

# Self-Concept and Consumer Need in Brand choices Among Young Adults

Prabhleen Bagga<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Roopali Sharma<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences*

<sup>2</sup>*Professor, Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences*

**Abstract**—The purpose of this study was to find out how self-concept and the desire for uniqueness affect the brand choices of young adults. The researchers used theories about identity and motivation to guess that how clear someone's self-concept is might influence their tendency to buy things based on their identity. They also thought that wanting to be unique might lead people to choose both special brands and brands that are seen as high status. The study used a quantitative and correlational approach. To collect data, the researchers used two well-known questionnaires: the Consumer Need for Uniqueness Scale and the Self-Concept Clarity Scale. The results showed that the average scores on both scales were in the moderate range, meaning people had average levels of self-concept clarity and motivation for uniqueness. When looking at the relationship between self-concept and motivation for uniqueness using Pearson's correlation, there was no significant link ( $r = 0.027, p < .05$ ). This means the study did not support the idea that self-concept influences brand preferences. On average, people had moderate levels of motivation for uniqueness, and this wasn't connected to how clear their self-concept was. The findings suggest that identity stability and motivation for uniqueness are separate ideas within consumer behaviour. This study showed how complex brand choice can be based on identity and gives a foundation for building more complete psychological models that include various factors related to self-concept and motivation.

**Index Terms**—Self-concept clarity, consumer need for uniqueness, brand preference, identity, young adults, motivational needs, consumer behaviour.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Your personal self-concept defines how you view yourself as well as the world around you. According

to the personal self-concept definition provided by the American Psychological Association, your self-concept is an organized, dynamic set of beliefs, perceptions, evaluations, and feelings that are developed over the course of your life. This definition includes various components of the self-concept such as personality traits, social roles, abilities, values, aspirations, etc.

When you look around at other people today and see how they are purchasing goods and services, the majority of people are not buying what they need to live on. They are purchasing goods and services for reasons that go beyond functional needs. In today's society, people purchase based on how a good or product meets their psychological or symbolic need. A person may not buy something solely because of its physical attributes, but because of what that particular good represents to the individual. For example, an individual could purchase an expensive watch to represent high status, a brand-new pair of sneakers to represent a certain personality type, or a certain item to show that an individual wants to belong. Each of these purchasing choices reflects how a person wants to define him or herself through consumption.

As media, marketing and social media become more pervasive in society's daily lives, research on how a person's self-concept impacts their purchasing decisions continues to grow. The increased exposure to idealized images and aspirational lifestyles through various sources of media, marketing and social media can result in changes to a person's self-perception and purchasing behaviours.

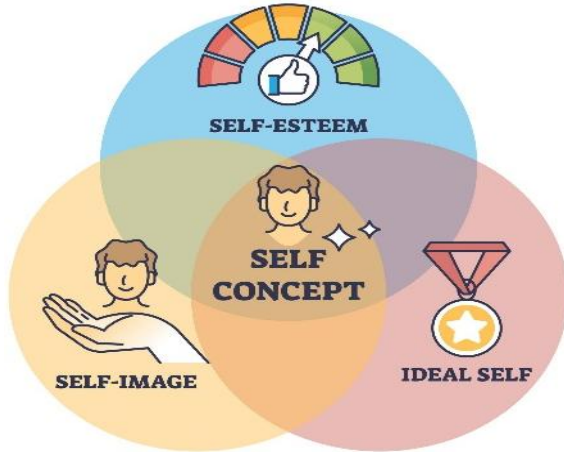


Figure 1.1: Components of Self-Concept in Psychological Theory

### 1.2 Concept of Self in Psychology

Your personal self-concept defines how you view yourself as well as the world around you. According to the personal self-concept definition provided by the American Psychological Association, your self-concept is an organized, dynamic set of beliefs, perceptions, evaluations, and feelings that are developed over the course of your life. This definition includes various components of the self-concept such as personality traits, social roles, abilities, values, aspirations, etc.

When you look around at other people today and see how they are purchasing goods and services, the majority of people are not buying what they need to live on. They are purchasing goods and services for reasons that go beyond functional needs. In today's society, people purchase based on how a good or product meets their psychological or symbolic need. A person may not buy something solely because of its physical attributes, but because of what that particular good represents to the individual. For example, an individual could purchase an expensive watch to represent high status, a brand-new pair of sneakers to represent a certain personality type, or a certain item to show that an individual wants to belong. Each of these purchasing choices reflects how a person wants to define him or herself through consumption.

As media, marketing and social media become more pervasive in society's daily lives, research on how a person's self-concept impacts their purchasing decisions continues to grow. The increased exposure to idealized images and aspirational lifestyles through various sources of media, marketing and social media

can result in changes to a person's self-perception and purchasing behaviours.

Developmental perspectives also emphasize the importance of identity formation. Erik Erikson identified adolescence and early adulthood as critical stages for identity development, characterized by the crisis of identity versus role confusion. During this period, individuals explore various roles and affiliations to establish a stable sense of self. Brand choices may function as symbolic markers that communicate personal identity and social belonging.

### 1.3 Consumer Needs and Motivation

The internal factors that motivate and direct people's behaviours towards achieving goals are referred to as motivational processes, which are linked closely to consumer behavioural patterns. Tension can be created within a person through his/her psychological needs, which motivate them to behave in a way that will reduce that tension.

Abraham Maslow outlined the framework that has had one of the greatest impacts on the study of human needs through his hierarchy of needs. He categorized five hierarchical levels of needs: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. The first two levels represent basic needs necessary for survival and safety, while the last three levels represent social recognition, accomplishment, and personal development. Many product and brand choices, especially in the areas of fashion, electronics, and luxury goods, are driven by esteem and belonging needs. For example, someone may buy a product or brand to receive social approval or feel competent and accepted by others.

