ABSTRACT

It has been argued that what we consume defines who we are. This paper begins by describing traditional theories of consumption, which propose that consumption is based upon utility. These theories are compared with the alternative idea that people consciously or unconsciously base their consumption activities upon identity construction.

The idea that possessions are important because of the role that they play as extended consumption items is then discussed with reference both to how people traditionally display their possession and how the loss of possessions affects the self.

Belk's (1988) work on the 'extended self' is presented to highlight the important link between identity and consumption, particularly in terms of how people incorporate items into their personal identity. This lead to a discussion on multiple selves and the potential for an identity to be changed via consumption, along with the relationship between group membership and consumption.

Finally, in order to illustrate and explain the relationship between consumption and identity, the role of food in identity formation through consumption is presented in detail.

Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Consumption is changing. Recent literature suggests that the economic idea of maximizing utility is dated with consumers increasingly participating in symbolic shopping. It is now just as important to buy things for what they mean as what they do. Consciously or unconsciously, consumers make decisions about their purchases based upon their identity or the identity they wish to project or communicate to others.

In order to investigate these ideas further, the concept of the 'extended self' (Belk, 1988) is discussed with reference to literature on consumption, possessions and identity. Possessions are considered with reference to, and as an extension of consumption, thus continuing to reflect identity. Traditional consumption rituals are compared and contrasted with modern idolization of possessions such as cars and the feelings of grief at the loss of a sacred possession.

The paper examines identity construction, development and transformation both as an individual expressing singular and multiple identities and as part of a group. Group identity may take many forms, including a family, a national / ethnic group, an age group (for example, teenagers) or people with similar interest, such as skydivers or motorbike enthusiasts.

Finally, an illustration of the link between consumption and identity is provided through a description of ‘food identities. Research in this area to date has been minimal, but this section considers identity construction and development in terms of food choices, changes in food preferences through life stages, the importance of food and food preparation in defining one’s identity within the family and food as a reflection of national and ethnic identity.

RATIONAL OF THE STUDY

In general the researcher will begin by describing traditional theories of consumption, which propose that consumption is based upon utility. These theories are compared with the alternative idea that people consciously or unconsciously base their consumption activities upon identity construction.

The idea that possessions are important because of the role that they play as extended consumption items is then discussed with reference both to how people traditionally display their possession and how the loss of possessions affects the self. Finally, in order to illustrate and explain the relationship between consumption and identity, the role of food in identity formation through consumption is presented in detail.

Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent literature has emphasized Consumption is the “search for, choice, acquisition, possession and disposal of goods and services” (Hogg and Michell, 1996). According to Veblen, consumption can be explained by a trickle down effect in which people of a lower social status envy and emulate those of a higher social status (Dolfsma, 1999). In turn, wealthier people and those of higher status change their consumption habits in order to remain distinguished. This helps to explain the never-ending quest for more consumption items and is described as the “Fetishism of commodities” by (Marx, 1961). As far as producers are concerned, the cycle also has the advantage of a regular demand for products both from the mass market (lower status individuals) and innovators who wish to distinguish themselves from the mass market (Trigg, 2001).

Veblen is criticized for a number of contradictions to his theory including a ‘trickle-up’ of fashions from lower to higher status, a current trend for subtlety in consumption habits and the low impact of social class on consumption habits, compared to ‘lifestyles’ (see Trigg, 2001). However, the theory can help to explain ideas of identity construction through emulating, for example of peers and celebrities.

Identity construction is an increasingly important area in consumption theories. Explanation of how consumers make choices between products and services may help to explain the relationship between identity and consumption. Demand theory suggests that consumers should choose the product which provides maximum utility for the disposable income they have (Worthington, 2001) where utility is the "satisfaction or pleasure derived from consuming a good "(ibid).

An alternative to this view is that consumers choose products which closely match their current or aspired personalities. Post-modern theorists such as Sartre would suggest that possessions (and thus our consumption habits) are important to knowing who we are and provide a "sense of being" (See Belk, 1988). Consumers may still choose products based upon their value but given the variety of choice in the market may, for example, choose a pink kitchen appliance because they feel it fits in with their warn personality. (Levy, 1959) suggests that choosing products is relatively easy because one object is likely to strike us more "symbolically more harmonious with our goals, feelings and self-definitions than another". Choice of products and services provides us with the opportunity to express our own originality (Donovan, 2001 in Arnould, 2002) and thus acts as a means of communication with others (Levy, 1959). A clear example of this is provided by (Salma ,1999) who suggest that the purchase of a watch may communicate one thing, such as need for timeliness, but the purchase of a Rolex watch demonstrates far more, potentially including status.

