Gordon Institute of Business Science
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Exploring the role of homophily in purchase behaviour

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A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration.

Date: 7 November 2018

ABSTRACT

Homophily is a well-researched phenomenon around the world contributing to the understanding of why certain people form social groups. Most of the dimensions including race and age homophily are often studied in isolation. However, since humanity is complex, so too is the study of human behaviour, and as such, requires an exploration of all the dimensions of homophily present in specific social groups to understand how these social groups interact and influence group behaviour and purchase decisions. This was an exploratory, qualitative study of 17 higher-income black South African women, the composition and nature of their social groups both offline and on social media, and the influence of the group on individual purchase behaviour. This study found the presence of multidimensional homophily in social groups which were formed offline, although homophily also exists on social media. In fact, groups interact over social media more than face-to-face, and while social comparison is a common behaviour both offline and online, it was not a predictor of purchase behaviour. It was also affirmed that groups are effective at nudging individuals and influencing their purchase behaviour. Group-based brand experiences are recommended for more effective brand engagement for advertisers. The implications and recommendations for further research have also been discussed.

KEYWORDS

DECLARATION

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

Name: Lauren Elizabeth Haworth

Signed:

Date: 7 November 2018

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CHAPTER 1: DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction

This research report explored the role of homophily in purchase behaviour. Various constructs, attributes and factors surrounding homophily are therefore defined, discussed, evaluated and presented. This chapter establishes the background and rationale for researching the role of homophily in purchase behaviour that follows in subsequent chapters. The research problem is explained, the significance of this study is offered, and the scope of this research concludes this chapter.

1.2 Research Problem

One of the world's most renowned supermodels, Naomi Campbell, said at the launch of Vogue Arabia, that the next progression was an "Africa edition". She explained further that African fabrics, materials and designs needed a global platform (Akwagyiram, 2018). However, a global platform is what South African columnist for the Sunday Times, Pearl Tsotetsi, said was indicative of this perpetual but unnecessary need for the 'West's Acceptance'. Tsotetsi elaborated that young black Africans do not need a "declining brand to validate [their] creative existence to the world" (Tsotetsi, 2018) because they have their own narrative to tell, in their own way. Both divergent opinions about the needs of African people came from black women who live in different parts of the world. Not all black women are the same; this should be intuitive, but it does not seem to be a common thought.

This article triggered further research and unsurprisingly, the discovery of recent colossal advertising oversights from established brands such as the Swedish clothing retail giant, H&M, advertising the 'coolest monkey in the jungle' sweater on a young black boy. This led to a furious local (and global) outcry of racism (News24, 2018a) and vandalism of the local stores (News24, 2018b). Another earlier example was a Dove video advert, which exhibited a black woman removing her shirt to become a white woman, who also removed her shirt to reveal an Indian woman. This advert was also deemed racist and Dove apologised for 'missing the mark' (Wattles, 2017). Both are

incidents of global marketing campaigns, executed without cultural sensitivity. Localisation efforts should be required to check the marketing messages and creatives in context for cultural sensitivities to avoid a social push-back.

These incidents mentioned above have indicated that global advertising and societal mind-sets are still not appreciative of the cultural differences and the emotional tracks etched by history. There is a need for deeper understanding and appreciation of the black consumer in different local contexts.

The author of this research study sought to offer foundational insights towards a deeper understanding of who these black South African women are, and what is important to them and the nature of their socialisation practices. The first step in this multi-layered endeavour, as with many psychosocial research studies, was to establish whether commonalities exist in this context, by using current research concepts discovered around the world. Thereafter, subsequent steps within the research process are explained in further chapters of this research report, to document the exploration of the existence and the extent of homophily within black South African female social groups. This exploration included the extent to which these offline, face-to-face groups also exist on social media; as well as the extent to which these women compare themselves to each other. The research process also determined the amount of influence that these groups have on the group members' individual purchasing behaviour. This was documented in the later chapters of the research report, and a discussion of the research results and further recommendations are made in the final chapters of this report.

1.3 Current Knowledge of Homophily

People tend to form connections with similar others, this phenomenon is called homophily (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; Verbrugge, 1977; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Similarities can take the form of socially ascribed status such as race, gender, age, and religion. A step beyond simple inheritance of the aforementioned status, moves the categorisation to an arguably more achievement-orientated status such as occupation, education and social class. In addition, homophily has also been recognised in group behaviours and group shared values, beliefs and attitudes. Homophily has been identified in a string of relationships ranging from acquaintances to friendships and even in intimate marriages. Essentially, social groups and networks

are often homogenous regarding socio-demographic, behavioural and interpersonal characteristics (McPherson et al., 2001). The strength of the ties between social groups can impact the diffusion of influence and information (Granovetter, 1973). Most of the research about homophily up until recently has been done in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and China.

Some would argue that the main reason human beings have outlived many former variations of the *homo sapiens*, is because of the human ability to work together in groups. It is accepted that tribes were formed and through collective efforts all members were fed and protected. One of the classic theories in this field is social identity theory, which expands beyond the innate need for protection to explain that our need to belong is also about the emotional value we attribute to being wanted (Tajfel, 1972). People tend to craft their own identity based largely on the groups to which they belong, which include the application of various social categories (Baumeister, 1999). The path to an accepted self-identity is foundational for the development of each member's self-concept. The self-concept is the result of a psychological interplay between an individual's self-image, and their perceived ideal-self which affects their self-esteem.

The bridge that facilitates the interplay of psychological concepts of the self-concept is a behavioural phenomenon called social comparison (Argyle, 2008). People have a natural tendency to select specific people as a reference group, often friends, and compare themselves, either explicitly or implicitly, to others during self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954). The result of this comparison either creates feelings of hurt, hope (Richins, 1991) or motivation (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). These emotions can influence decision-making (Camerer & Lovallo, 1999).

Group norms are normative because they are anchored in social consensus. This means that people identify with certain 'like' groups (homophily) and construct and adapt their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours to the norms to gain acceptance and belonging. This ultimately makes them more susceptible to influence from the in-group either directly or indirectly (Hogg & Reid, 2006).

The significance of offline social group influence on attitudes and purchase intention has been recognised by Moschis and Churchill (1978), De Gregorio and Sung (2010) and McPherson et al. (2001). Influence is synonymous with nudging. Thaler and Suntein (2008) found that if a source (Person X) merely brings the attention of the

target (Person Y), to an item, it makes the item more salient and the target is more likely to choose that item.

The research and recorded literature concerning homophily has shifted in focus to research the existence of online social groups and the interactions within these platforms. It has been affirmed that offline homophilous friendship groups drive social networking activities online. Homophily has been established on social media and online forums, and has been found to be more influential on consumer decision-making processes than heterophilous sources (Steffes & Burgee, 2008). Social media is still considered to be a new platform for socialisation to take place, and peers have been identified as key influencers in both this socialisation process (Moschis & Churchill, 1978), and on purchase decisions.

1.4 Research Gaps

1.4.1 Multidimensionality of homophily

Most of the research into homophily types, dimensions and causes focus on one or two dimensions. Currently there is not enough literature that explains the existence and interaction of multiple dimensions of homophily within the same social groups, and the implication of these interactions.

1.4.2 Homophily research in South Africa

Although homophily is a widely researched social phenomenon, the applicability and extent of this concept has not yet, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, been researched in South Africa, along multiple dimensions, amongst the cohort of black females. Considering that South Africa is arguably one of the most diverse melting pots of races, ethnicities, cultures and languages in the world, it would seem intuitive to establish whether a country sporting such differences, would foster homophily and if so, explore the implications for society and business.

1.4.3 Composition of online content

The formats of content shared online, such as images and videos, are mentioned in the literature, however, the composition of that content (what is being shared), is not a detailed field. Knowing the format of content shared is simply not enough to understand

why people share certain things online. Understanding the nature of the shared content is vital to understanding the group's identity, and therefore the individual's psychological needs.

1.5   Research Objectives

The research objectives are three-fold:

1. To explore whether the existing research concepts of homophily, group formation, social comparison, and purchase behaviour apply to a South African context.
2. To explore whether the offline social groups exist and behave similarly online.
3. To explore the nature of black female South African social groups and the extent of their influence on purchase decisions.

1.6   The Purpose of this Study

The above research objectives have been chosen because the purpose of this study is three-fold:

1. To contribute to the understanding of the rapidly changing South African market in terms of online consumer behaviour.
2. To extend the current body of research concepts, primarily studied in more developed parts of the world, to an emerging market context and evaluate the applicability.
3. To explore what the findings of this research mean for business.

1.7   Significance of the Research

This research sought to theoretically close the gap by identifying multiple dimensions of homophily occurring simultaneously in a new socially diverse context. The research also sought to identify whether racial and gender homophily found within the social groups is intentional. It was hoped that this research would affirm that the interests shared by all the participants with their social groups do not differ much from what one

may expect in any social group, and therefore adds comfort in the fact that South Africans share much more in common, regardless of socio-demographics.

From a business perspective, this research has:

a. Identified the composition of the content shared online and has made recommendations to business and marketers based on this finding.
b. Identified that peer groups are highly influential on decision-making, and the research has therefore suggested that advertisers might want to rethink their traditional celebrity influencer strategies, as well as their use of technology in advertising.

1.8   Scope of the Research

This research was informed by and combines diverse existing constructs from psychology, sociology, economics and anthropology, in the attempt to begin profiling the black South African consumer.

Black South African women have been chosen as the target participants for this study because they have endured significant historical disadvantage through racial and gender inequalities (South African History, 2018). As such, government and legislation are now fast-tracking this group through education and business opportunities (LabourGuide, 2018). This means that this group of women, which form most of the female population and half of the total population (Statistics South Africa, 2017) are a significant consumer group for business in South Africa. In addition, homophily is appropriate to study within this group because previous research has noted that strong homophilous associations with race have been found amongst peer groups and that females have smaller, more homogenous social groups than men (McPherson et al., 2001). Whilst this study does not aim to generalise the findings, this is prime research terrain to begin exploring homophily and group influence amongst black females in South Africa and its impact on decision-making.

Chapter 2 presents a more detailed account of the existing literature on homophily, group formation and influence, social comparison, purchase behaviour and social media, and how these are all related.

CHAPTER 2:   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

This chapter discusses various interlinking concepts that formed the basis for this research. Homophily is discussed first, detailing its ubiquity in social networks around the world. The literature then explains that homophily can be seen in online social networks as well as offline. Group formation and influence, which are closely linked to the former two concepts mentioned, develops the ideas further and provides a link to social comparison as well as nudge theory which closes the loop on all the concepts.

2.2   Homophily

"People love those who are like themselves"- Aristotle

The above quote alludes to what Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) described as the theory of Homophily. Generally, human beings have significant interactions with those who are like themselves. People both choose to interact with those who are like themselves (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001), and change themselves to become more like their interaction partners, also known as the chameleon effect (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). Every social group has a common thread that binds the members together, be it similar characteristics such as race, gender, and background or even values. The rate of connection is higher especially if the source and receiver have similar characteristics, since similarity breeds connection (McPherson et al., 2001). The more similarities that are shared, the stronger the connection (Curry & Dunbar, 2013).

Homophily is an important concept to understand because of the implications it has on the composition of social networks, the limited flow of information which can create cultural polarisation (Flache & Macy, 2011) and perhaps even the reinforcement and increased level of homophily in networks. Social groups and networks are often homogeneous regarding socio-demographic, behavioural and intrapersonal characteristics, which means that the information flow between these localised groups is limited but highly relevant (McPherson et al., 2001). Homophily is argued by McPherson and Smith-Lovin (1987) to exert significant influence on information being received, the formation of attitudes and interpersonal interactions.
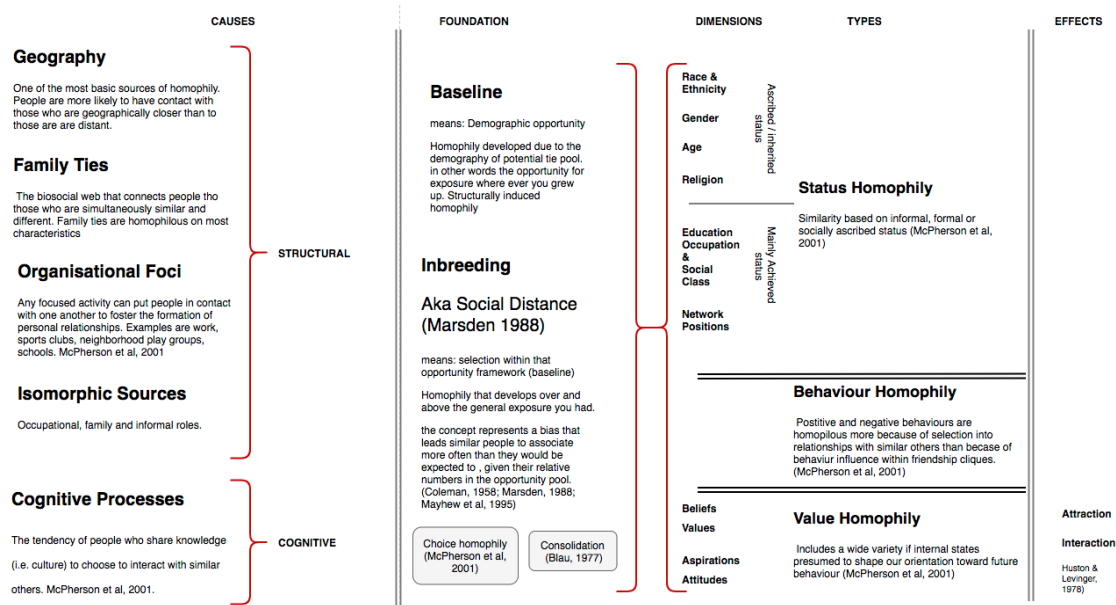
Figure 1: Basic structure of where each type of homophily fits into the larger picture

2.2.1   At the Core of Homophily

At the core of homophily theory are two foundational concepts that underpin all other variations of homophily. The first is 'baseline homophily' which considers the connections between people because of demographic and geographic opportunity. This means that connections that form are because of people being in a place in time that exposes them to limited opportunity for wider connections; it is largely an outcome of chance. Examples would include homophily because of living in the same town (geography); within families and family ties; and organisational foci (McPherson et al., 2001). This is a very similar to the concept of 'induced homophily' wherein homogeneity of social groups forms because of structural opportunities such as schools, neighbourhoods and workplaces (Feld, 1981).

The second foundational concept of homophily is 'inbreeding homophily' which explores the social grouping of people not by chance, but rather because of personal preferences and choices (McPherson et al., 2001). An example of this type would be close friendship groups which initially might have been formed from baseline homophily, but have been maintained and enhanced through selection of other factors that aid in continuing the friendship. In other words, people choose to associate with a social group, above and beyond what chance would limit.

Research concerning the origins of homophily on social networks by Kossinets and Watts (2009) revealed that the formation of ties or bonds between people, are partly due to individual preferences (choices) and partly due to structural opportunities (proximity) available at the time. Although baseline homophily (structural/proximal) seems to play a larger role in the formation of ties, it has been suggested that some people might choose to associate within certain locations and social clubs in order to meet the people with whom they want to associate.

'Baseline' homophily can be caused by similar structural circumstances and 'inbreeding' homophily can be caused by various cognitive processes. However, both foundational concepts can cause any one of the types of homophily, along multiple dimensions.

2.2.2 Types of Homophily

Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) distinguished two types of homophily at the base of their research to differentiate external and internal characteristics, namely status and value homophily. The third type, behavioural homophily, was borne from the literature largely focused on adolescent behaviour, although not exclusively.

2.2.2.1 Status Homophily

The first type is 'Status' homophily which focuses on external characteristics that are similar based on informal, formal or socially ascribed status. The first sub-section of this type of homophily includes statuses that are either socially ascribed or inherited from family. These include dimensions of race and ethnicity, age, religion and gender. The second sub-section of 'Status' homophily are dimensions which are mainly achieved (although these are influenced by inherited family circumstances and socially ascribed status). These dimensions include education, occupation, social class and network positions (McPherson et al., 2001).

These dimensions of homophily occur either because of baseline, or inbreeding homophily or both. To illustrate this simply, consider the rural town of Mthatha, in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. The majority of the Mthatha population is black, and the population there only has access to the educational, work and recreational facilities that are available in that town. The two main religions are Roman Catholic Diocese and Anglican Diocese, and the location is part of the O. R. Tambo District which is considered one of the poorest districts in the Eastern Cape Province (Olive Leaf

Foundation, 2018). Due to the structural limitations of this town, the poverty and inability to travel, the lack of education to the highest levels and limited job opportunities, the people in this town have limited opportunities to meet and become friends with other races, ethnicities, religions and social class. Therefore, their social circles are initiated because of demographic opportunity (baseline) and adjusted and maintained by inbreeding (choice) homophily.

Some researchers believe that specific status homophily is more likely to occur than the more general baseline homophily. Simply put, people are more likely to be attracted to those who share the same social status (same race, gender, class, or education level (or all of them) than they would band together by chance (McPherson et al., 2001).

2.2.2.2 *Value Homophily*

The second type is 'Value homophily' which refers to internal characteristics where people associate with others that think the same way and value the same things, regardless of differences of their socially ascribed statuses. Dimensions include attitudes, tastes, hobbies and interests, sense of humour, beliefs, aspirations, and values which ultimately lead to attraction and interaction (Curry & Dunbar, 2013; Huston & Levinger, 1978). Value homophily is presumed to guide individuals' future behaviour (McPherson et al., 2001) and is essential in collaboration, which requires that people share compatible preferences, such as interest in a collective project, and they have shared background knowledge. Both conditions allow people to solve interpersonal management issues (Curry & Dunbar, 2013). Curry and Dunbar (2013, p. 336) also found that "similarity in general is a significant predictor of altruism and emotional closeness".

Aiello et al. (2012) found in their research of homophily on social media that users with similar interests (topical similarity) are more likely to be friends. In addition, language was found to be an important binding feature amongst the online social groups. Cardoso, Meloni, Santanchè, and Moreno (2017) supported the above finding as their results demonstrated that on average, users of Twitter (a Social Networking Site) had stronger relationships due to higher topical similarity.

Whilst many dimensions of homophily have been studied in isolation, Block and Grund (2014) suggested that the multidimensionality needs further research. In other words,

research is required into the existence and interaction of more than one dimension of homophily simultaneously.

Evidence has shown that even the most random indication of similarity and group membership stimulate in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination, whether this is in a lab, in the field and even during economic games (Curry & Dunbar, 2013; Tajfel et al., 1972; Yamagishi & Mifune, 2008).

2.2.2.3 *Behaviour Homophily*

Social groups often share certain expectations of behaviour of each other, otherwise known as norms or social conventions which inform different group cultures (Curry & Dunbar, 2013). These norms differ for each social group and are found to be one of the main reasons that individuals prefer to associate with others demonstrating their shared culture (McElreath, Boyd, & Richerson, 2003).

Adolescents are a typical cohort that associate with others that share similar behavioural patterns, whether it pertains to academic, extra-curricular or social patterns. It has been found that homophily in both positive behaviours (for example, academic achievement) and negative behaviours (for example, smoking marijuana) were more a result of the adolescents choosing those specific friendships, rather than by being purely influenced by their close groups (Cohen, 1977; Kandel, 1978).

A second part of a behavioural focus is that of intentional choice or 'choice homophily'. *Constructuralism* is a sociological approach developed by Carley (1999) which posits that people are more likely to interact if they share knowledge with one another. Taking this a step further, if people share similar demographics, such as race and age, it is indicative of their shared knowledge gained through shared experiences (Mayhew, McPherson, Rotolo, & Smith-Lovin, 1995). Therefore, Hansen, Nohria, and Tierney (1999) insisted that since people interact based on shared experiences and knowledge, they would also then choose to associate with others who are similar because it is easier to communicate. This concept of group behaviour is discussed in the 'Group Influence' section below.

Within each type of homophily (Status and Value and Behaviour) there exists dimensions or sub-types of each concept. These dimensions are discussed in detail below.

2.2.3   Status Homophily Dimensions

2.2.3.1   Race and ethnicity

Racial and ethnic homophily have been discovered within peer groups (friendships), marriages (McPherson et al., 2001; Kalmijn, 1998), and in other relationships ranging from confiding relationships to acquaintances (Verbrugge, 1977; 1983). In addition, network homophily has been found in work environments, which result in acute segregation of the workforce and potentially increased reinforcement of homophily (Stovel & Fountain, 2011).

Race and ethnicity, both considered part of 'status homophily', are influenced by the powerful structural effects of category size and by differences in social features such as education, income and residence. The higher the density of one race (majority) in comparison to another in a certain location, the more likely that those friendship groups will be homogeneous (for example, at work). The more diverse the mix of people, the more likely that the social groups will be heterogeneous, which is attributed to baseline homophily (McPherson et al., 2001).

2.2.3.2   Gender

In terms of gender, females have been found to have smaller, more homogeneous social groups, when compared to men who have a more mixed and larger composition of social groups (Maccoby, 1998; McPherson et al., 2001). However, Marsden (1988) found that gender homophily is not as high amongst the young, well-educated, white generations. This cohort of society has more mixed groups in terms of gender. Verbrugge (1977) found that gender homophily was stronger than religion and education, especially amongst close friends.

2.2.3.3   Sexual Orientation

Galupo (2007) found that sexual minority individuals, such as lesbians or gay men, displayed similar patterns (regarding same-gender friendships) when compared to heterosexual individuals. However, Gillespie, Frederick, Harari, and Grov (2015) found that only lesbian women display homophily to the same extent as heterosexual men and women.

2.2.3.4   Age

An antecedent concept that is powerful in the study of age homophily is baseline homophily. People are grouped together by age from the early school years, although this glue for grouping does not maintain the integrity of the bond throughout life. People have been found to associate with people of similar age in work environments, neighbourhoods and voluntary organisations (McPherson et al., 2001). Homophily concerning age has been found to be stronger than any other dimension, except race, in studies of close friendships (Verbrugge, 1977).

2.2.3.5   Religion

Research into the bonds that link people to the same religion has been concentrated on giving trusted advice or even therapeutic counselling, as well as loaning money (McPherson et al., 2001).

2.2.3.6   Education, class and occupation

These dimensions can begin from baseline homophily, simply because of where a person is brought up, what schools their parents were able to send them to and their parents' occupations. More recent homophily research in these areas has been based on inbreeding wherein people make certain choices regarding their continued education, which can affect their occupation and social class status. These changes can also affect the kinds of social groups people migrate towards or create. (McPherson et al., 2001). Homophily based on education is relatively high in personal networks (Marsden, 1988; Verbrugge, 1977).

2.2.3.7   Network positions

Groups of people are often structured (structural homophily) as a central core group which is smaller and more intimate, and then a larger, wider group of less intimate connections (McPherson et al., 2001). This concept is mirrored by the conceptualisation and findings of Zhou, Sornette, Hill, and Dunbar (2005) that an individual could be imagined as placed in the centre of numerous successive concentric circles of acquaintance. The further out the circle is, the less emotional connection and actual interaction there is with the main individual at the centre and their close group membership (innermost layer of five friends, usually).