Achievement, affiliation, and power are three examples of motivational theories that can also help understand consumer behaviour and the variations between consumer preferences. Individuals who possess a high level of achievement motivation will choose products or brands that convey success or performance. Similarly, individuals with a strong need for affiliation will be drawn to some products or brands that evoke social acceptance of the group. Consequently, consumer needs have been identified as a psychological factor that influences the selection process of brands by consumers.

#### 1.4 Self-Concept and Brand Choice

One way to explain how a person's self-view relates to their choice of brand is through the idea of self-congruity. Self-congruity means that people like brands that match their self-image. The more a brand's personality matches what someone sees in themselves, the more they like that brand and the more likely they are to buy it. Besides how well a product works, brands also have meanings that show who a person is.

For example, choosing a high-tech brand can tell others that the person is smart or forward-thinking. Choosing an athletic brand can suggest that the person is determined or active. By buying these brands, people either support how they see themselves or try to become the person they want to be. How much someone feels about themselves also affects their buying choices. People with lower self-esteem might use brands to feel better about themselves or get approval from others. On the other hand, people with higher self-esteem usually use brands to support how they already see themselves. Identity rather than compensate for deficits they perceive in themselves. The relationship between self-concept and consumer needs thus provides a comprehensive model for explaining brand selection.

#### 1.5 Rationale of the Study

In today's world, how consumers behave is affected by psychological and social factors more than it is by economic factors. For example, young adults are influenced heavily by their peers, by media representations of products and services, and by comparing themselves to other people.

When young adults are trying to figure out who they are (identity development), they can use brands to express themselves (self-expression) and to show others how they fit into society (social positioning).

Although there are many theories about self-concept and motivation, there is a gap in the research on the relationship between these two constructs and brand preferences of young adults. By examining this relationship, we can also increase our psychological knowledge about identity formation and self-esteem regulation, as well as provide some insight into the effects of consumption on well-being and social relationships.

#### 1.6 Objectives of the Study

This study is intended to provide an analysis of how consumers use self-concept to determine brand choice. The specific goals of this study include:

- To determine how self-concept influences brand preference,
- To analyze how motivational needs relate to brand selection,
- To examine how self-esteem is related to aspirational brand selection and
- To better understand how identity is expressed through the use of brands for young adults.

#### 1.7 Hypotheses of the Study

Theoretical Perspectives of Motivational Theory and the Self-Concept provide the cornerstone of the following hypotheses:

H1: There is a strong relationship between self-concept and brand preference in young adults.

H2: Self-esteem and motivational needs (including affiliation and achievement) are good predictors of brand preferences for aspirational or socially desired brands.

#### 1.8 Research Questions

The goal of this research is to find solutions to these inquiries:

How does one's self-concept influence brand selection?

What is the impact of psychological needs on purchase decisions?

Do consumers choose brands that best represent their ideal self-image?

What relationship exists between self-esteem and motivation with respect to consumption?

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1 Introduction

Psychological and consumer research has turned a great deal of attention towards the link between consumers' self-concept and their behaviour as consumers. Earlier economic theories modelled consumers as rational beings who are making a decision to purchase based solely on the utility they expect to obtain from the product being purchased.

However, this is not the perspective taken in psychology today, as more researchers are questioning the original assumption of rationality as the driving force behind consumer behaviour and are disappointing with the findings of modern psychological studies which point to a great deal of identity motivation, emotional regulation, and social comparison in the consumer decision making process. As such, consumption is no longer merely a functional need but has a symbolic meaning through which an individual can build, communicate, and maintain their self-concept<sup>1</sup>.

The structures underlying the decision-making process are critically important in regards to understanding the brand preferences exhibited by individuals as most individuals have various structures or characteristics (i.e. self-concept, self-esteem, motivational needs) that can pre-dispose them to prefer one brand over another. Particularly among young adults, brands are often used as an avenue for communicating identity and positioning oneself among peers. By reviewing theoretical and empirical strategies through which researchers have examined self-concept clarity, self-esteem, motivational needs, and brand preferences, I will identify the conceptual and methodological deficiencies that have legitimised the need for this project.

## 2.2 Conceptualizing the Self in Psychology

### 2.2.1 Early Foundations of the Self

William James was one of the first academics to analyze the structure of "self."<sup>2</sup> He coined the phrase "I" to refer to a person's subjective self and "Me" to refer to an objective self, creating a dual concept of identity. James then further divided his theory of "Me" into three distinct categories: the material self, the social self, and the spiritual self. The material self refers to a person's possessions and the physical extensions of their identity. By creating this initial understanding of the relationship between physical objects and the self, James helped to lay the foundation

for theories that would later connect the use of material goods and brands with the definition of self.

James' work informs contemporary consumer psychology due to his view of possessions as having significant psychological meaning, as opposed to simply serving a utilitarian purpose<sup>3</sup>.

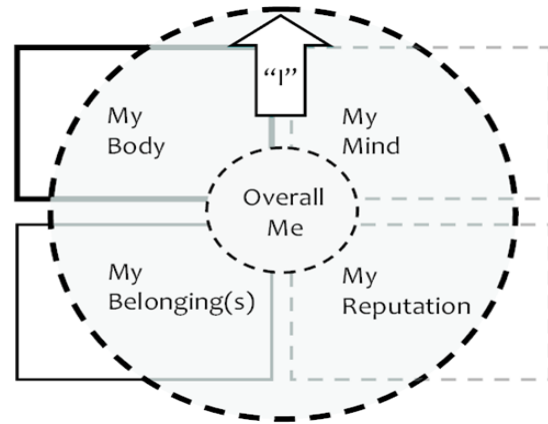


Figure 2.1: William James' Structural Model of the Self

### 2.2.2 Humanistic Perspective and Self-Congruence

Carl Rogers developed the humanistic belief of the individual self by defining the difference between the actual self and the ideal self.<sup>4</sup> He believed that psychological adjustment relies on the nature of the match between the two dimensions. When there is a mismatch, anxiety or dissatisfaction may accompany this mismatch, which will cause individuals to take action to alleviate the discomfort caused by the discrepancy.

