

**The consumption motivation of Vietnamese  
Generation Z consumers: An exploratory  
study of branded sports footwear**

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# Abstract

**Purpose/research questions:** This research aims to understand Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' motivation to consume branded sports footwear. It explores individuals' relationships with brands during their customer journey and the purchasing characteristics of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers when acquiring branded sports footwear from a business and academic perspective.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study employs an inductive, interpretivist approach, involving twenty-five branded sports footwear consumers aged 18-25 years from Hanoi. Semi-structured interviews, conducted in Vietnamese, were used to explore participants' experiences with branded sports footwear. The interviews were analyzed using content analysis, and the findings were then translated into English to preserve their meaning and nuances.

**Results:** During their customer journeys, Vietnamese Generation Z branded sports footwear consumers are motivated by various attributes, including self-identity and hedonistic desires, social responsibility, quality expectations and past experience, peer pressure, family and friends, and online sources, including social media, online reviews and external virtual influencers. Ultimately, the study revealed that the acculturation behaviour and the link between ethnocentric and xenocentric characteristics of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers are fundamental, highlighting the unique and distinctive purchasing behaviour experienced when these individuals buy branded sports footwear.

**Originality/value:** Several theoretical and methodological contributions are made. Firstly, the study provides an in-depth understanding of Generation Z's consumption motives through a Vietnamese and branded consumer lens. Secondly, the findings extend Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey model by adding a quality attribute, brand trust and brand respect, and finally the inclusion of acculturation behaviour which spans across the model. Finally, this study adopts a qualitative approach to explore further the complex nature of their consumption and purchasing behaviour.

**Practical implications:** Marketers and manufacturers should prioritize the importance of quality development in the manufacturing process and understand the unique acculturation characteristics of Vietnamese Generation Z branded sports footwear consumers. This includes the demand for localized and personalized products with a blend of self-identity, cultural heritage, and social responsibility when manufacturing and marketing these branded items.

**Future research:** Recommendations for further research are offered, including the extension of this study to other contexts.

*Keywords: consumption motivation, customer journey, Vietnamese Generation Z, brand consumption, branded sports footwear, acculturation*

## **Declaration**

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by a specific reference in the text. No part of this thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other educational institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Gloucestershire.

Signed: Khanh Phuong Dinh

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# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Overview**

The focus of this study is to critically investigate the consumption motives of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers when acquiring branded sports footwear. This introductory chapter will provide critical insight and an overview of the customer journey background in brand consumption study with a specific focus on Vietnam, as to the country's sports footwear industry and Generation Z consumers. The chapter will also present the study's aim and related research questions, together with an overview of the structure of this research project and an insight into emerging themes.

### **1.2 Research background**

To study the consumption motives of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in acquiring branded sports footwear, it is important to set out the background of the study. This section will critically present an overview of the current debate around customer experience and customer journey, as to how these concepts are conceptualized. Finally, this section will present an overview of Vietnam branded sports footwear industry before presenting the background to Generation Z as a consumer group.

#### **1.2.1 Overview of Customer Experience and Customer Journey**

Consumerism can be seen as being interlinked with modern-day life. Teimourpour and Hanzae (2011) contended that living and consumption have become synonymously linked, meaning that as life progresses, consumption follows. This has led to increasing debate in marketing literature by various writers, including Zukin and Maguire (2004), and Leonine and Santoro (2012), to argue that consumer behaviour, which is the consumption process of an individual, together with their motivation is the reason behind their purchasing behaviour, has become a multifaceted theme for investigating themes such as how and why the individual engages with certain products and services.

For the past two decades, consumer behaviour literature has focused on the customer experience (Abbott, 1995; Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Recent studies including Lemke, Clarke and Wilson (2011), and Schmitt, Brakus and Zarantonello (2015) have defined customer experience as the individual's subjective cognitive, affective and behavioural responses to any direct or indirect interaction with a brand or company, across a range of different touchpoints. These touchpoints can be used to represent the customer's interaction at multi-stages of an individual's decision process or purchase journey, which can be grouped into four categories: brand-owned, partner-owned, customer-owned and those which are socially or externally related. While the theme of 'brand-owned' is related to how a brand or company attempts to control the customer experience, such as through online platforms, the concept of 'partner-owned' is associated with the involvement or interaction with a third party, such as a distributor or vendor. In contrast, the 'customer-owned' construct represents the customer's desire or thinking, which is informed by the brand or external partner's connection with the customer. The final category is the social and external influences, which influence the customer during their acquisition decision-making process (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). However, recent business practice in consumer behaviour has broadly defined the customer experience as the inclusion of every perspective that a brand can offer to their customer, such as the quality of the after-care, advertising, packaging, product and service features, ease of use and the reliability (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). This has led Lemon and Verhoef (2016) and earlier Fournier (1998) and Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) to conclude that customer experience can be seen as a series of activities and a multidimensional construct, which are focused on a customer's cognitive, emotional, behavioural, sensorial and social responses to a brand during their entire acquisition journey. When the customer experience is positive, the experience enhances the relationship between the consumer and the brand, thereby leading to brand loyalty.

Building on and informed by the earlier work of Lemon and Verhoef (2016), Hamilton et al. (2021) updated the customer journey, which included how the various activities and connections can be represented. The customer journey model of Hamilton et al. (2021) consists of six distinct stages, including motivation, information search, evaluation, decision, satisfaction and sharing, which were then grouped under three core headings: pre-decision, decision and post-decision. Even though each stage in Hamilton et al.'s (2021) model cannot accurately capture the dynamics of the decision-making process as the consumer behaviour might not be repeatable or is unpredictable, these authors focused on the dependency of the consumer using online platforms and social media to inform their purchasing decisions, which

Hamilton et al. (2021) highlighted as to how the individual is drawn to the opinions of anonymous reviews through the concept of a travelling companion. However, an interesting aspect is that Hamilton et al.'s (2021) model omits other attributes that can potentially influence consumer motivation, such as the acculturation of the person's background or how the brand is perceived from a generational perspective, which are the lenses used in this study. Reflecting on this, the next section will present an overview from a brand perspective, focusing on branded sports footwear.

### 1.2.2 Overview of brand consumption theory in studying branded sports footwear

In studying branded sports footwear, it is necessary to understand the concept behind branded clothing products in relation to brand consumption theory. To study the concept of brand consumption studies, authors including Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), Sproles and Kendall (1986), Keller (2010) and Kotler and Keller (2016) have researched consumer motivation from a branded perspective. These studies have illustrated how brand-related measurements can inform and influence the consumer to establish credibility, judgement, engagement and attachment to certain products and services. Jones and Runyan (2013) and earlier Tynan et al. (2010) contended that purchasing branded products may be relevant to their social and ideal self. In contextualising this, Shin et al. (2011) contended that internal motives are personal orientated, which leads to self-directed enjoyment, experiences, fulfilment, and customer loyalty. An important component of this internal motive is to aspire the consumer towards seeking branded consumption (Kim et al., 2003; Grouzer et al., 2005). Reflecting this, Wilcox et al. (2012) emphasized that it is critical for marketers to understand that the reasons and rationale for the consumption of branded products can vary depending on the person and culture. Supporting this view, Cleveland et al. (2009), Camacho et al. (2020) and Xie, Choo and Lee (2023) contended that consumer acculturation, which is reflective of potential cultural connections and dynamics, is also significant in forming consumer motivation for purchasing branded products.

However, many brand consumption studies have focused on what motivates individuals to acquire branded products (e.g. Putra, 2023; Husain et al., 2022; Shahid & Paul, 2021; Chae et al., 2020; Berger & Warde, 2010; Hans et al., 2010;), while other researchers (e.g. Husain et al., 2022; Torelli et al., 2012; Mandel et al., 2006) have focused more on how marketing executive can efficiently sell premium products to customers, and very limited studies, which have explored how the consumption of branded products is used to shaped and reinforced by a

generational group of consumers. This is also the existing gap in marketing literature as to brand consumption through both a generational and Vietnamese lens.

### 1.2.3 Background of Vietnam branded sports footwear industry and Generation Z consumers

As the aim of this study is to focus on the consumption motivation of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers for branded sports footwear, the following sections will present an overview of the potential growth of the Vietnamese branded sports footwear industry before providing a brief background of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers.

#### 1.2.3.1 Vietnam branded sports footwear industry

Nguyen (2023) highlighted that the apparel and textile sector in Vietnam has contributed significantly to the rapid growth of the country's economy. As the global second biggest exporter of textiles and apparels (Hanoi Times, 2021), the sector has not only grown due to investment from global brands but also the recognition that the country is a substantial fashion sourcing hub, particularly for sportswear and footwear. Part of this growth can be attributed to the country's historical production of textiles and garments in a combination with cost-effective resourceful workforce. The ARC Group (2022), a leading Asian consultancy firm, reported that the industry has employed more than 2.5 million skilful workers, which since the late 1990s has led to the emergence of international brands investing in Vietnam, including Sketch, Nike, and Adidas (Business of Fashion, 2024). This trend can be seen with Nike's footwear in 2021 manufactured 51% of the goods in Southeast Asia, with Vietnam witnessing an increase of 155 manufacturers in 2022 (Barnes, 2024). The rapid growth of global branded manufacturers in Vietnam has led to the country being seen as a reliable destination for footwear quality production. Karjalinen (2023) argued that part of the global trade tensions with China has also become a major benefit for Vietnam's branded sports footwear manufacturers, this trend has led to consumers asking questions about the quality and authenticity of made-in-China products. These concerns are derived from the rapid emergence of counterfeit products which are mainly made in China and this market is estimated to be valued at 3,000 billion US dollars per year, which has resulted in the global manufacturers losing around 600 billion US dollars annually (Ho, 2023). As a consequence of media coverage, the perception towards counterfeit products has significantly influenced Vietnamese consumers buying decision-making for branded products.

Secondly, being located in a strategic area of The Mekong region, which also includes Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and the southern provinces of China, Vietnam's footwear market has become even more attractive to both domestic and international brands as the country has provided access to a market of over 250 million consumers (KPMG, 2018). Consequently, global brands have benefited from a low-cost but developed infrastructure of the Mekong Delta's transportation route, especially in southern Vietnam, which has accounted for 67 percent of Vietnam's seaport throughput (Nguyen, 2023), contributing to the shipping cost reduction for manufacturers. However, as indicated by Chayanis et al. (2019) if this rapid economic growth and increased regional economic integration continue in the Mekong region, environmental sustainability will continue to be a major global concern, including climate change and the degradation of ecosystems, which will have a negative impact on local community and consumers. In the next section, the study will focus on Generation Z consumers, particularly as to Vietnam consumers and their significance in consuming branded sports footwear in relation to their core values.

#### 1.2.3.2 An overview of Generation Z consumers and those in Vietnam

Born in the mid-1990s, Generation Z is expected to account for more than 2 billion of the world population and is becoming a major consumer grouping (IBM, 2018). In 2021, Bloomberg cited data and estimated that this generation was holding 360 billion US dollars of purchasing power and is now the most dominant force in the modern workforce (Pollard, 2021). Therefore, they are becoming potentially the most significant future consumer group for branded sports footwear.

However, Mintel (2023) noted that Generation Z consumers possess a unique shopping personality, unlike previous generations, due to the reliance on digital platforms such as social media or online websites, which inform their acquiring and consuming decisions. Gutfreund (2016) indicated that this generation is sceptical, practicality and equipped to search and seek information. For example, Generation Z consumer can easily get access to research the prices, quality and other criteria of branded sports footwear that might influence their buying decisions. Brenner (2022) contended that this generation grouping mostly discovers brands through digital channels, mobile applications, social media platforms, and online advertisements, with the purpose of making them less loyal to a particular brand since it encourages the consumer to seek alternatives such as a discounted price or have a higher quality. However, a report published by IBM (2018) highlighted that the percentage of

Generation Z consumers, who have a strong connection or loyalty to a particular brand, increases significantly as they get older and begin to find their self-identity and individuality, which is one of their core values. This value in the digital era for Generation Z consumers is increasingly influenced and informed by their online social connection, which has informed their acquiring decisions. This can be illustrated by this grouping of consumers would tend to seek purchasing advice from online reviews, word-of-mouth through social media or online influencers (Brenner, 2022). Therefore, it is crucial to understand this emerging group of consumers, whose reliance on online facilities for purchasing decision-making, due to their distinctive and complex personality, which ultimately shifted their consumption for branded sports footwear.

From a Vietnam consumer perspective, as an emerging economy in Southeast Asia, the country has a young population of approximately 96 million people reported in 2019 (World Bank Report, 2021), with young consumers accounting for the largest proportion of the country's inhabitants, of which the number of Generation Z in working age ranges from 15 to 25 years old. In 2019, the General Statistical Office (2024) reported that there were 13 million Generation Z citizens which represented about 14% of the Vietnamese population. It is predicted that by 2025, this generation will make up about one-third of the country's workforce (Kuermayr & Le, 2023). Therefore, in this developing economy, this fast-growing group of consumers are predicted to increasingly demand for branded products, including branded sports footwear.

While this grouping is growing, there is a challenge associated with the shopping personalities of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers for branded products. Authors including Asamoah and Chovancova (2016) indicated that this grouping has distinctive and unique features compared to global counterparts since this group of consumers is influenced by their Asian cultural origin, which shaped their preferences, values and behaviour. Nguyen (2016) contended that the global trend towards greater individualism has become diluted in Vietnam partly due to Confucianism, together with the intermixture of traditional culture and socialism. Even with this synergy, Vietnam remains a country which is an amalgamation of the three main religions of East Asia, that of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, which arguably still influences the individual's behaviour (Chu & Vu, 2022; Trung & Van, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2020). Confucianism is focused on following and adhering to societal rules and moral values, for example, their attitude towards buying counterfeit goods, whereas Taoism advocates a more simplistic lifestyle in tune with the natural world and the environment, whereby potentially informing the consumer's



environmental awareness (Zhang, 2021). Finally, with Buddhism, the religious focus is more on suffering and self-sacrifice, with the rejection of relying on or seeking material items, such as fashionable and branded items (Yau, 1988). These religious influences have informed the East Asian cultural values such as respect, humility and politeness, along with the concept of 'face', which is related to ensuring that individuals are not embarrassed or disrespected, known as saving or losing face (Zhai & Gao, 2019). This aspect of face cascades through to the workplace, how the individual in their social group or amongst friends avoids potential embarrassment, and through to the family, including showing respect for the opinions and knowledge of those who are influential such as parents (Eriksson et al., 2017). Therefore, the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer can be seen as a hybrid or a blend of Oriental, Western and socialist values, but the question is to what extent these influences inform the individual when acquiring branded sports footwear.

However, in academic research, the branded behavioural consumer patterns of this grouping have been studied predominantly from a European (Marroncelli & Braithwaite, 2022; Dubois & Laurent, 1996), and North American perspectives (Heugel, 2015; Lewis & Moital, 2016), with limited research until recently in Asia, including China (He & Zhang, 2012; Gao et al., 2009), and even less from a Vietnamese viewpoint, particularly with a focus on branded sports footwear. Reflecting on the predicted increase in the Vietnamese population and potential purchasing power of this group, and the lack of any studies focused on Generation Z consuming behaviour for branded sports footwear, this study intends to address these identified gaps.

### **1.3 Justification of the research gaps**

Based on the background of this study and research gap as mentioned in section 1.2, this section will present an in-depth explanation and discussion as to the academic and industry gaps within the scope of the study, commencing with the academic gap.

#### **1.3.1 Academic gap**

Research into brand consumption studies including by Vigneron and Johnson (2004), Sproles and Kendall (1986) have advocated that consumer engagement with branded goods through the influence of certain attributes such as quality, hedonic motives, self-image, and the uniqueness of the product which informs the individual decision-making process. For authors like Vigneron and Johnson (2004), there is an emphasis on the importance of social and

emotional values, which can influence the consumer buying experience while informing their emotions and feelings. These emotions and feelings are often the drivers behind the consumer purchasing decision-making process when buying a certain branded item, or whether this product is acquired, or repurchased in the future. In presenting this concept, both Vigneron and Johnson (2004), and Sproles and Kendall (1986) have also provided examples of the interaction between the consumer and the brand, including the relevance of consumer engagement, attachment, and trust, as to how these attributes assist the individual to establish a consumer connection. In contrast, Hamilton et al. (2021) in their North American conceptual project contended that these traits can be represented as a customer journey. In advocating this, Hamilton et al. (2021) focused on the influence of online platforms and social media as to these mediums' effect on consumer behaviour but missing was the potential importance of a brand. As there is limited research which has focused on the motivational attributes as to the relevance of the customer journey through a generational lens, this study intends to provide a better understanding of how brand consumption influences those from 18 to 25 years old when buying branded sports footwear. This study will therefore address this gap by investigating the motives behind the consumption of branded sports footwear through the lens of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, by adopting Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey model. In Hamilton et al.'s (2021) conceptual study, the paper provided a series of emerging research questions, including the focus of this study, *how do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientated, affect the customer journey?* The outcome of the study will be to determine the connection between brands and Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, and the extent to which this group connects or interacts with different influences during their customer journey.

As mentioned in section 1.2.3, several studies into Generation Z consumer behaviour in buying fashion items have been extensively researched. However, most of these studies have been conducted from a European perspective (Marroncelli & Braithwaite, 2022; Dubois & Laurent, 1996), and North American (Heugel, 2015; Lewis & Moital, 2016), with limited research in Asia, of which mostly have been focused on China (He & Zhang, 2012; Gao et al., 2009). Of these generational studies into fashion consumption, the majority have been conducted from a quantitative perspective (e.g. Gazzola et al., 2020 and Kraft et al., 2023), which has not provided the critical insight and richness as to why this grouping is motivated to acquire branded fashion items. Addressing this gap, this study intends to provide an in-depth understanding of the consumption motivational facets from a Vietnamese Generation Z

consumer perspective by adopting a qualitative method, and by conducting semi-structured interviews to explore further the complex nature of their consuming and purchasing behaviour.

Finally, there have only been a few extant studies based on Vietnamese consumer behaviour, which have been focused mainly on branded items like sports footwear, but from a counterfeit clothing perspective (e.g. Ha & Tam, 2015; Nguyen, Bui & Vo, 2019), or the purchasing behaviour influenced by social media or online platforms and advertising (e.g. Pham et al., 2021; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022) and have neglected the motivational reasons behind Vietnamese Generation Z shopping choices, between opting for authentic and counterfeit products. Therefore, this study intends to fill this gap to provide critical insight into the motivational drivers and influences behind this young generation's purchasing and consuming decisions for branded sports footwear within a Vietnamese context.

### 1.3.2 Industry gap

After the reform policies enacted in Vietnam in 1986, known as Doi Moi, the Vietnamese government focused on shifting from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented one, leading to many multinational brands and organisations seeing Vietnam becoming a high consumer-based economy in Southeast Asia (Hai, 2023). A study by Vo, Nguyen and Dang (2022) highlighted that there were currently more than 200 foreign fashion brands offering from mid-range to high-end products in Vietnam. From the branded sports footwear industry perspective, the Vietnamese fashion market is now dominated by international brands such as Nike, Adidas, and Puma. With this rapid growth of global branded sports footwear in Vietnam and reflecting the identified research gap mentioned in section 1.3.1 above, the study focuses on three business-related problems.

The **first problem** is associated with the branded sports footwear industry in Vietnam as to how Vietnamese consumers, and in particular Generation Z, perceive quality. The background to this problem is related to the rapid growth of global brands in Vietnam together with the increase of counterfeit products, where items are illegally reproduced, replicating trademark branded items, which are similar or identical to the original products, including packaging and labelling (Phau & Teah, 2009; Wilcox, Kim & Sen, 2008). Being a geographical neighbour to China, this country has gained the reputation of being associated with the main producer of counterfeit goods as mentioned in section 1.2.3.1, which has resulted in the Vietnam branded sports footwear market witnessing an increase of imported inauthentic products into the

country and then distributed under perceived authentic brand names. This issue does not only affect well-known brands but also small and local manufacturers in Vietnam. Based on this background, for the branded sports footwear industry, Vietnamese consumers have the choice now to acquire counterfeit goods, if they are unable to afford the authentic item, which often has a similar style to the original version, but then faced with potentially lower quality and the possible stigma of buying an item which is inauthentic and disrespectful to the original manufacturer. Reflecting on this issue, the study intends to investigate to what extent the perceived quality of branded sports footwear affects Vietnamese Generation Z consumers from a brand consumption perspective, and the attributes which influence this group of young consumers, such as respect for the original manufacturer.

The **second problem** that is associated with of branded sports footwear industry in Vietnam is the difficulty of brands understanding the distinct consumer needs of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers towards buying and engaging in branded sports footwear. A report by Schrieberg (2018) highlighted that brands have neglected the complexities of Generation Z consumers, and instead base their shopping activities mainly on online platforms, such as social media, for their consumerism (Kantar WorldPanel Vietnam Report, 2017), which limits the understanding of this grouping. Although online influencers such as key opinion leaders (KOLs) are influential, the question which emerges is whether this group simply relies on this media strategy to determine their purchasing decision. This leads to the question of whether there are other credible sources, which potentially could be influential, such as family, friends, or colleagues. If these are also influencers, then to what extent do these inform and influence this generational grouping?

There has also been reported unethical behaviour in the manufacture of branded and fashion brands, which has challenged this young group of consumers' ethical perspective towards consumerism. The unethical business practices, such as labour exploitation or poor working conditions, have caused a consumer rejection of buying these products, including in Vietnam, however to what extent does this ethical behaviour become an important facet in deciding which branded item to buy? This leads to the question of whether this group of consumers are still influenced by global brand manufacturing activity from an ethical and human resource perspective (Kihl & Vahanen, 2018).

Closely aligned to ethical manufacturing activity has been whether Vietnam as an emerging economy and consumer market are seeking overseas or foreign products, and for what reason?

Do Generation Z consumers seek high quality, highly fashionable and attractive goods, or does the individual seek the latest fashion item irrespective of the manufacturing process for self-identity purposes (Cora, 2019), or do they simply seek other benefits such as comfort, convenience, and reliability? Reflecting on this question, this study therefore intends to investigate the major motives of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in consuming branded sports footwear by understanding their perceptions and attitudes when acquiring brand items, from a branded sports footwear perspective.

Finally, the **third problem** which the study intends to address is to focus on Vietnamese Generation Z consumer's engagement with brand identity, which is related to a personal image and provides a business with a competitive advantage. Studies by Luan (2023) and Van den Bergh and Pallini (2018) mentioned that the conceptualisation of self-identity associated with brands includes characteristics such as moral image, personal values, self-image, and group identity so that brand identity can change the consumer self-image in the eyes of their peers, but how important is this to the individual? Therefore, it is essential for brands to establish and maintain a strong brand identity, but what does the consumer seek, and what attributes of sports footwear do Vietnamese Generation Z consumers want?

Therefore, there is a need to understand this as to consumer engagement, attachment, and trust in the product (Conner et al., 2020; Husain, Paul, & Koles, 2022; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Keller, 2012), but are there other important facets to engage with the consumer and ultimately make the individual acquisition and repurchase the product in the future? In a specific report based in Vietnam, the Kantar Worldpanel Vietnam's Lifestyle Report (2017) reported that brands are increasingly faced with the challenge of gaining and maintaining Vietnamese consumer's trust and loyalty, as this group of consumers has a larger range of choice of different brands, which are both local and internationally manufactured. But what does the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer seek when they acquire and consume branded sports footwear?

## **1.4 Rationale of the study**

This study explores the Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' motivations for branded sports footwear. Therefore, its purpose is to gain a better understanding of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' motivation towards buying and engaging with branded sports footwear, informing future marketers and business practitioners of this new and emerging consumer grouping.

From a consumption perspective, studies by Vo et al. (2022), Phau and Teah (2009), Wilcox, Kim and Sen (2008) have identified the need to further understand the attributes influencing consumption motivation which is a critical theme to understand from a brand marketing and retail perspective. While sections 1.2.1 and 1.2.2 have set out the overview and importance of the current debate related to the customer journey and brand consumption, there has been little research from a generational perspective. Section 1.2.3 has highlighted the potential of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers as an emerging group of consumers in the developing Southeast Asia area, however again, there have been limited studies focused on this cohort, as set out in section 1.3.1. While there have been some academic studies conducted in Asia into counterfeit clothing and Generation Z (e.g. Ha & Tam, 2015; Nguyen, Bui & Vo, 2019), or the buying activities influenced by online platforms and advertising (e.g. Pham et al., 2021; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022), the complexities of Vietnamese Generation Z as a consumer grouping have been omitted. This omission is also a dilemma as global and local brands are increasingly facing the need to differentiate their products to meet this group's expectations and needs while understanding how this generation is informed and consumes branded items. Understanding this theme will contribute to business practice as to how to potentially understand and target the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer when acquiring branded sports footwear.

From a manufacturing perspective, Kassel and Grebenstein (2006) identified the importance associated with studying consumer behaviour and motivation to improve the efficiency of the marketing and manufacturing processes. Kidd (1994) and Buyukozkan (2004) contended that globalization and the emergence of customer-oriented markets now require manufacturers be to adaptable and flexible to meet consumer's needs and expectations by providing additional values but also agile in responding to these new requirements. In the Vietnam context as set out in section 1.2.3.1, Nguyen (2023) contended that the Vietnam branded footwear industry offers this agility, due to its growing integrated economy and strategic location in the Mekong Region, Vietnam can offer access to the globalized trade routes along with the strong manufacturing workforce to meet the increasing demands for branded products. However, this open integrated economy has shifted significantly the consuming behaviour of Vietnamese consumers, particularly Generation Z consumers. As highlighted in section 1.2.3.2 above, this consumer grouping possesses a strong connection with their Vietnamese cultural background, which informs their consumer behaviour while also being influenced by technology and digital solutions. Therefore, understanding their consuming motivation is also important for the

Vietnamese branded sports footwear industry, especially from a manufacturing perspective, as this information will help the manufacturers create new products to attract this generation of consumers.

Therefore, this study offers several significant contributions both in academic knowledge and practical application. Firstly, this study expands the existing literature and framework by exploring Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' motivations for branded sports footwear. Through offering new academic insight, this study has provided new concepts to identify which attributes affect or influence their consumption behaviour during their customer journey. Secondly, this research provides practical contributions to the consumption of Vietnam branded sports footwear industry by promoting practical implications for both domestic and global brands to consider when focusing on Vietnamese Generation Z consumers. This includes how the branded sports footwear sector can use this study to understand the motives of this consumer group whereby acting as a reference for future marketing strategies and manufacturing plans. Reflecting this, the aim of the study is presented below in section 1.5.

## **1.5 Research Aim**

To achieve the above, this study explores the motives of Vietnamese Generation Z for consuming branded sports footwear. In achieving this, this study intends to address one of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) emerging research questions, as to how do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientated, affect the customer journey?

To address this research question posed by Hamilton et al. (2021), the following research sub-questions have been formulated:

**Research Sub-Question One:** What motivational attributes influence Vietnamese Generation Z consumers of branded sports footwear during their customer journey?

**Research Sub-Question Two:** On their customer journeys, how do these motivational attributes influence the connection between Vietnamese Generation Z and brand consumption?

**Research Sub-Question Three:** From a business and academic perspective, what are the characteristics of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers when acquiring branded sports footwear?

## 1.6 Thesis Structure

This section outlines the structure of the remaining chapters of this study.

**Chapter Two: Literature review.** This chapter critically reviews the existing literature on the central theme of this study, consumption motivation by using Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey model as a linear proxy. The chapter then presents the current debate related to brand experience, brand resonance, brand attachment, brand engagement, brand judgement and brand trust. In the context of branded sports footwear, the chapter links these brand themes concerning brand consumption theory by critically discussing the role of brand identity. The linkage to the concept of status, conspicuous consumption, and acculturation are also presented as to the influence of branded consumption on consumer behaviour.

The chapter then presents the current debate associated with Generation Z consumers, including their unique characteristics, online buying behaviour, being a sustainable group of individuals, but also a cohort who is subject to an increased range of branded products. Finally, the chapter presents a conceptual framework by integrating brand consumption and the theories behind Generation Z consumer buying motivation to highlight the central question of this study as to what purchasing characteristics the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer possesses when acquiring branded sports footwear, then as to what informs and influences this grouping.

**Chapter Three: Methodology.** The chapter begins with a debate on the various philosophical paradigms available for any research project before justifying the decision to use a qualitative research strategy by conducting semi-structured interviews, and then an interpretivist approach to analyze the data. The sample of the main study consisted of 25 Vietnamese Generation Z consumers who have or had experienced purchasing branded sports footwear. The study involved 7 participants who formed into a group interview and 18 were involved in semi-structured one-to-one interviews. Finally, a content analysis approach and coding strategy are presented together with the ethical considerations of the study which sets out how the findings are trustworthy and credible while ensuring the participants' rights were respected.



**Chapter Four: Findings.** This chapter introduces the research findings, which are grouped into three main themes as presented in Hamilton et al.'s (2021) model, including pre-decision, decision, and post-decision phases, along with another overarching theme associated with acculturation. The findings reveal different attributes that influence Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in connection with brand consumption at each stage. The pre-decision phase includes the motivation for self-identity, hedonistic desires, such as social status and social belonging, and personal values including environment and counterfeits. The next facet is the product and brand-related motivators, including manufacturing and quality experience, together with the importance associated with online reviews and the influence of the family as companion-related drivers. In the decision phase of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) model, family members play a significant role in influencing Vietnamese Generation Z consumers. The post-decision phase also includes the influential power of the quality experience, ethical implications, and the importance of word-of-mouth. The last theme which emerged from the findings was the overarching connection of acculturation and the preference for localized and personalized products which was part of the customer journey.

**Chapter Five: Discussion.** This chapter critically synthesizes the findings in Chapter Four and the current debate as presented in Chapter Two. The chapter reveals the connection between the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer and brand consumption by presenting the debate using the three main stages of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey model. The chapter sets out the motivational reasons behind this group's behaviour for buying branded sports footwear and the paradoxes behind the individual's decisions. The study also discovered emergent-overarching themes which are beyond Hamilton et al.'s (2021) original customer journey, including the perception of product quality, country of origin, acculturation, and centrism. The chapter then discusses the implications for branded sports footwear businesses, which are set out in further detail in Chapter Six. Finally, the chapter presents an update on the conceptual framework as presented in Chapter Two.

**Chapter Six: Conclusion.** This chapter provides a brief overview of the study and sets out how the research question and its sub-questions were addressed by the study identifying four main themes which were critically reviewed in Chapter Five. The chapter also highlights the professional contribution of the study, which sets out the extent to which theoretical and empirical evidence demonstrates the implication for potential changes to the existing production processes, through to how the footwear is manufactured and then marketed. The key contribution of this study is the extension of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) original customer

journey model with the addition of the influence of brand consumption along with the significance of acculturation behaviour, which provides a link between ethnocentric and xenocentric behaviour associated with Vietnamese Generation Z consumers when acquiring branded sports footwear. The chapter also discusses the limitations of the research and provides direction for future studies.

## **1.7 Chapter Summary**

In summary, this chapter has provided an informed overview and introduction to this study. The chapter has provided an overview of the research problem and gap, which has been focused on the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer's motivation for acquiring branded sports footwear. The background of the customer experience and their journey by following Hamilton et al.'s (2021) model has been set out and contextualized. The chapter has also provided an overview of the theories associated with brand consumption by providing a critical insight into consumer preferences to engage with and buy branded items such as sports footwear. To emerge from the overview and background of the study is the importance associated with understanding the dynamics of a generation. The rationale is based on the premise that this group of consumers is emerging as a new consumer group but remains relatively underexplored from an academic and business or practice perspective. The chapter provides a further explanation of the research gaps, including from an academic and industry viewpoint, which is highlighted in the rationale of this study, which has then informed the research aim and one main research question with three associated research sub-questions. Finally, the chapter has set out the structure of the study, providing an outline of each remaining chapter and the content.

The next chapter critically reviews the current academic debate, which is focused on the customer journey as proposed by Hamilton et al (2021), brand consumption, branded consumerism, and the characteristics of the Generation Z consumer.

# Chapter Two

## Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

In addressing the main aim of this study, this chapter provides critical insights into the current debate related to the core reasons, which influence how Vietnamese Generation Z consumers acquire branded sports footwear. In achieving this, the literature review initially draws on and adopts a customer journey framework to represent the entire consumer experience, as advocated by Lemon and Verhoef (2016), Fournier (1998), and Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), together with the focus of this study, the conceptual study of Hamilton et al. (2021).

Hamilton et al.'s (2021) conceptual model was primarily used as the methodology that enabled the conceptualisation of the customer's journey by mapping out the different phases, which the consumer could encounter from the initial pre-decision phase, then the decision-making and finally the post-decision phase. These phases can be seen as an organised device, which can facilitate a sequential order of themes or attribution of the consumer journey, but then address one of the emerging questions of Hamilton et al. (2021), as to *how do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientation, affect the social customer journey?* This framework, therefore, can be used to understand the underlying motives and influences that the individual may encounter when acquiring branded sports footwear, including the role of peers, family, social media, and past experience. By adding to the existing literature, the study offers insights into Vietnamese Generation Z's consumption motivation through a generational lens.

The literature review provides a critical and comprehensive investigation of the debate associated with branded consumption theory, which draws on the studies of Veblen (1899, as cited in Patsiaouras & Fitchett, 2012) and Vigneron and Johnson (2004) who are also core authors in branded consumerism.

Finally, the chapter presents a critical review of the lens used in this study, that of Generation Z as a group of consumers. This generation is critically discussed from various aspects, including the core characteristics and traits of Generation Z from a consumer theory perspective. During the critical and comprehensive review of the debate associated with consumer

motivation and Generation Z, the chapter highlights the gaps in existing knowledge that this study intends to address. It should be noted that although the focus is on consumption motivation, using Vietnamese Generation Z consumers as a lens, this study is not specifically grounded in cultural studies, however, related literature on consumer cultural backgrounds will be critically reviewed as these studies provide a rich context. The chapter finally concludes with a conceptual framework formulated from the relevant literature, setting out the research gaps and associated questions, which are aligned with Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey framework, the next theme of this chapter.

## **2.2 The customer experience**

There have been various definitions which have attempted to capture the essence of the customer experience when purchasing certain fashion items, including branded sports footwear. These definitions have included a broad perspective, including Abbot (1955, p.40) who saw the concept as 'what people desire are not products but satisfying experiences'. In building on the theme of what constitutes a customer experience, Pine and Gilmore (1998, p.3) saw the construct as separate and distinct from the goods and services provided, and noted that when a consumer acquires an item, they tend to want to spend time seeking a series of memorable events in an individualized or personal way. In contextualising this seeking of a personalized or individual experience, there have been a series of researchers including Schmitt, Brakus and Zarantonello (2015) who have presented a broader perspective advocating that businesses need to understand the complexities behind the customer experience, which includes the consumer's cognitive, emotional, sensory, social, and spiritual responses to the encounter. The need to understand these complexities behind the consumer experience has led to the emergence of a proposed multidimensional view, which for Schmitt (1999) can be portrayed in five types of experiences associated with the consumer: those which are sensory or gained through their senses, being affective or through feelings, those which are cognitive or through thinking, the physical and the ability to act, and those which provide social identity for the customer. Building on this perspective of Schmitt (1999), Verhoeff et al. (2009) agreed that the experience is multidimensional but also holistic. Based on Verhoeff et al.'s (2009) assertion, it is possible to surmise that the total customer experience is an amalgamation of cognitive, emotional, behavioural, sensorial, and social traits, however, the actual experience encountered by the consumer may relate to a specific aspect or various aspects of a branded item. Therefore, the experiences encountered by the consumer are built up through a collection of attributes or

influencers in the decision-making process. This series of encounters was earlier conceptualized by the emergence of the 'AIDA model', which was proposed by Lavidge and Steiner (1961), to represent how the consumer engages with the experience of buying an item. For Lavidge and Steiner (1961), the consumer experience involved the customer in being aware or having the 'attention' of the item, then gaining an 'interest', before having the feeling of 'desire', to then take the 'action' of purchasing. But to conceptualize and represent the multidimensional experience of the customer, as noted by Verhoeff et al. (2009), has led to the emergence of the journey metaphor to capture the customer acquisition decision-making process. One of the models, which has represented this journey, has included writers such as Lemon and Verhoef (2016), who saw the consumer progressing on a journey which occurs over time, indicating the dynamic nature of the process. The journey for Lemon and Verhoef (2016) can be broken down into three distinct stages, the pre-purchase, purchase, and the post-purchase stages, as presented below in Figure 2.1.

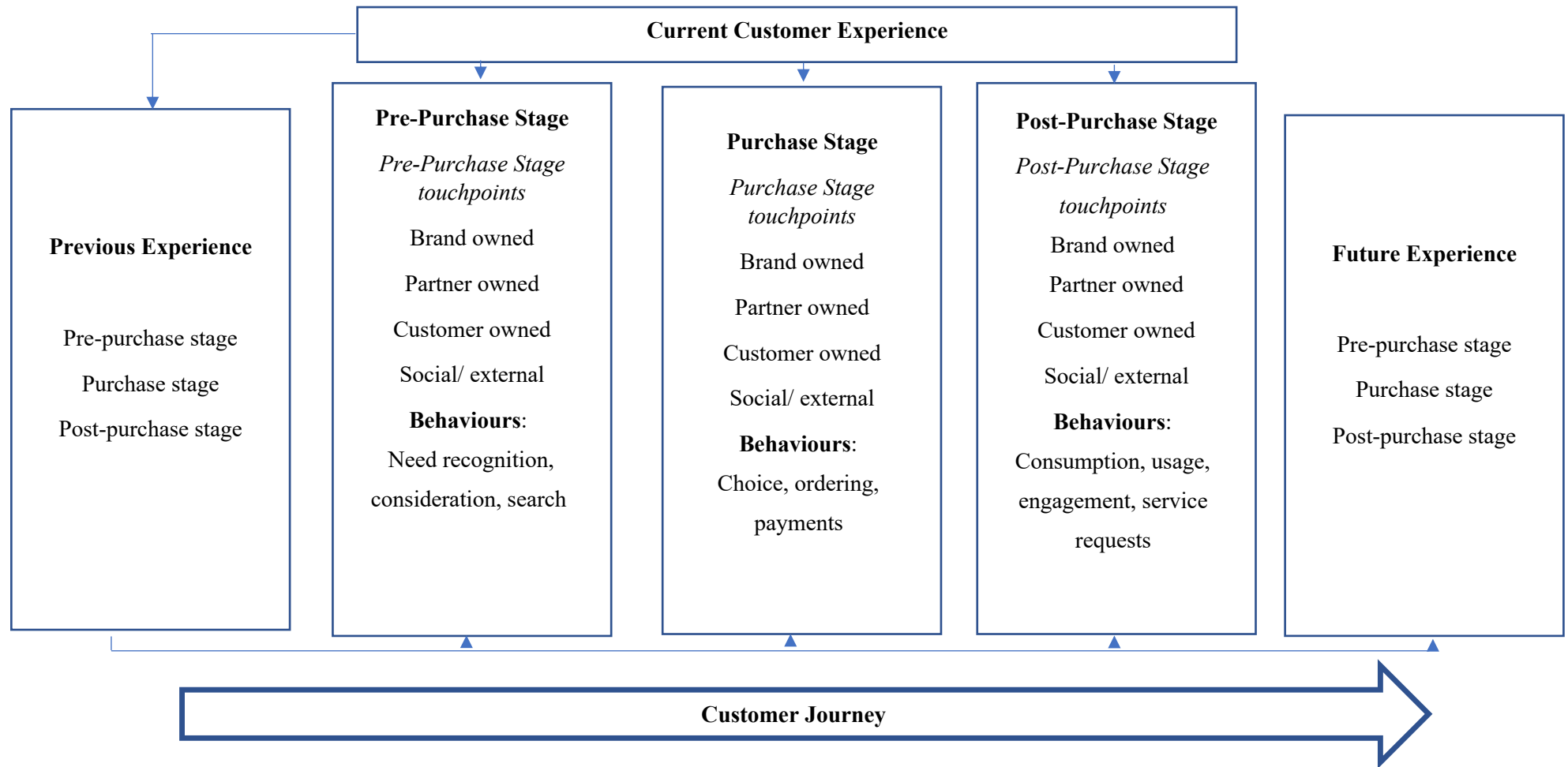


Figure 2. 1 The Customer Experience

Source: Lemon and Verhoef (2016, p.77)

The first stage of Lemon and Verhoef's (2016) model captures all aspects of the customer's interaction with the brand along with the environment of the transaction. This includes the recognition, searching and consideration as to the benefits of the item. This can include how the customer is aware of the brand, for example through word of mouth, peer influence or their loyalty to the product or service. The next stage, the purchase, is the consumer's interaction with the product or service. This includes the process of selecting the item, the ordering and then the payment. The selection part of the purchasing stage may involve the interaction with the shopping environment, through to whether the individual is prepared to acquire the item or defer the transaction. In the final stage, this represents the consumer's interaction with the brand and the environment. This includes the behavioural aspect of the consumer as to the usage of the item post-purchase and the overall experience. This last stage can lead to the consumer becoming a loyal customer, which will lead to repurchasing the item in the future, through to whether the individual continues or discontinues their purchasing journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Through Lemon and Verhoef's (2016) customer journey, the authors advocate the inclusion of 'touchpoints'. These touchpoints represent the customer's interaction at each stage during the experience, which was grouped into four categories: brand-owned, partner-owned, customer-owned and those which are social or external. The category of 'brand owned' was associated with how the experience of the consumer can be controlled by the firm or business, for example through marketing or social media. The next category 'partner owned' represents the vendors, communication services or distributors who act as intermediaries. The 'customer-owned' was related to the consumer's thinking, needs, and desires. This category is often informed and influenced by the brand or partner's interaction with the consumer. However, at the post-purchase stage, the consumer's experience tends to be devoid of any intervention by external forces or influences. The final category of Lemon and Verhoef (2016) is 'social and external' influences. Throughout the journey, the consumer is surrounded and influenced by external influences, such as peers, other customers, and independent sources of information. Interestingly in the journey model proposed by Lemon and Verhoef (2016) in their conceptual American study, the authors omitted the societal norms and the role and influence of the family, which brings into question the extent to which societal norms and family expectations influence a Vietnamese Generation Z consumer when deciding what branded item to acquire.

## 2.3 Background to the customer journey

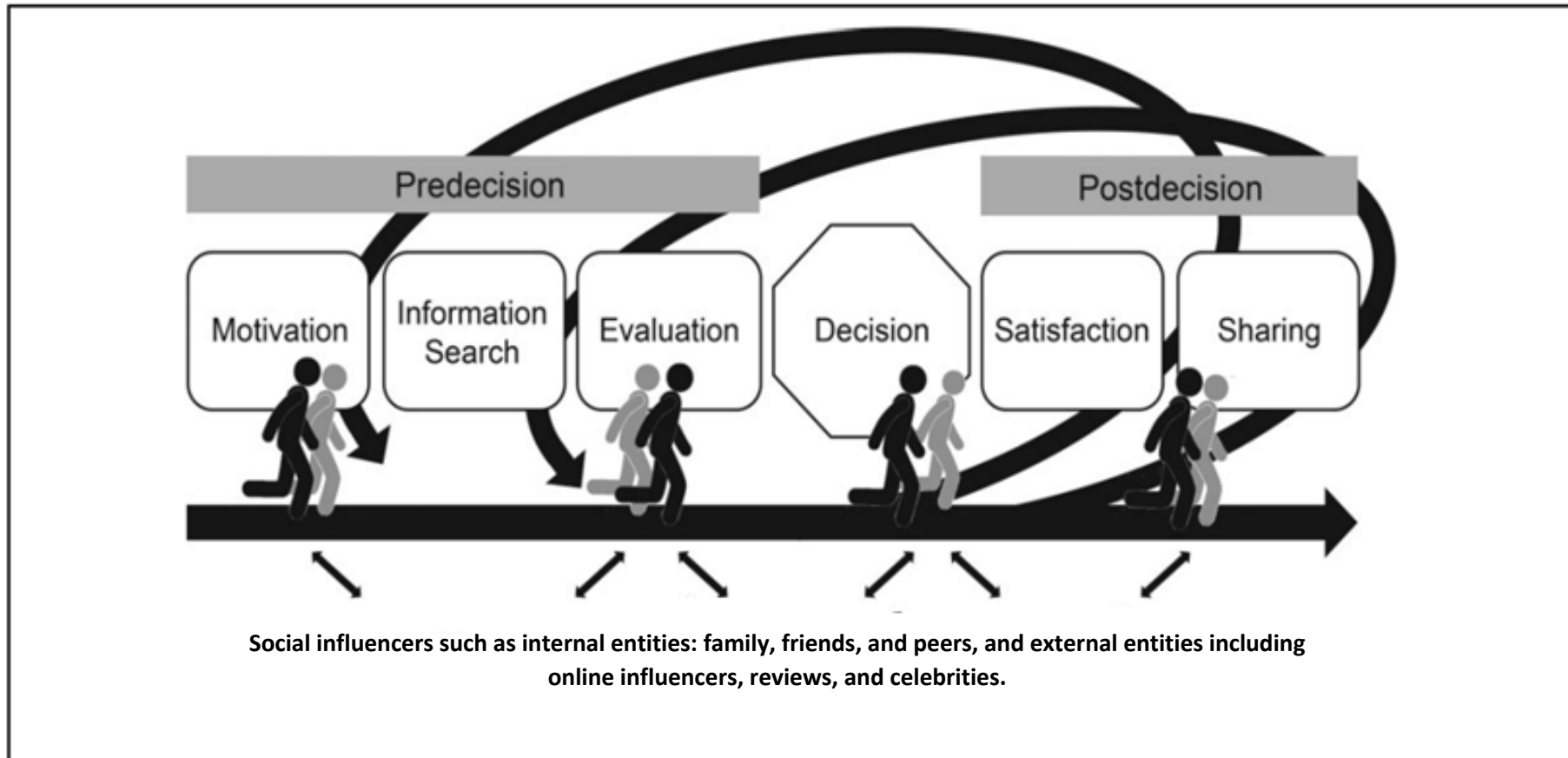
At the end of their journey construct, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) and earlier Fournier (1998) and Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) independently noted that the consumer is influenced by their experience and not simply the outcome of the item acquired. Where the experience is positive, this can lead to the development of a relationship between the brand and the individual becoming a loyal customer, including how the item aligns with their self-identity and the prevailing social grouping. This outcome indicates that the consumer experience is firstly a series of activities, secondly, that the decision-making process does not operate in isolation, but instead, it is thirdly informed by the interactive social relationships and societal contexts of the individual. Building on and informed by the earlier work of Lemon and Verhoef (2016), Hamilton et al. (2021) have updated the journey as presented in Figure 2.2, to include how the various activities and connections can be represented today. Part of the rationale for the updating of the customer journey has been the need to capture the increased usage of technology. This usage as noted by Hamilton et al. (2021) however can be paradoxical, with consumers and society being increasingly more reliant on technology for providing a wide range of information, but has also led to a more fragmented society, with increasing reports of alienation and disconnection (Lin et al., 2016). However, this reliance on technology has also seen the transformation of how consumers consume goods and services. Interestingly, even with the transformation due to technology, consumer behaviour does remain grounded in the original theory of how the individual decides as to what to buy, which includes one-way communication from advertisers through to two-way social interaction with friends, neighbours and now with third parties due to the emergence of digital technology. This depiction of the customer journey of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) North American conceptual study maps out the consumer purchasing stages. However, in presenting this construct, it is necessary to critically investigate the academic debate behind the concept, including Court et al. (2009), Lemon and Verhoef (2016) and Lee et al. (2018).

In presenting the customer experience as a journey, there have been authors as presented above, including Court et al. (2009) who have contended that the consumer tends to undertake this journey primarily on their own, and have focused on the decision-making process as an individualized 'own' activity. This perspective of an individualized experience has been challenged by the contention that the journey needs to consider more of the social aspects of the decision-making process. This has included Lemon and Verhoef (2016) who identified the



importance of the social aspects of the journey. This social dimension of the customer journey has been more recently updated by Lee et al. (2018) who re-emphasized the need for a multistage representation of the customer journey. In contextualising this, Lee et al. (2018) advocated that the journey needed to be seen as being in a fluid state whereby representing the individual's progression. In illustrating this, Lee et al. (2018) noted that this progression through the various stages of the decision-making process, which included the peer-to-peer social interaction as the consumer embarked on their journey. In presenting this, Lee et al. (2018) interestingly provided an up-to-date and contemporary perspective which includes the emergent role of social media as a potential influencer, which was presented as being part of the 'learning' process. More recently, Hamilton et al. (2021) updated this journey construct of Lee et al. (2018), to capture the entire process focusing on the importance of social influences. In justifying this return to the original journey metaphor, the study of Hamilton et al. (2021) attempted to fundamentally decontextualize the social influences. In achieving this, Hamilton et al. (2021) contended that there was a lack of academic understanding of the social influences which can inform the customer's decision-making process. Part of the rationale for this was informed by the recognised need for consumers to trade off or compromise preferences to conform with their peers or social groupings (Ariely & Levav, 2000; Berger & Heath, 2007).

For Ariely and Levav (2000) and Berger and Heath (2007), the level of influence from peers and social groupings can have a significant influence on the individual. This level of influence could potentially lead to some consumers trading or changing their preferences to conform to the social norms. This social influence of Ariely and Levav (2000) and Berger and Heath (2007) led Hamilton et al. (2021) to focus on the customer encounter by using a 'social customer journey' construct which incorporated the concept of a 'travelling companion' to represent the direct and indirect interactions of the individual with other actors or influencers. In achieving this, Hamilton et al. (2021), informed by the AIDA model, divided the journey into six distinct stages. These stages were grouped under three core headings: pre-decision, decision, and post-decision, which mirrored the work of Lemon and Verhoef (2016), as presented below in Figure 2.2.



*Figure 2. 2 The Customer Journey*

*Source: Hamilton et al. (2021, p.71)*

Under the pre-decision phase, are the categories of motivation, information search and evaluation. Between the pre-decision and post-decision categories was the category named decision, and finally under the heading of post-decision were the sub-groupings of satisfaction and sharing (as shown in Figure 2.2). While the journey model of Hamilton et al. (2021) was presented in a linear six-stage format there was the acknowledgement that each phase cannot accurately capture the dynamics of the decision-making process, as the activity may be iterated or erratic, as noted earlier by Lemon and Verhoef (2016). In presenting this contemporary customer journey, Hamilton et al.'s (2021) conceptual study, although focused specifically on the reliance on online platforms and social media, did attempt to illustrate how the consumer draws on the opinions of anonymous groups. However, missing from the study was whether other facets such as family and society were influential, or even the generational grouping of the consumer. Even with this omission from Hamilton et al.'s (2021) original study of the family, societal norms and from a generational perspective, these attributes emerged as key themes, as a Vietnamese lens was used to study these Generation Z participants' consumer experience. Hamilton et al.'s (2021) presentation of the social customer journey model does introduce the notion of the importance of social influence on others, for example, the introduction of the concept of travelling companions, who can inform and guide the individual consumer.

To capture the almost pragmatic nature of the concept, Hamilton et al. (2021) provided in their framework, bidirectional arrows to indicate the flow of social influences. There is also a focus on the actual decision-making process which may involve not just the consumer but also be informed by the social dimensions of the individual. In contextualising these social dimensions, Hamilton et al. (2021) proposed that there were two categories: proximal or closeness and distal or distance, which operate on a continuum. In explaining these two new dimensions, Hamilton et al. (2021) noted that the proximal social category was related to the temporal and physical proximity of the individual consumer to others in the decision-making process. For example, being a close well-known friend or being a member of a certain group with strong social ties to which the individual consumer belongs. At the other end of the continuum was the distal or distance dimension of the customer journey. This category was seen as being not on an individual basis, like proximal, but instead associated with larger groups or alternatively an individual, but not known personally to the consumer, such as an anonymous review writer, or a series of reviews, which are relatively unknown and not physically present.

In developing this model of social distance and its connection to the consumer journey further, Hamilton et al. (2021) drew on the earlier works of Brewer and Gardner (1996) and Trope and Liberman (2010). Brewer and Gardner (1996) advocated three distinct levels to represent the consumer journey: personal, relational, and collective. For Brewer and Gardner (1996), the personal perspective was associated with self-reflection and the differentiation to others. The relational level was associated with others, but only those who are close to the individual, while the collective is linked to the social perspective of a wider group. In contrast, Trope and Liberman (2010) saw this journey of the consumer as not abstract as presented by Brewer and Gardner (1996) but more solid. In presenting this tangible representation of the social considerations, Hamilton et al. (2021) used these terms proposed by Trope and Liberman (2010) to map out the customer journey to understand the social dimensions of the individual. In justifying this, Hamilton et al. (2021) also drew on the social impact theory which indicates the role and influence of the social environment. By adopting the social impact theory, Hamilton et al. (2021) were able to show the extent to which the social environment was dependent on the number of influencers, their potential immediacy or closeness, whether there was a physical or temporal connection, and the strength as to the importance of the individual to a particular grouping.

Based on the above, the usage and application of the influence of distal was important, as the dimension can indicate the level of power and effect of a group, compared to those which have a close proximity to the individual, such as family and friends. Interestingly, Moorman et al. (2003) contended that consumers with a high subjective knowledge of a product or service tended to seek distal social information to confirm their perceptions, thereby gaining a more objective perspective. Later, Zhao and Xie (2011) added that the level of influence from another individual tends to be more persuasive when the social distance is aligned with the temporal dimension. But what should be recognised is that the social distance of the consumer can change, as the individual is not static, but instead is moving constantly along the continuum. This movement along the continuum may be a result of the consumer reading a review which they identify with, even though there is a physical distance and association from the actual reviewer. This is particularly important to note, as technology is increasingly taking on or assimilating the role of information gatekeepers and experts, with information now being accessed in the home of the consumer, blurring the traditional construct of social proximity. This blurring led Hamilton et al. (2021) to recognise that the precise or actual roles and dimensions of proximal and distal are changing. While in the past a known individual, like a

friend with a social closeness would recommend a product or service, whereby exerting a close and trusted influence, as to the reliability of the information, or alternatively serving as a prompt for social conformity, the advent of social media has challenged this traditional activity. Arguably social media has been assumed as an expert or prompt for providing the consumer with information, or as a guide for social conformity. The question which does emerge is whether this reliance on social media exists in Vietnam for Generation Z consumers compared to their peers, friends, family, and social conformity, as most of these studies (e.g. Hamilton et al., 2021; Court et al., 2009; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) have been North American and European centric. The next section critically discusses the three phases of the customer journey which also draws on associated brand consumption theories which is the focus of this study, by commencing with the pre-decision phase of the consumer's motivation.

### 2.3.1 The pre-decision phase

This is the first stage of the three phases, which represents how the consumer begins to engage with the item or service. There are three stages, the motivation of the consumer, the information searching and finally the evaluation.

#### 2.3.1.1 *The pre-decision phase – motivation*

To fully understand the customer journey, it is necessary to unpack in greater depth, each of the three categories advocated by Hamilton et al. (2021). The next section will focus on these categories under the heading of the pre-decision phase, commencing with *motivation*. To understand what motivates a consumer, irrespective of their gender, age, generation, ethnicity, or even the item being bought, like branded sports footwear, there is a need to first consider what characteristics or motives influence a consumer to acquire a particular item or product. Writers on the theme of consumer motivation have included Solomon (2016), who contends that the concept of consumer motivation can be defined as a psychological aspect of consumer behaviour. Consumer behaviour and decision-making can be expressed through either a behavioural or sociological activity, which attempts to observe and measure how individuals tend to act or behave in certain situations (Foxall, 1986; Panitapu, 2013). Earlier, Locke and Latham (2004) argued that the concept of consumer behaviour is directly related to internal factors, which are informed by their values or to satisfy a particular need, can result in the consumer purchasing or engaging with a product or service. Therefore, motivation like the other social characteristics symbolizes the interaction of the individual with the service or product.

The motivation of the consumer might be informed by the need to conform, wanting to acquire the latest fashion item, or through observing what is available. The consumer may also be motivated to self-extend or seek self-extension—a tendency to express themselves through brands (Sprott et al., 2009) or possessions (Belk, 1988). Consequently, objects become part of the self-definition or representation of who they are.

