

**Symbolic consumption and the extended self during liminality
of MBA students**

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ABSTRACT

The current qualitative research was aimed at exploring and describing symbolic consumption and extension of self through possessions during liminality of full-time MBA students, moderated by financial constraint. The main purpose of the study was to gain deeper understanding of the liminal stage of full-time MBA students as consumers, and its effect on the symbolic consumption in the context of restricted financial resources.

The main purpose of the research determined its exploratory and inductive nature within the interpretivist philosophy to qualitative inquiry. Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants chosen according to the pre-set criteria. Raw data was analysed using constant comparative and content analyses.

The main findings of the research showed that during MBA studies as a period of liminality, participants faced the necessity to re-adjust their consumption behaviour in order to fulfil the shifts to new social roles and therefore construct new identities. Being financially constrained, they had to make trade-offs defined by main priorities of this stage in life. As a result, participants re-evaluated their previous consumption behaviour, and adopted a new one appropriate for their new social roles and gained new decision-making skills. Through financial constraint as an important moderating variable of the experience, participants gained new understanding of power and value of money which formed their consumption going forward.

The outcome of the research contributed to the existing body of knowledge on changes in consumption behaviour of individuals in life transitions, including symbolic consumption and self-extension through possessions. In addition to that, insights gained during research contributed to the understanding of the role financial constraint plays as a moderating variable for consumption in transition. Therefore, the results of the research are of practical value for marketers as they provide valuable insights that can be used for more efficient targeting of appropriate buyer groups.

KEYWORDS

liminality, symbolic consumption, extended self, financial constraint

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.

Vartush Grigorian _____ 12 March 2018

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1 Description of the problem and background

For any business to be successful it is essential to understand customers, and this comprehension would not be full without revealing the meanings of the two closely linked marketing concepts – “self” and “symbolic consumption” (Gazley & Watling, 2017). During the course of their lives consumers face various life events, changing their social reality. As a result and in response to that change consumers’ “selves” undergo a number of transformations, including shifts in social roles and needs associated with them (Hopkins, Siemens & Raymond, 2014). Consequently, consumption, as part of everyday routine forming individuals’ identities (Schäfer, Jaeger-Erben, & Bamberg, 2012) also undergoes changes. Therefore, knowledge not only of the categories of products and services consumers prefer during various life changing events, but also of the reasons for changes in consumer preferences is of a high value for marketers (Mathur, Moschis, & Lee, 2008).

A life changing period that involves separation from prior social roles and a period of transition to new roles, accompanied by potential change in consumption patterns (sometimes permanent) is known as a “liminal transition” (Noble & Walker, 1997, p. 30). During such liminal transitions individuals shift from one social role to another through three phases: 1) separation with symbolic detachment from previous roles; 2) liminality, with an individual being in-between the roles; 3) and aggregation, the finale of the transition, when a new identity is being formed (Beech, 2011). A practical example of such a liminal transition is enrolment to a full-time course of Master of Business Administration (MBA). In order to study an MBA, individuals have to detach from their previous roles (resign), become students for the duration of the course (liminality) and, finally, either get employed or start their own business after graduation (aggregation). Thus, students enrolled to the course could be regarded as either carrier-enhancers (getting better at job and making more money) or carrier-switchers (pursuing new prospects of carrier path) (Epstein, Clinton, Gabrovska, & Petrenko, 2013). In the example of enrolment in a full-time MBA course, carrier-enhancers pursue carrier promotion due to enhanced knowledge and skills acquired during the MBA while carrier-switchers view the MBA as a platform from which they can start carriers in new business fields (Epstein et al., 2013). Both strategies represent a shift in carrier (and social role,

as a result). Resignation from previous jobs leads both to a shift in social roles, and causes a certain degree of financial constraint for full-time MBA students.

In order to adjust to new circumstances, full-time MBA students have to change their consumption preferences. The possessions that play a key role in “easing the psychological difficulties” (Noble & Walker, 1997, p. 34) are symbolic during transition periods, which means they signify the owner’s image (Wattanasuwan, 2005) and are of emotional significance for their owners (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Belk, 1992; Belk, 1988). Among their key roles, possessions are symbolising new roles and new identities acquired during liminality (Noble & Walker, 1997). In this regard, Belk’s (1988) notion of the “extended self” is suitable regarding the ways individuals establish and maintain this new identity. Hence, being constitutive elements of the extended self, possessions play a variety of roles during liminality and this knowledge can be significant to consumer marketing as it can guide marketers’ choice of product promotion strategies (Noble & Walker, 1997; Wong, Hogg, & Vanharanta, 2013).

1.2 Research scope

The research scope covers symbolic consumption as a mean of self-extension during the period of liminality of full-time MBA students, accompanied by financial constraint.

1.3 Research motivation

A number of studies have been done to explore how life events lead to readjustments of consumption habits, for example Noble and Walker (1997); Kennett-Hensel, Sneath, and Lacey (2012); and Mathur et al. (2008). Still, Cody and Lawlor (2011) acknowledge the sparsity of attention that has been yet devoted to consumers experiencing the “mid-state of transition” (p. 224). The contribution of the study is of practical value for marketers to better understand the roles possessions play during a period of liminality, a gap identified by Kennett-Hensel et al. (2012). Furthermore, according to Schau (2014), there is limited knowledge on the effect of life transformations on consumer behaviour changes.

Following this discussion and elaborating on role-identity projects, Kleine III, Kleine, and Ewing (2017) highlighted the importance of exploring why and how identities drive consumption behaviour in order to advance both theoretical and practical understanding of consumption in general. In this regard, studying the “role-identity cultivation stage” (p.

1878) that takes place during the liminality is essential for comprehending the interconnection on role-identity, self, consumption, and possessions (Kleine III et al., 2017).

Therefore, exploring the lived experiences of those in between the identities has a potential to provide valuable insights into what can be a self-sufficient market segment – the “liminal consumer segment” (Kevina, 2012, p. 297). Understanding this market segment will allow in turn for a more efficient targeting of buyer groups (Kleine III et al., 2017).

Finally, the study also addresses the shortcoming identified by Sharma and Alter (2012) which suggests gaining insights into how individuals consume being financially deprived.

1.4 Research problem

Since consumption is “central to the meaningful practice of our everyday life” (Wattanasuwan, 2005, p. 179), possessions reflect individuals’ identities and are regarded as parts of their selves (Belk, 1988), playing an important symbolic role (Noble & Walker, 1997). Symbolic possessions, being emotionally important to the consumers (Belk, 1988), play multiple roles during life changing transformations (Belk, 1988, 1992; Mehta & Belk, 1991). For example, possessions help to establish and maintain a new identity (extended self) and roles (Belk, 1988; Noble & Walker, 1997). Therefore, a “self-creation project” is one of the key needs which individuals satisfy through consumption (Wattanasuwan, 2005, p. 179), in particular during life changing transitions known as liminality. This self-creation project consists of products consumed, activities undertaken and beliefs pursued, used by individuals to tell stories of who they are and with whom they identify (Wattanasuwan, 2005).

Consumer behaviour typically changes during such liminal transitions, as consumers tend to re-evaluate their consumption preferences (Mathur et al., 2008). An example of a planned liminality which has implications for consumer behaviour is embarking on a full-time MBA course. Noble and Walker (1997, p. 32) defined a period of liminal transition as “a change in a significant life role marked by a transitional or liminal period during which:

- a) personal identities are suspended, producing significant psychological consequences, and
- b) symbolic consumption may be used to facilitate the transition to the new role.”

Enrolment in a full-time MBA course typically leads to social role transitions (from an employee/entrepreneur to a full-time student) and a period of unemployment (accompanied with a certain degree of financial constraint). Limitations in financial resources might therefore have an impact on consumer preferences of full-time MBA students, especially in the context of symbolic consumption.

Against this background, the objective of this qualitative study was to explore and describe symbolic consumption behaviour and self-extension through possessions during liminality of full-time MBA students. The study aimed to gain deeper understanding of the liminal stage of full-time MBA students as consumers and its impact on symbolic consumption in the context of financial constraint.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review and covers the existing body of knowledge on the key concepts and their interconnectedness, which allowed the researcher to design a theoretical model reflecting the existing theory on self-extension through symbolic consumption during liminality. Financial constraint plays a role of a key variable in the model. Based on the insights gained through analysis of the conducted semi-structured interviews, the researcher adjusted the initially designed model to reflect the interviewees' experience.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

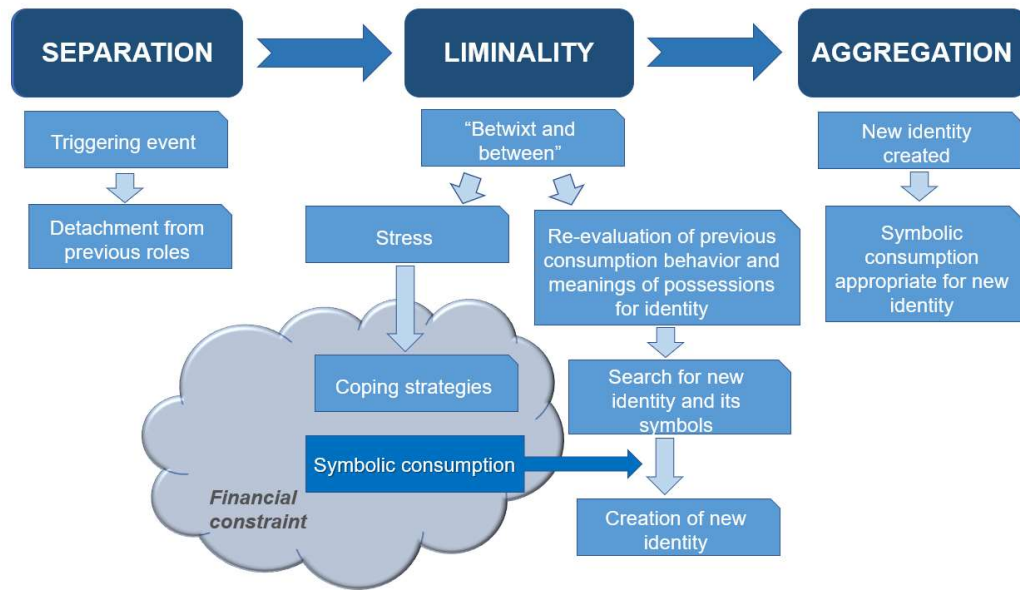
2.1 Introduction

The following literature review presents current findings and debates within academic literature on the concepts that are the key focus of the study – symbolic consumption and self-extension during liminality and financial constraint. These themes comprised the theoretical background for the study and thus are covered in this literature review. The review of the key theme – symbolic consumption – opened the discussion. Closely related to symbolic consumption, the second theme discussed was the extended self, well explored by researchers with Russell W. Belk being recognised as the leading scholar in the field. Since the studied sample (full-time MBA students) was experiencing termination of previous social roles and had not yet acquired new ones, liminality is the third theme that was reviewed with the focus on consumption during the transition period. Apart from a transition period, the studied sample was undergoing a period of unemployment and financial constraint. Therefore, consumption under stress and financial constraint was also discussed as an important element of the context.

Building on the theoretical and empirical background presented in following literature review, a theoretical conceptualisation of the study was designed to visualise the key concepts and their interrelatedness.

Figure 1 illustrates the three stages of a liminal transition undergone by full-time MBA students. Each stage has a number of sub-stages, at which full-time MBA students are subjected to certain transformation, leading to change in their consumption behaviour. Detailed descriptions of each stage and associated processes are presented later in this chapter. Role of financial constraint as an important variable, affecting consumption, is also discussed in the appropriate section of the chapter.

Figure 1: Liminal transition of full-time MBA students [researcher's conception].



The theoretical conceptualisation of the study was built on the basis of the model of a liminal transition suggested by (Noble & Walker, 1997), which adjusted to include all the elements to reflect the context.

As it can be seen, the theoretical conceptualisation of the study represents a process that can in other words be called a narrative, or a life story, showing a journey through past, present and future identities (Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995). This journey is not only unique to every individual, but can also be further complicated by experiencing a number of life transitions simultaneously (Hopkins, Siemens, & Raymond, 2014). Going through full-time MBA is an example of such a complex journey, when students go through at least two role transitions: firstly, becoming unemployed and, secondly, becoming a business school student. In accordance with the theoretical conceptualisation of the study, these social roles transitions progressed over three stages and were accompanied by a number of transformational processes, affecting consumption and self-extension. The following sections of this chapter present the critical review of the existing body of knowledge on the mentioned concepts and therefore allow to better understand the liminal transition of full-time MBA students.

2.2 Symbolic consumption

Contributing to the discussion of the practical value of the current study to marketers, it is important to mention that understanding the subjective nature of symbolic meanings (Prónay & Hetesi, 2016) is particularly important for brand management, because a brand's success depends heavily on its symbolic value (Preciado, 2013). Wong et al. (2013) argued in this regard, that understanding possessions and their role for the extended self can be valuable and applicable to consumer marketing.

Most of the existing consumer research was focused more on “how products make people feel” rather than “how people feel about the products” (Shank & Rohan, 2017, p. 188). It was Sidney J. Levy who opened the discussion of the symbolic consumption in his seminal work “*Symbols for sale*” in 1959 (Gazley & Watling, 2017), and claimed that apart from their functional characteristics, the things people buy also hold important “personal and social meanings” (Levy, 1959, p. 119). Thus, for example, it is more the meaning associated with smoking (masculinity) versus the functional benefit of it (nicotine intake) that a consumer will “absorb” through product utilisation (Kaiser, Ulrike, Schreier, Martin, & Janiszewski, Chris, 2017). Since then, material possessions, their value and symbolic meanings for a consumer have been well studied by scholars ((Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988, 1992; Mehta & Belk, 1991; Richins, 1994; Tian & Belk, 2005; Wattanasuwan, 2005). As a result, (Wattanasuwan, 2005) made a claim that consumption is an essential element of meaningful life as pursuit of meaningfulness lies at the basis of human existence. Building on that, (Prónay & Hetesi, 2016) called consumption a “society-forming force in modern society” (p. 88), which plays three overarching roles: a) it reinforces an individual's social status; b) it plays an essential role in social identity construction; and c) it forms the foundation of social interactions.

During their full-time MBA journey, students stay involved in consumption in their daily life. Their consumer preferences are thus guided by the motivation that acts as a driving force in every particular moment.

2.2.1 Motivation behind consumption

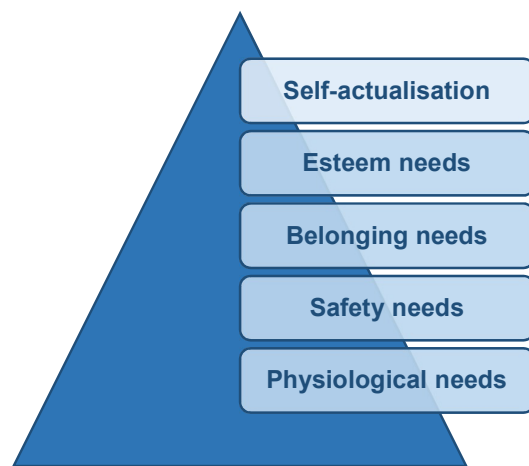
Scholars (for example, (Preciado, 2013; Wattanasuwan, 2005)) agreed that consumption is much more than just possession of tangible or intangible objects. Rather, it is a “highly complex phenomenon” (Witt, 2010, p. 18), when a product's value is defined by the extent to which it can satisfy not only immediate functional needs, but psychological and

social ones as well (Ahuvia, 2005; Wattanasuwan, 2005). This ability of a product to satisfy different kinds of needs simultaneously lies in the basis of the motivation that drives consumption. (Levy, 1959) highlighted the shift in the mindset of a consumer, when the question "Do I need this?" is increasingly being replaced by the questions "Do I want it?" and/or "Do I like it?" (p. 119). Similarly, in the daily consumption behaviour of full-time MBA students there is correspondingly a need to manage questions, which has implications for their consumption motivation.

Unprecedented economic growth over the past two hundred years, accompanied by substantial changes in the quality and variety of consumer goods and services, resulted in the growth of demand, or more precisely the "real per capita consumption" (Witt, 2001, p. 31). As a result of such a shift consumer lifestyles have undergone a fundamental transformation (Chai, 2017). For a consumer, the choice of a product becomes complex not only because of the variety of goods and services available, but also because a consumer pursues various motivations when making a purchasing decision (Witt, 2010).

One of the most well-known theories of motivation, which laid the foundation for people's management, is the content theory of motivation suggested by American psychologist Abraham Maslow in his book "*Theory of human motivation*" in 1943 (Kermally, 2005). Maslow suggested that all human needs can be structured as a five-level pyramid.

Figure 2: Maslow's hierarchy of human needs Adapted from Greene and Burke (2007, p. 118)].



The theory is based on two major premises postulated by Maslow: 1) human beings are by nature motivated to possess things they do not have, and 2) once satisfied, a need is no longer a motivator and no longer influences human behaviour (Greene & Burke, 2007, p. 119). Yet, it is not a "thing" that identifies a need, but the lack of a thing (Taormina & Gao, 2013). The first four levels of needs form the foundation of the pyramid and are

known as “deficit needs” while the last and the highest level of the pyramid represents “being needs” with the goal to “better” the self (Greene & Burke, 2007, p. 119).

Accordingly, satisfaction of lower-level needs of full-time MBA students in their daily consumption practice should be achieved first before satisfaction of their next higher-level needs can be achieved (Taormina & Gao, 2013). Upward movement along these hierarchical stages is a roadmap for increasing maturity, also known as self-actualisation (Pfaffenberger, 2013). Self-actualisation with aesthetic, cognitive and authentic needs is achieved by only a small proportion of individuals (J. M. Lee & Hanna, 2015) which has been recognised as one of the criticisms of the theory. Before applying the theory, (Kermally, 2005) suggested to take into consideration the fact that, in practice, there is an overlap of needs and that they are driven to a big extent by the context (situational, cultural and individual). Hence, both situational context and the level of maturity as the personal growth pursued and achieved by students during MBA course defined the level of needs to be satisfied.

Another approach to studying motivation that explains the long-term growth of consumption is the “learning to consume” (LTC) approach, suggested by Ulrich Witt ((Witt, 2001, 2017). LTC is an interdisciplinary study aimed at gaining insights from biology and psychology in order to explore the mechanisms underlying consumer preferences (Chai, 2017). It defined two levels of motivation driving consumer behaviour and the learning process, that modifies it – cognitive and non-cognitive (Witt, 2017).

Non-cognitive level is presented by basic motivational force – innate needs and drives, that are constant and form the part of the genetic heritage universal to all humans, and acquired wants, emerging as an adaptive response to changing environment (Chai, 2017). Known as “basic needs” (Witt, 2017) they are presented by two groups – of physiological and non-physiological nature. The first group includes the needs related to biological functioning of a body: for example, need for food, water, oxygen, protection of body against cold and pain. The second group of “basic needs” includes need for care, affection, “arousal” or “cognitive stimulation”, positive self-image and social recognition (Witt, 2017, p. 276). The common feature of the two groups of needs is the role that deprivation of needs plays for motivating actions, including consumption. The motivation for taking actions to eliminate deprivation grows as a need is becomes more deprived, until being satiated; though the question of satisfaction of the second group of needs is more complex due to the needs’ nature (Witt, 2017).

Witt referred to cognitive level of motivation and learning as “insightful learning” that leads to “goal-striving” (2017, p. 279), when achieving consumption is a rewarding

experience on its own (examples: efficiency, safety, sustainable consumption) or serves as a basis for achieving “deeper” cognitive needs (2017, p. 280). Outcome of consumption will depend on an individual’s creativity and ability to gain insights to guide his/her appropriate actions (Chai, 2017).

Motivation for consumption that satiates needs for positive self-image and social recognition were of particular interest for the study as they are closely aligned with the concepts of self-extension and symbolic consumption discussed later in Section 2.5. Witt (2017) defined deprivation of a need for a positive self-image as the “discrepancy between how they currently perceive themselves and their ideal self-image” (p. 284). In the case of social (and status) recognition an individual tends to compare him/herself with others and might feel insufficiently recognised. In both cases, individuals will apply to symbolic consumption. In the first case, symbolic consumption will be driven by the need to reduce the discrepancy between the present and the ideal self through consuming what is symbolic to the ideal self in order to restore self-congruity (Guzmán, Paswan, & Fabrize, 2017). In the second case is to show the improvement of status through consuming those goods and services that will be recognised as appropriate by the peer group (Witt, 2017).

As well as Maslow’s theory, LTC has been criticised for being context-dependant which makes generalisation of needs and their characteristics not applicable (Chai, 2017).

Regarding different stages of the experience that full-time MBA students undergo (pre-MBA, MBA and post-MBA), satisfaction at each stage is closely linked with particular needs and goals. These needs and goals thus determine particular consumption activities, either symbolic or non-symbolic, or both. Since the satisfaction of different needs depends on different properties of the consumed goods and services, motivations underlying consumer behaviour in the cases of symbolic and non-symbolic consumption differ significantly (Witt, 2010). In particular, self-esteem as a basic psychological need can be also referred to as an identity “payoff” and might drive consumption decision towards “investment” (Thompson & Loveland, 2015, p. 243). Challenged by financial constraint, it was suggested that full-time MBA students had to make a strategic “trade-off” based on assessment of possible advantages resulting from investment in a particular identity need.

What unites symbolic and non-symbolic consumption is that “consumption activity is motivated by the satisfaction it promises to yield” (Witt, 2001, p. 31). Satisfaction in its turn depends on whether objects chosen for symbolic consumption hold the meaning

that a consumer is seeking, or in other words, if they have appropriate product symbolism.

2.2.2 Product symbolism

Being the basis of symbolic consumption (Prónay & Hetesi, 2016), product symbolism defines the meaning the product holds for consumers and the image it creates in consumers' minds. Meaning as a concept is regarded as a fundamental aspect of life and a "primary driver" ((Lanier & Rader, 2017) of symbolic consumption in Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Thus, consumption is viewed not only as a functional, but also a symbolic activity in which consumers themselves determine meanings of products (Lanier & Rader, 2017) that they consume in order to construct and reconstruct their identities at different life stages (Belk, 1988; Schouten, 1991).

When an individual has a free choice to formulate consumption preferences, he/she would choose those things that hold particular symbolic meaning (Wattanasuwan, 2005). When choosing from which brand to buy, a consumer would prefer the brand that matches his/her image of self and thus can promote self-congruity (Guzmán et al., 2017). The outcome of this choice will depend on which brand's marketing message appeals to consumer identity and to brand fit (Bhattacharjee, Berger, & Menon, 2014). When the product of a certain brand promotes identity consumption will be regarded as a positive experience, leading to higher customer satisfaction (Chowdhury, Tilottama G., Desai, Kalpesh K., & Bolton, Lisa, 2012).

Eventually, through consumption, an individual surrounds him/herself with products that carry relevant self-defining meanings (Scharfenberger, Wentzel, Warlop, & Tomczak, 2014). Sense of meaningfulness is an essential void in the "self-creation project" carried out by symbolically acquiring meanings through the products individuals daily consume (Wattanasuwan, 2005).

Symbols of gender, age and social participation are the basic ones used for the main purpose – to distinguish (Levy, 1959). These cultural symbols are learned through social interaction and usually form groups of symbols that guide behaviour (Solomon, 1983). There is a consent among researchers (Belk, Bahn, & Mayer, 1982; Solomon, 1983) that the process of learning meanings behind the symbols and getting the skills to decode them begins in childhood and continues throughout the grade school, with media, family and friends being the key sources of the information to form the ""language" of expressive consumption" (Belk et al., 1982, p. 4). It is a result of a non-verbal "social agreement" on

the symbolism that certain products carry between the members of societal groups (Witt, 2010, p. 18). Thus, symbolic qualities and value of products are determined through the process of evaluation and socialisation (Solomon, 1983). Joining the class full-time, MBA students also join a certain social group with non-verbalised convention on what symbols are supposed to be appropriate for a group member.

The presented theoretical background of product symbolism thus confirms (Levy, 1959) notion that producers of goods are selling not only physical merchandise, but symbols as well. Hence, functional characteristic of products that serve as symbols are of a lower importance as compared to what (Witt, 2010, p. 18) called “social convention” on what goods and services mean and what symbols they represent. (Witt, 2010, p. 18) defined two major conditions for the emergence of this social convention:

- Individuals belonging to one societal group should share common understanding of the message that symbolic consumption can translate
- Based on this common view on the role of symbolic consumption individuals should agree on the appropriateness of using various symbols in various contexts.

Therefore, individuals belonging to one culture should interpret symbolic meanings in the same way (Solomon, 1983). Nevertheless, Prónay and Hetesi (2016) pointed at the claim made by Colin Campbell in his work “*The sociology of consumption*” in 1996 that there is no universal language for decoding symbolic meanings of products as only circumstances can provide that meaning, making context of symbolic consumption the cornerstone. Since an object of symbolic consumption can carry several meanings, it can play multiple roles in identity creation process (Brandi & Denmark, 2006).

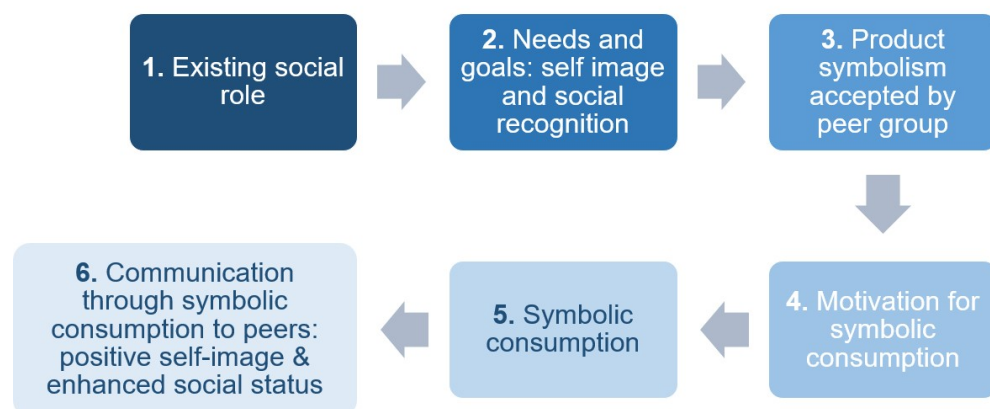
Building on this approach, various meanings of symbolic consumption in different life circumstances and contexts have recently been explored. For example, certain tourism destinations are more attractive to certain tourists due to congruency between the individuals’ self-images and destination brands (Gazley & Watling, 2017; Preciado, 2013). Restaurants can develop from just places to eat to sources of self-extension projects (Han, Nguyen, & Simkin, 2016). Through belonging to different societal and cultural groups and backgrounds, full-time MBA students are united by the same context. Exploring which symbols full-time MBA students impose on various products during their journey allowed a deepening in the understanding of product symbolism and non-verbal conventions supporting it.