Consumer research has heavily relied on these ideas and has demonstrated that when comparing brands to one's ideal self-image, individuals are more likely to select the brand that represents the ideal self. As such, consumer self-congruity theory supports the idea that matching the personality of a brand with an individual's identity will create emotional responses in positive ways when making a purchase. A wealth of empirical research demonstrates that greater self-

<sup>1</sup> Edward L. Grubb and Harrison L. Grathwohl, "Consumer Self-Concept, Symbolism and Market Behavior," *Journal of Marketing* 31, no. 4 (1967): 22–27.

<sup>2</sup> William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Vol. 1) (Henry Holt, 1890).

<sup>3</sup> Russell W. Belk, "Possessions and the Extended Self," *Journal of Consumer Research* 15, no. 2 (1988): 139–168.

<sup>4</sup> Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications, and Theory* (Houghton Mifflin, 1951).

congruity results in stronger brand attachment, higher purchase intention, and greater brand loyalty. However, there are some who criticize self-congruity research because it oversimplifies and categorizes identity into static constructs and does not adequately consider that identity is dynamic and changes depending on the contextual environment in which one exists.

### 2.2.3 Self-Discrepancy Theory

Self-Discrepancy Theory was created by E. Tory Higgins and has three categories of "self": actual, ideal, and ought<sup>5</sup>. If one has a discrepancy between

these different types of "self" then one may feel disappointed in themselves and have feelings of guilt. Therefore, it is common that people will attempt to use brands as a way to reduce any discrepancy they may have in their "self".

According to research, those that are more likely to have a greater incidence of self-discrepancies tend to be more attracted to aspirational brands. Most of the studies that have looked at these connections have used samples from within North America and luxury consumption; therefore, the findings are not necessarily generalizable across cultures nor to everyday purchases.

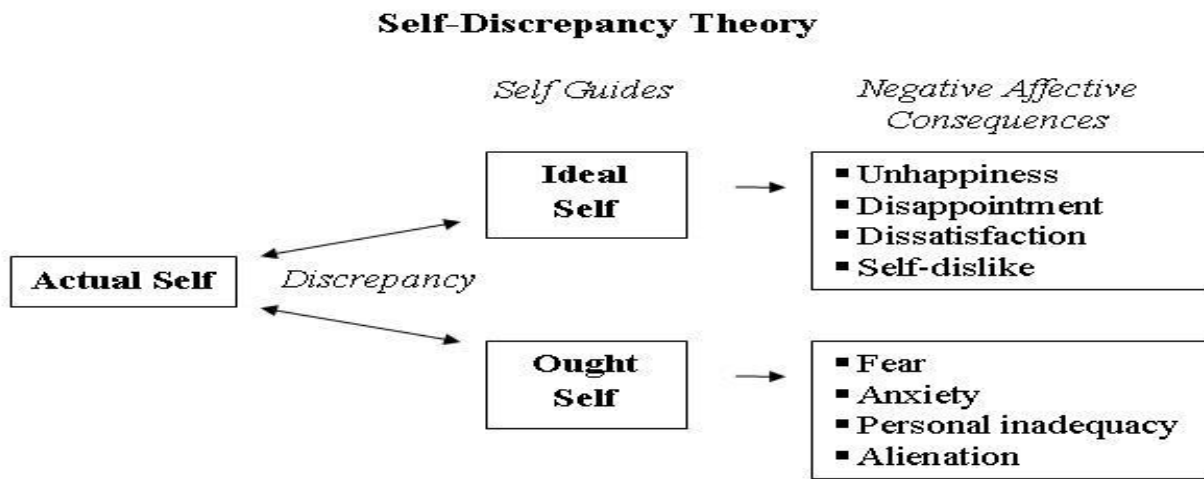


Figure 2.2: Higgins' Self-Discrepancy Model

### 2.2.4 Self-Concept Clarity

Self-Concept Clarity is defined as how well and clearly defined your self-identity is. If you have low clarity, you are likely to have some uncertainty about who you are as a person. People with low clarity depend more on external references to help define who they are than people who have high clarity tend to do. Empirical evidence also indicates that people with low self-concept clarity display more conformity to social norms by being more susceptible to peer pressure and identifying with their purchases. However, there have been very few studies which have examined the relationship between self-concept clarity and consumers' desire for uniqueness and this gap will be covered in this study.

### 2.3 Self-Esteem and Compensatory Consumption

Self-esteem is part of how people see themselves and shows whether they think they are valuable or not. Research shows that self-esteem affects the way people buy things. For example, people with low self-esteem may buy expensive or famous brands to feel better about themselves. They might do this to show they are part of a higher group, which can give them a sense of being worthwhile. Studies suggest that people who feel their self-worth is threatened are more likely to choose luxury products than those who have high self-esteem. On the other hand, people with high self-esteem are more likely to use brands to show who they are, rather than to make up for feeling unsure. However, some studies say that people with high self-

<sup>5</sup> E. Tory Higgins, "Self-Discrepancy: A Theory Relating Self and Affect," *Psychological Review* 94, no. 3 (1987): 319–340.

esteem might prefer unique brands because they want to show their personality, not because they need extra confidence. There are some problems with earlier research on this topic. One issue is that it doesn't clearly separate between people who have a strong, steady sense of self-worth and those who have a weaker, more fragile one. Also, much of the research has focused on luxury brands, not everyday items. This makes it harder to know how these findings apply to regular products.

## 2.4 Motivational Theories and Consumer Needs

### 2.4.1 Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow's need hierarchy theorizes the progression of human need fulfilment through levels starting with physiological needs that ensure survival

to the highest level of need fulfilment of self-actualization, or one's unique potential<sup>6</sup>. Lower-level physiological needs can be satisfied through basic needs, such as food or water. Higher-level esteem or belongingness needs generally represent symbolic consumption, refer to experiences using a symbolic consumption benefit associated with an esteem or belongingness need.