In societies where there is so much choice and relative wealth, it is hardly surprising that shopping and consumption have become major leisure activities. Much of the literature suggests that society and culture are very important to consumption and identity (Hogg, 1996) (Hill, 1990) describe the sense of self as being “embedded in the interactions and roles played within a society” and cite the homeless as people who lack the ability to consume in the traditional sense and are thus labeled and seen as failures.

(Celsi, 1993) suggested various factors likely consumption, in the context of high-risk sport: skydiving. Although some points may be less relevant to wider consumption, on the whole, these factors are likely to affect many types of consumption. Firstly, mass media and increased literacy provide more information to consumers whilst promoting an homogenous identity to which consumers aspire. Secondly, people’s jobs do not give them a “strong sense of self”, compared to those identities they read about in the mass media (Celsi, 1993). A high-risk sport provides them with a sense of release and is important to identity. Finally, in the high-risk sport arena, developments in technology (more reliable and lightweight) have led to greater interest in the sports. These factors, together with internal variables such as “predisposition, goal and psychological states…” (ibid). help to determine those likely to participate in a high-risk sport. Reasons for continuing with a high-risk sport are slightly different from those for initially trying out the sports. Firstly, the consumers like to try to “develop technical skill fro personal satisfaction and social status” (Celsi, 1993), termed ‘Efficacy’. Secondly,

participants like to be different from their everyday peers and may make the decision to construct a new identity around a new role such as skydiving. Finally, participants like the sense of involvement and community in which money and other forms of status are not an issue.

The link to identity can also be illustrated in the loss of possessions which can result in a lessening of self (Belk, 1988). This may be institutionalized such as the removal of possession upon entering prison (together with their replacement with non-unique items to engender group identity) or the violation, anger and grief felt by those who have experienced their possessions being stolen. The utilitarian response to such feelings is that the loss of benefits provided by objects is missed, not the objects themselves (Belk, 1988). For example, a photograph is simply a cue to remember the past. However, other literature suggest that objects provide feelings of security, the ability to express oneself and show connection or lack of connection with other members of society (Wallendorf, 1988).

Using the work of (Sartre, 1943), Belk suggest that there are three ways in which possessions may be incorporated into the extended self. Firstly, appropriation or control of an object. This clearly includes purchasing and consumption of products but may also include gift-giving. In choosing, wrapping and presenting someone with a gift, a part of the self is also given. Ultimately, a gift of poor taste may demonstrate incompatibility in a relationship (Belk, 1991) and may help to explain the time often devoted to finding the perfect gift and the worry felt upon presenting the gift.

The second way in which an object may be incorporated is by creating it oneself. This refers to both physical objects (for example, carving a chair) and thoughts (for example, writing a journal article). The use of patents and copyrights help to codify identity in this sense. The third form of incorporation is in knowing someone or something. Examples of this exist in name dropping, fighting over children in divorce or the sense of loss when someone dies.

A further means of extending oneself is suggested by(Belk, 1988), based on the work of Marx. He suggests that “money enlarges the sense of self because it enlarges imaginable possibilities of all that we might have and do” – it gives power, for example, power to select purchases and thus to selectively extend ourselves.

The idea of a single identity, with some objects being more or less important to that identity (described in terms of concentric circles) is part of Belk’s theory on the extended self. However, other authors have suggested that people are made up of many different identities with different possessions making up different parts of personalities or selves (Kleine, 1993).

The idea of multiple selves suggests questions regarding choice of identity. (Elliott ,1997) proposes that the social consequences of identity adoption are analyzed by consumers and a decision is made based upon this analysis. An example might be rejection by a young person’s peer group for wearing the ‘wrong’ brand of trainers. (Kleine, 1993) also suggest the importance of social connections but

also stress that identities that we perform well are given precedence. A more prominent identity for a person will probably have many more identity – related possession which, if visible, may lead to judgments by others on that identity. An assessment of products may be used to make inferences about commitment to the identity and thus guide behavior towards an individual (Ditmar, 1992) cited by (Elliott, 1997). For example, someone who sees themselves as a ‘gardener’ may have many possessions relating to this identity, including plants and equipment and may be assessed by others on his commitment to the gardening identity based upon his possessions.

Detection of customers’ identity constructions is important for retailers, enabling them to advertise to the right people at the right time, targeting their marketing. This is achieved through monitoring shopping behavior. Incentives such as loyalty cards can be used to collect data on spending habit sand try to identify potentially profitable and loyal customers. Additional information including socio-economic, demographic and geographical data such as age, gender, marital status, income bracket and postcode can also be used (Haley, 1985) to further pinpoint customers.