Enriching the understanding of symbolic consumption through its various forms, it has even been studied through the concepts which at first glance seem to oppose the very notion of possession such as nomadism and possessions disposal. Thus, it was found that modern nomads have “nomadism as a state of mind” (Nanarpuzha, Sinha, & Varman, 2014, p. 621), according to which they classify all their possessions depending on emotional attachment and instrumentality, which in its turn defines relationships with those possessions. Not only are special possessions meaningful for identity (Belk, 1988), but everyday commodities as well. Disposal of these ordinary goods can be also regarded as a threat to identity, which individuals tend to avoid (Argo & Meng, 2016). As stated earlier, starting the journey, full-time MBA students join a new social group and non-verbal rules of the group might include temporal (for the duration of the course) termination of certain consumer behaviours dictated by the circumstances of the context (for example, time constraint due to high work-load on the course).

A symbol is considered to be appropriate in a given context if it serves to enhance one’s self (Levy, 1959). Building on that, symbolic consumption involves evaluation of the appropriateness of the product symbolism in a certain situation, rather than pure rational decision making (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988; Schouten, 1991). The current study was aimed at exploring which products full-time MBA students regarded as appropriate symbols of their selves during various stages of their experience and motivation behind this product symbolism.

Building on the presented theoretical background related to symbolic consumption the following model of a symbolic transaction was built (Figure 3). The presented symbolic consumption transaction precedes the formation of attachments to possessions.

Figure 3: Symbolic consumption transaction.



2.3 Communicative function of symbolic consumption

As (Belk, 1988) noted, possessions reflect individuals' identities and are regarded as parts of their selves. Developing that notion, (Richins, 1994) argued that through possessions individuals consciously or unconsciously reveal their personal values, which allows them to fulfil two important functions – characterisation and communication. The social communication function is based on the existence of certain social stereotypes regarding various possessions that are believed to exist and enable observers to make appropriate conclusions regarding material values of the possessions' owners (Richins, 1994). Therefore, symbolic consumption is an important agent for communicating various messages (Witt, 2010) not only to other individuals, but to oneself as well (Argo & Meng, 2016; Prónay & Hetesi, 2016).

Decoding symbolic meanings of consumption behaviour is an essential prerequisite of the communication function of consumption (Belk et al., 1982). Thus, products that individuals consume can be “self-expressive” when signalling to the society and the consumer her/himself who he/she is (Gao, Wheeler, & Shiv, 2009). This non-verbal communication through consumption choices allows for achieving perhaps one of the key purposes of symbolic consumption – expression of one's identity (Belk et al., 1982).

From the reviewed theory, the social communication function is actively used to communicate various aspects of the self. Different possessions express different meanings and this acquisition of meanings through possessions is the core need met by consumption (Belk, 1988). Coming from different social and cultural backgrounds, full-time MBA students would have different values, which reflect in different meanings that they seek and express through their possessions.

2.4 The extended self

The significance of the possessions, as part of the extended self, has received continued attention in consumer behaviour research (Ahuvia, 2005; Karanika & Hogg, 2010; Richins, 1994; Tian & Belk, 2005). As Belk (1988) emphasised in his seminal work *“Possessions and the extended self”*: “we cannot hope to understand consumer behaviour without gaining some understanding of the meanings that consumers attach to possessions” (p. 139). Consumption activity can be recognised as symbolic when an individual chooses, buys and uses products for the purposes of non-verbal self-expression (Belk et al., 1982).

These products, being either tangible or intangible, are the possessions “we call ours” (Belk, 1988, p. 139). Hence, ownership and use of these possessions help individuals to communicate their identity to society and themselves (Argo & Meng, 2016). (Ahuvia, 2005) went as far as stating that most of the modern consumption is aimed at fulfilling the self-identity project as consumers tend to judge about themselves and others in relation to features and capacities of the owned goods (Weiss, Liad & Johar, Gita Venkataramani, 2016). For example, clothes can be used to communicate titles related to occupation (Ceballos & Hodges, 2015). In the context of the study, as an individual shifts from his/her previous occupation with conventional or non-conventional dress code to being a full-time MBA student, his/her previous identity gets abolished, a new one gets created and a new appropriate dress code is being followed (Ceballos & Hodges, 2015).

The foundation for modern conceptions of self, according to which possessions are parts of self, was laid by William James, who presented his theory of “me” and “mine” in 1890 (Belk, 1988; Rapier, 2016). Building on James’ theory, Belk (1988) defined the following major elements of the extended self: ideas, body, experiences, internal processes and “those persons, places, and things to which one feels attached” (p. 141). These “persons, places and things” are regarded as the “most clearly extended” (p. 141) and objects in these categories (specifically “things”, i.e. material possessions) are the potential means for self-extension (Belk, 1988). Nevertheless, abstract (or intangible) possessions such as experiences, ideas and relationships should not be excluded from the self-extension activity, especially with the recent expansion of the digital world and the newly emerging processes of “virtual self-construction” that takes place there (Belk, 2013, p. 478, 2014). In their day-to-day consumption, full-time MBA students face the choice between these two categories of possessions and the result depends on the value that these categories present for the extension of their self.

Apart from acquisition, possessions can be lost, whether voluntarily or not. Involuntarily loss of possessions (due to theft, disaster, economic reasons) can be regarded by individuals as a “loss or lessening of self” (followed by grief and mourning and an attempt for “self-restoration” (Belk 1988, pp. 142-143)). This primary reaction to the trauma is believed to be a stimulus for creativity. As opposed to that, the voluntarily loss of possessions, known as disposition, is usually not as traumatic. One of the examples is a disposition followed by an individual realising that a possession is no longer consistent with his/her self-concept (Belk 1988). Another example is an act of sacrifice (for instance, a religious act or a ritual), which is done with a purpose and has meaning behind it (Belk, 1992).

Consumers' relationships with their possessions signify that consumption is mainly a social act in its core, largely driven by peers' feedback (Solomon, 1983). According to the symbolic interactionism perspective suggested by Michael R. Solomon, product symbolism participates in the definition of reality and role performance (Solomon, 1983), regarding the appropriateness of social behaviour in a certain context (Gbadamosi, 2015). The symbolic interactionism approach is focused on the process of how individuals understand the social reality and shape their self-image through interaction within the symbolic environment they live in (Solomon, 1983). In the case of the study, social reality was the full-time MBA journey that students were undertaking, with both constraints and opportunities that the context provides. The way students shape their self-image through symbolic consumption reflects how they understand their current roles and how they perceive themselves in their particular social roles (Shank & Rohan, 2017).

Extending the theory of symbolic interactionism, Richard Elliott suggested in 1997 two directions in which product symbolism operates – social symbolism and self-symbolism (Gbadamosi, 2015). Accordingly, self-symbolism acts in forming self-identity, and social-symbolism defines social environment, both forming and maintaining individual's identity and social relationships (Prónay & Hetesi, 2016). Thus, facing the necessity to adjust to new roles, full-time MBA students would have to change their consumption to adjust their self-identity in order to fit in the new social reality. According to (Solomon, 1983), an individual's self-concept is largely defined by other people's evaluations, guided by the appropriateness of the symbols employed to signal a role. When a discrepancy between a socially accepted set of behaviours associated with the role and the actual individual's behaviour occurs, an individual can apply to material symbols to boost his/her confidence in meeting the role demands.

This shift between the roles that full-time MBA students experience can be considered a life transition, accompanied by a degree of uncertainty and requiring enrolment of various coping strategies. Consumption as a self-extension activity can be questioned and re-evaluated, making individuals seek for new ways of boosting their self-confidence.

2.5 Liminality and consumption in transitional periods

Consumption has long become an essential part of individuals' lives and an everyday routine. As with any routine, it is a well-established activity that balances individuals' personal needs with available resources and facilities (Schäfer et al., 2012). Consumers

tend to pursue this comfortable state of things, that they are used to, thus living by inertia (Andreasen, 1984).

But consumers' personalities, their values and self-perceptions are not predetermined and static throughout their lives. They do change by choice or chance, causing change in consumers' lifestyle and thus can be referred to as "life status changes" (Andreasen, 1984, p. 784). Enrolling to a full-time MBA course with all the challenges connected with the change in social roles and statuses can thus be regarded as such a life status change undertaken by students' own choice. The key social role in this case is the role of a student. Each student creates his/her own individual version of this social role – a role-identity (Kleine III et al., 2017). Unlike more stable identities (for example, daughter/son, farther/mother), this identity is a transitory one as it is more subjective to a change (Reed, Forehand, Puntoni, & Warlop 2012). Many authors have shown that such changes can lead to serious stress (for example, Andreasen, 1984; Lee, Moschis, & Mathur, 2001; Moschis, 2007; Hopkins et al., 2014; and Yap & Kapitan, 2017).

2.5.1 Life changing events and consumption coping strategies

Major life changes, or life transitions, also known as "stressors" (Lee, Moschis, & Mathur, 2001, p. 26) can be either acute or chronic, with the main differences being in duration of the causing event and individuals' objectivity of perception (Moschis, 2007). Both categories of stress require adjustment and adaptation to new roles (Hopkins et al., 2014; Lee, Moschis, & Mathur, 2001), underlying changes in consumer preferences (Schouten, 1991). During the shift in consumer lifestyle the existing equilibrium is broken, causing attempts to re-allocate existing resources (such as money, time, goods) in order to restore the previous equilibrium or achieve a new one by meeting the demands of the new roles (Hopkins et al., 2014). Increase in money saving can be an example of a coping strategy, helping consumers to restore the sense of control when facing a stressful environment (Durante & Laran, 2016).

Based on the comprehensive review of 35 years of available literature on consumption during life transitions, Yap and Kapitan (2017) suggested a consumption coping framework which consists of four phases:

1. Preparation

According to the framework, consumption coping is preceded and much determined by a preparation stage. At this stage consumers are making plans for both foreseeable

and unforeseeable events through available resources (for example, savings accounts).

2. Context

Following Campbell's critic regarding product symbolism and notion that context of symbolic consumption is the cornerstone, Yap and Kapitan (2017) also suggested that particular life events set the stage of a stressful context and that leads to particular coping responses.

Another important element of the stage is individuals' subjective appraisal of a particular stressful life event. How individuals evaluate an event and which coping strategy they will chose depends on personality traits, self-confidence and ability to manage a stressful life event efficiently. Life events can be regarded as congruent with individuals' goals, or incongruent with individuals' goals.

3. Coping strategies

In their attempt to relieve psychological tensions consumers get engaged in coping behaviours (strategies), that can be classified into two groups as suggested by Duhachek and Oakley (2007):

- (1) Approach strategies, when consumers face the challenge to life condition and address it directly.
- (2) Avoidance strategies, when consumers distance themselves from the stressor and its consequences and adjust to it indirectly.

4. Consumption coping opportunities

At this stage, consumers pursue consumption opportunities that will help them to follow one of the two coping strategies chosen at the previous stage. Thus, haven chosen the approach coping strategy, a consumer will join various support groups and increase consumption appropriate for the new role. Consumers that have chosen the avoidance coping strategy will tend to buy compulsively, increase alcohol consumption, avoid or delay consumption and dispose possessions, associated with the previous life stage.

Although the two coping strategies might seem to be opposite, consumers can adopt a combination of coping options within the strategies when facing a challenging life event. Therefore individuals use consumption coping strategies to either accept and integrate their new roles, or reject and escape from them (Yap & Kapitan, 2017).

Challenged by the demands of their new roles, full-time MBA students face the necessity to adjust to them through consumption. The outcome depends on how successfully students go through the described phases and which consumption coping strategies and options they choose as a result. As the coping framework suggests, the result of such an adjustment will much depend on whether students regard full-time MBA course as a positive or negative life changing experience. In addition to that, they have to deal with ambiguous feelings, typical for all periods of transitions (Hopkins et al., 2014).

2.5.2 Roles transition and symbolic consumption

Schouten's (1991) seminal work on the role of plastic surgery in the self-construction project marked the growth of interest in researching the role of symbolic consumption in role transition experiences (Brandt & Denmark, 2006). Hence, Schouten (1991) highlighted the importance of symbolic consumption for success of role transitions through exploration, integration and ongoing maintenance of new identities.

As suggested by Schau (2014), such a role transformation might be a result of a consumer pursuing new life goals and new experiences and is seen as a "fresh start" accompanied with hard work and commitment (p. 177). This definition of a "fresh start" accurately describes the experience offered by the full-time MBA course for those taking the journey. Significant changes in an individual's life roles can further accompany such major life events as change in marital status (whether marriage, or divorce), birth of a child, college graduation and others (Noble & Walker, 1997). Typically, throughout their lives, individuals experience a number of such role transitions (Kennett-Hensel et al., 2012). Enrolling in a full time MBA course can be regarded as one of such experiences involving not only identity and role transformation, but could also be regarded by students as a "fresh start" in life.

Researchers studying life transitions (Schouten, 1991; (Noble & Walker, 1997); (Beech, 2011) Kennett-Hensel et al., 2012) refer to the framework presented by the French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in "*The rites of passage*" (written in 1908 and translated in 1960). According to van Gennep (Brandt & Denmark, 2006; Kennett-Hensel et al., 2012; Schouten, 1991), an individual going through a significant life transition passes three distinct stages:

- (1) Separation, in which an individual is detached from the previous social role.
- (2) Transition, in which an individual changes to adjust to the new identity and roles or creates new ones.

(3) Reincorporation, in which an individual integrates the new self with the new roles.

Transition, also known as liminality is characterised by an individual being separated from previous roles, relationships and consumption patterns (Beudaert, Özçağlar-Toulouse, & Türe, 2016) and has not yet established new ones. This could lead to creating disruptive effects on an individual's perception of the self (Noble & Walker, 1997). Liminal transition begins with a triggering event, after which an individual symbolically detaches him/herself from the prior role and prepares for a new role which is obtained through the search for a new self-concept (Noble & Walker, 1997). This search is conducted in certain places for a certain period of time and uses certain rites that facilitate the transition (Beech, 2011). In the case of the full-time MBA journey – leaving a job in order to enrol for the course as a student – can be regarded as a triggering event with the course itself being the domain and the facilitating context of the transition.

The concept of liminality was further extended by van Gennep's greatest follower and leading specialist in symbolic anthropology, Victor Turner (Neumann, 2012) in "*The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*" (1967) and in "*The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*" (1969). Turner described the liminal stage as "limbo between a past state and a coming one" (Schouten, 1991, p. 421) and period of "incompleteness" (Kevina, 2012, p. 288). Thus, liminal individuals (liminars) are "betwixt and between" the separation and the reincorporation stages (Beech, 2011; Schouten, 1991). (Noble & Walker, 1997) based their definition of liminality on the notion that life events triggering liminal transitions mainly affect roles that are core to the definition of self. The period of liminal transition is characterised by re-evaluation of life, symbols that reflect identity and the overall re-examination of possessions as a reflection of self (Kennett-Hensel et al., 2012). Hence, Beech (2011) defines liminality as a "reconstruction of identity (in which the sense of self is significantly disrupted) in such a way that the new identity is meaningful for the individual and their community" (p. 287).

Based on these definitions, an operationalised definition of liminality chosen for the purpose was:

A period of re-evaluation of life and re-examination of symbols (possessions) that reflect current identity, resulting in transformation to a new identity and roles through symbolic consumption as a facilitator of the transition.

In traditional cultures, studied by van Gennep and Turner, the role of the facilitator of the transition was played by various rites of passages. Bridging the gap between past, present and future stages of an individual's personal history, these rites are idiomatic

elements of the transformation (Raineri, 2015). Since in modern world individuals are deprived of such rites and consequently in most cases are left on their own to deal with transition challenges (Brandt & Denmark, 2006) they have to create their own personal rites of passage using symbols available through consumption (Mehta & Belk, 1991).

Thus, consumption in general and possessions in particular can be used to both ease the psychological tension and “fill the void” (Noble & Walker, 1997, p. 34) of the lost past and facilitate the passage to new identity and roles ((Mehta & Belk, 1991); (Schouten, 1991). During this transition period “role-identity-related” possessions (Kleine III et al., 2017, p. 1878) that support the identity either functionally or symbolically become of a particular relevance. In this regard, existing possessions link an individual to his/her past identities and relationships, and new possessions signify new identity and roles, both becoming important elements of coping strategies in response to distress and confusion of the transition period (Kennett-Hensel et al., 2012).

Sharing similar experience during the transition period, full-time MBA students have the opportunity to challenge their own views and beliefs (Raineri, 2015) and question the role possessions play for their identity creation. Deprivation of material resources accompanying liminality can encourage students to prioritise essential needs over wants and re-evaluate the conventional market value of goods (Cheung & McColl-Kennedy, 2015). This self-reflection and self-exploration typical to liminality can potentially stimulate personality growth (Herminia & Otilia, 2016). Personal growth in its turn can boost creativity regarding innovative ways of using limited resources (Cheung & McColl-Kennedy, 2015), boost productivity, encourage new social contacts and give an overall sense of freedom (Bamber, Matthew, Allen-Collinson, Jacquelyn, & McCormack, John, 2017). For the purpose of the study, full-time MBA students were interviewed at the last stage of their journey (working on research). By that time, they would have been going through the role transition for approximately a year. Starting full-time MBA journey and the period of “role-identity cultivation” as “rookies” students will end it as “veterans”, maintaining and keeping ongoing development of their new internalised role-identities (Kleine III et al., 2017). Commitment to the new identity occurring at the last stage of the transformation journey and carried on to the reincorporation stage signalled the completion of the personal growth (Herminia & Otilia, 2016).

The degree of stress that accompanies transition experience during liminality of full-time MBA students can be intensified when it involves a period of financial constraint due to temporary unemployment.

2.6 Consumption under stress and financial constraint

In the context of the study full-time MBA students have to leave their current jobs in order to cope with the curriculum. This leads to a loss of a source of stable income and thus puts students under financial constraint.

Through being unemployed and financially constraint, consumers tend to evaluate their well-being using not only objective measures (for example, income), but subjective ones as well, through comparison of relevant standards (Sharma & Alter, 2012). Both individuals' subjective interpretation of life events as well as the context of the stressful event are important, thus any planned or unplanned life event may be seen as stressful only subjectively by an individual (Moschis, 2007b).

Financially constrained consumers tend to "stretch" their limited resources (Fernbach, Kan, & Lynch Jr, 2015, p. 1204). They also start to prefer material goods over experiences, as being limited in resources consumers are more concerned about their purchases' longevity (Tully, Hershfield, & Meyvis, 2015). In addition, during the period of financial deprivation consumers might feel that because they are limited in financial resources they are inferior (Sharma & Alter, 2012). One of the strategies to cope with the financial well-being imbalance might be seeking scarce goods (Sharma & Alter, 2012), as scarcity makes them attractive symbols (Witt, 2010). Thus, availability of resources (time, money, social support) during full-time MBA as the transition journey and the extent of control over the process will define whether the whole experience (including the triggering event) will be perceived by students as positive or negative (Hopkins et al., 2014)

It is not only unplanned life events and status changes that can be stressful, but planned or anticipated ones as well (Moschis, 2007b). However, any stressful life changes can have both negative and positive influences on certain individuals' behaviours (Durante & Laran, 2016). Individuals gain an opportunity to re-evaluate and re-arrange their lives (Andreasen, 1984) and develop new consumer and decision making skills and patterns (Moschis, 2007). As a possible result of such re-evaluation individuals might also to start spend more on certain goods and services (Hopkins et al., 2014) as importance of certain items during such periods can increase (Tonner, 2016). Thus, life changing events can be regarded as "windows of opportunity" for shifting to more sustainable consumption (Schäfer et al., 2012, p. 67).

Being temporarily unemployed, full-time MBA students experience limitation of their resources and have to face the challenge of consumption under financial constraint. As

the first reaction to the new circumstances, they might respond by adjusting their daily consumption behaviour. Along with changing their consumption patterns, students have an opportunity to reflect on their pre-MBA consumption patterns. This period of self-reflection will allow them to decide whether previous decision patterns are still aligned with their personality and will be carried over after MBA, or if they need to be re-arranged according to changing priorities.

2.7 Conclusion

The presented literature review reflected the growing attention that symbolic consumption is receiving in consumer research (Preciado, 2013). The importance of a particular context in which symbolic consumption takes place, as suggested by a number of researchers, has also been highlighted. Hopkins et al. (2014) noted that prior research has not sufficiently addressed life transitions of consumers, in particular, regarding non-Western societies (Yap & Kapitan, 2017). In addition to that, Yap and Kapitan (2017) defined the lack of insights into life transitions that a qualitative research can provide, pointing at the fact that the existing body of the research on life transitions is dominated by quantitative research. Regarding the existing body of research on identity projects, Thompson and Loveland (2015) noted that past research has not paid enough attention to the role that financial and time constraints play in identity related consumption.

Taking into consideration the abovementioned lack of qualitative data on consumers' life transformations in non-Western societies, the current study is believed to contribute to the existing body of research by providing insights gained during semi-structure interviews with full-time MBA students in a South African business school.

The literature review presented in this chapter laid the foundation of the research objectives and appropriate research questions discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1 Purpose of the research

The study was aimed at exploring symbolic consumption of full-time MBA students undergoing liminal experience. Based on the theoretical background presented in Chapters 1 and 2, the central research objective of the proposed study was:

To explore and describe symbolic consumption behaviour and self-extension through possessions during liminality of full-time MBA students.

The research questions were designed to explore the change in consumption behaviour of full-time MBA students since the beginning of the course in general, the symbolic consumption during the duration of the course in particular, and the role financial constraint played in this shift.

3.2 Research questions

The following research questions were formulated to address the central research objective:

3.2.1 Research question 1

How did consumer preferences of full-time MBA students change during their course, as a period of liminality?

This research question was aimed at exploring the shift in the consumer preferences of full-time MBA students over the duration of the course (i.e. a period of liminality). Both extrinsic and intrinsic reasons for the shift were explored in order to gain insights in the undergone experience.

3.2.2 Research question 2

How did symbolic consumption preferences of MBA students, who regarded possessions as means of the extended self, change during their full-time course, as a period of liminality?

This research question pursued the exploration of the meanings that possessions held for full-time MBA students before and during the course. The research question allowed to explore the shift in meanings and their both short-term and assumed long-term impact on consumer behaviour as expressed by the participants. As a result, it was possible to assess the depth of overall personality change experienced by the participants.

3.2.3 Research question 3

What effect does limited financial resources have on symbolic consumption of MBA students during their full time course, as a period of liminality?

The final research question sought to study and determine the role financial constraint played for consumption in general and symbolic consumption in particular. It allowed to explore both negative and positive outcomes of financially deprived consumption regarding consumer decision making and skills.

The research questions presented in this chapter defined the research method and design presented in the next chapter as to promote data collection to gain necessary insights for the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology and design that was used for the current cross-sectional study. The literature review presented in Chapter 2 laid the foundation for the research questions and consequently the interview questions. Research objectives therefore defined the qualitative, inductive and exploratory nature of the study. Based on that, the research design allowed for providing coherence between research questions and methodology to generate reliable and valid results (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

4.2 Research method and design

The study aimed to explore the meanings participants attached to their possessions and consumer experiences during MBA as a liminal transition (Sale, Brazil, & Lohfeld, 2002). Thus, views and feelings, underlying participants behaviour, and experiences during MBA were the main focus of the study (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Accordingly, the background and the objective of the study predetermined its qualitative nature, which allowed to study the social phenomena and their contexts and provided flexibility for addressing possible unanticipated issues (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

This study followed the interpretivist philosophy to qualitative inquiry. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) considered the interpretivist approach to be highly appropriate for business and management studies and marketing in particular, as business situations that are to be observed and interpreted in such studies are complex and unique. Furthermore, studies, conducted in accordance with the interpretivist approach allow for a deep and descriptive understanding of consumer-related phenomena, which (Shapiro, 2008) considered the core of marketing. The choice of the interpretivist approach was valid, given that the study aimed to be of practical value for marketers as it presents a research of a complex consumer experience of full-time students in a unique context of MBA as period of liminality.

Given the research questions presented in Chapter 3, the study was conducted as exploratory and inductive. As noted by Ritchie and Lewis (2003), the fundamental purpose of an exploratory research is to reveal the meanings participants impose on social phenomena. Hence, the choice of the exploratory character of the current study

allowed for providing insights and better understanding of such social concepts as liminality, self-extension and symbolic consumption (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Given the interrelatedness of these concepts and thus complexity of the environment under study, the exploratory approach provided for building rich descriptions of the participants' lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

According to Saunders et al. (2009), the lived experiences of the participants matter in qualitative research (especially from an interpretivist perspective) as they provide the context. For this reason, the inductive approach was chosen as the most suitable (Galletta, 2013) in order to explore the lived experiences of participants' and meanings that they assigned to them.

4.3 Population

Population, as defined by Saunders and Lewis (2012), is the full set of group members, which represent the main focus of a scientific or business research. Appropriateness of the population is determined by similar characteristics that members of the population share. For the purposes of this study, the population comprised full-time MBA students at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, in Johannesburg, South Africa (GIBS). The population was selected based on the premise that participants were able to provide the most relevant and rich data for the study (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

4.4 Sample

A non-probability, purposive sampling method was used for the study to define the selection of sample members based on a check-list of relevant characteristics (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The following inclusion criteria were applied in determining the sample for the purpose of this study:

- a) A participant should have been a full-time MBA student at GIBS at the completion stage of the course (working on MBA research). The reason for this criterion was that unlike full-time MBA students at the completion stage, students that just started the course would not have yet gone through the full scope of experiences related to liminality and would not yet have faced the challenge of establishing a new (post-MBA) identity and roles through symbolic consumption.

- b) A participant should have been a full-time MBA student at GIBS who has resigned from his/her job for the period of studies. Unlike full-time unemployed MBA students, students who stayed employed (including self-employment) and had a stable source of income would not have undergone experience of financial deprivation and would not have observed the effect that limited financial resources had on their consumer preferences.

Given that, newly enrolled students and students with jobs and stable source of income were not able to address the research questions and they lacked sufficient experience and context.

As suggested by Saunders et al. (2009) and (Sale et al., 2002), an interpretative study does not require a large sample of participants as the sample is not meant to represent the large population. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with 12 participants (Creswell, 2006).

4.4.1 Data saturation

The point of data saturation was reached by the ninth interview as the researcher stopped receiving new information (Saunders et al., 2009). Therefore, additional data provided few new insights into the research questions (Saunders & Lewis, 2012) as resulted in more of the same findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

4.5 Unit of analysis

The units of analysis were lived consumption experiences of full-time MBA students at GIBS during the duration of the course. The experiences of self-extension through symbolic consumption during the liminality stage was the particular focus of the study.