Research shows that consumers fulfilling esteem needs will select luxury brands. Consumers looking to fulfil their belongingness needs will choose socially acceptable brands. Nevertheless, researchers point to critics who argue Maslow's hierarchy does not have empirical precision, and does not necessarily proceed through the same levels or order of needs in different cultures.

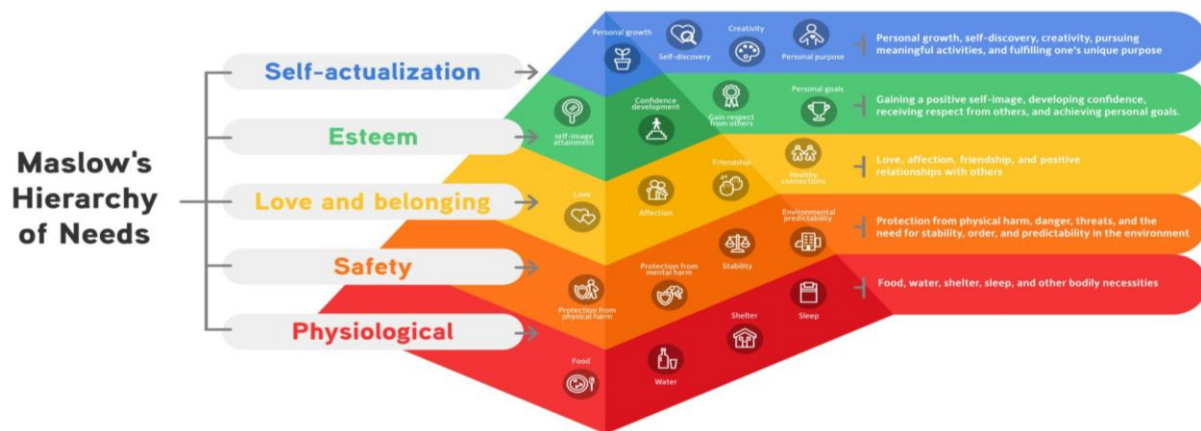


Figure 2.3: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Applied to Consumer Behavior

### 2.4.2 Need for Uniqueness

The Consumer Need for Uniqueness (CNFU) scale defines a uniqueness motivation that pushes consumers to create differences from one another by what they consume. Consumers who score high on the CNFU scale are more likely to seek out non-mainstream brands and therefore, more distinctive products.

Studies have found that CNFU consumers show a greater preference for limited edition products and atypical brands than low CNFU consumers. However, there are differences between the collectivist and individualistic cultures that affect this relationship. In

collectivist cultures being overtly unique may violate the social norm of maintaining harmony with others in the society.

Thus, there is a need to understand how CNFU operates in different socio-cultural contexts, as opposed to being assumed universally.

### 2.4.3 Achievement, Affiliation, and Power

Desire-related situations underscore the roles of achievement, affiliation, and power as the primary motivational sources<sup>7</sup>. For example, individuals who are driven by achievement will gravitate toward performance-based type products as an expression of

<sup>6</sup> Abraham H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370–396.

<sup>7</sup> David C. McClelland, *The Achieving Society* (Van Nostrand, 1961).

their ability to perform; those who are driven by affiliation will choose products that conform to social norms (i.e., they will seek out brands that are accepted socially); and people who are driven by power will gravitate toward products that represent status.

While empirical studies provide support for these connections, very few studies have examined the relationship between these need-related behaviours and identity clarity through an integrated approach.

### 2.5 Social Identity and Group-Based Consumption

Social Identity Theory, formulated by Henri Tajfel, is the theory that people establish their identities through the groups to which they belong<sup>8</sup>. Much like group membership, brand communities provide a symbolic connection to other people and thereby allow individuals to signal that they belong to a specific group<sup>9</sup>.

Research shows that adolescents and young adults tend to choose brands that are associated with groups they want to be a part of socially<sup>10</sup>. In addition to social groups, peer group norms also significantly affect how adolescents and young adults choose brands. However, overemphasizing group identity may lead to overlooking individuals' motives related to their own personal identities (e.g. uniqueness).

There is little research regarding the interaction between individuals' need to be unique and the pressure imposed by social identity. This represents an important research gap in the literature.

### 2.6 Emotional Regulation and Consumption

Recent evidence suggests that regulating one's emotions might be an intermediate variable between consumers' self-concept and the act of buying. Consumers can use brand names or products as a way to help themselves manage negative feelings (e.g., insecurity or social anxiety).

For example, using an aspirational brand may improve mood and increase how one perceives their social status (at least temporarily). However, many consumers rely on products to regulate their negative

emotions, which may develop into materialistic beliefs and decrease one's well-being. Emotional regulation as a mechanism in quantitative research on consumer behavior is relatively unexplored issue at present.

### 2.7 Empirical Studies on Brand Preference

Numerous empirical studies have shown that there is a high correlation between brand preference and self-concept congruence, where higher levels of congruence lead to increased loyalty and attachment to a brand.

However, a number of methodological limitations exist in this area of research, including:

Heavy reliance on cross-sectional surveys

Most of the studies are conducted with participants from Western universities

The majority of the studies have focused on luxury products

Very few studies take a broader developmental approach.

In addition, there are very few studies examining both self-concept clarity and need for uniqueness within the same model at this time.

### 2.8 Critical Evaluation of Prior Research

**Disconnected Research:** Many studies measure only a small part of psychological functioning rather than using an integrative model of identity clarity and motivational factors.

**Limited Depth of Psychology:** Research in the field of marketing predominates and ignores both developmental and personality psychology.

**Cultural Constraints on Findings:** Findings from the research can only be generalised to Western cultures.

**Neglect of Young Adults:** Current studies in this area neglect the age group with the highest likelihood of developing identity, i.e., young adults.

