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# **The role of brands in the formation and manifestation of adolescent identity**

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## ***ABSTRACT***

The role that brands play in the lives of consumers has changed dramatically over time, from purely functional to instrumental, symbolic and hedonic in nature. Literature supports that brands are major contributors to, and reflections of, consumer identities. Despite this, literature referring to adolescents, brands and identity is lacking. Adolescents are emerging as the most brand-orientated, consumer-involved and materialistic generation in history. This research sought to understand the role of brands in adolescent identity through: i) sourcing literature to understand the role of brands in the formation and manifestation of adolescent identity, and ii) empirically deepening our understanding of how adolescents use brands to form and manifest their identities in an emerging market context. In a qualitative research study using focus groups, the views of four high- and low-income groups of female adolescents were investigated, compared and contrasted. Differences and commonalities were evident among groups around current brands owned versus brands aspired to, whether brands are consumed for the self or for others, and the role of reference groups. The findings showed differences between the high-income groups, suggesting that variances exist due to differing social standings. The findings further suggested commonalities between the low- and high-income adolescents from a lower social standing. These findings suggest the importance and need for further research in understanding the adolescent consumer psyche and proposes ethical considerations on the part of marketers.

## **KEYWORDS**

Adolescents, identity, brands, materialism, status consumption, conspicuous consumption.

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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Date

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## **CHAPTER 1: RATIONALE**

Brands are a central component of modern life, with some researchers arguing that there is no single issue that dominates the modern psyche as much as the consumption of brands (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004; O’Cass & Frost, 2002). The role played by brands has changed dramatically over time as they have evolved from their focus on guaranteeing quality and reliability (Van Kempen, 2004; Chernev, Hamilton & Gal, 2011), to providing consumers with more symbolic meanings that represent ways of life and add value beyond the intrinsic product attributes (The case for brands, 2001; Chernev et al., 2011). Brands do not only have intrinsic value - they also have social meanings which cause consumers to value goods because they define their social status and affect the perceptions that people have about themselves (Reinstaller & Sanditov, 2005). Possessions are major contributors to and reflections of our identities, and it is the combination of consumer’s interactions with people, material objects and hedonic values that cause them to develop meanings in brands (Belk, 1984). Consumers use brands to express and validate their identities and engage in acts of self-expression by customising products to reflect their identity (Chernev et al., 2011).

The role of brands and their links to identity is so powerful that it may manifest into various consumption behaviours such as materialism (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998), conspicuous consumption (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998) and status consumption (Trigg, 2001). The need for status is powerful enough to override the most basic needs such

as hunger (Van Kempen, 2003) and research shows that consumers will indulge in consumption before securing their basic needs for food and shelter, going so far as to sacrifice nutrition for luxury (Belk, 1988). If this is so, then one needs to question the lengths that consumers will go to in order to communicate to the world and indeed themselves, the impact of a brand on their identity. Consumers are known to communicate their status and to signal their wealth to others through behaviour such as driving with their windows closed so that people think their cars have air conditioning, placing a TV antenna on their shack roof without actually owning a TV, and parading for the Joneses in supermarkets with baskets filled with items they have no intention of purchasing (various authors in Van Kempen, 2003).

Is this type of behaviour specific to a particular group of people? The signalling of deceptive status occurs in both developing and developed countries among the poor and the rich (Van Kempen, 2003). Globalisation has resulted in the spread of consumer culture to the third world developing countries, whose exposure to media and marketing is resulting in an increased need for luxury goods (Chaplin & John, 2010). This gives rise to another question: are the poor being lured into status-intensive consumption patterns due to seductive advertising and exposure to media? And is it only the poor? In first world countries such as America, children and adolescents have emerged as the most brand-orientated, consumer-involved and materialistic generation in history (Schor, 2004 in Chaplin & John, 2007). Trends in first world countries often migrate to emerging markets due to the exposure of brands via media. If the above is true and adolescents continue to believe that their brands describe who

they are and define their social status (Schor, 2004 in Chaplin & John, 2007), then it is important for marketers to understand the various dynamics at play in the interaction of brands and adolescent identity. Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) supported this thinking and opined that it is essential to understand the role that brands play in the development of consumers' identity given the dynamics at play between consumption, the self and the symbolic meaning of goods.

### **Adolescents as 21<sup>st</sup> century consumers**

Goldsmith (2001) stated that new-age consumers seek to create meaning and to develop personal identity through consumption. Put differently, the acquisition and consumption of brands have been argued to be part of identity management and explains how possessions become a reflection of who consumers are and / or how they want others to perceive them (O'Cass & Frost, 2002). The need for brands touches all consumers and adolescents are no exception. Adolescence is said to be the period when individuals are most likely to develop preferences for brands (Berk, 2006) and because of where adolescents are in their developmental stage, their relationship with brands can be instrumental in self-development and identity. Although there has been much research devoted to the role of symbolic consumption in adulthood, less attention has been given to this topic in the context of younger people (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). Furthermore, with 15-19 year old adolescent consumers starting to identify with aspirant brands (Berk, 2006) and influencing household expenditure (Statistics South Africa, 2010), the relationship between adolescents and brands needs

to be understood in terms of its impact on identity and the impact on consumption consequences such as materialism.

The personal and social experiences that are constructed through the use of material objects can lead to an improved understanding of consumer behaviour (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). Current research promotes gaining greater understanding of how consumers use status brands in their lives and how it impacts the self (O’Cass & Frost, 2002). Hogg and Banister (2001) were of the opinion that understanding how individuals use their consumption experiences to create and maintain their sense of self is a central concern in consumer behaviour research.

### **Emerging market consumers**

Emerging markets too are increasingly becoming more materialistic and adopting hedonistic consumption behaviours (Eastman, Goldsmith & Flynn, 1999; Zhou & Wong, 2008) as third-world countries become more affluent (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). The presence of materialism seems to be on the rise in the lives of many and it is said to continue to be a driving force for many markets (Eastman et al., 1999). In countries such as South Africa, the increase in consumer spending has sparked concern by the government which is trying to move the nation towards a culture of saving (Manzi, Chipp & Kleyn, 2011). Third world emerging economies have high complexities – often these economies are characterised by high levels of income inequality which makes a rise in consumer spending of great concern. Despite its recent interest, both academic

and commercial research is lacking in the area of low-income consumers (Hamilton & Catterall, 2005).

### **The importance of understanding the role of brands**

The increase in choice means that never before have consumers expected to interact so deeply with brands, nor companies (brands) so directly with consumers (Rust, Moorman & Bhalla, 2010). Barki and Parente (2006) stated that in order to maintain and grow market share, companies need to understand the distinctive characteristics of their consumers. For this to be possible, it is essential to fully understand consumer experiences and the symbolic meaning that brands play in their lives. This lends itself to the need for understanding these relationships within the realm of adolescent consumption. Furthermore, if brands offer consistency in an ever-changing world, and trust in a brand evolves over time (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998), then understanding the role of brands in identity formation may result in long-term trust in a brand.

According to O’Cass and Frost (2002), this insight can lead to increased market share, income generation, improved returns on brand investments and a slice of the billion dollar profits in the marketplace for status goods. Furthermore, consumers use brands as a means of self-expression to signal identity (Chernev et al., 2011). While there is extensive research on the use of brands as a means of self-expression to signal identity, the extent to which brands are used to signal self-expression and the boundaries of expressing one’s identity through brands remains unexplored (Chernev, et al., 2011).

This study seeks to achieve two main objectives: first, to source literature to understand the role of brands (in the context of consumption) in the formation and manifestation of adolescence identity; and second, to empirically deepen the understanding of how adolescents use brands to form and manifest their identities in an emerging market context.

This type of research may: i) provide insight to assist marketers / brand managers in developing identity-based market segmentations and positioning strategies targeting young consumers in emerging economies, thus developing brands that are perceived to be congruent to the target markets' self-image (O'Cass & Frost, 2002) and identity; and ii) assist in understanding the different influencers in the development of identity, thus enabling marketers to build brands with optimal images. Furthermore, income inequality in emerging economies provides challenges for marketers in terms of understanding the key insights (differences and similarities) between household income and identity formation in adolescence. While it is suggested in literature that a relationship exists between adolescence identity and brands (Chaplin & John, 2005; 2007), the role (if any) of household income has not been explored.

Understanding these dynamics is essential for emerging markets because one needs to understand the role that brands play in the lives of adolescents from various household income groups. If a difference exists, then marketers would benefit in terms of better brand positioning. Furthermore, a deeper insight and understanding may

assist social policy makers in the development of policies to protect consumers and indeed adolescents from an ever increasing spending culture.

In the chapter that follows, the relevant literature is reviewed and a framework is proposed to guide the formal analysis of the research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

One of the primary objectives of this research was to source literature in order to model the role of brands in the formation and manifestation of adolescent identity. The literature therefore commences with a review of the concept of identity and how it is formed. To understand the influencers of brands on identity, two categories of influencers were explored, namely: internal and external drivers, each comprising of various factors. Some manifestations of consumption are discussed and the chapter concludes with an attempt to develop a conceptual model for exploratory research into the role of brands in the development and manifestation of identity in adolescents.

### **2.1 Identity formation**

The formation of identity was first recognised by the psychoanalyst Erik Erikson (Berk, 2006). An identity is a firm sense of who you are, where you are heading, and where you fit in society (Shaffer, 1999). Defined by Erikson (1963) in Hook (2004), identity is a sense of being at peace with oneself as you grow and develop. The self is a developmental formation in the psychological make-up of the individual which consists of interrelated attitudes (Ross, 1971). Self-concept / identity is therefore a multidimensional construct encompassing the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings (Rosenberg, 1979 in Shukla, 2008), which relates to the attitudes and perceptions that people have of themselves (O'Cass & Frost, 2002). Given the above,

one can assume identity and self-concept to mean the same thing. According to Onkvist and Shaw (1987), the fundamental purpose of human activity is the protection, maintenance and enhancement of the self-concept or symbolic self.

### **Role of brands in identity formation**

O’Cass and McEwen (2004); and O’Cass and Frost (2002) opined that brands are important in the creation of identity, a sense of achievement and individuality for consumers. The self-concept is important because different perceptions of the self, influence purchase behaviour and decisions; and how and why consumers provide status to a brand (Onkvist & Shaw, 1987). As explained by various authors in Chernev et al., (2011), brands play multiple roles; they include the lavish spending on brands for the purpose of self-expression, they communicate membership in particular social or professional groups, they convey hidden aspects of a consumer’s self-image and they can serve to establish and confirm a consumer’s self-concept and identity.

### **Macro-environmental effects of consumption**

The endless choice of brands, together with the new role that they play in the lives of consumers, may be linked to an increase in consumer materialism (Ger & Belk, 1996) which is of concern - particularly with regards to the increase in materialism displayed by adolescents (Chaplin & John, 2010). Research conducted in the area of materialism is extensive (Eastman, Fredenberger, Campbell & Calvert, 1997) but concentrates mainly on adults (Chaplin & John, 2005; 2007). In addition, relatively little is known about how materialistic consumption consequences (such as conspicuous

consumption and status consumption), develop in adolescents (Chaplin & John, 2005; 2007). Chaplin and John (2005; 2007), who claimed to have conducted some of the first research into materialism in children and adolescents, stressed the increasing interest in the topic among educators, parents, government regulators and consumer activists. They proposed that changes in adolescents' self-concepts are the main reason for the adoption of materialistic values and argued that materialism develops in adolescents primarily because of their developing self-concept and the increase in marketing aimed at children and adolescents.

A new form of consumer activism - the anti-brand social movement - is also growing. Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2006) explained that there is a growing resistance to transnational brands and corporate globalisation and as a result some consumers are opposing global brands. The anti-brand communities can oppose specific brands (e.g. Jeep), or corporate brands (e.g. Wal-Mart), and consist of consumer groups resisting the imposed meanings or values that are prescribed by a brand (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006).

When does consumption become a bad / negative thing? Consumption and materialism is said to be linked to consumer happiness seeking but can also lead to the contradictory traits of greed, miserliness and envy which can result in misery (Belk, 1985). This is often termed the shallow desire to acquire or the "dark side to consumption" (McCracken, 1988 in Oropesa, 1995 p.215). The focus here is that what is acquired is never really enough and one always needs more. Linked to the notion of

the dark side of consumption is the view supported by Yankelovich (1981) in Belk (1985), which argued that the search for personal identity through consumption has led consumers away from each other, emphasising egoism at the expense of the altruism which traditionally bonded people together. Boorstin (1973) in Belk (1985) challenged this view with the opinion that pursuing the same brands, styles and consumption goals provides contemporary society with a sense of community that would otherwise be lacking.

The consequences are said to result in a society where people try to demonstrate their status in three different ways: consume more and save less; become more indebted to facilitate greater consumption; and increase working hours to facilitate increased consumption (Wiseman, 2009). This concept of neophilic passions is defined as the love of the new, which is known to fuel the desire for goods that are fresh and untouched (Campbell, 1992 in Oropesa, 1995). Modern consumers pursue the endless psychological quest of happiness and satisfaction through the experiences associated with the consumption of new things (Oropesa, 1995). This has led to consumers being referred to as addicts of consumption in the “endless pursuit of novelty” (Oropesa, 1995 p.221).

## **2. 2 Influencers of consumption that impact the consumer identity**

The literature reveals that there are many dynamics at play in the formation of identity. For the purposes of this research they will be classified into internal and external influencers. Each group of influencers will be discussed in detail below.

### **2.2.1 Internal influencers and their link to identity formation**

#### **a) Adolescent life-stage development**

The major developmental hurdle that adolescents face is the establishing of an identity (Erickson, 1963 in Shaffer, 1999). Constructing an identity involves defining who you are, what you value, and the direction you choose to pursue in life (Berk, 2006). It is believed that while the seed of identity formation is planted early, it is only in late adolescence and emerging adulthood that individuals become absorbed in identity formation (Berk, 2006). During this phase, the challenge is substantiating a secure sense of identity in order to bring together the various facets of the ego (Hook, 2004). Therefore, at this stage individuals are very sensitive to, and aware of, the way they appear in the eyes of others. This awareness can complicate the process of identity formation because they are attempting to define and distinguish themselves as precisely distinct from the rest (Hook, 2004).

In a bid to answer the question ‘Who am I?’ adolescents spend most of their time experimenting with different behaviours, roles, talents and fashions (Berk, 2006; Chaplin & John, 2007). This is what Erickson termed identity crisis, describing the

adolescent's active search for an identity and the common sense of confusion and anxiety that adolescents may feel as they try to decide what kind of 'self' they want to become (Shaffer, 1999). Erickson believed that successful psychosocial outcomes of infancy and childhood pave the way toward a coherent and positive identity and entrance into the adult community (Berk, 2006; Hook, 2004).

Social psychology literature explains that the symbolic role of brands satisfies people's desire for self-identity (Van Kempen, 2004) and the acquisition and consumption of brands explains how possessions become a reflection of who consumers are and how they want others to perceive them (O'Cass & Frost, 2002).

#### **b) The manifestation of multiple selves**

The nature of identity / self-concept is multifaceted and can manifest itself into a variety of actual selves and a variety of possible or ideal selves (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Hogg & Banister, 2001). It is suggested that our possessions are major contributors to, and reflections of, our identities and by attributing meaning to them, they become the means by which we strive to emphasise or accomplish our ideal self (Belk, 1984). The process by which consumers seek to match their actual / ideal self-concept to a social prototype is called self-congruence (Hogg & Banister, 2001). This is also known as a dual process where self-identities incorporate into possessions, and individuals also incorporate their possessions into their self-identities (called self-extensions) (Wong, 1997). There are different aspects of the self: private, public and collective, and these aspects are key strategies for maintaining self-esteem

(Hogg & Banister, 2001; Wong, 1997; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). The inert, private self consists of emotions, desires, personal values, memoirs and impulses, while the outer public self is based on social roles and the persona presented to others (Wong, 1997; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). In the private self, self-worth is achieved by striving to meet internalised standards, the public or collective self seeks to achieve self-worth by securing positive evaluations from significant others, and the collective self seeks to meet the goals of the reference group (Wong, 1997). Therefore individuals consume symbolic brands in order to form and fulfil their desire for identity and in so doing seek to balance their various selves.

### **c) The role of self-esteem / self-consistency**

Veblen and other researchers believed that self-esteem was of central importance to human beings (Wiseman, 2009). In understanding the relationship between the different / multiple selves explained above, it is essential to understand the two central motives to identity (self-concept): self-esteem and self-consistency (Rosenberg, 1979 in Hogg & Banister, 2001). Individuals are said to use products and brands as materials with which to cultivate, express and preserve their identities (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004; Van Kempen, 2004). The gained sense of identity enhances self-esteem and therefore increases well-being (Van Kempen, 2004).

The pursuit of self-esteem involves the maintenance / enhancement of the self via the purchase of positively valued items (Hogg & Banister, 2001). Research conducted by Piacentini and Mailer (2004) found that the choices made by young people around

possessions such as fashion clothing brands is closely linked to their self-concept and furthermore, these are used as a means of self-expression and a way to judge the people and situations they face. There is also a relationship between the types of brands consumed and self-image and how consumers communicate this to others around them (O’Cass & Frost, 2002). This indicates that certain brands may make the consumer feel more confident (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). Chaplin and John (2005; 2007) stressed the intricate link between self-esteem and levels of materialism, and maintained that as adolescents move from identity formation to identity achievement, they enjoy higher self-esteem and are less self-conscious or preoccupied with personal concerns (Shaffer, 1999).

Low self-esteem and hence a negative attitude toward the self has been linked to materialism in adults (Mick, 1996), because material goods are believed to be instruments used by people to cope with components of self-worth (Chang & Arkin, 2002). As discussed in the section above, the different aspects of the self (private, public and collective) are the key strategies for maintaining self-esteem (Hogg & Banister, 2001; Wong, 1997; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998).

### **2.2.2 External influencers and their link to identity formation**

The interest in consumer behaviour as a result of externalities is increasing (Reinstaller & Sanditov, 2005). These externalities include socio-economic factors, commercial and non-commercial stimuli, and the cultural values of individualism and collectivism.

### **a) Socio-economic factors**

There are many socio-economic factors that may influence identity, such as income distribution, education, living conditions and lifestyle changes; however, for the purposes of this research, household income is explored due to the recent interest in the emerging markets and their high levels of income inequality. Income inequality, increasing consumer spending and the collapse of personal saving is as much a concern in America (Wiseman, 2009) as it is in the emerging markets. As defined by Darley and Johnson (1985) in Hamilton and Catterall (2005), low-income consumers are individuals whose financial resources or income results in them being unable to obtain the goods and the services for an acceptable standard of living. These consumers, who may often feel neglected, marginalised or inferior, consume in order to feel normal (Hamilton & Catterall, 2005).