The theory of social comparison described by Festinger (1950) explained that people tend to use others who are like them in some way as a reference group for comparison.

> "People who are more structurally similar to one another are more likely to have issue-related interpersonal communication and to attend to each other's issue positions, which, in turn, leads them to have more influence over one another" (McPherson et al., 2001, p. 428).

2.2.4   Homophily and Social Media

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) facilitate a digital environment where people can actively choose their digital contacts (friends). It could be argued that baseline homophily in social groups could be reinforced and expanded on by choice homophily on social media. People can choose which friends to include in their digital social network and which to exclude. McPherson et al. (2001) expressed that homogeneity in personal networks can limit the information that the members receive, which has powerful influences on the formation of attitudes, and their interactions. The homophily on SNSs can arguably foster echo-chambers which are discussed in more detail in the SNS section below.

Steffes and Burgee (2008) found that information obtained from homophilous sources online were preferred and more influential on the consumer's decision-making process, than heterophilous sources. A study exploring whether Homophily exists in social media revealed that interest-based (topical) homophily was not a strong factor impacting the construction of new ties (Bisgin, Agarwal, & Xu, 2012). Put differently, shared interests are not a prerequisite for two people to be friends. However, De Salve, Guidi, Ricci and Mori (2018) found that homophily exists between users, and its dependence, is on the strength of the relationships. A study by Chu and Kim (2011) found that homophily had a negative correlation with electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), a marketing term used to explain the exchanging of marketing information among consumers. The interpretation follows that the social networking site-users were not able to access diverse information due to the nature of the group composition, and thus discouraged eWOM.

2.3　Group Influence

From the Homophily Principle, it is well understood that people organise themselves into 'like' groups, such as sports or restaurant interests and friendship groups that provide a sense of belonging and acceptance. Each of these groups operate in a specific way, guided by what is termed 'group norms'.

2.3.1.1　Group Norms and Nature's Murmurations

Group norms are defined as "regularities in attitudes and behaviour that characterise a social group and differentiate it from other social groups," (Hogg & Reid 2006, p. 7). One could conceptualise group norms and homophily in practice, on a functional level like the concept of the murmurations of starling flocks in nature. Each starling (a type of bird) watches six others around it in the flock and moves in relation to them. This is done by each starling, resulting in a perceived smooth and effortless transition in the sky from one direction to another (King & Sumpter, 2012). The effect is seen through intricately coordinated patterns of flight by thousands of the same group without collision. These birds move together in a way that they all understand, as with social groups. There are often unspoken but mutually agreed patterns of behaviour that is expected by every member of a group to ensure the sanctity of its constitution.

2.3.1.2　Social Identity Perspective

Social identity is defined as, "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional value significant to him, of his group membership" (Tajfel, 1972, p. 292). The cognitive processes involved in creating and maintaining social identity produce various intergroup behaviours as well as those of the collective group towards outgroups (Hogg & Reid, 2006).

The social identity perspective is premised on the idea that people derive a part of their self-concept from the groups to which they belong. The self-concept is defined as, "the individual's belief about himself or herself, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is" (Baumeister, 1999). The development of the self-concept relies on identifying and understanding that the self exists as distinct from others (the existential self), and the self acknowledges that it has distinct properties, such as gender and age categories (the categorical self).

2.3.1.3   Self-Concept Explained

The self-concept has three components according to Rogers (1959): self-image; self-esteem and the ideal-self. The first concept is self-image which explains who a person believes they are currently, broadly divided into two overarching categories: social roles (teacher or wife) and personality traits (outgoing and gregarious) (Kuhn, 1960). However, a person's self-image does not always reflect reality and is influenced by many external factors.

The second concept is self-esteem, a concept based on self-evaluation and the degree to which we value our own worth. A high self-esteem means that we have a positive view of ourselves which leads to confidence, self-acceptance and optimism. A low self-esteem leads to pessimism, seeking to be someone else and a general lack of confidence (McLeod, 2008). Argyle (2008) posited that social comparison is one of the behaviours that influences self-esteem, as well as the social roles that individuals ascribe to themselves (some carry prestige and others do not), self-identity and group-belonging.

The third concept is the ideal-self which relates to what a person would like to be. If a person does a conscious or subconscious comparison of their self-image to their ideal-self and finds a large discrepancy (lack of congruence), this is likely to negatively affect their self-esteem (McLeod, 2008).

2.3.1.4   Self-Categorisation and Prototypes

Social Identity Theory focuses on the differences of the in-group in comparison to outgroups, which uses a form of social categorisation that can motivate self-enhancement through positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Turner et al. (1987) described self-categorisation theory, (part of social categorisation), which explains that people identify with groups and conceive of themselves in relation to these groups, which transforms how they feel and conform based on their sense of belonging (Hogg & Reid, 2006).

The way that people categorise themselves and others, is by using prototypes, which are essentially social categories. The group prototype is the manifestation of the group norms (which are tied to social categories and attitudes), an unwritten guide that prescribes the accepted attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that transcend the diversity of individual perceptions (Hogg & Reid, 2006). The combination and usage of specific

languages could be unique to and formed in close interactions between people and culture (Vygotsky, 1978). Language is characterised by the syntagmatic (sentence construction) and paradigmatic (choice of words) properties (Wiley, 2006).

Social categorisation can produce normative behaviour (obedience, conformity and compliance) (Elsenbroich & Xenitidou, 2012), only if this categorisation is salient, which requires accessibility and fit (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Group norms are normative because they are anchored in social consensus. This means that people identify with certain 'like' groups (homophily), construct and adapt their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours to the norms, to gain acceptance and belonging, which ultimately makes them more susceptible to influence from the in-group either directly or indirectly.

Forsyth (2000) argued that a group is the intermediary through which the customs and culture of society influence an individual, and vice versa. The group's influence on its members is subtle and embedded in the principle of comparison. Social comparison is discussed in the following section.

2.4 Social Comparison

Human beings are scarcely able to comprehend their own abilities and attributes in isolation, so there is a tendency to compare with others (Richins, 1991). Based on this comparison, the person either feels positively reaffirmed in their beliefs about themselves; or acknowledges the need to move the benchmark (standard) up or down, or they feel inferior to the subject with which they have compared themselves. The outcome of this comparison can either be a sense of hurt, hope, or motivation. Social comparison serves a variety of functions during the process of self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954), leading to, amongst others, inspiration (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997), and influencing decision-making (Camerer & Lovallo, 1999).

Social comparison (Festinger, 1954) can be defined as the psychological processes by which individuals compare themselves to other people, either implicitly or explicitly (Richins, 1991). The purpose of these comparisons is to make accurate self-evaluations, or to protect or enhance self-esteem (Suls & Wheeler, 2017). It involves the comparer looking for similarities or differences, based on their personal reference, from the target of their comparison (selection). The reaction to this comparison is based on the discovery of a similarity or a difference, and the degree to which it affects the evaluation of themselves and their behaviour (Gerber, Wheeler, & Suls, 2017).

Gerber (2018) argued that comparisons arise when there exist specific conditions of uncertainty, such as when a person cannot comprehend their abilities/attributes in isolation.

Festinger (1954) originally demonstrated that human beings compare themselves to others in terms of opinions and abilities within groups or during other face-to-face interactions. In terms of abilities, people compare themselves to others perceived to be better (unidirectional drive upward), whereas for opinions, they compare with others like their own (Gerber, 2018). In group settings, these abilities and opinions form the norms and any deviation from these generates pressure from the group, or even expulsion. Later research by Wood (1989) revealed other attributes that were compared including personal traits and circumstances.

People see adverts on billboards, television, print media and multiple other forms of internet-driven mediums, which display life, not as it is, but as it should be. The adverts utilise often unrealistic standards (representations) of beauty and wealth (Richins, 1991).

2.4.1.1 Motivation for comparison

At times a person willingly compares themselves with a selected target, while at other times the comparison is thrust on the person. This forced comparison can have lasting emotional effects (Gilbert, Giesler, & Morris, 1995).

Self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954) and self-enhancement are motivations for comparison. The latter is demonstrated when people compare themselves with those who are perceived to rank lower than or are 'worse off' than them, with the aim to enhance themselves (downward comparison). In addition, self-improvement is also suggested as a motivator for social comparison, but this concept lacks support from experimental studies (Gerber, 2018).

Downward comparison theory is purported to be the most influential motivation according to Wills (1981), as people compare themselves to others who are worse off than them, and in turn they feel less threatened or insecure. This would seem to support the self-enhancement motivator and the concept of self-esteem (Suls & Wheeler, 2017).

Recently, a study conducted across Instagram, focused on the comparison processes which elicit beneficial emotional reactions to other users' online self-presentations. The study found the intensity of social comparisons on this SNS were positively related to inspiration and these online relationships were fully mediated by benign envy (Meier & Schäfer, 2018).

2.4.1.2 Effects of Social Comparison

According to Wheeler and Suls (2007), comparison can either lead to assimilation or contrast. If person A compares herself to person B and thinks she is better off than person B, she will assimilate (move her self-estimate closer to the target). Whereas, if person A feels worse off than person B, she will retreat (move her self-estimate away from the target). Gerber (2018) stated that most comparative responses place the individual in a contrasting position, while there are a few exceptions.

Further to this point, 'upward comparisons', where a consumer believes that the advertised person is 'superior' to them (or they are "worse off" than the advertised person), leads to self-doubt (Richins, 1991), failure or inadequacy (Festinger, 1954), jealousy, (Gilbert, Giesler, & Morris, 1995), lower self-esteem, depressed mood and lower estimation of abilities (Gerber, 2018). This comparison can be upsetting and painful, resulting in the consumer distancing themselves from the advertised person (Collins, 1996). In a branding context, this distance between the consumer and advertised person could result in decreased emotional brand attachment.

Other studies suggested that upward comparisons could also lead to hope (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, VanYperen, & Dakof, 1990) and motivation for self-improvement (van de Ven, 2015). One of the most pervasive tools for comparison, Facebook, has generated many studies to determine the extent of "upward" or "downward" comparisons. Most notably, a study by De Vries and Kühne (2015) revealed that Facebook usage was related to a greater degree of negative social comparison amongst adults (18 – 25 years).

It is important to note, that both upward and downward comparisons both have positive and negative effects. Essentially, each type of comparison can bring the comparer and the target either closer together or further apart depending on whether the compared information is assimilated or contrasted (Buunk et al., 1990).

Social comparisons are documented in the field of advertising and consumer behaviour. There are two main groups of thought: One standpoint is that people take adverts literally and the other is that people do not. The argument in favour of the former statement follows that social comparison can be an emotional process (Festinger, 1954). The argument in favour of the latter statement is that people who have seen adverts, do not take them literally and understand they are fictional. In addition, some people may even expect adverts to portray unrealistic images (Richins, 1991).

The result of social comparison can lead to either satisfaction or dissatisfaction along a continuum (Richins, 1991). Satisfaction is derived from the evaluation of an object, characteristic, person or relationship. The larger the discrepancy perceived between the actual state (observer's attribute) and the idealised state (Object being compared to), the more dissatisfied the consumer is, especially if that attribute is important to the consumer (Higgins, 1987).

2.4.1.3 People most likely to engage in comparison behaviour

Aside from group evaluations, Wheeler (2000) reviewed social comparison orientation (SCO), which supports the concept that people who compare themselves more frequently with others, tend to experience the comparison with a greater impact. Wheeler (2000) argued that people with high self-esteem tend to do downward-comparisons, however even though the benefits are known, people with low self-esteem do not seek to perform downward-comparisons. Cramer, Song and Drent's (2016) study revealed the same findings - that people with low self-esteem were more likely to compare themselves to others on Facebook for self-evaluation, self-improvement and self-enhancement motives, than those with high self-esteem. This notion was also discussed by Vogel, Rose, Okdie, Eckles, and Franz (2015) in their study that revealed that social comparison may be more detrimental for high SCO users.

It has been found that gender is another predictor of comparison behaviour. Gerber (2018) stated that females (from their mid-teens onwards) tend have a high comparison orientation, and therefore compare themselves on appearance more than males do.

Richins' (1991) exploratory and experimental study with young female college students revealed that they do indeed compare themselves with models in adverts. They often

perceive themselves as inferior and wish they could 'look like that'. In addition, others admitted that they found some of it 'motivational', especially if they believed the look was personally attainable.

Traditional social comparison occurs 'offline' in a face-to-face context with an individual's close networks. As technology has improved, societies have changed, as have the methods of communication and social interaction. SNSs, such as Facebook, allow people to make observations about one another's lives. This nature of SNSs is a prime basis for social comparative functions such as self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954) or self-enhancement (Gruder, 1971; Willis, 1981).

Usage of Facebook has grown exponentially from its launch as Face Mash in 2004, founded by Mark Zuckerberg and Eduardo Saverin. Studies have found that as Facebook has evolved, so too has its user behaviour. People have been found to post unrealistic information framing their lives to represent personas with the most desirable and positive traits (Gonzalez & Hancock, 2011; Chou & Edge, 2012). It is conceivable then that more people are being exposed to images that would elicit upward social comparison as the user compares their offline real lives to the online representations of more desirable lives.

Existing social comparison studies have revealed that women compare themselves on appearance to others on social media often, resulting in negative outcomes as a result of the incongruence between their self-image and others' portrayal of themselves (Fardouly, Pinkus, & Vartanian, 2017).

2.4.1.4   *Structural homophily link to social comparison*

The theory of social comparison described by Festinger (1950) explained that people tend to use others who are like them in some way, as a reference group for comparison.

In summary, it has been established that homophily exists both offline and on social media; it has also been established that people use similar others as reference groups for comparison (Festinger, 1950) both offline and on social media, and these comparisons have different effects on decision-making. Therefore, if social groups are highly influential over each other, then perhaps they are also influential on their purchase behaviour.

2.5 Nudging Towards Purchase Behaviour

It has been discussed above that people either by their structural opportunities, by choice, or by both, associate with similar others and form social groups. These groups are guided by social norms which are borne from the group and reinforced both offline and online. The question leading on from this is how powerful are these groups in influencing the member's purchase behaviour?

If Nudge Theory is the lens through which to answer this question, the answer is arguably affirmative in some cases. Nudge Theory is defined as:

> "An aspect of choice architecture that alters people's behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives. To count as a mere nudge, the intervention must be cheap and easy to avoid. Nudges are not mandates." (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008, p. 6).

In other words, just offering options for better choices, without limiting any other options, is a nudge in and of itself. It could be argued that sharing an image of a recommended restaurant on a social networking site, is a type of nudge. It costs nothing and can easily be disregarded. It has been established that anyone can nudge, from governments (Halpern & Sanders, 2016) to business and even individuals (Van der Heijden & Kosters, 2015).

Types of nudges that are particularly salient in this argument include social proof heuristics (Cheung, Kroese, Fennis, & De Ridder, 2017), which describes the tendency of people to look to others (which may include social comparison) to guide their own behaviour. Another example is that of 'increasing the salience of the desired option', which means that when a person's attention is intentionally drawn to a particular option, it will become more salient and therefore he or she will be more inclined to choose that option.

It is helpful to classify the concepts of information processing to explain how this is appropriate in a social networking context. As described by the model adaption by Vainikka (2015) from Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2010): Information processing begins with deliberate (highly selective) or random exposure to stimuli, leading to low or high attention given (highly selective process), which leads to interpretation, and then becomes processed in short term memory as active problem solving or through

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long-term memory which houses shared experiences, values and decisions. Memory, thereafter, is one of the antecedent elements which affect purchase and consumption decisions.

To close the loop on this thinking, if a member of X social group, shares an image of a restaurant, tags another member(s) and makes a recommendation to try said restaurant, this journey satisfies a situation that creates exposure to the element deliberately and because it comes from a trusted source, may justify more attention than would otherwise be given, therefore increasing the salience and potentially paving the path for purchase.

Advertising is not nearly as influential as recommendations provided by other consumers, in the consideration of product or brand-related information (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). Herd behaviour, the extent to which an individual imitates the decisions of another, and trust were found to influence users' online purchasing decisions (Chen, 2008; Chang & Chen, 2008; Munawar, Hassanein & Head, 2017).

2.6   Social Media

Kim, Natali, Zhu, and Lim (2016) found that offline friendship drives social networking activities on Twitter, one of the popular SNSs.

> "When people know each other offline, they are more likely to respond to the online gesture of friendship from their friend, share mutual online friends and distribute and gather information in their friend's twitter network; pay attention to their friend's tweets; post tweets that might be of interest to their friend; post similar tweets to their friends; respond to a friend's tweet; mention their friend in tweets and distribute their friend's tweets." (Kim et al., 2016)

Goncalves, Perra, and Vespignani (2011) posited that online friendships have structurally similar characteristics to offline face-to-face social networks. Dunbar, Arnaboldi, Conti, and Passarella (2015) also found that the online social network structures mirrored those in the offline world.

Social media is defined as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, p.61).

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and Instagram, offer borderless networking opportunities that were not previously available. Facebook offers individuals a space to upload their personal information, connect with existing friends and family and make new friends through referrals and expanded networks (friends of friends). This space offers an unbounded account of people's lives throughout the duration of account activation. The number of active Facebook users worldwide has grown from 100 million in 2008 to 2.19 billion in the first quarter of 2018 (Statista, 2018a). Facebook is recorded as having the most daily active users compared to other SNSs (Chaffey, 2018).

Social media provides a space to consume information which facilitates purchase decisions (Kozinets, 2001). Social media also utilises peer communication, a new form of consumer socialisation, which has been found to impact on consumer decision making profoundly (Casteleyn, Mottart, & Rutten, 2009; Okazaki, 2009).

Consumer socialisation is the process through which an 'individual consumer learns new skills, knowledge and attitudes from others through communication' (Ward, 1974). Conventional socialisation takes place offline in face-to-face interactions, whereas social media extends this to larger groups, and even includes strangers.

Peers are acknowledged as key influencers affecting consumer socialisation (Moschis & Churchill, 1978), however, De Gregorio and Sung (2010) and McPherson et al. (2001) take the findings further in their studies as they revealed that adult consumers placement-related attitudes and behaviours are influenced by friends and acquaintances, and peer communication is the greatest predictor of product-placement attitudes and behaviours. More individuals are crowd-sourcing information, using social media, to help them make various consumption-related decisions (Lueg, Bidwell, & Göth, 2006). Peer communication can, either directly (through conformity) or indirectly (reinforcing product involvement), influence purchase decisions.

One form of peer communication is Word of Mouth (WOM), defined as "the act of exchanging marketing information among consumers." (Chu & Kim 2011, p.48), which has been found to influence consumer decision-making in various marketing and advertising literature (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Engel, Blackwell, & Kegerreis, 1969; Gilly, Graham, Wolfinbarger, & Yale, 1998).

Electronic WOM (eWOM hereafter) is defined as "any positive statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made

available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet." (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler 2004, p.39).

Facebook is a platform on which previous research into eWOM influenced attitudes towards brands (Lee, Rodgers, & Kim, 2009), consumers' decision-making processes (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008), and product sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006).

On the 9th of January 2018, Mark Zuckerberg the CEO of Facebook, announced on his personal Facebook page, an update to their algorithms that determine what information is served to each user's timeline. This update would "encourage meaningful social interactions with family and friends over passive consumption. As a result, you'll see less public content, including news, video, and posts from brands." This change of content delivery could have far-reaching implications for reinforcing homophily on social networks and potentially making the degree of influence amongst peers, that much stronger.

Described above in simple terms, is one of the possible effects of an 'echo chamber', wherein information is exchanged mainly amongst people with similar beliefs. These beliefs are then amplified or reinforced by communication and repetition inside a closed system. This describes a situation of potentially selective exposure and ideological segregation which could create an environment fostering confirmation bias and increased polarisation, according to Barberá, Jost, Nagler, Tucker, and Bonneau (2015).

An annual report (Infinite Dial Media Research) was published in early 2018 stating that Facebook's usage in the United States (US), across every group studied, has declined, whilst other SNSs such as Instagram and WhatsApp usage has increased (Edison Research, 2018). The reasons for the decline in Facebook usage is yet unclear.

It has been established through the provided literature, that people tend to associate themselves with similar others, known as homophily. The more similarities that are shared, the stronger the connection (Curry & Dunbar, 2013). Friendship groups or peers are evidence of people associating with similar others. Peers, a type of social group, are acknowledged as key influencers affecting what each group member learns in terms of skills, knowledge and attitudes through WOM (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). SNSs provide a platform for eWOM, and therefore consumer socialisation is possible in a digital space. As such, it is possible for group members to learn and reinforce group

norms through the various SNSs. Steffes and Burgee (2008) found that information obtained from homophilous sources were more preferred and more influential on the consumer decision-making process, than heterophilous sources.

2.7   The Composition of the Shared Content

Most of the literature focuses on the generic uses of social media (Whiting & Williams, 2013) including social interaction and information sharing, and the formats of shared content such as photos and videos (Statista, 2018b), but there is limited literature detailing exactly the nature of the content shared amongst users, besides news (Kümpel, Karnowski, & Keyling, 2015; García-Perdomo, Salaverría, Kilgo, & Harlow, 2017). Essentially, researchers continue to be limited in assessing the 'what' of information sharing, for example: If a user shares an image with her friends, what is that an image of?

2.8   Conclusion

This chapter has extrapolated the various interlinking concepts that formed the basis for this research. Homophily is a well-researched concept around the world and has been found to have significant presence amongst social groups of similar race, gender, class, education, work, values and interests. Homophily can occur either by chance as people live together in the same area and attend the same schools, or they associate with each other by choice based on perceived similarities.

The review of the literature that was consulted then described how social networks provide a space for people to recreate their offline social groups online, and selectively choose their friendships and connections. Group development and influence is closely linked to both former concepts. Groups develop because of homophily and are reinforced by constructed social norms which guide the group behaviour, which in turn reinforce each member's sense of self-identity. The literature review expanded on the group influence by explaining social comparisons: who does it, why it occurs and what impact it has on thought processes and decision-making. Purchase behaviour was partially explained by Nudge Theory and the researcher made a link between the group's ability to intentionally or unintentionally nudge other group members into specific purchase decisions, suggesting the group's powerful influence. Finally, the format of content shared online was presented briefly.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research report aimed to bring together various distinct concepts that have been previously researched around the world in other contexts, in such a format that the results give some insight into the black female consumer group in South Africa.

Research Question 1: Is there a presence of homophily amongst black South Africa women?

This question aimed to establish whether homophily, previously found to exist between homogenous races and genders, does in fact exist within the black female South African group. The purpose was to extend the research concept applicability of homophily into a new and unique geographic and cultural context, to validate the findings and contribute to the existing body of research. The existence of this phenomenon would then reinforce the appropriateness of the research questions to follow.

Research Question 2: What is the extent to which black South African female offline social groups also exist on their social media networks?

This question aimed to establish whether close offline social groups also exist on social media, in the form of contacts on each member's social networks. The idea behind this question was to understand whether group dynamics that play out offline, ultimately play out online in a similar way.