Group identity can be expressed in a number of ways through possessions and other aspects of the extended self, including formal or informal uniforms, tattoos, piercings and ownership, for example of motorbikes or team shirts. People may identify with others through a subculture of consumption, for example, skydiving, spectators at sporting events or common ownership such as a Harley Davidson

motorbike (Schouten, 1995). According to Schouten, the Harley Davidson can be seen as a religious icon see also (Belk, 1989), worshipped through cleaning and maintenance rituals as part of a “brotherhood” (Schouten, 1995). The ownership of a bike can be seen as a barrier to entry to such a brotherhood. Without a bike, entry is not possible but even with bike, further commitment is demonstrated through tattoos, customization to the bike, pins, etc. All these symbols help to display group identity and commitment at the same time as distinguishing the group from others (Schouten, 1995).

An alternative example of group membership is the household or family.

Traditionally, the family is considered as a single unit of consumption in economics. However, as many will know, consumption decisions within a household are rarely unanimous with each member having different preferences for products and services (see for example, Valentine, 1999).

Identity transformation need not be so dramatic. It may be a gradual process which is not even recognised until the decision to tidy the wardrobe is taken and old possessions and clothes are discarded because they did not grow with the extended self (Belk, 1989). Landmarks in a person's life may involve identity transformations, for example, a person may purchase a different style of clothes following a divorce (McAlexandcr, 1992) or the start of a new job.

Perhaps the most obvious transition period for identity is in teenage years. Teenagers are often very interested in

consumption and identity. The products they purchase often have strong symbolism as well as a social function (Abrams, 1959, cited by Dolfsman, 1999). Items often include clothes and music but also the sources of information about what is desirable and undesirable, for example, magazines, advertisements, films, peers, celebrities and music television (Englis, 1993). The information from these various sources is used to construct an identity based upon their interpretations of "consumption ideals prevalent in popular culture". With time and changes in culture, identity is likely to alter.

Literature on the transformation of identity through food is particularly interesting. (Kcmmer, 1998) describe food transitions from being single to co-habitation through interviews with couples three months before and after the date of living together. They found that the effort put into shopping, preparation and eating as well as the overall importance of food often increased for a couple upon living together, with the interesting impact of improving men's diets at the same time as worsening women's! The couples described conflicting aspects of shared consumption with some mentioning the supportive nature of the relationship benefiting their diets whilst others found that mutual appreciation for nice food and drink impacted their diets differently.

(Valentine, 1999) suggests the importance of food in family identities, together with gendered identities relating to food within the home. Women often choose shop, prepare and cook the food but select foods that their children or partners would like instead of their own preferences. Thus, their own food identity is neglected. A literary example of

such a situation is provided by (Slama, 1999) who review a play by Nancy Barr entitled "Mrs Cage" about a housewife whose identity is shattered when she realizes that her children and husband do not value the attention she pays to their needs, thus causing her own identity to become meaningless.

Valentine goes on to present a number of different case studies on the impact of food within the home and the symbiotic relationship between identity and consumption in which identity effects choice of food but consumption practices also help to construct identity. The case of the Cushings is described in which the action of one daughter converting to vegetarianism caused great changes in the rest of the family. Initially, Mrs Gushing attempted to balance the wants of everyone, which involved cooking two different meals every night. Eventually this became too much work and the rest of the family gradually began to cut meat out of their diets until ultimately two other members of the family also completely gave up meat. In this case, the altered identity of one member of the group led to the eventual change of others' identities.

A different case shows the impact of life-changing events on diet and consumption. Walter, a recent widower has found a new interest in cookery, an activity in which he never participated due to the traditional division of labour within the household. When his wife became ill, she taught Walter how to cook. He is now fascinated by -cookery; he enjoys television programs about it and likes to cook for family and neighbours. However, he sadly does not normally

cook for himself as he finds it loo expensive and it is inconvenient to cook for one.

An alternative perspective on the importance of food to identity is provided by (Askegaard, 1999) who investigated food consumption amongst Greenlanders living in Denmark. Food is often an important element in national identity, for example cheese in France (Roberts, 1996), sausage in Germany or pasta in Italy. Traditional Greenlandic food is often seasonal, based on what can be hunted in different seasons. However, the food itself is not as important as the context in which it is eaten. Greenlanders have a great respect for nature and consumption within nature is deemed very important. Although imports from Denmark have helped to shape Greenlandic food al home, the impact is clearly greater for those people who have moved to Denmark. The new context means that the sense of nature is lost and ties with the community are lessened because food was based upon a gift economy and community links. The impact on immigrants is an "ongoing negotiation of identity" (Askegaard, 1999) and conflict between cultures. This effect is thought by the authors to be worse than similar issues faced by immigrants of other nationalities because of the ties between nature, community and food found in Greenland.

