in understanding how individuals are influenced by the people around them and also how they interact with the brands. Attitudinal questions focused on the issues of identity and how belonging to a group that consume luxury branded clothing means and the meanings attached to belonging to a different group. These questions highlight how individuals perceive each other in terms of the clothes that they wear. As mentioned in the literature, the framework of this study is SIT. SIT formed the basis of the attitudinal questions because the consumption of luxury branded clothes may be influenced by the value and emotional significance attached to a certain group.

4.5.2. Procedure of data collection

A basic requirement for conducting a proper survey is that a pilot study be run to assist in identifying whether there are any adjustments that need to be made to the interview questions (Potgieter, & Barnard, 2010). After the researcher conducted the pilot interview with a friend who falls within the category of the participants in this study, a few adjustments were made to the interview guide (Appendix B). The pilot interview was not included amongst the 12 participants because the purpose of the process was to test whether the interview questions were appropriate for the study.

One-on-one interviews were conducted with the 12 participants, with each interview lasting about 45 minutes to an hour. The interviews took place in an agreed venue between the interviewer and the participant to ensure that participants were in a comfortable space. The interviews were all conducted in the discussion rooms in the RU Library. The whole process of interviews took about two months. Before conducting the individual interviews, each participant was briefed on what the research was about and was required to sign a consent form (Appendix C). The briefing included a verbal explanation of what the research was about so that the participants understood the purpose of the research and their rights as participants in the study. The researcher chose the most common way of recording interviews, which is the use of an audio recorder. Permission was sought from the participants to allow the researcher to record the interviews (Appendix D). The use of an audio recorder, according to Kvale (2009), allows the interviewer to concentrate on the topic and the dynamics of the interview.

Audio recorders are crucial to ensuring validity and accuracy of the interviews as it can be replayed for analysis purposes (Silverman, 2000). Audio recorders assist in reducing the potential for researcher error, which could occur by recording data incorrectly or taking answers to questions that were not asked (Silverman, 2000). As the researcher was recording interviews, notes were also taken about the interview process. Note taking acted as a backup to the audio recorder in case something happens to the recordings (Bernard, 2013). During the process of conducting interviews, the researcher was aware of her role in the research process. The researcher was in control of the interview, ensured that there was no influence in the way the respondents answered the questions, recorded the interviews correctly, established rapport with the respondents and observed ethical standards, as suggested by Sarantakos (2013). These are some of the central tasks that the interviewers are required to perform irrespective of the underlying paradigm (Sarantakos, 2013). Additionally, the researcher took into account potential biases that might arise whilst conducting the research. Therefore, the researcher

employed reflexivity. Reflexivity is the process whereby researchers critically reflects on their own role and preconceptions throughout the research process (Schurink, 2004).

4.6. Interpretation of collected material

This section presents a discussion of the approach applied to analyse data, that is, qualitative analysis. The main purpose of the qualitative analysis is to uncover and highlight underlying patterns and processes that are found in the collected data (Patton, 2001). According to Polit and Beck (2008), data analysis allows research data to be organised, structured and elicit meaning. This is done by paying attention to the pattern-controlling variables that explain most of the variation in the content. The method of data analysis used in this study is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a foundational method for qualitative analysis (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, thematic analysis is a method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). In this case, the researcher reported on the experiences of students and the meanings that they attach to consumption of branded clothing. Thematic analysis also provides more detailed and distinct account of one particular theme, or group of themes, within the data (Braun, & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis was an analysis method of choice because it is an analysis method that allow the researcher to address research aims at hand. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is ideal for individuals in their early qualitative research career. This substantiates the use of thematic analysis a data analysis method of choice for the researcher as a person who is still in her early research career. Thematic analysis was a method of choice because of its flexibility and its compatibility with both essentialist and constructionist paradigms within psychology (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can be used within a constructionist method to examine ways in which individuals contextualise events, realities, meanings and experiences (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). For this study, thematic analysis is appropriate for the aims of the research. In other words, due to its flexibility, thematic analysis can be applied to different theoretical frameworks (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). The theoretical framework of this study is the SIT (Tajfel, 1982). As discussed in the literature chapter, SIT is a “social-psychological theory that attempts to explain cognitions and behaviour with the help of group processes” (Trepte, 2006, p. 256). The central principle of SIT is that individuals classify themselves and others into in-group (reference groups) and out-group social categories. It is from this theoretical point of view that the data will be analysed.

The following stages of thematic analysis (Braun, & Clarke, 2006) were used in the current study:

Stage 1: Familiarising with the data

The researcher immersed herself in the information collected from the interviews until there was familiarity with the content as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). This meant that data gathered were transcribed; re-read and interesting ideas were noted. Transcription of the information was regarded as a way of familiarising with the data (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). Re-reading ensured that the researcher was familiar with the depth and breadth of the data so that patterns could be formed. As she was familiarising with the information, the researcher coded responses relating to reference groups together, those to do with consumption together as well as those referring to in-groups and out-groups in preparation of generating initial codes.

Stage 2: Generating initial codes

Initial codes were generated after the researcher had familiarised with the data gathered and developed initial list of ideas about the interesting components of the data. Initial codes were then produced from the data (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). Codes identify the features of data that are of interest to the researcher and they are then organised into meaningful groups (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). In general, researchers can code the data either manually or through a software programme. For this study, the coding was performed manually, using highlighters to identify themes.

Stage 3: Searching for themes

This stage involved the sorting of different codes into themes and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). The codes were analysed and combined to form overarching themes (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). The researcher used tables to organise the codes. Some of the codes formed the main themes whilst other became the subthemes (Braun, & Clarke, 2006).

Stage 4: Reviewing themes

This stage involved the re-examination of the themes to make sure that data within the themes cohere meaningfully and there is a distinction between themes (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). The researcher refined the themes, taking out the themes that did not have enough data to support them and collapsed some themes to form one theme (Braun, & Clarke, 2006).

Stage 5: Defining and naming themes

Themes were defined, named, further refined, and supporting data was constructed (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). Each theme was analysed in detail to bring out the ‘story’ that each theme tells in relation to the overall ‘story’ (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). This was done with the research question in mind and making sure that the overall ‘story’ is in relation with the research question as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Stage 6: Producing the report

This is the last stage, which involved the final analysis and write-up of the report (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). The write-up was done in a way that it tells the complicated story of the data in a way that brings out to the reader the validity of the analysis which will be demonstrated in the chapters to follow. The researcher strived to write a story that provides a “concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story the data tell-within and across themes”, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 24).

4.7. Quality Criteria

The importance of validity and reliability in qualitative research was considered in this study. According to Patton (2001), validity and reliability are two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analysing the data, discussing the results and reporting the findings as well as judging the quality of the study. Validity and reliability are quality measures in quantitative research but qualitative research uses trustworthiness to measure quality of research (Patton, 2001). Trustworthiness is the extent to which the data and data analysis are believable and trustworthy (Patton, 2001). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that researchers need to pose questions to themselves when dealing with the issues of trustworthiness in research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that to assess the rigour of qualitative research four different criteria should be adopted. These four are credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. They further equated these to quantitative criteria of internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity.

4.7.1. Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research is defined as the extent the study addresses the problem it is intended to address (Golafshani, 2003). Credibility means the same as internal validity (Golafshani, 2003). Lincoln and Guba (1985), suggested ways to ensure credibility in a qualitative research. The researcher took some of the suggestions and incorporated them in her research to ensure that it is credible. Firstly, the researcher adopted well-established research

methods (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985). This is evident in that the researcher incorporated in-depth interviews to gather data and thematic analysis to analyse the data. In-depth interviews and thematic analysis have been successfully utilised in previous research that focused on the same area.

The second suggestion adopted related to the use of probes and iterative questioning (Shenton, 2004). The researcher ensured that she probed the respondents by returning to some of the issues raised by the participants and trying to rephrase them to see if there are any discrepancies. Lastly, the researcher included tactics to help ensure honesty in informants when contributing information (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Each participant was given the options to either participate in the research or not so that information was gathered from those who were willing to take part and offer data freely (Shenton, 2004). The participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time from the study and confidentiality and anonymity were ensured as well. Pitney (2004) suggests the use of peer review as a credibility measure. Peer review entails involving a qualified researcher from outside to examine the research processes and data interpretations (Pitney, 2004). For this research, the supervisors will verify whether the research was conducted in an appropriate, systematic manner and reasonable conclusions were drawn as suggested by Pitney (2004).

4.7.2. Transferability

The researcher would like to ensure that findings of this study will be applicable to other contexts therefore employed measure that checks that. The issue of applicability is important in ensuring trustworthiness in research. Applicability refers to the ability to apply findings in different contexts (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985). Shenton (2004) refers to applicability as transferability. Transferability is equivalent to external validity in quantitative research (Shenton, 2004). This refers to the extent to which the findings of the study can be generalised or applied to other situations (Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that transferability can be achieved through thick description of the research. Thick description refers to the description of a phenomenon in sufficient detail so that the person wishing to transfer the results to a different context will be able to draw that the conclusions are transferable to other settings, situations and people (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985). This can be done by examining the findings of this study and use it in future researches as reference (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985). As suggested by Shenton (2004), the researcher provided information such as the number of participants involved in the study, the data collection methods used, the length of data collection period, and the length of the interview sessions.

4.7.3. Confirmability

The findings should be purely from the subjects and no other motivations or views from the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, the findings should confirm what the participants experienced. This is called confirmability (Shenton, 2004). Confirmability according to Shenton (2004, p. 72) is “the qualitative investigator’s comparable concern to objectivity”. The transcribed responses (quotes) from the participants as well as the audio recordings ensure that there is no bias by the researcher. Hence, it was important for the researcher to make sure that the results presented were the experiences of the participants and not the researcher’s preferences (Shenton, 2004). The researcher tried to be as objective as possible and reflected on the whole process as a way of acknowledging the role of the researcher in the research process.

4.7.4. Dependability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), consistency is one of the important measures to ensure trustworthiness in a study. Similar to Lincoln and Guba’s (1995) consistency is Shenton’s (2004) dependability. Dependability is the reliability in quantitative research and it focuses on the ability to obtain the same results if a study was repeated in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants (Shenton, 2004). This means the extent to which the research findings can be replicated (Shenton, 2004). According to Shenton (2004), the inclusion of sections such as the research design and its implementation and details of how data was gathered is important to show that proper research procedures were followed (as provided in this chapter). This might help those who wish to conduct the same research for comparative and confirmation purposes.

4.8. Ethical considerations

When conducting research, it is crucial that all researchers are aware of the code of behaviour deemed correct for research (Pera, & Van Tonder, 1996). Ethics relate to two groups of people; those conducting research, who should be aware of their obligations and responsibilities, and the “researched upon”, who have basic rights that should be protected (Pera, & Van Tonder, 1996). The study therefore had to be conducted with fairness and justice by trying to eliminate all potential risks, which will be addressed in the following section. The respondents must be aware of their rights (Pera, & Van Tonder, 1996). Procedures relating to ethical issues such as informed consent; privacy, confidentiality and anonymity; harm and risk; voluntary participation and ethical clearance and permission to conduct research will be discussed below.

4.8.1. Informed consent

The issue of informed consent is important when conducting research. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the study before participation. The participants signed a consent form, to show that they were agreeing to participate in the study. A copy of the consent form is appended in Appendix C.

4.8.2. Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity

In order to ensure privacy, confidentiality and anonymity principles of ethical considerations were adhered to. Privacy is the agreement between people that limit the access of others to private information (De Vos, 2002). In this study, privacy was ensured by not identifying the participants but rather use pseudo names, as shown in Appendix A. Confidentiality means that no information provided by the participants will be made public or available to others (Polit, & Hungler, 1995). Anonymity refers to the impossibility of linking aspects of data to a specific individual. Similar with privacy, the researcher did not use the actual names of participants, rather pseudo names are used for privacy and anonymity purposes (Berg, 2007). To ensure confidentiality, the interview transcripts and recordings were accessible to the researcher and the supervisors only.

4.8.3. Harm and risk

The researcher acknowledged that the participants will not be put in a situation that will harm them. However, the researcher acknowledged that minor harm, such as providing information that the participant regard as very confidential, may occur. Harm and risk were considered prior to being provided ethical clearance from the psychology department and the humanities faculty of the University. If the minor harm was to be experienced, the researcher provided the contact details of the counselling centre on the participant consent form.

4.8.4. Voluntary participation

As suggested by Berg (2007), the researcher acknowledges the importance of voluntary participation in the research; therefore, the participants were given enough opportunity to opt in or out of the study. The information about the research was presented to them prior to engagement in the study. This means that they were informed of the right to discontinue the interview at any point (Bryman, 2012). The participants were also informed that if they want some feedback, follow-up meetings will be organised to give them the feedback.

4.8.5. Ethical clearance and permission to conduct the study

The study obtained ethical clearance from the Psychology Department's Research Projects Review Committee (RPERC) and the Humanities Higher Degrees Committee. To gain access to the participants; the researcher contacted the Registrar and the Director of Student Affairs, to request permission to interview the Rhodes University students (Appendix E and Appendix F) and permission was granted. The researcher did not disrupt the lecture attendance of the students. Students were approached via an advertisement (Appendix G) placed on RU Connected (an internal learning management system). The advertisement contained brief information on the purpose of the study and information regarding confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality and anonymity were also ensured during the interviewing process. Social networks like Facebook (Rhodes SRC page), can also help with the recruitment since the study is focusing on people born in the age of internet (Bevan-Dye et al., 2011).

4.9. Conclusion

This chapter laid out the research methodology and design for this study. A qualitative approach was employed to understand the symbolic consumption of branded clothing and identity construction among RU students as well as the impact of reference groups in the consumption behaviour. The section also included the research aims, research design, sampling strategies, data collection methods, quality criteria, data analysis as well as the ethical considerations of the study.

The next section will present the data gathered and how it was analysed using the thematic analysis method. The four themes that emerged indicate how the RU students construct identity through the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothing and the role played by reference groups in influencing the consumption behaviour.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the results of the qualitative analyses in an attempt to provide an insight into the construction of identity through the symbolic consumption of branded clothes by RU students. This discussion and analysis uncover the underlying patterns and processes that exist in the branded clothing consumption behaviour of university students. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the study explored how identity is constructed through the consumption of branded clothing and the role that reference groups play in their consumption behaviour.

Four main themes and 17 sub-themes emerged from the research findings of clothing consumption among participants and the role played by reference group in the consumption patterns. The SIT was used as the theoretical framework to support the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis.

5.2. Factors influencing the consumption of luxury branded clothing

Before discussing the four main themes, there was another theme that emerged from the interviews that the researcher believes plays an important role in contextualising the consumption behaviour among students. This theme is about the factors that influence the consumption of luxury branded clothing among participants. These factors are discussed below:

5.2.1. Income

The monthly income received by students plays an important role in determining their consumption patterns. Li (2010) found income to be a major factor that affects the consumption behaviour of students, especially the pocket money they get from their parents. Since most students rely on parent and family funding for their livelihood on campus, they need to make sure they have all the necessities for the month and still be able to buy their favourite clothing brands. When asked how much they get as an allowance, the participants had this to say:

I think on average I get R5 500 a month from my parents (Rhoda, 22, F, Guess).

I would say R 5000 because I stay in res so I don't pay any bills and I reserve half of that for clothes (Ruth, 20, F, Sissy Boy)

I get R 7000 every month I can say... (Moses, 20, M, Slazenger)

Probably about R5000-7000 but every month (Edna, 25, F Gucci)

The quotes above indicate that the students' income is between R5000 and R7000 a month from their parents and family. The respondents confirmed that they rely on money from parents and family for their upkeep. This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted by Li (2010) and Yun (2007), who found that the main source of income for students are parents and family regardless of one's social class. Most respondents indicated that they do not have bills to pay except for two post-graduate students who stay off-campus. The absence of bills to pay gives students an allowance to save for their favourite brands. *Ruth* mentioned that she does not have bills to pay so it is possible for her to reserve half of what she gets for her favourite clothing brands.

Although students depend mainly on parents and family for their income, they do not find it to be a barrier to consuming their favourite brands. As noted by Kang and Park (2016, p. 3813) "consumers, who consider the primary goal of their consuming behaviour to be improving personal value of self and expressing their identities effectively, carry out luxury consumption despite of economic barriers". The students choose to consume their luxury brands because they form part of a generation that value fashion more than any other age group. Yun (2007) views that students should not pursue brands because it is an unnecessary wastage, the participants in this study tend to feel otherwise.

However, Yun (2007) suggested that the university students should look for other ways of earning an additional income if they want to consume more. Li (2010) also found that the students who spent more were involved in activities that bring extra income. Two of the participants in this current study indicated that they earn a little extra money to add to their pocket money:

I do not wait for my parents' money I sell stuff like handbags, weaves and sunglasses here at school and online (Edna, 25, F, Gucci).

I am a local person so when I finished high school I started selling hair products and clothes.... I get quite a decent amount there (Lisa, 23, F, Zara and River Island).

Both *Edna* and *Lisa* demonstrated entrepreneurial tendencies to gain additional money. All these businesses serve as a way of earning an extra income, which allows them to purchase their favourite brands. Similarly, Li's (2010) study found that a minority of students in the study depended on themselves to obtain economic independence. This concurs the number of students who are entrepreneurs in this current study (2 out of 12). The independence is evident as the students indicated that they spend more on luxury branded clothing than others do. On

how much of their income do they allocate towards the purchase of their favourite luxury branded clothing, the respondents gave the following:

I save about R5 000 to go for shopping because the sections I shop sell brands umm...the sections are expensive (Martha, 21, F, Mango).

Of the R5000 that I get every month...I can say I reserve R3 500 for my shopping. It will be ok when I go home for my clothes (Ruth, 20, F, Sissy Boy).

I keep just above half of my allowance for clothes, let's say about R4 000 (Moses, 20, M, Slazenger).

The students' savings ranged from R3 500-R5000, with most students sparing about R3 500 a month to spend on clothing. The 2015 Student Village Student Spend Survey indicated that university students in South Africa buy expensive items such as branded clothing, electronics, tickets for concerts (Student Village, 2015). Another item that was not mentioned by the Student Village (2015) study but was found to be popular among university students is spending money on fast-foods (Chaston, 2009). Manley's (2013) study which investigated South African consumers' intention to purchase authentic luxury fashion branded products versus counterfeit products, found the following distribution (by race) as the average amounts spent on authentic luxury clothing; Indian group (R5 342,30) followed by blacks (R5 301,80), whites (R4 532,00) and coloureds (R4 223,70). This shows that our respondents are in the same bracket as other students when it comes to the average amounts spent on authentic luxury branded clothing. *Rhoda* even mentioned a change in her brand consumption because when she was in Cape Town she had an income of her own but now she is depending on parents.

I would spend quite a bit umm, let us say about R 5000 a month because I had an income of my own and I lived in Cape Town so I found it quite different (Rhoda, 22, F, Guess).

The quote above clearly indicates the transition that occurred in *Rhoda's* income and this is evident that an extra income is necessary for the students to enjoy on their favourite luxury brands. The respondent also compares Cape Town and Grahamstown in terms of money available. The difference between the two places is probably because Cape Town is bigger than Grahamstown, which means there are more opportunities to earn an extra income unlike Grahamstown, which is a small town and students compete for the few jobs available.

5.2.2. Buying frequency

Along with the source of income, the buying frequency of the luxury branded clothes is also important as a sub-theme. Buying frequency refers to how often the students shop for their favourite brands (Hughes, 2016). Since the university students indicated that they depend mainly on parents and family for their income, it might be difficult for them to purchase their clothes on a monthly basis. When asked how frequent they purchase branded clothes, the respondents had this to say:

I usually buy each term when I go home, so... this is like 4 times a year (Moses, 20, M, Slazenger)

Umm... when I really need them like, for example, seasons are changing, that will be probably 3 months that I would buy something (Joseph, 19, M, Nike)

I don't buy clothes monthly, I do shopping like 3 times a year during certain months, I do massive shopping (John, 24, M, Balenciaga and Nike).