Research Question 3: To what extent do higher-income black South African females share beliefs and norms with their peers?

This question aimed to understand the nature of the higher income (part of the sampling criteria was for black females to have disposable income) social groups and explore the nature of their group norms. Especially, the binding factors between these women and their reinforcing behaviours were of interest.

Research Question 4: To what extent do higher-income black South African females compare themselves with their peers?

This question aimed to establish whether social comparison exists within these female social groups, and if it does, to what extent does it exist. The nature of the comparison was also of interest to the researcher. The purpose of this research question was to

extend the current global research into social comparison into a new and unique geographic, and multi-ethnic culturally diverse context to validate applicability. The social comparison also lends itself to potential antecedent motivations for purchase intent and ultimately purchase behaviour.

Research Question 5: To what extent do the online social groups amongst black South African females influence their member's purchase behaviour?

This question aimed to explore whether the female social groups, in this unique context, are influential on their member's purchase decisions. The researcher sought to determine whether these social groups are more influential on each other than social media adverts. The purpose of this research question was to understand the nature of the group influence and the extent of the power in facilitating actual decision-making. The researcher wanted to understand whether the social group's recommendations are in fact more powerful than adverts in nudging the consumer along the path to purchase.

Research Question 6: To what extent are online social groups influential in black South African female's brand-specific purchases?

This question aimed to determine the nature of the content shared on social media, between these social groups, and to determine whether the content is more brand-specific or more generic in terms of sharing products rather than brands. This question sought to gain an understanding of what is natural in the black African female's online social interactions.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

In this chapter, the research methodology and design used is discussed, as well as the rationale for its selection. The literature review presented in Chapter 2 revealed the need for further in-depth enquiry into the existence of homophily in South Africa and the nature of social group influence. The research study aimed to explore whether homophily exists in black South African female social groups; whether these social groups exist on social media, and whether these groups are more influential on each member's initial purchase behaviour than adverts. In this chapter the research method, design, sampling and data analysis is discussed.

4.1 Research Methodology and Design

Achieving the stated research aims required gaining further contextually-relevant (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012), in-depth insights into the currently under researched topic. Therefore a qualitative, exploratory research methodology was selected (Saunders & Lewis, 2012) for a holistic understanding of non-numeric data (Ponelis, 2015). It is necessary to use an empathetic stance to explore the subjective responses of the participants with the aim of uncovering their truths, perceptions, motivations and actions within the social context, and how this changes with different experiences (Goulding, 2002; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009; Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

An inductive research approach was used to provide the researcher with the opportunity for greater understanding regarding the nature of the opportunity within the specific context of South Africa, and allow for alternative explanations in an unrestricted manner, an approach best utilised in social sciences. The researcher was able to look for patterns in the observations and results to answer the research questions.

4.1.1 Research Setting

The researcher employed the strategy of selecting multiple (17) black female South Africans to provide the ability to study the presence and interaction of multiple concepts relating to homophily, as defined in Chapter 2.

The researcher employed a non-probability sampling technique which was most appropriate given that specific participants were purposively sourced through the researcher's social networks, both professional and personal, as well as those of the supervisor. Convenience sampling, purposive and snowball sampling were utilised to assist in selecting participants best positioned to answer the research questions and meet the objectives (Patton, 2002; Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

4.2　　　　Population

The population chosen for this research was the black South African female market for a variety of reasons. First, post-Apartheid injustices resulted in racial and gender segregation perpetuating long-lived inequalities. To address this economic gap, government and legislation have made significant efforts to fast-track black females by offering many opportunities in education and business (LabourGuide, 2018) which means that they are fast becoming a crucial consumer group in the country. Black South Africans constitute 81% of the total population. The black female South African population was recorded at 23.3 million in Statistics South Africa (2017) mid-year estimates, which accounts for 81% of the female population in the country. This number has grown by 4 million in 10 years (21%).

Second, studies around the world have shown black consumers to respond better to advertising that portrayed black actors (Whittler, 1991). This suggests that the black population group shows an affinity to their same racial group and are perhaps more likely to be influenced by those of the same race.

Third, females have historically been represented in the television advertisements broadcast in South Africa as subordinate, undervalued, and secondary to men (Luyt, 2011). However, Eisend (2009) found that gender stereotyping in television and radio advertising mirrored the gender-related values of societies and not the other way around. Results from the content analysis study of television adverts between 1992 and 1994 conducted by Coltrane and Messineo (2000), found that white men were represented as 'authoritative', white women were predominantly represented as 'sex objects', black men were represented as 'aggressive', and black women as 'inconsequential'. These representations served to frame understanding, interpretation, beliefs and ultimately influence people based on experiences. Media images promote

acceptance of current social arrangements, which serves logically as a super-group norm that influences and reinforces societies behaviour.

Fourth, there are crumbs of evidence that a narrative exists around the internet which alludes to the mindset that black women in Africa are 'African women, not women of colour' (Lamuye, 2017). This distinction reveals a different perception of self than perhaps worldwide society truly understands. Another example of this narrative is seen through a South African columnist rejecting Naomi Campbell's insistence that Vogue Africa was the next progression. She wrote in response, "we're trying to do things on our own terms, disrupt the narrative, own our narrative and tell our own stories – our way." (Tsotetsi, 2018).

Fifth, in terms of entrepreneurship in the country, 72% of micro-enterprises and 40% of small enterprises are owned by women, as noted by The Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) in 2017. The government and the private sector have subsequently initiated various funding programmes aimed at empowering this growing market. These include the Isivande Women's fund and the Women Entrepreneurial Fund. Black South African women are blossoming as a group and as individuals, with major success stories championing doctoral graduates (EWN, 2018), wine makers (Khumalo, 2018), advocates and business women (van Niekerk, 2018) to name a few.

Lastly, higher income black females are essential for this research because they are more likely to have access to smartphones which they use to access social media often; they have the means to purchase various brands making them a relevant target market; brands may be more interested in this group considering their purchasing power and black people, especially in the USA, are more likely to signal status through brand purchases (Charles, Hurst, & Roussonov, 2007).

Historic representations of women in media have portrayed them as subordinate and inconsequential. This population is important because women have more opportunities than ever before, to advance their lives and express themselves in new ways. This is a powerful advancing consumer group for business and consumer research.

4.3 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this research, was not the black South African women but rather how their social groups' influence shapes the consumer purchase behaviour.

(Yin, 2012) There are a few factors which could influence consumer behaviour such as group-belonging, group norms, social comparison and the platform used for peer communications. As mentioned previously, the population of black South African females are consumers and members of their own groups, and as such, have been able to explain the detail behind the influence.

4.4 Sampling Method and Size

It was impracticable to interview the entire black female population, which makes up 51% of the total population (Statistics South Africa, 2017), so the need to choose a specific sample for this research was necessary to save time and allow for a 'deep dive' for insights.

The researcher used non-probability sampling because not all members of the population had an equal chance of being chosen, as the size and scope of the population was too large and unrealistic to allow for a sampling frame. In addition, the researcher had limited time, resources and a limited workforce, therefore non-probability sampling was necessary (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Non-probability sampling is considered most practical in exploratory research and was the most appropriate because specific participants were purposively sourced through the researcher's and supervisor's social networks, both professional and personal. This process involved both convenience and purposive homogeneous sampling techniques, which assisted in selecting the appropriate participants to answer the research questions and meet the objectives (Patton, 2002; Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

Convenience sampling, also called Accidental or Haphazard sampling, is a type of non-random, non-probability sampling where the researcher selected members of a target population (homogenous) based on their ease of accessibility, and willingness to participate (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). It is also affordable; the participants are readily available, and it is easier to do than other techniques. Purposive sampling, also called Judgement sampling, involved the researcher deliberately choosing the participant because they met the criteria for the research (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Both techniques were used because the researcher had contacts that met this criteria, and the purposive nature of the participant choices meant that the data quality would be high and research questions would be adequately answered.

The sample included 17 black women who met the following criteria: (a) are employed, (b) have passed high school final year, (c) use social media regularly, (d) who are over 23 years of age, and (e) have disposable income. The criteria filtered the population into those black females of higher income, which are more likely to afford buying various products recommended by peers. The reason for the selection of a homogenous subgroup was because it provided minimum variation in the data collected, allowing for minor differences to be more apparent (Saunders & Lewis, 2012; Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The number of participants chosen is above the common range of between 10 and 15 participants for semi-structured in-depth interviews of homogenous groups (Amarlal, 2017; Ainslie, 2017). The reason for this number was to allow for higher volume of participants as some interviews were shorter than 15 minutes and data saturation was not reached by the time the recommended 10 participants had been interviewed (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). South Africa has many sub-cultures within the black population, so the data gathered from these black women varied due to their individual cultural differences. Allowance for more interviews served to buffer against limited insufficient data.

4.5   Data Gathering Instrument

A semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 2) was designed to answer the research questions. This schedule provided some structure whilst allowing for flexibility in the direction of the questions to glean further insights (Myers, 2013). All the open-ended questions systematically stemmed from the overarching research questions formulated from the literature review. This interview schedule was used, under the same conditions, for each participant, to ensure limited variability in the data for controllable factors.

Although some researchers use qualitative and quantitative terminology interchangeably, for clarity and distinction in the nature of the research, the researcher used the following classifications to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research: dependability (reliability), credibility (validity), confirmability (objectivity), and transferability (generalisability) (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

To ensure credibility and dependability of the data, the researcher recorded each interview and transcribed them personally, to ensure all evidence was reported, to ensure the findings flow from the data, and not the bias of the researcher (Ponelis,

2015). In addition, the researcher contacted some of the participants after the interviews via email to confirm the understanding and interpretation of some responses. This process is known as triangulation (Saunders & Lewis, 2012) and adds to the credibility of the findings. The choice of broad sample selection of black women who met certain criteria is not unique to South Africa, so it is anticipated that the choice of sample, method of data collection and analysis is transferable for other researchers to use in other contexts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

A pilot interview was conducted with two black women who met the criteria mentioned above, to ensure the questions were clear, not leading and were able to provide the data required (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The pilot study revealed that topic 1, question 1 could be further detailed to gain insight into not only the racial composition of the black South African female social groups, but also the gender. Hence, this question was reworded from 'would you say that most of your close friends are black?' to 'would you say that most of your close friends are black females?'

In addition, topic 4 originally had four separate questions, however, the pilot study allowed for question 2 to naturally be absorbed into an extension of question 1. Therefore, the interview schedule has three questions for topic 4.

4.6   Data Gathering Process

The researcher manually sourced 17 black women that live in South Africa, based on the criteria mentioned previously, through their professional and personal social networks, and that of the supervisor. This method relied on the fact that the researcher knew, to varying degrees, the selected participants. This familiarity made it easier to legitimise the research upon approaching the potential participants. The mix of women selected was restricted to those who would participate and met the specific criteria mentioned. The researcher did not encounter any potential participants who refused to participate. All those approached, took part voluntarily.

The researcher contacted each participant individually, except one which was referred by one of the participants. The researcher sent each participant a message on LinkedIn, Facebook or over WhatsApp with a brief introduction into the topic and a request to participate on a date of their convenience. Each participant was informed that the research would involve one-on-one interviews, would take place in one of the syndicate rooms at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) Illovo campus,

and would be recorded for later transcription. The location was chosen because the research could leverage the brand equity that GIBS has already established in the country. The location also provided multiple rooms to conduct an interview which was quiet and undisturbed. Each participant was also informed that their names would be kept confidential in the write-up.

Each participant who was contacted responded favourably to take part. The researcher then established the best time and date that suited both the researcher and the participant and booked the seminar rooms. The researcher subsequently sent reminders the day before the interview to ensure the participant was still willing to be interviewed and knew the location.

The interviews took place between the 31st of July 2018 and the 27th of August 2018, in the evenings after work. The cut-off date for the interviews was extended from the 17th of August, until the 27th to allow for as many interviews as possible within the time limitations.

All seventeen (17) interviews were conducted face-to-face to allow each person to fully express their feelings (Richins, 1991). The researcher began each interview by requesting the participant to read and sign the informed consent document and date it. The researcher co-signed every document on the same day. The researcher explained that a full discussion of the topic is on offer, after the interview because the researcher did not want to influence the participant's potential answers in any way, with any bias. The topic and questions were not discussed before the interview. The participants were happy with this explanation and agreed to continue.

The researcher asked all the questions in the interview schedule, however, if further detail was needed, the researcher probed with additional questions not formalised on the schedule. This was the nature of a semi-structured interview and the temporary deviations allowed for exploration for further insight (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

Each interview was recorded on the researcher's Apple iPhone. The researcher personally transcribed each of these recordings onto a Microsoft Word document after the respective interview. Orthographic transcription was the strategy used because it requires verbatim transcription (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The purpose of this verbatim transcription was to capture what was said and how it was said. This is a 'messy' task because the spoken word is very different to the written word. Often, people do not speak using punctuation to assist in receiving the message, rather, people use

intonation, pace and volume. In addition, the spoken word often will begin without completing the sentence, words are stumbled over and phrases are repeated. The researcher undertook the task to choose how and what would be translated from speech into written text (Ochs, 1979) to pre-clean the data for the software analysis. This strategy was undertaken because very often software will not recognise intonation, repeated sentences and slang often used in the spoken word. This involved excluding non-additive words such as 'ya' or 'you know' or 'like' or 'um'.

The transcriptions were prepared for analysis by spelling and grammar checking, saving each transcription separately, and noting any additional conversations or comments that came up before or after a set question. The researcher felt the need to analyse deeply into each sub-question, and as such prepared two other documents for analysis. One document included the answers from all participants, to Topic 1, Question 1. The same was repeated for all the topics and all the answers. Each document was saved separately and named as 'Topic X, QX'. The second document was a Microsoft Excel document, populated with all the answers to a specific question and prepared for a thematic content analysis. The transcriptions were analysed as discussed below.

4.7 Data Analysis

The data analysis began with transcribing all the voice recordings. As mentioned previously, each interview was transcribed into a separate Microsoft Word document. Subsequently, a new document was created which collated all the lifted participant answers for each individual question. The purpose of this second document was to upload each to Leximancer, an online tool which analyses the content of collections of text documents (Leximancer, 2018). This tool uses 2-sentence segments as the basic unit of analysis. This tool then displays the extracted information by means of high-level concept maps. These concept maps show various bubbles, which by virtue of their size, indicate the importance of each concept. This program has been commonly used for survey analysis, market research, and interview transcript analysis.

The researcher completed uploading all the documents, however, the concept maps only touched on the surface of the data. An exploratory research study requires in-depth analysis; therefore, the researcher undertook a manual thematic content analysis for each question, in addition to the concept maps. This analysis technique was chosen

to identify common themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013), and to explain the concept map findings in more detail. Thematic analysis (TA), was first developed by Gerald Holton, a physicist and historian of science in the 1970s, but was only recently recognised as a unique method with specific procedures used to research a wide range of topics including women's clothing practices (Frith & Gleeson, 2004, 2008) and living with multiple sclerosis (Malcomson, Lowe-Strong, & Dunwoody, 2008) as mentioned in Braun and Clarke (2013). TA is defined as, "a method of identifying themes and patterns of meaning across a dataset in relation to a research question" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.193). It can be used to answer almost any type of research question.

The analysis began with inputting each participant's answer, in the form of textual data, into separate rows in a Microsoft Excel document. Again, each question from the interview schedule received its own document for analysis. Codes, in the form of keywords or short phrases which symbolically translates the language data (Saldaña, 2016) extracted from the answers, were then inserted into a separate column adjacent to each participant's answer. The researcher selected codes that would be relevant to answer the question within context, which is appropriate given that, "a good qualitative analysis is primarily a product of 'analytic sensibility', not a product of 'following the rules'" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 221). Analytic sensibility involves a skill of reading and interpreting data through an informed lens. "Coding is a heuristic, an exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas or algorithms to follow" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 29). Coding is iterative and links data to ideas (Saldaña, 2016).

Some of the codes were partially guided by existing theory from which prevalent concepts were noted in the search for themes and codes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Themes were identified using both bottom-up (data-driven) and top-down methods (existing theory).

Table 1: The stages of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 222)

Stage	Thematic Analysis
1	Transcription
2	Reading & Familiarisation; taking note of items of potential interest
3	Coding – complete; across entire data set
4	Searching for themes
5	Reviewing themes (Producing a map of the provisional themes and subthemes, and relationships between them – aka the 'thematic map'
6	Defining and naming themes
7	Writing – final analysis

Conceptual analysis is a type of content analysis which utilises frequency counting, a linear model (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Content analysis is used to distil the material into distinct categories and identify relationships to quantify and analyse the text (Leximancer, 2018). The frequency analysis was used to rank themes in order of importance based on the frequency of mention or applicability across all participants. Some of the questions, due to the shorter nature of the answers and limited scope for variation, do not display patterns in the coding; however, other questions do where some of the codes were repeated throughout (Saldaña, 2016). Abductive analysis is partially used where in some cases the codes do not fit a theme, but rather are fragments which stimulate deep reflection of the reason for their existence in the larger context (Saldaña, 2016).

The results of the analysis are presented in Chapter 5. Each question took between one and two hours to analyse using Leximancer and the manual thematic content analysis.

4.8   Research Methodology Limitations

Qualitative research techniques always risk potential bias in some form or another (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The following aspects were identified as limitations of this study:

- The researcher does not believe that data saturation was reached, but due to time and resource limitations, the researcher had to choose a cut-off number of participants to interview, which was seventeen. Any number above fifteen was the goal, and to obtain as many responses as possible, to increase the dependability, and credibility of the results.
- A weakness of TA mentioned in Braun and Clarke (2013) is that the method is perceived by some researchers as 'something and nothing' and lacks substance in comparison to other theoretically driven approaches such as Grounded Theory (GT) and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). However, the strengths of this method lie with the uncomplicated nature of the method best used for first-time qualitative researchers, and the flexibility in terms of the theoretical framework and non-prescriptive nature of data collection and sample size (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In addition, this method has

been used within an existing theoretical framework which adds interpretive power, and the findings are accessible to an educated, wider audience.

- This study is cross-sectional, which means the answers to these questions in the interview schedule are embedded in the perceptions of this racial and gender group, in South Africa at a specific time. It does not lend itself to the dynamic nature of changing human desires, beliefs and values.

- There is limited research available that combines these constructs and applies them to specifically South African black women, and as such, limited empirical data available from which to base the questions. The questions therefore, are new and the researcher has attempted to create them in such a way, that they do not lead the participant's answers, to allow for broad response and potentially new insights. Other limitations include the convenience sampling technique wherein bias is likely to occur, especially if the presence of homophily does exist within social networks. However, the researcher is aware that the sample was not likely to be representative of the population. To avoid self-selection, the researcher has also proposed to use, in conjunction, purposive sampling, which should have negated the risk of outliers and potentially poor quality data (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

- The choice of sample group may have skewed the data, However, this is appropriate given that there are significant differences in purchasing power between low and high income individuals, and this is important for their relevance as target market for brands.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The results of this research study are presented within this chapter. The layout of the results repeat the layout of the Chapter 3 research questions for ease of reading and consistency. A summary of the research questions and the related interview questions can be found in the consistency matrix (Appendix 1). The rationale for each research question is presented in Chapter 3. This chapter focuses on the presentation of the results only. Discussion of the results follows in Chapter 6.

5.1.1 A summary of the research methodology

This research is qualitative and exploratory. Participants were chosen based on four main criteria and contacted personally through WhatsApp or via messaging services on Facebook or LinkedIn. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted in syndicate rooms at GIBS after work and recorded on the researcher's Apple iPhone. The researcher then personally transcribed each interview verbatim into separate Microsoft Word documents. The researcher subsequently created distinct documents in which all answers for a specific question were inserted, and the data was 'cleaned' of non-additive words such as 'um' and 'like'. These documents were then uploaded to Leximancer, the online textual data analysis tool which created concept maps. Concept maps indicated by size of the bubbles, which high-level concept was most important. Thereafter, the researcher conducted manual thematic content analysis using Microsoft Excel following the steps laid out by Braun and Clarke (2013) and addressed in Chapter 4. A frequency analysis was conducted on the themes, and those higher ranked themes are discussed in Chapter 6.

This chapter presents general observations of the sample and context. The research questions and related results follow by firstly providing the results from Leximancer, and subsequently the results from the manual thematic analysis. The results are discussed in terms of (a) answering the questions, and (b) whether both results from the two forms of analysis concur with each other.

5.2   General Observations

Most of the participants in this study expressed their interest in this topic, their appreciation for the interest in researching more about who they are as a social group, and requested that the researcher send them the final write-up once complete for interests' sake.

Every person who was approached initially and requested to participate, enthusiastically agreed, and subsequently all became participants. The scope of the black females ranged in age from very early twenties up to mid-forties; two were entrepreneurs and the rest worked in a corporate company of varying sizes. This became an interesting observation given that age, as is discussed in Chapter 6, was noted as an important factor in the conscious recall of social comparison.

Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher stopped recording and as promised, explained what the research was about, and how it came to be with each participant. The discussions about the topic often continued for at least another 10 minutes due to their interest in discussing the concepts. The researcher did not do this before the interview, to avoid influencing the participant's answers. There was great interest among participants in discussing their own nature and narrative.

5.3   Results for Research Question 1 (Topic 1)

Question: Is there a presence of homophily amongst black South Africa women?

This question aimed to establish whether homophily, previously found to exist between homogenous races and genders, does in fact exist within the black female South African group. The purpose was to extend the research concept applicability of homophily into a new and unique geographic and cultural context, to validate the findings and contribute to the existing body of research. The existence of this phenomenon reinforces the appropriateness of the research questions to follow.

The related interview questions were:

Question (1) Are your friends similar to you in some way? If yes, how so?

Question (2) Do you and your friends share the same desire for the same types of things?

Question (3) Would you say that most of your close friends are black females?

5.3.1 Results for Topic 1, Question 1

Question: Are your friends similar to you in some way? If yes, how so?

Homophily is inextricably linked to the concept of similarity amongst members of a group. This interview question was designed to explore whether the participants knowingly share similarities with their peers.