This section has demonstrated the importance of food to identity, both for individuals and groups at different levels, including families and nationalities. Food as an everyday consumption item can demonstrate a lot about a person's identity - whether they choose a diet option, how they like their meat cooked, whether they choose to omit

certain foods from their diets, etc. Food is not the only way in which identity may be constructed and the identities which are formed may not correspond to identities constructed through other forms of consumption but eating is an everyday activity which is one reflection upon identity.

The terms brand identity and brand image are sometimes confused with each other, leading to errors of judgment in marketing and brand building. The result is often a credibility gap that damages the reputation of a business-its image.
Many Asian companies are familiar with the term "brand image," but the term is used very loosely. The term "brand identity" is rarely used though, and is generally not understood. This leads to misunderstanding about the very nature of branding.

One of the key activities in branding is the creation of an identity for a product, service, or company-to give it personality. With entertainers, sports celebrities, or politicians, the "raw material" for the intended identity already exists. But with non-human subjects, it may initially appear to be more difficult to achieve. A person's identity is reflected in his/her appearance, actions, and behavior.

The way a person dresses, speaks, acts, or moves indicates whether he/she is trustworthy, creative, or friendly. The challenge in branding a non-human subject is in evoking the

personality traits, and it can be done. A product, for example, can be physically dressed differently (packaging), speak differently, (through the tone used in commercials), and have other specific characteristics such as reliability.

The sum total is its identity it is the whole of what is being offered. As with people, so too with places, countries, products, services, and companies-their identity involves depth, substance, character, performance, and other qualities.

The aim of providing brands with identities (including their names) is to get people to like them and see them as being unique in some way. By doing so, branding will succeed in generating the desired brand image. When determining what this should be, never overlook that in addition to the basic expectations created, every customer hopes for personal recognition and attention beyond the normal acceptable standards and to be associated with something special.

In today's markets, most companies provide similar products and services.

Fundamentally, these markets are commodity markets driven by prime needs and minimum standards of service. When customers consider such factors, some products and services will meet their requirements. How do customers differentiate them? When the basic qualifying factors are in place and the consumer is considering all the available options, brand image resoundingly comes into play-company or product imaging becomes fundamental to the decision. Image is highly important to companies in Asia, where

essentially collectivist cultures prevail in every country and image represents "face" and quality.

Although image is important, it is identity that should drive the brand. The identity or personality of the brand gives it consistency and longevity. Many companies are tempted by results of brand-image research to change their brand's identity. But, it is identity and the values upon which the identity is based that define the brand. Brand image is how the brand is seen, but this is only a point of comparison with the identity. Companies must be prepared to change the image, not the identity, if the two do not match. Guardianship of brand identity is, therefore, essential.

Image is the market's summation of the complete product-the way it perceives the total experience, brand against brand. Largely, it is the thrust, tone, and manner of a company's communications, and the consumer's experience with the brand that builds its image. Brand image should reflect and express the brand personality.

A brand's image, however, may not be the same as the identity we would like the brand to have. Image is a product of people's perceptions, that is, the way in which people think about or even imagine something to be. There is a real danger in assuming that the image we want people to have of our brand will be the same as the identity we are trying to project as this might not always be the case. For instance, people might view a company as dull and unexciting when it is actually trying to appear lively. Or

a company's new headquarters may appear far too opulent when the company is actually trying to look prudent. This difference between identity and image is called a "perception gap," and is to be avoided at all costs. Unfortunately, it is a common weakness found in many companies.

Then~ are many instances in Asian countries of companies claiming to have impeccable service standards, but failing to translate this service into customer experience. So remember that when building a brand, great care must be taken to ensure that the brand image matches its identity. The golden rule is: Do not promise what you cannot deliver.

Some companies set goals for their brand identity in terms of the desired image they would like the brand to have. One company has written down typical desired consumer responses to define what these perceptions mean, for instance: service-oriented: "It's easy to do business with Company X because its service and the way it does business are second to none."

By spelling out its brand values to its employees and including sample situations that staff might come across involving customers, the company is helping all of its staff take responsibility for managing the brand and for developing a brand culture that delivers on the promises made. Consequently, this company has developed a highly successful corporate brand. But branding can be accomplished at various levels.

There are several branding strategies that a company can choose to determine the focus of the brand it is creating and developing. The basis for the choice boils down to a central issue, for whatever reason, which is how prominent should the company brand name be in relation to the product or service brand name. This decision has implications for not just marketing communications, but also the development of the whole relationship between the brand and its customers.

Product branding lies at one end of the brand-strategy spectrum. It entails giving each individual product an exclusive brand name, with the company name either totally or virtually absent. Companies such as Procter & Gamble are famous for product branding, for example, with Tide washing powder.