I don't buy every month if I am to go shopping I wait for Johannesburg so ... that will be after every 2 months I guess (Edna, 25, F, Gucci).

The general response from the respondents was that they purchase their favourite brands when they are back in their hometowns. For *Moses*, the purchase happens each term when he goes home and this adds to four times in a year. *Joseph* goes with the change of seasons so for him it is probably every three months. *John* engages in mass shopping and this happens three times a year. *Edna* shops in Johannesburg after every two months. The pattern was similar for the other respondents. No one indicated engaging in shopping every month.

Generally, students purchase luxury branded products less often, possibly because of the fact that they are highly priced. Purchasing brands after a while indicates that the students saved money first for them to be able to buy their favourite luxury clothing brands. Cumulative savings allow for the consumption of favourite brands to transpire because respondents of this study indicated that they will save until they have enough money by the time they want to make a purchase.

5.2.3. Spending patterns

5.2.3.1. Students who stay in University Residences

The respondents were asked about their spending patterns as people who now possess the freedom to make consumption-related choices with restricted income and being away from parents. The spending patterns differed significantly between two groups of students; those who stay in university residences and others who stay off-campus. Both groups indicated that

they rely on parents and family for income. This means that the income that respondents get each month determines their purchasing power.

I start of by identifying the things I need like basic toiletries and then I move a bit down, then I buy food and then I go to clothing and all of those things, it is around about the third option so I don't actually have a lot of expenses; it is just toiletries, food and clothing (Joseph, 19, M, Nike).

I got a phone on contract so that's my first priority and then after paying my phone I buy my groceries, after groceries then my clothes come in but sometimes my clothes come before my groceries (Monica, 20, F, Guess and Nike).

Clothing is the highest for me like I spend a lot of time looking for the perfect like outfit whether its umm ... I like my clothes shopping that's why its top on my priority list, then I make sure I have food money (Anna, 27, F, Burberry).

Joseph places importance on basics such as food. As a person who does not have a lot of expenses, he still is able to budget for clothing. Unlike *Joseph*, *Monica* has to settle her credit payments for a phone before the basics. For *Monica*, she sometimes spends on clothes before the basic necessities. She cited that looking good is important for every event that she attends; hence the reason she gives first priority to clothes. *Monica* as a student who stays in the university residence, mentioned that she is not worried about food because she can eat from the dining hall. *Monica's* response indicated that she made a monthly commitment to pay for her phone bill so she makes sure she settles that bill before anything else. *Anna* ranks luxury-clothing brands as highest on her list of priorities so she sets money aside for her shopping, then she buys food. This is possibly because as a mature student, she understands her budget very well so that she will not run short of anything.

According to Norvilitis, et al. (2006), factors such as age, personal traits and knowledge determine the way in which college students spend their money. In this study, undergraduate students might still be battling with their budgeting hence they are not yet sure about budgeting. Age also might play an important role because *Anna* is a bit mature than the other students that is why she might not be afraid of putting her favourite brand first before food and other basic necessities. Thus, overall, there is great variations with regards to students' spending patterns.

5.2.3.2. Students who stay off-campus

Most respondents did not mention spending on accommodation because they live in student residences and those who live off-campus will have their rent paid by their parents or sponsors. This is indicative that regardless of whether a student stays on or off campus rental expenses do not have significant effect on luxury brand consumption. This is possibly because accommodation is parents or sponsors' responsibilities.

I would say food is probably first followed by study material, third will be petrol, I would say clothes will be like 4th or 5th. My pocket money does not cover rent my rent is paid for because I live in digs and my parents do so ummm...but it includes petrol (Ruth, 20, F, Sissy Boy).

Honestly after I have paid all my necessary expenses like food, electricity and all that. Luckily, I do not worry about my rent because my dad pays. I only buy clothes when I have money remaining after I have paid all the essential things that I need yah (Lisa, 23, F, Zara and River Island).

The fact that students who stay off campus do not have to worry about rent, leaves one with relative freedom to still purchase luxury branded clothing after necessities. Greene and Adams-Price (1990) stated that, in the transition from childhood to adulthood, young people try to disengage from the parental authority in order to construct and define their identities and lifestyles. In this study, students have indicated that they now have their own lifestyle whereby they decide what to spend their income on first as they construct an identity of their own. One item that they spend their income while defining their identities is the luxury branded clothes.

The difference in a choice of what to spend money on indicated their individual differences, as they have different needs to fulfil. Nelson (2011) argued that needs are the strongest motivators for consumers to spend their money. Maslow's Hierarchy of needs emphasises the need for consumers to fulfil physiological needs such as food, water and shelter first before any other needs (Hawkins, 2004). These are the basic needs required by an individual for survival. Most respondents, both staying on and off campus, agreed with traditional interpretation of Maslow's hierarchy by emphasising the importance of having the basic necessities before considering luxuries. Maslow's hierarchy of needs state that until the low-level needs are fulfilled higher needs are not considered (Hawkins, 2004).

Monica and *Anna* differs from most of the respondents in that they are driven by esteem needs first before any other needs. Even though *Monica* and *Anna* are driven by the esteem needs, their lower level physiological needs, such as food and shelter, would have been satisfied already because they stay in the university residences. Luxury clothes and cell phones form part of the esteem needs within Maslow's Hierarchy of needs. The need for *Monica* and *Anna* to satisfy different needs concurrently agree with Ward and Lasen (2009) who demonstrated that individuals can simultaneously desire and search for more than one need at a time and may well prioritise them differently and within each stage. Luxury clothes and cell phones attract recognition and communicates that an individual has reached a high-level status. As mentioned above, the difference in the choice of which need on the hierarchy to satisfy first amongst the respondents might be due to individual differences. *Monica* and *Anna* possibly have been

motivated by showing a high status among other students. Nelson (2011) argued that esteem needs are influenced mainly by the consumerism that is experienced today. Consumerism leads to students engage in 'saving to spend' whereby they save whilst at university and spend when they get home. Generally, whether one stays on or off campus does not significantly influence the consumption of luxury branded clothes.

5.2.4. Perceptions and habits around retail shopping

Another factor that influences the consumption of branded clothes among Rhodes University students is the availability of retailers selling their favourite luxury brands. The absence of the bigger shopping centres disadvantage the respondents in their consumption of luxury branded clothes because they fail to get what they want when they want it. Lack of variety in Grahamstown, makes the city unfavourable for those who would like to purchase luxury branded clothes. The respondents in this study indicated that Grahamstown lacks the retail stores selling favourite brands hence saving money and purchasing in their hometowns. This is what the participants had to say:

I also think that the choice of shops is limited you cannot really get your favourite brands here obviously; we will go and get stuff from home (Rhoda, 22, F, Mango).

the shops that are in Grahamstown you wouldn't find a specific brand shop so people do not do shopping in Grahamstown, they shop where they come from. This might be of much difference because you can't find brand you want (Ruth,20, F, Sissy Boy).

.... the only downfall is that I live in Grahamstown there is not much to shop so every time I go to Johannesburg I go on shopping sprees for about 5 days straight and shopping is just a lot of fun (Edna, 25, F, Gucci).

For *Rhoda*, home becomes a default place to purchase her luxury brand. She mentions that the choice of retail stores in Grahamstown is limited so she opts to purchase the clothes from the stores in her hometown. *Ruth* says that the retail stores in Grahamstown do not sell specific brands that she wants so she waits to buy at home. For *Edna*, Grahamstown does not have much to offer, so she goes to Johannesburg and go on a shopping spree, getting her favourite brands. The respondents in general cite that the choice of retail stores is limited and *Edna* even refer to it as a downfall. This might mean that the availability of retail stores that sell luxury branded clothing would increase the buying frequency of the participants. The availability of retail stores is crucial because, according to Mowen (1995), variety is one factor that influence shopping centre choice. Additionally, the availability of shopping outlets is an important factor, which determines the shopping behaviour of consumers. For example, the availability of

shopping outlets with luxury clothing brands would have increased the frequency of purchasing among the respondents.

The choice of a consumer to purchase either in a shop or online is called consumer purchase mode, according to Peter and Olson (2002). Since respondents indicated that Grahamstown lacks their favourite luxury clothing shops, the researcher asked about considering an alternative, which is online shopping. The researcher asked about online shopping because the respondents are part of a technology savvy generation, and online purchasing is growing exponentially (Du Preez, & Visser, 2003). Most respondents indicated that they prefer walking into a shop, feel the clothes and try them before a purchase. This finding concurs with North et al. (2003) who stated that a barrier to clothes purchasing online is the fact that clothing is a so-called touch and feel product. As noted by Grewal et al. (2004), characteristics of goods such as fit and quality are difficult to present online yet they are important in consumer decision making. The quotes below represent what most respondents regarding their shopping preference said:

I prefer going physically I just don't trust buying stuff online I am still in that era, I like to buy when I'm there just my items physically and all that. I prefer feeling what I am buying [laughs] (Monica, 20, F, Guess and Nike).

I prefer going into a shop, feeling what I want to get, I do shop online but not a lot because the thing about shopping online is that you might see something as nice but it doesn't go with you (John, 24, M, Balenciaga and Nike).

I prefer going to the shop because then you will see ok this thing is gonna suit me or not and I am just paranoid of buying things online (Joseph, 19, M, Nike).

Kacen et al. (2013), argue that consumers have considerably lower willingness-to-pay for products online than at traditional stores. Yörük et al. (2011) in their study found groceries and clothing to be the most unsuitable items for online purchases. What makes groceries and clothing unsuitable for online purchases is the importance of inspection of these items before purchase and the difficulty that consumers face to return these items. Respondents in this study made mention of 'feeling' the clothes before purchase which means they value inspecting the clothes before purchasing them.

There was a consensus among the respondents as indicated by the quotes regarding the need to inspect the clothes. Some respondents mentioned lack of trust with buying products online; they prefer to be there physically when making a purchase. Trust, according to Barnard and Wesson (2003) is critical for the survival of an online shop. Consumers should be able to trust

an online shop for them to continue purchasing products from there. Lack of trust means the brick and mortar stores will be the stores of choice for consumers. The respondents clearly state the importance of making sure that something is the right size before buying it. *Monica* even laughs when she speaks about her preference to feel the product. The laughing possibly is an indication that she is ashamed that she still prefers traditional shopping to online shopping. Some of the respondents mentioned that they once purchased products online and were unsatisfied with what they received. This is one of the risks of purchasing a product online because one does not get the opportunity to feel or touch the product physically. Additionally, one cannot fully assess product characteristics and retailer identity during the transaction when conducting an online purchase.

John mentioned his disappointment after purchasing a product online:

I did it one-time last year when I bought something and it was not nice on me so I do not believe much in shopping online (John, 24, M, Balenciaga and Nike).

The findings in this study support a study by TimeTrade (2015). TimeTrade (2015) found that consumers generally still prefer the brick-and-mortar model to online shopping because of the personal experience gained from a physical store. *Edna* indicated her preference for brick-and-mortar stores by stating how she enjoys shopping and the fun that comes with shopping inside a shop. With the lack of outlet variety in Grahamstown, it is generally expected that online shopping would be a preferred consumer purchase mode but the participants still prefer the brick-and-mortar stores. TimeTrade's (2015) study focused on consumers' perceptions and habits around retail shopping. More than 70 percent of the consumers indicated that they prefer to shop in a physical store rather than online store. Another aspect that comes from this sub-theme is that of human interaction that comes with physical shopping. One respondent had this to say:

I prefer going into the shop umm the experience that you get from the shop its different from the one that you get online you know the people that serve you they explain the product to you, they explain, you don't necessarily get that online, that human interaction aspect instead of just talking to a computer going to google it's an experience that you don't get from online (Moses, 20, M, Slazenger).

The above quote show that respondents as human beings are social; they prefer social interaction when making their purchases. The respondent mentioned that the help that he gets from the physical shop is different from what he gets online. *Moses* mentions that the experience that a consumer gets from the physical shop is different from the one you get online.

This shows that *Moses* searches for a true retailing experience whereby he tries the clothes before buying them. He also mentioned how the salespeople educate consumers by explaining the product. Social interaction lacks when making online purchases, which makes it difficult for the respondents to choose it (online shopping) as a purchasing method. This finding is consistent with previous research by de Swart and Wagner (2008), who found that the absence of a salesperson is a major limit when making an online purchase. Physical shopping possesses what Arnold and Reynolds (2003) refer to as aesthetic appeal. Aesthetic appeal is the appreciation of the physical design of a shop and is based on the premise that some consumers notice and enjoy the physical elements of the retail environment (Arnold, & Reynolds, 2003). The retail environment thus influences different emotions and behaviours related to shopping, for instance, 'fun' or paranoid.

Previous studies conducted in South Africa indicated price of a product did not affect consumers but South African shoppers are concerned with security and reliability when shopping online. As noted by BMI (as cited in North et al., 2003), security concerns, mistrust of current banking and shopping methods and privacy concerns are the main reasons why some South Africans do not shop online. From *John's* quote, it shows that he is concerned about the reliability of online shops than anything else because he once experienced it. The findings of this study are also a reverse of what Gupta (2015) found in his study of online and offline shopping in Odisha, India. Gupta (2015) found consumer who are between the age group 18-25 to be more comfortable with online shopping than consumers above 35; citing that the youths are more into e-shopping. This study comprises of the youth but revealed that they tend to prefer physical shopping to online shopping. The difference between the current study and that by Gupta (2015) is possibly brought out by the differences in technological advancement between the two countries.

5.2.5. The shopping experience

Since the respondents prefer physical shopping, further interest was on what motivates the students to shop for their favourite brands. The respondents were asked how their shopping experience was and they had this to say:

I am happy when I do go to the shops, it umm I can never tell you that I ever go to a shop and get Slazenger and walk out sad but I walk out with a smile and I am really like I wanna try this on so it just really picks up my spirit Yes, umm it sorts

of umm who doesn't like nice stuff [laughs] I enjoy my shopping (Moses, 20, M, Slazenger).

Yes, I enjoy shopping so I enjoy it knowing that I am going to have something new, I am gonna wear this thing on Monday or whenever (Joseph, 19, M, Nike).

Yeah like I am in heaven [laugh] very happy, very happy I look forward to shopping. I have no problems when I am shopping for clothes [laughs] like eish my friend and I just feel like we are in another world even when we are coming home we are just happy [laughs] because we got that particular thing that we always wanted (Monica, 20, F, Guess and Nike).

I enjoy it especially when I am shopping for my favourite brands ummm... I think it's because I do that only 3-4 times a year. So yes, I like shopping a lot (John, 24, M, Balenciaga and Nike).

The quotes above indicate that the respondents enjoy shopping for their favourite brands, it really brings a lot of excitement. The respondents indicated that shopping for their favourite brands makes them happy. There was a lot of laughter that can be observed from the respondents when they were talking about their shopping experience. The laughing may be an indication of respondents visualising their shopping moments and immediately having a pleasurable feeling. One respondent even equates her shopping experience to heaven. The pleasurable experience that the respondents feel from shopping for their favourite brands reflect that they experience hedonic pleasure. According to Blythe (2013), fashion is one of the products that are hedonic in nature and this is evident from what the respondents said.

Consumption of hedonic products is of high importance for happiness among modern consumers. Arnold and Reynolds (2003) distinguished between personal and social motives of hedonic consumption and conclude that the social motives that drive consumers to shop are social experiences, communication with others, peer group attractions, status and authority, and pleasure of bargaining. For a consumer to be able to fulfil his or her social motives, he or she must engage in different forms of shopping. Arnold and Reynolds (2003) mentioned six dimensions that motivate consumers in their shopping. These six were 'adventure shopping', 'social shopping', 'gratification shopping', 'idea shopping', 'role shopping', and 'value shopping'. From the findings, respondents' desire to shop is motivated by different reasons. The most common reason that can be deduced from the above quotes is that of adventure shopping. The respondents expressed how exciting it is for them to shop for their favourite brands. Adventure shopping according to Arnold and Reynolds (2003) is shopping for the sheer excitement and adventure of the shopping trip.

An element of social shopping is evident as well in the findings. Social shopping is when one enjoys shopping with family and friends, socialising and bonding at the same time. *Monica* uses the shopping time to spend time with her friend. She mentioned how she and her friend feel like they are in another world when they are shopping together which makes the part of shopping a time for them to socialise. Social shopping helps them because they do not see each other often. Arnold and Reynolds' (2003) study was a mixed method study and the former is what came out of their qualitative study. In the quantitative study, there was correlation between flow, which is the optimal experience when shopping that is intrinsically enjoyable and adventure shopping (Arnold, & Reynolds, 2003). This correlation occurs because adventure shopping captures the fantasy aspects of shopping than any other hedonic motivations. Fantasy or enjoyment is what the consumers are after hence adventure shopping came as a common motivator. All respondents expressed the happiness that comes with shopping for their favourite luxury clothing brands, which indicates the pleasure principle that reside in shopping for clothes.

The table below displays the four themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study and they were discussed and analysed using verbatim extracts to substantiate the themes from the data, as suggested by Richie and Lewis (2004).

Table 3:

Themes and Sub-themes

Main Theme	Sub-themes
1. The symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothes among RU students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Luxury brands consumed• Uniqueness• Individuality• Brands are 'clean'(Presentable)• Quality• Status• Brand consciousness (positive and negative attributions)
2. Processes of identity construction through the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothes by RU students within the South African context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tying the identity with luxury brands• Brand transitions
3. The role of reference groups in the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothes among RU students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Celebrity influence• Family influence• Peer influence• Peer in-group
4. The impact of reference groups on the identity construction of RU students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The meaning of identity• Different identities in different places• Sense of belonging• Perception of others matter

5.3. The symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothing among RU students.

This theme focuses on the underlying fundamental factors why RU students consume branded clothing, not just for the utilitarian but also for symbolic purposes. From the data gathered, it is evident that RU students consume brands for symbolic purposes. According to Jackson and Holbrook (1995), consumption is more than just being a monetary act of purchase; it is a social process, whereby individuals relate to goods in complex ways, transforming their meanings as they incorporate them into their lives. As products and brands have a symbolic value, for this population of consumers (RU students) it symbolises; ‘uniqueness’, cleanliness of brands, quality, status, and brand consciousness. The aforementioned sub-themes reflect how the students construct the meaning of the brands that they consume. We focus on the luxury branded clothes that the students indicated to be their favourite, then a discussion as to why they consume those particular luxury clothing brands is given.

5.3.1. Luxury brands consumed

The most familiar luxury brands consumed by the respondents are Nike and Guess brands. Of the 12 participants, three indicated Nike as a favourite luxury-clothing brand and three people indicated Guess as their favourite. Of these six people, one indicated that both Nike and Guess are their favourite luxury-clothing brand. This finding concurs the results from a survey by Sunday Times in 2014 in which Nike was the top most preferred international brand amongst the youth in South Africa (Sunday Times, 2014). The Sunday Times (2014) survey gave the following as the top most preferred luxury brands (in the order of most preferred to the least preferred): Nike, Adidas, Guess, Sissy Boy and Puma. In this study, Adidas was not very popular. There was only one person who indicated Adidas to be a favourite luxury-clothing brand. From the Sunday Times (2014) survey, Sissy Boy was the fourth familiar luxury brands and only one respondent indicated to be consuming Sissy Boy as a favourite luxury brand. The Sunday Times Survey (2014) focused on the top five international and local clothing brands consumed by the youth in South Africa. Interestingly in this current study, none of the respondents indicated a consumption of local South African luxury clothing brand as their favourite.