5.3.1.1 Leximancer Results
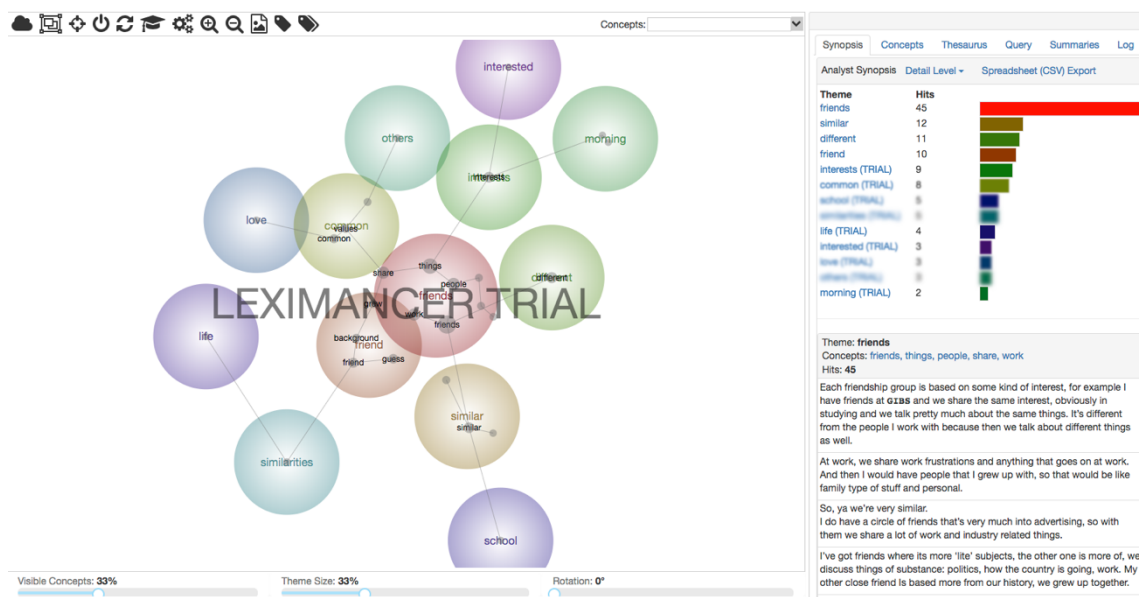
Figure 2: Results of the Leximancer Content Analysis for Topic 1, Q1

The leximancer concept map, the result of the online content analysis, confirmed that the participants and their friends share many similarities, including: interests, life, background, school, and work.
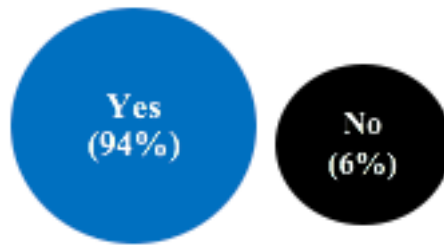
RQ Direct Response 1 - Majority answered 'Yes'

The majority of the participants answered yes to the question, acknowledging that their friends are similar to them. A total of 95 codes were extracted from all the explanations, and assigned categories borne from the data, based on common occurrences. The four categories chosen were based on three or more related codes: Similar Interests, Similar Characteristics, Similar Backgrounds and Similar Demographics.

The majority of the similarities described by the participants fell into the Similar Interests category which includes codes such as 'Work', 'Church' and 'Hiking'. The second most important theme was Similar Characteristics which included codes such as 'Driven', 'Values' and 'Achievers'. This theme generally includes how the participants described their social group characteristics. Similar Background was the third most important category which included codes such as 'School', and 'Township'. Finally, Similar Demographics was the last theme used to describe the physical attributes mentioned by participants describing their social group similarities. The codes used in this theme included, 'black' and 'age'.

Table 2: Topic One, Question 1 - Are your friends similar to you in some way? If yes, how so?

Rank	Categories	Frequency	Descriptions
1	Similar Interests	61	Activities the participants enjoy doing with their close social group
2	Similar Characteristics	38	Words that describe similar features or qualities common amongst the close social group

3	Similar Background	19	Words that describe similar history, upbringing
4	Similar Demographics	5	Words describing the physical attributes of the women in these social groups.

The frequencies displayed above are based on the frequency of the categories present in each participant's answer. Some participants had multiple occurrences of the same category in their answer.

5.3.1.3   General Observations

All participants answered this question on behalf of their social group, often using the pronoun 'we'. Examples of this usage include, "*we love travelling'*, '*we are somewhat driven individuals*' and '*we have the same academic knowledge'*. In addition, positive words were used to describe their social groups such as 'friends', and 'family'.

An important phrase, 'pockets of friends' was used in different ways, by a few participants. This indicated that their friendship groups might be homogenous in some ways, for example by race, but have different interests. This means that each participant has more than one close group of friends, which serve a purpose, distinct from each other. Participant 15 alluded to her different pockets of friends: "W*e're close in different ways, with different friends,*" and participant 6 also offered the same thought-process: *"I have different types of friends. Let's say I have friends at school, where we have the same academic knowledge or aspirations. At work, we share work frustrations and anything that goes on at work. And then I would have people I grew up with, so that would be like family-type of stuff and personal stuff".* Participant 15 also mentioned, "*I have pockets of friends with different similarities. My closest friend, we love fashion. I have got friends where we discuss 'light' subjects and others where we can discuss topics of substance like politics or how the country is doing. My other friend is more based [on the fact that] we share the same history, we grew up together".* Participant 4 expressed how her friends differ in terms of interests: "S*ome of us are more interested in travelling, like myself. Others are more interested in fancy cars and houses*". These examples indicate that these participants have more than one group of close friends, and each friend or group shares a particular interest or history with the participant which binds them.

There were many positive words used to describe their commonalities, such as '*we share*', '*commonality*', '*opposites attract*', '*connect*', '*we're close*' and '*close relationships*'.

5.3.1.4 Evidence of Status and Value Homophily

As explained in Chapter 2, status homophily are either informal, formal or socially ascribed categories such as race, age, education, religion and gender. The results of this question confirm that status homophily is present in all the forms described, as shown in Table 10.

Table 3: Evidence for the presence of status homophily

Code	Participant	Phrase Used	Status Homophily
Age	16	*"Right now, the friends that I have are the friends I went to high school with. Childhood friends. We are more or less around the same **age**"*	Confirmed
Age	5	"*a mixture of ethnicities and cultures, but similar **age** group.*"	Confirmed
Religion	7	*"A strong sense around **Christianity**."*	Confirmed
Religion	4	"*most of us are from the same **church**.*"	Confirmed
Education	6	"*we have the same **academic knowledge**.*"	Confirmed
Education, gender, race, religion	4	*"my closest friends are **black females**. We have the same **upbringing** and **religion**. All of us managed to finish **varsity**."*	Confirmed
Education	11	*"I have friends at GIBS and we share the same interest, obviously in **studying**."*	Confirmed
Sexual Orientation	14	*"My best friend is **gay**, and I am gay. There are those similarities."*	Confirmed

The presence of status homophily confirms that social groups are formed, intentionally or unintentionally in part, because the members share the same race, gender, religion or education level/interests.

Table 4: Evidence for the presence of Value homophily.

Code	Participant	Phrase Used	Value Homophily

Similar in the way we think	2	"I try to **surround myself** with people that are more similar in nature and character to myself."	Confirmed
Similar in the way we think	3	"Probably just in **the way that we think** and look at different views regarding different topics. We actually also share the same kind of humour, maybe a bit dark, a bit weird."	Confirmed
Shared values	4	"It's because we share the same **values**, really, that binds us"	Confirmed
Shared values	Participant 7	"I think for me it's just in terms of the **principles** that we believe in. It's more around the **character** of a person."	Confirmed
Shared beliefs and values	Participant 8	"Ours **beliefs**, our spirituality."	Confirmed
Shared beliefs and values	Participant 13	"They are **outgoing** like me."	Confirmed
Shared beliefs and values	Participant 14	"In certain ways, our **values** are a little bit aligned. That's why we are friends" "It's more that we share the same sense of what is right and what's wrong in terms of values."	Confirmed
Shared beliefs and values	Participant 15	"I think that's why we're close…if it's not **values**, we have the same **moral compass**."	Confirmed

There were many adjectives used that describe the similar characteristics which the participants valued of their friends, including: "aspirational"; "ambitious"; "adventurous"; "achievers"; "trustworthy"; "curious" and "out-going". These words describe the type of characteristics which relate to how they think and what they value.

5.3.1.5   Choice (inbreeding) vs induced (baseline) homophily

Choice homophily is one condition that informs the presence of inbreeding homophily, as displayed in Figure 1. The researcher focused on 'choice homophily' as representative of 'inbreeding' for the purpose of this study, in that both terms refer to personal preferences above what is expected within the given opportunity pool. In addition, choice homophily explains the intentional association with similar others, in understanding their motives. The researcher refers to 'baseline homophily' as the same

as 'induced', in that groups were formed by chance (geography, family and family ties and organisations).

Table 5: Evidence of Induced/Baseline homophily

Code	Participant	Phrase Used	Induced/Baseline Homophily
Upbringing	4	*"We have the same **upbringing**, and religion."*	Confirmed
School; upbringing	5	*"Very similar **upbringing**, similar schools that we've attended, similar lifestyles."*	Confirmed
Upbringing	6	*"I have different types of friends. I have friends at school, where we have the same academic knowledge. At work and then I have **people I grew up with**."*	Confirmed
School	11	*"Each friendship group is based on some kind of interest, for example…those I went to **high school** with."*	Confirmed
Township	12	*"I think we have **similar backgrounds**. Most of us had the opportunities to leave the **township** at some point and went to model C or private schools."*	Confirmed
Grew up together	15	*"My other close friend is based more from our history, **we grew up together**."*	Confirmed
School	16	*"Right now, the friends that I have are the friends I went to **high school** with. **Childhood** friends."*	Confirmed
Work	Participant 16	*"We're going through the same struggles in terms of **work life** and **careers.**"*	Confirmed
work	Participant 6	*"At work, **we share work frustrations** and anything that foes on at work."*	Confirmed

Similar Backgrounds, which described codes such as 'upbringing' which can mean cultural and geographic, as well as 'school' and 'township' all indicate baseline homophily. These words describe the places the participants were born in, the schools they went to and the townships that some lived in, which are more often than not, by chance and not by choice. Those friendship groups that developed just because the participants lived in close proximity, and attended those schools were fortuitous. Those friendships would arguably not have developed had the participants grown up in a

different area, and attended a different school. The participants would likely have had a different set of friends.

Similar Demographics are also considered evidence of baseline homophily. Gender, age and race are all socially-ascribed statuses. The evidence of this section of homophily in Table 10.

Choice homophily, which describes how people actively select their friends based on varying criteria, is also present in so far as participants are actively surrounding themselves with friends that are similar to them in some way (McPherson et al., 2001). Examples of descriptions can be found in Table 13.

Table 6: Evidence of Choice/Inbreeding homophily

Code	Participant	Phrase Used	Choice/Inbreeding Homophily
Actively select their friends	2	*"I **try** to surround myself with people that are more similar in nature and character to myself."*	Confirmed
	7	*"I like to **associate myself** with people who believe in those things"* [same principles].	Confirmed
	11	*"I think friends who I **choose** and who **choose** me, it's because of some kind of commonality we have."*	Confirmed
	13	*"That's the kind of people I **connect** with. The ones who know what they want in life."*	Confirmed

The above table describes four specific answers that indicate the participants actively select friends that meet certain criteria and ultimately serve a mutually beneficial purpose.

5.3.1.6   Topical homophily

Topical homophily, as explained in Chapter 2, is focused on similar interests. Aiello et al. (2012) found that users with similar interests (topical similarity) are more likely to be friends, and Cardoso et al. (2017) confirmed that users had stronger relationships due to higher topical similarity. The table below expresses the findings of these similar interests in the research.

Table 7: Evidence of Topical homophily (interests)

Code	Participant	Phrase Used	Topical Homophily
Travel	1	*"We love travelling."*	Confirmed
Travel	2	*"We sort of like the same things, one of them being travel."*	Confirmed
Travel	4	*"Some of us are more interested in travelling, like myself."*	Confirmed
Travel	8	*"We're all very adventurous, we like travelling."*	Confirmed
Travel	10	*"My friends and I, we love travelling."*	Confirmed
Travel	12	*"A little bit of travel when we can afford it."*	Confirmed

Travel was the top shared interest expressed amongst the participants. The participants mentioned they enjoy travelling together. The other shared interests mentioned included *work* (industry information and events); *going-out* (for dinner and/or drinks); *church*; *kids*; *fashion & beauty*; *studying (education)*; and *hiking* (exercise).

Topical homophily was by far the most significant result for this question, surpassing similar characteristics, similar backgrounds and the lowest result was similar demographics. Only one participant volunteered information pertaining to the race and gender of their friendship group, the remainder spoke only of similar interests and characteristics.

Topic 1, Question 1 was followed up by Question 2, which effectively delved into their shared desires more than their shared commonalities.

5.3.2 Results for Topic 1, Question 2

Question: Do you and your friends share the same desire for the same types of things? If yes, please elaborate.

5.3.2.1   Leximancer Results
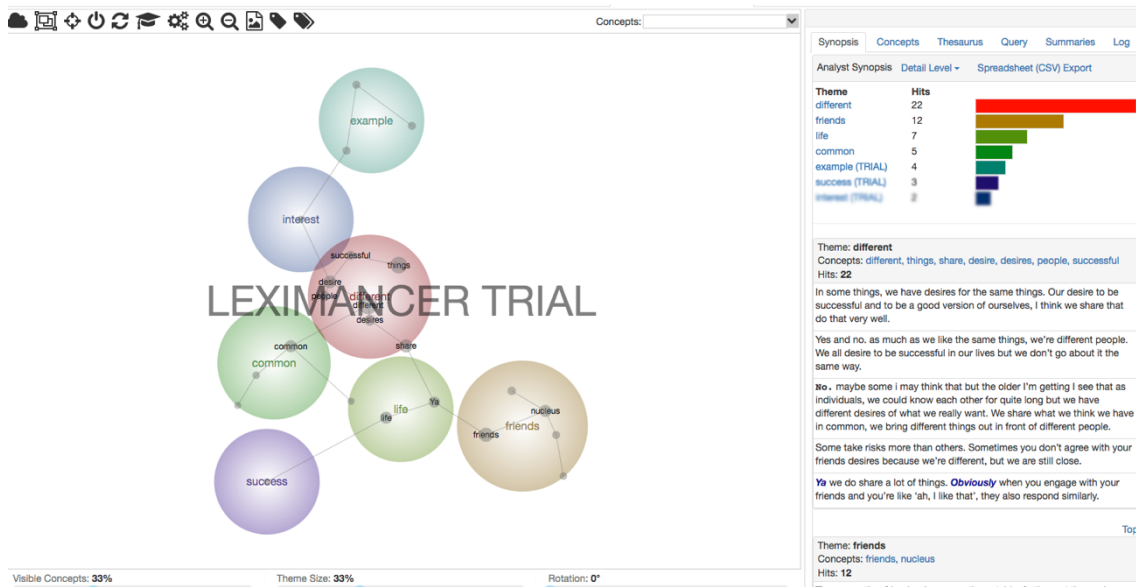
Figure 3: Leximancer results: Topic 1, Q2

The leximancer concept map displayed bubbles of important concepts borne from the data and explained their shared desires, including 'success', 'life', and 'interests'.

5.3.2.2   Manual Thematic Content Analysis Results

This question, although similar to Question 1, delved a little deeper into the commonalities. It revealed that the highest number of the participants shared a desire with their friends, for personal growth, which included concepts such as "*Entrepreneurship*", "*Education*", "*Dreams*" and "*Success*". Most of these women consider themselves and their friends highly ambitious and driven. 'Similar Characteristics' was a category which described attributes the participants desired to have and share with their social groups. Codes included 'ambitious', 'adventurous' and 'driven'. The participants described that these attributes are common within their groups.

Most respondents (15) answered yes, confirming that they believe their friends share the same desire for the same things. Two (2) answered no, explaining their friends share common interests, but not the same desires.
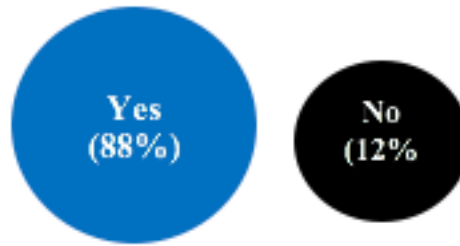
RQ Direct Response 2 - Majority answered 'Yes'

The other stand-out finding was that many shared a desire for experiences. More specifically, shared experiences. These include activities such as "*shopping*", "*travel*", going to the "*zoo*" or the "*bush*", watching "*movies*" or "*comedy shows*" or "*performances*" together, as well as "*running*" together and doing events like the "*Park Runs*" (social runs in various parks organised around Johannesburg, South Africa). It is important to note that not only do these women share these interests, but they also want to do these activities together, for a group experience.

The last interesting topic was materialistic desires. Many of the women shared an interest in personal aesthetics and the ultimate desire to achieve what they perceive to be acceptable beauty standards. This includes the shared interest in "*make-up*", and "*fashion*". The other side of the coin was the acquisition of assets such as "*fancy cars and fancy houses*", however, these desires were not popular amongst all participants.

5.3.2.3   General observation

Some of the participants emphasised that although they share similar interests and similar desires to be successful, they pointed out that how (method) each person achieves these desires is different, as explained by Participant 17, "*We all desire to be successful in our lives, but we don't go about it the same way. Some take risks more than others*". Participant 16 explained that even though "*All of us want to be successful*", their "priorities and goals" were "different". What one participant considers to be 'success' is not the same as another's definition.

Table 8: Do you and your friends share the same desire for the same types of things?

Rank	Category	Frequency	Description
1	Desire for Personal Growth	17 (100%)	Shared desire for self-improvement such as 'education' or 'career progression'
2	Desire for Experiences	11 (65%)	Shared desire for any activity that can be enjoyed together such as

			'travel' or 'shopping'
3	Similar Interests	8 (47%)	Shared desire when it comes to common interests such as 'country' and 'kids'
4	Materialistic Desires	7 (41%)	Shared desire for physical items which can be purchased
5	Similar Characteristics	6 (35%)	Important attributes of personality which are common within the group and necessary.

5.3.3   Results for Topic 1, Question 3

Question: Would you say that most of your close friends are black females?

The purpose of this interview question was to establish the demographic composition of the social group.

5.3.3.1   Leximancer Results
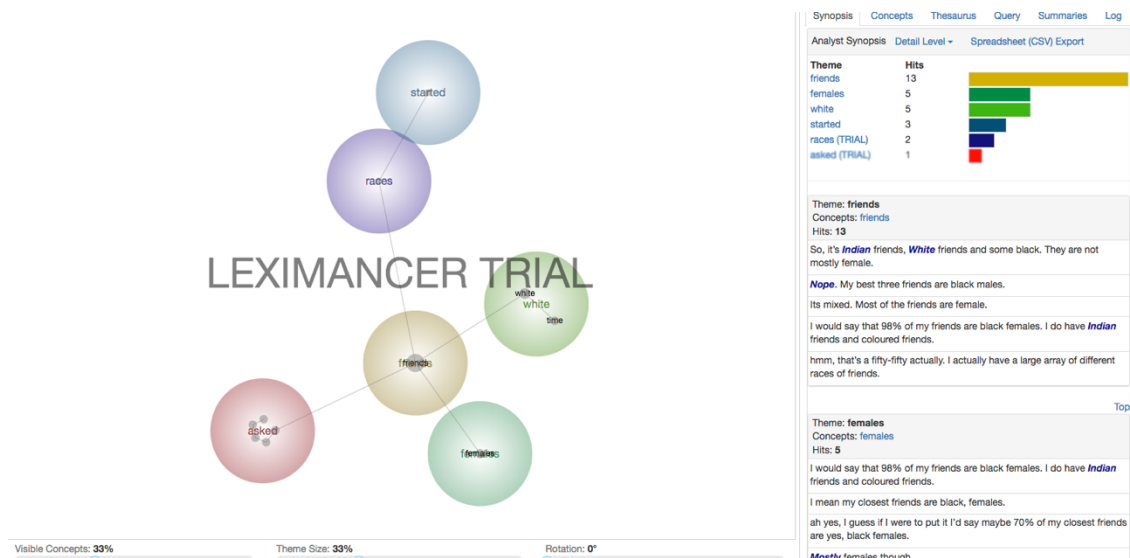
Figure 4: Results of the Leximancer Analysis for Topic 1, Q3

The concept bubbles indicated that "friends", "females", "white" and "race" themes were important. This concept map did not reveal enough information behind the composition of these themes, hence the need for a secondary method of content analysis.

5.3.3.2   Manual Thematic Content Analysis Results

Most participants answered that their close social group consists exclusively of black females (76%). There was one participant that could be classified as an outlier, with her closest friends being black males. Fourteen (14) out of the seventeen (17) participants confirmed that their social group was made up exclusively of females, and the same number of participants confirmed that the racial demographic of their social group was exclusively black.

Table 9: Would you say that most of your close friends are black females?

Rank	Category	Frequency	Description
1	Black	14 (82%)	Closest friends are black (race)
2	Female	14 (82%)	Closest friends are female (gender)
3	Black female	13 (76%)	Closest friends are black females
4	Mixed race	3 (18%)	Closest friends are a mix of races
5	Black male	1 (6%)	Closest friends are black males

There were a few outliers which indicated their social groups were a mix of races. This was the case for participant 15 who was, incidentally, the only black girl in her class at a previously all-white school. Participant 6 began work in a previously all-white office environment, so her friends are also more of a mix now. Participant 3 has a white female as her closest friend and identifies her friendship composition as mixed.

It seems that the more exposure to 'other' races people have in their formative years at schools, universities and thereafter in work environments, the more likely they are to have friends from multiple races.

5.3.3.3   General observation

Many of the participants had to think long and hard about the composition of their friendship groups, indicating again that race is likely not a conscious criterion for their social groups. These social group compositions are arguably more a function of having grown-up in a certain place, in a certain era (specifically late-Apartheid, early democracy) as well as a function of attending schools and being employed in the same areas. Baseline homophily may be the initial reason for the start of the friendships, and thereafter as people move around, choice homophily maintains some of the friendships as the interest's progress and align, so does the friendship. As people age, they are perhaps more selective of the friends in their close social groups.

The online content analysis executed by Leximancer included all the answers to research Question 1. The results confirmed the manual thematic content analysis done by the researcher, including that similarities exist between friends including values, workplace and life similarities, and interests in travel.

It has been established that homophily is present, in multiple forms, within this sample of black South African females. It has been discussed that although racial homophily is undeniable in the results, its presence does not lend itself to choice, but rather more to baseline homophily. In other words, these participants are not actively choosing black females as their friends, they just happen to be black females by virtue of the environment in which they grew up, their similarities of background and culture in some cases but mostly their similarities of interest. Conversely, these interests, such as travel, are not exclusive to black females, and can arguably be said to be of interest to all racial groups. The reason that such homophily exists in this case, is perhaps because the integration of different races was not mainstream when they were young. South Africa's first democratic elections were in 1994, yet the clear majority of these participants were born in the late 1970s and throughout the 80s. Only two participants, 16 and 17 were born in 1994.

5.4   Results for Research Question 2 (Topic 2)

Question: What is the extent to which their offline social groups also exist on their social media networks?

This question sought to establish whether the social groups formed offline, do in fact, exist on social media too. The researcher also wanted to know which channels are popular and whether the offline group dynamics carry across to the online space.

5.4.1   Results for Topic 2, Question 1

Question: Are most of your close friends' also contacts on your social media network?

