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Project Submission Sheet

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Dissertation

The Impact of Emotional Marketing on Purchase Intentions of Sneakers among Young Adults

Your Name/Student Number	Course	Date
Suvrat Ashutosh Shukla / 22225951	MSc in Marketing	10 th August 2024.

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of emotional marketing on purchase intentions of sneakers among young adults. Emotional marketing as a marketing strategy has been used by brands in order to form strong connections with their consumers. This paper aims to study how storytelling plays a part in emotional marketing to connect with young adults.

The research looked at the extensive literature available to formulate the research question and objectives that would be studied. The research was conducted through the means of semi-structured online interviews with eight young adults who are sneaker enthusiasts. The data was analysed using a thematic approach which was deemed appropriate for the research objectives.

The principal finding of this study was that there exists a positive impact of emotional marketing and storytelling on the purchase intentions of sneakers among young adults. The respondents were found to be more loyal to the sneaker brands whose emotional story resonated more with them.

The core conclusion arrived from this research is that sneaker brands should use emotional marketing and storytelling in their marketing communications campaign in order to create a loyal customer base among young adults.

The research findings pointed to further areas for exploration and study

Keywords: Emotional marketing, brand storytelling, sneakers, purchase intentions, young adults

Declaration

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland

Research Students Declaration Form

(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

Name: Suvrat Ashutosh Shukla

Student Number: 22225951

Degree for which thesis is submitted: MSc in Marketing

Title of Thesis: The Impact of Emotional Marketing on Purchase Intentions of Sneakers among Young Adults

Date: 10/08/2024

Material submitted for award

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B. I declare that all verbatim extracts contained in the thesis have been distinguished by ☒ quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.

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Signature of research student: Suvrat Ashutosh Shukla **Date:** 10th August 2024

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I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Louise Maguire, whose guidance, encouragement, and invaluable insights have been instrumental in the completion of this thesis. Her patience and expertise have greatly shaped the direction and quality of my research, and I am profoundly thankful for her support throughout this process.

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A special thanks is due to the library staff, whose assistance was indispensable. Their willingness to help me navigate the vast resources available, often going the extra mile to ensure I had access to the necessary material, made the research process smoother.

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Chapter One – Introduction

1.1. Background

Psychological literature states that in every step of a purchase decision making process, emotions play a vital role (Consoli, 2010). They have been instrumental in all aspects of marketing. Bagozzi et al. (1999) observed that emotions are ubiquitous throughout the entire marketing process. The contents of a marketing communications campaigns should be engaging in a way that it inspired the consumers to act and develop a psychological attachment towards the brand and the product (Kemp et al., 2021).

Storytelling is considered a powerful tool for improving communication and boosting organisational performance (Hsiao et al., 2013). The use of storytelling for marketing commercial products, such as sports products, has become quite common (Williams and Heo, 2023). While other practical factors like comfort, price, product quality, etc. are still important factors, they can be overshadowed by the emotional response that a brand can evoke.

Sneakers, once merely functional footwear, have transcended from their utilitarian background to be known as symbols of identity and personal expression. This transformation of sneakers into cultural and social symbols highlights the impact that emotional marketing has in shaping consumer behaviour. Emotional marketing taps into the consumers' feelings, desires, and aspirations, creating deep a connection between the brand and the consumer. For young adults, the appeal of a sneaker brand often lies in how well it aligns with their identities. Brands that can create a unique space in the minds of its consumers can transform their products into cultural and social symbols.

Thus, marketers have used emotional marketing and storytelling as a strategy for their marketing communications campaigns. This strategy involves using emotional elements like personal journey, struggles, achievements, etc. in the context of the current social and cultural norms, in order to communicate brand values which, resonate with those of their consumers.

1.2. Research Focus

The focus of this research is on the intersection between emotional marketing, storytelling, and sneakers. This was studied with respect to understanding its impact on purchase decisions among young adults.

The impact of emotional marketing and storytelling on consumers has been studied extensively in literature (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Consoli, 2010; Dessart and Pitardi, 2019; Dias and Cavaleiro, 2022). Similarly, Williams and Heo (2023) looked at storytelling for signature

sneakers only. However, the impact of storytelling and emotional marketing has not been studied on the purchase decisions of young adults when it comes to sneakers as a product category. Hence, the research was focused on filling this gap in literature and making meaning contribution to the topic.

1.3. Research Aim, Objectives, and Method

The overarching aim of this research is to study the impact of emotional marketing and storytelling on the purchase decisions of young adults. This study has three specific objectives, they are as follows –

- a. To ascertain if there is a positive relationship between strong storytelling in marketing communication campaign for a sneakers brand and the purchase intention of young adults.
- b. To determine if emotional elements of storytelling such as achievements, personal journeys, values, etc. influence the buying behaviour of young adults.
- c. To explore if young adults are more loyal to a brand if they feel a strong connection with the story that the brand tells.