The other luxury clothing brands that were popular but not part of the top five, were Mango, Slazenger, Zara, River Island, and Balenciaga. According to Ismail et al. (2012), consumers prefer international brands to local brands because consumers generally associate international

brands with a status symbol, followed by quality. The participants in this study were the youth aged between 16-24 years and they indicated that the foreign branded clothes allow them to fit into certain social groups. Thus, the current study agrees with the findings by Ismail et al. (2012), as the foreign brands allow participants to communicate their status. By communicating their status, the students demonstrated that they can be able to find where to fit in and who can be their reference groups. After discovering the top favourite luxury clothing brands amongst the students, the focus is now on the reasons why the respondents consume these brands. The significance of this lies in investigating whether the students consume luxury clothing brands for utilitarian purposes or symbolic purposes.

5.3.2. Uniqueness

One major reason why participants in this current study consume branded clothing is the uniqueness possessed by the brand, which allows individuals to 'stand out' from others. According to Ruvio (2008) individuals win social appreciation and sense of assimilation by displaying their uniqueness through consumption. Since possessions are an extension of one's identity, individuals strive to differentiate themselves from others by possessing unique products (Ruvio, 2008). The desire for uniqueness lead consumers to purchase luxury brands which help them to establish a unique personal identity. These unique products act as a symbol of one's identity. This speaks to the need of individuals to be unique and to be appreciated by a group (in-group) that consumes similar brands.

Because they are unique, they are not found in the local retail shops or anywhere it's a specific style that you don't find easily (Lisa, 23, F, Zara and River Island).

the reason behind me buying these clothes is because I want to stand out from the rest so I don't like to wear clothes that a lot of people are going to wear. So most of the labels that I wear are labels that I know for a fact that most students won't necessarily be able to afford yah (Anna, 27, F, Burberry).

The uniqueness of the luxury branded clothes that *Lisa* consumes also comes from the notion that the local retail shops do not sell such brands. Her ability to consume luxury brands that are not popular with others reflects how powerful her need for uniqueness is. *Anna* feels that she stands out because most students do not afford the luxury branded clothes that she wears. This makes her a unique individual. Tian et al. (2001, p. 52) defined the need for uniqueness as "the trait of pursuing differentness relative to others through the acquisition, utilisation, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's self-image and social image". *Lisa* consumes luxury branded clothes to develop and enhance her self-

image as well as her social image to people around her. As one of the few who affords these brands it makes her to ‘stand out’ on campus.

The uniqueness that comes with purchasing branded clothes makes consumers to pay premium price for a brand (Park et al., 2008). For *Lisa*, she is motivated to purchase her clothing brands because they are scarce in Grahamstown so she will be unique. Park et al. (2008) found that luxury brands satisfy the consumer’s need for uniqueness because they are scarce and the scarcity value enables consumers to display their uniqueness. Individuals seek on what Ruvio (2008) refers to as avoidance of similarity, whereby they avoid buying and consuming commonly consumed brands as a sign of uniqueness. Luxury brands allow the students to express their uniqueness in a non-deviant manner as well as displaying their individuality (Ruvio, 2008).

Individuals with higher stable needs for uniqueness also prefer greater differentiation from others on a more consistent basis (Tian et al., 2001). In addition, individuals care more about being unique in domains they find personally important. The students regard the university campus to be a space where their consumption of branded clothes is important because not every student affords to buy luxury branded clothes. The findings are consistent with previous research by Ayupp et al. (2013), in which they found that Malaysian students as consuming luxury brands in order to stand out and be recognised. This is an indication of a common trend among university students.

5.3.3. Individuality

Brands can be used as a means of self-expression either privately or publicly and one of the expressions that brands can convey publicly is allowing an individual to differentiate him or herself from the rest (Cătălin, & Andreea, 2014). Therefore, brands have the ability to set you apart. Just like what *Elmar* said about her brand:

It’s a very unique brand [...] a brand that everyone wants and it separates you. I like it (Elmar, 26, F, Guess)

Elmar’s individuality comes from how most individuals wish to own the brand but they cannot afford and it separates her from the rest. *Elmar* acknowledges that everyone wants to consume the luxury brand but cannot afford, therefore because she affords it she is separated from the rest. This is an indication that when brands become linked to the self, they will be able to help consumers achieve goals that are motivated by the self. Findings of this study are consistent with research by Ariely and Levav (2000) and Ruvio (2008), who found consumers as

possessing the drive to differentiate themselves and have a strong need for uniqueness. People with high needs for uniqueness have been observed as those who consume high-involvement products. This is evident in this research where students use expensive clothing brands to display their uniqueness. Clothing is argued to be one of the high-involvement product (Solomon, 1986). Brands have become a way of self-realisation and identification according to O’Cass and Frost (2002).

Consumers have moved beyond mere consumption of product for utility to symbolic purposes. The findings suggest that the symbolic purpose of branded clothing consumption for some of the students is to display their individuality and to ‘stand out’ among other students (for example, out-groups). As noted by Keller (2003), one of the key drivers for consumer behaviour is that of fulfilling symbolic needs. Symbolic needs are desires for products that display a consumer’s success in public, such as luxury brands. The consumption of such products indicates that one has need for individuality and standing out amongst others. This is consistent with what Boli and Elliott (2008, p. 543) argue that “individuals must consciously construct their identities to build (or discover) authentic selves, and the identities they construct must be unique”. Therefore, the need for individuality becomes important in every context.

5.3.4. Brands are ‘clean’ (presentable)

Some respondents felt that they are driven to consume luxury branded clothes because they are ‘clean’. The cleanliness of the brands leads to consumption being more than just utilitarian purposes but for symbolic purposes as well.

The brand is a clean brand [...] its very clean that is why I like it (Martha, 22, F, Mango).

I really enjoy umm it’s a type of image that they have that I associate myself with, it is very clean, it is very simple and I am not a big person of colour so I enjoy blacks, whites, cream, and stuff like that (Anna, 27, F, Burberry)

My brand is a clean brand that is all I can say, you look very clean when you are wearing it, it normally has cool colours like your greys and whites (Matthew, 28, M, Adidas).

It is simple, it is not loud, it is not bright, and I personally do not like bright colours (Martha, 22, F, Mango).

The respondents view their favourite luxury branded clothing as ‘clean’. For them being clean means the clothes are not colourful but presentable. For *Anna*, apart from standing out from the rest, she also feels that brands are ‘clean’, she narrated that her brands are very simple; they are not of colour because she is not a big person of colour. This means that for her clean brands

are of colours like black, white and cream. Colour is regarded as important characteristic when people are making purchasing choices. *Matthew's* clean brands are grey and white. From the colours stated by respondents, black is a colour associated with powerfulness, high quality, luxury, and expensiveness (Amsteus, et al., 2015). The colour black is also associated with modernity and attracts attention and influence moods as well (Amsteus, et al., 2015). The characteristics associated with the black colour are perhaps being an indication of the personality of the respondents because colour indicates one's personality and self-image. Grey colour has been associated with high quality as well. The above responses indicate that a clean brand is associated with simplicity and subtle colours. The colours preferred are not loud or bright because the respondents do not prefer bright colours. This indicate that there has been a shift from the preference of bright colours to the quiet and subtler ones. Amsteus et al., (2015) in their study found that context plays an important role in colour choice. This is confirmed in the current study because the respondents have almost similar reasons for colour choice. This means that being at a university, there are certain messages that a student's colour choice should convey, for example, powerfulness.

According to Kaya and Epps (2004), black, white and grey are neutral or achromatic colours. Achromatic colours are neutral and blend well with other colours. The association of white with being 'clean' is consistent with what a study by Kaya and Epps (2004) found. They found that white is associated with being simple and clean. Black is associated with richness, wealth and power. From the same study, black was associated with sophistication and was linked to fashion and clothing (Kaya, & Epps, 2004). Kaya and Epps (2004) investigated the colour-emotion associations among college students at a public institution in the South East. The positive responses on the black colour might indicate a shift that is taking place from associating black with negative stuff to considering it as a colour representing positivity. However, colours tend to have different meanings in different cultures, which mean some colours are regarded positively in a certain culture yet it is regarded negatively in another culture. Therefore, individuals in different contexts socially construct the meaning given to colours.

I do not like colour; I usually have blacks, brown and white (Edna, 25, F, Gucci).

Edna does not only prefer bright colours but she also prefers certain colours to others. Kim Kardashian influences *Edna's* choice of colours because she aspires to be like her. She mentioned how Kim Kardashian dresses in a simple way with no bright colours. In this case, the simple colours thus communicate the meaning behind *Edna's* choice of colours. Colours

convey meanings and communicate information beyond the simple aesthetic appeal (Amsteus et al., 2015). A product's colour can act as an identifier of its price as well. This means that certain colours can be associated with a certain price tag. Additionally, in the current study colour expresses how clean the respondents are and portraying their image as well.

In their research De Klerk and Lubbe (2008), found that there are two dimensions of the sensory experience that are important when a consumer is purchasing a luxury brand. These two are sight and touch. Of the two, sight is the most important influential and comes in the form of the colour of the product, whereas touch refers to the texture of the product. Colour is regarded as the strongest and most visible element of a clothing product hence its importance. Colour plays an important role to consumers who seek to make fashion statements. Research showed that (DeLong 1998, as cited in De Klerk & Lubbe, 2008) colour is an aspect that has the potential to highlight the various parts of one's body and therefore brings variation to an individual's day-to-day looks.

A study by Akcay (2012) on the influence of colour, ethnicity and gender on teenage marketing revealed that black colour is the most popular amongst both genders when making purchasing choices. The findings of the current study confirm both Pantone (1992) and Akcay' (2012) studies, which state that black is amongst the most preferred clothing colours. Since colours can have a series of meanings and interpretations to various people (Kaya, & Epps 2004; Kurt, & Osueke, 2014), the findings of the current study suggest that black, white and cream were constructed by the respondents as 'clean' (presentable) colours. The 'cleanliness' comes as a result of the colours not being bright but subtle.

5.3.5. Quality

Some respondents indicated that they choose to consume certain brands because of the quality of the luxury brands. For them quality is the top most characteristic that draws them to consume their favourite luxury brands. Quality influences consumers who see a higher value in the products apart from the cost. The consumers value guarantee in quality and reliability from the brand (Sun, 2011). Consumers interested in the quality of luxury brands are likely to regard luxury brands as those that exhibit superior characteristics and presentation compared to that of normal goods (Sun, 2011). Consumers interested in purchasing luxury brands expect them to be of high quality because of the price they pay.

.. they are very durable they don't easily tear up and living at a place like university where you don't find time to be washing, these ones they work pretty well on the machine they are not fragile, it's the quality, you can just put them on the machine

and they are good. You can also use the dryer to dry them or if you prefer to use the sun (Moses, 20, M, Slazenger).

I would say because their clothes are less likely to break, they are of good quality. The stitching will be well made and you don't have like loose ends it's like umm a wide range so you are almost guaranteed to buy or find something that's going to fit and it's like in trend with the fashion so it's like they keep up to date with what's happening, it's not like one style of jeans (Ruth, 20, F, Sissy Boy).

They also have trendy things that you find and they are of good quality cos I do not feel like you have to keep buying clothes and I am a student so I do not afford to buy clothes always (Edna, 25, F, Gucci).

For *Moses*, his choice for a particular brand (Slazenger) is because it is durable, which means it lasts for a long time. He also pointed out how the durability is essential because at a university it is difficult to find time to wash, which makes the machine an alternative to hand wash. Consuming such a brand is an advantage because he can use a washing machine to wash without worrying about damaging his clothes. *Moses* indicated that the quality of the brand allows the clothes to wash in the washing machine and remain strong. He also pointed that you can even choose the drying method because if something is of quality anything goes. The knowledge possessed by *Moses* about Slazenger as a brand indicates that he has an informational and evaluative belief about Slazenger. Informational beliefs are associated with product attributes whereas evaluative beliefs are associated with product benefits (Mpinganjira, 2013). Knowing the product attributes and benefits assist *Moses* to avoid disappointment after buying a luxury brand. *Ruth* agrees that if clothes are of good quality, they are less likely to break. There is guarantee that all the touches on the garment will be finished well, one will not find loose ends. In addition, she mentioned the guarantee of a perfect fit and always being on trend.

Still continuing on the aspect of trends, *Edna* agrees that where she shops for her favourite clothing brand, they always have trendy stuff so she is always on trend. For her, good quality means that she does not always have to buy clothes. As a student, *Edna* acknowledged that she does not afford to buy clothes all the time so if she goes for quality, it means she is not going to worry about replacing the clothes all the time. This speaks to the source of income of the students. They rely on income from family, parents, or sponsors, which makes it difficult for them to purchase clothes regularly as the money does not come regularly. For these respondents, their desire for quality makes them to choose the type of luxury brands that they consume on a daily basis. The current study is consistent with Haataja's (2011) study on the

attitudes of young people towards luxury products. What was concluded in Haataja (2011) study is that the students are supposed to be financially self-sufficient but most of them do not have much money to spare so they invest in quality, if possible. In the current study, participants prefer luxury brands because of the quality, durability, good stitching and the trendiness of luxury brands. This finding is similar to what Knag (2012) found in a study that focused on the consumer's motive behind purchasing luxury brands. Knag (2012) found that aspects such as unique design, high quality and workmanship are important to consumers. Knag's (2012) study was similar to the current study because of the focus on students, who belong to a social group with average to low-income levels but still striving to make it possible to consume luxury brands.

Quality is an important factor to consumers; it draws consumers to luxury branded clothes (Jacoby, & Olson, 1985). Most consumers tend to believe that the rarer or unique the product is the more value it symbolises. Quality plays an important role in differentiating a brand from competing brands, making it a brand of choice among consumers. Aqeel's (2012) study found that Saudi women purchase luxury brands because of quality, followed by the need for uniqueness and then for emotional value. From the current study, quality and the need for uniqueness emerged as some of the reasons why the students consume luxury branded clothes. Emotional value was not mentioned to be one of the driving force behind their consumption of luxury branded clothes. This means that the consumption of luxury clothing by students is a result of displaying who they are to others and not to do about themselves as individuals.

5.3.6. Status

Apart from the uniqueness, quality and brands being 'clean', some respondents indicated that consuming a certain brand shows that you are of a certain status. Status is the person's position relative to others in a society (Han, et al., 2010). According to Han et al. (2010), status is regarded as one of the most important factors in the consumption of luxury brands, and a person of status is highly ranked than others (Nelissen, & Meijers, 2011). The status symbol that the luxury branded clothing carries, leads to an increase in conspicuousness. Asked on how consumption of luxury branded clothing relate to their status, some of the respondents had this to say:

Umm I think class, yah it will represent class like a certain level of distinct level of class by wearing such clothes (Monica, 20, F, Guess and Nike).

When I got here, I did not want to be like any other student, I wanted to show my class, so my clothes show my class, a certain top class yah [laughs] (Joseph, 19, M, Nike).

For *Monica* and *Joseph*, status is important to them so they have to consume brands that show that they are of a certain class. *Monica* mentioned that consuming luxury clothing is an indication of her belonging to a certain distinct level of class. This qualifies *Monica* as a status seeker. A status seeker is defined by Eastman and Eastman (2011) as an individual who engage in visible consumption as evidence of the superior rank he or she claims. The luxury branded clothes will act a status symbol that express the lifestyle of the individual. Luxury brands, according to Steinfield (2015) also have the ability to divide the social world into different categories. *Joseph* gives his reasons for consuming his favourite brands as a way to show that he is not like any other student; he believes his status is different from any other student on campus. *Joseph's* mention of eagerness to show that he belongs to a top class possibly symbolises his need for recognition by other students. This is so because he mentioned how his clothes should indicate that he is not just from an ordinary class but a top class.

The findings of this study concur with the results of Haataja's (2011) study that the reason why the youth buy luxury brands is partly to show social status and to display that they have money to buy the products. According to Nelissen and Meijers (2011), individuals who consume brands for status need respect, power and entitlement. *Joseph* is a clear example of a person who views that his luxury clothing brand consumption earns him respect from people around him. Additionally, *Joseph* could be showing his financial standing because, as according to Nelissen and Meijers (2011), financial wealth is one of the traits associated with high status. *Joseph* already mentioned how he wanted others to know his class the moment he got to university, which is indicative that he possibly comes from a family of good financial standing. *Joseph* indicated that he wishes to show his high class through clothes. Because *Joseph* comes from a family with a good financial standing, display of financial wealth indicates that he possesses abundant resources that allow him to consume luxury branded clothes. Possession of abundant resources reflects *Joseph's* ability to purchase luxury clothes that enable him to enhance his status as suggested by Nelissen and Meijers (2011). Clothes therefore act to communicate social distinctions such as status of an individual within a society or at a university (Lee et al., 2008). A study by Nelissen and Meijers (2011) found that an individual

who displays a luxury brand label tends to be regarded as wealthier and receives higher status rating than a person wearing non-branded clothes.

Displaying one's status through the consumption of branded clothing symbolises a particular high social status to those around. In addition, luxury branded clothing consumption can act as a way of showing a rise in one's status (Saad, 2007). Therefore, students who consume luxury branded clothing tend to value a prestigious status that comes with the consumption patterns regardless of their income. Participants tended to make sacrifices and save their pocket money to enable themselves to purchase luxury branded clothing that gives them a higher status among their RU community.

In addition to the above, *Edna* also felt that consuming luxury branded clothes makes her a trendsetter. She mentioned how others view her as someone who is on top of her game, someone who is knowledgeable about current trends and who is in good financial standing. In particular, this is what she had to say regarding trendsetting:

.... someone who is on top of his/ her game, who is knowledgeable about current trends and ummm what can I say someone who is of a good financial standing
(Edna, 25, F, Gucci).

Edna tries to show her purchasing power to those around her through displaying her luxury branded clothes. For example, her belonging to an in-group shows that the people who consume the same products as her managed to identify her and those who are the out-group felt that they are not in the same category as her. *Edna's* knowledge of current trends separates herself from the out-groups.

5.3.7. Brand consciousness (positive and negative attributions)

After investigating the motives behind the consumption of luxury branded clothing among participants, focus now shifts to investigating whether participants are regarded brand conscious. Brand consciousness is the “degree to which a consumer is oriented towards buying well-known branded products” (Lee et al., 2008, p. 29). Displaying brand-consciousness is one of the reasons why consumers purchase luxury branded clothing. Brand conscious consumers are those who tend to pay attention to brand names and are interested in buying well-known brand names (Yasin, 2009). According to Nelson and McLeod (2005), brand consciousness helps in examining the consumption attitudes of consumers because brands play an important role in the psychological pre-purchase process. Individuals with a high level of brand consciousness have a high level of conspicuous consumption motivations (Yasin, 2009). Brand conscious consumers view high prices as a sign of high quality. The respondents in this current

study are part of a generation that view luxury as a right more than a privilege, thus despite their relatively lower earnings, they tend to be highly brand conscious consumers. When the respondents were asked about their thoughts on how brand conscious they are, they had this to say:

I feel like we are not a lot of people, you will find people that are very particular about the brands they wear but I haven't come across many people like that I think it is because they are students and are living off people like our parents (Edna, 25, F, Gucci).

Some people are brand conscious but I believe that a lot of people are not brand conscious because for example, when I was watching this thing called Fashion Friday by Oppi TV one can clearly see that there is a minority of people that are actually very brand oriented. But otherwise RU students they just put on whatever they want and they just go on (Joseph, 19, M, Nike).

