

**School of Marketing**

**Does Social Media User Engagement Impact Brand Preference?  
Exploring the Interactive Roles of Self-Brand Congruence and  
Perceived Social Approval**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of  
Master of Philosophy (Marketing)  
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## **Declaration**

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material, which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number #HRE 2018-0626

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## **ABSTRACT**

Past research shows that consumers' engagement with social media has a positive influence on the sales of branded products but there is hardly any research on the process underlying this relationship. This research addresses this gap by exploring the mediating role of social approval in the relationship between social media user engagement and brand preference and the moderating effect of consumers' self-brand congruence on the association between social media user engagement and social approval.

Using an abductive approach, this research begins with a qualitative study consisting of in-depth interviews with users of social media. The findings and insights obtained from these interviews were utilised to create and conduct a structured survey, in order to analyse all the constructs and analyse the hypothesised associations among them.

The results of the survey establish that social approval has a mediating impact on the connection between the contribution aspect of social media user- engagement and brand preference. However, it was found that social approval did not mediate the consumption aspect of social media user- engagement to brand preference. Additionally, research from this study discovered that self- brand congruence moderates the link between the consumption and contribution dimension of social media user- engagement with social approval. It was established that the greater the self- brand congruence, the greater the corresponding social approval.

The findings from this study expands on existing theory and proposes fresh ideas into the link between social media user- engagement and brand preference for both brand managers and academic researchers concerned with the influence of social media on consumer preference and sales of branded products. It provides an insight into how consumers on social media platforms, develop their brand preferences.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

Brands as a concept and theory have been discussed by various authors such as Veloutsou et al. (2004) and Wigley et al. (2005). Buil et al. (2013) established that brands and their value are mainly affected by their awareness and perceived quality. Hence, the significance of social media to brands and consumer's choice of brand is of great value (Brodie et al., 2013). Hence further examination of social media and brand theories is vital. Consequently, providing more connective approaches to social media and branding will enrich existing literature. This research will examine how consumers connect with brands based on how they relate to brands on social media due to social acceptance (Bibb Latane, 1981) and congruence (Islam and Rahman, 2016).

#### **1.1 Research Background**

The commencement of the various social media networking sites, which include Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, to mention but a few have been greatly intertwined in the lives of individuals and consumers, influencing their lifestyles (Schivinski, Christodoulides, and Dabrowski, 2016). The engagement of consumers on these platforms has led to communities being developed and opinions being shared amongst other consumers (Berthon, Pitt and Campbell, 2008). The nature in which consumers interact with one another on social media has resulted in an evolution in how consumers engage in brand- related content. The constant use of social media by consumers on a frequent basis has allowed consumers to be open to a wide range of brands due to their reading, commenting, liking, or sharing of content.

Brands as a construct have been researched previously (Veloutsou et al., 2004), focusing on their efficiency. Wigley et al. (2005) studied indulgence brands and

features that enable them to be sort after. According to Tong and Hawley (2009), the success of a brand is mostly determined by its assumed worth and significance. However, Buil et al. (2013) offer the idea that assumed significance; association and dependability mostly impact a brand's success. Although, social media- user engagement has previously been researched, there is still a need to analyse this construct from different theoretical viewpoints, such as congruence theory (Meir, 1989) and social approval (Bibb Latane, 1981). This is because social media- user engagement is “expected to provide contributions that extend beyond those made by traditional concepts, including consumer involvement, satisfaction, trust, and reliability, in clarifying and predicting focused results of consumer behaviour” (Brodie and Hollebeek, 2011). Hence, this research paper offers vital prospects for organisations and academics that work within the social media sector to increase their awareness of this theory.

Consumers' purchase of goods from brands, aids in the definition of the consumers' identity and how they would like to be perceived (Zinkham and Hong, 1991). Graeff (1996) concurs with this sentiment by stating that the purchase and use of brands remain means of individualism. This is because patrons habitually consume brands that tend to be similar to their self- concept. Therefore, purchasers' preference for certain brands might be based on how similar it is to their self-concept (Zinkham and Hong, 1991). Although authors including Greve (2014), argue about the benefits of social media on consumer brand value, the development of brand preference on social media platforms still requires investigation.

To fill the gaps in existing theory, this research paper aims to explore social media- user engagement and brand preference, thereby enhancing previous literature. Additionally, this study also proves unique and contributes to existing theory as prior research mainly examined brand value and sales. This study achieves this by assessing self- brand congruence as a moderator, as well as social approval as a mediator. This provides an opportunity to establish the influence social media- user engagement has on brand preference.

## **1.2 Research Aims**

This research paper proposes an examination into how social media- user engagement impacts brand preference, focusing on the mediating impact of social approval and the moderating effect of self- brand congruence. These will be established using cosmetic brands as the main reference.

- i. Examine the impact of social media- user engagement on social approval.
- ii. The effect of social approval on brand preference.
- iii. Explore the mediating role of social approval in the relationship between social media user- engagement and user- brand preference.
- iv. Establish the moderating impact of self-brand congruence in the relationship between social media- user engagement and social approval.
- v. Investigate the impact of demographics in these relationships.

## **1.3 Significance**

### **1.3.1 Theoretical Significance**

This research paper offers a significant role and fills an existing gap in the current literature. This is because this research utilises social approval as a mediator, and self-brand congruence as a moderating influence. Research into these hypotheses will enhance existing literature by presenting novel concepts to the way consumer engagement and brand preference are examined.

### **1.3.2 Managerial Significance**

The economic worth of a brand sits mostly on the customers' reaction to the brand (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010). As a result, social media user- engagement is essential to an organisation's brand. Brands are working in an increasingly expansive setting. Brands that can gain a good foothold in social media are more likely able to participate in this exceedingly competitive market (Yomega, 2011). The use of social media allows the organisation's chance to gain awareness and strengthen their image, which increases the customers' information of the brand.

## **1.4 Methodology**

### **1.4.1 Philosophy**

This study makes use of both the interpretivist and positivist philosophies. These two philosophies were used in this study because of the dearth of existing literature on the subject matter. The aim of interpretivist study is to yield “new, richer understandings and interpretations of social worlds and contexts” (Saunders et al. 2009), which helps the researcher to better understand the phenomenon of social media user engagement and the role that it may play in the context of brand preference. On the other hand, the positivist philosophy is followed to examine and/or measure the effect social media user engagement on brand preference. Thus the use of these two philosophies aided in the proper understanding of the research area.

### **1.4.2 Approach**

Approach utilised in this study is the abductive approach to discern and evaluate the hypotheses. An abductive approach can be defined as gathering information to establish themes and highlight patterns, to produce new theories or adapt existing ones (Saunders et al., 2009). The use of an abductive approach offered the participants of this study an opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions on the subject matter, thereby enabling the creation of a survey, tailored to answering the research question. As a result, this aided in developing and reinforcing the findings of this research study.

### **1.4.3 Method**

This study initially made use of a qualitative pilot study as a research instrument, which was then followed by in-depth interviews, consisting of ten participants. This was a good resource in obtaining information by using tests, observation, and open-ended questions (Hair et al., 2009). Subsequently, this paper utilised a quantitative

survey to analyse the constructs, with the help of prevailing scale items from prior papers.

#### **1.4.4 Measures**

This study made use of existing scales from previous research, as well as modifying some to fit with this study. Self-brand congruence was analysed with scales recognised by Sirgy et al. (1997) due to their prognostic nature. This scale has been utilized by previous studies (e.g., Cowart et al., 2008). Social media- user engagement was analysed with the scale utilised by Schivinski et al. (2016). This consisted of utilising “specialized software and indexing to check the hypothesized three-factor (consumption, contribution, and creation) structure of the scale and to analyze the covariance matrix” (Schivinski et al. 2016). This study made use of only consumption and contribution dimensions because they were found to be adequate means by which to measure social media user engagement. This study will utilize the scale items formed by Stuart & Ebbeck (1995) and Venaglia and Lemay (2017) to analyse social approval. Brand preference will be analyzed by utilizing a grading scale. This functions by asking participants to grade how their brand preferences are developed (Niedrich and Swain, 2003; 2008). A seven- point Likert scale was used to grade the brands, extending from most to least favored (Hughes, 1976; Ross, 1971).

#### **1.4.5 Sampling**

The sample group for this research study were users of social media who follow cosmetic brand-related content. This was vital to addressing the investigative questions and aims of this study (Kozinets, 2010). The participants for the survey were gathered through a third-party data collecting company. This study aims to gain a sample size of 300 participants.

#### **1.4.6 Data Analysis**

Data collected from qualitative research will be analyzed through the use of visual and thematic analysis. The data will be drawn from the participants’ responses from

the interviews. Analyzing the quantitative research and evaluating the links concerning the constructs and variables will examine the hypotheses. The data will be analyzed through the use of SPSS and AMOS 25(Kozinets, 2010). The findings from the surveys will offer more of an understanding of how brand preference in social media is impacted by self- brand congruence and social approval.

### **1.5 Thesis Overview**

This thesis comprises of seven chapters, excluding the references. This chapter presents the research study, background, and purpose. Additionally, it shed light on the research problem and clarifies the research aims and objectives, which are essential in solving the research problems. The second chapter focuses on the established theories and reviews existing research on social media user- engagement, brand preference, social approval, and self- brand congruence. Chapter three focuses on the conceptual framework and hypotheses of this research study. This model is founded on the theoretical background of the constructs. Additionally, it provides details on how social approval and self-brand congruence develops consumer brand preferences. The fourth chapter discusses the philosophy and assumptions of this study. It highlights the research methodology and data collection, which combines both qualitative and quantitative methods. The methods used to gather data are explained and defended. Chapter five identifies the measures and scales utilised to analyse the data collected. Chapter six deliberates the findings from the data analysed and finally, the conclusions drawn, implications of the findings, research limitations, and future research are discussed in chapter seven.

### **1.6 Summary**

This research paper expands on existing theory and fills the gaps in current theory. The following chapter will examine existing theory and literature of the various constructs. Also, this study aims to supplement and improve the conservative opinion as well as develop brand preference norms. Additionally, how the constructs of self-brand congruence and social approval, relate and affect social media user-engagement and brand preference will be evaluated. Lastly, the following chapters express the significance of each construct in influencing consumer preferences.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

As stated in the title of this research paper, “Does social media user engagement impact brand preference? Exploring the interactive roles of self- brand congruence and perceived social approval”, this research deals with several vital concepts namely, social media, user engagement, social approval, and self- brand congruence, which are likely to influence brand preference. This chapter aims to deliver a thorough appraisal of the current knowledge surrounding the concepts mentioned above. First, the chapter elaborates on brand preference, and factors influencing brand preference. Then the chapter focuses on social media, brand preference in social media, social media content – user- generated content, nature of user-generated content, followed by social approval and self-brand congruence.

Further, the chapter discusses various demographic variables such as age, gender, income, and so on that are likely to have an impact on brand preference. While outlining the existing knowledge, significant research gaps in the existing literature are identified in this chapter. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a summary discussion and pinpoints the way forward towards the next chapter, Chapter 3.

#### 2.1 Brand Preference

Various disciplines have examined preference, but yet there is no generally agreed-upon description of the term (Tomer, 1996). In the field of marketing, preference is defined as the “desirability or choice among alternatives” (Oliver and Swan, 1989). D’ Souza and Rao (1995), defined brand preference as the “consumer’s predispositions toward a brand that varies depending on the salient beliefs that are activated at a given time.” Hellier et al., (2003), interpretation was that brand preference is the “extent to which a consumer favours one brand over another.”

According to the dictionary, brand preference means “a measure of brand loyalty in which a consumer will choose a particular brand in the presence of competing brands, but will accept substitutes if that brand is not available” ([www.businessdictionary.com](http://www.businessdictionary.com)). Chang and Liu (2009) and Hsee et al. (2009) both took a holistic approach in their definition, summing up that consumers’ brand preference was revealed by their cognitive and behavioural responses toward the targeted brand. According to Ben-Akiva et al. (1999) and McFadden (1996), preference can be described as the relative decision between choices in the decision-making process. This is manifested through the consumers’ thought processes and actions when it comes to brands or products (Zajonc and Markus, 1982). This study proposes that brand preference can be described as the social inclinations reflecting the consumer’s behaviour regarding a brand. Additionally, brand preference may be seen as a consumers’ inclination concerning a specific brand, which recapitulates how they process information concerning brand inducements (Howard and Sheth, 1969).

The importance of brands has dramatically increased over the last decade. Branding serves as a vital instrument for businesses to make use of when it comes to their products and services (De Chernatony and Riley, 1998). Branding is deemed to be of importance and value to both the consumer and the business. This beneficial asset enables organisations to establish vital continuous relationships with their consumers as well as guarding the organisation from other competing businesses (Kolter et al., 2009). On the other side, for consumers, brands mirror their experience and provide them with ease when it comes to the information processing of the business and their products. As a result, brands allow consumers to seize the rational and non-rational principles of their experiences (Aaker, 1998; Kotler et al., 2009). Hence, businesses and content creators need to construct their brand content with consumers’ expectancies of the brand in mind.

The consumers’ decision-making process and consequently, how they determine their brand preference has been thought of as complicated. The consumer makes their decision based on their brand information, experience, and preferences.

### **2.1.1 Buyer behaviour and Brand Preference**

Originally, buyer behaviour theory was part of the initial models to emphasise brand preference (Howard and Sheth, 1969). This is one of the crucial fundamentals of buyer behaviour theory when examining an individual's purchasing behaviour. These mediators serve as a bridge between consumers' needs and satisfying those needs. According to Howard and Sheth (1969), brand preference is about customers' feelings towards specific brands, which encapsulates their intellectual knowledge processing concerning brand stimuli.

This theory focuses on the cognitive aptitudes of customers. It emphasises the part information and experience plays regarding consumers' decision-making process. According to Biehal and Chakravarti (1986), the consumer is stimulated by brand knowledge and experiences. Hence, a consumer's idea and perceptions of brand results in their attitude, preference, and choice towards that brand. This theory has, however, been criticised for its complexity and undetermined relationship between the components. As a result, because of the lack of extensive market research, the validity of the theory has been brought into question (Farley and Ring, 1970). Additionally, the theory's approach did not apply to marketing research because of its extensive reliance on measures and its lack of steadiness on the prevailing development amid the contributions and productions (Bettman et al., 1975).

Bagozzi (1982) similarly inferred that consumers gather information from multiple sources and methods for them to make an informed decision. However, customers can only work with the extent of knowledge they have at their disposal (Payne et al., 1998). Based on these ideas, consumer brand preferences are formed during the decision-making process, when there is a merge between the prior knowledge of the consumer and their experience (Bettman et al., 1975; Payne et al., 1998).

This theory, however, does not take into account or consider the part experience plays in determining consumer preferences (Dhar and Novemsky, 2008). The theories were also critiqued due to the fact that they were complex and not thoroughly examined (Foxall, 1983). The significant condemnation of the cognitive behaviour theory is its overlook of the expressive and irrational features of behaviour displayed

by customers. The premise of the information-processing theory follows the notion that customers rely on their feelings during periods when there is an overwhelming amount of material (Grimm, 2005). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) are critical of these traditional theories because of their lack of acknowledgement of experiential responses and the role these responses play when it comes to consumption. The authors bring forward the notion that takes into consideration both the consumer's cognitive, emotional, and visual abilities. The experiential outlook emphasizes the consumer's view about the brand qualities, imagery, and symbolic meaning (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). The traditional model, in comparison to the experiential model, the former focuses on attitude and preference while the latter is linked to emotions (Mano and Oliver, 1993). The experiential theory broadens the traditional theory, addressing the neglected issues in consumer research.

## **2.2 Social Media**

It can be said that the most influential force of social media is technology (Li and Bernoff, 2008). This has been held by other authors such as Patterson and Brown (1996) and Mangold and Faulds (2009) stating that in such a short period, the Internet has become a dominant global framework, connecting individuals and corporations all over the world. Researchers have been perplexed by what the phrase 'social media' encompasses and if it should be differentiated from the associated concept usually used alongside it; User-generated content. As a result, it is essential to examine this concept to understand and define social media.

### **2.2.1 Social Media Definition**

Authors such as Xiang and Gretzel (2009) insinuate that an official classification of social media does not exist. Nevertheless, it is stipulated by a number of researchers that social media is how individuals or consumers connect and interact with one another through the use of online applications, thereby enabling the conception of user-generated content that can be shared with others (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2009; Xiang and Gretzel, 2009; Palmer and Koenig- Lewis, 2009). An alternative definition has been proposed by Solis (2010), which stipulates that social media is a means in which individuals converted from being passive observers into active

content creators. Consequently, this creates content, which is inserted into communications between individuals as well as establishments and vice versa.

On the other hand, Mangold and Faulds (2009) propose that social media is “created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers’ intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues.” This study makes use of the definition found in Drury’s (2008) study which states that “Social media describes online resources that people share ‘content’: videos, photos, images, text, ideas, insight, humour, opinion, gossip, news, and so on.” In Drury’s (2008) research, individual interaction with each other has rapidly evolved. Consequently, this has had a significant effect on the way businesses operate in terms of branding and marketing. Social media has given companies and brands a chance to interact openly with consumers with great effectiveness and little to no cost. This has been supported by Stokes (2008) who proposes that social media is a significant element of online marketing campaigns because of its means to create a direct connection to consumers that is difficult, if not attainable to get using the traditional means of marketing. Furthermore, Drury (2008) stipulates that social media enables us to form relationships and create conversions with people, going beyond just sending messages but exchanging opinions and philosophies. Stokes (2008) further purports that a part of the major benefits of social media is its capacity to gain from consumers’ imagination and their ability to disperse their message further, at minimal expense.