This strategy allows the brand to have unique values, personality, identity, and positioning. As a consequence, this approach implies that every new product the company brings on to the market is a new brand and can be positioned precisely for a specific market segment. This makes it easier for the company to evaluate brand performance and worth, and allows better resource-allocation decisions. A potential problem is product cannibalization if consumers cannot differentiate clearly among product brands, that is, if the product positioning is not clear. Another disadvantage of this strategy is the requirement that every product brand has its own advertising and promotion budget and is totally self-supporting, with little or no brand name assistance or assurance from the parent.

In product-line branding, products appear under the same brand name and possess the same basic identity, but with slightly different competencies; for example, a line of hair shampoos like Follow Me that has different benefits. The brand line comes under the hair-care category, but the different line extensions cover complementary applications of essentially the same product. Clearly, the various products remain very close to the initial brand concept. Economies of scale in advertising and promotion are a feature in this strategy and each new line extension strengthens the positioning of the brand, and therefore, its image. The line helps defend the category from predatory attack. In this way, individual product brands move across to line brands as companies find ways of extending the brand to different customer groups or segments.

Product-range branding is a strategy where a number of products or services in a broad category are grouped together under one brand name and promoted with one basic identity. Unlike line-branded products (mentioned earlier), range-branded products carry out basically the same functions, but at different performance levels. Examples of such products include the various cars 'n the Mercedes S, E-, C-, and A-class, and Intel's Pentium and Celeron ranges of microprocessors. A single brand name allows SOt: 1:L economies of scale in advertising and promotion as the products tend to carry the same overall brand values and positioning.

There are basically two approaches to corporate branding. One is the decision a company takes to promote its name as the main brand name, sometimes referred to as monolithic or umbrella branding. In this approach, the product or service offered is not branded individually or as strongly as the corporate brand. The aim is to leverage the corporate identity and image. Companies with powerful images, such as IBM and Virgin, use this branding method. Akio Morita, the founder of

Sony Corporation expressed well the rationale for corporate branding when he said: "I have always believed that the company name is the life of an enterprise. It carries responsibility and guarantees the quality of the product."

Many Asian companies have taken this route because the commitment and longevity of the company are judged to be of great importance in their countries.

The need to satisfy the consumers' concerns about credibility and quality is an important reason why the second approach to corporate branding is becoming popular. In this approach, the product brand name has a high profile, but is endorsed by the parent company, which gives the product a stamp of quality and credibility. The product brand is self supporting in practically every respect, but retains the assurance of the corporate brand endorsement. This brand strategy is sometimes referred to as house or endorsement branding.

It is a popular form of branding used by well-known multinational companies such as Nestle. With a multitude of brands in its portfolio, Nestle sometimes needs to give its products the protection and guarantee of performance to

make them profitable in highly competitive categories. New products especially can find it very difficult to break into mature markets without the endorsement of a strong and credible corporate parental brand name. This type of corporate branding is also appropriate to those companies engaged in service industries as their products are more intangible in nature. When consumers cannot see the product, the company name helps to give them an assurance of quality, heritage, and authenticity.

Branding has made marketing more strategic than it was two decades ago. The marketing mix is now seen more as an arsenal of tactical weapons, with the brands playing the big guns. Top brands have their own vision, mission, financial and marketing objectives, and a whole array of strategies to achieve these ambitions. They are run as corporate entities in their own right, right down to their profitability and equity valuation. The introductory chapter mentioned the huge rewards that can be achieved by companies possessing strong international and global brands. In some cases, the brand is the company and the company is the brand. From this viewpoint, brands are a vital part of corporate strategy.

Much has been said about globalization and competing in a borderless world with international goods and services both in the domestic and international markets. It is hastily assumed that the competition will be between products judged on quality, service, and supply. In fact, Asian goods, still viewed and promoted as products, will come up against not just other products, but established brands.

For Asian companies, the branding route is undoubtedly the one to travel.
Companies are unlikely to attain world-class financial performance or global recognition without building at least one strong brand, whether corporate or product. Branding is strategic and should be a permanent item on boardroom agendas.

Company visions and missions are often defined, and strategies are put in place to help achieve them. Brand and corporate strategies are extremely close.
However, it is rare for Asian companies to have brand strategy blueprints for either corporate or product brands, or clear brand platforms upon which such blueprints can be based. A strong brand platform (the way in which a brand is positioned and given personality) becomes the raw material for product development and differentiation meaningful to the consumer. A clear brand-strategy blueprint provides the foundation for image development-a "glue" that binds all strategic activities in a co-coordinated and synergistic way. Internally, a strong, well-defined brand strategy blueprint will assist employee understanding of the company's strategic marketing objectives and their roles in achieving these objectives, thus boosting motivation, purpose, pace, and productivity.