For *Edna*, the reason why most students do not consume luxury branded clothes is that the students live off their parents' money. She indicates that she is different from the rest of the students by saying that "I feel we are not a lot of people". She is admitting some students are brand conscious, including herself but they are just a few. *Edna* feels advantaged because she is one of the few who can afford to buy luxury branded clothes. This confirms the definition of a brand conscious person by Bhattacharyy and Biswas (2016) to be true, which states that being brand conscious means that a person has a maximum awareness and usage of the brand. This means that *Edna* knows fully well the advantages of owning a luxury brand and has trust in the brand that it matches with the price tag that comes with it. *Edna* has maximum awareness and usage of brands that is why she is brand conscious. She also displays an in-group belonging tendency in saying "we are not a lot of people".

As shown in the extract, *Edna* spends more on clothing and is brand conscious. There is a positive correlation between spending more on clothing and being a brand conscious consumer, according to Khare and Rakesh (2010). Teimourpour and Hanzae (2011) argued that Generation Y consumers are brand conscious consumers who use well-known, expensive products to symbolise their status. In this current study, the conclusion by the respondents about other students not being brand conscious might be coming from the observations they make on campus and see that not many students will be wearing well-known expensive luxury brands.

Yah some RU students are brand conscious I see a lot of people wearing Adidas, Nike but people not only at RU but in general, misunderstand it. For me I think when you are trying to get something that you cannot get and you end up wearing fake stuff. When I see someone wearing something that's not real because I have

been consuming brands so it's easy to see that something is not real like I don't need to spend 10 seconds. So because of the whole brand thing people tend to misunderstand and say ooh if I'm wearing Yeezys then I'm the freshest student. No it's not like that you can still use the same money to buy a nice pair of original Adidas and look fresh so at RU people are brand conscious but there are people who want to take it too far and buy fake (John, 24, M, Ballenciaga).

John views some RU students as brand conscious but most of those he meets wear fake brands. He considers himself as an expert when it comes to distinguishing between real and fake brands because he has been consuming brands for a very long time. As noted by Nia and Zaichkowsky (2000), the more original products people own, the more familiar they are with the attributes and qualities of such products. Students who are non-brand conscious do not seem to be spending more on their clothing, and this might be as a result of being value-conscious. Value-conscious consumers have a value mindset and prefer to shop at shops that offer low prices. The brand-conscious consumers can be distinguished from the value-conscious consumers in that the brand-conscious consumers are driven by the symbolic value of luxury clothing brands whereas the value-conscious consumers are driven by the functional value of the luxury branded clothes. *John* also states that students who desperately seek to display themselves as 'fresh' among others end up buying fake brands to prove their freshness. What *John* refers to as 'fake' brands are also known as counterfeit brands. Counterfeit or fake brands are closely similar or identical reproductions of the genuine brand (Wilcox, et al., 2009). *Anna* agrees that luxury branded clothes are expensive and it is difficult for students to keep up hence they opt for alternatives.

I feel people who are interested in brands firstly it is a lot of money and if you do not have the money it is very hard for you to be part of a certain group (Anna, 27, F, Burberry).

As an alternative option, counterfeit brands help students to fit in a circle of friends that they wish to belong to on campus. The counterfeit brands are a cheaper version of the genuine brand but have lower quality in terms of performance and durability (Wilcox et al., 2009). Students may consume counterfeit brands because they are keen to be part of a certain group on campus. Counterfeit products can act as an alternative way for the students to redefine their social identity when it is impossible to do so using original products (Phau, & Teah, 2009). As *John* indicated, the students' wish will be for them to be considered as 'fresh' students on campus. Although counterfeit products look like the original they are not. Consumers of counterfeits pay for a famous brand's visual attributes (e.g. logo) and functions of the product but not the quality. Students who consume counterfeit products use the visual attributes so that they will

be considered 'fresh'. Since students live off their parents and family's income, their purchasing power is low and they may end up affording to pay for the price of a counterfeit product because it is cheaper than the genuine product. This will make them feel as if they belong to the same class as those who consume genuine products.

According to Commuri (2009) counterfeits only cost a fraction of the price of the genuine items thereby addressing the limitation of purchasing power. This may be the reason behind the students' purchase of the counterfeit brands because they operate on a limited budget. Phau and Teah (2009) state that consumer satisfaction when consuming counterfeit products comes from the ability of the product to perform basic functional requirements as well as achieving the symbolic value. Consuming the counterfeit luxury brands means the students will be participating in non-deceptive form of counterfeiting whereby they are aware that they are purchasing counterfeits. However, the consumption is guided by social motives, for example the desire to create identities, to fit in and/or to impress others (Wilcox et al., 2009).

Joseph agrees with the other respondents in that few students at RU are brand conscious. He supported his view by referring to a program that was aired on Oppi TV called Fashion Friday, where there was no indication of brand consciousness among students at RU. Fashion Friday is a television program that discusses the knowledge that the students have on fashion trends; whether they consume trendy fashion and how students are keeping with the trends. From what he gathered from the student interviewed on the program, *Joseph* concluded that most of the students on campus just put on whatever feels comfortable without worrying about it being a luxury brand. The above explanations filter down to the point that students rely on their parents, family or sponsors for their upkeep so it is difficult for them to purchase luxury brands because they are expensive.

5.4. Processes of identity construction through the symbolic consumption of luxury clothing brands within the SA context.

This theme aims to address the construction of identity through the consumption of luxury clothing brands among the participants. According to Belk (1988), SIT assumes that there is a connection between one's self-concept and one's possessions. This means that identity-related possessions form a coherent set around one's identity. Identity-related possessions are crucial for enacting the associated identity (Kleine et al., 1993). Therefore, the symbolic meanings of branded clothing play a significant role in the process of identity construction as consumers construct their meaning (Elliott, & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Banister, & Hogg, 2007). The use of luxury branded clothing in the construction of identity indicates the importance of using possessions to create one's self-concept (Escalas, & Bettman, 2005). As mentioned in Chapter 2, "identity directly translates into consumption, and that consumption is capable of revealing identity" (Schau, 2000, p. 50). This forms the foundation of the theme with regards to the importance of luxury branded clothing in the construction of identity among university students.

According to Dlodlo (2014, p. 191), in South Africa, "fashion (specifically clothing) is seen as very relevant because of its symbolic properties and accessibility to a majority of consumers". Consumers in South Africa now afford to consume luxury brands because of the emergence of the Black middle class since independence (Dlodlo, 2014; UCT Unilever Institute, 2013). The social role of clothing is important in developing countries, where interpersonal relationships and issues of identity are of prime importance. As indicated in the previous theme, respondents acknowledge the role that luxury brand consumption plays in identity formation. This confirms Wattanasuwan's (2005) notion that identity creation is inseparable from consumption. The participants highlight how the consumption of luxury branded clothes reflects on their identity, making this statement true. According to Peltonen (2013), consumption of brands and goods are used for creating consumer's identity and expressing it to outside counterparts as well as for locating oneself socially. This theme has two sub-themes; tying of identity with brands and transition in the consumption of brands.

5.4.1. Tying of identity with brands

This sub-theme addresses how the respondents view their identity in relation to the consumption of luxury branded clothing in considering the South African context. Tying of one's identity to a luxury branded clothing supports the suggestion by Belk (1988); Sørensen and Thomsen (2005) that consuming certain products can be a source of identity for communicating a particular message about the consumer. Additionally, Belk (1988) emphasised that it is important to know the meanings that consumers attach to possessions when studying consumer behaviour. The current study aims to find out those meanings that the respondents in the study attach to their possessions.

According to Burger et al. (2014) and Cătălin and Andreea (2014), younger members of the middle class in South Africa tend to spend much on conspicuous consumption as a way to express their identity. They engage in conspicuous consumption as a sign of wealth and expressing their identity (Burger, et al., 2014; Szmigin, 2003). The forms of conspicuous consumption include the consumption of luxury branded clothing, which is undertaken by the students in this study. The rise of the Black middle class in South Africa since the early 2000s saw the establishment of luxury brand boutiques such as Louis Vuitton, Porsche and Burberry, making it easier for the local consumer to purchase international brands (Dlodlo, 2014). The respondents explained that luxury branded clothes indicate 'who they are' and relates to their identity because respondents gave the same definition for the meaning of identity. For example,

Identity means to me like the person who you are, how you appear to people...
(Joseph, 19, M, Nike).

So yah, identity for me is who you are and how others see you (John, 24, M, Balenciaga and Nike).

Belk's (1988) analysis on the extended self, made a conclusion that the feeling of identity invested in material objects can be extraordinarily high in this age. According to Kaiser et al. (1991), consumers use clothing as a flexible means to communicate identity as different fashion brands are seen more appropriate in different situations. Additionally, clothing works as a symbol of social identity instead of personal identity. In other words, clothing is a symbol that reflects one's in-group they belong to and the other reference groups that influence them in the society. Therefore, consumers use possessions and consumption of goods as symbols to form their identity, to connect with significant others, and to take part in a larger group in a society (Banister, & Hogg, 2004).

Actually, one funny thing about me is I'm one person who like imposing labels on myself I guess you could call that [umm.] you know part of the identity and the funny thing is that yet I tie myself so much into these brands so identity I can say I am saying this is me (Moses, 20, M, Slazenger).

I feel like they represent my age, when I wear these clothes I feel like they go hand in hand with my kind of brand as a person, they become my identity; I want to be different, and I want to act my age (Anna, 27, F, Burberry).

Moses explains how luxury branded clothing symbolises his identity by saying that he imposes labels on himself and he ties himself to brands. Tying himself to luxury clothing brands is a way of showing people around that 'it is him'. This is what Belk (1988) refers to as extended self. The brands become part of his extended self. Therefore, the extended self is concerned with consuming products that become part of one's identity (Escalas, & Bettman, 2005). This confirms Elliot's (1997) and Huang's (2009) statements that consumers purchase brands because of the underlying meaning assigned to the brands in the social context. In *Moses*' case, luxury branded clothing indicates his identity to his in-group and to the out-groups around him. *Moses* even refers to the way he ties his identity to the luxury branded clothing as funny. He considers it to be funny because he feels like he is overdoing it yet it is something that has become popular among the young generation.

Anna feels that as a mature student, her luxury brand consumption should indicate her age. Age is a demographic factor that influences an individual's purchasing decisions in South Africa. Researchers like Ditmar (1992) and Jansson-Boyd (2010) argue that age is an important demographic variable that can influence one's purchasing behaviour. The study revealed that age could determine the place of purchase and the dimensions of value that an individual looks for in a luxury brand. For *Anna*, the brand ought to reveal her identity as an older student and to show that it is her personal brand as well. She can afford luxury clothing brands but at the same time communicating her maturity to the other students. Therefore, age in this case is influencing *Anna*'s personal motivations of consuming certain luxury clothing brands.

Although the respondents are referred to as Generation Y (18 – 35 years old), they are at different stages of identity development. Some fall in the late adolescence stage (16 – 25 years) and other are in the young adulthood stage (26 – 39 years). *Anna*'s stage of development as a young adult brings out that she has a strong sense of identity than the late adolescent stage. Therefore, she uses her luxury clothing consumption to show her personal achievement. Schade et al. (2016) referred to the motivations by the young adults to demonstrate their identity and personal achievement with the term 'active mastery'. This means that they would have

familiarised with their identity and striving to maintain it. The late adolescence and young adulthood stages of development are the stages whereby two related psychosocial functions emerge, according to Erikson (1963). The two functions are identity and ego strength of fidelity.

[ummm...] I am so much into what I wear everyday umm I am worried about what people think about me so basically what I wear has become my identity, I am what I wear and it is important to me (Matthew, 28, M, Adidas).

Matthew's response indicates that he engages with his luxury clothing consumption on a daily basis to make sure that he is on track. He is also concerned about what people say about him which means that reference groups are important to him. This finding is consistent with what Damhorst's (1999) findings that a dress can be a reflection of one's patterns of everyday life. What one wears becomes important because it is his source of identity. The clothes also communicate a particular message about him to others. The respondents acknowledged that the luxury clothing brands have become their identity and have created an extended self for them, confirming that students consume luxury branded clothing for symbolic purposes.

For *Matthew*, he is trying to protect and enhance the self-concept because it is of great value (Sirgy, 1982). He does this through the purchase of the fashion brands that have a positive image for the individuals based on the typical user stereotypes associated with the brand (Banister, & Hogg, 2007). The luxury clothing brands consumed by *Matthew* are highly visible which make it easier for him to communicate his status to those around him. *Matthew* mentioned how he is concerned about what people say about him. To him, clothing is a symbol of social identity and the values espoused by his in-group and serve as a premise for judging the clothing worn by others and the social identity symbolised by it.

According to Sørensen and Thomsen (2006), consumption changes one's identity along with the relationship between group memberships. Therefore, understanding how people interpret clothing and how different groups of people make different judgements about the same brand of clothing is critical to fashion companies. (Auty, & Elliott, 1998). Belk (1988) indicated that the self includes one's group affiliations, and items that identify with these groups become part of the extended self. The following is *Matthew*'s response, which clearly supports the point:

They should remember me when they see that brand [...] especially when we are home for holidays. That brand is me, I love it [laughs] (Monica, 20, F, Guess and Nike).

Monica views her relationship with her luxury clothing brands as strong that each time people see the brand, it should remind them about her. Thus, she ties her identity with her luxury-clothing brand. In this case, *Monica* does not want her peer in-group to forget about her when they are separate which means their social category as an in-group should be maintained every time. The attachment that they have to the brand should be maintained because it forms the social identity that exists between *Monica* and her peer in-group. *Monica* uses the luxury clothing brands in this case to mark her position within the in-group. Her peer in-group should remember her every time they have an encounter with the brand. As noted by O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2004, as cited in Sowden (2009) consumers use possessions as a way to mark their positions. This is so because the luxury-clothing brand expresses their social identity.

Monica felt that the way she has been interacting with the brand enables everyone to notice. This is evident because she stated that 'the brand is me'. She also emphasised how she is fond the brand by laughing after mentioning her love for the luxury-clothing brand. *Monica* does not want to lose touch with her group membership hence the need for others to remember her because to them the consumption of the luxury branded clothing signals group membership. Therefore, *Monica* wants to make sure that they are all conforming to the norms of the in-group by continuing with their luxury clothing brand consumption in their different places. This means that the peer in-group should maintain their uniqueness even when they are not at the university.

The findings of the current study concur with the findings of a study conducted by Cătălin and Andreea (2014), in that they also found that people use brands to create unique and social identity, a phenomenon known as an authenticating act. Essentially, authenticating act is when consumption objects give the consumer a strong feeling of self-conception and uniqueness (Cătălin, & Andreea, 2014). To elaborate, the previous responses from the students stated how the consumption of luxury branded clothes gives them a sense of uniqueness. One's possessions play a significant role in identity construction in two ways. The first one is that one is constantly surrounded by things we own (e.g. the clothes) and these things are located on the borderline between the others and us. The other reason is that one use one's possessions to signal what we are, so these objects become an essential part of the self the others perceive in us.

According to Bearden and Etzel (1982), the influence of reference groups in fashion brand choices is strong, which means social surroundings have an influence on the consumption of fashion as group affiliation. Consumers prefer using products that are similar to their reference groups so that they feel a sense of belonging. This means that consumers are likely to accept brands associated with their in-group and reject those associated with the out-group.

5.4.2. Brand transitions

Brand transitioning seeks to show whether the respondents changed the brands they consumed from the time they first came to university to where they are now. The findings will help to examine the importance of identity as an individual moves from one stage to the next in their lives and the role that individuals around them play in the changes taking place. Most respondents transitioned from depending on parents on the choice of luxury clothing brands to individual freedoms and financial or social independence as students. Even though some respondents are still influenced by their parents in their consumption behaviour as mentioned in sub-theme 4.5.2, living away from the parents makes them have a little bit financial and social independence. According to Haataja (2011), the students are at a stage of transition from dependent childhood to independent adulthood. This means that they face choices and risks that highlight the need to plan their own orientation and social integration. Noble and Walker (1997) give quite a few examples, among them adolescence, college and first-time employment, as transitional events that consumers experience and that shape the direction and quality of their lives. Late adolescence and young adulthood are considered as the stages when young people become financially self-sufficient. When self-sufficient, the young people start to prefer consuming certain products as they rediscover themselves. Holbrook and Schindler (1994, p. 414) explain that, regarding consumer preferences, “consumers form enduring aesthetic preferences during a sensitive period,” specifically late adolescence or early adulthood and suggest that consumers maintain these imprinted preferences for the rest of their lives. With regards to these stages, the following is what some of the respondents had to say:

Yes, it has changed, when I came to RU I was a tomboy, I never used to worry about clothes you know as long as I am wearing something to campus that was all that matters. When I got to 3rd year and after when I graduated with my undergrad that's when the interest in clothes really picked, that's when I was conscious of what I am wearing, what I am doing as a now mature student (Anna, 27, F, Burberry).

Definitely, yes, I used to buy from the local retail shops in Grahamstown, but since they are few and everyone on campus has the same, I moved to unique clothes (Edna, 25, F, Gucci).

Umm... I think there has been change but in terms of me what I just prefer umm it changed around second year, so I have to go with grey tracksuits and stuff like that that's not everywhere on campus (Moses, 20, M, Slazenger).

The responses above indicate the transition that took place in the consumption patterns of the RU students from the time they arrived at university to date. Luxury clothing brands in this instance, act as a rite of passage that is allowing an individual to transform from being a child at home to the role of an independent university student (Sørensen, & Thomsen, 2006). *Anna* describes herself as a person who came to university as a tomboy but later became conscious of what she was wearing then she changed to start consuming luxury branded clothes. *Anna* emphasised how she wanted to show her maturity as she had moved from being an undergraduate student to a postgraduate student. She felt that it was critical for her to communicate her maturity through her clothes, which she referred to as part of her identity as well. *Anna* felt that her transition from undergraduate to postgraduate should be marked by a certain identity and it is the time also that she moved from being a late adolescent to young adulthood. *Edna* felt the limitation of retail stores in Grahamstown as a pushing factor for her to change her clothing consumption from generic to unique brands.

For *Moses*, the transition was motivated by a change in preferences. His clothing preferences changed in his second year when he preferred something that was common on campus. The changes in clothing brand consumption among the respondents are an indication of how they use the luxury clothing brands as a way to communicate and symbolise their identity to others around them. Noble and Walker (1997) identified two functions of symbolic possessions during transitional stages. The first one is how possessions fill the role that family, friends, and other personal relationships once held in the individual's extended self. The second one is that symbolic possessions facilitate the establishment of a new identity. Both functions resonate well with the current study. Possessions signify group memberships and assist with the psychological transformation into the new identity.

For *Moses*, he realised the need to provide a meaning to his identity and opted to change the way he dressed. The findings of this study indicate that the need for uniqueness and social status as the main motives that informed the transition in the consumption of luxury clothing brands. Erikson (1956) viewed the adolescence stage as the stage when people undergo significant changes as they experience new challenges that come with adult life. *Moses* chose to change his clothing consumption during this critical life stage. The basic function of the

consumption of clothes, such as covering the body, has been outweighed by the need to signal status thus the students decides to change the brands that they wear. This perspective of viewing brands as status signals confirm how consumers of today are concerned with the symbolic value of products than the physical aspects.

The transition that takes place within the consumption of luxury branded clothes lead to the transition in identity because an individual try to match with his or her new consumption patterns. Sørensen and Thomsen (2005) references Van Gennep (1960) as the one who birthed the concept of transition and termed it 'rite of passage'. There are three distinct phases during this rite of passage. The first one is separation, followed by transition and then incorporation. The respondents are in the transition phase characterised by the need to adapt to and create a new role (independent student) or identity (who they are) (Sørensen, & Thomsen, 2005). A few things thus, mark this transition. These include purchasing a different style of luxury brands because starting university means moving away from parents thus marks the beginning of new roles (Noble, & Walker, 1997). This means that consumers' consumption patterns may change with the change of roles and in some cases permanently, which makes understanding of brand transitions to be important (Noble, & Walker, 1997). The findings of the current study are consistent with Ahuvia (2005) who view objects as closely related to important life stages and they become a part of individual's identity and extended self.