The study aims to add to the existing literature with regards to emotional marketing, storytelling, and sneakers, respectively. For the same, primary research was conducted in the way of online meetings, using digital tools, with young adults who are sneaker enthusiasts.

Through this study, the researcher hopes to shed some light on the use of emotional marketing and storytelling as a marketing tool, with an intention to create a deep and strong connection between a sneaker brand and its consumers.

1.4. Organisation of the Dissertation

The following chapter of literature review will critically examine and evaluate theories related to the study, which will subsequently lead to the development of the research question and objectives. The research methodology chapter will then outline and justify the approaches that were used to conduct the research effectively with an aim to address the research question and objectives, including the limitations of this research. The findings from the interview data will be analysed to provide insights and will be compared to the theory from the literature to draw conclusions. Along with the conclusions, suggestions for future research would be outlined followed by a personal reflective note by the researcher.

1.5. Value of this Research

To the best of the author's knowledge, no prior studies have examined emotional marketing and storytelling, and their impact on young adults. Hence, this study would contribute to the existing literature. Due to its limitations, including a limited sample size, the findings of this study cannot be generalised. However, it can still be used as a foundation for further research that can be carried out to explore this aspect of the broader marketing umbrella. Additionally, the researcher hopes that this study would increase the visibility of studies focused on emotional marketing and storytelling.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The literature on the impact of emotional marketing on purchase intentions explores how emotional appeals in marketing communications influence consumer buying behaviour. Understanding these factors is crucial while formulating marketing strategies in the current world where emotional engagement often plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours. This review of literature thoroughly examines the work already done on said topic and concludes by identifying the gap in literature that supports the research questions and objectives of this study.

2.2. Emotional Advertising

Establishing a personal connection with the consumers can often enable businesses to strengthen bonds and cultivate long-lasting relationships (Kemp et al., 2021). Gebhardt et al. (2019) defined emotions from a psychological point of view as behavioural, physiological and cognitive reactions of a person to a situation. Jianming Wang *et al.* (2022) noted that the advertising space uses various categorized emotions, also referred to as emotional appeals. Emotional advertising campaigns create an intense connection between a customer and a brand or product (Vrtana and Krizanova, 2023). It is targeted towards appealing to the heart of the consumer rather than their minds. Casais and Pereira, (2021) looked at emotional advertising appeals as an important practice in modern marketing.

It was initially thought to be more effective in low involvement products (Rossiter et al., 1991). Batra and Stephens, (1994) also observed that emotional advertising is more impactful when it comes to low involvement products as compared to high involvement products. However, Stout and Leckenby (1986) opinionated that emotion is seen as a potential affective mediator of attitudes. This approach goes beyond the traditional focus on rational arguments and taps into the psychological and emotional dimensions of decision making. The case of emotional advertising depends on the argument that emotions significantly impact memory, attitudes and behaviours which ultimately culminates in the buying decision of an individual. However, emotional ads do work better for some products than others, but not necessarily depending on whether the product is a low involvement product or high involvement product (Geuens et al., 2011).

It is an inescapable fact of modern life that we learn, define, and remind ourselves of who we are by our possessions. (Belk, 1988). Hence, it is of utmost importance for brands today to be a part of their customer's possessions, one of the factors for which is brand loyalty. Emotional

advertising has a huge impact on brand loyalty. By creating an emotional bond, brands can foster a sense of attachment and affinity among its consumers. This emotional connection can result in higher customer retention rates and a greater willingness to advocate for the brand. For example, brands like Coca-Cola, Apple, Nike, etc. have successfully used emotional advertising to build a loyal customer base that strongly identifies with their brand values and narratives.

Emotions are an integral part in storytelling. In the narrative persuasion process, people are more likely to be persuaded by emotions rather than by strong arguments from the information provided in the story (Kang et al., 2020). Advertising campaigns with emotional appeal can be perceived as a trend by which companies want to stimulate final purchasing decisions (Vrtana and Krizanova, 2023). Papadatos, (2006) identified three core elements of storytelling – hardship – overcoming obstacles is essential to feeling truly rewarded, as perseverance amplifies the value of an earned reward compared to unexpected ones; reciprocity – a sense of reward is strengthened by an equitable exchange of value where acts of giving and receiving reinforces satisfaction; defining moments – life's most memorable and transformative experiences are often pivotal moments that shape our understanding of happiness.

2.3. Storytelling and Brand

A product or service is made up of a bundle of tangible and intangible attributes and benefits designed to satisfy consumer needs and wants (Hoeffler and Keller, 2003, p. 6). One such intangible attribute separates the product from rest of the market. According to Keller (2013), many practicing managers look at brand as something that has resulted into the product gaining awareness, prominence, and reputation.