In attempting to understand motivation further, Ryan and Deci (e.g. 2017, 2022) advocated the self-determination theory (SDT). SDT has become a highly influential human motivation, personality development and well-being theory, which has been arguably a ‘blueprint’ for understanding the motivational basis of an individual’s personality and social behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 2022). SDT argues that there are three basic human psychological needs which are universally shared but are still required to be met or satisfied. As a concept, SDT is a meta or macro-construct which is composed of six existing mini-theories, that have been developed or created at different times, to contextualize or explain the phenomena of motivation and how an individual’s psychological needs are met (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Vansteenkiste, 2023). The first is called the *cognitive evaluation theory*, which is associated with intrinsic motives, which are influenced directly by the social environment of an individual. These intrinsic motives are closely aligned with how an individual is inherently interested in doing or being involved in a certain activity where the reward or the outcome is internalized, often leading to no tangible or extrinsic benefits (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

The second is the *organismic integration theory* which is focused on extrinsic motives and the associated benefits. These extrinsic motives are the result of different degrees of how the individual’s behaviour is internalized and then transformed to become extrinsically important to the person. The internalisation of these external motives occurs when the individual’s behaviour is influenced by the unconscious adoption of ideas or attitudes of others (Ryan & Deci, 2022), which can result in the person’s behaviour changing either positively or negatively. This change can be a result of feeling guilty, or a result of the disapproval of others, alternatively, the behavioural shift may be due to wanting to gain self-esteem or seeking third-party approval.

The third SDT mini-theory is the *causality-orientated theory* which is associated with the individual’s differences in their behaviour dependent on the environment or situation. Here the individual’s behaviour is orientated towards three causality orientations: autonomy, impersonal

and the controlled index (Ryan & Deci, 2017). When the individual has an autonomy orientation, the person will act out or be motivated internally by the interests and values of what they are doing, making the orientation inherently intrinsic and almost altruistic. The next axiom of causality-orientated theory is the impersonal orientation, which is related and characterized by the person's anxiety as to the feelings of incompetence or the perceptions of being unloved, where the individual seeks a sense of belonging through social acceptance and conformity. The final causality-orientated theory axiom is closely associated with the unconscious adoption of ideas or attitudes of others, known as the controlled index. This is where the individual's orientation is towards seeking external cues, which are manifested through seeking and attaining rewards, fulfilling their sense of self-worth or gaining the approval of others, which makes this motivational aspect externally influenced.

The fourth mini-theory is the *basic psychological needs theory* which represents how the psychological needs of the individual and the person's health and well-being are met (Chen et al., 2015). With the basic psychological needs theory, the concept has three propositions, with the first being focused on meeting the basic psychological needs of competency, autonomy and relatedness. The second proposition is related to how the person attains satisfaction compared to being frustrated in achieving their goals or aspirations, while the final axiom is directly associated with the social context in which the person is located. Based on these three axioms, the basic psychological needs theory contends that all three propositions are essential and universally shared, and where one of these propositions is prevented or thwarted, the outcome can have a negative effect on the person.

*Goal contents theory* is the fifth mini-theory. It distinguishes between intrinsic personal aspirations and life goals and those which are more extrinsic. Intrinsic personal aspirations encompass aspects such as personal growth, having a close relationship with others, and possessing a sense of belonging, while extrinsic aspirations tend to be more associated with the external attractiveness of the person, the display of personal wealth or seeking popularity (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). In framing these differences in aspirations, the goals contents theory has attempted to distinguish between the intrinsic and extrinsic motives, indicating that intrinsic goals can be related to attaining self-fulfilment and self-motivation ambitions, while those extrinsic are more aligned with basic needs. However, this differentiation has been recently challenged by Martela et al. (2019), who contended that intrinsic and extrinsic motivational traits tended to be closely related, with self-expression being a synergy of intrinsic aspirations whilst the seeking of influencers, was more extrinsic.

The final mini-theory is the *relationship motivation theory*. This theory focuses on representing the connection with others, and the extent to which an individual is supported to attain their aspirations or goals (Deci et al., 2006). The theory has been used to effectively study the theme of altruism motivation, where the individual can fulfil or meet their sense of self through the support of others, which can lead to the giver as much as the receiver attaining an intrinsic benefit.

While SDT has provided an invaluable insight into how individuals are motivated by internal rather than external drivers, the concept has been criticised for its Western-centric bias, especially for its emphasis on autonomy (Chirkov et al., 2003). The contention is centred on the argument that in collectivist cultures such as Vietnam, social harmony and interdependence are more valued than individual autonomy, whereas SDT tends to be focused on personal freedom and therefore, may not fully capture or represent all cultural influences of an individual (Chirkov, 2009). In contextualising this, Koestner and Losier (2002) suggested that the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation potentially oversimplifies the complexity of human behaviour, in which external rewards often undermine intrinsic motivation. Despite these criticisms, SDT does remain a widely used and generic motivational and psychological concept. However, as the purpose of this study is to investigate and understand the hidden layers of Vietnamese consumers' motivation for branded items through a generational lens, the complex and hybrid cultural background of these consumers cannot be accurately represented using only SDT. Therefore, to address this potential limitation and to understand the underlying fundamental motives, this study will also focus on the motivation from a brand consumption perspective as to how Vietnamese Generation Z consumers can be motivated while acquiring branded sports footwear. This could include seeking symbolic values or being motivated to attain hedonistic or utilitarian motives, which will be discussed further in the next section.

#### a. Hedonic and utilitarian motivation

Hedonic and utilitarian motives are closely aligned with the consumer behavioural traits of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, or pleasure versus utility. Hedonic and utilitarian values can have a direct and positive effect on the consumer's preference, levels of satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Overby & Lee, 2016; Childers et al., 2001). These two types of motivational concepts are notably important when it comes to buying branded goods, as



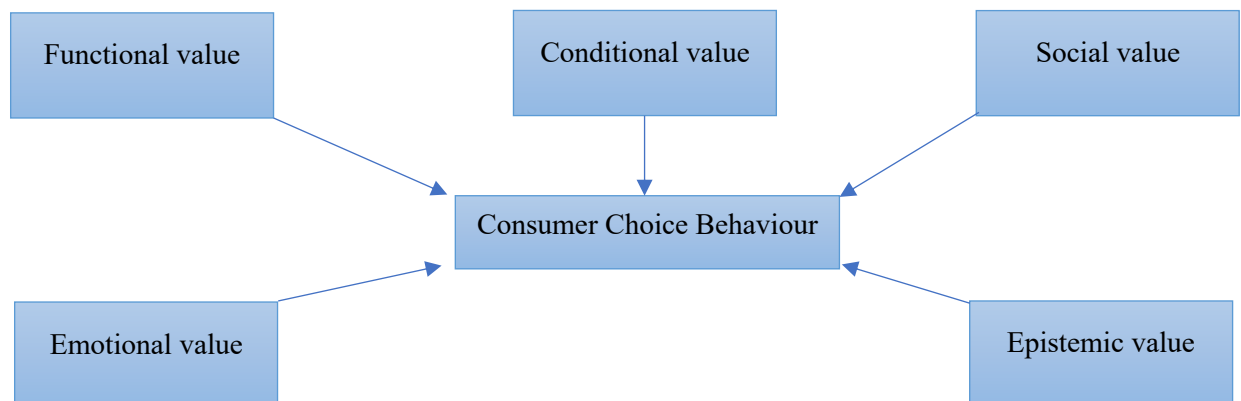
utilitarian behaviour is defined as goal-oriented and rational, or a conscious response to a particular need, whereas hedonic behaviour implies seeking fun, play, enjoyment, and experiences, therefore tends to be an unconscious response to an external stimulus (Voss, Spangenberg & Grohmann, 2023). The utilitarian consumer tends to differ from those who are hedonically orientated in their behaviour, as hedonic motivations are stimulated positively by their immediate interaction with the brand, which further stimulates their acquisition intentions (Chan et al., 2017). However, challenging this perspective, Jones et al. (2006), and later Tyrväinen, Karjaluoto, and Saarijärvi (2020) found that the hedonic consumer tended also to be directly influenced by emotional experience and satisfaction, therefore was strongly influenced by word-of-mouth, and their repeat custom to a particular brand due to their perceived brand loyalty. In contrast, the utilitarian consumer tended to be motivated by the quality and long-term benefits of the product, therefore often sought a long-term experience, and were less influenced by the anticipated feeling associated when purchasing the item or the influence of the prevailing fashion trend.

In connection to this study, based on the central theme of investigating Vietnamese Generation Z's buying branded sports footwear, concepts such as extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, together with hedonic and utilitarian motives are potential characteristics which may influence this consumer grouping. The premise of this is based on the principle that extrinsic and intrinsic motivation provides a means to understand the motives behind an individual buying branded items, and that they can be influenced by internal and external attributes, while hedonic and utilitarian motives can drive the desire to experience the consumer to buy certain items of the clothing including branded sports footwear.

#### b. Symbolic motives

Beyond the above, individuals may also seek symbolic benefits in products and services they consume. Symbolic interactionism suggests individuals understand and interpret their world through their actions, as opposed to simply reacting. Therefore, how the consumer responds and acts is a function which is informed or mediated mainly through symbols (Solomon, 1983). In contextualising this concept, a symbol can be seen as acting as a stimulus, where the meaning and value of a product or service are informed by how the consumer perceives the object, which then results in the action or response of the individual (Solomon, 1983). For Kinch (1967), symbolic interactionism has several core attributes which include how the self-concept of the consumer is influenced by the perception of the responses of others, and therefore directly

influenced by their behaviour, then as to how the consumer's motivation is influenced by the response of others. In illustrating how consumption values operate through symbolic consumption, Sheth et al. (1991) proposed a five-value model to depict the five consumption values (Figure 2.3). In presenting the model, Sheth et al. (1991) noted that the consumer choice is a function of multiple consumption values, which make differential contributions to any given choice and operate independently (p.160).



*Figure 2. 3 Five values influencing consumer choices*

*Source: Sheth et al. (1991, p.160)*

In explaining how this construct operates, Sheth et al. (1991) highlighted that the functional value represents how the consumer perceives the product or service, which is aligned to meeting a utilitarian rational-related goal or attaining a focused practical application need. However, while the functional value addresses a broader need of the consumer, such as convenience, durability and reliability, the utilitarian value specifically emphasizes meeting more pragmatic desires, including saving time, ease of use and efficiency (Sheldon et al., 2001). For branded sports footwear, while its functional values refer to its improvement of athletic performance and injury prevention, the utilitarian values tend to be more focused on the practical usage, such as running shoes with enhanced sole flexibility for running marathons (Voss et al., 2003). In relation to the customer journey of Hamilton et al. (2021), the functional value can be seen in the evaluation stage, when the consumer evaluates how the product can solve a particular problem or meet a specific need, with the individual assessing the practical attributes such as durability or usability (Sheth et al., 1991; Cronin et al., 2000; Firtikiadis et al., 2024). The

decision phase of the model also encapsulates the consumer decision-making process, where the individual begins to finalize their purchase decision based on the assurance that the product delivers on its perceived functionality. Finally, there is a connection to the post-decision phase, where the customer's ultimate satisfaction of the product's performance and functional value will either positively or negatively influence continued usage and brand loyalty.

The social value, unlike the functional aspect, is acquired and informed by the social values of the individual based on their demographic, socioeconomic and cultural-ethnic group, which is relevant to this study. This value is aligned as to how the consumer choice is made, for example, whether the individual is seeking visible products, such as clothing, including branded items or shared services, which are driven by social values. From the perspective of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey, this value is closely aligned to the motivation stage, when a product or brand image can influence the customer's level of motivation, especially for buying branded sports footwear, which can be often associated with the individual wanting to conform with their social grouping. Then at the end of the journey, the post-decision phase of Hamilton et al. (2021) journey is where the consumer might assess how their choice affected their social identity or how others perceived them whilst wearing the product, which is closely associated with meeting social values.

With the emotional value, the concept is the extent to which the consumer responds to an aroused feeling or state of mind. While this can include euphoric behaviour, such as actively seeking comfort, or aesthetic alternatives through to attaining utilitarian motives, the emotional value is also satisfied when the consumers succeed in seeking fun, enjoyment or experiences through their unconscious behaviour, which is related to hedonic motives (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). From the context of the customer journey as advocated by Hamilton et al. (2021), the emotional value plays a key role in influencing the consumer to engage with and then ultimately buy branded or personalized products. This can be through the product being marketed during the decision phase of the journey to generate a positive emotive response, such as the excitement of a new design of footwear (Sheth et al., 1991; Sheldon et al., 2001). These positive emotive responses can then lead to long-term satisfaction, which ultimately manifests into brand loyalty and engagement, with the consumer repeating their purchase decision in the post-decision phase (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982).

The epistemic value of Sheth et al. (1991) represents how the individual responds to new experiences due to their curiosity which provides novelty, thereby influencing their knowledge

or awareness, for example, the launch of a new style of footwear. This value is associated with the motivation and information search stages of the pre-decision phase of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey. The final value is conditional value, which is often informed by the situation or circumstances of the individual consumer, for example when the consumer engages with a particular product or service based on their situation during the evaluation stage. For example, the customer might consider purchasing a pair of branded sports footwear with a tiger print on it to celebrate the Lunar Year of the Tiger, rather than only for its functional attributes.

In summary, the functional, social, emotional, epistemic and conditional values are aligned with the three different phases of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey: the pre-decision, decision and post-decision stages. These values tend to operate independently while also contributing incrementally, with the consumer often seeking to maximise the five values, but this is often not achievable, with the individual willing to accept or prepared to reject another but dependent on the individual. For example, a consumer seeking a functional pair of sports footwear could result in the importance of attaining social values of seeking a stereotype experience amongst their peer group being reduced.

### c. Proximity and distance of social drivers

Drawing on the concept of the customer journey, for Hamilton et al. (2021), motivation is directly influenced by the proximity and distance of social drivers together with those who are journeying with the consumer, the 'joint journey'. The proximity of the social driver in relation to motivation is associated with the need or desire to affiliate or match with others (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020). This desire and motivation are dependent on the social distance of the consumer, for example, the connection to a particular branded sports footwear which is seen or perceived to be fashionable, therefore is hedonic centric. However, at the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge that the consumer may be motivated or alternatively demotivated by the product or service which conveys a certain image. This desire or motivation is made more explicit, if the consumer perceives the item has a negative association, for example being gender specific or has a poor brand image, such as being not environmentally sustainable, which is particularly important for Generation Z consumers (Gardetti & Giron, 2014; Parzonko et. al, 2021; Dabija & Bejan, 2017). This negative association can lead to the rejection of the product or service. This association with consumer identity has also cultural and status dimensions, which could indicate the individual's desire for conformity or alternatively to present externally their social status, displaying again their hedonic behaviour. This is closely related to Sirgy

(1985) who introduced the concept of self-congruity, which refers to the degree of match or mismatch between an individual's perception of a brand or product and the perception they have of themselves, as to their self-identity. Self-congruity is also connected to consumption value theory where the consumer may be seeking or motivated to attain their social or emotional values as proposed by Sheth et al. (1991), as opposed to more utilitarian or functional experiences.

In relation to distal or distance of social motivators, this attribute is often associated with how the consumer is influenced by their altruistic desires and needs. For example, whether they are motivated to acquire an item seen as being environmentally responsible, through information, which is gathered abstractly from external groups, like those online. This could also be linked directly to the social groups to which the consumer belongs, and how the product or service is perceived, so influencing the consumer's motivation indirectly. The last attribute associated with motivation is the joint journey. Here this attribute is linked to the extent to which the consumer is influenced or persuaded by another, hence the term a joint journey. This persuasion could be in relation to conformity, determined by the extent to which the power or influence of each party has on the other, and the motivation behind the relationship.

### *2.3.1.2 The pre-decision phase – information search*

The next attribute is associated with information searching. The term *information search* refers to the assessment of memories or past experiences, along with information gathered from the external environment about the product or service. This often involves the gathering of extensive information until the consumer has sufficient knowledge of the item. This information can be gained from various sources, which today is predominantly from social media, but has historically been through word-of-mouth (Kizgin et al., 2018). With the advent of social media, word-of-mouth has been expanded beyond the traditional boundaries of those physically close to the consumer. While the reliance of searching for information may still be gained through family, friends, and neighbours, increasingly this activity has begun to be more reliant on anonymous reviews and recommendations including social media influencers (Chen, 2017). However, as noted by Hamilton et al. (2021), the nature of social information has changed the nature of searching, whereas the extent to which the consumer relies on social media and associated online influencers remains unclear. This is particularly relevant for this study, as the focus is on Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, who are still bound to a traditional monarchic

culture. With the emergence and reliance on social media and online reviews, there has been a trend to investigate the reliability of these external online sources of information. Part of this online trend has seen the emergence of social media influencers and online interest groups, but also the increase of an echo chamber where similar consumers share similar experiences (Terren & Borge-Bravo, 2021). At the same time, there has been an expansion of information available together with the broadening of searches, leading to more information being made more accessible and available. The last theme associated with information searching is linked to the 'joint journey'. As mentioned above, the theme of the joint journey is associated with the other party providing additional information to expand the individual consumer's knowledge. The type of information can include influencing the type of evidence being sought, through to the consumer or the joint journey partner needing to defend or justify their evaluation or opinion which they are providing. With the emergence of social media, this can include the influence of social media influencers, who have increasingly become dominant. What remains unclear from Hamilton et al.'s (2021) conceptual paper is the extent to which family, friends and societal norms influence the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer or have external influencers are now the main influence. This is particularly interesting as Hamilton et al.'s (2021) study was a North American-centric project, presenting a series of emerging research questions for future research to address.

#### *2.3.1.3 The pre-decision phase – evaluation*

The last category associated with Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey's pre-decision phase is evaluation. This stage represents the interpretation of the information and where the data has come from. For the consumer to evaluate effectively, the process often includes the assessment of the creditability and likability of the sources, and what the key information provides. With the essence of evaluation being grounded in creditability, trustworthiness, likeability, and attractiveness, the consumer needs to be able to discern the reliability of these attributes. For example, as noted by Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann (1983) and then later by Hamilton et al. (2021), attractive online celebrities like the traditional role of the salesperson can be a persuasive influencer on the consumer. This is further enhanced by the interactive nature of social media, where the consumer is encouraged to engage more with the product or service. This process also involves how the information is received, and the number of sources used. This process of evaluation to be effective often needs to have a combination of distal or

distance social influences, such as the prevailing social norms together with proximal or closer influences like friends, family, and neighbours. But this summation of evaluation as advocated by Hamilton et al. (2021) brings into question whether these two dimensions are still relevant if viewed from an acculturation lens. This lens includes the extent to which the cultural and social dynamics of Vietnam influence the consumer, for example, whether the individual is informed by the country's beliefs of Confucianism which is focused on the societal rules and moral values, or Taoism which seeks simplicity and a life which is environmentally focused. Closely associated with the theme of acculturation, which is aligned with Hamilton et al.'s (2021) original question as to the importance associated with collectivism versus individualism. Cultural collectivism is a concept closely associated with cross-cultural psychology, which sets out and contextualizes how a culture of a group can prioritize its shared beliefs, attitudes and values over those of the individual (Triandis, 1955). In a collective culture, which is often associated with Asian countries, like Vietnam, people see themselves as part of a larger group, such as a family, and are motivated by the norms and obligations of the group (Duong et al., 2024; Geiger-Oneto, 2023). For these individuals, there is a tendency to put the goals and values of the group before their own and behave according to the roles and norms imposed by the collective. Therefore, the collectivist culture tends to value harmony, cohesion, duty, and interdependence of each other and may emphasize conflict avoidance and achieving group goals, which is closely aligned with Confucianism.

Several key authors in cultural studies and cultural collectivism, including Hofstede (2011), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2020) and Minkov (2018), have contended that those people who lived in an individualistic society, which included North America and Europe, were independent in their values and attitudes and often only focused and cared for themselves and their immediate family, therefore were classified as individualistic. In contrast, the collectivist culture represented those individuals who tended to view themselves as members of larger groups, including extended family members, and therefore, were prepared to conform to the prevailing norms, whereby accepting the group's shared values (House et al., 2004). Even though Hofstede's (2011) study has become widely influential, there have been criticisms as to whether its outcome can accurately represent the intricacies of a culture (Mc Sweeney, 2002). This includes whether a culture or a region can be accurately captured by a single generic score related to whether the culture is either individualistic or collectivistic (Minkov & Hofstede, 2012). Reflecting this criticism, this study intends to focus on whether cultural influences can affect the customer journey but specifically from a collectivist perspective, whereby enabling a

deeper insight to be gained as opposed to providing a generic outcome. In achieving this, the study will attempt to add to Hamilton et al.'s (2021) earlier call for further collectivist studies into how cultural influences affect the customer journey, by focusing on the consumer from a Vietnamese perspective. The study will also present an additional question as to whether the traditional influencers of the past – like family, friends and societal norms or have been superseded or replaced by third-party recommendations. This was issue also recognised as an under-explored area by Hamilton et al. (2021), who called for future research.

#### *2.3.1.4 The pre-decision phase from a brand perspective*

In relation to this study, as to the connection between the pre-decision phase and branded items, there are several associated themes which need to be reviewed, including brand resonance and brand experience. Interestingly, these themes are not presented in the current literature related to the customer journey.

##### a. Brand experience

The brand experience can be conceptualized as being made up of sensations, feelings, and behavioural responses which are evoked by brand-related stimuli which arguably commence at the early motivation stage, indicating the relevance of the journey continuum. These stimuli can be through a brand's design and identity, the packaging, through to the marketing communications (Brakus et al., 2009). For Brakus et al. (2009), brand experience can be divided into four distinct categories of experience: *sensory, affective, behavioural, and intellectual*. These four brand experiences represent how the consumer interacts with the brand item, and the overall brand experience is only complete if these four aspects are in *harmony* with each other. The process involves the consumer firstly engaging with the item, but then dependent on what the individual is seeking, will gather information by searching the evidence as to the potential value of the acquisition. This evidence may be gained often through a holistic set of experiences including sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural interactions, and not simply based on practical qualities and benefits (Huang, 2017; Kim & Chao, 2019). In contextualising this, Kim and Chao (2019), suggested in their Chinese-based consumer study that both the rational perceptions and emotional feelings of the individual play an important role in the evaluation process.



The *sensory* dimension of Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) consumer evaluation process relates to the aesthetics and the sensory qualities associated with a specific brand of a fashion item (Nysveen et al., 2013; Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014). This tends to be aesthetically orientated which triggers the consumer's five senses to sensorial stimuli the individual to actively engage in the item, in what Nysveen and Pedersen (2014) saw as the consumer becoming a cocreation participant. Nysveen and Pedersen (2014) in their consumer study argued that the cocreation participation process required the senses of the consumer to engage affectively, cognitively, behaviourally, and relationally ultimately to the brand experience. Later research by Lee et al. (2020) into consumer engagement, indicated that visual stimuli needed for influencing a consumer's evaluation needed also to be aligned with the consumer's values and perceptions. For Lee et al. (2020) to enhance and attract the consumer perception towards positively evaluating a branded item, needed to have a specific focus on the affective dimension of the experience which must be matched to the consumer's expected mood or emotion when purchasing the item (Iglesias et al., 2011; Kim & Chao, 2019).

Aligned with consumer affective engagement are the *behavioural* traits, which are often linked to brand communications, that are used to stimulate the analytical and imaginative thinking in the minds of consumers, thereby influencing the evaluation process (Schmitt, 2009; Zarantonello et al., 2007). The study of Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) argued that this could be achieved through the exposure to advertising prior to the actual encounter or the consumer actively engaging with the product. Therefore, this exposure and then engagement with the branded item can trigger a meaningful experience that may result in positive behavioural consequences for the consumer, which can lead to the individual positively engaging and evaluating the branded item (Lee & Trim, 2019). The *intellectual dimension*, the final trait of Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), captures the intellectual aspects of the brand experience (Bapat & Thanigan, 2016; Brakus et al., 2009). The intellectual dimension relates to how a brand can make or influence a consumer to think and then act (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). This can include the behavioural dimensions of associated bodily or functional experiences of the individual, their lifestyle and the overall interaction with the item. This intellectual dimension is related to symbolic consumption and its relation to a hedonic experience, where the consumer engages with the product through the functional value of seeking a utilitarian or physical experience, alternatively a social desire of conformity to the prevailing socio-norms or those of their social-grouping or by the consumer's emotional values which are driven by feelings, emotions and affective behaviour traits. Bapat and Thanigan (2016), in their consumer

study, revealed that emotional and cognitive brand experience dimensions can affect brand evaluation through the consumer logically evaluating the benefits of the item.

#### b. Brand resonance

Associated with brand experience is brand resonance. Brand resonance is related to the degree of engagement and attachment which a consumer has towards a particular brand when searching, evaluating, and then purchasing the item (Hamilton et al., 2021). As a concept, brand resonance is seen as being the extent to which the consumer interacts with the branded item, and how aligned or consistent is the product to the individual's values and aspirations (Keller, 2010, 2012). Thus, brand resonance tends to be associated with the psychological and emotional connections of the consumer during the pre-decision phase (Huang et al., 2014), but also relates to the cognitive and affective consequences of the post-purchase stage after the item is bought (Keller, 2012; Shieh & Lai, 2017). Therefore, as a concept, brand resonance refers to how the consumer relates to a particular brand as they evaluate the item during the pre-purchase stage (Keller, 2010), but then extends to the post-purchasing phase, including aspects such as satisfaction, brand loyalty (Chiou & Droge, 2006) and brand equity (Shieh & Lai, 2017). Then, depending on the level of brand loyalty, this can lead to a strong link between the consumer's attachment to a particular brand, and a willingness to sacrifice personal resources, like the funds to buy the item, to maintain an ongoing relationship with a brand thereby positively influencing the evaluation process (Park et al., 2010).

#### 2.3.2 The decision phase – consumers' decision-making style from a brand perspective

The next phase of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey is the decision phase, which is independent of the pre- and post-decision phases. As a process, a decision is the culmination of the pre-decision phase. Therefore, the process reflects the social influences of the consumer. The rationale for having a single entity called decision located between pre and post-decision phase was informed by Lee et al. (2018, p.280), who advocated that a single stage was needed to separate the journey, as in deciding the individual '...to make up one's mind about whether to buy and if so, which particular brand or product or product to purchase', which is separate from the acquiring activity, which is 'to buy a brand or product item that one has decided upon'.

This distinction between the two phases illustrates the change in the consumer journey from pre- to post-purchase activities.

While the decision process is an independent phase, there is still a social aspect to the activity. For example, in the actual decision process, there have been studies which have indicated that men will spend more time shopping with a friend than without, and if coupons are used, then the consumer will likely shop on their own. This behaviour indicates the influence of the social dynamics of self-image and impressions. This can be extended as to whether the consumer is accompanied and if so by who and their power of influence. For example, is the consumer's decision informed by the need to conform, wanting to seek affirmation or avoid embarrassment, through to the amount of time needed to decide on their customer journey? This theme of power or influence is also closely associated with the approach-avoidance motivational theory (Elliot, Gable & Mapes, 2006). This theory is grounded in a construct which operates at a higher or lower level of motivation, which is influenced or informed by specific goals the individual consumer pursues from their general, dispositional preferences and tendencies. As a construct, the approach-avoidance motivational theory brings in the importance of socialisation and the importance of friendships (Deci & Ryan, 2002). The individual will be motivated to avoid a particular item, if the experience results or leads to a negative stimulus, for example, the product or service does not meet their expectations, or alternatively receiving a negative review or rejection from peers. Based on the above, and including the motivational theory of approach-avoidance, the question which emerges is whether the consumer today, Generation Z, will still make the ultimate decision accompanied, like with a friend or a family member, alone, or even shopping with some form of remote and online involvement? With the concept of the joint accompanied journey companion, as advocated by Hamilton et al. (2021), it remains unclear whether the same individual or influencer is part of the pre-decision phase, what their involvement is and who they are. To potentially understand this gap, the next section will focus on the consumers' decision-making style from a brand consumption perspective, which is currently not fully investigated by writers such as Hamilton et al. (2021), and Lemon and Verhoef (2016).

From the context of this study, it is necessary to critically review the literature related to brand consumption during the decision phase of the customer journey. As noted above, consumers make conscious or unconscious decisions, often informed by their motivation, information searching, and evaluation as presented in the customer journey. From a brand consumption perspective, Sproles and Kendall (1986) earlier argued that these daily consumer decisions can

be illustrated by eight domains: recreational shopping consciousness, perfectionism, brand consciousness, being confused by over-choice, fashion consciousness, price consciousness, impulsive/careless, and habitual/brand loyalty. While it is acknowledged that Sproles and Kendall's (1986) consumer styles inventory (CSI) research is arguably dated, this study remains significant, as a series of studies (e.g. Nayeem & Marie-IpSooching, 2022; Eom, Youn, & Lee, 2020) have still revisited the original methodology, confirming the relevance of these domains. In the context of this study, these domains are also relevant to the pre-purchase stage of the consumer journey when shopping for branded products like sports footwear, as the overall experience is shopping for recreational purposes. The consumer at the beginning of the journey is often seeking some form of perfectionism in their fashion choice, which is aligned to their self-identity, but the individual can be confused by the various options and choices available but also may be influenced by the cost or price of the product. Finally, the pre-decision process could be informed by their loyalty to a brand or their conditioned habits or values which is associated with symbolic consumption theory (Sheth et al., 1991), in determining which item to buy, or alternatively if the acquisition in the past has been informed or impulsive which will then lead to the motivation to avoid the product in the future (Elliot, Gable & Mapes, 2006).

In contextualising these domains, Sproles and Kendall (1986) saw recreational *shopping consciousness* as being associated with the consumer orientation, which is mainly aligned with the enjoyable feeling that they can gain from a shopping experience, represented by the individual's need for adventure and leisure while shopping (Sproles & Kendall, 1986; Puiu, 2020). The second trait of Sproles and Kendall (1986) is *perfectionism*, which is based on the consumer's orientation to make the best choice for themselves, through making decisions based on finding the product which provides the best quality and value, which are aligned with the individual's criteria (Sproles & Kendall, 1986; Sharda & Bhat, 2019). It should be noted that the term *quality* does not always equate to a high level of quality, like branded goods. The third trait is *brand consciousness*, which represents the consumer's tendency to prefer or reject purchasing decisions based on well-known brand names and the associated price the consumer needs to pay (Sproles & Kendall, 1986; Turunen & Pöyry, 2019). The fourth criterion is where the consumer is *confused by over-choice* which sees the individual faced with too many choices, and potentially hindering the person's decision-making process (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). The fifth trait of Sproles and Kendall (1986) is related to *fashion consciousness*. Here, the trait represents the consumer's orientation, preference, or lack of preference toward seeking the latest trend or style, which will then inform the individual's decision-making process of wanting

to buy or not, such as branded items, like sports footwear. The next criterion is *price consciousness*, which refers to the consumer's sensitivity toward the price of products. This trait of Sproles and Kendall (1986) informs and influences whether the consumer decides to buy the real or authentic product or alternatively seeks a less expensive replacement, such as counterfeit sports footwear (Sproles & Kendall, 1986; Turunen & Pöyry, 2019). With the trait of *impulsive* or *carelessness*, this represents the consumer's preference or ability to make spontaneous decisions without too much consideration. The alternative of *impulsive* or *carelessness* is that the consumer may take time to consider their purchasing decision, as they may have been influenced by previous experiences in the post-purchase stage. Finally, the last trait of Sproles and Kendall (1986) is *habitual/brand loyalty*, which represents the consumer's tendency toward shopping or acquiring the same brand based on their post-purchase experience and satisfaction, rather than trying a new item (Sproles & Kendall, 1986; Adeleke et al., 2019). Based on Sproles and Kendall's (1986) traits, and later with Husain, Paul, and Koles (2022), there is an indication that the decision-making process is influenced by various aspects identified on the customer journey, including brand awareness, information searching, evaluation and brand consciousness through to brand loyalty in the post-purchase stage. In combination, all these phases and stages inform and influence the decision-making process as to how the item or product fits into the individual's purchasing preference and social identity.

### 2.3.3 The post-decision phase

The last phase is the post-decision part of the customer journey, which occurs after the acquisition has been made. This phase has two aspects: satisfaction of the experience and sharing of the item with others.

#### 2.3.3.1 *The post-decision phase – satisfaction from a brand perspective*

The last stage of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) model is the post-decision phase, which has two facets: satisfaction and sharing. Once the decision has been made, the consumer now moves beyond the actual activity of purchasing, and into an equally important role, the usage and evaluation stages. From a branded footwear and fashion item perspective, this is vitally important to understand. This stage could result in the consumer feeling post-purchase regrets or success, dependent on the evaluation of their experiences and the views of others. This post-purchase stage led Hamilton et al. (2021) to highlight how decisions were made, whether they were

independent or dependent. In illustrating this, an acquisition decision could lead to the feeling that the item has fulfilled the customer's needs while gaining affirmation from their social grouping, meeting their hedonic motives, which can result in enhanced enjoyment, or the opposite, dissatisfaction. This conclusion confirms the earlier work of Ratner and Hamilton (2015), who identified that there were consumers who were engaged in a hedonistic activity or experience, who then shared this with others, tended to experience a higher level of satisfaction. Even if the individual does not consume the product or service with anyone else, there can be a significant influence on the usage and level of satisfaction experienced. Therefore, as consumers are often concerned about the perception of others, their response can have a direct influence on the level of satisfaction. This involvement of others in the post-decision phase can also extend to the level of enjoyment and experience of the product or service, which could include being aligned and conforming to the existing norms of their social grouping. Again, from reviewing the current academic debate associated with the customer journey as presented by Hamilton et al. (2021) and Lemon and Verhoef (2016), there is a gap in existing knowledge related to how the individual engages in the experience of purchasing branded items, including at the post-decision phase. Reflecting on this omission, the next section draws on theories aligning with the satisfaction stage of the customer journey. These theories include brand attachment (Conner et al., 2020), brand trust (Hamilton et al., 2021), brand judgment (Burgess & Spinks, 2014) and brand engagement (Husain, Paul, & Koles, 2022). The next section starts with the discussion of brand attachment.

#### a. Brand attachment

Brand attachment represents how the consumer creates some form of loyalty to a branded item and, therefore can be emotionally driven by the bond between the individual and the brand, which is often seen as being associated with the post-decision phase, but also informs the pre-decision phase and the evaluation process (Conner et al., 2020). Conner et al. (2020) provided empirical evidence that indicated the consumer is influenced by social concepts such as adhering to the prevailing norms. Where the consumer's attachment to a brand is positive or perceived to be beneficial, for example, if the brand meets or even exceeds the consumers' original expectations the overall level of satisfaction increases (Jacob et al., 2019; So et al., 2013). The opposite is also true, if the brand fails or alternatively loses its ability to satisfy the consumer's needs, then the individual's attachment is potentially compromised (Keller, 2009;

Palusuk et al., 2019; Park et al., 2007), therefore brand attachment can directly influence brand resonance, as presented above (Donvito et al., 2020).

#### b. Brand engagement

Related to brand attachment is brand engagement, which although has been a theme of interest in consumer behaviour since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been a lack of agreement as to the general conceptualization of this concept (Husain, Paul, & Koles, 2022). Burgess and Spinks (2014) stated there is an indication that consumer engagement with a particular item goes beyond the sales or acquisition experience, and instead, it encapsulates a wider range of branded purchasing consumer behaviour. Brodie et al. (2011) in conceptualising brand engagement, stated that the concept is a psychological phenomenon that occurs between a consumer and a brand, which can occur before or even during the buying experience, but is more predominant in the post-purchase stage. Therefore, the engagement process with a brand is multifaceted and can encompass a range of intellectual, psychological, and behavioural dimensions (Dhaliwal et al., 2020; Hollebeek et al., 2014). However, to achieve consumer brand loyalty to a particular item, the process involves a long-term level of engagement and involvement, which can only be achieved when the product or service is recognised by the consumer for its associated benefits, which will inform their future purchasing decisions (Brandão et al., 2019).

#### c. Brand judgement

The next theme associated with consumer decision-making styles in the post-decision phase is *brand judgment*, which is related to the consumer's opinions and beliefs based on their experience for the product or item (Keller, 2010, 2012). This concept is also associated with how the consumer perceives the brand from a quality perspective. This consumer judgement or decision can be measured by the extent to which an item is re-used or re-acquired compared to other branded items (Burgess & Spinks, 2014). Therefore, brand judgement is based on and informed by the consumer having first-hand experience of the branded item whether that is positive or negative (Gummerus et al., 2012; Keller, 2009), which will then inform future decision-making and acquisitions.

#### d. Brand trust

Linked to brand judgement is the theme of how much the consumer trusts a particular brand. Brand trust has emerged as an important theme associated with consumer behaviour, which is related to the prior experiences in the post-decision phase, and how the individual decides which brand to trust. Part of this process is related to the consumer's experiences as they learn which items and brands, they prefer through undertaking the customer journey (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Keller, 2012; Hamilton et al., 2021). In studying brand trust, Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2005) revealed that brand trust is rooted in the result of past experience of the consumer engaged with the brand and therefore, is closely associated with brand loyalty and brand equity. In a later study, Kotler et al. (2014) contended that brand trust represented the extent to which the consumer has a sense of security, which has been gained through their interaction with a brand. This sense of trust can be gained when the consumer perceives that their needs whether that is psychologically, socially, or physiologically met. Therefore, brand trust captures the individual's entire knowledge and experience with a particular brand, whether that is a favourable or a negative experience (Keller, 2009). These experiences are often attached or linked to the actual consumer experience, which for Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2005), and Sirdeshmukh et al. (2018) are often associated with the relevance and creditability of a brand and its usage, which can either be positive and enhance the level of trust, or alternatively be negative, whereby negatively influencing the brand experience and ultimately resulting in a negative consumer experience.

#### *2.3.3.2 The post-decision phase – sharing*

The last stage of the customer journey is sharing. The sharing stage relates to the word-of-mouth part of the journey. Here the consumer will inform existing or potential consumers of their experience. This stage of the process tends to be motivated by having either a strong positive or negative experience, but it also depends on the level of social distance. This sharing is also closely associated with their projected persona as to how they wish to be perceived by others. This projected perception can be through showing the item acquired and curating or generating their self-identity. The actual sharing experience irrespective of being online or in person, tends to be targeted to a specific group of recipients. Interestingly, consumers tend to share their



negative product experiences with friends, neighbours, and family members, whilst positive experiences are more likely to be conveyed to strangers or anonymous recipients, but this has changed with the emergence of social media and the anonymity the medium offers. But again, what remains unclear is whether this assertion of Hamilton et al. (2021) which is North American based exists in a Vietnamese setting for Generation Z consumers when buying branded sports footwear.

Interestingly, where the post-decision is shared amongst their community or social group, the consumer is more likely to be led to a common affiliation with the brand, whereby the individual becomes a loyal customer, and ultimately an advocate. However, there is also the opposite if the consumer is part of the shared community and has a negative experience, the group may place pressure on the individual to conform, whereby needing to change their perceptions due to peer pressure. From a consumer's shared experience, ultimately the journey can result in the individual reaching some form of consensus or alternatively evaluating the product independently without their social grouping. But again, does this influence on consumer behaviour extend to a new generation, Generation Z, who are potentially bound by their Vietnamese cultural background?

#### 2.3.4 The implications for business

Although the study of Hamilton et al. (2021) was a conceptual project, the authors attempted to present potential emerging implications for business and marketing practices under seven categories: motivation, information search, evaluation, decision, satisfaction, post-decision sharing and cross-stage influences.

Hamilton et al. (2021) also noted the need for future research to focus on the nature of social influence and whether there were any additional layers, which could include a generational perspective of the consumer, the influence of cultural norms or the purchasing of branded products, like sports footwear. The study also called for further research into cross-stage influence and the role of the travelling companion, including the extent to which this role differs from general social trends, then as to the journey time of the companion to determine if this affects the level of influence on the individual consumer.

While the customer journey framework provides a useful construct to understand the individual's experience, the concept does have a series of limitations as noted above. These

include the omission of any real depth as to the relevance of hedonistic and utilitarian drivers or intrinsic and extrinsic motives as the consumer begins to be motivated by the item. Then there is the importance associated with the brand experience and brand resonance at the pre-decision phase when the consumer evaluates the product.

During the decision phase of the customer journey, largely neglected has been the importance associated with the consumer's decision style. Finally, during the post-decision phase, the criteria of satisfaction which is arguably associated with brand attachment, brand engagement, brand judgement, and brand trust as indicated by Hamilton et al. (2021), remains unclear, which is potentially a fundamental component associated with a consumer's engagement with branded items. Reflecting this, the next section is dedicated to providing an in-depth review of the conspicuous consumption theory of the consumer, and important concepts associated with branded fashion items, such as sports footwear.

## **2.4 Conspicuous consumption**

The background of conspicuous consumption can be traced back to the emergence of the middle class in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when materialistic items such as property ownership and social status became important to be outwardly displayed through the wearing of branded items (Husain, Paul & Kolas, 2022). Conspicuous consumption can be defined as the search for social prestige, by projecting the concept or image of wealth in social contexts, which has been recognized as one of the main reasons for acquiring branded products, like sports footwear (Miller, 2009). Link to Sheth et al.'s (1991) five consumption values, conspicuous consumption theory is fundamentally associated with the concept of social value, in which consumers would purchase products from prestigious brands to project to others their status and self-image to represent their social standing (Groening, Voss & Spangenberg, 2007) or wanting to be seen as being associated with a particular grouping or identity (Veblen, 1899, as cited in Patsiaouras & Fitchett, 2012; Belk, 1988). This motivation for recognition and social belonging is a core component in relation to conspicuous consumption.

As to the connection between conspicuous consumption and emotional value of the consumer, this can be present when the individual gains satisfaction not only from the product's practical usage but also from the emotional rewards gained, such as the sense of self-worth of owning a high-status item, like a pair of branded sports shoes (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Belk, 1988). For the functional value, it is associated with conspicuous consumption through the

performance, quality or durability of the branded product, whilst the epistemic aspect of Sheth et al. (1991) model is related to the consumer seeking a novelty or intellectual level of satisfaction (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Finally, the conditional value can be relevant in conspicuous consumption, particularly in a scenario where the value of an item is enhanced by specific contexts or situations, which can contribute to the consumer's social status (Sheth et al., 1991). These values, in association with conspicuous consumption, can collectively shape consumer behaviour on their customer journey, from the pre-decision, decision to the post-decision phases as presented in section 2.3.1.1b. With the close connection between these values and the theory associated with conspicuous consumption, it is necessary to critically review and evaluate this theory from the context of branded sports footwear based on Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey model.

Another reason to study conspicuous consumption theory is due to its close association with brand consumption, which is aligned with the focus of this study as to understanding Vietnamese Generation Z's consumption motivation for branded sports footwear. A brand can be seen as a concept which encompasses a name, insignia, symbol, design, or a combination of these attributes, intended to identify the products or services of a seller or group of sellers to differentiate them from competitors (Motale & Dhurup, 2016). Branded items are often perceived to be of higher quality and provide a projected self-image for the consumer. With the focus of this study being on branded sports footwear, these shoes, including brands such as Nike, Adidas, Puma and Reebok, tend to be designed to be worn for sports, exercising, or related recreational activities but are also for projecting a particular image beyond any physical pursuits.

Emerging from the concept of conspicuous consumption have been two themes to categorize the consumer: the bandwagon effect and the snob effect. The *bandwagon effect* tends to use a particular brand to obtain membership or acceptance into a specific social group, while the *snob effect*, rejects goods and brands which are used by other consumers that they consider less prestigious by selecting more expensive items (Leibenstein, 1950).

In attempting to contextualize branded consumer behaviour, there have been several key writers in the field, including Vigneron and Johnson (1999, 2004). For Vigneron and Johnson (1999, 2004) there are five prestige-seeking motivations and corresponding values, which can be used

to distinguish and define what a consumer perceives as a prestigious branded item. For Vigneron and Johnson (1999, 2004) prestigious branded items should provide perceived conspicuous, unique, social, hedonic, and quality values, which reflects the above notion of snob and bandwagon, along with hedonist motives (Figure 2.4).

Vigneron and Johnson (2004) differentiated prestigious from non-prestigious brands by classifying the former into three categories: upmarket, premium, and branded items, in increasing order of prestige. To contextualize this, Vigneron and Johnson (2004) developed a framework which introduced the concept of ‘personal effects’ which was used to categorize hedonist motives, which was informed by the earlier research of Dubois and Laurent (1994). Vigneron and Johnson’s (2004) study attempted to establish a balance between personal and interpersonal-oriented motives for branded item consumption, which demonstrated that individual behaviour tends to vary depending on the person and their susceptibility to interpersonal influences, such as their travelling companion, whether that role is external or internal. In setting out this argument, Vigneron and Johnson (2004) proposed several other dimensions in addition to hedonism, including conspicuous value, uniqueness and perceived quality, as shown below in Figure 2.4.

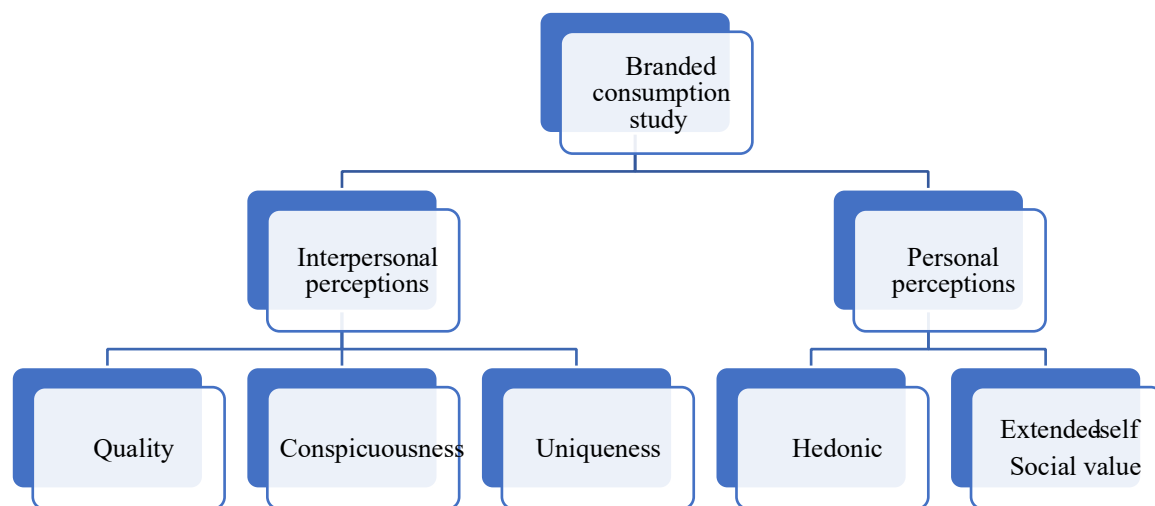


Figure 2. 4 Vigneron and Johnson (2004) framework of branded consumption

Source: Jahn et al. (2013)

In explaining these additional concepts, Vigneron and Johnson (2004), commenced with the term of perceived *conspicuous value*, which drew on the earlier work of Veblen (1899, as cited

in Patsiaouras & Fitchett, 2012), Bearden and Etzel (1982) who suggested that a consumer tends to consider or are influenced by their reference group when consuming branded products. The consumption of branded items therefore may be important to the individual if they are *searching for social acceptance* or *being seen to be aligned to a particular grouping*. This means that social status associated with a brand is an important consideration in conspicuous consumption. Furthermore, consumers who perceive the *price as a proxy for quality* often perceive a high price as a good indicator of quality, and prestige (Lichtenstein, Ridgway, & Netemeyer, 1993). With this conclusion of Lichtenstein, Ridgway, and Netemeyer (1993), Vigneron and Johnson (2004) identified that conspicuousness could be categorized or grouped as being 'extremely expensive' or 'items for the wealthy', which are terms often related to the branded item's price and perceived social status.

The next theme of Vigneron and Johnson's (2004) conspicuous consumption construct is *uniqueness*. Uniqueness is an important attribute associated with branded items and conspicuous consumption, as it is often related to the theme of scarcity or limited supply of certain items or products, which can enhance or at least influence the consumer's desire and preferences for the brand (Lynn, 1991; Pantzalis, 1995). Consumers often express a need or desire for uniqueness when searching during the pre-purchase stage for something that is difficult to obtain, e.g. a Louis Vuitton handbag or a pair of Nike Jordan X Dior Air High sports footwear. The purpose of buying this form of item is to enhance one's self- and social image by meeting a particular need or desire. The need for uniqueness is based on the premise that perceptions of exclusivity and rarity of an item can enhance the desire for a brand, and that this desirability is increased when the brand is also perceived as unique (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2018). Therefore, a branded item which is difficult to find, for example, a limited edition, and then expensive compared to normal items, could be perceived by the consumer as potentially more valuable and unique. Leading from Vigneron and Johnson's (2004) perceived uniqueness category is the extent of the self-image or identity of the consumer. Here the consumer may use branded items to classify or distinguish themselves compared to other individuals, but they may also try to integrate the symbolic meaning of the brand into their own self-identity or extended self. This extension of self can be seen as being part of the individual's desire or need for social identity, where the individual constructs an appearance based on the branded item. Here the individual is seeking to conform or project an image of an affluent lifestyle and/or to be distinguished from nonaffluent consumers, which relates to the snob or hedonic effect. This concept of social identity and extended projected self, is closely aligned to

Belk's (1988) original concept of extended self, which represents how the consumer regards their possessions or footwear as being a part of their identity. In achieving this extended self, writers including Hirschman (1988), Dittmar (1994) and more recently Kapferer and Valette-Florence (2018), contend that the consumer to achieve this may decide to buy 'imitators' or 'imitations' to enhance their self-identity. However, as noted by Kapferer and Valette-Florence (2018), does an imitation or counterfeit item provide the consumer with the same customer journey experience and outcome?

For Vigneron and Johnson (2004), the consumption of branded items is often associated with the consumer looking for or seeking personal rewards and fulfilment acquired through the acquisition and consumption of products evaluated for their subjective and intrinsic emotional benefits, as opposed to more functional features (Kaur et al., 2020), which can be closely aligned to sensory gratification (Razak, Themba & Sjahrudin, 2019), and sensory pleasure (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

For Razak, Themba and Sjahrudin (2019), and Lemon and Verhoef (2016), the expectation is that branded items are perceived to offer or provide superior product quality and performance compared with non-branded items. Some consumers may perceive more value from a brand because they may assume that it will have a greater brand quality and reassurance (Aaker, 1991). Therefore, existing literature on brand consumption often emphasizes the importance of ensuring the perception is maintained, and it seems difficult to develop a brand image without developing a long-term commitment to quality. But does this perception of quality extend to branded sports footwear, and if so, what do Vietnamese Generation Z consumers perceive to be quality, for example, durability, the materials used or the design?

In a more recent study, Rosendo-Rios and Shukla (2023) argued that brand consumption depends on what others consume within the '*network*' or *social grouping*, which is closely aligned to Hamilton et al.'s (2021) journey companion, by highlighting the significant role of social comparisons and the influence that reference groups can have on branded item consumption. However, as noted above the customer journey was originally devised from North American and European perspectives and omitted the importance of understanding the background and acculturation of the consumer. Reflecting this important theme, section 2.4.2 is dedicated to presenting the theoretical understanding of acculturation, which also includes the theory behind ethnocentrism and xenocentrism.

#### 2.4.1 Country of Origin and Customer's perception of products

Closely linked to the consumption motivation theory of buying branded items is the theme of the country of origin, which emerged from a series of studies including Diamantopoulos et al. (2011), Martin and Cervino (2011), and Lee et al. (2013). While studies have applied source-based perspectives to define country of origin as being the location of manufacture (Ha-Brookshire & Yoon, 2012), the influence of the brand's headquarters (Martin & Cervino, 2011) or the country where the designs and materials are sourced (Ha-Brookshire & Yoon, 2012), the latest definition from Garcia-Delos Salmones et al. (2022) has conceptualized the country of origin as being a combination of mental associations, beliefs and attributes which are directly related to the specific country from where the product has originated from. These associations may refer to the brand's image and reputation (Kabadayaki & Lerman, 2011), evaluation (Lee & Lee, 2011) and the perceptions about the country's people or products (Moradi & Zarei, 2012), which can lead to a positive or negative attitude towards a particular item or brand (Martin & Cervino, 2011). Recently, Prabowo et al. (2019) and Merabet (2020) also highlighted the significant relationship between the country of origin and perceived quality, which refers to the overall evaluation of a branded item which is informed by the consumer's experience. For Prabowo et al. (2019) and Merabet (2020), this has now become an essential element to consider in the consumer's decision-making process. For both Lie and Bernarto (2019) and later Heriyati et al. (2023), the overall image and reputation of the product and the company can potentially influence the consumer's perception of quality, in which a well-established and reputable brand is more likely to be associated with higher perceived quality, leading to increased brand trust, loyalty and confidence in the product. Therefore, potentially the consumer will prefer a product which is made by a well-known global brand compared to a local or an item manufactured in an unknown country. However, it is noticeable that most global branded items currently are made and manufactured in various unknown countries, which can potentially influence the consumer's perception during their journey. For example, while the manufacturing country influences serviceability, the skillsets of the workforce, and ultimately the local economy, the assembling country can also influence the product's functionality and design which includes the item's image and aesthetics. This brings into question the extent to which the brand image and reputation are influenced by the country of origin when the consumer evaluates the item. It should be, however, noted that the study of Lie and Bernarto (2019) was only focused on Korean consumers' engagement in a cosmetic brand while Heriyati et al.'s (2023) research was based on researching Indonesia consumers as to their motivation to buying fashionable clothing but

used a quantitative perspective. The question then emerges is whether Vietnamese Generation Z consumers when acquiring branded sports footwear are influenced by the country-of-origin as to their perceptions towards quality?

#### 2.4.2 Consumer acculturation

To emerge from consumer motivational behaviour studies into branded consumerism (e.g. De-Juan-Vigaray et al., 2021; Cleveland et al., 2019; Kizgin et al., 2018; Das & Jebarajakirthy, 2020) has been the theme of acculturation. Although this study as set out in Chapter One, is not focused on the cultural aspect of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, an emerging theme from the current literature related to branded consumer consumption is the influence of acculturation. Related to the consumerism of branded goods, literature into acculturation has focused on investigating individual consumer responses and behaviours based on being in contact whether that is directly or indirectly, with another culture, which potentially could be relevant to this study, as branded goods consumerism is now a globalized phenomenon.

Acculturation is a process of cultural and psychological change which occurs because of continual contact between people of different cultural backgrounds (Kizgin et al., 2018). These contacts can be physical, online or through engagement with different products and services. Through these contacts, the outcome can lead to changes or shifts in the prevailing societal, cultural and norms but to varying degrees (Berry, 2006). Acculturation from a consumer behaviour perspective can be seen as the influence of how an individual from another culture buys certain goods from another country (Bundy, 2017; Wamwara-Mbugua, Cornwell & Boller, 2008; Lin & Chen, 2013; Nkamnebe, 2014). To explain this connection of acculturation and consumerism of branded goods, writers like De-Juan-Vigaray et al. (2021) have contended there is a connection to sociodemographic attributes including the location of origin of the consumer, age, income level, and educational background. For other authors, such as Berry (2009), acculturation indicates how individual consumers' cultural, behavioural, and psychological attitudes or perceptions change when engaging with other cultures and their values through exposure to other country's products and goods. Earlier, Faber et al. (1987) saw acculturation as the adoption of values, behaviours, attitudes and beliefs when exposed both directly and indirectly to another culture. What emerged from the literature related to acculturation, including from writers such as Berry (2009) and De-Juan-Vigaray et al. (2021) is that many of the studies have been based in established consumer markets where the customer has been



exposed, therefore used to acquire overseas goods and services, but there has been relatively little studied from an emerging new market viewpoint, like in Vietnam. Recently however, there has been increased interest in studying this emergent theme (e.g. Das & Jebarajakirthy, 2020), with studies focused on researching acculturation amongst young Asia-Pacific consumers, especially in relation to conspicuous consumption in Asia, when seeking branded Western fashion. While these studies including by Das and Jebarajakirthy (2020) have been arguably informative and insightful, these studies have also been based in established markets, and there remains little conducted from an emerging Asian consumer market perspective, such as in Vietnam, which this study intends to address. Therefore, to address this identified gap, the study will focus on the acculturation characteristic of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, which includes their changes in consuming motivations, values, attitudes and beliefs towards branded items from other countries.

#### 2.4.3 Consumer centrism

Closely linked to acculturation and the theory of consumer behaviour when acquiring global brands is the debate surrounding the concepts of ethnocentrism and xenocentrism. These two concepts which are potentially overlooked by Hamilton et al. (2021), are closely associated with the consumer on their journey, and how they engage with and buy international goods, which has come to the forefront of consumption motivation research in recent years due to globalization, as to whether the consumer acquires either domestic or foreign manufactured products. Xenocentrism as a concept is based on the consumer preferring to buy overseas goods or items rejecting local products, while ethnocentrism is the opposite rejecting overseas items for locally manufactured products. These two concepts being opposite have generated a series of different views, studies, and disagreement from consumer behaviour theorists (e.g. Venugopal et al., 2022; Camacho et al., 2020; Xie, Choo & Lee, 2023; Danilwan & Pratama, 2020) as to whether the consumer has become globalized and more likely to acquire foreign goods creating a homogenous global consumption culture (Cleveland et al., 2009), or is there a trend which exists rejecting overseas items over a preference for locally manufactured products (Lawrence, 2012). This debate has led writers including De Mooij (2004) to argue that globalization has led to some consumers being increasingly more attached to their local culture based on their evaluation of psychological and tangible features of a product based on their self-perception, motives, local societal norms, and customs, and have therefore rejected xenocentrist

behaviour (Danilwan & Pratama, 2020), while other studies have rejected this conclusion, such as Venugopal et al. (2022), who noted in their Nigerian and Malaysian based study that xenocentrism was prevalent in these two countries due to the consumers desire for quality and sustainability which was only offered by overseas brands. While these studies have highlighted the potential debate as to whether the consumer is more attracted to a globalized or xenocentric experience, or alternatively seeking a local culture-based option of ethnocentrism, most of the studies, including in Nigeria and Malaysia (Venugopal et al., 2022), have again been conducted in established consumer markets, and there is limited research within a new and emerging market, like in Vietnam.