4.6 Data collection tool

Semi-structured interviews, as the most common data collection method of a qualitative exploratory study (Doody, 2013; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), were conducted with the participants. Combining flexibility and structure, this method allowed for greater understanding of the participants' described experiences and meanings (Saunders et al.,

2009). During semi-structured interviews, participants gained an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and verbally reconstruct them, providing researcher with insights into the subject (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The interview schedule consisted of pre-set open-ended questions, directly focused on certain topics, that guided the interview flow (Flick, 2014). In accordance with the form of the interview, participants were asked additional questions in order to make certain points clear and dig further into a topic (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

As a critical part of the research process, a pilot interview was conducted for the purpose of validating the interview guide (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). It turned out to be successful, proving the interview schedule contained appropriate questions. However, the third interview showed that the interview schedule lacked depth and retrospective approach was adopted that would encourage participants to reflect on their experience more and thus provide more valuable insights to better meet the objectives of the study. For this reason and as suggested by (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) the interview schedule was revised.

In the final version, the interview guide was split into three parts in accordance with the research questions. All the questions were broken down to shorter ones, and more questions on previous (pre-MBA) experience were added. As a result, interview questions became more detailed and allow for deeper insights to be gained from the different stages of participants' experience (Appendix II). This second version of the interview schedule was the final one and was used to conduct all the consequent interviews. All of the above-mentioned changes in the interview schedule did not change the key focus nor the direction of the interview questions, but increased the depth of the questions. Therefore, the results of the first three interviews were still considered valuable for the study and were used in data analysis.

As suggested by Sanders and Lewis (2012), prior to the interviews the researcher contacted the participants to explain the purpose of the study, specify the general format of the interview, and agree on time and place of the interview. Each interview took on average 35-40 minutes. At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked to sign a standardised consent form (Appendix III) and were asked permission to audio-record the interview. Before proceeding with questions, key concepts covered in the study were briefly explained to participants, in particular: symbolic consumption, self-extension and liminality. Such an introduction was done in order to create "unthreatening atmosphere" for the participants (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 112) and make participants feel more comfortable when answering the questions. As none of the participants objected audio-recording of the interview, there was no need for the researcher to take

note (Doody, 2013). Five out of twelve interviews were conducted over skype as to the participants' convenience.

4.7 Data collection methodology

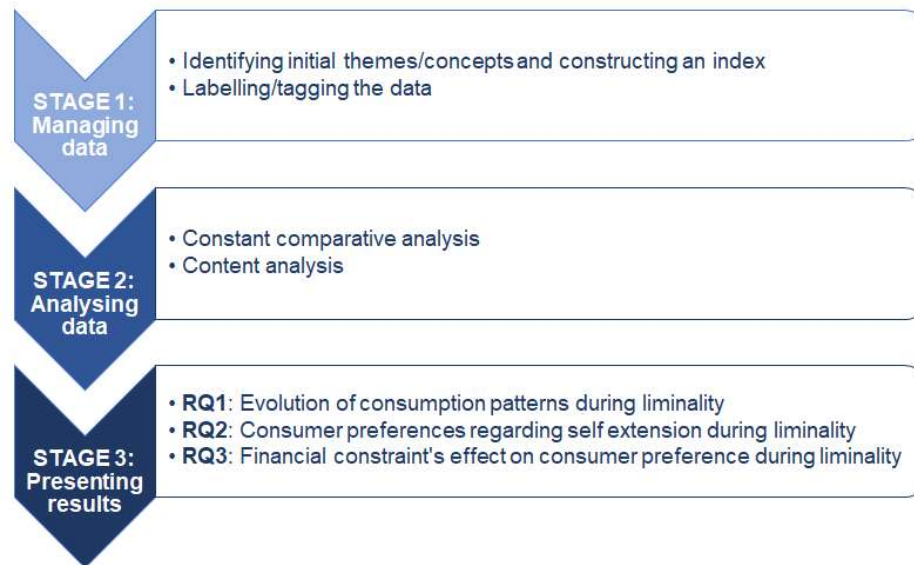
Predetermined open-ended questions were used to conduct the semi-structured interviews, starting from questions related to the past state and followed by questions about the current and future states, which helped the participant to get better involved into the interview (Doody, 2013). Also, such a chronological order helped participants better-recall their experience (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In order to clarify participants' answers, the researcher used various probes and follow-up questions to achieve greater understanding of important points discussed during the interview (Doody, 2013). Appropriate questions during semi-structured interviews were asked to encourage participants to share stories revealing how their consumer preferences in general and symbolic consumption related to self-extension, in particular evaluated over time within the context of liminality, and what factors had the biggest impact on this process (for example, financial constraint).

Effectiveness of the chosen approach was proven in recent studies on symbolic consumption and the extended self during liminality by Wong, Hogg and Vanharanta (2013) and (Wong, Hogg, & Vanharanta, 2017) on possessions and the extended self, and by (Cody & Lawlor, 2011) and Kennett-Hensel et al. (2012) on liminal consumption.

4.8 Data analysis

After the recorded interviews were transcribed, the data was managed and analysed. The qualitative data analysis was conducted in accordance with the framework suggested by Ritchie and Lewis (2003) and complemented by data analysis methods recommended by other authors. The framework consists of three stages as can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Adaptation of Ritchie and Lewis' (2003) data management and analysis framework for the purpose of this study [researcher's conceptualisation].



At Stage 1, construction of index allowed for the discovery of insights and patterns throughout the conducted interviews in order to develop theories and, finally, draw and verify interpretations and conclusions (Galletta, 2013; Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

At Stage 2 the following two qualitative analytical methods were used:

1) Constant comparative analysis

Inductive coding with codes emerging from the data was conducted (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Utilising the codes, all the data was analysed in order to find similarities and differences to explore relations across the data (Thorne, 2000).

2) Content analysis

Allowing for analysing both the context and the content of the data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), the classical content analysis was undertaken to identify the frequency of each used code (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Frequency of the codes within the key themes revealed the patterns within the experiences of the members of the sample group (Thorne, 2000). The content analysis was done in Microsoft Excel. Microsoft Excel was used as the platform to conduct the content analysis.

Using the two abovementioned tools for qualitative analysis enabled an increase in trustworthiness and rigor of the findings, and thus provided the methodological triangulation of the study results (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

4.9 Data reliability and validity

As suggested by Saunders et al. (2009), reliability is the extent to which data collection methodology and following data analysis are capable of producing consistent results. Out of the four threats to reliability described by Saunders et al. (2009) – “subject or participant error”, “subject or participant bias”, “observer error”, and “observer bias” (p. 156-157) – the last one was most likely. Hence, the researcher made sure that participants’ own language and perspectives were held beyond the researcher’s interpretation.

Validity is about whether data collection methods really measure what they are supposed to measure (Saunders & Lewis, 2012), showing “causal relationship” between the variables (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 157). Thus, the researcher made sure that the interview schedule and follow-up questions were aligned with the research questions and objectives. Increasing validity was one of the reasons behind revision of interview schedule discussed above.

4.10 Research limitations

Every research has its limitations (Saunders et al., 2009). A number of limitations, grounded in the nature and design of the current study were identified:

1. The sample was limited to students of only one particular business school.
2. As the study was conducted by the means of the semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, during which participants were sharing their subjective perceptions, a degree of bias was expected to be present in the findings.
3. A degree of bias might be observed in the findings as data analysis was carried by the researcher based on her own perceptions and interpretation.
4. The cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow for comparison of participants’ perceptions regarding their post-MBA consumer behaviour and their real post-MBA long-term consumption behaviour.

4.11 Conclusion

The described research methodology was designed in such a way that it best met the objective of the study as stated in section 3.1 of Chapter 3. The interview schedule designed based on the research questions (Chapter 3) allowed for insights to be gained

into symbolic consumption and self-extension of individuals during the liminal stage. By asking additional questions and probing, a greater depth of understanding of the lived experiences of participants and the meanings they attached to them was achieved and used in data analysis.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 presents the results gathered through data collection in order to meet the objective of the research and therefore to explore symbolic consumption and self-extension through possessions during liminality of full-time MBA students in the context of financial constraint. The chapter also provides guidance into the data analysis process, describing which methods were used at each step.

5.2 Realised sample and interview process

A total of 12 interviews were conducted for the purpose of the research. All the interviewees met the selection criteria described in section 4.4 of Chapter 4. All but one participant agreed to have the interview recorded. In this case, detailed notes were taken to include the participant's view with the recorded interviews which were transcribed.

Table 1 presents the timeline and duration of the conducted interview.

Table 1: Interview durations.

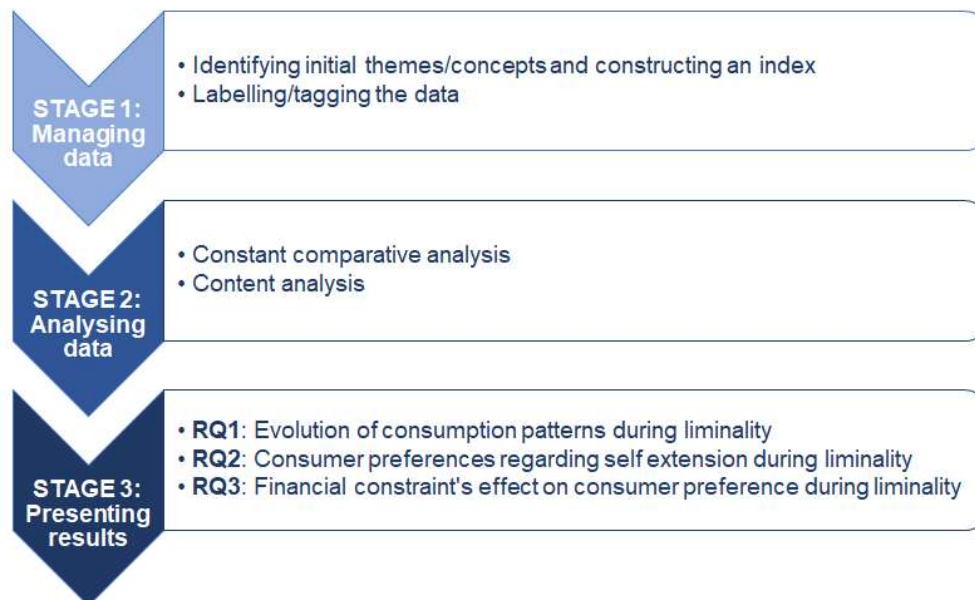
Interview #	Interview duration (mins)
1	36:46
2	38:25
3	19:16
4	15:30
5	45:12
6	50:20
7	16:48
8	31:39
9	30:00
10	34:36
11	29:15
12	19:30

Although going through the same experience in the same context, individual experiences of participants were unique regarding their personal life circumstances. Each participant had his/her own depth of the explored lived experience, which influenced the duration of the interviews. Thus, the longest interviews conducted were with those participants who had experienced a significant shift in consumption habits and a deep personality change as the result of the full-time MBA journey accompanied by financial constraint. These participants had more to reflect on as compared to those who did not observe significant transformation.

5.3 Description of the data analysis process

The qualitative data analysis was conducted in accordance with the following framework described in section 4.8 of Chapter 4.

Figure 4: Adaptation of Ritchie and Lewis' (2003) data management and analysis framework for the purpose of this study [researcher's conceptualisation].



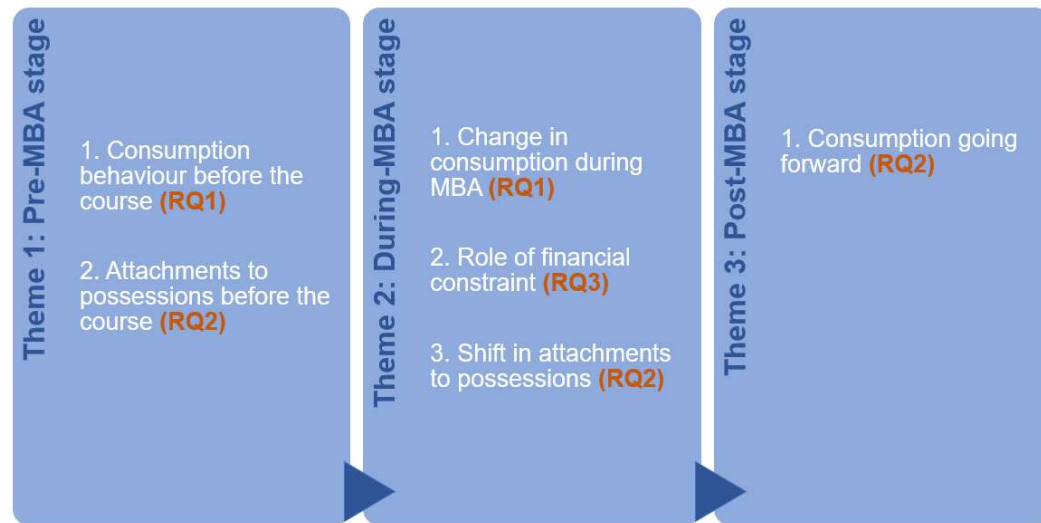
5.3.1 Stage 1: Managing the data

In accordance with the data management and analysis framework in Figure 4, data analysis started with data management which prepared the raw data for the next stage.

Identifying initial themes or concepts and constructing an index and labelling/tagging the data:

Based on the recommendations by Ritchie and Lewis (2003) for this step, identification of the recurring themes and concepts and construction of the index resulted in the following framework:

Figure 5: Recurring themes and index of the study with allocation of the research questions.



As it can be seen, the design of the framework replicates the theoretical model introduced in the introduction to Chapter 2 and represents the main stages of the liminal transition in the context of the research.

The raw data was labelled in accordance with the indexes formulated at the previous stage.

5.3.2 Stage 2: Analysing the data

Identification of recurring themes and concepts, construction of index raw data labelling at Stage 1 prepared the raw data for Stage 2, where it was analysed using two methods – constant comparative analysis and content analysis.

5.3.3 Stage 3: Presenting the results

Conducted data management and data analysis procedures allowed for deep analysis

of semi-structured interviews, identifying and describing important concepts, patterns and outliers.

Results were presented within the initial conceptual framework and in accordance with the appropriate research and interview questions.

Table 2: Matrix illustrating the themes relative to the study's research questions and interview questions.

Themes	Related research question	Related interview question
<i>Pre-MBA stage</i>		
1) Consumption behaviour before MBA	Research question 1	Interview question 1
2) Attachments to possessions before MBA	Research question 2	Interview question 4
<i>During-MBA stage</i>		
1) Change in consumption behaviour during MBA	Research question 1	Interview questions 2,3
2) Shift in attachments to possessions during MBA	Research question 2	Interview questions 5, 6, 7
3) Role of financial constraint during MBA	Research question 3	Interview question 9
<i>Post-MBA stage</i>		
1) Consumption going forward	Research question 2	Interview question 8

5.4 Results for research question 1

5.4.1 Interview question 1

Before the course started, what did you most like to spend money on?

Interview question 1 sought to open the discussion of the lived experiences of the participants and thus encourage participants to reflect on the evolution of their consumption behaviour by first revealing their pre-MBA consumption preferences.

5.4.1.1 Frequency of categories

Table 3 presents the list of the categories of spending that participants considered they most enjoyed before starting their MBA.

Table 3: Spending categories favoured by participants prior to MBA commencement.

Categories of spend	Frequency
Entertainment (going out, social life)	9
Travel	7
Clothes	6
Sports and recreation	4
Books	2
Food	2
Jewellery	1
Shoes	1
Consumables	1
House décor	1
Car	1
Dogs	1
Spa-treatments	1

5.4.1.2 Explanation of categories

The majority of the participants identified expenses on entertainment (including going out to restaurants, bars, and socialising with friends) as their major expense by choice before MBA started. This spend was admitted as important both for the opportunity of fine-dining, and spending time with friends:

Participant 11: "My fiancé and I both had a rule that it didn't matter if we go out for dinner how much the meal cost. We enjoy food. If you want it you can have it, because we both love food."

Participant 4: "And going out is just spending time with your friends."

Although one of the participants explained high expenses on eating out from practical point of view as a necessity:

Participant 6: "... too busy to ever make food."

The second popular expense was travel, whether it was overseas holidays or domestic day trips. One of the participant's motivation was not only his own desire for travel, but also willingness to compensate previous lack of travel of his spouse:

Participant 8: "My wife didn't travel a lot previously, so when we started meeting we went to a lot of the places I used to go to."

For another participant, traveling was something more than just a way to spend time:

Participant 11: "...opportunity to explore new places, and to get out of my comfort zone..."

Buying clothes was motivated by participants as either matter of choice or necessity, or both, depending on their personal preferences as well as professional occupation before they resigned from their jobs and started the studies on MBA.

Participant 6: "In advertising the way you dress matters. It just involves presenting yourself in a certain way. I personally never been a big shopper, I could wear jeans and t-shirt every day. But the job sort of required it."

Participant 11: "I like to have nice clothing. When I was working in a sort of corporate law firm, so you had to look good and other people will also dress well, and dress smartly."

Expenses on sports and recreation included both sports, hobbies, and a way to invest money.

Participant 3: "Before coming into the MBA I had horses which are a very expensive sport.... There was a lot of money on the horses' investments per se."

Participant 4: "Last year I used to do a lot of shooting in winter."

Apart from their practical use as source of information, books were also bought for their intangible value:

Participant 4: "Books are just interesting, because I think it is important to read and it's nice to read. It's great to read and I used to read a lot on the weekends."

One of the motivations for buying food was its tangible value and its benefit for health:

Participant 11: "Food is important to me because I value health in my life. And I love cooking, so I believe very strongly in having good quality ingredients, good quality food, so I spent a lot of money on food."

But it was also considered to be of experiential value:

Participant 8: "And then the food... grocery shopping when you walk into like a Woollies that all you need, stuff of different things, you can buy and that was also quite lekker, so shopping was almost like outing."

Though might not be recognised as personal spending at first glance, expenses on house décor had a very personal meaning for one of the participants explained in the following way:

Participant 7: "And the reason I'm saying that was personalised because décor and painting, all of that was my choice."

5.4.1.3 General patterns emerging from categories

5.4.1.3.1 Commonalities in patterns

While reflecting on their general spending pattern the majority of participants admitted that they have not been conscious about spending before the course, in particular paying little if any attention to how much they were spending on daily consumption. One of the key reasons of such behaviour was having the source of constant income.

Participant 2: "Prior to this I had no idea what a bottle of milk cost...All I know is that I need that milk."

Participant 4: "I never really used to notice bills because there was always a surplus of money."

Participant 8: "Previously we didn't even check the prices of what we were buying."

Participants, naming experiential expenses such as entertainment, travel and sports and recreation as their preferable ones also noted that they had never been spent much money on themselves regarding physical objects. They preferred experiences over material objects.

Participant 3: "It was never a big issue to buy a lot of clothes and that."

Participant 12: "I don't find things very important."

Participant 4: "I was never a big spender on myself."

5.4.1.3.2 Disparities in patterns

Explaining high expenses on clothes and accessories one of the participants pointed at the combination of such factors as time constraint due to work overload and the expectations of the previous professional occupation:

Participant 6: "You are just moving, you know, and you are in this consumerist cycle. And capitalism, and all of those horrible things, it's about industry working."

5.4.1.3.3 Deviations from patterns

Such categories as jewellery, shoes, consumables, house décor, car, dogs and spa-treatments were outliers. Only one participant out of the whole sample explained his previous consumption habits as a matter of personal choice.

5.4.2 Interview questions 2 and 3

How has your consumption behaviour changed since the course started? What are you buying more/less/not buying at all?

Why you think your consumption changed this way?

Moving towards exploration of changes in consumption behaviour that might have taken place during the MBA journey, interview questions 2 and 3 were both aimed at gaining insights into the way consumption behaviour might have changed and reasons for that change. Given the interrelatedness between these two questions participants' answers were analysed in parallel. Along with describing main trends of the change participants were also asked to give specific examples of activities, goods and services that they were either buying less, not buying at all or buying more during MBA.

5.4.2.1 Frequency of categories

Table 4 presents the list of the categories of activities, goods and services that participants completely stopped buying during their MBA.

Table 4: Activities, goods and services that participants stopped buying during MBA.

Category of expense	Frequency
Financial services	3

Clothes and shoes	3
Food treats	2
Sports and recreation	1
Jewellery	1
Books	1
House renovation	1
Entertainment	1

Table 5 lists reasons for cutting out expenses on categories of activities, goods and services that participants completely stopped buying during their MBA.

Table 5: Reasons for cutting out expenses during MBA.

Reasons for cutting expense	Frequency
Financial constraint	8
Attitude change and financial constraint	3
Couldn't find what used to buy before	1
Attitude change	1

5.4.2.2 Explanation of categories

Half of the sample had to cut out certain expenses from their budget during MBA. One the main categories of expenses that participants cut out from their budget were financial services, namely retirement fund, insurance and savings plan. The main reason for doing that was the fact that for the duration of MBA participants were unemployed and thus did not have source of stable income to fund them.

Participant 6: "So, I had like insurance for my phone, for my laptop, for my car, for my handbag. And I was like ok, I'm going now to not make any money, let's get comprehensive car insurance and that's it."

Participant 11: "I had like a savings plan in place, where money would be debited off my account every month to go towards sort of different retirement savings... Those I couldn't justify, because I wasn't getting a salary, I didn't really have money to put to those, so those went away."

Clothes and shoes were the second main category that participants stopped buying during MBA. But unlike the case with cutting out expenses on financial services, the main reason was the combination of the financial constraint and the shift in priorities.

Participant 1: "I think really, I don't need them I can do something better with my money now."

For one of the participants cutting our expenses on clothes was connected with shift of priorities based on accepting the new social role:

Participant 6: "Now definitely clothes shopping is not a priority... It's just like being in school again. You need like two pairs of jeans, two serious pairs of pants and like five shirts. It doesn't matter. On my list of priority, it is so low now."

Food treats (namely chocolate, cookies, cold drinks and chips) were also cut out from budget, not only because of the limited amount of money available, but because of the change in attitude towards this particular category of spending. One of the participants described it the following way:

Participant 8: "Last year I would stop at the garage to fill up and I will buy a cold drink and a packet of chips. When this year you don't do it. You would just fill up and then go... Because of budgeting... I think it is more like a conscious behaviour. You realise you don't really need a cold drink, you'll get home and you still have cold drink or water there."

Financial constraint forced suspending expenses on house renovation and entertainment for the duration of the MBA.

Participant 7: "We kind of stopped the house renovations."

Participant 12: "... definitely not going to concerts anymore."

Combination of change in attitude and limited budget led to one of the participants stopping buying accessories and jewellery, that the participant was fond of buying before MBA:

Participant 1: "I do not like to buy them anymore... these are very expensive, more expensive than in my own country. So, I give up to buy them."

Same participant said that before she started her MBA, she liked buying books for leisure or for work, but had to stop buying them as couldn't find books in native language:

Participant 1: "I couldn't find Persian book here, so I stopped that."

5.4.2.3 Frequency of categories

Table 6 presents the list of the categories of activities, goods and services expenses on which were reduced by participants during MBA.

Table 6: Activities, goods and services that participants were buying less of during their MBA.

Buying less	Frequency
Going out	8
Travel	6
Clothes, shoes, bags	4
Petrol	3
Sports and recreation	3
Beauty treatments	2
Jewellery	2
Entertainment	1
Food	1

Table 7 lists reasons for reducing expenses on categories of activities, goods and services during the MBA.

Table 7: Reasons for reducing expenses during MBA.

Reasons for buying less	Frequency
Financial constraint	16
Resigning	3
Financial constraint and personal reasons	2
Time constraint	2

5.4.2.4 Explanation of categories

The majority of the sample had to significantly reduce the number of times they were going out during MBA as compared to the previous periods, predominantly because of limited finances.

Participant 6: “Definitely eating out less... I used to eat out 100% of time and now I eat out like 25%.”

Participant 10: “I probably go out 90% less than I used to and only go out now to special occasions – birthdays, celebrations.”

Apart from reducing the frequency of times he would go out, one of the participants also described the way he was managing the bill:

Participant 8: "We, maybe, dropped from eating 1-2-3 times in a week to maybe once a month, maybe two times a month... When you're going out you watch your drinking, you're not going to order fancy whiskies, you just have beer or two... Eating out it's not anymore starters and main and maybe a desert. It's just a main."

For another participant, financial constraint was not the only reason for going out less. Certain family-related changes also caused adjustments to his lifestyle during his MBA:

Participant 4: "So, there was quite a change in our consumption in going out, having dinners, lunches, that sort of things. Just sort of naturally because of having a child... The two biggest things that sort of went down was our entertainment expenditure and my alcohol bill because now it was just one instead of two, because my wife couldn't drink."

Half of the sample admitted they were travelling less during the MBA as compared to previous year solely because of budget limitations. Financial constraint affected long holidays overseas:

Participant 2: "I've probably haven't travelled as much. Last year I went overseas three times."

Participant 4: "There was no extravagant holiday, which normally happened."

However, short trips and local visits to family reduced too:

Participant 7: "I think I only travelled down to Durban maybe twice this year. We had to cut down the number of trips that I can go down to Durban to see my family."

Participant 8: "That we cut almost completely, I can't remember in last six months we've been somewhere on Saturdays."

Financial constraint limited participants in buying personal items such as clothes, shoes and bags:

Participant 3: "Yeah, definitely clothes... Definitely I've cut that. There is no salary coming in and there is no one else paying, so it is all self-funded... It is the limited amount of money... It's just buying one or two things instead of a bunch."

Thus, forcing participants to deal with what they had before during MBA:

Participant 2: "I would normally buy probably three new pairs of shoes. I've kind of stretched out my shoes. And this is the only new pair of shoes I bought (pointing at the shoes he was wearing)".

Despite the fact that unemployment significantly changed participants' consumption towards reducing their expenses, it also had a positive effect for those participants who used to spend a lot of money on petrol to get to workplace by car before beginning their MBA. Since their trips to GIBS were much shorter than to workplaces, some participants managed to save money on petrol bills:

Participant 4: "I travel less because of just distances to school is not as far as it was to work. Like my petrol bill was a big difference."

Participant 7: "Now that I don't work anymore I don't need to spend around R2000 a week on petrol".

It was mainly time constraints due to the high workload of the MBA that stopped participants from doing their sports and recreational activities as often as they used to before.

Participant 4: "I made one shoot this whole year. Normally I would do four. But again, it is a time related issue... Another thing that went down dramatically was golf. And that's the time issue too versus money I think."

Participant 5: "I didn't play golf once this year....So, honestly, it wasn't financial constraint per se even though finances were constrained. The MBA just took it all out".

Jewellery and beauty treatments were the next two categories that were subjected to reduction with financial constraint being the main reason:

Participant 1: "When money problem start feeling, so I give up some more things like, for example... I prefer to do my nails and manicure, pedicure and everything. So now I have money problem, so I give up. I am doing less than two months one, no times in two months."

Another respondent cut her expenses on entertainment because of the limited budget:

Participant 10:" I cut my entertainment probably by about 80%..."