Van Laer et al. (2019) mentioned that stories have a unique ability to connect with its audiences. Storytelling is an influential and lasting method of communication where the blend of verbal and visual educates, informs, and entertains an audience (Spanjaard et al, 2023). It is regarded as an effective advertising format to deliver messages and promote communication (Padgett and Allen, 1997). The Furrow magazine by John Furrow is often credited as being one of the first few examples of using storytelling for marketing communications (Pulizzi, 2012). They used the magazine as a means to educate farmers on new technologies and how they could benefit from it. Pulizzi, (2012) adds that this not only resulted in John Deere becoming an expert source of information for farmers, but also became the go-to brand for new equipment, resulting in an increase in revenue.

Brand storytelling leverages narrative techniques to create a deeper and emotional connection between the brand and its audience. Research and theories around brand storytelling have inspired brands to embrace the notion that a story could be used as a persuasive tool for a brand's sales or marketing message (Pereira, 2019). Being a persuasive technique, storytelling has the ability to convey a message more effectively. Listeners learn lessons contained in stories more effectively as compared to a lecture-based learning (Ganassali and Matysiewicz, 2021). They also note that a good brand story features a clear, main message that is easy to understand and is believable, if not necessarily true. One of the main reasons for marketers resorting to storytelling is that well told stories are better remembered as compared to facts (Escalas, 2004). Sometimes an important fact may not be that easy to recollect for a consumer as compared to a story, while they are in the buying process. Hall, (2017) opinionated that the best brand stories put the listener or customer in the shoes of the storyteller. This makes the storyteller more relatable and creates opportunities for a deeper relationship with the storyteller and the brand.

A well told story is a brands greatest opportunity to have an impact on its consumers (Zak, 2014). However, unlike traditional marketing, brand storytelling does not focus on the product features and benefits. It takes the audiences on a journey that captures the brand values and encourages the audiences to share these values. The set of values attached to the brand are almost always aspirational in nature, which encourages the audience to buy the brand to embody the values. As a result, the relationship between a brand and its customers goes beyond being just transactional as it enhances interaction and results in increased customer loyalty. Kaufman, (2003) states that stories have the power to elevate the consumption experience of a consumer. Brands that can address the desire of the consumer to co-create value, express their authentic self rather than an ideal self, and have a positive influence can stand out among the clutter (Youn-Kyung Kim and Pauline Sullivan, 2019). Hence, storytelling conveys a message to the consumers in a way that it stays with them. Just mentioning rational facts or figures does not have a strong recall as a relatable story would have (Kaufman, 2003).

Although a brand story increases consumer's engagement more than compared to listing product information (Dessart and Pitardi, 2019), it does not present the point of view of the consumers. Westbrook, (1987) describes word of mouth as the interpersonal communication which is directed at other consumers regarding the ownership, usage, or characteristics of a particular goods or service or their sellers. Dichter, (1966) stated that word of mouth is more persuasive to consumers than advertisements as they look at advertisements as a sales tool used by companies, whereas word of mouth disarms them, making the information more acceptable. Kang et al., (2020) opinionated that the essence of word of mouth lies in the fact that this communication takes place among peer consumers who have no expectation to

receive any form of compensation for this communication. Thus, when consumers hear a brand's story from other consumers, it comes across as more authentic (Hong et al., 2022). Dessart and Pitardi, (2019) observed that consumer's brand storytelling would help other consumers process the information more meaningfully and result in an increased engagement. Word of mouth has a significant impact on consumer purchase decisions as compared to other marketing communications as an environment is created through social media wherein customers act as voluntary marketers of a product or a service by sharing information directly through their social networks (Kimmel and Kitchen, 2014). This indicates that marketers should put more efforts into encouraging their loyal customers to share their own stories and experiences with other consumers (Hong et al., 2022).

Using storytelling in communication is key to catching their attention and is one of the main reasons they like a brand (Dias, and Cavaleiro, 2022). Such like-minded people form a community and the only thing common, binding them together, is the brand. Muniz and O, Guinn (2001) look at brand communities as explicitly social commercial collectives that revolve around a particular brand at the centre.