#### a. Consumer xenocentrism

In studying the theme of xenocentrism further, for writers such as Camacho et al. (2020), Venugopal et al. (2022) and Lawrence (2012), the concept is based on how a consumer may reject or devalue their cultural values in preference for a foreign culture and their goods, which could manifest itself in overrating the overseas products, irrespective of the local alternatives. The term xenocentrism was first introduced in the early 1950s by Kent and Burnight (1951), who considered it to be “a view of things where the centre of attraction is on a group other than one’s group, and all other groups, including the one the person is affiliated to, are rated based on the groups (external) that take centre stage”. Therefore, xenocentrist behaviour occurs when consumers identify with these foreign values and features, and then develop a preference for certain aspects and ideas from the external culture which are different from their native background. More recently, Venugopal et al. (2022) have viewed xenocentrism behaviour as manifesting itself into becoming potentially disproportionate and with a biased focus towards another culture (Stier, 2010), which can result in a high preference for imported commodities or ideas, at the expense of local products. Essentially, consumer xenocentrism can lead to consumers being voluntarily prepared to pay more for imported commodities than they would typically be willing to pay for the locally manufactured alternatives, which may or may not be identical (Stier, 2010). Put simply, xenocentric individuals prefer another society, and their values and products other than their own (Kent & Burnight, 1951), which from a consumer behaviour perspective means that the local culture and societal norms represented by the local products are being rejected for more homogenised experiences and items.

There are different reasons why xenocentrist behaviour may exist, and why a consumer might feel attached to other cultures and societies. The most prevalent reason for a high level of

xenocentrism, can be attributed to the increased homogenised global marketplace, brought about by the prevalence of the internet and social media, which has permitted international brands to cross borders and cultures, enabling consumers to share and collect brand-related information instantly during the pre-purchase stage (Sun, Gonzalez & Wang, 2021). With the development of social media, writers such as He and Wang (2015) and more recently Sun, Gonzalez and Wang (2021) have begun to highlight that consumers often display some form of consumer ethnocentrism due to their usage of social media but have also begun to potentially reject the notion that globalization will lead to a homogeneous consumer experience. In reaching this conclusion, writers such as Pelet, Massarini and Pauluzzo (2018) in studying the growth of ethnocentrism, found that consumers wanted to seek more local or domestic brands over overseas imports, due to a shift in consumer perception of wanting to retain their culture and country of origin. Lawrence (2012) in researching consumer xenocentrism, then independently by Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2016) both independently concluded that consumer often justifies their buying decisions mainly by their social identity but will use the rationale of being unable to find a local product which meets their expectations as a suitable justification.

Cleveland et al. (2017), Danilwan and Pratama (2020), Diamantopoulos et al. (2019b) have more recently contended that consumers are often attracted to the “foreignness of products” due to their perceived quality or past experience compared to buying local goods. In explaining this, Diamantopoulos et al. (2019b) focused on consumer xenocentrism to illustrate how the consumer’s preferences are influenced and informed by domestic and foreign brands.

In a more recent study conducted by Camacho et al. (2020) the focus was on the influence of xenocentrism on the acquisition intention of Colombian consumers, and the attitudes of the individual to the product. Camacho et al. (2020) acknowledged that xenocentrism has emerged as a global construct for understanding consumer behaviour when researching local and foreign products. The study found that there was a direct and indirect effect of xenocentrism on consumers’ acquisition intentions on imported products, through perceived product quality of the goods, and how the product was manufactured. This direct effect could be a positive or negative experience based on the acquisition intentions and perceived product quality, whereas the indirect effect could be related to buying overseas manufactured footwear which could result in local jobs being lost. In conclusion, the study also called for further research into whether other consumer cultures displayed similar traits in other countries.

## b. Consumer ethnocentrism

In contrast to xenocentrism, ethnocentrism is the almost complete rejection of globalization and the homogenisation of consumerism. This rejection could be based on past historical events or due to a more recent issue connected to the consumer's country of origin. Khan et al. (2019) provided an example of the rejection of overseas consumer goods by Chinese consumer, who have tended to reject Japanese products since the Nanjing aggression in the late 1930s, which has now become embedded into the national culture. Interestingly, Diamantopoulos et al. (2019b) and Mueller et al. (2015) both found that in emerging economies, there was a preference to identify more both psychologically and emotionally with overseas goods and therefore displayed a higher preference for foreign products (Belk et al., 1982). However, the reported rejection of Japanese goods by the Chinese was the same for some Dutch consumers who disliked German products owing to the economic crisis and the historical atrocities inflicted during the Second World War (Ahmed, Hinck & Felix, 2018). More recent events which have influenced different consumers have been the rejection of United States products in Iran (Danilwan & Pratama, 2020) or the reported boycott of French goods during the Beijing 2008 Olympic games. This then presents the question as to whether Vietnamese Generation Z consumers are in any way influenced by the Vietnam War?

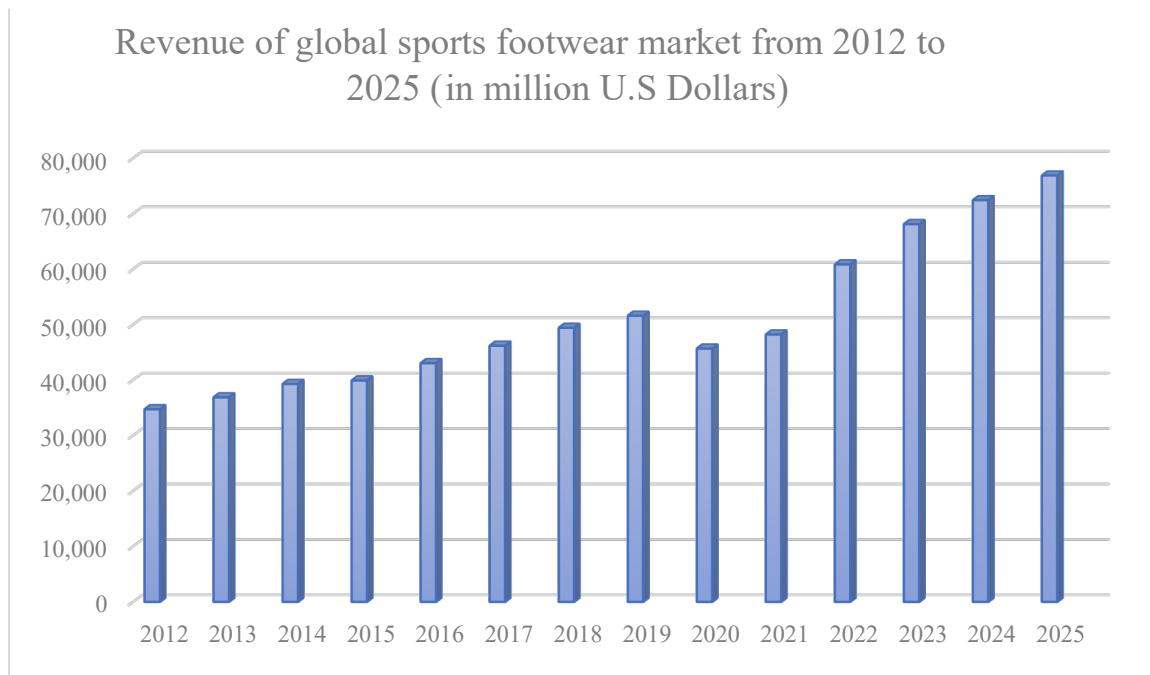
In investigating this theme further, writers including Zeren, Kara and Arango (2020) have recently reported that buyers can also be attracted towards anything which is close to or like their traditions and are still prepared to change their commodity or manufacturer if there is a close synergy to their own culture. In explaining this, Cleveland et al. (2017) stated that a consumer, who is loyal or patriotic to their nation or culture, is often inclined towards culturally alike products compared to items which are culturally different. For Siamagka and Balabanis (2015) consumer ethnocentrism can be defined as the tendency of consumers to differentiate commodities based on their country and societal norms, while prepared to boycott foreign items irrespective of any valued-added benefits, for reasons including loyalty, patriotism, and nationalism, but also based on items which are not culturally aligned. This rejection of other culture's products could also be related to and informed by the prevailing economic context, such as the possible repercussions of increased unemployment and job losses among the local community (Cleveland et al., 2017; Farah & Mehdi, 2021; Pentz et al., 2017) or that the manufacturers and the individual's beliefs, ethics, and morality are not aligned (Cleveland et

al., 2017; Halimi, 2017; Khan et al., 2019; Pentz et al., 2017). This rejection of overseas goods by consumers while providing an advantage to the local producer by consuming domestic commodities, even though the items may be of a lesser value in terms of quality, the ethnocentric consumer does however overestimate or overvalue the quality of local products which can lead ultimately to consumer dissatisfaction (Cleveland et al., 2017; Zeren et al., 2020).

## **2.5 Background to branded sports footwear**

### **2.5.1 Branded sports footwear industry**

While this chapter has provided a critical review of consumer behaviour and their journey; the focus has been on presenting the debate and theory behind the concept of why and how the individual decides to buy a particular item. However, this study is also focused on the consumer journey as to deciding which branded sports footwear to acquire and why, and although the concept has been discussed to varying degrees, there is a need to have a dedicated section to contextualize the theme of branded sports footwear. Therefore, based on the above, the next section critically reviews the literature related specifically to branded sports footwear, including the trend and growth of this fashion item. It is projected that the value of the sports footwear market to be around 365 billion US dollars in 2020 and is projected to increase to 530 billion US dollars by 2027 (Statista, 2020). The total profit from the footwear market was estimated to be 432,108 million US dollars and is set to increase by 5.5% annually (Statista, 2020).



*Figure 2. 5 Revenue of global sports footwear from 2012 to 2025 (in million U.S Dollars)*

*Source: Statista (2020)*

Reviewing Figure 2.5, sports footwear is a million-dollar business, which is illustrated by the fact that there are more than 200 internationally branded shoes (David et al., 2020). The leading brands include Nike, Adidas, Puma, and Reebok. Globally, the worldwide sports footwear industry is expected to produce around 48.2 billion US dollars by 2021. This was expected to increase by around 3.4 billion US dollars since 2020 was the first indication of the market's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, although sales remained below the pre-pandemic revenue of 51.6 billion US dollars in 2019. According to the Statista Consumer Market Forecast, revenue will continue to rise and will reach around 76.9 billion US dollars by 2025 (see Figure 2.5), but with consumers from different countries spending and engaging in branded sports footwear differently, which is part of the focus of this study. Research indicates that Asian countries are the biggest footwear manufacturers (70%) in the world (Statista, 2020). Amongst these countries, India represents 13% of the entire footwear market segment, which is only second to China. In Hong Kong, for example, consumers spend more on footwear, than their European counterparts. As a global market, manufacturers of branded sports footwear have realized that there is a need for innovations, research, and development, which has been led by international branded shoe producers to satisfy the taste and preferences of customers. While this has been acknowledged by writers including David et al. (2020), and earlier by Mehra

(2017), there is still a gap in understanding how consumers in Vietnam perceive as important attributes of branded sports footwear.

David et al. (2020) compared the four different brands of international sports shoes, including Nike, Puma, Adidas, and Reebok, then concluded that quality, comfortableness, price, and innovation were influential aspects in the consumers buying sports footwear. The study of David et al. (2020) also identified the role of customizing sports shoes which is now available on the internet, which suggests that the pre-purchase stage is often influenced and informed by external entities, such as endorsements from celebrities or online reviews. Finally, David et al. (2020) noted that nearly half of the customers in their North American study were willing to change their branded shoes, and more customers are likely to wear customized sports shoes. Again, while the trend of customizing these branded footwear items is interesting, the question which emerges is whether this extends to Vietnamese Generation Z consumers? and whether there are any specific consumer preferences associated with Generation Z?

### 2.5.2 Counterfeit branded sports footwear

Another key theme to emerge associated with branded items, including sports footwear, has been the increase in counterfeit activities, which has grown significantly in recent years. It is estimated that more than 3 million individuals globally a year acquire counterfeit goods (Howie, 2010), however, there is a link between the location of counterfeiting and the purchasing activity of the consumer. As to where counterfeit goods are manufactured, including branded items, the main manufacturer of counterfeit goods is China, although Taiwan, South Korea, and South America are also producing these goods (Longo, 2019). Interestingly, the locality of where these counterfeit goods are manufactured has led to an increase in consumers' purchasing these types of goods, which in the context of this study is whether the Vietnamese consumer being in close proximity to China is also influenced by this counterfeit activity (Sonmez et al., 2013).

In contextualising the consumer's perspective as to counterfeit branded items, Perez et al. (2010) highlighted that the consumer's decision to acquire counterfeit goods beyond the initial cost could be motivated to show or project a certain image of wealth while providing an indication of belonging to a specific social class. Beyond the debate as to the motivation behind the consumer's purchasing decision-making process is the level of individual awareness of where the item or goods are produced or whether they are original or counterfeit. For some

individual consumers, the purchasing of counterfeit goods can be motivated by the perception that certain branded companies overcharge for their products (Wang & Song, 2013), while others will see the branded item as providing quality and status. Closely aligned to this is the consumer's perspective as to their ethical stance associated with the purchasing of counterfeit branded items. This decision can represent how the consumer perceives the value of the item but can also challenge their ethical stance as to purchasing a counterfeit product (Wong et al., 2019). However, some consumers believe that fake or counterfeit products have the same quality as the original (Tom et al., 1998), while others have highlighted the opposite (Penz & Stottinger, 2012). Amar et al. (2018) authors found that counterfeit products tended to lead to a perceived reduction in the value of the original items due to the consumer and their peers being unable to determine which item was real or counterfeit. The study also reported that the exposure to counterfeit products led to some consumers rejecting the fake branded items based on their moral stance, while others avoided buying the original products due to the savings associated with acquiring the less expensive alternative. Interestingly, not all studies believe that the production of counterfeit products damages the originals. For example, Romani et al. (2012) argued that the widespread prevalence of counterfeit products can benefit branded items and brands, as their quality benefits can be promoted, while other studies (e.g. Baghi et al., 2016) found that counterfeit goods had a mixed effect on original brands, with some consumers less concerned about the quality, reputational damage for the brand or themselves, or loss of revenue to the manufacturer. From above, the theme of counterfeit goods, the location of manufacture, and the consumer ethical preferences indicate a lack of consensus and agreement, which has not been studied from the Vietnamese Generation Z perspective. Therefore, the following section focuses on this grouping in relation to their characteristics as consumers.

## **2.6 Generation Z**

This section reviews the literature on Generation cohort theory and its importance to generational studies, including the relevance to this study. The section also sets out the core characteristics associated with Generation Z and this grouping's purchasing characteristics. There have been many attempts to present a more generalized or overarching perspective as to defining and grouping different people and places together. One of these attempts has led to the generalized grouping of using the term 'generation.' A generation can be defined as an identifiable group that shares birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical



developmental stages (Kupperschmidt, 2000). Mannheim (1952) earlier introduced the development of the term generation to highlight the fact that the phenomenon has its origins in the dynamics of historical, social, and societal events and changes.

Therefore, the premise of the concept of a generation relates to how individuals can be grouped together based on shared experience, for example, economical, and historical events, while being exposed to the same environment, such as the prevailing cultural setting (Lyons et al., 2015). This can include being impacted by similar technologies, which today arguably have influenced and informed how people think, and make decisions, and can include how the individual behaves in a similar way. However, Lyons et al. (2015) argued that the grouping of individuals including consumers is not an exact science as shared experiences can differ between contexts (e.g. North America versus southeast Asia, including Vietnam). This potential weakness of a generation is also prevalent when defining the boundaries of a particular group of individuals (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). This has also extended when defining the age boundaries and the date ranges for the generational grouping, as shown below in Table 2.1.

<b>Date Range</b>	<b>Authors</b>
<b>Born early 1990s or later</b>	Levickaite (2010), Pozzulo, Dempsey and Pettalia (2013)
<b>Born 1995 - 2010</b>	Seemiller and Grace (2017), Zemke et al. (2010)
<b>Born 1997 - 2012</b>	Pew Research Center (2014), Wilson (2021)
<b>Born after 1997</b>	Hughes et al. (2022)
<b>Born after 2001</b>	Reeves and Oh (2007), Ozkan and Solmaz (2015)

*Table 2. 1 The differences to Generation Z date range*

*Source: Author*

Even the name of this generational grouping is contentious. Unlike previous generations, there are many terms used to name this group, including Generation Z, iGeneration, Gen Tech, Online Generation, Post Millennials, Facebook Generation, Switchers, and always clicking. Other names include the ‘C Generation’, which refers to the group always being connected to the

internet, the computerization of the cohort, the focus on communicating, being content-centric, or community-oriented (Hardey, 2011), or even being called the 'R Generation', as to being the environmentally and socially responsible generation. These different names do indicate that this generation has been brought up in a digital era, born in the 1990s and raised in the 2000s, which has witnessed arguably profound changes in technology through the introduction of the World Wide Web, the Internet, smartphones, laptops, freely available networks, and digital media. This has led this group to navigate in both the real and virtual world, perceiving both of them as complementary to one another. The result is that this group relies on various sources of information including those online, and then checks their sources virtually. Consequently, information is being shared quickly, with communication being processed amongst each other continuously, using and relying on a wide range of online communication devices and channels.

However, while there is a lack of agreement concerning the name, the boundaries of this grouping along with their shared characteristics, in this study, this grouping will be referred to as Generation Z, and the date range of this generation will be those consumers born between 1997 and 2005 (aged 18-25), which has been informed by the earlier work of Hughes et al. (2022), Wilson (2021), Pew Research Center (2014).

While the concept can be problematic, the means to group consumers does provide a mechanism to understand potential shared experiences and behavioural motives of a group of consumers, for example, their preferences and how they communicate compared to those born earlier or later. This information can be used to inform business marketing strategies to capture the unique characteristics and meet consumer needs and demands (Munsch, 2021).

Existing literature related to Generation Z, including Barhate and Dirani (2022), has indicated that this grouping tends to aspire of seeking to achieve a professional career immediately, and this immediacy is also translated into the seeking of a shopping experience and how they behaviour as a consumer. Generation Z consumers are portrayed as being confident and self-assured, but this is a generalized portrayal, and arguably other facets such as the culture of an individual are also influential (Lev, 2021).

In reviewing the existing generational literature related to Generation Z, research indicates that the main characteristics and problems of this grouping are their level of strong self-awareness, their individualized personalities, their adaptability, and their reliance on technology for

gathering information, through to being prepared to accept new things, but also influenced by social media and the diverse range of opinions, which then informs and influences their brand dissemination (Gutfreund, 2016). This has led authors including Dragolea et al. (2023) to conclude that Generation Z consumers are prone to erratic behaviour, which is fed by their curiosity, with a focus on the cultural connotations of their setting, but also in terms of seeking hedonistic experiences but also altruistic, which is paradoxical. In summarizing the existing literature, the main motives for the current consumption behaviour of Generation Z consumers are to achieve some form of consumer identity, and self-expression and to represent their perceived status, while also meeting personalized needs such as being seen as fashionable or seeking convenience. There are also motives which include being part of and identifying with a particular social group, through a shared group identity, and not simply generational. However, it should be noted that most of these studies are predominantly North American and European, with an absence from a Vietnamese perspective. This omission is problematic, as noted in section 1.2.3b, as the population of Generation Z Vietnamese consumers is predicted to represent one-third of the Vietnamese workforce together with a high level of disposable income (PwC, 2021), therefore becoming a significant consumer group for branded item consumption in Vietnam. Reflecting this, this research intends to provide a critical insight into Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' consumption motivation, whereby adding to the existing literature, but from a Vietnamese perspective.

The next section introduces the core characteristics of Generation Z in relation to consumer behaviour, investigating this groups online usage and habits.

#### 2.6.1 Generation Z's online usage and behaviour

Djafavora and Bowes (2020) highlighted that this generation is the first to be born after the advent of the Internet, hence their constant online activity and reliance. As a grouping, Generation Z have reportedly unique traits in comparison to previous generations, including awareness, persistence, realism, innovativeness and self-reliance in their attitudes and perceptions when faced with the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Pandey et al., 2020), but this may be a generalized portrayal. However, Pandey et al. (2020) do indicate that this generation is strongly motivated to become activists and volunteers particularly supporting various causes, due to their global online interconnectedness through their active usage of various online platforms.

In relation to this generation's online activity, Gilbert (2003) and Jacobsen and Barnes (2020), both contended that this grouping often spends more than five hours a day online, which has led to their online buying preferences being five times larger than Generation X. As a result, Generation Z has become a significant consumer group for online producers and retailers. It seems that Generation Z tends to rely on technology, as presented earlier by Hamilton et al. (2021), including from searching for information during the pre-purchase stage, to inform their purchasing decisions, and then at the post-purchase stage.

### 2.6.2 Generation Z's social responsibility and a sustainable generation

Fernando and Wah (2017) indicated that Generation Z is seen as being motivated to become sustainable consumers and contended that sustainable consumers can be divided into three categories. Firstly, those consumers who are environmentally, economically, socially, and sustainably responsible. The second group are those individuals who are actively involved in ethically responsible purchasing activities, and the final group, are those who seek and choose ethically sourced products and items while spending less. From a generational perspective, Generation Z consumers often actively engage in these three activities to varying degrees, this has led to this group being referred to as 'Generation Green,' reflecting their environmental and socially responsible attitude to their shopping behaviour. The Global Web Index survey (GWI, 2020, cited in Nikolić et al., 2022), noted that approximately 64% of Generation Z are willing to pay more for environmentally friendly items or products. This environmental awareness also extends to the group purchasing sustainable products, as these items are these consumer's values and beliefs. These characteristics are also reflective of this generation's fashion consumption motives, including the desire for uniqueness and personalization, but there are also other motivational facets. Lundblad and Davies (2016) contended that the motives behind sustainable purchasing decisions are influenced and informed by their ethical perspectives and beliefs. These ethical considerations can include wanting to reduce waste and emissions by consuming less and changing their loyalty to those businesses that enhance their working practices and treatment towards their workforce.

In relation to the central theme of this study as to Generation Z consumer behaviour in buying branded sports footwear, an earlier study by Joshi and Rahman (2015) highlighted that purchasing sustainable but branded footwear for this generation was less appealing than purchasing second-hand footwear. These sustainable alternative products were seen as being

reasonably priced and suitable for this grouping's values and perceptions, which was also linked to the cohort's self-image. Machado et al. (2019) later indicated that the motivation for purchasing used items was frequently unrelated to fashion trends, as opposed to being driven by a desire to be more environmentally sustainable, but also for being more cost-effective. Although it should be noted that price is a critical aspect when making acquisitions, earlier studies into Generation Z's acquisition decisions, such as by Amed et al. (2019), indicated that this group was also influenced by the individual's limited financial resources to acquire sustainable new products, however, this purchasing behaviour has changed since the cohort has now entered the workforce. This limited financial resource does potentially influence buying or acquiring decisions of this group of consumers. For marketing writers including Masterson et al. (2017) it has been noted that while the consumer may be classified as the 'user', the parent(s) who may be financing the purchase becomes the 'financier' but also potentially the 'decider' (Masterson et al., 2017, p.121), which brings into question the extent to which the parent influences the final buying decision.

Interestingly, more recently, as a generation, it has been reported that Generation Z is beginning to consider the current trend of fast fashion as being unsustainable and perceive that fashion retailers need to address these environmental concerns (Amed et al., 2019), making this group highly sensitive towards fashion trends and symbolic consumption. Kihl and Vahanen (2018) concluded that Generation Z's decision-making process including the pre-decision phase was actively informed by a desire to seek sustainable fashion for a variety of reasons, including fashion, economic benefits, and being more environmentally friendly.

### 2.6.3 Generation Z's self-identity and social-belonging

As to self-identity, Generation Z as a group of consumers has several priorities, including aligning or self-identifying themselves to the existing or prevailing fashion, and to various online interest groups, which mirrors Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey and the role of the external social companion. This is particularly influential, as fashion is seen as a unique means for Generation Z to express their identity and their social belonging amongst their peers (Ozkan, 2017). Generation Z consumers have high expectations for seeking a high-quality lifestyle with external experiences related to their shared personality traits and characteristics (Djafarova & Bowes, 2012). Van den Bergh and Pallini (2018) and Luan (2023) both contended that Generation Z's self-image is usually defined as seeking items or brands which provide a

high level of self-esteem, which matches their own values of self-image and belonging to their social grouping. As a result, Generation Z tends to resist being influenced by directly paid marketing and exhibits a higher level of awareness to negative attitudes being posted on earned media social sources. This is particularly important as the online platform is the primary source of information, including related information from influencers, such as celebrities or KOLs (Van de Bergh & Pallini, 2018).

As to self-image, Generation Z is seen as being motivated to make sustainable purchasing decisions but needs to have clear evidence and information as to the themes such as the industry's sustainable policies like the carbon footprint or where the item is manufactured. In a study conducted by Wood (2013), the generational group—when unaware of which brands were sustainable—tended to seek additional information before they acquired the item by seeking online evidence, mirroring Hamilton et al.'s (2021) information searching activity during the pre-purchasing phase. However, Wood (2013) also held the opinion and assumption that premium or branded products with higher prices, would be of a higher quality and better made, but lacked the knowledge to back up this perspective. Interestingly, Generation Z had a stronger taste for and acceptance of global brands (Cora, 2019), including fashion items such as branded shoes or clothing. Part of the reason was due to the items meeting their self-identity association with their peers. Furthermore, it was assumed that Generation Z consumers held a higher desire for their self-identity and recognition to seek distinctiveness and individuality in their buying habits and acquisitions, which indicates a paradox, as to the desire for uniqueness and conformity. As reflected above and throughout most of this chapter, the literature related to this group of consumers is predominately North American and European, which brings into question whether these traits exist amongst Vietnamese Generation Z consumers? Furthermore, whether the customer journey proposed by Hamilton et al. (2021) when viewed through a Vietnamese Generation Z lens accurately captures the essence of their purchasing behaviours, motives, and activities.

## **2.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has been based on the customer journey as advocated by Hamilton et al. (2021) and Lemon and Verhoef (2016) to represent the individual's pre-purchasing, the decision and then post-purchasing activities. The chapter commenced by presenting the background of the framework and its relevance to this study. In achieving this, the chapter has critically reviewed

each of the journey phases which have been broken down into the three core phases. In the first phase, the pre-decision phase, the concept has been critically reviewed as to the motivation behind the early stages of the decision-making process and the information searching that a consumer will undertake. However, what should be recognised during the pre-decision phase was the absence of some important themes, that are arguably relevant to branded consumerism and consumption. This included the consumer's motives behind the decision, for example meeting extrinsic or intrinsic motives, hedonistic or demonstrating utilitarian behavioural traits. The same was for the evaluation process undertaken by the consumer at the pre-decision phase. Again, absent from Hamilton et al. (2021) and Lemon and Verhoef (2016) constructs is brand consumption theory, which includes the motivation of seeking a brand experience (Holbrook & Hirshman, 1982) and brand resonance (Keller, 2010, 2012). In contextualising this, the theory included how motivation through the senses, by being influenced by affective, though behavioural and intellectual aspects of the experience. Part of the early stage of the customer journey is also the importance of internal and external influencers, which include their journeying or social companion. This role of the companion from Hamilton et al. (2021) was primarily studied from an online social media perspective, which brings into question whether this concept which is North American-based is relevant from a Vietnamese perspective.

The next stage of the customer journey is the decision. This phase included how the consumer makes the actual purchasing decision, including the role and influence of external and internal journey companions. However, to contextualize this journey from a branded consumer perspective, the chapter has also included the decision-making style from a brand consumption stance. This presentation included Sproles and Kendall (1986), who introduced eight domains related to consumer-making decision styles, which added further depth and context as to why a consumer buys branded items.

The last phase was related to the post-decision phase. Again, while informative and presenting this activity in two distinct areas: satisfaction and sharing, there was a need to further extend the literature from a brand consumption perspective. This included extending the satisfaction category to include how the consumer experiences the satisfaction of the product post-purchase stage and drew on Sproles and Kendall (1986) to provide a comprehensive insight into how the consumer experienced the item post-purchase stage. This included the theory associated with brand attachment (Conner et al., 2020), brand engagement (Husain et al., 2022), brand judgement (Keller, 2010, 2012) and brand trust (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alema, 2005), and the relevance to the consumer's buying branded sports footwear.

The chapter then progressed to critique relevant studies related to conspicuous consumption which extends Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey, as this study is focused on branded items such as sports footwear. This critique has included introducing how the consumer can be categorised or grouped by their motivational traits and attitudes. This includes those who are motivated to follow others, referred to as the bandwagon effect, those who are seeking a higher social status, known as the snob effect and consumers who have hedonistic tendencies. In the chapter, it is also recognised that there have been studies (e.g. Loureiro et al., 2020) that have pointed out the influence of branded item consumption on consumer behaviour, which is associated with their expression of self-aspiration, or wanting to make them unique and distinctive (Wang et al., 2020). However, these studies have not focused on these attributes when researched through a generational lens to provide a better understanding of how brand consumption is formed when purchasing branded sports footwear for the young generational group as Generation Z consumers. What remains unclear *is the motivational attributes affecting Vietnamese Generation Z consumers during their customer journeys when acquiring branded sports footwear and how these attributes influence the connection between Vietnamese Generation Z and brand consumption.*

Finally, as the study is focused on Generation Z, the chapter has also presented the current debate as to the uniqueness of this generational grouping, including their shared values and attributes. In presenting this, key writers such as Mannheim (1952) and Lyons et al. (2015), have been presented as to the underlying theory of generational studies. These generational studies have included the contention that there are potential similar characteristics shared amongst Generation Z consumers, including the reliance to buy and be informed online (Gilbert, 2003; Jacobsen, 2020), or seeking to be socially responsible and being a sustainable generation (Kihl & Vahanen, 2018), wanting self-identity and social-belonging (Cora, 2019) while also being a generation which is seen as being an over-choice cohort (Gao & Simonson 2016; Iyengar & Lepper, 2000). However, the majority of these studies have been researched from a European perspective (e.g. Marroncelli & Braithwaite, 2022; Dubois & Laurent, 1996), and North American (e.g. Heugel, 2015; Lewis & Moital, 2016), with very limited research in Asia, of which mostly have been focused on China (e.g. He & Zhang, 2012; Gao et al., 2009), therefore, another research sub-question was formulated: *what are the characteristics of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers when acquiring branded sports footwear for research and business implications?*



## 2.8 Conceptual framework

This chapter is based on Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey, which has been used as a heuristic device to critically review and organise the current academic literature and debate, to address the original call of Hamilton et al. (2021) *as to how do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientation, affect the social customer journey?*, which is presented below in Figure 2.6. The literature review has revealed a conceptual overlap between the two main themes in this study, the motivation theories for branded consumption and Generation Z studies. Reflecting this, this study intends to critically evaluate the motivational influences on purchasing branded sports footwear by using Hamilton et al. (2021) customer journey framework, to determine the different drivers of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers to acquire branded sports footwear. Based on this, the literature review has revealed four potential gaps.

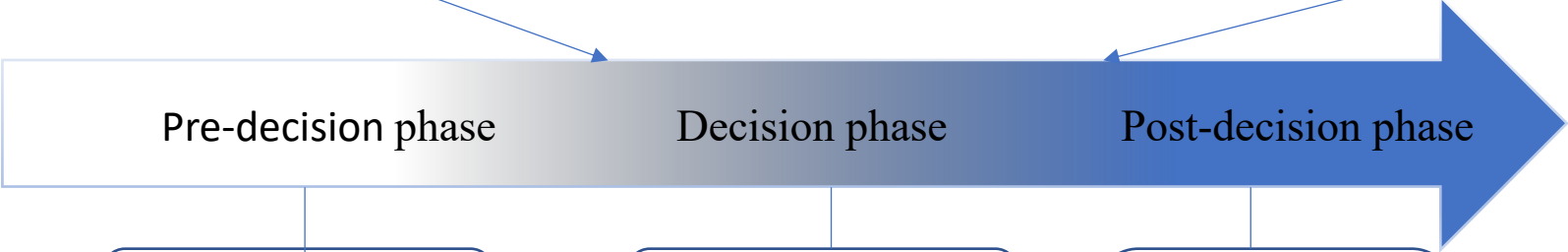
The first three gaps as shown below in Figure 2.6 are related to the motivation for purchasing branded sports footwear, which are related to the core three phases of the customer journey: the pre-decision, decision, and post-decision phases. In addressing these gaps, the study intends to identify how the social drivers and past experiences influence the Generation Z consumer's purchasing behaviour towards branded sports footwear, to determine the extent to which this informs the actual consumption decision, addressing the earlier calls for additional research (Hamilton et al., 2021; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), but from a Vietnamese perspective. In addressing these gaps, the study will identify and investigate whether these motives apply to Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, before determining what this consumer group is seeking during their customer journey.

The last gap is related to the theory associated with conspicuous consumption and generational cohort studies. The gap emerged from previous studies (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004; Camacho et al., 2020; Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015), contending that young Asia-Pacific consumers are seeking to acquire branded Western fashion items (Das & Jebarajakirthy, 2020), while other studies (e.g. Loureiro et al., 2020; Wilcox et al., 2009; Sparks & Honey, 2014; Barr, 2016) see Generation Z as being a unique generational group, therefore are wanting to customize their fashion, while being also loyal to a brand. In combining these theories, this study intends to address, as noted above, Hamilton et al. (2021) called to study *how do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientation, affect the social customer journey?*

Consumption motivation of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers for branded sports footwear

Generation Z studies  
(Born 1997 – 2005) (Djafavora & Bowes, 2020; Joshi & Rahman, 2015; Ozkan, 2017)

Motivation theory for branded consumption studies (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004, Sprole & Kendal, 1986; Veblen, 1899, as cited in Patsiaouras & Fitchett, 2012)



Brand experience  
Brand resonance

Brand consciousness  
Brand loyalty

Brand attachment  
Brand engagement  
Brand judgement  
Brand trust

Distal social drivers

Proximal social drivers

Travelling companions influences

Conspicuous consumption influences

- *What are the motivational attributes affecting Vietnamese Generation Z consumers during their customer journeys when acquiring branded sports footwear?*
- *How these attributes influence the connection between Vietnamese Generation Z and brand consumption?*

*What are the characteristics amongst Vietnamese Generation Z consumers?*

**RESEARCH QUESTION:**  
How do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientation, affect the social customer journey?

Hamilton et al.'s Customer Journey (2021)

Brand consumption perspective

Potential motivation

Research sub-questions

Figure 2. 6 Conceptual Framework

# Chapter Three

## Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

The fundamentals to conduct and then reach a robust research outcome is to decide on the most suitable positionality of the research and how it is to be conducted (Saunders et al., 2011). This strategy is defined by the methodological choices needed in preparing, collecting, and then analysing the research, which is informed by the ontological and epistemological position of the researcher. The ontology and epistemology positionality are informed or at least influenced by the worldview and experience of the researcher as to the nature of the world or reality. It is possible that some researchers are strongly grounded in different methodological approaches and have an adaptive strategy to research, while others may be closely aligned and unchanging in taking a particular perspective or stance. Karataş-Özkan and Murphy (2010) indicated that the intended research strategy and philosophy tend to reflect the researcher's field of interest. Reflecting on this, this chapter will present the key research approaches available and set out a critical justification for selecting research philosophy, together with the researcher's positionality, before setting out and justifying the most suitable philosophical approach adopted for this study. The chapter will also present the intended research strategy which will include both the philosophical perspective and the practical methods used. The chapter will then present the rationale and justification behind these choices before the potential limitations of the study are set out.

Before proceeding writers including Silverman (2013), Halkier (2011) and Blaikie (2007) noted that most studies and researchers have experienced challenges, before deciding on the most suitable research approach and methodology. Much of these challenges and research considerations tend to be related to the nature of what is being studied and the researcher's worldview. The researcher's worldview tends to make-up and represent the individual's reality (Blaikie, 2007) and is not based on the existence of independent truths (Silverman, 2013). In this study, the researcher's focus was on wanting to seek the experiences, perceptions, and values of Vietnamese Generation Z's motivation towards acquiring branded sports footwear.

## **3.2 Research Strategy**

Blaikie (2007) asserts that to select the correct research strategy, there are two key aspects which inform the researcher's choice. The first consideration is to 'try to match a strategy to the nature of a particular research project and the kind of research questions which have been selected for consideration', which are reflective of the individual's 'world-view.' Secondly, the research strategy needs to ultimately reflect 'the adoption of a particular set of ontological and epistemological assumptions' (Blaikie, 2007). In determining, which is the correct research strategy, Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) and Alvesson and Deetz (2000) both highlighted the key fundamental differences between two main paradigms: quantitative and qualitative perspectives. In highlighting these differences, the authors also noted that this is not necessarily essential to compare the weaknesses to consider and understand the ontological, epistemological and axiological implications of the research strategy. Reflecting this, the potential research methodologies available will be presented, and how the selection may influence the research outcomes.

## **3.3 Potential Research Methodologies**

Although Bryman (2012) noted that both quantitative and qualitative research tend to exhibit distinctive, but contrasting characteristics, Blaikie (2007) highlighted that the selection of a methodology tends to reflect the beliefs or values of the researcher's view of the world. These characteristics reflect the epistemological beliefs about what constitutes acceptable knowledge. In determining which research strategy is appropriate, writers such as Bryman (2016), Veal (2017) and Silverman (2013) contend there are two principal research 'paradigms': positivism and constructivism. The next section will focus on the justification for both positivist and constructivist paradigms.

### **3.3.1 Positivist Approach**

A positivist tends to be grounded in a quantitative paradigm, with its origins in natural sciences, therefore positivist standing sees the object of the study as being separate from the researcher and does not interfere with the object. This is important for the positivist as the approach does not avoid corruption of the data by the researcher's presence. A positivist believes that the researcher must be separated from the research object in such a clear way that no interference is possible. The characteristics of positivism often reduce all factors or phenomena to follow

certain scientific rules by taking a deductive approach, which either disproves, falsifies, verifies or a hypothesis or predetermined assumption (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). A positivist will often take an objectivist perspective to social reality, which can be based on the collection of numerical data, by adopting a deductive strategy to understand the relationship between theory and the objects being studied (see Table 3.1). However, Blumer (1956) sees the usage of the positivist approach as bringing into question the reliability when studying the influences or perceptions of a subject or an individual. In expanding on this, Blumer (1956) argued that following a positivist approach, the role of the researcher and the connection between the person being studied are often interlinked closely to the perceptions of everyday events and therefore cannot be detached or should be ignored. Schutz (1962) later concurred with Blumer (1956), pointing out that a positivist or quantitative technique, because of its scientific orientation, may fail to differentiate persons and social institutions from the reality of the 'social world.' In the study of Guba and Lincoln (1994), a positivist method can only produce findings that exist separately from some form of theoretical foundation, which can be questionable when studying real-world topics like beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This is significant because this study is based on the perceptions and experiences of Vietnamese Generation Z when it comes to looking for branded sports footwear. In contextualising this, Bryman (2016, 2012) highlighted also the objective and value-free nature of a positivist paradigm which means that the researcher needs to be detached from the research. Therefore, adopting this paradigm could potentially limit the research to be able to investigate only experiences or the perceived experiences through the sample's senses (Bryman, 2016, 2012), as opposed to understanding the rich and reflexive perceptions of those involved or who have experiences in purchasing branded sports footwear.

### 3.3.2 Constructivism and an interpretivist approach

In contrast to a positivist perspective, constructionism enables the researcher to be embedded or to be directly connected to the research object or participant. A constructivist approach can be defined as being a particular method of wanting to understand the world of human experiences and discovering how people understand their reality (Cohen & Manion, 1994). Focused on understanding the social world of the participants, which in this study was Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, constructivism requires the study to interpret the social

world of those who are participating. Therefore, constructionism is focused on understanding the interaction between the researcher and the participant.

In this study the researcher needed to reflect on her own role within the study to ensure that the research was conducted according to the ontology, epistemology and axiology of the project. To achieve this, Bogna, Raineri and Dell (2020) contended that constructivism is based on the social analysis and discourse which is generated from the data collected. Throughout the research process, constructivism then seeks to identify different worldviews, to provide subjective meaning and perspectives in a social setting of the beliefs and opinions of those being studied. This includes the identification of patterns and themes generated from the data whereby understanding the complexity of reality, rather than attempting to reduce the outcome to a single hypothesis.

From an ontological perspective, the assumption of a constructivist is that there are multiple, equally valid and socially constructed realities (Ponterotto, 2002), in which the nature of reality is socially constructed. Practically, this means that the reality or the truth is personal and subjective, therefore, the researcher needs to engage and understand an individual's point of view. Therefore, in a constructivist study, including in this project, a participant tends to be invited to explain their reality from which new understanding and concepts can emerge. Denicolo et al. (2016) clarified this by indicating that the constructivist ontological perspective is often aligned with the relativist position, which focuses directly on an individual's experiences.

From an epistemological position, Ponterotto (2022) noted that constructivism tends to be grounded in a qualitative approach, which often links to the interactive connection between the researcher and the participants, as presented in Table 3.1. Constructivism requires the study to engage in the social reality of the participant as to how this can influence or inform the person which then generates new social insights. Mojitahed et al. (2014) contended that constructivism epistemological assumptions are therefore non-positivist, as the perspective is focused on the study investigating what exists of a phenomenon, which is often unknown or under-investigated. The epistemological position of constructivism is therefore centred on generating new findings whereby gaining new and critical insights into the participants' experiences using an inductive strategy (Aliyu et al., 2014). By using an inductive method, the study requires the generation of new theory but also requires the researcher and subject to be inter-dependent (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). However, Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) added that a researcher

is unable to be detached, totally independent or distant from the study, but instead investigates the topic in a subjective paradigm. To gain this subjective knowledge, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, cited by Mojtahed et al., 2014) highlighted that often the study tends to adopt an interview method to collect the data to capture the experiences and perceptions through active dialogue, from which social constructivist meaning can be gained.

From an axiological perspective, constructivism tends to select data generation techniques, in which the researcher decides how to conduct the project by producing data often through interviews or adopting a more collaborative approach to empower the participants to co-create data or even the research design. To achieve this, the constructivist researcher needs to be aware of the importance of human interaction and how to ensure that the research is sufficiently rich and authentic.

Based on the above, the next section critically discusses the most common perspectives associated with these two philosophical positions in the context of this thesis. This includes a discussion of ontology and epistemology, followed by the selection of techniques and procedures relevant to this research.

### **3.4 Determining the research paradigm and philosophical stances**

Research is often undertaken from the perspective of the participating researcher (Alavi et al., 2018), therefore the context of the study is an important consideration. Without a clear understanding of the research philosophy, it can lead to wrong conclusions to occur. This selection from the research approaches also served as the data analysis method. The world of research can widely be described from two main positions. In deciding which research approach should be adopted, writers including Rogers (2011) and earlier Guba (1990), suggested that the researcher ought to select a single approach. While there are clear differences between the approaches, Sale, Lohfeld and Brazil (2002, p.43), argued that qualitative and quantitative are incompatible, as ‘the two paradigms do not study the same phenomena, therefore qualitative and quantitative methods cannot be combined’. However, Creswell (2012), Bryman (2012, 2016), and Godenough and Waite (2012) noted that these paradigms do not operate in isolation. It should be noted that even though this study adopted an interpretive paradigm for both the group and one-to-one interviews, the two approaches, quantitative and qualitative, will be presented in the next two sections.

As mentioned above the ontology of a researcher is important to understand. As a concept, ontology is a branch of philosophy which is focused on the nature of what exists (Crotty, 1998, p.8). Based on this Crotty (1998) argues that the focus is on ‘how you choose to define what is real’. Reflecting the theme of this study as to investigating the motivation of Generation Z’s preferences to buying branded sports footwear, there was a recognition that there would be multiple realities from the participants. Related to the ontology of the researcher is epistemology. The epistemology is centred on ‘how you form knowledge and establish criteria for evaluating it’ (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006, p.12). This knowledge will mainly come from the stories/ experiences of interviewees, who are Vietnamese Generation Z branded sports footwear consumers and the interpretation of the researcher. Since the nature of this research is explanatory, it is essential to count on the experiences, perceptions or stories of the Vietnamese Generation Z participants.

The ontological positionality is associated with the nature of social reality, which is reduced into two opposing groups: a realist or a positivist, or objectivist versus an interpretivist or constructivist or subjectivist, as presented above. The realist or the positivist contends that knowledge is centred on the objective measurement or assessment of an independent external reality, while the interpretivist or constructivist recognises that the participant’s meaning cannot be ignored and that the external social world is not separated from the individual’s social world.

Unlike ontology, epistemology is based on the theory as to how individuals gain knowledge of reality, and how the individual gains this understanding (Silverman, 2013; Blaikie, 2007). As a concept, epistemology provides a philosophical grounding as to deciding what knowledge exists, what is known, and the criteria needed to gain the insights required, while also reflective of the researcher’s ontology positionality (Crotty, 1998). Crotty (1998, p.8-9) stated that epistemology ‘is the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the knowledge’, which means that the epistemological position sets out how the researcher perceives their world. Being a constructive study, the epistemological approach in this study proposes that knowledge can only be created and understood by Vietnamese Generation Z consumers for branded sports footwear.



<b>Ontology</b>	<b>Epistemology</b>	<b>Typical methods</b>
<b>The nature of reality or being</b>	What constitutes acceptable knowledge	
<b>Positivism</b>		
<b>Real, external, independent. One or single true reality</b>	Scientific method, observable and measurable facts. Causal explanation and prediction as contribution. (“Positivism - Research Methodology”)	Deductive, large sample, quantitative method, statistical data related
<b>Constructivism</b>		
<b>Complex, rich, social constructed, multiple meaning.</b>	Theories and concepts too simplistic. Focus on narrative stories, unheard voice. New understanding and social view as contribution	Inductive, small sample, in-depth investigation, qualitative method. Themes and interpretation related.

*Table 3. 1 Major philosophies*

*Source: Author and informed by Saunders et al. (2016)*

### **3.5 Research Approaches**

#### **3.5.1 Inductive and deductive reasoning**

Dewey (1993, cited in Gray, 2017) stated that the original paradigm of scientific research includes induction and deduction reasoning. While deductive reasoning starts with an overall view and ends with particular conclusions/ endings, inductive reasoning begins with unfocused details and comes to a connected conclusion (Gray, 2017). Reflecting on this, this study will deploy inductive reasoning with the constructivism research philosophy (see Table 3.1). The reasons behind this decision are based on the premise that the research does not require many theories from the start or the theories will be gathered from various sources. Secondly, the literature in this study might not be sufficient and specific enough to explain and understand

the phenomenon. As a result, the inductive approach will help to gather the data, patterns and meanings, and even theories during the research to come out with a connected conclusion.

This is particularly the case for this study, as the focus is on the consumption motives of Vietnamese Generation Z of acquiring branded sports footwear, as the area has not been extensively studied from a Vietnamese perspective, and therefore it would be arguably difficult to prove or falsify an unknown phenomenon, rather it would be more beneficial to investigate and to generate new critical insight.

### 3.5.2 Qualitative and quantitative approach

This section will critically discuss two main approaches for the study with their pros and cons. Finally, the researcher will bring out the analytical justification of whether these methods are appropriate for the study's purpose and how they can contribute to address the research.

#### 3.5.2.1 *Quantitative Approach*

The quantitative approach is closely associated with positivism, with its origin in natural sciences (Table 3.1). In a quantitative study, the research approach is often conducted based on a single reality of truth, which can only be explained by following fixed laws and a deductive approach to ensure that the results are valid or value-free (Bryman, 2016, 2012). The findings tend to be mathematical or statistical when presented. Using a quantitative study, the researcher will often seek to identify patterns which can be checked and repeated in the future based on following the same study and using controlling research variables (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). However, in this study, the focus is centred on the purchasing experiences/ motivation of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers for branded sports footwear. Therefore, it is not suitable to use a statistical approach to measure their experience with pre-determined variables but instead provide a new framework or theory, as opposed to collecting data to check or validate previous theories.

#### 3.5.2.2 *Qualitative Approach*

Unlike the quantitative approach, a qualitative strategy is more closely associated and therefore linked to a constructivist perspective. The qualitative approach perceives the social world is being a human construct, where reality can only be understood from the participant's perspective of social interaction (Bryman, 2016, 2012). As an approach, the strategy adopted

is inductive, therefore it recognises the dynamic nature of the subject being researched and does not provide a static analysis based on defined variables or attempt to prove or disprove a hypothesis. The qualitative approach enables the researcher to determine the participant's perception to gain meaning, insight and understanding as to how and why a theme exists. Following this strategy permits the qualitative approach to enable the participants to describe in their own words and perceptions of their social reality, and therefore generates richness or depth in the data (Bryman, 2016, 2012). Rather than using and needing many participants which is a prerequisite to provide a generalized outcome, a qualitative approach is often based on a smaller number of participants. With a qualitative study, the approach seeks to discover the perceptions, attitudes, or behaviours, whereby the complexities within the real world can be understood. Reflecting the central theme of this study, a qualitative approach will enable the researcher to understand the perceptions and experiences of those involved or participated, especially their experiences in purchasing branded sports footwear with their motivations.

### *3.5.2.3 Justification for choosing the qualitative method*

In this section, the rationale for selecting a qualitative strategy will be presented. Firstly, the qualitative method tends to be associated with research philosophy, which is subjective and inductive, where the researcher seeks to understand the values, perceptions, and experiences of individuals. Based on the literature review, there are potentially certain attributes which are unique to Generation Z consumers as to their characteristics, preferences and values which inform their behaviour when buying fashion items including purchasing branded sports footwear (Holloway & Galvin, 2017). Secondly, the qualitative method tends to be more focused on human perception and behaviour, which aligns with this research project's focus on consumer motivation. Adopting a qualitative method is more suitable and convenient for the participants, allowing them to express their feelings, perceptions, and experiences about acquiring branded sports footwear (Brown, 2008). Being inductive, the approach will enable new theories to emerge which can be further explored as opposed to simply trying to validate a predetermined assumption or hypothesis. This strategy and approach are supported by Creswell (2013, p.22), who stated that when a particular population is studied, there is a need to listen to the unheard "voice" of participants and their narrative stories, which can only be achieved by following a qualitative approach. Therefore, the qualitative method is chosen for this particular reason to understand and explore Vietnamese Generation Z's acquiring experiences.

Even though several authors have criticised the precision and the small sample size which a qualitative approach will use, together with the claims of being biased, lack of rigour, time-consuming problems, small sample scale, “messiness”, ethical issues, and subjectivity (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Anderson, 2010; Queiros et al., 2017), but if a qualitative approach is conducted properly, these potential identified limitations can be reduced. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argued that the qualitative method is studying the natural settings to provide a deeper meaning or interpret a phenomenon through multiple layers of realities by the understanding of participant’s feelings, experiences, or interactions, while quantitative data only focuses on the measuring or predicting a phenomenon. Antwi and Hamza (2015) emphasized the use of the qualitative method can be beneficial in exploring the nature of the social world, which matches the topic of this research, the consumption motives of Vietnamese’s Generation Z.

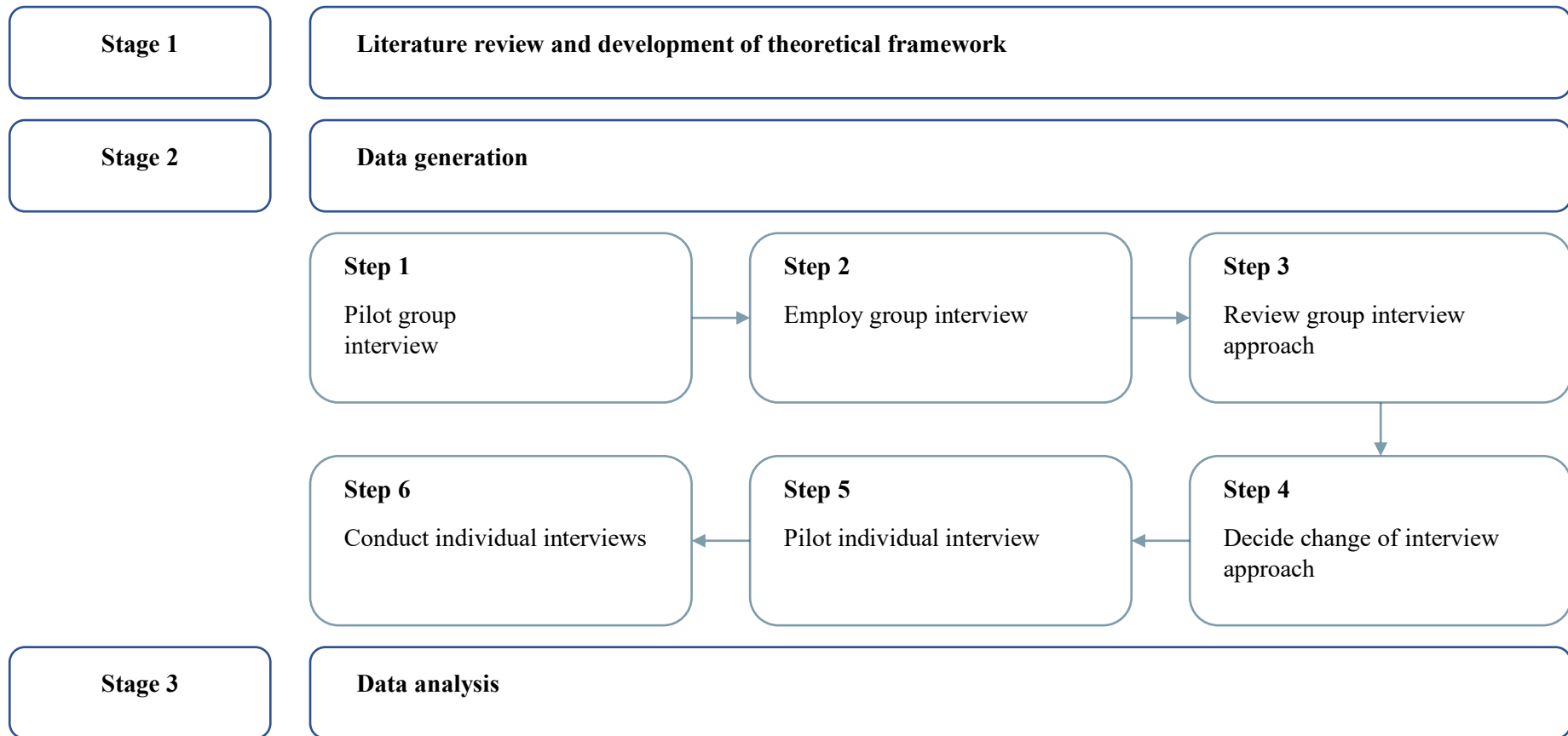
Hamilton et al.’s (2021) customer journey model introduced in Chapter Two facilitated the organisation of existing literature. The model firstly enabled the subjective journey of the individual to be mapped out using the framework’s six stages, including motivation, information search, and evaluation. Secondly, to understand further the influence of these attributes on Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, the model indicated the need to deploy a qualitative approach to provide a rich and nuanced understanding of these young customers’ experiences, motivation, and emotional responses. Thirdly, as indicated in the literature review, one of the gaps identified in Hamilton et al.’s (2021) framework was its North American conceptual project, which focused primarily on the influence of online platforms and social media on consumer behaviour, possibly omitting the potential importance of brand consumption, which is arguably a new perspective. Therefore, using a qualitative method can enable the connection between branded sports footwear consumption and the attributes that influence Vietnamese Generation Z consumers to be understood, which addresses the second research sub-question. Finally, the fifth usage of the model is centred on a new lens being applied to the central theme of the study. By using a different lens, a qualitative approach enabled the investigation of the purchasing characteristics of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers by presenting their experiences as a customer journey, which was aligned with the third research sub-question.