**Measurement Error:** There is a high risk of social desirability bias due to the use of self-report scales.

---

<sup>8</sup> Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. Austin & Worchel (Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33–47.

<sup>9</sup> Americus Reed II, "Social Identity as a Useful Perspective for Self-Concept-Based Consumer

Research," *Psychology & Marketing* 19, no. 3 (2002): 235–266.

<sup>10</sup> Jennifer Escalas and James R. Bettman, "You Are What They Eat," *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 13, no. 3 (2003): 339–348.

### 2.9 Research Gap

There has been little research studying how the clarity of an individual's identity and the desire for uniqueness can affect their consumption decisions.

Most of the literature does not directly connect:

The clarity of self-concept,

The need for uniqueness,

The choice of brands.

There is also a limited amount of research on the consumption decision-making process of non-Western young adults.

### 2.10 Linkage to Present Study Objectives and Hypotheses

In this paper, we have identified the existing gaps in research and focused on the following hypotheses:

How self-concept clarity relates to one's preference for a brand.

How consumer need for uniqueness can predict whether you choose to buy an aspirational or distinctively different brand.

It is our belief that combining identity stability and uniqueness motivation can provide a fuller psychological understanding of why people behave the way they do towards brands.

To summarize, the state of current research validates that the self-concept, self-esteem, and needs for motivation have a great deal of influence over the behaviour of consumers. Brands can be used as extensions of one's identity and tools for both social and emotional regulation.

However, more often than not, existing research is either fragmented, limited to a culturally homogenous sample group or limited to those perspectives traditionally used in the field of marketing. As such, this study represents an attempt to address those gaps and bring together clarity of self-concept and the consumer's need for uniqueness under a psychological context for young adults, thus contributing to our understanding of the process of identity development and the motivational processes behind brand preference.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

This research was conducted using a quantitative correlational approach to determine those self-concepts and their relationship to brand preference through their ability to satisfy consumer needs. It was chosen because the implementation of the research involved the assessment of the degree and direction of the relationship between the two psychological variables rather than manipulating/controlling the variables through experimental methods. The design allowed the researcher to explore how self-concept clarity and need for uniqueness related to young adults' attitudes and preference towards brands.

A cross-sectional survey was conducted (with each participant responding at one time) and collected via an online questionnaire.

### 3.2 Participants

Young adults (aged 18–25) who participated in this study were recruited using convenience sampling, which is a commonly used method of sampling in research. The primary reason for using this sample during young adulthood is because it represents a point in development characterized by exploration of identity and an increase of self-definition/dependency upon others to define oneself (in terms of perception) and an increased awareness of social comparisons and how others see them through peer influences on social relationships.

Potential participants were recruited via an online survey invitation and asked to complete a questionnaire anonymously. Respondents provided informed consent prior to participation and were told their survey results would only be used for research purposes and kept confidential.

### 3.3 Tools and Measures

Data were collected using two standardized psychological scales administered through a Google Form. The online questionnaire was created and distributed. The responses were compiled and exported for statistical analysis.

### 3.3.1 Consumer Need for Uniqueness Scale

Steven J. Tian and his colleagues created the Consumer Need for Uniqueness (CNFU) Scale to assess individuals' tendency to seek a uniqueness through their purchase decisions or consumption behaviour<sup>11</sup>. Examples of this type of behaviour would be opting for an un-trendy style of clothing or opting to purchase a new type of food that no one else has purchased.

The CNFU scale consists of 3 subscales, as measured through a Likert-type scale (typically 1 - strongly disagree to 5 - strongly agree), to measure the desire of an individual to be distinctive based on their purchase decision.

The CNFU has been used in prior studies to demonstrate reliability and validity in the assessment of identity-based consumers. In this current study context, the CNFU is used to measure how aspirational consumers can be motivated toward a brand through an individual's search for distinctiveness.

### 3.3.2 Self-Concept Clarity Scale

The Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCCS), created by Jennifer D. Campbell and others, was used to check how clear people's ideas of themselves are. The SCCS looks at how clear, consistent, and certain people are about who they think they are. The SCCS includes questions that measure how clear, consistent, and confident someone feels about their self-image. People answered these questions by agreeing or disagreeing on a scale. A higher score means someone has a clearer and more stable sense of themselves, while a lower score shows they are unsure or inconsistent about who they are. Understanding self-concept clarity is important in studying how people behave as consumers. People who are unsure about themselves may rely more on things like brand names to show who they are.

### 3.4 Variables of the Study

The study will examine the following independent and dependent variables:

Independent Variables

Self-Concept Clarity

Consumer Need for Uniqueness

Dependent Variable

Brand Preference Tendencies (as measured via responses to consumption-related survey items)

Self-Concept Clarity is the identity component of the consumer, whereas Consumer Need for Uniqueness represents the motivation that will influence their brand selection.

### 3.5 Procedure

To collect participants' responses, researchers designed a structured Google Form. The questionnaire contained three major sections:

Demographics (age, gender, educational background).

File-consumer need for uniqueness scale outcomes.

Self-concept clarity scale outcomes.

The link to the Google Form was distributed using various online communication methods. The participants were given an explanation of the purpose of the study and they consented to participate in the survey before they started. They also were advised to be honest in their responses and that there were no "right" or "wrong" answers.

The data collected from the Google Form were automatically compiled into a spreadsheet format. The retrieved data were then exported into Microsoft Excel to conduct coding and preliminary analysis. Following proper procedures for reverse-scoring, Total scores from each scale were derived by summing each of the items from the scales.

## IV. DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the statistical analysis and interpretation of the data collected through the Google Form questionnaire. A total of 108 responses were obtained from young adult participants. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation analysis to examine the relationship between Self-Concept Clarity (SCC) and Consumer Need for Uniqueness (CNFU).