2.4. AI and Storytelling

The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has impacted every aspect of business and marketing and advertising are no exceptions. With the advent of AI, the marketing landscape has changed drastically (Hoffmann et al., 2023). The integration of AI with storytelling gives marketers a great opportunity to enhance personalisation, engagement, and efficiency while creating marketing campaigns. These tools could be a decisive factor in the war for loyalty among brands. However, Spanos, (2021) observes that though AI can create content, it alone is not powerful enough to change consumer decisions. He further adds that content must be grounded in story and purpose in order to actually make an impact. He, A.-Z. and Zhang, (2023) observed that with multiple touchpoints available to marketers throughout the customer journey, improving AI's effectiveness in interactive marketing from a consumer perspective should be a critical concern for marketers and academics. In order to navigate the changes in the marketing world due to AI, arguments have been made that the marketing discipline should not simply react to AI advances but rather take an active role in shaping them and thereby harnessing them to significant advantage (Davenport et al., 2020). AI has the power to make marketing more powerful and efficient. However, the expanding use of AI has also highlighted ethical concerns that come along with it (Kumar and Suthar, 2024). They observed that concerns such as privacy violations, gender discrimination and bias, manipulating consumer behaviour, etc. need to be considered while implementing AI for marketing. Having said that,

leveraging AI and predictive analytics is the key to offering customer experiences that builds advocacy and customers for life (Verma et al., 2021). Thus, balancing the benefits of AI with its potential risks and negative consequences requires hybrid approaches that combine AI with human interaction and oversight (Kumar and Suthar, 2024).

2.5. Brand Loyalty

The generation of loyal customers has been one of the most important objectives of marketers (Knox and Walker, 2001). It has often been used as a measure to calculate brand equity. Aaker, D.A. (1992) observed that brand loyalty is a key consideration when placing a value on a brand because loyalty translates into a profit stream. It leads to long-term business success by reducing marketing costs, as retaining customers is usually cost-effective than acquiring new customers. Dias and Cavaleiro (2022) observed that *the use of storytelling has the effect of generating, enhancing and reinforcing brand love, as it was a crucial factor to feel identification with the brand and to develop emotions toward it.*

Pulizzi, (2012) observed that by just educating farmers about new technology and how to benefit from it, John deere gained the trust of its target consumers and gained fame as the go-to expert for farming equipment, resulting in an increase in brand loyalty as well as revenues.

2.6. Celebrity Endorsements

Brands use marketing strategies such as celebrity endorsements to enhance their associations (Schnittka et al., 2023). However, their significance is not restrictive to just boosting revenues, it goes beyond that to enhance the value of the brand (Amos et al., 2008).

Knoll and Matthes, (2017) stated that celebrity endorsements led to a higher intention to purchase the advertised product. This effect is rooted in the credibility and attractiveness of the celebrity. When consumers see a known and admired person endorsing a brand, they transfer positive emotions from the celebrity to the brand. In marketing communications, managers aim to leverage the transfer of meaning from the endorser to the associated product or brand (Schouten et al., 2020).

However, critically looking at celebrity endorsements, Schouten et al. (2020) observed that influencers are more effective product endorsers as compared to celebrities. Thus, the influence of celebrities could be seen diminishing. However, they also stated that with celebrities, being proactive on social media as well, the line between influencers and celebrities could get blurry.

Schartel Dunn and Nisbett, (2023) observed that when a celebrity takes a stand, it is viewed as the stand of the brands that they endorse too. When those stands are not in line with the brand's values, the partnerships are broken off (Ex – Kanye West and Adidas). However, when

the align with the brand values, the brand stands by the celebrity, or signs them (Ex – Colin Kaepernick and Nike). Thus, the transfer of meaning from celebrity to brand can have both positive and negative implications for a brand.

2.7. Marketing Sneakers

Emotional marketing strategies are particularly effective among lifestyle brands (Thompson and Arsel, 2004). Thus, a lot of sneaker brands market their sneakers as a lifestyle product. However, it is not clear as to what aspects help a consumer decide their preferred brand. Some brands focus on creating different range of sneakers and conveying a story through them, whereas some brands focus on leading athletes and conveying message through them (Williams and Heo, 2023). One of the critical aspects of emotional marketing is creating brand communities which foster a sense of belonging among the consumers. Such brand communities are formed through binding over mutual experiences and shared emotional connect that the people have towards a brand (Muniz and O, Guinn, 2001). For example, Nike's marketing campaigns focus on themes such as empowerment and achievement which resonates with their consumers who want to overcome personal challenges. By aligning their brand message with these aspirational narratives, sneaker companies can cultivate a loyal customer base which identifies strongly with the brand characteristics. Williams and Heo, (2023) observed that using storytelling to promote commercial products has become common in the sports industry. However, they also opinionated that it is not clear as to which type of story strongly appeals to the consumer. Lundqvist *et al.* (2013) noted that exploring the impact of storytelling on purchase intentions has been limited to a certain extent. Thus, this study aims to explore its impact on sports products, particularly the sneaker market.

2.8. Conclusion

The literature review represents a thorough dive into the available literature regarding emotional marketing, storytelling, and sneakers. Every literature agrees on the fact that emotional marketing and storytelling is an effective tool in order to create a deep and strong bond with the consumer. The literature above delves into emotional marketing (Vrtana and Krizanova, 2023; Casais and Pereira, 2021; Geuens et al., 2011), as well as storytelling (Van Laer et al., 2019; Pulizzi, 2012). It also sheds light to understand different themes such as brand loyalty and use of AI in storytelling. It further concludes by highlighting the limited literature on marketing of sneakers.