Social media observers might have a different vantage point to the way organisations view or make use of social media. According to Shao (2008, p.18), “individuals make use of social media in different ways for different purposes.” Correa et al. (2009, p.248) suggest that social media enables the “audience to connect, communicate, and interact with each other.” This has been further stipulated by Wang et al. (2009), affirming that people utilise social media networks to keep and disperse content, distribute thoughts, ideas, and preserve connections. Shao (2008) proposes an alternative view on why individuals make use of social media. Shao’s (2008) research study suggests that there are three main motives for individuals to make use of social media, which includes to disperse information, entertain and interact with the content of others. Also, another motive is to create content for self-fulfilment.

### **2.2.2 Social Media -User Engagement**

It is argued, "...media sharing sites allow users to create and upload multimedia content, sometimes called user-generated content (UGC)." This study goes further to state most of the participants of social media are passive who choose to view the content of these sites, not create them. Since the creation of social media, it has been suggested that it has moved the power from the producer to the consumer (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008). This has also been echoed by authors such as Shankar and Malhotra (2009), who stated how social media had provided a means of liberation for consumers, giving them the ability to become partners and creators, wielding influence in the market with their actions.

Social media has been established to be a precious medium to engage with consumers through interactivity and gives companies the ability to communicate with targeted segments. This provides them with a direct means to target exceedingly, desirable demographic groups (Eikermann et al. 2008). A study led by the Foster Research organisation discovered that information attained on social media through organisations are the least likely to be trusted by consumers. However, reviews by consumers were found to be the most trusted bases of information by other consumers (Bernoff 2008). This evidence has been backed up by Gretzel and Yao (2008) and Ye et al. (2011), whose study discovered that most consumers conveyed that the opinions they trusted were those of other consumers online.

Due to consumers' ability to engage in two-way interactive communications with other consumers because of social media, it has provided them with the chance to use this medium as a means to search for information. Solomon (2006) and Tapp (2009) describe information search as to how an individual studies the environment for adequate information to make an educated decision. Likewise, Constantinides and Fountain (2008) argue that the decision-making process of customers' is heavily impacted by social media. This includes various forms, such as consumer reviews and referrals, social networks, online forums, and other types of user-generated content.

Social media contains a vast array of information sources, such as ratings, reviews, etcetera, amongst community members (Agichtein et al. 2010). Hughes (2009), states that a significant advantage of information searches, using social media is that because reviews by other members of the community are so trusted, it bypasses the ample time needed to go through the extensive amount of online information available. Peterson and Merino (2003) also concur with this sentiment; they state that the entire duration of time used to gather information from searches would decline for online consumers. Mangold and Faulds (2009) claim that consumers, regardless of the products and services, see social media as a dependable source of knowledge.

### **2.2.3 Social Media - User Generated Content**

Kaplan and Haenlein (2008) describe user-generated content as the methods in which social media can be utilised. Hughes (2009) goes further in explaining user-generated content as information such as observations, thoughts, and personal beliefs, distributed through social networks. According to Brodie et al. (2015), engagement, especially within brand communities, can be defined as consumers' interactive displays which include sharing and socialising within communities like social media brand groups. One of the primary purposes of engaging with others on social media is to create and grow relationships (Park and Kim, 2014). However, it should be known that most participants of these online groups do not tend to be active participants (contributors) in the communities (Schau et al. 2009). Online community members tend to join or be part of these communities to be observers who benefit from the conversations, to gain rewards such as deals and offers (Sung et al. 2010; Nambisan and Watt, 2011).

An analysis of social media discovered that a small percentage of users tend to be the immensely, more substantial portion of content creators on social media (van Belleghem et al. 2012). Simon et al. (2016) paper highlights the ninety-nine-one rule which describes that merely one percent of participants generate content permanently, nine percent are occasional content creators, and lastly, ninety percent of the social media community stays quiet over the course of social conversations. More research into determining what encourages consumer engagement in social media has been requested by the Science Institute (MSI, 2010, 2014). Presently, only

a handful of studies have investigated the different sides of consumer engagement in social media online brand groups.

#### **2.2.4 Consumer Experience and Participation**

Consumer experience has been defined early on as ‘accumulated knowledge’ (Abbot, 1955). This way of thinking has been traditionally used as a way of viewing consumer behaviour. The Collins English Dictionary describes experience as “the accumulation of knowledge or skill that results from direct participation in events or activities.” This includes clear surveillance or contribution in an occasion. Experience has also been defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “active participation in events or activities, leading to the accumulation of knowledge or skill.” However, the American Heritage Dictionary describes experience as “the feeling of emotions and sensations as opposed to thinking” and “involvement in what is happening rather than abstract reflection on an event” (Palmer, 2010).

According to Brakus et al. (2009), consumer experience is established by their interactions with brands as well as the synchronicity between the individual and brand (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Experience occurs in a variety of scenarios such as when an individual is shopping, consuming, or using the brand. These responses created by the consumers’ interaction with the brand can be categorised as individual experiences that can be personal, and behavioural reactions (Brakus et al., 2009).

Pine and Gilmore (1998) express that there are two measures to experience, the first being customer interaction and the second, customer linking. Customer interaction can be defined as customer meddling in the empirical occurrence. This measure brings about two different types of consumers; passive consumers who have no part in the interactions and active consumers, who are actively involved in the creation of content.

As can be seen, preference is a complex psychological state that cannot be limited to words such as brand physical features. According to Bagozzi (1983), preferences are a result of consumer’s awareness of alternatives and the making of mental and emotional findings concerning the brand. Additionally, authors including Lee et al.



(2007) and Mathur et al. (2008) have found that a consumer's lifestyle heavily influences brand preference. According to Sirgy (1997; 1982), brand preference is achieved when the brand attributes are in congruence with the consumer's self. This is made clear with the high level of preference developed when the brand's image is congruent with the consumer. Consequently, consumers' participation in social media is impacted by the approval of others, more specifically, peers within the online brand community.

### **2.3 Social Approval**

Social approval occurs when an individual gets emotional satisfaction through happiness or a sense of security due to being viewed positively by others (Auty, 2001). The role approval plays in conversations about identity has been growing. Kelman (1961) stated that approval might take place when other individuals influence individuals in the hope that others will positively perceive them. This has been seen as a move away from being individualistic to being more or less a social role (Auty, 2001). This similarly lends itself to social desirability, which happens when consumers choose brands that correspond to the beliefs of others, thereby elevating their self-image and status (Bearden et al., 1989; Roy and Rabbane, 2015). This can be seen when consumers place preference or choose brands that are preferred by others (Marlowe and Crowne, 1960). Burnkrant and Cousineau (1975) identified the impact of groups on brand preference and found that once a brand or product is seen as being valued or praised by others, that brand or product will be positively by others, despite that brand not being regarded if that praise was not observed. Individuals might choose in favour of particular brands or products that others in communities or groups purchase. These preferences may not seek favour or rewards from others but to attain brands they view as being good.

Morgan (1998) found that approval especially applies in situations where "...visible consumption of a brand is seen as 'saying something' about the chooser." Individuals or customers are more likely to be influenced when they place high value and regard the opinions of others (Netemeyer, Bearden, and Teel, 1992). Research conducted by Auty (2001) found that this is mainly the case when it comes to youths or adolescents, as they are more likely to be prone to social influence.

### **2.3.1 Mediating Role of Social Approval**

Although social approval has been studied in existing research, the theoretical understanding of the impact social approval has on consumers' preference of brands on social media has not been fully examined. As a result, this research paper aims to explore how social approval can have a mediating effect on the relationship between social media and brand preference.

A significant asset that brand content creation has is brand preference, which is where consumers are faithful to a specific brand (Kao, 2016). Hence the main cause of concern in brand strategies is how to create and sustain customer brand preferences. The social identity theory devised by Tajfel and Turner (1986) states that individuals are likely to associate themselves with successful individuals or groups since it strengthens their self-esteem. Hence this research study examines in what ways social approval affects consumers'. This will allow this study to evaluate whether social approval can mediate brand preference concerning social media.

### **2.4 Self-Brand Congruence**

It has long been established that consumers make purchases from brands that express who they are as individuals (Roy and Rabbanee, 2015). These brands are not only used to express themselves but are also preferred for what the brand represents (Aaker, 1999). Authors such as Sirgy et al. (1997) have provided research which has shown that consumers gravitate towards brands whose image aligns with theirs. As a result, this indicates that self-brand congruence may moderate the relationship between social media- user engagement and brand preference. To explore this concept, the self-concept theory and self- congruity have to be evaluated.

#### **2.4.1 Self-concept**

According to Sirgy (1982), self- concept is the sum of a person's ideas and emotions about himself as an object. Consequently, the self- concept refers to an individual's

view of himself or herself. It has been recognized as one of the leading concepts in marketing because consumers make use of brands for self- manifestation (Belk, 1988; Sung & Choi, 2012). The term, self- concept, is mostly discussed as the “totality of an individual’s thoughts and feelings with himself as an object” (Sandhu et al. 2018). The self as a concept has been categorised in two ways, the actual self, which can be described as how the individual views themselves and the ideal self which could be described as how the individual would like to be seen (Ross, 1971). Authors such as Sirgy (1982) and Jamal and Goode (2001), have also included the social self, which they describe as how the individual presents him or herself and wants to be viewed.

#### **2.4.2 Self-congruity**

Self- congruity theory is described as consumer attitudes that have to some degree been influenced by the consumers’ self- concept, about the perceived appearance of the brand (Sirgy, 1982; Sirgy et al., 1997; Graeff, 1996). Self- congruity theory works under the premise that the higher the congruence between the consumers’ ideal, actual or social self and the brand, the more likely the brand is seen in a positive light by the consumer (Malar et al., 2011). Based on research from authors such as Schiffman and Kanuk (2000), individuals have a higher probability of procuring brands with personalities that are similar to their view of who they are as a person. Self- congruity is the resemblance of the brand image with the self- image (Sirgy, 1982). Phau and Lau (2001), explain that self- congruity is created based on the relationship between the image and personality of the brand and the consumers’ self- concept. As a result, the closely linked a customers’ self- concept is to the image of the brand, the more likely the brand would be viewed in a positive light by the consumer.

Self- concept can be argued to have four variations (actual, ideal, social, and ideal social self), as well as corresponding variations of self- congruity. These include actual self- congruity, social self- congruity, ideal self- congruity, and ideal social self-congruity (Sirgy, 1982). These varying types of congruity denote the various forms of self- image and brand image that the typical consumer represents (Sirgy, 1986; 1997). However, it is worth noting that of the four varying types of self- congruity, actual, and ideal self-congruity is the most widely utilised in studies

(Sirgy, 1982). The match that occurs between a consumers' self-image, whether actual or ideal and a product or brand can be defined as self-congruity (Sirgy et al., 2000). Attaining this congruence results in a sense of fulfilment in all areas of the consumer's self and social needs (Sirgy et al., 2000; Roy and Rabbane, 2015). According to Graeff (1996), consumers' self-image plays a huge role in their views and attitudes towards visibly used brands. This opinion was also supported by Dolich's (1969) and Ross (1971) research. However, Graeff (1996) went further, stating that the actual and ideal self- image has the same impact on customer views of brands used which was not supported by the previous research conducted by Dolich (1969) and Ross (1971). According to Mizerski and Soh (2012), self-congruity influences brand behaviour. This has been supported by Marshall, Na, and Deuskar (2008), who argued that self- congruity has a major effect on brand behaviour, which leads to preference.

Their social group publicly can also impact consumers' attitudes and preferences for a brand. Venkatesan (1966) believed that outside influences, group pressures might impact consumers' brand preferences. This is also supported by Bourne's (1965) research, which discovered that others could influence preferences for individual brands. For this study, groups are defined as "actual or imaginary institutions, individuals, or groups conceived of having significant relevance upon an individual's evaluations, aspirations, or behaviour" (Park & Lessig, 1977). This suggests that customers utilise brands to improve their self- image to adhere to the views of others (Bearden et al., 1989). As discussed, brand preferences dictated by consumers' self-brand congruence and how they choose to present themselves to the world. This, as a result, realises their need for approval and influences the behaviours of other consumers.

#### **2.4.3 Self-congruity and Social media user-engagement**

Public or private use of a brand becomes irrelevant when social media is in question. Self-concept in the context of social media has previously researched by authors such as McKenna & Bargh (2000). It is unclear whether consumers in online brand communities are showcasing their actual or ideal self. Brand content published may be enhanced or heavily edited to suit their needs. According to Nadkarni and

Hoffmann (2012), consumers' social needs in social media brand communities are usually for a sense of belonging, value reinforcement, and or the need for self-exhibition. Consumers or participants of social media brand communities may be incentivised to promote their ideal selves on these platforms because of the effect of positive reassurances from others within these communities (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Hence, consumers' might find it beneficial to present their ideal-self in these social media brand communities.

#### **2.4.4 Moderating role of Self-Brand Congruence**

As discussed previously, research conducted by Sirgy (1982, 1997) show that self-congruity highlights the range of congruity concerning the brands character and the actual self- concept of the consumer. The self-congruity theory suggests that a customer's attitude towards a brand is determined by how he or she believes they are similar to that brand (Sirgy et al., 1997). Chebat et al. (2016) argue that the more likely the perception of similarity between a customers' self- concept and the image of the brand, the more likely it is to influence a consumers' brand preference. Additionally, consumers work on satisfying their internal compliance by making use of brands that mirror their self-concept (Tsai et al., 2015). On the other hand, some authors have queried the sweeping applicability of self- congruity theory to consumers and propose that the theory might not apply to all types of consumers (He and Mukherjee, 2007). They believe that self- congruity theory and the significance of self-concept should be applied to consumers on a case by case basis. However, authors such as Yusof and Ariffin (2016) have established the positive effect of self-congruity when it comes to brand preference, and behaviour.

Self- congruity has a positive effect on consumer actions, and this is due to the feelings of satisfaction the consumer has when it comes to the matched brands (Sirgy et al., 1997). This, as a result, impacts the consumers' preferences and actions towards brands (Mehta, 1999). Furthermore, the positive impact self- congruity has had on consumer brand preference has been established by various research papers. In the past years, self- congruity theory has been developed by examining its influence on various products. These include products such as jewellery (Jamal and Goode, 2001), utilitarian and hedonic products (Grimm, 2005). Although studies

have been conducted on the impact self-congruity has in various industries, there is little to no research on the effect it has on the beauty industry. According to Aaker (1999), consumer brand preferences are linked to how they characterise themselves. This research proposes that self-congruity influences brand preference.

## **2.5 Control Variables – Consumer Demographics**

The impact consumer demographics have on brand preference has vastly varied based previously conducted researches. A handful of previous research has shown that demographics play a large part in brand preference when it comes to education (Jamal and Goode, 2001) and age (Bass and Talarzyk, 1972). On the other hand, research conducted by authors, such as (Duarte and Raposo, 2010) have proven that when it comes to age, gender and education, consumer demographics do not have any relevance to an individual's preference of a specific brand.

Research from authors such as (Fennell et al., 2003) has explored the use of demographics in determining brand preference. They concluded that these variables have very little significance in predicting preferences (Rossi et al., 1996; Singh et al., 2005). This is due to the deficiency in demographics, justifying consumers' brand preferences (Rossi et al., 1996). Despite this, Lin (2002) argued that individuals' brand preferences might be linked to demographic variables. Lin went on to state; establishing and accepting this would lead to more efficient approaches being developed, allowing brands to grow (Lin, 2002) effectively.

Individuals react differently to various sources of information based on their society or background. Keillor et al. (1996) found that individuals in the collectivistic culture tend to rely more on the opinions of family and others to influence their preferences for brands while those in individualistic cultures tend to rely on their own opinions. Additionally, ethnic groups do not have an impact on brand preference. Berkowitz et al. (2005) did not discover any major difference with individuals' preference for brands between various consumer demographics. Jamal and Goode (2001) confirmed this theory; they found in their research that consumer demographics have limited influence on consumer brand preferences.

## **2.6 Summary**

The literature reviewed in this chapter has encompassed social media, brand preference, self-brand congruence, and social approval. Although there is general research on social media and brands, there is limited research examining the predictive influence of these constructs concerning cosmetic brand preferences. This study is aware of the integral role social media plays in determining brand preference, which in addition to social approval and brand congruence, can have a major effect on an individual's brand preferences. This study aims to accomplish the following objectives. To explore the relationship between social media user- engagement and social approval, the relationship between social approval and brand preference, evaluate the mediating role of social approval and the moderating role of self-brand congruence in the relationship between social media user-engagement and social approval. A review of relevant theories will be discussed in the following conceptual framework and research hypotheses chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK & HYPOTHESES

#### 3.0 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the various theories on social media user-engagement, focusing on the dimensions consumption and contribution. Also, the development of brand preference and the impact perceived social approval and self-brand congruence has on these constructs were discussed. From this, a conceptual framework can be established for this research paper. The following sections will discuss the factors that go into the development of consumer preferences to brands, and as a result, illustrating the influential role of social approval and self-brand congruence. This chapter will discuss the theoretical background and research hypotheses. This will be followed by an investigation of the methodology utilised by this study in the following chapter.

#### 3.1 Theoretical Background

There are two theories when it comes to preferences. One theory is that individuals have established, clearly defined preferences, which is tied to concealed importance. On the other hand, another theory is that individuals' preferences are established at the moment of assessment and not just exposed. This type of preference is created by the relationship between data handling and decision making factors (Payne et al., 1999). Based on previous research, the creation of preference is the predominant subject of behavioural decision theory (Payne et al., 1992). On the other hand, Simonson (2008) disagrees; stating that this viewpoint is not inclusive of the other preferences, which are not established by context factors. This shows the thought process of decision-making and overlooks the causes of preferences, including the consumers' preference derived from choice (Simonson, 2008). Yoon and Simonson (2008) states that there are two viewpoints when it comes to the creation of brand preference; they can be either stated brand preferences or preferences not visibly created. Despite this, it should be noted that consumer preferences are not consistent,



and there is no singular means to define the creation of brand preference (Yoon and Simonson, 2008).