The primary aim of the analysis was to test the two hypotheses:

H1: There is a significant relationship between self-concept and brand preference.

---

<sup>11</sup> Kuangwen Tian, William O. Bearden, and Gary L. Hunter, "Consumers' Need for Uniqueness: Scale

Development and Validation," *Journal of Consumer Research* 28, no. 1 (2001): 50–66.

H2: Consumer need for uniqueness significantly predicts preference for distinctive and aspirational brands.

#### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated to understand the central tendency and variability of the two main variables.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Self-Concept Clarity (SCC)	3.04	0.67	1	4.5
Consumer Need for Uniqueness (CNFU)	3.05	0.73	1.32	5

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics for SCC and CNFU (N = 108)

Interpretation: The mean score for Self-Concept Clarity (M = 3.04, SD = 0.67) indicates that participants demonstrated a moderate level of clarity regarding their self-beliefs. Since the scale ranged from 1 (low clarity) to 5 (high clarity), the average score suggests that most participants neither strongly lacked clarity nor possessed extremely high clarity, but rather fell within a moderate range.

Similarly, the mean score for Consumer Need for Uniqueness (M = 3.05, SD = 0.73) indicates a moderate tendency among participants to seek distinctiveness through consumption. The standard deviation suggests reasonable variability, meaning that while some participants strongly preferred uniqueness in brands, others displayed lower distinctiveness motives. Overall, both psychological constructs show moderate levels within the sample, making correlational analysis appropriate for examining their relationship.

#### 4.2 Correlation Analysis

To test the relationship between Self-Concept Clarity and Consumer Need for Uniqueness, Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed.

Variables	SCC	CNFU
Self-Concept Clarity (SCC)	1	0.03
Consumer Need for Uniqueness (CNFU)	0.03	1

Table 4.2: Pearson Correlation between SCC and CNFU

Correlation coefficient (r) = 0.027

Interpretation: The Pearson correlation coefficient between Self-Concept Clarity and Consumer Need for Uniqueness was  $r = 0.027$ , indicating a very weak positive relationship between the two variables.

This value is extremely close to zero, suggesting that there is no meaningful linear relationship between self-concept clarity and the need for uniqueness in this sample. In practical terms, individuals with clearer self-concepts were not significantly more or less likely to demonstrate a higher need for uniqueness in brand choices.

#### 4.3 Hypothesis Testing

##### Hypothesis 1

There is a significant relationship between self-concept and brand preference.

In this study, brand preference was operationalized through the Consumer Need for Uniqueness scale, which reflects identity-based consumption tendencies. The correlation result ( $r = 0.027$ ) indicates an extremely weak association.

Since the relationship is negligible, Hypothesis 1 is not supported based on the present data.

This suggests that clarity of self-concept alone may not directly determine whether individuals prefer distinctive or aspirational brands.

##### Hypothesis 2

Consumer need for uniqueness significantly predicts preference for distinctive and aspirational brands.

Descriptive findings indicate that participants showed moderate levels of need for uniqueness (M = 3.05). This suggests that distinctiveness in brand choice is present to a moderate extent among young adults.

However, since the correlation between SCC and CNFU is negligible, uniqueness motivation appears to function independently of identity clarity. Thus, while CNFU reflects a psychological tendency influencing brand preference, it does not appear to be significantly associated with self-concept clarity in this sample.

#### 4.4 Psychological Interpretation of Findings

A weak connection between self-concept clarity and need for uniqueness has several important implications for psychological understanding:

Independence of Constructs: Self-concept clarity indicates how stable one's identity is, while the consumer need for uniqueness is a measure of

motivational differentiation. The results indicate that a person can have a clear self-concept and choose mainstream brands or may obtain personal uniqueness despite an unclear identity.

**Contextual Influences:** The degree to which a person will be influenced by social factors (social pressure, trends, affordability) in choosing brands may be greater than the influence of their own internal identity clarity.

**Developmental Considerations:** Since the sample was made up primarily of young adults, identity development processes may still be ongoing. It is possible that both clarity and uniqueness will have a dynamic influence on each other at this stage of the life cycle.

**Cultural Factors:** In collectivist cultures, overt expression of uniqueness may conflict with social harmony, so it is unlikely that individuals who have a high degree of self-concept clarity will express this clearly in their choice of brands.

#### 4.5 Variability in Responses

The standard deviation for CNFU (0.73) was slightly higher than SCC (0.67), indicating greater variability in uniqueness motivation. This suggests that distinctiveness in consumption varies more widely across individuals compared to identity clarity.

The maximum score of 5.00 in CNFU indicates that some participants strongly endorsed uniqueness motives, while the minimum score of 1.32 suggests others showed strong conformity tendencies.

#### 4.6 Summary of Findings

Moderate levels of self-concept clarity and uniqueness motivation were present within the researched participant population.

There was a statistically non-significant, extremely weak correlation between self-concept clarity and consumer need for uniqueness ( $r = 0.027$ ).

Self-concept clarity also did not provide a statistical significant association with uniqueness driven brand preferences.

Uniqueness motivation appears to exist as an independent motivational characteristic.

This research indicates that, while there is evidence of both motivations within sample size of young adults, there does not appear to be a statistically significant linear relationship between self-concept clarity and uniqueness motivation. Additionally, findings suggest

that brand preferences may be affected by many interrelated psychological or contextual influences rather than by a direct correlation between self-concept clarity and uniqueness motivation.

## V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to investigate how clarity of self-selection relates to consumer need for uniqueness in determining brand preference by young adults. Ultimately, the researchers looked at whether clarity of self-identification has a significant effect on brand choice and whether consumer need for uniqueness predicts the desire to purchase unique and aspirational brands. The results indicated a moderate level of both self-concept clarity and consumer need for uniqueness in the sample; however, the correlation of the two variables was negligible ( $r = 0.027$ ).