It is believed that the growing desire to acquire will be a driving force for economies world-wide going forward (Eastman et al., 1997). It has been noted by various authors that developing countries are acquiring hedonistic consumption attitudes such as an interest in status (Belk, 1988). As explained by Wiseman (2009), there is a belief that if a household consumes at the level of those with a higher status, then it too can acquire the same status and reputation. A study conducted by Wiseman (2009) found that the higher the income and wealth inequality, the higher the amount that must be consumed in order to create the impression of higher status (Wiseman, 2009), due to a belief that status mobility is possible. In a different study conducted by Manzi et al. (2011), which intended to understand the large increase in spending on the part of

Black South Africans, it was suggested that consumers' previous experiences of relative deprivation is linked to subsequent conspicuous consumption. Further literature showed that third world consumers are often attracted to and indulge in aspects of conspicuous consumption before they have secured adequate food, clothing and shelter (Belk, 1988). Simply put, the poor have a need for status (Van Kempen, 2003). This need for status is a concern to many, and research in this area with relevance to household income groups is necessary.

## **b) The role of commercial and non-commercial stimuli**

### **Commercial stimuli (brands / marketing)**

Marketers exploit consumers via media. Belk, Ger and Askegaard (2003) stated that marketers are one of the main instigators of enchanting consumer desire for goods. Cited by various authors in Chaplin and John (2007), the level at which marketers have been criticised for their role in the development of materialistic values have been stressed for this very reason. The role of brands has changed over time, resulting in instrumental, symbolic and hedonic meanings being attached to goods (Belk, Mayer & Driscoll, 1984; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998); the increase in marketing may be one of the reasons for this. The symbolic meanings of brands operate in two directions: i) outward in constructing the social world; and ii) inward in constructing one's self-identity (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Because consumers become highly involved with objects that arouse interest and stimulate them, the consumption of products, services and media often results in psychological and emotional attachments (Belk, 1992 in Zwick & Dholakia, 2006) which are central in the construction of self-identity

(Zwick & Dholakia, 2006; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Consumers use these symbolic meanings to construct, maintain and express each of their multiple identities (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998).

How does consumption lead to identity formation? Consumption acts as a never-ending signalling device for identity in that it provides a means by which to define and project one's self to others (Wiseman, 2009). Material possessions have profound symbolic significance, which is an integral feature of expressing one's own identity and perceiving the identity of others (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Consumers are what they own and their possessions are viewed as a major part of their extended selves (Belk, 1988). To help define one's self-concept, an individual uses products that have meaning to define them as a group member (Fitzmaurice & Comegys, 2006). Through a long and continuous process of self-examination and observation, Piacentini and Mailer (2004) believed that consumers develop a sense of who they really are over time. Therefore individuals use goods as symbols for communicating to other consumers and in doing so develop their own self-identify (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). People communicate with others and display their status, personality and self-image, not only by what they wear, but also by what they possess (Shukla, 2008).

In much the same way as adults, materialism develops in adolescents primarily because of the increased marketing aimed at them (Chaplin & John, 2005; 2007). The increase in marketing and advertising to adolescents has raised concern among parents, educators and social scientists (Chaplin & John, 2007) and increasingly there

are suggestions around the limiting of advertising aimed at this consumer group (Chaplin & John, 2007). Belk (1988) stated that adolescents tend to have a strong desire to communicate their maturity and 'adulthood' to their peers through consumption and gathering material possessions. This is their way of establishing their identity and gaining much-needed prestige. This is especially true during the time of identity crises for many adolescents.

### **Non-commercial / social stimuli (reference groups)**

What drives consumption? The consumption of consumer goods is said to be driven by the admiration and recognition of our fellow human beings (Smith in Rosenberg, 1968). These fellow human beings make up reference groups. Defined by Park and Lessig (1977), a reference group represents an actual or imaginary group conceived of having significant relevance upon an individual's evaluations, aspirations or behaviour.

Reference groups are instrumental in consumption. Zhou and Wong (2008) cited various authors who explained that reference groups are used for the purposes of appraisal or as a source of personal norms, values and attitudes. This is because product satisfaction is derived from audience reaction rather than product use (Trigg, 2001; Wong, 1997). Reference groups reflect the need to identify with others, enhance one's image, or provide a common identity or interests (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004; Bearden, Netemeyer & Teel, 1989). These authors explained that brands that have certain characteristics can provide entry into groups and allow consumers to fit in by portraying a particular image.

Work conducted by Veblen (see the section on conspicuous consumption) suggests that individuals use consumption to compare themselves to others in terms of status (Reinstaller & Sanditov, 2005). In the context of consumption, exposure and comparison to reference groups leads to various consumer behaviours such as conspicuous or status consumption (Reinstaller & Sanditov, 2005; Marcoux, Filiatrault & Cheron, 1997). This is supported by Wong and Ahuvia (1998), who stated that consumers' desire for conspicuous goods is determined by their social networks and reference group influence. Literature by O'Cass and McEwen (2004) explained that conspicuousness is essential if consumers want to gain recognition, approval, or acceptance from their reference groups and that the conspicuousness of a product allows the reference group members to see the product or brand and provide their approval or disapproval. It is suggested that the status consumption tendencies of individuals are associated with the extent to which they are influenced by their reference group(s) and are self-monitored, while conspicuous consumption tendencies are influenced by reference group(s), gender and status consumption tendencies (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998).

Literature further suggests that there may be differences between reference groups based on income level. Reinstaller and Sanditov (2005) were of the opinion that high-income groups seek distinction from members of lower social classes and find well-being in being similar or different to their peers, while low-income consumers support the cohesion of the group and aspire to the lifestyle of people in the upper class. In

developing countries, consumers are said to try to imitate the more extravagant consumption of consumers from more economically developed nations which they are exposed to via the media (Ger & Belk, 1996). Reinstaller and Sanditov (2005) suggested that members of high status groups draw their identity and well-being from what they consume over time and as low-income consumer groups increase and they acquire imitating products, the members of the elite change their patterns of consumption in order to defend their position and well-being.

Within any group of consumers, reference groups create the desire to fit in with the in-group / the elite (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). In the context of adolescent consumers, fashion brands such as clothing establish a sense of belonging to a clan and allow one to show off and become known and appreciated by the group (Ifergan & Etienne, 2002 in Cardoso, de Araujo & Coquet, 2007). In support of this, Maisonneuve (1993) in Cardoso et al. (2007), stated that the fashion phenomena in young people reinforces the concept of group pressure and social influence on behaviour, to the point that the interaction between young adults and their schoolmates have an influence on consumption patterns. These consumption patterns lead the youngsters to a phenomenon of identification through which they want to be similar to others (Cardoso, 2004 in Cardoso et al., 2007).

The role of parents and peers as reference groups have influence over adolescents as both parents and peers provide a contributing factor to consumption behaviours such

as materialism, because they transmit their consumption attitudes, goals and motives (Chaplin & John, 2010).

### **c) Social values (need for individualism versus collectivism)**

With brands / material possessions being symbolic expressions of consumer identity, they express aspects of the consumers' identity both to the self and to others (Van Kempen, 2004). Research has termed these two opposing consumer needs as: i) the need for uniqueness (individualism) and ii) the need for conformity (collectivism) (Shukla, 2008; Wong, 1997; Van Kempen, 2004). Status symbols therefore serve to fulfil opposing functions: first, they can claim a superior position, command respect and admiration and provoke envy (uniqueness); and second, they can symbolise the similarities between the owner and others (conformity) (Van Kempen, 2004). Thus material possessions may be used to increase a sense of belonging with others or differentiation from others (Van Kempen, 2004).

Wong (1997) described the defining attributes of the individualism as collectivism construct. She explained that individualism is characterised by emotional detachment from in-groups, primacy of personal goals over in-group goals, competition and individual achievement. These characteristics are said to correspond to the consumption behaviour of conspicuous consumption (luxury consumption for public view) (Shukla, 2008; Wong, 1997). It is argued that when consumers purchase products to satisfy their need for uniqueness, the value of the product increases (Shukla, 2008). Wong (1997) further explained that collectivism is characterised by family integrity,

self-definition through social roles, hierarchical social structures, and strong in-group / out-group distinctions. A large body of research shows that status symbols stress the importance of material objects in the social differentiation process, but equally, research also suggests that the consumption of goods fulfils the opposite function of symbolising similarities between the owner and others (Van Kempen, 2004). Ultimately, it is the individual who uses the symbolic content of the chosen brand to reflect the connection that they desire: individualism or collectivism (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004).

The need for individualism versus collectivism is closely linked to reference groups (discussed in the section above), especially in the context of income. Low- income groups may imitate the consumption patterns of high-income consumers to feel a sense of belonging (Ger & Belk, 1996), while the members of the elite change their patterns of consumption in order to defend their positions (Reinstaller & Sanditov, 2005).

### **2.3 Manifestations of consumption**

Humans are characterised by having wants and needs for brands because they have symbolic meaning (Van Kempen, 2004). The acquisition and consumption of brands have been argued to be part of identity management and explains how possessions become a reflection of who consumers are and how they want others to perceive them (O’Cass & Frost, 2002). Social psychology literature on the subject explains that

the symbolic role of brands satisfies people's pride or desire for self-identity and prestige (Van Kempen, 2004). Consumer needs and wants for brands can manifest themselves into desire, envy and competitiveness which impact the realm of consumer behaviour (Mowen, 2004). The possible consequences of wants and needs may be classified under various consumer behaviours such as: a) materialism; b) conspicuous consumption; and c) status consumption. These will be discussed below.

#### **a) Material possessions / materialism**

Materialism is a highly researched consumer phenomenon (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998), and was defined as the "importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions" (Belk 1984 in Belk, 1985 p.265). In support of this, the link between material possessions are said to be so closely linked to identity that they are often regarded as extensions of the person's self (Van Kempen, 2004; O'Cass & Frost, 2002). Fitzmaurice and Comegys (2006) noted that the continual acquisition of goods becomes a primary goal of materialists. Research into materialism suggests that people who are very materialistic are more likely to value things that signal accomplishments and enhance social status (Wong, 1997). At the highest level of materialism, possessions assume a central place in a person's life and are believed to provide the greatest sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Belk, 1985).

Materialism is a contentious issue given its consequences. It is said to manifest into three traits: possessiveness, lack of generosity and envy (Belk, 1985; Chaplin & John, 2010). Further, it has been said to drain cultural resources, distort value, accentuate

class differences and hurt the environment (Collins & Jacobson, 1990 in Eastman et al., 1997).

The cause of materialism in adolescents (which is on the rise), has been researched by Chaplin and John (2010) to include factors such as the role of parents and peers (reference groups explained in the see section above). The rise in materialism spans all economies and according to Shultz in Ger and Belk (1996), is on the rise in developing countries because the have-nots want more than the haves due to relative deprivation.

#### **b) Conspicuous consumption**

Researched originally by Veblen, the concept of conspicuous consumption suggests that humans consume in order to demonstrate social status (Wiseman, 2009; Reinstaller & Sanditov, 2005; Van Kempen, 2003; Shukla, 2008). Conspicuous consumption is defined as the motivational process by which individuals strive to improve their social standing through the consumption of products that symbolise status and prestige (Eastman et al., 1999; Shukla, 2008). Stated differently, conspicuous consumption refers to expenditure not made for comfort or use, but to inflate the ego (Veblen, 1934 in Eastman et al., 1997; O’Cass & McEwen, 2004; O’Cass & Frost, 2002). It was Veblen’s belief that because of the human need to maintain the respect of others, conspicuous consumption manifests itself in: i) one’s status, and ii) the practice of imitating the consumption standards of those of a higher status, with the intention of appearing to also possess that status (Wiseman, 2009). Veblen’s

theory was based on the assumption that leading classes tend to seek differentiation from other social classes in order to show their status (Reinstaller & Sanditov, 2005).

Mowen (2004) argued that conspicuous consumption can occur either directly (for yourself) or vicariously (for others as an extension of the self) in the purchase of consumer goods. According to Shukla (2008), conspicuous goods are different to many frequently purchased goods as they satisfy not just material needs, but also social needs such as prestige. The argument put forward by Zhou and Wong (2008) and Piacentini and Mailer (2004), was that publically consumed brands are used more conspicuously because they can be seen and identified in public, whereas privately used products are inconspicuously consumed because they are consumed in the privacy of the consumer's home. Hwan Lee (1990) agreed with the above in that conspicuousness influences the communication of the self-identity because consumers are more likely to use products that are socially visible to communicate their identity. The link between identity and conspicuous consumption lies in that conspicuousness of brand-use lends itself readily to the self-concept (O'Cass & Frost, 2002). Conspicuous consumption is undertaken or pursued in order to enhance one's position in society, which can be achieved through signalling wealth, public demonstration and communicating affluence to others (O'Cass & Frost, 2002).

According to various authors in Shukla (2008), researchers have explored how consumers use conspicuous brands in their life and how they display their personality and status through brand image, however the role of brands in adolescent identity

formation and the subsequent manifestation of conspicuous consumption remains to be understood. Conspicuous consumption links to emerging markets in that in less affluent societies / developing economies, conspicuous consumption serves as a major avenue for establishing one's social identity (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004).

### **c) Status consumption**

Status is a form of power that consists of respect, consideration and envy of others (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004; Eastman et al., 1997). It is said to be an important ingredient of the self (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981 in Van Kempen, 2004) and is believed to be earned, not given (Wiseman, 2009). It is thought that the rise and spread of capitalism created the potential for social mobility and thus gave rise to status (Wiseman, 2009). Status is the relative rankings of members of each social class in terms of status factors such as wealth, power and prestige (Schifman & Kanuk 2006, in Fitzmaurice & Comegys, 2006). Status consumption is the process of gaining status or social prestige from the acquisition and consumption of goods that the individual and significant others perceive to be high in status (O'Cass & Frost, 2002).

How does status consumption manifest? Status symbols are brands that indicate status (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Their goal is two-fold: first it is to gain social status, and second, it is to obtain satisfaction with the constitution of the self for others (Friedman, 1990). These status symbols are therefore purchased and consumed in order to increase a person's social status through conspicuous consumption (Eastman et al., 1997; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004; O'Cass & Frost, 2002). The status consumption

tendencies of individuals are associated with the extent to which they are influenced by their reference groups (Friedman, 1990).

Research suggests that people who live in poverty suffer from a lack of ‘belonging’, which can lead to low self-esteem and feelings of inferiority, hence failure to consume a symbolic brand can lead to exclusion (Van Kempen, 2004). Stearns (2001) in Van Kempen (2004) provided an example to substantiate this claim by arguing that the purchase of second-hand western clothing offers African consumers a sense of belonging to a larger global world. Van Kempen (2004) further stated that designer labels carry symbolic meaning for low-income consumers that are elements of their social identity, however, it remains unknown if low-income consumers gain social identity through differentiating themselves from other low-income consumers by using brands as status symbols or by integrating with the non-poor by signalling a modern middle-class lifestyle. From the above, it is clear that much like materialism and conspicuous consumption, its consequences are contentious. The need for status is said to be so powerful that it can override the most basic needs such as hunger (Van Kempen, 2003). This naturally impacts emerging markets because the likes of status / prestige are highly relevant in societies of income disparities (Featherstone, 1991 in Zhou and Wong, 2008).

## 2.4 Aligning the constructs

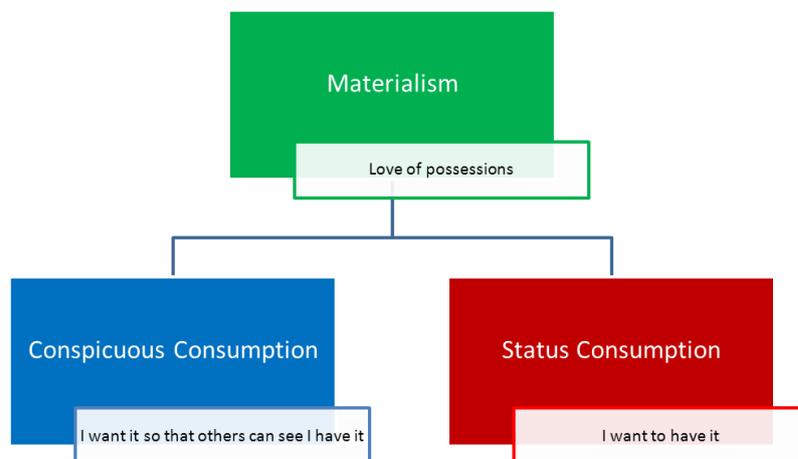
The constructs of materialism, conspicuous consumption and status consumption may appear similar, however all three constructs are different - although they may be connected to each other. When compared to status consumption, a materialist person views ownership of the product as playing a central role in their life where a status consumer is concerned with the status a product has (Eastman et al., 1997). It is necessary to understand the connection between conspicuous consumption and materialism as this assists in the evaluation of luxury consumption (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998).

Conspicuous consumption and status consumption are also different constructs. While conspicuous consumption focuses on the visual display or overt usage of products in the presence of others, status consumption is more a matter of consumers' desires to gain prestige from the acquisition of status-laden brands (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004), and is the result of consumers being driven by desire for status in their lives (O'Cass & Frost, 2002). In summary, the difference between the two lies in how overtly the brands are displayed (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Status consumption is the desire for brands in order to own them ('I want to have it') which has an internal focus, versus conspicuous consumption which is externally focused and is the desire for brands so that others may see them ('I want it so that others can see I have it'). O'Cass & McEwen (2004) proposed that status consumption and conspicuous consumption are not the same because status consumption is affected by self-monitoring and interpersonal influences, while conspicuous consumption is only affected by

interpersonal influences. When there is no need to have possession of brands that are overtly displayed this is status consumption, whereas the need to have brand possessions overtly displayed is conspicuous consumption (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004).

For the purposes of this research, materialism will be used as the overarching consumption behaviour, meaning that objects / brands are used to define identity. Coming out of the category are two types of behaviours: status consumption and conspicuous consumption. A figure depicting the above explanation is shown in Figure 1 below.