One of the studies conducted on consumer engagement is the paper authored by Wallace et al. (2019) which examined consumer engagement with brands, in addition to their effect on consumers' attitudes. Hollebeek et al. (2014) paper focused on the impact of positive and negative brand engagement in social media groups. Another research paper that focused on engagement was by Dessart et al. (2015) which emphasised defining the concept and measurements of customer engagement regarding social media brand groups. These studies examined the relationships of consumer engagement with other concepts. Authors such as Dessart et al. (2015) have expressed the need for future examination of the relationship between the constructs recommended by their framework, in addition to analysing the link amongst the varying elements of the structure with a comprehensive study throughout brand forms. This research paper focuses on Dessart et al. (2015) request for further research on consumer user- engagement and especially in regards to user-engagement in social media brand groups.

Another theory that can be utilised is the social exchange theory, which examines the interactions between consumers, specifically the factors that go into it, which include the features of involvement (Foa & Foa, 1974). The marketing viewpoint of social exchange theory looks at the individual or customer as an expert with, for example, brand-related capabilities, who benefits from the brand community conversations due to intellectual and emotional satisfaction (Keller, 1993). Hence, if the members of the social media brand communities gain satisfaction through their interactions, they are more likely to place importance and benefit from their conversations about brands (Bruhn et al., 2013).

Consumers' sense of fitting into online brand communal spaces is a type of social activity (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Through interactions with others, the members of online brand communal spaces derive a sense of emotional and social sense of belonging to the community (Algesheimer et al. 2005; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Members of these communities value the information and knowledge shared about

brands and as a result, may place significance on the approval of others within the community (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Hence social approval is a huge motivating factor of consumer behaviour. As a result, the social exchange theory supports the notion that consumer engagement in social media online communities, brand communal spaces specifically, impacts their decisions on brand preference.

To discover consumers' brand preference development in social media, this study examines the role of self-congruity and social approval, in relation to social media consumption and contribution. The study investigates consumer engagement on social media amongst each other and the impact this has in developing brand preferences.

## **3.2 Hypotheses**

### **3.2.1 The Dimensions of Social Media User- Engagement and Social Approval**

Prior researches on social media have divided consumers on these platforms, into two groups, observers, who consume content, and contributors (Schlosser et al., 2006; Shoa, 2009). Hence in the current research, the dimensions of consumption and contribution (Schivinski, Christodoulides, and Dabrowski, 2016) dimensions were applied in order to conceptualize and measure social media user engagement. Consumption can be viewed as a passive means of absorbing content, while contribution can be seen as an active form of engaging with content (Shoa, 2009). The dimensions of consumption and contribution were analysed individually with the different constructs discussed in this research. This study makes use of the consumer engagement description provided by Sedley & Perks (2008), which describes consumer engagement as a measured act with the brand, satisfying both new and contributing values.

Social media acts as a guide to a “wide range of Internet-based services and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute to user-created content or join online communities” (Dewing, 2012, p.1). Various social media platforms allow consumers the opportunity to be a part of communities where they

can share their thoughts on brands (Chen et al., 2011). The increased popularity of the various social networking sites has resulted in much discussion about social media user engagement in social media brand groups (Hoffman and Novak, 2012). Previous studies show that there is no definitive explanation of the construct of consumer engagement (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Dessart et al., 2015; Simon et al., 2016). Van Doorn et al. (2010) describe consumer engagement as “customers” collaborative exhibitions, which are usually focused on brands, moving beyond procurement. According to Mollen and Wilson (2010), engagement (contribution) is an intellectual and emotional commitment to an ongoing relationship with a central point. Hollebeek et al. (2014) theorized that “engagement” (contribution) occurs as a result of customer’s shared knowledge and involvements with particular brands, which is essential for numerous online offerings.

Additionally, Calder et al. (2009) also described the idea of online or social media engagement and found that engagement is an assortment of the experiences of consumers with a central purpose. It has been suggested by Brodie et al. (2013) that consumer engagement in social media groups comprise of collaborative experiences amongst consumers and consumers, and customers and brands in the online communal space. While consumer engagement may appear similar to consumer participation, it has been separated by prior studies. Sedley & Perks (2008) state that consumer engagement can be analysed as a “deliberate imperative, activated by marketers to institute and maintain a competitive edge over others.” Sedley & Perks (2008) view consumer engagement as a dependable predictor of corporate performance. Vernuccio et al. (2015), brought the idea of social- interactive engagement, which proposes that consumers’ place great importance on engaging and partaking with others, in addition to the feedback they receive from other members in the online community. Hence, the essential members of online communities place on social media platforms are contingent on the shared uses they derive from them (Vernuccio et al., 2015).

Regardless of the vast, varied descriptions, the feature of partaking in collaborative experiences with a central point is shared amongst most descriptions (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Consequently, authors such as van Doorn et al. (2010, p.254) propose that user engagement is “customer’s behavioural manifestations that

have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers.” The result of the growing amount of connectivity between consumers or members of online communities has led to consumer to consumer or peer interactions to be a vital element of social media user engagement (van Doorn et al., 2010; Vernuccio et al., 2015). This study adopts a social standpoint on consumers’ engagement in online communities about brand content from users. According to Porter et al. (2011) and Fernandes and Remelhe (2015), engagement shows the consumers’ readiness to partake and collaborate with other participants of the online brand communal spaces, which enables them to generate significance for themselves and others.

Upon examination of the data obtained in the quantitative research survey, this study found that the most effective means of measuring social media was to split the construct into two dimensions, consumption and contribution, thereby expanding the hypotheses.

*H1A: Consumption dimension of Social media user- engagement has an influence on social approval.*

*H1B: Contribution dimension of Social media user- engagement has an influence on social approval.*

### **3.2.2 Relationship between Social Approval and Brand Preference**

Brand preference can be described as “the subjective, conscious and behavioral tendencies, which influence consumer’s predisposition towards a brand” (Jamal and Goode, 2001). Bruhn et al. (2012) argue that consumer engagement on social media platforms create brand preference. Doorn et al. (2010) and others have identified that social media users tend to seek other user’s thoughts and opinions adding to brand content and identity. The involvement of others on social media platforms increases brand knowledge amongst consumers, which in turn, has a lot of influence on brands. The dispersed brand information shows that brand communications online guide consumers’ preferences (Bickart and Schindler, 2001). Hence, consumers’ reaction to the thoughts and opinions of others on social media sites contributes in the creation of preference concerning the brand (Gummerus et al., 2012). Brodie et al. (2011) highlights that the greater the contribution of consumers, the higher the brand

satisfaction, participation, consciousness, appearance, and dependability. Hence, this research posits that:

*H2: Perceived social approval has a positive effect on brand preference.*

### **3.2.3 Mediating role of Social Approval**

Social approval comes about as a result of the impact of the thoughts of others within the online groups (Chen et al., 2011). This type of engagement leads to customers getting a greater positive perspective of a brand, which results in the brand being promoted to other consumers in online groups (Aspen, Rooij, & Dijkmans, 2017). This research paper considers social approval as a mediating variable due to its explanation of the relationship between the consumption dimension of social media user- engagement with brand preference and contribution dimension of social media user-engagement with brand preference. Despite a large amount of research on social media, there is limited to no studies on examining the mediating effect of social approval, specifically in regards to brand preference. Consumption and contribution dimension of social media user- engagement is suggested to create social approval, which results in an on- going connection amongst. This largely applies to younger customers, due to the fact that they contribute more to online communities on the various platforms, and are more likely to be influenced by others (Haven, 2007).

Relationships created within online communities can be argued to be interactions with others which in some sense applies influence on the individual or consumer. Social impact theory is utilised to further expand on social approval in social media online communities. Social impact theory is an effective means to explain outside powers that influence consumer choices. This theory looks into the effects other individuals or brands have on another individual. Social impact theory suggests that the impact of others on social media sites grows as a force, increasing its influence when the community is large with a huge presence (Latane, 1981). Based on the social impact theory found in Latane (1981), the higher the role credited to the brand by the consumer, the higher the significance of the brand content and communications amongst social groups. It should be noted that for this to be

effective, the consumers' use of the brand has to be evident to others as this provides more allows for others to come to the preferred conclusions (Swaminathan et al., 2009). Social networking sites allow for consumer brand choices to be seen by peers and others, as a result of engagement with these built online groups (Schau and Gilly, 2003; Berger and Heath, 2007).

It was discovered by Yoo et al. (2000) that positive communications enable consumers to participate in online groups. The positive connections individuals in these online communal spaces receive from others comprise of social factors. Studies conducted by Vernuccio et al. (2015) proposed the notion of socio- interactive engagement, which recommends that consumers gain from providing and receiving content from others in the online groups. Hence, the value the participants receive from these online communities influences their brand preferences (Vernuccio et al., 2015). Participation shows the consumers' willingness to being a part of online brand groups which provides value for the participants and others within the groups (Fernandes and Remelhe, 2015). As a result, it can be argued that with social approval, consumers in online brand groups are more likely to be connected to a brand, resulting in a preference for said brand (Sorenson, 2014). Hence, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

***H3A:** Social approval mediates the relationship between the consumption dimension and brand preference.*

***H3B:** Social approval mediates the relationship dimension contribution dimension and brand preference.*

### **3.2.4 Moderating role of Self-Brand Congruence**

According to Palfrey & Gasser (2008), the primary reason customers make use of social media is to connect with like- minded customers, due to the fact that great significance is placed on their opinions. As a result, younger customers utilise social media to participate with brand content that has similarities with their image. According to Zinkham and Hong (1991), the description of self- concept is dependent on the notion that customer acquisitions are impacted by the idea that the customer has of themselves. Customers establish and develop their self- concept through the

use of brands (Graeff, 1996). The results in what can be labelled as self- image congruence (Sirgy et al., 1997). Congruence theory proposes that “customers express positive attitudes and behaviours if they attain beliefs congruent with events or experiences” (Lee and Joong, 2014). Additionally, there is a positive link in consumers’ brand reviews when the customers’ self- image is in congruence with the brand image (Graeff, 1996). This means that “the more similar a consumer’s self- image is to the brand’s image, the more favourable their evaluations of that brand should be” (Graeff, 1996, p. 5). Congruence theory suggests that customers are more likely to demonstrate a positive approach towards a brand that they consider to be in congruence with their values.

The perceptions of one’s self is closely linked to their personality. Authors such as Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) state that individuals create presences online in social media communities to show a particular side of themselves or a somewhat self- concept they want to present to the online community. As a result, these online brand communities are sometimes seen as public platforms to show their identity through brands and products (Chernev et al. 2011; Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012). Hence, this research study makes use of the social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) to present the notion that consumer-brand similarities influence the brand preference of consumers in online brand communities. It has been argued by authors such as Toubia and Stephen (2013) and Wilcox and Stephen (2013) that individuals use brands to improve their self-image, to make positive impressions among their peers and others in these online member communities.

Tajfel and Turner’s (1986) social identity theory proposes that consumers define their self- concept based on the links they have to their social groups. The identifying supposition of social identity theory is that self- concept is made up of an individual identity that is gotten from a unique sense of identity that includes particular subjective characteristics and a social identity, which is the idea of being part of a community (Elbedweihy et al., 2016; Homburg et al., 2009). The idea of social identity is a feeling of being part of a community (Dholakia et al., 2004; Homburg et al., 2009; Lam et al., 2010), and as a result, they go through a mutual illustration of self (Ellemers and Haslam, 2011). Previous studies have discovered that online community members cultivate or grow a notion of being part of a group, allowing

them feeling like they are part of the in-crowd. Individuals that place value and importance on social identity, usually participate in group activities and information (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006).

Lam et al. (2010) associated the self-concept to brands by describing consumer-brand identification as how consumers use their link to brands to define who they are as individuals. According to Lam et al. (2010), the social identity theory shows the reasoning for consumers' eagerness to forge a dedicated partnership and participation with brands. Additionally, consumer-brand identification promotes the growth of a consumer's enthusiasm towards certain brands (Elbedweihy et al., 2016). Also, the way an individual presents themselves is an essential and perceptible element of who they are as individuals (Goffman, 1959). Individuals use brands as representative assets of who they are, as well as make assumptions about others, based on their brand choices (Chernev et al., 2011; Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967). According to Escalas and Bettman (2005), a brand that is suitably linked and congruent with the consumer is more likely to be made use of by the consumer. On the same note, individuals and consumers use brands to improve their self-image and show others who they identify as or who they want to be (Berger and Ward, 2010; Simon et al., 2016). Hence, a consumer's view of the association of their self-concept to a brand is more likely than not to increase their preference for said brand.

The concept of brand congruence can be argued as being an addition to the self-congruity theory from the perspective of branding (Mulyanegara and Tsarenko, 2009). As discussed earlier, the self-congruity theory insinuates that the higher the similarity (congruity) between the individual's self-concept and the features of the brand, the more chance of a preference for the brand (Malhorta, 1988; Sirgy, 1982). The two main reasons that can be identified as to the motivation of consumer's choice of brands to mirror their self-concept. To begin with, the image and character of a brand gives consumers the chance to show their actual self-concept (Belk, 1988) and the ideal self-concept (Malhorta, 1988). Another reason is that if consumers find congruence between their self-concept, and brands, there is a higher probability to develop an ongoing relationship with the brand and the community of that brand (Aaker and Fournier, 1995).



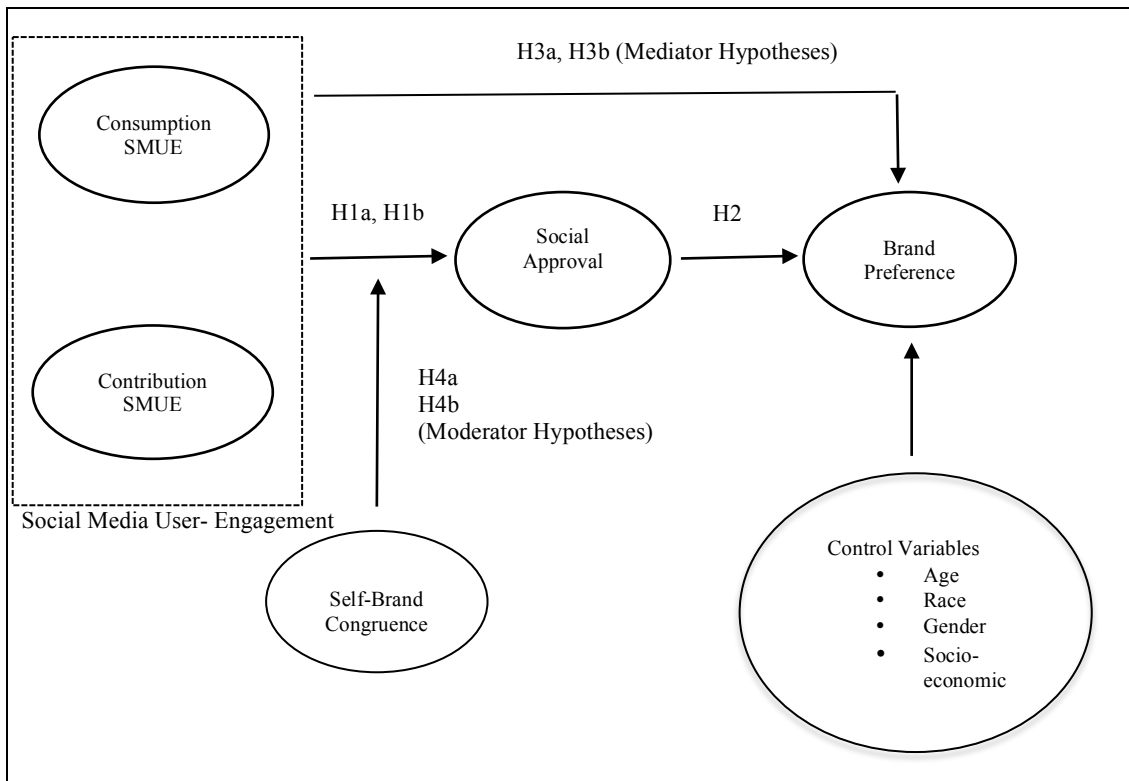
Examining the marketing perspective, congruence concerning the customer, and the brand has a considerable impact on the consumers' engagement with like-minded individuals (Pradhan et al., 2015). Congruence can be thought of as a comparative and conditional variable, which acts as a moderating component instead of having a clear influence (Pradhan et al., 2015). Therefore, engagement conduct is encouraged mostly by means of several motivational variables, such as social approval, and the location in which this engagement attitude occurs must act in a moderating role not a motivational role (Alsaad et al., 2017). Therefore, it is suggested that when customers discern a higher point of congruence concerning particular brand content, the higher the impact of social approval. Therefore sanctioning preference concerning the brand (Sanchez- Franco et al., 2015). Using the self-congruity theory on branding, this research study evaluates the influence self-brand congruity has on the relationship between social media user-engagement consumption and social approval, as well as social media user-engagement contribution and social approval. Hence, the following hypothesis:

***H4A:** Self-brand congruence positively moderates the effect of consumption dimension on social approval.*

***H4B:** Self-brand congruence positively moderates the effect of contribution dimension on social approval.*

The offered research, and framework, which theorizes that the consumption and contribution dimension of social media user-engagement, has a positive impact on social approval. Additionally, it is suggested that social approval has a positive effect on brand preference. Additionally, social approval is likely to mediate the relationship between the consumption and contribution dimension of social media user-engagement and brand preference. Lastly, this study proposes that self-brand congruence moderates the positive effect of the consumption and contribution dimension of social media user-engagement and social approval.