### 3.6 Research Design

Research needs to be carefully designed which involves the selection of the most suitable method before the framework for the research is conducted. For writers including Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the research design and strategy are often a plan to answer the relevant research questions. The research strategy often establishes the connection between the philosophical approach and the selection of methods to generate the required findings (MacDonald, 2012; Cunliffe, 2010; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Figure 3.1 below illustrates the partial research design, including the steps leading up to the generation of findings. In the first stage, central themes were derived from the literature review to develop a conceptual framework, which then guided the design of the interview guide for data collection in Stage 2. The interview method will be discussed in more detail in section 3.8.

Initially, the researcher planned to use group interviews to explore Vietnamese Generation Z's consumption experiences. However, a key challenge emerged after the first group interviews: despite efforts to moderate effectively, group interviews were dominated by a few articulate and more willing participants, which limited opportunities for others to share their experiences. Consequently, some participants were unable to fully express their views. To address this, the researcher shifted to one-on-one interviews, which offered deeper insights into individual customer journeys. This adaptation aligns with constructionist research principles, which emphasize the need for responsiveness and adaptability, including adjusting the “‘mode’ of data collection to suit changing circumstances and contexts...” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p.131). The interview guide for both was essentially the same and was piloted before implementation (Hassan et al., 2006; Majid et al., 2017; Williams-McBean, 2019). Learnings from the pilots are discussed and summarized in subsection 3.8.2.

As part of Stage 3, data were analyzed inductively through content analysis (see section 3.9) and organized thematically extending Hamilton et al.'s (2021) framework.



*Figure 3. 1 The research process from literature review to generating findings*

*Source: Author*

### **3.7 Sampling strategy and sample size**

This study aimed to explore Vietnamese Generation Z consumer's motivation when acquiring branded sports footwear, therefore, the researcher wanted to generate a rich and thick description of the participant's beliefs, values, and perceptions of this young generational group of consumers. Reflecting on this, this study adopted an intentionally homogeneous convenience sampling strategy, as the population was Vietnamese along with Generation Z consumers are a homogeneous group, i.e. socio-demographic grouping (Jager et al., 2017). Participants were carefully selected to reflect the Generation Z profile: Vietnamese citizens, born between 2005 and 1998, aged 18-25 years old, and employed, which meant that they had a disposable income (Nguyen et al., 2018), and a starting salary of 9 million Vietnam Dong per month (around £300 Sterling). The criteria also included that the participants needed to be residing in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam. Part of the rationale was based on the premise that Hanoi has witnessed a rapid increase in sports footwear sales amongst urban Generation Z consumers due to the recent trend in associated health and fitness activities (Euromonitor, 2020; Tran, 2020). Finally, the criteria involved only those Generation Z individuals who bought or possessed a pair of branded sports footwear.

These selection criteria matched Holloway and Galvin's (2017) premise that the sampling method needs to be focused on a pre-determined criterion. Wolcott (2001, 2006) highlighted that to give the reader confidence in the robustness of the data generated, the study needs to ensure that the background and purchasing characteristics of these participants' experiences are accurately captured. To achieve this, based on the above selection criteria, a snowball strategy was adopted. Based in Hanoi, the researcher drew on her contacts to serve as gatekeepers, which enabled the study to access other participants. Eventually, the first participant approached acted as the initial gatekeeper for reaching other potential participants. As noted by Mack et al. (2005) while it is often not possible to gather data or information from all participants of the target population, the sampling method which is adopted needs to gather sufficient data, therefore the referral of potential interviewees continued until saturation was reached when there were no new and emerging themes.

In total, 25 Vietnamese Generation Z branded sports footwear consumers from Hanoi participated in this study. DePaulo (2000) contended that the sample size should be sufficiently large enough to achieve the research aim and objectives, and to reach saturation, which was

accomplished. The participants' characteristics are presented in Table 3.2 and their personas in Appendix 2.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Name (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Monthly income</b>
001	Dung	Male	22	Accountant	£500 to £800
002	Duong	Male	19	Legal intern	less than £300
003	Ha	Female	19	Marketing intern	less than £300
004	Hai Anh	Male	22	Personal trainer	£500 to £800
005	Hieu	Male	24	Senior accountant	£800 or more
006	Hoang	Male	23	Start-up owner	£800 or more
007	Huyen	Female	20	Freelance writer	£300 to £500
008	Linh	Female	23	Senior sales assistant	£500 to £800
009	Long	Male	19	Legal intern	less than £300
010	Luong	Male	20	Legal intern	less than £300
011	Minh	Female	24	Data administrator	£500 to £800
012	Ngoc	Female	22	Legal intern	£300 to £500
013	Nhi	Female	21	Marketing assistant	£300 to £500
014	Phung	Female	20	Marketing assistant	£300 to £500
015	Quan	Male	25	Sales assistant	£300 to £500
016	Quyet	Male	20	Sales assistant	£300 to £500
017	Quynh Anh	Female	22	Office assistant	£300 to £500
018	Sy	Male	25	Concept illustrator	£500 to £800
019	Tam	Female	19	Sales intern	£300 to £500
020	Thanh	Female	24	Freelance writer	£500 to £800
021	Thao	Female	22	Interpreter	£300 to £500
022	Tien	Male	22	Marketing intern	less than £300
023	Trang	Female	20	Office assistant	less than £300
024	Tuan Anh	Male	25	Chef	£500 to £800
025	Viet Anh	Male	25	Consultant	£800 or more

*Table 3. 2 Participant information (in alphabetical order)*

*Source: Author*

### **3.8 Data Generation**

The data generation process for this study was designed to align with the research objectives and ensure the depth, richness and authenticity of the data collected. In this study, the intention was to explore the consumption motives of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers towards branded sports footwear, therefore it was critical to conduct semi-structured interviews to



achieve this aim. These semi-structured interviews were designed to ask open-ended questions, which encouraged the participants to discuss their experiences. This method enabled the participants the opportunity to express their feelings or experiences comprehensively (Giorgi, 1997). The study first adopted a group interview strategy, before deciding to use individual interviews to capture the complexity and depth of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' experiences and perspectives while acquiring branded sports footwear. The following section below will discuss in more detail the rationale for choosing these methods and the implications of changing approaches.

### 3.8.1 Justification for choosing group and individual interviews

The study initially adopted the group interview method to research Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' motivation, which involved seven participants. The group interview is a technique that involves encouraging the individual to share their experiences in a group format, therefore the interviewees were specifically selected to have similar experiences as to the given topic or theme (Thomas et al., 1995). This approach can provide information about a certain issue or theme which can generate different perspectives based on the group of individuals' viewpoints. The initial rationale for selecting a group interview format was that firstly the approach can assist the researcher in understanding the shared experiences of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers while acquiring branded sports footwear, by encouraging an interaction between the participants to elicit shared responses as to their purchasing behaviour, motivations, beliefs and values (Morgan, 1996). Therefore, this method can enable the collection of multiple participants' viewpoints simultaneously, and the discussion generated can produce a broader set of insights due to the group dynamics (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Additionally, the group interview format can produce an efficient approach while generating a shared richness of data. However, while this approach enriches the data by capturing the social interaction of the participants and providing a rich shared reality while conducting this approach, several limitations emerged. These limitations included that some of the participants were not prepared to express different perspectives due to the influence of the group dynamics, especially when their voice was being dominated by other participants, or unable to have a sufficient opportunity to speak about their experiences or perspectives, due to the limited allocated time (Morgan, 1996), as presented in section 3.6. In the study, there was evidence of peer influence within the group, with some participants keeping silent or tending to agree with others' opinions, which potentially could have affected the authenticity of the data. As the format progressed, the researcher found that coordinating multiple participants can be logistically

challenging since the group had busy or conflicting schedules, particularly due to the difference in time between the UK and Hanoi, which meant that the targeted individuals may not present (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Based on the above, the researcher decided to conduct individual interviews to explore the personal experiences and perceptions of these consumers.

Unlike the group interview format, the individual interview technique enables a comprehensive exploration of a participant's personal experiences, opinions and attitudes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The individual interviews followed a semi-structured approach, which was based on providing a structure of pre-determined questions but also the flexibility to explore emerging themes, with follow-up questions to uncover hidden layers of meaning while clarifying ambiguity, leading to a more nuanced and textured dataset (Creswell & Poth, 2017). To achieve this, the researcher asked follow-up questions based on the participant's responses, which led to more personalized and detailed data. This adaptation of the one-to-one semi-structured interview format was also participant-centric, therefore can provide a private and confidential environment for these young consumers to feel comfortable to share their personal experiences when acquiring branded sports footwear, thereby ensuring that the collection of the data met the required high-quality and rigorous standards (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This included sensitive or personal subjects, such as income or shopping habits when buying branded items, which could be disclosed by the participant recalling their experiences through providing an open and honest account, by the removal of the pressure to conform to the social dynamics of a group. Finally, although the individual interviews might be more time-consuming to collect the data compared to a group interview, this approach offered flexibility in scheduling, and permitted the interview format and timing to be tailored to individual participant's level of engagement or the richness of their responses (King & Horrocks, 2010). Therefore, the researcher decided to adopt individual one-to-one interviews for the remaining eighteen participants.

### 3.8.2 The pilot studies and the development of the interview guide

A question guideline was adopted for this study following the recommendations of Brown (2008) and Roberts (2020) who advocated the need to prepare and organize the interview structure or protocol and questions to be logical, open-ended, and sufficiently flexible (Appendix 3). This enabled the ordering or flow of the interview questions and the wording to be changed depending on the response of the participant. This flexibility allowed the researcher

to use improvised follow-up questions, to investigate, seek clarification or explore new and emerging themes (Arksey & Knight, 1999).

Two pilot studies were conducted for both the group and individual one-to-one interviews to develop the final interview guide (Appendix 4 and 5). Hassan, Schatter and Mazza (2006) highlighted the importance of the pilot study, in assisting in reviewing the format of the interview. This included the interview format's feasibility, which involved the research process, the sampling strategy, and the data collection method, which are important considerations when ensuring quality is maintained (Majid et al., 2017). Commencing with the pilot for a group interview, the researcher recognised the importance associated with ensuring that the terminology and questions asked were simplified and clearly explained to enhance the discussion. This necessity as some of the participants indicated that the terminology associated with consumer behaviour research like 'motivation' was unfamiliar to them. Therefore, the wording around motivation was simplified and prompted to develop participants' experience and motivation. Table 3.3 presented below includes the original questions that were used during the pilot study, and how these questions were changed and modified, together with a justification. Even though there were issues with the sequencing of the questions during the pilot study, the final questions followed the format of Brown (2008) and Roberts (2020), while the follow-up questions were partly changed depending on the response of the participant.

Question focus	Original question	Why the change?	Changed question
<b>Motivations of buying branded sports footwear and the influence of brands to consumers</b>	How important is branded sports footwear to you?	The researcher wanted to warm up the interview by giving interviewees' idea to understand the importance of sports footwear in their daily life.	Do you wear branded sports footwear often and why?
	How confident are you in wearing branded sports footwear?		Which factors do you consider when buying branded sports footwear? Price, quality, convenient or physical appearance? Can you please explain which factor is the most important and why?
	Does the price of the branded sports footwear influence your buying habits and why? Does price indicate quality, or the name / logo?		
	How important is the physical appearance and fashion to you? Does it increase your personal value, prestige?		
	To what extent do you seek novelty– being the first one, and keeping up with fashion?		Are you following new trend? If so, why?
<b>Counterfeit and authentic comparison</b>	Would you or have considered wearing counterfeit branded sports footwear?	The researcher wanted to find out which brands are most popular worn for counterfeit and reasons for choosing them, how the participants react to counterfeit shoes.	Have you ever worn counterfeit shoes? Which brands and why did you choose it?
	Does wearing counterfeit branded sports footwear fulfil your desire to wear branded goods? Social status, keeping up with fashion, seem to be fashionable?		
	Is counterfeit branded sports footwear better value financially and socially?	The researcher believed that the comparison between price and quality will help to understand the behaviour of participant, giving them the opportunity to explain	Can you please compare the quality and price between counterfeit and authentic shoes? Do you feel confident while wearing counterfeit shoes
	Is counterfeit branded sports footwear a consideration? Would you buy counterfeit branded sports footwear if the original authentic is too expensive?		

<b>Question focus</b>	<b>Original question</b>	<b>Why the change?</b>	<b>Changed question</b>
<b>Media to inform the acquisition behaviour</b>	What media do you use to search or inform you as to branded shoe footwear?	The researcher believed that the media to inform the acquisition behaviour, both for new customers and loyalty customer	Do you prefer to go to store or buying online and why? Compare the price, quality, customer service?
<b>Influences of buying motivation</b>	Who are the influencers / medium influence in you making your decisions in buying branded sports footwear?	The researcher found that the questions need to be more specific to encourage the participants	Do you get influenced by your family/friends/KOLs/ online reviews for your acquisition behaviour? And why, which one is the most important?

*Table 3. 3 Question changes during pilot studies*

*Source: Author*

From the preliminary data generation perspective, the researcher found that there was some data redundancy, and several themes generated from the interviews were unrelated to the research aim during the pilot study. To address this, the interview data was constantly reviewed and then linked back to the existing literature by adopting Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey model. The pilot study also enabled the researcher to determine the average duration of the interview format and provided the means to rehearse the approach along with the data collection strategy, which was then used for the main study. This was particularly important for the group interview, as the format required the researcher to act as a moderator to ensure that the participants kept to the theme being discussed while attempting to ensure that everyone in the group was involved.

The usage and importance of a pilot study were supported by Williams-McBean (2019) who provided some examples where a pilot study might not be necessary because the entire process of the data collection strategy had been previously conducted, but also concluded that a pilot study is essential for novice researchers to improve their confidence, which was relevant to this study. If the researcher is unfamiliar with conducting interviews, this can lead to an imbalance of power between the researcher and the interviewee. If this occurs, the interviewee may feel disempowered, then they may be less willing to be open to disclosing their experiences. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) also noted the potential consequences of the researcher having influential power and control over the research process compared to the interviewee, which can lead to a possible bias in the interviewee's response. In using a pilot study, for the one-to-one interviews, the researcher was able to rehearse and then reflect on how the power relationship could be addressed. The importance that emerged from the pilot study was the main study would be conducted in a neutral environment and the interviews initially focused on asking non-sensitive or perceived personal questions. The pilot study also ensured that the interviewee was given sufficient time to reflect before they answered a question, therefore reducing the interviewee feeling pressurized to answer another question, without fully addressing the previous one. Table 3.4 below presents the learnings of the researcher from both pilot studies.

Aim of the pilot	Lessons learned including emergent issues	Changes made
Testing the interview protocol and guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Framing of questions: Several questions needed rephrasing to facilitate participants' understanding.</li> <li>• Content of questions: The need for follow-up questions to seek clearer understanding</li> <li>• Sequencing of questions: The ordering of the questions was changed dependent on the previous response of the participant.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wording around motivation was simplified and prompts added to encourage an additional insight.</li> <li>• Revised the questions employed in this study as presented in Appendix 4 and 5.</li> <li>• Main questions and interview guide is followed commencing with neutral questions, but the flexibility to explore new and emerging themes.</li> </ul>
Generating preliminary data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of data: Some of the data was redundant and not relevant.</li> <li>• Scope of themes: Some of the themes covered were not related to the research aim.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview data was reviewed and linked back to existing literature</li> <li>• Adopting Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey model to ensure that the themes generated were relevant.</li> </ul>
Identifying logistical problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duration: for group interview was estimated to be 1 hour 30 minutes. For individual one-to-one interviews it was estimated to be 45 minutes to 1 hour.</li> <li>• Location / Medium: online via Zoom.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determined that 1 hour 15 minutes was sufficient for group interview.</li> <li>• Determined that 45 minutes is sufficient for the one-to-one individual interviews</li> <li>• Location /Medium: online via Zoom and the remaining three participants in a neutral physical environment.</li> </ul>
Gaining confidence in interviewing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant recruitment: group recruitment was difficult as some participants found it hard to find a mutual scheduled time.</li> <li>• Communications: some participant felt shy or reluctant to share their experiences or hard to understand the question or terminology used.</li> <li>• Ethical challenges: ensuring that the participant's viewpoint was respected.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage and explain the difficult terminology to the participants, using follow-up questions</li> <li>• Change from group to individual interviews to gain greater in-depth understanding of their experience</li> <li>• Ensure the confidentiality of the data by opting for one-to-one interviews.</li> </ul>

*Table 3. 4 Learnings from Pilot Studies*

*Source: Author*

### 3.9 Data Analysis

The data analysis stage which occurred after conducting the interviews, involved the transcription and analysis process with reviewing the qualitative data. As mentioned in section 3.8, the study first adopted group interviews and then one-to-one interview methods, which provided a different focus and insight in reviewing the data, there was a recognition that both datasets were able to provide a rich insight into the experiences of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers. Based on this, the data generated using both approaches were then analyzed together.

The choice of treating the data generated from the group and then the one-to-one individual interviews as one dataset was informed by Morgan (1996), who noted that the combination of individual and group interview data can enable a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. While group interview generated a collective narrative, which highlighted shared experiences and the social dynamics of buying branded sports items amongst the participants, the one-to-one semi-structured interviews offered an in-depth exploration of the personal experiences and perspectives, whereby providing more intimate and nuanced data which did not emerge in the group setting (Barbour, 2007). Therefore, by combining the two datasets, the researcher constructed a richer and more layered understanding of the consumption motives of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers when acquiring branded sports footwear. Finlay (2002) highlighted that the benefits of combining the group and individual datasets can encourage a reflexive approach when analysing the power dynamics, social interaction of the participants and the interview environment which all can influence the data collection process. For instance, when interviewing Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in the group interview, several of the participants were influenced by the peer dynamics, whereas the one-to-one interviews yielded more personal and unfiltered accounts. By acknowledging these characteristics, the researcher was able to produce a more contextually sensitive and nuanced analysis, thereby enhancing the authenticity of the qualitative data (Denzin, 1978). The treatment of both sets as one body of data, therefore, enabled the researcher to capture and accurately represent the complexities of these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' experiences, from both the collective voices in the group setting and the individual perspectives with the one-to-one interviews, providing a comprehensive representation of the participant's experiences for branded sports footwear.



### 3.9.1 Transcription

Following the interviews, the first step of the analysis and interpretation strategy was to transcribe the recorded data into a written format, as advocated by Wengraf (2001). The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, the native language of the participants and the researcher. The Vietnamese transcribed interview data was then coded before being translated into English, which followed the transcription conventions of Azevedo et al. (2017), to ensure that the meaning and authenticity of the interview data were not lost. The interview recordings were repeatedly listened to, and this continued throughout the coding process, to ensure that words and phrases were accurately captured, which is presented in Appendix 11.

### 3.9.2 Justification for choosing Content Analysis

Before choosing the content analysis approach, consideration was given to using a thematic or template analysis (see Table 3.5 for the comparison). Thematic analysis can be used for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021), which involves the identification and searching for common themes or threads that extend across an entire interview, or sets of interviews (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000). In contrast, template analysis can be used as an approach to code the data textually using a template. The main difference between these two approaches is that the thematic analysis tends to define themes at the latter phase of the process, while with the template analysis, the themes are produced at the initial stage which guides future coding and template development. Therefore, template analysis can be less flexible as the coding is organized in a structured framework and can potentially overlook or miss unexpected themes (King, 2004, 2012). Furthermore, the thematic analysis is considered a relatively descriptive approach, which may not offer sufficient depth or the necessary tools to uncover more nuanced, latent meanings embedded in the data for the interpretivist researcher to use (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

After careful consideration, the study decided to adopt a content analysis strategy to extend existing knowledge from a collectivist perspective, specifically focusing on Vietnamese Generation Z, building on Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey framework. The content analysis provided the flexibility but also a systematic approach to code the data based on pre-defined categories (Neuendorf, 2017; Krippendorff, 2018). Compared to grounded theory, which requires the researcher not to code in advance any emerging themes from the literature,

the content analysis permitted the researcher more flexibility to code data while enabling the characteristics of the language and meaning used by the participants in the transcripts to emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Therefore, this study used qualitative content analysis to code and categorize the data which enabled the findings to be systematically classified and put into a logical order, which assisted the analytical process. As the data collection proceeded, the approach was subject to constant revision, which meant that the process involved when new themes emerged, they were merged, deleted or created. Therefore, in this study, the revision process included analysing the interview transcripts which changed the theme, and the position in the coding framework. As the process progressed, consideration was also given to the possibility of introducing new codes or altering or changing the level of existing codes in the framework. However, one of the main weaknesses has been the process of coding the content without misreading or reading into the data perspectives which were not present. To address this, the study, therefore, as the data was coded was then frequently returned, to determine the key themes.

NVivo was considered as to whether it should be used to code or to analyze the data, and, during the early stages an attempt was made to use this qualitative software. However, NVivo was rejected. This decision was firstly based on the intention of the researcher to immerse into the data and notice subtle shifts in tone or context that automated coding might overlook, leading to deeper reflexive insights, which is crucial in qualitative analysis (Finlay, 2002). Secondly, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggested that while NVivo can enhance efficiency for managing large datasets, this process can risk decontextualizing the data, stripping it of its original meaning or relational context. Meanwhile, manually analysing data allows the researcher to maintain this contextual integrity, ensuring the nuances of participant narratives or interactions are not lost.

	<b>Content analysis</b> (Adapted from Neuendorf, 2017)	<b>Thematic analysis</b> (Adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021)	<b>Template analysis</b> (Adapted from King, 2004, 2012)
<b>Purpose</b>	<p><i>Quantitative research:</i> to systematically quantify and determine the frequency of words or themes.</p> <p><i>Qualitative research:</i> to describe the content of textual data by identifying the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts.</p>	To identify, analyze and report patterns or theme within data.	To provide a flexible technique for thematic analysis that uses a template to create a set of codes to analyze textual data.
<b>Approach</b>	<p><i>Quantitative research:</i> the counting the frequency of themes and words.</p> <p><i>Qualitative research:</i> identifying and interpreting themes or words as to the meaning of the content.</p>	Primarily qualitative, focusing on identify themes to capture important aspect of the data.	A form of thematic analysis but involves more structure using templates.
<b>Process</b>	<p><i>Quantitative research:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Define categories to group the data deductively.</li> <li>2. Coding through using a pre-coding scheme based on pre-determined categories or emergent themes.</li> <li>3. Quantify and count the frequency of each category.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Familiarization: reading and re-reading the data to gain a deep familiarity.</li> <li>2. Generating initial codes: systematically code the interesting feature of the data.</li> <li>3. Searching for themes: collating codes into potential themes.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Preliminary coding: identifying initial codes from a subset of data or prior knowledge.</li> <li>2. Developing the template: organizing these codes into a hierarchical structure or template.</li> <li>3. Refining the template: using the template to code the entire data set,</li> </ol>

	<p>4. Seek patterns and trends which are based on the frequencies.</p> <p><i>Qualitative research:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create categories to group the data inductively when themes emerge.</li> <li>2. Coding through using a posteriori inductive strategy based on new emergent themes.</li> <li>3. Interpret the data as to the content and meaning.</li> <li>3. Seek patterns and trends which are based on the content of the interview data.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Reviewing themes: checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set.</li> <li>5. Defining and naming themes: refining and generating clear definition and name for each theme.</li> <li>6. Writing up: producing a report of the analysis with coherent narrative.</li> </ol>	<p>allowing for modifications as new insights emerge.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Finalising the template: finalizing the structure once it adequately represents the data set.</li> <li>5. Interpreting data: interpreting the data and developing the findings based on the final template.</li> </ol>
<b>Key features</b>	<p><i>Quantitative research:</i></p> <p>Focus on quantifiable data. Systematic and replicable. Can handle large volumes of data. Categories can be pre-defined deductively from existing knowledge.</p> <p><i>Qualitative research:</i></p> <p>Focus on understanding the data.</p>	<p>Focus on identifying themes with flexibility. Emphasis on the depth and richness of the data. Can be used across various epistemological and theoretical approaches.</p>	<p>Begins with priori codes with pre-existing framework. Allows more modification and additions of insight within a structured framework. Particularly use for large, complex data set with structured approach.</p>

	<p>Focus on inductively interpreting the data as to the content and themes.</p> <p>Categories created by a posteriori strategy based on emerging themes and knowledge.</p>		
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*Table 3. 5 Content analysis, thematic analysis and template analysis*

*Source: Author and informed by Neuendorf (2017), Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021), and King (2004, 2012)*

### **3.10 Research Quality**

Throughout the study, the researcher ensured that the research was reliable, valid, dependable, and trustworthy, therefore enhancing the projects' robustness (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

#### **3.10.1 Dependability and Reliability**

Research dependability or reliability tends to refer to the question of whether data generation techniques and analytical procedures used can produce consistent and robust results. For the study, which is subjective in nature, the term reliability is often changed to be dependable. The dependability of the study was gained through the data collection strategy of ensuring that the interviews provided accurate answers and insights, where the participants were permitted and encouraged to reflect, then with the coding process this was accurately conducted and reviewed without the researcher imposing any bias.

#### **3.10.2 Authenticity and Validity**

In a quantitative study, valid means that the results could be considered reliable, and therefore the findings can be accurately measured to ensure that the data is consistent. In achieving this, for a quantitative study, the approach seeks to have a representative sample of the entire population to create a generalized outcome. Therefore, it is important to consider the validity and reliability of the data collection strategy and then the instruments or techniques used. From the outset of this study, the researcher recognized that the sample size was seen as being too small to make generalized assumptions, and therefore could only be used to inform the main qualitative study and provide an indication of the experiences, perceptions, and reflection of business continuity planning based on a select few, as opposed to validating the literature review through the findings of the interviews.

Being a qualitative study, the term validity is not the correct terminology, instead, authenticity can be used, as it is closely linked to qualitative studies (Saunders et al., 2011). For the research to be seen as authentic, it is necessary to consider credibility, which relates to how believable or trustworthy the findings are. For research to be credible, the study needs to represent accurately the experience, perceptions, and reflections of those being interviewed in the

reporting and interpretation of the data. This was achieved by the researcher who frequently returned and checked the data and narrative, constantly reviewing and verifying the content. Linked closely to authenticity and credibility is the transferability of the findings. Transferability relates to how future researchers can access the findings and use them for their future projects, which can be problematic for qualitative projects, as the study are often very subjective, individualized, and focused. It should be noted that transferability, for writers such as Baxter and Eyles (1997), is less relevant to a qualitative researcher compared to credibility, as the term is more quantitative in nature. Unlike transferability, dependability is essential for a qualitative research project to ensure that the findings and outcomes are robust. With dependability the focus is on showing and providing the confidence to the reader as to how the data can be trusted and that there is integrity in the narrative. Dependability is also related to how the findings can be applied potentially to other events or situations.

Finally, confirmability for qualitative research is related to the degree to which the findings generated from the participants are an accurate representation of their viewpoint or perspective and have not been distorted by the researcher. Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that honesty, authenticity, and truthfulness are central aspects of any qualitative study and provide the reader with the confidence in the robustness of the findings. To ensure that this occurred, the participants were offered the opportunity to review the transcripts to confirm the reliability and validity of the findings. However, although there was an initial reluctance to have their perspectives documented, none of the participants requested a copy of the transcripts.

### **3.11 Research Ethics**

Irrespective of the research approach, research ethics has significant importance and implications for any project. For a qualitative researcher, undertaking research with participants always presents the researcher with challenges. The following section will set out and discuss the ethical issues considered and followed. The research was conducted within the Principles and Procedures framework of the University of Gloucestershire, which is based on British Educational Research Association (BERA) and the British Sociological Association (BSA). The University sets out that the researcher has several responsibilities including to ensure that the physical, social, and psychological well-being of research participants should not be adversely affected by the research or the researcher (University of Gloucestershire, 2021) with the participant giving freely informed consent. Reflecting this, the study informed the

participants prior to the study, the nature and the aim of the research, the reasons for the study and the usage of the data afterwards. This was particularly important as the participants were initially very reluctant to disclose their experiences. To provide assurance, the participants' anonymity was assured, as was the assurance of confidentiality of the data so that their organization, role, and profile were not revealed.

The power relationship between the participant and the researcher was carefully considered, as often the participant sees the interview as potentially intimidating when commencing the process. Often the researcher is seen as being in control or having a higher degree of influence or power, as they possess the information about the study, and for the participants, who while possessing the knowledge and experience which the researcher is seeking to find, still have the perception or belief that they are still not fully aware of what is expected. To address this, the researcher showed an awareness of this potential power relationship by firstly sending out in advance the central themes to be discussed, then throughout the interviews maintained open communications to enable the interviewee to explain their perspective without any interjection or criticism (Bravo-Moreno, 2003).

All participants were given the right and the opportunity not to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with or had the right to withdraw at any time during the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The participants were also reminded, particularly during sensitive or reflective parts of the interviews, of their freedom to answer the question or to stop the interview.

Special attention was given to the group interview format. The researcher ensured that each participant had the same opportunity to participate, and no one person dominated. To assist in the process, a pre-determined and agreed time allocated per person was agreed by the group to speak on each theme. Each participant was asked to respect each other's perspective.

In summary, all the participants were provided with a written summary of the research purpose and structure. The participants were asked whether they understood and agreed before their participation commenced. The anonymity of the participants was maintained throughout the study, in which their identities were pseudonyms instead of their real names. There was also the inclusion of minimal personal information provided in the findings therefore confidentiality



again was maintained. Permission to record and transcribe the interviews was sought on an individual basis. Finally, the recordings were handled with care and stored securely.

### **3.12 Methodological Limitations**

As the study was based on a sample of twenty-five participants, the findings can only indicate and provide a potential insight into Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' preferences when acquiring branded sports footwear, rather than providing a representative depiction of this entire generation. However, it should be noted that this sample size allowed the study to generate a sufficient richness of data as the interview saturation was reached with twenty-two participants.

As mentioned above, the robustness of the data and the credibility and justification of the research are important and often depend on identifying and highlighting clear gaps in existing knowledge, then ensuring that the perceptions and experiences of the participants and the researcher can represent the multiple realities of the interviewees. To achieve credibility and to justify how the data is interpreted, the strategy adopted focused on Generation Z's preferences for buying branded sports footwear. Consideration was given to the language and terminology used, reflecting this, the study was conducted in Vietnamese. The data was also analyzed and coded in Vietnamese to avoid the meaning being lost before it was translated into English.

Consideration was also given to the reliability of the research so that the methods, materials, and settings of the study were considered and reflected upon throughout the study. This included ensuring that the data was dependable and authentic. To achieve this, the interviews were conducted in a neutral place or online, and then during the coding process, the interview data was constantly reviewed and linked back to the performance data and existing literature.

A key challenge of a study being based on a qualitative perspective is that the method tends to produce a large amount of rich but interesting data. Therefore, the challenge is often to separate the data into themes which can be problematic. Easterby-Smith et al. (2008), argue that meaning is often generated from counting frequencies, but this is not qualitative in nature. To address this, the study adopted an inductive approach to the coding process. This strategy

enabled the core coding to be completed first and then for the new themes to be revisited to ensure all themes were reviewed.

### **3.13 Chapter Summary**

This study methodology can be summarized firstly, in terms of its ontology and epistemology, as being subjective in nature. It involved a sample of twenty-five Vietnamese Generation Z participants and was composed of equal number of males and females. These twenty-five participants then made up the two research approaches, a group interview which was made up of seven individuals and eighteen other individuals who participated in one-to-one semi-structured interviews. The study was informed by Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey, enabling the exploration of consumer motivations along the full consumption cycle. Insights fed into the design of the research approach and instruments. The interview data were analyzed manually, using a content analysis approach. Pilot interviews were conducted in semi-structured interviews, which provided additional confidence in the interview guide and helped refine the questions and format. Finally, the ethics of the study were considered as to the research's credibility or trustworthiness, including the role of the researcher, its relevance, dependability, and authenticity.

# Chapter Four

## Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

In addressing Hamilton et al.'s (2021) emergent research question of *how do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientated, affect the customer journey?*, the focus of the study has been to determine what motivates Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in acquiring branded sports footwear? The project therefore was aligned to the core three phases of the customer journey as proposed by Hamilton et al. (2021): the pre-decision, decision, and post-decision phases.

The study conducted group and one-to-one semi-structured interviews to focus on identifying how the social drivers and past experiences influenced the Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' purchasing behaviour towards branded sports footwear. Next, the study focused on the extent to which this informs the final part of the journey, the post-decision phase which then will echo into future decisions. In addressing these themes, the study focused on identifying and investigating whether these applied to Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, before determining what this consumer group was seeking throughout their customer journey.

This study, informed by the literature review, will also focus on why young Asia-Pacific consumers, more specifically Vietnamese Generation Z customers, are seeking to acquire branded fashion items to determine whether this group have certain preferences when buying branded sports footwear, including cultural connections or influences which informs this young Vietnamese consumer on their journey. The findings generated from the interviews are presented as to the perceptions and experiences of these consumers as to their buying behaviour, which is based on Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey. The Chapter commences with an exploration of the motivational attributes of each stage of the customer journey as these Vietnamese Generation Z acquired branded sports footwear, which includes the pre-decision, decision, and post-decision phases, as presented in Table 4.1 below.

Phase	Main theme	Sub-theme	Description
<b>Pre-decision phase</b>	Identity-related motivators	Self-identity	Closely aligned to self-congruity (Sirgy, 1985) and symbolic consumption (Kinch, 1967; Solomon, 1983), as to how the motivation of the consumer seeks a branded item to meet their associated identity needs and projected image.
		Social status	The seeking of social status which represents how the branded item is aligned to the individual's persona within their peer and social group, which is related to symbolic consumption and meeting social values (Solomon, 1983; Sheth et al., 1991).
		Social belonging	Closely associated with the social value (Sheth et al., 1991) and symbolic interaction theory (Solomon, 1983) of wanting to conform to the prevailing group and social norms and the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020) as to the desire for social belonging.
		Personal value: Environment	Related to symbolic consumption theory of meeting emotional and functional values (Solomon, 1983; Sheth et al., 1991), where the individual seeks to meet their

		environmental lifestyle, aligned to the underlying sociocultural dynamics of Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism in Vietnam (Yau, 1988).
	Personal value: Counterfeit goods	Seeking an authentic item which is functional as to its durability and quality, while respecting the global brands investment, informed potentially by the ideals of Confucianism (Sheth et al., 1991).
Product and brand-related motivators	Manufacturing	How the product is manufactured from an environmental and social perspective.
	Quality	The functional value of seeking a durable item which is reliable, durable, and ultimately cost effective (Sheth et al., 1991).
Companion-related motivators	Online reviews and key opinion leaders (KOLs)	The usage of online reviews to search for information which represents their projected persona, and the extent to which KOLs and celebrities influence the consumer pre-decision phase (Hamilton et al., 2021).
	Friends, peers and family	The influence of peers and friends in their social group to confirm their pre-decision choice. Included is the influence of family members, such as a parent who acts as a trusted

			source, but also as a ‘financier’ and potential ‘decision-maker’ (Masterson et al., 2017). This is also aligned with the self-determination theory as to the motivational intention of an individual’s personality and social behaviour can include the role and influence of peers and social group (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020).
<b>Decision phase</b>	Decision-making unit		The activity of making the final acquisition and the role of trusted companions (Hamilton et al., 2021).
<b>Post-decision phase</b>	Brand trust		The extent to which the consumer after the acquisition then trusts the brand, which then informs future decisions (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Keller, 2012).
	Brand loyalty and respect		The level of loyalty and respect which a brand provides in the post-decision phase (Hamilton et al., 2021).
	Word of mouth (WOM)		How does the consumer inform others of their positive or negative experiences to their peers, friends and family (Hamilton et al., 2021). This includes the usage of social media to provide anonymity to ‘save face’ following a negative experience.

<b>Emergent- overarching themes</b>	Acculturation		The influence of the sociocultural dynamics of Vietnam, including the traits of saving face, trust and respect, which is closely associated with Confucianism (Eriksson et al., 2017; Sheth et al., 1991).
	Preference of localized and personalized projects		The emergence of seeking localized products as opposed to a globalized manufactured brand, but also being able to project their unique Vietnamese culture by the self-extension of their identity.

*Table 4. 1 Emergent themes*

*Source: Author*

Finally, this Chapter presents in greater depth emergent themes, which include the acculturation characteristics of this group of consumers, together with their motivation to seek a localized and personalized product. The next section will specifically focus on the pre-decision phase.

## **4.2 The pre-decision phase**

### 4.2.1 Theme One: Identity-related motivators

The commencement of the customer journey is the pre-decision phase, which symbolizes how a consumer becomes aware and then engages with a particular brand. In the study of Hamilton et al. (2021), the pre-decision phase comprises of three stages, including motivation, information search and evaluation. To present the data, there are three main categories of motivation which have emerged from the interviews: identity-related motivators, product and brand-related motivators and companion-related motivators.

The next section will focus on the motivation stage of the pre-decision phase of the customer journey looking at the consumer's identity-related motivators of the consumer, which will be presented in four sub-themes: self-identity, social status, social belonging, and personal values which include the importance of the environment and acquiring counterfeit goods.

#### *4.2.1.1 Identity-related motivator: Self-identity*

Drawing on Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey, at the commencement of the experience is the motivational stage, where the individual can be influenced by symbolic interaction of their experience, for example as to seeking or meeting their perceived values, including those which are functional, social or emotional, which may be distal or proximal. From a brand consumption perspective, Vigneron and Johnson (2004) highlighted how branded items are often associated with self-indulgence. An individual consumer is considered to display hedonistic tendencies when looking for or seeking personal gratification, some form of reward or personal satisfaction through the acquisition and consumption of products, or alternatively meeting their intrinsic aspirations. For the Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in this study, they were motivated by social status satisfaction, such as being a follower of the latest trend,



whereby displaying hedonistic traits. The participants also revealed a strong self-identity of wanting to seek an item which fulfilled their personal intrinsic self-gratification needs. The findings therefore revealed the extent to which these consumers were concerned about their perceived social and individual values, which influenced their level of motivation and intended purchasing behaviour, which included a self-seeking desire trait for searching for a product which was aligned to their personal need.

Ozkan (2017) highlighted that fashion was one of the unique areas that Generation Z prioritized as a means of achieving their self-identity, which was also present among Vietnamese Generation Z consumers. This was illustrated by Linh who recalled her motivation to buy a pair of branded sports footwear because the item aligned with her active personality, but she was also critically aware that the shoe design needed to be not too ostentatious, while still offering her various design options, which could reflect her persona based on her projected image or ideal self, which is closely aligned to self-congruity theory, which refers to the degree of synergy between an individual's perception of a brand or product and the perception they have of themselves (Sirgy, 1985):

*“I prefer sports footwear as it represents an active persona, with designs that reflect my personal characteristics. I especially choose branded products since there are various styles to select. Sometimes, what you wear, like the style, the design or the brand speaks for you. I am an active sportsperson; therefore, this is my projected image. My footwear lets others know who I am; I don't even have to talk much, it is more about the shoes you are wearing, as they show a lot about who you are”* (Linh, 23-years-old).

Like Linh, but from a more fashion perspective, Duong's choice of branded sports shoes was based on the item being fashion-centric. This fashionable style focus was important for him to gain respect amongst his peers by wearing this form of footwear, which was related to the symbolic motives and desire to meet his identity and social value of being associated with hip-hop:

*“I think branded sports footwear is very trendy and shows my personality to my friends. I feel more confident and cooler while wearing them. I don't change my style very often*

*as all my selection of shoes is designed to be in hip-hop design. But they are still fashionable” (Duong, 19 -years-old).*

Dung saw branded sports footwear not only suitable as a fashion statement, but also reflective of his lifestyle representing his persona, and underscoring their symbolic value. For Dung, the shoes projected his self-image, therefore the function of the sports footwear was not simply for being used in a sporting activity, like Dung, but a statement of his projected lifestyle, as can be seen below:

*“I just find that wearing branded sports footwear allows me to show others my interest in the hip-hop scene. I feel more confident about expressing my interests and personal characteristics with people around me when I wear these types of shoes” (Dung, 22 -years-old).*

Illustrative artist Sy found that there was nothing more important than showing his personality through his clothing choices including footwear. As an illustrator, his external appearance was critical to establish his own personal brand and self-image, also informed by his social identity or value. For Sy, the purchasing decisions he made for fashion items were partly influenced by his social community and clients, which also reflected his creative job. This was seen with Sy’s closing comment about not being too bland or extreme:

*“As an illustrator, I care a lot about my appearance because most of my clients come from my online platform. My normal lifestyle is important in influencing my artwork. The clients do not only see your profile, but they also see you as you really are, how you really dress and how you actually fit into your community. Therefore, the shoes I choose must match my fashion tastes, my personality and my online presence as an artist. But nothing too extreme or standing out, but also not too plain or boring” (Sy, 25-years-old).*

For Nhi, her taste in shoes and style varied and changed over time. Nhi recalled that her fashion tastes and items of clothing had evolved, but her current consumption motive was informed by her current lifestyle of living and working in Hanoi. This indicated that the consumption values proposed by Sheth et al. (1991) were independent but also changed over time, which was demonstrated by Nhi's shift from seeking social values to a product which was more functional:

*“My styles and therefore footwear have changed over the years. For example, when I was in high school, I only wore shoes that were very simple, so I was not different from anyone else. But when I get older, I choose those branded shoes with a special feature on them or limited editions, so I feel special. The shoes, of course, have to show my personality and my lifestyle of working and living here in Hanoi”* (Nhi, 21-years-old).

Some of the participants did not think or consider branded sports footwear as being a central feature in projecting their personality or being an indication of their fashion tastes, therefore considering the item to be almost homogenous. Part of the reason for this perception was that the footwear did not accurately represent their personality. Quyet stated that he would be comfortable in flip-flops or sandals and that other shoes still made him confident, but on reflection, some branded footwear did symbolize or represent part of his self-image, therefore he was motivated still to buy branded footwear. Quyet's choice and perspective were primarily driven and influenced by wanting to fulfil a particular functional value.

*“I am motivated when buying shoes for the need to feel comfortable. But my definition of confidence is sometimes as to whether I feel comfortable or not wearing the clothing item. Also, I don't think that shoes make me confident. Even if I wear flip flops or sandals, as long as they are comfortable to wear, I am more than happy to wear them”* (Quyet, 20-years-old).

Ngoc agreed with Quyet's opinion, as her main motivation and preference for shoes was for multi-purpose usage:

*“I am not really motivated to buy branded sports shoes as they do not really show or represent me, my personality or uniqueness. For me, I tend to buy fewer shoes, but they can be used for multiple purposes and match any outfit. Therefore, it [branded sports footwear] doesn’t really need to show my personal characteristics because if that pair shows too much about me, such as too colourful or too many features on it, I think it is not practical to buy, and it is not really me. I prefer something simple” (Ngoc, 22 - years-old).*

From above, it is possible to summarise that Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in this study potentially are motivated by various internal self-expression motives, informed by the consumer seeking social value. The grouping bought branded sports footwear for a variety of reasons including the means to express their personality within and representing their social community but also due to comfort and being fashionable. However, some Vietnamese Generation Z consumers preferred and sought more functional attributes which were closely associated with the consumption values proposed by Sheth et al. (1991), whereby selecting a simple style and were less focused on expressing their self-image but instead sought footwear which was more practical or functional.

#### *4.2.1.2 Identity-related motivator: Social status*

Closely aligned to the theme of self-identity is the topic of social status and from a symbolic interactionist perspective, the social value was particularly dominant. Thompson and Norton (2011), and Kirmani and Ferraro (2017) suggested that consumers can be motivated to consume branded products which are associated with their social status or identity. For Sy, he highlighted that he felt more confident when wearing an expensive pair of branded Nike shoes, as it represented his financial status.

*“...For me, the value of the shoes increases my social status. If I wear shoes around £200 like Nike Airforce, people will know the cost of these shoes therefore I feel more confident and classier, as it raises my social status in their eyes” (Sy, 25 -years-old).*

Viet Anh stated that others tended to judge his appearance based on assessing his personal and financial circumstances, particularly amongst those in his social community, like the workplace. Therefore, Viet Anh was motivated to acquire branded sports shoes as its logo or brand was a representation and association of the image he intended to project. One of the terms used in his peer group to indicate social and financial status was being called a ‘sneakerhead’, as it represented those who were obsessed with wearing branded sports footwear for everyday use, indicating their financial stability:

*“I feel more confident when I wear branded sports footwear because of its logo. Because they [the branded item] are a well-known brand, so everyone will know the logo since they are high-quality and fashionable. Especially if they are “sneakerheads”, when they see the branded shoes, they know that you are accomplished and have financial stability. As I’m an education consultant I usually go out to meet my work partners or clients, so the footwear represents my role, self-image and my social image” (Viet Anh, 25-years-old).*

Trang tended to follow the trend of the brands she liked but also ensured that her appearance was fashionable. However, to maintain this projected persona of being fashionable, Trang would seek advice from her peers, friends and social media, indicating the importance she placed on personal style and taste, but also the reliance on distal and proximal influences.

*“I like the update of the new trends of Nike brands. My friends also follow these latest trends, and they will tell me which trend is popular and recommend them to me. I don’t want to be old-fashioned so I will buy similar styles to be like my friends. A good, branded pair of sports footwear can show others my taste and my social position” (Trang, 20 -years-old).*

Drawing on his past personal experience of purchasing branded sports footwear, Hieu identified the main motivational reasons why well-known brands were embraced by most of their peer group, as branded manufacturers often sold hidden value or extras in their products.

This drawing on the past indicated the presence potentially of a duality of a conditional value, which is based on the result of previous experiences (Sheth et al., 1991) and seeking of a social value of conformity within the peer group, which indicated the potential influence of the collective nature of the Vietnamese culture on this group of young consumers.

*“Besides the quality of the products, the brand also sells social status, the image of financial stability, and a wealthy appearance. For example, sometimes they release a limited line of a particular shoe style. This gives the client the feeling that their shoes are unique and personally made for them, so they [the customers] can project their status to others”* (Hieu, 24 -years-old).

However, for this group of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, there was also a shared opinion that the desire and motivation to project to others their social status could also bring about negative consequences, such as paying for something which was unaffordable (Loureiro & Araújo, 2014). Viet Anh shared his personal experience that even though he bought a pair of branded trainers, he then realized the item had cost him most of his disposable income for that month, which made it difficult for him to live in a metro city like Hanoi. Therefore, after the purchase, he decided to resell the shoes even though he was happy with his original acquisition, which was closely associated with brand consumption and relationship motivation theories, in which the result can be negative if the experience does not fulfil or meet their expectations (Park et al., 2010), in this case, this was the associated extrinsic high expense compared to the intrinsic benefit (Deci et al., 2006):

*“Before I worked in a very posh office in central. My colleagues were usually wearing nice clothes and shoes because our clients are high-end. So, I spent most of my salary that month just to buy a pair of Gucci trainers, around 700 US dollars. When I bought them, I was happy but couldn't save any money that month. I even ate instant noodles for the rest of the month. Later I resold the shoes because I only wore them twice and I needed the most to survive”* (Viet Anh, 25 -years-old).

Based on the above, Vietnamese Generation Z consumers were motivated by their perceived social status or identity which were projected by their motivation to acquire branded sports footwear. There was an overall awareness of the product's price and quality, which then provided this group with the confidence to acquire these branded items to partially represent their financial status. However, where the acquisition of a branded item was based on social values together with hedonistic motives, there could also be negative consequences particularly if the individual was unable to afford the item. The outcome of the decision could potentially influence the individual not to repurchase a particular brand in the future, a theme associated with the post-decision phase of the customer journey, indicating that the model of Hamilton et al. (2021) is not static.

#### *4.2.1.3 Identity-related motivator: Social belonging*

Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey included the theme of motivation, which was directly influenced by the proximity of social drivers, which are associated with the need or desire to affiliate or match with others (Sheth et al., 1991). This desire and motivation can be related to an individual consumer wanting to belong to a particular social grouping. For Thao, one of her motives for buying branded sports footwear was not to impress, but rather to feel she belonged to her social grouping. Her motivation to acquire the branded sports footwear was her perception that she felt like an outsider in her social community, and to fit in she needed to conform and modify her fashion decisions:

*“I feel more confident when buying and wearing branded sports footwear. But not to impress anyone, I just feel like I belonged. I'm just like everyone else. I'm afraid of feeling I am abandoned or outside of my friendship community. They have the same shoes as me, so I don't have to think about being different” (Thao, 22-years-old).*

Like Thao, Tam expressed her opinion about being judged by others as to her fashion and style. To avoid this perceived judgement, Tam had acquired a particular branded sports footwear that conformed and was worn by most of her social grouping. Therefore, the motivation was the need to be accepted as part of her social group.

*“Because everyone wears Adidas or Puma, such as my friends, so I will change to be more like them. Some people are quite judgmental, and I don't want them to be more*

*curious about me. So, my motivation is I try to wear footwear like everyone else, not too stand-out so that when they talk, they won't have a chance to judge my outfit"* (Tam, 19-years-old).

This was the same for Viet Anh, as his purchasing decision was informed by the need to socially belong and fit into his workplace, but interestingly was also motivated by wanting to project a self-image that reflected his personality, which can be challenging.

*"As I said previously, I had chosen a pair of Gucci shoes because I wanted to be like my co-workers at the time. Everyone was following a similar dress code or outfit so that they didn't feel like an outsider. But it also depends on your workplace. Some of my friends work in Marketing, and they can wear whatever they want, there are no specific rules, but just be respectful"* (Viet Anh, 25 -years-old).

To summarise the above, Vietnamese Generation Z consumers were motivated to acquire branded sports footwear to socially belong and conform, indicating that the consumer's choice was influenced more by social value as opposed to other consumption values, such as functional or conditional values. Again, this finding showed the importance and influence of societal collectivism in Vietnamese culture on these consumers. From a consumption motivation perspective, these young consumers were seeking a product and experience which was closely aligned with the self-determination construct of Ryan and Deci (2022) and one of the mini theories incorporated into the meta or macro-construct, the goal content theory. The goal content theory distinguishes between intrinsic personal aspirations and those which are more extrinsic. Those personal aspirations, which are intrinsic motivations, tend to be associated with individual growth, and meeting personal and social needs through conformity, while those extrinsic aspirations are more aligned to external attributes of the persona of a person, such as the display of personal image or wanting to seek popularity or approval of others (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). In this study, the participants wanted to be a part of their community, which included sharing similar brands of footwear. There was also the influence and need to comply or follow with the prevailing workplace and organisational culture, while also wanting an item which reflected their persona or unique personality. This finding does indicate the dominant influence of acculturation amongst Generation Z consumers who were Vietnamese, during the pre-decision phase.



#### 4.2.1.4 Identity-related motivators and personal value

This section will focus on the identity of these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers as to their personal values. The first theme is related to the individual seeking a product which is aligned with their motivation of wanting to find a sustainable and environmentally friendly product.

##### a. Identity-related motivators and personal value: the environment

Drawing on Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey, the individual at the commencement of their journey can be influenced by distal or distance social motives, which are closely associated with their altruistic desires or needs. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, this is aligned with the emotional value, with the consumer seeking a product which meets their need for an item that provides a sense of fun, and the symbolic value as to meeting their self-identity needs of wanting to conform. For Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, the findings indicated a strong emphasis towards seeking “sustainable” and “socially responsible” manufactured branded items, which will be presented in greater depth in the next section. With the emergence of online platforms and the rapid access to information, this grouping has become critically aware and concerned about socially responsible issues such as global warming, climate change, and emissions, along with an awareness of the exploitation of labour in East Asia, which are informed their personal values.

For Quyet, the environment was one of the reasons he was motivated to potentially acquire a particular item as he preferred a sustainable lifestyle, so he did not need to buy so many shoes, instead, he believed that a well-made pair of shoes could last a long time and ‘save the environment’ or be more sustainable. Quyet’s perspective epitomizes a duality of functional and emotional values being important:

*“I used my branded sports shoes for 3 years now, when they are really damaged then I will buy a new pair. I don’t buy them every year because it is not good for the environment. I consume less with this sustainable lifestyle because it takes so many resources to produce a pair of shoes, including the amount of water needed, then there is the emissions and air pollution generated” (Quyet, 20-years-old).*

Like Quyet, Tien mentioned that besides the price of the item, sustainability and environmental issues were the core reasons that influenced his motivation when considering buying branded sports footwear, but there were also the financial implications of the acquisition decision. This finding represented how the interconnectedness and independent nature of emotional and social values can influence the consumer's decision-making process, but also illustrates that the functional and conditional values were also important:

*“To be honest, it is just recently I think about sustainability. Now if I go to buy sports shoes, I will choose the pair that is more friendly to the environment, or at least can be used for a long time to save money”* (Tien, 22-years-old).

The motivation of the consumer was also informed by their engagement with internal and external sources of information, including social media, which will also be presented in section 4.2.3.1. Hoang explained that the use of YouTube or online platforms had influenced him on reducing buying unnecessary shoes, and changed his motivation of constantly seeking branded items, due to the impact on the environment.

*“Recently I bought some second-hand products for environment-friendly reasons, as I watched a video about the impact of fashion on the environment and how the manufacturing process was unsustainable. I think because most of us use the Internet and social media now, there is a better awareness for the need to be more sustainable in our fashion tastes, including buying branded or counterfeit items”* (Hoang, 23-years-old).

Some of the Vietnamese Generation Z participants indicated that they were actively interested in recycling programs offered by some of the branded sports footwear manufacturers, and this informed and motivated them to engage with the brand. This was demonstrated by Minh who thought that this marketing strategy was very interesting as she would not need to worry about

where to dispose of her old pair of shoes, but also that the footwear would be recycled afterwards.

*“I feel very excited if the brands propose the shoe recycling program, as I can now recycle my old shoes and become more environmentally responsible. Recycling can help to protect the environment, and I hope that the manufacturing process of branded shoes will maintain the quality, therefore ensuring the footwear is more durable”* (Minh, 24-years-old).

As for the usage of recycled sports footwear, Trang found that the recycled shoes had a similar quality as the non-recycled shoes, and therefore, she was motivated to buy more recycled sports footwear in the future.

*“I do think about the environment, and since I bought a pair of recycled Nike shoes, I think they are similar to a new pair. I also think that brands in Vietnam should focus more on sustainable manufacturing initiatives to protect the environment”* (Trang, 20-years-old).

In summary, the Vietnamese Generation Z consumers were potentially sustainably aware, with some form of awareness about recycling and the environment. The findings indicated that some of the consumers had experienced or were motivated to seek items which were second-hand based on previous experience. Drawing on consumer behavioural theory, the consumers' choice was a function of a composition of different values as advocated by Sheth et al. (1991).

b. Identity-related motivators and personal value: the counterfeits

Within the pre-decision phase, but often associated with the evaluation process, the findings indicated that buying counterfeit shoes in Vietnam emerged as an important facet which influenced this group of consumers. With China being the world's biggest producer of counterfeit goods, Vietnam, due to its geographical proximity to China, is a key market for this type of product. Most Vietnamese consumers have experienced purchasing or wearing

counterfeit items or products, either early in their life bought by family members or later by themselves. Ngoc mentioned that most Vietnamese consumers wear some form of counterfeit goods or items, including herself, but after recognising the difference in quality, she stopped buying the items and now buys only authentic shoes. The decision to buy authentic branded sports footwear was driven by various functional reasons, including durability and comfort:

*“Now in Vietnam, I think everyone wears branded shoes, but they are counterfeit. So, for me, I will try to save and buy an authentic pair because I care more about endurance, and not simply for the fashionable style. I won't buy counterfeit shoes anymore, as I said, I try to save to buy the authentic ones with good quality and reasonable price, especially during the sales”* (Ngoc, 22-years-old).

For Trang, she had several poor experiences with the quality of counterfeit shoes. So instead of buying so many counterfeit items, which eventually meant that these needed to be replaced within weeks and therefore cost her more, she wanted to buy the actual authentic shoes, which were also more durable, which mirrored Ngoc's functional values.

*“No, I won't buy counterfeit shoes in the future. Their quality is poor and can be used only for a few times. Before I didn't notice it, but now I prioritize quality more, so I am saving money to buy an authentic pair of sports shoes. Then I can use them for multiple purposes like exercising or simply hanging out with friends”* (Trang, 20-years-old).

Like Trang, Tam stated she has not had positive experiences with counterfeit shoes as she was concerned that the long-term cost of replacing them would be more expensive:

*“No, counterfeit shoes are no longer on my list while shopping. I am concerned about comfort, and economic conditions for the long term and buying authentic shoes meets these priorities. They can be worn for a long time, so the quality does matter. They always say [tien nao cua nay] [you get what you pay for]”* (Tam, 19 -years-old).

To emerge from the interviews was the paradox associated with buying counterfeit items. While there was an acknowledgement as shown above from the interview data as to the prevalence of being able to buy these types of goods, there was also an ethical and cultural

dimension which influenced these young consumers, of wanting to show respect to the brand manufacturer. These consumers acknowledged and recognised that branded manufacturers had invested their reputation to provide a certain style and quality, therefore they felt obliged to respect this commitment to providing the latest fashion. If a counterfeit item was bought, this was a sign of disrespect, which for the Vietnamese culture is not acceptable indicating the potential underlying sociocultural background of Confucianism and the collectivist culture in Vietnam.