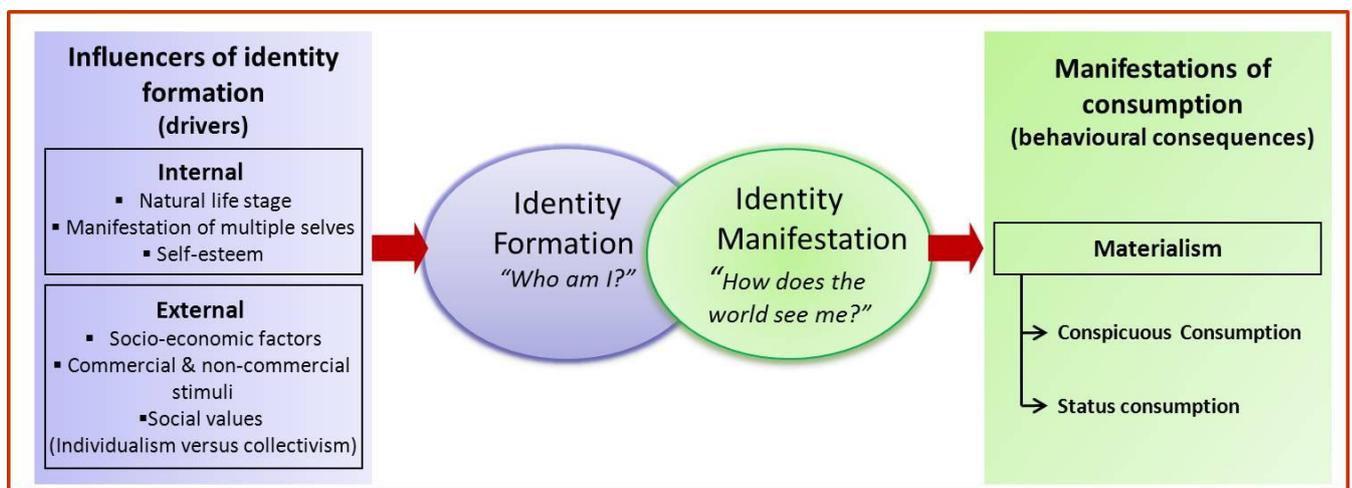
**Figure 1: The make-up of materialism**



## 2.5 A model of the role of brands in the formation and manifestation of identity in adolescent consumers

In consolidating the literature review and its various constructs, the model below has been developed to depict the role that brands play in the formation and manifestation of adolescent identity. That is, the various influencers of identity formation as well as the consequential behaviours that may manifest from adolescent identity are graphically represented. Each construct depicted in the model has been discussed in the sections above.

**Figure 2: The influencers and consequences of identity formation and manifestation**



## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The model presented in Chapter Two suggests that there are various influencers (both internal and external) at play in adolescent identity formation, including natural life stage phase, manifestations of multiple selves, self-esteem, socio-economic factors, commercial and non-commercial stimuli and social values. Likewise, identity manifestation is made up of consumption consequences / behaviours that are materialistic in nature and can be categorised into conspicuous consumption and status consumption. The empirical testing of the model proposed in Chapter Two in its entirety falls out of the scope of this research due to time and capacity constraints. Following the literature review above, it is evident that brands hold symbolic meaning that influences the formation of identity in consumers (Van Kempen, 2004) and it is suggested that our possessions are major contributors to, and reflections of, our identities (Belk, 1984). This research will focus on the socio-economic factor of household income as well as the role of reference groups and social values. Household income has been selected due to the lack of research in income inequality in emerging markets (Hamilton & Catterall, 2005).

With approximately 11% of the South African population being made up of 15-19 year old adolescents (Statistics South Africa, 2010) who are not only starting to identify with aspirational brands but who are also undoubtedly influencing household expenditure, this driver needs to be understood in terms of its relationship to the various consumption consequences proposed in the model in Chapter Two.

Reference groups are used for the purposes of appraisal or as a source of personal norms, values and attitudes (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998; Zhou & Wong, 2008). Research suggests that there are differences between reference groups based on income level (Reinstaller & Sanditov, 2005) and understanding these differences within adolescent consumers is important. The need for individualism versus collectivism is closely linked to reference groups, especially in the context of income groups. Consumers are driven by two opposing social needs: conformity (collectivism) and uniqueness (individualism) (Shukla, 2008; Wong, 1997; Van Kempen, 2004). These concepts are not fully researched within adolescent consumers. The relationship between a need for collectivism versus individualism, the role of reference groups, and household income has not been reported in branding literature.

The empirical objectives of this research are therefore to explore literature to understand the role of brands (in the context of consumption) in the formation and manifestation of adolescence identity, and to empirically deepen our understanding of how adolescents use brands to form and manifest their identities in an emerging market context. The research questions proposed are as follows:

*Research Question 1:*

Do the role of brands in the formation and manifestation of identity differ between high- and low-income adolescents?

*Research Question 2:*

Which reference groups influence adolescent consumers to select certain brands?

*Research Question 3:*

Which social values (individualism / collectivism) influence adolescent consumers to select certain brands?

*Research Question 4:*

How do adolescent consumers use brands in the manifestation of their identity?

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Research design**

For the purposes of this study, the role of brands in the formation and manifestation of the identity of adolescent consumers was explored. Given that these dynamics are under-researched within the realm of adolescent identity formation, qualitative / exploratory research was selected to explore this relationship further. As defined by Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2008), exploratory research is useful when little is known about a problem and insight is required. Esterberg (2002) explained that in qualitative research, researchers immerse themselves in the social world of their research subjects and only when they have been in a setting long enough, do they begin to develop theories. The use of qualitative research in this instance was appropriate in the examining of relationships, exploring new conceptual frameworks and describing new phenomena, because it allowed things to be interpreted in their natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000 in Barki & Parente, 2006).

The method for the research was focus group discussions. Focus groups are generally believed to be useful data collection methods for exploring new research (Morgan, 1997 in Hogg & Banister, 2001), and various authors in Hogg and Banister (2001) supported the use of a small number of participants for research that is in its preliminary stages. Furthermore, a semi-structured format provides the scope to cover the necessary areas whilst remaining flexible (Morgan, 1997 in Hogg & Banister, 2001).

The focus groups which consisted of four to five participants included two main exercises: i) a Post-it note exercise; and ii) a collage construction exercise. Participants were provided with the opportunity to identify their favourite brands as well as their desired brands using Post-it notes and magazines to create their own collage depicting the role of brands in their lives.

According to various authors in Havlena and Holak (1996), collage construction is used in consumer research as a projective technique. Collage construction in this instance provided a combination of visual and verbal information about the role and meaning of brands in adolescent consumers. While a focus group provides the opportunity for participants to talk, share and reflect, group influences may impact participation to some degree. For this reason, the interviewer used the time in which participants worked on their collages to engage in one-on-one discussions as a follow-up opportunity to explore the topic further. This one-on-one informal interview is a relationship between two people and is thought to be a good research technique when seeking to understand how individuals think and feel about an issue (Esterberg, 2002). It was kept unstructured in nature (also known as in-depth interviews) as the goal was to explore the topic as openly as possible so as to allow the respondents to express themselves freely (Esterberg, 2002). According to Yin (2009), the use of multiple sources of evidence (such as focus groups and one-on-one discussions) provides the opportunity to investigate a broader range of behavioural issues and can provide the platform for converging lines of inquiry and thus result in more accurate conclusions.

## 4.2 Population and unit of analysis

In understanding how adolescents use brands to form and manifest their identity, the population was defined as South African female adolescents between the ages of 15 and 18. The unit of analysis was adolescent female consumers.

## 4.3 Size and nature of the sample

Sampling was theoretically driven because of the indication that there is relevance in studying younger consumers (Hogg & Banister, 2001). The sample consisted of four sets of focus groups, each consisting of four or five female adolescent participants. The selection criterion for participation in the study was age, household income and gender. For the first selection criteria, adolescents between the ages of 15 and 17 (grade 11 or 12) were recruited to participate in the research. Adolescents in this age group are said to be on the cusp of adulthood (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004) and the identification of aspirant brands are relevant at this age. Informed consent was established for the participants between the ages of 16 and 18. Where participants were 15 years of age, parental permission was obtained prior to the study.

The second selection criteria used was that of household income and participants were selected from both high- and low-income areas. Private school pupils were used for high-income groups and government school pupils who live in townships were recruited for the low-income groups. For the third criteria, females were selected. It is believed that males and females differ in the way they form their self-concepts

(Piacentini & Mailer, 2004) but using both sexes would be too complicated, so only females were researched. Furthermore, the decision to focus on females was to ensure a level of homogeneity among participants. Homogeneity of groups was emphasised because research has shown that individuals tend to disclose more about themselves to people who resemble them (Krueger, 1994 in Hogg & Banister, 2001).

A combination of snowballing and convenience sampling was used so as to allow the researcher to use the most economic sample. The researcher was aware that the disadvantage of this sampling method is that variability and bias estimates cannot be measured or controlled and therefore projecting of data beyond the sample was not possible (Blumberg et al., 2008).

Yin (2009) opined that exemplary research is achieved if: i) the research is unusual and of general public interest; *ii*) the underlying issues are nationally important; or *iii*) the research meets both preceding conditions. Given that this topic is relatively unexplored within the adolescent consumer market, focuses on consumers in South Africa where income inequality exists and consumer spending is increasing, and investigates behaviours such as adolescent materialism, it is believed that this research meets all the above conditions.

#### 4.4. Analysis

The data was grouped into categories, sub-categories and themes which emerged from the literature review.

The focus groups and individual one-on-one sessions were recorded with the consent of the participants, however they were not put forward so as to maintain the anonymity of the participants. A research assistant was further used in each focus group. The assistant is a registered child and adolescent therapist. Her role was one of observer and note-taker. In order to enhance the validity of the results, the findings were given to the research assistant to validate.

All recordings and notes were analysed using content analysis. Content analysis, which is an objective and qualitative method for assigning types of verbal and other data to categories (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000), uses the process of coding to analyse data. As described by Kerlinger and Lee (2000), coding is the term used to describe the translation of question responses and respondent information to specific categories for the purpose of analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1997) explained that coding in grounded theory is the process of breaking down, conceptualising and grouping data together in new ways in order to build theory through biases and assumptions. During open coding analysis, comparisons are normally made between focus groups or individual interviews in order to identify categories / themes.

As explained by McBurney (2001) and Esterberg (2002), there are two basic approaches to content analysis, namely: i) manifest content analysis in which the frequency of objective measures are counted; and ii) latent content analysis which is more interpretive in nature and allows the researcher to interpret the presence of a particular theme. Each approach has its limitations and both have been criticised from a reliability perspective. Manifest content analysis is difficult where words are used differently and coders can make errors, while latent content analysis can be subjective (McBurney, 2001). The decision is therefore to use both approaches in conjunction to ensure that the results turn out the same.

McBurney (2001) opined that should the results be the same using both methods, this suggests strong evidence for the validity of the results. This means that words and images used in a collage together with the respondent's explanation will be coded to identify categories / themes. These categories / themes will be used to explain the relationships that are being researched – in this case the influencers of identity formation and the consequential manifestations as stated in the framework in Chapter Two.

#### **4.5 Research procedure**

An initial pilot study was conducted with one participant with the aim of obtaining a tentative understanding of brands within the adolescent group and to assess whether the structure of the focus group would provide sufficient data for understanding the role of brands in the formation and manifestation of adolescent identity. The pilot

study participant was taken through the focus group using the two exercises in order to test the duration, flow and appropriateness of techniques and questions for the focus group. The information and feedback obtained was used to adjust the group discussion guide and as a result a warm-up exercise was included to ensure common understanding of brands and brand categories at the onset of the focus groups.

The focus groups commenced with an explanation of the intention of the research project and what the focus group would entail. To set the tone for the focus group and break the ice, a warm-up exercise was used whereby participants answered three questions in order to introduce themselves to the group. The researcher introduced herself first to lead by example, followed by the research assistant and then the participants. The researcher then checked the participants' understanding of brands through an exercise where participants were asked "What do you understand about the term brands / labels?" and "What are some examples of brands?". Comments were recorded on a flipchart and the examples of brands were grouped into brand categories so that participants understood that within different categories such as mobile phone, food etc., there are many different brands. Participants were also asked to think as broadly as possible with regards to brands and a discussion followed on possessions that participants were not sure were actually brands, for example search engines.

For the first exercise, participants were given a pack of Post-it notes and coloured Koki pens and were asked a series of questions. They were required to answer using as

many brands as possible and writing one brand per Post-it note. The questions included:

- i) Write down your favourite sports team, TV show, band / singer, books, hobbies and products.
- ii) What brands currently form a part of your life? (They can be used every day or only on special occasions.)
- iii) We have spoken about brands that are part of your life – what about those that are not currently a part of your life but you would like them to be?

In each instance, participants were asked to consider carefully the reason for selecting each brand and asked to share the following with the group:

- i) Why is the brand important to you?
- ii) Why do you use it over another brand in the same category?
- iii) What do you think the brand says about you (to yourself)?
- iv) What do you think other people think of you when you use the brand?
- v) Do you use the brand for yourself or for others? If you could only consume the brand in the privacy of your own home, would you still want the brand?

For the second exercise – collage construction, the high-income (private school) participants were asked to bring a few of their favourite magazines. The researcher

also made a variety of 25 magazines available to the participants. The low-income participants were not asked to bring their own magazines but had access to the researchers' magazines. Participants were asked to pick any two magazines that most appealed to them. They were then asked to page through the magazines and extract any pictures, words or symbols relating to brands that they currently own or aspire to own. Each participant was provided with a flip chart paper and asked to construct the collage using the clippings extracted from the magazines and their Post-it notes. They could use Koki pens to draw or write anything they felt around the brands. Each participant then took a turn to present the personal brand collage back to the group. The group could in turn ask questions as well as share where they had common interests in brands. Participants were asked to differentiate which brands they currently owned and which they aspired to own. The discussion questions included the following:

- i) Why did you buy this brand / why do you aspire to have it?
- ii) What other things influenced you to choose this brand?
- iii) What about the brand is important to you? What do you think the brand says about you?
- iv) How do you use it to say something about yourself or present yourself to the world? Would you still want a brand if you could only consume it in private?
- v) How is the brand linked to who you are?
- vi) What roles do your friend / family / media play in terms of what brands you consume?

## 4.6 Description of areas

### Alexandra (Alex) township

Alexandra is a township in Johannesburg, South Africa, which has been in existence for ninety years. The township has many unique characteristics stemming from its history and its location near to places of work and upmarket areas such as Sandton and Rosebank (Davie, 2008). 'Alex', as it is commonly called, has a population estimated at approximately 350 000 people who are squeezed into an area of about 800 hectares. In addition to its original well-built houses, Alex also has a huge number of informal dwellings or shacks (Davie, 2008).

### Pretoria and Rosebank

Rosebank is a suburb in the North-Western part of Johannesburg. It has several high-end shopping malls and is a popular tourist destination. It is known as Johannesburg's Elysium for compulsive shoppers and art enthusiasts (Go2Africa, 2011). Pretoria is the capital city of South Africa; the eastern suburbs of Pretoria are known to have relatively high socioeconomic residents and consumers have higher discretionary incomes (Marx & Erasmus, 2006).

## **CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS**

In the section below, the data that emerged from the focus groups will be reported under the following categories, sub-categories and themes for both the high- and low-income consumers: i) research design, ii) general findings including understanding of brands, brands consumed - current versus aspirational, brands consumed for the self versus for others, reference groups and influencers, and iii) additional findings.

### **5.1 Research design**

Overall the approach of using focus groups worked well, especially where the participants knew each other. The use of the smaller focus groups (four participants) worked better than the slightly larger focus groups (five participants). The extra participant in each high-income group made it more energy consuming for the group and made it easier for the group to get side tracked. This resulted in the researcher spending more time trying to bring participants back to the topic at hand. This may have also been attributed to the fact that all participants in the five person focus groups were friends and general discussion was much easier.

The warm-up exercises were important in setting direction and ensuring that everyone's thinking and understanding was orientated in the same direction with regards to brands. The Post-it note exercise worked well and this is where the majority of the information was established. Participants were generally more excited around the Post-it note exercise – the picking out of the colour Koki pen, writing down their

thoughts and laying out the sticky notes around them seemed to stimulate interest, and they enjoyed writing in big letters and drawing pictures on their notes. The collage construction exercise brought everything together and supported participants in presenting their personal brand back to the group. The exercise was however the most time consuming one and the majority of the participants battled to complete it in time. For the collage construction exercise, both high-income groups were asked to bring their own magazines. They also had access to the researcher's magazines. The Pretoria group used the You, People, Cosmopolitan and Sixteen magazines and their collages consisted of pictures and words. The Rosebank group used their own expensive magazines such as Vanity Fair, Vogue, Exit, and Lula. Because these were imported magazines, the participants were under pressure to return the magazines without cutting out of them. Their collages consisted mainly of words and phrases. The low-income groups used the magazines provided by the researcher and their collages resembled those of the Pretoria group. (Refer to Appendix II, III, IV and V for photos of the collages.)

## **5.2 Description of focus groups**

### **Alex focus groups**

The two low-income focus groups were conducted with four participants each. The focus groups were conducted at a conference venue in the township. The first focus group lasted three hours and the second lasted two and a half hours. The venue was well-lit and comfortable but slightly cold at times. Both focus groups were conducted on June the 16<sup>th</sup> which is Youth Day in South Africa and a public holiday. As a result the

township was busy and the sounds of music, laughter and young boys playing soccer in the street could be heard. This resulted in a more relaxed atmosphere. In each group, every participant knew at least one other person, either from the neighbourhood or from school. The first focus group was much more participative and generally talkative, while the second group was quieter and less relaxed – at times this group seemed to say what they thought the researcher wanted to hear. Group Two also struggled to put into words why they choose certain brands and to explain how the brands made them feel. Two participants in the second group had been waiting since the morning session and one confessed to feeling like she was coming down with a cold. Towards the afternoon the venue became cooler. These factors may have contributed to the notably less comfortable body language in Group Two.

The eight participants from Alex were between 16 and 18 years old. Their nature and body language was engaging and semi-relaxed although they approached the focus group in a formal manner. All except one participant lived in Alex, with the remaining participant living in a suburb just outside the township. It was evident that this participant was from a higher income household because she owned high-end possessions such as an iMac Laptop and Big Boy Scooter. Of the eight participants only one went to school in Alex, while the others attended government schools in the surrounding areas such as Edenvale, Sandringham and Dowerglen. All participants were Black. Demographic information is presented in the table below. Additional information including a short description on each participant is presented in Appendix I.

**Table 1: Demographic information for the low-income groups**

Name	Age	Race
<b>Alex low-income: Group One</b>		
* Olivia	16	Black
* Luisa	18	Black
* Nomsa	17	Black
* Loraine	16	Black
<b>Alex low-income: Group Two</b>		
* Mavis	16	Black
* Kagiso	16	Black
* Griselda	16	Black
* Anna	18	Black

*\* Names have been changed to protect anonymity.*

### **Pretoria and Rosebank focus groups**

Two high-income focus groups were conducted with five participants each. The first focus group was conducted in Pretoria East at one of the participant’s homes in an upmarket golf-estate. The second took place in Rosebank (Johannesburg) at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). The first focus group lasted three hours and the second group two and a half hours. This first focus group took longer because there were numerous interruptions, however despite these, the participants were in good spirits and discussions flowed well.