The researcher has identified a gap in the literature as there is a lack of a specific peer-reviewed research which addresses the impact that emotional marketing and storytelling has on the purchase intentions of young adults. This gap presents an opportunity for the researcher to explore the topic in depth.

The next chapter of this study would highlight the main research question and mention the research objectives that will be studied.

Chapter Three – Research Question and Objectives

3.1. Research Question

After reviewing the literature, a need to discover quality insights felt necessary. These insights would throw some light on whether emotional marketing and storytelling is used by brands of sneakers to influence purchase decisions, specifically of young adults. Hence, the main research question goes as follows –

Does Emotional Marketing and Storytelling have an impact on the Purchase Decisions of Sneakers among Young Adults?

3.2. Research Objective

In order to answer the research question, the following sub-objectives were formulated from the literature review.

To ascertain if there is a positive relationship between strong storytelling in marketing communication campaign for a sneakers brand and the purchase intention of young adults.

The first research objective aims to understand whether there exists a positive relationship between a story that the brand communicates through its marketing communications campaign and the purchase intention of young adults.

To determine if emotional elements of storytelling such as achievements, personal journeys, values, etc. influence the buying behaviour of young adults.

The second research objective attempts to explore whether the emotional elements of storytelling that a brand uses in its marketing communications, influence the buying behaviour of a young adult.

To explore if young adults are more loyal to a brand if they feel a strong connection with the story that the brand tells.

The third research objective seeks to understand if there exists a brand loyalty in the minds of young adults with respect to the sneakers brand if they feel a powerful connection with the story that the brand tells.

By comparing the findings of the literature that was reviewed, to the findings of this study, this research will try to understand the role that emotional advertising and storytelling plays to influence the buying behaviour of sneakers among young adults.

Chapter Four - Methodology

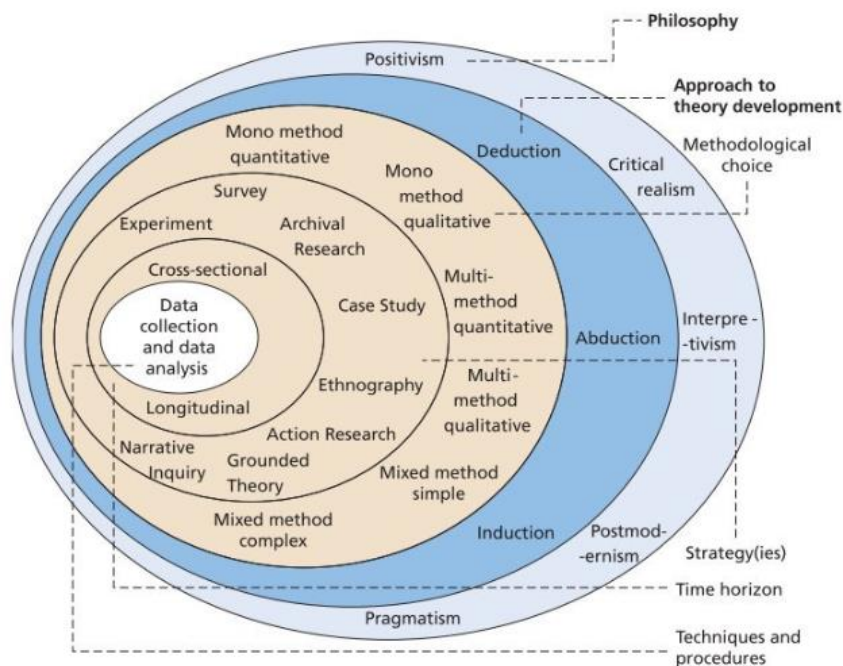
4.1. Introduction

After the relevant literature on the research topic has been examined, this chapter will provide an understanding of the research methods used and the rationale behind it. The research methodology refers to the theory of how research should be undertaken (Saunders et al., 2019).

We will be referring The Research Onion framework in order to determine the most suitable method for this research (Saunders, M. et al., 2019). This framework systematically guides researchers to determine which methods and strategies are most suited to address the research problem. It also provides different stages which the researcher must follow when piecing together the appropriate methodology.

In this chapter, the discussions revolve around the relevant research philosophies, the research approach, sampling method used, data collection and analysis, limitations specific to this research, and ethical considerations relevant to this study.

Figure 1 - The Research Onion



Source - Saunders, 2019, p. 130

4.2. Research Philosophy

Saunders, (2019) refers to research philosophy as a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge. He further opinionated that though it sounds profound, this is exactly what a researcher does - develop knowledge in a particular field of interest.