*“I saw once the amount of lost revenue due to us buying the counterfeit goods, but then also how these brands are potentially struggling to maintain their development and investment in these items of clothing”* (Quynh Anh, 22-years-old).

This was the same for Quyet, as he also saw the short-term benefit of buying counterfeit and the consequences of the brand repetition and image of these items:

*“...some counterfeit items are very good, but ultimately, they are not the same. Then what happens to the money and profits from these counterfeit items, certainly not in research and development or style design”* (Quyet, 20-years old).

However, some participants still reacted quite positively towards evaluating counterfeit sports shoes due to their convenience and to satisfy their short-term fashion needs. This was illustrated by Long, who said that he wore counterfeit shoes all the time as long as he could buy the latest style he wanted.

*“I don’t care about counterfeit or not, as long as they have the style I like. I bought a lot of them, I find it very convenient when you can change or throw them away easily”* (Long, 19 -years-old).

This perspective of Long also challenges the notion that all Generation Z consumers are environmentally and socially responsible. However, for Tien, he felt that the quality of counterfeit and authentic shoes was similar, and there was little difference now from a style or quality perspective, although the ethics of the manufacturing process remained questionable.

*“I got a pair of counterfeit shoes which cost me around 70 US dollars. But I feel the quality is similar to other authentic brands. My friends still think they are authentic shoes...(laughed)...but what does concern me a little is how these were made”* (Tien, 22 -years-old).

To summarise these findings, this section has revealed the shared view of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers that they tended not to buy counterfeit shoes. The reason for this rejection of counterfeit items was based on the perceived lower quality of the product, which was closely related to the functional value of the item, together with the long-term associated financial costs. This rejection was also based on their ethical values, such as brand respect, in which buying counterfeit items was seen as being disrespectful to the authentic branded manufacturers. This ethical stance was not only informed by their interaction and engagement on social media, but also based on their Vietnamese culture, which is predominately collectivist and grounded in Confucianism. However, some of the participants did see that buying a counterfeit item would meet their immediate needs and that the quality of this type of product was equally good, indicating that the rejection of buying counterfeit goods was not categoric.

#### 4.2.2 Theme Two: Product and brand-related motivators

The study then focused on the product during the pre-decision phase which included how the branded sports footwear was manufactured and the quality of the item. For the consumer, the functional value of reliability, durability, and price was seen as important, together with emotional and conditional values, where the consumer learns from the past (Sheth et al., 1991).

##### *4.2.2.1 Product and brand-related motivators: manufacturing*

Closely linked to being environmentally aware was being socially responsible and then wanting to know where and how the sports footwear was manufactured. This social responsibility was displayed through the comments generated as to the theme associated with the manufacture of branded products. There was an acknowledgement that these consumers were motivated to buy branded items but were also aware of how these products had been manufactured, including in Vietnam. For these consumers, this awareness has emerged from their engagement with social media as a source of information, but also through their friends. This finding also indicates the

almost blurring of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) separate domains during the pre-decision phase. Instead, the reputation of the brand has now come to the forefront of young Vietnamese consumers' consciousness which has been influenced by social media, which can inform and motivate the individual to consider the product in the future. Thanh illustrated this by expressing her concerns about the issues reported in the past about child labour in Nike factories, and how this practice was unethical, which was particularly important for these East Asian consumers:

*“I notice that many global brands, such as Nike have taken advantage of developing countries, including here in Vietnam, Bangladesh, or India for child labour, as I think the cost is much cheaper. From an economic side, it is good to generate a profit and provide employment, but from a human rights perspective, it is not right, in fact, it is exploitation”* (Thanh, 24 -years-old).

Sy agreed with this opinion of Thanh, and mentioned the benefits to the country's economy but also the negative aspects associated with child exploitation, along with the potential environmental impact:

*“I think the global company will come here to Vietnam as we offer low-cost labour, but it also means that our working hours are longer for less remuneration, therefore the benefits are not always good. A few years ago, there was a scandal in China due to exploiting labour and I think it still happens here in Vietnam. Since most of the shoe companies will release many emissions into the environment, it causes pollution and damage to the locals' health, so we are badly paid, and the local environment is damaged, and all of this for what, a branded fashion item...”* (Sy, 25 -years-old).

In the area of the exploitation of labour, Hieu interestingly played down his responsibility in seeking a branded item, as he believed this had always been a problem associated with global brands, and that it was normal business behaviour for these manufacturers to maximise their

profit. For Hieu, his main motivation was the acquisition of branded sports footwear which provided quality, rather than an item which was manufactured responsibly.

*“Branded sports footwear is mainly a capitalist invention, where they care more about profits and money, but so do I (laughed). I personally look for the quality of the product, rather than the environmental impact or who made it, as I think any company will have problems with foreign labour or in the manufacturing processes” (Hieu, 24 -years-old).*

However, unlike Hieu, most Vietnamese Generation Z participants emphasized the importance of ethical manufacturing of their branded items, and if this unethical behaviour did occur, how this knowledge would negatively affect their motivation and ultimately purchasing decision-making along with their engagement with the brand. For Viet Anh, when he was searching for product information, if there was some indication of unethical behaviour, he would become demotivated and then refuse to buy that branded item.

*“I love my country, so if I know those companies are unethical or terrible at treating Vietnamese employees, then I would never buy those shoes. It’s like you are helping them to reduce our fellow citizen’s lifestyle and being disrespectful to our community” (Viet Anh, 25 -years-old).*

Huyen highlighted how as a consumer she was critically aware of reports relating to unethical behaviour through social media in the manufacture of branded items, and how this informed her ultimate motivation to buy a particular item. This also illustrated her willingness to change manufacturers or brands, indicating there was no absolute brand loyalty.

*“Of course...(laughed)...there are many other branded sports footwears with a good reputation in the manufacturing process. I don’t think I have to support those who are not ethical. Young people should and I expect be aware of ethical behaviour as we are living in a digital world now. Every scandal will be on the news the next day and the company’s reputation can easily be damaged overnight. So, I think they [the*



*companies] should be more ethical in their manufacturing processes” (Huyen, 20 - years-old).*

From above, this section has indicated that the theme of ethical manufacture of branded items such as sports footwear does influence, inform, and motivate the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer during the pre-decision phase. The Vietnamese young generation is aware through social media as to the origins of the product being manufactured. This includes news reports of the exploitation of child labour and the environmental damage caused. As a result, this generation tended to prioritize ethical issues above being loyal to a particular brand.

#### *4.2.2.2 Product and brand-related motivators: quality*

The next sub-theme of Hamilton et al.’s (2021) customer journey model was related to the pre-decision phase and was associated with the evaluation stage. From the interviews, the consumers indicated an important facet of the evaluation stage which was related to the influence of quality when deciding what to acquire. The framework developed by Vigneron and Johnson (2004) earlier indicated that quality was one of the core interpersonal perceptions in brand consumption studies. In contextualising this, Lichtenstein, Ridgway, and Netemeyer (1993) stated the consumer may perceive the price as an indication of superiority, as a higher price was seen as an indicator of the item being of high quality. This perception was shared by the Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in this study.

The interviews revealed that the Vietnamese Generation Z participants considered high quality to be interconnected to well-known branded items and the associated higher price tag. For Quan, since he had a satisfied experience with several well-known brands in the past, this had informed his pre-decision phase of evaluating branded items in terms of trusting the reputation of the brand. This also had a direct connection to the consumer’s association with the brand experience and then engagement with the product, known as brand resonance. There was evidence as to the consumers seeking to engage and then becoming attached to a particular brand due to the fashion item meeting their criteria such as quality, during the initial searching then evaluation processes of the pre-decision phase. For Quan, the positive evaluation process was based on the perceived quality and the style which the product offered, but interestingly the price was seen as less important for him. Instead, there was an acceptance by Quan that

well-known brands tended to produce high-quality items and therefore, had spent more time and resources on researching and developing their product range.

*“I care more about quality and style, if they are a bit pricey then I still buy them. For me buying from well-known brands is very important since I know that the quality will be good compared to having to find out whether a particular item offers me the same value. I trust branded products since they spend a lot of money on research and development”* (Quan, 25 -years-old).

Linh also highlighted the perceived notion that the higher quality the more well-known the brand was. In illustrating this, she shared her experience in shopping for fashion items, where she would evaluate brands based on quality and brand reputation while accepting the premium charge.

*“When I go shopping for footwear, I tend to choose Nike or Adidas, those global and reputable brands as they have better quality. Since I don’t buy shoes often, I save up to buy a good pair of shoes. So reputable brands are a safe option for me”* (Linh, 23 -years-old).

For Ha, she paid more attention to the details of the branded shoes’ quality and style, which had been informed by her previous purchasing experience. This perspective of Ha indicates that the journey model of Hamilton et al. (2021) again was not linear, but instead was on a continuous continuum.

*“I think global brands or even fewer known manufacturers have quality checks before releasing the items to the public. They apparently check the sole, sock liner and stitching. Global brands take care of their brand image, so they need to be careful when manufacturing their products. That is what makes a good brand”* (Ha, 19 -years-old).

The interviews then focused further on the evaluation stage to determine why these Vietnamese Generation Z participants preferred global brands over local products, even though the local brands could potentially provide a similar standard of quality but less expensive. Viet Anh in attempting to contextualize this, stated that it was because local brands did not offer the same

range or variety of products compared to global brands. This perspective of a limited range of items influenced directly these consumers' evaluation of whether to select a pair of local or branded manufactured sports footwear.

*“I think reputable brands and good quality are the same. There are some local brands, such as Bitis or Thuong Dinh, whose prices are much more reasonable, and they can provide a quality product. However, their weak point is the limited variety in the product range. That’s why I prefer to choose global brands, such as Nike”* (Viet Anh, 25 -years-old).

For Huyen, her acquisition experience had informed her evaluation process, which involved her comparing buying and then wearing a local brand called Thuong Dinh, before trying a global branded footwear. This process enabled Huyen to evaluate and decide to acquire in the future a global branded item due to the quality and different styles offered.

*“Oh...I only used Thuong Dinh when I was in high school. Those shoes are very popular, the quality is not bad. We used them for physical classes. But they only had very limited styles of shoes, so I was quite disappointed. That’s why I choose global brands now, they can provide me with both with different styles and quality. Sometimes in the sale season, you can even get a better deal”* (Huyen, 20-years-old).

Interestingly, the Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' evaluation process was informed by their perception that in purchasing global brands such as Nike, Adidas or Puma, these items represented quality. For these participants, the association of quality led the consumers to perceive these branded goods to be deemed as being trustworthy and providing personal credibility to their social grouping indicating brand trust and resonance, which supports Doney and Cannon's (1997) assertion that a brand represents safety, honesty and/or reliability, a theme also associated with functional values. Throughout the interviews, there were a series of keywords repeatedly used when describing the evaluation process, including “reputable brands”, and “good quality”. However, underlying these findings was also an indication that during the evaluation process, these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers were also influenced by the prevailing cultural norms by wanting to retain their Vietnamese identity, indicating the presence of acculturation, while still seeking branded items which assimilated Western identities and values.

Related to the theme of quality, was durability and comfort. This was important for this group of consumers as often these footwear items tended to be worn for the purpose they were originally designed and manufactured for, like running or doing the gym, not simply a fashion item. For Luong, he sought branded sports footwear, as he prioritized the importance of style and the intended purpose of the item for being comfortable when evaluating the pre-decision-making phase:

*“Normally I wear sports shoes quite a lot, so I do care about the purpose of the shoe, and of course the style. I prioritized this over the price when I decide how much it will cost, but I am not looking for basketball shoes to play basketball (laughed), but for the extra cushioning they give”* (Luong, 20-years-old).

This perspective of Luong was partly shared by Dung who mentioned that the branded shoes provided him with a better running experience while also being durable, which motivated him to repurchase the same branded shoes later whereby becoming a loyal customer through a positive brand experience which indicates brand resonance. Again, this finding indicates that the customer journey does not operate in a static or linear way as the post-decision phase informed the pre-decision phase, indicating its dynamic nature.

*“I used to run marathons and still do now. Therefore, a pair of good shoes can help me run and protect my feet. The comfort and endurance of branded shoes are undeniable. I can use them for years, while counterfeit and regular brands, I can only use for 2-3 times, which is not cost-effective”* (Dung, 22-years-old).

For Hai Anh, he highlighted how in the evaluation process during the pre-decision phase, it was quality that was seen as being important to him due to his job requirements. Being on his feet for long hours, therefore meant that Hai Anh needed to pay particular attention when initially searching and then evaluating the item, which included the materials used and the design which fitted the workplace requirements.

*“I think the brand is partially important, [but] I strongly care about the quality more. The shoe's sole needs to be soft enough, for a sock liner. The structure of running shoes usually makes our body fall forward, flat shoes are used for the gym, and deadlifting to balance the body, and I need a pair of shoes that allow me to stand on my feet for hours without any discomfort. Finally, the style needs to fit the requirements of my place of work” (Hai Anh, 22 -years-old).*

To summarise, this section highlighted the importance of quality evaluation in the pre-decision phase. The findings revealed that Vietnamese Generation Z consumers tend to consider the function of the item, such as its durability and comfort for their daily purpose, including playing sports or walking and their long-term benefits, such as finance and work purpose, including the duality of the functional, emotional and conditional values.

#### 4.2.3 Theme Three: Companion-related motivators

The last set of findings associated with the pre-decision phase was related to the companion role of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) journey model. This included the emergence of the usage of online reviews and the extent to which friends, peers and family members were part of this stage. Data suggest that these themes were driven mainly by social and emotional values.

##### *4.2.3.1 Companion-related motivators: online reviews and KOLs*

Hamilton et al. (2021) stated that the pre-decision phase represents how an individual starts their customer journey by engaging or interacting with different brands, which can include how the information searching is conducted through the usage of social media. Earlier, Mollen and Wilson (2010) found that engagement is a cognitive and affective process in which the consumer is attracted to a product via an active connection, either through social media or via a personal encounter. For the Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in this study, these participants were influenced by key opinion leaders (KOLs) or social media influencers, whereby becoming what Hamilton et al. (2021) classified as a ‘travelling companion’. These KOLs or influencers were perceived to have a high degree of authentic knowledge in a particular field or product, which was then shared through social media.

This was demonstrated through the interviews, where Trang stated that during her evaluation and information searching process, she was strongly influenced by online brand celebrities, particularly those who advertised clothing and footwear which reflected her style, and this directly influenced her buying motivation and intentions.

*“I am influenced by others, especially celebrities or KOLs. I have followed some of them for years, particularly those who have a similar style to me. So, if the shoes I see are not at first sight really fashionable, but they [the KOLs or celebrities] are wearing them I tend to change my mind and think that the item is trendy after all”* (Trang, 20 - years-old).

Luong noted his usage and almost reliance on YouTube for visual reviews. These online reviews were his main way to search for information which informed and influenced his buying habits particularly when deciding which branded item to buy.

*“Normally I go to YouTube and look for unboxing videos or short clips about particular shoes. I think YouTube reviewers are the most honest and have influenced me in the past because they have experience in wearing the item, then give me an objective opinion”* (Luong, 20 -years-old).

For Linh, some of the online influencers were also popular in her social community. Therefore, for her, part of the reason for being influenced by these external influencers or journey companions was due to her wanting to follow her friendship group, but also wanting to follow someone who had a similar fashion style to her but was slightly older. For Linh, these external online companions due to their age were perceived to be more trustworthy. Finally, these external influencers were also perceived to be more knowledgeable about the product and could offer additional information about the branded footwear.

*“I usually watch YouTube’s unbox videos, especially from Giang Vu or Dino. They are older than me, which I respect, but also buy fashionable branded sports shoes, which I*

*like. This gives me an element of trust which has enabled me to reduce my time searching by following them only. Besides, they sometimes collaborate with different brands, so they can offer a discount code for their followers. That's a bonus for me"* (Linh, 23 -years-old).

Like Linh and Luong, Duong's style and branded item preference were influenced by his online idol, whom he followed through social media. By following this influencer, this idol had become his virtual travelling companion. Like Linh, he was able to reduce the time needed to search for product information when seeking an item which reflected his fashion persona, particularly as the idol with similar fashion tastes provided product information.

*"Most of my shoe inspiration has come from my idol, whom I admire and follow on Instagram and Facebook. When my idol is wearing something fashionable, I am more likely to want to seek the item and buy the product, often at any cost"* (Duong, 19 -years-old).

Thao took a more external or removed perspective as to the influence of social media on evaluating and undertaking information-searching activities. For Thao, she highlighted the role of KOLs and influencers who were now used by manufacturers as part of their marketing strategies. It was also noted by Thao, indicating that this group of consumers was aware of the techniques adopted and that these brands were intentionally targeting young customers due to their time spent online.

*"Well... the marketing of branded goods is mainly through a celebrity or KOLs endorsement. Normally these well-known brands would collaborate with celebrities, who have a huge fanbase or high level of influence on social media, which is where most young people are. So, no doubt their strategy is working as it attracts us to buy their shoes and other fashion items, but we are not naive or stupid"* (Thao, 22 -years-old).

Some of the participants in this study, however, when making their purchasing decisions did not simply base their pre-decision information searching or evaluation on the views of the online influencers, but also used anonymous online reviews. These online reviews were often written by previous buyers on a particular product, but their profile such as gender, age and location remained unknown. There was a degree of integrity and honesty about these reviewers as they had normally engaged and experienced the product but then wanted to share their opinion often beyond the company's website using other online channels.

For Dung, he tended to consciously read online reviews during the information search and evaluation stages. Through using online reviews, this source of information enabled him to save time in researching the product, for example having to go to an actual physical store.

*“I do read online reviews. I search them on Google and see the reactions and feedback on how functional the product is, the materials used, and how the previous customer felt about the experience. I'm a picky consumer, so when I buy, I look at all the reviews and comments. I don't think I really need to watch YouTube, but it does depend on which type of shoes I am buying” (Dung, 22 -years-old).*

This was the same for Tien who emphasized how online reviews were an important source of information for him and his peers when buying branded sports footwear. This included firstly actively searching for online reviews before considering researching the item any further if the reviews and feedback are positive.

*“I definitely look at the reviews as I believe these are the most honest. These are different people's unbiased views, which could be from different genders, ages, and locations... so they have different buying experiences and opinions, very objective and genuine. I like to check other people's views before I make my own decision” (Tien, 22 -years-old).*



From above it is possible to conclude that the Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in this study were influenced by online influencers or journey companions, and actively used online reviews to search for information and then evaluate the branded product. Clearly, KOLs or celebrities played a significant role in connecting the brand to the consumer. These Vietnamese Generation Z consumers were actively engaged in this online activity but were critically aware of the motives behind a particular brand's online marketing campaign or the usage of celebrity endorsements. However, the usage of online resources was not the only source for these consumers to search for information and evaluate the product, there was also the influence of family, friends, and peers.

#### *4.2.3.2 Companion-related motivators: friends, peers, and family*

The travelling companion was not only online or virtual, but also included friends, family, and peers. These physical travelling companions were also used to search for information then involved during the evaluation stage (Hamilton et al., 2021). In this study, Vietnamese Generation Z consumers interestingly saw friends or peers as being significant influencers which informed their purchasing behaviour when buying branded sports footwear. In contextualising this, Sy included the role of his social group or peers as to how they informed his fashion style and choices, which ultimately influenced his evaluation processes. This alignment of influence also extended to sharing the same hobbies within his social community.

*“Of course, I bought these shoes because of the quality and style. But it is also because I see people, who also work in the field of art around me, who are wearing this style too, so I think we share similar interests. The most interesting aspect of the style we all seem to wear is that the Vans design is quite basic, so I can, along with many others, add a personal design to reflect my personality” (Sy, 25 -years-old).*

Several of the participants mentioned that their style and taste were based on their friend's preferences or suggestions. For Tien, his fashion style originated from observing his friends wearing the Adidas brand. This observation of Tien, and then following other peers' fashion tastes, may have been also subconscious, as presented in the organismic integration theory,

which contends that the individual may be influenced unconsciously to adopt the ideas or attitudes of others (Ryan & Deci, 2022).

*“I personally like Adidas brands since my friends wear them quite a lot. I usually hang out with people who have some sort of similar interest to me, which includes wearing this particular footwear. Therefore, whatever they wear, it attracts my attention, so sometimes I copy their shoe styles or preference, so I feel that I can belong in the same social grouping”* (Tien, 22 -years-old).

Unlike Tien, Hieu stated that he was influenced by his friends’ previous experience with a particular branded item, which then led him to seek further information as to the choice of styles available, before enquiring about the price and general information as to the product’s quality, which was then used to evaluate the footwear.

*“I usually take advice for shoe purchasing from my friends, who have already purchased the product previously, so they can inform me as to the quality, design, and associated benefits. I bought a pair of Nike Airforce recently as it was my friends’ idea. They told me that the price was reasonable, and the style would fit me, so I bought them”* (Hieu, 24 -years-old).

Like Hieu, Long sought his friend’s advice during a shopping experience. Hieu actively sought his friends’ opinions as to their fashion advice, whereby seeking their endorsement, as he trusted their recommendations and opinions.

*“I have a friend who studies fashion, her taste for fashion is unbelievable. She is the one whom I always ask for fashion advice, and she will try to help me find the right style, sometimes we can even get bargain deals but still look fashionable”* (Long, 19 -years-old).

To emerge from the interviews was also the importance of family. For these participants, the family as a travelling companion included their parents and siblings. Part of the influence of the family can be attributed to the age of the participants, but also the social dynamics of the Vietnamese culture.

*“I usually look for the branded shoes online and then ask my elder sister for her recommendations if the brand is a bit pricey. For example, she normally gives me advice on the quality of the brand or what was her experience of wearing them in the past, so I can save more time on going to the physical store to try them on myself...”*  
(Sy, 25-years-old)

Having a younger sister is an advantage for Phung, as she indicated that her sibling was like a best friend when she went out shopping since they share similar interests and preferences.

*“My sister is just 2 years younger than me, so we get along really well with each other. We share similar tastes in shopping, so she is definitely the person I go to if I need fashion recommendations, especially for branded items”* (Phung, 20-years-old)

Like Sy and Phung, Tuan Anh shared his approach of actively asking his father’s perspective, indicating his respect for his parents, but also seeking a conservative traditional viewpoint, which indicated the potential influence of the Vietnamese sociocultural background of Confucianism and collectivism as to respect their elders.

*“There’s nothing to be ashamed of. I sometimes asked my dad’s opinion whenever we spend time together because I respect him and his advice. Not just because of finance, but because I want to get closer to my parents, so they know that I still seek their advice even though I have grown up. Therefore, I have shown him the picture of the branded shoes and asked him about the style and colour”* (Tuan Anh, 25-years-old).

From above, as to the theme of journey companions, the Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in this study were influenced by their friends, peers and immediate family during their information searching and evaluation stages of the pre-decision phase. The findings revealed that while online reviews and social media were used to search for information and then evaluate the product, their physical friends, peers along with family members were also influential. Underlying this was also the presence of Vietnam’s sociocultural dynamics, for example, the role and influence of collectivism within the Vietnamese culture along with Confucianism, which was seen in how they respected their elders while also wanting to socially

conform with their peers and social group. From a motivational perspective, these findings were also closely linked to the SDT (Deci et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2022). The meta-construct theory provided insight into the motivational intention of an individual's personality and social behaviour, which include the role and influence of peers and the individual's social group. For example, the causality-orientated theory sees the individual's differences in their behaviour are often dependent on the environment, which in the case of this study, is the prevailing influence of the Vietnamese culture of conformity and collectivism. Based on the situation and environment, the person will act out or be motivated internally to attain their intrinsic needs, while also ensuring that they retain a sense of belonging or acceptance by their peers and family. At the same time, consumer motivation is orientated or influenced by meeting external aspirations or needs like fulfilling their sense of self-worth or gaining the external approval of others. The other mini-theory associated with the self-determination construct is the goal content, where the motivation of intrinsic personal aspirations such as personal growth, having a sense of belonging or a close relationship with others is balanced by the motivation of seeking extrinsic aspirations of displaying external traits such as self-image or seeking personal popularity (Kasser & Ryan, 1996).

#### 4.2.4 Summary of the pre-decision phase

To conclude, Vietnamese Generation Z consumers were potentially influenced by various social drivers during the pre-decision phase of their customer journey. During the motivation stage, the findings discovered that Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in this study are motivated by their self-identity, in which this grouping bought branded sports shoes to express their personality amongst their social community but also to represent their social status. The participants also wanted to be a part of and belong to their community, including sharing similar footwear preferences, which presented their desire to attain social inclusion. In addition, the findings also revealed that there was the influence of distal social drivers in relation to social responsibility, including environmental considerations and whether the manufacture of the products was ethically produced.

The study discovered the significant influence associated with quality for these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, in which most of the participants tried to avoid purchasing branded counterfeit products due to the poor quality, hence, chose authentic branded items instead.

Therefore, there was a seeking of reliability, durability and price when buying a pair of branded sports footwear, which was closely associated with functional values. Finally, Vietnamese Generation Z consumers potentially are influenced by various travelling companions, such as online reviews, KOLs, friends and their family during the pre-decision phase. The participants shared their thoughts on how these influencers informed their purchasing decisions when information searching and evaluating, which included the consideration as to the source of information prior to purchasing the branded item, which indicated the potential subconscious influence of Confucianism within a collective cultural society.

### **4.3 The decision phase**

The study then explored the decision phase of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey framework. This phase was designed to address the question inspired by Hamilton et al. (2021) *as to what extent are the consumers affected by the physical presence of others or by online influences?*, but via a Vietnamese Generation Z lens. For this grouping, their friends, but also more importantly parents were influential, particularly when it came to financial, style and appearance advice.

Main theme: The decision phase - the influential power of family dynamic

Interestingly, although being presented in the pre-decision phase, the influence of the family came to predominance during the decision phase. The relevance of the family is that these individuals played several roles in the actual act of buying the branded sports footwear. There was the influence of these consumers seeking family members' advice, ahead of their social group, peers and information on social media, as being a trusted and honest source. There was also an underlying desire to conform and respect their parents, whereby showing the family respect or 'giving them face', an important ideal of Confucianism, while also recognising the multiple roles of the family, with the parent being potentially the 'decider', and 'financer' while the Generation Z consumer was the ultimate consumer or 'user' (Masterson et al., 2017, p.121). In illustrating this, Linh stated that she was still receiving financial support from her family, therefore, to acquire branded sports footwear also still involved her parents due to the cost.

*“I’m still dependent on my family because my salary is still basic, and it is so expensive to live in Hanoi. I still need my parents to financially support my shopping activities. I don’t buy branded sports shoes too often because they are a bit pricy. The most expensive branded pair I bought was Nike, around 100 US dollars and I had to ask my mom for an opinion so she could pay for these shoes...(laughed)...”* (Linh, 23 -years-old).

This was the same for Minh, as she highlighted that her family still influenced her, and potentially more than her friends or KOLs. Part of the reason was related to honesty of the advice which her family members would give her, while the online information was more marketing or selling-focused, while her friends tended to appease her. Ultimately, when the decision was being made, she actively sought her parent’s opinion.

*“My mom has significantly influenced my purchasing behaviour and still does. I ask my friends but also my mom, because I trust her more. She gives me honest advice on which style is most suitable for me. For example, if I buy those shoes, will it go well with other clothes and outfits, also whether they are suitable in summer or winter”* (Minh, 24 -years-old).

Mirroring Minh’s perspective, Ha also shared her evaluation experiences with her mother. Ha’s mother provided her with invaluable guidance and experience, for example, white shoes were not practical as they can easily get dirty if used in the workplace, indicating the functional value of the decision.

*“Usually, I will go with my mom’s advice, she can give me advice if the colour is too light for me. For example, with white, she would say that it is not easy to wash if it gets dirty, then if the shoes are washed, the form or shape could be lost. I do ask my friends also, but they tend not to want to be too negative or honest with their advice, therefore I do not rely on them as much”* (Ha, 19 -years-old).

In contextualising further, the influence of the family dynamics on young Vietnamese consumers, Thao highlighted that the family remained a core influencer, and for her, her fashion taste was still being informed by her parents, and ultimately not directly by her peers

or KOLs, when it came to the final decision. Although not specifically mentioned in the interviews, underlying many of these young Vietnamese consumers was still the presence of being respectful to their parents, which was irrespective that for many participants were still financially dependent on them:

*“When I see many people around me buying a particular pair of branded sports shoes, then I will buy them. When I’m walking, for instance, I see their style then I will search for it online, how much is it and how many positive feedback comments there are.... since it is a trendy and reasonable price, I will consult my siblings or my mom for advice to decide whether to ultimately buy them”* (Thao, 22 -years-old).

From the perspectives above, in relation to the decision-making stage when making the final purchase, these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers were influenced primarily by their immediate family (decision unit) during Hamilton et al.’s (2021) decision-making phase. This grouping still placed a high level of credibility on the family advice as to what items to buy based on their experience, but the recognition that they were still reliant on their parents for financial support. This significant influence of the family could also be attributed to the cultural background of these consumers which indicated the underlying sociocultural dynamics of wanting to show their respect which could be attributed to Confucianism. This acculturation can be seen through the interviewees recalling the influence of their upbringing to respecting their parents, which still meant that their ultimate decision had the family at the forefront. This included advice as to the practicalities of the item or parental guidance as to conforming and acceptability within the prevailing societal norms.

#### **4.4 The post-decision phase**

The next and final stage of Hamilton et al.’s (2021) customer journey is the post-decision phase. Here the consumer has acquired the item, and their experiences will potentially influence others but also will inform whether the individual engages with the product in the future.

In the study of Hamilton et al. (2021), this stage includes two facets: satisfaction and sharing. While the level of satisfaction is determined when an individual has engaged with the

purchasing activity or experience, which is then observed and shared with others, the sharing aspect is more focused on the power of word of mouth (WoM), which is the process where individuals share their opinions regarding a negative or positive aspect of the item. Based on this, the following section presents the findings related to the influential power of past experience, the role of WoM on satisfaction, and how the sharing stage can be captured in Hamilton et al.'s (2021) framework. In achieving this, the findings addressed Hamilton et al.'s (2021) research question, as to how do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientation, affect the social customer journey?, which informed this study to ask *how past experience can influence the connection between brands and consumers?* and then as to *how brands can understand the motivation of sharing on the customer journey?*

#### 4.4.1 Theme One: Brand trust

Brand trust was studied by Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2005) and Keller (2012), who argued that trust in a brand had a significant connection with a consumer's previous experience. For both Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2005) and Keller (2012) trust can be achieved when consumers perceive their physical or social needs are being met. This element of trust was illustrated with Linh, a 23-year-old Vietnamese consumer, who stated that the branded products gave her more confidence in her social community, as they shared the same interest in wearing branded sports footwear for everyday usage. This usage of branded sports footwear meant that she had gained the respect of her peers, and was seen also as being a 'sneakerhead', a term that she and Viet Anh in section 4.2.1.2 used for those who wore branded sports shoes for everyday usage:

*“I feel more confident when wearing branded shoes, especially when I go out with friends or family. I have a group of friends, who are sneakerheads and are knowledgeable about shoe trends, updated styles, brands, and quality... so I feel more like them if I wear a pair of shoes from a good brand. Besides, I trust branded sports shoes as they are made to a higher-quality since they usually spend more time in developing their products”* (Linh, 23-years-old).



This aspect of trust was shared by Long, a 19 -years-old male, who stated that the endurance and quality of branded sports footwear convinced him to repurchase the same branded sports shoe based on his positive experience that the product would again have the same level of quality.

*“I trust brands such as Nike or Adidas as I believe they are famous and therefore have a good reputation, use good materials, have long endurance, and are very comfortable to wear. When I plan to buy any footwear, I will always consider these brands first for my everyday purposes, such as running, exercising, going to school or work, or just for hanging out with friends”* (Long, 19-years-old).

During the interviews, the theme of quality during the post-decision phase was seen as an important consideration, which was closely aligned with the brand being seen as being trustworthy. Vietnamese Generation Z consumers highlighted that if they had acquired the item previously, then there was often a direct connection between the perceived level of quality and the association with the brand or logo, which influenced their level of loyalty to the branded product.

Linh also emphasized her experiences of previously buying branded sports footwear, as the item had on reflection to her represented quality, which then influenced her future buying decisions.

*“Based on purchasing a pair of branded Nike sports shoes, I think a brand or logo represents a degree of quality. When I see Nike now, I automatically know their quality is good or better than other brands in a similar style, so I don’t hesitate to buy another pair of Nike shoes. If the shoes are not a reputable brand, or not on any well-known website then I won’t buy them. I feel too risky. I trust only now well-known brands like Nike, based on previous experience”* (Linh, 23 -years-old).

Sy, a 25-years-old male, also used his previous consumer experience in buying branded sports shoes, but was also influenced by other consumer experiences, including those in his social grouping:

*“I buy them [branded shoes] because I know I can trust their quality, but I also checked as to whether other customers have had the same experience which confirms my perceptions towards quality” (Sy, 25-years-old).*

From the perspectives above, in terms of the post-decision phase, brand trust was associated with the individual’s direct engagement with the brand, whereby building and reinforcing credibility between the brand and the consumer. The findings revealed that Vietnamese Generation Z consumers potentially trusted well-known or high reputation brands, such as Nike or Adidas when it came to sports footwear because these brands offered better quality. The interviews indicated that this grouping had a clear brand awareness of what constituted a good pair of sports shoes, such as the material used or the durability which was based on past experience. For these consumers, the brand name and logo partly represented the product quality, as these brands tended to spend more time on research and development. This perception was potentially informed by previous quality experiences, which answered the question as to what extent the past acquisition can influence Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in their post-decision phase. This sub-theme also indicated the prevalence and importance of quality experience in building brand trust, brand awareness, and brand resonance amongst this grouping.

#### 4.4.2 Theme Two: Brand loyalty and respect

Brand loyalty is associated with the extent to which a consumer repurchases the product after their purchasing experience, meanwhile, the theme of brand respect includes how a brand can gain the respect of the consumer, then how the individual engages with the product during the post-decision phase. Earlier, Sparks and Honey (2014) highlighted that brand respect can be related to the ethical concerns of Generation Z, since this grouping tends to be more environmentally and ethically conscious, therefore, making their buying decisions based on

their personal beliefs. This was illustrated by Duong, a 19-years-old, who during his post-decision experiences had reflected on the acquisition, which then had informed him that branded sports footwear could provide him with durability and authenticity in an item, indicating a functional value to the footwear. This authenticity was seen as important as for Duong, since it represented his identity of being an ethical consumer, as opposed to simply displaying his latest fashion tastes through a pair of counterfeit shoes, which meant the decision met his extended identity.

*“I think counterfeit shoes are still worn by other Vietnamese buyers as they think that they can show off their fashion tastes to others, showing how fashionable they are, but they forget the ethical side of buying counterfeit goods. Personally, I care more about the durability of the item and not simply fashion. So, I won’t buy counterfeit shoes just for my appearance. I will try to save money to buy an authentic pair which is of good quality and reasonably priced, especially during the sales season. But also buying the authentic item shows I am real and not counterfeit” (Duong, 19 -years-old).*

Dung, in elaborating on the limitations of counterfeit items also stated that this footwear only lasted for a short period of time, which ultimately cost him more money.

*“... if I do buy counterfeit shoes like in the past, I’m afraid that after using them for a while, due to their quality, the shoes will be damaged easily, which will cost more money when buying a new pair, so counterfeit really are fake” (Dung, 22 -years-old).*

This post experience of limited durability was a key economic reason why some of these consumers had rejected counterfeit footwear compared to buying an authentic item. Quynh Anh, agreed with this perspective and also mentioned that buying counterfeit footwear in the past compared to the authentic pair proved to be less economic in the long term.

*“Although the price of counterfeit shoes is cheaper, based on my past experience they only can last for a couple of months or a season, sometimes even a few weeks. I have*

*learnt that buying an authentic pair is ultimately better value” (Quynh Anh, 22 -years-old).*

Tam also emphasized her choice based on previously buying counterfeit goods as not being as comfortable compared to branded sports footwear:

*“I would rather not buy anything counterfeit because I appreciate the quality. The last time I bought counterfeit shoes they did not last as long as an authentic pair, which makes branded footwear a better buy” (Tam, 19 -years-old).*

For these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, the post-decision phase was informed and influenced by how the consumer reflected on the experience, and what they encountered. This activity was closely associated with the functional value.

Finally, some of the participants indicated that their post-decision phase was also informed by their respect for brands which had been influenced by their social community. Illustrating this, Trang stated that brand respect was directly influenced by his close friends, but also reflected his Vietnamese culture of showing respect, an important trait of Confucianism.

*“I don’t buy counterfeit shoes because I’m afraid that everyone will think I’m poor and pretend to be rich or something...(laughed)...it will be so embarrassing if my friends were to find out. Even if the price of counterfeit shoes is cheaper, I still don’t buy them. Then there is the lack of respect for the brand which my friends see as not ethically right, and it is not Vietnamese” (Trang, 20 -years-old).*

To summarise the section above, there was a clear connection between brand respect and the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer as to their attitude towards counterfeit shoes. This connection was seen as being related to the consumer’s past experience, and the fact that counterfeit goods generally were of a poor standard and seeking a functional valued product.

There was also the connection of their peers and culture to what was acceptable and the ethical implications of buying an item which was an inauthentic version of the branded footwear.

#### 4.4.3 Theme Three: Word of mouth (WoM)

The last part of the post-decision phase is the sharing of the experience. Based on the customer journey, Hamilton et al. (2021) stated that word-of-mouth (WoM) played an important role in the journey, indicating that this process involved the flow of information between individuals. This study found evidence that the WoM irrespective of the experience being positive or negative, the consumer still shared this either online or in person with others. A positive outcome of the acquisition experience can lead to consumer satisfaction, providing an affirmation to other consumers, which was mirrored by the negative experience. For the Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, their WoM activities were conducted both online, including anonymous online reviews or via KOLs and physically such as friends, family, or peers.

From an online perspective, these consumers indicated that they were most engaged with and used some form of online reviews during the post-decision phase. The use of online reviews was interesting, mainly because this medium was used to indicate some form of dissatisfaction, whereby their identity could remain anonymous. In explaining this, Trang identified the need to ‘save face’ amongst her friends when a particular shoe was poorly designed:

*“I once bought this really expensive pair of branded Nike, but the design and fit were very poor. As I had been recommended the shoes by my friend, I could not really tell her what I thought of her recommendation. It would have been embarrassing for her [saving her face], so instead I posted a bad review, to avoid anyone else making the same decision” (Trang, 20-years-old).*

This was the same with Dung, who reportedly had a group of friends who all bought the same pair of shoes because it was the latest trend, but then complained sometime afterwards to each other as to the poor quality and design.

*“... we all bought these sports shoes as this was the latest trend, but even though they were uncomfortable and of poor quality, we all said how good they were. It was only after a while we had a conversation about these shoes. In the meantime, I had posted online an honest but poor review, as I did not want to offend my friends or feel I was the only one thinking this (laughed)” (Dung, 22-years-old).*

There was a clear indication amongst these consumers that they wanted to conform to their peer group, and if the post-decision phase was negative, the social dynamics and values were still important. However, when the post-decision experience was positive, these individuals were happier to confirm their purchasing decision to their friends and in person, indicating the importance associated with social belonging and affirmation of the purchase, with their social group, which could be related to the collective societal norms.

*“Compared to that poor decision of buying those Nike, the next pair I bought which was informed by a celebrity, was good. I was more than happy to share my experiences and how good these shoes were to my friends. I think a couple went out later and bought something similar” (Trang, 20-years-old).*

When it came to honesty as to a bad experience in buying the expensive branded footwear, these young consumers, based on wanting and seeking respect and saving face, sought individuals that they could trust, therefore often spoke to their family members, and in particular parents. Part of the motivation was due to the lack of judgment while also being able to have an honest discussion without any peer or social pressures:

*“I once bought this really expensive pair of shoes only to find out it was only hype and the design, comfort, style and quality were lacking. I was really disappointed. I could not speak to my friends as they would have laughed at me, so I went to my parents and told them, as they are more understanding and do not judge me the same way others do” (Linh, 23-year-old).*

As can be seen above, following the post-decision phase, these consumers were still active in evaluating the purchase and used various forms of feedback. When the acquisition was positive, which could have been informed and influenced by their social group of friends and peers, these consumers tended to openly discuss their experience, whereby seeking affirmation and showing their respect, which is also a form of giving face to each other. However, if the purchase did not meet their expectations, they tended to post online anonymous negative reviews to save face. Finally, these consumers were still prepared to disclose their negative experiences with their family, due to the perceived lack of judgment.

## **4.5 Emergent-overarching themes**

Although the next section will focus on themes which have already be presented, this study has found several topics which have emerged when addressing one of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) original research questions: *how do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientation, affect the social customer journey?*, which used the customer journey framework. The emergence of localization and acculturation characteristics have been continuous themes which have been presented throughout the previous sections, which indicates their importance and relevance. Part of the emergence of these themes was due to the two lenses used, the Vietnamese consumer and those who were grouped based on their date of birth by their generation, which significantly differs from the original work of Hamilton et al. (2021). These two lenses have brought in the influence of culture, or in the case of this study, acculturation. Acculturation has emerged during the three main phases: the pre-decision, decision, and the post-decision phases. Closely aligned to acculturation was also the preference towards seeking branded sports footwear, to seeking a globalized brand but remaining Vietnamese. The next section will commence with acculturation.

### **4.5.1 Theme One: Acculturation**

Acculturation can be seen as a cultural adjustment and adaptation which can occur when local and foreign residents find a cultural balance due to their continuous interaction and exposure to another culture, which can result in a proactive or negative response (Kizgin et al., 2018).

Proactive is when an individual assimilates a new culture into their original norms, whilst reactive acculturation happens when the individual rejects their adaptation to a new culture. In this study, the Vietnamese Generation Z consumers experienced both proactive and reactive acculturational attitudes. For these consumers, they had been exposed to and experienced global branded sports footwear. The study found also that Vietnamese Generation Z consumers were aware of and influenced by Western countries' values and preferences, particularly through their usage of online platforms for information searching. Again, informed by global trends often through social media, this generation has indicated a high level of preference towards seeking some form of social status and self-identity, which is closely associated with the emotional, social and epistemic values of Sheth et al. (1991).

This trend can be seen through the increased sales of this cohort of purchasing branded products in Vietnam to express their self-identity, achieved partly through an acceptance and embracement of globalization. However, this study also found a paradox, as Vietnamese Generation Z consumers still significantly relied on the opinions and views of their peers and family members for their purchasing pre-decision and decision-making processes. Furthermore, this grouping felt uncomfortable being seen differently from the other members in their peer group, therefore indicating their motivation of wanting to assimilate or copy as opposed to being different. This assimilation could be related to consumers seeking social values, but this could also be closely associated with the Vietnamese sociocultural dynamics of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, along with the collective cultural dynamics of the country.

The interviews revealed that purchasing globally branded sports footwear provided the individual with the latest and newest fashion trends, but there was also a caveat. This caveat was that Vietnamese Generation Z consumers wanted to retain their national culture and values still, and not be completely engulfed in a globalized product or item. Instead, these consumers wanted to tailor their sports shoes to reflect their pride in their culture, like adding the Vietnamese national flag or the red star of Communism to their shoe design. This was seen with the perspective of Sy, a 25-years-old male illustrator, who stated that the reason he chose a simple or plain pair of branded shoes was for special occasions such as on Independence Day when he liked to draw something unique about Vietnam on his shoes to celebrate this day.



*“I like to celebrate special occasions in Vietnam. I live in Hanoi, the capital, where Vietnamese culture is distinctive and the most obvious. On Independence Day, Hanoi is filled with patriotic spirit. I feel so proud to be Vietnamese, so I always create something special about Vietnam on my plain Nike shoes or T-shirt, such as a traditional dragon or the Vietnamese lotus flower. It is a small token, but I feel it represents my culture and country” (Sy, 25 -years-old).*

For Nhi, a 21-years-old female, she wanted to have a pair of sports shoes which permitted her to express her cultural tradition of serving the government. But for Nhi, to honour her family and the country she was proud to live in, she had never considered wearing a theme or design which would be seen as being disrespectful.

*“My grandfather doesn’t like it when I wore a pair of Nike shoes with the Vietnamese flag on it. But he is ok if I wear a T-shirt. For him, the Vietnamese flag is something very holy so it is weird to have them on my shoes. The more practical reason is also that I need shoes to wear on different occasions, so a flag might be out of place, while a T-shirt I can change or use the item once only. So, it is better not to have a design or feature which is too obvious on my shoes” (Nhi, 21 -years-old).*

The findings also indicated a cultural dimension to respecting the manufacturer. This was also paradoxical, as this consumer grouping wanted to own and wear a global branded footwear, but this was expensive, however, they did not buy a counterfeit alternative, as this was seen as being disrespectful to the manufacturer. Part of this perspective was seen by the consumers recognising that the branded manufacturer tended to invest in research and development of the product range therefore ensuring that the quality and style were constantly being reviewed. There was also the acknowledgement that many of the branded sports footwear manufacturers were becoming more environmentally conscious, indicating their commitment to producing goods which are recyclable and friendly to the environment. This was illustrated by Tien, a 22 -years-old male consumer, who saw his decision to consider wearing counterfeit shoes was contentious and had bothered him.

*“China...Hmmm...That is a sensitive topic to mention. Yes, I like to be trendy and up-to-date with my fashion, so I can buy counterfeit shoes if the authentic pair is too expensive. However, I tend to buy now the real version, as these companies are*

*manufacturing their sports shoes in a more environmentally friendly way and of course, there is the quality issue” (Tien, 22 -years-old).*

This perspective was shared by Ngoc, a 22-years-old legal intern, who openly shared her thoughts on choosing to buy counterfeit items and the negative aspects of this decision following buying the item during the post-decision phase:

*“Oh...of course I don’t think I will rebuy counterfeit shoes anymore. Apart from the quality, there are unethical and illegal activities which bother me from my professional perspective. It’s like you are disrespectful to the brand. Besides, it is not economical to buy low-quality shoes, instead, I can save and buy a pair of high-quality ones that I can continuously use without compromising my ethics” (Ngoc, 22-years-old)*

Finally, the study found from an acculturation perspective that Vietnamese Generation Z consumers were influenced directly by their peers and friend’s recommendations, to ensure they conformed to the societal norms. In deciding which product or item to buy, the consumers tended to actively seek their friend’s opinions or previous experiences before they decided whether to acquire the item or not, but with a focus on whether the item would still be acceptable amongst their peer group but also from a Vietnamese societal perspective. Part of the reason for this was the need to conform to the norms or values, and not to be “too different”, but instead “wanting to belong to the community and their social grouping”, as opposed to “standing out.” This finding indicates that the group of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers wanted to assimilate into their social community, such as their workplace. While self-identity was important, assimilation was seen as being more critical, as these individuals did not want to be judged by their individualized appearance, but rather fitting or belonging to their peer grouping or community.

This was seen with the comments of Viet Anh, who considered the process prior to making the acquisition decision when acquiring branded sports footwear.

*“Normally when I decide to buy branded shoes, I would ask my friends or my colleagues’ as to their opinion. For example, I have asked them about the most up-to-date trends so that I won’t be too old-fashioned. There are also other considerations, footwear which fits my style, but also which can be used for multiple uses, for work or*

*for hanging out with my friends. The second consideration is to ensure that the shoes are not too different and make me stand out in the crowd, and this would be no good for work. ... I must think about another option.... (laughed)...yes, it is a complex process to choose the right shoes. The shoes must be multi-functional but also have my own uniqueness on them, such as the colour I like, or allowing me to customize them with my name in very small print” (Viet Anh, 25-years-old).*

A similar experience was shared by Hieu, a 24-years-old male. For this participant, he had expressed his gratitude to his friends who had kept him up-to-date with the current fashion trends while providing him with honest recommendations, whereby ensuring his shoes would not make him too different.

*“Yes...my friend gave me the inspiration to purchase that Nike AirForce shoes. It’s my best purchase so far. The Nike Airforce are still trendy as they can be worn on different occasions, at school, work, going out...you name it. Many celebrities promote the brand worldwide, so it is for sure trustworthy. Another interesting thing I can do with Nike is that I can customize the shoes with my name on them with my own signature, but they still look classy, not too fancy, therefore my place of work, my family and what is seen is acceptable here is still being followed” (Hieu, 24-years-old).*

From the above, it is possible to conclude that Vietnamese Generation Z consumers like the idea of purchasing the latest up-to-date global trends, like buying global-branded sports shoes. The motivation, evaluation and ultimate decision tend to be based on and informed by their perceived level of trust in the brand and the high credibility the item offers. However, while this group of consumers are seeking to assimilate global trends, they are also influenced and therefore adhere to the country’s social conformity which is still present in the Vietnamese culture, indicating their desire of wanting to retain their unique origins and core values of being Vietnamese.

#### 4.5.2 Theme Two: Preference for localized and personalized product

After Doi Moi which was the economic reform initiated in Vietnam in 1986, the goal of the country was to create a socialist-oriented market economy. The outcome of this governmental

initiative was that the country witnessed an increase in global brands entering Vietnam. For Vietnamese Generation Z consumer, this opening-up and emergence of branded items have generated a desire to fulfil their need for self-identity and self-image, which has been in part informed by the emergence of social media. However, as mentioned above, set against this background, this study found that there was still a need amongst this group of consumers to retain some form of Vietnamese identity when deciding and then buying branded sports footwear. To illustrate this, Minh stated that she bought branded sports footwear because she wanted to be seen as a trendsetter amongst her peers and social group, but she mainly chose a simple style so she could personalize the ultimate design herself, whereby indicating a self-extension of her image through the brand and added feature:

*“Personally, we are Generation Z, we like to be seen as adaptive to global trends. We like the Western culture and their style; they have more innovative ideas for fashion. If big brands, such as Nike or Adidas can develop footwear that everyone likes and is awareness of, they have more influence on the consumer even here in Vietnam. People will think that the Vietnamese are up-to-date with the latest trends, but I think we are still followers but also adaptors. From a cultural perspective, I think brands should localize their products, as here in Vietnam we like to customize our footwear to be more personalized, like adding our name or our own identity on them. We are after all Vietnamese and we are proud of our country, tradition, and heritage” (Minh, 24 -years-old).*

This was similar to Quan, who highlighted that the quality of branded shoes was good, however, some of the branded items were too globalized, and he wanted to have the option for a personalized Vietnamese fashion feature, which enabled him to tailor the footwear to his Vietnamese background:

*“An important thing about my fashion is my Vietnamese personality. As a Generation Z consumer, my characteristics are unique and very strong, as a country, we know what we want. I want to be different but also to fit into society. I would like the design of these branded shoes to permit me to draw flowers and clouds, or whatever. The brand can produce the same shoes and sell them as usual but may be a higher price so they can be customized to be uniquely Vietnamese” (Quan, 25 -years-old).*

Sy also indicated his preference for more innovative development in global brands to be more Vietnamese-centric. He expressed his desire for a branded pair of shoes which enabled him to put his name or signature onto the footwear, which indicated his motivation for self-extension, while also following the recent trend in Vietnam.

*“I appreciate that brands spend a lot of money on the research and development phases of their products. This includes the maintaining of the quality, the high standard of durability and design which I like, but I also want to be Vietnamese and put my own cultural identity on to them” (Sy, 25 -years-old).*

In agreeing with this opinion of Sy, Hieu stated that the customized products could include personalized prints or enable the consumer to choose materials or even colours. For Hieu, he highlighted that the trend of globalized fashion products like sports footwear, also needed to recognise that the consumer, and in this case the Vietnamese Generation Z individual, also wanted to retain their cultural identity:

*“There are a lot of ways to attract me to buy branded shoes, but I feel missing sometimes is the blend of Western style and the uniqueness of the Vietnamese culture. I really love the fashion style of Nike and Adidas, but I also love my country and respect the society and traditions we have. We have the Internet here, and we are up-to-date with the recent styles and trends, but sometimes, I feel like my friends, we want to make our fashion a little more unique to us as Vietnamese citizens” (Hieu, 24 - years old).*

Huyen, a 20-years-old female, shared her experience of observing high-end brands that successfully launched their limited collection with specific designs. Reflecting on this, she also expressed her desire of wanting to own a unique pair of shoes but also included her Vietnamese cultural heritage.

*“There’s a lot of designs you can do on a basic pair of shoes. Vietnamese is a Southeast Asian country, where we celebrate Lunar New Year with our spiritual animals. I see many high-end brands, such as Kenzo or Tommy Hilfiger who release a limited collection of shoes and clothing with that particular animal on them for that specific year. I think it is a creative idea, it makes the shoes unique but of course, it*

*depends on the style you like. I was born in the year of the Goat which is based on the Chinese Zodiac; therefore, I feel that a small and cute goat pattern on my shoes would be good” (Huyen, 20-years-old).*

The interviews then moved on to understand the relevance of acculturation in relation to the localization of branded sports footwear. In the interviews, Hai Anh, a 22-years-old personal trainer indicated that localization was about understanding the local community and providing the service or product which best fitted their needs as opposed to offering a generic style:

*“With shoes, I prefer them to be designed, sourced, and manufactured for the local environment. For instance, in the North here, the weather is seasonal, while in the South is always humid and has no seasons. Therefore, in my city, Hanoi, which is in the north, I prefer footwear that is both functional and adaptable to the environment. Branded sports footwear cannot be manufactured with the assumption that light material for the summer is acceptable for all year-round usage, but instead needs to be reflective of the entire year and the locality” (Hai Anh, 22 -years-old).*

To summarise above, in addressing Hamilton et al.’s (2021) proposed research question, as to *how do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientation, affect the social customer journey?*, the findings indicated that this group of consumers wanted to customize their branded sports footwear based on their cultural background. There was a recognition of the style and quality of the branded sports footwear, but they also wanted the item to be reflective of their Vietnamese cultural heritage and norms, which have been arguably influenced by the sociocultural dynamics including Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, together with the need to conform, indicating the influence of the collective culture in Vietnam. There was also the need for branded sports footwear to reflect the consumer’s location and usage, as in Vietnam, parts of the country are seasonal while others are humid throughout the year.

## 4.6 Chapter Summary

This Chapter has set out the findings generated from the interviews with Vietnamese Generation Z consumers which has been aligned with Hamilton et al.'s (2021) original question, as to *how do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientation, affect the social customer journey?*, when the consumer progresses on this customer journey. The focus of this chapter has been to address the identified gaps which emerged from the literature review. In addressing this overarching question the findings have been aligned to the core three phases of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey: the pre-decision, decision, and post-decision phases. Based on the gaps, three research sub-questions were asked:

**Research Sub-Question One:** What motivational attributes influence Vietnamese Generation Z consumers of branded sports footwear during their customer journey?

**Research Sub-Question Two:** On their customer journeys, how do these motivational attributes influence the connection between Vietnamese Generation Z and brand consumption?

**Research Sub-Question Three:** From a business and academic perspective, what are the characteristics of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers when acquiring branded sports footwear?

Findings from this study suggest that Vietnamese Generation Z consumers had various motivational drivers during the first phase of the customer journey when purchasing branded sports footwear. The pre-decision phase was reflective of how the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer began to engage with the branded sports item. There are three main influences which motivated the young Vietnamese consumer's behaviour during the pre-decision phase. The first influence was the social value of self-identity behaviour displayed by the consumers when acquiring branded sports footwear. Here the consumer focused on social status and social belonging desires along with the perception of self-identity. This finding was closely related to

the self-determination theory of Ryan and Deci (2022) and the mini-theory of goal content theory of the individual being motivated to attain both extrinsic and intrinsic needs, including a sense of belonging and conformity. There were also personal values which informed the consumer, such as social responsibility, including environmental considerations and counterfeits, which directly influenced the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer's purchasing behaviour.

The next influence was the product and brand-related motivators, including the manufacturing and the quality of the item. Aligned to this was this group's awareness of their desire to respect the brand manufacturer, and their commitment to research and development in manufacturing quality items which were fashionable. This led to this group predominately rejecting counterfeit sports footwear, as they acknowledged that the manufacturing quality could be poor, that the workforce could be mistreated, and that the environmental standards could be compromised. This finding does partly add to the proximal and distal social motivations proposed by Hamilton et al. (2021) during the pre-decision phase of the customer journey in relation to motivation, information searching and evaluation. Another important attribute was the perception of quality as it indicated the durability of the footwear, the materials used and the long-term economic viability of the product as to brand value.

The final influence during the pre-decision phase was the influence of companions, specifically social dynamics, including their usage of online reviews, KOLs, celebrity endorsements, and through friends and family, when conducting information searches and then during the evaluation process. During this process, the individual was motivationally influenced by the intrinsic needs of wanting to belong while also seeking extrinsic self-motivation ambitions (Kasser & Ryan, 1996), which are closely associated with the goal-content of self-determination theories. This study found that although social media was used as an external source of information, therefore acting as a journey companion as advocated by Hamilton et al. (2021), their friends, the prevailing social norms and the family were closer and more influential travelling companions.