The same participant managed to significantly reduce food expenditure due to moving into her parents' house for the duration of MBA and being provided with meals at GIBS:

Participant 10: "...with the GIBS programme we got free lunch, so I spent less on food and going out. And then, if I wasn't at GIBS, I was at home and I stayed with my parents, so that was also free dinner... I'd probably cut out my food expenses by almost 100% from my pocket..."

One more participant saw provision of meals to students by GIBS as a good opportunity to reduce expenses on food during MBA:

Participant 2: "You try when you in class to load up as much as possible on the food that is included with course. To the point when in many occasions I didn't even need to go home and eat. So, I cut out dinner."

5.4.2.5 Frequency of categories

Table 8 presents the list of the categories of activities, goods and services that participants were buying more of during MBA.

Table 8: Activities, goods and services that participants were buying more during the MBA.

Buying more	Frequency
Stationery	5
Food	3
Going out	3
Additional education	2
Clothes	3
Petrol	2
Takeaway food	2
Printing	2
Sports and recreation	1
Software	1
Car rental	1
Travel	1
Entertainment	1
Coffee	1
Massage	1
Airtime and data	1
Netflix	1
Alcohol	1

Food	1
Vitamins	1
Books	1

Table 9 below gives reasons for increasing expenses on categories of activities, goods and services during MBA.

Table 9: Reasons for increasing expenses during the MBA.

Reasons for buying more	Frequency
Studies	9
Stress-relief	4
Resigning	3
Staying energised	3
Time constraints	3
Attitude change	2
Living far from home and time constraint	2
Living far from home	2
Attitude change and financial constraint	2
Adjustment	1
Personal reasons	1
Attitude change	1
Matching GIBS dress-code	1
Future employment	1

5.4.2.6 Explanation of categories

Even being financially constrained due to unemployment, some participants had to increase expenses on certain categories in order to adjust to their new roles and requirements of their new life context. The major motivation for buying more during MBA was to keep up with the study related requirements. Thus, the main expenditures were on stationary, printing out study materials, buying software for doing assignments, books, and buying data to download materials and stay connected with syndicate members.

Participant 2: "I spend R1000 for a year subscription on a flowcharting software."

Participant 6: "I started buying stationary. A lot if it actually... Airtime and data for like readings and doing work."

While being time constraint as well some participants found themselves eating out and eating takeaway food more:

Participant 2: "Unfortunately, just of the time constraints we've eaten out or eaten takeaways a lot more."

Participant 1: "I didn't have time for cooking, so I spent lots of money for takeaway."

For those participants who had to move to Johannesburg from their home towns for the course duration, time constraints were intensified by the fact that they were far from home:

Participant 3: "... for not living at home in Durban. So, I eat out hell of a lot more. And you are generally never cooking for the last year... So, normally you cook at home...So, eating out was... there was not enough time to cook".

Participant 6: "When the MBA began we've been so busy and stressed out and in a different place – I moved to Joburg and stayed on campus. Lots of Uber eats, ordering food, lots of popping out for lunch in Lorenzo's, the cafe here."

Those participants who were going out quite a lot at the beginning of the MBA eventually reduced this expenditure and started to buy more groceries to cook at home, both driven by budget constraint and attitude change towards healthier nutrition:

Participant 1: "And now I spend more money for healthy food, for fruits, I start to buy, I start to cooking and buy some fruits and something that more healthier and also cheaper that I needed".

Participant 6: "I have bought a lot more things like groceries, I used to do grocery shopping. I buy groceries, I make dinners in the evenings.... I eat a lot healthier at home, I like meal prep, I do salads. It's actually a lot better."

Facing the necessity to match GIBS's dress-code, a number of participants had to buy clothes during their MBA:

Participant 2: "I had to go and buy a whole load of new shirts because mine were going a bit tatty."

Participant 8: "I bought about three or four formal pants this year and about eight formal shirts. So, that's more than in previous three years combined. And it's just linked to classes."

After becoming unemployed, some participants had to adjust their budget as to accommodate expenses on petrol and car rental, as the benefit of employers' paying for that that was no longer available.

Participant 3: "So, previously with work I had a company car and a petrol card. So, now I had to rent a car and I had no petrol card."

Participant 6: "I spent on petrol. My work used to pay for all my petrol. I only recently discovered what it cost to fill up a tank."

Closer to the end of the course some participants started investing money into additional education and access to information in order to enhance and complement the knowledge they got during the course. Also, being close to graduation at this stage of MBA, they felt the need to catch up with the world of business that they were planning to get back to.

Participant 1: "I try to have some courses and classes that help me, for example, in my English or my computer skills and my everything that could help me for my future."

Participant 6: "I probably spend a lot more now on books and subscriptions to like Harvard Business Review. So, this is something I bought this year. There's sort of like course correction that I feel has happened... It feels that my life was getting away from track in many ways that I wasn't noticing."

One of the participants, who already started looking for possible future employment options, had to increase his expenses on travel to the places where his potential employers were located.

Participant 3: "For jobs next year I needed to see where to potentially work. So, I spent a lot more on travel this year than the old year."

Also, having moved to Johannesburg for taking the course, the same participant had to spend money on travelling home:

Participant 3: "Flights backwards and forwards to Durban is definitely a big cost."

The same reason – living far from home – forced another participant to look for new entertainment options like going to concerts and talks, as the usual ones in the home city were no longer available

Participant 3: "I think I've done more things like rock climbing and go karting. That you would not normally do just to get out of the house. I think because you not at

home on the weekends in Durban in front of the beach. Here you got to spend the money to do stuff. So, going to markets or rock climbing or go-karting.”

In order to stay energised during the course some participants had to start buying certain goods which they would normally buy in less quantities:

Participant 5 (talking about buying more coffee during MBA): “It was purely to stay awake and being at GIBS for so many hours every day.”

Participant 7: “Coffee and green tea. I’ve never been a big coffee lover, I used to just drink a certain type of green tea. And now, this year, if you open up my cupboard I’ve got a whole flavour range of coffees and a whole flavour range of green teas, like five different green teas... Vitamins, that’s also something that’s expensive, that I’ve never used to spend a lot on before... just trying to stay healthy, staying alert, staying awake considering the amount of energy we’re putting to MBA.”

For the same reason – coping with stress on the course – two participants had to increase expenses on stress relieving goods and activities, even though such behaviour would not be typical for them in ordinary circumstances.

Participant 5: “Massages. I did go for few of those when I had time... I did more often. That’s probably the only thing that I did more often... Actually, it could have been to spoil myself, to forget like the stresses or the deadlines or anything. I probably went for about five, which isn’t over the top in a year. But I wouldn’t give for five in any given year to be honest.”

Participant 6: “I’ve never had time to watch TV, but the stress lead me to Netflix, so now I pay for Netflix... Just so tired I want to spend three hours watching a show and then sleep. It’s necessary evil.... Alcohol. It is like Netflix. It’s not that I buy it often. But I noticed if like we go out for drinks, I definitely spend a lot more money than before.... It is a big de-stress element.”

Apart from such straightforward changes in consumption behaviour as cutting out expenses completely, buying something less or more during MBA, participants also showed consumption behaviour that was either new to them, or allowed them to get to a point of compromise dealing with limited budget. For example, in dealing with financial constraint, but still trying not to cut out certain expenses completely, some participants went for another option that could be called downgrading. They were still spending money on habitual goods and activities, but this time going for cheaper options in order to save money. One of such categories of spend was food:

Participant 2 (giving an example of buying milk): "Now I will go and buy the store's brand because it's the cheapest. I'm going to go and see whatever is the cheapest on the shelf."

Participant 8: "Like chips you would buy normal no-name brand at Pick'n'Pay, just like R8 or R9 a packet compared to Simba which is R12,30... What we did buy more is the cheaper stuff like instead of buying pre-cooked meals you get those vegetables and they are packed and cheese inside and you just put it in the oven."

One of the participants had to go for downgrading both his expenses on sports and clothes he was buying during his MBA:

Participant 2: "I changed my gym membership from being the premium gym membership. So that was something that about saved R1000 a month... Normally I would have spent R2000 on a shirt. I would have gone and buy five shirts and spend R10 000. I went and I bought three shirts from ZARA for R600 each."

Apart from going out less during the MBA, ones of the participants also started going for cheaper options of alcohol to cut down the bill:

Participant 12: "...buying less expensive whisky."

Being limited in money, two participants started paying their attention to specials and student discounts:

Participant 8: "Like this year when you get newspaper, or flyers at the road, or you hear advert on TV you would take more notice. Previously we didn't even check the prices of what we were buying... In September Makro had a home-brand specials, so we went there, we bought like R5000 Rand worth of imperishables. So, washing liquid, Sunlight... stuff like that. And that will last for the next 5-6 months."

Participant 2: "Students discounts are great. Some of the things were...with software you get students discounts, some of the things when you are overseas you show the student card and you get student discounts"

Being on a limited budget, another participant had to cut down the medical aid, leaving only the essential option:

Participant 10: "I could no longer afford medical aid, so I just had a hospital plan."

Experiencing both time and financial constraints and thus feeling the need to adjust both their expenses on food and time for cooking food at home, two participants described how their normal way of shopping and cooking changed.

Participant 7: "I used to make canned tomatoes. Now I buy them, because they are convenient and I don't need to worry about tomatoes going off. And wasting my time on chopping and cutting..."

Participant 8: "You will see if you can buy in bulk, instead of just buying once of. So, we would go grocery shopping maybe twice a month and previously we went every weekend."

5.4.2.7 General patterns emerging from categories

5.4.2.7.1 Commonalities in patterns

In preparation for living out of limited savings, two participants made certain adjustments in their lifestyles before the course started. Thus, one of them had to sell an expensive car and buy a cheaper one, and both of them moved to their parent's house so that they would not be paying for rent for the duration of the MBA.

As all the members of the sample group were unemployed during the MBA and thus were not earning salary, financial constraint was admitted as one of the key reasons for changes in consumption behaviour, especially for cutting out expenses or buying less, to make sure the available savings would last long enough to get them through the course.

Participant 2: "So, the motivation is definitely to make that money go further. And knowing that you are on a fixed income, that you have a fixed level of savings that you've allocated."

As Participant 9 noted it would have been irresponsible for him to keep his old lifestyle. The change in consumption he made during his MBA was the sacrifice he was willing to make.

Nevertheless, financial constraint as such were not the only reason for changes in consumption. Budget limitations encouraged participants to be more responsible with their money and to be more conscious of how they spend money during MBA, focusing on necessities:

Participant 6: "The whole idea like you should be responsible, you have a finite amount of money."

Participant 10: "No income, I had to start making sacrifices, only focusing on the expenses that were the necessities versus luxury."

Another substantial reason for adjusting consumer behaviour for the duration of the course was time constraints.

Participant 5: "I think a lot of it has to do with the amount of time that we had to dedicate to the MBA."

Both participants that used downgrading of what they were buying to cut down expenses showed shift in brand preference. They were going for the same options of goods but of cheaper brands, when it came to buying clothes and groceries.

Participant 8: "When you buy tinned tomatoes you also look again on a no-name brand."

Whatever they bought, participants also showed the desire to fully utilise it, whereas before the MBA such attitude was not common.

Participant 8: "So, previously we've thrown out R500 worth of food, maybe even more, where this year we'll use everything up to the last bit."

Participant 12: "Things that you use up, but conditioners and shampoos didn't make up somethings. You always had more than you use one type, and then you switch to another type and that type still in the cupboard, and I sort of use that up this year, instead of buying new ones."

Despite all the changes in their consumption behaviour and consumption preferences, many participants noted that they were still living a comfortable life and not feeling that they had to make a major sacrifice in their lifestyle. For example, Participant 9 noted he did not feel he was much constrained, and he was still living in the same house.

Participant 2: "So, I have lived comfortably in spite of the fact that I haven't actually had a job. I haven't cut my lifestyle back to the point where I'm eating corn flakes."

They were still able to buy what they needed and have what they like:

Participant 12: "I suppose it wasn't that constraint. I didn't have to give up things that you need."

Participant 8: "It's not like my standard of living has dropped drastically. We're still eating nice at home."

A number of participants eventually gave up buying certain things they were buying more at the beginning of the course, for example eating out and takeaways, and shifted to the healthier option of cooking at home.

Reflecting on the practical side of consumption behaviour change, participants also shared the effect it had on their personal relationships, either positive or negative.

Participant 4: "Sad, I wasn't seeing my friends more but happy I was spending time with my family."

Participant 2: "And the honeymoon which I really struggled to kind of motivate myself to pay for. In any ordinary year we probably could have gone overseas, to Thailand and everything... In this case we just went to Camps Bay for four days, so I owe Liezl like a proper second honeymoon."

Participant 8: "When you have friends and instead of going out and eating out, you invite them to your house and make a braai, and it works a lot cheaper and we actually had a lot better time than going out."

5.4.2.7.2 Disparities in patterns

For one of the participants, stress related to the workload and deadlines of MBA were intensified by the fact that she had to move from another country. Living in a new country and studying in the foreign language lead to high level of stress, which she was relieving through buying what she liked to buy in her home country.

Participant 1: "When I was in a lots of stress and pressure, somehow buying things helped me to feel better, you know... Just feel relief, I don't know... So, I bought lots of shoes. It's because of the all the pressure, it's like what you call it... the painkiller that helps you to tolerate the situation."

While the majority of participants had either reduced their sport activities, or stopped doing sports at all, the same participant increased her expenses on gym as she experienced the shift of priorities from short-term pleasures of consumption to long-term benefit of investment to health.

Participant 1: "And I spend more money for my gym classes, I had trainer, so I focus more on my health, than my pleasure."

Not willing to stop doing sports for the duration of the course because she moved from her home city, another participant went for a creative way of adjusting her sports routine to the new environment.

Participant 6: "...my friends have gym membership all around Joburg some near here, some where I live and they're all at Planet Fitness, so what you can do you pay an extra R100 a month as a member and you can bring someone with you every time you go."

5.4.2.7.3 Deviations from patterns

Going through family-related changes during the course (having a baby), one of the participants could not clearly distinguish whether he was time constrained due to the workload on the course or due to personal reasons. Either way, he had to adjust his life and his consumption.

Participant 4: "So, it is the difficult one for me to measure because of the external factor of having a start of a family... And that's the time issue too versus money I think."

The same participant was the only one who increased his expenses on food, which was due to having a baby.

Another participant, explaining why he had not increased expenses on anything during the course, explained that cost of the course itself was as increase of expenses for him during this period of time and he did not want to add any extra expenses.

5.5 Results for research question 2

5.5.1 Interview question 4

Before the course started, what were the most significant possessions for you?

Extending the exploration of pre-MBA consumption patterns, interview question 4 opened the discussion of the most valued possessions/activities before MBA, reasons for creating attachments to those possessions/activities and the meanings these

possessions/activities had to their owners. Both tangible and intangible possessions were included.

5.5.1.1 Frequency of categories

The following table presents the list of the categories of significant possessions/activities that participants had attachments to before MBA.

Table 10: Significant possessions/activities before the MBA.

Categories of significant possessions	Frequency
Car	3
Electronics	2
Watches	2
Heirloom items	2
Gifts from family	2
Kitchenware	1
Books	1
Eating out	1
Clothes	1
Bank card	1
Sports	1
Travel	1
House	1
Dogs	1
Jewellery	1

5.5.1.2 Explanation of categories

Regarding a car as a significant possession and extension of self was partly explained by the participants as an integral element of South African culture, which creates certain expectations towards the car an individual owes:

Participant 2: “We are such a car centric culture. I think South African car culture is quite negative, is quite damaging. People sort of sit in their cars and they become their cars...In South Africa you have to have car to extend your personality.”

Participant 5: "When I lived in Joburg a nice car was incredibly important to me.... Every second person has a nice car.... So, part of it was comfort and part of it was 'keeping up with the Jones's.'"

Participant 10: "When you start working there's almost this pressure, or this need to tick off achievement boxes, you know. A certain car dictates where you are in life socially, you know. I guess I also felt victim to that."

Creation of a particular image that one of the participants wanted to achieve was the root to motivation of having a certain car:

Participant 2 (describing his car): "It's like this adventurous, psyche, alternative, adventurous spirit, I like it... It's basically it is functional, but it is it is also about my image. I want to be seen as the guy who does that... I think it defines me."

Therefore, being an important element of identity communication car was seen as one of the most desirable possessions to celebrate achievements in life, both professional and personal:

Participant 8: "It was also the first big purchase I bought after my previous fiancé left me...I just got a major promotion just before that... So, it links the promotion, what I've achieved, independence, everything to like one asset, I would say. It allowed me a lot of freedom and it also linked back to a lot of things that I've achieved, so I think in a way, when I look at it, I think back of everything I've gone through, everything that has happened that allowed me to have that car."

Participant 10: "I had quite an accelerated career and I think me buying the car that I did was quite a... it was almost like a present to myself. I climbed the ladder so quickly and I think I deserved to buy myself a nice present... I wanted to buy myself something that would be "Look, well done, you work hard."

For one of the participants, such items as electronic devices and corporate bank card were important possessions as they provided higher efficiency at work:

Participant 6: "My friends always joked, they said my Mac is my best friend. I've taken it everywhere I travelled around the world... It was literally the most important. Second, my phone. iPhone is just a mini Mac for all the same reasons. I was always on the phone again for work...And my bank card. When I was working it was the single important thing in my life. Like losing it was like train smash, I would call my bank and shout, and it would be delivered in a day. It was a huge deal."

Being a second significant possession, watches were valuable to the participants both as a tangible and intangible asset. Intangible value of watches was presented by the status affirmation it could provide:

Participant 5: "I got very nice watch that my dad gave me... I was very attached to that while wearing a suit because of the value of the watch, the status of it."

Another intangible value of watches – brand equity – together with status affirming value made watches an attractive item to purchase to celebrate achievements, to invest and to regard it as heirloom:

Participant 10: "I bought a very expensive Tag watch after I got my first senior management position... I collect watches. So, for me a watch is an investment, because they appreciate in value over time, particularly if you buy a good-branded watch like a Tag... It is something I can pass down to my kids, because you got a lifetime guarantee and so that was something that I wanted to have... I have achieved a very great opportunity career wise. So, that was a very big moment for me and I wanted something that I'd always remember, that achievement."

Both heirlooms and gifts from family had more of the sentimental value for participants. Heirlooms might be either inherited from previous generations or created by oneself as a memory of family member that passed away:

Participant 11: "I have certainly family jewellery, necklaces and stuff that have special meanings to me. When my grandmother died before my MBA, she left me some money and so I used that to buy a necklace that has meaning to me."

Sentimental value of gifts from family resided in the connection it created between family members:

Participant 12: "I have a special pen that my mom gave me many years ago... I like things that are sentimental, that people give me, that I have attachments to. And a lot of that is jewellery, jewellery that people give me... it makes me remember the person, and the relationship... And the moment when they gave it to me. Yeah, makes me feel special."

When it came to family gifts, brand equity also mattered as it them more desirable and precious. Answering the question "What gives things that sentimental value?" Participant 9 said it was in the good brand and the way it makes him feel.

The following significant possessions and activities were the outliers in the sample: kitchenware, books, eating out, clothes, bank card, sports, travel, house, dogs, and jewellery. Attachment to most of them was of intangible nature, even though such a possession as a house itself is a physical object:

Participant 8: "The house where we're living in now, myself and my wife altogether. Because if I look at last three to four years, how it has changed and what we've done to it, I think it's something that links to two of us together."

Experiential value of possessions and activities was the biggest motivation for spend for the participants, from the emotional point of view:

Participant 4: "Books are full of emotion... Eating out is an experience and I spent money on it."

Participant 7: "That wasn't necessarily a physical attachment, but it was important for me to go down and see my family, whenever I wanted it, without having to worry about anything."

Some of the possessions combined both tangible and intangible value:

Participant 5: "I was on the corporate side wearing suits...So it was important to look good. Professionally and I supposed to keep up... just fit in with the type of role. it was because my colleagues were doing it."

Participant 12: "I would spend money on jewellery, which has no function. Expression of yourself..."

5.5.1.3 General patterns emerging from categories

While describing the possessions and activities that were significant for them before MBA, participants also expressed their general attitude to valuing material possessions versus experiences and significant relationships. Analysis of these insights identified a number of patterns, differences and outliers.

5.5.1.3.1 Commonalities in patterns

In line with the common patterns identified when analysing results of the previous Interview Question, those participants who mentioned experiences as the activities they

felt most attached to noted that material possession have never been of a big value for them:

Participant 4: "I'm not really good at holding value in items... I am not precious about things...I don't find much value in goods, I find more value in experience...That's why I like going out a lot, seeing people, interacting."

Including status affirmation:

Researcher: "It can be something functional, but it also has a special meaning for you...It's about your status, or the level of living that you achieved... belonging to a certain class. That's the example I am giving."

Participant 12: "Yes. ok, so none of those things are at all important to me."

In contrast, participants who named only material possessions as the most significant ones were also the ones who most valued the status value and the brand equity of such belongings as watches, car and clothes:

Participant 5 (speaking about formal suits): "It was almost like a status thing."

5.5.1.3.2 Disparities in patterns

Only one participant out of the sample named the possessions related to previous job as the most and only significant ones before MBA. The motivation behind high level of attachment to those possessions was driven by the professional role played at that time:

Participant 6: "I think everything has to do with the roles that I was playing, but it's just everything in my life served for primary objective. So, the primary objective at work was to deliver on what I was hired to do, at all costs... And tools needed for that, like my phone and my laptop."

5.5.1.3.3 Deviations from patterns

Though admitting attachment to such possessions as jewellery and heirloom items, one of the participants argued that if faced by a threat to life safety, material possessions would become obsolete for her:

Participant 11: "And to be honest... if my house caught on fire the only things that I would take are my dogs. I don't really care about material possessions as much,

they are not as important as my dogs' safety and my own safety, and my family. So, there is nothing that I feel very strongly attached to."

5.5.2 Interview questions 5

Have you bought anything specifically for your MBA?

Opening the discussion on what role possessions played for identity projection and self-extension of full-time students during their MBA, interview question 5 explored whether full-time MBA students applied to consumption in their preparation to the course and their new social roles.

5.5.2.1 Frequency of categories

The following table presents the list of the categories of goods and services that participants bought specifically for the course.

Table 11: Goods and services bought for the MBA.

Bought for MBA	Frequency
Clothes	5
Electronics	4
Bag	4
Stationery	2
Healthcare goods	1
Data	1
Software	1

The reasons that these goods and services were specifically bought for the course are listed in Table 12.

Table 12: Reasons for buying goods and services for MBA.

Reasons	Frequency
Studies	11
Matching dress-code	4
Health support	1

5.5.2.2 Explanation of categories

Motivation to buy new clothes in the first place was driven by the necessity to match the dress-code of the business school.

Participant 10: "When we did our invitation, we were informed that the dress code is business smart casual. And I didn't have anything that was smart casual really, my wardrobe will be either extremely formal or... shorts and T-shirts. So, I needed to buy something that was in the middle."

Other popular items bought specifically for the course were a laptop and laptop bag, and notebooks.

Participant 7: "That was my biggest expense on the MBA, just the laptop, the one I bought for the MBA."

Participant 11: "I bought a new MacBook, so that was quite important because it was portable, it was very convenient. I bought new handbag for varsity as well before I started, so, that was nice because it has to be like the right size, so it was important for me to get something like that."

Stationery, software and data were other categories of popular goods and services bought by participants to be fully equipped for the studies.

Such healthcare goods as vitamins were also bought by one of the participants specifically for the course in order to boost efficiency:

Participant 7: "... nutritional tablets, the vitamins... To stay awake, to read a lot and hopefully encourage brain cells to be activated, so I can absorb information."

5.5.2.3 General patterns emerging from categories

Participants' answers to interview question 5 allowed to explore whether or not participants were buying any goods and services to make themselves ready for the course. Analysis of these insights identified a number of patterns, differences and outliers.

5.5.2.3.1 Commonalities in patterns

As can be seen from the analysis many items from Table 9 overlap with the items that participants mentioned answering the question “What are you buying more/less/not buying at all?” from interview question 3. This overlap can be explained by the fact that not all the items from Table 9 were bought once-off, like laptop and bags, but many other items like clothes, stationery and software were being bought throughout the duration of the course and thus were seen as recurring purchases.

5.5.2.3.2 Disparities in patterns

Despite the necessity to get equipped for the studies, not all the participants were ready to spend money. One of the participants decided to borrow some items for the duration of the course instead.

Participant 12: “I borrowed a laptop, had a printer. And I didn’t need anything else.”

Another participant decided to go as far as arranging a special space for studies during the course, which also required certain investment.

Participant 11:” We have a small room outside our house, we turned it to like my study, so I put some shelves and I bought a nice table, and had all my books and files there, so it was like my study space.”

5.5.2.3.3 Deviations from patterns

Apart from naming the items bought for the MBA such as electronics, stationery and clothes, one of the participants also shared that he got gifts from his family dedicated to the course, that hold special meaning for him, symbolising family support during MBA.

5.5.3 Interview questions 6

What were those most significant possessions for you during the course?

Following the previous discussion interview question 6 was asked in order to understand which possessions (whether tangible or intangible) had become significant for the participants during the course and why. Participants could have become attached to either what they have bought specifically for the course or anything they had before.

5.5.3.1 Frequency of categories

Table 13 presents the list of the possessions that participants identified as significant ones and the ones that had special meaning for them during MBA.

Table 13: Significant possessions during the MBA.

Significant possessions	Frequency
Laptop	4
Nothing	3
Personal	2
Internet	2
Travel	1
Stationary	1
Car	1

5.5.3.2 Explanation of categories

Laptops had become very valuable and important possessions for participants during the course. Some participants even admitted they has become very attached to their laptops over MBA journey, creating a kind of relationship with their devices.

Participant 5: "I became very attached to my laptop.... But I mean you're using it every day."

Participant 10: "It became my MBA companion. I relied so much on it, whether it was preparing for classes or whether it was in class. it really became a big part of my MBA journey. And I wouldn't have thought that at the time, I would have thought at the time that it was just a tool, that I used until the laptop I was using just decided to give in one day and I realised how much of my journey was on that laptop and how much I actually valued that laptop."

Apart from laptops such things as stationery and internet connection, that could have affected participants' performance on the course became of high practical importance.

Participant 6: "Some things like pens became... finding a perfect pen because it's always like writing and working. So, I had a much faster WiFi put into my apartment. For like downloading readings and working on Google, and Skype calls, and WhatsApp calls. So, that became really important. Data, generally."

Car as a vehicle that could get participants to business-school had also become of high value as it could directly affect participants attendance at classes.

Participant 6: "I remember one day this year my car broke down on the way to school and it was a disaster."