Epistemology concerns with the scope and nature of knowledge - what constitutes as valid knowledge and how can it be acquired. It addresses questions about the relationship between the researcher and the reality being studied. In the research onion, epistemology is critical as it influences methodological choices and the interpretation of data.

Positivism is an epistemological stance that focuses on collecting data with an objective of establishing cause and effect relationship. It is widely used in scientific research where the study largely depends on factual data free from any human interpretation or bias (Saunders et al., 2019). In contrast to that, interpretivism emphasizes understanding the subjective meaning and experiences of an individual. Interpretivists argue that reality is formed through interactions and experiences, which makes it subjective and dependent on a context.

4.3. Research Approach

Saunders et al., (2019) quotes Easterby-Smith for discussing the three reasons why selecting the correct research approach is essential. First, it enables the researcher to make an informed decision about the research design. Second, it gives a clarity to the researcher about which research strategies and methodologies will work and more importantly which will not. Third, having the knowledge of different research traditions enables the researcher to adapt their research design so as to cater the constraints.

The extent to which the research is concerned with theory testing or theory building raises the question regarding the approach taken by the researcher. It can either be inductive, deductive or abductive in nature (Saunders et al., 2019). Inductive reasoning begins with specific observations and builds up to broader generalisations and theories. It is often used in exploratory research to generate new theories based on observed patterns. Deductive theory starts with a general theory and tests it through structured methodologies to reach a specific conclusion. It can be used to confirm or disprove existing theories. Abductive reasoning seeks the most likely explanation for a set of observations that are tested repeatedly. The diagram below shows a detailed difference between the three approaches.

Figure 2 - Different Research Approaches

	Deduction	Induction	Abduction
Logic	In a deductive inference, when the premises are true, the conclusion must also be true	In an inductive inference, known premises are used to generate untested conclusions	In an abductive inference, known premises are used to generate testable conclusions
Generalisability	Generalising from the general to the specific	Generalising from the specific to the general	Generalising from the interactions between the specific and the general
Use of data	Data collection is used to evaluate propositions or hypotheses related to an existing theory	Data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns and create a conceptual framework	Data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns, locate these in a conceptual framework and test this through subsequent data collection and so forth
Theory	Theory falsification or verification	Theory generation and building	Theory generation or modification; incorporating existing theory where appropriate, to build new theory or modify existing theory

Source - Saunders, 2019, p. 153

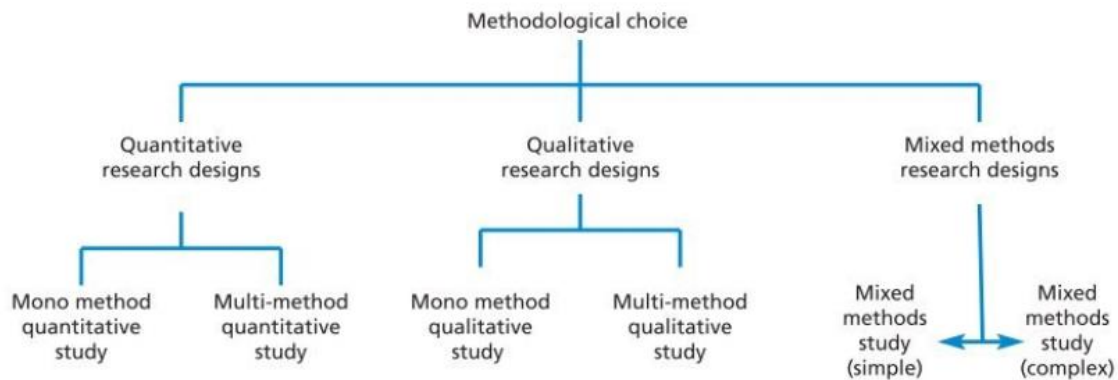
As this study aims to understand the feeling and motivating factors which may influence buying behaviours, an inductive research approach will be adopted.

4.4. Research Design and Method

A research design refers to the general plan of how the researcher would go about answering the research questions (Saunders et al., 2019). It would consist of clear objectives which would be derived from the research questions, specify the sources from which the researcher intends to collect data, how the data would be collected and analysed, and the limitations that can be encountered.

As per Saunders et al., (2019), the first methodological choice that a researcher has to make is whether to follow a quantitative, qualitative, or a mixed methods research design. They are further explained in the diagram below.