The next motivator on the customer journey was the dominant influence and power of family dynamics (decision-making unit). The findings indicated that the family members were the main influencers or the journey companions for the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer. In contextualising this, the core reasons could be attributed to the level of trust that family



members without judgment or losing face still represent to this group of young consumers. Family acted as a guide for societal and cultural conformity, which is an important consideration for this group, but also the recognition that this group were still financially dependent on their parents and extended family.

The findings have also indicated the influence of past experience and the word-of-mouth on Vietnamese Generation Z consumers during their post-decision phase. This study found that a satisfied experience with a previous acquisition can lead to brand trust, brand resonance, and brand loyalty or brand respect for the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer, which could lead to them repurchasing the item in the future. Additionally, the findings also highlighted the role of the word-of-mouth of sharing in their post-decision phase, which although included social media tended to be shared physically or in person with their peers and social grouping, which differs from Hamilton et al.'s (2021) focus on social media as the major communication tool.

The final theme, which is overarching of the entire customer journey is the importance of the acculturation characteristics of this group of consumers, as to the need for localized and customized branded products. This theme emerged as it addressed the interesting question as to whether there is a cultural connection and global connection amongst Vietnamese Generation Z consumers and to what extent do they want to customize their branded sports shoes? The findings indicated a strong desire of the consumer wanting to retain their Vietnamese national identity even though they sought globalized branded sports footwear. This pursuit of national identity extends to sports footwear not being too unique and being designed to be respectful, but also paradoxically fashionable. These consumers also wanted the design to be customizable but also reflective of their self-identity of being Vietnamese. Finally, there was a realisation that the sports footwear needed to be customized to reflect the environment, therefore able to be functionally suitable. This theme is partly addressed the third research sub-question as *from a business and academic perspective, what are the characteristics of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers when acquiring branded sports footwear?*

Finally, Figure 4.1 below provides a visual presentation of the findings generated from the findings using Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey as a framework, while also addressing the overarching original research question: *as to how do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientation, affect the social customer journey?* To

emerge from the findings was the importance associated with underlying sociocultural dynamics of Vietnam, which included the significance of acculturation, the influence of the collective culture of the country and the importance of localization, together with the need for brand quality, trust and brand loyalty.

# Consumption Motivation of Vietnamese Generation Z consumer for branded sports footwear

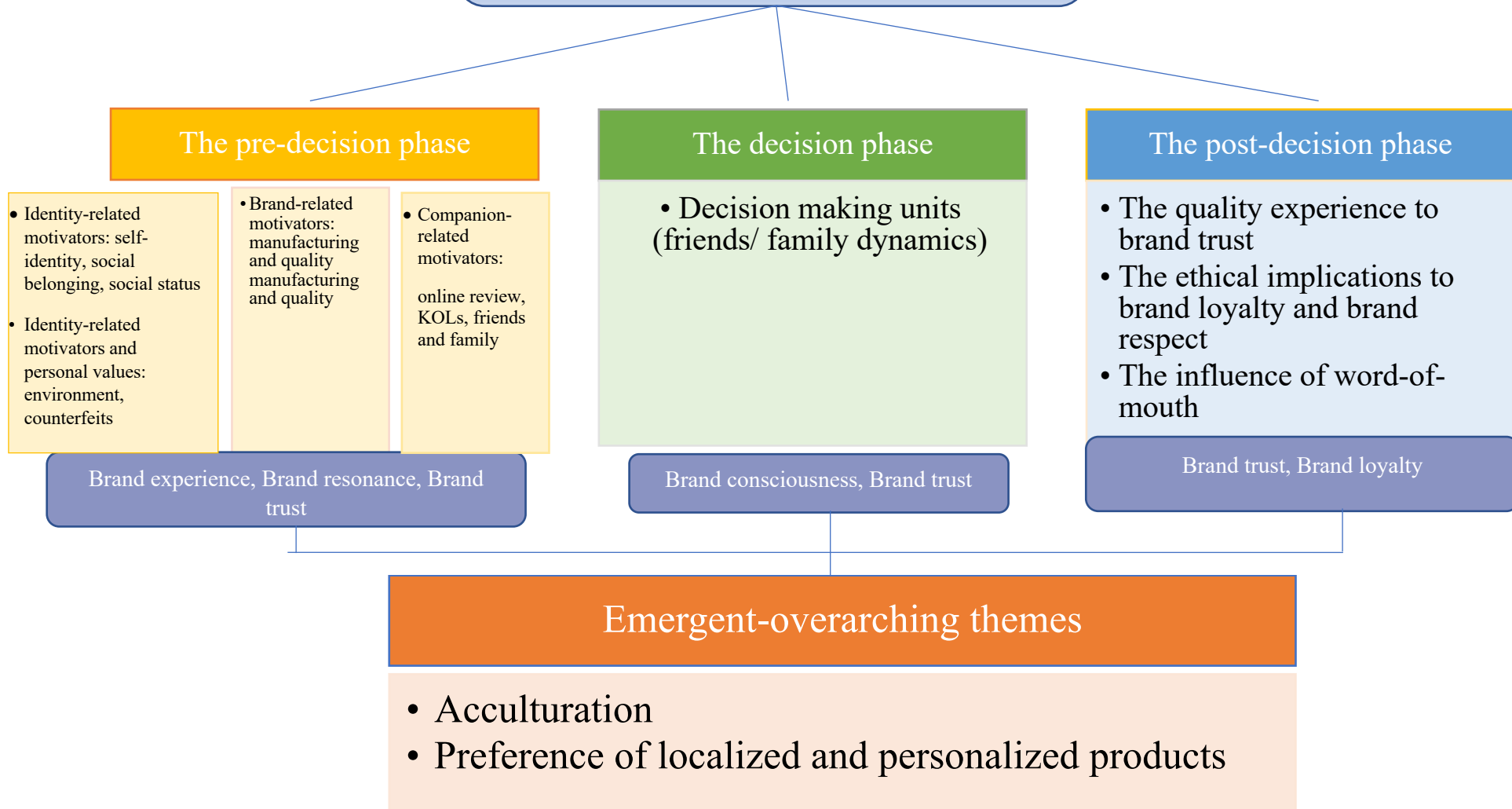


Figure 4. 1 Emergent themes

Source: Author

# Chapter Five

## Discussion

### 5.1 Introduction

As the focus of this study was intended to critically evaluate the motivational influences on purchasing branded sports footwear by using Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey framework, to address the research question of *how do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientated, affect the customer journey?*, this chapter critically discusses the findings of the previous chapter with the current debate as presented in Chapter Two, the literature review.

During the interviews, the study identified how the social drivers and past experiences influenced the Generation Z consumer's purchasing behaviour towards branded sports footwear, then determined the extent to which these influencers informed the final customer decision, which addressed the earlier calls from Hamilton et al. (2021), Vigneron and Johnson (2004), Lemon and Verhoef (2016), Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), for additional research, but from a Vietnamese perspective. The interviews therefore investigated whether these motives were present and influential to Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, before determining what this consumer group was seeking during their customer journey. Reflecting on this, this chapter presents this critical discussion, drawing on Hamilton et al. (2021) customer journey framework to represent the entire consumer experience, but also act as an organising device. This framework enables the conceptualisation of the customer's journey by mapping out the different phases which the consumer could encounter from the initial pre-decision phase, then the decision-making and finally the post-decision phase. The framework also enables the understanding of underlying motives and influences, including the role of peers, family, social media, and past experience, together with the importance of acculturation when the findings are viewed through a Vietnamese and generational lens. The chapter commences with the first phase of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) journey, the pre-decision phase.

## 5.2 The pre-decision phase

The first stage of the three phases of Hamilton et al. (2021) model represents how the consumer begins to engage with the item or service. In the first phase, there were three stages, the motivation of the consumer, the information searching and finally the evaluation.

### 5.2.1 The pre-decision phase – motivation

The pre-decision phase of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) framework commenced with the topic of motivation, which represented how the consumer is stimulated or becomes initially aware of the product or item. As a concept consumer motivation can be defined as a psychological aspect of consumer behaviour (Solomon, 2016). Here the consumer's behaviour and decision-making processes are expressed by how the individual acts or behaves in certain situations or alternatively influenced by their values to satisfy a particular need, which can be due to hedonistic or internal motives. Therefore, the motivational activity during the pre-decision phase represents how the individual interacts with the service or product. This can include those influences which inform the consumer as to wanting to conform, to acquire the latest fashion item, or through observing or hearing from external sources what is available. From a brand consumption perspective, the customer journey in this study was influenced by the various consumption values proposed by Sheth et al. (1991) including social, emotional or functional values, which can be either distal or proximal to the individual. From a motivational perspective, the findings indicated that the meta-construct of the self-determination theory advocated by Ryan and Deci (2022) can also be applied to the motivational attributes of these consumers. This included how intrinsic influences including the need and the sense of seeking a social belonging could be met, while also meeting more extrinsic motives such as external attractiveness of the person, the display of personal affluence or the seeking of popularity (Kasser & Ryan, 1996).

This study identified several motivational themes, including the pursuit of self-identity, social status, and belonging. These motivations were linked to preferences for footwear with specific aesthetic and sensory qualities, the desire to conform, or the aspiration to act socially responsibly. Moreover, the aesthetic and sensory traits were closely aligned with symbolic interactionism where the consumer's decisions are informed by interpreting their actions when purchasing an item (Solomon, 1983). With this study being based on branded consumption and consumerism, writers including Vigneron and Johnson (2004) have noted that branded items

are often associated with self-indulgence, with the consumer displaying hedonistic tendencies of wanting to seek personal gratification, or alternatively some form of reward or personal satisfaction through the acquisition of branded sports footwear. For these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, there was an indication that these individuals were motivated by social status satisfaction, such as being a follower of the latest trends and therefore, were motivated to display some form of hedonistic behaviour. The participants also revealed a strong self-identity of wanting to find an item which fulfilled their personal intrinsic needs. These consumers were motivated to wear the latest trend to indicate to others, their social status, being reflective of their lifestyle persona, while projecting their self-image. This included the connection and influence of their workplace and profession of wanting to conform, but also wanting to follow and replicate the styles and designs of those who influenced them.

This finding revealed the extent to which these consumers were concerned about their perceived social and individual values, which influenced their level of motivation and intended purchasing behaviour. There were, however, also other influencers who interplayed and informed the individual consumers, which included the role and influence of key opinion leaders or KOLs, online reviews, their peers, and interestingly family members. Underlying this was the desire and motivation to engage and then seek a product which was aligned to their personal needs. This was also directly related to the proximity of these influencers or what Hamilton et al. (2021) called 'journey companions'.

For Hamilton et al. (2021), motivation was directly influenced by the proximity and distance of social drivers. The proximity of these social drivers was related to the motivation, need or desire to affiliate or match with others. In this study, the distal or distance of social motivators included how these young consumers were influenced by their altruistic desires and needs. This was demonstrated by some of the participants in this generational group being motivated to acquire an item which was perceived as being environmentally responsible or ethically manufactured. This motivation was informed by the individual wanting to be an ethical consumer, which had been informed by their social group, whether that was through online reviews, social media influencers or in person. This finding supports Hamilton et al.'s (2021) notion that consumer motivation was influenced or persuaded by another journey companion. These journey companions had directly and indirectly persuaded the individual Generation Z consumer to conform to the prevailing norms of the Vietnamese collective shared values, indicating the extent to which the power or influence of others can have on the individual, which was closely associated with the motivational influence indicated by Ryan and Deci

(2022), as to the self-determination theory which shows how the consumer's motivation and behaviour shifts depending on whether the individual is seeking intrinsic and extrinsic needs such as wanting to gain self-esteem needs or seeking third-party approval. This level of motivational influence amongst these Vietnamese consumers was seen by their dependence on following various online influencers or KOLs, together with the reliance on online and often anonymous reviews.

However, unlike Hamilton et al.'s (2021) study, there was through a generational lens, the recognition and awareness of how branded sports footwear was being marketed to them through the usage of online celebrities and influencers. There was also an underpinning theme as to the importance of the background of the consumer who was Vietnamese. This theme of acculturation emerged as an overarching and core attribute missing from the original customer journey as proposed by Hamilton et al. (2021). While there was a distal proximity influence as to the consumer being motivated, there was also a close reliance on family members which emerged to be of a higher influence compared to online influencers. Also, to emerge from the study was the almost complete rejection of counterfeit goods, which was based on this Vietnamese generational grouping seeking an authentic product which provided quality, but also out of respect for the manufacturer. In this study, Vietnamese Generation Z consumers indicated that they recognised the brand manufacturers' commitment to research and development around the design and style, and this influenced them to become loyal customers. There was also the associated peer pressure of buying counterfeit sports footwear, particularly around the potential damage to their self-image and projected persona if their peers found out. Finally, to emerge from the findings was also the interconnected and continuum nature of the journey. While not as a self-contained or dependent stage, the next stage, that of information search, provides a critical insight into the importance of motivation and evaluation.

### 5.2.2 The pre-decision phase – information search

Next and closely linked to motivation was information searching. For Hamilton et al. (2021) *information search* was related to the (internal) assessment of memories or past experiences, along with information which has been attained externally about the product or service. Once motivated, the consumer then starts to gather information until the individual has sufficient knowledge of the item. This gathering of information can be gained from various sources, which today and reflecting the work of Hamilton et al. (2021) was predominantly from social

media, including following certain idols, online celebrities, KOLs and reading online reviews (Chen, 2017). While online information searching was used, information for Vietnamese Generation Z consumers was also gained through friends, and neighbours, along with the immediate family member. This reliance on the immediate family, friends and colleagues was partly attributed to the Vietnamese culture, which these consumers were still bound to, which challenges the original assumption of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) North American-centric conceptual work.

This information search stage of the pre-decision phase included the importance of the journey companion, which although presented in the previous section has relevance here also, indicating the blending or overlapping of these stages. There was evidence from the interviews as to how the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer initially was informed and motivated to engage with the branded sports shoes, which included drawing on their past experience through to being then influenced by their journey companions. These journey companions could be online or in person, but irrespective of their proximity needed to have a perceived credibility. This credibility could be based on the consumer identifying with the influencer, being someone who is seen as being older, therefore seen as reliable, alternatively a particular idol or KOLs. The reliance on online and social media to search for information was seen as being a trusted source and time-saving, however, the interviews also revealed that family members, and in particular parents, were perceived to be more reliable. In exploring this theme further, the role of friends, peers and family members were seen as important travelling companions. These travelling companions during the information stage challenge the original assertion of Hamilton et al. (2021) who firstly did not acknowledge the role of the journey companion at this stage but also introduced the importance of parents and family members. Again, these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers indicated why their family members were important, which included their young age, the reliance or dependence on parental finances to fund their lifestyle, but also their elder's advice, which was based on past experience, which also echoed into the final stage of the pre-decision phase, the evaluation. This finding is aligned with the study of Sheth et al. (1991) that the consumer's actions are influenced by the prevailing social value, which includes the cultural-ethical background of the individual. From the context of this study, there is a clear indication that the cultural-ethical background of Vietnam being a composite or amalgamation of the three main religions, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism is still present, along with the prevailing cultural norms of the Vietnamese culture of collectivism. To emerge from the findings was that Confucianism still arguably influences



these young consumers to follow and adhere to existing societal rules and moral values including respecting their parents. However, as noted above, while there was a dependence on their parents for their finances, this financial dependency was not seen as a fundamental influencer on these consumers, instead the conditional consumer values were informed and influenced by the prevailing societal norms in Vietnam (Sheth et al., 1991).

### 5.2.3 The pre-decision phase – evaluation

The last category proposed by Hamilton et al. (2021) during the pre-decision phase was the evaluation stage. At the end of the pre-decision phase, this phase represents the interpretation of the information gathered which has been based on the consumer's motivation. For the consumer to effectively evaluate the information, the process needs to include the assessment of the credibility of the sources, and then what the information provides. The essence of the evaluation process tends to be associated like the information search stage, with credibility, trustworthiness, likeability, and attractiveness, as the consumer also needs to be able to discern as to what information is reliable. This finding indicates the continuum nature and interconnectedness of the various stages and phases of a consumer journey. Again, Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in this study mirrored the earlier work of Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann (1983) and then later by Hamilton et al. (2021) who highlighted the influence of attractive online celebrities in the evaluation process, who have replaced the more traditional role of the salesperson, who has become arguably more of a persuasive influencer. The findings indicated that the interactive nature of social media did encourage greater engagement with the product or service. The consumers in this study tended to seek information from different sources including those online and anonymous, but then evaluated the different information and influencers irrespective of them being distal or distance through social media, or closer to the consumer, like neighbours, friends, and family members. But again, underpinning the evaluation process was the relevance and influence of friends but more importantly immediate family members. These family members' involvement in the evaluation process indicated the importance of the traditional family dynamics of this consumer group, which could be attributed to the age of the individual but also the paradox associated with the individuals wanting to be fashionable but also respectful to their Vietnamese background. There was also these consumers' evaluation of the branded sports footwear as to whether the design and style were fashionable, which fitted their persona or lifestyle but also conformed to the prevailing

social norms of Vietnam. This finding indicates the presence and importance of acculturation amongst Vietnamese Generation Z consumers.

Another facet to consider during the evaluation stage of the pre-decision phase is the influence of quality as to how it informs the purchasing behaviour of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers. In this study, Vietnamese Generation Z consumers were partly informed and influenced by their global experience of purchasing branded products, in which they evaluated the footwear based on its quality as a representation of “a reputable brand” or “having a good quality”. This implies that these consumers saw these products as providing a high standard of manufacture and product development. The assurance of quality also led these customers to perceive these branded products to be deemed as being trustworthy and providing credibility to their social position, which was supported by Doney and Cannon (1997) that a brand can symbolize or represent aspects of safety, honesty and/or credibility. This study supported the earlier assertion of Wood (2003) who contended that this generation gained the necessary knowledge that premium or branded items with higher prices often represent higher quality and better-made goods through their experiences, but also informed by third-party intervention, such as their parents and peers, indicating the potential of quality-price heuristics. This finding of seeking high-quality products to attain a more durable and comfortable product also advocates the notion that this generation was more of a utilitarian consumer group, motivated by the quality and long-term benefits of the product, as opposed to a transient and often hedonistic experience.

However, potentially underlying this assertion is that there is also the potential financial risk of needing to constantly replace the footwear as opposed to seeking a product which is ultimately more cost-effective and durable, which is arguably important as these young consumers were still not financially independent. As to the influence of quality, most Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in this study also showed their rejection of counterfeit alternatives due to the lower quality and the long-term higher financial costs. Even though a few of these consumers saw counterfeit shoes to satisfy their immediate needs, and that the quality was relatively good, most of the consumers disliked buying these inauthentic products. Part of the rejection was informed by this generation wanting to show their respect for the authentic brands and embrace ethical manufacturing processes, representing their customer self-value, a theme supported by Wong et al. (2019).

Beyond the pre-decision phase but associated with branded items such as sports footwear, which emerged when addressing the question: *of how do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientation, affect the social customer journey?*, included several emergent themes which could extend Hamilton et al.'s (2021) earlier model. These themes included the importance of brand resonance and brand experience. The next section focuses initially on brand experience from a brand perspective which will be aligned to the customer journey.

#### 5.2.4 Additional themes associated with the pre-decision phase from a brand perspective

The original framework of Hamilton et al. (2021) was created to conceptualize the generic experience of the consumer, therefore arguably was unable to fully capture the entire journey of a branded consumer experience. In illustrating this process associated with the brand experience, this study found that the consumer initially engaged with the item through various mediums and sources but is dependent on what the motivation of the individual is, which then leads to the gathering of information by searching for evidence. The next dimension is associated with the *sensory* stimuli, which for Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) was related to the consumer's evaluation process. In this study, Vietnamese Generation Z consumers did seek the aesthetics and the sensory qualities of branded sports footwear, including certain styles, which were aligned to their peers, friends, workplace, or online influencers, but also included the materials being used and the style, together with a Vietnamese theme. In this study, the consumer engagement was initially motivated by past experience or from their peers, along with the motivation to wear an item of footwear which was reflective of their projected self-image but also wanting to be paradoxically fashionable but also conforming. Vietnamese Generation Z consumers then evaluated this motivation by searching for information from both external or distal sources, including from online reviews and social media, along with a reliance on family, friends and peers. This enabled these young consumers to evaluate the information in relation to their values and perceptions and ensure that they still retained their Vietnamese identity from a Vietnamese perspective. To achieve this, these consumers indicated the importance of family and friends, through their desire to be fashionable, but also be respectful to their Vietnamese background.

Aligned with consumer affective engagement are certain *behavioural* traits. These traits are often linked to how the brand communicates with the consumer, therefore acting as a stimulus to generate analytical and imaginative thinking in the minds of consumers (Schmitt, 2009; Zarantonello et al., 2007). The study found that the exposure to advertising prior to the actual encounter or the consumer did lead to them actively engaging with the product, however, there was also a critical awareness of this marketing strategy, indicating that this group of consumers were not naive. The final trait of Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), the *intellectual dimension*, captured the intellectual aspects of the brand experience (Bapat & Thanigan, 2016; Brakus et al., 2009). Here again, Vietnamese Generation Z consumers during the evaluation process did use a logical approach in their search to evaluate the benefits of the item. However, again underlying this was the reliance on friends, peers, the workplace and most importantly family members as to the final evaluation of the brand experience, drawing on their perspectives.

Closely associated with brand experience was brand resonance. Brand resonance was related to the degree of engagement and attachment these consumers had towards a particular branded pair of sports footwear when searching, evaluating, and then purchasing the final item. Brand resonance in this study was related to how these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers interacted with the branded sports footwear, in relation to the individual's self-image, values and aspirations (Keller, 2010, 2012). This brand resonance was present when the consumer began to seek and then find a branded pair of shoes that fulfilled or met a series of criteria or characteristics, such as being reflective of their environmental and ethical projected image of being a socially aware consumer. This ethical stance was, however, paradoxical when considering that these consumers also sought a brand resonance which reflected their style and fashion taste of being up-to-date which meant that the old designs and styles of previous footwear had become obsolete. Then there was the challenge of seeking a brand which was both fashionable while also being sufficiently traditional to be respectful to the Vietnamese traditions. The findings also indicated that brand resonance extended through to the post-purchasing phase, where the satisfaction of the acquisition was internalized, potentially leading to or reinforcing brand loyalty. This study found that the level of brand loyalty and, therefore, brand resonance had a strong link between the consumer's attachment to a particular brand and their motivation to acquire the item in the future. This had led to some of the participants spending so much of their funds on their new branded sports footwear that they had insufficient personal resources to live on in the following months, indicating the importance of the branded item to them, and the strength of the brand/consumer relationship which could be positive or

negative (Park et al., 2010). For some of those participants who had spent most of their disposable income or had to seek additional external funds, indicated that their perceived brand loyalty had been potentially weakened or damaged due to the need to rely on additional financial support.

Below are the above themes which aligned to the three stages: motivation, information searching and evaluation.

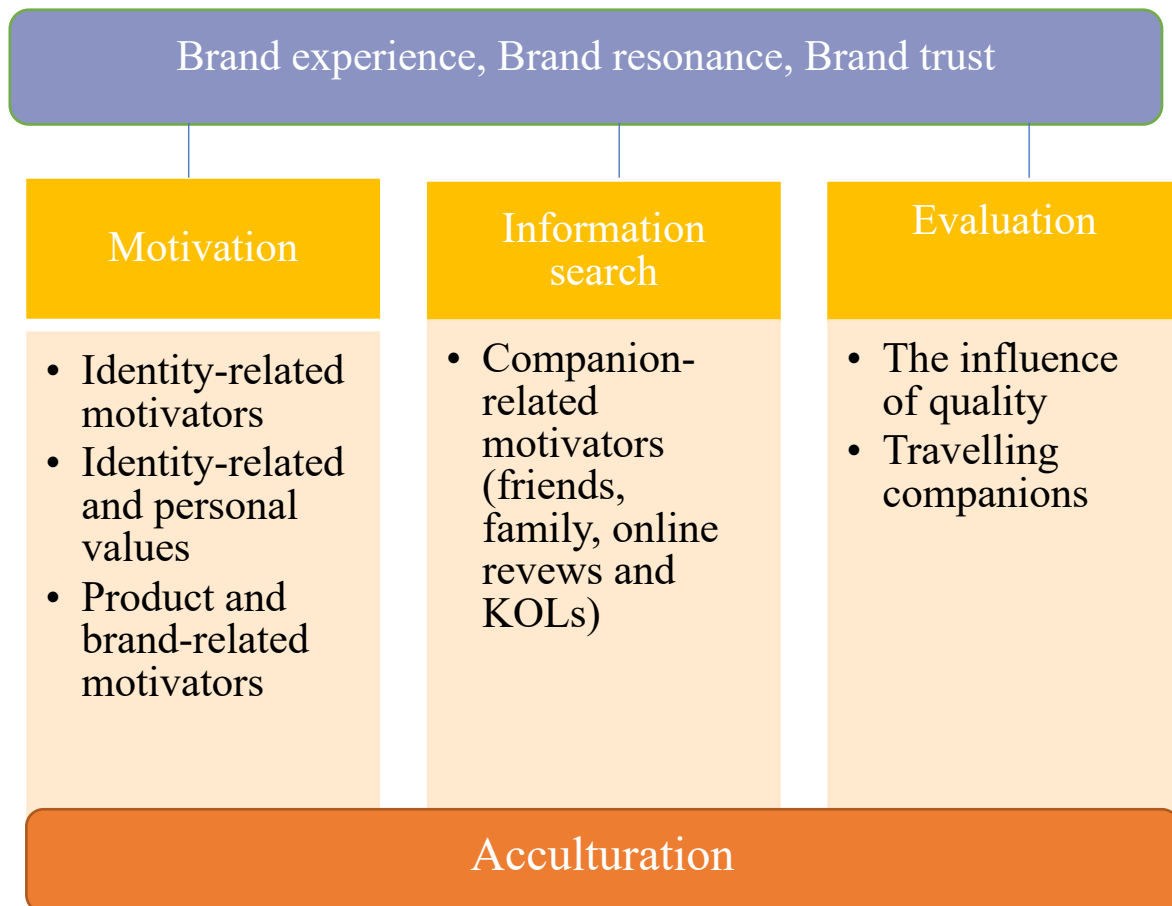


Figure 5. 1 The Pre-decision phase

Source: Author

### 5.3 The decision phase

The decision phase for Hamilton et al. (2021) was portrayed as being independent of the other phases. However, this study would argue that the phase was a part of the continuum of the journey and therefore, did not operate in isolation. Instead, the decision phase was informed through a culmination of the pre-decision phase, which then fed into the post-decision phase.

This perspective partly contradicts the single entity of the decision phase proposed by Lee et al. (2018, p.280), who saw the phase as an independent single entity which separated the pre and post-decisions on the journey, which represents how the consumer actively decides which branded item to buy and then procure the shoes. This study contends that the independent stage of the decision does exist, but it is not an autonomous or an isolated activity but rather interconnected.

This study found that the decision process could be differentiated from the pre and post-decision phases, with underlying social dynamics which is present throughout the phase. The consumers indicated that this phase of the journey tended to include the individual wanting to seek close and reliable journey companions to confirm and approve their ultimate purchasing decision. This outcome indicated the influence of the social dynamics of the consumer on their self-image and projected self-identity, together with the influential power of others during the decision-making process. For most of the participants in this study, this phase was a blend of proximal friends and family members but also could include online or remote distal influencers, which indicated that there existed a joint accompanied journey companion relationship, which agrees with Hamilton et al. (2021). However, when the findings were viewed through both a generational and the Vietnamese acculturation lens, there was a significant reliance on actively seeking parental and close family members' advice, indicating the importance of the Vietnamese culture of being respectful of their elders and parents. The findings indicated that the decision-making process for these consumers was influenced and informed by the need to conform, whilst also seeking affirmation, whereby avoiding embarrassment whilst also being respectful, which reflected the underlying Confucian values of respect, humility and politeness (Eriksson et al., 2017). For these consumers, Vietnamese Generation Z took the ultimate decision by being accompanied by a close friend or trusted individual, but interestingly also with a family member, such as their parent. This reliance could be directly attributed to the acknowledgement of their dependence still of their parents from a financial perspective but also underlying this, was the respect still for their parents and their perspectives. This finding supports Masterson et al.'s (2017) earlier proposition that due to limited financial resources, this group of consumers, could be classified as the 'user', but the parent(s) who were the 'financiers' also potentially acted as the 'decider.' However, it should also be noted that the parental influence extended beyond simply being the financier and was arguably informed by the sociocultural dynamics in Vietnam, including Confucianism and a collectivist culture. With their friends and peers, the decision process was centred on replicating others' fashion tastes,

including the design and style to socially conform with their social group while also ensuring they did not buy branded sports footwear which was deemed to be too ostentatious. Again, this was closely associated with conformity and the desire to avoid being embarrassed in front of others, which was related to the concept of the consumer wanting to save face.

From a motivational perspective, the findings also align with the meta-construct of the self-determination theory which theorises and represents how an individual is intrinsically and extrinsically motivated by various motives. These motives can include social acceptance, and seeking a sense of belonging, through to the individual being influenced by the unconscious adoption of ideas or attitudes of others (Ryan & Deci, 2022), alternatively motivated to meet self-esteem needs or seeking third-party approval. The study also indicated that some of the participants had also been motivated to buy particular branded sports footwear based on or influenced by their peers, which is closely associated with the organismic integration theory. This mini-theory of self-determination is where the internalisation of external motives of the individual is influenced by the unconscious adoption of ideas or attitudes of others (Ryan & Deci, 2022), which can result in the person's behaviour changing either positively or negatively, depending on the outcome of the experience.

When the findings were viewed from the perspective as to the behavioural decisions being made, to emerge from the study were similar traits as proposed in Sproles and Kendall's (1986) six domains. Vietnamese Generation Z consumers perceived the decision-making process as being a pleasurable and recreational experience which was associated with the feeling of enjoyment and was likened to a shared adventure with their journey companion (Sproles & Kendall, 1986; Puiu, 2020). The second trait was related to perfectionism, where this group of consumers actively sought branded sports footwear in terms of which item provided the best quality and value, which were aligned to the individual's personal criteria of self-identify and projected image. This motivation and perception included the consumer drawing on their past experience of buying counterfeit goods, in which the individual in this study reflected back on the poor quality of this product, including the lack of durability but also the potential lack of respect for the original manufacturer, and then the questioning of the manufacturing processes of these inauthentic shoes (Sproles & Kendall, 1986; Sharda & Bhat, 2019). This study did find that the theme of quality and counterfeit goods was related to durability, potential long-term economic savings, along with the type of materials, styles and designs being offered. As to the trait of brand consciousness, drawing on the findings in this study, these young Vietnamese

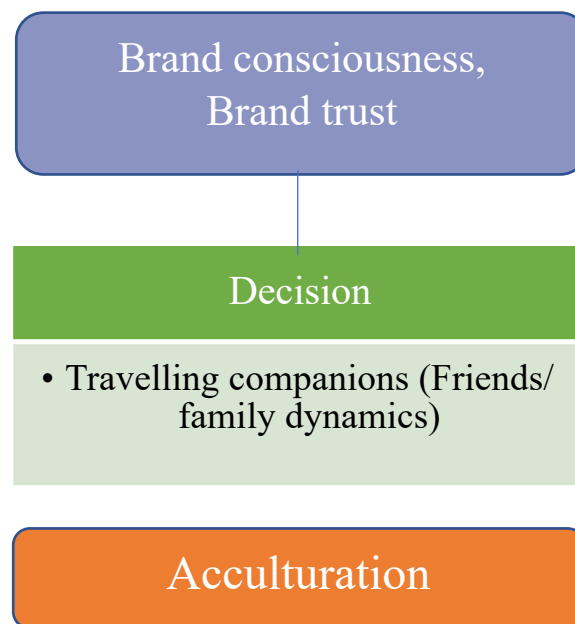
consumers were actively seeking, but also rejecting certain footwear based on the brand name, the associated price, their self-image, their past experience and the perceptions in their peer grouping, which influenced the consumer to ultimately buy similar branded styles and designs, as a means to conform. As for the potential confusion because of over-choice of options and items, these consumers tended to have preferences which had been informed by past experience, through their online activities, like following certain celebrities or idols, or aligning with their peers, friends or the workplace. There was no evidence as to these consumers being hindered by the number of options but were very discriminatory during the decision-making process.

The findings in the study indicated that there was a close association with branded sports footwear fundamentally targeted to motivate the fashion-conscious consumer. The consumers in this study who were young fashion-conscious individuals reported a series of traits associated with their preference for seeking the latest trend or style. There were some Vietnamese Generation Z consumers who actively sought sports footwear which were aligned to their specific activity such as playing basketball or running, but underlying this preference was also wanting to buy fashionable shoes which had a stylish design. With branded sports footwear, there was an acknowledgement as to the close association of the brand item and the price. There was no real indication for most of the interviewees as to being price-conscious which deterred them; therefore, the trait of potential price-sensitivity was not present. However, there were a few consumers who did indicate that the cost of purchasing an authentic pair of branded sports footwear was too high, therefore they had in the past decided to acquire a counterfeit item so that they could be seen still as being fashionable. Much of the decision-making process, including the pre-decision phase did not indicate any impulsive or careless behavioural traits being displayed, instead, all had spoken about the importance of the pre-decision phases of information searching and evaluation. In analysing the findings further, part of the reason could be attributed to the price of buying branded sports footwear and the projected self-image the product provided, together with the funding and reliance of family members and parents to assist in the decision.

Finally, the interviews revealed that Sproles and Kendall's (1986) trait of habitual/brand loyalty existed amongst these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers. These consumers tended to shop or buy the same branded footwear based on their post-purchase experience and satisfaction but were also influenced by distal influencers such as online reviews and KOLs, together with their friends, peers, and family members, like siblings and parents. Ultimately, these consumer traits were informed and influenced by various aspects, including how the branded sports footwear



projected its brand consciousness to the individual through trying to influence the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer to become loyal to the brand. Underlying this, was how the sports shoes fitted into the individual's purchasing preferences, self-image, and social identity, but also conforming with peers, and the workplace while also aligned to their Vietnamese background. This theme covered above is presented below in Figure 5.2.



*Figure 5. 2 The Decision phase*

*Source: Author*

## **5.4 The post-decision phase**

The last phase of the customer journey, which this study's findings have been aligned to, is the post-decision phase, which occurs after the acquisition has been made. Drawing on Hamilton et al.'s (2021) framework, there were aspects, satisfaction of the experience and sharing of the item with others.

### **5.4.1 The post-decision phase – satisfaction from a brand perspective**

Once the decision was made, the consumer then moved beyond the actual purchasing activity but remained on the journey continuum. Arguably the next stage is equally important compared to the two preceding phases, as the phase captures and represents the consumer's usage and

evaluation of the footwear. From a branded footwear and fashion manufacturing sector perspective, this aspect was vitally important to understand the entire journey of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers as they bought a branded pair of sports shoes. For most of the participants, there was a perception that the post-purchase stage tended to be a process of self-evaluation, with some of the interviewees reflecting on the positive and negative experiences, such as buying counterfeit items, spending too much money on the branded sports shoes, or how the experience led them to become loyal customers, which agreed with the original work of Lemon and Verhoef (2016). There was also evidence that this self-reflection of the interviewees' experience had been evaluated independently of other parties' influence, while also recalling times when they had been dependent on the viewpoints of others. To illustrate this, several participants indicated that their acquisition decision had met their individual needs, for example being able to be used in the gym and for socialising, while others had sought affirmation from their social group. Other consumers in this study mentioned that the branded sports footwear had fulfilled certain symbolic motives and aspirations, such as the social values of indicating their social status, which had resulted in enhancing their self-image and identity, which had been then confirmed by their peers who had observed and confirmed the purchasing decision.

The findings also indicated that these consumers were often concerned about the perception of others, particularly amongst their peers and friends, which was predominately associated with conforming with the norms in their social group. There was also the awareness of their parents' and immediate family members' attitudes and perceptions of ensuring that the branded sports footwear was reflective of their Vietnamese values, indicating the importance of the presence of acculturation during the post-decision phase. With the study's specific focus on branded items, such as sports footwear, to emerge from the post-decision phase, which arguably had been omitted from the original work of Hamilton et al. (2021) and earlier by Lemon and Verhoef (2016), was the importance of brand attachment and brand resonance. These two new themes of brand attachment and brand resonance partly mirrored the pre-decision stage, but also to emerge from the findings were two themes of brand trust and brand loyalty, which are also associated with brand conspicuous consumption theory.

The consumers in this study provided evidence as to the extent of their loyalty to a particular branded sports footwear, which had been informed by their positive or negative past experience, which could lead to an almost emotional bond or *attachment* between the individual and the actual brand, which then informed future pre-decision motives including the

evaluation process (Conner et al., 2020). But this attachment and emotional bond can be positive or negative, depending on the outcome of the experience. To illustrate this, some of the interviewees recalled how their branded sports footwear had met or even exceeded their expectations thereby increasing the overall level of satisfaction post-purchase. However, for some of the participants having to use their disposable income or having to depend on others, the experience felt that the consumer relationship with the brand had been weakened, as the purchase had been ‘forced’ through the dependency of others to finance the acquisition. There were also those consumers, particularly with the counterfeit goods, who recalled negative experiences, like the poor quality or lack of durability which led them to reject buying this alternative, therefore informing, and had *resonance* in their future acquiring decisions (Donvito et al., 2020).

There was evidence that at the post-decision phase, these consumers were psychologically attached and engaged with the brand. The interviews revealed that this group of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers were more focused on *brand engagement* following the acquisition decision compared to during the early part of the journey, as they were now fully engaged with the actual sports footwear, for example for socialising or for playing sports. The findings indicated that the engagement process following the acquisition was multifaceted, and included the consumers displaying intellectual, psychological, and behavioural traits (Dhaliwal et al., 2020; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Here, the consumers were able to see the benefits of buying branded sports footwear as they experienced the high-quality standards and design, through to how the items were made. Some of the interviewees indicated that their footwear illustrated to others their social and ethical stance, as these shoes were known to have been manufactured in an environmental and sustainable way. Many of the consumers highlighted that their brand loyalty to a particular item had been directly informed by their post-purchase experience, which had evolved over time through identifying and experiencing the benefits, such as the materials used or the durability of the footwear.

As to *brand judgement*, while not present in the pre-decision phase, this theme was related to the consumer’s opinions and beliefs based on their wearing and using the footwear. Here, the brand judgement was most relevant when the consumers spoke about the quality of the branded sports footwear, the materials used or related to the design or style of the shoes. These consumers also judged and assessed their loyalty by comparing a particular branded sports footwear with another to assess whether they would re-use or re-purchase them, compared to alternatives. Some of the consumers expressed their loyalty to brands such as Nike or Adidas,

as their experiences had met their expectations, therefore confirming, or reinforcing their brand judgement. Again, there was a recognition that alternatives such as locally manufactured or counterfeit sports footwear may not have had the same quality, design or durability compared to the more expensive but authentic sports shoes.

The final theme to emerge was *brand trust*. This theme was associated with how the consumer experienced the branded sports footwear during the post-decision phase, for example, the comfort, the positive comments of others, or the durability of the item which then informed whether the individual ultimately trusted the brand in the future. As proposed by Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2005) brand trust was mainly centred on the consumer's past experience engagement with the brand, therefore, is closely associated with brand loyalty and brand equity. The interviewees indicated that brand trust was closely aligned to their perceptions of having a sense of security which would then inform their future purchasing decisions. This sense of trust was gained if these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' psychological, social, or physiological needs had been met, which indicated the item needed to have been actually experienced rather than through a third party. When speaking about brand trust, the consumers also used words like the creditability of the brand and its actual usage, or how the sports footwear had met their needs and expectations.

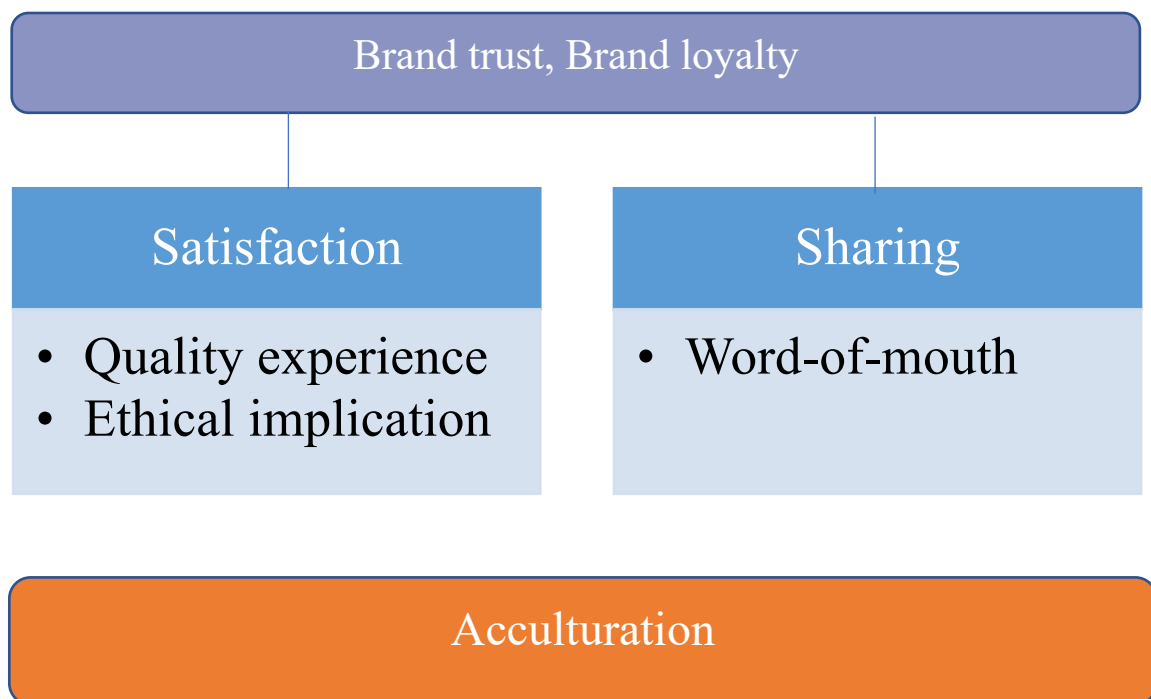
#### 5.4.2 The post-decision phase – sharing

Moving to the final phase of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) framework was sharing. This sharing stage was closely associated with how the consumer relates or conveys their experiences to others. This stage represents how the consumer informs existing or potential consumers of their experience. Therefore, this process of sharing the experiences of the branded sports footwear was influenced by the type of experience encountered which could be either positive or negative, but it was also dependent on the consumer's social distance. This process of sharing emerged to be closely associated with their projected persona as to how they wish to be perceived by others, together with the medium of communication used by the individual Generation Z consumer.

The sharing experience predominately was either online or in person but was targeted to a specific group of recipients. In this study, if the consumers had a negative experience would only speak to close friends and family members due to the potential embarrassment, and the perceptual portrayal of their self-image and identity. This negative experience was not shared amongst those who were external or distal. In contrast, with a positive experience, this was

conveyed to their proximal and distal friends, peers, colleagues and online through reviews to strangers or anonymous recipients. Part of the reason could be related to their cultural background of wanting to 'save face' amongst their peers and social group.

Interestingly, where the experience was shared amongst their community or social group, these consumers tended to present a positive experience as they wanted an affirmation as to their acquisition decision of their branded sports footwear. There were some interviewees who recalled that when they had conveyed a negative experience of a particular brand, their group did place some pressure on the individual to conform which had changed their negative perspective but had potentially damaged their trust in buying the same brand in the future. This peer pressure was in part informed by the individual wanting to fit into their social grouping, but also adhering to the Vietnamese traditional values, which appeared to be more important than their social grouping.



*Figure 5. 3 The Post-decision phase*

*Source: Author*

## **5.5 Emergent-overarching themes beyond the customer journey**

While there were several new themes which emerged related directly to the pre and post-decision phases, there were also additional topics which were more overarching of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) original customer journey framework. These themes emerged as the study viewed the customer journey through two distinct and unique lenses, from a generational and then a Vietnamese perspective. The next section will focus on the importance of country of origin and Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' perception of local and overseas brands.

### **5.5.1 Country of Origin and the perception of the product**

Arguably, as indicated in the interviews, Vietnam being geographically closely located to China, potentially influenced these Generation Z consumers not to seek Chinese-manufactured sports footwear due to the perception that there were a lot of poor-quality counterfeit goods being produced. However, in contrast to this, was that these consumers were critically aware of the emergence of locally manufactured sports footwear in Vietnam. The interviews revealed that in the past the manufacture of Vietnamese sports footwear was of poor quality and the materials used resulted in a short duration of usage, however, this perception was beginning to change. Some of the interviews revealed that the quality and durability issues of the past had been resolved. Interestingly, there was also a clear indication that these young customers are patriotic Vietnamese citizens and future consumers, who wanted to support local manufacturers and workers, however, the main criticism of these locally produced footwear was related to the limited range of styles and designs compared to international brands.

For these Vietnamese consumers in this study, they were not directly influenced by the country of origin or location of manufacture (Ha-Brookshire & Yoon, 2012), the brand's headquarters location as the focus was on the style, design and reputation, which contradicts the earlier work of Martin and Cervino (2011) or which country the designs and materials were sourced (Ha-Brookshire & Yoon, 2012), but instead sought a quality branded sports footwear, which could be local or overseas, but the criteria was centred on the quality, design and style being offered, which therefore led these consumers to seek and choose international brands. With the international brands, there was the association of the consumer with the brand image and reputation, but the perceptions about the country of origin, the people or products from a cultural perspective were not seen as relevant, even though they expressed being proud to be

Vietnamese. What this study did establish was that the overall image and reputation of the product and the company can potentially influence the consumer's perception of quality. Many of the interviewees in this study saw well-established and reputable brands being closely associated with higher perceived quality, leading to increased brand trust, loyalty, and confidence in the product. In reaching this conclusion, this study has addressed the question as to whether Vietnamese Generation Z consumers when purchasing branded sports footwear are influenced by the country of origin, as the findings indicated that the perceptions towards quality, reputation, design, and style were more important.

### 5.5.2 Consumer acculturation

Another theme to emerge from the studies into branded and conspicuous consumption has been acculturation. This has included research related to young Asia-Pacific consumers of wanting to acquire branded fashion items (e.g. Das & Jebarajakirthy, 2020), however, these studies have mainly been North American and European-centric. Consequently, existing literature was reviewed to explore the extent to which acculturation in emerging Asian markets, such as Vietnam, has been studied. In addressing this question, to emerge from the interviews was the indication that throughout the three stages of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey, acculturation was present. However, it should be noted, as indicated in Chapters One and Two, that this study was not focused on the cultural aspects of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers but instead on the customer's journey and experience. However, as noted in Chapter One, by studying the Vietnamese consumer it was necessary to acknowledge and reflect on the sociocultural background of the interviewees. This included recognising and then reflecting on the influence of the three main religions, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism when analysing the findings of the study, as they arguably still do influence the Vietnamese individual's behaviour of collectivism. This influence includes the societal rules and moral values followed in Vietnam, for example being respectful to others including their elders, through to humility and saving face, along with a cultural philosophy associated with seeking a more simplistic lifestyle in tune with the environment, which could inform an individual's attitude to consumerism (Eriksson et al., 2017). Acculturation, therefore, has emerged as an overarching topic used to contextualize and understand these consumers. Acculturation is mainly focused on investigating individual consumer responses and behaviours based on being in contact

whether that is directly or indirectly, with another culture, which was potentially relevant as this study was focused on branded sports footwear which is now a global phenomenon.

As a concept, acculturation is the influence by which an individual from another culture is prepared to buy certain goods from another country, for example, branded sports footwear from Nike which is North American-based (Bundy, 2017; Lin & Chen, 2013; Nkamnebe, 2014). Reflecting the work of De-Juan-Vigaray et al. (2021) this study found that there was a connection between the consumer and acculturation, but not necessarily influenced by their generational grouping, but potentially based on income level, self-identity, and projected image to others, while still wanting to conform through retaining their Vietnamese identity, which is paradoxical. This paradox also included the potential of some of these consumers seeking self-extension through their branded sports footwear but also wanted to retain their Vietnamese sociocultural background. The awareness of these international branded sports footwear was predominately sourced from social media, online reviews and following certain KOLs, celebrities or internet influencers, although friends and peers were also influential during the early pre-decision phase. Closely associated with acculturation when purchasing branded sports footwear, are the concepts of ethnocentrism and xenocentrism. These two concepts are arguably closely linked to the customer journey, as they indicate how the individual engages with and buys branded goods like sports footwear, then as to whether the decision was informed based on the item being domestically or overseas manufactured. As a concept, xenocentrism is based on the consumer preferring to buy overseas goods or items, rejecting local products, while ethnocentrism is the opposite rejecting overseas items for more locally manufactured products. The next section is focused on the acculturation of consumer centrist, commencing with xenocentrism.

### 5.2.3 Consumer centrist

As presented above, the findings in the study indicated that these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers recognised the improvement in locally manufactured sports footwear, however, they were still seeking a variety of fashionable designs and styles. As a result, these consumers were seeking a globalized brand due to the variety of styles and designs, but they were also wanting to tailor these shoes to reflect not only their own persona but also their Vietnamese background. This finding does to an extent confirm De Mooij (2004) original argument that globalization has led to some consumers being increasingly more attached to their local culture



based on their evaluation of psychological and tangible features of a product based on their self-perception, motives, local societal norms, and customs, but also challenges the assertion that they have rejected xenocentrist behaviour, therefore agreeing with Venugopal et al. (2022). The premise of this paradoxical argument is based on the concept that xenocentrism is centred on the consumer rejecting or devaluing their cultural values in preference for a foreign culture and their goods. In this study, the interviews indicated that there was no rejection by these Generation Z consumers of their Vietnamese traditions, in fact quite the opposite. Drawing on the findings of the study, it should be recognised that xenocentrist behaviour can occur when the consumer identifies that certain foreign values and features are more valued than theirs, which includes an increased focus and preference towards imported products compared to the local alternatives (Venugopal et al., 2022), which was present in this study. This means that the consumer is prepared to pay more for imported commodities rather than pay for the locally manufactured alternatives (Stier, 2010). In this study, there was arguably some indication that these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers had wanted to wear local shoes, but the globally branded sports shoes provided different styles and designs, higher quality and then provided a positive reputational image, which reflected their own projected self-image, which agrees with Camacho et al. (2020) contention as to why consumers were seeking overseas products due to quality issues. This indicated some form of xenocentrism, however underlying this these young individuals were adamant about retaining and respecting their Vietnamese background. This finding also aligns with the work of Pelet, Massarini and Pauluzzo (2018) who indicated the growth of ethnocentrism, by contending that consumers were seeking more local or domestic brands over overseas imports, due to a shift in consumer perception of wanting to retain their culture and country of origin. The findings of this study also confirmed the work of Lawrence (2012) and Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2016) who stated that consumer often justifies their buying decisions mainly by their social identity but then rationalize their reasons for not buying local products due to being unable to find a local alternative which meets their needs.

Unlike xenocentrism, ethnocentrism as mentioned above is the complete rejection of globalization and homogenisation of consumerism including branded sports footwear such as Nike or Adidas, which are predominately North American brands. Even though Vietnam was at war with the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, interestingly this group of Generation Z consumers, who are proud of their country, had not rejected these overseas branded fashionable items due to past historical events, which does contradict studies such as Khan et al. (2019) who provided examples such as the Chinese consumer rejecting Japanese products due to the

Nanjing aggression in the late 1930s, which has now become embedded into the national culture, which was similar to Ahmed, Hinck and Felix (2018) who noted that still some Dutch consumers dislike German products. Instead, these consumers in this study were more open-minded and pragmatic, who fully understood the events of the past, but were proud of their Vietnamese origins, but recognised the extrinsic and intrinsic values that this branded sports footwear offered. Therefore, the decision made by these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers was taken irrespective of the country of origin but was based on other facets such as style, design, or the recognition of these manufacturers' commitment to ethical and sustainable practices. Again, the outcome of this study does challenge the premise of Cleveland et al. (2017) who indicated that a consumer who is loyal or patriotic to their nation or culture is often inclined towards culturally similar products compared to items which are culturally different. While there are some similarities between North America and Vietnam, there are significant differences as to cultural and acculturation traits, which therefore rejects Siamagka and Balabanis (2015) notion that consumer ethnocentrism exists amongst this type of consumers, as these Vietnamese Generation Z individuals did not fully differentiate commodities based on their country and societal norms, as they sought to buy these foreign items for their value-added benefits. However, underlying this was the perception that these consumers also wanted to have branded sports footwear which reflected their loyalty, patriotism, and nationalism, and not simply wear a globalized homogenous brand. Furthermore, these Generation Z consumers were critically aware of the social and economic ramifications of their acquisition decision, and the potential loss of jobs when buying this global branded sports footwear, however as noted in the interviews, this was also paradoxical, as they highlighted that often these shoes are manufactured in the region, but also that these branded manufacturers tended to be more socially and environmentally friendly. This complex rationale does in part support the work of Cleveland et al. (2017), Farah and Mehdi (2021), and Pentz et al. (2017) who highlighted the importance associated with the consumer considering the locality of the manufacturer to ensure that local jobs are retained.

Interlinked with this theme was the focus on the manufacturers and the individual consumer's beliefs, ethics, and values which needed to be closely aligned as proposed by Cleveland et al. (2017), Halimi (2017), Khan et al. (2019), and Pentz et al. (2017). For Cleveland et al. (2017) if these beliefs, values, and ethical stances are not aligned, then the consumer may reject the overseas goods, as in the case of Chinese manufactured sports footwear. In reference to this study, the local products were perceived to be manufactured at a lower design and style

standard, the processes used were not environmentally sustainable, and the workplace practices were not socially responsible. To come to these conclusions, the findings indicated that these consumers were fully informed, therefore critically aware of the options and arguments of buying local, did understand the improvements made as to the quality of local products, how counterfeit goods provided a similar product appearance but were of a lower quality, manufactured unethically, and was seen as being disrespectful to the original brands who had invested in their product development and research. Ultimately, these consumers in this study were a composite of being a blend of ethnocentric and xenocentrism, which addresses the earlier calls of Camacho et al. (2020) and Venugopal et al. (2022) to determine whether Generation Z consumers, in this case were Vietnamese, displayed ethnocentric or xenocentrist behavioural traits towards buying branded items, like sports footwear.

## 5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter critically discussed the customer journey as advocated by Hamilton et al. (2021) and Lemon and Verhoef (2016) to represent the individual's pre-purchasing, the decision and then post-purchasing activities. In achieving this, the chapter reviewed each of the journey phases which have been broken down into the six stages, by combining the existing theory together with the findings from the interviews. The basis of this chapter has been centred on addressing Hamilton et al. (2021) research question:

*How do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientation, affect the social customer journey?*

In addressing this question, this chapter has presented a critical review based initially on Hamilton et al. (2021) framework, commencing with the pre-decision phase. The concept of the pre-decision phase indicated that the motivation behind the early stages of the journey included the motivation, the information searching and then finally the evaluation of the branded item. However, to emerge from the findings was the absence of some important themes which are important to contextualize this study, that the consumers were Vietnamese Generation Z individuals, who were buying branded sports footwear, which differs from Hamilton et al.'s (2021) original generic framework. Reflecting these differences there were additional motives behind these consumers' pre-decision intentions, for example, the

importance of symbolic values, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations along with hedonistic and utilitarian considerations. This newly identified theme was seen as being relevant throughout the entire pre-decision phase. Again, missing from Hamilton et al. (2021) and Lemon and Verhoef (2016) constructs was the importance associated with brand experience (Holbrook & Hirshman, 1982) and brand resonance (Keller, 2010, 2012), together with brand loyalty and trust. In contextualising this, this study found that the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer was influenced by behavioural and intellectual aspects of the experience including how the branded sports footwear would meet their self-identity and projected self-image.

Part of the early stage of the customer journey included the importance of internal or proximal and external or distal influencers, which were called journeying or social companions. This role of the companion for Hamilton et al. (2021) was mainly from an online social media perspective, which this study extended. This study found that while online influencers such as celebrities, YouTube idols and KOLs were present, their peers, friends, social groups, and the workplace were more influential, as they informed the consumer as to what was seen as acceptable from their social group and acculturation perspective. Part of the pre-decision-making process also included how past experience had informed these Generation Z consumers, indicating the continuum of the journey and the importance of brand resonance, loyalty and trust which refers to how the consumer relates to the brand through previous experience. Part of this could be attributed to the Vietnamese sociocultural background of these consumers who value attributes such as trust, loyalty, and respect, which is part of the collectivist culture.