Externally, brand communications will inform the world of the company's corporate and brand values, achievements, and why they are different and better.

A strong and well-executed brand-strategy blueprint is fundamental to the achievement of the company's vision and will impact strongly on the bottom line. Given the current economic downturn in Asia that is affecting all industries, an excellent window of opportunity now exists for companies to develop their brand strategies for the future.

Branding in sports is big business. The first case study shows how the New
Zealand rugby team has tried to change its brand image by changing its brand personality. Even at the team level, branding works and New Zealand is currently the most popular rugby team in the world.

From sports to fashion, the Padini Holdings case study highlights how top management passion for its brands is translated into market success. The fashion industry is a difficult one to succeed in, and risks have to be taken. But Padini has minimized the risks by really understanding what customers want.
The third case study is about branding a country. Anything can be branded, and Britain in Malaysia was a highly successful branding exercise, changing market perceptions and image, and resulting in business success.

We are all familiar with branded products like Kit Kat, companies like Sony
Corporation, and services like FedEx, but we often forget that many other things can be branded too, such as

entertainers, politicians, events, destinations and places, and even nations. The principles remain the same.

Entertainers and celebrities are often the result of skillful branding. Michael

Jordan, Tiger Woods, Mariah Carey, Jay Leno, and Jackie Chan are good examples of what the power of branding can achieve. Star Trek is more than just an ongoing space-fantasy soap opera; it is a brand with millions of constantly satisfied customers (viewers). Star Trek memorabilia sales chalk up millions, and conventions and associated events abound. Actors starring in the series come and go, but the Star Trek brand lives on. The X-Files is a similar entertainment brand.

Disneyland has become the top destination on practically every family's wish-list.

Events like the Football World Cup and the Super Bowl attract billions of television viewers. The Manchester United Football Club has been so successful in branding itself that it has become a target for acquisition. It is setting up a chain of amusement parks in Asia called "Theatre of Dreams" to cater to its millions of fans (an estimated 20 million in China alone), having already established retail outlets in some Asian countries.

Politicians are also good examples of branding. Margaret Thatcher changed her brand image totally prior to getting elected as British prime minister and George Bush's 1988 presidential election campaign was an astonishing success with the change in his image from a low positive negative ratio of around 40% to a much improved and winning result of 60%.

Countries are also using the techniques of branding to change perceptions. For example, Taiwan is carrying out a

long-term campaign aimed at changing business people's perceptions of its identity to a more high-tech image. As can be seen from the above examples, anything or anyone can be branded.

The success of branding depends to a certain extent on the quality of the product, service, or person. Many singers and politicians, for instance, possess certain abilities, but it is the perceived image others have of them that wins the day for them and enhances their value. However, branding should not be used as a substitute for poor quality or inferior performance. Allowing situations like these to slip through can result in sales slipping too, as Jaguar found out in the 1970s, when it let its product quality drop to unprecedented depths. So when building a brand, it is important to remember that the product or service on offer must be seen to be at least as good as that of the competition. In the 21st century, however, quality and performance levels, of competing products and services especially, will be on par with each other. It will, therefore, require more than these two factors to make a product or service appear greatly superior to its competition. It is branding that creates lasting differentiation, and in many cases, legendary success. In order to understand how branding achieves this, we have to first recognize what it is about brands that causes people to prefer them to ordinary products.

People are always talking about brands. Even young children discuss their favorite brands. Why then do the majority of consumers prefer to buy branded products and services instead of commodity-type goods and services? There are several reasons for this. Brands provide consumers with a

means of choice. The mere existence of brand names makes it easier to differentiate one product from another. Over the years, the power of the consumer in terms of knowledge and rights has risen, while the broadening range of brands facilitates the freedom of choice, which is valued so highly. Customers have better knowledge of branded products and services than they do of commodity-types. As such, customers are able to choose easily from among branded products and services than unbranded, unfamiliar, and similar offerings. First, brands make shopping easier because branded packaging facilitates quick recognition of a product. Living in a fast-paced world, people are constantly looking for ways to make their lives less frustrating. Being able to home in on a favorite brand saves time and effort.

Second, branding often helps arriving at a purchase decision more quickly. This aspect is particularly important to people who are buying technical products as they do not always understand all the specifications and jargon fired at them by sales staff and promotional leaflets.

Furthermore, when products from various manufacturers are technically indistinguishable, it is the brand name that offers comfort and simplicity. Intel is a good example.