Both groups were different to those of the Alex groups in that all the girls knew each other and were friends. In the Pretoria group the five girls were from two different private schools but were all in the same grade (eleven). The Rosebank group all attended a well-known all-girls private school and were also in the same grade

(eleven). Each group had one Indian female and the remaining were White females. Both groups were extremely comfortable, very participative and willing to share. The Pretoria group seemed to be more informal (perhaps because they were at a friend's house), whereas the Rosebank group were more formal in nature. The Pretoria group were going to a concert the evening of the focus group so there was excitement in the atmosphere which made it hard to maintain their attention at times. The Rosebank focus group was held the day after the Pretoria group. This group of participants had attended the same concert the evening before and were a little tired.

The Pretoria group struggled at times to express why they choose certain brands and to explain how the brands made them feel. The Rosebank group were extremely mature and notably different in their cultured and poised approach to the focus group exercises and discussions. Although both groups attended a private school and would be classified as coming from high-income households, a distinction in social class / standing was evident in the Rosebank group. The findings were so different that they will be presented separately, unlike those of the low-income group.

The ten participants from the high-income groups were between 15 and 17 years old. The Pretoria group had two 15 year old participants, making this group the youngest overall. Demographic information is presented in the table below and additional information, including a short description on each participant, is presented in Appendix I.

**Table 2: Demographic information for the high-income groups**

Name	Age	Race
<b>High-income: Pretoria Group</b>		
* Sara	15	Indian
* Melinda	15	White
* Mary	16	White
* Casey	16	White
* Claire	16	White
<b>High-income: Rosebank Group</b>		
* Christina	16	White
* Alice	16	White
* Zuraida	16	Indian
* Pippa	16	White
* Nelly	17	White

*\* Names have been changed to protect anonymity.*

### 5.3 Low-income group findings

#### a) Understanding of brands

Both the low-income groups had a good general awareness of brands or “labels” as they referred to them. When asked about their understanding of brands, the first group jumped to status clothing brands such as Louis Vuitton, Lacoste and Nike. When the researcher explained that these were brands that fell into the category of clothing, they were easily able to identify other categories of brands such as food, toiletries and mobile phones. There was a notable difference in the exposure to brands between the one participant who attended school in Alex (Mavis) versus the other participants who attended school outside of Alex. Although Mavis was affluent with status brands such as Louis Vuitton, Volvo and Sony, her general knowledge of status brands seemed to be slightly narrower.

When asked what they use their mobile phones for, they quickly answered “social networking” (which they agreed was also a brand category) and they were able to identify brands such as Facebook, MXit, Toilet (a blog application used to gossip), YouTube and Twitter under this category. A summary table of product categories and brand names mentioned by the low-income groups is presented in Appendix VI.

When asked about their personal learning from participating in the focus group, the participants mentioned that they learned about themselves.

*Lorraine: I thought I was the kind of person who didn't really care what other people thought but this has made me think about what brands mean to me...it was interesting.*

#### **b) Brands consumed: current versus aspirational**

Current brand categories that are consumed by participants and deemed important include mobile phones, social networking, food and toiletries. The role that mobile phones play in this income group spans more than just a means of communication and social networking. With many of the participants not having access to home computers, they use their phones to a large extent to do school research.

*Mavis: My Samsung is my favourite, it helps me when I have research...I (used) Google for example when they told us a school that we had to research about people being high-jacked... then I could research.*

Their awareness of social media and search engines such as Google was also mentioned. With regards to food, quality was deemed important, while toiletries such

as face wash were important in terms of how they made the participants feel during consumption.

*Griselda: I wouldn't want to buy cheap labels of food...they differ from others.*

*Mavis: I like Sunlight face wash because it is nice and cheap, (I feel) great, amazing!*

*Loraine: (My) favourite product is Seventeen Magazine – I like the fashion...the accessories and the issues that they speak about in the magazine... (I buy it) every month.*

When asked about the possessions they most aspired to own and what they mean to the individual, the participants agreed that they play an important role in their identity.

*Nomsa: When I go window shopping I look at furniture – it inspires me and I think that one day I will buy it.*

Mobile technology and cars were at the forefront of the most aspired possessions. Clothes such as Guess jeans and designer dresses were also mentioned, as was overseas travel to places such as Paris, the USA and Egypt. Attending tertiary educational institutions was raised once.

While all the participants had mobile phones, they unanimously aspired to own a BlackBerry Torch / Bold. One of the reasons they aspired to own this product is because it would give them access to another form of social networking - BlackBerry Messenger (BBM). It was unanimously described as an item that if owned, should be shown off to the world.

*Luisa: My Samsung... I thought it was cool at that time... it was nice cos it was a slide phone and at that time it was the 'in thing'...now it's BlackBerry.*

*Researcher: Why do you think BlackBerry is so important right now?*

*Olivia: For the youth, they like BBM... people will think this girl is so rich, she is spoilt, she is a coconut...if I have it I will feel popular.*

*Lorraine: BlackBerry keeps you in touch with the world ...I want BlackBerry applications and I would want it even if others couldn't see it.*

*Mavis: A BlackBerry says that I am unique.*

*Griselda: It's all about the money and some will say you got swag (you cool, you know what is in).*

Cars also emerged as aspirational items and participants explained that a vehicle such as a BMW not only creates the perception that you have money and a good choice in cars, but it also earns you the respect of the community. When asked what the car you drive means to yourself and to others, participants answered that it is a reflection of your personality and that the better and bigger the car, the more people respect you. It is seen as a symbol of success and something you want people to see you in.

*Luisa: A BMW says that you are independent; you were able to do something good with your life.*

The importance of status brands was evident in the low-income group.

*Anna: Anything, clothes, shoes I just love this brand (D&G)...I just adore it...(if I could wear it) I would feel happy.*

The table below depicts a list of brands that participants owned and aspired to own.

**Table 3: Current versus aspirational brands in the Alex low-income groups**

CURRENT	ASPIRATIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Kaleidoscope deodorant (smells nice and gives you confidence)</li> <li>▪ Ponds facial wash (feels good, makes you glow and feel confident)</li> <li>▪ Always Ultra Pads (quality and comfort)</li> <li>▪ Panado (because it works for me)</li> <li>▪ McCaine frozen vegetables (convenient and easy but I only eat it because mom buys it )</li> <li>▪ Weet-Bix ( keeps me full, tastes good)</li> <li>▪ Mr Price accessories (individual and quirky)</li> <li>▪ Samsung phone (I need to be in touch)</li> <li>▪ Google (convenient)</li> <li>▪ Seventeen Magazine</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ BMW (symbolises money, success and respect)</li> <li>▪ BlackBerry (BBM is cool)</li> <li>▪ Mercedes Benz (independent and unique)</li> <li>▪ Holiday destinations: Paris / the USA (to learn about different cultures)</li> <li>▪ Dolce and Gabbana (D&amp;G) (I love it)</li> <li>▪ Bakos Brothers furniture (one day I will have it)</li> <li>▪ iPad (the newest and coolest thing)</li> <li>▪ Honda motorbike (well-known brand that is trusted in my family)</li> <li>▪ Louis Vuitton (bags / belts)</li> <li>▪ Sony Plasma (it’s the best)</li> <li>▪ Carvela</li> <li>▪ Russell Hobbs (good quality)</li> <li>▪ American Swiss</li> <li>▪ Clinique</li> <li>▪ Guess – clothes and sunglasses</li> <li>▪ Gym membership at Virgin Active (because I like running)</li> <li>▪ Expensive Perfume</li> <li>▪ Laptop</li> </ul>

**c) Brands consumed for the self versus for others**

When asked about what brands they use for themselves and what brands they use for others, gadgets such as mobile phones and social media were said to be consumed mainly for others. On the contrary, clothes (which play a role in making participants feel good) were said to be consumed for both, but mainly for oneself. Generally it was agreed that appearance is important in clothing. Having people think you look “nice” is as important as you feeling good about yourself.

*Nomsa: Jeans and dresses - nice clothes make you feel good and gives you confidence.*

The participants were asked to make a choice between having their most desired mobile phone but never being able to show it to the world, or having a more ordinary

phone and being able to show it to the world. They chose to have a phone that they could show off to the world.

*Nomsa: If I couldn't leave the house with my (desired) phone then I may as well get another one that's cheaper because what is the point if it has the same features I need.*

It was mentioned that with clothing (because the label is not always visible), females do not mind what the label is as long as it looks good, however, with other possessions such as mobile phones, the label is more visible to others so it becomes more important.

*Lorraine: for me there are some things that I would buy just to please other people. If there is Civvies Day at school I would want to look so beautiful because these people see me in uniform all the time... but the most important opinion for me are those of my true friends and family... those two are the only ones that matter to me.*

Status brands were often linked to being consumed for others.

*Lorraine: I like Ray Bands... they a nice look...I would wear them even if there was no sun...you can carry yourself with your head held up high if you have Ray Bands.*

Toiletries, particularly skin and hair brands, were raised as important products in both groups. Hair products such as Dark and Lovely are said to be consumed for the self. There is a competitive nature to the consumption of these brands because while participants did mention that they appreciate recognition from others that their skin / hair looks good, there is a conflicting desire to keep “your trade secret”. It causes conflict because on the one hand the individual wants people to recognise that they look good because of a particular brand, but they do not want to divulge the brand for fear that others will use it too.

*Olivia: Ponds gives me that glow ...it gives you confidence and people say ‘wow girl, what are you using? – you have to tell me (about) that product’, but nahh it’s a secret, I don’t always tell them.*

*Olivia: My favourite product is Ponds...my face is so oily so when I use Ponds it dry’s it up...Ponds works for me.*

*Researcher: Do you like it when people ask you what products you use?*

*Olivia: Yes and no, because it gives me the spotlight, people are looking at me ...and I feel so there. They mustn’t use the products that I am using it. If Ponds satisfies me I will use it even if no one asks me (about it).*

Hair is very important to Black females and this was one aspect where the participants unanimously cared about what others thought of their hair as much as they did themselves.

*Nomsa: For us Black people our hair is not nice ... it’s not straight so you don’t want to look gross when other people see you...you want to look nice.*

Similarly to face and hair brands, deodorant is consumed for both the self and others. It was explained that the smell of the deodorant is important and when asked what you are wearing you must tell them by name, even though by telling them you risk giving your trade secret away.

*Loraine: Kaleidoscope - the perfume is my favourite...I like the smell, it smells really divine ... when you smell good it gives you up-liftment and confidence ... I make sure when I leave the house I have Kaleidoscope on me ....I use it for myself.*

Group One was comfortable enough to speak about personal product brands such as sanitary pads and how they make them feel confident and comfortable. Given the

importance placed on these type of products the participants felt that quality was an important consideration.

*Nomsa: Always Ultra Pads are important to me because if I feel comfortable with myself I feel comfortable with others and then I feel comfortable.*

*Nomsa: The quality stands out and I don't have to think about it all the time... quality is important in everything.*

*Olivia: A pad is a pad but then the weak ones I don't use.*

Food brands were mentioned as items consumed mainly for the self.

*Olivia: Weet-Bix...I have it every day with milk and Rama (margarine)... it keeps me full till break and it gives me a fresh start... you feel like home when you eat it...home as in the farms.*

Personal possessions were sometimes consumed for the self and sometimes consumed for others. Only at one point was the uneasiness of showing off brought up.

*Griselda: I like my Wasp hockey stick – it shows I play well.*

*Researcher: When you play hockey is it important that other people know that you have a Wasp hockey stick?*

*Griselda: No....cos some of them will think that I'm showing off.*

Certain brands such as accessories were used to communicate individual identity or aspects of the individual's personality and often to differentiate them from the group.

*Loraine: Mr Price Accessories... I like it because I like earrings... it gives me a sense of individuality and quirkiness to what I am wearing... I want to be different... I want to contribute something different to the world... people must see that this (Mr Price Accessories) is nice and different.*

The table below highlights a summary of brands consumed for the self, for others and for both the self and others.

**Table 4: Brands consumed for the self, for others and for both (Alex groups)**

FOR YOURSELF	BOTH (YOURSELF & OTHERS)	FOR OTHERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Wasp hockey stick (I don't want people to think that I show off)</li> <li>▪ Apple laptop (it's for me)</li> <li>▪ Food- Weet-Bix</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Deodorant- Kaleidoscope</li> <li>▪ Hair products- Dark and Lovely</li> <li>▪ Face products- Ponds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ BlackBerry (I want to show it off, it shows I have money, I'm unique and swag)</li> <li>▪ Sony Plasma</li> <li>▪ Carvela shoes</li> <li>▪ Mr Price Accessories</li> <li>▪ BMW</li> <li>▪ American Swiss jewellery</li> </ul>

#### **d) Reference groups and influencers**

The role of reference groups are important as can be seen by the quote below:

*Nomsa: Most of the things we have, they are influenced by us but, we live with people around us so another person's opinion on something you have is important.*

*Nomsa: my friends (influence my choice)...my best friend. My mom is different from me she thinks that things I like are not nice so I don't think her opinion matters.*

The key influencers of brands for both groups were predominately media (TV and magazines). Friends, older siblings and cousins were also regarded as influential. From a media perspective, magazines and advertisements were mentioned as highly influential and included magazines such as Drum, True Love, Seventeen, Cosmopolitan, Bona, Woman's Health and TV channels such as FTV. It was noted that parents are the least influential group due to their perceived "old-fashionedness" and lack of knowledge on "cool" brands.

*Mavis: My older sister...she likes fashion, Guess, Levi, Carvela...not my parents... they don't care about fashion; they wear 80's clothes, 70's clothes.*

*Griselda: My cousins... the way they dress... they dress nice... they like fashion and like looking beautiful. My parents are old fashioned.*

*Researcher: What do you think influences you to go into Mr Price to buy accessories and not some other shop?*

*Lorraine: I think it's because my sister... she just buys from there and most of the time she has nice stuff...when I see it on her I'm like oh my gosh I need to go and get it.*

*Olivia: Mainly shops and TV cos they advertise things and then I think I have to have it.*

*Kagiso: Honda is one of the brands I grew up with at home... my cousins will say it's cool.*

The only time that parents were mentioned as influencers was around non-status brands. This was especially true for toiletries and food.

*Mavis: I started using Sunlight when I was young and I am already used to it...my mother (used it).*

The role of icons such as Eva Longoria and Niki Manage, who the participants are exposed to via the media, also plays a big role in influencing them with brands.

*Lorraine: I love Gossip Girl (TV Series)...I love Blair and Serena. I also love Bollywood movies...you always know what's going to happen...damsel in distress gets saved and they live happily ever after. Eva Longoria...I love her in desperate housewives.*

### **e) Additional findings**

It was evident that brands are not always about status. When asked about how important they think brands are, the groups mentioned that they think it means a lot and says a lot about who you are.

*Mavis: People like labels....especially boys more than girls.*

*Olivia: Clothes define who I am... I'm this cool girl.*

The difference between the adolescent male counterparts was raised by both groups and it was suggested that males generally buy fewer possessions but the ones that are purchased are name brands. Females in contrast are thought to value quantity more, suggesting that their possessions do not have to be name brands as long as they look good. While this seems to be applicable to clothing and shoes, this will require further research to validate.

School Civvies Day (a day where school goers are allowed to wear any clothes and not their usual uniform) was highlighted as a “big deal”. It was mentioned that adolescents are judged by what they wear, and that wearing the same thing (particularly for girls) is taboo. The participants explained that preparation for Civvies Day can take hours.

*Lorraine: Some people view it as different kinds of opportunities... some want boyfriends, some just want to look good and some kids who are fortunate to get labels just want to show off. I want people to know that I can look good.*

*Nomsa: Civvies Day is important to every school child because most of the time we are at school and all look the same but on Civvies Day they get to see a different side of Nomsa.*

*Anna: The school becomes chaos on Civvies Day and people just want to show off...they would all want to wear their latest clothes that no one has seen. People remember outfits so you can't wear the same thing.*

It was mentioned that often there is risk in wearing too good a status brand as people jump to the conclusion that it must be “fong-kong” (a fake).

*Researcher: What do you think people would think if they could see you with a Dolce and Gabbana handbag?*

*Anna: Some will say funny stuff... they will say it's fong-kong because it's a very expensive label.*

*Researcher: Do you care if it's fong-kong?*

*Anna: Yes, I won't buy fong-kong, I'd rather buy something which is not a label.*

It further emerged that groups at school are very prevalent and it is important to play the part of the group you are in. If you are part of the “Barbie Popz” group for example (as mentioned by one of the participants), then you consume the brands in accordance with the stereotypes of the group.

As mentioned above, in both groups a car such as a BMW was said to be a very strong indicator that an individual is not only rich but also successful and worthy of respect. For this reason the participants felt that if you drove a nice car you would want everyone to know about it. The comparison was made in Group Two between the character of a young male who drives a Golf 4 versus a young male who drives a BMW and it was commented that the BMW driver is more serious, has a better character and is more successful.

## 5.4 High-income group findings

### a) Understanding of brands

The Pretoria group had a fair understanding of brands and at the start of the focus group spent some time debating the difference between icons and brands such as Nelson Mandela and Christina Aguilera. They reasoned that if you cannot buy something then it is not a brand, therefore if you cannot buy or use Nelson Mandela then he is not a brand. The discussion progressed towards the fact that often you cannot buy the actual person but you can consume their products, (for example you can purchase Christina Aguilera's music therefore she is a brand). Their understanding of brands and brand categories were conflicted at times. The Pretoria group mentioned that they enjoyed the exercise and said that they learned about themselves and that the exercises made them question what is most important to them.

*Claire: It made me realise that half the stuff that I think about and really want I don't really need it.*

The Rosebank group described themselves as friends because they do not put up facades and are not shy to express themselves. They had a deep understanding of brands and material possessions. They spoke to personal branding and understood concepts such as brand messaging, target marketing and advertising.

*Zuraida: I think that a brand is kind of how you carry yourself, you brand yourself... the brands you consume are how you create yourself, the way you use them creates an image of you.*

*Nelly: With brands, in today's society it's not so much about the product as it is a lifestyle...I want the lifestyle they portray.*

The understanding of brands in the Rosebank group was greater and their discussion was much stronger and more detailed, including scope around the role of trust in brands. This group alluded to the power of brands and their link to adolescent identity. They further alluded to the fact that brands play an important role because adolescents often feel alone and brands connect and attract them to like-minded individuals. Brand categories such as movies, music, books and TV shows play a large influencing role in this regard.

*Nelly: People can capture their whole identity in a shirt.*

*Christina: How many times have you been with someone, someone that you not that good friends with...the first thing they say to you is I really like your jersey... as soon as the conversation is sparked you think 'we could have good conversation'.*

The Rosebank group also mentioned that brands are so powerful and influential that they can cause you to wear something you may have not liked to begin with. The example given by one participant was that she was not a fan of floral patterns but when Guess started using florals she felt that if Guess made clothes with floral patterns then she should like it. The participants also alluded to the power of advertising and its role in influencing purchasing decisions.