This can be shown in the conceptual research model illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Model**

### 3.3 Summary

This study focuses on how the two constructs, self-brand congruence, and social approval, moderate and mediate, which is crucial in understanding how the constructs are developed. This paper aims to work towards an improved understanding of the consumption and contribution dimension of social media user- engagement, social approval, self- brand congruence and consumer brand preference. As a result, this upcoming chapter will examine the methodological approach implemented to offer solutions for the research questions of this research paper.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the philosophy, methods, and measures used to gather data. Additionally, both secondary research and multi-method primary research utilised by this study will be discussed. Initially, secondary research was essential in establishing an in-depth understanding of the different constructs and the roles they play in determining consumer brand preference. Also, secondary research is used in assisting with the development of the primary research questions. Exploratory research was used to get a better, deeper understanding of the thoughts and behaviour of social media users. This enabled the development of hypotheses, which was only made possible through the use of in-depth interviews. According to Saunders et al. (2009), the aim of exploratory research is to gather more understanding and evaluate facts in a different light. The exploratory research was followed by explanatory research, which serves the purpose as a form of expressive study that aids in explaining the connections between variables (Saunders et al., 2009). This was utilised in the developed hypotheses for this research.

#### 4.1 Research Process

##### 4.1.1 Philosophy

Richie and Lewis (2001), describe epistemology as “the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired.” Epistemology can be divided into two main opposing views, interpretivism and positivism. Saunders et al. (2009), argues that the interpretivist philosophy encourages a better understanding of humans as social actors by the researcher. On the other hand, the positivist philosophy works under the premise that there is only one truth and it is both objective and hypothesis determined (Sayre, 2001). Due to the limited literature on the subject matter (relationships among social media user-engagement, social approval and brand preference) of the current study,

an interpretivist philosophy was initially employed by the study to better comprehend the research area. This enabled the study to get a better understanding of the topic area, to contribute to the improvement of the hypotheses, allowing for it to be tested using a positivist philosophy. These two philosophies were used in this study to gain further understanding of the research area and test the relevant hypotheses.

#### **4.1.2 Approach**

Dual tactics may be implemented in academic studies, an inductive approach and a deductive approach. Ritchie and Lewis (2001), define the inductive approach as an approach, which investigates patterns and connections gotten from observations of the world. The deductive approach comprises an analyses of the study by using an investigative strategy particularly intended for its analysis (Saunders et al., 2009). This research initially made use of an inductive approach, mainly linked with interpretivism, allowing this study to investigate the thoughts, and views of the participants further. This enabled for further development of hypotheses, and a deductive approach, which is linked with positivism, was then made use of to analyse them.

#### **4.2 Secondary Research**

This study made use of existing research that was assembled for purposes other than the present study project, which was essential for an in-depth understanding of the research area (Hair et al., 2009). Malhotra and Birks (2000), classify secondary research as either internal or external. However, this paper only made use of external secondary data, gotten from academic journals, textbooks, articles, and various online websites.

##### **4.2.1 Secondary Research Advantages**

The use of secondary research for this paper enabled for better understanding of the research issue and provided vital contextual material for this research (McDaniel and Gates, 2010). Additionally, the use of secondary research required little to no costs

and due to the wide accessibility of data online; this study was able to gather information in a short amount of time (Hair et al., 2009).

#### **4.2.2 Secondary Research Limitations**

The secondary research undertaken for this study had some limitations. To begin with, there were not a lot of academic journals about user-engagement in social media concerning brand preference. Additionally, there were even less on this relationship in connection with social approval and congruence. Another problem that arose was that of research relevancy, which occurs when determining whether the secondary research matches the existing issue (Hair et al., 2009). There was also an issue of the various ranging terms used for social media, which resulted in this study enlarging the scope of the term when searching for secondary data. Finally, the accuracy of the research was an issue, in terms of how well the secondary research can be relied upon (Hair et al., 2009). A vast majority of the research discovered was more routed in the opinions of the researchers rather than tried and tested research with results.

#### **4.3 Qualitative and Quantitative Research**

Qualitative research methods comprise in-depth interviews, focus groups and observations gained through text, images employing open-ended questions, surveillance or discovered information (Hair et al., 2009). Focus groups were first considered for this study but it would not have been the most effective in gaining in-depth data on a one on one bases. This is because a group setting might not prove to be a comfortable environment for some individuals to openly share their thoughts and opinions. This research made use of in-depth interviews, as they were the most suitable in gathering rich and extensive information (Walls et al, 2011). This was then followed by quantitative means of data collection, which usually involves surveys and online surveys. This comprised of formal questions and prearranged answer choices dispensed to a sizeable amount of participants (Hair et al., 2009). The findings of the in-depth interviews aided in contextualizing the model and the

measures of the constructs. This allowed for a transition to quantitative by means of a survey questionnaire containing measures of the constructs.

This research made use of quantitative methodology as it signifies an approach that combines data to analyse with statistical methods (Malhotra, 2007). Punch (2013) states that the research methodology utilised for a study should be in accordance with the study research question and objectives. Additionally, previous studies have encouraged the use of qualitative and quantitative surveys to examine the underlying phenomenon, as a result, a survey is considered as a suitable approach in this circumstance. According to Zikmund (2003), questions are efficient, affordable and effective to examine theories. As a result, the most effective means of examining the proposed theories of this study is to make use of both qualitative and quantitative surveys to achieve the objectives of this research study.

#### **4.4 Research Instruments**

##### **4.4.1 In-depth Interviews**

The instrument design used for the exploratory research was in-depth interviews; which is a direct, one-to-one interaction with specific participants, focused on a specific topic (Hair et al., 2009). In-depth interviews allowed for the research to delve deeper and understand brand preference in terms of social media and the correlations they have to social approval and self-brand congruence. The participants were able to talk in-depth about their experiences, thoughts, and opinions when it comes to the topic area (Parasuraman et al., 2004).

The interviews were comprised of various segments of the population, ranging in age, gender, race, and socio-economic class. The participants were recruited through word of mouth and provided with consent forms with a brief detail about the study and what their parts involved. Participants were provided with drinks and refreshments for taking part in the research.

#### **4.4.2 Online Survey**

Findings from the exploratory research were used to design a survey for the online survey. This takes the form of an official structure comprising of a prearranged set of questions and scales devised to produce primary data (Saunders et. al, 2009). The survey was used to assemble data, to test the hypotheses and make deductions, connecting back to the objectives of this research paper.

#### **4.5 Sampling**

##### **4.5.1 Rationale for sample used in In-depth Interviews**

Malhotra and Birks (1999), see a sample as the population of relevance that has the information required by the researcher and where deductions can be made. Concerning this research, the target population can be described as social media users, who made use of the social media content of personal care brands they preferred. The sample comprised of both male and female participants of various ethnicities, within the age range of 19-45, with an income level between \$20-150,000 per annum. Consequently, the qualitative research instrument, the geographical boundaries of this study was contained in Perth, Western Australia.

The study adopts the definition of sampling frame described by Malhorta and Birks (199). They defined a sampling frame as a snap shot of the features of the target population. Initially, this study was both exploratory as well as inductive and made use of a small sample size. Data attained from the in-depth interviews could not be generalised. Hence, a purposive non-probability sampling technique was implemented. This can be defined as a process in which the likelihood of choosing each sampling unit is undetermined (Malhorta and Birks, 1999). Non-random sampling consists of four different types of sampling methods. These comprise of convenience, quota, judgement, and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling, which encompasses choosing persons that are easiest to attain for the sample (Saunders et al., 2009) was used for this study. Additionally, Snowball sampling, which involves using the approach of word-of-mouth, was also adopted for this

survey (Saunders et al., 2009). According to Yu and Cooper (1983), interviews allow for the utmost rate of responses, in comparison to other means of data collection. The researcher conducted a total of 10 in-depth interviews for this survey. This study concluded its qualitative survey at 10 in-depth interviews due to data saturation. This was because no new data was being attained from the interviews.

#### **4.5.2 Rationale for sample used in Survey**

The purpose of a sample is to provide a suitable option to survey the whole population, which would prove to be unfeasible as a result of a lack of time and sufficient funds (Saunders et al., 2012). The use of samples allows for more precise results compared to other means such as a census which may not yield exact results (Churchill, 1979). It is important to note that when making use of samples, the researcher has to leave room for generalisability, as a result, a representative sample of the demarcated population was sort (Saunders et al., 2012). To achieve this result, the author examined the quality as well as the bias of the sample.

Three bases of sample bias were identified by Blair and Zinkhan (2006), these included, coverage bias which occurs as a result of excluding a portion for the intended population. Another type of bias is selection bias which happens when specific groups are chosen above others. Lastly, non-response bias can be described as the comparison between respondents who refused to take part in the survey or were not eligible and valid. It can be argued that non-response bias is more suited to non-probability samples. Nevertheless, by no means is non-response bias the only means by which to evaluate sample quality (Blair and Zinkhan, 2006). The responses deemed by the author to be invalid due to refusal or ineligibility are viable sources of non-response bias (Yu and Cooper, 1983). Non-response bias can be minimised at the early stages through the means of research design development and decreasing the number of non-respondents (Churchill, 1979). The response rate can be improved by means of ensuring the right target population for the research, as well as ensuring accuracy in survey design and means of attaining contact with respondents.

As for explanatory and analytical research, an online research survey was conducted to measure the constructs and gain additional data (Malhotra and Birks, 1999). The



author believes that the use of a self-administered survey in this study, allowed the respondents to be guided during the course of their survey participation (Saunders et al., 2012). This study was able to get respondents for its online survey using a third party company known as GrowthOps. The main benefit of this research data collection is the large response rate it attains in a short period (Sekaran, 2003). The online survey had a total of 1,079 participants' responses. Data collected from the survey was tested and evaluated to identify any errors or missing data. According to Pallant (2010), missing data can be identified as 'unavailable values of one or more variables'. The result of missing data leads to sample size reduction, which is followed by result bias, inevitably impacting the generalizability of the survey (Tabachnick and Fidel, 2006). Research conducted by Hair et al. (2010) proposed that missing data can be identified and solved by recognising the type of data missing, evaluating the degree of missing data, analyse the uncertainty of missing data and lastly apply the solution.

As a result of the process of elimination due to failed QA's (lack of consent, flat liners and so on), the online survey concluded with 299 valid completes a valid sample size. The respondents ranged from male to female, various ethnicities which reflected the population and spectrum of ages and socio-economic classes. The length of the survey was considered and designed specifically to attract participants. Once the data was attained, examining the sample selection bias, assessing the respondent demographics with the present population, tested the sample quality.

## **4.6 In-depth interviews**

### **4.6.1 Planning phase**

One of the most essential parts of this research is the planning process of in-depth interviews (Hair et al., 2009). The settings for the interviews were of the utmost importance to ensure a comfortable and safe setting to ensure an unhindered, open dialogue between the participant and the researcher. The researcher of this study, using a preassembled, semi-structured, open-ended list of questions, guided the interviews. This was able to ensure that the interviews were semi-structured conversations. Open-ended questions were asked, to encourage unrestricted, open

dialogue. Most of the interviews were audio- recorded to transcribe the data once they were completed. The qualitative discussion is attached in Appendix A.

#### **4.6.2 Execution Phase**

Each interview began with the researcher clarifying the purpose of the study and how the interview would be conducted and the confidentiality of the research. The participants were asked to sign a consent form to use the interview results and each participant was assured that their anonymity would be respected. The interview guide was composed of open- ended enquiries that aimed to achieve the objectives of the study. Additionally, the researcher incorporated probing questions, to investigate issues further. The interviews began with opening questions, which were answered expediently, allowing for the participants to give brief introductions about themselves, in addition to stating the social media channels they made use of.

This was followed by questions, which allowed the participants to reflect on previous experiences and their links to the topic as a whole. The interview guide comprised of questions such as, ‘What type of social media do you use?’; ‘How often do you use social media?’ and ‘Why do you use social media?’ enabling the participant’s views, feelings and opinions about social media to be examined. These were followed by transition questions, guiding participants towards the fundamental themes of significance with questions, which included, ‘Do you follow any cosmetic brands on social media?’; ‘Please elaborate what you actually do while following the brands on social media?’ and ‘Please share your thoughts on how social media influences your purchase decision of brands in general and the cosmetic brand mentioned previously?’ which assisted in answering the objective of participants views on the role social media plays in their preferred brand choice.

Following this, essential questions were then utilised to discuss what role the different constructs play in determining the importance of social approval and how their brand preference is formed. The participants were asked: ‘Share your thoughts on how social media influences your purchase decision of brands in general and the cosmetic brands mentioned in particular?’; ‘Do you think the opinions of others on social media affect your perception about brands?’ and ‘How likely others’ opinions

influence your purchase decision of the brand and why?'. These questions were used to be able to garner the impact or influence social approval on social media sites have on the participants' brand preference decisions.

The questions then delved into the role self-brand congruence plays in the decisions the participants make when it comes to deciding the brands they prefer and follow on social media. These questions included: 'Do you think the personality or image of the brands that you follow on social media match with your personality or image?' and 'Do you think such a match influences your thoughts and actions towards the brand?'

Lastly, the participant's demographics, which included their age, gender, and occupation, were gotten to achieve one of the objectives of this study. This aided in exploring if demographics play any role in their decisions or the relationships of these constructs.

#### **4.6.3 Data analysis of the In-depth interviews**

The data attained from the in-depth interviews provided an abundance of rich data. As a result, thematic qualitative analysis, which is a way in which words and ideas are sorted into themes, was employed to analyse the data received (Hayes, 2008). This method of analysis allowed for the formation of consequential discoveries from the in-depth interview conversations. Consequently, these themes lead to the development of hypotheses and the generation of a suitable quantitative survey that examined these hypotheses (Bellenger, Bernhardt and Goldstucker, 1976). This study conducted a thematic analysis by collating and categorising the responses received from the interviews into themes. Once this was completed, queries were run to identify and categorise the most useful themes. This provided the insights needed to report the findings. The details of the thematic analysis of the in-depth interviews will be addressed in the subsequent chapter, chapter 4.

#### **4.6.4 Issues arising with the In-depth Interview Research**

The interviews comprised of mostly females because most of the male individuals approached to be participants did not follow personal brands on social media, which

might have led to a female- biased view. On the other hand, the age range of the participants varied, allowing a suitable array of ages. Another issue that arose was that upon transcribing the interviews, some of the data was inaudible, which led to some gaps in the information provided. The findings received from the in-depth interviews, provided the information required to compile a list of questions for the survey. These survey questions helped to answer the research questions.

## **4.7 Quantitative Data Collection**

### **4.7.1 Designing the Survey**

The survey was made up of structured, close-ended questions, which asked the respondents to select from designed scale points (Hair et al., 2009). The questions designed for the survey were created based on contributions from the literature review and themes derived from the qualitative research. The researcher made use of the funnel approach to develop the survey. The survey started with general questions and then gradually tapered down the range of the questions (Oppenheim, 1996). The survey started with factual questions about their favourite cosmetic brands and if they follow said brands on social media. This allowed the researcher to get foundational details about the respondent's background and experience.

This was followed by further questions to determine respondent's opinions towards social media and brand preference, measured using a 7 point Likert scale of 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', which was created from a theme that came out of the qualitative research analysis. Also included in the survey were questions about if and how the participant's brand decisions on social media are impacted by the approval of others and the similarities between themselves and the brand. Lastly, the participants were given multiple-choice questions at the end of the survey about their demographics, including gender, age, and income level.

The online survey was developed with the use of Qualtrics software, which allowed respondents to effectively and efficiently respond to questions promptly. The researcher designed the online survey in a way in which respondents were unable to

skip questions, alerting the respondent to the error and requesting for them to complete the question before being able to proceed.

#### **4.7.2 Pilot Test**

A pilot survey was developed as a form of beta testing before the official online survey was created with Qualtrics. A pilot survey involves minor sample testing of participants to detect and exclude potential issues (Malhotra and Birks, 1999). According to Churchill (1979), a pilot test is an essential part of scale development and measurement. The pilot study aimed to examine and refine the content of the survey. A paper version was developed and distributed to test out the survey. The researcher was unable to prevent respondents from skipping over some questions or not filling them correctly. This resulted in a few invalid survey, which was taken out of the completed data. This pilot study was completed by a small sample group of 12 individuals. All respondents were within the research target group and as a result, were well situated to complete and comment on the survey. The respondent's feedback on the survey's content, wording, form and layout were discussed with the researcher. The respondents filled the surveys and then the researcher about their feedback on the survey interviewed the respondents.

The pilot study revealed that the survey was too long, taking a duration of about fifteen minutes to complete. Also, it was discovered that some of the enquiries were monotonous. As a result, some of the questions were restructured, which resulted in the completion time being reduced. This resulted in an increase in completed surveys and a decrease of respondent redraws. Furthermore, the pilot survey revealed that some questions needed better clarification in the phrasing to clarify what was expected of them in the response.

An example of this is the researcher further clarifying questions such as 'It makes sense to buy brand X instead of any other brand of cosmetics even if another cosmetics brand has the same features as brand X'. This made it less confusing for the respondents. The online survey was launched and active for a week to gather the number of responses needed for this research study, which was faster than the researcher anticipated it would take.

### **4.7.3 Method of Data Collection and Rationale**

Initially, the online survey was operationalized through emails; however, the response rate was found to be less than ten percent. Hence the researcher used a third party data collection company to run the online survey. The company distributed the online Qualtrics survey link to their panel members and achieved 1,079 participant responses. This also helped the researcher to benefit from a wide demographic range of respondents.