5.5.3.3 General patterns emerging from categories

Answering interview question 6, participants revealed whether or not any possessions had become particularly important for them during the MBA journey and reflecting on the reasons. Analysis of these insights identified a number of patterns, differences and outliers.

5.5.3.3.1 Commonalities in patterns

Practical reasons were not the only ones laying the foundation for creating attachments to certain possessions or regarding them as significant ones during MBA. Those attachments also had meaning for participants as they were related to the shift to a new social role and new context of studying in business-school. As one of the participants described it:

Participant 6: "I think there was meaning in like going back to school. So, that idea of going back to school and now you're taking it seriously, so you buy some proper stationary, make sure you got proper WiFi... So, I think it's like the appearance of going back to school. Oh, my gosh I need to get everything that I need, I'm very serious about this..."

This shift to the new role of a student caused shift in priorities as well, thus making possessions related to fulfilling the role particularly significant for the duration of the course.

Participant 6: "So, now the objective was more type learn... It's all about your priorities and your objective at the time. So, the things that became important were the things that just allowed me to learn and then everything else became peripheral."

5.5.3.3.2 Disparities in patterns

For those participants who were also undergoing changes in their personal life during MBA certain personal possessions and expenditures became of high significance as well:

Participant 2: "I think spending money on the honeymoon because we originally were not going to and I thought about it like 'We can't not go on honeymoon, let's go and do that'."

Participant 3: "I bought a wedding ring but I haven't used it yet. That was a big cost, yeah."

Similarly, personal connections related to certain possession put them on the forefront together with practical value. Thus, for Participant 9 his was of sentimental value it was a gift.

5.5.3.3.3 Deviations from patterns

Nevertheless, there were some participants who had not created any special attachments to any possessions during the course.

For one of the participants, who already started exploring options for future employment, travelling to various countries to visit potential employers was an important activity:

Participant 3: "And then I think the travel was a big significance."

Not only acquisition of possessions happened during MBA in preparation for the new role of a business-school student. As one of the participants shared, there was a point in time when he decided to give up a valuable possession as it was no longer valid in the new context.

Participant 5: "I got very nice watch that my dad gave me. I actually gave it back to him subsequently...I just felt it was a waste. I just hold on to it... I mean he really liked that watch, so. I didn't buy it. That was a really nice one. But I can see he's just... I don't know. It just lost its meaning. Learning the MBA and like wearing a flashy watch, I didn't feel... Felt unpractical. There is no specific reason."

5.5.4 Interview question 7

What have you bought for your new role after MBA?

Interview question 7 was asked in order to understand whether or not at this point of time (end of the MBA course) participants started to plan for their new roles after MBA and thus apply to consumption to prepare themselves to their new life.

5.5.4.1 Explanation of categories

Only two participants out of the whole sample have acquired certain possessions preparing for future at this stage of the journey. One of the participants bought a new laptop, thinking about joining a corporate company after MBA. Discussing this purchase the participant revealed the motivation behind the decision to buy a new laptop for new life.

Participant 1: "So, I was thinking if I'm going work there or as a business woman I need to be more... you know, seems more professional or something like that."

Researcher: "Ok, so, do I understand correctly that when you have a new, light, more professional, maybe fancy laptop it makes you feel different as a professional? Like the impression you're creating or the identity you're reflecting..."

Participant 1: "Yeah! You know this is impressions on people, it's going to be one of the reason. So, it's... And also, it's brand new and it's more quicker than the old one, so all of them has... But you know I think the biggest part of the reason why I bought that it was for the impression, yeah."

Another participant bought clothes for future interviews with potential employers.

Participant 6: "I bought like interview outfits, because I'm going to have to start interviewing for jobs. I think you always feel better if you buy like an interview outfit."

Researcher: "Sounds like special outfits. Why you call them "interview outfits"?"

Participant 6: "Because the worst thing in the interview is to wear something that you are not comfortable in and you like adjusting it, and it distracts you, and you don't feel confident... So, in preparation for the future it was the only thing that I

spent on recently. Because now I'm like 'Ok, I'm finishing my thesis and I need to get ready for interviews and meeting with people'."

The rest of the sample admitted they had not bought anything yet because of a combination of reasons. They were still financially constraint and could not afford any additional expenses and at the same time they still did not know what that new life after MBA would be like and what roles they were going to take.

Participant 4: "I've no money at the moment. And no job coming up so I've got to save that little I do have."

Participant 7: "Simply, because I don't know what my new role is going to be and where I'm going to be."

Participant 8: "I don't know yet, what I'm going to do, that's the major thing... So, I haven't bought anything because it is difficult to plan for the future since I don't have anything lined up yet."

Nevertheless, a number of participants were already making assumptions and plans on what they would buy once they knew what they would be doing after MBA. Many participants said they would like to buy new clothes, more suitable for the dress codes of the corporate companies they might join.

Participant 2: "I've envisaged... If I get the role that I want, pick me up one or two more nice suits... I like wearing suits."

Participant 3: "Before I worked for a company where I wore uniform. So, now that won't happen. So, I will have to buy a corporate attire. The suits will have to be... So that they set a right image depending on a company."

5.5.4.2 General patterns emerging from the categories

Analysing whether or not participants had already bought anything for their new roles after MBA or their plans for buying identified a number of patterns, differences and outliers.

5.5.4.2.1 Commonalities in patterns

The majority of the sample had not yet bought anything for their life after MBA sharing two main reasons – uncertainty regarding their new roles after MBA and financial

constraint. Participants admitted that once they knew what exactly they would need, they would be ready to buy.

Participant 10: "I wouldn't want to spend whatever little... I don't even want to say savings, because that's not a thing anymore..... Once I know what my needs are then I will be able to buy according to my needs."

When making plans on what they would want to buy for period after their MBA, many participants said that would be clothes, which would help them to fit in the appropriate corporate style of the companies they would join.

5.5.4.2.2 Disparities in patterns

One of the participants noted that at this stage of the course she had not bought anything for herself not only because she was not ready to spend the limited amount of savings she had, but also because she was still occupied with the MBA journey itself.

Participant 10: "I haven't quite decided what my post-MBA life is. So, I'm just still very much in the MBA mode."

For the participant who was thinking globally regarding the geography of his future employment, plans for buying a car were also a matter of consideration.

Participant 3: "I will have to buy suits and car. Depending on the country. The car at the moment would just be like a run-about car, it won't be what you want."

Apart from a necessity to buy something for future occupation after the MBA, one of the participants also mentioned he might need to create a special space in his house that would serve the function of office for him.

Participant 8: "If it is something I have to work from home, I'll maybe have to change like the one bedroom to study, so it is a bit more comfortable, because currently I'm working in a living room."

Planning for buying something for their life after the MBA, two of the participants said they want to reward themselves after the course is finished.

Participant 11: "Maybe a piece of jewellery or a new dress... Maybe it's like a reward mechanism. That you feel like you've achieved something, so now I should be rewarded."

Participant 12: "Reward with concerts and massages... Or go visit my sister in Canada."

5.5.4.2.3 Deviations from patterns

Apart from rewarding herself for going through MBA one of the participants was also planning to buy a memorable gift for herself, commemorating the journey she has been through.

Participant 11: "I would probably buy myself something to celebrate the end of the MBA, I like to buy things that have meaning associated with them. So, you know, when I finally finish, I'll probably get maybe a necklace or something that I can attach meaning to. That thing that reminds me: 'Ok, well done, you finished, this is worth it'".

Another participant, describing what he would like to buy for himself after MBA, said he would like to buy something for his wife.

Participant 4: "What would I buy if I had a lot of money... I've no idea. Maybe something for my wife. That's one thing that I wasn't able to do this year – spending money on her. So, like I wouldn't mind giving her a gift for our new daughter coming up."

5.5.5 Interview question 8

How has the overall experience, since the course started, changed you as a person and your consumption preferences?

Interview question 8 explored the effect overall experience of MBA journey accompanied by unemployment and financial constraint had on participants on personal level, including their attitude to consumption in general and possessions in particular. Reflecting on their experiences participants were sharing their observations on the changes on personal level that they have gone through, how these changes transformed their attitude to consumption in general and how from this new perspective they evaluate consumption behaviour they had before MBA.

5.5.5.1 Frequency of categories

These changes were observed in the following areas:

Table 14: Areas of observed changes.

Areas of changes	Frequency
Attitude to consumption and possessions	10
Personality level	8
Awareness (of price, cost, brand)	7
Re-evaluation of consumption before MBA	6
Value of investment	6
Value of money	3
Re-evaluation of consumption during MBA	2
Focus on future	2
Relationship with others	2

5.5.5.2 Explanation of categories

A majority of the participants shared that the main change they experienced going through the MBA was in their overall attitude to consumption. Attitude to consumption related not only to consumption habits *per se*, but also to motivation for consumption choices.

Reflecting on his consumption choices before the MBA and the new attitude to consumption one of the participants came to a conclusion:

Participant 5: "It is not necessary to drive a car as nice as a person sitting in a chair next to you or dress as nice."

With their new attitude participants leaned towards more purposeful consumption, unlike to compulsive one they had before.

Participant 11: "I won't just buy clothing because I like it, I have to buy it if I genuinely need something, if I'm going to event, if I need a dress or something. It's no longer like, oh, I walking into a shop and I see something that I like and I can just automatically buy it."

Seeing the shift to new consumption patterns as a positive change, one of the participants reflected on the way new attitude to consumption made her feel:

Participant 6: "I'm proud of myself of not spending so much on clothes, I don't feel any less happy, I don't feel badly dressed because I haven't shopped for like every week, you know."

As the result of changed attitude to consumption in general, one of the participants described the way his attitude to possessions in particular has changed as well:

Participant 8: "I realised I don't have to link myself to a possession, or car, or a house. I can link in to myself and what I can achieve. Because the car doesn't make money, I can make money. So, if I'm looking after myself and I'm feeling good, then that's all that matters."

Another participant noted that haven gone through the whole experience he started to value experiences over material objects:

Participant 5: "I do value experiences more than I used to."

Speaking about personality changes and their connection with consumption one of the participants noted:

Participant 1: "...your consumption attitude also under effect of your personality."

Thus, the change on the personality level that participants also experienced during the course was second major area of change during the MBA. One of the participants described her search for inner harmony. As a result, she found her own style of dressing and that affected her consumption choices:

Participant 1: "I came to peace with myself. I don't want to change myself anymore. I am happy with the way that I am. So, I accept myself. Now... So, I think after this year I finally find my own style. I can keep it, so that's good for me. I don't need to spend lots of money and be like other all the beautiful girls, you know. I love my own style and I don't care about the others now."

Another participant felt proud of herself observing how she was managing the whole experience in terms of consumption.

Participant 6: "Yeah, I feel really proud of myself. I haven't had to borrow money, deep into any huge savings. And I thought it would be much worse because I've never actually had to be frugal in any way. So, I do feel like quite pleased with myself."

As a result, the sense of achievement boosted participants' confidence, including the way they express themselves.

Participant 8: "And think it's also a bit more confidence, you're confident in yourself... I realised that what I can achieve and what I can do. I don't know why I had the lack of confidence before this year but I gained this confidence."

Participant 1: "Also, maybe when you are more confidence, you have more confidence, you don't really care about your appearance. Because you find your way for express yourself..."

Speaking about self-expression through clothes, one of the participants noted:

Participant 10: "From the personality perspective I think it affirmed that I really am not a clothing brand person."

Observing the overall increase in awareness and the way it is related to consumption, one of the participants observed:

Participant 6: "It's not about the money, it's like it makes me stop and think. When I stop and think about the spending, I think about everything around me more. So, do I really need this? Do I just want it? Am I tired and I go shopping because I'm just tired? Am I sad, so I'm about to buy a slice of cake and I don't even like cake. Why you're buying cake? Get a juice. So, being aware made me stop and pause more, and stopping and pausing more has made me make better decisions essentially."

Describing how their attitude to consumption evolved over the course, participants were also re-evaluating their consumption behaviour before the MBA. One participant compared it with addictive behaviour:

Participant 1: "It's like when you buying things it's like addiction, you just need it more."

Being employed before the MBA and having constant income, participants were not really worried about their cashflow. As one of the participants noticed, it was also related to her sense of financial responsibility.

Participant 5: "You know you'll always get a pay-check, another pay-check..."

Participant 6: "I think I was really irresponsible financial person before. I didn't see it then because when you earn money the money is constantly coming in."

Participants admitted that before MBA they were more focused on consumption rather than investment or saving.

Participant 5: "Things like proper savings, separative pension, didn't really cross my mind."

Participants 8: "So, you would be more enjoying and wasting money, than actually using it on future planning and future benefits."

Reflecting on past consumption two participants realised that it was excessive and not really bringing that much value:

Participant 10: "I realised that I've actually spent a lot of money on things that I didn't actually need. Things, that didn't add any value to my life. That didn't add any experiences."

Participant 6: "There was no need to be spending whatever I was spending before...It was excessive."

Following their observations of the lack of attention they paid to savings and investment participants noted growing interest to that financial activity, thinking about their future.

Participant 2: "...the learning that we've had. It's definitely shifted me away from consumption to wanting to invest and save."

Participant 5: "Now I see the value in saving and actual value creation and growth of funds... So, I really started to value not just the spending but also the saving investing aspect."

Participant 10: "I think I value the importance of saving more now, than I did before."

Thus, the overall focus on future would be the shift from short-term goals to long-term.

Participant 8: "This year made me realised that I can't be focusing anymore on short-term... I need to be more future focused."

The increasing awareness, whether cost, price or brand was also mentioned by participants as one of the outcomes of the experience. Speaking about increased price awareness, participants described their experiences the following way:

Participant 11: "I've definitely become more aware of, you know, when I'm spending money and when I go to the shops, how much things cost."

Participant 7: "I'm very aware of prices now of simple goods or essential goods, which I'm barely was aware of before, simply because I had the salary."

One of the participants noted the growth in his cost awareness:

Participant 5: "How... fees kind of erode earnings... Just through a little bit of thinking you're not throwing money away. As opposed to before, when I'd be like 'It's not an issue'. I would just allocate the funds and not think about the fees."

Along with growing price awareness, one of the participants mentioned growth of brand awareness and their interconnectedness:

Participant 2: "Probably a lot more brand aware. Now I know that this is better than that. This costs R12, that costs R10... Yes, it is R2 better and I'm not going to compromise."

Growth in awareness also caused the shift in participants' perception of value of money and value for money.

Participant 6: "I'm just more mindful and I think a lot more about value than I used to... I think I didn't know how much you can do with money because I never had to think about it."

Participant 11: "When I say 'buying what I need' it's not buying like I said ten items of ten shirts of bad quality that will last two months, when they shrink in washing machine. I'd rather spend my money on one good quality shirt, that I know is going to last me a long time. So, it's also about making sure I spend my money on items that are worth buying."

Thinking about the way they used to spend money before the MBA participants, also reflected on their consumption behaviour related to spending on other people. Thus, two participants re-evaluated their previous relationship with other people through the lenses of consumption.

Participant 1: "And I don't like to make others happy. Sometimes you doing something like that. For example, make others happy, so also in that way you should spend money to make them happy."

Participant 10: "So, when I started my MBA and I cancelled all my contracts, the people that I would spend the thousands calling and catching up with weren't calling or catching up with me. So, I realised that I was investing so much money in what I thought were relationships, but..."

Two participants admitted that they could have adjusted their consumption during MBA even more. Hence one of the participants confessed she was still overspending during MBA mainly due to buying too much takeaway food and hosting friends at home:

Participant 1: "Still I'm overspending... When I don't have feeling to cook, so I call for takeaways... And then I love to have friends in my home sometimes and I spend lots of money for, I don't know... for wine and those things."

Another participant regretted he had not planned his expenses during his MBA better:

Participant 2: "I think the regret that I had is maybe that I didn't cut back even further. That I didn't manage my costs a bit more aggressively."

One participant, who had admitted to feeling guilty about overspending before her MBA, said that things changed as she managed to change her consumption behaviour towards buying what she really needed:

Participant 1: "Now I feel better, because I think this way of living is much better, you know... You know what do you want and what you need and just buy it."

Following a discussion of the reasons for the change that participants have gone through during their MBA, many participants admitted the compound effect of financial constraint and MBA learnings.

Participant 5: "It's been a more difficult year financially. And also, the learnings, you do learn like the value of...a lot more. You know, of investing... Half being on a certain budget and half the learning you gain from the MBA."

Participant 2: "What those courses have done is that they opened up a whole new world of possibilities rather than going and buying new shoes and new shirts. Let's going to buy this share... And now not only do you have the knowledge of benefits of doing that, but you also have got tools with which to go and effectively invest."

5.5.5.3 General patterns emerging from categories

Analysis of participants' reflections on their experience during the course, the way it changed their attitude to consumption and possessions and reasons for the change led to the following observations:

5.5.5.3.1 Commonalities patterns

Majority of participants shared the same re-evaluation of their previous attitude to money and consumption, causing unpleasant feelings:

Participant 5: "Working before I wasted a lot of money. My attitude was that I could always get more."

Participant 2: "I definitely increase my level of guilt by spending money or overconsuming. Spending money on consumption rather than investment. And that's partially being constrained as far as the amount of money available, but also partially what we've learnt."

Overall higher awareness of how they started to spend money during the MBA was observed by many participants:

Participant 6: "Now, when I spend money it has to be purposeful... The money is just... it's a way of becoming aware... So, I feel good about the fact that I have more awareness now, of how I'm spending my money."

This awareness encouraged participants to shift towards more purposeful consumption:

Participant 8: "You realise what you need to plan for, what you don't have to plan forward away. And then also what you need to spend on."

Many participants mentioned the shift from short-term goals including consumption towards long-term planning including investment and saving:

Participant 8: "So, investment and money... You need to be sure what you use it for is for the future, not for your current enjoyment."

Participant 2: "It's definitely shifted me away from consumption to wanting to invest and save."

Change in attitude to consumption affected not only participants' private consumption, but consumption related to others as well:

Participant 10: "It really changed my perspective of buying for me versus buying for one."

The overall experience with the change in perception towards consumption was seen as a positive one by all participants.

Participant 10: "So, the experience, I say, has been good because it changed my perspective of spending."

Speaking about consumption before the MBA one of the participants admitted every time she was overconsuming it caused sense of guilt:

Participant 1: "You know, the way that I raised my parents always told me this consumption attitude is not very good, you spend lots of money, so just buy something that you really need. So, I always, when I spent lots of money for buying things that I don't really need, I feel guilty."

5.5.5.3.2 Disparities in patterns

For one of the participants shift towards increased awareness stretched far beyond the boundaries of consumption:

Participant 6: "I have found that since I started studying I had a lot more time and energy for studies, that's not material. To make some yoga, and reading, and sitting with yourself, meditating and stuff like that."

Same participant shared that re-evaluation of her consumption experience and attitude to money before MBA gave her a different perspective on the notion of privilege:

Participant 6: "I think I've learned a lot this year about privilege... I think where I live, where I come from I think I probably take money for granted a lot more than other people."

5.5.5.3.3 Deviations from patterns

For the participant who had moved to South Africa from her home country for the purpose of the studies, the overall experience was intensified by the challenges of living in a new environment. Shift in attitude to consumption was enhanced by exposure to a different culture, including consumer culture:

Participant 1: "I was alone and I have lots of time to think about myself and also... you see new people, different kind of people, personality, new culture and people are just here I think live for yourself, or their selves, you know. But in my culture, you must put people first, other people first than yourself. So, you learn this to the time, the whole your life and then when you come here, when I came here and I meet new people I saw they are just... you know, there is a respect, everything is good, but they think about themselves, not you."

Only one of the participants from the sample did not observe any changes in her attitude to money and consumption due to the fact that her consumption before and during MBA did not differ significantly:

Participant 12: "The way I feel about things, hasn't really changed, that I think of... I've always sort of lived not extravagantly."

5.5.6 Interview question 9

How you think your consumption will change after your MBA?

After describing how the experience of the course affected their attitude to money, consumption and possessions, participants were asked interview question 9 in order to explore whether participants supposed that the described change in attitude would affect their consumption after MBA.

5.5.6.1 Frequency of categories

Participants' answers were categorised the following way:

Table 15: Categories of changes of consumption after the MBA.

Consumption going forward	Frequency
Stick to new consumption behaviour	6
Focus on investment and saving	5
New consumption choices	5
Back to old preferences	4
Readiness to give up possessions	4
Spending on family	3
Giving back to the community	2
Compensation of expenses on MBA	2
Experiences over material possessions	2

5.5.6.2 Explanation of categories

When answering the question, the majority of the participants immediately expressed confidence or hope that after MBA they would stick to the same consumption behaviour

that they had during MBA, as all of them regarded the shift to the new attitude as a very positive one.

Participant 1: "I hope it's not going to change. Because I've told you it's not just because of the financial constraint, or because of it. No, it's the whole package of things... whole experience, that changed my view about life and about myself also."

Participant 8: "It just made me realise that maybe if I paid a bit more attention to what I'm spending in last four years, could have been even better off now financially than what I have. So, that's something that I will maintain going forward."

One of the participants called this experience and shift she has been through an "eye-opener".

Participants 7: "Because of being in this situation for a year, I feel it's been an eye-opener, I'm a lot more aware and appreciative, I don't want that to change."

In alignment with their answers to interview question 8, when many participants admitted they started to value investment and saving more, answering this interview question many of them noted that they were going to be investing and saving much more after the MBA.

Participant 5: "You need to save, you need to plan for things."

As one of the elements of this shift participants also mentioned moving away from consumption.

Participant 8: "It will be a lot more important to use that money for future investments, especially for... the family. So, that my kids are one day better off. So, it will be more important if they can afford to go to nice school and nice University and have some money to start off with, than using those money to buy nice car now."

Participant 3: "I may be looking at the different things from the investment side of things. Instead of spending money on per se a better car. To invest a bit more money and then buy a better car later."

Despite the fact that almost all participants expressed their desire to stick to new consumption behaviour, many of them admitted that when they would be back to work

and income, they would be also back to some of their old consumption preferences. These are the preferences they had before MBA and that were important for them.

Participant 4: "Like go shooting again, go out again, go on holiday again."

Participant 6: "The biggest thing I'll go back to as before is my spend on my laptop, my phone and the maybe the car."

In contrast to that and in alignment with their answers to interview question 8, many participants stated they were not going to be back to spending money on certain possessions or activities, as they used to before their MBA. This decision was made as a result of the re-evaluation of their previous consumption behaviour that took place during the course.

Participant 6: "I don't think I will ever go back to the things where I'm buying new clothes because of dirty laundry."

As the result of this re-evaluation participants started to value certain consumption choices over the others and expressed the desire to spend more money on them after MBA. One of such key consumption choices would be travelling.

Participant 2: "Definitely traveling and doing that more. I travelled kind of up and down the world but I didn't travel across the world."

Participant 8: "So, that is something that I definitely want to do more of, and see more places, and experience more cultures, than just buying a bigger and a better car."

These new consumption choices also included shift in brand preferences, described by one of the participants. Being financially constrained, he had to shift from an expensive brand he preferred before MBA to a more affordable one, which he eventually started to appreciate.

Participant 2: "And I like it and it's probably the cheapest shirt I bought in a long time. But it probably will change my behaviour in future and I will probably buy a lot more ZARA shirts that are not that expensive and not Thomas Pink."

Speaking about their new consumption behaviour after MBA participants also mentioned spending on their family as an important part of their lives.

Participant 4: "I think I need to spend a bit of money on my wife. And it is quite important... Because I think she feels a bit neglected after this year."

As the result of their re-evaluation of previous consumption behaviour two participants made a decision to be doing more to give back to the community and the country, either through investment or consumption.

Participant 3: "I think to give back more to the people that you can't help. And it's nice to see things grow. Particularly helping people that don't have the opportunity to go to a bank or... That need help. Small scale funding. Start-ups with maybe like underprivileged people that don't have a credit record, they don't have anything... I think the country needs a lot that input and also it feels good to help people. They need help."

Participant 10: "I think going forward I really want to be someone who invests my money into the local economy, into local designers... And give back to the economy."

Having made significant financial investment to do the MBA course, participants also mentioned that when they would back to work, they would need to compensate those expenses before they could start spending money on themselves.

Participant 7: "I think when I shift back into working again and actually start earning a salary my consumption will still be restricted because we've got sort of re-financing and re-fill our 'piggy bank'."

Participant 4: "So, there are a few things that need to be fixed first. First, I have to re-put money into the savings. Taking the money out of savings needs to be put back."

Following the tendency to value experiences over material possessions as one of the elements of the changed consumption behaviour, participants described how they would be making decisions in favour of spending on experiences going forward.

Participant 5: "If I got paid the same amount I still wouldn't go and buy like the top of the line German car, whereas before I would. I would rather put that money towards like as I said travel. Even just weekends away, like little getaways."

Participant 8: "...the more money I would save, the more I can spend on experiences than physical assets, if it makes sense."

Re-evaluating his previous consumption choices, guided by the necessity to fit in a certain social group and catch up with people around, one of the participants noted that this consumption would no longer have place in his life:

Participant 5: "Is it really important to have that nice car and people can see you in it and it just goes much faster, so you feel better? No, it will certainly change going forward. That goes without saying."

Participants were also asked whether they thought this transformation on personal level and towards their new consumption behaviour was deep enough to prevent them from bouncing back to old consumption habits. All the participants admitted that it was.

Participant 6: "Like discovering a muscle, you didn't know you have. Like I didn't know I can have a restraint. I'm not a particularly restrained person. But I just discovered a part of me that actually like 'No, don't eat sushi this afternoon, go home make a salad, there's no need to do that'. So, I think it has been deep enough than just... I hope so."

Participant 8: "I think there will still be instances when I feel like maybe splurging on fancy car, especially cars maybe, I have a big love for cars. But I think I will have a lot more thought and deliberation about making a decision."

5.5.6.3 General patterns emerging from categories

5.5.6.3.1 Commonalities in patterns

Majority of participants wanted to hold on to new consumption behaviour and not to bounce back.

Participant 11: "I hope I don't bounce back to my old consumption kind of habits."

One of the biggest changes in consumption many participants described was preference of investment and saving over consumption.

A number of participants admitted that after MBA they will be back to certain consumption activities that have been their favourite and significant ones before MBA. As a result of the experience many participants started to value experiences more than material possessions.

Participant 3: "And possessions are not necessarily all to life. There is lot more to love in terms of experiences."

Speaking about preference of experiences over material possessions, many participants named travelling as the most desirable activity after completing their MBA.

Going forward, participants would be ready to give up those possessions and consumption activities which were not actually bringing value to their lives before MBA.

The main reason for the new consumption behaviour going forward was the combination of financial constraint and MBA learnings.

5.5.6.3.2 Disparities in patterns

Though expressing her hope not to be back to old consumption habits, one of the participants noted that it would also depend on her professional occupation after her MBA. She might be back to her old consumption behaviour if her new job would be similar to the one before MBA.