### 5.1 Interpretation of Findings in Relation to Objectives

The study had two main goals. The first was to look at how self-concept, measured by self-concept clarity, relates to brand preference, measured by how much consumers want unique things. The results showed that there was a very weak link between self-concept clarity and the need for uniqueness. This suggests that people's clarity about who they are doesn't strongly affect how much they want to buy unique brands when they shop or make other buying choices. It also means that people with less clear self-concepts might be more likely to look for unique brands when choosing a product. For the second goal, we checked if the need for uniqueness helps predict whether people prefer aspirational or special brands.

The data showed that young adults have a moderate need for uniqueness, meaning they are interested in buying brands that stand out. However, our findings didn't show that self-concept clarity has a strong connection to the desire to buy unique brands.

### 5.2 Hypothesis Testing and Interpretation

**Hypothesis 1:** There is a significant relationship between self-concept and brand preference.

The correlation analysis resulted in a correlation coefficient( $r$ ) of 0.027 which suggests an insignificant correlation. These findings indicate there is no statistical relationship between brand preferences and self-concept clarity hence Hypothesis 1 is not

supported. This result is inconsistent with the theoretical predictions formed based on self-congruity theory (the theory states people are more likely to enjoy a brand that matches their self-image). It must be recognized however, that while self-concept clarity examines the stability of an individual's identity, current research on self-congruity generally focuses only on perceived similarities between the personality attributes of the brand and the individuals' self-perception. Therefore, the fact that the present study found no significant relationship may be due to the fact that there was a difference in how the two variables were operationally defined, not because they do not support broad theoretical assumptions.

Hypothesis 2: Consumer need for uniqueness significantly predicts preference for distinctive and aspirational brands.

Participants in this study were found to possess some medium level of desire to be unique or distinct from their peers; therefore, the sample does have evidence of a desire for uniqueness.

Further analysis revealed no meaningful correlation between participants' motivation to be unique and their self-concept clarity as defined in this study. Based upon these results, one can conclude that while consumers have an innate or psychological need to be unique and thus seek out distinctive products, that need is not significantly related to their self-concept clarity (as measured herein).

Although slightly confirmed by the above analysis, Hypothesis Two is deemed only partially supported in that it indicates only moderate levels of uniqueness motivation are present within this group and their respective levels of self-concept clarity are not statistically significant or predictive of uniqueness motivation.

### 5.3 Comparison with Existing Literature

The present findings both align with and diverge from prior research.

#### Consistency with Prior Research

Consumer research indicating a need for uniqueness reveals distinct and persistent characteristics of motivation that influence consumer behaviour. Researchers have also examined a number of other characteristics of motivation including the desire for uniqueness in preference for limited and one-of-a-kind products as well as more unconventional branded

products by identifying people with high levels of desire for uniqueness. These two areas of study confirm the present study's moderate level of CNFU, which indicates that young adults do indeed display behaviours that reflect an interest in unique products. In addition, research on self-concept clarity indicates that when one's self-concept is not clearly defined, he or she will often look outside of themselves for information to help define themselves. However, the present finding of this study indicates that reliability and general structure of the uniqueness motivation system are not guaranteed by the extent to which individuals are clear about their identity. Therefore, the data collected support to ideas that uniqueness has the potential to function, in part, as a personality trait, as well as a compensatory response to identity issues.

#### Divergence from Prior Research

Numerous previous research has demonstrated associations between constructs associated with self-concept and an individual's preference for a brand. Studies conducted based on the theory of self-congruity suggest that a greater degree of congruence between the self-image and the brand personality results in a higher level of brand attachment or commitment. Research based on self-discrepancy theory contends that individuals utilize brands as a means of reducing the discrepancy between multiple identities.

Findings from the current research are different from findings in past research: self-concept clarity was not found to correlate significantly with brand preferences driven by uniqueness. The divergence of findings may be a result of methodological differences. Previous research has evaluated congruence between the brand image and self-image, while this research has measured clarity of self-concept in lieu of evaluating the content or the valence of self-image.

Some of the previous studies suggest that low self-esteem individuals engage in compensatory consumption. Since this research was focused on the clarity of self-concept in comparison to evaluative self-esteem, this difference may explain the absence of strong correlations found in the current research.

### 5.4 Psychological Meaning of the Results

Identity clarity appears to be independent from motivation to be unique; both may serve different functions in an individual's life. An individual may

view the clarity of their identity in terms of structure, while the way in which they want to be perceived in the marketplace is driven by their desire to differentiate themselves from others.

The small relationship between these two concepts indicates that people tend to choose brands with unique/one-of-a-kind attributes regardless of how clearly they think of themselves in relation to their peers. Individuals who have established themselves and have confidence in their self-concept may choose to purchase distinctiveness as a way to express themselves, yet they will do so regardless of how well-defined of a self-concept they possess.

The results of this study further highlight the fact that identities and consumption can be impacted by a variety of external factors (e.g., approval from peers, cultural expectations, socio-economic status, etc.) rather than just by one's own identity.

### 5.5 Implications of the Findings

The study has produced various theoretical implications for scholars:

A separate dimension of self-concept is identity structure compared to identity expression. In particular, the findings demonstrate that one's expression of self is separate from the clarity of the self-construct.

There are indications that the consumer's personal motivation for uniqueness operates independently from the clarity of their identity. This may suggest that need for uniqueness is more of a personality-oriented trait than a function of the clarity of an individual's self-object.

The relative lack of correlation between a person's brand preference and their identity suggests that there is a more complex relationship between brand behaviour and psychological variables than previously assumed, indicating that a more integrated model of brand behaviour incorporating more than one psychological variable is needed.

### 5.6 Limitations of the Study

There are specific limitations to consider before interpreting the results:

Cross-sectional research limits causation as it only measures data at one specific point in time; thus, any conclusions drawn will be based on correlation rather than causation.

The primary limitation with all self-reports is that they introduce biases into the research due to respondents wanting to present themselves positively (i.e., through social desirability bias).