*Alice: I think its propaganda...it sort of makes you buy into certain things.*

*Zuraida: For me it's how the brands make you feel, so if I look at a Burberry ad I think wow those people's lives must be so interesting and then I feel my life is so boring.*

(Refer to Appendix VII and VIII for a detailed list of brands mentioned in the two high-income groups.)

## **b) Brands consumed: current versus aspirational brands**

### **Pretoria group:**

The brands consumed by the Pretoria group which had meaning in their life included food, mobile phones and toiletries. When consumed, the food and toiletry brands were linked to a feeling of contentment with oneself.

*Casey: Maggie two minute noodles, it's divine and I eat it every day...my dad buys it in bulk and it's always Maggie chicken (flavour.)*

*Claire: McFlurry ...that's the thing that makes me happy... love Oreo's and ice-cream, it's my most favourite thing all together.*

*Claire: I cannot live without Colgate.*

The Pretoria group also mentioned a list of status technological gadgets such as BlackBerry and Sony Plasma TVs. These had an impact on their identity as can be seen from the quotes below.

*Casey: Sony is the best... Sony makes the biggest TV in the market right now.*

*Sara: (My BlackBerry) it means everything to me, when I got grounded the only thing I wanted, I said you can take my TV, my everything away but not my phone...I just can't stand not being able to talk to my friends...BBM.*

The prominent clothing brand mentioned by the Pretoria group was Mr Price. The researcher inquired further to understand what they liked about Mr Price.

*Claire: Their jeans and their variety like they have underwear and pyjamas and shoes and glasses and accessories...you can buy everything.*

Although every participant in the Pretoria group had a BlackBerry, they all wanted the newer version. They also mentioned status clothing brands.

*Casey: (Louis Vuitton) I think that it's just such a big name brand that's so expensive that people just want it to be like...ahh look I can afford it – I went to Sandton to buy it.*

There is also a perceived quality attached to status brands such as these. The participants felt that to be able to own one would communicate to others that they had achieved much and worked hard in order to buy it.

**Table 5: Current versus aspirational brands in Pretoria high-income group**

CURRENT	ASPIRATIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maggie two minute noodles</li> <li>▪ Lindt Chocolate</li> <li>▪ BlackBerry</li> <li>▪ Revlon</li> <li>▪ Clinique</li> <li>▪ Mr Price</li> <li>▪ Edgars</li> <li>▪ Guess</li> <li>▪ Jay-Jays</li> <li>▪ iPod</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Car –BMW (convertible)</li> <li>▪ Golf GTi</li> <li>▪ Mini Cooper</li> <li>▪ Holiday: France, Miami, Spain, Italy</li> <li>▪ Bobby Brown make-up (because it makes you look pretty)</li> <li>▪ Own Virgin Atlantic (because they do everything)</li> <li>▪ Own Sun International hotels</li> <li>▪ Jenni Button (clothes and shoes)</li> <li>▪ Louis Vuitton (handbags)</li> <li>▪ iPad (convenient and nice)</li> <li>▪ New BlackBerry</li> <li>▪ Prada (shoes and handbags)</li> </ul>

What was common in this group is that even though status brands are consumed conspicuously, they are mostly consumed for both the self and for others. When asked if there was any product that the participants would want purely to show others, one of the participants mentioned a pair of Jimmy Choos.

*Claire: Jimmy Choos...they just nice...if someone would complement my shoes it would be a nice feeling ...people always look at people shoes.*

*Claire: Your friends and people look at you up and down to see what you are wearing to see if it's nice or they don't like it and they will ask you where you get it if they really like it and they will want to go buy it.*

One participant mentioned that she aspired to study overseas:

*Researcher: What would going to Medical School in Miami say to others about you?*

*Melinda: Well, they would think that you are smart because you are a Doctor. There is a whole prestige thing about being a Doctor and that you actually help people and do something important with you life.*

Cars and holiday destinations were also said to be consumed for the self. When inquiring into the reason for technology gadgets such as the iPad, the participants mentioned that they wanted it for themselves:

*Sara: I go to X school (Private School) and all of us know that X school pupils will take their iPads and Louis Vuitton to school and show everybody...we not like that...well I'm not.*

### **Rosebank group:**

When conversing about brands that they currently consume which mean something to them, the Rosebank group spoke mostly to the category of clothing and brands such as Burberry, Country Road and Marc Jacobs (high-end brands). Other clothing brands such as Iron Fist, Quicksilver, Trenery, Twist and Woolworths were also mentioned. At this point in the focus group, the distinction was made between clothing and fashion and the following emerged.

*Zuraida: Clothing is stuff you wear but fashion is a way you live...fashion...the way they bring it across is a whole other world. Country Road is fashion but Woolworth is clothing.*

*Nelly: You don't portray an image when you wear Woolworths.*

The role that these brands play supports how they make the participants feel:

*Christina: I don't like spending a lot of money on clothes... my mom bought me a pair of Aldo high heels and they just make me feel so happy but if I got to the point where I was making my own money I would feel less guilty about buying things.*

Blogs, BlackBerry and iTunes were also mentioned. Every participant in the Rosebank group had a BlackBerry. While they accepted its usefulness (affordability in using the internet to blog), their attitude towards it was different.

*Christina: if you have a BlackBerry you a conformist cos everyone has it...it's practical and helps me save money and I can talk to people easily...in that way I love my phone, it's one of the most useful things I have.*

For this group, their BlackBerrys were used for communicating and blogging, however the participants did not use it to store and listen to music. In most instances they had separate devices for music and photos. They mentioned that they would not mind any mobile phone as long as they could access the internet with it.

*Nelly: I have a phone to phone people, an iPod to listen to music and a camera to take pictures.*

*Christina: I don't really have music on my BlackBerry but I always have my iPod...I only play my music on my BlackBerry when my iPod dies.*

They mentioned current brands that they already consumed but would want more of, such as imported magazines like Lula and Exit. They also discussed what these status

brands would say about themselves to others. It was evident that music plays a big role in their lives and as such an unlimited voucher for iTunes was raised as an aspirational item.

With regards to aspirational brands, the participants agreed that everyone aspires to own different brands for affirmation and acknowledgement. The brands that they mentioned as aspirational included status brands such as Burberry wellington boots, Jimmy Choos and Christian Louboutons.

*Christina: They so sacred cos you can't buy ten pairs of Jimmy Choos that being able to get to a point in my life to have one pair....it says sophistication...I've arrived when I can buy a pair for myself...item of success...would add value to my life in a materialistic way.*

The role of status brands was explored in the context of identity and the power that these brands have in making the consumer feel a certain way.

*Zuraida: They (Burberry advertisements) look sophisticated yet alternative and that it difficult to pull off...I feel that if I was wearing those clothes and I looked like that then my life would be exciting.*

*Nelly: It (brands) tries to validate your existence.*

Despite the role of status brands, there was recognition for practicality. It was mentioned that buying a coat from Woolworths and buying a coat from Burberry would be the same thing but the one from Woolworths would be practical because it is the cheaper option. The differentiator is that the Burberry advertisements when

compared to those from Woolworths portray the message that “your life would be better if you wear Burberry”.

When the researcher inquired further around levels of guilt that participants experience when consuming brands, the participants confessed that they would buy more status brands such as Louis Vuitton if they could afford it.

*Pippa: When you earn something you feel so much better about it (the brand).*

They spent some time conversing about how material and status possessions are not real and do not last. They mentioned that they value more the things that make them happy.

*Pippa: I don't find my social standing a hell of an important thing...I just got good friends and I don't see myself on a social ladder.*

*Zuraida: For me, I'm Indian, I have never grown up in a high-class society like those girls so for me that stuff has never been important...for me it's about the kinds of relationships you have with people.*

Two of the participants in the Rosebank group had travelled together on a school tour to France and they shared their disappointment in their fellow classmates who used their trip as an opportunity to spend money carelessly and “buy just for the sake of buying”. When the researcher inquired why the participants believed that some people think it necessary to buy, they alluded to the fact that your background (how you were raised) and your self-esteem play a role. They also had a good understanding

of social class and status and shared the reasons they believed many adolescents have a connection with brands.

*Nelly: They have low self-esteem; they need those kinds of things to justify their existence.*

*Christina: There are a lot of girls that their parents have a very high social standing but they think that that makes them so much better...it's the gossip girls effect...my dad always taught me to find people that make you happy ... that it's not always a competition about who has the fastest car, the biggest house.*

They believed that they were different to the majority of their classmates whom they described as superficial.

*Nelly: What you classify as important...in our grade how we define ourselves is different to how they (classmates) define themselves... they define themselves by how much money they have, what status your parents have, how close you are to being a gossip girl character.*

*Christina: I don't want to be a trust-fund baby.*

When asked why brands make them happy, they clarified that it is not about the brand but rather which clothes make them happy. The participants stressed that the important thing is that you like the outfit and it makes you happy. However, when asked if they do not care at all where their clothes came from, they mentioned that there is trust and loyalty in brands which results in repeat purchasing.

*Christina: I can guarantee you that I don't just have one Guess item in my cupboard because I know it's durable, it lasts long.*

There was a link to the quality of the brand which they deemed important. When asked where they would not buy from because of inferior quality, one participant

mentioned Mr Price, however her reasoning was not because she did not like the look of Mr Price clothes, but rather because she did not perceive the quality to be good. The other participants seemed to agree with this statement and mentioned that they had purchased Mr Price clothes in the past and may continue to purchase from Mr Price from time to time or on an emergency basis because the clothing is “funky”. When asked whether they would use R1000 to buy quantity or quality, the participants unanimously agreed that they would rather buy one really great item that they would appreciate forever. They did however make the point that the item need not necessarily be a status possession.

*Zuraida: I want things that last long...in my cupboard I will buy a few expensive things but then I will not buy stuff for a long time.*

**Table 6: Current versus aspirational brands in the Rosebank high-income group**

CURRENT	ASPIRATIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Burberry</li> <li>▪ Billabong</li> <li>▪ Quicksilver</li> <li>▪ Apple</li> <li>▪ Country Road</li> <li>▪ Twist</li> <li>▪ Woolworths</li> <li>▪ Ironfist</li> <li>▪ MAC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Burberry</li> <li>▪ Louis Vuitton</li> <li>▪ iTunes</li> <li>▪ Jeep</li> <li>▪ Mini</li> <li>▪ Polaroid Camera</li> <li>▪ Audi TT</li> </ul>

**c) Brands consumed for the self versus for others**

**Pretoria group:**

One of the brand categories that the participants mentioned they used for themselves was toiletries (particularly face products). It was explained that the products are an

individual choice and that once you find the right product for you, it gives you confidence. Interestingly enough, few of the Pretoria participants were willing to share what brand of face products they used.

The researcher inquired whether they were comfortable to tell others that they buy from Mr Price.

*Claire: I normally tell them from M.R.P dot ICE.*

*Researcher: Why do you change the name?*

*Claire: Because it makes it sound cool, everyone goes to Mr. Price.*

When asked if the participants purchase Mr Price for themselves or others they said for themselves. It was also mentioned that you only buy Mr Price for casual wear. The more expensive items are purchased from Woolworths or Guess.

*Claire: (Mr Price is) for myself because the prices aren't expensive so it's easy for me cos I don't spend a lot of money on shopping for clothes. So it's easier for me to get a lot of clothes out of Mr Price then go to an expensive shop and get something really nice that I can wear it like twice and then everyone will know that 'that's the thing she always wears'".*

Status possessions such as laptop were said to be consumed for the self because of their sentimental worth.

*Casey: if you have a computer, you have a computer, I don't find that you have to have a Mac... it keeps memories and pictures and keeps your music, your internet, games... it's what you like doing on your computer.*

The majority of their pocket money was spent on shopping, movies and CDs but they were willing to save up to buy a possession with a name brand, for example an iPad, mobile phone or Guess clothing. When asked which brands they consume or would consume for others, status clothing emerged as the key category (Guess and Louis Vuitton). Even the participant who argued that she did not care about what other people thought, confessed that she would love to own a pair of Jimmy Choos to show off.

*Melinda: I think Guess, you would want others to know because it's so expensive and it's a fashion statement.*

*Claire: Yes... it says 'I can afford it' because sometimes you get those rich, rich people that say you can't afford it but I can... and you want to tell them that 'I can also buy it.'*

Other brand categories consumed for others included cars and mobile phones.

*Cassey: If you don't have a BlackBerry then you like a nobody.*

*Sara: You want people to know that you have a Black Berry... that's what they say.*

*Claire: It's not like add me on Mxit anymore like it used to be, you don't even ask for their numbers, it's just add me on BBM.*

**Table 7: Brands consumed for the self, for others and for both (Pretoria group)**

FOR YOURSELF	BOTH (YOURSELF & OTHERS)	FOR OTHERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Food - Maggie, Lindt Chocolate, Rooibos</li> <li>▪ Make-up – MAC, Revlon, Bobby Brown</li> <li>▪ Skincare: Clarins, Clinique</li> <li>▪ Toiletries: Johnson and Johnson</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Stores: Mr Price, Edgars, Jay-Jays</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ BlackBerry</li> <li>▪ Louis Vuitton</li> <li>▪ Gucci</li> <li>▪ Jenni Button</li> <li>▪ Lamborghini</li> </ul>

**Rosebank group:**

When the researcher inquired which brands they consumed for others, the participants all agreed that clothing is worn for themselves and for others. Clothing is a powerful communicator because as they explained, clothes are used to convey messages about themselves to others. For example, wearing a Beatles or Star Wars T-shirt communicates to others what your personality and interests are.

*Zuraida: Maybe if I'm honest, probably my Jeans (Guess), so that I look decent for people to see and I don't get judged.*

*Christina: (Clothes) help you connect with people who are the same.*

*Alice: Clothes, not always but often reflects who you are... it shows your interests.*

When the question was put to the group, "Do people use brands for themselves or for others?", the participants thought that they were mainly used for themselves because if you do not like a brand you would not buy it, however they did agree that there are instances when you consume brands for others.

*Nelly: no one is completely oblivious to what people think.*

*Christina: We all have a little bit of that in us...while I don't buy things for others- I buy it because I like it, at the same time when you wear it you want people to think 'wow I wish I had that' or 'wow she looks amazing'.*

**Table 8: Brands consumed for the self, for others and for both (Rosebank group)**

FOR YOURSELF	BOTH (YOURSELF & OTHERS)	FOR OTHERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MAC make-up</li> <li>▪ Beatles Music</li> <li>▪ Bobby Brown</li> <li>▪ Lula Magazine</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Guess Jeans</li> <li>▪ Jimmy Choos</li> <li>▪ Christian Loubouton</li> <li>▪ Burberry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mustang</li> </ul>

#### **d) Influencers and reference groups**

##### **Pretoria group:**

The main influencers for the Pretoria group were magazines and TV. Friends, people and parents were also mentioned. Parents (moms and dads) were also mentioned as influencers. Moms were mentioned as influencers in the areas of make-up and facial products and dads in the areas of technology gadgets such as Plasma TVs and cameras. Parents were said to be influential because they have a lot in common with their children. Older siblings (mainly sisters) were also mentioned as influential.

##### **Rosebank group:**

The Rosebank group's main influencers were parents, media (magazines in particular), movies and music.

*Alice: For me it's music but also magazines like Lula because they present ideas versus famous personalities*

*Christina: I know that when I want to dress all glamorous I dress like Rachel's mom and when I want to look funky I dress like Kylie's mom. When I see pictures of my mom many years ago with her Bohemian clothes I like it.*

#### **e) Additional findings**

##### **How brands are used to communicate identity**

A class distinction was evident between the private schools.

### **Pretoria group:**

When the researcher inquired how the participants use brands to communicate to others, they explained that when they wear something nice, people tend to ask them about it and this provides them with the opportunity to tell them about the brand. It was agreed that everyone had done it at some point or another. They elaborated that what happens when you get something new is that you feel confident and people notice this and as a result ask you about it, giving you the opportunity to then communicate your brand. It is seen as “tacky” to blurt it out without being asked first. It was also mentioned that adolescents photograph their new possessions and post them on Facebook (as a photo or a profile picture) and that sparks conversation and a further opportunity to communicate the brand. Male and female adolescents were said to do this.

The researcher asked whether they would want people to know that they buy from Guess. The answers varied but some did confess that the answer was yes because there is a link to status and confidence. Participants did argue however that it depends on your personality.

*Mary: I think you want them to know like if you go buy something from Guess and it's like R1000 or whatever and I paid all that money for it then I would be like 'look at me I got Guess on'.*

*Melinda: I don't know, I think that if you spend so much money you would want people to notice how you look, but not just for the clothes you wear but how you act in them... like they notice the confidence not just the clothes.*

*Researcher: So do expensive things give you confidence?*

*Melinda: Yes, they make you feel better about yourself, and if you feel happy then you complete.*

### **Rosebank group:**

The Rosebank group validated the use of brands in the formation of adolescent identity explaining how brands provide the platform for experimentation.

*Christina: Brands are important to teenagers because it helps you with your identity...when you at a point where you don't know how to come across... all those things you trying to figure out, having certain brands and knowing how you will come across to others by wearing them...gives you room to explore and decide what kind of person you want to be.*

The concept of the adolescent male counterpart being more influenced by brand names was discussed in the Pretoria group and the participants agreed that males were possibly more status conscious. They provided an example of when they were on a school tour overseas and the females bought counterfeit name brands and were later ridiculed by the males for doing so. The participants believed that their male counterparts would prefer to buy fewer things and rather focus on those few things being status name brands.

*Claire: Boys will always buy brand stuff...they won't go to Mr Price like we do.*

## **CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION**

This section consists of a deep discussion around the research questions posed and attempts to link the findings to the literature that was used to inform the research questions. As previously indicated, the two low-income groups were from Alex township, while the high-income groups were from the areas of Rosebank and Pretoria. All but one of the low-income participants attended school outside of the township. Although Alex is a township, its neighbours are the high-income suburbs of Sandton and Rosebank. The Rosebank group attended a private school in the area and came from a high cultural standing. In comparison, the Pretoria group who also attended a private school and were considered to come from high-income households, came from a lower cultural standing.

Key insights were evident from the research findings, which highlighted both similarities and differences among the income groups. These insights are linked to the research questions and will be presented as follows: (i) the role of brands in the formation and manifestation of identity between high- and low-income adolescents, (ii) influencers in adolescent brand selection (internal and external – reference groups and social values); and (iii) the use of brands in the manifestation of adolescent identity (consumption consequences).

## 6.1 The role of brands in the formation and manifestation of identity between high- and low-income adolescents

### General understanding of brands between high- and low-income consumers

Despite their differences in household income, all the groups shared similarities. The most obvious was their general awareness of brands and the messages that the brands communicated to their community. While the brands may have differed in some instances between groups, all the groups showed signs of materialism - the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions (Belk, 1984; Eastman et al., 1997) - even if these were traits they did not want to portray. The materialistic behaviours included status consumption - a concern with the status a product has (Eastman et al., 1997) - and conspicuous consumption - the need to have brand possessions overtly displayed (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004).