A structured survey was utilised for this research due to its investigative, statistical and analytical abilities. The use of quantitative research provides the ability to solve questions such as how often, how likely and when (Cooper and Schindler, 2006). The data collected from the research sample was measured and the findings were used to generalise the views of the population.

### **4.7.4 Data analysis of Online Survey**

The data obtained from the online survey was examined with the use of AMOS 25 and SPSS (Statistical Package for Social sciences). AMOS 25 can be defined as a module of SPSS that performs data analysis and structural equation modelling. In other words, AMOS 25 is a statistical software, which is used to perform various tasks related to data analysis. AMOS 25 was beneficial for this study as it was used for confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling. Using AMOS 25 helps in identifying, estimating and accessing models in the form of diagrams and also aids in defining the relationship between the variables. This assisted the study in analysing and examining the data for validity and reliability. Additionally, AMOS 25 also allowed this study to build models that reflect the relationships among the variables. SPSS is popular for its software for effective data analysis. SPSS has the capabilities of data analysis, reporting of data and file management. Additionally, survey reliability test techniques were applied for data analysis.

This method was efficient in achieving the main goal of this study, which is to examine the part social approval and self- brand congruence plays in the relationship between social media- user engagement and brand preference. As discussed previously, this was achieved using a sampling frame of both male and female participants, within broad socio- economic and ethnic groups, who make use of social media to follow content on personal care brands.

#### **4.7.5 Issues arising with Online Survey**

The online survey for this research study was extremely delayed due to financial constraints. As a result, this set back the analysis of the data and consequently the completion of this research thesis. The researcher was aware of having an adequate sample size because a suffice size of the sample respondents may refuse to participate and become non-response errors, which could lead to bias.

#### **4.8 Assessment of the Construct**

##### **4.8.1 Validity**

According to Hair et al. (2009), validity can be defined as the extent to which a research instrument assists the purpose of what it was created, and the results gotten from the research are accurate. To safeguard the accuracy and validity of the data obtained from both the qualitative and quantitative surveys, a pilot study was carried out to make sure that the data being measured is what was required for this research study. Another instrument used to check the validity of the survey was content validity. Content validity can be described as the subjective evaluation of how well a construct's measurable components embody the construct (Hair et al., 2009).

Extensive research was done into both in-depth interviews and online survey methods, to ensure the growth of the researcher's skills and knowledge. Additionally, an essential study was done of these two research instruments to make sure there was no bias or influence while conducting the interviews, as well as making sure the

language used for the surveys was logical and significant to the respondents. This aided in the increase in validity of the content understood by the respondents.

#### **4.8.2 Reliability**

Saunders et al. (2009) describes reliability as the degree to which data collection will produce dependable results. The main issue with the use of in-depth interviews is its lack of reliability. However, due to the number of interviews conducted with varied respondents, this research study was able to make sure the reliability of the data collected, due to the similarities in the content gotten. Additionally, reliability was ensured with the use of a structured question guide, as well as, gaining feedback from the pilot study conducted. On the other hand, surveys are known for their reliability and to ensure further reliability, a pilot study was conducted.

#### **4.8.3 Generalisability**

Generalisability can be defined as research study results that can be applied to the total population (Saunders et al., 2009). In-depth interviews are done on a one on one basis, which results in an absence of representativeness when it comes to the general target population. Consequently resulting in difficulty when it comes to generalising the results. Hence, a survey was designed to evaluate the hypotheses, which were created from the data collected from the qualitative study. The use of surveys allow for a larger sample size, resulting in a larger representative of the total population.

External validity, which can be defined as the degree to which a connection found in a study can be predicted to be accurate when it comes to the whole target population (Hair et al., 2009). This study was able to achieve external validity because due to the access the research survey had to the general public as a result of assistance gotten from the third party company.



## **4.9 Summary**

The methodology aims to perform as a general strategy of the approaches used to gather and evaluate data as well as a vital portion of attaining the research objectives (Hair et al., 2009). Additionally, this chapter also discussed the research design used and the kind of data collection and sampling methods that were employed. The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods for the primary research allowed for the research study to amass more information required to add to the existing secondary research data available on the specific area of research. The various limitations that existed at each step of the research were addressed and the solutions, where applicable were discussed.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

The study aimed to use existing scales to determine social media user- engagement concerning brand preference, using the moderating and mediating roles on social approval and self-brand congruence, as discussed previously. Qualitative practises were utilised to produce the preliminary pieces, which showed the various stages of social media engagement and brand preference. This chapter shows the data obtained and findings discovered from the qualitative and quantitative research conducted by this study. The initial questions in the quantitative research survey were preliminary data screening questions to ascertain the social media platforms and cosmetic brands of the participants. Sections about social media, brand preference, self-brand congruence, and social approval followed these. Then questions about the participants' demographics were asked lastly. The data was examined initially, using the software package SPSS as recommended by Zikmund (2003), which was followed by AMOS 25.

#### **5.1 Qualitative Data Analysis**

The in-depth interviews for the qualitative research first began in January 2019 and were structured around pre-determined questions to answer the primary qualitative research objectives. The objective of the in-depth interviews was to investigate the thoughts and opinions of individuals towards social media concerning to brand preference and to examine how social approval and self-brand congruence affects brand preference. This aided in understanding the subject and helped in developing the gap in the literature. The data gotten from the primary qualitative research was analysed with the use of themes, which were used to cultivate hypotheses, which assisted in the creation of the survey for the quantitative primary research survey. The responses and resulting themes from the data collected in qualitative research can be found below.

## **Theme 1: Social media is an informative and trusted tool for information**

The results attained from the qualitative research found that participants of the in-depth interviews were aware of the different types of social media and made use of it in some aspect of their lives. The researcher asked questions like: ‘What type of social media do you use?’, ‘Why do you use social media?’ ‘Do you follow any cosmetic brands on social media?’ the results from data collected found that there was an overall agreement amongst all the participants interviewed in their outlook and opinion in regards to social media being informative, reliable and appreciated.

*“It’s my first point of call when I am considering buying a product. Get more information about which brands provide what products and if those products suit my needs. Also, it helps me in getting more information on what the products offer and if there are better products offered by other brands.” (Interviewee 4, Female, Age 30)*

The views and opinions of participants when it comes to social media, were alike in terms of how they find social media and content about brands on social media influential, trustworthy and consequently had importance when making purchase decisions. Additionally, participants were questioned on what they use social media for and in what aspect they gather information from the content on these sites. The findings from data collected discovered that the participants spent a minimum amount of time searching for products and or brands because they regularly got updates on their feed. As a result, they were able to get a maximum amount of information in a short amount of time.

*“Well, I regularly check for updates from the brands I am interested in on social media. It provides me with information on the latest products and offerings they have on offer. Also, it makes me aware of any sales or deals they have on offer as soon as possible, so I am able to get in on it before it’s too late.” (Interviewee 4, Female, Age 30)*

*“...When I am actively seeking a product, I will go to their Instagram page and go through their feed” (Interviewee 5, Male, Age 19)*

*...if something starts to pop up more and more; you will be more likely to pay attention to it. With things like that, if it does catch my eye sometimes, I do click it,*

*and that is why I think social media really does have an influence on what I'm looking at." (Interviewee 1, Female, Age 22)*

It is worth noting that two participants made it clear that social media is not the sole reason why they choose a specific brand, but they find it more of a reassuring factor.

*"I can tell you that I am more likely to support brands that are clean, no animal testing, and give back to the community. I usually get this information from others on social media. I am able to find out what honestly goes on behind the scenes of a brand from them, not the perfect images the brands themselves show you." (Interviewee 4, Female, Age 30)*

*"...It shows you where there are deals and other stuff, but I personally went to the store and had a look, so that was not advertised anywhere. It all depends on me." (Interviewee 8, Male, Age 27)*

The use of this theme presented significant positions, which showed that social media is deemed to be dependable and trustworthy when it comes to making decisions about brands. Although there may be varying degrees of trust in social media, the primary research data showed that brand preference on social media was achieved through the following of content from trusted user-engagement generators.

## **Theme 2: Interaction and perception of others on social media, influence brand preference**

Participants were queried on if they follow any cosmetic brands or cosmetic brand content creators on social media, and if so, what information they look for when looking at brand-related content. Additionally, they were asked how the content creators and others within the social media brand communities influence their cosmetic brand choices. The findings from the interviews suggest that the participants take into consideration the thoughts and opinions of other like-minded individuals and others within their social circle. These results were gathered through questions such as 'Can you share how social media influences your decision to buy, purchase certain products from specific brands?' and 'Do you think the opinions of others on social media affect your perception about a specific brand?'

*“Influencers like Jackie Aina or Elisa Ashley, if they have said that the product they have used is easy to use, it’s nice, it’s inclusive, the brand itself is supportive to myself...then I’m more inclined to use those products.” (Interviewee 1, Female, Age 22)*

*“...It’s not as if it has direct influence on it... I might just like someone’s style of edit and then maybe pick one or two things from it, or you just appreciate it.” (Interviewee 3, Male, Age 36)*

*“The opinions I take into considerations when thinking of buying a product from a specific brand are from influencers. I am aware that these influencers tend to be sponsored by brands, and there might be a chance of bias, but the influencers I follow, I follow because I trust them and trust their opinions. They are similar to me, have similar tastes, and like the things I would like. So I use them as a sounding board before I invest money into a product or brand and so far they haven’t led me wrong.” (Interviewee 4, Female, Age 30)*

The interviewees were asked about their peers within the social media online brand communities, influenced their decision-making, about cosmetic products. These questions allowed the research to explore the attitudes and perceptions of participants concerning how the thoughts of others affected their choices in cosmetic brands. The results show that participants used social media as a means to interact and connect with others. The interviewees took into consideration the views of others within their brand communities when determining their choice of brands. The interactions and perceptions of participants in the interviews suggest that interacting with others plays an essential part in their brand preferences.

*“...with some of my friends, like close friends, if they don’t like a certain brand or like a certain product, it might give me a second thought about that second product and so if... For example, if I share a post to one of my friends from Instagram about a product, and I was like “oh should I get this” or something like that.” (Interviewee 5, Male, Age 19)*

According to the discussions from the participants, interaction with other like-minded people in online brand communities, was of high value and importance when choosing a brand of preference. The participants placed much of significance on the communication and connection they have within social media, highlighting the need for interaction, especially when it comes to choosing brands.

*“... if they are not sure about it, then yeah, that would have an influence but or if they have liked it for example or shared it on Instagram or Facebook.” (Interviewee 5, Male, Age 19)*

*“...I come into contact with their content, then that might influence me purchasing as well.” (Interviewee 5, Male, Age 19)*

*“Well more of the reviews of the people who use the products can affect my decision.” (Interviewee 9, Male, Age 26)*

It was revealed that this interaction and engagement on social media had a significant impact on their views on brands and if those brands, were right for them. Additionally, the participants found the reviews of others to be reassuring in forming their preferences. This shows the essential role of engaging and interacting with others on social media plays when it comes to consumer's choices in brands.

*“My friends and I kind of look to each other when it comes to buying products. We like and enjoy the same things. So, yeah, their opinions do matter to me. They have an impact on what I buy.” (Interviewee 6, Female, Age 25)*

*“Yes, I look to certain influencers with simple needs as mine. How they feel about a brand does affect my perception of that brand.” (Interviewee 7, Female, Age 51)*

These statements show that consumers' perceptions of themselves and how they would like to be viewed by others is linked to the brand they choose. Research from authors such as Locke & Christensen (2007) suggests that individuals who are attached to how others perceive them are more likely to acclimatise to societal standards. The qualitative findings propose that the attitudes and perceptions of others on social media platforms affected the participants' choices when it comes to their brand preferences.

### **Theme 3: Similarities between consumers and the brand, influences brand preference**

The participants were queried on what role similarities between themselves and the brand image play when it comes to their brand preferences. This was ascertained through questions such as ‘Do you think the personality or image of the brand that you follow on social media matches your own personality or image?’ and ‘Do you

think such a match, influences your thoughts and actions towards that brand?' Findings from the data collected in the interviews found that participants' decisions about what brands they chose on social media were influenced by how likely the brand's image matched with the image they had of themselves.

*"...it might not necessarily match my personality, exactly, but it reflects different things that I like." (Interviewee 1, Female, Age 22)*

*"...it affects the way I interact with that brand or the way I feel towards it because if I was not able to relate to it, then I wouldn't watch it." (Interviewee 1, Female, Age 22)*

*"I can tell you that I am more likely to support brands that are clean, no animal testing, and give back to the community. I usually get this information from others on social media. I am able to find out what honestly goes on behind the scenes of a brand from them, not the perfect images the brands themselves show you." (Interviewee 4, Female, Age 30)*

Additionally, the participants were queried on whether they follow and prefer a brand that fulfil the needs of their self-image or identity. Questions also included were, "Do you think the image or personality of the brands you follow on social media matches yours?"

*"...if the product matches my need, yeah." (Interviewee 3, Male, Age 36)*

*"Well, to some extent, yes, I would say that I follow brands based on how I would like people to see me, the type of person I would like to be." (Interviewee 6, Female, Age 25)*

*"In a sense, yes, I follow brands that align with my sort of style and lifestyle" (Interviewee 5, Male, Age 19)*

The responses from the participants showed that they were attracted to brands that matched their self-image, and they were able to gain awareness of these brands through content creators and brands they followed on social media. Consequently, the findings suggest that the participants' brand preference, in part, was based on the similarities between themselves and the brand. This research found that the congruence between a brand and the consumer has a positive effect. Thus the findings from the qualitative research helped to contextualise the proposed model, its

constructs and the measures. This led the researcher to develop a structured questionnaire to run a quantitative survey. The analysis of the quantitative research is discussed below.

## **5.2 Quantitative Data Analysis**

The findings from this research survey were gathered on Qualtrics, which was subsequently downloaded into the SPSS statistical programme for analysis. Examination of the data was done by using various techniques, beginning with fundamental analysis, which was done through a combination of frequency analysis. This was carried out to determine the amount of responses connected with the different values of one variable, stated in percentage terms, and cross-tabulation analysis, which is a statistical technique that portrays two or more variables simultaneously (Malhorta and Birks, 1999). The use of these techniques created tables and charts.

The questions provided in the research survey were measured using a combination of an interval scale and a nominal or ordinal scale to assess the hypotheses (Malhorta and Birks, 1999). Additionally, this study utilised an independent T-test to ascertain the mean score between variables.

### **5.2.1 Control Variables - Demographics**

This research survey gathered the demographics of the respondents. This included their gender, race, age, and socio-economic class. The initial few questions asked by the researcher in the survey were the name of their favourite cosmetics brand if they follow the cosmetic brand on social media and the social media platform they follow said brand. Questions about their social media usage followed this. Respondents were also queried on brand preference, in regards to their loyalty and support to their preferred brand. In regards to self-brand congruence, the respondents were questioned on how closely their preferred brand aligns with their self-image and how they view themselves. The data received found that the respondents either agreed or were on the fence about their similarities with their preferred brand. Lastly, the survey contained questions about social approval, which denotes the likelihood that



they decide on which brands to like, follow and purchase from, based on the influence from friends, family or peers. Based on the data collected, the respondents made decisions to use or purchase from their chosen brands, due to at least some impact from those around them (their ecosystem) on social media.

### **5.2.2 Construct Measures**

The survey was segmented into four parts, which enclosed questions correlated to each variable, including information about demographics. The social media user-engagement scale used in this study adopted two dimensions in the scale developed by Schivinski, Christodoulides, and Dabrowski (2016). The scale created by Schivinski, Christodoulides, and Dabrowski (2016) was developed to define and measure engagement and also to measure engagement concerning social media brand content, which was expressed as a need by authors Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014) in their study. This study utilised the consumption and contribution dimensions but not the creation dimension because this research focused on the participants' intake of social media content, especially brand content. This study measured social media using questions 2A1- 2A11 from the survey. Consumption and contribution dimensions were used because research showed that the consuming dimension is a precursor of consumer engagement in the contribution of social media brand content and that the contribution dimension is a predecessor to user-generated content (Schivinski, Christodoulides, and Dabrowski, 2016). The use of these two dimensions for the social media user-engagement scale highlights the range and different levels of social media engagement concerning brand content. Additionally, according to (Schivinski, Christodoulides, and Dabrowski, 2016), the dimensions or 'subscales' can be used on an individual basis, to gather particular information.

This scale shows its effectiveness in consumer behaviour measurement concerning brand content on social media. The beneficial aim of this measurement scale is to not only use it in structural models but also as a means to examine various variables, to evaluate the forces behind consumer online behaviour when it comes to brand content. The information gathered as a result of this will significantly enhance theories that aim to explore the motives behind consumer activities in brand-related

social media engagement and the types of marketing activities that have an impact on consumer engagement with social media brand-related content.

Each construct was measured using the following questions from the survey. As discussed above, the social media user engagement construct was divided into two dimensions. The first dimension was consumption, which was measured using questions A1, 2, 3, followed by the contribution dimension, measured using items A4-A10 from the survey. Brand preferences were measured using the scale developed in research studies conducted by Chang and Liu (2009), Spry et al. (2017) and Buil et al. (2017). Questions B3, 7, 8, 12, 14, 16, and 17 were used to measure brand preference. Additionally, this study consulted the paper written by Auty and Elliott (2001) to measure social approval. Questions D2, 5, 6, and 8 in the survey to focus on the compliance dimension for the social approval construct. The self-brand congruence construct was measured using questions C6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 for the scale utilized in Japutra et al. (2017) study.