Participant 6: "I hope I don't get into a job where I get so busy again that I don't have time to do like normal things, like make lunch, think about my coffee, or whatever."

5.5.6.3.3 Deviations from patterns

The only participant who said that she would be back to the same consumption behaviour she had before MBA was the only one who admitted that her attitude to consumption has not changed over MBA as she has never lived an extravagant life before.

Participant 12: "As soon as I get a salary again, I'll go back to how I was."

5.6 Results for research question 3

5.6.1 Interview question 10

How did being under financial constraint change your consumption and attitude to possessions in general?

Interview question 10 sought to explore in more detail the effect of the financial constraint on the whole experience of participants and the change in attitude to consumption that took place during the course.

5.6.1.1 Frequency of categories

Describing what role financial constraint played on their journey, participants identified a number of key areas, presented in Table 16.

Table 16: Areas of change due to financial constraint.

Areas of change due to financial constraint	Frequency
Attitude to money	8
Financial freedom	3
Consumption	2
Future employment	2
Attitude to costs	2
Attitude to leisure	2
Savings	2

5.6.1.2 Explanation of categories

Having limited money during the course promoted change in attitudes to money among participants.

Participant 7: “And because of being in this situation for a year, I feel it’s been an eye-opener, I’m a lot more aware and appreciative, I don’t want that to change, it’s kind of humbling and I hope that if I do start working, I want to still be aware of those things. To be a little more frugal, to be a little more appreciative.”

Participant 10: “Not having money gives you perspective on money, it gives you perspective on the power of money and how much you can do with.”

As noted by a number of participants, financial constraint also highlighted the importance of financial freedom and independence from others.

Participant 5: “Financial stress is a very big stress, I mean life has stresses as is, and if you can especially try and avoid that one, then by all means try.”

Participant 11: “... it has an impact on your... I wouldn’t say confidence, but it’s more about your independence, so it’s sort of that inner-independence.”

Speaking about the overall change of consumption during MBA two participants mentioned that being on a tight budget forced them to cut out non-vital consumption.

Participant 1: "I start to cut things that I do not really need them. I stop to buy them."

Participant 12: "Not doing any luxuries... just buying things that you really need."

Financially restricted participants also became sensitive to costs, as two of them noted:

Participant 7: "...it's only when you don't have a salary do you actually take cognisance of the costs around you."

Participant 8: "I've seen this year when you have financial constraint and you have all these... responsibilities, like every month you need to pay for bond, you need to pay for house, insurance, all of that. When you're financially constrained those staff becomes a big concern to you."

Forced to cut down expenses on going out, participants had to spend much more time at home. Eventually they started to appreciate this type of leisure.

Participant 8: "As you're financially constrained you spend a lot more time at home just like with my wife and then you realise how much nicer those days are, than just travel, and spend, and go everywhere."

Reflecting on his personal experience of being under financial constraint, one of the participants also shared his views on the ways of overcoming, it depending on the entertainment options a person is exposed to. He was comparing Johannesburg and Cape Town.

Participant 5: "If you're financially constraint in Joburg you are very much confined to walks and jogs, you know, staying at home. Whereas [in Cape Town] there there's like so much more you can do if you're financially constrained so as not to spend money. So, you can go for a promenade, or hike up the Lion's Head or just take a bit of a drive somewhere... I certainly think it does not weigh on your shoulders as much when you have more options...Because all the things you look to do now due to lack of variety involve spending money."

Living out of savings made participants willing to make those savings last as long as possible.

Participant 2: "You see those savings clicking down, its budgeted for and you got the budget, but you see them clicking down and you kind of wonder when you going to get work, if the money is going to make last till the end of the MBA or MBA is going to last longer than the money."

At this stage of the course, participants were already starting to think about their employment after the MBA. While one of them described his motivation for finding a job:

Participant 1: "What it has done is that it incentivises me to really be quite aggressive in the job market."

Another one explained the criteria he would have when looking for a position:

Participant 8: "And it links to future job opportunities that I'm looking at. You first look – can it cover all my basic expenditures and responsibilities like house and car, insurance, all of that, than just looking at a job that you really want to do."

While reflecting on the role of financial constraint on their journey, many participants noted that such factor as time constraint also played an important role for the experience. It changed the way the felt about being limited in money.

Participant 5: "I didn't have time to be concerned with spending otherwise."

In particular that related to entertainment and going out.

Participant 11: "...because when you're doing MBA you don't see people as often as you like. So, I didn't find that I was missing out on anything."

Another factor that made the experience of being on limited budget more bearable for the participants was the fact that they were undergoing that experience with a purpose. Thus, Participant 9 said he was not negative towards his experience as he knew it was a short-term sacrifice with a pay off in future. In a similar way the fact that MBA was preceded by some sort of preparation eased the negative side of the experience.

Participant 10: "I think mentally I was prepared for it, so the experience was not bad, I didn't feel like I was missing out anything. Because I think mentally I had prepared myself that I would be living like a very budgeted life. So, I didn't feel bad when people went out and I couldn't afford to go out or things like that."

5.6.1.3 General patterns emerging from categories

The following common patterns, differences and outliers stood out while analysing participants' answers to the interview question.

5.6.1.3.1 Commonalities in patterns

The biggest effect that financial constraint had on participants was shifting increasing awareness of the value of money and appreciation. Awareness also included cost awareness. Essential costs came to the forefront. Financially constrained participants started to value financial freedom and independence even more.

Making consumption choices, participants preferred necessities over non-vital items. Not having any other source of income rather than their savings, participants were trying to spend responsibly to make their money last as long as possible.

Not being able to go out as often as they used before, participants started to value time spent at home.

Experiencing life on a tight budget encouraged them to be more aggressive in their search for future job and that job should make them be able to cover all the basic needs at first instance.

5.6.1.3.2 Disparities in patterns

Living on a limited budget and thus not being able to buy the things he was used to buy before, one of the participants admitted that eventually through this experience he has changed his attitude towards consumption and it's meaning for identity creation.

Participant 8: "I think it definitely made me a lot less... I say... linking myself and who I am, identity to certain possession. Although I still want certain things for life like I want a bigger house one day in future, but it's not something anymore that defines me, it's not something that I feel I must have."

Following this shift the same participant noted that the experience of financial constraint gave him a new perspective on what a comfortable life in the context of income was.

Participant 8: "Through the financial constraint I also got a bit of calmness, because I think it made you realise you don't need hundreds of thousands of Rands to live comfortably. You just need to make conscious decisions about what you do with your money. So, actually, I am less stressed about money now than I was last year. Because you realise that you don't need all that money to live comfortably."

Going through all the challenges of life with financial constraint one of the participants started to feel certain connection with those experiencing the same limitation.

Participant 6: "I think like if I only have R2000 to spend on groceries I'd rather go to urban farmer guy than some huge conglomerate kind of thing. Because he also has financial constraint and if I can help with his financial... So maybe I feel some sort of comradery with other people who are experiencing financial constraint. So, I favour them now over the ones who have excess or whatever."

Thinking about how her experience would be different if she did not have limited budget during the course, one of the participants noted that she would still go through the same transformation that made her more sensitive to other peoples' needs. Though, she would not have to adjust her consumption as much.

Participant 11: "I think you are still influenced by the people that you are studying with and you're still influenced by what you are learning in class as well. So, it's not the earning factor. If I would have still been earning money and if I'd still had a job, but other people in my class weren't, I would have still been influenced by the fact that maybe they couldn't afford it. So, that would have made me more aware of other people and their needs.... Although I don't think my spending would have been curved as much, than it has been."

5.6.1.3.3 Deviations from patterns

In alignment with her answers to other questions, one participants noted that financial constraint did not play any major role for her experience.

Participant 12: "It doesn't really make a difference... never lived a very extravagant life, so being under financial constraint."

The only impact of financial constraint she mentioned was that it made her think about a backup plan in case she would run out of money.

Participant 12: "Maybe I made I thought about options, of what I can do if the money does run out. I don't know... loans, or borrowing from family, or friends, or things like that, which I have never thought about before, because there was always money coming in."

5.7 Role of MBA learnings for personal growth during the liminal transition

When answering the interview questions participants often highlighted the role that MBA

with all its learnings and challenges played in their personal transformation, affecting consumption. The MBA both equipped them with knowledge and tools and facilitated their personal growth.

Thus, one of the major reasons for the shift away from consumption towards investment were MBA learnings. As one of the participants described his personal experience:

Participant 2: "So, going forward consumption... Not so much not having an income but there's a huge personal growth that I have experience from taking Andrew's core course as well as Adrian's Elective were both of those dealt with financial analysis of companies and portfolio construction, and how to build a value portfolio. And how to build wealth. And that's markedly changed my consumption behaviour going forward, I will be less likely to consume."

Studying strategy during the MBA encouraged one of the participants to apply strategic approach to many aspects of her life:

Participant 6: "And I think now maybe because the MBA teaches you to be a little bit more strategic, I'm trying to apply some of those lessons about where you focus your energy, you can't do everything, to work smarter and not harder. I want channel sort of effort and focus on things that really matter in the long run and I think in the long run as greatest profit and keeping businesses. Keeping business is important, people depend on it for life. But I think keeping your family close and staff like that is more important for you as a person in long term. So maybe it's just the way you learn to think in the MBA, you learn to be a little bit more strategic. Even just the concept of ROI – return on investment, I kind of apply to everything now. To be like 'Ok, this is the effort I'm putting in, what's the real value I'm getting out, other people are getting out?'"

Speaking about the impact that overall experience had on their personality transformation two participants mentioned the shift in their attitude to future career:

Participant 3: "...coming into the MBA a large portion of it was like to jump over a ladder to a better salary and make a lot more money. But as the year's gone on the salary has almost become second to doing something that keeps you motivated and inspires you to keep going."

Participant 6: "But I am looking for like a lot more of work-life balance. And a lot less superficial of a career... Maybe I just only recently started to believe it's possible"

For one of the participants, two main shifts on the personality level were aspiration for additional education, and willingness to give back to the community through helping other people:

Participant 3: "So, maybe doing more like helping people with whatever problems they have. That sort of things. And then spending more money on education... To grow yourself."

Going through all the challenges of MBA was regarded by one of the participants as his personal achievement, encouraging higher self-worth.

Participant 5: "You start to value your sort of achievements more, or your... getting through, or you see this riddle, you think it is not possible to do it... I suppose you value yourself a lot more. After going through these periods. Tough periods build character, they say... And having completed the MBA, it's another achievement and it was a tough year."

Reflecting on the role of financial constraint, many participants were speaking about the combination of financial constraint and MBA learnings, rather than financial constraint in isolation. Thus, financial constraint influenced consumption behaviour during the course, and MBA learnings gave new perspectives for consumption going forward.

Participant 10: "I'll say the combination of both. Probably, the influence on looking... like taking a decision to step back and look at how I treated money was probably the financial constraint part. But I think the decision I've made on how to move forward dealing with money has been lessons from the MBA, on the importance of saving not just as an individual but the contribution and the impact it has on the economy and the country. So, I'd say that almost the initial decision was the financial constraint, but I think what influenced my decision going forward has been the lessons that I've learnt."

One of the participants summarised the impact that the combination of financial constraint, and MBA learnings had both on professional and personal level in the following way:

Participant 11: "So, you are learning about managing a business, and managing yourself as well, at the same time. And a lot of that has to do with the finance side of the business and understanding... you can understand assets and liabilities, and that of a business, well you should also be able to understand that in your own life and understand where you are. If you going to plan for your own future, your strategy going forward, and that includes your finances, so you have to be

able to know your own spending habits and to be able to plan accordingly if you going to reach your goals. And now that I understand that a lot more and understand what's been taught to on the MBA, I'm able to apply that on my personal level."

5.8 Conclusion

Analysis of the participants' answers to interview questions supports the theoretical model of the liminal transition in the context of the current research presented in Chapter 2. Results are aligned with the existing body of knowledge and provide insightful findings that can contribute to the understanding of the liminal transition and its elements, in particular the ones, related to symbolic consumption. Chapter 6 presents the comprehensive discussion of the results in accordance with the model.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

Being the “culmination of the analysis process” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 287), discussion of the results of the analysis conducted in Chapter 5 is presented in this chapter. Thus, relating findings to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, this chapter presents a broad and critical analysis of the results.

This chapter provides insights into the findings as investigated through semi-structured interviews. Results are discussed in accordance with the three research questions and their objectives. Patterns and outliers that were revealed during data analysis in Chapter 5 laid the foundation of the discussion of symbolic consumption of full-time MBA students going through the liminal transition accompanied by financial constraint.

There were overlaps in findings presented for research questions as they were interrelated and were aimed at exploration of different aspects of the same experience participants have gone through. Nevertheless, discussion of results for each separate research question was conducted through the lens of the objective that each separate research question had.

Discussion of the results is presented using the integration of the model of liminal transition of full-time MBA students presented in Introduction to Chapter 2 and the conceptual framework for data analysis used in Chapter 5. The aggregated framework for the discussion of the results is presented below. It includes a number of figures visualising various processes occurring at different stages of the liminal transition, grounded in the existing body of knowledge on liminality and symbolic consumption. Therefore, pre-MBA corresponds to the separation stage of the liminal transition, During-MBA corresponds to the liminality stage and Post-MBA corresponds to the aggregation stage. Figures 6-9 in the aggregated framework below picture this correspondence.

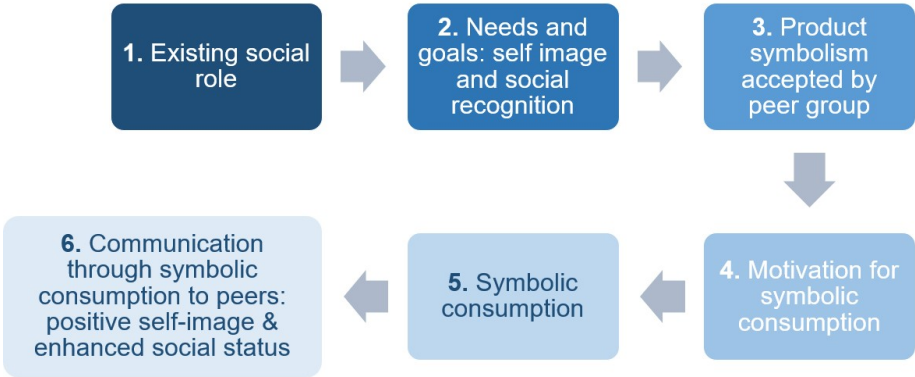
Pre-MBA stage

1) Research question 1: *Consumption behaviour before MBA*

2) Research question 2: *Attachment to possessions before MBA*

Figure 3 introduced in section 2.2.2 of Chapter 2 presents the model of a typical symbolic consumption transaction that precedes the formation of attachments to possessions.

Figure 3: Symbolic consumption transaction.

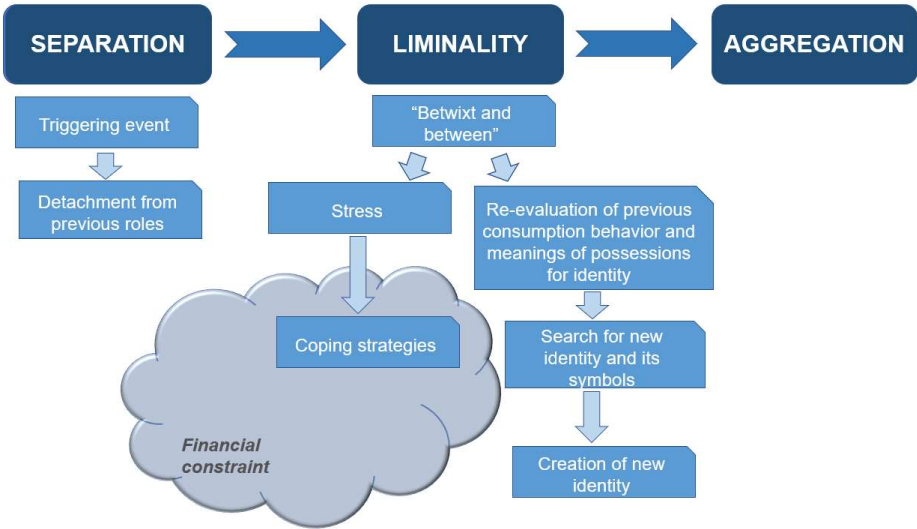


During-MBA stage

1) Research question 1: Change in consumption behaviour during MBA

Change in consumption behaviour during MBA as the liminal transition occurs at the separation and the liminality stages as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Change in consumption behaviour during MBA.



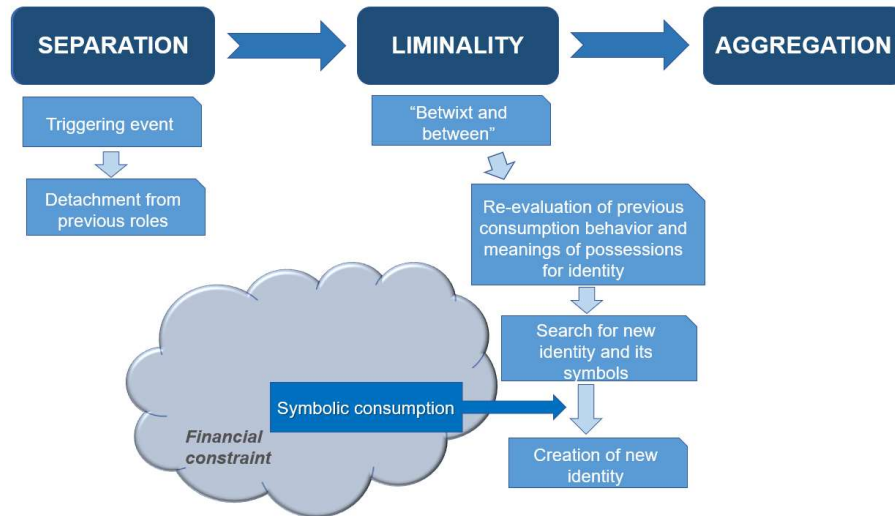
2) Research question 2: Shift in attachments to possessions during MBA

- Getting ready for new roles on MBA

- Significant possessions during MBA
- Getting ready for new roles after MBA

Figure 7 shows the shift in attachment to possessions takes place over the separation and the liminality stages, involving symbolic consumption mediated by financial constraint.

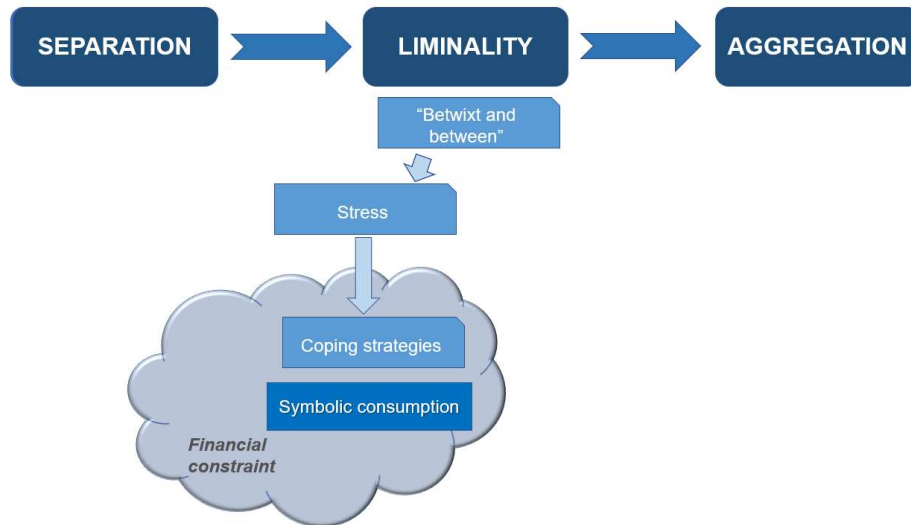
Figure 7: Shift in attachments to possessions during MBA.



3) Research question 3: Role of financial constraint during MBA.

Figure 8 illustrates the effect financial constraint has over symbolic consumption during liminal transition.

Figure 8: Role of financial constraints in the shift in consumption behaviour and attitude to possessions during MBA.

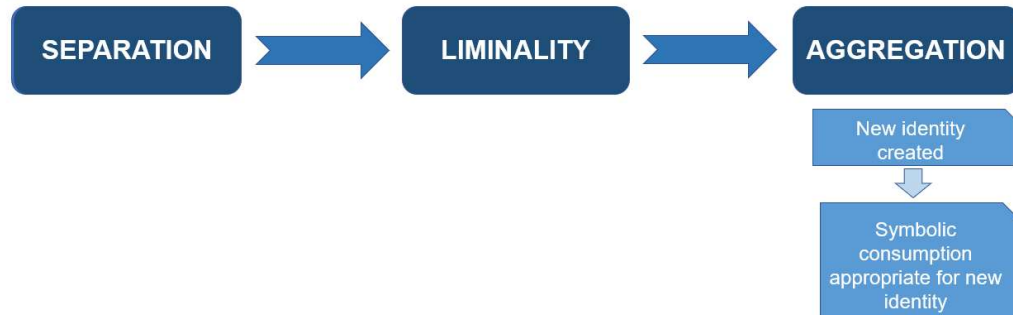


Post-MBA stage

1) Research question 2: *Consumption going forward*

At the aggregation stage of the liminal transition, creation of a new identity is finalised and appropriate symbolic consumption is involved as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Formation of new consumption behaviour.



6.2 Discussion of results for research question 1

How did consumption behaviour of MBA students change during their full-time course, as a period of liminality?

Research question 1 was sought to explore how consumption behaviour of full-time MBA students evolved during their MBA journey and what were the reasons for the change. Discussion of the consumption behaviour evolution was opened with the question on participants' consumption preferences before MBA.

6.2.1 Pre-MBA: Consumption behaviour before MBA

As the results showed, before MBA experiential expenses outweighed material possessions. Participants enjoyed spending money on entertainment, travel, books, food and spa-treatments due to their intangible value. Intangible value would include among others socialising with friends and exploring new places.

One of the categories of tangible possessions that participants were buying before MBA, namely clothes, was of particular interest since the main motivation for buying clothes was based on their symbolic value. Thus, for participants working in a corporate

environment or in advertising industry, it was important how they looked and presented themselves due to certain social and professional expectations. These expectations could be referred to as social reality, understanding of which Solomon (1983) supposed to be key for engaging product symbolism in order to align with the environment. Thus, in agreement with Levy (1959), participants were buying those clothes that indicated their social positions. Through buying clothes that were appropriate to the dress-codes of the companies and industries they were working in, participants were pursuing two goals – to fit in the certain social group and to communicate certain image. This inference therefore supports the argument belonging to Argo and Meng (2016) that through products they use, consumers signal their identities and showcase the communication function of symbolic consumption, suggested by Richins (1994).

Another category of tangible expenses were expenses on house décor. The participant who regarded these expenses as “personalised” explained that the décor for the house was chosen by herself and was expression of herself which confirms the argument made by Gao, Wheeler, and Shiv (2009) that the products individuals consume can be self-expressive.

6.2.2 During-MBA: Change in consumption behaviour during MBA

Evolution of consumption behaviour of participants that took place during MBA went through the separation and the liminality stages of the liminal transition as shown in Figure 3 in the introduction to this chapter.

6.2.2.1 Triggering event and detachment from previous roles

In alignment with the separation stage, change in consumption behaviour started with participants' resignation from work and enrolment to the full-time MBA course as the triggering events. Thus, participants experienced two shifts in their social roles: from employee to unemployed and from unemployed to student. This shift in multiple roles is aligned with the argument made by Hopkins, Siemens and Raymond (2014) that individuals can go through multiple life transitions at the same time. The next step that followed was detachment from previous roles. In accordance with Brandi and Denmark (2006) who stated that detachment from a role can be manifested by disposition of some old possessions and activities, a number of participants had to sell their cars, buy cheaper ones and to move back to their parents to cut out expenses on renting and food.

6.2.2.2 Re-evaluation of previous consumption behaviour

In accordance with Kennett-Hensel, Sneath and Lacey (2012), at the liminality stage being “betwixt and between”, participants had gone through the re-evaluation of their previous consumption behaviour and role of possessions as a reflection of their identities.

Participants unanimously admitted that before the MBA they were overconsuming and sometimes this behaviour was addictive. Overconsuming included compulsive consumption as well. Looking back at their consumption choices before the MBA, participants realised they were excessively spending money on things they did not really need and that were not bringing any real value to their lives. In addition, before the MBA, participants were “wasting” money on consumption instead of using it for investment and savings. Explaining the reasons for this consumption behaviour, participants noted it was due to the fact they had stable income and thus knew there would always be more money coming in. This attitude to consumption reflects what Andreasen (1984) called inertia, when consumers follow the patterns they are used to.

Re-evaluating their old consumption behaviour, participants also revised their spending related to other people. Some participants observed that before the MBA they had been spending money on others “to make them happy” or to sustain the relationships they considered to be important. This process is aligned with the effect of life transitions claimed by Schouten (1991), when not only consumption behaviour but relationships and values can be subjected to restructure as well.

Apart from re-evaluating their consumption behaviour before the MBA, two participants also reflected on their consumption during the course and came to conclusion that they could have planned their expenses even better and cut them more dramatically. In their minds they still were overconsuming in certain instances, for example, on takeaway food.

This re-evaluation resulted in participants leaning towards more sustainable consumption, that assumed passage from compulsive consumption (buying “what I want”) towards consumption motivated by needs (buying “what I need”).

6.2.2.3 Search for new identity and its symbols

As stated above, during their MBA journey participants went through two shifts in their

social roles – from an employee to an unemployed and from an unemployed to a student. Though these shifts between the social roles happened sequentially, participants had to face challenges related to each shift simultaneously. Supporting Prónay and Hetesi's (2016) argument, participants applied to consumption for construction of their social identities. Analyses of the ways participants adjusted their consumption behaviour during the course lead to the conclusion that they had to fulfil the search for more than one identity in parallel. And in accordance with Andreasen (1984), in each case the requirements for change in consumption patterns were unique. As a result, each participant created his/her own individual version of each role-identity (Kleine III et al., 2017).

The majority of the participants were dealing with the shift to two new identities – an unemployed person and a student. At the same time, a small group of participants faced the necessity to form a third identity related to the changes in their family status that took place during MBA as well.

6.2.2.3.1 Identity #1 – The unemployed

After resigning from their previous jobs, participants lost their sources of stable income and had to live from the limited savings they had accumulated by the time MBA started. Being limited in financial resources, participants had to adjust their consumption behaviour in order to make their limited savings last till they got employed again. Participants had to cut out and/or reduce their consumption of certain goods and services for the duration of MBA.

Overall, half of the participants admitted they had cut certain expenses out of their budgets during MBA. Financial services, clothes, and shoes were the main categories of goods and services on which spending was suspended. Not having sources of income, participants were no longer able to pay for insurance and supplement their savings plans and retirement funds. Spending on food treats (sweets, chips and cold drinks) was cut out not only because of the financial constraint, but also because of the shift towards more conscious consumption decisions. As an example, one of the participants stopped buying cold drinks every time he was going to a fuel station as he could drink the cold drinks or water he already had at home.