There was an awareness amongst these consumers as to the branded footwear manufacturers' marketing campaigns and strategies, and the usage of celebrity and KOLs endorsements, which needs to be extended to recognise the importance of the consumer's social group and the influence of the family. Underlying this was also the importance of conformity, due to the presence of Vietnamese social norms and acculturation, which was highlighted by the important role of their immediate family members, such as siblings or their parents. Part of this dominance of the family can be attributed to the Generation Z consumer wanting to conform and respect their Vietnamese identity, but recognising as young consumers that they were still reliant on their parents for financial assistance, but also, they trusted these individuals' judgment, which potentially has been informed by the underlying three main religions in Vietnam and the prevailing collectivist culture.

The next stage of the customer journey was the decision. This phase included how the consumer made the actual purchasing decision, including the role and influence of external and internal journey companions. At this stage, these consumers sought trusted journey companions, which tended to be their parents or immediate family members, or a close friend. In contextualising this stage of the journey from the consumer perspective, this chapter has also viewed the themes from a brand consumption stance, as proposed by Sproles and Kendall (1986).

The last phase was related to the post-decision phase. The study found the prevalence and importance associated with brand attachment, brand engagement, how the brand was judged, through to the extent to which the brand was trusted, which then informed the consumer as to future brand experience and the consumer's resonance (Conner et al., 2020; Husain et al., 2022; Keller, 2010, 2012; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alema, 2005).

This final stage indicated the importance of satisfaction and sharing amongst their social group and externally, which is reflective of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) original framework. The study found that the consumer's experience of satisfaction with the product in the post-purchase stage agreed with the work of Sproles and Kendall (1986) which has enabled this study to contend that there were missing facets to represent the consumer experiences, such as brand loyalty, engagement, resonance, and attachment. The consumers in this study did convey their experiences through social media, but this was only based on conveying positive experiences, whereas if the experience was negative, they would only share this with trusted individuals, such as close friends or family members. Interestingly, the experience following the acquisition of the branded sports footwear was also influenced by their social group, which was informed by the need to socially conform to the prevailing Vietnamese identity.

The chapter has also identified that the existing framework of Hamilton et al. (2021) needed to be expanded to accurately represent the consumer journey of buying branded items, like sports footwear. This expansion included the acknowledgement of acculturation, as the Vietnamese Generation Z in this study were paradoxically seeking a product that met their self-image and projected identity, indicating their hedonistic tendencies, but were also influenced, or tempered by their desire to still respect their Vietnamese identity. This paradox indicates the complexities behind the customer journey, as these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers were a composite of displaying xenocentric and ethnocentric behavioural traits of wanting to wear international branded items due to the quality, style, and design, but also still wanting to support

and ensure that the materials are locally sourced and manufactured, which is partly informing to addresses the underlying research question of Hamilton et al. (2021): *how do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientation, affect the social customer journey?*

## **5.7 Updated Conceptual Framework**

Before proceeding to present the study's contribution, the conceptual framework will be revised and re-presented. Based on Hamilton et al.'s (2021) model, the study has found the connection between brand consumption and Vietnamese Generation Z consumers with the emergence of several important facets, including brand experience and brand resonance in the pre-decision phase, brand consciousness in the decision phase and brand trust and brand loyalty in the post-decision phase. During their customer journey, the findings also revealed various motivational attributes, including self-seeking and hedonic behaviour, the role of the travelling companions and the influence of quality, ethical implications, the preference of localized and customized products and word-of-mouth. Finally, there are emergent themes that are beyond the customer journey, namely consumer acculturation and centrism with the perception of the product and country of origin, which is presented in Figure 5.4.

Connection between Vietnamese Gen Z and brands

Motivational attributes

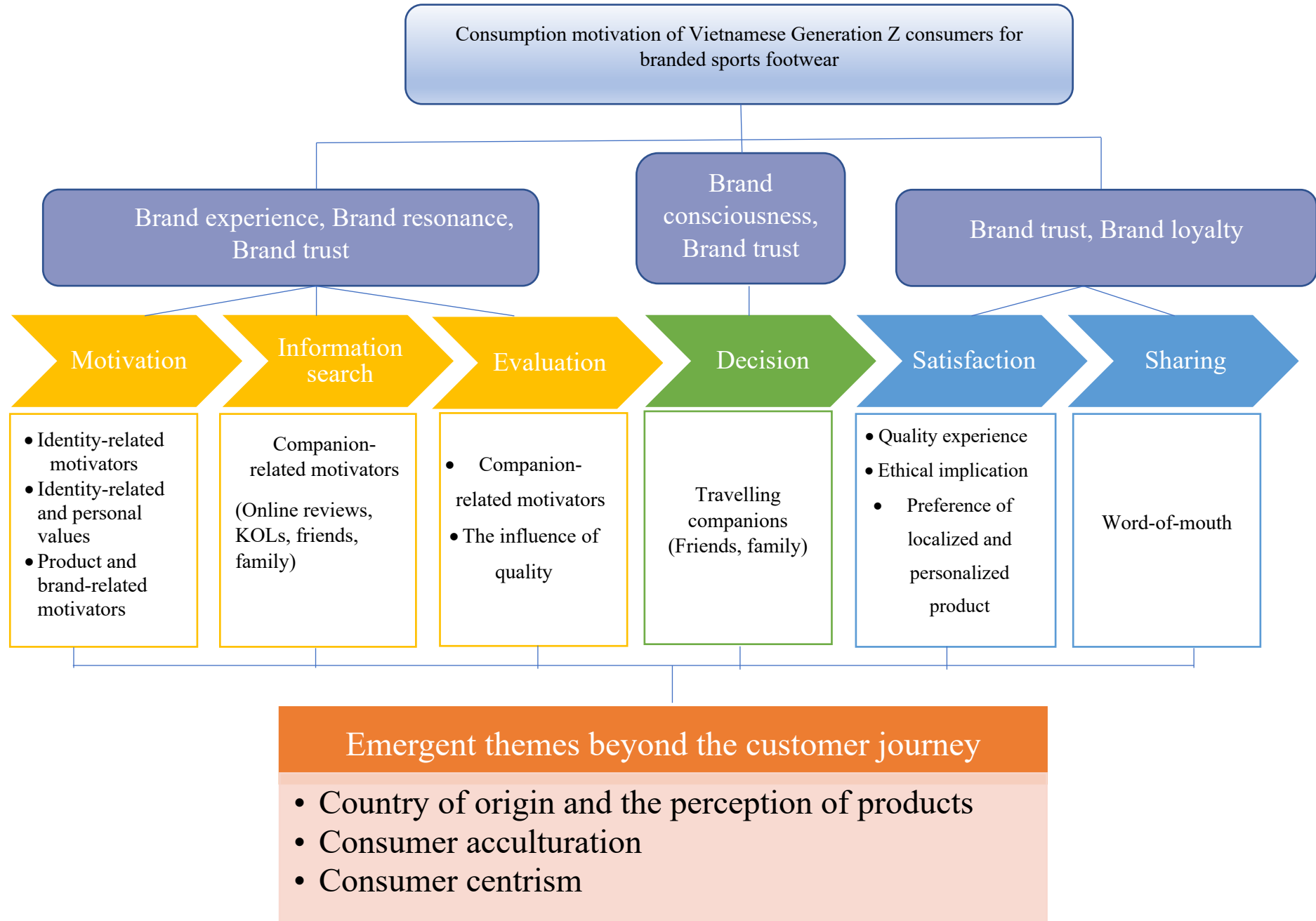


Figure 5. 4 Updated Conceptual framework

Source: Author

# Chapter Six

## Conclusion

### 6.1 Introduction

Following the presentation of the study's findings in Chapter Four and the discussion of the outcomes as presented in Chapter Five, which was linked to the existing literature, this Chapter presents the conclusions of the research project. The Chapter sets out how the study achieved the aim and objectives of the research project, before presenting the contribution to academic theory and business practice. Finally, the Chapter presents the limitations and recommendations for future research.

### 6.2 The Aim of the Research

This study aimed to explore the motives of Vietnamese Generation Z for consuming branded sports footwear. To achieve this, the study addressed the following research question, as posed by Hamilton et al. (2021):

*How do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientation, affect the social customer journey?*

To address this, the following research sub-questions were asked:

**Research Sub-Question One:** What motivational attributes influence Vietnamese Generation Z consumers of branded sports footwear during their customer journey?

**Research Sub-Question Two:** On their customer journeys, how do these motivational attributes influence the connection between Vietnamese Generation Z and brand consumption?



**Research Sub-Question Three:** From a business and academic perspective, what are the characteristics of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers when acquiring branded sports footwear?

By investigating this question, the study also intended to produce an in-depth understanding of the motivational traits which influence Vietnamese Generation Z consumers when purchasing branded sports footwear, to provide greater insight into this generational consumer behaviour from a Vietnamese context by adopting Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey model.

### **6.3 Overview of the Study**

In this study, consumption motivation was viewed from Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey model when Vietnamese Generation Z consumers are buying branded sports footwear. This has included this consumer group's engagement and usage of online platforms and reviews to inform their buying decisions, and their focus on seeking sustainable fashion, while also being influenced by their peers, celebrities or KOLs and family members during the decision and post-decision phases.

The fieldwork undertaken for the main study consisted of conducting semi-structured interviews with 25 Vietnamese Generation Z consumers based in Hanoi. The participants were part of the Generation Z grouping aged from 18-25 years old, and who were employed. The group of participants were interviewed and had shared interests or experiences in buying branded sports footwear. Interviews were undertaken both online and in person. An interpretive methodology was adopted, using an inductive approach to understand the individuals' motives to consume branded sports footwear.

Interview questions were generated from the current emerging knowledge and identified gaps but being semi-structured, the research format enabled the participants to present their experiences. The interviews were recorded, and the transcripts were analyzed using a content analysis approach advocated by Miles and Huber (1994) and Neuendorf (2017). The findings

were evaluated in relation to various studies from the literature review regarding Generation Z consumption behaviour.

## 6.4 Findings and Conclusions

This section sets out how the three research sub-questions were answered and how the research aim: *to critically evaluate the consumption motives of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers towards branded sports footwear*, was achieved.

In addressing the research question of Hamilton et al. (2021), as to *how do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientation, affect the social customer journey?*, the focus was on what motivational attributes influenced Vietnamese Generation Z consumers during their customer journey when acquiring branded sports footwear. There was robust academic evidence in Chapter Two and the findings in Chapter Four that highlighted the different motivational characteristics that influenced the Vietnamese Generation Z consumers during their customer journey. In reaching this conclusion, the findings drew on consumption motivational theories, including Ryan and Deci (2017), Sproules and Kendall (1986), Vigneron and Johnson (2004) and Keller (2010, 2012), together with Hamilton et al.'s (2021) linear proxy customer journey model. In the **pre-decision phase**, this group of consumers was influenced by self-identity, social status, social-belonging desire, sustainability, the quality experience, and includes their peers or friends and family members and finally online influencers. The study concurred with the classification advocated by Mitchell and Biglan (1971) that external attributes may affect consumer behaviour, which can include advertising, social media or from their peers, friends, or other influencers, while the internal attributes may involve personal satisfaction, a desire or self-need (Wilcox et al., 2009). This finding is closely linked to the studies by Overby and Lee (2016) and Childers et al. (2001) who argued that hedonic and utilitarian motives can have a direct and positive influence on the consumer's preference. This finding was also associated with the self-determination theory as advocated by Ryan and Deci (2017) and Deci et al. (2016), as to the causality-orientated and goal content theory concepts. The causality-orientated theory sets out how individual differences may be influenced by the environment; conversely, the goal content theory focuses on personal intrinsic motivations (e.g. personal growth, having a sense of belonging, or a close

relationship with others), which are balanced by extrinsic motivations (e.g. projecting self-image or seeking personal popularity) (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). The study also supports the proposition of Hamilton et al. (2021) that consumer motivation was influenced and persuaded by a journey companion, which can be their friends, family members, or even online influencers, such as KOLs or online reviews. However, in differentiating from the study of Hamilton et al. (2021), the findings have revealed the influence of the cultural background of these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' acquisition behaviour. As to peer influence, the Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in this study indicated that they tended to follow their friends and family members, who share similar interests or experiences, therefore creating a sense of trust.

During the **decision phase**, the study revealed that family played a crucial role in influencing their purchasing and decision-making behaviour. This finding supports Shukla and Rosendo-Rios (2023) who from a brand consumption perspective, highlighted the importance of social comparisons and the influence of reference groups. From this finding, this study found that the family was an important influence on Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, but also these individuals were still not entirely financially independent. These Vietnamese Generation Z consumers saw the decision-making process as meeting their self-identity and self-image while experiencing a shared adventure with their journey companion, which was often a family member.

In the **post-decision phase** of the Vietnamese Generation Z customer journey, the study highlighted the importance of past experience, including the influence of quality, ethical implications and word-of-mouth. The study revealed that this grouping of consumers tended to self-evaluate their past acquisition experience. This included reflecting on either the negative experiences, such as acquiring counterfeit products or the positive aspects experienced that led them to become a loyal customer, which supports the work of Lemon and Verhoef (2016).

As to investigating the customer journey as to whether these motivational attributes influenced the connection between Vietnamese Generation Z and brand consumption?, Chapter Two presented Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey model. This study found that the model still lacks a brand perspective. Based on this finding, each stage of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) model has included the influence of brand fashion items, for example, the pre-decision phase with the inclusion now of brand experience and brand resonance. With the post-decision phase,

there was the inclusion of brand attachment, brand engagement, brand judgement and brand trust, which updates Hamilton et al.'s (2021) model drawing on existing brand consumption studies, including Brakus et al. (2009), Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), Keller (2010, 2012), Sproles and Kendall (1986), Conner et al. (2020), Dhaliwal et al. (2020), Hollenbeck et al. (2014) and Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2005).

In exploring these theories further, the findings in Chapter Four found that these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers engaged and interacted with social media when seeking information, but also relied on close friends, peers, and family members. The study revealed that Vietnamese Generation Z consumers did rely on online resources, such as social media influencers like celebrities and KOLs, or online reviews to stimulate and inform their acquisition decision. Noticeably, the Vietnamese Generation Z consumers were strongly influenced by their past acquisition experience at the end of their customer journey. Most of the participants in this study shared their negative experiences of purchasing counterfeit goods and their poor quality, leading to them rejecting these inauthentic items in the future due to the unethical manufacturing methods while showing their respect to the branded companies. For this grouping, an ethically manufactured brand was aligned with their self-image and perception of value.

From a business and academic perspective, what are the characteristics of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers when acquiring branded sports footwear?, Generation Z theories as presented in Chapter Two, including Djafavora and Bowes (2020), Joshi and Rahman (2015), Ozkan (2017), Van den Bergh and Pallini (2018) and Luan (2023) have presented shared characteristics of the Generation Z consumers, however, what remains unclear is the extent to which these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers sought branded sports footwear, and if there were any distinctive characteristics? To address these questions, the study found that Vietnamese Generation Z consumers have an acculturation behaviour in their purchasing activities. The study revealed that while this group of consumers tended to seek global trends and wanted to wear the most up-to-date shoe styles based on recommendations from social media—including KOLs and online influencers—the final decision was mainly based on their parents' opinions due to their financial dependency and respect to their family. In reaching this conclusion and illustrating this, the participants in this study recognised the importance of their cultural background as being fundamental to their self-identity when purchasing fashion items. This included seeking a globally branded item which was also Vietnamese in its style, such as the inclusion of the national flag on their clothing, symbolising their respect for the country.

Finally, this grouping also considered that as a Vietnamese consumer, they wanted to be an ethical customer and to buy a counterfeit item was seen as unethical, which could reflect on the country's international reputation. These purchasing characteristics of the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer have provided a significant contribution and implications for marketers, retailers, and manufacturers, which is presented in more detail in section 6.6.

## **6.5 Contribution to knowledge**

This section is based on evaluating the consumption motives behind Vietnamese Generation Z consumers purchasing branded sports footwear, to provide a new insight into the connection between the Vietnamese young generation and branded items, indicating the implications for global marketing practitioners. The first contribution is related to the characteristics associated with Generation Z, and their relationship to purchasing branded items, which will be presented in section 6.5.1. The next contribution is the extension of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey model as presented in section 6.5.2, to illustrate the motivation of young Vietnamese consumers when engaged in brand consumption.

### **6.5.1 Contribution to Generation Z studies - understanding the characteristics of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers and their relationship with brand consumption**

In brand consumption studies, motivation has been presented, interpreted, and contextualized using different theories, which included the concept of conspicuous consumption (Richins, 1994; Dubois & Laurent, 1996; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Then over the past decade, there has been increased academic interest in Generation Z as a new consumer grouping as to whether this conspicuous consumption theory has relevance to this new cohort (Dorsey, 2020; Fromm, 2019; Weise, 2019). By combining these two disciplines, this study has introduced a new dimension and unique contribution to investigating the consumption motives of Vietnamese Generation Z towards branded sports footwear as to the connection between this grouping and brands, and what motivational facets influence their purchasing behaviour for buying branded sports footwear. Fundamental to this research was the call for future research articulated in Hamilton et al.'s (2021) conceptual paper. It asks, *how do cultural*

*factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientation, affect the social customer journey?* Additionally, there have been other calls by writers such as Bharadwaj (2020), Marroncelli and Braithwaite (2022), Heugel (2015) and Lewis and Moital (2016) for research further into how the young generation buys branded items. Partly addressing this gap, Bharadwaj (2020) conducted a longitudinal study in India, then from a U.K. perspective this theme was researched by Marroncelli and Braithwaite (2022), and from a Latin America viewpoint (Heugel, 2015 and Lewis & Moital, 2016). From an Asian perspective, Das and Jebarajakirthy (2020) and Jinkins (2016) studied young Asian-Pacific consumers in their brand consumption, but there was still a lack of research into brand consumption from a Vietnamese Generation Z consumer's viewpoint and less focus on branded sports footwear.

In studying Generation Z's consumption motives and behaviours, this study has revealed that the quality aspect of footwear was a key attribute for this generation during their purchasing decision-making process. For the participants in this study, as regular consumers of branded items including sports footwear, Vietnamese Generation Z tended to focus more on high-quality shoes which could provide reduced replacement costs due to their durability, thereby mitigating the potential long-term financial cost. This finding is aligned with the study of Vigneron and Johnson (2004), and earlier Aaker (1991) that the perception toward quality is one of the crucial consumption motives. The importance of quality experience in consumption motivational behaviour can be seen in this study's findings, where the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer tends to build their level of trust and connection with the brand by having a positive experience as to the item's quality, whether that is directly or indirectly through their peers or individuals of influence. This finding supports the work of Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2005), and Sirdeshmukh et al. (2018) that the consumer experience can significantly be enhanced or impeded by the perceived level of trust and credibility towards a particular brand. Closely associated with the quality attribute, Vietnamese Generation Z consumers were highly aware of the brand's manufacturing commitment to research and development, together with the business's ethical stance. This awareness was reflected in the respect and loyalty that this generational grouping demonstrated, and potentially informed and influenced their repurchasing behaviour.

This study found that Generation Z relied on online platforms to inform and make their purchasing decisions due to their exposure and usage of online activities, which concurs and agrees with Djafavora and Bowes (2020), and Gilbert (2003). While Generation Z consumer studies tended to view this grouping as an independent generation possessing a high level of

self-esteem and self-identity attributes (Van den Bergh & Pallini, 2018), which emerged as a key contribution of this study. While not entirely dependent on this medium, Vietnamese Generation Z consumers used online platforms to express their self-image and also as a key means to gain brand awareness. This study revealed that this generation tends to rely more on social media, especially endorsements by celebrities or well-known influencers, who share similar interests or lifestyles with them, therefore these young consumers tend to follow and potentially buy products and items based on recommendations. These celebrities, influencers or KOLs, often cooperate closely with the brand, helping the manufacturer to introduce and advertise the products to the market, acting as a partner, before assuming the role of brand influencers to build the image (Jerslev, 2016; McCormick, 2016).

As to the theme associated with the attributes related to consumption motives, this study contributes to existing academic knowledge in relation to social responsibility, ethical business practices and environmental concerns, but from a Vietnamese Generation Z perspective. Earlier in studying Generation Z's sustainable consumption behaviour, Fernando and Wah (2017) and Nikolić et al. (2022) highlighted these grouping characteristics of being a "green generation", these studies contended that this group actively sought sustainable solutions including wanting to reduce emissions which have cascaded into their awareness of climate change. This behaviour has now been influencing their fashion acquisition decisions. These characteristics were found in this study, with the Vietnamese Generation Z consumers actively seeking environmental and practical solutions such as saving to buy high-quality and authentic sports footwear for its long endurance and durability, rather than buying counterfeit items for the latest trends and then disposing of the item quickly. This study also found that there was a strong awareness amongst this generational group of consumers as to the importance of ethical business practices of branded manufacturers. From the findings of this study, the participants tended to indicate an empathy for their country as a key manufacturer of branded clothing including branded sports footwear, and therefore possessed a high level of awareness of the need to have an equitable workforce. This grouping of consumers was prepared to shift their purchasing habits and loyalty if their perceived values and ethical stances were compromised. As a result, this grouping tended to engage with brands based on their desire for "perfectionism", not only on quality as a functional motivator but also as a representation of their social value.

This study additionally highlighted the participant's attitudes and display of hedonistic behaviour. There was a high level of hedonistic motivation displayed towards seeking brand consumption which was built on the earlier research of Vigneron and Johnson (2004) together with the work of Veblen (1899, as cited in Patsiaouras & Fitchett, 2012), and Lemon and Verhoef (2016). In this study, Vietnamese Generation Z consumers saw wearing branded sports footwear as a personal statement of their financial stability, self-identity and assimilation into their social grouping. A crucial contribution of this study was that while this grouping of consumers could buy counterfeit shoes to be up to date with the latest fashion trend, there was an unspoken rejection of purchasing counterfeit goods and the associated unethical practice of the manufacturer. For these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, they tended to build their respect and commitment to a brand through their previous acquisition experience and perception of brand quality which could be informed also by their social grouping. For this group of Vietnamese consumers, the durability, the high-quality materials used, and the lifestyle that a brand represents were important influencers of their purchasing behaviour. The study also revealed an awareness of illegal counterfeit goods, which potentially challenged their perceived self-image of lifestyle and social values, which could also negatively affect their social status and appearance.

While there were some extant studies based on acculturation in consumer motivation, authors including Berry (1997), and Laroche and Cleveland (2007) highlighted the close relationship between acculturation and brand consumption. For these writers, acculturation is a process in which an individual must shift or change their lifestyle to be adaptive to their environment as presented in section 5.5.2. Building on this, the most important contribution of this study is the acculturation characteristics highlighted from the findings generated by Vietnamese Generation Z consumers to their purchasing decision-making. From the findings of this study, this group of consumers were motivated to acquire global branded sports footwear and mainly influenced by online advertising, and persuasive online influencers, who have a significant interaction with the brand's identity through social media. During the interviews, most of the Vietnamese Generation Z participants expressed less interest in existing local brands, such as Thuong Dinh and Bitis, while indicating a high level of enthusiasm when purchasing reputable brands based on the desire to be wearing the latest global trend. This finding concurs with the



study of Cleveland, Laroche and Takahashi (2015) together with Jebarajakirthy et al. (2021) who contended that acculturation of the consumer often occurs when the perception of an individual changes due to the new engagement with another culture's value. For this study, this occurred when these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers were exposed to new cultural values through social media and their engagement with online social networking. Based on the findings of this study, this grouping of consumers was motivated by their desire and need to be integrated into their social grouping and to be accepted in their community without being seen as being different. Even in the workplace in Vietnam, this generation group sought to assimilate with other colleagues, irrespective of their generation or age. The study also revealed that this group of consumers expressed a perceived fear or anxiety if they were seen as being different compared to those in their social group, like at work. This finding indicated that while acculturation was important for this group of consumers, there was also a need for acceptance in their social community compared to being assimilated into a global trend or movement. In this study, Vietnamese Generation Z consumers expressed a preference to seek a self-identity in their fashion choice, which was globally informed, but also respected the prevailing norms of their culture when buying branded sports footwear. Associated with this desire to conform, they tended to seek a product which was reflective of their culture and societal norms, therefore the participants in this study sought a global branded product which could be potentially modified to reflect their culture and nationhood, as opposed to wearing a branded item sold anywhere in the world. This finding was supported by Danilwan and Pratama (2020), and De Mooij (2004) who highlighted that a cultural sense of 'localness' was essential for brands to consider, especially those providing a special, uniquely personal, and socio-cultural meaning in their products to their customers. Interlinked to acculturation was the paradox of dependency, which is the significance of depending on their parents due to their social dynamics in relation to Confucianism and collectivist behaviour in their cultural background. Since this group of Vietnamese consumers are relatively new to work, or just entered the workforce, it is understandable that their financial dependence on their parents is unavoidable, which has led to their lack of independence in buying and consumption of fashion items. As a grouping, the findings indicated that there was a desire to assimilate into the global trends while being up to date in their social grouping, but still desire to retain their self-value and personal characteristics, without being too different. As indicated in Chapter One, even though culture is not the main focus of this study, this theme has cascaded throughout the project, indicating that the underlying consumption motivations of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers are potentially derived from the influence of three main religions, Confucianism, Taoism and

Buddhism, together with the societal collectivist behavioural traits. These factors have arguably influenced and still inform the societal rules and moral values these young consumers followed, including their respect for others, such as elders or brand manufacturers. These collectivist behaviour traits have also extended to influence the displayed behaviour of modesty and saving face while desiring a more sustainable lifestyle, as opposed to one which is individualistic and hedonistic.

From the theme of acculturation, the behaviour of this group of consumers also possessed ethnocentric and xenocentric behavioural attributes. While the advocates of xenocentrism highlighted that the behaviour of consumers tended to prefer to buy overseas goods while devaluing their own culture (Camacho et al., 2020; Venugopal et al., 2022; Lawrence, 2012), this study found that Vietnamese Generation Z consumers tended to want to be recognised as a part of globalization and therefore sought global brands, such as Nike, Adidas or Puma, rather than local brands, such as Thuong Dinh, and Bitis. The reason for this was based on the belief that global brands were committed to research and development, including around quality, durability, and sustainability, while also wanting to be seen as part of the global experience. For the local brands such as Thuong Dinh and Bitis, these items were perceived as less favourable due to their quality and variety of styles available but also did not have the same kudos. However, paradoxically, while seeking a globalized brand, there was also an emphasis on aligning themselves with the Vietnamese cultural heritage and supporting the local economy, which could be arguably aligned with rejecting xenocentrist consumer behaviour.

The study did find that there was a strong determination to reject buying counterfeit branded sports footwear, based on the unethical practice and the lack of respect for the manufacturers, but also the connection to China where these goods are often manufactured. This finding indicated an ethnocentric characteristic, in that there was an appreciation of their own cultural values and were prepared to boycott foreign items (Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015). Even though Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in this study rejected counterfeit goods due to their connection to China, the attribute of quality and respect for the manufacturer was seen as more important to this consumer grouping. Reflecting this, this study contributes to Generation Z research studies to effectively understand Vietnamese Generation Z consumers that the

grouping is a composition of ethnocentric and xenocentric behavioural attributes, which informs their buying decisions.

From a methodological perspective, the findings of this study have contributed to the existing research into Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' motivation towards acquiring branded items. However, while most research on the Vietnamese Generation Z's consumer motivational behaviour has been based on quantitative research or mixed-method studies (Nguyen et al, 2022; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022), this study has studied themes from a qualitative perspective providing a richer insight. This qualitative study has provided a rich and in-depth insight into the perceptions and beliefs of Generation Z consumers when acquiring branded sports footwear. Instead of looking for a large sample size to provide a generalized outcome to prove existing knowledge, this study has focused on investigating the beliefs and attitudes towards their experiences, feelings, and stories behind their consumption and acquisition decisions.

6.5.2 Contribution to consumer research studies - understanding the motivational influence on Generation Z consumers when viewing using Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey model.

This study's aim was to explore the motivation of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers towards acquiring branded sports footwear. In the literature review, as set out in Chapter Two, the study has been informed and based on the key customer journey model of Hamilton et al. (2021), which was based on the research of Lemon and Verhoef (2016). The model captures the decision-making process of an individual, from the pre-decision, decision to the post-decision phase, which was presented in a linear six-stage format, including motivation, information search, evaluation, decision, satisfaction and sharing. In the study of Hamilton et al. (2021), the motivation stage was directly influenced by the proximity and distance of social drivers together with those who are journeying with the consumers, which was called the 'joint journey'. While the proximity of the social drivers was related to the need or desire to affiliate or match with each other, such as the link to social status, self-seeking or social belonging, the distal social drivers of an individual were associated with how the consumer is influenced by their altruistic desires and needs, such as environmental responsibility or seeking sustainable fashion items. However, it is also noted that Hamilton et al. (2021) proposed that there were

two social dimensions which can influence the consumer decision-making processes, including proximal or closeness and distal or distance. While the proximal social category was related to temporal or physical proximity to the individual consumer, such as friends, peers or family, the distal social category was related to a larger external group, such as online influencers. These attributes were related to the extent to which the consumer is influenced or persuaded by another companion on their customer journey. These attributes are directly influenced by the individual's behaviour due to their age, occupation, or even their desire to conform to the prevailing societal and cultural norms. In this study, the original model of Hamilton et al. (2021), has been updated with the inclusion of an in-depth understanding of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' perspective towards branded sports footwear, which is a unique academic contribution.

#### *6.5.2.1 Extending the model with the knowledge of quality experience in the pre- and post-decision phase*

Hamilton et al. (2021) in developing the customer journey model highlighted the importance of past experience in their purchasing decisions, from their information search stage to the post-decision phase. This study, however, has found that the quality experience is one of the fundamental influences for Vietnamese Generation Z consumers when acquiring branded sports footwear during the evaluation and satisfaction stages. There was evidence indicating that this group of consumers saw the benefit of purchasing branded sports footwear which included the high-quality standards of manufacture. Many of the participants highlighted that the reason behind their loyalty behaviour towards a branded item was because they had experienced a positive outcome with the brand, particularly as to the quality associated with the materials used or the durability of the footwear. In supporting this, conspicuous consumption authors including Vigneron and Johnson (2004), Veblen (1899, as cited in Patsiaouras & Fitchett, 2012) and Sproles and Kendall (1986) emphasized the quality attribute in brand consumption studies. This study found that Vietnamese Generation Z consumers actively sought branded sports footwear due to the perceived quality and value, which were aligned with their self-identity and projected image. This perception included the consumer's memories or past experience of purchasing counterfeit goods, which had led this group of consumers to recall the lower quality of inauthentic products, lacking durability and the

potential disrespect to the authentic brand. However, in this study, the Vietnamese Generation Z consumers were not directly influenced by the origin or location of the manufacturer, which challenges the study of Ha-Brookshire and Yoon (2012) and Martin and Cervino (2011). Instead, this group of consumers tended to seek branded sports footwear irrespective of whether they were local or overseas-owned, as the central criteria was based on the quality, design and style being offered, which informed their opinion of seeking an international brand. In addition, this study has also added a new generational perspective to Hamilton et al.'s (2021) model, and from a Vietnamese context, in relation to buying branded sports footwear, therefore extending the original customer journey framework.

#### *6.5.2.2 Extending the model with the knowledge of brand experience and brand resonance in the pre-decision phase*

Associated with this study was the extension of the existing knowledge related to brand experience and brand resonance, which was not represented in the customer journey of Hamilton et al.'s (2021) model as mentioned in Chapter Two, in section 2.3.1.4. This study found that the Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' purchasing behaviour had a significant connection with brand experience and brand resonance. Brand experience, from a theoretical perspective, can be defined as consisting of sensations, feelings and behavioural responses which are evoked by brand-related stimuli, which can include brand identity, design, product packaging, the marketing communications (Brakus et al., 2009). The findings of this study revealed that Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' purchasing behaviour was informed and influenced by online reviews, KOLs, their peers, friends, and family members, but also based on past shared experiences, such as the quality of the item. In Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) study, the components of brand experience also included four aspects which influence the consumer: sensory, affective, behavioural, and intellectual stimuli. In this study, while this group of consumers sought a pair of sports footwear for aesthetics and the sensory qualities reasons during their pre- and post-decision phases, which can be considered as their sensory stimuli, their behavioural traits were influenced by social media, such as KOLs or online reviews, which are a part of the branded manufacturing marketing strategy. Therefore, the findings have added brand experience as an emergent theme which can be added to Hamilton

et al.'s (2021) original model, along with the connection between Vietnamese Generation Z consumers and brand consumption.

Closely linked to brand experience was brand resonance. Keller (2010, 2012) conceptualized brand resonance as being the degree of engagement and attachment that an individual has towards a particular brand. In this study, brand resonance for these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers was found during their interaction with the branded sports footwear in terms of self-image, values, and aspirations when they searched, evaluated, and then acquired the item. The findings revealed that this group of consumers tended to seek and wanted to project an ethical image through engaging with environmentally friendly brands that were reflective of their self-image and values. It was noticeable in this study that these consumers were willing to pay more attention to their up-to-date fashion style and taste but also showed their respect to the Vietnamese tradition of respecting others, during the pre-decision phase. At the end of the post-purchase stage, the study discovered that their brand resonance was underlying their perceived level of satisfaction during the purchase stage, leading to their loyalty to the brand and creating a strong future connection. By looking through a generational lens from a Vietnamese context, this study has extended Hamilton et al.'s (2021) model with the inclusion of brand resonance.

#### *6.5.2.3 Extending the model with the knowledge of brand trust and brand loyalty in post-decision phase*

Missing from Hamilton et al.'s (2021) model was the theme of brand trust and brand loyalty, which are also a contribution to existing knowledge. For brand consumption writers, including Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2005), brand trust is often associated with brand judgement, where the consumer decides on which item or product to buy based on several reasons, including the perception of quality. Part of this brand trust can be based on past experience where the consumer engages with the brand and is therefore closely associated with brand loyalty and brand equity. Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2005) and then later with Sirdeshmukh et al. (2018) contended that the relevance and creditability of a brand and its usage, which can either be positive and enhance the level of trust or alternatively be negative, whereby negatively influencing the brand experience and ultimately the level of trust, was paramount for these consumers. In this study, most of the Vietnamese Generation Z

participants, there was a perception that the post-purchase stage is considered a process of self-evaluation which includes reflecting on the experiences of the past, such as the quality, which supports Lemon and Verhoef's (2016) conclusions. Some of the Generation Z consumers in this study specifically expressed their loyalty and preference for global brands such as Nike or Adidas as their experience had met their expectations, including the quality of the material used, the design, or the durable function of the branded shoes when they compared them to counterfeit alternatives or even locally manufactured footwear. The findings also indicated that from the negative experiences of acquiring counterfeit shoes, most of these Vietnamese Generation Z participants in this study tended to avoid repurchasing counterfeit alternatives due to their awareness of the often-unethical manufacturing processes used, together with the lack of respect towards the authentic branded item. Some of the interviewees indicated that their footwear represented their social status and ethical stance to others, therefore, their branded shoe selection needed to be made in an environmentally and sustainable way that reflects their values and self-image. Therefore, their loyalty to a particular brand did not stop at the evaluation stage or later at satisfying their need for seeking a quality item but continued to inform their perception towards self-values when purchasing the branded sports footwear. Again, by adopting a Vietnamese Generation Z lens, this study has extended the customer journey of Hamilton et al. (2021) as to purchasing branded sports footwear while enhancing the existing understanding of the connection between brands and Vietnamese Generation Z consumers.

### 6.5.3 Contribution to cultural studies - extending the understanding of acculturation in overarching the Hamilton et al.'s (2021) model

This study includes the acculturation perception which is not represented in Hamilton et al.'s (2021) model when researching brand consumption motivation through a generational lens towards buying branded sports footwear in Vietnam. This study found that in branded sports footwear consumption, acculturational motivation is overarching and influencing different stages in the customer journey. Acculturation means the ability to adapt to a new lifestyle trend informed by their social grouping or through an external medium, such as social media (Jebarajakirthy, 2021). Most of the participants in this study mentioned their strong engagement with their preferred brands which had been informed by an awareness of global

fashion trends, through international celebrities or KOLs. This level of influence represented their desire to be assimilated with global fashion trends but also seeking paradoxically social acceptance prior to making their acquisitions. This social acceptance was informed and influenced not by international celebrities or KOLs, but through family members, their peers and social grouping.

In this study, the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer indicated a strong inclination towards self-identity and hedonism but also paradoxically did not want to be seen differently in their social grouping. This finding provides the most contribution to existing research, that the prevailing norms including the cultural background of the Vietnamese consumer can influence their purchasing behaviour, such as the significant reliance on family prior to making the acquisition, but also seeking to reflect and engage in global fashion trends. This acculturation, as mentioned above, was highlighted in the interview data, that the appearance of tiny Vietnamese symbols or features on the branded sports footwear, was important and was directly informed and influenced by their cultural heritage. It can be concluded that even though this generation tries to be more independent in their purchasing decisions, their behaviour tends to be influenced by their family background and emotional attachment to a particular brand, which gives them high credibility and respect amongst their peers without being too unique. While agreeing with the dimensions of acculturation as proposed by Cleveland and Laroche (2007), this study does challenge the dimension of complete *openness and desire to copy or duplicate a global culture*. Instead, this study contends that although counterfeit items have become popular amongst Vietnamese consumers, most participants in this study chose to avoid or reject buying these inauthentic items. This finding shows their determination to respect certain brands and seek those manufacturers who act ethically.

## **6.6 Contribution to the practice for sports footwear brands**

As highlighted above, there have been several writers, including Djafarova and Foots (2022), Weise (2019), and Dorsey and Villa (2020), whose studies have focused on consumer motivation amongst Generation Z in relation to the challenges faced by marketers to understand this new consumer group, which has included a focus on consumer behaviour. This academic debate has led various writers including Tran et al. (2022), Nguyen and Nguyen (2022), and



Vo et al. (2022), from an Asian perspective to independently call for further understanding of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers since this generation will shape ultimately Vietnam's future consumer market. While the findings of this study have provided evidence to support the fundamental theoretical underpinning of consumer consumption motivational theory related to Generation Z, this study also contends that the findings have added to the existing canon of consumption motivational theory associated with branded products. This includes introducing Hamilton et al.'s (2021) model as a new dimension from a Vietnamese and brand consumption theory perspective. The study revealed that Hamilton et al.'s (2021) customer journey model did not stop at one stage but was a continuum. Then based on the findings of this study, there is a necessity for sports footwear brands to understand the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer behavioural traits, as this research contends that this group cannot be seen only from a homogenised perspective, as there are arguably generalized similarities but also unique Vietnamese attributes.

#### 6.6.1 Implication for product development and glocalization strategy

The first contribution to business practice is that there is a need for manufacturers to consider the development of a localized manufacturing and marketing planning strategy. Due to the acculturation behaviour displayed by this Vietnamese generational grouping, the brand should understand the importance of localization and how the distribution channels operate in Vietnam. Even though the study was conducted with participants from Hanoi, in northern Vietnam, the findings indicated that the weather, which was linked to quality, was a consideration for the consumer, in that the sports footwear needed to be suitable for the local climate, as Hanoi is seasonal. Therefore, the preference was for the branded sports footwear to be adaptable, light enough for the summer, and warmer in the winter. This was not however the same for the south, for example in Ho Chi Minh City where there is only one season. Therefore, it is critical for the brands to understand the local differences and adapt suitable globalized marketing strategies.

There was also the need for brand customization as indicated above. Even though through globalization, the Vietnamese Generation Z consumer lifestyle has arguably changed, with most of the participants in this study expressing a desire to maintain their cultural heritage in their sports footwear, while also acting as a fashion item, whereby expressing their self-identity

while adhering to the societal norms. The study revealed that Vietnamese Generation Z consumers tended to prefer to have their own customized features on sports footwear even though the items were a globalized brand. This finding reflects the work of Di Pietro, Guglielmetti Mugion, and Renzi (2017) who emphasized that culture and cultural heritage are the foundation for creating and maintaining consumer identity, giving a sense to the individual of belonging to their community by adhering to the prevailing social values. In this study, there was a desire for localization and customization which represented Vietnamese Generation Z consumers' cultural identity which has been influenced by their family but also their Vietnamese community. Therefore, the recommendation is the production of branded sports footwear to offer personalized services, including designing your own shoe option, allowing for the incorporation of cultural symbols.

#### 6.6.2 Implication for the production process

This study has found that Vietnamese Generation Z consumers placed an emphasis on quality when it came to purchasing branded fashion items throughout their customer journey, particularly in the pre-decision and post-decision phases. In the pre-decision phase, the focus was on quality which included the consumer's consideration for seeking a product which could provide a long-term economic benefit, such as durability, together with self-satisfaction or gratification. Reflecting this, for manufacturers, there is a need to focus on constantly researching and developing their brands and products to be adaptive to these Vietnamese consumer changing demands based on quality.

This study also found that several Vietnamese Generation Z consumers sought a product which was manufactured sustainably, which was seen as part of their ethical stance and lifestyle. From an environmental perspective, this was illustrated by this consumer group wanting to engage with those products which are recycled or manufactured using reused materials to minimise the impact on the environment. Therefore, it is necessary for manufacturers to be aware of and consider the use of eco-friendly or more sustainable materials and designs to meet the expectations of these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers. From the ethical manufacturing process perspective, it was identified that most of the participants were critically aware of the issue of counterfeit shoes, particularly as Vietnam is geographically close to China. However, for these Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, they prioritized buying authentic shoes due to their preference for seeking quality compared to buying counterfeit items, which also reflected

their focus on purchasing items which were durable, comfortable, and long-term economically beneficial as they had negatively experienced buying counterfeit shoes. This was indicated in their post-decision phase when this group of consumers recalled the memories of having bought counterfeit items. Therefore, manufacturers must consider the materials used and designs, which should be eco-friendly and ethically manufactured.

### 6.6.3 Implication for marketing

This study contends that marketers should be aware that even though Vietnamese Generation Z consumers shared common attributes with other Generation Z customers including those with Western cultural backgrounds, these individuals on their customer journey were also significantly influenced by their Vietnamese origins and background. The shared common attributes included the acquisition of branded sports footwear not only for its main functional purpose, such as walking or playing sports but also for socialising, representing their social status and portraying their self-identity. From a motivation theoretical perspective, this duality of buying this product is closely associated with the goal content theory (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Ryan & Deci, 2022). The goal content theory which is part of the self-determination construct sets out and distinguishes the differences between intrinsic personal aspirations such as seeking a close relationship with others and possessing a sense of belonging which is related to socialisation, while also seeking extrinsic ambitions of wanting to display their personal image to gain popularity amongst their peers. Therefore, based on the outcome of the study, it is possible to conclude that these consumers were motivated intrinsically and extrinsically by various motives, which included their cultural background. This included the extrinsic motivator of wanting to conform to their social group and the workplace while following their family values and expectations. In contrast, the intrinsic motivators included seeking a product that fulfilled their self-identity needs, which was also tempered or influenced by being not too individualistic. These characteristics of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers indicate that the collectivist cultural background of Vietnam still dominates and influences these individuals, who tended to respect the hierarchical order of the family, which led to them seeking advice from trusted and respected family members. For marketers and retailers, this knowledge can be used to enable them to design their various activities to be reflective of the collectivist background of these consumers. As the study indicated, the globalized branded sports footwear sector currently has tended to see the market as a massification of consumers, but this study

has indicated that potentially, at least for these young consumers, some of their expectations are met, however, their collectivist Vietnamese background and importance of family and social conformity needs also to be considered when manufacturing and marketing these items.

## **6.7 Limitations of the study**

The study attempted to develop an understanding of Vietnamese Generation Z's motives for consuming branded sports footwear. In achieving this, there are, however, several limitations associated with the project. Given the sample size of 25 Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, findings cannot be generalized to the entire Vietnamese Generation Z population. Instead, this study has generated a richer insight into this group of consumer's behaviour and perceptions to branded sports footwear. It should be noted that the study also reached saturation, therefore the 25 participants generated a sufficient richness of data. To have conducted the study from a quantitative perspective, this method might not have identified potentially new attributes and rich insights but instead tested existing knowledge to develop and test hypotheses, with a larger sample size of other collectivist countries similar to Vietnam, therefore potentially expanding on Hamilton et al.'s (2021) original question, as to *how do cultural factors, such as an individualistic versus collectivistic group orientation, affect the social customer journey?*

Due to restricted access to individuals, the study used a snowball or referral technique to access possible participants, but this approach could potentially have limited access to a broader variety of consumers. This technique is based on a social network, where there is a chance that participants would suggest likeminded or similar individuals to themselves; therefore, the subjects may possess similar features and attributes as the gatekeeper. However, substantial academic evidence indicates that this technique is widely acknowledged as a genuine qualitative approach (Noy, 2008) and can provide the researcher with access to a sufficiently rich pool of participants (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Finally, drawing on the different definitions of consumption motives of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers during the interview process proved to be difficult for some of the participants to understand. Even though most participants could recognise and had an awareness of what influenced them to make a purchasing decision to buy branded sports footwear, some of the participants found it difficult to explain the reason why these attributes motivated their

behaviour. However, by simplifying the concepts to the participants at the outset of the interview, the interviewees could understand the fundamentals of the theories. On reflection, which will be presented in the next section, to address this potential limitation, recommended would be to adopt a different qualitative approach such as using a projective technique whereby enabling the participants better articulate their pre-reflexive experiences.

## **6.8 Future research**

While the study has effectively provided a new qualitative insight into consumer motivational behaviour amongst Vietnamese Generation Z consumers when purchasing branded sports footwear, new themes emerged which could be investigated in the future. Recommended would be to replicate this study with other similar age groups of participants and conduct a comparison study with other generation consumers. This could enable a richer insight beyond a single generation, but needs to consider as this study did, other attributes such as gender and whether the participants are in paid employment.

While this study was conducted in northern Vietnam, in the city of Hanoi, where the business and social environment are quite distinctive compared to other cities in the country, future research could consider studying the theme of consumer behavioural motivation from various perspectives, such as cultural, economic or political. Consideration could be given to further research to be discovered in another location, such as in Ho Chi Minh City, a metropolitan area in southern Vietnam. Repeating the study in other locations would determine whether the outcome of this study is a representation of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers or is unique due to the geographical background of the individual.

Finally, future research could investigate Vietnamese consumer motivation from a cultural perspective. As this study is focused on Generation Z consumers, grounded as a consumer behavioural study from a generational perspective, the influence of culture was intentionally minimised, as this concept can become a domineering theme, which would change the complexion of the study. Even though the study has highlighted potential cultural-related influences, these aspects have been used only to act as a signpost to contextual the findings.

## 6.9 Concluding reflection

This section is dedicated to providing a critical reflection of this qualitative study. This study was a research journey that demonstrated the significance of important findings. Firstly, the research has brought a new critical academic insight into the motivations of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers when consuming branded sports footwear. Secondly, the study has been informed by the conceptual project proposed by Hamilton et al. (2021) and has extended this original construct to be viewed from a Vietnamese perspective, introducing a new motivation perceptions/attributes including the importance of acculturation, together with the need for quality, while seeking a durable and sustainable branded sports footwear.

My personal and professional interests have influenced the choice of researching this topic. The fact that I chose Vietnamese Generation Z consumers for this research was based on my passion for learning marketing and consumer behaviour studies and perceptions since I started my studying abroad journey and my curiosity about the purchasing power that the Vietnamese young generation can hold for the future. In the last six years of studying and working in the UK, I have had a chance to study existing generational research and its predicted influence on the global economy, yet there are very few studies conducted from a Vietnamese or Southeast Asian perspective. While most of the current research has focused on luxury and brand consumption, these studies have been focused on China, North America, and Europe. In researching this theme, I realized this perspective is not fully understood from a Vietnamese generational lens. As a marketing student and a Vietnamese consumer, I therefore wanted to explore their purchasing motivation to find out whether their generational traits were accurately presented, or if there were significant differences as presented in the current academic debate. I always assumed that if consumer motivation can be studied thoroughly and from different points of view, it will potentially provide practical implications that can help sports footwear brands in Vietnam to understand the Vietnamese consumer grouping better. As the research proceeded, my appreciation and understanding of this consumer grouping have been vastly enriched.

For Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in this study, I can see that this generation grouping is making a significant impact in society through his/her choice of seeking an ethical and sustainable lifestyle, which informs their purchasing behaviour. I see this grouping now as having the potential purchasing power which is interestingly multi-faceted including the role and influence of their social community such as families and friends, which are important for

me to understand as a future brand marketer. By listening to their stories, I have been inspired not to give up and keep moving forward so that their stories and experiences might be heard in the future.

From a personal perspective, this research project has significantly changed my point of view and provided me with a rich insight into how this grouping seeks and is motivated to buy branded sports items and has developed myself as a researcher. When I started this journey, I was a Master's graduate with limited experience in research methods, where my point of view was quite simple and I would refuse to change my perspective for research, such as only conducting a quantitative project or mixing the positivist and interpretivist language. Part of this attitude led to delays in my project approval, particularly in determining which direction my research should take. However, with the encouragement and guidance of my supervisor, Dr. Douglas Yourston, whom I will be forever indebted to, I can see myself as a more mature researcher. I changed my point of view to open for much more suggestions and recognise what my research skills are. Therefore, this work to me should not be considered as an outcome but as a milestone on who I am as a researcher.

The DBA journey has also been very challenging because of COVID-19, which limited me from accessing the taught stage in person. At the start of the research, I considered this to be a personal journey. The project has never been straightforward, sometimes with one step forward, but then taking two steps or even more backwards. At times I found it difficult which required more investment in thinking and reflecting on my role as a researcher. But what has been important to me is that on this journey, I have never felt alone because of the support of my family and the university, this has made this journey meaningful. The experience has felt as though everyone around me has assisted in my development, both mentally and maturely as a researcher.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 Letter to participants

### **The consumption motivation of Vietnamese Generation Z consumers: An exploratory study of branded sports footwear**

#### PARTICIPANT'S INFORMATION SHEET

(This information sheet will be translated into Vietnamese)

Dear participants,

Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed for my research project on the consumption motives of Vietnamese Generation Z for branded sports footwear. This project will form an important part of my DBA research at the University of Gloucestershire, in the School of Business.

I hope that you too will find the interview interesting and helpful, in that it may allow you to reflect on some purchase experience which you may not have considered in depth before. During the process, I'd also like to get your permission to record the interview and have you sign the consent form prior to the interview. All the information and replies you share with me will be kept strictly secret, and only the supervisor and the researcher will have access to them. However, your identity, occupation and your income will remain concealed. If you are interested, the research findings will be made available to you. After the research is completed, the notes will be deleted, and the recordings will be erased permanently.

Your participation is entirely optional, and you are free to leave at any moment without explanation. There will be no exact answer, and your comments will represent your ideas and emotions. As you are a key part of this study's success, I would prefer it if you answered all the questions, but you have the freedom to refuse to answer any question if you feel uncomfortable doing so.

I anticipate that the interview will take no longer than 2 hours. The enclosed sheet contains some further information about its format and contents and please do not hesitate to contact me at any point if you have any concerns.

I look forward to meeting you.

Yours sincerely,

Khanh Phuong Dinh, DBA student.