Brands offer quality assurance and reduce risk

When customers repeatedly buy a certain brand, they quickly get a feel for the quality and value for money they can expect from that brand. For example, stepping into a Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) outlet anywhere in the world, one knows precisely the quality of food to expect. This expectation (associated with a brand) helps a customer avoid the risk associated with buying untried products and

services. Most customers are risk-averse and avoid the unknown, but brands offer them security and reduce worry and fear. In addition, if a brand fails to live up to their acceptable levels of quality, customers have recourse ro the manufacturer.

Companies, as a result, try harder to maintain quality standards and their reputations.

An important reason why most people prefer brands is that brands provide an avenue for self-expression. When asked why the company had introduced computers in many colors, Steve Jobs of Apple Computer replied that people do not care so much about megabytes and gigabytes, but want to express themselves through the color of their computers. Such psychological need is often at the heart of a purchase decision because brands become the means through which people can express their personality, aspirations, and achievements. By using or wearing a particular brand, customers can express something about themselves that normally they might not be able to or willing to do.

In Asia, it is common to find successful people expressing their wealth or success through their Mercedes-Benz cars or Rolex watches. An advertisement in a Singapore newspaper by a Mercedes-Benz distributor featured a picture of an EcIass model with the tag line: "Make a statement, without saying a word."

Consumers buy expensive and prestigious brands of goods because possession of these outward expressions of success differentiates them from other people, giving them the opportunity to stand out from the crowd. Prestige brands are world famous, and there is no shortage of people waiting to buy them.

Brands offer psychological benefits that far outweigh the practical benefits of the product. In some cases, consumers form strong associations with a brand, leading to friendship and even dependency. The value of logos and names increases as brand association becomes more indelible in the psyche of consumers. Logos and names become triggers that, upon recognition, evoke memories and feelings associated with the brand. Brands, therefore, can generate intense emotion and pleasure.

Chapter 3
METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sampling method that the researcher used is a non-probability sampling method. The researcher will be using both Convenience sampling and Judgment sampling. It is also a judgment sample because the researcher is going to question people that seem responsible, willing and able to answer.

Data Collection

The researcher has employed the survey data collection method so as to attain a wide array of data and results.

Data Analysis

The tool the researcher will be using to analyze the data collected for the 100 consumer surveys in the SPSS statistical tool. Frequency tables will be used to assist in the analysis of how consumers express their identity through choice of products that they buy.

Chapter 4

DATA INTERPRETATIONS

Analysis of Questionnaire

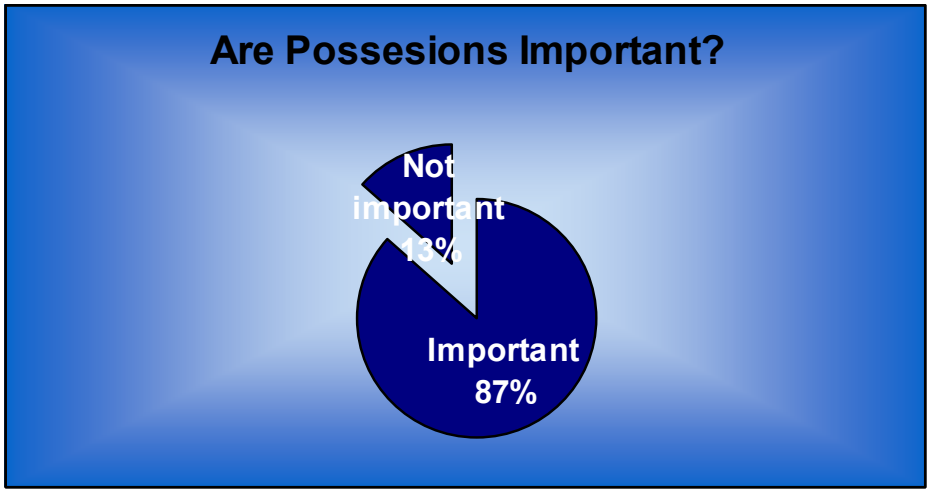
1. What are the factors that influence you before buying any brand?

Firstly, the consumers like to try to develop technical skill fro personal satisfaction and social status. Secondly, participants like to be different from their everyday peers and may make the decision to construct a new identity around a new role such as hunting. Finally, participants like the sense of involvement and community in which money and other forms of status are not an issue.