Identity-related consumption depends on how an individual encounters the object or consumption practice (Sørensen, & Thomsen, 2005). Sørensen and Thomsen (2005) suggested a framework to explain transition-related consumption. They found that symbolic consumption supports life role transition in four different ways. These are "its value as a 'signal' versus an 'experience' and its meaning residing in a 'private' versus a 'common' realm" (Sørensen & Thomsen, 2005, p. 573). For the current study, the researcher found that the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothes and identity construction in this transitional phase shows 'common signal' and 'common experience' as the main reasons for the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothes. These students consume the luxury branded clothes to communicate taste for quality, their status, uniqueness, cleanliness, brand consciousness and to show the group they belong to, which is a sign that many people can understand. This helps to maintain identity, commencement of a new role in life (independent student) and partial disposal of the previous life role (depending on parents). With regards to 'common experience', the consumption of luxury branded clothes adds to one's sense of self and most individuals

associate luxury branded clothes with status so the meaning resides in a 'common' domain of symbolic meanings.

Previous studies focused on the transition of identity in the symbolic consumption of plastic surgery (for example, Schouten, 1991, Sayre, 2000; Tait, 2007). This study however, focuses on the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothes as one transitions from depending on parents to independent life at college. During these transitions, the extended self plays an important role, as it becomes part of one's identity. This happens because the most extensive identity development occurs during college years (Waterman, 1993). During this period, there is a progressive strengthening of identity that takes place from adolescence to adulthood (Waterman, 1993). Identity then continues to evolve throughout the adulthood stage. Waterman (1993) mentions that college environments are conducive for dynamics of identity construction issues. The interactions that one forms at a college are a sign of maturity and independence because they represent a breaking away from family and forming social ties with the outside world, who in turn influence their identity (Prasad, 2009). This leads to students having to explore different identities.

5.5. The role of reference groups in the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothes.

This theme explores the role that reference groups play in influencing the symbolic consumption of branded clothing by RU students. Reference groups are a major social group from which consumers receive information or benchmark the consumption behaviours (Walters, & Bergiel, 1989). In order to identify the role that reference groups play, one part of the interview questions addressed this. Reference groups are considered an individual's source of values, norms and perspectives within the social psychology field (Stafford, 1966). They serve as a referent point or yard stick for an individual in the formation of those beliefs (Rousseau, 2007). Reference groups act as models that enhance the transfer of meaning from goods to consumers (McCracken, 1988). Reference groups are a common characteristic shared by participants as external influence in their consumption patterns.

Cant et al. (2006) found that in South Africa, family members, peer groups, and role models have a strong influence on consumer behaviour. Additionally, South Africa, unlike Western countries, has a collective culture whereby the focus is on the social self rather than the personal self (Escalas, & Bettman, 2003). Individuals are connected to one or a few groups such as

family, friends or peers. The significance of the social-self amongst the respondents is evident in the relationships that exist between the respondents and their social groups. This section will present the details surrounding the identified influencers in the consumption behaviour of the students.

5.5.1. Celebrity influence

The first sub-theme under the influence of reference groups on the consumption behaviour of students is around celebrity influence. This sub-theme speaks to how celebrities influence participants in their consumption patterns. Six of the 12 participants, stated that their consumption influence comes from the celebrities. Celebrities become an indirect aspirational membership group, which the respondents identify with. According to Singer (1990), belonging to a reference group does not require one to be conscious of the actual group. This is the case with the respondents and celebrities, the respondents identify with the group but the celebrities are not aware of it. Celebrities can shape the students' habits, practices and daily lives (Yurdakul-Şahin, & Atik, 2013). Below are the extracts from the participants when they were responding to the question of influence in their consumption pattern:

Well...umm... in general I just like people like celebrities abroad and local who appear on TV and stuff. That's more aspirational than anything else because I know they wear very, very expensive clothing and a lot of time they get them for free because they are influential, they are famous but that's more aspirational to always been drawn to the most expensive brands because its luxury. It's something that some people want, it's something that I would definitely want to experience having not that I will have the entire closet of brand names but just a few items just to add but its more aspirational (Martha, 22, F, Mango)

I really like what Kanye West wears. I like the way he plays around with style and I like the fact that he doesn't only wear expensive stuff. He just shows that you do not have to wear something expensive for you to look nice. He puts on clean stuff that is very simple that's what I like. He influences the way I decide what to wear (Matthew, 28, M, Adidas).

I like Kim Kardashian she influences me simply because she has this simple look; she wears lots of nudes and blacks. I do not like colour. I usually have blacks, brown and whites. She is like that I think I got it from her, umm if you see me wearing colours it's a very good day. I don't know what would have happened. I also like Bonang, she is very stylish (Edna, 25, F, Gucci).

Martha's response is clear that she looks up to celebrities in general; both local and international. She indicates that she is aware that some celebrities get their clothes for free but they are still influential to her. *Martha* refers to celebrities as aspirational and influential. Aspirational reference groups are groups that a consumer wishes to associate with (Salmon,

2008). Being aspired by the celebrities makes *Martha* an aspirational consumer, and aspirational consumers tend to imitate the buying behaviour of particular reference groups. In this case, she tries to imitate the buying behaviour of the celebrities she sees on TV. As explained by the SIT, aspirational groups shape the characteristics of an individual so that they become similar to the ones of the aspirational group. For instance, *Martha* would feel as if she is a celebrity and separate herself from those who consume different luxury clothing brands from hers. *Martha* also mentions that the celebrities are aspirational because they are famous and she would love to experience having a closet full of luxury branded clothes just as the celebrities. This shows that celebrities are a symbolic aspirational group to *Martha*, a group that she admires and accepts their attitudes but she is not likely to belong.

The celebrities in this instance exert a referent power whereby *Martha* identifies with them because they have the same beliefs and attitudes towards luxury clothing brands. The identification of the respondents with the celebrities is an indication that the celebrities succeeded in meaning transfer from the product to the consumers (McCracken, 1988). According to Yurdakul-Şahin and Atik (2013, p. 67) “consumers take the possession of these advertised commodities in order to transfer these meanings to themselves in the creation of their own identity and image”. Therefore, the luxury branded clothes that the respondents consume assists in the creation of identity and self-image the respondents portray to their social groups. Associating with a certain aspirational group improves one’s self-image and the improvement occurs whether the group is real or imaginary. Unlike *Martha* who did not specify which celebrities influence her consumption of branded clothes, *Edna* was more specific.

Kim Kardashian influences *Edna* because of her simple look and choice of colour. She relates to Kim Kardashian because she is a person who does not like bright colours. The findings for the current study suggest that consumers carefully consider both local and international celebrities’ brand choice when they are choosing their brands. *Edna* did mention Bonang, a local celebrity as her referent. She mentions that the style possessed by Bonang inspires *Edna* when purchasing and consuming luxury branded clothes. Salmon (2008) suggest that consumers buy products consumed by reference groups because the products are geared for that certain group. A case in point is how *Edna* consumes products similar to Kim Kardashian because the clothes are simple and not colourful.

From the findings of the current study, female participants tend to be related to female celebrities and male participants related to male celebrities. The female participants spoke

about Kim Kardashian as a celebrity that influences their clothing consumption and for the males it is Kanye West. All the participants described their celebrity influences as people who dress in a 'clean' and simple manner. When consumers purchase the products celebrities endorse, or own, they feel as if they are in the same class as them because they are able to afford and possess what these celebrities have (Villamor, 2015). Kim Kardashian is a reality television personality, actress, socialite, businesswoman and model. Kim Kardashian and her family appears on a reality television series *Keeping up with the Kardashians* (Cohen, 2015). She has become an influential online and social media personality with millions of followers on Instagram and Twitter. Kim, together with her sisters, owns a variety of clothing and make-up products whilst Kanye West is a hip-hop artist, songwriter, producer, fashion designer and entrepreneur (Cohen, 2015).

Kanye West was one of the top 100 most influential people in the world in 2005 and in 2015 (Cohen, 2015). Kanye West and Kim Kardashian married in 2014. They are regarded as a powerful celebrity couple in the entertainment industry (Cohen, 2015). Being a powerful celebrity couple means that they possess the power to influence young people in terms of fashion because the young people look up to them as their role models. This means that Kim and Kanye possess social power, which is basically the capacity of reference groups to change other people's actions by making them behave in a certain way (e.g. consume certain luxury brands). Bloggers take advantage of the popularity of Kim and Kanye as well as other celebrities to influence consumer opinion by virtue of their access to 'exclusive' information. Therefore, bloggers possess information power because they know something that others need to know (Solomon, 2008). Bloggers have become the fashion industry's newest and most reliable facilitators in trendsetting and brand ambassadors (Hsu, & Tsou, 2011).

Khan and Lodhi (2016) found that consumers are attracted to celebrities, which makes the celebrities a powerful, marketing tool to most consumers. The consumers try to purchase products to look like a celebrity because they trust the celebrity (Khan, & Lodhi, 2016). Celebrities are a group of people that marketers mainly engage to influence the consumption behaviour of the youth (Young, & Pinsky, 2006). Celebrities will also influence consumers through value expressive influence (Bearden, & Etzel, 1982). Value expressive influence help marketers to attract consumers by using famous individuals or celebrities in an advertisement. The term celebrity refers to an individual who is well-known to the public, for example, actor, entertainer or a sports person for his or her achievements in areas other than that of a product class endorsed (Young, & Pinsky, 2006). Celebrity endorsements are adopted by different

companies to attract consumers, thereby making endorsement a powerful marketing tool (Babu & Latha, 2014; Khan & Lodhi, 2016). According to Khan and Lodhi (2016, p. 105), “celebrity endorsement is a way of brand communication through which celebrities endorse the brand by transferring their personality, status in the society”. It is through celebrity endorsement that the consumers’ purchase decisions are influenced (Khan, & Lodhi, 2016). Sports, fashion and entertainment are the main areas where celebrity endorsement is high. This confirms the findings of this study whereby the focus is on fashion and the respondents mentioned the influence of celebrities in their consumption of luxury fashion brands.

Khan and Lodhi’s (2016) study on the influence of celebrity endorsement on consumer buyer behaviour found celebrity endorsement to play a crucial role in the consumers’ purchase decisions. The influence of Kim Kardashian and Kanye West is evident in this study whereby participants mentioned how they influence the way they dress. Rapid technological growth has led to the easy connection of consumers to celebrities around the world (Okonkwo, 2007). The connection usually happens through media when the celebrities advertise brands. The celebrities ‘grab’ the attention of consumers and the consumer is able to link the brand to the celebrity even if the celebrity is miles away. This shows how celebrity endorsers are most likely to induce positive feelings toward a brand than non-celebrity endorsers (Nyarko et al., 2015). The positive feelings towards a brand by the consumers lead to a stronger brand association.

Several studies including Boon and Lomore (2001) and Surana (2008) stated that, apart from family and peers, young people form secondary attachments with celebrities. The attachments with celebrities then play a crucial role in the transition to adulthood through the development of an adult identity (Boon, & Lomore, 2001). Celebrities in this case possess referent power because the participants admire them and imitate what they wear. The findings of the current study are similar to Eze et al. (2012) found in their study on the role of reference groups in the purchase of designer label apparels in Malaysia. In addition, as stated by McCracken (1988), passing through a role change and identity construction process, young people are influenced by celebrities more than other segments of society. Schikel, 1985 (as cited in Babu, & Latha, 2014) describes the influence of celebrities on the youth as subtle but intense. Horton and Wohl’s study conducted in 1956, (as cited in Babu, & Latha, 2014) showed that celebrity influence is equated to ‘intimacy at a distance’ because young people tend to form illusions of interpersonal relationships with celebrities. These formed illusions draw the young consumers to form attachments to celebrities as observed in this study. The present study’s findings suggest that Horton and Wohl’s (1956) findings still hold true in 2016.

5.5.2. Family influence

From data gathered, family was a second group that plays a huge role in the consumption patterns of the university students. Four of the participants out of the 12 pointed to their families as the major influencers in their consumption of branded clothes. The participants had this to say:

My mom, I think I take after her. To my parents actually clothes are a big thing in my family so my father is like this fashionista, and he is really into clothes. He is the type that would go into a shop and when he buys clothes he wears them in the shop and he takes his own clothes to the dry cleaners. My mom is big on clothes also like each time when I go back home there is always a little top or something waiting for me (Monica, 20, F, Nike and Guess).

My mom, for example, we share the same tastes so what she likes I'm likely to like and what I like she is likely to like. So she definitely influences me in the sense that we like that same taste of clothing and she likes (Lisa, 23, F, Zara and RiverIsland)

People from home are the ones who influence me. They like the same brands that I like so obviously, we are in a circle so it's like let's get this Balenciaga, this Balenciaga will be nice on you so in that sense the people around influence the brands that I wear because they also like it, we are birds of the same feather so there is a probability of us getting the same clothes (John, 24, M, Balenciaga and Nike)

Family emerged as an external influence to the participants as well, which shows that families are playing a big role in the participants' luxury branded clothing consumption. *Monica* even refers to her father as a 'fashionista' in the family. Although the father is the 'fashionista' in *Monica's* family, the mother appears to be the influencer in the family. An influencer is the family member(s) who provides information to others about a product or service (Blythe, 2013). An expensive purchase such as luxury branded clothes, which affect the family budget, is likely to be influenced mostly by the family (Blythe, 2013).

Clothing, according to Bearden and Etzel (1982), is a public necessity with a weak reference group influence in terms of the product category but a strong reference group influence on the brand choice. This means that clothes, as a product category in general, does not have strong reference group influence. But the brands, for example purchasing Guess or Zara, are strongly influenced by reference groups. In the current study, the family has strong influence in the brand choice (for example, choosing Guess or Zara brand) but not on the clothing category in general (for example, choosing a dress versus a trouser). The participants also mentioned that their brand choice takes after their family. *John* even incorporated an idiom in his explanation of the family's influence and said 'we are birds of the same feather'. The family then, according

to Bristol and Mangleburg (2005), guides consumers as to what is desirable or what is not desirable a brand to purchase. In the current study, the family guides the participants to purchase clothing brands that are regarded as desirable and the findings suggest that the participants have a positive attitude towards their family hence the inspiration.

The choice of family as an influential reference group stem from the role that parents play as socialising agents to their children. Usually, parents guide their children when making purchases especially on how to select and interpret product information (Hsu, & Chang, 2008). Parents possess informational influence as well, whereby they search for information about products (Yang et al., 2007), which they pass to their children through socialisation. Furthermore, parents educate their children on how to shop for quality products and personal brand preferences (Hsu, & Chang, 2008). Co-shopping of parents and children is an informal way of teaching children specific consumer skills about brands or product (Roberti, 2014). Co-shopping enables parents to remember their children's favourite luxury clothing brands and the parents would be able to buy for their children in absentia. This is indicated in *Monica's* case whereby she mentions that each time she arrives home from university, she finds something new waiting for her from her mother.

Rousseau (2003) stated that a reference group plays a significant role in the attitude of an individual towards consumption. In addition, Abraham (2011) asserted that family has an influence on personality characteristics, attitudes, values and the decision-making processes when buying goods. Moreover, the conversations amongst family members, giving each other feedback on brands, are a fundamental building block in influencing purchase decisions. Therefore, the role of family, especially parents in influencing consumption behaviour stems from a very young age because children seek information about products from their parents (Eze, et al., 2012) and children perceive parents as knowledgeable and observe parental consumption behaviour (Park, & Lessig, 1977).

According to Cant et al. (2006), of all the groups that influence consumer behaviour, the family is usually the primary influencer. The family is an informal primary reference group, which Cant et al. (2006) and Rousseau (2003) referred to as a powerful reference group. In the current study, family was outweighed by celebrities' influence. Therefore, the current study contradicts Rousseau's (2003) statement that parents are the most influential in the consumption of luxury branded clothes. Although not most of the students indicated parents to be most influential, participants acknowledged the role of family in luxury brand consumption. The influence of

parents in this study is indicative that family provides opportunity for product exposure and trial, and imparts consumption values to its members (Schiffman, & Kanuk, 2004). Rousseau (2003) found parents, as well as peers, to be the most influential informal reference groups in South Africa however, in this study, celebrities also appeared to be prominent influencers on participants' consumer behaviour.

Some participants were not very clear as to which family they are referring to, thus further clarity had to be sought regarding the type of family. Family can be either a married couple, nuclear family or the extended family (Rousseau, 2003). Since none of the participants are married, the focus was on the nuclear family and the extended family. Nuclear families usually consist of a couple and one child or children whereas the extended family has a nuclear family plus other relatives such as grandparents, uncles, aunts or cousins living in the household (Cant et al., 2006).

Both types of family can play a significant role in consumption behaviour but in the current study, the nuclear family plays a significant role in the consumption patterns of university students. When asked which type of family influences their consumption behaviour the most, the participants had this to say:

Umm I look in my nuclear family I think ...as far as extended family not very much because I am not particularly close in age with a lot of my cousins, aunts and uncles, so they are either a lot older or very young so I am in an awkward middle space yah (John, 24, M, Balenciaga)

I can say my immediate family is the most influential. We do not have much of an extended family so yah...it is my immediate family (Monica, 20, F, Guess and Nike).

What can I say? We are a small family we stay away from all our relatives so I can say my nuclear family influences me most (Lisa, 23, F, Zara and River Island).

John mentioned that he is influenced by the nuclear family most because there is so much of an age difference between himself and his extended family. He finds himself in the middle; whereby the extended family has people who are either a lot older or a lot younger. *Monica* indicated that she does not have much of an extended family so her immediate family plays an important role in her consumption of branded clothes. *Lisa's* family is small and they stay far from the rest of their relatives so her nuclear family is all she has.

From the responses, it is evident that the participants come from small families hence the influence of a nuclear family. These findings contradict Childers and Rao's (1992) findings. Childers and Rao (1992) found the extended family to have significant influence on purchasing

decisions than the nuclear family. In the current study, the participants live with their nuclear families, therefore the extended family may have little or insignificant contact with the participant. The underlying reason that this study contradicts that of Childers and Rao (1992) could be as a result of the shift from the traditional (extended) families to nuclear families. This is confirmed by Cant et al.'s (2006) assertion that the traditional families are diminishing, making the nuclear family a more attractive alternative. Schiffman and Kanuk (2004), views the diminishing of traditional families to be a result of geographical mobility that is splitting up families. *Lisa's* response indicated that the family moved from one country to another hence there is no contact with the extended family.

Parents will spend a lot on their children including purchasing their favourite clothing brands as indicated by *Monica* previously. Her mother purchases her favourite clothing brands even when she is not around. The purchases that *Monica's* mother does on her behalf showed that it is possible that the family continues to contribute to a child's choices even when the child is not around. Values, attitudes and expectations originally shaped by socialisation experiences within the family may continue to be influential, therefore there will not be any disagreements with the choice of clothes that the mother would have bought. The clothes will meet *Monica's* expectations since her mother socialised her into buying the luxury clothes.

5.5.3. Peer influence

The sub-theme on peer influence focuses on the extent to which peers influence the attitude, thoughts and actions in terms of buyer behaviour of an individual. Asked on the peer influences, the following is what some of the respondents had to say:

I look at people on campus how they dress because if you dress in a certain way you blend in no one will notice you but if you wear something that's really out of it people will notice you quite fast. My friends especially we like the same brands so yah and this other friend has a very good eye on brands.... every time we go for vac I will be looking forward to the new things he brings... (Joseph, 19, M, Nike).