The aim of this interview question was to establish whether the close social groups which exist offline (in the real world), also exist in a similar form on social media.
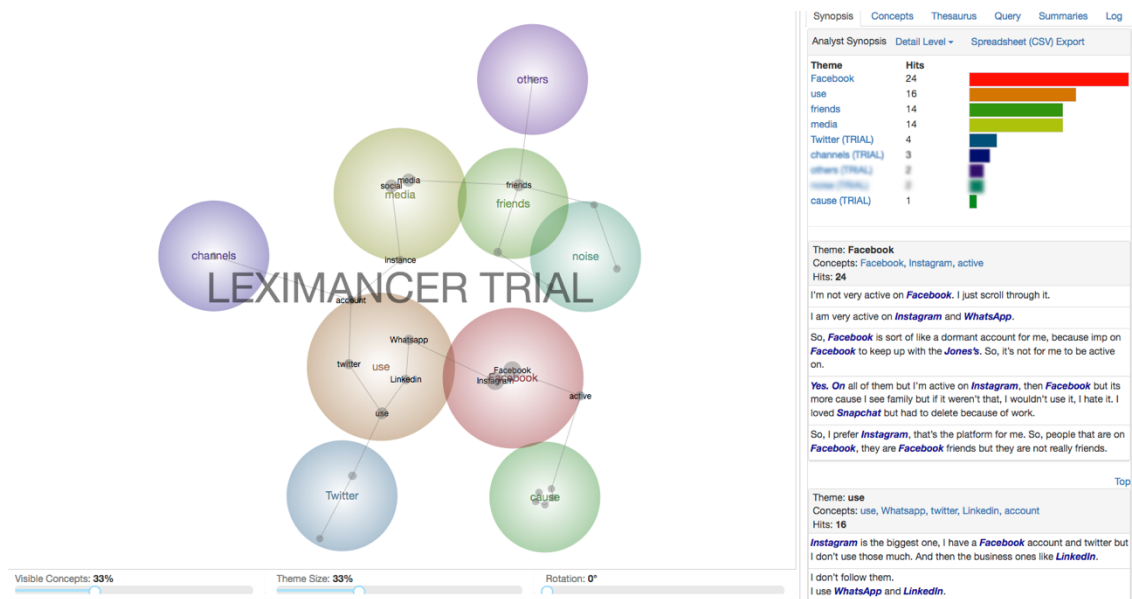
Figure 5:Results of the Leximancer Analysis for Topic 2, Q1

The Leximancer concept maps included the use of WhatsApp, Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram as the main social media channels. The quoted responses that form the Facebook theme indicated the passive usage of the SNS, and the scepticism around the authenticity of their contacts. This result required further exploration.

5.4.1.2   Manual Thematic Content Analysis Results

Most of the participants confirmed that their offline social groups are also contacts on their social media channels. Table 5 displays the frequency of the social networking sites (SNSs) mentioned by participants.
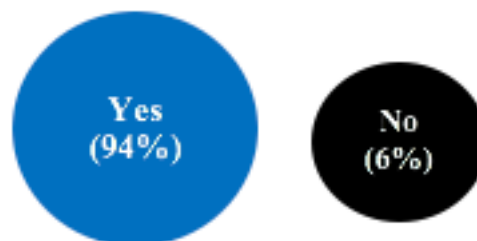
RQ Direct Response 3 - Majority answered 'Yes'

Table 10: Are most of your close friends' also your contacts on your social media network?

Rank	Social Media Channel	Frequency
1	Facebook	16
2	Instagram	14
3	Twitter	9
4	LinkedIn	9
5.	WhatsApp	3

The clear majority confirmed that their close friends are contacts on their various social media networks. The highest mentioned Social Networking Site (SNS) was Facebook, with Instagram as a close second. Only 30% of the participants who have Facebook accounts, use them passively to keep up with their friends and families, and for information. In the words of Participant 1, "*I am on Facebook to keep up with the Jones's".* They do not actively post on Facebook. Some reasons cited for their limited preference of Facebook is the perception that there is little privacy and it's "noisy and crowded", it consumes too much data and is not an option without Wi-Fi access. In addition, there was mention of the lack of authenticity of the friends on this SNS, this is explained in response to the next question.

Instagram, however, is an actively-used SNS. A majority, 82% of the participants, confirmed that they actively use Instagram. Participant 1 mentioned. "*I prefer Instagram, that's the platform for me*". A general observation about this SNS was that the participants were emphatic when discussing Instagram and how much they enjoy it, some even said they were "obsessed" and participant 1 brought this idea home by stating, "*I'm an Instagram addict*". This enthusiasm did not appear during discussion of any other SNS.

WhatsApp is considered a social media application that comes in third in terms of usage and preference for connecting with friends.

Twitter is tied at third place but 56% say they are 'passive users' and just 'browse' for news updates. In the words of Participant 8, "*I have a Twitter account, but I'm not actively tweeting. I just follow people and channels that give me information".*

LinkedIn was the final SNS mentioned by only three participants.

Another observation is that some participants mentioned that even though they have a few SNS accounts, depending on their 'pockets of friends', some friends are active on social media, others are not. Some prefer interacting with their friends face-to-face to '*maintain the relationships'* and SNSs are used for insignificant interactions.

5.4.2   Results for Topic 2, Question 2

Question: Do you interact with your friends more over social media, than you do in person?

The aim of this question was to establish whether the social groups are maintained more over social media interactions, or if they are maintained through offline, face-to-face interactions.

5.4.2.1   Leximancer Results
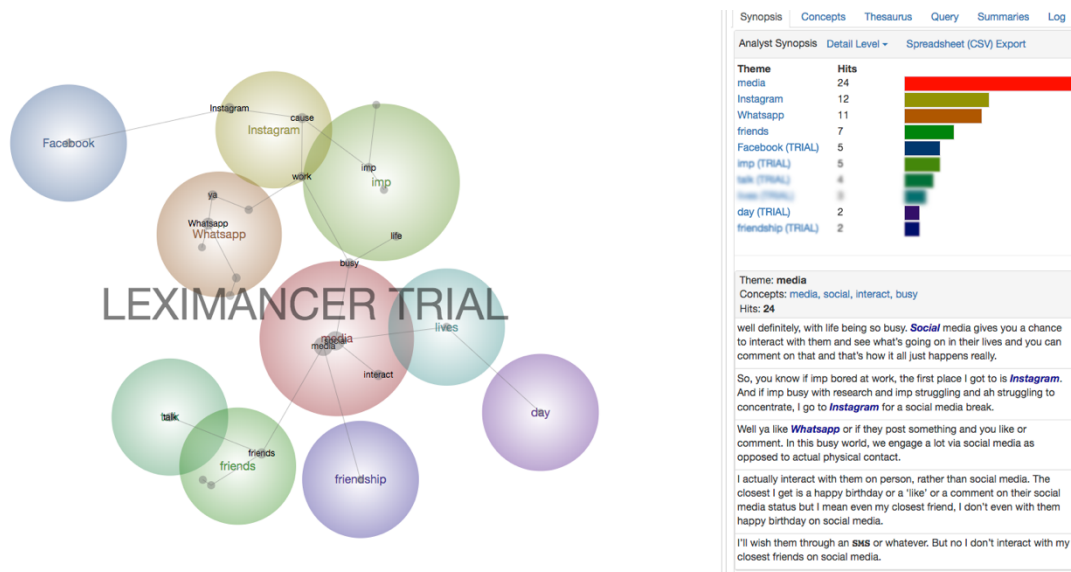
Figure 6: Results of the Leximancer Analysis for Topic 2, Q2

The concept maps indicated that social media is used for interaction, specifically Instagram and WhatsApp. There was also some indication that some participants prefer face-to-face interaction.

RQ Direct Response 4 - Majority answered 'Yes'

Social media is defined as, "an internet-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas and information, such as videos and photos, via computer, or smartphone via web-based software or web application, often utilising it for messaging." (Investopedia, 2018), in this context, WhatsApp is classified as a platform for social media.

Table 11: Do you interact with your friends more over social media, than you do in person?

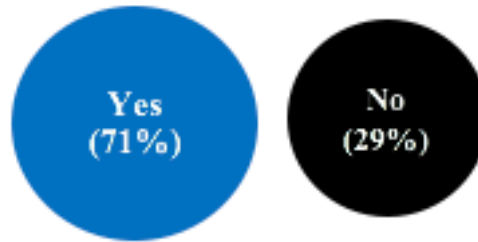| Rank	Social Media Channel	Frequency
1	Social Media	12 (71%)
2	Face-to-face	5 (29%)
3	WhatsApp	6 (35%)
4	Calls	2 (12%)

The clear majority (71%) confirmed, as shown in Table 6, that they interact with their friends using their SNSs, including WhatsApp, more than they do face-to-face. The reasons provided for this shift of interaction is because many participants stated that their lives are 'too busy' and so, SNSs provide a short and medium-term solution to interact with their friends, in-between seeing them in person.

Participant 1 explained that "*it's a way to communicate with people, especially if you don't have time* [to see them]". Participant 2 added, "*we see each other, like once every two weeks or once a month. So, you know, we're always 'liking' each other's posts every single day*".

WhatsApp is considered a more personal SNS allowing for one-on-one conversations with their close friends, and Facebook is not considered personal enough to warrant

those kind of conversations. Participant 4 said, "*Facebook, not so much, it's not as personal you know? When you are talking 'close friends', you are talking one-on-one. So, it's more WhatsApp*".

Participant 1 alluded to an interesting thought that the SNSs have the ability to provide a type of virtual reality in which users see all the activity of their friends online and therefore feel they have 'caught-up'. She explained that "*Instagram gives me the illusion that I've been seeing her* [a friend she has not seen in two years] *because I've been tracking what's happening in her life*". This allows the participants to immediately 'relate' when they see their friends in person.

Participant 14 explained that social media is very useful in her situation because she lives in a different province to her close friends, so her SNSs are important for their communication.

Some of the participants (29%) expressed that they would rather interact with their friends offline. "*Social media does not maintain the friendships, it's just for sharing jokes and stuff…the friendship needs to be maintained personally*".

5.4.2.3   General observation

Two of the participants referred to what they termed "*social media breaks*" and in their contexts, this phrase was used to indicate how they use social media to take a break from work.

5.4.2.4   Summary results for Research Question 2

Most the participants interact with their close friends using their various SNSs rather than seeing each other in person because people have busy lives and are not able to see each other as often as they may prefer.

Facebook seems to be the 'default' SNS account to have to keep up with family and friends in a more passive capacity, whereas, Instagram is the visual SNS which many of the participants seem to prefer in terms of being active members of the platform. WhatsApp is utilised mainly for one-on-one conversations in the absence of face-to-face interactions.

It seems that most of the participants have most of their close friends on their various SNSs and maintain the friendships using these sites. Whether it is the illusion that the

participants feel connected to their friends by virtue of simply seeing updates of their lives or by purely 'liking' or 'commenting' on their statuses, both are likely to provide a feeling of connectedness to their friends. Since their offline interactions are often informed by what they have seen in their social media feeds, it is reasonable to conclude that these relationships are in fact, partially maintained through social media.

5.5 Results for Research Question 3 (Topic 3)

Question: To what extent do higher income females share beliefs and norms with their peers?

This question aimed to understand the nature of the higher income (part of the sampling criteria is for black females to have disposable income) social groups and explore the nature of their group norms. Especially, the binding factors between these women and their reinforcing behaviours were of interest.

5.5.1 Results for Topic 3, Question 1

Question: Do you and your friends have the same beliefs about life, career and success?

The purpose of this question was to establish whether the social group is bound psychologically through similar beliefs.

5.5.1.1   Leximancer Results
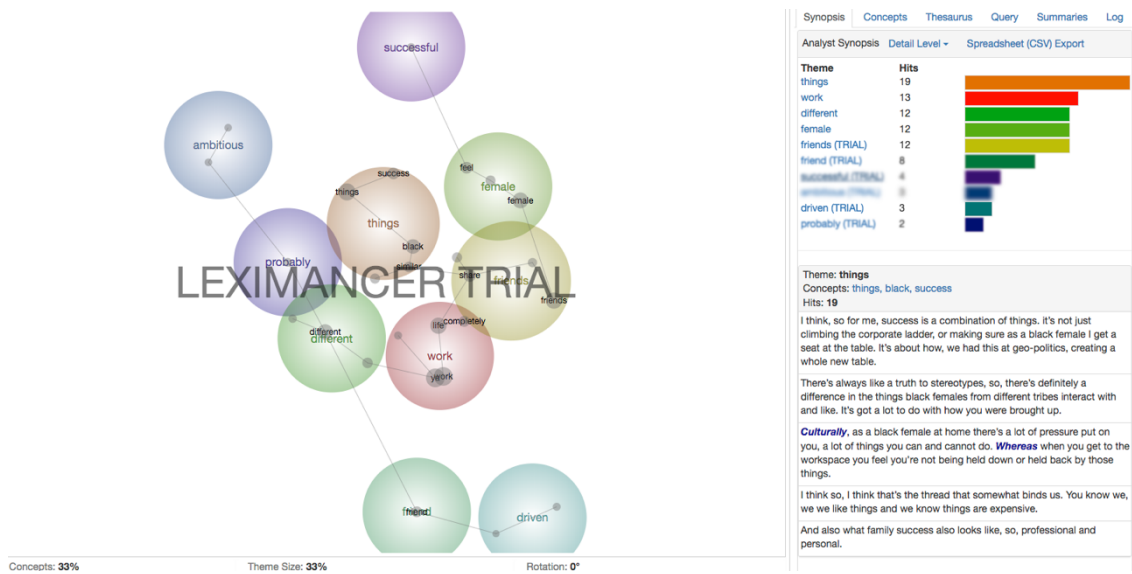
Figure 7: Results of the Leximancer Analysis for Topic 3, Q1

The concept bubbles indicated the importance of the themes "work" and "successful", as well as "ambitious" and "driven" as key shared characteristics of their friends. The manual analysis provides more detail.

5.5.1.2   Manual Thematic Content Analysis Results
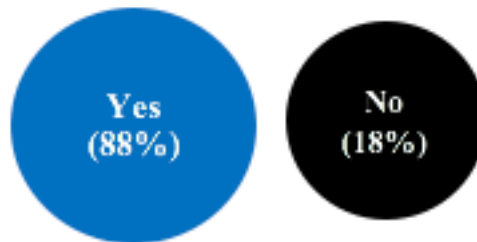
RQ Direct Response 5 -Majority answered 'Yes'

Fifteen (15) participants confirmed that their friends share similar beliefs about life, career and success. Two (2) mentioned their friends have completely different beliefs and one (1) said some of her close friends share similar beliefs, some do not. Table 7 categorises the reasons for their answers.

Table 12: Do you and your friends have the same beliefs about life, career and success?

Rank	Categories	Frequency	Description

1	Characteristics	11	The close friends share similar characteristics such as 'independent' and 'driven' and that is why they believe they share similar ideas about life, career and success.
2	Professional Success	10	Words describing professional achievements or desires based on their similar characteristics, such as 'entrepreneur' or 'money'.
3	Personal Success	7	Words describing shared beliefs about what constitutes personal success, such as 'PHD attainment' and 'family success' or 'to be happy'.
4	Different Beliefs	6	Words describing why the friends do not share the same beliefs. Such reasons include 'concept of success means different things to different people'.
5	Different methods	6	Words describing that even though their beliefs might be similar, the way they achieve is different. The 'how'.
6	Background	3	Words describing why the friends share similar beliefs in relation to their background and upbringing.

Most of the participants (88%) confirmed that their social groups share the same or similar beliefs about life, career and success, predominantly because they share similar personality characteristics.

Table 13: Participants explain their shared beliefs about life, career and success

Participant	Phrase
1	*"That's the thread that binds us… we recognise that you can't wait for somebody else to provide, you must provide for yourself".*
2	*"We definitely aspire the same way and like certain things that are similar".*
3	*"We do want a career, we want to be ambitious and we would like to have a lot of the same things, but it's all done in our own and unique sort of ways".*
5	*"[We] definitely, have the same beliefs about what life should look like and should be, where we want to go with our careers and what success looks like".*
7	*"We're all working hard and aspiring to be better leaders".*
10	*"I feel I connect a lot more with people that I find I have a similar belief structure".*
12	*"The aspiration to be successful is definitely there and its shared, but it's not wanting the same things".*
14	*"That part is almost the same as our value system. Most of my friends*

	studied engineering and I kind of studied the same [construction], *so our way of thinking like black and white, is the same".*
16	*"We come from similar backgrounds in terms of family life and growing up with a black family, branching out into the Western world, and trying to make a name for yourself. So yes, I'd definitely say we share the same views".*
17	*"I think we all have the desire to be successful, but it's not on the same wave length* [success means different things]. *Some friends feel that just being happy is enough, you don't have to have all the money in the world. Some friends do feel that having money* [for] *all your heart's desires* [and to buy] *a good home and car – that's your measure of success".*

A few participants do not believe that they share the same beliefs because success means different things to them. Participant 4 explained: "S*uccess is a combination of things. It's not just climbing the corporate ladder, or making sure as a black female, I get a seat at the table. It's about creating a whole new table."* And she continued to offer examples of their different concepts of success: "H*ow do I make a meaningful difference outside this organisation? For my other friends, it's to be the CEO of the organisation they work for. Another close friend wants to be a housewife and success for her is to be able to balance her kids and husband and family".*

Participant 11 also added, "*If I want to be the CEO of Standard Bank, it doesn't mean my friend, who is also in banking, wants to be the CEO of Nedbank. As people, we are very different".* However, this particular participant confirmed that they do share similar characteristics, "*my girlfriends are very ambitious. I am very ambitious*" but it seems they do not similar definitions of success or goals.

Many of the participants (59%) described their mutual desire for professional success, using words such as 'career', 'money' and 'entrepreneur'. A smaller but significant portion of the participants (41%) expressed their mutual desire for personal success which was described as "to be happy", and to acquire materialistic things, to advance their education and have a family.

5.5.2   Results for Topic 3, Question 2

Question: Do you and your group have a certain way of doing things that is unique to your group?

The purpose of this question was to explore whether the social groups operate in a unique way that creates and reinforces group norms, as well as affirms the group membership.

5.5.2.1   Leximancer Results
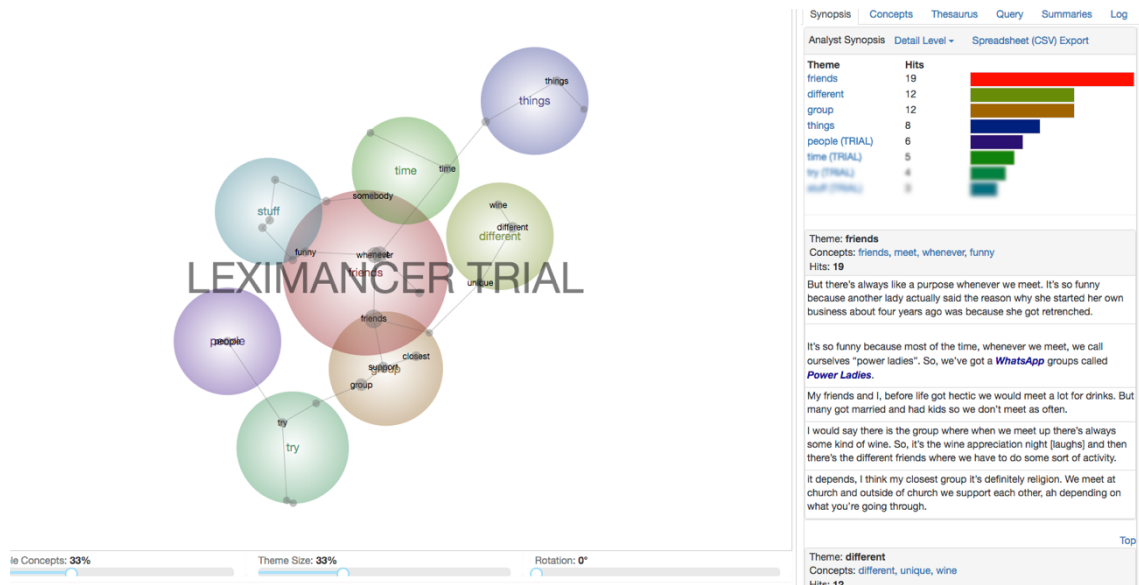
Figure 8: Results of the Leximancer Analysis for Topic 3, Q2

The concept maps produced were not clear in terms of responses to this question, however, it mentioned through the quotes pertaining to 'their' friends, that unique group features included unique in-group naming, going-out together. There were features mentioned when they do get together such as 'wine' and 'religion'. This output required further exploration.

5.5.2.2   Manual Thematic Content Analysis Results
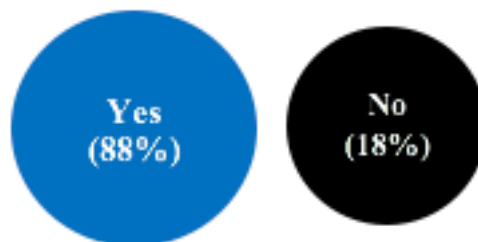
RQ Direct Response 6 - Majority answered 'Yes'

Most of the participants confirmed that their social group had something unique about them. Many described shared characteristics which they enjoy about their group including "loud", "bubbly", "supportive", "witty" and "spontaneous". Participant 1 stated that "*we are bubbly and tend to attract each other because of our loudness. I feel normal around them*".

Table 14: Do you and your group have a certain way of doing things that is unique to your group?

Rank	Categories	Frequency	Description	Examples
1	Perceived unique group activity	30	Activities mentioned which the participant believes is unique to their group, at least in what activities they do, and how they do them.	Attending events; going-out; stokvels; wine evenings; group lunches; entrepreneurship talks
2	Group characteristics	27	Features or attributes of the group operating towards each member.	Aspirational; Supportive; adventurous; way of speaking; nicknames; creative

Most of the participants shared opinions about what they perceived to be unique group activities, such as Participant 2 described the purposeful get-togethers she has with her close friends. They call themselves the 'Power Ladies' (unique in-group naming) and tend to organise a get-together monthly, and each event has a different topic that is important to one or more of the members. Often, they involve guest speakers to address the group on the topic, such as a financial advisor or a psychologist specialising in depression. These social groups are highly supportive of each other and mobilising in getting things done.

Participant 4 believes her social group is unique in that they are bound by religion, and their socialising is woven in and around their church activities. She mentioned that she values the support her group gives her, from life advice to actual emotional and physical support.

Participant 5 expressed that her friends get together once a month for a dinner club, and each member hosts this club in a different month. She too explained the inclusion of 'older women' who give advice and talk about life at these dinners.

Two participants mentioned the use of *Stokvels*, which in their case, means that the women in each social group, contribute a certain amount of money into their shared fund annually. This bulk amount is then used for whatever cause is agreed upon, which could include a holiday trip for the group, or a contribution to a charity or even to the education of one or more of the ladies. They believe in giving back to their community as well. These groups operate more as families than purely as friends.

5.5.2.3 General observations

There were two stand-out features from this question, one was that some of the women seem to change their behaviour in the presence of different friends, like chameleons would change their colours in different circumstances. Participant 13 described the unique and tailored way of speaking and behaving with each of her different friends: "*It's different for all of them. The one in London, I have to be very posh and act very lady-like* [around her]. *The other two, it sounds very weird but I'm ghetto with them. With one of them I would walk in and say 'Wasssuup' but in my language, you know? The other one I am like 'yo, homs, what's up?"* with each of them it's different. It's kind of cool".