Figure 3 – Methodological Choice



Source - Saunders, 2019, p. 176

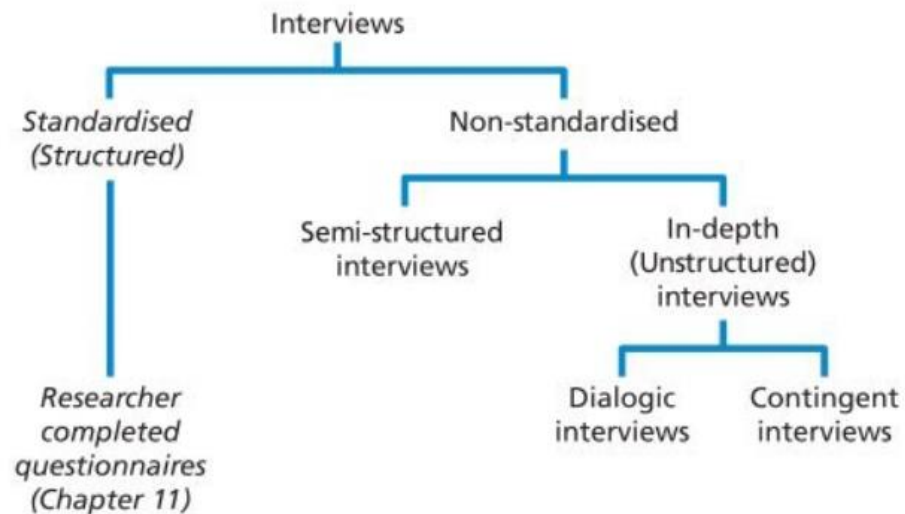
Qualitative research questions are useful to answer the questions how and why (Savarit, 2020). They are useful to identify phenomena, common patterns and systematic occurrences. Qualitative research suggests that the answer to any single research question or objective is embedded in a range of interconnected questions that explore the core of human experiences (Margaret R. Roller and Paul J. Lavrakas, 2015).

Since this study would follow an inductive approach with an interpretivist philosophy, a qualitative approach was deemed to be more suitable for the study. This approach would assist in understanding the feelings, experiences, motivations, and shopping behaviour patterns among young adults with respect to sneakers.

4.5. Data Collection

The data available for this research was collected by using a research instrument known as semi-structured (non-standardised) interviews. Saunders et al., (2019) introduces research interviews as a *purposeful conversation between two or more people, during which the interviewer asks concise and unambiguous questions and listens attentively to the interviewee talking*. Through this, the interviewer can explore points of interests, as well as confirm and clarify any of the answers. This helps in gathering valid and reliable data which would be relevant for the research. The different structures of interviews available are depicted in the figure below.

Figure 4 - Interview Structure



Source - Saunders, 2019, p. 437

In a one-to-one interview, the researcher has the opportunity to build a rapport with the interviewee and make them comfortable (Quinlan, C., 2011). They also suggested that face-to-face interviews gives an opportunity to the researcher to observe the interviewee, including the manner in which they answer the questions, their tone of answers, as well as their facial expressions.

For the purpose of this research, the interviews are conducted online through Microsoft Teams as the respondents are in different parts of Dublin city and have different schedules. Hence, the researcher decided to adopt online interviews which consist of semi-structured interview questions (Appendix). These responses were recorded and transcribed using online tools for further analysis with the consent of the respondent.

4.6. Research Sample

4.6.1 Sampling Technique

Since collecting data from the entire population for this study would be impractical as well as restricted due to time constraints, it was thus deemed appropriate to select a sample. There are two types of sampling – probability and non-probability (Saunders, 2015). Probability sampling involves random selection, which results into making strong statistical inferences about the entire group. Non-probability sampling involves non-random selection based on convenience or any other criteria, resulting into easy of collecting data.

For the purpose of this research, non-probability sampling method was used. It is further divided into four types, namely quota sampling, purposive sampling, volunteer sampling, and haphazard sampling (Saunders et al., 2019). Among these, purposive sampling allows the researcher to rely on their own judgements and experiences while selecting members of the population. As a result, this method of sampling was selected for the purpose of this study. Saunder et al. (2019) further states that purposive sampling can be implemented in two ways – homogeneous, where the selected respondents have similar characteristics, and heterogeneous, where the selected respondents have diverse characteristics.

The participants of this study were asked to participate based on the knowledge and experience of the researcher that they were highly invested in purchasing sneakers and owned a few pairs already. As a result, the sampling method chosen would be homogeneous in nature.

4.6.2. Sample Size and Target Population

Saunders, (2015) states that for all non-probability sampling, the issue of sample size of ambiguous and there are no rules. Saunders, (2015) quotes Saunders (2012) to recommend that for a homogeneous purposive sample, four to twelve participants can be selected.

Figure 5 - Minimum Non-Probability Sample Size

Nature of study	Minimum sample size
Semi-structured/In-depth interviews	5–25
Ethnographic	35–36
Grounded Theory	20–35
Considering a homogeneous population	4–12
Considering a heterogeneous population	12–30

Source – Saunders (2015)

This study aims to understand the opinions of the target population, which consists of eight young adults in Ireland, who are sneaker enthusiasts. The criteria for selection was that the individual should be aged between twenty to thirty-five years, should own at least five sneakers and must be currently residing in Ireland. The researcher is a part of an unofficial sneaker community in Ireland, and hence, gaining access to these individuals was not difficult.