When I started university, I was not into brands but my friend was so much into them that I liked it and I started copying her up to now I can say she inspires me and I go to her to ask for whatever the new trends are. Even all our other friends look up to her... she is like eer a fashionista, she wants to start a blog (Elmar, 26, F, Guess).

Joseph responded to the question of reference group influence by mentioning that he looks at how people on campus dress and attempt to dress differently so that he does not just blend in otherwise he will not be noticed. In particular, he tries to stand out such that his peers notice

him fast. The responses indicate that the participants have one friend who possess knowledge about brands and pass it to the others. The friend has information-based influence on the other friends because he or she knows about brands. This confirms the findings of Prasad (2009), which say individuals like to shop with experienced people who have knowledge about a desired product or service. According to Mangleburg et al. (2004), peers may be one of the earliest groups by which individuals learn to deal with the world outside the family, and one of the most important peer group is friends. The friends fill the void of parents and family as the support system of the students. Friends therefore, act as an important resource to the students in the absence of parents and family. For instance, *Elmar* mentioned how she was not into brands but the inspiration came from her friend who she refers to as a ‘fashionista’. *Joseph* refers to his friend as a person with a very good eye on brands. Eze et al. (2012), mentioned that some young adults rely on their peers to make purchasing decisions because they are less confident in doing so. This is where one finds a group of friends relying on one member like in the case of *Joseph* and *Elmar* when it comes to brand choices.

Shopping with friends becomes fun and reduces a risk of buying products that will be socially unacceptable (Prasad, 2009). Although our findings indicate celebrities to be the most influential reference group, Bearden and Etze’s (1982) study found that since clothes are a public consumed luxury, their consumption is more prone to peer pressure. Makgosa and Mohube (2007) in their study on the impact of peers on young adults’ product purchase in Botswana also found the publicly consumed products to attract more peer influence.

5.5.4. Peer in-group

The SIT assumes that identity begins with categorisation, whereby one is classified into inclusive categories (Forsyth, 1999). Identification with a group cements an individuals’ attachment to their own group (in-group) but widens the gap with other groups (out-groups) (Forsyth, 1999). This is important in the current study because in as much as students in this study relate to general reference groups, they are members of another group, which is a group of friends on campus. The students are in contact with one another on daily basis in this group. The peer in-group becomes a sub-culture formed through the consumption of luxury clothing brands. Ellemers et al. (2002) stated that the impact of social groups on the way people see themselves and others around them cannot be understood without taking into consideration the broader social context in which they function. According to this logic, the researcher took into consideration that the respondents are students on the RU campus thus there are groups of friendship that form on campus that need to be taken into consideration. Seeking and

maintaining the friendships is a drive of most students (Prasad, 2009). Therefore, in this instance, luxury clothing brands are used to provide entry into the peer in-group.

University students interact on a daily basis with each other, which makes the peer in-group a primary informal reference group. According to Prasad (2009, p.53), “small, informal, primary membership groups are of great interest to marketers because they exert the greatest potential influence on consumer purchase decisions”. This means that the students exert pressure on each other in their small peer in-groups. The peer in-group consists of friends who consume the same luxury branded clothes as the respondents. As noted by Giles et al. (1977), an important characteristic of an in-group is that groups mark their identities communicatively by using a distinctive character such as a dress code. The dress code will separate in-groups from out-groups because the dress code as the distinctive marker tells it all. All the respondents admitted that apart from their major reference groups, they have friends whom they hang out with on campus and whom they consider to be their in-group while the rest of students are out-groups. The SIT theoretical framework employed in the current study, acknowledges that an individual may belong to various social groups. The findings of the current study suggest that students do not only have celebrities, family and peers as their reference groups but rather there is an additional form of reference group on campus. The respondents had this to say when they were asked whom do they consider as their in-group:

Yes, I have my circle of friends who [umm...] I can say we are of the same class, we wear brands (Martha, 22, F, Mango).

We are a small group of boys yes, and we dress clean, we are not like others, we wear brands (Moses, 20, M, Slazenger).

Me and my friends we actually go to shop together in Johannesburg, we are into brands yes and we actually help each other when buying (Lisa, 23, Zara and River Island).

Martha mentions that her peer-in group consist of students of the same social class as hers, which is an indication that class plays an important role when selecting an in-group. Social class is important in how groups form because consumers in a certain social class tend to develop preferences and consumption patterns that are unique to them. Those in a different social class become an out-group in this case. *Moses* described his group as a small group consisting of boys who dress clean. To indicate that he considers others as out-group, he described his group as a group that is ‘not like others’ because they wear luxury brands. ‘Othering’ shows that the in-group does not want to be associated with people who do not wear same luxury brands. According to Dos Santos (2013), group size is one of the many

characteristics that influence interaction in a group. A small group makes the interaction personal and decision-making becomes easier. *Moses'* peer in-group tend to function well because it is of a small size.

Forsyth (1999) confirms to the importance of small groups and views small groups to be important in the study of consumer behaviour because small groups are likely to influence the consumption behaviour of group members. In addition, *Lisa's* peer in-group helps each other with the shopping. A group of friends who help each other with shopping are a shopping group, according to Prasad (2009). This is a group of two or more people who shop together for food, clothing or to pass time (Prasad, 2009). Mangleburg et al. (2004) propose that shopping with friends provide individuals with information and normative standards by which others may evaluate the shopping phenomena. This shows that there is unity and harmony within the group. Dos Santos (2013) views unity and harmony in a group as a tool for attachment and among group members. *Lisa's* peer in-group depend on each other when buying their brands, thereby confirming what Dos Santos (2013) mentioned about unity and harmony within a group. One common feature of the peer in-groups stated above is that the groups possess a referent power. Referent power refers to the identification and feeling of oneness of an individual with the group. Referent power manifests within groups that consume status-oriented products (Mowen, 1995). The identification and feeling of oneness is indicated by how the respondents mentioned that they feel a sense of belonging to their in-groups.

According to Mowen (1995), groups influence buying in two general ways. The first way is that they influence the purchases made by an individual consumer, that is, luxury branded clothes. The second way is that members of a group sometimes have to make decisions as a group, such as who are their out-group. In-group members are then judged more positively than out-group members and the in-group members are also regarded as trustworthy (Escalas, & Bettman, 2003). The out-group in this instance becomes a dissociative reference group which the respondents and their in-group do not want to associate with because they consider themselves as having moved into a higher social class. Luxury branded products are a source of group-identity, because they can provide an association with other users or owners of a particular brand. In this case, the peer in-groups are formed because of brands that the students consume. A study by Subhani et al. (2011) showed that having fashionable clothing portrays a sense of belonging or an impression before other people. Additionally, the consumption of brands expresses who one is and the group that he or she aligns to, fulfilling both psychological and social needs.

Choosing to consume luxury-clothing brands as your in-group members is a form of communicating social identities. In addition, with consuming brands similar to an in-group and avoiding the ones consumed by out-groups, consumption becomes symbolic in that it becomes an indicator of group membership (Chan et al., 2012). The findings of the current study indicate that normative social influence guide the relationships in the in-groups. Normative social influence is when members of a group comply with the positive expectations of one another (Bearden, & Etzel, 1982; Mangleburg et al., 2004). Not only is the social influence normative but it is also value-expressive in that individuals attempt to associate themselves with positively evaluated groups (luxury branded clothes consumers) and negatively from out-groups. South Africa societies are generally regarded as having a collectivist culture, where normative influence is adopted when it comes to decision-making.

The researcher followed up on the respondents by soliciting on who actually do they consider as their out-groups. The question resulted from noticing that out-groups might include either students who consume different brands from the in-groups or those students who are not into branded clothes consumption at all. Interesting responses emerged, with some considering those who wear brands different to theirs as out-groups and some considering those who consume non-branded clothes as out-groups and others considered both to be out-groups. The following are the responses obtained from the respondents regarding who the respondents considered their out-groups:

No, I rather feel different to people who wear other brands more than the people that wear no name brands. With the people that don't wear a specific branded wear I just, I'm very comfortable around them it's just a very relaxed atmosphere (Moses, 20, M, Slazenger)

I think so, I think those people who buy sporty brands e.g. Adidas shoes they are more like Hip-Hop stars I don't think that's anything that I can go towards and even I like [umm...] more established styles. I also see those who put on no name brands as a different people to us in a way (Lisa, 23, F, Zara and River Island).

What I can say is that we do relate to those that wear branded clothes so I don't feel like there are a different group and I am a different group we are all related we just wear branded clothes...the difference is with those who [umm.] wear no name brands, yah we are different with those ones (Joseph, 19, M, Nike).

Moses points to people who wear other brands as the out-group rather than the one who wear unbranded clothes. To him, being around people who consume unbranded clothes makes him comfortable and he even mentions that it will be a very relaxed atmosphere. Lisa views people who consume brands such as the sporty ones as people who are more into Hip-Hop and she cannot relate to them. For her, she considers a style that is more established above anything

else as part of her in-group. It is not only the sporty people that *Lisa* considers as out-groups, she also considers those who consume unbranded clothes to be different. In contrast to *Lisa*, *Joseph* relates to people who consume different luxury branded clothes as his in-group, but not those who wear unbranded clothes. He says that he does not feel any difference between him and students who consume branded clothes, they are all related because of the consumption of luxury brands but the difference comes to those who consume unbranded clothes. When individuals identify their in-group, they reject members of other groups not because they fear them or because they compete with them, but simply because they belong to a different group (Forsyth, 1999). In the current study, for example, there were different responses of who the respondents consider to be out-groups.

Respondents indicated that they were practising social categorisation by categorising themselves in relation to the luxury clothing brands they consume. Person perception as a form of social categorisation was indicated in the current study whereby respondents considered the material possession of others for them to be part of an in-group. According to Jansson-Boyd (2010), person perception is affected by people's material possessions and the perception of others. The respondents were also aware of the way in which other people perceive them so they had to consume the luxury clothing brands to keep up with a positive image. This means that people become a representative of what they possess instead of being individuals in their own right (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). By consuming brands similar to an in-group and avoiding the ones consumed by out-groups, consumption becomes symbolic in that it becomes an indicator of group membership (Chan et al., 2012). Brands and products could be a true representation of what a person is like (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). As noted by Giles et al. (1977), an important characteristic of an in-group is that groups mark their identities communicatively by using a distinctive character such as a dress code, in this case, luxury branded clothes.

The findings above confirm previous studies' findings (for example, Bearden, & Etzel, 1982, Escalas, & Bettman, 2003, Eze et al., 2012) that reference groups play a crucial role in the consumption of brands. In the current study, respondents use their in-groups as sources of information and to evaluate their purchase decisions because they share similar beliefs. There has been correspondence between group membership and the use of luxury branded clothes.

5.6. The impact of reference groups on the identity construction of RU students.

The essence of a reference group lies within the sub-groups that comprise it, aspirational and non-aspirational groups, and the potential advantages of each (Salmon, 2008). The concept of a reference group is that an individual in a specific group who purchase a certain product (in this case luxury branded clothes), compares him or herself to other individuals in his or her group (direct membership) as well as individuals in a different group (indirect membership) who consume the same or a different product (Salmon, 2008). Understanding how goods become incorporated into people's everyday lives helps to shed light on the social context of consumption and on the situated daily practices of individual and identity formation.

This section focuses on group membership and its relation to the psychological concept of SIT. The underlying concept of SIT and in-group versus out-group influence an individual's decision to belong to a group that is larger than the individual. As SIT explains, a group member's self-esteem and self-concept can be influenced by the group as the member begins to associate and identify with the group. Additionally, consumer behaviour among groups is influenced by normative social influence whereby individuals are expected to conform to the acceptable behaviour of the group to which they belong. The following sub-themes emerged from the respondents' responses; discussions with the respondents; the meaning of identity, sense of belonging, different identity in different places and the perception of others.

5.6.1. The meaning of identity

This sub-theme on the aims to explain how the respondents understand what is meant by identity. Respondents described explicitly how they construct identity. There were a variety of responses, but all the responses pointed to identity meaning 'who you are'. When they were asked the meaning of identity, the following is what they had to say:

I guess you could say identity is like every single aspect and umm thing that makes who you are or who you portray yourself to be to other people. Umm, so I think it is very like ranges from how you dress, what you like, what you dislike and also like what you want other people to think of you. Umm, yah I guess it is like everything that makes up who you are (Ruth, 20, F, Sissy Boy).

Identity I think it's a mixture of your personality and your character. So yah, identity for me is who you are and how others see you umm defined by your personality and your character like what you like and what you don't like, what you do and don't do, your morals, your principles in life yes I think that's what gives you an identity (John, 24, M, Ballenciaga and Nike).

Identity means to me like the person who you are, how you appear to people. Basically it's more of an internal thing how you carry yourself as a person and

your values, your morals and also people around you how they build up on your identity as well (Joseph, 19, M, Nike).

For the respondents, identity is about who one is. All of the respondents gave a response of identity as being about 'who you are'. This is indicative that the respondents had an idea of what is meant by identity. The respondents' descriptions show that they understand the uniqueness of their identity construction. Belk (1988) defined identity in the exact way; it is all about who you are. The participants went on to describe what constitutes an identity and for example, *Ruth* mentioned that it is about how you dress, what you like or dislike and also what other people think about you. For *Ruth*, identity consists of every aspect of an individual, including who you are, how you portray yourself to other people and what you want other people to think of you as well. *John* mentioned that identity is a mixture of different qualities such as character, personality, what you like and do not like, morals and principles in life.

Joseph spoke of identity as who you are, how you appear to people, how you carry oneself, values, morals and individuals around you as important in identity formation. Consumption is not an individual matter but it is intertwined within the social, moral and interpersonal attributes of people's lives (Dolfsma, 2008). People's consumption patterns are guided by the behaviours and lifestyles of various dimensions through the means of socialisation and enculturation (Dolfsma, 2008). Once an individual is socialised into the consumption of brands, it implies that brands depict one's social status. In the current study, the participants incorporate the values they learnt through parents in terms of luxury brand consumption, for instance, through co-shopping.

According to Burke and Stets (2009, p. 3) "an identity is a set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person". Apart from defining identity as 'who you are', the respondents also listed the characteristics that identify them uniquely. This indicates that the respondents have person identity meanings that make them unique individuals. Personal identity meanings, according to Burke and Stets (2009), are internal, culturally recognised characteristics that make one unique individuals.

In addition to constructing individual identity, individuals are social beings and continuously construct and re-construct their collective identities. This will enable them to express their self-concept. The self-concept allows individuals to distinguish themselves from others. It comprises of the actual self, ideal self, social self and the ideal social self (Banister, & Hogg, 2003). Additionally, self-concept is the image of oneself or a sense of who we are. Social

identity is part of the self-concept. With social identity, the goals and achievements of the group are merged with one's own and the group's welfare.

Individuals could feel strongly that they should fit in their social groups that is why another common factor amongst the respondents was the importance of 'people around you'. In particular, the responses above represent what was generally said by all the 12 respondents and on each respondent's definition was the mention of the importance of people around you in identity meanings. This is a clear indication that the respondents tend to share their identity with other people in the society. It is difficult for the respondents to separate themselves from those around them, that is, the society because the respondents exist in a social structure. The identification of the respondents with other people means that they value the importance of social identity. Social identity refers to how an individual identifies with a social group (Burke, & Stets, 2009). A social group is then defined as a set of individuals who share the same views as members of the same social category (Burke, & Stets, 2009). A social group gives respondents social identity and work to protect and strengthen self-identity (Tajfel, & Turner, 1979). Within consumer research, social identities guide consumer behaviour at any given moment, for example, the group one identifies with is a very important factor in one's consumption decisions.

Social identity meanings tend to be explained using the SIT. SIT is a "social-psychological theory that attempts to explain cognitions and behaviour with the help of group processes" (Trepte, 2006, p. 256). Therefore, individuals classify themselves into in-groups and out-groups. The students use luxury branded clothing consumption as a way to communicate their desired social identities (Escalas, & Bettman, 2003), as provided under the SIT framework given by Trepte (2006). The luxury branded clothes are used as a way to set the students apart from those who do not consume brands. The respondents mentioned the role that those around them play in the construction of their identity (the self). Shared interest lead to perceptions of similarity and contribute to attraction among individuals. The attraction leads to reference groups having a strong impact on attitudes and influence of the self-concept.

Moses mentioned how the influences of reference groups depend on the type of people and their perception of the self. To him, the perception of the self is crucial when it comes to reference group influence. *Moses*' response indicates the fluidity of identity; it is not static but can change depending on a situation. For *Moses*, people who perceive him in a positive way (in-group) are the ones who have a great impact on his identity than the out-group. The impact

could be a positive self-esteem since group memberships are a source of self-esteem within social identity. In particular, this is what Moses had to say:

People that affect my identity it depends on the type of people, and their perception of self (Moses, 20, M, Slazenger).

For *Joseph* and *Elmar*, the friends around them influence their identity the most. In other words, the individuals who share the same taste, have the same experiences as them and people whom they identify with, influence who they are or their sense of self. The respondents felt similar to the people who consume the same brands as theirs. This shows that in-groups are characterised by similarities among members. Both *Joseph* and *Elmar* indicated that the peer reference group mainly influences them, thus to them their peers' perception is important in their identity construction. Peers influence their consumption of luxury branded clothing and how they portray themselves to other people. This shows how the students use informational influence in their consumption choices. Informational influence is when the students accept information from others as evidence about reality (Yang et al., 2007). This indicates that the respondents evaluate their friends (peers) more favourably than they evaluate the out-groups in terms of the clothing brands associated with the in-group. Identifying with the peers defines 'who they are', and also could be a strategy to 'fit in' given that the respondents are at a university setting. The groups that the participants belong consume similar luxury clothing brands. This shows that luxury branded clothes can be a marker of social groups.

Once a marker is established, the consumer would change his or her personal identity to reflect that of the group (Salmon, 2008). The findings of the current study confirm how luxury branded clothing consumption act as communication of identity through in-group association. Additionally, out-groups have stronger impact on consumers' decisions and therefore avoidance of associations with out-group identities plays a bigger role in consumer behaviour than desire for belongingness. This is indicated by how the participants mentioned the groups they do not relate to because the groups consume different brands.

According to Erikson (1956), identity development is not only a psychological process but also a form of social interaction with others. The interaction of the respondents with their peers helps with the development of identity hence identifying positively with them. Below are the responses from *Elmar* and *Joseph* about the reference group that influences their identity:

My friends.... I hang around with people who share the same taste and the same experiences as me and they also identify with me in that sense (Joseph, 19, M, Nike)

Friends around me really influence my identity, how they perceive me (Elmar, 26, F, Guess)

A common theme emerged from the respondents about how others perceive them. The concern about other individuals' perceptions shows that the respondents are concerned about what the out-groups think about their consumption patterns. The concern about the perception of other people in a different category is important because it implies that people engage in social categorisation within groups. In this case, the form of categorisation is the person perception. According to Jansson-Boyd (2010, p. 56), person perception is "often affected by people's material possessions" and by the perception of others. In this instance, the categorisation is due to the possession of luxury branded clothes. The categorisation is meaningful because the luxury branded clothing consumers are comparing themselves with non-brand consumers. Other respondents did not say much about how the major reference groups influence their identity because they are not always around those reference groups.

5.6.2. Different identities in different places

The respondents as students tend to move back and forth between university and their homes. The researcher asked how they portray their identity in those different places since they meet with different people. The focus is on how the students view their personal identities among different groups of people. Burke and Stets (2000) view individuals as possessing objective and subjective social identities. Objective identities are relatively more stable than subjective identities, which are transitory fluid. Consumers who identify with both the categories have multiple social identities (Burke, & Stets, 2000). These multiple identities are necessary in understanding how an individual relates to the society. For example, the respondents for the current study are students at RU yet when they leave university and are at home, they occupy different roles altogether. When at home, the participants are expected to follow the rules and roles of the home because they go under the authority of the head of the family but when they are at university, they have more autonomy and they make their own decisions.