Since young adults made up ~85% of the sample surveyed, we cannot generalize our results beyond this age group.

Instead of specifically measuring preference for different brands, we assessed brand preference using a measure of individual-level need for uniqueness.

The results collected from this revised study were likely influenced by the cultural processes that shaped participants in this study. Overall ethnographers have suggested that there are different ways to describe culture and culture is subject to change over time.

### 5.7 Suggestions for Future Research

Future investigations could overcome these limitations by Using longitudinal study designs.

Including additional identity constructs, such as self-esteem, self-discrepancy and identity centrality.

Measuring consumers' actual brand choices as well as their motivation on multiple motivational scales.

Conducting cross-cultural comparisons to explore contextual differences.

Using experimental designs to establish causal relationships between identity threats and brand preference.

Overall, the present study has found moderate levels of both self-concept clarity and consumer need for uniqueness among young people; however, the correlation between these two variables was not statistically significant. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was not supported (self-concept clarity was not shown to be significantly related to brand preference), while Hypothesis 2 was partially supported (the motivation for uniqueness was present in the sample but did not show a significant relationship with self-concept clarity).

This research enhances our understanding of the complexity of identity-driven consumption and highlights the importance of integrated psychological models of identity. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that self-concept clarity alone does not account for variations in brand preferences, while motivational traits, such as uniqueness motivation, may function independently from the self-concept.

## VI. SUMMARY &amp; CONCLUSION

In this study, we looked into how clear self-concept and the need for uniqueness influence brand preference among young adults. Our main goal was to see if having a clear self-concept and habits based on personal identity are connected. We also wanted to find out if the desire for uniqueness affects preference for unique or aspirational brands, and the other way around. Overall, the results showed that participants had a moderate level of both self-concept clarity and need for uniqueness. This means they had a reasonably clear sense of who they are, and they also showed some interest in being unique when choosing products. However, the data from the correlation analysis showed very weak links between self-concept clarity and the need for uniqueness. This suggests that having a clear self-identity doesn't strongly influence the desire to buy unique or aspirational brands.

The first hypothesis wasn't supported. There's no evidence that clear self-concept strongly predicts the tendency to buy brands because of their uniqueness in this study. The second hypothesis was only partially supported. In general, people have a medium level of motivation to be unique, but this motivation isn't significantly linked to how clear their self-concept is. The findings show that self-concept and the need for uniqueness may be separate psychological factors. Earlier research suggested that identity and consumption could be explained through self-congruity and self-discrepancy, but this study didn't find enough support for that. Instead, it seems that the desire for individuality might come from a personal trait rather than an attempt to compensate for an unclear sense of self.

The researcher also mentions that consumer behavior is complex and affected by many factors, like being a brand ambassador or having the right group of friends, not just one type of person, like someone older. Young adults, as they develop their identities, are most influenced by peer pressure and other cultural and social factors in their buying decisions. In conclusion, the study suggests that to understand brand selection better, an integrated psychological approach is needed. Although self-concept clarity doesn't directly affect the desire for uniqueness, both are still important in understanding how individuals express themselves through their purchases. The findings offer insight into

how self-related constructs and consumer behavior are connected. This helps psychological theory by providing more understanding of how self and consumption processes are related.

## REFERENCES

- [1] R. W. Belk, "Possessions and the extended self," *J. Consum. Res.*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 139–168, 1988.
- [2] J. D. Campbell et al., "Self-concept clarity: Measurement, personality correlates, and cultural boundaries," *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.*, vol. 70, no. 1, pp. 141–156, 1996.
- [3] J. E. Escalas and J. R. Bettman, "You are what they eat: The influence of reference groups on consumers' connections to brands," *J. Consum. Psychol.*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 339–348, 2003.
- [4] E. L. Grubb and H. L. Grathwohl, "Consumer self-concept, symbolism and market behavior: A theoretical approach," *J. Market.*, vol. 31, no. 4, pp. 22–27, 1967.
- [5] E. T. Higgins, "Self-discrepancy: A theory relating self and affect," *Psychol. Rev.*, vol. 94, no. 3, pp. 319–340, 1987.
- [6] W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1. Henry Holt, 1890.
- [7] R. E. Kleine, S. S. Kleine, and J. B. Kernan, "Mundane consumption and the self: A social-identity perspective," *J. Consum. Psychol.*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 209–235, 1993.
- [8] A. H. Maslow, "A theory of human motivation," *Psychol. Rev.*, vol. 50, no. 4, pp. 370–396, 1943.
- [9] D. C. McClelland, *The Achieving Society*. Van Nostrand, 1961.
- [10] A. Reed II, "Social identity as a useful perspective for self-concept-based consumer research," *Psychol. Market.*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 235–266, 2002.
- [11] M. L. Richins, "Valuing things: The public and private meanings of possessions," *J. Consum. Res.*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 504–521, 1994.
- [12] C. R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications, and Theory*. Houghton Mifflin, 1951.
- [13] M. Rosenberg, *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image*. Princeton University Press, 1965.

- [14] M. J. Sirgy, "Self-concept in consumer behavior: A critical review," *J. Consum. Res.*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 287–300, 1982.
- [15] M. J. Sirgy, "Using self-congruity and ideal congruity to predict purchase motivation," *J. Bus. Res.*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 195–206, 1985.
- [16] H. Tajfel and J. C. Turner, "An integrative theory of intergroup conflict," in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, W. G. Austin and S. Worchel, Eds. Brooks/Cole, 1979, pp. 33–47.
- [17] K. T. Tian, W. O. Bearden, and G. L. Hunter, "Consumers' need for uniqueness: Scale development and validation," *J. Consum. Res.*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 50–66, 2001.
- [18] K. White and D. W. Dahl, "To be or not be? The influence of dissociative reference groups on consumer preferences," *J. Consum. Psychol.*, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 404–414, 2006.