Expenses on going out and travel were significantly reduced due to financial constraints as well. Half of the sample admitted they were travelling less during the MBA as compared to the previous year solely because of budget limitations. Speaking about the

reduced number of times he was going, out one of the participants also shared how he was managing his restaurant bills – instead of having three course meals (starter, main and desert), he was having a main course only.

While for one group of participants being unemployed meant their employers were no longer paying for car rent and petrol, for another group it meant lessening of their petrol bills as their trips to and from business school were much shorter than their trips to and from workplace.

6.2.2.3.2 Identity #2 – The student

Being detached from previous social roles and moving into a new social role as a business-school student, participants faced the necessity to create a new identity to match this new role. In order to fulfil this task, participants adjusted their consumption behaviour.

The major motivation for increasing expenses during the MBA was to keep up with the study-related requirements. Thus, the main expenditures were on stationary, printing out study materials, buying software for doing assignments, buying books, and buying data to download materials and to stay connected with syndicate members.

Ceballos and Hodges (2015) suggested that clothes can communicate titles related to occupation. In accordance with that, after participants shifted from their previous occupational roles with appropriate dress-codes, they had to follow the dress-code of the business school. Therefore, necessity to match the business school dress-code was the reason for a number of participants to increase their spending on clothes and shoes.

As some participants admitted the clothes and shoes they had before MBA were either too formal or too casual. Thus, the mismatch between the social roles they had before the MBA and the new social role they moved to forced them to apply to consumption to reduce this discrepancy. These actions support Solomon's (1983) notion of the appropriateness of the symbols that are used to signal a role and that products are "setting the stage" (p. 320) for participants to play their new roles.

As students, participants faced the necessity to deliver their academic work within clearly defined timeframes. Given the workload during the MBA, their time resource was significantly limited and thus it can be said that participants were subjected to time constraints. In certain cases, time constraints led to participants cutting out or reducing expenses, for example on sport and recreational activities. And in other cases, it led to

increase of expenses, for example, not having enough time to cook for themselves and increasing spending on restaurants and takeaway food. Driven by the same reason, one participant shared that she had to start buying chopped tomatoes that she had never bought before as using chopped tomatoes for cooking helped her to reduce time spent in the kitchen.

Apart from the abovementioned financial and time constraints, such factors as shift in priorities related to the new social role also affected consumption of clothes and shoes during the MBA. Firstly, the social role of a student and the dress-code associated with it did not suppose high expenditure on clothing. Thus, following Wattanasuwan's (2005) argument, dressing in accordance with the established dress-code allowed participants to express their belonging to a group and express group identity as well. Secondly, the priority of spending on clothes and shoes became obsolete as participants' focus shifted towards their academic performance.

As time passed and participants became mature in their new social role, consumption behaviour within the same social role started to evolve. This observation confirms Hopkins's et al. (2014) and Tonner's (2016) suggestions that as a result of re-evaluation, consumers might start spending more money on those good and services whose importance increases during life changing events. Hence, driven by budget constraint and shift towards healthier nutrition, those participants who increased their expenses on eating out and takeaway food at the beginning of the MBA due to time constraint eventually reduced these expenditures and started to buy more groceries to cook at home.

Additionally, closer to the end of the course some participants started investing money into additional education and access to information in order to complement the knowledge they were getting. Approaching graduation, participants felt the need to catch up with the world of business that they were planning to be back to through subscribing to business-related media such as the Harvard Business Review. Having already started exploring options for future employment, one of the participants started visiting his potential employers therefore increasing his travel expenses.

6.2.2.3.3 Identity #3 – The family individual

There were few participants that were undergoing changes in their family statuses during MBA as well. As the result, apart from two identities discussed above, they were also going through the shift to the identities of husbands and fathers. One of the participants

who got married during MBA had to accommodate expenses on honeymoon, although he had to go for a cheaper option of domestic trip instead of going abroad as he would prefer to do in normal circumstances. Another participant admitted that the birth of his child has considerably changed consumption behaviour of their household and this change would have happened regardless of MBA and unemployment. Consequently, the number of times they were going out as a family dropped, as well as his alcohol bill. At the same time their expenses on food increased.

6.2.2.4 Creation of new identity

Moschis (2007) claimed that significant life events, especially those accompanied by role transitions, encourage development of new skills and thus promote personal growth. Research results confirm that as participants reflected on their change in consumption behaviour when moving to new social roles, they admitted to observing certain changes on the personality level as well.

Thus, one of the participants observed that she managed “to come to peace” with herself. This newly-acquired harmony included finding her own dressing style which adjusted her consumption accordingly. Guided by her own style more than by fashion trends, she started buying only those things that were relevant to her style and which can be related to as carrying relevant self-defining meaning according to Scharfenberger et al. (2014).

Participants’ necessity to be constantly aware of the way they were spending money resulted in increased self-awareness regarding motivation for consumption. One of the participants noted that she was able to better understand the real reasons for her consumption decisions, thus improving them over time. The same transformation laid the foundation for the passage to purposeful consumption, guided by situational needs rather than compulsive wants. Being more focused on their consumption decisions, participants also noted they had become more conscious about spending money on their true needs versus spending money because of other people’s expectations. Thus, this is in line with the development of new consumer and decision making skills as a displays of personal growth, as posited by Moschis (2007).

As the result of re-evaluation of their previous consumption behaviour, participants eventually started to move away from short-term goals of consumption towards long-term planning of their future. Thus, one of the participants increased her expenses on sports and additional educational courses as she deemed it to be beneficial for her future.

6.3. Discussion of results for the research question 2

How did symbolic consumption preferences of MBA students regarding possessions as means of the extended self change during the full-time course, as a period of liminality?

Following the broader discussion of the change in consumption behaviour, research question 2 focused on the shift in attachments to possessions as elements of self-extension experienced by the participants during MBA.

6.3.1 Pre-MBA: Attachments to possessions before MBA

Cars were reported as the most significant possessions for the majority of participants before MBA. Explaining the reasons behind attachment to their cars, participants highlighted the role of a car in South African culture. South African culture was called “car centric”, where people “become their cars”. Cars are symbols of success and achievement, by which cars owners’ social status is judged by others. Since, according to Solomon (1983) a car as an important symbol in South African culture, it is a vital element that allows to interpret the social reality of the culture-bearers. This instance where a car is a recognised symbol of success and achievement in a certain culture also confirms Witt’s (2010) argument that symbolic value of a product is not intrinsic, but is a result of a social agreement within members of a group.

Thus, cars as accepted symbols and extensions of identities communicate certain messages, in particular the image. Illustrating that, one of the participants explained that driving a Land Rover – a car that can go off-road – allowed him to translate the image of an “adventurous spirit”, as he considered himself to be one and wanted to be recognised by others. Thus, it showed the two-way relationship between symbolism attached to a product and consumer’s image according to Wattanasuwan (2005). In addition to that, this example proves what Guzmán, Paswan and Fabrize (2017) said about the brand choice – when choosing from which brand to buy a consumer would prefer the brand that matches his/her image of self and thus can promote self-congruity. In this regard, appropriateness of a brand’s marketing message, highlighted by Bhattacharjee, Berger and Menon (2014), comes to the forefront as consumer’s choice will depend on which brand’s image appeals to his identity.

Second position among the most significant possessions before the MBA belonged to electronics (namely, laptop and cell phone). Significance of electronics was determined by the role it played for efficient fulfilment of a social role of an employee. In this context,

electronics can be regarded as enhancing one's capabilities and strengthening the self at work as suggested by Levy (1959) and Karanika and Hogg (2010) with reference to the seminal work of Belk (1988).

The key reason for the significance of watches as valuable possessions was the brand equity. Brand equity, in its term, provided status affirmation for the owner of watches. Similar to cars, owning watches with well-established brand equity was regarded as a symbol of social achievement. As a result of this combined value, watches were also regarded as a desirable heirloom that could be passed to future generations. Consequently watches, being an object of symbolic consumption with several meanings, can play numerous roles in identity creation process as suggested by Brandi and Denmark (2006).

Following the discussion of the value of heirlooms, certain physical items that participants received as heirlooms from their family members as well as family gifts were of intangible and sentimental value. These items were the symbols of the family ties and the continuity of generations. Thus, Solomon's (1983) and Wong et al.'s (2013) arguments that products become incorporated into personal relationships, connecting individuals with significant others get confirmed. In addition to that one of the participants admitted that brand equity enhanced the sentimental value of these items. This is the example of symbolic consumption when products combine both social and private meaning as suggested by Solomon (1983).

Apart from possessions with material and sentimental values, participants were also attached to those possessions and activities that had experiential value. Among these possessions and activities were books, travel, sports and eating out. Thus, attachment to experiences as abstract possessions supports the claim made by Scharfenberger et al. (2014) that possessions do not need to have a solid form to be considered part of self.

One of the participants explained why items of clothing such as formal suits were significant for him before his MBA. Wearing formal suits according to the dress-code of the company he was working for before MBA helped him to fulfil the social role of an employee and thus to fit in certain social group. Attachment to clothes can therefore be an illustration of the model of symbolic consumption behaviour introduced in Chapter 2 and presented in Figure 1. Following the symbolic consumption transaction flow:

- (1) Before MBA participants were fulfilling the social role of employees of certain companies.
- (2) As employees of the companies they had to match the dress-codes.

(3) Apart from matching the dress-codes wearing formal suits signified that participants belonged to a certain social (peer) groups.

(4,5) Thus motivation to match the dress-codes and to affirm belonging to the social groups led to the act of symbolic consumption of formal suits.

(6) Through wearing formal suits participants were communicating the social status associated with the social role and confirming their belonging to the social groups.

Therefore, symbolic consumption of formal suits before MBA is an example of how consumption can reinforce social status and form social identity (Prónay & Hetesi, 2016).

Participants were also attached to possessions due to their relatedness to significant relationships. Thus, one of the participants had a special attachment to his house as the house symbolised his relationship with his wife.

Certain possessions like jewellery and kitchenware were important for participants as they allowed them to express themselves and make certain affirmations. Therefore, in accordance with what was stated by Belk et al. (1982) this non-verbal communication through consumption fulfils one of the key purposes of symbolic consumption – expression of one's identity.

Despite having attachments to certain material possessions one of the participants admitted that if hypothetically faced with threat to life no material objects would matter for her as much as the safety of her family, her dogs and her own.

6.3.2 During-MBA: Shift in attachments to possessions during MBA

Simultaneously with the evolution of consumption behaviour during the MBA, participants were experiencing a shift in their attachments to possessions related to the change in social roles. This process had also gone through the separation and the liminality stages of the liminal transition as showed in Figure 4.

6.3.2.1 Triggering event and detachment from previous roles

Shift in attachments to possessions started with the same triggering events as for the change in consumption behaviour described in the discussion of the research question 1. At the detachment stage, one of the participants decided to give up the watches he got from his father and that he was attached to before MBA. When explaining motivation behind this decision the participant said that in the new context the watches "lost its

meaning". Wearing expensive and status affirming watches being a student was not valid. This episode exemplifies the notion of appropriateness of the product symbolism in a certain situation, rather than pure rational decision making elaborated by Ahuvia (2005) among other authors. In addition to that it confirms that the Separation stage of the liminal transition involves episodes of symbolic detachment (Beech, 2011). In agreement with Belk (1988) the participant realised that watches as possession were no longer consistent with his self-concept and thus the volunteer loss of this possession was not traumatic.

6.3.2.2 Re-evaluation of meanings of possessions for identity

Becoming more confident over the MBA journey, one of the participants observed that he was no longer linking himself to the possessions he had and instead started to link himself to what he could achieve. Another participant realised that it was no longer important for him to "catch up with the Joneses" when it came to the car he was driving and clothes he was wearing. This observations support Raineri's (2015) argument that experiencing transition individuals tend to challenge their views and beliefs and question the role possessions used to play for their identity creation.

6.3.2.3 Search for new identity and its symbols

At this stage, the social role of student was what Solomon, James, Baldwin, and Horton (1981) identified as the set of meanings that direct individuals' behaviour in a social setting comes to the forefront.

As this was key a social role that participants committed to for the duration of their MBA, their priorities shifted towards its fulfilment. The way this shift in priorities affected consumption behaviour in general has already been discussed within the results of the research question 1. In this section the emphasis was on the possessions in particular and how attachments to possessions evolved. Given that possessions are the special cases of consumption, there were overlaps in findings for research question 1 and research question 2. These overlaps therefore indicate the significance of the observed patterns and increase the validity of the conclusions made.

6.3.2.3.1 Identity #1 – The student

Matching the analysis of goods and services that participants bought specifically for the MBA and the possessions they have become attached to during the MBA allowed exploration of which possessions participants considered to be essential for their new social role and could communicate their new identity most effectively.

Clothes and shoes were bought specifically for the MBA by almost half of the sample in order to match the dress-code of the business school. This finding refers back to the previous discussion of the increase in expenses during the MBA. Despite the fact that this category of spend was at the leading position among goods and services bought for MBA participants have not got attached to them.

What participants became attached to were the possessions related to their academic and role performance as students. Thus, participants had become very much attached to their laptops. As one of the participant commented her laptop has become her “MBA companion”. She realised how attached she was to it once it stopped working, which can be regarded as an episode illustrating threat to identity described by Argo and Meng (2016). For the same reason – meaning for performance – participants have become attached to their stationary, software and data.

Gifts from family members (an expensive pen and a backpack) dedicated specifically to the MBA journey were also mentioned as significant possessions by one of the participants. They carried special sentimental value, symbolising family’s support on the journey. The fact, that these personal items have become significant for the social role of a student supports the critics of universal language for symbolic consumption introduced by Colin Campbell in his work “*The sociology of consumption*” in 1996 and referenced by Prónay and Hetesi (2016). Thus, following Campbell’s argument this particular case of attachment supports the idea that context of symbolic consumption is the cornerstone for understanding the meaning of product symbolism.

Despite the fact that they have also bought or borrowed certain items specifically for MBA a few participants had not become attached to any possessions during their MBA.

6.3.2.3.2 Identity #2 – the family individual

The same participants who experienced changes in consumption behaviour due to changes in their marital status during their MBA admitted that activities and possessions related to these changes (namely honeymoon and wedding ring) had special meaning for them.

6.3.2.4 Creation of new identity

At this stage of the liminal transition majority of the participants had not yet bought anything for their life and new social roles after the MBA since they did not know what these new social roles would be. This is in alignment with Noble and Walker (1997), who said that at the stage of liminality individuals do not yet acquire symbols of future roles.

Only those two participants, who already started planning for future had bought certain goods as part of the post-MBA identity creation project. Buying new a laptop, and clothes for interviews, each of the participants were accordingly pursuing not only practical goals, but intension to create certain impressions as well. Thus, one of the participants admitted that when she was choosing a new fancy laptop she was thinking about creating an image of a “business woman” and communicating the message that she was a professional. As such, in this particular case the laptop, symbolically extending the participant, would be aimed at convincing others and herself that she was someone who she would not be without it, as suggested by Belk (1988). The same motivation – creation of desirable image – was shared by the participants who were planning to buy new formal suits for their future roles after MBA.

Following discussion of the plans for consumption after the MBA, two participants mentioned they were going to reward themselves for completing the course either by buying material objects (jewellery, dress) or by experiences (entertainment, beauty treatments and travel). These categories of spending were regarded as rewarding as they are both expensive and non-necessities. One of these two participants was also planning to buy something she could attach the meaning of achievement to, commemorating her graduation from MBA. In this case, according to Solomon (1983), a product the participant would buy to attach the meaning to would be carrying not a social, but a private meaning and would be considered not a symbol, but a sign.

6.3.3 Post-MBA: Consumption going forward

Despite the fact that the majority of participants did not yet have clear view of their social roles after their MBA, they were already able to share how they would be consuming going forward. Decisions on consumption behaviour after MBA resulted from the transformation that participants have gone through during MBA as period of liminality. This transformation was the basis for the formation of the new identity and symbolic consumption appropriate to it as shown in Figure 6.

The transformation of their consumption behaviour and attitudes to possessions was believed by the participants to be too positive and deep enough. Participants expressed hope that they would manage to maintain this new consumption behaviour after MBA. One of the participants noted he would stick to the brands he shifted to during MBA in search for cheaper options as he no longer saw practical reasons for buying more expensive ones. This perceived long-term or even permanent change in consumption behaviour as a result of going through life transitions is in agreement with Noble and Walker (1997).

Travelling has become one of the most desirable activities after MBA as participants were experiencing growth of preference for experiential expenses over material ones. Thus, preference for travelling signifies that after completing their MBA, participants would prefer to extend their selves through places they would visit when travelling. As suggested by Rapier (2016), places can also be means of self-extension along with possessions.

Consumption for the sake of creating an impression would no longer be maintained, particularly related to cars. This new approach was adopted even by those participants who noted earlier that cars were significant possessions for them as symbols of success. Therefore, going forward participants would be no longer buying expensive “flashy” car and would prefer cheaper reliable options. The money they would therefore save they would spend either on experiences (like travel) or investment.

This willingness to maintain the new consumption behaviour after MBA can signify that even though participants had not yet completed the liminal transition and therefore the new identities had not yet been constructed, they were already showing what Herminia and Otilia (2016) called commitment to new identity. Once the new identity is constructed and commitment, it carried on to the aggregation stage of the liminal transition and will signal the completion of participant’s personal growth.

A number of participants admitted that when being back to work and source of stable income they would be back to certain consumption behaviour that they had before MBA and that they want to maintain. That would include sports and recreation, entertainment, beauty treatments, electronics and buying gifts to family members.

Only in cases when consumption behaviour had not been subjected to a dramatic adjustment during MBA, did a participant intend to be entirely “back” to her old consumption behaviour once employed.

6.4 Discussion of results for research question 3

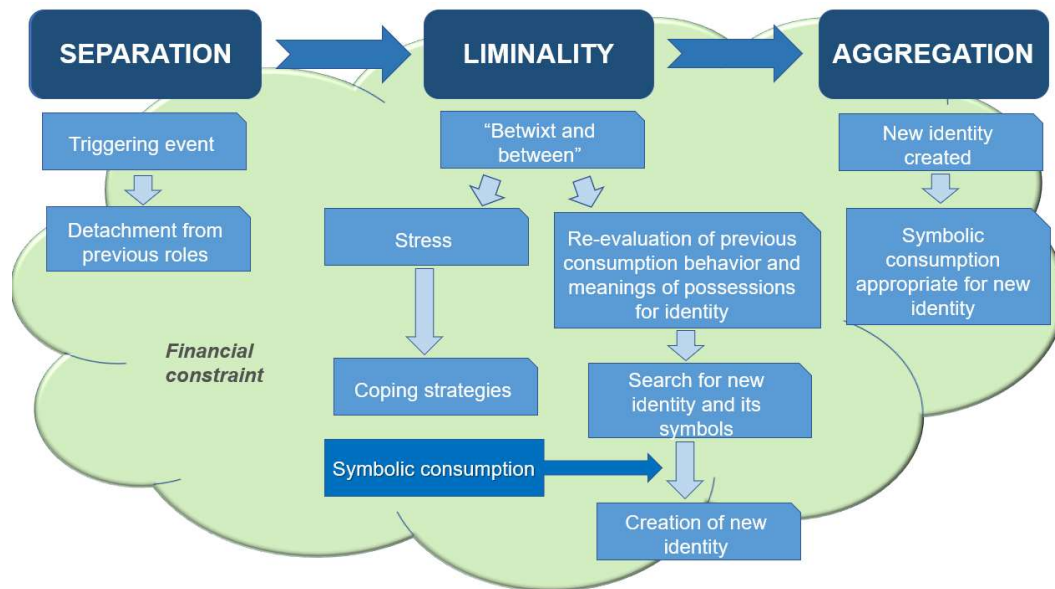
What effect did limited financial resources have on symbolic consumption of MBA students during their full time course, as a period of liminality?

Previous section of the chapter explored the change in consumption in general an attitude to possessions in particular as the result of the transformation participants have gone through liminal transition. The objective of the research question 3 was to investigate the role that financial constraint as an important variable played in this transformation.

6.4.1 During MBA: Role of financial constraint during MBA as period of liminality

Findings showed that financial constraint had been an important moderating variable for all the stages of the liminal transition that participants had gone through during MBA and not only for the symbolic consumption as previously illustrated by Figure 8. Thus, Figure 10 below shows the actual area of influence of financial constraint over the liminal transition.

Figure 10: Role of financial constraint as a moderating variable during MBA.



6.4.1.1 Triggering event and detachment from previous roles

Being one of the triggering events for the liminal transition resignation in order to enrol to the full-time MBA course was followed by the necessity to live out of limited savings. As discussed earlier a number of participants had to make certain adjustment in their lifestyles in order to cope with the challenge of living on tight budget, namely selling their expensive cars and moving to parents' houses.

6.4.1.2. Re-evaluation of previous consumption behaviour and meanings of possessions for identity

As already shown participants unanimously agreed that before MBA their financial behaviour was irresponsible. Thus, having the stable source of income participants were spending money excessively.

6.4.1.3 Search for new identity and its symbols

As an important moderating variable financial constraint affected participants' search of new identities either directly through limited resources available for consumption, or

indirectly through the new perspective on money that they gained. And each of the following identity roles were affected in a specific way.

6.4.1.3.1 Identity #1 – The unemployed

Being the core reason causing financial constraint shift to the role of an unemployed was subjected to the effect of the financial constraint most of all. For the majority of participants, experience of financial constraint resulted in attitude change towards money. Describing this attitude change participants were speaking about increased cost, price and brand awareness.

As a result of spending less during their MBA, participants became more responsible, disciplined and conscious regarding their consumption decisions. One of the key adjustments to their consumption behaviour was cutting out or reducing non-vital consumption, so that during the course participants were buying necessities and making sure their essential costs were covered.

Being challenged by living on tight budget, participants had become more appreciative and aware of the financial privilege they used to take for granted before MBA. Participants became more sensitive to other people in the similar financial situation. Thus, for example, one of the participants shared that having the sense of “comradery” towards those struggling financially, she was more willing to support local producers of food through buying from them as opposed to shopping in big supermarkets. This shift can be thus related to as a change in patronage preferences, common to identity transformation as argued by Lee, Moschis and Mathur (2001).

Facing the need to make their savings last as long as possible, participants were making consumption trade-offs, which, in agreement with Spiller (2011), made them take opportunity costs into more consideration. Through this experience participants eventually became more aware of the power and value of money. When spending money during the MBA, participants made sure they were getting maximum value for their money. In alignment with what Fernbach et al. (2015) defined as “stretching” their limited resources, one of the participants was “stretching” his shoes. Being financially constrained, he was wearing the shoes he had bought before MBA instead of buying new pair as he would do in normal circumstances. Similarly, another participant was making sure she was fully utilising the toiletries she had before buying new ones.

Student discounts and special offers had become attractive ways of reducing expenses, even though participants were hardly paying attention to them before MBA. Buying in bulk and thus reducing the cost was also one of the ways to bring expenses down.

Not being able to sustain the same level of expenses they had before but still not willing to give up certain activities and services, some participants had to go for downgrading. Thus, going for cheaper options of gym membership and medical scheme for the duration of the course allowed participants to reduce expenses but still have access to these benefits.

Participants showed certain opportunist behaviour trying to make the most out of meals supplied by the business school as it allowed them to reduce their expenses on food during MBA.

As part of the transformation caused by financial constraint, participants started to value time spent with family and friends at home. Initially participants had to change the format they were socialising with friends from going out to getting together at home in order to keep their expenses under control. But eventually participants started to like this new format of socialising. Thus, financial constraint had an indirect impact on participants' social life and relationships.

Financial constraint had no significant effect on the consumption and the whole experience of liminal transition only in one case, where a participant admitted that her consumption before and during MBA did not differ significantly. The only adjustment she had to make was cutting out a couple of expenses that she considered to be luxuries, namely spa-treatments and concerts. Explaining the reasons for not observing any changes, the participant noted that as her salary before MBA was quite low so she never lived an "extravagant" life.

Despite all the challenges of living from limited savings, participants had not become negative about their experience. One of the participants explained that she had prepared herself mentally for living on tight budget. Another participant highlighted that he approached the sacrifices he had to make in his lifestyle during MBA from the perspective of the purpose and future pay-off. These insights confirm the validity of the consumption coping framework suggested by Yap and Kapitan (2017), according to which both preparation stage and the context of consumption play significant roles in how a life event is perceived by consumers and what coping strategies they choose.

Discussing the effect of financial constraint on his lifestyle, one of the participants shared his views on the ways he could have eased the burden of life on tight budget. In his view

having bigger choice of free-of-charge options for entertainment and leisure would have eased the stress of the experience as it would allow to avoid unnecessary expenses. Having such options like going for tourist attractions, hiking, or just taking a drive to places nearby would have helped him to withstand the financial constraint even more.

6.4.1.3.2 Identity #2 – The student

Financial constraint did not have a significant moderating effect on consumption related to the shift to the social role of a student. Participants were still spending money on goods and services needed for creation of identities and fulfilment of the role. Only one participant has not bought anything for MBA due to fact that he considered price of MBA itself to be high enough and did not want to have any additional expenses.

The most significant constraint that participants experienced fulfilling the social role of students was the time constraint. Remarkably, time constraint moderated the negative effect of the financial constraint. Therefore, feeling more limited in time rather than money and not having time to spend the limited money they had, participants did not feel too negative about being financially constrained.

6.4.1.3.3 Identity #3 – The family individual

Another social role hardly subjected to the financial constraint was the one related to changes in participants' family status. Despite being aware of the limited amount of money he had on his savings account, one of the participants still made a decision to go for honeymoon even though he replaced an expensive overseas trip with cheaper local option.

6.4.1.4 Stress and coping strategies

Supporting the claim that Lee, Moschis and Mathur (2001) made according to which life transitions are characterised by both stress and necessity to adapt to new roles, liminality stage with the shifts in social roles that participants were undergoing during MBA was the source of stress for them. Facing the stress and the necessity to overcome it participants were applying to various coping strategies. For each of two major social roles, the level of stress and coping strategies were different.

Despite all the changes in their consumption behaviour caused by unemployment and limited financial resources, participants noted that they were still living comfortably and not feeling that they had to make major sacrifices in their lifestyles. Participants were still able to buy what they needed and to have what they liked, albeit in smaller moderation.

In the contrast, the shift to the social role of students caused higher level of stress. The source of this stress was the time constraints due to the workload and deadlines. Facing the challenges of the curriculum a number of participants increased their expenses on vitamins, nutrition tablets and coffee in order to stay energised and focused. When the stress was too high, some participants used activities as massages, watching TV (Netflix) and drinking alcohol to relieve stress.