*Alice (high-income): I think it’s (brands) propaganda...it sort of makes you buy into certain things.*

*Zuraida (high-income): I feel that if I was wearing those clothes and I looked like that then my life would be exciting.*

*Researcher: When you play hockey is it important that others know that you have a Wasp hockey stick?*

*Griselda (low-income): No....cos some of them will think that I’m showing off.*

The Alex groups had a good understanding of brands and overall mentioned the most number of brands compared to the other groups, even if they could not pronounce or spell them correctly. While all the groups were familiar with and had a sound understanding of brands and could recall brand names and brand categories, the

Rosebank group were most able to articulate their thoughts and feelings around brands. They placed more emphasis on the sentimental / experiential aspects of brands, especially those associated with art, music, poetry and holiday destinations. They had a deep understanding of brands and material possessions and spoke of personal branding. They demonstrated understanding of concepts such as brand messaging, target marketing and advertising. This particular group focused on the anti-brand - a growing resistance to transnational brands (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006), as well as the importance of not conforming to society (this will be discussed below). They also distinguished clothing (Woolworths) from fashion (Burberry).

There was a notable difference between the Rosebank group and the Pretoria group who both fell within the high-income category. While both groups can be considered well-off, the difference with the Rosebank group may be a culturally-based difference reflecting a typical modern / post-modern society which values experiences more than possessions and believes that being an individual versus conforming to society is important. There was an acceptance by this group that most of what is consumed is because human beings desire affirmation from others that they look good, versus affirmation that people know what brands they are wearing.

*Nelly (high-income): They have low self-esteem; they need those kinds of things to justify their existence.*

The topic of quality versus quantity was raised in all groups. Participants were asked whether they valued having many possessions (quantity) or if they preferred to have fewer possessions but have them of higher quality. The Rosebank group was the only

group that agreed that they would not ordinarily buy from places such as Mr Price because quality is important. They were the only group who (being given a certain amount of money) would prefer to purchase fewer possessions but of better quality (although they mentioned that the brands need not necessarily be expensive or a particular name brand). Contrary to this, the Pretoria group and Alex groups believed that clothing which looks good on an individual is more important than quality overall. Given the choice, these groups would rather have more clothes and therefore not need to wear the same thing over again. The similarities between the Alex group and Pretoria group (and their common difference to the Rosebank group) in this regard was interesting. The distance between Alex and Rosebank is roughly 8km and generally there were more similarities between the low-income groups and the Pretoria group than amongst the two high-income groups.

### **The rationales for brand consumption**

While the Rosebank group believed that most of their possessions are consumed for themselves, the Alex and Pretoria groups showed commonality. Both these groups mentioned the food and toiletry category as brands consumed for themselves. With regards to toiletries, the Alex group mentioned face and hair products. Some food and toiletries items were linked to feelings of nostalgia for example “Weet-Bix reminds me of the farms” or “I use Sunlight because my mother used it”. The brand categories currently consumed which held the most meaning for the Pretoria group included food, mobile phones and toiletries (similar to that of Alex). The Rosebank group on the

contrary referred to status brands of clothing and they never mentioned food or toiletries.

A commonality among all groups with regards to brands and particularly clothing brands is that it is more important that the clothing you wear makes you look good, rather than that it is a well-known name brand. This finding may suggest that because a name brand is not always visible in the clothing worn (because the label is inside the garment), adolescents may not mind what name brand it is because others may speculate about the brand name but never really know. This is different in the case of a mobile phone, for example, because the name is visible for all to see. Zhou and Wong (2008) and Piacentini and Mailer (2004) stated that publicly consumed brands are used more conspicuously because they can be seen and identified in public, whereas privately used products are inconspicuously consumed because they are consumed in the privacy of the consumer's home. This research suggests that while this may be so, there is a further distinction around the visibility of the brand of the publically consumed brands.

It is evident that brands are not solely used for the self or for others and that often it is a combination of both reasons. When a brand is consumed both to communicate internally and externally, the strength of that brand increases. Brands offer consistency in an ever-changing world, and trust in a brand evolves over time (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). The Rosebank group mentioned that there is trust and loyalty

in brands which results in repeat purchasing, and it appears the most trusted brands are often the ones used for both the self and others.

*Christina (high-income): I can guarantee you that I don't just have one Guess item in my cupboard because I know it's durable, it lasts long.*

*Zuraida (high-income): I want things that last long...in my cupboard I will buy a few expensive things but then I will not buy stuff for a long time.*

### **Brands consumed: current versus aspirational**

The brand categories mentioned in both the low- and high-income groups were similar, however certain categories such as food were often mentioned in the low-income group, mentioned a few times in the Pretoria group and only mentioned once in the Rosebank group. This may be linked to household income – when income is limited, choices need to be made around the quality and quantity of food. In addition, adolescents may need to use their own money to purchase desired food products. In comparison, high-income households may take it for granted that they have the option to consume any type of food. Household products and appliances were mentioned in the Alex groups with references to cleaning products and appliances such as Russell Hobbs kettles and LG washing machines. The Pretoria group did not mention cleaning products however reference was made to an upmarket appliance (Samsung double fridge with a water fountain). This category was not mentioned in the Rosebank group. This again indicates that the role of brands is different for high- and low-income households. In the low-income communities, household chores may be a part of the adolescents' everyday reality – everyone needs to pull their weight and help out

around the house. This may therefore lead to a heightened awareness of household products. High-income households more than likely do not consciously budget for cleaning products and the adolescent may not play as big a role in household chores (many families have domestic workers).

For the Rosebank group, music and iPods came out as more important possessions / brands versus the BlackBerry in the Pretoria and the Alex groups. The Rosebank group was also the only group not to mention BlackBerry or Mr Price as a key brand and believed that owning a BlackBerry (although practical) was a sign of conforming to society – something they did not aspire to. They were the only group who did not mention any food or toiletries, although make-up brands such as MAC and Bobby Brown were mentioned. Perhaps the lowered sense of fascination with brands in the Rosebank group is because they are exposed to status items on a regular basis and they may have become desensitised to them.

Toiletries were another category raised in the Alex and Pretoria groups as current brands that hold importance in participants' lives (these hardly featured in the Rosebank group). This category of brands was said to be consumed mainly for the self and led to feelings of increase self-esteem.

*Loraine (low-income): Kaleidoscope - the perfume is my favourite...I like the smell, it smells really divine ... when you smell good it gives you up-liftment and confidence ... I make sure when I leave the house I have Kaleidoscope on me ....I use it for myself.*

*Melinda (high-income): I don't know, I think that if you spend so much money you would want people to notice how you look, but not just for the clothes you wear but how you act in them... like they notice the confidence not just the clothes.*

With regards to the types of brands that the participants aspired to own in the future, the responses varied significantly among the groups. For the Alex groups it included clothing and accessories, laptops, cars and holiday destinations. For the Pretoria group some of the possessions included holiday destinations and cars. The Rosebank group made the comment that relationships with friends and family are more important than any brand, however, when brands were mentioned they tended to vary between art, holiday destinations, and unexpected items such as owning a cinema that shows only classic movies and having a Polaroid camera to capture memories.

Cars were mentioned in all the groups, however the biggest emphasis on the role of motor vehicles was mentioned in the Alex groups. Cars were one of the most aspirational brands in the low-income participant groups and were said to be consumed for others. It is a possession that is used to communicate social and economic status and success. Cars may have featured more in this group because many of their low-income family members do not have their own vehicles and the use of public transport is a reality for this market. Aspirational brands such as cars act as a symbol of hope for the future for low-income groups. BMW, Mercedes Benz and Volvo were the highest status vehicles mentioned. This differed from those of the high-income groups who mentioned vehicles such as Ferrari, Lamborghini and Aston Martin. There were however commonalities between all groups such as the Mini Cooper which was mentioned in all three groups and the BMW which was mentioned in the Alex and Pretoria group. Overall this category was said to be consumed mainly for others.

Technology gadgets, particularly mobile phones, were highly regarded brands among the low-income participants and the Pretoria group. While the BlackBerry was the most aspirational brand in the low-income group, it was also the favourite currently owned brand for the Pretoria group - so much so that they aspired to own the newer models of the BlackBerry in the future. Technology gadgets played a less pivotal role for the Rosebank group. The reason for the high importance of technology for the low-income groups and particularly with regards to mobile phones, is because of their multi-purpose use for this group – it is used as a music player, camera, computer and phone. The Rosebank group in comparison made the comment that they prefer to have different devices for different purposes. The BlackBerry was more popular with the Alex and Pretoria participants, but the Rosebank participants (who could appreciate its practicality) felt that it was a means of conforming to society versus being an individual. This particular group focused on the anti-brand and the importance of not conforming to society. Increasingly in a modern and post-modern society the anti-brand social movement is growing.

Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2006) explained that this movement consists of consumer groups who resist the imposed meanings or values that are prescribed by a brand. For the Rosebank group, commercial status brands such as BlackBerry, Gucci and Louis Vuitton symbolised a conformance to society that they were not comfortable with because of the belief that this type of society valued possession and brands over friendships and family and required brands to validate their existence. The focus on

the anti-brand may be prevalent in this group because of the constant exposure to status brands, so the anti-brand becomes more appealing and aspirant.

*Christina (high-income): If you have a BlackBerry you a conformist cos everyone has it...when we were on French Tour (overseas), there were girls who came home every day with bags from expensive places...just buying for the sake of buying.*

*Nelly (high-income): They have low self-esteem and need it (brands) to justify their existence.*

Social media was mentioned in all the groups, most predominately in the Alex group with the likes of Google, Facebook and Twitter. In comparison, the Rosebank group mentioned blogs and web sites that require payment such as iTunes. Both high-income groups mentioned they would like more of the status brands that they already own, whereas for the low-income groups it was purely things that they did not have. The Rosebank group wanted a mix of status brands and experiences.

*Christina (high-income): They so sacred cos you can't buy ten pairs of Jimmy Choos that being able to get to a point in my life to have one pair....it says sophistication...I've arrived when I can buy a pair for myself...item of success...would add value to my life in a materialistic way.*

*Christina (high-income): People mature in different ways...what we classify as important and how we define ourselves (is different)...there is a difference between people who want to experience versus people who just want to shop.*

## **6.2 Influencers of brands in adolescent identity formation**

Literature shows that there are different drivers of brands (Chernev et al., 2011), with the framework in Chapter 2 categorising these into internal and external drivers. The internal drivers that will be discussed below are life-stage development (Berk, 2006;

Chaplin & John, 2007) and the role of self-esteem. External drivers include household income, reference groups and social values.

### **Internal drivers - life stage development and self-esteem**

Although this research did not originally plan to look at internal drivers, the following emerged from the findings and literature review. Literature supports that adolescents use this *life-phase* to experiment with different behaviours, roles, talents and fashions (Berk, 2006; Chaplin & John, 2007) and engage in acts of self-expression (Chernev et al., 2011) in order to answer the question “Who am I?”. It was evident that all groups used brands to experiment to some extent.

*Christina (Rosebank high-income): Brands are important to teenagers because it helps you with your identity...when you at a point where you don't know how to come across... all those things you trying to figure out, having certain brands and knowing how you will come across to others by wearing them...gives you room to explore and decide what kind of person you want to be.*

Although the willingness to explore was evident in all groups, the Alex groups and the Pretoria group seemed the most aware of, and potentially concerned for, the way they appeared in the eyes of others. On the other end of the spectrum, the Rosebank group seemed to be more occupied with distinguishing themselves as different from the rest (Hook, 2004). This type of experimentation with one's identity is what literature terms 'self-congruence', where self-identities incorporate into possessions and individuals also incorporate their possessions into their self identities (Wong, 1997). Identity / self concept is important in brands, not only because it influences behaviours, but also because different perceptions of the self influence purchasing

behaviour and decisions, as well as how and why consumers provide status to a brand (Onkvist & Shaw, 1987).

It was evident that the participants use brands to signal who they are and in so doing develop a heightened sense of *self-esteem*.

*Christina (high-income): We all have a little bit of that in us...while I don't buy things for others- I buy it because I like it, at the same time when you wear it you want people to think 'wow I wish I had that' or 'wow she looks amazing'.*

*Nomsa (low-income): Jeans and dresses - nice clothes make you feel good and gives you confidence.*

It was further evident that possessions impact self-esteem because of how they make consumers feel and consequently what messages they send both internally (to the consumer themselves) and externally (to the outside world). Toiletries were often raised as an example of this where participants mentioned that using a particular type of skin care product made their skin look good and hence made them feel confident. According to research, people use fashion to communicate messages externally. Although this was found to be true, a subsequent consequence of the participants communicating the intended message internally led to them feeling good about themselves.

Research conducted by Piacentini and Mailer (2004) found that the choices made by young people around possessions such as fashion clothing brands are closely linked to their self-concept, and furthermore, these are used as a means of self-expression and

a way to judge the people and situations they face. Again, this was evident based on the pressure of events such as Civvies Day at school, as well as adolescents being labelled into groups based on their appearance and sense of dress. Chaplin and John (2005; 2007) stressed the intricate link between self-esteem and level of materialism, and maintained that as adolescents move from identity formation to identity achievement, they enjoy higher self-esteem and are less preoccupied with what others think. This seemed to be true for the Rosebank group who constantly implied that brands are less important than having good friends and family and being true to oneself. One could make the assumption that based on the superior socio-economic position of the Rosebank group, they were able to move to identity achievement earlier than the other groups. It can also be suggested that the Rosebank group were more comfortable in themselves and therefore placed less importance on brands. This can be linked to Shaffer (1999) who said that as adolescents move from identity formation to identity achievement, they enjoy higher self-esteem and are less self-conscious or preoccupied with personal concerns.

*Pippa (high-income): I don't find my social standing a hell of an important thing...I just got good friends and I don't see myself on a social ladder.*

According to various literature (Hogg & Banister, 2001; Wong, 1997; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998), human beings have different selves such as the personal, public and collective, and each one of these want different things which dictates behaviour. In the private self, self-worth is achieved by striving to meet internalised standards. This was evident in all the groups, however in each, the brands and the categories differed. In the case

of the Alex and Pretoria groups, food and toiletries and to a certain extent clothes and accessories were used as a means to meet internalised standards. The Rosebank group, who spoke less about this, used their music, poetry and blogs to meet internalised standards.

*Researcher: What would you say is your favourite possession?*

*Nelly (Rosebank high-income): My John Keits collection of poetry.*

*Olivia (low-income): Weet-Bix...I have it every day with milk and Rama (margarine)... it keeps me full till break and it gives me a fresh start... you feel like home when you eat it...home as in the farms.*

*Claire (Pretoria high-income): McFlurry ...that's the thing that makes me happy... love Oreo's and ice-cream, it's my most favourite thing all together.*

At some point or another, the participants agreed that they all have a public self which dictates that they want to be seen in a certain way. For the Alex and Pretoria groups, this involved the possession of status brands such as mobile phones, laptops and clothing. The Alex groups also described the importance of aspirant brands such as cars, which would communicate success and demand respect from others. Even the Rosebank group who tried to avoid being perceived as materialistic confessed that there is always that one item you want more to communicate a message to the outside world, with the examples including status items such as a pair of Jimmy Choos (luxury shoes).

### **External factors –household income, reference groups and social values**

*Household income* was explored due to the recent interest in the emerging markets and their high levels of income inequality. It is said that low-income consumers

consume in order to feel normal (Hamilton & Catterall, 2005). The way in which brands are often overtly used to compensate for social and economic class supports this. While the participants never verbalised this out-right, there was evidence to suggest that brands, and particularly status brands, play an important role in the lives of the low-income participants.

*Luisa (low-income group): A BMW says that you are independent; you were able to do something good with your life.*

A relationship exists between the brands and the message that it communicates internally and externally. Internally, brands and especially status brands act as a vote of confidence and increase self-esteem, while externally it earns the consumer respect from their community and creates the perception of success. This may be the reason for the growing desire to acquire amongst the lower-income consumers. Manzi et al. (2011) argued that the large increase in spending on the part of Black South Africans is because of the consumers' previous experience of relative deprivation, which has led to an increase in conspicuous consumption. Literature also suggests that the growing desire to acquire status goods such as cars is based on the belief that if you can consume at the level of those with higher status, then you will acquire status, recognition and respect (Wiseman, 2009). This explains why the Alex groups placed such an emphasis on brands such as BMW and their link to achievement and hence respect from the fellow community.

*Reference groups:* It has emerged from both the literature and the research findings that people are very concerned about what those around them think of them. This suggests that reference groups are instrumental in consumption because of the admiration held for fellow human beings (Smith in Rosenberg, 1968). They reflect the need to identify with others, enhance one's image, or provide a common identity or interests (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004; Bearden, Netemeyer & Teel, 1989).

The research findings highlighted differences in the key influencers and reference groups among the different income groups. The role of parents and peers as influencers provide a contributing factor to consumption behaviours such as materialism, because they transmit their consumption attitudes, goals and motives (Chaplin & John, 2010). While parents were the overarching influencers in the high-income groups, media and friends played the same role for the low-income group.

*Nomsa (low-income): Most of the things we have, they are influenced by us but we live with people around us so another person opinion on something you have is important.*

*Nomsa (low-income): My friends (influence my choice)...my best friend...my mom is different from me she thinks that things I like are not nice so I don't think her opinion matters.*

*Christina (high-income): I have a good relationship with my family and if it's between going out and getting with guys or staying home, I'm much happier to stay at home.*

The Alex groups' main influencers were magazines and friends, while parents featured as the least influential. It was noted that this group perceived their parents to be the least influential due to their perceived 'old-fashionedness' and lack of knowledge on 'cool' brands. Relative deprivation again may play a part here because parents of low-income and previously disadvantaged consumers were not exposed to the level of

brands that their techno savvy adolescents are. With regards to reference groups, they also mentioned the influencing role of idols such as Tyra Banks, Kim Kardashian and Alicia Keys.

It was evident that there was a difference between the brand knowledge of the participants who lived in Alex and attended school outside Alex versus the participant who lived and attended school in Alex. Although Mavis (the participant who lived and attended school in Alex) was familiar with status brands such Louis Vuitton, Volvo and Sony, her general knowledge of status brands seemed to be slightly narrower. The other participants were more attuned to various levels of status brands which may be attributed to the fact that these participants are exposed to middle-class consumers at school. This was evident at the point when the researcher inquired about where they shop and Mavis mentioned a local mall within the township (Pan-Africa Mall) and the other participants in contrast mentioned the top-end malls such as Sandton City, Eastgate and Greenstone. This may indicate that exposure to brands via peers and media influences brand awareness and the types of brands which form part of the identity and which become aspirational.