Yes, I have these different identities when I am with different people, for example, I will definitely be more of myself when I am back home and I will just be myself but when I am with my friends then I will be someone else (Joseph, 19, M, Nike).

Joseph's response spells out two situations where his identities are different; when he is back home and when he is with his friends at university. He stated that he is more of himself when he is with friends, which means he relates more and feels comfortable around his friends. Though not mentioned, but drawing from what *Joseph* mentioned as his reference group, it can

be concluded that his friends are part of his peer in-group. *Joseph* mentioned that his peers influence the consumption of luxury branded clothes, which is why he feels comfortable around his friend. The responses from the student confirm the importance of the different roles that they play in different situations and how that influences their identity (who they are). Below is a response from *Lisa* explaining her position when in different situations:

Very different, it is very different... when I am with my friends, I have different kinds of friends so it is like I have those friends who are out there, they are like me they like nice things , they are outgoing and then I have the opposite of me like those friends who don't even get why I do my nails and why I buy expensive clothes, they wear cheap clothes so obviously when I am with them I don't identify with them like when I am with my friends who are out going so now I have to be more humble and try to accommodate them as well .(Lisa, 23, F, Zara and RiverIsland).

Lisa's emphasis was on how different the identity that she portrays is when she is in different situations or when she is with different people. *Lisa* identifies herself as a person who is outgoing and as someone who has an eye for nice things so she chooses friends with the same character as hers. She distinguished between two groups of friends; the ones that wear luxury branded clothes (in-group) and those that wear 'cheap' clothes. The distinction between in-group and out-group is clear for *Lisa* because she mentioned that she does not identify with the friends that wear 'cheap' clothes and they make her humble to accommodate them. This finding is similar to that of Uusitalo (1995) who stated that people use objects that have great capacity of self-expression to differentiate themselves. *Lisa* uses the consumption of luxury branded clothes as a reflection of her social ties with her in-group. This is aligned with Escalas and Bettman (2005, p. 378), who argues that "possessions can also serve a social purpose by reflecting social ties to one's family, community, and/or cultural groups, including brand communities". Although the respondents identify with a certain reference group, they are aware of other groups that they belong to but the groups are not as salient as the reference groups. They experience more positive effect towards the members of their reference groups than the other groups. Context becomes essential because one can alter one's identity to include a given situation. Most respondents mentioned how they alter their identities depending on a situation. For example, *Matthew* had this to say:

Yes, definitely, I mean like when I am home I am gonna be different from when I am with my friends so yah different environments influence the type of identity that I portray (Matthew, 28, M, Adidas).

Matthew mentioned how, when he is home he is different from when having his friends, and also how his identity is influenced by the environment. As noted by Hall (1997) identity is dynamic and is influenced by one's relationships, reference groups and socio-cultural environment. Celebrities (reference group) influence *Matthew* and peer in-group thus being amongst family might not affect his identity significantly because they are not as salient as the other two reference groups.

5.6.3. Sense of belonging

This sub-theme aims to discuss whether the respondents have a sense of belonging to the in-groups that wear the same luxury clothing brands as theirs. The difference between this sub-theme and that of peer in-group is that with peer in-group, interest was in identifying the groups that the respondents identify with, whereas, with 'sense of belonging' participants were asked if they feel that they belong to that in-group. The previous sub-theme addressed how respondents possess different identities in different places and with different groups of people. In this subsection, the aim is to understand whether the respondents have a sense of belonging with their in-groups. Just as Wattanasuwan (2005) stated, the clothes, hairstyles, shoes signal symbolic meanings and connect us with the groups that share the same values or lifestyle. All the respondents responded by saying that they regard their in-groups as groups of people consuming the same luxury branded clothing. According to Salmon (2008, p. 6) a person who relates to an in-group whether consciously or subconsciously, "has the tendency to look more favourably on their group's positive characteristics and minimise negative characteristics". Here is what some of the respondents had to say:

I guess the only group I belong to is like a fashionable group of people but I really feel like that's my identity because other people are wearing the same brand (Ruth, 20, F, Sissy Boy).

Yes, definitely there are certain type of dressing styles that I think I associate myself with and when I dress a certain way I definitely feel I am part of that style (Edna, 25, F, Gucci).

Yah I belong to a group that goes to the shop and they spend so yah it's specifically [umm...] the group that is really into (Moses, 20, M, Slazenger).

Generally, the respondents agreed that in their consumption of branded clothing, they feel that they belong to their in-group. For *Ruth*, she feels that she belongs to her in-group because the group consumes the same luxury-clothing brand as hers. She calls the group a fashionable group of people. This means that fashion is what separates this particular group to any other group. *Ruth* tends to rate the members of her in-group more favourably than those of other

groups showing the importance of luxury branded clothing to her as an identity construction criterion. This finding is consistent with what Subhani et al. (2011) found in their study. They found that having fashionable clothing portrays a sense of belonging or an impression before other people. *Edna* views herself as part of individuals with a certain dressing style; her peer in-group. *Edna* also added that as a peer in-group, they have another social group that they associate with; an online brand community. This is a group of black girls on Instagram:

I can say I am part of Instagram ecstatic, the Black girl ecstatic on Instagram in terms of my hair, nails and how I dress I'm definitely part of that group and I enjoy being part of that group because there is a lot of influence that group has on the outside world and I'm influenced in how people on Instagram dress (Edna, 25, F, Gucci).

Instagram is a photo-sharing network, where about 40 percent of the world's top 100 brands are active (Reis, 2015). *Edna*' and her peer in-group's love for the Gucci brand is confirmed by Reis (2015) who states that the most active people on Instagram consume brands such as Gucci and Hermès. Additionally, 70 percent of Instagram users are female (Reis, 2015). Black girls on Instagram is an online brand-related community that *Edna* and her friends belong to. Brand communities are "a specialised, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand (Muniz, & O' Guinn, 2001, p. 412). A brand community can exist everywhere, even in the virtual world (Zaglia, 2013). Online social networks (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) have played an important role in transforming consumers from being invisible and quiet to a noisy, public collective (Paterson, 2012; Zaglia, 2013). Brand communities formed around social networks are called brand-related online communities. Within a brand-related community, consumers share their interest for a brand, exchange information and knowledge, or they simply express their affection for this specific brand (Zaglia, 2013). Although the Instagram brand-related online community occurs in a virtual space, "group members may as well act as if the community is meeting in a physical public space, with shared rules, values and code of behaviour" (McWilliam, 2000, p. 46).

The Black girls on Instagram is a shared identity between *Edna*, her friends and other members of the group. They categorise themselves from non-community members. The art of perceiving a group as different from non-community members leads to consciousness of kind (Muniz, & O' Guinn, 2001). Consciousness of kind is a shared knowing of belonging (Muniz, & O' Guinn, 2001) and intersects with SIT (Bagozzi, & Dholakia, 2006). Members feel connected with other members, and separate themselves from outsiders (Bagozzi, & Dholakia, 2006). Belonging to

an in-group on campus and belonging to an online brand-related community confirms that an individual does not belong to only one social group, but various social groups. *Edna* confirms that it is not only herself and friends that are part of the Instagram brand-related community, but there are other individuals whom she has never met that are part of that group as well. A further question was posed to *Edna* regarding whether her brand-related community is centred around the Gucci brand only and she explained that she consumes other brands as well but of all the brands, Gucci is her favourite. Her exact response was:

We discuss quite a number of brands but Gucci is my number one brand [...] I like it (*Edna*, 25, F, Gucci).

Brand-related online communities maintain their unity because of their common interest, the brand (Muniz, & O' Guinn, 2001). A typical characteristic of brand-related communities is that they form around brands with a strong image, a rich history and brands that are publicly consumed (Muniz, & O' Guinn, 2001). Branded clothes fall into the category of publicly consumed luxuries, hence communities form around them.

Moses explains that his in-group is a group that goes into a shop and spend money as well as concerned about their image. He calls his in-group narcissistic:

they call them narcissist or something the one that is really concerned by their image although to a great degree, I do identify with a specific group specifically the one that is obsessed with umm you know branded clothes (*Moses*, 20, M, Slazenger).

The description given by *Moses* as belonging to a narcissistic group shows how strongly he identifies with the brand. *Moses*' reference to his in-group as 'them' indicates how, although he is part of a group being labelled as narcissistic; he chooses to concentrate on the positives of the group rather than the negatives. Salmon (2008) acknowledges this by stating how individuals can relate to only the positives and ignore the negatives of an in-group. In addition, Salmon (2008) states that the reaction happens whether one is conscious about it or not. Fundamentally, narcissism is a personality trait that has both cognitive and motivational elements (Lee, & Seidle, 2012). According to Jansson-Boyd (2010), people with narcissistic tendencies are people who wish others to see them as special and superior and they purchase expensive products viewed by many as highly desirable. This is consistent with the definition by Dunning (2007) who stated that narcissists purchase prestigious products with high symbolic value to sustain their self-positivity. Since *Moses* mentioned that his in-group is concerned with image, purchasing their favourite brand helps them to feel good about themselves because the out-groups will admire their ability to afford branded clothes.

Narcissism leads individuals to create their own ideal images and develop a self-concept systematically (Kang, & Park, 2016). The consumption of products with a greater symbolic value is typical of narcissist, according to Jansson-Boyd (2010). This makes narcissistic consumers to sacrifice utilitarian aspects for symbolic ones. Kang and Park (2016) argue that consumers with narcissistic orientations indulge in brand consumption to show their positive images and to get admiration from others. In this case, other groups around them that they consider as out-groups will admire *Moses* and his in-group. Additionally, *Moses* admits that this group is obsessed with luxury branded clothing. This admission is an indication that the group is concerned with status and their brand consumption is mainly symbolic and not utilitarian. To them, there is more to consumption of brands than just covering the body.

5.6.4. Perception of others matter

To ease the burden of making a purchasing decision, consumers seek inputs from their in-groups. The way individuals judge others based on perceptions is important in the consumption behaviour literature. According to Wattanasuwan (2005) one's appearance, gender, accent or outfit sends a direct and powerful image to the perceivers. According to this logic, the feedback that consumers get regarding their outfits or luxury clothing brands plays a significant role in their consumption behaviour. Therefore, Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that positive social feedback is a crucial source of one's ego. Each of the feedback act as a signal that affect their attitudes and perception towards the product. The respondents for the current study were asked whether the perceptions of people around them contribute to their choice of luxury brand consumption and they generally admitted that there is indeed contribution. This is so because consumption of luxury branded clothing carries social perception, and a well-known brand means good social value. When referring to the perception of others, the current study is focuses on both in-groups and out-groups. Respondents are expected to have a positive perception towards the brands consumed by the in-groups whereas they are expected to have negative perceptions towards the out-groups.

According to *Joseph*, he expects people around him to treat him differently because he consumes a certain brand. Below is what he said:

Yes, obviously, they see me like for example, he can afford Nike let's treat him in this way yah (Joseph, 19, M, Nike).

For *Joseph*, he is content with the fact that he receives better treatment because of his ability to afford an expensive luxury-clothing brand. Therefore, keeping his social ties is an indication that he has a positive social image. Similar to *Joseph*, *Matthew* draws respect from people

around him because he consumes a certain brand. To him, the better one dresses, the more respect one gets. This means that according to him if people do not view him as dressed better then there is no respect, hence he feels the pressure to put his favourite luxury-clothing brand on all the time. *Matthew* is concerned with his impression to people around him and he feels that people perceive one as a person of status based on how one dress. Matthew had this to say:

Yes, I definitely think so the better you dress there is a lot more, I would say respect but I think there is a kind of [...] people kind of put you in a higher level based on how you dress (Matthew, 28, M, Adidas).

The fact that *Matthew* belongs to an in-group is an indication that his luxury clothing brand consumption is yielding positive results. *Matthew* indicates that he is high in public self-consciousness, which means he is especially concerned about social identities and constantly strive for approval and avoid disapproval. In *Matthew*'s case, the respect has to come from both the in-group and out-group in order for him to feel recognised. This shows a success in the communication of the symbolic meaning of luxury branded clothes to different groups of people. The findings are consistent with Peshkova (2013), who found that individuals by nature are more concerned about the impression they make on others. This means that the respondents are self-conscious; they are always aware of how they present themselves to others around them. Individuals pay more attention on physical appearance and fashion, and are more likely to use different strategies to gain approval from others (Peshkova, 2013). However, *Monica* worries about acceptance and accommodation. She consumes on the branded clothing so that she is accepted and accommodated by the in-group. To her, the acceptance is an indication that the in-group notices her consumption patterns. She says:

Yes, yes, I always worry about how people look at me and what people think of me so I want to dress in a way that people will not shut me out so I try to dress in a way that people will accept and accommodate me which is sad though but yah [laughs] (Monica, 20, F, Guess and Nike).

Monica mentioned that she worries about what other people (out-group) think when they look at her, which motivates her to maintain her luxury brand consumption standards. *Monica* shows that she is worried about negative perceptions from people hence she also mentioned how she does not like people to shut her out. Fear of being shut out pushes *Monica* to continue consuming luxury clothing brands so that she stays in her in-group. *Monica* also admits that she feels sorry for herself by acknowledging that 'it is sad' and then she laughs. The laughter could signal her awareness of her obsession with acceptance and that she finds happiness and fulfilment in material possessions. For *Monica*, keeping her in-group is a positive sign that her

taste for expensive clothes is being recognised which further motivates her to continue consuming luxury branded clothes.

Nelissen and Meijers (2011) investigated whether perceivers treat an individual who consumes luxury branded clothes differently from the one who consumes ordinary clothes. The study found that the difference between an individual wearing brand-label clothes and non-labeled clothes is in how the one with brand-label clothes is perceived to be of high status than the one who with non-labelled clothes (Nelissen, & Meijers, 2011). The main reason for the findings of this study is probably because most of the respondents are in their late adolescence (16-25 years) and it is a critical stage in which they search for their identity (Belk, 1988; Erikson, 1963). This stage is marked by a weak sense of identity that leads to the adolescence seeking approval from their peer groups (Erikson, 1963). This desire to seek approval leads to some form of peer pressure to conform to their social group to avoid being labelled as an out-group. All the aforementioned sub-themes are an indication of how in-groups, especially peer groups are important in the consumption decisions of people within the late adolescence stage. The findings of the current study are consistent with Peshkova's (2013) finding that individuals by nature are more concerned about the impression they make on others.

5.7. Conclusion

The current chapter discussed all the research aims. The findings highlight the symbolic consumption behaviour of luxury clothing brands among RU students. The study found that RU students engage in the consumption of luxury branded clothing for a variety of reasons. The reasons (for example; perceived uniqueness, individuality, cleanliness of brands, quality, and status) reflect how the RU students do not only consume brands for utilitarian value but for symbolic value as well. This study supported previous research (e.g. Keller, 2003; Park et al., 2008) who found that consumers place importance in the symbolic rather than utilitarian value of luxury brands.

RU students demonstrated that Belk's (1988) study still holds true. Belk (1988) stated that individuals use possessions as forms of extended selves. This suggests that the second aim pertaining to the process of identity construction through the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothing in South Africa holds true. The RU students construct their identities through the consumption of luxury branded clothing by tying their identity to the brands. The students also communicate their identity and the groups in which they belong through the luxury

branded clothes. The findings of the current study confirm those findings by researchers such as Cătălin and Andreea (2014) who found that people use brands to create identities. In addition, the current study's findings indicate how RU students transition their consumption of brands as they progress with their university career. This confirms that brands help people through transitions (for example, from adolescence to adulthood) as suggested by Arnett (1997) and Noble and Walker (1997). The students indicated a change in the luxury clothing brands they consumed at the beginning of university to those that they currently consume (now when they are no longer in first year). They cited financial and social independence as factors influencing their change in the brands they now consume. Another factor indicated was the availability of luxury brand boutiques in South Africa such as Louis Vuitton, Porsche and Burberry that now makes it easier for the locals to consume international brands. Therefore, the availability of the boutiques paves a way for RU students to construct identity through the consumption of luxury clothing brands. Although the boutiques are not available in Grahamstown, the students engage in 'save to spend' strategy whereby they save pocket money and spend when they are in their home towns.

In terms of the role played by reference groups in the symbolic consumption behaviour of RU students, the findings suggest that celebrities, family and peers play an enormous role. Additionally, the study revealed that brands could act as tools for social integration with reference groups (Escalas, & Bettman, 2005). This finding confirms the findings of Cant et al. (2006) to be true that family members, peer groups and role models have a strong influence on consumer behaviour in South Africa. Celebrity endorsements, socialisation (family) and friendships (peers) came out as the main ways in which reference groups influence RU students. A new form of reference groups emerged in this study, which is formed around friendships. This reference group is the peer in-group. Peer in-group forms around friendships on campus and this is a group to which an individual is in contact with on a daily basis. The students use the luxury branded clothing to communicate and symbolises their identities thereby distinguishing an in-group from an out-group.

This study also confirms the last theme that reference groups play an important role in RU students' construction of their identity. The respondents mentioned the importance of reference groups in constructing identity because those around them need to know their identity meanings. Applying the theoretical framework that is guiding this study (SIT), the findings show how RU students classify their reference groups (in-groups) from out-groups. The students mentioned how they identify positively with those who, similar to them, consume

luxury branded clothing. The findings also reveal how the movement between home and university affect how they display their identity. This means that identity, for the students, is not static but rather fluid to suit a place and situation. Generally, the students revealed how their in-groups play a huge role in how they regard the identity because they want to 'fit in' with the in-groups.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The study draws on SIT and advances extant research on the impact of socio-psychological traits of consumer behaviour by examining impact of in-groups on symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothes and identity construction thereof. The findings brought out factors that influence the consumption of luxury brands among RU students. The most prominent factor that influences the consumption of luxury brands was income. The major and primary source of students' income is from parents, family, or sponsors. Some of the students indicated that they are involved in entrepreneurship activities to supplement their monthly income from their primary source of income. Consequently, the students tend to spend more on luxury clothing brands than the others do. Furthermore, the findings suggest that students' income determines how the students spend their money. All respondents indicated that they ensure they have basics before setting money aside for the purchase of luxury clothing brands. This was the case for both students staying in the residences and those who stay out of the residences (off-campus).

The responses in this study confirm Maslow's Hierarchy of needs model that states that people fulfil basic needs first before moving to the next level of the hierarchy of needs. However, there were some students whom, after the fulfilment of the basic (physiological) needs, make sure that their esteem needs are fulfilled in the form of paying for a phone bill and purchasing the luxury branded clothes. The findings of this study display what the researcher termed 'save to spend' whereby the students save a substantial amount of their pocket money so that they can purchase their favourite luxury clothing brands at a later stage. The second factor that influenced the consumption of luxury branded products related to the frequency of such purchases. On average, respondents purchased luxury clothing between four and six times a year.

The third factor influencing the consumption of luxury brands related to the availability of retail stores in Grahamstown. The study found the lack of big shopping centres as a setback in the consumption behaviour of the students. Grahamstown is a small city with relatively small shops as compared to where the students come from. This substantiates why the students opt to 'save to spend'. The students' situation (lack of shops in Grahamstown) is exacerbated by the fear that they do not prefer shopping online. The reasons respondents do not like shopping online were: 1) due to clothes being a touch and feel product so they prefer to have a feel of what they are buying 2) lack of trust in online shopping and 3) shopping being an experience. In other words, they choose to inspect the clothes before deciding to buy. The respondents

found physical shopping to be a way of having fun. Human interaction in a physical shopping environment emerged as a reason for the shopping option. The respondents indicated that through interacting with the salespeople in the shops, they will get some form of education about the products from the salespeople. This will inform the decision to either purchase or not to purchase. The respondents mentioned their concern over security when buying clothes online, which leaves the physical shopping to be a better option. From this finding, the students echoed how shopping makes them happy.