For one of the participants, MBA-related stress was aggravated by the challenges faced when moving from another country. She found herself in a new cultural environment where she had to speak foreign language and study unfamiliar subjects. Thus, in her particular case the challenge to cope with the demands of the new context was the source of stress (Durante & Laran, 2016). As a consequence, she turned to excessive consumption of shoes, something she enjoyed buying before MBA. This behaviour and the motivation behind it evidenced one of the coping strategies in response to distress, described by Kennett-Hensel et al. (2012). During transitional periods when individuals experience negative emotional states, they might apply to stress-induced overconsumption as it can distract them from their negative feelings and thus provide a relief. As the participant explained it herself such consumption behaviour was a “painkiller” for her. Eventually, becoming more confident and comfortable in her new role she stopped doing that.

6.4.1.5 Creation of new identity

Facing the challenges of the financial constraint, including financial dependence on other people, participants started to value financial independence and financial freedom much more. Thus, it encouraged one of the participants to be more “aggressive” in his search for future employment in order to restore his financial position. At the same time another participant shared that the experience of financial constraint gave him a new perspective on what a “comfortable” life in terms of earnings meant for him. As he realised he could live comfortably with a moderate amount of money making conscious consumption decisions. He had become less stressed about money as compared to the period of time when he was still working. Having this new perspective, the participant also noted that

he was no longer thinking that such commonly accepted symbol of success as a big house could define him and thus he was no longer thinking he had to have it.

As it became clear during data analyses discussion of the transformation and personal growth that participants experienced as the result of the liminal transition would not be full without discussing the role of MBA learnings. In certain cases, MBA learnings as an important variable also impacted participants' attitude to consumption.

6.5 Role of MBA learnings for personal growth during the liminal transition

MBA learnings and challenges facilitated participants' personal growth, consequently affecting consumption. Thus, knowledge and tools gained during the MBA changed participants' perspective on wealth and well-being. The notion of well-being included work-life balance. Its significance increased in participants' eyes as during the MBA they had to balance the amount of energy they spent on deliverables. Motivation for higher salary that one of participants had for doing the MBA was replaced by search for meaning and inspiration in his future job.

Participants started to apply the strategic approach learned during the MBA to many other aspects of their lives apart from business and work. Examples included allocation of energy to different tasks, and application of the concept of ROI (return on investment) to all efforts. Valuing the benefit of education participants also were willing to invest in their further education.

Going through the challenging MBA experience, participants started to value their achievements on the journey. Together with learning how to manage business, they were learning how to manage themselves as individuals, including their consumption decisions.

Learning about the role of consumption for economic growth of a country, one of the participants realised the importance of giving back to the community. She said that going forward she would be giving preferences to local producers which she believed would allow her to support the economy of the country. Through buying from local producers she would be creating the identity of a "proudly South African".

Therefore, the combination of financial constraint and MBA learnings had a compound effect on the transformation of the consumption behaviour of participants. Going through financial constraint caused participants to re-evaluate their previous consumption

behaviour and to adjust it in accordance with the current context. MBA learnings laid the foundation of consumption going forward and more strategic approach to future.

6.6 Conclusion

Exploration of the changes of consumption behaviour of full-time MBA students and shift in attachments to possessions they experienced during the liminal transition allowed insights to be gained into motivation behind symbolic consumption they were applying to at different stages of the experience. Analysis of the role of financial constraint as the moderating variable allowed to assess the importance of the context. Though being an unexpected result of the research, the role of MBA learnings extended the understanding of the compound effect the whole MBA experience had over transformation of consumption of participants.

As such, research objectives as stated in the research questions were achieved. Contribution of the findings to the current body of knowledge on symbolic consumption, liminality and consumption under financial constraint is discussed in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 presents the principle findings of the study and their contribution to the existing body of knowledge on the four key topics of the study declared in the Introduction to Chapter 2 – symbolic consumption, extended self, liminality and consumption under stress and financial constraint. Findings on the topic that emerged at the stage of data collection, namely the role of MBA learnings on changes in consumption behaviour, is also presented. Synthesising all the findings of the study a new, updated model of the liminal transition of full-time MBA students is introduced. The initial model was presented in the introduction to Chapter 2.

Conclusive remarks unfold how the research objective was met and what are the managerial implications of the findings. Limitations of the study are discussed in relation to the ones originally stated in Chapter 4.

Finally, suggestions for future research are made.

7.2 Principle findings of the study

Principle findings of the research are discussed in accordance with the topics of the research questions and its theoretical significance. Changes in both consumption behaviour (section 7.2.1) and attachments to possessions (section 7.2.2) followed the same order aligned with the separation and the liminality stages of the model of liminal transition of full-time MBA students presented in the Introduction to Chapter 2. Thus, both topics are covered using the same stages.

7.2.1 Consumption behaviour change during liminality of full-time MBA students

7.2.1.1 Consumption before MBA

Before their MBA, participants spent more money on experiences rather than material possessions. The two most popular categories of spend were entertainment (going out) and travel as they allowed participants to socialise with friends and explore new places.

The most popular category of spend on material possessions was clothes and shoes. The value of buying clothes and shoes before MBA was of symbolic nature. Through buying and wearing certain clothes and shoes, participants were matching both conventional and non-conventional dress-codes of companies and industries they were working for and thus translating their social status and belonging to certain social groups.

7.2.1.2 Triggering event and detachment from previous roles

The liminal transition started with triggering events of resignation and enrolment to MBA. Detachment from previous social roles that followed was marked with giving up certain possessions and lifestyle which were no longer valid in the new context, for example, selling an expensive car and buying a cheaper one.

7.2.1.3 Re-evaluation of previous consumption behaviour

Being “betwixt and between” (Beech, 2011, p. 286), participants started to re-evaluate their previous consumption behaviour. Being used to stable source of income, all but one participant agreed they were spending money excessively on things that were not bringing real value to their lives, including spending money on other people. Saving and investment had not been priorities for them.

7.2.1.4 Search for new identity and its symbols

Once the transition began, participants had to reallocate their resources in order to meet the demands of their new social roles (Hopkins et al., 2014). Participants faced the necessity to construct more than one identity. Two core identities were “unemployed” and “student”. A few participants also had to form the third identity – a husband/father. In all the cases, participants applied to consumption behaviour for identity construction.

Being unemployed and thus financially constrained, all participants had to adjust their consumption behaviour in various ways in order to make their limited financial resources last longer. In order to achieve that, participants had to either cut out, or significantly reduce their expenses on certain goods and services. Expenses on financial services, clothes and shoes also became either redundant or were minimised as not valid for their new social roles. Encouraged to make their limited financial resources last longer and be

more sustainable in their consumption, participants minimised throwing away food, were “stretching” and fully utilising the possessions they had. These examples of consumption behaviour support Fernbach et al.'s (2015) notion of “planning mix” (p. 1205), which is the combination of efficiency planning and priority planning coping strategies in response to limited resources.

Not being able to go out as often and thus spending more time at home, participants started to socialise with family at friends at home. Eventually they started to value the new format of their interactions with friends.

Becoming students, participants faced the need to match the business school dress-code. Thus, they had to increase their expenses on clothes and shoes appropriate for the role of a student. Time constraints due to workload and deadlines also had a significant impact on participants’ consumption. On the one hand, participants had to significantly decrease or cut out expenses on sports and recreation. On the other hand, they found it necessary to spend more money on eating out and takeaway food.

Shift in family status experienced by two participants was accompanied by additional expenses. These expenses included a honeymoon, and spending more money on food with the birth of a child. At the same time, birth of a child led to participants going out less regardless of financial and time constraints.

Participants’ consumption evolved with time as they were moving towards more sustainable lifestyle, focused on what was beneficial for them in the long run. Thus, realising the importance of healthier nutrition, participants reduced their expenses on restaurants and takeaway food and started buying groceries to cook at home. The same reason – focus on future – encourages some participants to start investing money in additional education.

7.2.1.5 Creation of new identity

Two previous stages – detachment and re-evaluation – created a need for participants to start the search for new identities. The outputs of the research were predetermined by the personality growth, which in its turn affected consumption behaviour. This personality growth included finding peace with oneself and own dressing style as the self-expression, which led to more focused and conscious consumption. Participants also admitted they have become more self-aware regarding their true needs, which allowed them to make better consumption decisions. Speaking about better consumption

decisions, participants noted they were consuming purposefully instead of conspicuously and they stopped spending money to satisfy other people's expectations.

7.2.2 Changes in symbolic consumption regarding possessions for the extended self during liminality of full-time MBA students

7.2.2.1 Attachments to possessions before MBA

In agreement with Belk (1988), the study showed that material possessions are the major potential means for self-extension. As the discussion of the most significant possessions before MBA showed that cars played a very important role to participants. The basis of this significance lays is the role that a car has as a symbol of success in South African culture. Thus, South African culture is considered by participants to be "car-centric", when people "become their cars". As a symbol of success, a car depicts the owner's achievement and social status. These findings illustrate what McCracken (1986) said about cultural categories of meanings, specifically that the most important categories are those that serve for distinction of class and status. Another symbol of success was watches with well-established brand equity.

Electronics (laptops and cell phones) as significant possessions are related to the efficient fulfilment of a role of an employee as have a direct impact on one's work performance.

Heirlooms and family gifts are other categories of possessions participants were attached to before MBA. These items had a symbolic meaning of family ties and continuity of generations, which can be enhanced by brand equity.

Apart from material objects participants were also attached to such experiences as reading books, going out, sports and recreation, and travelling.

In alignment with previous discussion, clothes and shoes (in particular, formal suits) were important to participants as allowed them to create and communicate the social roles of employees and members of certain social groups.

Possessions related to significant relationships were also important objects of attachment as well as the ones, allowing to express oneself.

7.2.2.2 Triggering event and detachment form previous roles

The same triggering events apply. At the detachment phase one of the participants gave up expensive watches he had as this possession “lost its meaning” within the new social reality. Supporting Price, Arnould and Curasi (2000), this voluntary act preceded life transition.

7.2.2.3 Re-evaluation of meanings of possessions for identity

Together with re-evaluation of previous consumption behaviour participants were re-evaluating the meanings possessions had for their identity. With the growth of confidence, participants linked their identity not to possessions, but achievements, thus it was no longer important for them to catch up with other people through cars and clothes.

7.2.2.4 Search for new identity and its symbols

As the role of a student was the key one participants became committed to during MBA, it defined the shift in priorities regarding significant possessions. Though half of the participants had bought clothes and shoes specifically for MBA, they had not become attached to them. This observation confirmed Kentucky and Heights' (2006) statement that not all products consumed become significant possessions, others remain consumables. Instead, participants became attached to those possessions that had a direct meaning for their academic performance, especially laptops, which have become their “MBA companions”. Symbolising connection with past relationship, that become important during MBA, one of the participants considered gifts from his family dedicated to his MBA journey as significant ones. Those participants who had gone through changes in their family status admitted that possessions related to the shift to social role of a husband were also significant ones for them during this period.

7.2.2.5 Creation of new identity

At this stage of the study, participants had not yet accomplished MBA, therefore they did not yet know what new social roles they would take. Therefore, the liminal transition of full-time MBA students has not been yet completed and the new identity has not yet been

formed. This is why the majority of participants had not yet bought anything for their new roles after MBA. However, two of them have bought certain items in preparation to their new life and a few of them had plans on what to buy when they know their needs connected with the new roles. Thus, they either purchased or planned items combined two features – functional and creation of impression. For example, one of the participants had bought a new laptop as it would allow her to create an image of “business woman” and translate the message that she was a professional. The same motivation was behind plans to buy new formal suits. Apart from that, some participants decided they were going to reward themselves for accomplishing their MBA through something with experiential value and would buy something that they would attach the meaning of achievement to.

7.2.2.6 Consumption going forward

Despite the fact that at this stage of their MBA, participants did not yet know what their new social roles would be, the personal growth that took place over MBA defined their consumption behaviour going forward. That personality growth was admitted to be positive and deep enough for participants to hope they would carry it over to their new life. This new consumption behaviour included:

1. Sticking to the shift in brand preferences that happened during MBA.
2. Even higher preference of experiences over material possessions than before MBA, especially travelling.
3. Creating impression through possessions will no longer be the motivation for consumption. Thus, cars as symbols of success in South African culture have lost their significance.
4. When back to employment and income participants will be back only to that consumption behaviour, which has always been truly important for them and which they had to suspend and reduce during MBA because of financial and time constraint.

7.2.3 The effect of limited financial resources on symbolic consumption during liminality of full-time MBA students

As the results of the study show, financial constraint was an important moderating variable affecting all the stages of the liminal transition. This is why the same principle of presenting the results is used.

7.2.3.1 Triggering event and detachment from previous roles

Resignation as one of the triggering events forced participants to live out of limited savings. Therefore, facing the necessity to adjust their lifestyles some participants had to sell their expensive cars, buy cheaper ones and move to parents' houses to cut out expenses on rent and food.

7.2.3.2 Re-evaluation of previous consumption behaviour

All but one participant, unanimously agreed they had irresponsible financial behaviour before MBA, having stable source of income and thus living by inertia.

7.2.3.3 Search for new identity and its symbols

Financial constraint affected participants' search of new identities either directly through limited resources available for consumption, or indirectly through the new perspective on money that they gained.

Change in attitude towards money was the major shift, experienced by participants as the result of living from limited financial resources. It included a number of elements:

1. Increased cost, price and brand awareness.
2. Higher levels of responsibility, discipline and consciousness regarding consumption decisions.
3. Appreciation to financial privileges they used to have before.
4. Compassion to other people in similar financial situation, sense of "comradery".
5. Opportunity cost consideration increase.
6. Realisation of power and value of money.

Inevitably, a shift in attitude to money was followed by change in consumption behaviour which included:

1. Shift in brand and patronage preferences.
2. Suspension of buying luxuries and focus on buying essentials.
3. Making consumption decisions was accompanied by trade-offs.
4. Making sure they were getting maximum value for their money, including full utilisation of whatever they were buying and "stretching" their possessions.
5. Making use of discount and special offers.

6. Downgrading certain expenses to reduce them but still keep benefits available.
7. Making the most of whatever was available for free.
8. Shift to new ways of spending leisure time, not involving or reducing the amount of money spent.

Time constraints experienced by participants weakened the negative effect of financial constraints as participants did not have time to spend money.

Following the discussion on how participants perceived their experience of living on constricted budgets, two participants noted that mental preparation for this type of experience as well as approaching it from the perspective of purpose and future pay-offs made it bearable.

Therefore, in agreement with Cheung and McColl-Kennedy (2015), scarcity of material resources accompanying liminality encouraged participants to prioritise essential needs and re-evaluate the conventional market value of goods.

7.2.3.4 Stress and coping strategies

MBA as a liminal transition accompanied with shifts in social roles was a stressful period in life for participants which is supporting the claim made by Lee, Moschis and Mathur (2001) that life transitions are characterised by both stress and necessity to adapt to new roles. In response to the stress participants were applying to two major coping strategies:

1. Social role of a student was the biggest source of stress for participants due to workload and deadlines. In order to cope with the challenges participants started to buy more vitamins, nutrition tablets and coffee. At the highest peaks of stress, they were applying for stress-relief to massages, TV and alcohol;
2. One of the participants demonstrated stress-induced overconsumption at the beginning of MBA. Having moved from another country for the duration of the MBA, she had to adjust to new language and cultural environment. Thus, in alignment with Durante and Laran (2016), her stress was caused by the demands of the new context. As a result, she applied to one of the coping strategies in response to distress described by Kennett-Hensel et al. (2012) which was excessive consumption of shoes. This activity was a “painkiller” for her, distracting her from negative feelings and providing temporary relief.

Despite limited financial resources participants noted they were still living a comfortable life. They did not feel that they had made major sacrifices in their lifestyles as they were still able to buy what they needed and to have what they liked though in moderation.

7.2.3.5 Creation of new identity

Living under financial constraints, participants started to value financial independence and financial freedom much more. One of the participants said he gained a new perspective of what a “comfortable” life in terms of earnings is. Living with limited amount of money available he was less stressed than before, he realised he could now live comfortably with a moderate amount of money and he was no longer thinking he had to have commonly accepted symbols of success as they no longer defined.

7.2.4 Role of MBA learnings for personal growth during the liminal transition

Unexpectedly, MBA learnings were discovered to be an important variable affecting personal growth and transformation experienced by participants and consequently causing change in consumption behaviour. Through new knowledge and tools, participants acquired new understanding of wealth and well-being. Focusing now on long-term planning of their financial position instead of short-term consumption, participants were more willing to save and invest money to build wealth. The notion of well-being included work-life balance, strategic approach to energy allocation, search for meaning, inspiration in their future occupation, and self-managing. Going through the challenging MBA experience, participants started to value more what they can achieve versus what they have. MBA learnings encouraged participants to be giving back to the community through supporting local producers.

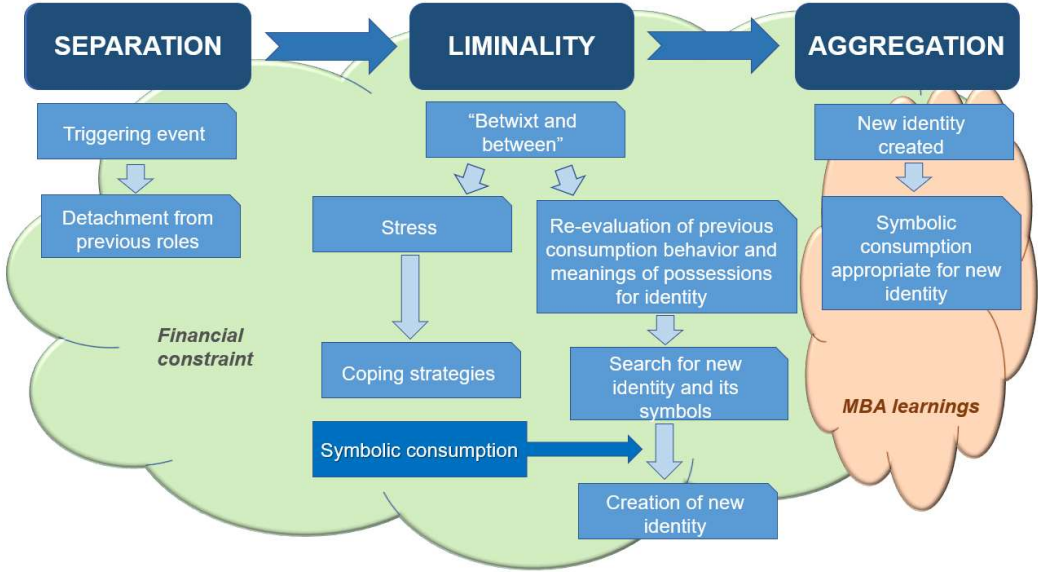
Summarising the compound effect of the three identified variables (financial constraint, time constraint, and MBA learnings) the following inferences can be made about their role for change in consumption behaviour and attitude to possessions:

1. Financial constraints affected all the stages of the liminal transition, causing adjustment of participants’ consumption behaviour during MBA.
2. Time constraints moderated the negative affect of financial constraint.
3. MBA learnings laid the foundation of consumption going forward.

Based on the role that the MBA journey played for personal transformation of full-time MBA students it can be regarded as a “window of opportunity” for shifting to more sustainable consumption (Schäfer et al., 2012, p. 67). Moreover, MBA as an educational programme can be referred to what Kleine III et al. (2009) called transformational value offering. As such, transformational value offerings create conditions for consumers’ personal growth, involving identity project.

Synthesising all the findings of the study the model of liminal transition of full-time MBA students, initially presented in introduction to Chapter 2 was adjusted as follows:

Figure 11: Adjusted model of liminal transition of full-time MBA students.



7.3 Conclusive remarks

The central research objective as stated in Chapter 1 was to explore and describe symbolic consumption behaviour and self-extension through possessions during liminality of full-time MBA students, moderated by financial constraint. The study was aimed at gaining deeper understanding of the liminal stage of full-time MBA students as consumers and its impact on symbolic consumption in the context of financial constraint. Based on the findings presented in this chapter it can be claimed that the research objective has been achieved. Perspectives on additional element of context – MBA learnings – were also gained.

Therefore, the following managerial implications can be inferred from the study findings with the reference to the need for research discussed in Chapter 1:

- The study contributed to the existing body of knowledge on consumers experiencing the “mid state of transition” (Cody & Lawlor, 2011, p. 224) by providing insights into consumers’ motivation for consumption. Lack of prior research in this area has also been regarded by Hopkins et al. (2014) especially in non-Western societies (Yap & Kapitan, 2017). Therefore, findings on the effect life transformations have on changes in consumer behaviour broaden the body of knowledge (Schau, 2014).
- The study provides insights into the roles possessions play during the period of liminality and how and why these roles shift, a gap that was identified by Kennett-Hensel et al. (2012).
- Contributing to the discussion of role-identity projects by Kleine III et al.'s (2017), the findings provided insights into the “role-identity cultivation stage” (p. 1878) during the liminality. These insights thus throw light on the interconnection of role-identity, self, consumption and possessions which is important for both theoretical and practical understanding of consumption in general.
- As the study explored the lived experiences of individuals in-between the identities, it can provide valuable information for marketers to enhance their understanding of the “liminal consumer segment” (Kevina, 2012, p. 297), which can be used for better-targeting of this consumer group (Kleine III et al., 2017).
- Exploration of the effect of financial constraint on consumer behaviour addressed the shortcoming identified by Sharma and Alter (2012).
- Following the discussion on the role of financial constraint in identity related consumption, the study provided insights into the moderating effect of time constraint. Need for exploration of the compound effect of these two variables was mentioned by Thompson and Loveland (2015);
- Role of MBA learnings on consumption behaviour change was acknowledged and described, presenting an additional important variable for marketers.

7.4 Limitations for the study

The current study had the following limitations:

- The sample was limited to students of only one particular business school.
- As the study was conducted by the means of the semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, during which participants shared their subjective perceptions, a degree of bias is expected to be present in the findings.

- A degree of bias might be observed in the findings as data analysis was carried out by the researcher based on her own perceptions and interpretation.
- The cross-sectional nature of the study did not allow for comparison of participants' perceptions regarding their post-MBA consumer behaviour and their real post-MBA long-term consumption behaviour.

7.5 Suggestions for future research

The following suggestions for future research can be made based on the limitations of the current study and need for future research identified in existing body of knowledge:

- Since the current study explored the lived experience of full-time MBA students, a comparative study could be conducted including part-time MBA students in order to understand which factors have the most impact on consumer behaviour for these two groups, and why.
- In their attempt to assemble a consistent theoretical background to explain how identity and consumption behaviour reciprocally influence one another, Thompson and Loveland (2015) introduced the Identity Investment Theory (IIT). IIT aims at extending marketers' understanding of consumption behaviour by approaching consumption and identity projects as the outcome of strategic investment decisions. Since this area of knowledge has received sparse attention in identity theories so far, it opens a wide range of future research opportunities:
 - a) The current study showed the impact of identity on consumption, but the reciprocal connection was not in the scope of the research, therefore future research could be conducted to explore it.
 - b) The current study shed the light on how more than one identities impact consumption behaviour. Future research should be conducted in order to further explore the impact of multiple identities on consumption.
 - c) Finally, within exploring the reciprocal connection between identity and consumption, a longitudinal study could be conducted to investigate how consumption and identity transform one another over time, as consumption impacts identities, which in their turn outline future consumption.
- The findings of the study showed that as the result of the transformation participants underwent during their MBA, many participants tended to pursue well-being without directly linking it to pure financial and material success. Though living a more frugal life, participants were still happy. Therefore, as

suggested by Hoffmann and Lee (2016), there is a potential for further exploration of the overlap of consumer well-being and anti-consumption, which would benefit policymakers promoting sustainable development.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Interview guideline (initial version)

Initial interview schedule used for interviews 1-3 (pilot interview included):

1. How has your consumption behaviour/preferences changed since your MBA course started?
2. What are you buying more/less/not buying at all?
3. Why are you showing these consumption patterns?
4. What factors affected these changes in your consumption behaviour/preferences?
5. What possessions have been significant for you since your MBA course started?
6. What do they mean for you and how do they identify with you?
7. What possessions have you acquired for your new role after MBA?
8. Why did you acquire these new possessions for your new role after your MBA course?
9. How do these possessions identify with your new identity and roles?

Appendix II: Interview guideline (final version)

Final interview schedules used for interviews 4-12:

Research question 1: *How did consumer preferences of MBA students change during their full-time course, as a period of liminality?*

Interview questions:

1. Before the course started what did you like to spend money on most of all?
2. How has your consumption behaviour changed since the course started?
3. What are you buying more/less/not buying at all?
4. Why you think your consumption changed this way?

Research question 2: *How did symbolic consumption preferences of MBA students regarding possessions as means of the extended self change during their full-time course, as a period of liminality?*

Interview questions:

1. Before the course started what were the most significant possessions for you?
The ones that you most identified yourself with
2. Have you bought anything specifically for MBA?
3. What were those most significant possessions for you during the course?
4. Why this shift did/didn't happen?
5. What have you bought for your new role after MBA?
6. How do these things identify with your new role?
7. How has the overall experience since the course started changed you as a person and your consumption preferences?
8. How you think your consumption would change after MBA?

Research question 3: *What effect does limited financial resources have on symbolic consumption of MBA students during their full-time course, as a period of liminality?*

Interview questions:

1. How being under financial constraint changed your consumption and attitude to possessions in general?

Appendix III: Informed consent letter

Informed consent letter:

*Dear participant, I am conducting research on symbolic consumption in order to find out more about how consumption evolves regarding one of its symbolic functions (i.e. self-extension) during the liminality period of MBA students. Our interview is expected to last about an hour and a half and will allow us to explore how your consumption patterns have changed since the MBA course started, how has meaning of possessions changed for you during this period and what effect financial constraint during the MBA course has had on your consumption choices. **Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.** Of course, all data will be reported anonymously. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.*

Researcher name:

Vartush Grigorian

Research Supervisor Signature:

Email: 17325677@mygibs.co.za

Phone: (061) 5037482

Email: ilse.struweg@gmail.com

Phone: (083) 3882187

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____

Appendix IV: Ethical clearance letter

**Gordon
Institute
of Business
Science**
University
of Pretoria

Ms Vartush Grigorian
(cc Dr Ilse Struweg)

1 November 2017

Dear Vartush

This letter serves to grant you permission to interview or survey Full Time MBA students as part of your Integrative Business Research Project.

Please note that permission is only granted to extend an invitation to them to participate and that have the option to decide whether they are willing to participate, i.e. participation must be voluntary and that they can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All requirements of informed consent, as detailed in the MBA Research Regulations/ Green Pages, must be strictly adhered to.

Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind Regards,



Prof Louise Whittaker

Executive Academic Director: GIBS

whittakerl@gibs.co.za

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