### **5.2.3 Validity of Measures**

The pilot study assisted in evaluating the reliability of the measurement items with the aid of Cronbach's alpha (Churchill, 1979; Hair et al., 2010), thereby examining content validity to assess the validity of the survey. According to Hardesty and Bearden (2004), content validity can be seen as a way in which items measured, reflect the actual sample of the constructs. There is content validity if the items have face validity. Face validity occurs when there is a correlation between the constructs and the objectives of the survey (Hardesty and Bearden, 2004). The most effective way to test content validity is to conduct a preliminary survey in which the survey is scrutinised to establish the clarity of the questions within the survey (Saunders et al., 2012). This allows for any unrelated items to be removed from the survey (Hardesty and Bearden, 2004). Based on the response gotten from the pilot study, some wording of the questions in the survey was changed to aid in a better understanding of the questions by the participants.

The pilot study was conducted in April 2019, with the use of a self-administered survey. A sample of 15 respondents took part in the pilot study, which according to

Saunders et al. (2012), is a reasonable sample size as the recommended amount by the author is ranging from 10 to 100. The total amount of valid responses was ten as the other five had omitted data. The sample of respondents for the pilot study included six male and nine female respondents, within the age range of 19 and 52 years. In regards to the sample respondents' demographic status, the socio-economic range of the respondents was ranging from 20,000 to 88,000 per annum.

#### **5.2.4 Reliability of Measures**

Following the assessment of the validity, the reliability of the survey was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, although this is not the only means by which reliability can be measured. According to Field (2005), the worth of alpha is impacted by the amount of items and may generate false outcomes. Hair et al. (2010), states that the consistency of scales can be determined with the use of Cronbach's alpha. The expected overall value of good alpha is 0.7 or higher (Hair et al., 2010), but it is worth noting that a level of 0.5 to 0.6 is adequate in the beginning phases of research (Churchill, 1979). Hence, if the alpha falls lower than the minimum value, the item is subject to deletion (Churchill, 1979). After some adjustments, the values met the expected threshold of 0.7.

#### **5.2.5 Reliability Assessment (Cronbach's Alpha)**

Reliability may be described as the range of constancy concerning the measurement items of the variable is steady at somewhat given period, and clear of mistakes (Kline, 2005). Reliability can be measured in three ways, which include split-half, test-retest, and Cronbach's alpha. Although the use of the split-half can be easily achieved, it is dependent on how the data is split (Field, 2005). As a result, Cronbach's alpha was applied to test the reliability of the collected data from the survey. Cronbach's alpha specifies how a reliable measurement founded on various items is and varies between 0 and 1. Cronbach alpha measurements of above 0.7 are decent measurements. This is a commonly used form of measurement to determine the reliability, enabling the internal consistency of variables to be tested (Hair et al., 2010). It is vital to measure the reliability of collected data, as this removes the

likelihood that the results attained are coincidental and minimising the sampling errors and external factors, to improve valid content measures (Churchill, 1979).

Additionally, the reliability of the scale must be achieved to measure validity (Churchill, 1979). The results obtained from the reliability test of the scale showed that the constructs all have reliable measures that are consistent with the acceptable range, stretching from good to excellent (Hair et al., 2003). Additionally, the test of validity using the analysis obtained from the confirmatory factor was also found to be in the ideal range. As stated, composite reliability (CR) values of the construct for reliability and AVE values for validity were examined and the following CR and AVE results were found for each construct; consumption dimension CR = 0.85, AVE = 0.66; contribution dimension CR = 0.92, AVE = 0.63; self- brand congruence CR = 0.86, AVE = 0.86; social approval CR = 0.78, AVE = 0.55 and brand preference CR= 0.87, AVE = 0.58.

### **5.2.6 Structural Equation Modelling**

Structural equation modelling is explained as a form of analysis that describes the links between identified variables in a hypothetical model (Hair et al., 2010). Additionally, two forms of models exist with structural equation modelling. These include the measurement model and structural model. It also evaluates the validity of the construct with the use of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). According to Hair et al. (2010), the structure model signifies the interlinking of variables amongst constructs to assess the research hypotheses.

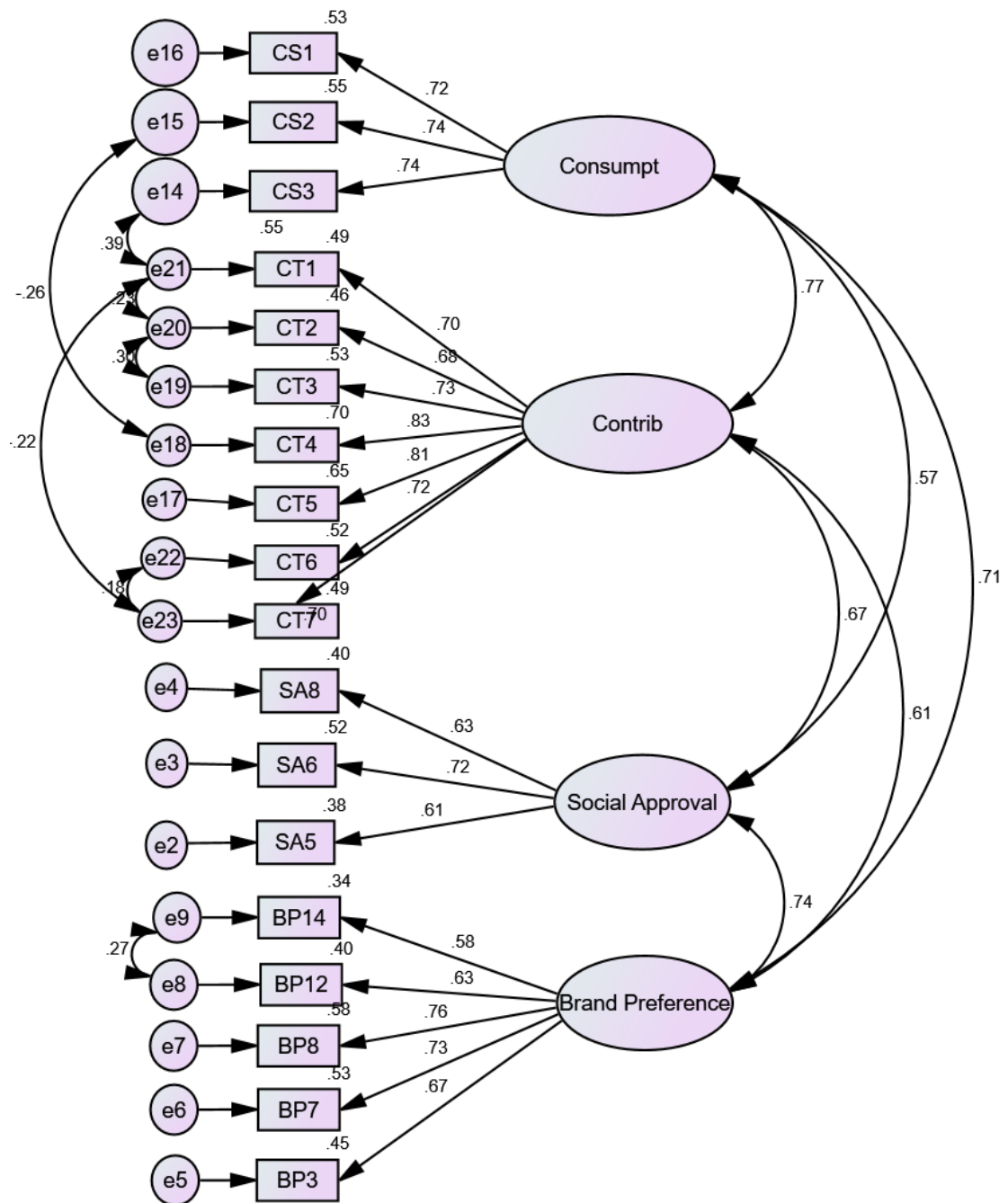
### **5.2.7 Measurement Model**

The validity of a measurement model can be determined by measuring the model's level of fitness and the valuation of validity. The measurement model was tested a few times to attain validity. Using Bagozzi and Li's (1988) research, the initial results of the test run on the measurement model did not produce acceptable standardised loading of some of the factors. However, upon further testing, all the factors met the acceptable threshold. These include the chi-square (CMIN = 318.134), DF = 122,

comparative fit index (CFI = 0.926), tucker lewis index (TLI = 0.907), normed fit index (NFI = 0.887) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = 0.073).

Data obtained from the study, which was gathered from the survey was used to examine the factor structure. The confirmatory factor analysis for this study aimed to achieve a ratio of less than 3 to 5 for the chi-square value and degree of freedom. Also, a Ramsey value of less than .08 was sort from the output. In addition to this, the CFI, NFI, and TLI could not be more than 0.9 (Hair et al., 2010). The amount of factors attained was three. The first factor, which was social media, was divided into two dimensions, consumption and contribution. Consumption consisted of three items, and contribution had seven items. The second factor was social approval, which consisted of three items and the last factor, brand preference, comprised of five items.

The badness- of- fit index, which is commonly use to the model fit in relation to the populace, not only the sample (Hair et al., 2010), has a satisfactory value. Also, a suitable fit for the RMSEA values gauge from 0.05 and 0.08 (Hair et al., 2010). Additionally, normed fit index, also known as NFI is enhanced by the CFI. Following this, the IFI is an upgraded form of the non- normed fit index (NNFI). This overpowers the unpredictability of NNFI with values stretching from 0 -1 (Hair et al., 2010). The guidelines indicate that values of IFI that are larger than 0.9 show a desirable fit (Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2005). Furthermore, Lacobucci (2010) indicates that on the likelihood that the model IFI (CFI, IFI, or TLI) is greater than 0.9, then it is proof that the fit is suitable. A desirable CFI contains a value of 0.95 or roundabout (Lacobucci, 2010). The indices of this study achieves the above standards.



Chisquare = 318.134 DF = 122 RMSEA = .073 CFI = .926 TLI = .907 NFI = .887

Figure 2: Measurement model

<b>Item Code</b>	<b>Scale Items</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Consumption</b>				
CS1	I follow regular updates of Brand X on social media	0.72	5.42	1.3
CS2	The social media community is useful for gathering information	0.74	5.73	1.18
CS3	I am interested in receiving company communications via social media	0.74	5.36	1.27
<b>Contribution</b>				
CT1	I am motivated to participate in the social media community to reach personal goals	0.70	5.11	1.46
CT2	I am motivated to participate in the social media community to support other members	0.68	5.1	1.38
CT3	I am strongly affiliated with others on social media	0.73	5.07	1.45
CT4	I have a sense of strong belonging to the social media community	0.83	5.05	1.44
CT5	Social media helps to form relationships with others	0.81	5.34	1.32
CT6	Social media entertains and stimulates my mind	0.72	5.48	1.24
CT7	Social media is a convenient tool to transmit complaints and suggestions	0.49	5.49	1.26
<b>Social Approval</b>				
SA5	When someone praises this brand, it feels like a personal compliment	0.61	4.92	1.62
SA6	Brand X has a good image among customers	0.72	5.55	1.12
SA8	I consider the opinions of others about brand X	0.63	5.23	1.29
<b>Brand Preference</b>				
BP3	Brand X offers very good quality products	0.67	5.91	1.07
BP7	The company of Brand X is trustworthy	0.73	5.65	1.14
BP8	Brand X is interesting	0.76	5.71	1.13
BP12	Brand X is a brand of cosmetics I am very familiar with	0.63	5.67	1.19
BP14	The company which makes Brand X has credibility	0.58	5.57	1.12

**Table 1: Measurement model table**

Constructs	AVE	CR					
Consumption	0.66	0.85	1				
Contribution	0.63	0.92	.586**	1			
Self- brand congruence	0.86	0.86	.326**	.491**	1		
Social Approval	0.55	0.78	.386**	.529**	.699**	1	
Brand Preference	0.58	0.87	.565**	.525**	.412**	.536**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 2: Correlations and Psychometric Properties**

### 5.2.8 Validity Assessment

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is a type of factor analysis utilised to determine whether variables or constructs are consistent with the hypotheses of the study. Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2014) describe confirmatory factor analysis as a statistical procedure, which differs from exploratory factor analysis in that common factors are assumed to be uncorrelated, observed variables are affected by only some of the common factors, and the variables, which define the construct, are researcher defined. It is a means by which variables can be tested, allowing the researcher to examine that a link among identified variables and their core constructs occurs (Churchill, 1979). The primary function of using CFA is to test the validity of the construct (Hair et al., 2010). Confirmatory Factor Analysis was attained with the use of AMOS 25, which aided in the examination of the measurement model. Diverse indices as well as Chi-square (CMIN/DF) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) were measured in order to determine the fitness of the data. According to Hair et al. (2003), construct validity is assessed by evaluating both the validity and discriminant validity. The results from the structural model of this study found the chi- square to be (CMIN = 344.008), DF = 124, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = 0.077), comparative fit index (CFI = 0.917), tucker lewis index (TLI = 0.898) and normed fit index (NFI = 0.877).

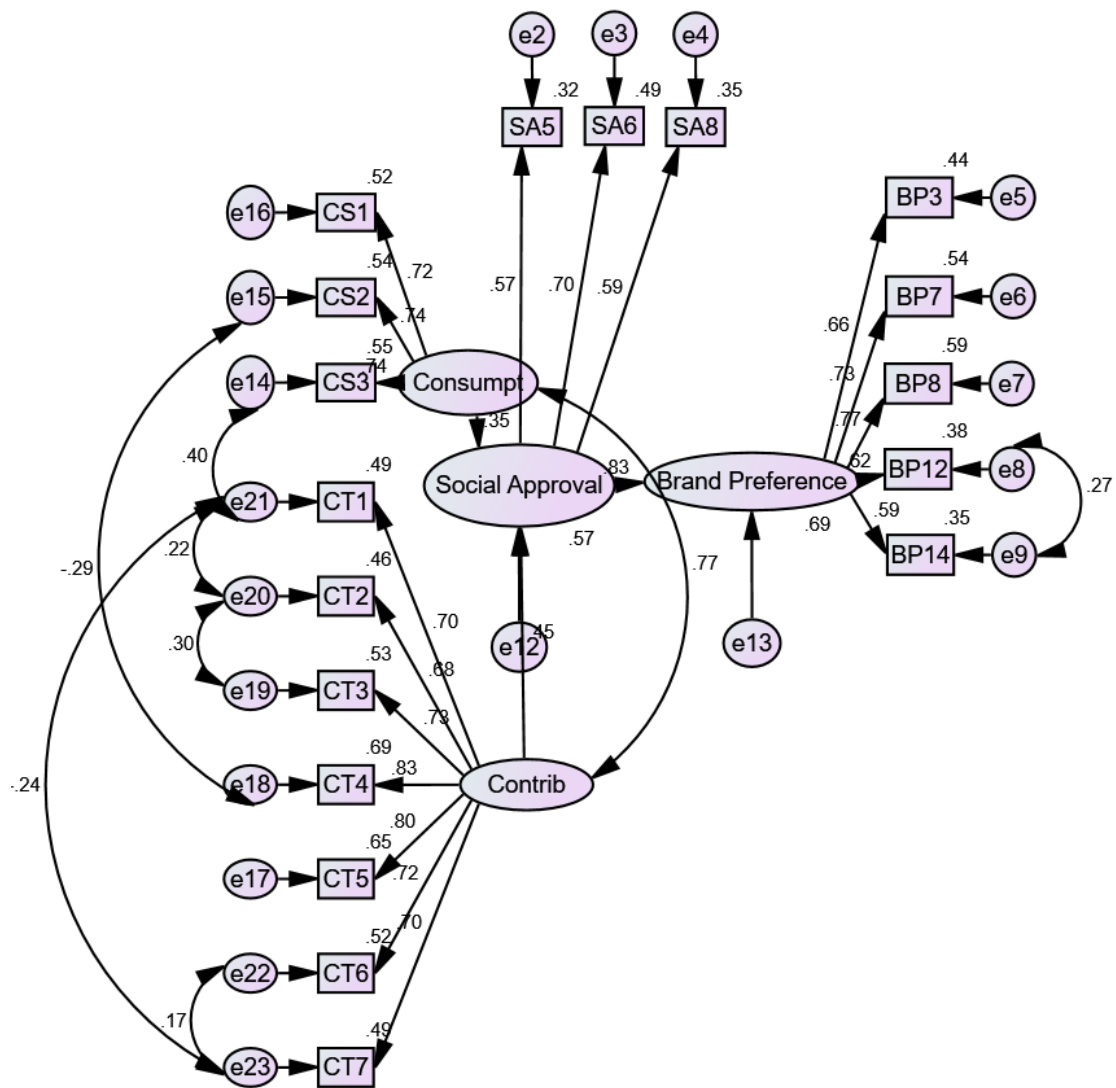
In order to additionally make sure that the construct measurements of this study were both valid and reliable, the constructs were also assessed fashioned on convergent and discriminant validity. Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) of the constructs met the required standard (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Additionally, the factor loadings of the objects assessed were discovered to be important. The discriminant



value was also assessed using the method created by Fornell and Larcker's (1981). It was discovered that the constructs have a greater square root of AVE values in comparison to their associations with other constructs.