The literature suggests that there is a link between reference groups and conspicuous consumption (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998) because it is through consumption that that consumers gain recognition, approval and acceptance from groups (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004). In the context of adolescent consumers, fashion brands such as clothing establishes a sense of belonging to a clan and allows one to show off and become

known and appreciated by the group (Ifergan & Etienne, 2002 in Cardoso et al., 2007). This was evident in the Alex and Pretoria groups around the role of Civvies Day at school and the type of pressure associated with this. Civvies Day is seen as an ideal opportunity to communicate to those around you who you really are.

In support of this, Maisonneuve (1993) in Cardoso et al. (2007) stated that the fashion phenomena in young people reinforces the concept of group pressure and social influence on behaviour to the point that the interaction between young adults and their schoolmates has an influence on consumption patterns. Brands are used to signal wealth and status and leads to behaviours of parading to send out signals to the outside world. This was evident when participants spoke about Civvies Day. Van Kempen (2003) mentioned that the signalling of deceptive status is prevalent among the poor and the rich, however this research highlighted how this is predominately true for the lower-income groups.

### **Social values – individualism versus collectivism**

Findings emerged with regards to individualism and collectivism. Both individualism and collectivism were raised during the focus groups and generally it emerged that there are instances when participants want to be seen as unique (individualism) and other instances when being part of a group (collectivism) is important.

The distinction between income groups and reference groups as explained by Reinstaller and Sanditov (2005) suggests that high-income consumers seek distinction

from lower-income groups, while low-income groups aspire to the lifestyle of the upper class. This was found to be true with the Rosebank group who rejected brands such as Mr Price and BlackBerry for the reasons that they believed these brands labelled them as conformists. The Alex groups, in contrast, desperately aspired to the status brands owned by high-income consumers. Van Kempen's (2004) explanation of possessions being used to increase a sense of belonging to others or differentiation from others was clearly evident between the Rosebank and Pretoria groups. The difference between the Rosebank and Pretoria groups suggested that the Rosebank group displayed a need for uniqueness / individualism (to become their own group), while the Pretoria group displayed a need for conformity / collectivism to that of other high-income consumers.

Consumption patterns lead youngsters to a phenomenon of identification through which they want to be similar to others (Cardoso, 2004 in Cardoso et al., 2007). The research findings suggest, however, that there is not always a need to be seen as 'similar' to others but rather that adolescent's desire 'approval' from others. Whether a brand is consumed for the self or for the outside world, at some point there is a desire for recognition from others. This links to the literature on the public self which demonstrates the desire for achievement and positive recognition from significant others or reference groups (Wong, 1997). This notion was raised in the low-income groups and supports the literature that explains that even with their limited income, low-income consumers still desire aspirational products and are willing to pay a premium for them because i) designer labels are a symbol of status and integration in

society, and ii) it is a kind of differentiation from extremely poor people who cannot afford these products (Barki & Parente, 2006).

*Olivia: Ponds gives me that glow ...it gives you confidence and people say 'wow girl, what are you using – you have to tell me (about) that product', but nahh it's a secret, I don't always tell them... It gives me the spotlight, people are looking at me ...and I feel so there. They mustn't use the products that I am using it. If Ponds satisfies me I will use it even if no one asks me.*

*Madika: A BlackBerry says that I am unique.*

This suggests that at some level, brands are consumed in order to differentiate consumers from their groups and position them as similar to higher-income groups. This may explain why low-income groups imitate the consumption patterns of high-income consumers to feel a sense of belonging (Ger & Belk, 1996), while the members of the elite change their patterns of consumption in order to defend their position (Reinstaller & Sanditov, 2005).

### **6.3 How adolescent consumers use brands in the manifestation of their identity (consumption manifestations)**

Chapter Two highlighted that the possible consequences of wants, needs and desires may be classified under various consumer behaviours that are materialistic in nature such as: conspicuous consumption and status consumption. The following transpired with regards to the above.

*Materialism* is the general love of possessions and the research findings suggested differences among income groups. Generally the high-income groups were less

materialistic than the low-income groups. The general findings proposed that the higher the income group or social standing status, the less that brands were mentioned.

*Conspicuous consumption* (the wanting of things so that other people can see that you have them) was also more obvious in the low-income groups. Again this may be attributed to the fact that there is a history of relative deprivation. Researchers have argued that publicly consumed brands are used more conspicuously because they can be seen and identified in public, whereas privately used products are inconspicuously consumed because they are consumed in the privacy of the consumer's home (Zhou & Wong, 2008; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). This was evident in the question put forward to the groups about having a desired brand but having to keep it private. This bothered the low-income groups the most. It also emerged that there are exceptions to the above, for example, the Alex and Pretoria participants believed that the name brand of clothing was not as important as whether the clothing looks good on the individual.

Status possessions such as laptops are consumed for the self in the high-income groups, whereas low-income groups use them conspicuously. The low-income groups want the outside world to know of these possessions because it communicates the message of wealth, success and sophistication. In certain instances, this was also the case for the Pretoria group.

*Status consumption* was overt, particularly in the low-income groups who had a strong understanding of status brands, such as Louis Vuitton. This also included categories such as mobile phones, toiletries and food. However it is believed that external influencers played a role here as the participants who attended school outside the township had a broader knowledge of brands. This supports the notion that the more one is exposed to brands via media and reference groups, the more aware and the greater the desire for the brands. Brands define social status and affect the perceptions that people have about themselves (Reinstaller & Sanditov, 2005). This may be the reason for the heightened need for status brands in low-income groups, where consumers may find it hard to communicate their status by the house they live in or the car that they drive. The easiest way to communicate status is therefore via other possessions such as clothing and mobile technology.

## **CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION**

This paper started with the bold phrase ‘brands are said to be a central component to life and it is believed that there is no single issue that dominates the modern psyche as much as the consumption of brands’ (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004; O’Cass & Frost, 2002). The research paper put this to the test with an equally bold question, ‘Do brands play a role in adolescent identity formation and manifestation?’ The research has demonstrated that the answer to this question is an undeniable yes. Adolescent consumers are no different to adults (Belk, 1988) in that they have a desire to communicate their maturity through consumption and believe that their brands describe who they are and define their social status (Schor, 2004 in Chaplin & John, 2007).

The research encompassed two main objectives: first, to source literature to understand the role of brands (in the context of consumption) in the formation and manifestation of adolescence identity; and second, to empirically deepen our understanding of how adolescents use brands to form and manifest their identities in an emerging market context. The research used the technique of focus groups to facilitate findings that would answer the following research questions: (i) do the role of brands in the formation and manifestation of identity differ between high- and low-income adolescents?, (ii) which reference groups influence adolescent consumers to select certain brands?, (iii) which social values (individualism/collectivism) influence

adolescent consumers to select certain brands?, and (iv) how do adolescent consumers use brands in the manifestation of their identity?

Four focus groups were conducted in which participants went through a collage construction and Post-it note exercise related to current and aspirational brands. The two low-income groups were from the Alex township while the two high-income groups were from the areas of Rosebank and Pretoria. The two low-income groups in Alex consisted of participants who lived in the township, but all with the exception of one went to school outside the township. The Rosebank group attend a private school in the area and came from a high cultural standing. In comparison, the Pretoria group, who also attend a private school and were considered to come from high-income households, came from a lower cultural standing.

This research has demonstrated the power that brands hold over female adolescent consumers and the role that brands play in signalling various aspects of the consumer, such as their status, wealth, affluence, individuality, self-expression, membership (reference groups), as well as hidden aspects of the self (such as who they are, what they value and what direction they want to pursue in future). The research resulted in insights within three areas: (i) The role of brands in the formation and manifestation of identity between high- and low-income adolescents, (ii) Influencers in adolescent brand selection (reference groups and social values); and (iii) The use of brands in the manifestation of adolescent identify (consumption consequences). The findings for each of these insights will be summarised below, followed by a discussion on the

implications of these for marketers wanting to reach this target market. The implications for further academic research are also discussed.

**(i) The role of brands in the formation and manifestation of identity between high- and low-income adolescents**

Some of the most surprising findings were around the differences and similarities between income groups and social standing where one might not expect to find them. The research accounted for various instances where low-income adolescent consumers shared commonalities with some of the high-income consumers (particularly the group from a lower social standing), for example the important role that toiletry brands play in adolescent identity formation and self-esteem. The research also accounted for instances where the two high-income groups (of different social standing) had very little in common with regards to the role of clothing brands and status brands, for example. Not so surprising is the generally high level of brand awareness among female adolescents in emerging markets, perhaps due to the exposure of brands via media in the typical 21<sup>st</sup> century world. While brands do play different roles in the identity formation and manifestation of adolescents, not every brand consumed is done so in order to signal status. The Rosebank group highlighted the fact that the anti-brand plays a strong role among adolescents who want to signal to the world that they do not care about brands. This seems to be more prevalent in high social standing groups where the constant exposure to status may have led to the desensitisation of status brands. The low-income groups were more prone to using brands to signal status.

*Current brands consumed versus aspirational brands:* The research supports a general difference among income groups and the types of brands owned versus the types of brands that are aspirational. One cannot underestimate the power of aspirational brands - most especially to the low-income consumers. Aspirational brands tend to act as a symbol of hope for the future and a motivational force to work hard. The research further highlighted that low-income adolescents have a higher consideration for food, toiletries, cleaning and appliance brands. Within the high-income groups however, social-cultural differences are prevalent which result in differences in aspirational brands. High-income adolescents (particularly those of high socio-cultural standing) aspired to have experiences versus owning status possessions.

It was suggested by the respondents that brands are consumed for different reasons, either for the self, for others or a combination of both. Despite the difference in income, there were commonalities in desired brands among groups, for example BlackBerry and BMW are aspirant brands for low-income and high-income adolescents.

## **(ii) Influencers of adolescent identity formation**

*Internal influencers of identity:* the adolescent life-phase is a period where consumers experiment with different brands. Where there is a fit between the individual and the brand, adolescent consumers experience a heightened sense of self-esteem.

Furthermore, the brands used to meet internal and external standards differed by income group.

*External drivers:* The research suggested that low-income consumers overtly use brands to compensate for their social and economic class. Internally, brands (especially status brands) act as a vote of confidence and increase self-esteem, while externally they earn the consumer respect from their fellow community members and create the perception of success. This may be the reason for the increase in consumer spending, materialism and status consumption.

*Reference groups:* It has emerged from both literature and the research findings that adolescent female consumers are concerned by what those around them think. This means that reference groups and key influencers are instrumental in consumption and cannot be underestimated. Reference groups and the role they play differ among income groups and this was one area where there was a difference in income groups and not social standing. The low-income groups, for example, did not consider their parents as instrumental in brand choice and consumption, unlike the high-income groups.

*Social values:* there are instances where participants want to be seen as unique (individualism) and other instances where being part of a group (collectivism) is important. While high-income groups generally seek differentiation and low-income groups generally seek the life-style of the upper-class, this is not always the case. The

research findings also suggested that there is not always a need to be seen as ‘similar’ to others, but rather that adolescents desire ‘approval’ from others.

### **(iii) Consumption manifestations**

Both forms of materialism (conspicuous consumption and status consumption) were visible in all income groups to different extents, and overall were the most visible among the low-income consumers, followed by the high-income group of less social standing. The high-income group of high socio-cultural standing displayed the least amount of conspicuous consumption and the low-income groups displayed the most conspicuous consumption. This research suggests that publically consumed brands (such as mobile phones) are overall used more conspicuously than privately consumed brands (such as toiletries), but there is a further distinction around the visibility of the name of the publicly consumed brands.

### **Implications for marketers**

With adolescents influencing household expenditure and quickly becoming the most brand-orientated and materialistic consumer segment (Schor, 2004 in Chaplin & John, 2007), this research supports that marketers need to understand the adolescent consumer psyche and the various dynamics at play in the interaction of brands and adolescent identity. Adolescents use brands in the formation and manifestation of their identity and therefore, this target market may appear to be appealing to marketers who can undoubtedly see the opportunities available in targeting this market - both in terms of current and future revenue streams. However the increase of

materialism in adolescents raises ethical concerns which need to be considered within the context of emerging market consumers - particularly those from low-income households. Marketers, who are known to exploit consumers via media, have an ethical role to play in the way that they create desire in marketing brands to this group of consumers.

The role of brands in the formation and manifestation of identity differs between high- and low-income adolescent consumers, while socio-cultural status also plays a role. This suggests that marketers should not underestimate the role that brands play and the extent to which they are understood and held in high regards among female adolescent consumers. Furthermore, no assumptions should be made around general understanding of brand or the kinds of brands that are consumed or aspired to, based solely on cultural standing or income. The insights presented in this research can assist marketers / brand managers in developing identity-based market segmentations and positioning strategies targeting female adolescent consumers in emerging economies. Furthermore, marketers need to consider if it is better to market per income group or per age group.

Both internal and external influencers play a role in adolescent brand selection. This research has provided insights with regards to the role of reference groups and social values. The research assists in understanding the different influencers in the development of identity and can direct marketers in achieving brands with the correct status image. The roles of reference groups differ between high- and low-income

adolescents, suggesting that marketing needs to be targeted. Using Hollywood stars and famous singers in marketing, for example, may be better suited to low-income consumers. The fact that media plays a strong influencing role in brand choice suggests that marketers can influence brand loyalty by understanding consumer identity, consumption needs, reference groups etc. The research also suggests that the messaging and type of media used is different among income and socio-cultural groups. The way one would market to a Rosebank adolescent versus an Alex adolescent is different.

The manifestation of brands in adolescent identity is shown through various materialistic consumption behaviours. The insights put forward can provide strategic direction for marketers and brand managers and provides cues in terms of ethical considerations.

### **Recommendations for further academic research**

The increase in materialism displayed in adolescents (Chaplin & John, 2010) and the increase in marketing and advertising aimed at adolescents has raised concern among parents, educators and social scientists (Chaplin & John, 2007). The combination of these is alarming when one considers that the need for status is powerful enough to override the most basic needs such as hunger (Van Kempen, 2003) and that consumers will indulge in consumption before securing their basic needs for food and shelter, going so far as to sacrifice nutrition for luxury (Belk, 1988). This suggests that further research is required in understanding the powerful role of brands in the lives of

adolescents. Further research can assist in the development of social policies to protect consumers and indeed adolescents from an ever increasing spending culture.

Because this research was exploratory in nature, it has raised a number of tentative hypotheses which could be tested quantitatively:

- Zhou and Wong (2008) and Piacentini and Mailer (2004) stated that publically consumed brands are used more conspicuously because they can be seen and identified in public, whereas privately used products are inconspicuously consumed because they are consumed in the privacy of the consumer's home. This research further suggests that the visibility of the name of the publically consumed brand determines how it is used, for example technology gadgets such as mobile phones are consumed for others because the brand name is overtly visible, versus clothing brands where the brand name is normally inside the garment. This needs to be formally tested.
- Understanding the relationship between the economic group (social-cultural) and the choice of brands. The research suggested that two high-income groups can vary substantially in brand preference due to socio-cultural standings and this needs to be formally tested.
- Given that males and females differ in the way they form their self-concepts (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004), further research is required to determine if the role of brands is the same for male adolescents.

- This research suggested that low-income consumers will only consider using counterfeit brands (fong-kong brands) if there is a high probability that society will believe they are wearing the real brand. This needs to be formally tested.
- This research suggested brands play a bigger role in the identity formation of low-income adolescent consumers. Further research is required to explore whether brands play a bigger role in low-income consumer identity because of their aspirational role.
- The research conducted by Manzi et al. (2011) suggested that consumers' previous experiences of relative deprivation is linked to subsequent conspicuous consumption. Building on this, the extent to which brands play a stronger role in low-income consumer identity because of their aspirational role needs to be investigated.
- The participants in this research suggested that when it comes to clothing brands, the brand name is as important as how the actual garment looks on the individual. The extent to which the brand name and how the brand makes the consumer look and feel needs to be investigated further.
- In this research, low-income consumers generally valued quantity in comparison to the high-income consumers (of high social standing) who valued quality. This needs formal investigation.
- This research only looked at some of the external influencers of identity formation. The remaining variables of the model presented in Chapter Two need to be tested, such as the internal influencers of identity formation (life-stage, manifestation of multiple selves and self-esteem), and the

manifestations of consumption (conspicuous consumption and status consumption).