E-Mail: [s4000323@glos.ac.uk](mailto:s4000323@glos.ac.uk)



## Appendix 2 Participant profile (in alphabetical order)

NAME (pseudonym)	BACKGROUND	PURCHASING CHARACTERISTICS
<b>Dung</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 years-old male, single, working as an accountant for a year in Hanoi.</li> <li>• His budget for branded shoes is 900,000- 1,2 million VND (£30- £40) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every year.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Converse and Nike.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong rely on online reviews from previous customers.</li> <li>• Reject counterfeits due to quality and endurance reasons.</li> <li>• Pursuit personal style and customization on shoes.</li> <li>• Social media active, Facebook and Instagram.</li> </ul>
<b>Duong</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 19 years-old male, single, working as a legal intern for 3 months in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is 900,000-1,2 million VND (£30- £40) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every 2 years</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike, Bitis, and Thuong Dinh.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate ethical manufactured products, reject counterfeits.</li> <li>• Prefer personalized style, comfort, and high quality.</li> <li>• Influenced by online influencers.</li> <li>• Social media active: Facebook and Instagram.</li> </ul>
<b>Ha</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 19 years-old female, single, working as a marketing intern for 5 months in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Her budget for branded shoes is 900,000-1,2 million VND (£30- £40) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every year.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike and Adidas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prefer to shopping with her mother for colour and style advice.</li> <li>• Like to show her personality through her shoes but kept simple.</li> <li>• Social media active: Instagram and Facebook.</li> </ul>
<b>Hai Anh</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 years-old male, single, working as a personal trainer for 2 years in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is 2,4 million -6 million VND (£80- £200) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every year.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concern about material, long endurance, and quality due to his job.</li> <li>• Reject purchasing counterfeits.</li> <li>• Social media active, mainly on Instagram and YouTube.</li> </ul>
<b>Hieu</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24 years-old male, single, working as a senior accountant for 2 years in Hanoi.</li> <li>• His budget for branded shoes is 2,7 million -15 million VND (£90- £500) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every 2 years.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike, Adidas, and Puma.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trend follower.</li> <li>• Prefer getting advice from friends for style, quality, design but seeking cultural heritage to personalize the footwear.</li> <li>• Less environmental concern but economically / price aware.</li> <li>• Social media active: Facebook and Instagram</li> </ul>

<b>Hoang</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 23 years-old male, single, working as a start-up owner in fashion for 3 years in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is 1,5 million -6 million VND (£50- £200) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 3-4 times every year</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike and Adidas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recently prefer second-hand products for environmental and sustainable reasons.</li> <li>• Influenced by Youtubers or other online influencers for style recommendations.</li> <li>• Social media active, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.</li> </ul>
<b>Huyen</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 years-old female, single, working as a freelance writer for 2 years in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is over 1,5 million VND (£50) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 2-3 times per year.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Previous experience with local brands: Thuong Dinh but very limited styles.</li> <li>• Willing to change brands if unethical manufactured.</li> <li>• Prefers customization on shoes to reflect the cultural heritage.</li> <li>• Social media active: Instagram and Facebook.</li> </ul>
<b>Linh</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 23 years-old female, single, working as a senior sales assistant for a local fashion brand, Elise, for 5 years in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is 1,2 million-3,million VND (£40- £100) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 3-4 times per year</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike, Adidas, and local brands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prefers high-quality over quantity and is an active trend follower.</li> <li>• Social media active, following Vietnamese Youtubers, including Giang Vu, and Dino.</li> <li>• Financially dependent on her family.</li> </ul>
<b>Long</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 19 years-old male, single, working as a legal intern for 3 months in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is 1,5 million – 2,4 million VND (£50- £80) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every year</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike and Adidas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reject buying counterfeit for quality reason.</li> <li>• Concern about quality and the endurance of the products so he is very careful about the material and shoe structure.</li> <li>• Prefer comfort style for multi purposes, such as running, exercising, school or work.</li> <li>• Social media active, Facebook and Instagram.</li> </ul>
<b>Luong</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 years-old male, single, working as a legal intern in Hanoi.</li> <li>• His budget for branded shoes is 900,000-1,2 million VND (£30- £40) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every 2 years.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize style, comfort, and multi-functional purpose.</li> <li>• Follow YouTube reviewer and online influencers to search for shoe recommendation.</li> <li>• Social media active: Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.</li> </ul>

<b>Minh</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24 years-old female, single, working as a data administrator for 2 years in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is 1,5 million -3 million (£50-100) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every 2 years.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike, Adidas, and Bitis, a local brand.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trend followers, like customization.</li> <li>• Prefer to shopping with friends and her mother for style advice.</li> <li>• Support recycling program for shoes, and environmental awareness.</li> <li>• Social media active, mainly Facebook and Instagram.</li> </ul>
<b>Ngoc</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 years-old female, single, working as a legal intern for 9 months in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is 1,5 million -2,1 million VND (£50- £70) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every year.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike and Adidas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reject counterfeit because of ethical conduct and quality.</li> <li>• Preferred simple style, multi-functional shoes, good quality, reasonable price, and long endurance.</li> <li>• Social media active, mainly on Facebook.</li> </ul>
<b>Nhi</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21 years-old female, single, working as a marketing assistant for a fashion company for 1 year in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is 1,8 million – 3 million VND (£60- £100) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times per year</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike, Adidas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prefer customization of her cultural heritage to show respect to her family and the country.</li> <li>• Varied shoe styles and limited editions.</li> <li>• Social media active: Instagram and Facebook.</li> </ul>
<b>Phung</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 years-old female, single, working as Marketing assistant for a year in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is 900,000-1,5 million VND (£30- £50) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every year.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike and Vans.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prefer asking her sibling or other family members for fashion recommendations.</li> <li>• Prefer simple styles, good quality and authentic shoes with customization.</li> <li>• Social media active, Facebook and Instagram.</li> </ul>
<b>Quan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25 years-old male, single, working as a sales assistant for a beverage company for 5 years in Hanoi.</li> <li>• His budget for branded shoes is 1,5 million -2,4 million VND (£50- £80) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every year.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prefer varied styles with personalization.</li> <li>• Prioritize high-quality brands.</li> <li>• Social media active: Facebook and Instagram</li> </ul>

<b>Quyet</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 years-old male, single, working as a sales assistant for a beverage company for 2 years in Hanoi.</li> <li>• His budget for branded shoes is 900,000-1,5 million VND (£30- £50) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every 3 years.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike and Adidas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid counterfeit shoes due to quality reason.</li> <li>• Consider sustainable consumption: environmental concern</li> <li>• Prefer simple stye, multi-functional shoes for everyday use.</li> <li>• Social media active: Facebook and Instagram.</li> </ul>
<b>Quynh Anh</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 years-old female, single, working as an office assistant for 2 years in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is 1,5 million– 2,4 million VND (£50- £80) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every year.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike and Adidas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid buying counterfeit due to quality and economic reasons.</li> <li>• Concern about product research and development.</li> <li>• Preferred varied styles and good quality.</li> <li>• Social media active: Facebook and Instagram.</li> </ul>
<b>Sy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25 years-old male, single, working as a 2D concept illustrator in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is 1,5 million -2,4 million VND (£50- £80) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every year.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike, Adidas, Vans, and Converse.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly socially responsible, considering labour and environmental facets of a brand.</li> <li>• Simple style but personalization with cultural heritage and has a good quality.</li> <li>• Influenced by both friends and family.</li> <li>• Social media active, Instagram and Facebook.</li> </ul>
<b>Tam</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 19 years-old female, single, working as a sales intern for a local clothing brand for 2 years in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is 900,000 – 1,2 million VND (£30- £40) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times per year.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike, Converse, and Puma.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comfort style, to look like her peers.</li> <li>• Reject counterfeits due to quality and economic reasons.</li> </ul>
<b>Thanh</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24 years-old female, single, working as a freelance writer for 4 years in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is 3,6 million – 4,5 million VND (£120-150) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every 3-4 years.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: barefooted for health reasons.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High environmental awareness, pursuit sustainable lifestyle, so she is focused on materials used.</li> <li>• Only purchase once, as the shoes were damaged.</li> <li>• Socially responsible, considering employment and labour conditions of a brand which influences her purchasing behaviour.</li> <li>• Less social media active, mainly Instagram.</li> </ul>

<b>Thao</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 years-old female, single, working as a Chinese interpreter for 3 years in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is 900,000 – 1,5 million VND (£30- £50) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 2-3 times per year.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike, Adidas, and local brands.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple style to look like her peers.</li> <li>• Reject counterfeits because of unethical manufactured and environmental damage.</li> <li>• Social media active, following KOLs and online influencers.</li> <li>• Preferred to shopping with her mother or siblings.</li> </ul>
<b>Tien</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 years-old male, single, working as a marketing intern in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is 1,5 million -2,4 million VND (£50- £80) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every year.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Bitis (local brand) and Adidas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concern about the style over quality.</li> <li>• Willing to purchase counterfeits if the similar authentic pair is over budget.</li> <li>• Online reviews are important.</li> <li>• Usually copies shoe style of friends but wants to be trend follower.</li> <li>• Social media active, Facebook and Instagram.</li> </ul>
<b>Trang</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 years-old female, single, working as an office assistant for 2 years in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is 900,000 – 1,200,000VND (£30-40) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every year.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike, Adidas, and Puma.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preferred high-quality brands and is a trend follower.</li> <li>• Refuse to purchase counterfeits due to quality reason and disrespect to the brand.</li> <li>• Social media active, KOLs and celebrity’s follower.</li> <li>• Style is influenced by friends.</li> <li>• Support sustainable manufacturing processes.</li> </ul>
<b>Tuan Anh</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25 years-old male, single, working as a chef in a 4-star hotel for 5 years in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes is 1,8 million -4,5 million VND (£60- £150) per pair.</li> <li>• Purchase frequency: 1-2 times every year.</li> <li>• Preferred brands: Nike and Adidas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeks recommendation from family members, such as father on the style and colour.</li> <li>• Preferred quality and long endurance.</li> <li>• Less social media active, mainly on Facebook.</li> </ul>
<b>Viet Anh</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25 years-old male, single, working in education sector as a consultant for 5 years in Hanoi.</li> <li>• Budget for branded shoes varies, but usually from 1,5 million VND to 21 million VND (£50 minimum and £700 maximum) per pair.</li> <li>• Branded sports shoes purchase frequency: 1-2 times per year.</li> <li>• Preferred global brands such as Nike and Adidas shoes and other luxury brands (e.g. Gucci).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple style, comfort to work, multi-functional shoes but personal uniqueness.</li> <li>• Refused to purchase unethical manufactured products or counterfeits.</li> <li>• Social media active, prefer to shopping with friends.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 3 Question Guidelines

Adapted from Brown (2008) and Roberts (2020)

Questions	Examples
<p><b>Orientation questions.</b></p> <p><b>Raised at the start of the interview so that the participant will feel more comfortable and being prepared what to expect, such as what kind of interview they are participating</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you know branded sports footwear?</li> <li>- How important the branded sports footwear to you and why?</li> <li>- Can you name me your favourite brands?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Main questions (Grand tour questions)</b></p> <p><b>Based on the research question and objectives of the study, the sub-questions should be formed accordingly. These sub-questions are important as they address the research sub-questions so that they should be general broad and open-ended. The participants can feel comfortable to share their answer. Each main question should cover key themes of the study.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How important is the physical appearance and fashion to you?</li> <li>- To what extent do you care about social responsibility, such as environment?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Follow up questions (mini-tour questions)</b></p> <p><b>Raised after the main questions to clarify the answers of participants so that the researcher can have better understanding on their answers. These questions can appear throughout the interview.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you think that wearing branded sports footwear increase your personal value, prestige? And how?</li> <li>- Do you think that social responsibility affect your purchase behaviour? And how?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Example questions and Experience questions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you share a previous experience when you purchase a pair of counterfeit branded shoes?</li> </ul>

<p><b>Raised to make the answer clearer for the participants so that they can express their emotional feeling during the interview process.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Would you buy counterfeit branded sports footwear if the original authentic is too expensive?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Debriefing questions</b></p> <p><b>Asked when finishing the interview to inform the participants about the closure of the interview, helping them reduce stress or anxiety and welcome them to ask questions to the researcher.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Would you like to add your thoughts about your purchasing habits for branded sports footwear that you have not mentioned?</li> <li>- How do you feel about the interview?</li> </ul>

## **Appendix 4 Interview Guide in English**

1. The researcher introduces herself
2. Explain the purpose of this interview and the participant's rights briefly.
3. Give the participant the informed consent form to review and sign.
4. Thank you for participating in an interview.
5. Use probing questions as needed.
6. If an interviewee has difficulty answering a question, provide examples or suggestions based on previous answers
7. Follow-up questions will be used as needed to invite the participant to elaborate more.
8. Debriefing at the end of the interview.

### **Interview Questions (Applied as question guidelines adapted from Brown (2008) and Roberts (2020))**

1) Please introduce yourself

- What is your name?
- Your age?
- Your occupation?
- Your income? (if possible)
- What is your favourite activity to do when you have free time?

#### **Guidance questions:**

- Do you like shopping?
- Do you like purchasing branded sports footwear?
- How important is the branded sports footwear to you?
- What brand do you like the most and how long have you used this brand?

2) Can you share an experience when you purchased branded sports footwear recently?

- What occasion did you buy them?



- How often do you buy? And how much on average you are willing to pay for a pair of branded sports shoes?
- Do you feel more confident when you wear them? Why is that?
- How important is the physical appearance and fashion to you? Does it increase your value and prestige?
- Does the branded sports footwear fulfil your social status? Why?
- Have you ever considered yourself a trend follower? Why?
- To what extent do you care about social responsibility, such as the environment? In what way and why? Do you think it impacts your purchase behaviour?
- So, what do you like about the branded sports footwear? Such as price, quality, patterns on the shoes, convenience, or trend?
- To what extent do you like the brand? Why? Such as advertisement, innovation or promotions?
- Please specify the attributes that made you choose that brand and explain why.

3) Can you share a previous experience when you purchase a pair of counterfeit branded shoes?

- When did you purchase it and on what occasion?
- Where did you buy them and how much was it?
- Do you recognise that they are counterfeit? If not, why?
- Where did these counterfeits come from? What are your thoughts about its origin?
- What brand did you buy that counterfeit shoes?
- Why did you purchase them?

**Guidance questions:**

- Does wearing counterfeit branded sports footwear fulfil your desire to wear branded goods? Social status, and keeping up with fashion, seem to be fashionable.
- Is counterfeit branded sports footwear better value financially and socially?
- Are you able to compare the quality between counterfeit and authentic shoes?
- Would you buy counterfeit branded sports footwear if the original authentic is too expensive?

4) What media do you use to search or inform you as to branded sports footwear?

- Do you use online platforms or social media to get product information?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages that you get from this platform?
- How reliant are you on social media to inform your decision, and do you trust this medium?
- Do you follow celebrities or online influencers and get influenced by them?
- How did you get influenced and why?
- Who are other influencers / medium influencers in your decisions to buy branded sports footwear?
- What are your family or friends' role in helping you make the purchase decision? How and why?
- Do you rely on other's shopping advice, or do you prefer to make your own decision? Why?

5) In your opinion, do you think Vietnam's culture influences strongly on your purchase behaviour? In what way and why?

6) Do you wear local brands? What do you think about them? Do they have an advantage over global brands?

7) If you can choose, will you choose a local brand or a global brand? Please explain your choice.

8) Can you share your thoughts about the current situation of global sports footwear brands in Hanoi? Such as stores, online websites, promotions, styles etc.

9) What makes sports footwear in Hanoi market different from other locations in Vietnam and in the world?

10) Did COVID-19 impact your purchase habits and behaviour? In what way and why? Do you see branded sports footwear any differently?

11) What recommendation can you give for sports footwear brands to improve themselves in the Vietnamese market?

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

## Appendix 5 Interview Guide in Vietnamese

1. Người phỏng vấn (tôi) giới thiệu bản thân
2. Người phỏng vấn giải thích mục đích của buổi phỏng vấn cũng như những quyền lợi của người tham gia
3. Người phỏng vấn gửi thư chấp thuận trả lời phỏng vấn cho ứng viên tham gia và ký.
4. Cảm ơn người tham gia phỏng vấn
5. Sử dụng những câu hỏi phụ nếu cần
6. Nếu người phỏng vấn gặp khó khăn trong việc trả lời câu hỏi, một số ví dụ và gợi ý sẽ được đưa ra, tham khảo từ những người đã trả lời trước đó.
7. Sau khi phỏng vấn, những câu hỏi phát sinh thêm sẽ được sử dụng để mời người tham gia phỏng vấn trả lời thêm,
8. Tóm tắt lại ở cuối buổi phỏng vấn

### Interview Questions (Applied as question guidelines adapted from Brown (2008) and Roberts (2020))

#### 1) Xin hãy giới thiệu về bản thân

- Tên bạn là gì?
- Bạn bao nhiêu tuổi?
- Bạn làm nghề gì?
- Thu nhập trên 1 tháng của bạn là bao nhiêu? (nếu có thể)
- Hoạt động yêu thích của bạn khi rảnh rỗi là gì?

#### Câu hỏi gợi ý:

- Bạn có thích đi mua sắm không?
- Bạn có thích mua giày thể thao có thương hiệu nổi tiếng không?
- Giày thể thao có thương hiệu quan trọng với bạn như thế nào?
- Bạn thích nhất là thương hiệu gì và bạn dùng nó bao lâu rồi?

#### 2) Bạn có thể chia sẻ trải nghiệm mua giày thể thao có thương hiệu gần đây được không?

- Bạn mua chúng vào dịp gì?

- Tần suất bạn mua như thế nào? Và trung bình bạn sẽ trả cho 1 đôi có thương hiệu là bao nhiêu tiền
- Bạn có thấy tự tin khi đeo chúng không? Tại sao vậy?
- Về bề ngoài có quan trọng với bạn không? Nó có làm tăng giá trị của bạn hơn trong mắt mọi người không?
- Giày có thương hiệu có giúp bạn tăng thêm địa vị xã hội không? Tại sao?
- Bạn có nhận thấy mình là người chạy theo xu hướng không? Tại sao?
- Bạn quan tâm đến trách nhiệm xã hội (ví dụ như môi trường) đến mức độ nào? Điều này có làm ảnh hưởng đến hành vi mua sắm của bạn không?
- Vậy điều gì làm bạn thích ở giày có thương hiệu? Chất lượng, kiểu dáng, họa tiết trên giày hay sự tiện lợi chẳng hạn?
- Bạn thích nhãn hiệu đó đến mức độ nào? Tại sao vậy? Có phải vì quảng cáo, khuyến mãi?
- Xin hãy giải thích chi tiết lý do bạn chọn nhãn hiệu ấy.

### 3) Bạn có thể chia sẻ trải nghiệm quá khứ khi mua hàng nhái/hàng fake

- Bạn đã mua khi nào và vào dịp gì?
- Bạn đã mua ở đâu và bao nhiêu một đôi?
- Bạn có biết đó là hàng nhái không? Tại sao?
- Những thương hiệu nhái này đến từ đâu? Bạn nghĩ sao về nguồn gốc xuất xứ của nó?
- Tên thương hiệu bạn đã mua là gì?
- Tại sao bạn lại mua chúng?

#### **Câu hỏi gợi ý:**

- Đeo một đôi giày nhái có thoả mãn mong muốn được đeo giày hiệu của bạn? Địa vị xã hội, bắt kịp xu hướng để trông thời trang hơn?
- Giày nhái có mang lại nhiều giá trị xã hội và tài chính cho bạn?
- Bạn có phân biệt được hàng nhái và hàng thật?
- Bạn có mua hàng nhái với kiểu dáng tương đương không nếu đôi hàng thật vượt qua mức giá bạn có thể chi trả?

### 4) Bạn dùng phương tiện gì để tìm kiếm thông tin về sản phẩm

- Bạn có dùng mạng xã hội để tìm kiếm thông tin sản phẩm không?

- Lợi ích và bất lợi mạng xã hội mang lại cho bạn là gì?
- Bạn có tin tưởng vào mạng xã hội khi ra quyết định mua sắm không?
- Bạn có bị ảnh hưởng bởi người nổi tiếng trên mạng không?
- Bạn bị ảnh hưởng như thế nào và tại sao?
- Còn đối tượng nào khác có thể ảnh hưởng tới bạn không?
- Vai trò của gia đình và bạn bè như thế nào trong quá trình quyết định mua sắm của bạn? Tại sao?
- Bạn có dựa vào ý kiến của người khác khi mua sắm không hay muốn tự theo ý mình?

5) Theo ý kiến của bạn, bạn có nghĩ rằng văn hoá Việt Nam đã ảnh hưởng mạnh mẽ tới hành vi mua sắm của bạn? Theo cách nào và tại sao?

6) Bạn có đeo giày thương hiệu trong nước? Bạn nghĩ gì về chúng? Chúng có lợi thế hơn các thương hiệu quốc tế không?

7) Nếu được chọn, bạn chọn thương hiệu trong nước hay quốc tế? Tại sao?

8) Bạn có thể chia sẻ một chút về tình hình hiện tại của thị trường giày thể thao thương hiệu quốc tế ở Hà Nội? Ví dụ như ở các cửa hàng, trang mạng...

9) Điều gì khiến thị trường giày thể thao có thương hiệu ở Hà Nội khác với các thị trường ở khu vực khác?

10) COVID-19 có làm thay đổi hành vi và thói quen mua sắm giày thể thao có thương hiệu của bạn không? Như thế nào và Tại sao? Bạn có cách nhìn khác về giày thể thao có thương hiệu không?

11) Bạn có đề xuất gì tới các thương hiệu quốc tế để phát triển ở Việt Nam?

Xin chân thành cảm ơn sự tham gia của bạn!

## Appendix 6 Initial content coding structure

Potential themes	Grouped codes/content
<b>1. Brand consumption attributes</b>	1.1 Value
	1.1.1 Perceived quality
	1.1.2 Reputation/Well-known
	1.2 Brand name
	1.2.1 Logo image
	1.2.2 Quality
	1.3 Brand satisfaction
	1.3.1 Quality satisfaction
	1.3.2 Service satisfaction
	1.3.3 Loyalty
	1.4 Brand trust-credibility
	1.4.1 Quality trust
	1.5 Involvement

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1.5.1 Engagement

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**2. Consumption motives of Vietnamese  
Generation Z**

2.1 Quality

2.2 Comfort

2.3 Multi-use

2.4 Health concern

2.5 Shoes pattern

2.6 Belongingness

2.7 Brand logo

2.8 Social status

2.9 Trend novelty

2.10 Credibility

2.11 Self-identity

2.12 Uniqueness

2.13 Self-image

2.14 Environmental concerns

2.15 Social responsibility

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**3. Attitudes towards counterfeit and authentic branded sports footwear**

3.1 Fulfilled the novelty-seeking need

3.2 Reasonable price

3.3 Diversity in styles

3.4 Easy to change

3.5 Bad quality

3.6 Costly for long term

3.7 Short endurance

3.8 Disrespect the brand

3.9 Unethical Issues

3.10 Environmental damage

3.11 Origin issues

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**4. Attitude for local brands**

4.1 Simple style

4.2 Multi-use

4.3 Decent price

4.4 Decent quality

4.5 Hesitate to purchase local brand

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	4.6 Limited styles
	4.7 Similar price to global brands
	4.8 Not trendy
<b>5. Influencers of purchasing behaviour</b>	5.1 Friends
	5.2 Family
	5.3 Peers/colleagues
	5.4 Oneself decision
	5.5 Online platforms/social media
	5.6 Online reviews
	5.7 Online influencers: KOLs/celebrities
<b>6. Perception of brand development in Vietnam</b>	6.1 Loyalty customer policy
	6.2 Localize product policy/cultural-heritage
	6.3 Personalize/customize product
<b>7. COVID-19 and its influence on purchasing behaviour</b>	7.1 Health concern
	7.2 Purchase frequency
	7.3 Purchase method

## Appendix 7 Developed content coding structure with Hamilton et al. (2021) customer journey

Potential themes	Grouped content
<b>1. The pre-decision phase</b>	1.1 Self-identity 1.2 Social status 1.3 Social-belonging 1.4 Environmental considerations 1.5 Ethical manufacture of products 1.6 Quality attribute 1.7 Perceptions of counterfeit shoes 1.8 Online reviews and KOLs influences 1.9 Friends, family and peers influences
<b>2. The decision phase</b>	2.1 Family influences
<b>3. The post-decision phase</b>	3.1 Quality experience to brand trust 3.2 Ethical implications to products to brand respect and brand loyalty 3.3 Word-of-mouth influence

#### **4. Emergent-overarching themes**

4.1 Acculturation

4.2 Post-decision phase the preference of localized and personalized products

## Appendix 8 Final content coding structure with Hamilton et al. (2021) customer journey

Customer Journey	Themes	Grouped contents
<b>1. The pre-decision phase</b>	1.1 Identity-related motivators	1.1.1 Self-identity
		1.1.2 Social status
		1.1.3 Social belonging
	1.2 Identity-related and personal values	1.2.1 Environmental considerations
		1.2.2 Counterfeit shoes
	1.3 Product and brand-related motivators	1.3.1 Quality
1.3.2 Ethical manufacture of products		
1.4 Companion-related motivators	1.4.1 Online reviews and KOLs as travelling companions	
	1.4.2 The role of friends, peers and family members as travelling companions	
<b>2. The decision phase</b>	2.1 Decision phase unit- the influential power of family dynamic	Family influences

<b>3. The post-decision phase</b>	3.1 Brand trust	Past experience for quality
	3.2 Brand respect and brand loyalty	Ethical implications
	3.3 Word-of-mouth	Word of mouth influences
<b>4. Emergent-overarching themes</b>	4.1 Acculturation	Acculturation
	4.2 Post-decision the preference of localized and personalized products	Localization and personalization demand

## Appendix 9 Analysis theme

Example of Coding theme one: The pre-decision phase

Core theme	Sub-theme	Data extracts	Grouped code/content	Ref
<b>The pre-decision phase</b>	Self-identity	<p><i>“I prefer sports footwear as it represents an active persona, with designs that reflect my personal characteristics. I especially choose branded products since there are various style to select. Sometimes, what you wear, like the style, the design or brand speaks for you. I am an active sports person; therefore, this is my projected image. My footwear lets others know who I am; I don’t even have to talk much, it is more about the shoes you are wearing, as they show a lot about who you are”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reflect/show/match personal characteristics/ lifestyles/ personalities.</li> <li>- Feeling confident is comfort and multi-purpose usage while wearing branded sports shoes.</li> <li>- Follow an online influencer to style.</li> </ul>	Linh
		<p><i>“I think branded sports footwear is very trendy and shows my personality to my friends. I feel more confident and cooler while wearing them. I don’t change my style very often as all my selection of shoes</i></p>		Duong

*is design to be in hip-hop design. But they are still fashionable”*

*“I just find that wearing branded sports footwear allows me to show others about my interest in the hip hop scene. I feel more confident about expressing my interests and personal characteristics with people around me when I wear these types of shoes” (Dung, 22 -years-old).*

Dung

*“As an illustrator, I care a lot about my appearance because most of my clients come from my online platform. My normal lifestyle is important in influencing my artwork. The clients do not only see your profile only, but they also see you as you really are, how you really dress and how you actual fit into your community. Therefore, the shoes I choose must match with my fashion tastes, my personality and online presence as an artist. But nothing too extreme or standing-out, but also not too plain or boring”*

Sy

*“My styles and therefore footwear has changed over the years. For example, when I was in high school, I only wore shoes that were very simple, so I was not different from anyone else. But when I get older, I choose those branded shoes with a special feature on them or limited editions, so I feel special. The shoes, of course, have to show my personality and my lifestyle of working and living here in Hanoi”*

Nhi

*“I am motivated when buying shoes for the need to feel comfortable. But my definition of confidence is sometimes as to whether I feel comfortable or not wearing the clothing item. Also, I don’t think that shoes make me confident. Even if I wear flip flops or sandals, as long as they are comfortable to wear, I am more than happy to wear them”*

Quyet

*“I am not really motivated to buy branded sports shoes as they do not really show or represent me, my personality or uniqueness. For me, I tend to buy fewer shoes, but they can be used for multiple purposes and match any outfit. Therefore, it [branded sports*



*footwear] doesn't really need to show my personal characteristics because if that pair shows too much about me, such as too colourful or too many features on it, I think it is not practical to buy, and it is not really me. I prefer something simple"*

Ngoc

*"I will buy counterfeit if I must, for example, the counterfeit has the new style at a cheaper price. Of course, they have different types of counterfeits, quality from low to high. As long as I can update the trend, I don't mind what I buy, it is the style and design which is my motivation"*

Tien

*"As I said, I got influenced by KOLs. I follow them and get inspiration from their lifestyle, not only from my friends or family. At first, it was hard to find your own style, but then slowly you get used to it, depending on your preferences, purpose of use or experience. For me, I have always liked to wear items manufactured overseas, this is a key motive for me, particularly when I am beginning to seek new footwear"*

Trang

*“My Youtuber idol has a very independent life both financial and daily life. I find that is what I look for, so I learn from that idol a lot, from fashion style to brands that he used, he has been a key motivator for me”.*

Luong

Social status

*“...For me, the value of the shoes increases my social status. If I wear shoes around £200 like Nike Airforce, people will know the cost of these shoes therefore I feel more confident and classier, as it raises my social status in their eyes”*

- Increase social status.
- Show social position as trendsetter.
- The image of financial stability and wealthy appearance

Sy

*“I feel more confident when I wear branded sports footwear because of its logo. Because they [the branded item] are a well-known brand, so everyone will know the logo since they are high-quality and fashionable. Especially if they are “sneakerheads” [those addicted to sports footwear], when they see the branded shoes, they know that you are accomplished*

Viet Anh

*and have financial stability. As I'm an education consultant I usually go out to meet my work partners or clients, so the footwear represents my role, self-image and my social image”*

*“I like the update of the new trends of Nike brands. My friends also follow these latest trends, and they will tell me which trend is popular and recommend them to me. I don't want to be old-fashioned so I will buy similar styles to be like my friends. A good, branded pair of sports footwear can show others of my taste and my social position”*

Trang

*“Besides the quality of the products, the brand also sells social status, the image of financial stability, and a wealthy appearance. For example, sometimes they release a limited line of a particular shoe style. This gives the client the feeling that their shoes are unique and personally-made for them, so they [the customers] can project their status to others”*

Hieu

*“Before I worked in a very posh office in central. My colleagues were usually wearing nice clothes and shoes because our clients are high-end. So, I spent most of my salary that month just to buy a pair of Gucci trainers, around \$US 700. When I bought them, I was happy but couldn’t save any money that month. I even ate instant noodles for the rest of the month. Later I resold the shoes because I only wore them twice and I needed the most to survive”*

Viet Anh

Social  
belonging  
desire

*“I feel more confident when buying and wearing branded sports footwear. But not to impress anyone, I just feel like I belonged. I’m just like everyone else. I’m afraid of feeling I am abandoned or outside of my friendship community. They have the same shoes as me, so I don’t have to think about being different.”*

- Feeling belonged
- Afraid of feeling abandoned or outside social community
- Dislike curiosity from others
- Following similar dress code in workplace

Thao

*“Because everyone wears Adidas or Puma, such as my friends, so I will change to be more like them. Some people are quite judgmental, and I don’t want them to be more curious about me. So, my motivation is I try to wear footwear like everyone else, not too stand-out*

Tam

*so that when they talk, they won't have a chance to judge my outfit"*

*"As I said previously, I had chosen a pair of Gucci shoes because I wanted to be like my co-workers at the time. Everyone was following a similar dress code or outfit so that they didn't feel like an outsider. But it also depends on your workplace. Some of my friends work in Marketing, and they can wear whatever they want, there is no specific rules, but just be respectful"*

Viet Anh

Environmental considerations

*"I used my branded sport shoes for 3 years now, when they are really damaged then I will buy a new pair. I don't buy them every year because it is not good for the environment. I consume less with this sustainable lifestyle because it takes so many resources to produce a pair of shoes, including the amount of water needed, then there is the emissions and air pollution generated"*

- Pursuit sustainable lifestyle
- Wasting resources for manufacturing
- Prefer environmental-friendly products and recycling programs

Quyết

*"To be honest, it is just recently I think about sustainability. Now if I go to buy sports shoes, I will choose the pair that is more friendly to the*

Tien

*environment, or at least can be used for a long time to save money”*

*“Recently I bought some second-hand products for environment-friendly reasons, as I watched a video about the impact of fashion on the environment and how the manufacturing process was unsustainable. I think because most of us use the Internet and social media now, there is a better awareness for the need to be more sustainable in our fashion tastes, including buying branded or counterfeit items”*

Hoang

*“I feel very excited if the brands propose the shoe recycling program, as I can now recycle my old shoes and become more environmentally responsible. Recycling can help to protect the environment and I hope that the manufacturing process of branded shoes will maintain the quality, therefore ensuring the footwear is more durable”*

Minh

*“I do think about the environment, and since I bought a pair of recycled Nike shoes, I think they are similar to a new pair. I also think that brands in Vietnam should focus more on sustainable manufacturing initiatives to protect the environment”*

Trang

Ethical  
manufactured  
of products

*“I notice that many global brands, such as Nike have taken advantage of developing countries, including here in Vietnam, Bangladesh, or India for child labour, as I think the cost is much cheaper. From an economic side, it is good to generate a profit and provide employment, but from a human rights perspective, it is not right, in fact it is exploitation”*

- Concerning manufacturing process, such as labour or economic issues
- Ethical business practice can influence the company’s reputation

Thanh

*“I think the global company will come here to Vietnam as we offer low-cost labour, but it also means that our working hours are longer for less remuneration, therefore the benefits are not always good. A few years ago, there was a scandal in China due to exploiting labour and I think it still happens here in Vietnam. Since most of the shoe companies will release many emissions into the environment, it causes pollution and damage to the locals’ health, so we are badly*

Sy

*paid, and the local environment is damaged, and all of this for what, a branded fashion item...”*

*“Branded sports footwear is mainly a capitalist invention, where they care more about profits and money, but so do I (laughed). I personally look for the quality of the product, rather than the environmental impact or who made it, as I think any company will have problems with foreign labour or in the manufacturing processes”*

Hieu

*“I love my country, so if I know those companies are unethical or terrible at treating Vietnamese employees, then I would never buy those shoes. It’s like you are helping them to reduce our fellow citizen’s lifestyle and being disrespectful to our community”.*

Viet Anh

*“Of course...(laughed)...there are many other branded sports footwears with a good reputation in the manufacturing process. I don’t think I have to*



*support those who are not ethical. Young people should and I expect are aware of ethical behaviour as we are living in a digital world now. Every scandal will be on the news the next day and the company's reputation can easily be damaged overnight. So, I think they [the companies] should be more ethical in their manufacturing processes".*

Huyen

Quality for high-end products

*"I care more about quality and style, if they are a bit pricey then I still buy them. For me buying from well-known brands is very important since I know that the quality will be good compared to having to find out whether a particular item offers me the same value. I trust branded products since they spend a lot of money on research and development".*

- Well-known/reputable brands spend more time on research and development.
- Good quality represents brand image.
- Global brands have more variety than local brands.

Quan

*"When I go shopping for footwear, I tend to choose Nike or Adidas, those global and reputable brands as they have better quality. Since I don't buy shoes often, I save up to buy a good pair of shoes. So reputable brands are a safe option for me".*

Linh

*“I think global brands or even fewer known manufacturers have quality checks before releasing the items to the public. They apparently check the sole, sock liner and stitching. Global brands take care of their brand image, so they need to be careful when manufacturing their products. That is what makes a good brand.”*

Ha

*“I think reputable brands and good quality are the same. There are some local brands, such as Bitis or Thuong Dinh, whose price is much more reasonable, and they can provide a quality product. However, their weak point is the limited variety in the product range. That’s why I prefer to choose global brands, such as Nike”*

Viet Anh

*“Oh...I only used Thuong Dinh when I was in high school. Those shoes are very popular, the quality is not bad. We used them for physical classes. But they only had very limited styles of shoes, so I was quite*

Huyen

*disappointed. That's why I choose global brands now, they can provide me with both with different styles and quality. Sometimes in the sale season, you can even get a better deal.*

High quality,  
durable and  
comfort

*“Normally I wear sports shoes quite a lot, so I do care about the purpose of the shoe, and of course the style. I prioritized this over the price when I decide how much it will cost, but I am not looking for basketball shoes to play basketball (laughed), but for the extra cushioning they give”*

*“I used to run marathons and still do now. Therefore, a pair of good shoes can help me run and protect my feet. The comfort and endurance of branded shoes are undeniable. I can use them for years, while counterfeit and regular brands, I can only use for 2-3 times, which is not cost-effective.”*

*“I think the brand is partially important, [but] I strongly care about the quality more. The shoe's sole*

- Branded sports shoes give extra cushioning.
- Comfort and long endurance, feet protector during exercise
- Good design structure and materials

Luong

Dung

*needs to be soft enough, for a sock liner. The structure of running shoes usually makes our body fall forward, flat shoes are used for the gym, and deadlifting to balance the body, and I need a pair of shoes that allow me to stand on my feet for hours without any discomfort. Finally, the style needs to fit the requirements of my place of work”.*

Hai Anh

Counterfeit shoes

*“Now in Vietnam, I think everyone wears branded shoes, but they are counterfeit. So, for me, I will try to save and buy an authentic pair because I care more about endurance, and not simply for the fashionable style. I won't buy counterfeit shoes anymore, as I said, I try to save to buy the authentic ones with good quality and reasonable price, especially during the sales”.*

*“No, I won't buy counterfeit shoes in the future. Their quality is poor and can be used only for a few times. Before I didn't notice it, but now I prioritize quality more, so I am saving money to buy an authentic pair of sports shoes. Then I can use them for multiple*

- Reject counterfeit shoes due to quality and economic reasons.
- Positive attitude for counterfeit shoes due to its convenience

Ngoc

*purposes like exercising or simply hanging out with friends”.*

Trang

*“No, counterfeit shoes are no longer on my list while shopping. I am concerned about comfort, and economic conditions for the long term and buying authentic shoes meets these priorities. They can be worn for a long time, so the quality does matter. They always say [tien nao cua nay] [you get what you pay for]”.*

Tam

*“I saw once the amount of lost revenue due to us buying the counterfeit goods, but then also how these brands are potentially struggling to maintain their development and investment in these items of clothing”*

Quynh Anh

*“...some counterfeit items are very good, but ultimately, they are not the same. Then what happens to the money and profits from these counterfeit items,*

Quyết

*certainly not in research and development or style design”*

*“I don’t care about counterfeit or not, as long as they have the style I like. I bought a lot of them; I find it very convenient when you can change or throw them away easily”*

Long

*“I got a pair of counterfeit shoes which cost me around \$US70. But I feel the quality is similar to other authentic brands. My friends still think they are authentic shoes...(laughed)...but what does concern me a little is how these were made”*

Tien

Online reviews and KOLs *“I am influenced by others, especially celebrities or KOLs. I have followed some of them for years, particularly those who have a similar style to me. So, if the shoes I see are not at first sight really fashionable, but they [the KOLs or celebrities] are*

- Seeing KOLs or celebrities wearing them on social media such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram
- Follow online influencers for discount or better deals.
- Brands collaborate with KOLs.

Trang

*wearing them I tend to change my mind and think that the item is trendy after all”*

- Search Google or brand website for previous reviews

Reviews are honest and unbiased

Luong

*“Normally I go to YouTube and look for unboxing videos or short clips about particular shoes. I think YouTube reviewers are the most honest and have influenced me in the past because they have experience in wearing the item, then give me an objective opinion”*

*“I usually watch YouTube’s unbox videos, especially from Giang Vu or Dino. They are older than me, which I respect, but also buy fashionable branded sports shoes, which I like. This gives me an element of trust which has enabled me to reduce my time searching by following them only. Besides, they sometimes collaborate with different brands, so they can offer a discount code for their followers. That’s a bonus for me”*

Linh

Duong

*“Most of my shoe inspiration have come from my idol, whom I admire and follow on Instagram and Facebook. When my idol is wearing something fashionable, I am more likely to want to seek the item and buy the product, often at any cost”*

*“Well... the marketing of branded goods is mainly through a celebrity or KOLs endorsement. Normally these well-known brands would collaborate with celebrities, who have a huge fanbase or high level of influence on social media, which is where most young people are. So, no doubt their strategy is working as it attracts us to buy their shoes and other fashion items, but we are not naive or stupid”*

Thao

*“I do read online reviews. I search them on Google and see the reactions and feedback on how functional the product is, the materials used, and how the previous customer felt about the experience. I’m a picky consumer, so when I buy, I look at all the reviews and comments. I don’t think I really need to watch*

Dung



*YouTube, but it does depend on which type of shoes I am buying”*

*“I definitely look at the reviews as I believe these are the most honest. These are different people’s unbiased view, which could be from different genders, ages, locations... so they have different buying experiences and opinions, very objective and genuine. I like to check other people’s views before I make my own decision”*

Tien

Friends, peers  
and family

*“Of course, I bought these shoes because of the quality and style. But it is also because I see people, who also work in the field of art around me, who are wearing this style too, so I think we share similar interests. The most interesting aspect of the style we all seem to wear is that the Vans design is quite basic, so I can, along with many others, add a personal design to reflect my personality”*

- Share similar interest and wanted to feel belonged.
- Observe people’s style surround them.
- Take advice from friends/ siblings regarding quality, price.
- Get recommendation from family due to respect

Sy

*“I personally like Adidas brands since my friends wear them quite a lot. I usually hang out with people who have some sort of similar interest to me, which includes wearing this particular footwear. Therefore, whatever they wear, it attracts my attention, so sometimes I copy their shoe styles or preference, so I feel that I can belong in the same social grouping”*

Tien

*“I usually take advice for shoe purchasing from my friends, who have already purchased the product previously, so they can inform me as to the quality, design, and associated benefits. I bought a pair of Nike Airforce recently as it was my friends’ idea. They told me that the price was reasonable, and the style would fit me, so I bought them”*

Hieu

*“I have a friend who studies fashion, her taste for fashion is unbelievable. She is the one whom I always ask for fashion advice, and she will try to help me find the right style, sometimes we can even get bargain deals but still look fashionable”*

Long

*“I usually look for the branded shoes online and then ask my elder sister for her recommendations if the brand is a bit pricey. For example, she normally gives me advice on the quality of the brand or what was her experience of wearing them in the past, so I can save more time on going to the physical store to try them on myself...”*

Sy

*“My sister is just 2 years younger than me, so we get along really well with each other. We share similar tastes in shopping, so she is definitely the person I go to if I need fashion recommendations, especially for branded items.”*

Phung

*“There’s nothing to be ashamed of. I sometimes asked my dad’s opinion whenever we spend time together because I respect him and his advice. Not just because of finance, but because I want to get closer to my parents, so they know that I still seek their advice even though I have grown up. Therefore, I have shown him*

Tuan Anh

*the picture of the branded shoes and asked him about  
the style and colour”*

## Appendix 10 Interview Code

Interviewee: Thanh

Interview Date & Time: 25<sup>th</sup> September 2022, 10am

Interview Length: 1 hour

Interview Type: Online Interview via Zoom

<b>Data Extracts</b>	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Grouped contents</b>
<i>I: First, can you please tell me a little bit about yourself, your age, occupation and your shopping habit?</i>		
<i>THANH: My name is HTT, I'm 24 years old and currently I'm a freelance content writer living in Hanoi. I love dancing and shopping, especially shoes and clothes.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Match with study criteria: Generation Z aged from 18-25</li><li>- Living in Hanoi</li><li>- Interest in shoes</li></ul>	
<i>I: What is your thought about branded sports footwear? Is it important to you?</i>		

<p><i>THANH: I used sports footwear a lot since I like dancing. So a good pair of sports footwear are very important to me. <b>Brand or no brand doesn't matter too much</b> for me, but I usually <b>choose Nike as my favourite brand to buy sportswear</b> in general.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Favourite brand is Nike</li> <li>- Doesn't care much about brand</li> </ul>	
<p><i>I: So how long have you been choosing Nike for your choice of sportswear?</i></p>		
<p><i>THANH: hmm...I think it is about <b>4-5 years now</b> I have been choosing this brand because <b>they have very good quality.</b></i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Long term use Nike brand</li> <li>- Quality is the main reason to choose Nike brand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brand trust</li> <li>- Brand loyalty- repurchase</li> <li>- Quality attributes as motivation</li> </ul>
<p><i>I: Can you share a bit more detail about your recent experience of buying Nike sports shoes?</i></p>		
<p><i>THANH: of course...so I just bought a pair for this summer (2022) because I work out and exercise quite often. So in a year, I will try to buy one pair if possible.</i></p>		
<p><i>I: what do you mean about "possible? Would you mind telling me a little bit of your income and your budget for a pair of branded sports footwear?</i></p>		
<p><i>THANH: because I'm freelancer so my income is not fixed, it is flexible by months, depend on the project I take. I would say <b>my income will be around 15 million Vietnam Dong (approx. £500)</b></i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sufficient income to purchase branded sports footwear</li> </ul>	

<p><b>per month.</b> So if I purchase one pair a year, I will spend around 3 to 6 million Vietnam Dong (approx. 1-200£) for a good pair of shoes.</p>		
<p><b>I: Can you tell a bit more why did your purchase them? Do you feel confident when you wear them?</b></p>		
<p><b>THANH: hm...I would say not really. Because now there are a lot of fake shoes but similar style, so it's hard to recognise which one is authentic. So it doesn't really make me confident or feel any special when I wear them.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The appearance of counterfeit is similar</li> <li>- Do not feel confident or special when wearing them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Perception about counterfeit shoes</li> </ul>
<p><b>I: So is it only because of quality?</b></p>		
<p><b>THANH: mostly...yes...because I wear them to dance. So I care pretty much about is quality do I can function easily. That's why I choose Nike. Because I feel their material very light and airy so it is good for my feet.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quality motivation</li> <li>- Comfy and be able to function</li> <li>- Material concern</li> <li>- Health concern</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quality attributes</li> <li>- Quality comes with comfort and durability</li> </ul>
<p><b>I: Have you ever bought a pair of branded sports shoes because of fashion reason? Your appearance among your friends for example?</b></p>		
<p><b>THANH: oh yes, I did. But it is not Nike. I bought a pair of Alexander McQueen, which was quite popular even now. It is</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Follow trend</li> <li>- Fashion reason</li> <li>- Going out purpose only</li> <li>- Price consideration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hedonistic motivation</li> </ul>

<p><i>trainer but it's more like for going out rather than exercise. That pair was a bit pricey but I only wear it when I go out.</i></p>		
<p><i>I: Did you buy it because of trend?</i></p>		
<p><i>THANH: yeah... partly. But they are also very comfy as quality is good as well. My friend wore it and I bought with her because I tried it on and that fits my style. I'm more like minimalism. I prefer something simple but effective.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comfy and quality</li> <li>- Friend influence</li> <li>- Simple style</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quality attributes</li> <li>- Friend influence</li> </ul>
<p><i>I: What about the brand that make you buy it?</i></p>		
<p><i>THANH: both Nike and Alexander Mc Queen has a well-known reputation in producing footwear, especially Nike. They have more experience in creating sports footwear. So I believe that their quality is better than other in the market. Besides, Nike always update their styles to catch up with customer's need. I think it's a good point that I'm hard to find in local or domestic brands. They have very generous customer service and return policy, so I prefer to purchase this brand more.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Well-known reputation brand</li> <li>- Have experience</li> <li>- Trust the quality</li> <li>- Update styles</li> <li>- Compare to local brands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brand trust</li> <li>- Quality attributes</li> </ul>
<p><i>I: You just mentioned about counterfeit. Have you ever bought or worn them?</i></p>		
<p><i>THANH: I wore them before, when I was high school student.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Past experience with counterfeit</li> </ul>	
<p><i>I: Did you know that they were counterfeit?</i></p>		



<p><i>THANH: No I didn't, I just wore them because my mom bought them for me. I didn't notice much until after few months of wearing them, my feet started smelling because the material was too thick and not airy. I googled online and knew that was counterfeit shoes.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family influence</li> <li>- Counterfeit quality compare</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family influence</li> <li>- Perception about counterfeit shoes</li> </ul>
<p><i>I: Do you think they are reasonable price so you can change more often?</i></p>		
<p><i>THANH: hmmm, it's not really. Because there is a lot of fake shoes now, different type. So it can be below 1-2 million Vietnam Dong (approx. 70£) per pair now, depends on the style. So you see that its price is close to an authentic pair. If for long term, I have to buy 2-3 counterfeit pair per year because they get damaged very quickly, that is even more pricey than buying an authentic pair to use for the whole year, maybe even more years.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economical consideration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Perception about counterfeit shoes</li> </ul>
<p><i>I: So for example, if the authentic brand doesn't have the style you like or it is too pricey, will you choose to buy counterfeit as alternative?</i></p>		
<p><i>THANH: I don't buy counterfeit shoes even though they are very tempting, cheaper prices with similar styles. I personally don't want to support them as I want to support authentic</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attitude for counterfeit shoes</li> <li>- Respect the brand</li> <li>- Self-identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Perception of counterfeit shoes</li> <li>- Brand respect</li> </ul>

<p><b>brands because I respect the work of the designer</b> when they create a product. If I were the designer, I had spent a lot of time and effort on my work and someone stole it and then sold it at a lower price, I will feel offended. <b>The shoes show my personality so I cannot fake my personality by purchasing counterfeit</b></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ethical business support</li> <li>- Self-identity</li> </ul>
<p><i>I: Do you know where these counterfeits are from?</i></p>		
<p><i>THANH: Most of them are from China, because they have big market in China for it. Besides we located near China so it is understandable that counterfeits are everywhere in my daily life.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Origins of counterfeit</li> </ul>	
<p><i>I: What do you think about the origin of the product?</i></p>		
<p><i>THANH: personally I'm not a fan of China, after everything they have been doing in the past until now to my country. So that's why I don't advocate to purchase counterfeit from China.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attitude opposed to China</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unethical business</li> <li>- Advocate for authentic</li> </ul>
<p><i>I: So do you think it's normal to purchase an authentic pair of Nike shoes that are made in China, but it's not ok to purchase counterfeit from China?</i></p>		
<p><i>THANH: yeah because counterfeits are unethical business. By doing that, I feel like I'm disrespect the brand, the hard work and effort of the designer.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attitude for counterfeit shoes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brand respect</li> </ul>

<p><i>I: How about ethical business issue? What do you think about Nike manufacturer in Vietnam?</i></p>		
<p><i>THANH: There are lots of things in the past that Nike made bad impression to Vietnam. But now I they are getting better. Vietnam is their destination for manufacture because of cheap labour and operation cost.</i></p>		
<p><i>I: What do you think about it?</i></p>		
<p><i>THANH: I notice that many global brands, such as Nike have taken advantage of developing countries, including here in Vietnam, Bangladesh, or India for child labour, as I think the cost is much cheaper. From an economic side, it is good to generate a profit and provide employment, but from a human rights perspective, it is not right, in fact it is exploitation.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advocate for equal rights</li> <li>- Advocate humanity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social responsibility</li> <li>- Ethical business</li> <li>- Patriotic characteristic (arguable)</li> </ul>
<p><i>I: How about other social responsibility, such as environment, do you care about it too?</i></p>		
<p><i>THANH: yes I do. If any brand that doesn't have ethical business practice or damage the environment. I won't purchase them. That's also why I only buy one pair per year, no more than that. Because I know it's hard and waste of energy to recycle a pair of shoes.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attitude for unethical business</li> <li>- Environmental consideration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social responsibility</li> <li>- Environmental consideration</li> <li>- Sustainability lifestyle</li> </ul>

<i>I: What media did you use to get the product information?</i>		
<i>THANH: I don't have much free time so I mostly look for it online. Such as its website or online review. Sometimes I see my friends wearing them, then I will go to store and try them on to see if they fits me or not. Then I will purchase them.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Online review inform purchase behaviour</li> <li>- Friend influence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brand engagement</li> <li>- Influence from online source</li> <li>- Friend influence</li> </ul>
<i>I: So do you think you get most influenced from online sources?</i>		
<i>THANH: yeah I would say that. If the products' online review is not good, I won't consider purchasing them. At least they must have the rate of 4.5 star above.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Criteria to make purchase decision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Online source influence</li> </ul>
<i>I: How about online influencer, do you follow them?</i>		
<i>THANH: yeah I do, but not to get shoes influenced. Because their body is different from mine. Beside I know they get paid to do it so I don't trust them much.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do not get influenced by online influencers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Online source influence</li> </ul>
<i>I: How about family, do they still influence you?</i>		
<i>THANH: It's been long time I have been financial dependence so I don't ask my family much about my purchase. But I do regular go shopping with my mom, she gives my advice about colour and style, the final decision is still mine.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not dependant financially on family</li> <li>- Dependent on family about colour and style</li> <li>- Oneself-decision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family influence</li> <li>- Background influence</li> </ul>

<p><i>I: What do you think about global sports footwear brands in Hanoi now? Do they need to improve anything?</i></p>		
<p><i>THANH: Hmm it's hard to say. Because Hanoi is the capital of Vietnam, So we have pretty much everything we need in the city. All the styles are up-to-date so I don't have any complaints.</i></p>		
<p><i>I: How about Nike? What else do you think Nike should do to improve their products or service?</i></p>		
<p><i>THANH: Even I'm minimalism, I like simple things but effective. I also like to have my own characteristics on the shoes. So I like to customize shoes myself, which I think it is very common now in Western countries. I like to have sometime a little flower or my initial on the shoes so it's felt like the shoes are mine. No counterfeits can copy that.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Need for customization products</li> <li>- Wanted to be up-to-date to global trend but keep self-identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Customization products</li> <li>- Acculturation characteristics</li> </ul>
<p><i>I: How about COVID-19, did it impact your purchase?</i></p>		
<p><i>THANH: yeah I didn't buy anything in Covid because I don't use them to do anything. But I have more time to be online and look for shoes' information, learning the health of my feet so I think it somehow affects my purchase decision at the moment. I prefer quality more.</i></p>		

<i>I: Do you have any recommendation for the global brand in Hanoi and Vietnam in general?</i>		
<i>THANH: not much, they are doing very well I think. It's just customer service should be more effective and helpful, that would be great.</i>		
<i>I: Thank you so much for your time.</i>		
<i>THANH: No worries, I'm more than happy to be a part of your thesis.</i>		
<i>I: Thank so much and I wish you all the best with your work.</i>		

## Appendix 11 Guidelines for Interview Transcription

Adapted from Azevedo et al. (2017)

Interviewer cannot hear what interviewee is saying	Information inside parenthesis (inaudible text segment)
Interviewer cannot understand what interviewee is saying	Information inside parentheses E.g.: Yes, exactly! Of course (unintelligible segment) are the first!
Interviewer is unsure about what interviewee is saying	Inside parenthesis and delimited by question marks E.g.: well-known brands can provide good quality. Others (Counterfeits?) are not long lasting and wasting my money.
Interviewer cannot understand because of cross-talk	That piece of information inside parenthesis (unintelligible segment due to cross-talk or overlapping speech)  E.g.:  R: She likes wo- (unintelligible segment due to cross-talk)
Interruption/word is cut	Hyphen at the end

E.g.: I prefer global branded sports shoes over local brands -

Non-verbal sounds (e.g. emotions)

Information inside parenthesis

(laughed); (sighed)

Silence/pauses

Three ellipses inside parentheses

(...)

Interjections

The following designations:

Hmm, Mm, Ah

Emphasis

Caps are used to denote strong emphasis

E.g.: they did WHAT?

If the interviewer believe that the interviewee mispronounced the word

The exact transcription of what was said and a proposal inside parenthesis delaminated by slashes

E.g.: pha ke/ (fake)



## Appendix 12 Translations of Sy (male, 25-years-old)

Direct quotes used in main text	Extract from original English transcript	Extract from original Vietnamese transcript
<p><i>As an illustrator, I care a lot about my appearance because most of my clients come from my online platform. My normal lifestyle is important in influencing my artwork. The clients do not only see your profile only, but they also see you as you really are, how you really dress and how you actual fit into your community. Therefore, the shoes I choose must match with my fashion tastes, my personality and online presence as an artist. But nothing too extreme or standing-out, but also not too plain or boring.</i></p>		<p><i>Là một nghệ sĩ vẽ tranh minh hoạ, em quan tâm nhiều đến ngoại hình của mình bởi hầu hết các khách hàng của em đều từ trên mạng ra. Cuộc sống thường ngày ảnh hưởng nhiều đến công việc vẽ của em. Các khách hàng không chỉ xem trang cá nhân mà còn muốn biết con người thật của em qua cách em mặc có hợp với gu của họ không. Cho nên em chọn giày hợp với gu thời trang, cá tính và diện mạo trên mạng của mình. Nhưng không có gì quá nổi bật và cũng không nhàm chán.</i></p>
<p><i>...For me, the value of the shoes increases my social status. If I wear shoes around £200 like Nike Airforce, people will know the cost of these</i></p>	<p><i>I prefer branded shoes from well-known brands because of its quality and other values that they provide. For me, the value of the shoes increases</i></p>	<p><i>Em thích giày thể thao hiệu từ những thương hiệu có tiếng vì chất lượng và giá trị nó đem lại. Với em, một đôi giày mang lại giá trị địa vị xã</i></p>

*shoes therefore I feel more confident and classier, as it raises my social status in their eyes.*

*my social status. If I wear shoes around £200 like Nike Airforce, people will know the cost of these shoes therefore I feel more confident and classier, as it raises my social status in their eyes.*

*hôi. Nếu em đi một đôi giày tầm 6 triệu Việt Nam giống như Nike Airforce, mọi người sẽ biết nó xịn bởi giá và nó khiến em tự tin hơn, làm em thấy hãnh diện hơn trong mắt mọi người.*

*I think the global company will come here to Vietnam as we offer low-cost labour, but it also means that our working hours are longer for less remuneration, therefore the benefits are not always good. A few years ago, there was a scandal in China due to exploiting labour and I think it still happens here in Vietnam. Since most of the shoe companies will release many emissions into the environment, it causes pollution and damage to the locals' health, so we are badly paid, and the local environment is damaged, and all of this for what, a branded fashion item...*

*I think the global company will come here to Vietnam as we offer low-cost labour, but it also means that our working hours are longer for less remuneration, therefore the benefits are not always good. A few years ago, there was a scandal in China due to exploiting labour and I think it still happens here in Vietnam. Since most of the shoe companies will release many emissions into the environment, it causes pollution and damage to the locals' health, so we are badly paid, and the local environment is damaged, and all of this for what, a branded fashion item. I think Vietnamese authority should do more on this issue.*

*Em nghĩ công ty tầm cỡ quốc tế sẽ chọn Việt Nam vì nhân công rẻ, nghĩa là lương thấp hơn với số giờ làm nhiều hơn, nên công ty được lợi. Vài năm trước đã có vụ ở Trung Quốc về bóc lột lao động, em nghĩ nó cũng xuất hiện ở nước mình. Vì hầu hết công ty giày còn xả thải nhiều nên gây ô nhiễm, ảnh hưởng sức khỏe người dân xung quanh, mà lương thì thấp, môi trường bị thiệt hại, tất cả chỉ để sản xuất đồ hiệu. Em nghĩ các quan chức nên làm gì đó về vấn đề này.*

*Of course, I bought these shoes because of the quality and style. But it is also because I see*

*Đương nhiên em mua vì chất lượng và kiểu dáng. Nhưng em cũng thấy các bạn cùng ngành*

people, who also work in the field of art around me, who are wearing this style too, so I think we share similar interests. The most interesting aspect of the style we all seem to wear is that the Vans design is quite basic, so I can, along with many others, add a personal design to reflect my personality.

đeo kiểu ấy nên bọn em hay chia sẻ sở thích. Điều thú vị nhất là bọn em đều thích thiết kế đơn giản của Vans, nên em có thể thêm chi tiết cá nhân mình vào.

I usually look for the branded shoes online and then ask my elder sister for her recommendations if the brand is a bit pricey. For example, she normally gives me advice on the quality of the brand or what was her experience of wearing them in the past, so I can save more time on going to the physical store to try them on myself...

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Em thường xem nhiều hàng trên mạng rồi hỏi chị gái nếu giá nó mắc. Ví dụ chị em thường đưa ý kiến về chất lượng hãng đó và trải nghiệm chị ấy có, thì em sẽ tiết kiệm được thời gian đến thử ở cửa hàng của nó. Nhưng cá nhân em nghĩ cửa hiệu sẽ không giúp ích được nhiều vì họ không có nhiều mẫu.

I buy them [branded shoes] because I know I can trust their quality, but I also checked as to whether other customers have had the same

Em mua giày hiệu vì em tin vào chất lượng, nhưng em cũng sẽ kiểm tra nếu các khách khác

*experience which confirms my perceptions towards quality.*

*I like to celebrate special occasions in Vietnam. I live in Hanoi, the capital, where Vietnamese culture is distinctive and the most obvious. On Independence Day, Hanoi is filled with patriotic spirit. I feel so proud to be Vietnamese, so I always create something special about Vietnam on my plain Nike shoes or T-shirt, such as a traditional dragon or the Vietnamese lotus flower. It is a small token thing, but I feel I belong to my culture and country.*

*I appreciate that brands spend a lot of money on the research and development phases of their products. This includes the maintaining of the quality, the high standard of durability and design which I like, but I also want to be Vietnamese and put my own cultural identity on to them.*

*có chung quan điểm chất lượng về sản phẩm ấy với mình hay không.*

*Em thích kỉ niệm các ngày lễ ở Việt Nam. Vì em sống ở thủ đô Hà nội, nơi văn hoá khác biệt và rõ nét. Vào ngày Quốc Khánh thì Hà Nội ngập tràn tinh thần yêu nước. Em rất hạnh diện là người Việt Nam, em luôn muốn có cái gì đó đặc biệt về Việt Nam trên áo phông hoặc đôi Nike trơn của mình, như con rồng truyền thống hay hoa sen. Nhỏ thôi nhưng nó khiến em thấy yêu văn hoá và đất nước mình.*

*Em thấy trân trọng những thương hiệu dành nhiều thời gian và tiền bạc vào phát triển sản phẩm. Nó đi kèm với sự bảo hành về chất lượng, độ bền và thiết kế nhưng em cũng muốn có dấu ấn văn hoá Việt Nam trên đôi giày ấy.*