Hence, the findings from the measurement model assessment are in conjunction with the validity and reliability criteria. Consequently, the constructs utilised in the measurement model are appropriate to be utilised in assessing the structural model and established hypotheses. Average variance extracted (AVE) is summed by the mean variance gotten from factor loading. The prescribed rule shows that suitable AVE begins from a value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). Please see Table 2 for AVE

The standardised factor loading was higher than 0.5, with noteworthy t- values. Additionally, the AVE was also greater than 0.5 in the entirety of the constructs, which proposes a suitable convergence. Furthermore, reliability for the constructs was more 0.7, which shows exceptional reliability. Discriminant validity can be defined as the degree to which the constructs are dissimilar, and the measures of respective construct are not connected to one another (Hair et al., 2003). Based on this principle, it is evaluated with the aid of arduous examination by means of comparing the AVE values for multiple constructs with the square of the correlation estimate among the dual constructs. The principle that confirms discriminant validity is that the AVE summed, will be examined with the square of the correlation estimate amongst constructs.



Chisquare =344.008 DF =124 RMSEA =.077 CFI =.917 TLI =.898 NFI =.877

Figure 3: Structural model

### 5.2.9 Results of Hypotheses Testing

According to Hair et al. (2010), an inspection of the hypothesised relationships between, the constructs, needs to be done through the alteration of the measurement model to the structural model. Using the findings attained from the hypotheses

examination, the social media- user engagement construct had to be split into consumption and contribution to fit the model indices. As a result, hypotheses 1, which is that ‘social media user engagement has a positive effect on user-brand preference,’ has been split into hypotheses 1a and 1b. Hence, the results attained from the measurement model support the following hypotheses

**Hypothesis 1A:** Consumption dimension of social media user- engagement influences social approval.

**Hypothesis 1B:** Contribution dimension of social media user- engagement influences social approval.

**Hypothesis 2:** Social approval has a positive effect on user-brand preference.

**Hypothesis 3A:** Social approval mediates the relationship between the consumption dimension and brand preference.

**Hypothesis 3B:** Social approval mediates the relationship between the contribution dimension and brand preference.

**Hypothesis 4A:** Self- brand congruence positively moderates the effect of consumption dimension on social approval.

**Hypothesis 4B:** Self- brand congruence positively moderates the effect of contribution dimension on social approval.

<b>Hypotheses</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>T-value</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>Hypothesis 1A</b> Consumption => Social Approval	0.354	3.053	0.002	Significant
<b>Hypothesis 1B</b> Contribution => Social Approval	0.446	3.935	0.001	Significant
<b>Hypothesis 2</b> Social Approval => Brand Preference	0.832	7.739	0.001	Significant
<b>Hypothesis 3A (Mediation)</b> Social Approval => Consumption => Brand Preference	0.121	0.988	0.323	Significant
<b>Hypothesis 3B (Mediation)</b> Social Approval => Contribution => Brand Preference	0.580	4.583	0.001	Significant
<b>Hypothesis 4A (Moderation)</b> Self- Brand Congruence moderates the effect of Consumption on Social Approval	0.357	2.946	0.003	NS
<b>Hypothesis 4B (Moderation)</b> Self- Brand Congruence moderates the effect of Contribution on Social Approval	0.482	3.567	0.001	Significant

**Table 3: Results of Hypotheses**

### **5.2.10 Testing for Mediation (Hypotheses H3A and H3B)**

This research study states that social approval theoretically mediates the relationship between social media user engagement and user-brand preference. Hair et al. (2010), to be able to decide whether a mediating role is present, a completion of certain conditions is required. Mediation can be proven to exist in the ensuing ways. To begin with, mediation does not signify a relationship between the independent and dependent variables, but if the mediation fit is right, then the actuality of a mediator is proven (Hair et al., 2010). Mediation requires a T-value of more than 1.96 to be proven as significant. The direct effect of the consumption dimension of social media and the contribution dimension of social media on user-brand preferences were both measured through social approval. Additionally, the indirect effect of consumption and contribution dimension to user- brand preference through perceived social approval was also examined. This study found that the direct effect of consumption to

user- brand preference was significant with  $\beta_{\text{direct}} = 0.52$  and  $CR = 4.45$ . However, the direct effect of contribution to user- brand preference was not significant with  $\beta_{\text{direct}} = -0.16$  and  $CR = 1.33$ . The results for the indirect effect of consumption to user- brand preference through social approval was not significant with  $\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.067$  and  $CR = 0.70$  while contribution through social approval to user- brand preference was significant with  $\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.324$  and  $CR = 2.65$ . The findings from the study reveal that the direct effect of social approval on social media contribution is not significant, but the indirect effect of social media contribution on brand preference through social approval is significant. Hence, social approval fully mediates the relationship between contribution and brand preference.

The findings from the examination reveal the major impact of social approval on the constructs. Past studies have been conducted on the impact of several dimensions in moulding user-brand preference, such as trust and satisfaction in the online community, behavioural intention, and consumption of luxury brands (Chang and Chieng, 2006; Atwal and Williams, 2009 and Rose et al., 2012). The mediating role of social approval in the relationship between social media user- engagement and brand preference extends existing theory, the details of which are discussed in the implication section.

Relationship	Direct effect	T- value	Outcome
Consumption => Brand Preference	0.52	4.45	Significant
Contribution => Brand Preference	-0.16	1.33	NS

Relationship	Indirect effect	T- value	Outcome
Consumption => Social Approval => Brand Preference	0.067	0.70	NS
Contribution => Social Approval => Brand Preference	0.324	2.65	Significant

**Table 4: Mediation analysis output**

### 5.2.11 Testing for Moderation (Hypotheses H4A and H4B)

This study researched self-brand congruence moderating link between the consumption and contribution dimension of social media user-engagement with social approval. Moderation was measured in this study by attaining the average of the data collected on self-brand congruence from SPSS. Accordingly, it can be argued that the higher the self- brand congruence, the higher the desire for social approval. This study found that the path for contribution to social approval is stronger than consumption to social approval. As a result, contribution is higher than consumption, making it is more significant. This is because the higher the level of self- brand congruence, the higher the corresponding social approval.

Relationship	Beta Value	T- Value
Self- Brand Congruence => Consumption => Social Approval	0.35	2.94
Self- Brand Congruence => Contribution => Social Approval	0.48	3.56

**Table 5: Multi-group Moderation analysis output**

This study found that self- brand congruence has a stronger moderating effect on contribution to social approval than consumption to social approval. However, it is worth noting that there was not enough data to effectively measure the moderating role of self-brand congruence in the relationship between consumption to social approval and contribution to social approval. The results from the moderation model of this study found the chi- square to be (CMIN = 509.919), DF = 154, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = 0.088), comparative fit index (CFI = 0.921), tucker lewis index (TLI = 0.902) and normed fit index (NFI = 0.891). Overall, the results from the study reveal self-brand congruence strongly moderates social approval, positively.

### **5.3 Summary**

This chapter delved into the exploration of the research gathered for this study, both qualitative and quantitative. The primary data was gathered with the use of in-depth interviews and surveys. The reliability of the data was measured with the use of Cronbach's alpha. The tests revealed that the constructs were beyond the minimum requirements. The CFA conducted for this study shows that the measurement model has an acceptable fit. Consequently, the measurement model was then moved to the structural model to test the hypotheses. Through analysis, the following findings were achieved;

The theoretical model proposed by this research study provided for a practical understanding of the development of user-brand preference. The model expands on the role of user-brand preference in consumption and contribution of social media user-engagement. The findings allude to the fact that social media users take into consideration the social approval of others as well as their congruence with brands when determining their preference. User-brand preferences incorporate their self-image, social, and behavioural responses when considering a brand. The high level of level these variables play on user-brand preference shows the consumer appeal to the principle of the brand. This model confirms fully, the critical roles of social approval and self-brand congruence as a direct precursor, in influencing brand preferences. Additionally, the mediating role of social approval in the relationship between

consumption, contribution, and brand preference shows an essential awareness of how the consumer recognises the representative value of the brand. The next chapter will discuss further the impact the data analysis from the qualitative and quantitative research survey had on the proposed hypotheses by this study.



## **CHAPTER 6**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

The preceding chapter empirically tested the hypothetical model suggested in this research paper to examine how consumers develop brand preferences. The analysis provided showcases the link between the constructs in the determining of brand preference. The chapter aims to discuss the qualitative and quantitative findings from the previous chapter through which the research hypotheses were accepted.

#### **6.1 Discussion of Hypotheses Findings**

The findings from the data analysis, which was discussed in the previous chapter, revealed that social approval for social media users is heavily influenced by the congruence between their self- image and the brand. Additionally, this study found that social approval has a mediating effect on the relationship between social media contribution and brand preference. However, social approval did not mediate the relationship between the consumption dimension of social media user- engagement and brand preference. Consequently, these findings show that brand personality, content, and attributes are identified by the consumer. Additionally, it is worth knowing that consumer demographics did not have a substantial impact on user-brand preferences.

##### **6.1.1 Social Media User- Engagement**

This study theorised that the consumption and contribution dimension of social media user-engagement influences social approval. Previous studies have been conducted on the impact of social media on luxury brands, jewellery, automobiles and so on (Jamal and Goode, 2001; Grimm, 2005). However, this study is believed by the author to be the first to examine the effect the consumption and contribution dimension of social media user- engagement social media user- engagement has on

social approval. As speculated, the study findings show consumption and contribution positively affect social approval. The consumption and contribution dimension of the social media user- engagement hypothesis was supported by the data collected from both the qualitative research and the quantitative survey. This can be due to their acknowledgement of how social media influences and motivates their choices. Additionally, since this study focused on consumer engagement and how their exposure and interactions with one another affect their brand preferences, the study focused on consumption and contribution dimension and ignored creation dimension. As the findings reveal the positive effect both consumption and contribution on social approval, this provides support for selecting consumption and contribution dimension and ignoring creation dimension.

The data gotten from the qualitative research study found that social media user engagement was viewed as a trustworthy, informative medium amongst the participants. Hence, the hypothesis stated above was examined using a 7 point Likert scale with respondents being questioned about to what degree they agreed with the statements about user-engagement. The respondents were asked to choose from the range of 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' on statements depicting their interests and motivations regarding user-engagement on social media. The statements to test the hypothesis were garnered from the interviews, due to the views of the interview participants. As a result, the questions asked in the survey included 'The social media community is useful for gathering information' and 'I am motivated to participate in the social media community to reach personal goals'. Frequency analysis was conducted on these statements, which show that the majority of respondents agreed with these statements. This supports the findings from Mangold and Faulds (2009), which states that social media can be used as an educational tool to learn about brands, products and so on.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the quantitative research utilised two out of the three dimensions created by Schivinski, Christodoulides, and Dabrowski (2016), to get an adequate model fit. By split social media user-engagement into the dimensions it is composed of, the individual accounts were able to show their significant impact. This aided in ascertaining the role they play when it comes to the other constructs. The consumption dimension represents the hedonic experience as it

represents both a sensorial and emotional feeling (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). While the contribution dimension represents the behavioural, cognitive and physical elements of social media user engagement (Brakus et al., 2009). The research conducted by Allen et al. (2005), addressed the important part of emotional responses play in developing and impacting preferences. The findings from this study support the significant value social media has on social approval. Also, the results from the quantitative research contain similarities from Winer's (2009) model, which highlights consumers' preference for two-way open communications, allowing for ratings, reviews and peer recommendations. Research on the effectiveness of social media by Constantinides and Fountain (2008) suggested that social media is affecting how consumers are making decisions. To varying degrees, this was revealed in both the qualitative and quantitative results as the participants used social media to gather information. As a result, social media has a major effect on their decisions when it comes to brands and their preferred ones.

The similarities in the responses of the participants in terms of the effect of social media user engagement on social approval led to the hypothesis being accepted. As discussed by Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) and Xiang and Gretzel (2009), social media user-generated content is an effective tool for individuals and consumers to share information such as brand knowledge with others. This was confirmed in this study as a majority of the participants used social media to gather information. Additionally, the qualitative findings suggested that social media was effective in informing their decisions on brands. As discussed by Berry et al. (2002) and Goode et al. (2010), it provides consumers with an informational base for evaluating the brand which in effect develops their brand preferences. This resulted in further questions within the survey regarding the awareness and likely use of social media to explore the hypothesis. The results were also consistent with sha's (2008), which suggested that the primary motives of individuals' use of social media were for entertainment, information, and interaction.

### **6.1.2 Mediating role of Perceived Social Approval on the relationship between Social Media User-Engagement and User-Brand Preference**

This research paper examined perceived social approval as a moderator in the relationship between the consumption dimension, as well as the contribution dimension of social media user- engagement and brand preference. The role of social approval is highlighted through its direct influence on brand preferences and also by its mediating relationship between consumption dimension of social media user- engagement and brand preference, and also the contribution aspect of social media user- engagement and brand preference. With the use of Bearden's scale and Auty and Elliott's (2001) subscale, the findings of this research study revealed as hypothesised, the likely hood of social approval's role in influencing customers' brand preference. This affirms that the reactions suggested by customers through various forms of communications with others within their online community or social circle are fundamental in motivating consumers' brand preferences.

The aforementioned scale used to measure the mediating role of social approval, Bearden's scale, was an essential tool in determining consumers' influence over each other. In Auty and Elliott's (2001) study, they found that the subset of the scale used for approval was able to envisage the consumers' genuine behaviour when it comes to their brand choices. Additionally, testing the mediation model showed that social approval in part mediates the effect of consumer's views of the brand and consequently brand preferences. While perceived social approval fully mediates the relationship between social media user- engagement contribution and brand preference. From the data obtained, the consumers who were more likely to be influenced or try to garner the opinions of others were not swayed by a particular brand. This study found that approval was a motivating factor that is not related to how they view themselves as individuals. Consumer engagement on social media platforms and communities is mainly reinforced by the emotional connections they have with others within the community which develops their purchase preferences. According to McCracken (1986), "the systematic appropriation of the meaningful properties of goods" by individuals, highlights an individual's high placement of social approval. This by any means does not reflect that consumers want to be like

others but more so that they want the approval of those they deem share the same values as they do (Dittmar (1992)).

It can be argued that consumer's self-concept, how they perceive themselves as individuals, and motivation by approval often merge. This is because the easiest means by which to achieve approval is to have similarities with those whose approval is being sought. The mediating role of perceived social approval shows that consumers' perception of the brand is influenced by other's opinions of and experiences with the brand. This study highlighted the impact social approval has on consumers' brand preferences. According to Dittmar (1992), individuals' self-identity can be tied to their belongings since they are reflections of who they are based on how others view and interact with them. The findings propose that the brand identity is a significant part of determining brand preference. As a result, this study cannot examine one without the other. Consequently, the following sub- topic will discuss self-brand congruence as well.

### **6.1.3 Moderating role of Self-Brand Congruence on the relationship between Social Media User-Engagement and Social Approval**

This research paper offers empirical evidence in the context of cosmetic consumers to confirm or invalidate existing theories about self-brand congruence and its effect. Most of the previous research studies focused on evaluating brand loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009, Bidenbach and Marell, 2010). One of the aims of this study was to test the hypothesis of self- brand congruence moderating the consumption dimension of social media user engagement and social approval, as well as the contribution dimension of social media user engagement and social approval. This study hypothesised that self-brand congruence as a moderator, positively affects social approval. The findings from this study revealed that self-congruity influences social approval. Sirgy (1982; 1997) evaluates the match between a consumer's self- concept and the brand image. The relationship between consumers' preferred brands and their self-concept was examined and is explained using self-congruity theory as a frame of reference (Sirgy, 1986).

This research study concurs with previous theories of self-congruity by confirming the influence self-brand congruence has on social approval. Research results from this paper reveal that social approval is gauged by consumers matching themselves with their perceived self or self-image with the brand. Hence, social approval tends to be valued more when the brands that are preferred tend to be the matches that mirror or reflect their own perceived sense of self. Additionally, this study confirms that the higher the match of a consumer's self- image to a brand, the higher their desire for social approval.

This research found that consumers integrate brands into their self-concept and perceive the brand to be a part of their identity. The results of this study support the self-image congruity theory and add to the literature that consumers' social approval can be linked to at least some part of their self-concept (Rhee and Johnson, 2011). Additionally, the results from the study support the notion that self-congruity positively affects social approval. According to authors such as Aaker (1999) and Heath (2007), consumers use brands to define who they are as individuals, which proves consistent with the findings of this research. The findings revealed that self-brand congruity highly moderates the relationship between social media contribution and social approval. The findings are similar to the large majority of empirical studies conducted on self-congruity (Sirgy et al., 1997; Jamal and Al-Marri, 2007). They show the influence self- congruity has on actual- self and the ideal- self. Similarly, Cowart et al. (2008), supports the notion of the important impact of congruence amongst the consumers' actual self- concept and the brand image when it comes to social approval.

It is clear consumers prefer to make use of brands that are consistent with their perceived self-concept which places a large significance on social approval when it comes to brands they make use of. Thus, this research paper shows the huge influence self- brand congruity has on the relationship between social media- user engagement and brand preference.

#### **6.1.4 Role of Demographics in the relationship between Social Media User-Engagement and User-Brand Preference**

It is to be noted that consumer demographics did not have a major influence or significant influence on user- brand preference. This is supported by the findings from Fennell et al. (2003) and Singh et al. (2005), which found that consumer demographics are a poor indicator of consumer preferences and are also inadequate in determining the development of user-brand preference. However, this did not consist of the findings from studies, such as Bass and Talarzyk (1972); Duarte and Raposo (2010) and Jamal and Goode (2001) that discovered consumer demographics are seen as relevant to consumer brand preference. On the other hand, these studies noted that the significance of consumer demographics on brand preference is very minute. This is because the authors only found a demographic significance in specific fields, in cases of the education level of the respondents. Jamal and Goode (2001), found that the education of the consumers impacted the consumers' brand preferences when it came to jewellery. Despite this, this study revealed that the demographics of the consumers (gender, age, race, income level) were irrelevant to their preferences for specific brands.