Additionally, participant 16 referred to the use of '*vernac' (short* for vernacular which means slang*)* when speaking to each other in personal time, whereas they speak English at work. This means that these women speak to each other using a tailored variation of their language, a mixture of isiZulu, Sotho and '*broken English'*.

5.5.2.4 Summary results for Research Question 3

Most of these participants share the same or similar beliefs about life, career and success. Some believe that their definitions of success differ from their friends, but this does not negate the fact that they all share similar personal characteristics such as 'ambition'. The participants all seem to take comfort in the fact that, because their friends are ambitious, they will achieve whatever everyone's version of success looks like. The social groups are incredibly supportive of each other's successes.

Additionally, these participants expressed that although they all share the drive to be 'successful', how they get there, what their priorities are and when they achieve their pinnacle of success will differ. They acknowledge that each woman is on her own journey in this life.

The participant descriptions of their unique group features, especially group activities and the use of vernacular is indicative of the presence of unique group norms that are reinforced, and affirm group membership, especially because these women seem proud of their 'unique' social groups and how they operate together.

5.6   Results for Research Question 4 (Topic 4)

Question: To what extent do higher income females compare themselves with their peers?

This question aimed to establish whether social comparison exists within these female social groups, and if it does, to what extent does it exist. The nature of the comparison was also of interest to the researcher. The purpose of this research question was to extend the current global research into social comparison into a new and unique geographic, and multi-ethnic culturally diverse context to validate applicability. The social comparison also lends itself to potential antecedent motivations for purchase intent and ultimately purchase behaviour.

5.6.1   Results for Topic 4, Question 1

Question: Do you ever compare yourself to your friends?

The purpose of this question was to establish whether the women compare themselves to their close friends offline, and to explore the aspects with which they compare themselves.

5.6.1.1   Leximancer Results
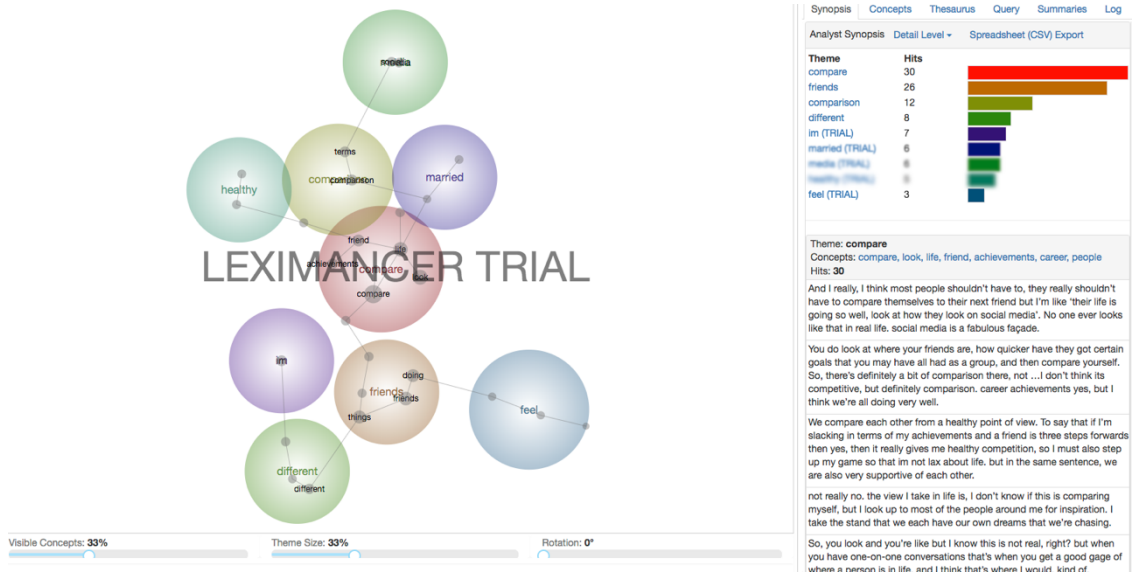
Figure 9: Results of the Leximancer Analysis for Topic 4, Q1

The concept maps showed that the participants compared themselves to others on subjects such as life, achievements and career. In addition, "healthy" was a term used to describe the kind of comparison done, in that the comparisons with others are not insidious. The responses are evaluated in detail below.

5.6.1.2   Manual Thematic Content Analysis Results
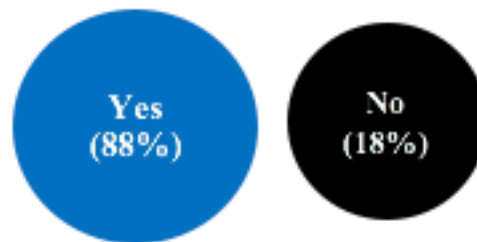
RQ Direct Response 7 - Majority Answered "Yes"

Fifteen (15) women confirmed comparing themselves to their friends, at least at one point in time. It was stated that these comparisons, however, are not necessarily intentional. The participants based their comparisons mainly on career achievements, using their close friends progress as benchmarks of their own progress. Participant 1 explained: "*If I'm slacking in terms of my achievements, and a friend is three steps ahead, then yes it really gives me healthy competition to also step up my game*". Another example from Participant 16: "*we use the comparison to kind of push each*

other. We're always encouraging each other to do the most, do the best and strive for everything that you want. The comparison can come at a stage where let's say we're on the same level, and then one of us progresses more than the other. When I see her it kind of gives me that push that you know, if she can do it, I can do it too".

Table 15: Do you ever compare yourself to your friends?

Rank	Categories	Frequency	Description	Examples
1	Aspects compared on	25	Participants compare themselves to their friends based on these aspects	Materialistic possessions; body image; travel; marriage; career
2	Objectives of comparison	18	What are they comparing to achieve?	To benchmark their progress against another; motivation
3	Justification for comparisons	14	Reasons why they compare themselves on the above aspects.	Age; upbringing; education; race/cultural differences; loneliness

A few of the women noted that they believed their comparisons were healthy and not sinister in any way, mainly because they acknowledge that each woman is on her own journey. Participant 4 explained, "*It's not that I want to do better than her, I just want to do better".* The other topics that were compared include marriage, material acquisitions, body image, children, travel and fame.

When explaining why they compare themselves to their close friends, some participants mentioned it was because they 'have the same upbringing' or went 'to the same university'. Participant 8 explained: "I *does happen sometimes when I'm like, 'oh my gosh, I don't think I'm moving as quick as I should', and not just with my [close] friends, but also my classmates, people of similar age group to me*".

The researcher believes that is relates strongly to age and structural homophily. The logic would follow as such, 'if we are the same age, had the same opportunities at school and university, then we should logically be at the same level now'. However, life does not progress equally, and at the same time for everyone.

Social comparison seems to be related to age amongst this group. A few participants mentioned that they used to compare themselves when they were younger but now as they have gotten older the comparisons are less. Participant 10 explained: "*I used to [compare] a lot. Most of my friends are also CAs [chartered accountant] so, coming out of varsity, we've all been progressing in our careers. I used to compare myself, early days, after articles. You almost track yourself against them to see how you're doing versus where they are. [But] since I've discovered more what my purpose is and where I wanna go, I've stopped comparing myself*". Participant 9 also said, *"I've learnt not to compare on material things and looks. It's an age thing".*

Participant 14 added an interesting take that because *"everyone has a different journey, so I can't compare my life to their lives".*

5.6.1.3   The link between group norms and social comparison

Participant 14 described a situation where their group discourages competitive behaviour and if any 'newly introduced member' displays competitive behaviour, they "*quickly fall out* [of the group*]. It's very clear, we complement each other*".

5.6.2   Results for Topic 4, Question 2

Question: Do you compare yourself to your friends on social media?

The purpose of this question was to establish whether social comparison occurs online, as well as offline.

5.6.2.1 Leximancer Results
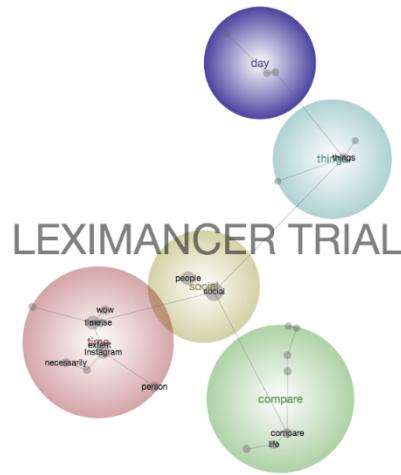
Figure 10: Results of the Leximancer Analysis for Topic 4, Q2

The concept maps were unclear about a direct response to the question; however the bubbles indicated that comparison on social media exists but is not highly prevalent. However, where it does occur online, it is mostly on Instagram. It was also noted that there is scepticism coming through in the quotes indicating that some participants believe that posts sent out and profiles on social media are framed to show the best of other people's lives, not the reality and therefore it is a reason for restricting comparison to a mainly offline activity in this research. The concepts are explored below.

5.6.2.2 Manual Thematic Content Analysis Results
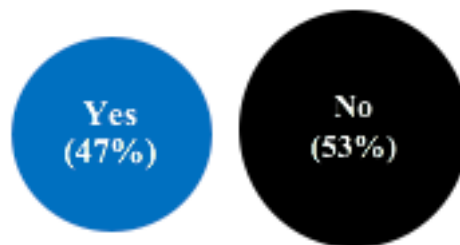
RQ Direct Response 8 - Majority answered 'No'

Most the participants (53%) confirmed that they do not compare themselves to their friends on social media, whereas the remaining 47% confirmed that they do. The main reasons provided for not comparing using social media was that the information and

profiles maintained are purposeful and intentional. Participant 1 said: *"People are very intentional with what they put on social media…whatever you're seeing on Instagram, that's only 10% of who that person really is"*. And participant 4 said: *"I mean social media, it's not real, a lot of it, right? I think I'm quite conscious of that"*.

Their perceived inaccurate representations of real life dissuade the participants from taking what they see literally. These participants prefer face-to-face interactions and that comparison comes from what is perceived as 'real'. Participant 10 said: '*Comparison happens through discussions, actual conversations'* and they too relate this concept to age.

Participant 3 included an interesting thought that, even though she acknowledges that *"people put the best of themselves on social media"*, she still compares herself, knowing that what she sees is not the whole picture. She uses these ideal depictions as her motivation. Of those who do compare using social media, participant 8 said of the public figures or important members of society that she follows, *"shuu, people are living great lives, you know? Wonder what they do for a living or how they make their money"*.

5.6.2.3   General observations

Whilst some participants compared with each other and insist it is from a healthy perspective, other participants acknowledge that there is underlying competition, but it seems to be kept in check by the supportive element of the group. These women, whilst having different paths to walk, still experience human nature to compete, but are also cognisant of the fact that they will not necessarily achieve their successes alone. Their social groups are critical in helping them get there, through the support and motivation provided.

Social comparison, loneliness and perceived social pressure also seem to be connected in this research. As participant 12 put it: "*[I compare] all the time. When all of them had children and I didn't, I felt left out. So, as much as the decision to have a child was mine, it was definitely influenced by the fact that 'its Friday night and I don't have anybody to go out with because everybody else is at home with their kids and husbands or partners'"*.

Another interesting behaviour that came through this study, is that one of the participants actively avoids Instagram because she tends to compare herself and this

elicits a negative self-evaluation. Participant 6 describes: "*I don't use Instagram for that reason. I see something and I'm like 'fuck, why not me?' and I can't stand that, so I've literally blocked it.*

5.6.3 Results for Topic 4, Question 3

Question: Are you inspired by your close friends, or made to feel envious or demotivated in some way?

The purpose of this question was to establish whether social comparison was mainly upward or downward comparison.

5.6.3.1 Leximancer Results
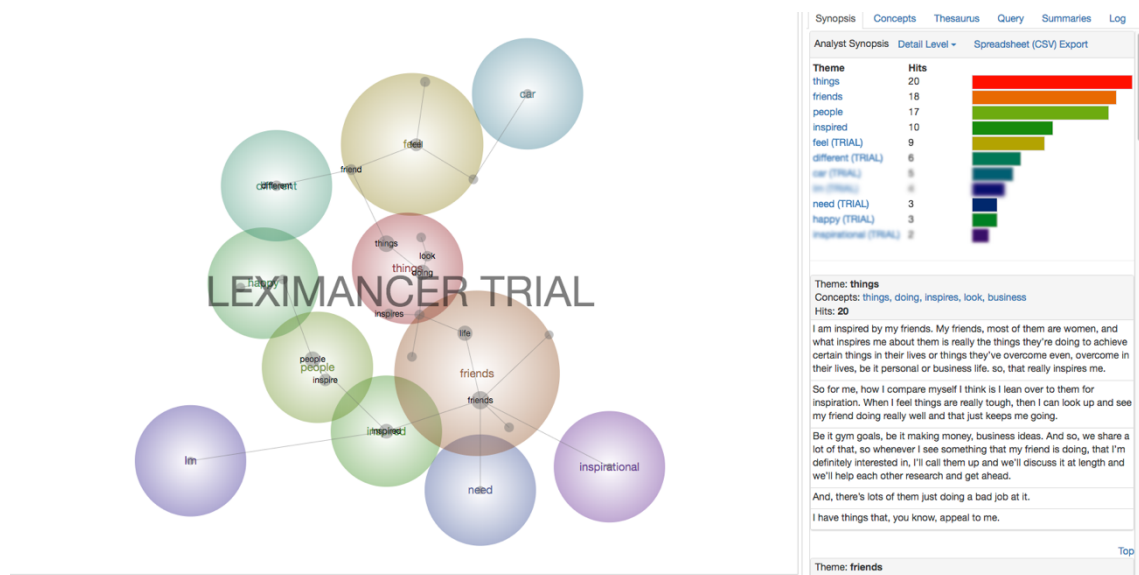
Figure 11: Results of the Leximancer Analysis for Topic 4, Q3

The concept map indicated that inspiration is the main emotion felt by the participants when thinking about their friends. This is explored further below.

RQ Direct Response 9 - Majority answered 'Inspired'

All the participants commented that their close friends inspire them in one way or another. Because of their mutually ambitious nature and drive, they seem to inspire each other to achieve. Participant 8 said: "*I am very inspired by my friends. We are a group of very ambitious ladies. We've got big career aspirations and personal development goals*". And participant 7 said: "W*hen things are really tough, then I can look up and see my friend doing really well, and that just keeps me going*". Participant 11 added: "M*y friends, most of them are women, and what inspires me about them is really the things they're doing to achieve certain things in their lives or things they have overcome in their lives. So, that really inspires me*".

The participants often used positive words of affirmation to describe the type of friends they have, including *"I have great friends"*, *"I have kick-ass friends"*, and *"the friends I keep have such great minds and good hearts"*. This lends itself to 'choice homophily' where the participants acknowledge the value of their friends and choose to maintain or build the friendships. Participant 17 said: "*I surround myself with good, positive thinking people. So, with everything that they do, the people I have known for years, to see them do great and prosper; I like it*".

When explaining why their friends inspire them, many participants referred to their shared personality characteristics which include words such as "determined", "persistent", "ethical", and "brave". Additionally, because some friends have "overcome challenges" and are "self-made", which are all inspiring achievements for some of the participants.

5.6.3.3 Summary results for Research Question 4

Higher income females compare themselves with their peers both offline (mainly) and on social media. Their comparisons are concentrated on career achievements mainly

and this is possibly related to age. All participants confirmed that their friends are inspirational to them.

5.7 Results for Research Question 5 (Topic 5)

Question: To what extent do the online social groups influence their member's purchase behaviour?

This question aimed to explore whether the female social groups, in this unique context, are influential on their member's purchase decisions. The researcher sought to determine whether these social groups are more influential on each other than social media adverts are. The purpose was to understand the nature of the group influence and the extent of the power in facilitating actual decision-making. The researcher wanted to ultimately understand whether the social groups recommendations are in fact, more powerful than adverts in nudging the consumer along the path to purchase.

5.7.1 Results for Topic 5, Question 1

Question: Would you say that you are more influenced by adverts or your friends into buying things?

The purpose of this interview question was to explore whether the participants consider their friends' recommendations as more influential on their buying decisions, or adverts.

5.7.1.1   Leximancer Results

Figure 12: Results of the Leximancer Analysis for Topic 5, Q1

The concept maps indicated that friends are more influential than adverts on purchase behaviour. This is explored further below.

5.7.1.2   Manual Thematic Content Analysis Results
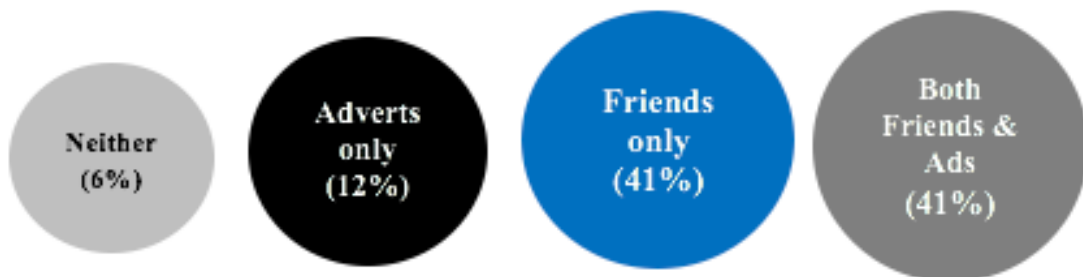
RQ Direct Response 10 -Majority answered 'Friends'

Most of the participants confirmed that recommendations by their friends are more influential than adverts (41%), the other 41% confirmed that both friend recommendations and adverts are equally as influential. Only two participants confirmed that they felt adverts were more influential than their friends' recommendations.

Instagram seems to be the main SNS where adverts are highly influential, and Facebook is more a platform for the recommendations. Participant 1 explained that the relevance of Instagram advertising is high because websites she visited tracked her

using "*cookies*". This then allows the advertisers to tailor and place the adverts in the most relevant online channels at the right time. The adverts are then more "*appealing to the eye*" because of relevance, which leads her to click on the advert to "*check it out*".

The participants who prefer recommendations from their friends defend their preference by insisting there is an element of trust. Others prefer crowd-sourcing recommendations, so they will post a question and ask for recommendations from a broader group of friends (not just close friends) on Facebook, and then they receive many responses from people who recommend a product or service and have personally tried it. Social proof seems to be important in this decision-making. Participant 3 put it like this: "*I prefer to get referrals and recommendations from other friends. People who have actually dealt with other people,*" and Participant 6 added that she prefers recommendations from her friends "*based on their experience*". Participant 12 added: "W*ord of mouth is more powerful. Friends definitely. If somebody says, 'you, that washing powered is great, and it doesn't harm your hands and it's a good buy', you know, I'd probably believe it more*". Participant 6 explained her preference for recommendations over adverts: "*I don't see the adverts, it looks like everything else and its annoying*".

Other than adverts and friend recommendations, participants mentioned other influencers, including '*information pages*' such as travel pages or '*influencers/celebrities*'. Participant 2 explained: "*I like property and I've invested a lot in property, so I always follow nice property pages*".

A general observation is that three participants mentioned that simply seeing an advert and hearing a recommendation is not sufficient to motivate their purchase. They only purchase if the participant is 'in the market' for a product or service – that is when they are more susceptible to both adverts and recommendations. However, further to this they conduct research of their own. Participant 9 summarised this action by stating: "*Nothing in particular grabs me, unless I'm looking for something in particular*". Recommendations and general discussions with their friends who have tried it before, is part of this research, as is internet-based research.

5.7.2 Results for Topic 5, Question 2

Question: If one of your close friends shared an image on social media and made a recommendation for you to try a product or service, would you be more inclined to try it at least once?

The purpose of this interview question was to extend the concept of influence to a more real example, to verify the answers from the previous question.

5.7.2.1 Leximancer Results
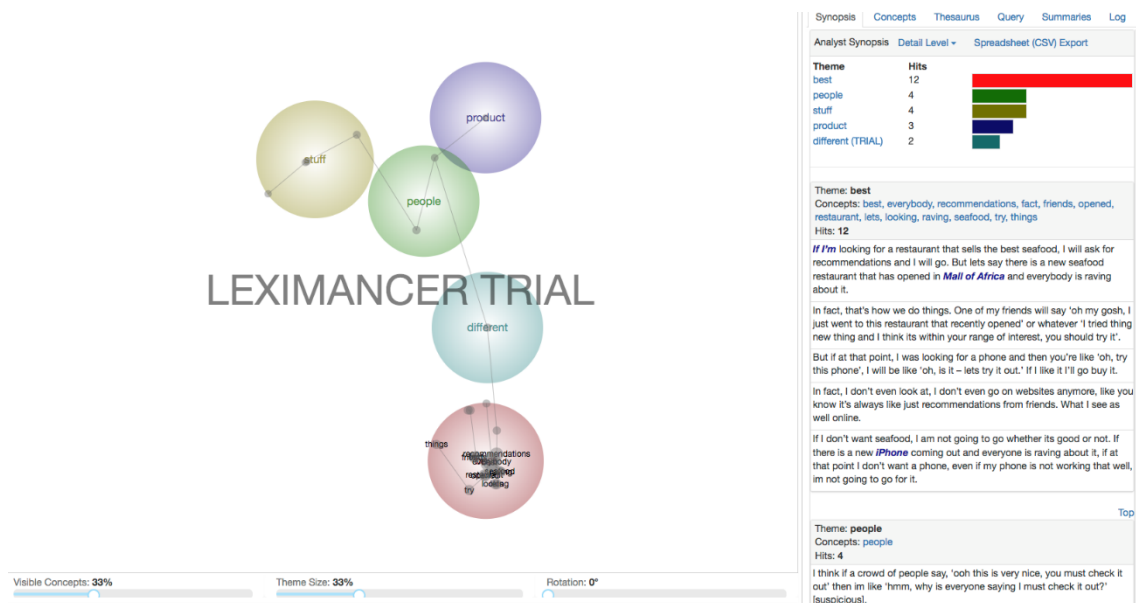
Figure 13: Results of the Leximancer Analysis for Topic 5, Q2

The concept map did not indicate a clear response for the question, however, the quotes indicated that recommendations increase the salience of the product or service, and affect inclination to purchase. This is explored further below.
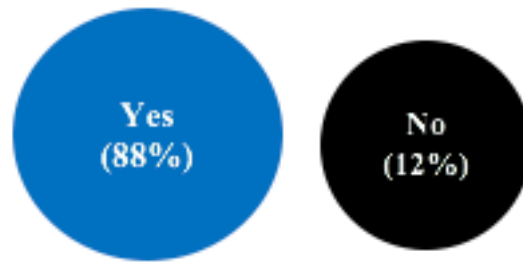
RQ Direct Response 11 -Majority answered 'yes'

The clear majority (88%) confirmed that they would be more inclined to try a product or service at least once, if one of their close friends recommended it to them. Participant 2 said: "A*lways, that is how we try new things actually. One friend might go on a conference and post about it or tell us and say 'we went away to some resort somewhere, and it was really good. Let's go, we'll take our kids and families there".* Another participant mentioned that prefers to look at comments and reviews of products/services online to see what others have to say, and if they highly recommend it *"that's when I go like aaah! This is not just the first person who has tried it, let me give it a go. I am more willing then to try it out".* Participant 17 added, "*We do share reviews about different products. We make recommendations for something and against something".* A caveat to this, however, is some participants mentioned that only if they have the budget to try it, would they even consider it.