## **Conclusion**

The world we live in is progressing and gone are the days where brands play purely functional roles. The often deep-rooted symbolic role of brands cannot be underestimated in the formation and manifestation of adolescent identity. In first world countries adolescents have already emerged as the most brand-orientated, consumer-involved and materialistic generation in history (Schor, 2004 in Chaplin & John, 2007). This research suggests that emerging market adolescents and certainly lower-income adolescents are well on their way to following in the footsteps of those whose behaviour they are exposed to via media. Every bit of human activity is to protect, maintain and enhance our identity (Onkvist & Shaw, 1987) and one needs to question just how far consumers will go to achieve this. While this presents countless opportunities, marketers need to remain cognisant of the ethical issues of unduly influencing individuals who have yet to gain significant experience in purchasing and consuming brands.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX I: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

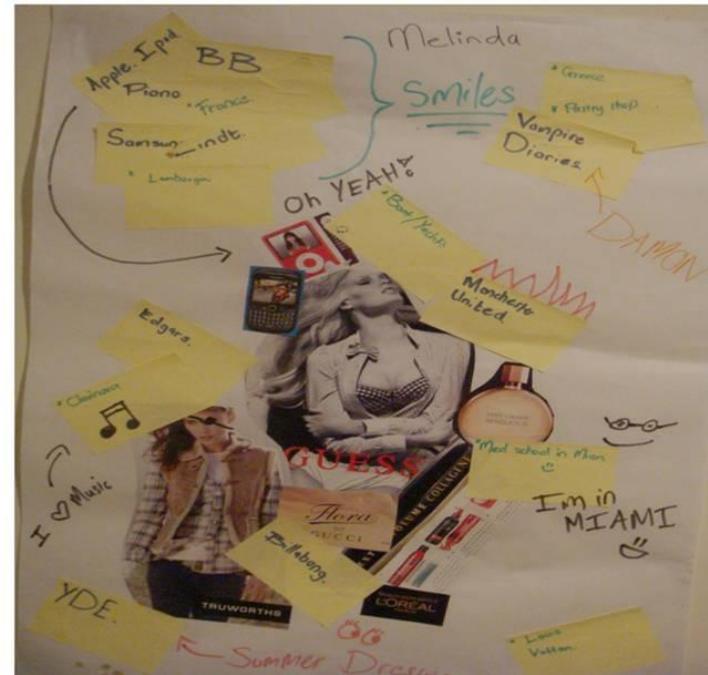
Name	Age	Race	Description	Brands / possessions mentioned
<b>Alex low-income Group One</b>				
Olivia	16	Black	Most out spoken and described herself as outgoing with a never give up attitude. Very strong minded and does things for herself. Her phone is very important to her. Spoke of social networking and Toilet (used to gossip).	Toilet (blog), Big Brother (T.V. show), DSTV, Parlotones (band), Ponds face wash.
Luisa	18	Black	Described herself as creative, quiet / shy. Favourite hobby is drawing. Toothpaste is important to her.	
Nomsa	17	Black	Planning to study Accounting. Clothing is very important to her. Using Toilet (blog) makes her feel good - it gives her the opportunity to speak her mind. Her hobby is shopping for clothes and she enjoys window shopping for furniture she hopes to own in the future.	Always Ultra Pads, Tyra Banks, Eastgate, Sandton.
Lorraine	16	Black	Free spirit- wants to change the world. Described herself as crazy and different. Enjoys reading fantasy and suspense books.	Seventeen Magazine, Niki Minaj.
<b>Alex low-income Group Two</b>				
Mavis	16	Black	Appeared to be the least well-off. Only participant who lives and attends school in the township. Enjoys poetry and communicating with others. Would never dress or consume the brands that her parents use.	Sunlight, Russell Hobbs, Louis Vuitton.
Kagiso	16	Black	Strong minded. Enjoys fiction books and music. Appeared to be the most well off - only participant to live outside of the township and own status brands such as an Apple laptop and Big Boy Scooter. Reference groups included mother, older brother, cousins and friends.	Apple, Honda.
Griselda	16	Black	Hockey player and loves her Wasp hockey stick.	Wasp hockey stick.
Anna	18	Black	Described herself as very shy. Spoke the least.	
<b>Pretoria high-income Group</b>				
Sara	15	Indian	Sweet nature - not too loud but willing to talk. Mentioned that she wants her BlackBerry phone with her all the time because she can not live without it - this is her favourite product. Her hobby is shopping.	BlackBerry, Revlon, Clinique, Rooibos, Aldo, Puma, Guess, Clarins, Forever New, iPod, Jay-Jays, Nine West, Sports Scene, Magato, Mr Price, Vampire Diaries, Chris Brown, Justin Bieber. Aspirational: Miami, Jenni Button, Louis Vuitton handbag, BlackBerry Bold.
Melinda	15	White	Most reserved / quiet. Musician. Very introspective / intelligent. Was the only participant to say that brands give her confidence. Believes that labels make her feel good. Her hobby is playing piano. Her favourite product is her BlackBerry.	iPod, Piano, BlackBerry, Lindt, Vampire Diaries, Billabong, L'Oreal, Edgars, Woolworths, YDE. Aspirational: Lamborghini, Greece, Boat, Louis Vuitton, France, Clarinova.
Mary	16	White	Has a twin brother and is from a big family. Very funky and free-spirited. Always willing to talk - first to admit when she wanted something for others. Introduced herself as the eldest of all the friends. Hobby is playing sports. Lindt Chocolate is her favourite product. Reference group / influencer - mother.	Labello, Johnsons face products, Sushi CTFM, Mr Price, Lindt, Frisco coffee, Jockey underwear, Guess, Jay Jays, BlackBerry, Daughtry, Puma, All Gold (tomato sauce), Clinique. Aspirational: Louis Vuitton bag, Prada, Gold GTI, iPod, holiday to Spain / Italy.
Casey	16	White	Very loud and bubbly. Enjoys the attention of her friends but is comfortable to choose different brands. Loves chocolates and her hobby is ice-skating. Favourite product is Maggie noodles.	Maggie noodles, Sony camera, Milo, Guess, iPod, BlackBerry, iMac PC, Justin Bieber, Nine West Aspirational: Bobby Brown make-up.
Claire	16	White	Comfortable / confident in her own skin. Seems older than she is. Verbalised that it is far more important that a brand looks good on you versus what name brand it is. Quantity is important because she needs to be seen in something different. Hobby is sleep-over's and favourite product is a McFlurry.	Colgate, Sensodyne, Garnier, Mr Price, Edgars, Nestle (cereal), McDonalds McFlurry, Rooibos, MR Price, Sony TV. Aspirational: Jimmy Choo's, Mini Cooper, Yacht, Holiday to the USA, Gucci, Lacoste.
<b>Rosebank high-income Group</b>				
Christina	16	White	Loudest of the group. Very friendly and out-going. Wants to be an actress / study art. Lived in London for a year. Does not like to be on her own and loves music. Wants to get into acting and singing. Reference groups / influencer - parents especially mother.	Guess Jeans, Paramore, MAC Makeup, Apple iPod a/ PC, iTunes, Lady Gaga, Fnac, Big Blue, Iron Fist, Country Road, H&M. Aspirational: Cartier, Chanel, Marc Jacobs, Christian Louboutin / Jimmy Choo, Dior, Harry Winston, Armani, Apple software, Aston Martin, Travel to Europe and USA, Camera with a big lens, art prints (Warhol, Dali, etc.).
Alice	16	White	Quietest of the group - hardly spoke. Mother is an artist. Loves photos from Lula and Exit Magazines. Mentioned that she enjoys being alone. Loves Irish poetry and Oscar Wilde. Reference groups / influencer : music.	Tumblr, Country Road, iTunes, Lula Magazine, Marc Jacobs Perfume, Musica, Bleubirdvintage (blog), Exit Magazine, House of Isis (store), BlackBerry, Cinema Nouveau. Aspirational: Polaroid camera, Latest Lula Magazine, Coldplay t-shirt, Mumford and Sons concert tickets, Skullcandy headphones, Old vintage car / vintage clothes.
Zuraida	16	Indian	Talkative. Loves movies (her form of escape). Loves 80s teen movies like The Breakfast Club. Reference group / influencer - movies	Guess Jeans, Burberry Wellington boots, study in UCT.
Pippa	16	White	Plays hockey, bought herself a surfboard and wet suit. Loves music. Believes that we are limited by society and thus held back from our own potential. Would want to meet Oscar Wilde. Reference groups / influencer - music.	The Cure, Burberry, Short Straw, Guy Ritchie, Video Spot, The Strokes, Converse, All- Star, Quentin Tarantino, Fight Club, Coldplay, Ster-Kinekor. Aspirational: Own a cinema (old movies), own a studio apartment, study in Cape Town, Mustang. Skullcandy earphones.
Nelly	17	White	Speaks her mind. Described herself as introverted and religious. Loves John Keats poetry.	Poetry, Fnac, Tublr, any Bohemian clothes, The Space, The Beatles, Exclusive Books, Star Wars, YouTube and Internet, Time Magazine. Aspirational: Anything vintage, Burberry Wellington boots, Monet, vintage Typewriter, meet George Lucas, own a house in the south of France, Mini Cooper, Comic books, Star Wars memorabilia.

\* Names have been changed to protect anonymity





APPENDIX IV: COLLAGE CONSTRUCTION - Pretoria high-income Group





## APPENDIX VI: BRANDS MENTIONED - Alex low-income Groups

Category	Brand	Count	Self	Others	Current	Aspirant
Food	McDonalds	2				X
Food	Coca Cola					X
Food	Rooibos Tea					X
Food	Pinpop					X
Food	Joko Tea	1				X
Food	Kellogs	3				X
Food	Dairybell cheese					X
Food	Clover Milk	1				X
Food	Pilchards	1				X
Food	Weet-Bix	2				X
Food	Koo	1				X
Food	McCain	1				X
Food	All Bran Flakes	1				X
Food	Ceres Juice	1				X
Food	All Gold Tomato Sauce	1				X
Food	Basmati Rice	1				X
Food	Corn Flakes	1				X
Food	Tropica	1				X
Food	Jungle Oats	1				X
Food	Ricoffee	1				X
Toiletries	Sunsilk	1				
Toiletries	Palmolive	1				
Toiletries	Exclamation Deoderant					X
Toiletries	Hoity Toity Deoderant	1				X
Toiletries	Kaleidoscope Deoderant	1				X
Toiletries	Love Letters Deoderant	1				X
Toiletries	Clean and Clear	1				X
Toiletries	Lifebouy soap	2			X	
Toiletries	Bio Oil	2				X
Toiletries	Ponds	5				X 1
Toiletries	Always Ultra Pads	3	X			X
Toiletries	Avon	1				X
Toiletries	Sunlight Facewash	1				
Toiletries	Colgate	3				
Toiletries	Dark and Lovely	3				X
Toiletries	Panado	1				
Toiletries	Yardley (nail polish)	1				X
Toiletries	Nivea (roll-on)	2				X 1
Toiletries	Krayons (Vaseline)	1				X
Toiletries	Soft and Free	1				X
Household	Jik	1				X
Household	Sunlight dishwashing liquid	2				X
Household	Bic pen	1				X
Appliances	LG Washing Machine	1				X X
Appliances	Russell Hobbs Kettle	2				X X
Furniture	Bakos brothers Ales group	X				X
Education	Liso					X
Education	UP	1				X

Category	Brand	Count	Self	Others	Current	Aspirant
Possessions	Guess Jeans	3				X
Possessions	Make-up	1			X	X
Possessions	Nailpolish	1	X			X
Possessions	Hair accessories	1	X			X
Possessions	Mr Price Accessories	3			X	X
Possessions	Designer dress	1				
Possessions	Music	1	X			X
Possessions	Wasp hockey stick	1			X	X
Possessions	Shoes	1			X	X
Possessions	Bags	1			X	X
Possessions	Red mounta in school bag	1				X
Possessions	Stadler pencil case	1			X	
Possessions	Levi Jeans	1				X
Possessions	L'Oreal Face cream	2				X
Possessions	Townhouse	1				X
Possessions	Clinique	1				X
Status	Ed-Harvey	1				X
Status	DKNY watches	1				X
Status	Gucci / D&G (perfume)	4				X
Status	Louis Vuitton	5				X
Status	Ray Bans	3		X		X
Status	D&G	2				X
Status	LTD clothing	1				X
Status	Hugo Boss	1				X
Status	Prada	1				
Shoes	Cavela	3				X
Shoes	Nike	4			X	
Shoes	Puma	3			X	
Shoes	Adidas	3				X
Shoes	Timberland	1				
Shoes	LaCoste	3				X
Mobile phones	BlackBerry	12				X
Mobile phones	Nokia	8			X	1
Mobile phones	Samsung	5				
Mobile phones	LG	2				X
Mobile phones	iPhone	1				X
Technology	Apple i- Mac	3				X
Technology	Sony Plasma	1				X
Technology	Laptop	3				X
Technology	iPad	5			X	X
Cars / Bikes	Mini Cooper	1				X
Cars / Bikes	Ford Fiesta	1			X	X
Cars / Bikes	Honda	1				
Cars / Bikes	Big Boy Scooter	1				X
Cars / Bikes	Honda -Motor Bike	1				X
Cars / Bikes	BMW	10			X	X
Cars / Bikes	Mercedes Benz	1			X	X
Cars / Bikes	Volvo	2				X

Category	Brand	Count	Self	Others	Current	Aspirant
Stores	Mr Price	6	X			X
Stores	Rage	1				X
Stores	DKNY	1				X
Stores	Divia	1				X
Stores	Forever New	2				X X
Stores	Pick n Pay	1				X
Stores	American Swiss	2				X
Stores	Woolwoths	2				
Stores	Legit	1				
Stores	Guess	4				X
Stores	Mango	1				X
Stores	Nine West	2				X
Stores	Truworhs	3				
Stores	Jay-Jays	1				
Stores	Edgars	6		X		X
Shopping centres	Sandton	3				X
Shopping centres	Eastgate	1				X
Shopping centres	Greenstone	3				X
Shopping centres	Balfor Park	1				X
Shopping centres	Pan-Africa (Alex)	1				X
Media	E-news					X
Media	Seventeen	1				X
Media	Drum	1				X
Media	You					X
Media	Bona					X
Media	Elle					X
Media	Mizz					X
Media	DSTV					
Media	FTV					
Media	True Love					X
Media	Move	1				X
Social media	BBM	3				
Social media	Twitter	2				X
Social media	Face Book	2				X
Social media	Toilet	1				X
Social media	Youtube	1				X
Social media	MXIT	1				X
Social media	Google	3				X
Role models	Beyonce	1				
Role models	Kim Kardasian	1				X
Role models	Kelly Roland					X
Role models	Vampire Diaries					X
Role models	Niki Minaj	1				
Role models	Big Brother					
Role models	Parlotones	1				
Role models	Alicia Keys					

## APPENDIX VII: BRANDS MENTIONED - Pretoria high-income Group

Category	Brand	Collage Count	For yourself	For others	Current	Aspirat
Food	Maggie Two Minute noodles	2	X		X	
Food	McFlurry - McDonalds	1	X		X	
Food	Coffee - imported brand	1	X		X	
Food	Rooibos	2	X		X	
Food	Lindt Chocolate	3			X	
Food	Nestle Cereal	1			X	
Food	All Gold Tomato Sauce	1			X	
Food	Milo	1		X	X	
Food	Milo Cereal	1	X		X	
Toiletries	MAC	1	X			
Toiletries	Revlon	3	X		X	
Toiletries	Clinique	3	X			
Toiletries	Clarins	2	X		X	
Toiletries	Bobby Brown	2	X			X
Toiletries	Colgate / Sensodyne	1	X		X	
Toiletries	Garnier	1	X		X	
Toiletries	Labello	1	X		X	
Toiletries	Johnson & Johnson Facial Pro	1	X		X	
Toiletries	Nivea	1	X			
Toiletries	Yardley make up	1	X			
Toiletries	L'Oreal	1	X			
Household	Samsung fridge	1				
Education	Medical School (Miami)	1	X			X
Holiday	USA	3	X			X
Holiday	Spain	1	X			
Holiday	Italy	1	X			X
Holiday	Paris	3	X			X
Holiday	Greece	1	X			X
Holiday	France	1				X
Holiday	USA					
Holiday	Miami					

Category	Brand	Collage Count	For yourself	For others	Current	Aspirat
Possessions	Jockey underwear	1			X	
Possessions	Make-up	1	X	X	X	
Possessions	BB			X		
Possessions	Yacht	2		X	X	
Possessions	Plane	3		X	X	X
Possessions	Clarinova Piano	1	X		X	
Possessions	Sony Plasma TV	1			X	
Possessions	Clothes	1		X		
Status	Louis Vuitton Hanbag	5		X	X	X
Status	Jimmy Choo	1	X	X	X	
Status	Gucci	2		X	X	X
Status	Prada	1		X	X	
Status	Jenni Button	1		X	X	X
Status	Superga			X	X	
Shoes	LaCoste	1				
Shoes	Puma	1				
Shoes	All Stars	1				
Shoes	Mogato	1				
Mobile phones	BlackBerry (including Bold)	7	X	Mair	X	1
Mobile phones	Nokia	1				
Mobile phones	LG	1				
Mobile phones	iPhone	1				
Mobile phones	Sony Ericsson	1				
Technology	iPad	2			X	X
Technology	iMac	1	X		X	
Technology	iPad	3	X			X
Technology	iPod	3	X		X	
Technology	Sony Camera	1			X	
Cars / Bikes	Lamborghini	1		X		X
Cars / Bikes	BMW	1	X			X
Cars / Bikes	Mini Cooper	1	X			X
Cars / Bikes	Gold Gti	1	X			X

Category	Brand	Collage Count	For yourself	For others	Current	Aspirat
Role Models	Gossip Girl					
Role Models	Justin Bieber	1				
Social media	BBM	1				
Social media	Facebook	1				
Social media	Google	1				
Store	Mr Price	5				X
Store	Edgars	3				X
Store	Truworths	2	X			X
Store	Woolworths	1				X
Store	Forever New	2				X
Store	YDE	2				X
Store	Billabong	2				X
Store	Guess	5				X
Store	Jay-Jays	4				X
Store	Nine West	3				
Store	Aldo	1				
Store	Sports Scene	1	X			X
Store	CTFM	1				X
Store	Roxy	1				
Store	Superga	1				
Store	Van's	1				
Store	Spur	1				
Store	CompuTicket					

## APPENDIX VIII: BRANDS MENTIONED - Rosebank high-income Group

Category	Brand	Collage Count	For yourself	For others	Current	Aspirat
Food	Coca-cola	1				
Toiletries	MAC	2	X		X	
Toiletries	Bobby Brown		X		X	
Clothing	Billabong	2			X	
Clothing	Quicksilver	1			X	
Clothing	Treney (clothing)					
Clothing	Studio W					
Clothing	Country road	2			X	
Clothing	Twist				X	
Clothing	Ironfist				X	
Clothing	H&M (Sweedish brand)	2				
Clothing	Turbo costumes					
Clothing	Guess jeans	2		X		
Clothing	Ed Hardy					
Clothing	Tommy Hillfiger (negative)					X
Clothing	Rolling Stones T-Shirt					X
Cars / Bikes	Mustang			X		X
Cars / Bikes	Ferrari	1				
Cars / Bikes	Jeep					X
Cars / Bikes	Mini					X
Cars / Bikes	Audi TT					X
Cars / Bikes	Aston Martin	2		X		

Category	Brand	Collage Count	For yourself	For others	Current	Aspirat
Possessions	Music		X		X	
Possessions	Flat					X
Possessions	Polaroid camera		X			X
Possessions	Scull candy earphones	2				
Possessions	Flat	2				X
Possessions	Own cinema (old movies)					X
Status	Marc Jacobs	2				
Status	Marc Jacobs	2				
Status	Burberry	6			X	X
Status	Louis Vuitton	1				X
Status	Harry Winston (jewelery)					X
Status	Cartier Jewelery	2				X
Status	Dior					
Shoes	Jimmy Choos					
Shoes	Christian Loubouton					
Shoes	Converse					
Shoes	All Stars					
Mobile phones	BlackBerry	3				
Mobile phones	Ipod	3				
Technology	Apple				X	
Technology	iPad	3			X	
Technology	Apple Mac PC					X
Technology	Canon camera					X

Category	Brand	Collage Count	For yourself	For others	Current	Aspirat
Stores	Jay-Jays (negative)					
Stores	Video Spot	1				
Stores	Roxy	1				
Stores	Woolworths	2				X
Stores	Fnac ( store in France )					
Stores	Aldo Shoes	1				X
Stores	Exclusive books	1				X
Stores	Wicked Hair (hair salon)					
Stores	Big Blue					X
Stores	Kitch 'n Cool					
Stores	Mr Price		X			X
Media	Exit Magazine					
Media	Lula Magazine		X			X
Media	Exit Magaxine		X			X
Online	Tumblr Blog	3				
Online	BluBird vintage blog					
Online	iTunes	2				X
Online	e-Books					
Online	PS3					X
Role models	Oscar Wilde	1				
Role models	Desmond Tutus	1				
Role models	Haylee Williams (Paramore)	1				
Role models	Beatles				X	
Role models	Lady Gaga					