This study confirmed the significance of the use of luxury branded clothing in identity construction. All respondents mentioned that the luxury clothing brands assist them in identity-formation processes and fitting into groups. This leads to the formation of in-groups and out-groups using the consumption of luxury branded clothes as the categorisation criterion. The luxury branded clothes also act as communication about the transition taking place from adolescence to adulthood. In all these transitions and consumptions, reference groups play a huge role in influencing the students. Celebrities, family, peers and peer in-groups play different roles in influencing the consumption behaviours of RU students.

6.1. Research aims and overview of findings

The findings from the first theme of the study addressed research aim one: *the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothing among RU students*. The findings suggested that students do not only consume luxury brands for their utilitarian value but for symbolic value as well. The study found that the Nike luxury brand to be the most preferred luxury brand amongst RU students, followed by the Guess brand. These two luxury brands and other brands are preferred because they symbolise uniqueness. Uniqueness of the brands also comes from the scarcity of the luxury brands in Grahamstown, since the local shops do not sell a variety of such luxury brands. The luxury clothing brands allow the students to ‘stand out’ amongst the rest. The findings also indicated that the absence of the luxury brand shops in Grahamstown allows the students to consume products that are not popular thereby making them unique.

The study found status as an important aspect in the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothing among RU students. From the findings, consumption of luxury branded clothes symbolises a certain class level that is different from others and that particular class is the top class. Thus, the respondents use the luxury branded clothing to communicate social distinctions in the university setting. In addition, as a status symbol, the luxury branded clothes demonstrate that one is a trendsetter in terms of fashion. Being a trendsetter is indicative of the knowledge

that the respondents have about the current trends and it shows that they are on top of their game.

The respondents also mentioned how their consumption of luxury branded clothing communicates that they are from a good financial standing. Brand consciousness came up as another reason for the consumption of luxury branded clothing by the respondents. The respondents echoed that they are some of the few who are brand conscious on campus and most of the students do not afford the luxury branded clothing. The reason given for most students not affording the luxury clothing brands is because they live off their parents and family's income. Some respondents highlighted that some students resort to counterfeit brands to display 'freshness'. These students would like to fit into certain in-groups so they end up consuming counterfeit brands for the functions and symbolic value. Therefore, the respondents construct identity through the symbolic consumption of the luxury branded clothing to bring out the uniqueness, individuality, 'cleanliness', quality, status and to communicate their brand consciousness.

The second reason why the RU students consume luxury clothing brands is because the brands symbolise individuality. This study found that the luxury branded clothes allowed distinction of the students from the rest. Luxury branded clothing symbolise 'cleanliness'. Respondents stated how they prefer clothes that are not colourful. To them, clothes that are not colourful (for example, black, white, cream and grey) are 'clean'. According to the respondents, the study found that clean luxury brands are associated with simplicity and subtle colours. The findings in this study show how colour meaning is socially constructed, depending on the context because different colours have different meanings in different cultures and/or contexts. The colour choice for the respondents was influenced by the individuals they aspire to become, such as celebrities. These findings indicate the importance of colour in communicating the meaning beyond aesthetic appeal (Amsteus et al., 2015). Colour can be an identifier of price such that people will be able to tell the price of clothes just by the colour. In this instance the subtle colours indicate a sophisticated consumer.

Perceived quality is another reason for the symbolic consumption of luxury clothing brands among RU students. This study found that the students consume their favourite luxury branded clothes because they are durable. The clothes last for quite a long time. The students operate on a limited budget thus they seek products that last long. The students also mentioned that they use machine wash most of the time, which could damage clothes but because of the

durability of the luxury clothing brands, they are unlikely to be affected. The study found that the students prefer to purchase luxury branded clothes because they are guaranteed that the clothes are sewn well, are of perfect fit and they are always on trend.

The second theme of this study was to address research aim two, relating to the processes of *identity construction through the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothing by RU students within the South African context*. The respondents indicated that they tie their identity to the luxury clothing brands that they consume. The luxury clothing brands are an indication of 'who they are', that is, their identity. The brands will then act as what Belk (1988) refers to as 'the extended self'. The respondents also mentioned how the luxury clothing brands can act as a way of communicating one's maturity. The study found that luxury branded clothing is used as a 'rite of passage' separating one from being a child to being an independent university student (young adult). The luxury branded clothing also communicates the transformation of one from undergraduate to postgraduate level through the change in clothing preferences. The respondents of this study are in the transition phase. Van Gennep (1960) refers to the transition phase as the 'rite of passage' whereby individuals maintain identity, approach a new role in life (independent student) and dispose of the previous life role (depending on parents).

The third theme of the study addressed research aim three, which was to *explore the role played by reference groups in the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothes*. The findings of this study have indicated a strong influence of reference groups in the consumption of luxury branded clothes among RU students. Celebrities, both local and international play an aspirational role to the respondents because they aspire to be like the celebrities. The findings suggested that the respondents associate with the celebrities because aspiration with the group improves one's social image. The female respondents related to the female celebrities whereas the male respondents related with the male celebrities. These findings demonstrate the success of celebrity endorsements in influencing consumer behaviour.

The family is another reference group that influence the symbolic consumption of luxury branded clothing by RU students. Mothers were reported to be the prominent influencers within the family, as they provide information to other family members about brands. The brand choices of the respondents take after the family because the family acts as the socialising agent. The findings also indicated the significance of co-shopping within the family which influences luxury brand choice. The respondents emphasised that the nuclear family has the most influence in their consumption behaviour over the extended family.

Apart from the celebrities and family, peer influence was also mentioned by the respondents. What was interesting in this study is that peer in-group was one common reference group that influenced all the respondents. This reference group is influential because of the day-to-day interactions that happens on campus. Students who belong to the same social class form some peer in-groups; some are formed because they dress 'clean', and some are formed because they go shopping together. The consumption of luxury branded clothing becomes a source of group identity because it provides a criterion to group individuals with other users or owners of a particular brand. The luxury branded clothing are then used to communicate identity through in-group association. The relationships in the groups are guided by normative social influence.

The respondents clarified whom they consider as out-groups. There were different responses but all had groups that they consider as out-groups. Out-groups were described as those who wear luxury brands different to the respondents' in-groups, those who consume non-branded clothing. Furthermore, for some respondents it is both those who consume different luxury branded clothing and those who consume non-brands who are considered to be out-groups. The categorisation between in-groups and out-groups indicates the social categorisation that takes place between groups. The students categorise themselves in relation to the luxury branded clothing they consume. The study indicated that reference groups play a major role in the consumption patterns of RU students. The peers consume the same luxury branded clothes as the respondents and they help form the purchasing behaviour of the respondents, leading to an influence on the identity as well.

The fourth theme of the current study addressed research aim four, which *seeks to explore the impact of reference groups on the identity construction of RU students*. The respondents indicated the significance of brands in the construction of identity. They indicated that brands are a part of who they are. The respondents' definitions are in line with the Burke and Stets' (2009) definition of identity. There are other characteristics of identity that emerged from this study. These include how individuals dress, what they like or dislike, what other people think of them and how they portray themselves. Another interesting definition of identity was that it is a mixture of different qualities such as character, personality, morals and principles in life. The respondents are concerned with impressing the peer in-group because of the sense of belonging that they have towards the group. The study also found the importance of other people's perceptions.

The respondents felt that they were treated well by their peers because of their ability to afford expensive luxury brands. This makes them feel recognised by both the in-group and the out-groups. The respondents mentioned how the out-groups motivates them to maintain luxury branded clothing standards because their perceptions matter. The respondents stated the significance of social identity because the respondents exist in a social structure. The social identity guides consumer behaviour. This emerges through interaction with reference groups and the luxury branded clothing communicate the desired social identities. Through social interactions, the respondents mentioned that they might display different identities in different places. This shows that identity is not static but there is an element of fluidity whereby identity changes depending on context. The application of SIT to this study helped to unpack the cognitions and behaviour that RU students engage in group processes. We found that the students have in-groups that they identify with in terms of consuming luxury branded clothing and out-groups whom they dissociate with. The in-groups that RU students associate with, help in shaping and constructing of identity.

6.2. Strength and limitations of the study

One of the strength of the current study is that it managed to tap into an area with limited research in South Africa. Thus, the study can help with filling some research gaps in South African research on consumption and identity construction. As an exploratory study, the sample size is sufficient to generalise the study to RU students. The study speaks to a topical issue, a subject that affects how identity is constructed. In particular, individuals' identity can easily be constructed and defined by what one consumes.

The potential limitations of the study are the focus on one luxury product category, which is clothing. It would have been interesting to have a comparison between clothing and other luxury conspicuous products to get an insight on quite a number of luxury products. Even though the choice of qualitative research has provided the most appropriate results for this particular research, a mixed method approach would have helped to get a deep understanding of the study area. The sample in this study only targeted those who consume luxury branded clothing, thus the study did not give those who do not consume the luxury branded clothes an opportunity to explain why they choose not to consume the luxury branded clothes.

6.3. Recommendations for future research and practical implications

As suggestions for future research, replication and expansion of the same study should be conducted to allow for a comparative analysis that includes luxury non-branded clothing consumers. The study is purely a qualitative study. A mixed method approach would have allowed for a comparison. The information gathered from the qualitative interviews could be utilised to develop a questionnaire for the quantitative study. As mentioned in the limitations section, this study has focused its research only on consumers within the age bracket 18-29 years; future research can be undertaken targeting different age groups in South Africa, which would probably bring to light different perceptions regarding this topic. Future researchers can enlarge the sample size in order to gather different views about this topic. Future research can also target young people who are working in comparison to those still in tertiary education and compare their perceptions towards the consumption of luxury branded clothing. In addition, future research can also target respondents from tertiary institutions in big cities.

This study reaffirms that consumers have a need for uniqueness regarding luxury brands. Because Generation Y consumers are businesses' future consumers, marketers need to ensure that they provide these consumers with uniqueness. Therefore, they should work on their brand identity. The findings also suggest that if marketers establish a relationship with Generation Y consumer now, they are likely to be brand loyal. This is because literature, and participants of this study, indicated that consumers are loyal to their brands because brands provide them with reduced social and quality risk. This might make retailers aware that recent consumer searches and wants to experience something unique. The findings also suggest that Generation Y consumers are resourceful, as they engage in entrepreneurial activities to increase their monthly income. Thereby, they can 'save to spend'. This suggests that these consumers may be a lucrative market. Retailers in Grahamstown should consider bringing luxury branded clothing to cater for students with a taste for the luxury brands because university students are at the forefront in terms of consumption. Analysing their consumption behaviour will help in knowing the trends among modern youth.

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Appendix A

Description of study participants

Participant	Age, Gender, Year of study, Brand
1. Martha*	22-year-old female, 3 rd year, Mango brand
2. Rhoda*	22-year-old female, Honours, Guess brand.
3. Moses*	20-year-old male, 2 nd year, Slazenger brand
4. Joseph*	19-year-old male, 1 st year, Nike brand
5. Monica*	20-year-old female, 1 st year, Nike and Guess brands
6. Ruth*	20-year-old female, 2 nd year student, Sissy Boy brand
7. Anna*	27-year-old female, PhD, Burberry brand
8. Lisa*	23-year-old female, Post-grad Diploma, Zara and RiverIsland
9. Edna*	25-year-old female, 4 th year, Gucci brand
10. John*	24-year-old male, 2 nd year, Balenciaga and Nike brands
11. Matthew*	28-year-old male, Masters, Adidas brand
12. Elma*	26-year-old female, Masters, Guess brand

*pseudo names chosen by the researcher

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Section A: Background information

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself (age, gender, level of study and nationality)
2. Can you tell me (on average) how much you spend on clothing per month
3. On your list of priorities, where does clothing come in? Follow-up: How much is your monthly allowance?

Section B: Consumption

1. Tell me about the clothing brands you consume, from beginning of university, to where you are now.

Follow-up: Have they changed? i.e. the brands you consumed in first year and what you consume now?

2. Why you have been consuming them?
3. Could you tell me why you became interested in a particular brand (included name of brand).
4. How is the shopping experience to you?
5. What does your branded clothing represent?
6. In your conception, what are the advantages/drawbacks of purchasing branded clothing?
7. Which of the following do you prefer; online shopping or walking into a shop?

Can you say Rhodes University students are brand conscious?

Section C: Identity

1. What does identity mean to you?
2. How do people in your circles influence your identity?
3. Follow up question: Is your identity different in different situations or different groups?
4. Do you think your choice of clothes influence the way in which other people perceive you?

Section D: Reference groups

1. How do people close to you influence on your decisions to buy particular brands?
Follow up question: Do you look up to anyone in particular?

2. Do you feel like you are a part of a group when you wear a certain brand?

3. Follow up question 1: what does this group mean to you?

Follow up question 2: Do you see yourself differently a group that wear different brands?

Appendix C

Research participants consent form

Research topic: Symbolic consumption and identity construction through luxury branded clothing among Rhodes University students.

<p style="text-align: center;">RHODES UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AGREEMENT BETWEEN STUDENT RESEARCHER AND RESEARCH PARTICIPANT</p>

I (participant's name) _____ agree to participate in the research project of Perpetua Chinomona (g11c0817) on the symbolic consumption and identity construction through luxury branded clothing among Rhodes University students in Eastern Cape, South Africa.

I understand that:

1. The researcher is a student conducting the research as part of the requirements for a full Master's degree at Rhodes University. The researcher may be contacted on 0790373053 or g11c0817@campus.ru.ac.za. The research project has been approved by the relevant ethics committee(s), and is under the supervision of Ms Richenda Koeberg and co-supervision of Mr Werner Bohmke in the Psychology Department at Rhodes University, who may be contacted on 046 603 7382 or r.koeberg@ru.ac.za and w.r.bohmke@ru.ac.za or 046- 603 8508 respectively.
2. The researcher is interested in identity construction and symbolic consumption of branded clothing among Rhodes University students.
3. My participation will involve responding to some interview questions and will be about an hour long.
4. I may be asked to answer questions of a personal nature, but I can choose not to answer any questions about aspects of my life which I am not willing to disclose.
5. I am invited to voice to the researcher any concerns I have about my participation in the study, or consequences. I may experience as a result of my participation, and to have these addressed to my satisfaction. A counselling centre may be contacted for further support on (046) 603 7070 or counsellingcentre@ru.ac.za.

6. I am free to withdraw from the study at any time – however I commit myself to full participation unless some unusual circumstances occur, or I have concerns about my participation which I did not originally anticipate.

7. The report on the project may contain information about my personal experiences, attitudes and behaviours, but that the report will be designed in such a way that it will not be possible to be identified by the general reader.

Signed on (Date):

Participant: _____

Researcher:

Appendix D

Tape recording consent

Rhodes University –Department of Psychology

USE OF TAPE RECORDINGS FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES

PERMISSION AND RELEASE FORM

Participant name & contacts (address, phone etc)	
Name of researcher & level of research (Honours/Masters/PhD)	
Brief title of project	
Supervisor	

Declaration

(Please initial/tick blocks next to the relevant statements)

1. The nature of the research and the nature of my participation have been explained to me	verbally	
	in writing	
2. I agree to be interviewed and to allow tape-recordings to be made of the interviews	audiotape	
	videotape	
3. I agree to take part in and to allow tape-recordings to be made.	audiotape	
	videotape	
4. The tape recordings may be transcribed	without conditions	
	only by the researcher	
	by one or more nominated third parties:	
5.1 I have been informed by the researcher that the tape recordings will be erased once the study is complete and the report has been written.		
5.2 OR I give permission for the tape recordings to be retained after the study and for them to be utilised for the following purposes and under the following conditions:		

Signatures: Participant----- Researcher-----

Appendix E

Letter of permission to the Registrar

Research topic: Symbolic consumption and identity construction through luxury branded clothing among Rhodes University students

Dear Dr Fourie,

My name is Perpetua Chinomona and my student number is g11c0817. I am currently pursuing my Masters by Thesis in Psychology. My research is on the symbolic consumption and identity construction through luxury branded clothing among Rhodes University students.

The inclusion criteria for the participants of this study are both undergraduate and postgraduate students between the ages of 18 and 29. My supervisors are Ms. Richenda Koeberg (email id: r.koeberg@ru.ac.za; 046 603 7382) and Mr Werner Bohmke (email id: w.r.bohmke@ru.ac.za; 046- 603 8508) in the Psychology Department. The study has been approved by the research supervisors, the Psychology Department Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee (RPERC), the Humanities Higher Degree Committee (HHDC) and the Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee (RUESC).

I kindly request permission to gather data from Rhodes University students. The study will observe ethical considerations such as consent, anonymity and confidentiality. The research is solely for academic purposes hence results will not be used for any other purposes.

Thanking you,

Yours Sincerely

Perpetua Chinomona

(g11c0817@campus.ru.ac.za, 0790373053

Appendix F

Letter to the Director of Student Affairs

Research topic: Symbolic consumption and identity construction through luxury branded clothing among Rhodes University students.

Dear Dr Vassilou

My name is Perpetua Chinomona and my student number is g11c0817. I am currently pursuing my Masters by Thesis in Psychology. My research is on the symbolic consumption and identity construction through luxury branded clothing among Rhodes University students.

The inclusion criteria for the participants of this study are both undergraduate and postgraduate students between the ages of 18 and 29. My supervisors are Ms. Richenda Koeberg (email id: r.koeberg@ru.ac.za; 046 603 7382) and Mr Werner Bohmke (email id: w.r.bohmke@ru.ac.za; 046- 603 8508) in the Psychology Department. The study has been approved by the research supervisors, the Psychology Department Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee (RPERC), the Humanities Higher Degree Committee (HHDC) and the Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee (RUESC).

I kindly request permission to gather data from Rhodes University students. The study will observe ethical considerations such as consent, anonymity and confidentiality. The research is solely for academic purposes hence results will not be used for any other purposes.

Thanking you,

Yours Sincerely

Perpetua Chinomona

(g11c0817@campus.ru.ac.za, 0790373053).

Appendix G

Advert for recruiting participants

Research topic: Symbolic consumption and identity construction through branded clothing among Rhodes University students.

Dear undergraduate/postgraduate student

My name is Perpetua Chinomona. I am a Masters by Thesis student in the Psychology Department here at Rhodes University and I am kindly asking for your participation in my research project. I am researching on the symbolic consumption and identity construction through luxury branded clothing (e. g Levi's, Guess, Lacoste and Converse etc) among Rhodes University students. The main aim of the study is to explore the role that reference groups play in the symbolic consumption patterns of university students. Secondly, we aim to determine impact of reference groups in the identity construction of university students.

Participating in my research will involve face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, which will last about an hour. The interviews will be recorded using a tape recorder and transcribed. Pseudo names will replace real names when transcribing data to ensure the protection of your real names. To ensure confidentiality, the interview transcripts and recordings will be accessible to the researcher and the supervisor only. The study was approved by the supervisors, the Psychology Department Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee (RPERC), the Humanities Higher Degree Committee (HHDC) and the Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee (RUESC). Permission for the research was also sought from the relevant institutional gatekeepers at Rhodes University. The researcher acknowledges the importance of informed consent and voluntary participation in the research, and participants are free to withdraw anytime should they wish to do so.

If you are interested in participating in this study, or would like further information, please contact me on the following email address: g11c0817@campus.ru.ac.za or you can contact my supervisors; Ms Richenda Koeberg (r.koeberg@ru.ac.za) or Mr Werner Bohmke (w.r.bohmke@ru.ac.za).

Kind Regards

Perpetua Chinomona (g11c0817)