5.7.3 Results for Topic 5, Question 3

Question: Are you ever influenced to buy something, after comparing yourself to a friend?

The purpose of this interview question was to establish whether social comparison was an influential driver in purchasing decisions.
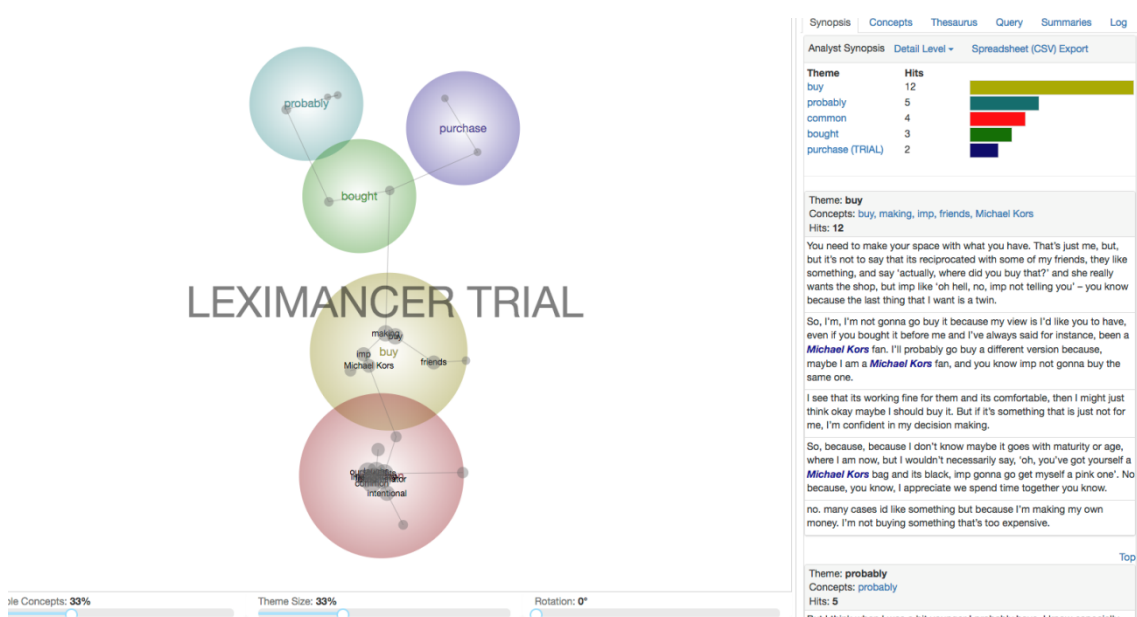
Figure 14: Results of the Leximancer Analysis for Topic 5, Q3

The concept map did not display the themes 'probably' as a response to the question but the quotes indicated that purchase as a result of comparison does not occur. Clarity on the answers require further investigation provided below.

5.7.3.2   Manual Thematic Content Analysis Results
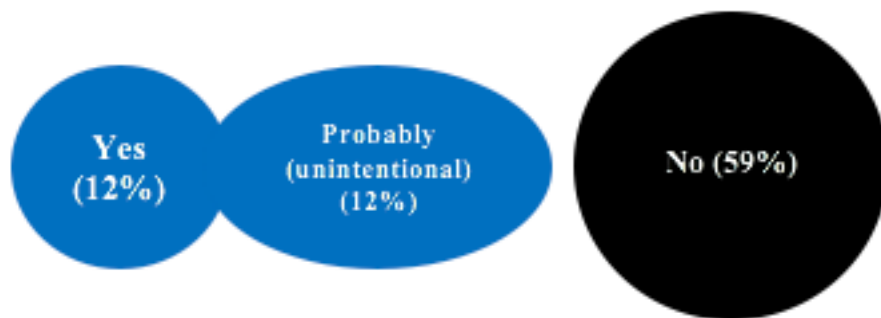
RQ Direct Response 12 - Majority answered 'No'

Most of the participants (59%) confirmed that they do not buy things because of comparing themselves to others. The minority (41%), but still a significant number, confirmed that they do buy because of comparing themselves, however, it is not always intentional. In other words, they are not always consciously aware of the motivation behind their purchase. Participant 10 explains: "*I found myself asking where*

people bought their things, because I wanted it as well. Ya, it's so weird how, when you grow up, certain things elude you." This participant thought long and hard about her answer because she had never thought about this motivation for purchase before. She seemed genuinely surprised at her own response to this question.

Age has risen its proverbial head again in these set of answers. Of the participants who denied buying because of comparing, many confirmed that this was something that they did when they were younger. Participant 3 said: "*I think that when you are younger, you are like 'well everyone is doing it, everyone has got this and they are all fantastic, so let's go for it'. I mean, if I was twenty, I would have gotten a fidget spinner. Now? Why would I even bother? I don't need that in my life".* Participant 2 said: "*I have this friend, she is a bit of a slay queen: a diva, she likes expensive things and has sugar daddies. They own everything without working for it. She's the type that will wear things like long weaves and expensive handbags and she always flashes it around. I bought my first Louis Vuitton purse, it was about R6,000, I think because of her. I wish I could take it back and use my money somewhere else".*

Another reason provided for buying because of comparison, is because the target is perceived to be similar (homophily) to the participant. Participant 12 explains: "I*f a face cream works for somebody else and they say, 'this thing is perfect', I'd probably be inclined to [buy] because that person looks like me or is closer [similar] to me. I feel like if it works for her, then it surely would work for me".* Expanding further on this concept, racial homophily may well lend itself to this case because black women are interested in the skin and hair care that other black women use, because their needs are similar.

5.7.3.3   Summary results on research question 5

Close friendship groups are highly influential on their members' purchase decisions. Recommendations from people who the participants trust, perceive similarities with and are perhaps in similar life stages are more influential than adverts. Homophily is a clear link between social comparison and purchase behaviour regarding skin and hair care (physical attributes).

5.8   Results for Research Question 6 (Topic 6)

Question: To what extent are online social groups influential in brand-specific purchases?

This question aimed to determine the nature of the content shared on social media, between these social groups, and to determine whether the content is more brand-specific or more generic in terms of sharing products rather than brands. This question sought to gain an understanding of what is natural in the black South African female's online social interactions.

5.8.1 Results of Topic 6, Question 1

Question: Are there any types of purchase items (products or brands etc) which your group likes to share a lot on social media?

The purpose of this question was to understand whether these social groups share more generic items on their social pages, or specific brands.

5.8.1.1 Leximancer Results
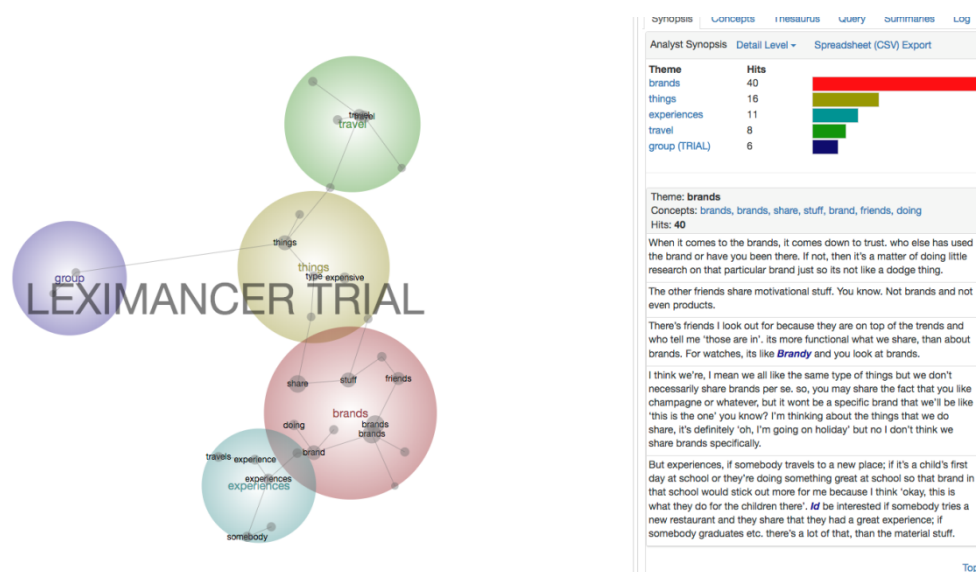
Figure 15: Results of the Leximancer Analysis for Topic 6, Q1

The concept map indicated that brands are important. However, the quotes indicated that in fact, the frequency of the word 'brand' is related to reasons against its importance. Experiences are emphasised as important concepts. This is explained further in detail below.
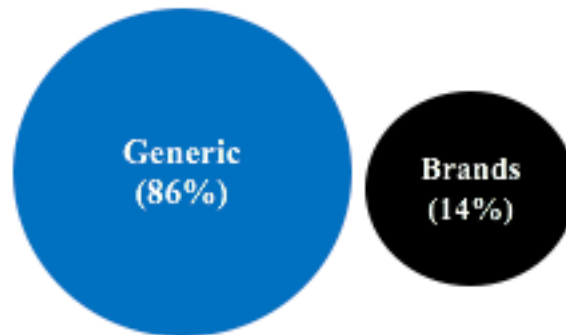
RQ Direct Response 13 - Majority answered 'Generic'

Mainly generic products and services, as opposed to specific brands, are shared across the SNSs. Participant 1 said: "*I'm not a brand-person as such, I'm about quality. So, as long as every time I wash it, the ink doesn't, you know, fade.*" And participant 5 added: "*I mean we like the same types of things, but we don't necessarily share brands. You may like champagne, but it won't be a specific brand that we will be like "this is the one' you know?".* Participant 6 added further to this concept with her response: *"Its more functional what we share, than about brands"* and participant 8 concluded with: "*I wouldn't say we're particularly brand conscious. If something looks good and it feels good, and its within our price range, then definitely*".

The most shared generic topic is travel, followed by fashion, hair products, restaurants and exercise. Participant 1 said: "*Travel, that's my poison for sure",* and participant 2 added: "*I went to Hong Kong, Beijing and Shanghai. So obviously, you share photos online and even on our WhatsApp group. When I came back, I was like okay guys let's do China.* Participant 14 concluded with: "W*e are at the age where we explore a lot with travel. So, we share a lot of recommendations. We're always looking at new things, affordable travel. We want to explore more".*

Participants and their friends share products or services related to their mutual interests (topical homophily) which serve a function regarding that interest. In other words, if a new pair of Asics running shoes are released, the participant who enjoys running with her group will share it; however they are not brand loyal. They will share any brand provided the product's functions provide what is required.

Participant 3 added another angle: "*I would not say people look at brands. It's a lot of exclusive products that are put out there that you can only get online or at a specific*

shop, and you can't find it anywhere else". In other words, it's not about the brands, rather, the exclusivity of the products. Some women do not want to wear an item of clothing that is easily purchased at any franchise store and would rather buy a one-of-a-kind item if they can afford it.

The only time brands were important was in the purchase of luxury items, as participant 6 phrased her response: "*Watches, bags and shoes are about brands, but for everything else its more about functionality and comfort"*. Alcohol is also mentioned as a brand-specific item for this participant who stated: "*Everyone wants to drink the expensive stuff"*.

Finally, the last topics that are often shared are more about the 'experiences' than products or services specifically. If friends have great experiences, then those are shared amongst the group and are important in the decision-making. Participant 12 explained: "*Who would share brands, I am not moved by that. But experiences, if somebody travels to a new place; if it's a child' first day at school or they're doing something great at school so that brand [of school] would stick out for me because I think 'okay, this is what they do for the children there'. I'd be interested if somebody tries a new restaurant and they share that they have a great experience"*.

5.8.1.3   Summary results on research question 6

Specific brands are not often shared amongst the participants and their friends, but rather products or services that serve a particular purpose in relation to their shared interests and lifestyles. These participants are not necessarily brand-loyal and change their purchase between brands if the functionality of a specific product is perceived to serve them better.

The most common topic that the participants enjoyed sharing and being involved with are experiences, including travel. More specifically, experiences they can do together or with their families. If the recommendations for a travel destination are good, these are highly influential on the recipients in the social group.

Brand mentions are related more to luxury items rather than everyday items and experiences.

5.9   Conclusion on Findings

Main findings of topic 1: Ninety-four percent of the participants agreed that their close friends were similar to them mainly regarding their mutual interests, and secondary was similarity in terms of characteristics. Eighty-eight percent of the participants agreed that their friends shared the same desires for the same types of things, most of which centred around desires for personal growth. Lastly, 76% of the participants agreed that the composition of their social group was exclusively black females.

Main findings of topic 2: Ninety-four percent of participants, agreed that their close friends are on their social media networks as contacts. Seventy-one percent agreed that they interact with their friends more over social media, than they do in person. In other words, the SNSs are the main conduit for interaction between these social groups.

Main findings of topic 3: Most of the participants share the same or similar beliefs about life, career and success predominantly because they share similar personality characteristics. The two main categories that were borne from the data included shared beliefs about professional success and personal success. It is pertinent to note that despite participants sharing a drive to be successful, their individual definitions of success seem to be different. The participant descriptions of their unique group features, group activities and the use of personalised language for in-group communication is indicative of reinforcing group norms and affirming group membership, especially due to the evidence of pride in their comments.

Main findings of topic 4: Higher income females compare themselves with their close friends both offline and online, specifically around career achievements. The more materialistic comparisons seem to be limited to those who are younger, whereas the career achievements are a focus with those who are more mature in age. All the participants feel inspired by their friends, a result of minor upward comparisons.

Main findings of topic 5: There was a split in the participant's answers, as 41% agreed that they are mainly influenced by their friends into buying things (recommendations), and another 41% of the participants cited that both their friends' recommendations and adverts are equally as influential on them. Only 12% agreed that adverts were more influential than their friends' recommendations. However, 88% of

the participants, agreed that if one of their close friends recommended something specific to them, like a restaurant to try or a product, they would be more inclined to try it at least once. Of the participants, 59% did not agree that they make purchases as a result of comparing themselves to a friend.

Main findings of topic 6: Brands are not commonly shared amongst the participants and their social groups. They share any product or service which serves a function in relation to their shared interest. If the product or service is comfortable and of good quality, the brand is inconsequential. However, some of the participants mentioned that luxury items such as watches are more about the brand.

These results are discussed in relation to the literature that was reviewed earlier, in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the results presented in Chapter 5 in relation to the literature presented in Chapter 2. The research questions and interview schedule were guided by the literature in Chapter 2.

6.2 Homophily is present and multi-dimensional

The findings of this research reveal that homophily is present in multiple dimensions across this sample of black South African female social groups. Confirming the findings by McPherson et al. (2001) and Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954), inbreeding and baseline homophily are both present, which influence status, behaviour and value homophily because of shared geography, family ties, organisational foci, isomorphic sources and cognitive processes as detailed by McPherson et al. (2001). This study revealed multidimensional homophily, and therefore addresses Block and Grund's (2014) recommendation for further research that is required in this space.

The overarching categories included shared interests, characteristics, backgrounds and demographics. Topical homophily was a stand-out dimension in this research. The participants' social groups displayed strong racial and gender dimensions of status homophily as was also found previously by McPherson et al. (2001). These social groups shared more than one commonality, thereby supporting Curry and Dunbar's (2013) suggestion that their social groups are stronger than those who share only one similarity.

The findings also revealed that most of the participants have more than one type of social group with which they share various aspects, and each group serves a purpose in fulfilling a need for each member.

6.2.1.1 Comparison to Literature

This study confirmed all the previous research findings mentioned in the literature in Chapter 2. Most of the literature regarding racial and gender homophily is observational. However, the extent to which the occurrence of these two dimensions of

homophily exists in social groups is by choice, is not clear. Only one participant volunteered the race and gender of their friendship group, the rest only spoke of shared interests and characteristics. This suggests that this sample group did not consciously choose friends because they were black or female. The racial composition of these friendship groups may well be attributed to baseline homophily. The choice of friends were more likely because they either shared similar backgrounds, interests, languages, cultures and/or religions.

6.2.1.2   Implications of Research Findings

Homophily has been established and this means all the benefits and concerns involved in this phenomenon are present. Homophily is important to understand because of its implications on the composition of social networks, the limited flow of information which can create cultural polarisation as described by Flache and Macy (2011), and perhaps even the reinforcement and increased intensity of homophily through the lack of diverse ideas, thoughts and knowledge.

The implications for marketers is the reinforced understanding that their target market profiles would be more impactful in reaching similar others by creating 'like audiences' specifically focusing on 'friend of a friend' campaigns and retargeting them with similar messaging that appealed to a specific profile. An example profile: Thando is a 23-year old black female who often researches, interacts with and purchases beauty products through websites and social media. Her close friendship group is homophilous based on interests and shared values, and is mirrored as such on social media. Brand X can then create Thando's profile on Facebook advertising services, select interest-targeting around the topic of beauty, and then create 'like' audiences for Facebook to identify similar others interested in beauty. Brand X then targets the initial advertising message to Thando and her 'similar others', and thereafter Brand X employs retargeting of different messages to those similar others who interacted with the adverts in some way. Social media is a machine that feeds off the concept of homophily.

The other alternative to machine-led advertising on social media, is to actively engage people and their friends for a shared brand experience. As discussed in Chapter 2, Facebook and other SNSs facilitate electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Advertisers can take advantage of this by engaging the friendship groups that share recommendations and reviews with each other, and ultimately influence the attitudes towards the brand

(Lee, Rodgers & Kim, 2009), consumers' decision-making processes (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008), and product sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006).

6.3   Group Influence

Most of the participants confirmed they shared similar beliefs about life, career and success which influenced their attitudes and behaviours, and that their social groups have unique group norms. Chameleon behaviour and the use of 'tailored' language were unique features in these results.

6.3.1.1   Comparison to Literature

The findings confirmed that black South African female social groups, from the sample interviewed, conform to group norms that show consistencies in attitudes and behaviours of the in-group that differentiate it from others, as explained by Hogg and Reid (2006).

The descriptions by the participants regarding their self-concept, as described by Rogers (1959), confirmed the presence of conscious self-image acknowledgement, their ideal-self which seems to be crafted, supported and motivated by their social groups through mild social comparison, and as a result, these groups support and enhance the self-esteem of its members.

There were two main behaviours that were interesting in the findings. The first was a presence of the chameleon effect, which occurs when people change themselves to mimic their interaction partners, as described by Chartrand and Bargh (1999). This mimicry enhances the positive association within the group and facilitates smooth interactions between group members.

The second behaviour was the unique use of language. Language is characterised by the syntagmatic (sentence construction) and paradigmatic (choice of words) properties, as described by Wiley (2006). This may account for the selective use of multiple languages in the participant conversations. Each sentence includes selective words from different languages and structured grammatically following possibly an English or mother tongue format. The combination and usage of specific languages could be unique to and formed in close interactions between people and culture, as mentioned by Vygotsky (1978).

6.3.1.2 Implications of Research Findings

The social groups of the participants sampled for this study conformed to all the previous research provided in Chapter 2, in terms of the formation of, and influence of group norms on individual members' behaviours. This means that the social groups influence consumer socialisation, their members' attitudes and purchase behaviours. The influence is partly because of social comparison.

6.4 Social Comparison

This research found that higher-income females compared themselves to their friends, although this was not always intentional. The participants compared themselves mainly on career achievements and used their close friends' progress as benchmarks of their own progress. The comparisons involved an element of underlying competition in most cases but this did not seem to develop into an unhealthy situation. Justifications for comparisons included that the women were around the same age; had a similar upbringing and went to the same schools or had the same level of education. Loneliness resulting in social pressure was also an interesting motivation for comparison and subsequent action. This offline comparison extended to online comparison over social media in almost half the cases. All the participants agreed that their close friends inspired them.

6.4.1.1 Comparison to Literature

People tend to select a target similar-other as a reference (homophily) either explicitly or implicitly, as described by Richins (1991), with which to compare themselves in terms of what Festinger (1950) stated as opinions and abilities which, when occurring in a social group, form norms according to Gerber (2018), as well as personal traits and circumstances, as mentioned by Wood (1989). This comparison is used for what Festinger (1954) termed, self-evaluation and can influence their self-esteem, social roles, self-identity and group-belonging according to Argyle (2008).

Females who tend to have a high comparison orientation, compare themselves on appearance more than men do, according to Gerber (2018). Women also compare themselves on appearance over social media, which often illuminates an incongruence between their own self-image and the others. This incongruence results in negative feelings as described by Fardouly, Pinkus and Vartanian (2017). Richins (1991) found

that most people are aware that internet-driven mediums, along with other advertising mediums, display an ideal representation of life using unrealistic standards of beauty and wealth and not reality. This explains why one of the participants, who was aware there are false-representations on social media, still actively avoids Instagram to avoid comparison and feeling inferior. Despite knowing the representations on social media are not real, some people continue compare themselves to them, and are aware that it can potentially impact them negatively.

Inspiration has been found to be one of the results of comparison processes using SNSs, specifically Instagram (Meier & Schäfer, 2018).

Self-improvement was suggested by Gerber (2018) as a motivator for social comparison but indicated that the concept lacked support from experimental studies. This current research report, although exploratory and not experimental, showed strong evidence of self-improvement as a motivator for comparison. The direction of the comparisons seems to be mildly upward, leading to contrast and resulting in a positive reaction supporting self-improvement, as was suggested by van den Ven (2015).

Career achievements are not mentioned in detail in the literature as one of the elements with which people compare themselves. There appeared to be a self-perpetuating effect in the occurrence of social comparison in this particular research report: The women compared themselves, mainly on their career achievements, to their close friends. If they felt they were not achieving as much as they felt they should, they would resolve to work harder and their social groups would support them intensely. This ascending spiral of rolling progress, supported by their close friends, seems to be a major factor in the ultimate success of these women.

One participant, who used Instagram often, mentioned that because she compared herself to her friends at a particular point, she felt lonely and thereafter exhibited conformist behaviour. Her friends were all having children and growing their families, so this participant decided to join them, as a reaction to avoid feeling socially isolated. Loneliness has been linked to social media browsing, specifically on Instagram (Yang, 2016). Hansson and Jones (1980) found that lonely females were more conforming to societal norms.

6.4.1.2   Implications of Research Findings

This research report confirmed previous literature about social comparison that is prevalent in South Africa, as it is around the world, and that social media is a distinct medium for which aesthetic comparisons are on-going. It is interesting to note that despite the myriad of cultures, languages and experiences of people around the world, humans tend to exhibit very similar behaviours.

The strength of the social groups in supporting their members and being influential in their success suggests that there is an element of collectivism amongst the black South African female groups, at least of those related to the participants of this study. This is important in the way groups operate together, and it is significant for brands to understand if they are to fully appreciate this consumer group.