2. How much importance do you give to your possessions?

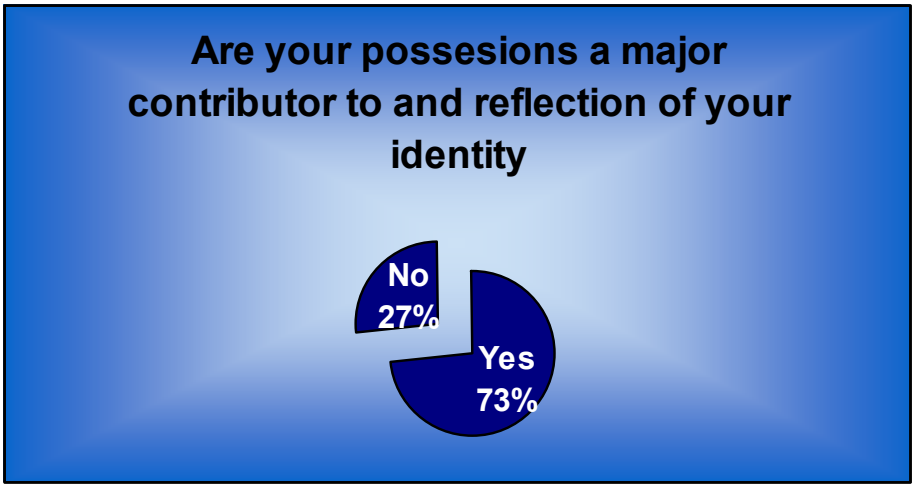
86.7% cited that possessions are an important part of their life. Some obvious examples include the way in which some people ‘care’ for their car: washing it and polishing it or the feelings of nostalgia and regret at disposing of old possessions such as clothing, while 13.3% said that possessions are not important in life.



3. Are your possessions a major contributor to and reflection of your identity?

People are made up of many different identities with different possessions making up different parts of personalities or selves. 73.12% cited that possessions are a major contributor to and reflection of their identity.

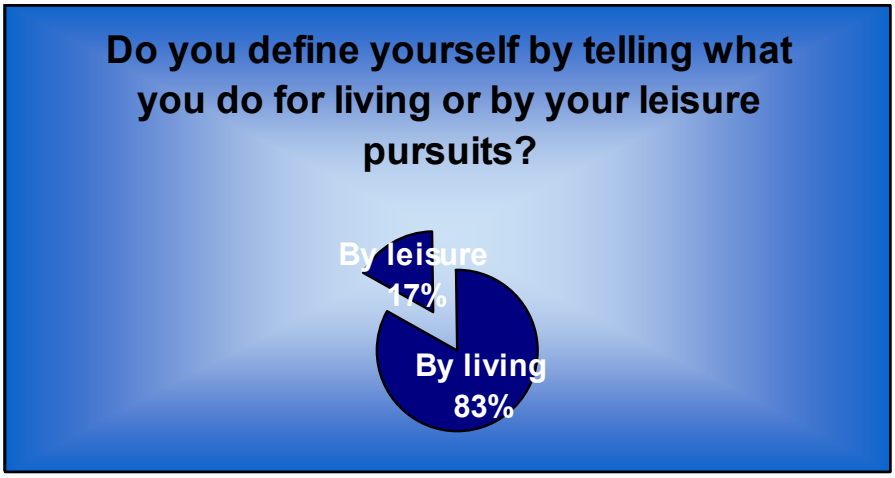
Where as 26.88% cited that possessions are not the major contributors.



4. Do you define yourself by telling what you do for living or by your leisure pursuits?

5. If leisure pursuits then name which?

83% cited that they define their self by telling what they do for living where as 17% cited that they define them selves by leisure pursuits such as Hunting, fishing and golf.



6. Due to change in time do you think culture identity will alter?

The information from these various sources is used to construct an identity based upon their interpretations of consumption ideals prevalent in popular culture. With time and changes in culture, identity is likely to alter.



7. Does the food you eat express your identity?

Food as an everyday consumption item can demonstrate a lot about a person's identity - whether they choose a diet option, how they like their meat cooked, whether they choose to omit certain foods from their diets, etc. Food is not the only way in which identity may be constructed and the identities which are formed may not correspond to identities constructed through other forms of consumption but eating is an everyday activity which is one reflection upon identity.


Does the food you eat express your identity?
No 26%
Yes 74%

Chapter 5
CONCLUSION

The link between consumption activities and identity has been demonstrated through an investigation of consumption theories, the importance of possessions, multiple selves and group membership.

Consumption choices help to define the identities of both individuals and groups either at a conscious or unconscious level. Equally, an identity in itself may influence consumption habits.

The main context in which identity and consumption have been discussed is that of food consumption. A number of different examples have been provided including nationalities, families and individuals to show the impact of consumption and identity.

Although the described link between consumption and identity may be controversial, it is interesting to consider why we purchase certain goods and services over others. Are they cheaper? Do they provide greater utility? Or do they reflect our personalities? Perhaps a combination of all of the above. Further research is inevitably required in this field, in particular focusing on different areas of consumption, for example, clothes, cars, food, tourism, etc. but also on the context in which consumption occurs - as an individual, family, group or nation.

APPENDIX