## CHAPTER 7

### IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

#### 7.0 Introduction

This chapter starts by linking its findings with existing theory through theoretical implications. This is followed by the managerial implications of the findings from this study, to increase organisations advantages in the growing competitive environment. Then, an evaluation of the research methods utilised will be discussed as well as the conclusions drawn from the findings of this study. Lastly, the research limitations of this paper and the impact this study will have on future research will be addressed.

#### 7.1 Research Implications

##### 7.1.1 Theoretical Implications

Prior studies on brand preference focused on predicting brand preferences based on consumer views on biased characteristics while other consumer behaviour theories considered consumer preferences as a link between the consumers' knowledge and emotional responses (Howard and Sheth, 1969; Bettman, 1979). However, these theories were criticised for having more of an empirical view and not having much of an all-inclusive standpoint (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1980). Holbrook and Hirschman (1980) focused more on the subjective features, alongside the objective features when examining brand implications. It also included the consumers' unintentional and secluded reactions. This study expands on the traditional theories by examining consumer brand preferences using social approval and self-brand congruence variables, which takes a more holistic approach. While past research (Schivinski et al, 2016) predominantly examined social media user engagement as a composite construct, the current research considered its two major dimensions, consumption and contribution, separately and examined their effect on social approval. This offers an improvement in understanding the role that each dimension



plays on social approval. This further expands the existing social identity theory by showing the differential effects of consumption and contribution dimension on social approval. This can be seen by this research's focus on multiple factors that comprise consumer information and involvement of the brand compared to previous studies that mainly focused on single factor (Dar and Novemsky, 2008; Simonson, 2008). Consequently, this enables the determination of salient factors in preference formation, which the findings from the study highlights the value of the multiple factors and brand involvement in developing consumer preferences. This study goes beyond traditional models of communication by examining preference in a social media setting. Hence, this study adds largely to current literature by providing a model that works to understand brand preferences in social media with the aid of social approval and self-brand congruence. The importance of this contribution is that it offers a more advanced understanding of brand preferences and the effect it has. Therefore, it encompasses the lack of information in this space and shows the brand preference elements (Singh et al, 2005; Simonson, 2008).

Also, this research paper contributes to the current literature by expanding existing self-congruity theory as well as social media user engagement literature by focusing on the moderating role of self-brand congruity in the relationship between social media user- engagement and social approval. Using a different route to previous research, this study examined brand preference with the use of various factors. This allowed for the strength of other notable variables in the development of preference when it comes to user-engagement in social media. The findings reveal the significance of the factors that impact brand preference. The importance of these factors is shown in this study, highlighting the impact they have on consumers' view of brands and their brand preference. The findings indicate that several factors are considered based on the social media consumer. This study goes further than the leading suppositions of previous studies. This study similarly offers a well-rounded view to illuminate on consumer brand preference on social media.

Additionally, the results of this research provide another perspective into the significance of customer insights on brands. The findings reveal the important impact of social approval as a clear factor that impacts customer brand preferences. This approach offers another perspective from previous studies as it reveals the

behavioural responses of consumers due to their interactions with other users in online brand groups on social media platforms. Social approval plays a vital part in the shaping of customer preferences. This role is warranted by the mediating role of social approval in the relationship between social media user-engagement and user-brand preference.

### **7.1.2 Managerial Implications**

Establishing capable brands to gain consumer preferences is beneficial to the marketing community. As a result, managerial implications can be gathered from the results of this study. The findings from this research paper offer a robust understanding of the marketing community to concentration and direct their communication to these brand-related communities. Since these brand communities have a major impact on each other's preferences, brands and organisations can place emphasis on them through social media networks. Brands can maximise their impact on consumers by influencing these social media brand communities, creating awareness, preference, and loyalty. This is the first study to focus on these elements when it comes to social media user engagement and brand preference.

In today's market, building consumer preferences for cosmetic brands in the saturated social media space is especially difficult. The findings of this study show that the perception motivating customer preferences is founded on subjective and objective information. The paper suggests two ways consumer preferences can be positively impacted. The first signifies the consumer's connection to others in online brand communities and the brand reasoning that is reflected through that influence. The second is where the consumer sees the brand as being similar to their image, principle or mind-set.

From a marketing perspective, marketing managers need to change their strategies when it comes to brands based on the various self-concept perceptions across the sectors instead of using the usual branding strategies. Branding strategies must aim to develop customer consciousness on the basis that promoted brands will take them closer to their realised self-concept. It will allow marketing individuals to incite affirmative brand awareness by way of effective and convincing brand

communications. Conscious consumers are loyal to brands that consider the environmental, social and political impact of their actions (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). As a result, strategies created by sustainable brands such as JUST water whose campaigns are reliant on the composition of their paper based packaging and their eco-footprint, has led to a loyal following. This recommendation is supported by previous research from authors such as Kim (2015) and Liu et al. (2018).

Furthermore, this study delivers marketers with a more in- depth understanding into the idea of self-congruity, particularly when making direct and segmentation decisions based on consumers' perception of self. Also, this study suggests that marketing individuals have a better understanding of how precise communications could be used to entice customers by matching their self-image and the social media platforms that are particularly suitable to attract them. A campaign that made use of precise focus communication was the ad campaign created by Dove. The brand decided to develop an ad that reflected their consumer's self-image, which contradicted popular strategies created by other brands. These brands communicated a certain perception of the "perfect" body. The brand's campaign not only listened to their consumer's desire for body positive imagery but also conceptualised a campaign to reach their target audience (Millard, 2011).

This research suggestions practical insight into how brand communications can be modified to reach the target market based on their self-concept (Riefler et al., 2012). The marketing community is aware that consumers utilise brands to express their self-image and as a result, this knowledge has to be used in branding to create a preference for their brand. This can be achieved by making consumers believe that the use of their brand provides them with more fulfilment, acceptability and idealisation from others. Thus, if marketers have understandings into the link between self- congruity and brand preference for customers, they are more likely to attract their target market. It should be noted that the results did not back the direct influence of self- congruity on brand preference. However, consumer brand preferences cannot be directly impacted without emphasising self-congruity evaluations.

This study proposes that marketing individuals should use precise focused communications to online brand communities that have the ability to link consumers' self-concept with the brand instead of utilising a generalized tactic for all consumers (Malär et al., 2011). Branding strategies aim to shape consumer insights and preferences for particular brands. This study provides marketing practitioners with the opportunities to branding strategies that develop the brand in consumers' thoughts. This approach enables organisations to shape the brand in a way that is impressionable in consumers' thoughts.

## **7.2 Summary and Conclusion**

This research study has, to begin with, focused on exploring the effects of social media user engagement on brand preference. This information was then used to uncover and examine if social approval has a mediating role in the relationship between the consumption dimension of social media user engagement and brand preference, as well as the contribution dimension of social media user engagement and brand preference. This, in turn, has been used to determine the moderating effect self-brand congruence on the relationships between the consumption dimension of social media user engagement and social approval, as well as the relationship between the contribution dimension of social media user engagement and social approval. The findings from this study showed the significant impact consumer contribution on social media platforms has on social approval, self-brand congruence and brand preference. Lastly, the demographics of the participants were examined to discover what role it plays in these relationships. The tested demographics were found to be inconsequential to the research study.

Based on the results gained from the primary and secondary research undertaken, it can be established that individuals place value in social media, which allows two-way communications between members of the network community about brands. This includes peer recommendations through social media from individuals who have made use of the products from the brands. Additionally, results show that most of the participants use social media to gather information, suggesting that social media was effective in having an impact on the individual's brand preference.

Additionally, results have shown that social media had some influence in reassuring participants that they had made an informed decision after performing a search towards their decision making process about the brands they choose. It can be concluded that social media is an effective tool that can be used effectively if done correctly, with trust, interaction, and accessibility being essential factors in their success. Another major finding of this research study has been the significant impact of social approval and self-brand congruence has on influencing brand preference in social media. The widespread movement of information through social media has changed consumers' brand preference considerably (Clemons, 2008).

In this current period, social media is a major portion of an individual's everyday life. Social media has given the individual's power and access to disperse and show others their opinions, feelings, experiences and so on. These networking sites provide individuals with the opportunity to form communities, enabling communication and interactions amongst each other, thereby impacting their preferences and purchases. This research study focused on social media user engagement and its effect on consumers' brand preferences, with social approval and self-brand congruence as moderating and mediating factors. This study proposes that brand preference in social media can be influenced by two sources, which are through social approval and self-brand congruence. Social approval encompasses consumer action or behaviour based on how they believe they are perceived by others while self-brand congruence is reflective of the consumers' brand preference centred on the similarities between brands and how they view themselves. Consequently, these respectively positively influence how consumers' brand preferences are developed, which can be seen in this research.

### **7.3 Research Limitations**

A larger research pool and a more in-depth understanding of the attitudes and perceptions of individuals towards social media would be required for more data. Although the correlation between consumption and contribution dimension is found to be 0.59, this is acceptable because both of these reflect two dimensions of a construct, social media user engagement, which is in line with existing research

(Schivinski et al. 2016). Further research would benefit from more data collection, which would produce results that are more representative of the total population of interest. This research might benefit from a larger and richer data pool and as a result, the data collected is reflective and recommendations may not be as effective in targeting individuals as social media is ever changing.

The sample size for the quantitative research was limited to two hundred and ninety-nine responses collected. Even though the researcher believes that this is an adequate sample size to gather valid and reliable data. Hence, to examine trends in more detail, the researcher believes it would be necessary to expand the sample size to allow broader and more in-depth representation of the population of interest. Increasing the sample size could do this. Additionally, a larger sample size would be required to attain more data, to assess the moderating effect self- brand congruence has on the relationship between social media user- engagement and brand preference.

#### **7.4 Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings of this research have steered to these recommendations, which can be put into action to assist in the advancement of the development of brand preference through social media user engagement.

Despite the increasing use of social media networking platforms by professionals and consumers alike for marketing purposes, research on social media user engagement is still emerging (Yadav and Pavlou, 2014; Fulgoni and Lipsman, 2015 and Araujo et al., 2015). However, for social media to be utilised effectively when it comes to brand preference, further knowledge needs to be acquired about consumer behaviour and interaction within social media brand communities. Further understanding of how the brand preference development among consumers is required. The majority of existing research posits that information processing and brand experience are the most contributing factors when it comes to consumer brand preference. However, there is not much research on how brand preferences are created. Brand preference has not been extensively researched, providing an essential understanding of how it is created and developed. Most of the research conducted has been on either, how consumer demographics affect the consumer's brand preference or associations

between brand personality and self-image congruence. Nevertheless, these studies have yet to come up with a unanimous conclusion. Research is required to examine the potential side effects of the experiences of brand preference. Despite the vast existing research on brand preference within social media and there remains non-existence research on understanding how customers grow their preferences for diverse brands.

Future research should look into adding other variables and constructs to the research model to investigate and determine other elements that affect consumers' decision-making process using social media. As social media has grown and developed with continuous research being conducted on it, more research needs to be done on the other factors that have been discussed in this research to garner more answers. Further research should also look at other segments of society as most individuals in society use social networking sites.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Curtin University School of Marketing**

#### **In-Depth Interview Schedule**

**Please share your thoughts on the following issues in detail:**

**Q1.** Do you use social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.?

If yes, refer to Q2; If no, thank you for your time.

**Q2.** Which social media do you mostly use?

**Q3.** What do you usually do on social media?

**Q4.** Do you follow any cosmetic brand on social media? If no, thank you for your time. If yes, refer to Q5

**Q5.** Please elaborate what you actually do while following the brand on social media. For example, How often and how much time do you usually use on social media, do you follow more than one cosmetics brand? What kind of information do you look for, are there any specific websites that you use?

**Q6.** Please share your thoughts on how social media influence your purchase decision of brands in general and the cosmetic brand that you mentioned in particular.

**Q7.** Do you think the opinions of others on social media affect your perception about a brand? Please elaborate.

**Q8.** How likely others' opinions influence your purchase decision of the brand and why?

**Q9.** Do you think the personality or image of the brands that you follow on social media match with your own personality or image? If so, please explain

**Q10.** Do you think such a match influences your thought and action towards the brand?

## APPENDIX B



I have received information regarding this research and had an opportunity to ask questions. I believe I understand the purpose, extent and possible risks of my involvement in this project and I voluntarily consent to take part.

### SURVEY

Thank you for your consent to participate in this study. This survey is related to the impact of social media engagement on brand preference, in this case preference towards cosmetics brands. Your answers will be kept confidential; so please feel free to answer all questions truthfully.

Q.1 A	The name of my favourite cosmetics brand is	.....
B	Do you follow your favourite cosmetics brand in social media?	(i) Yes      (ii) No
C	If yes, which social media do you usually follow the brand?	.....

Q.2	To what extent do you disagree or agree with the following (Circle ONLY one number for each statement).	Strongly disagree	Strongly agree
A1*	I follow regular updates of Brand X on social media.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
2*	Social media community is useful for gathering information	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
3*	I am interested in receiving company's communications via social media	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
1	I am motivated to participate in social media community to reach personal goals	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
2	I am motivated to participate in social media community to support other members	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
3	I am strongly affiliated with others on social media	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
4	I have a sense of strong belongingness to the social media community	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
5	Social media helps to form relationships with others	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
6	Social media entertains and stimulates my mind	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
7	Social media is a convenient tool to transmit suggestions and complaints	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
8	Getting into contact with companies is easy through social media because it is simple and free	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
12	Social media helps me find out about new brands	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
13	Social media allows me to browse a large range of brands	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
14	I like to use social networking sites to increase my knowledge about the products, services and brands.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
15	Being part of brands I follow on social networking sites, increased my trust on those brands.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
16	Using social networking sites of brands help me make better decisions before purchasing goods	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
17	I use social media to engage in brand-related conversation	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
18	Social networking sites of brands enable information sharing with others.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
19	Using social networking sites of brands increase my interest in buying products	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	

B1	I consider myself to be loyal to brand X	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	I recommend brand X to others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
*3	Brand X offers very good quality products	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	Brand X appears to be very poor quality ®	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5	I have negative opinions toward brand X ®	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6	The company of brand X is socially responsible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
*7	The company of brand X is trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
*8	Brand X is interesting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9	I think brand X is superior to other competing brands	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10	I am interested in trying other brands ®	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11	When I think of cosmetic brands, brand X is what comes to mind	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
*12	X is a brand of cosmetics I am very familiar with	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13	Brand X is good value for the money	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
*14	The company which makes brand X has credibility	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15	Brand X would be my first choice when considering	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
*16	I will not buy other brands of cosmetics if brand X is available at the store	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
*17	It makes sense to buy brand X instead of any other brand of cosmetics even if another cosmetics brand has the same features as brand X	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18	I would feel proud to own a product from brand X	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19	I am willing to wait if this brand X is not available in the market.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C	Consumers of brand X are more like me than any other brand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	I can identify more with individuals who use brand X than any other brand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	I am very much like those people who prefer to use brand X than any other brand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	The image of consumers of brand X is consistent with how I see myself as compared to the consumers of other brands	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	I have a clear image of the type of person who would use the brand X	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Brand X is consistent with how I see myself	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Brand X is a mirror image of me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Brand X is similar to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Brand X is mirror image of the person I would like to be	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Brand X is similar to the person I would like to be	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Brand X is consistent with how I would like to be.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D1	To me, the brand is indeed important because I believe that other people judge me on the basis of it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2*	I purchase particular brands because I know that other people notice them	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	I purchase particular brands because I have much in common with other buyers of that brand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	I pay attention to the brand because its buyers are just like me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5*	When someone praises this brand, it feels like a personal compliment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6*	Brand X has a good image among customers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7	I have a close connection with consumers of brand X	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8*	I consider the opinions of others about brand X	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2.1	Please choose which of the following is the main purpose of using social media?				
	(i) Work- related	(ii) Study	(iii) Entertainment	(iv) Social media sites	(v)
2.2	Which social media sites do you mainly use?				
	(i) Twitter	(ii) Instagram	(iii) Facebook	(iv) You-tube	(v) None
2.3	Why do you use social media?				
	(i) Networking	(ii) Entertainment	(iii) To get more information	(iv) Keep in touch with friends/ family	(v) Deals and promotions
2.4	Which of the following do you prefer to connect with brands?				
	(i) Facebook	(ii) Twitter	(iii) You-tube	(iv) Instagram	(v) Others

3.1	Age (years)	i) 18 - 24	ii) 25 – 34	iii) 35 – 44	iv) 45 – 54	v) 55 – 64	vi) 65 – 74	vii) > 75
3.2	Gender	i) Male	ii) Female	iii) Others				
3.3	Hours spent on social media daily	i) 1 - 2	ii) 3 - 4	iii) 5 – 6	iv) 7 - 8	v) 9 - 10	vi) > 11	
3.4	Annual income	None	AU\$0 – 30,000	AU\$31,000 – 50,000	AU\$51,000 – 70,000	AU\$71,000 – 90,000	AU\$ 91,000 - \$110,000	AU\$110,001 and above
3.5	Ethnicity	Australian	Asian	African	American	European	Middle Eastern	Others

*Thank you*

## APENDIX C

### DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

<b>Demographic Statistics</b>	<b>(%)</b>
<b>Age</b>	
18-24	15.24%
25-34	34.05%
35-44	27.14%
45-54	17.86%
55-64	4.52%
65-74	0.95%
75- above	0.24%
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	37.86%
Female	61.19%
Other	0.95%
<b>Income</b>	
None	3.33%
AU\$0 – 30,000	15.71%
AU\$31,000 – 50,000	17.14%
AU\$51,000 – 70,000	20.24%
AU\$71,000 – 90,000	19.76%
AU\$ 91,000 - \$110,000	11.43%
AU\$110,001 and above	12.38%