6.5   Friends influence on Purchase Behaviour

The findings of this research indicated that friends are more influential than adverts on the participants' purchase decisions, largely because of trust. Direct recommendations by friends to try a product or service influences an individual to be inclined to try it at least once. Racial and ethnic homophily between the source and receiver is especially important when considering aesthetic products and services. Adverts continue to have some power, especially on Instagram. Most of the participants do not buy products or services because of social comparison, although some admitted this was customary when they were younger.

6.5.1.1   Comparison to Literature

Nudge theory, as described by Thaler and Sunstein (2008) suggests that anyone, including friends, can alter people's behaviour in a predictable way by simply offering better choices, in full view of all the choices available. The nudges from friends are particularly salient because people tend to look to [similar] others (homophilous social comparison) to guide their behaviour; this is described as social proof heuristics by Cheung et al. (2017). This guidance might result in herd behaviour, wherein an individual imitates the decisions of another mostly because they trust (Sun, 2013; Chang & Chen, 2008) their friends. In addition, simply mentioning a product or service to their friends increases the salience of the desired option and ultimately their

inclination to choose that option. The abovementioned behaviours influence online purchase decisions, according to Munawar, Hassanein and Head (2017).

This research report has confirmed that social groups are effective 'nudgers', and can be influential in purchase behaviour. Whether the nudges are intentional or not, and what the 'nudger' gets out of an intentional nudge, remains to be explored by further studies. Hanna, Rohm, and Crittenden (2011) described that consumers are highly likely to consider product or brand-related information provided by other consumers, rather than relying exclusively on advertising.

6.5.1.2   Implications of Research Findings

Social groups are effective 'nudgers', and as such, group-based brand experiences might make the difference between one consumer and multiple consumers.

6.6   Social Media

Almost all the participants' friendship groups formed offline, also exist on social media as contacts on their SNSs, and they interact over SNSs more than they interact face-to-face. Most of the participants have a Facebook account. However, a large portion of the participants described themselves as 'passive users' who merely use Facebook to browse and catch-up on what is happening with others. Instagram seemed to be a SNS that was actively used among the participants interviewed.

6.6.1.1   Comparison to Literature

Dunbar et al. (2015) found that the online social network structures mirrored those in the offline world. Kim et al. (2016, p.736) found that offline friendship drives social networking activities on Twitter, one of the popular SNSs. The findings affirmed that:

> "when people are friends offline, they are more likely to respond to the
>
> online gesture of friendship (reciprocity) from their friend, share mutual
>
> online friends and distribute and gather information in their friend's twitter
>
> network; pay attention to their friend's tweets; post tweets that might be of
>
> interest to their friend; post similar tweets to their friends; respond to a

friend's tweet; mentioned their friend in tweets and distribute their friend's

tweets." (Kim et al., 2016)

The passive browsing described of some using Facebook concurred with Orben and Dunbar's (2017) finding that passive consumption, simply reading others' posts without interacting, is a new method of interaction but still founded on the same principles as offline communication. Both passive consumption on social media and real-life interactions trigger similar or identical relationship formation pathways.

The findings of this research concurred with the literature from Kim et al. (2016) in that offline friendships exist online as well. What is not clear in the literature is the tendency for social interactions to occur online more than they do offline, perhaps mediated by social networking sites and evolving technology.

6.6.1.2 *Implications of Research Findings*

Offline homophilous social groups have been noted as circulating limited information, a result of the lack of diversity (knowingly or unknowingly) in these groups. This already has repercussions for potential cultural polarisation (Flache & Macy, 2011). If these offline groups now also exist online and interact with the same or similar triggers, then it would be fair to assume that the effects of homophilous groups offline will carry over to the online space. The caveat to this is the nature of the SNSs and artificial intelligence.

Facebook allows the selection and maintenance of online friendships from a user perspective, but also uses algorithms to tailor the type of information served to the users on their timelines, based on their interests and their friend's interests. The logic follows that if the social groups online already share homophilous information into their whirlpool of accepted beliefs, values and attitudes, and then the SNSs enclose this cocoon with similar information whilst simultaneously limiting diversity, it risks the creation of intense echo chambers. These can then amplify and reinforce shared beliefs inside the closed system.

Emotions can be weaponised significantly on social media. These online platforms, which facilitate the use of psychographic filters in advertising; lacks immunity to fake news, is vulnerable as an open platform for manipulative and insidious advertising

campaigns that leverage and amplify the differences between people for various gain. Echo chambers, crafted and amplified by social media, can threaten democracy.

An example of this misuse of data captured from social media, was the Facebook user-privacy compromised when Cambridge Analytica was allowed access to around 50 million Facebook profiles. The company gleaned extensive psychographic data, crafted tailored advertising messages to targeted individuals and excluded select types of people from election activities for Donald Trump (The Guardian, 2018).

In South Africa, there is a continuing need to break-down the psychological segregation between cultures, races and ethnicities. Marketers using social media to leverage the homophilous social groups and potentially contribute to growing echo chambers may well face an ethical dilemma in this country. If they leverage social media to segment the public and serve different messages, it might gain more customers and promote their business in the short term but may ultimately contribute to keeping this country in a continued state of social and psychological segregation and therefore, is not sustainable in the long-term.

6.7 Social Group's Shared Content

Most of the content shared amongst the participants and their social groups, using social media, were generic products and services, such as travel and hair products, that provide a function for their shared interests. Brands did not come across as important in the sharing of content, except for the sharing of luxury items such as watches, bags and shoes.

6.7.1.1 Comparison to Literature

Most of the literature focused on the generic uses of social media (Whiting & Williams, 2013) including social interaction and information sharing, and the formats of shared content such as photos and videos (Statista, 2018b), but there is limited literature detailing exactly what the detail is of the content shared amongst users, besides news (Kümpel et al., 2015; García-Perdomo et al., 2017). In other words, if a user shares an image with her friends, what is that an image of?

This study contributes to the literature offering that the content shared by users is more likely to be generic products and services, rather than branded. It is the intention to

share the product for its function and relevance, more than sharing the product because of its brand name.

6.7.1.2   *Implications of Research Findings*

This study may suggest that products and services are interesting to a user, not because of the brand they represent but because of the function the product or service offers in response to a need or want. Brands should be inclined to explore how their products and services could solve a need or address a want and leverage that through an appealing story and a unique selling point, rather than solely punting the brand name.

CHAPTER 7:   CONCLUSION

7.1   Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the composition of black South African female social groups, the nature of these groups and the extent to which these groups are influential in individual decision-making. This was an exploratory, qualitative study that interviewed 17 higher-income, black South African females. The findings are not intended to represent the entire black South African female population or make generalisations about the larger applicability of the findings. The findings are intended to extend the current research applicability into a new geographic and cultural dimension, and provide a foundation for further in-depth research, for a more representative body of work.

7.2   Summary of the Principle Findings

The principle findings of this study provided in Chapter 5 and discussed in Chapter 6 are summarised in this chapter.

1. The sample of black South African females studied in this research confirmed that multidimensional homophily is present in their social groups.
2. Almost all the participants' friendship groups formed offline also exist on social media, and they interact using social media more than they do face-to-face.
3. The nature of the social groups demonstrates shared beliefs and attitudes which influence their adherence to group norms, illustrated by the unique use of multiple languages in conversation, and chameleon behaviour.
4. The participants implicitly compare themselves to their friends, mainly concerning career achievements. Social comparisons occur offline as well as online. All the participants confirmed that inspiration was their dominant result of social comparison.
5. The social groups are highly effective in nudging, using recommendations for and against products and services. These groups impact their individual members' purchase decisions, both offline and online and are more influential than adverts.

6. The main content shared between the individuals in a social group are not brands but rather generic products or services which serve a function for their shared interests.

7.3 Implications for Marketers, Brand and Business Strategists

7.3.1 Homophily, Group formation and Social Comparison

Homophily can be used to understand the purchase behaviour by inventory analysis of customer purchases, and whether they buy in groups. This information can then be used in customer retention strategies to send existing customers, similar or complementary products and services based on their previous interest and spend (Birke, 2013). The company databases can be cleaned and categorised, uploaded to Facebook and used to find 'similar others' as part of their growth strategy.

In taking this a step further, companies could make use of an existing and highly-rated database management platform (DMP), such as Oracle Bluekai. In short, this DMP has been designed to absorb big data from selected sources including the demographic and behavioural first party data (CRM, Call-centre analysis); which is then enriched by adding secondary data (from business partnerships, if available) and third-party data (collected by participating websites, using cookies that track behaviour and interests). All three sources of data are used to personalise offline, online and mobile marketing campaigns. The combined data enriches the findings and helps evaluate the true nature of the customers. Information such as Customer Lifetime Value can be determined and loss-making customers and advertising efforts can be identified. Thereafter, the DMP which plugs into various output sources, can execute relevant social media, email, programmatic display, and mobile campaigns based on informed analytics. The use of three sources of broad data, can add an element of diversity to homogenous findings, creating a holistic 360-degree view of the ideal customers, and expand the footprint of advertising-relevance and effectiveness.

7.3.2 Nudge Behaviour

The notion of manipulating public behaviour for an any outcome, leaves the concept of free-will floating in the ether. If governments can nudge and influence the behaviour of

the public to save for retirement, eat healthier and pay their taxes on time; they can also arguably manipulate the social narrative in whichever direction serves their purpose. The same could be said of advertising companies who have similar access to advertising services on social media. The duality of outcomes presents as much opportunity for good, as it does for bad. There is of course the foundation of subtle nanny-states and prescriptive information released to the public. Take the introduction and evolution of social media, its algorithms and profile targeting, and you have the perfect storm for social manipulation leveraging off echo chambers.

A prime example of these dangers, was Bell Pottinger, a UK public relations (PR) firm, who on retainer by the Gupta brothers, intentionally and successfully executed abominable social media campaigns, using fake accounts, that inflamed racial tensions in South Africa. The company filed for administration amid the media storm (Mayes, 2017, September 12).

Management has the responsibility, knowing that social media is a tool that can be used for social manipulation, to execute advertising and communications campaigns ethically, and the requirement to take accountability for every decision made.

There is, of course, a larger ethical discussion warranted for the use of 'fun' social plugins which collect the data from unassuming people, in addition to the companies using their own first-party, second party and enriched with third party data, as mentioned previously, to weave a web of informed suggestions and nudging customers towards their product.

7.3.3   Group-based Brand Experiences

Marketers, brand and business strategists have an opportunity to tweak their focus in their advertising efforts. Knowing that these social groups share a high proportion of commonalities, enjoy doing activities together, often make group purchases and are highly influential on each other's decision-making, advertisers ought to consider group-based experiential marketing that allows groups of black South African women to experience the brand's products and services together, in a fun and inclusive way. These women are more likely to buy the products or services if it serves their needs and the entire group experience was positive.

7.3.4   Influencers Closer to Home

Influencers are typically celebrities or people who have gathered a large social media following from various online activities relating to specific interest groups, however, there has been recent talk of a decline in the effectiveness of these types of influencers (Conner, 2018). The findings of this research report show that friends are highly influential on purchase behaviour because perhaps they are perceived as more personally attainable, and perhaps the traditional use of influencers needs to be relooked, to include efforts to use 'normal' people to influence their friends, and friends-of-friends.

7.4   Limitations of the Research

All research studies have certain limitations, and this research report is no exception.

1. The study was limited to participants living in Johannesburg, and the findings may not be generalisable to other cities, or provinces across South Africa or be representative of the general black South African female population group.

2. There is limited research available that combines these constructs and applies them to specifically black South African women. As such, there is limited empirical data available from which to base the interview questions. The questions therefore, were new and the researcher attempted to create them in such a way, that they would not lead the participants' answers to allow for broad response and potentially new insights.

3. There is always a high possibility of researcher subjectivity in (a) identifying a sample set using a purposive sampling technique in exploratory, qualitative research, and (b) analysing the qualitative data, creating categories chosen by the researcher from what is perceived to be important in the context of the study. The risk of subjectivity is acknowledged. Every effort to remain unbiased has been taken, without compromising the necessary flexibility in thinking required to glean insights from in-depth qualitative exploratory research. To avoid self-selection, the researcher used convenience sampling in conjunction with purposive sampling, which should have negated the risk of potentially poor quality data (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

4. The researcher also conducted the interviews and had no previous training nor instruction in interviewing techniques. This might have impacted the results. However, the process of interviewing was followed using literature as a guide.

5. The researcher does not believe data saturation was reached, but given the time and resource limitations, a line had to be drawn regarding the number of participants above the recommended minimum for qualitative exploratory studies, of 12 participants.

7.5   Suggestions for Future Research

1. Does the heterogeneity of the population in South Africa, make the ties of homophilous social groups stronger or weaker?

2. With the knowledge that homophilous groups circulate limited and biased information offline and on social media, further research could consider whether homophily is facilitating echo chambers online and driving extremism, racism and xenophobia in South Africa.

3. Further research into why highly-educated and successful women continue to compare themselves to images on social media, despite knowing full-well that these portrayals are not real.

4. Are the nudges, in the form of product or service recommendations by friends, intentional? What would an instigator get out of the nudge psychologically?

5. Age-related social comparisons and the link to purchase behaviour requires further research, specifically if younger people are more likely to make purchases based on social comparison with others, than older people are.

7.6   Conclusions

This research has achieved the stated objectives stated in Chapter 1:

1. The existing research concepts of homophily, group formation, social comparison, and purchase behaviour do apply to the South African context, limited for now to the sample studied.

2. Offline social groups exist and behave similarly online. The caveat to this is the nature of SNSs may amplify the group behaviours, but that is to be explored in further research.

3. The nature of black female South African social groups are highly ambitious and supportive of each other, which in turns makes them highly influential on an individual's purchase decisions.

The achievement of the objectives has meant that this research has contributed to the understanding of the rapidly changing South African market in terms of online consumer behaviour. It has done this by extending the current body of research concepts, primarily studied in more developed parts of the world, to an emerging market context and evaluated the ubiquitous applicability in the sample studied.

The implications for management, especially concerning ethical decision-making, have been discussed.

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APPENDIX 1: CONSISTENCY MATRIX

TITLE: Exploring the role of homophily in purchase behaviour

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	LITERATURE REVIEW	DATA COLLECTION TOOL	ANALYSIS
RQ 1: is there a presence of **homophily** amongst black South African women?	Lazarsfeld & Merton (1954); McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook (2001); Curry & Dunbar (2013); Chartrand & Bargh (1999); Kossinets & Watts (2009); Verbrugge (1977); Aiello et al., (2012); Steffes & Burgee (2008)	**Topic 1:** **Q1:** are your friends similar to you in some way? If yes, how so? **Q2:** Do you and your friends share the same desire for the same types of things, please elaborate? **Q3:** Would you say that most of your close friends are black females?	Leximancer online analysis software & thematic content analysis.
RQ 2: What is the extent to which black South African offline social groups also exist on their social media networks?	Barberá et al., (2015); Kaplan & Haenlein (2010); Chaffey (2018); Kozinets et al., (2001); Casteleyn, Mottart & Rutten(2009); Ozazaki (2009); Moschis & Churchill (1978); De Gregorio & Sung (2010); Lueg, Bidwell & Göth (2006); Chu & Kim (2011); Hennig-Thurau et al., (2004); Lee, Rodgers & Kim (2009); Curry & Dunbar (2013); Steffes & Burgee (2008); Kim et al., (2016); Dunbar et al., (2015)	**Topic 2:** **Q1:** Are most of your friends' contacts on your social media network? **Q2:** Do you interact with your friends more over social media, than you do in person?	Leximancer online analysis software & thematic content analysis.
RQ 3: To what extent do higher income black South African females share beliefs and norms with their peers?	Hogg & Reid (2006); King & Sumpter (2012); Rogers (1959); McLeod (2008); Argyle (2008); Tajfel & Turner (1979); Forsyth (2000)	**Topic 3:** **Q1:** Do you and your friends share the same beliefs about life, career and success? **Q2:** Do you and your friends have a certain way of doing things that is unique to your group?	Leximancer online analysis software & thematic content analysis.
RQ 4: to what extent do higher-income black South African females compare themselves with their peers?	Richins (1991); Festinger (1954); Lockwood & Kunda (1997); Camerer & Lovallo (1999); Suls & Wheeler (2017); Gerber (2018); Wood (1989); Gilbert, Giesler & Morris (1995); Meier & Schäfer (2018); Collins (1996); Buunk et al., (1990); van den Ven (2015); Wheeler (2000); Vogel et al., (2015); Cramer, Song & Drent (2016); Fardouly, Pinkus & Vartanian (2017);	**Topic 4** **Q1:** Do you ever compare yourself to your friends? **Q2:** Do you compare yourself to your friends on social media? **Q3:** Are you inspired by your close friends, or made to feel envious or demotivated in some way?	Leximancer online analysis software & thematic content analysis.
RQ 5: To what extent do the online social groups amongst black South African females influence their member's purchase behaviour?	Thaler & Sunstein (2008); Kosters & Van der Heijden (2015); Cheung et al., (2017); Vainikka (2015); Hawking & Mothersbaugh (2010); Chen (2008); Sun (2013); Chang & Chen (2008); Munawar, Hassanein & Head (2017).	**Topic 5:** **Q1:** Would you say you are more influenced by adverts or your friends into buying things? **Q2:** If one of your friends shared an image on social media and made a recommendation for you to try a product/service, would you be more inclined to try it at least once? **Q3:** Are you ever influenced to buy something, after comparing yourself to a friend?	Leximancer online analysis software & thematic content analysis.
RQ 6: to what extent are online social groups influential in black South African female's brand-specific purchases?	Whiting & Williams (2013); Kümpel, Karnowski & Keyling (2015); Garcia-Perdomo et al., (2017)	**Topic 6:** **Q1:** Are there any types of purchase items (products or brands) which your group likes to share a lot?	Leximancer online analysis software & thematic content analysis.

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Topic One: Presence of Homophily amongst black South African females

1. Are your friends similar to you in some way? If yes, how so?
2. Do you and your friends share the same desire for the same types of things? Please elaborate?
3. Would you say that most of your close friends are black females?

Topic Two: Extent to which their offline social groups are also present on Facebook

1. Are most of your close friends' contacts on your social media network?
2. Would you say that you interact with your close friends more over social media, than you do in person?

Topic Three: Extent to which higher income females share beliefs and norms with their peers

1. Do you and your friends have the same beliefs about life, career, success?
2. Do you and your friends have a certain way of doing things that's unique to your group?

Topic Four: Extent to which higher income females compare themselves with their peers?

1. Do you ever compare yourself to your friends?
2. Do you compare yourself to your friends on social media?
3. Are you inspired by your close friends or made to feel envious or demotivated in some way?

Topic Five: Extent to which the social group engagement on Facebook influences purchase behaviour

1. Would you say you are more influenced by adverts or your friends into buying things?
2. If one of your close friends shared an image on Facebook or made a recommendation for you to try a product/service, would you be more inclined to purchase or try it for the first time?
3. Are you ever influenced to buy something after comparing yourself to a friend?

Topic Six: Extent to which the influence is skewed to specific brands

1. Are there any particular types of purchase items your group shares a lot?

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW CONSENT LETTER

Informed Consent Letter

I am a second-year MBA student at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) and I am in the process of completing my research project as a compulsory component to my degree.

I am conducting research on the influence of black female social groups on purchase behaviour online, and am trying to find out more about the nature of their group influence in South Africa. Our interview is expected to last about an hour, and will help us understand how black South African women engage with and influence each other through Facebook.

Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. Data will be collected through a semi-structured, in-depth interview, and with your permission will be recorded for analysis. Your identify will remain confidential throughout the process as only aggregated data will be reported. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher Name: Lauren Haworth

Email: 17337144@mygibs.co.za

Phone: 079 511 5222

Research supervisor: Mignon Reyneke

Email: mignon.reyneke@gmail.com

Phone: 082 474 0330

Signature of Participant: _____

Date:_____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date:_____

APPENDIX 4: ETHICS CLEARANCE APPROVAL

Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

26 July 2018

Haworth Lauren

Dear Lauren

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.

Take care to avoid closed ended questions in your interview guide

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

Please note that approval is granted based on the methodology and research instruments provided in the application. If there is any deviation change or addition to the research method or tools, a supplementary application for approval must be obtained

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Kind Regards

GIBS MBA Research Ethical Clearance Committee

APPENDIX 5: TURNITIN RECEIPT

turnitin

Digital Receipt

This receipt acknowledges that Turnitin received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

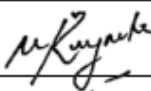The first page of your submissions is displayed below.

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Assignment title:	Test your originality
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Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

Exploring the Role of Homophily in Purchase Behaviour

Lauren Elizabeth Haworth
Student number: 17337164

A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration.

Date: 7 November 2018

APPENDIX 6: COPYRIGHT FORM

COPYRIGHT DECLARATION

Student details				
Surname:	HAWORTH	Initials:		L.E.
Student number:	17337144			
Email:	17337144@mygibs.co.za			
Phone:	+27 79 511 5222			
Qualification details				
Degree:	MBA	Year completed:		2018
Title of research	Exploring the Role of Homophily in Purchase Behaviour			
Supervisor:	Mignon Reyneke			
Supervisor email:	Mignon.reyneke@GMAIL.COM			

Access

Please select

A.

X	My research is not confidential and may be made available in the GIBS Information Centre and on UPSpace.

I give permission to display my email address on the UPSpace website

Yes		X		No	

B.

	My research is confidential and may **NOT** be made available in the GIBS Information Centre nor on UPSpace.

Please indicate embargo period requested

Two years		Please attach a letter of motivation to substantiate your request. Without a letter embargo will not be granted.
Permanent		Permission from the Vice-Principal: Research and Postgraduate Studies at UP is required for permanent embargo. Please attach a copy permission letter. Without a letter permanent embargo will not be granted.

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I hereby declare that I have not used unethical research practices nor gained material dishonesty in this electronic version of my research submitted. Where appropriate, written permission statement(s) were obtained from the owner(s) of third-party copyrighted matter included in my research, allowing distribution as specified below.

I hereby assign, transfer and make over to the University of Pretoria my rights of copyright in the submitted work to the extent that it has not already been affected in terms of the contract I entered into at registration. I understand that all rights with regard to the intellectual property of my research, vest in the University who has the right to reproduce, distribute and/or publish the work in any manner it may deem fit.

Signature:		Date:	1 Nov 2018
Supervisor signature:		Date:	1 November 2018

APPENDIX 7: CERTIFICATION OF ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

I hereby certify that:

I RECEIVED additional/outside assistance (editorial services) on my research report.

If any additional services were retained – please indicate below which:

| X | Editor

Name and contact details of all retained:

NAME: Claire Pienaar

EMAIL ADDRESS: completeclaire@gmail.com

CONTACT NUMBER: +61 423 323 611

TYPE OF SERVICE: Editor

I hereby declare that all (statistical and/or thematic) arising from the analysis; and write-up of the results for **my study was completed by myself without outside assistance.**

NAME OF STUDENT: Lauren Elizabeth Haworth

SIGNATURE:

STUDENT NUMBER: 17337144

STUDENT EMAIL ADDRESS: 17337144@mygibs.co.za