Before conducting the interviews, a pilot study was conducted with another sneaker enthusiast. This assisted in identifying any flaws and limitations that the interview design would have and gave space to make the necessary changes before interviewing the respondents.

4.7. Interview Participation

The identity of each interview participant was kept confidential, and all the data was retained with the consent of the respondents. The average interview time was twenty minutes and was recorded using Microsoft Teams application. The interview was also transcribed while recording which made it easy to transfer it into a Microsoft Word document. Before the interview, each respondent was shown three ads of three different sneaker brands.

The participants of this study comprised of six male and two female respondents.

Table 1 - Research Participants

Participant	Age	Sex	Number of Sneakers Owned
Respondent A	22	Male	6
Respondent B	26	Female	5
Respondent C	24	Male	7
Respondent D	32	Male	8
Respondent E	25	Male	6
Respondent F	34	Male	5
Respondent G	30	Female	8
Respondent H	29	Male	7

4.8. Research Limitations

One of the main limitations of this research was the limited amount of research done that studied the use of emotional marketing as a tool for marketing of sneakers. This limited availability of literature indicated a substantial research gap for this study, necessitating the author to delve into other areas of marketing such as storytelling and brand loyalty, to create a literature review in the absence of specific literature.

Saunders et al. (2019) identified a limitation that is applicable to qualitative research in general, and not restricted to this study. He states that the findings in qualitative research cannot be

generalised for the overall population due to a smaller number of respondents. Although this study does provide a strong foundation for further exploring this topic.

The third limitation for this research was due to time and distant constraints. As a result, the interviews of the respondents had to be taken online using digital tools. Although it was still possible for the researcher to observe the facial expressions of the respondents, there was limited scope for personal contact and observing body language.

One of the critical limitations of a qualitative research is that it can be criticised due to the personal bias, background, and values which could have an impact while collecting and interpreting data.

4.9. Ethical Considerations

Saunders et al. (2019, p. 815) defines research ethics as *standards of the researcher's behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of a research project, or who are affected by it*. Keeping the ethical considerations in mind, the researcher assured the respondents to keep their identity confidential, and that they would receive a copy of their interview transcripts, recordings, notes, etc. if they wish so. All respondents were also given an option to pull out their interviews at any time and up to a week after the data was collected.

The participants were also informed that the data was confidential and would be used only for the purpose of a Master's dissertation at National College of Ireland. Each interview was recorded on Microsoft Teams platform and transcribed to a Microsoft Word file. In order to maintain confidentiality, each interviewee was assigned a letter from A to H. The participation of each respondent was voluntary.

4.10. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explain the reasoning and specifics of the strategy used in this study. Given that this research used an inductive methodology with an interpretivist approach, a qualitative method which used personal interviews as a data collection tool was considered the most appropriate for exploring the emotions, experiences, and influences that emotional storytelling has among young adults. The next chapter, guided by the research methodology, will present the findings based on the research objectives outlined in Chapter Three of this study.

Chapter Five – Analysis and Findings

5.1. Introduction

This chapter will discuss the findings of the eight online interviews that were conducted between 22nd July 2024 to 30th July 2024. The data will be analysed and themed through a three-stage thematic analysis process, as outlined in the previous research methodology chapter. The findings will then be summarised separately according to the relevant research objectives. To protect the interviewees' identities, generic labels such as (Respondent A) will be used.

5.2. To ascertain if there is a positive relationship between strong storytelling of marketing communication campaign for a sneakers brand and the purchase intention of young adults.

The first research objective was to evaluate whether a strong storytelling in marketing communications of a sneaker brand has a positive impact on the purchase intentions among young adults. The researcher asked the respondents about their feelings when they saw an advertisement of a sneaker brand. The following themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews.

5.2.1. Theme one – Emotional Engagement in Marketing Communications

Emotional storytelling in sneaker advertisements is crucial for capturing consumer attention and generating interest in the product. Respondent E emphasized that stories which highlight celebrities or historic moments, such as Nike's Air Jordan ads, are very effective. These advertisements not only highlight the product features in a subtle manner, but also incorporates the cultural significance that appeals to its consumers. Respondent F was left inspired by Nike's "Dream Crazy" campaign. This emotional engagement makes the brand more relatable and establishes a deeper connection with the consumer beyond the product.

"I love Jordans and biggest reason of them would be they look cool but apart from that I also wear them because it has a big history behind it." – Respondent E

"Nike 'Dream Crazy' campaign featuring Colin Kaepernick was powerful. The message of following your dreams and standing up for what you believe in resonated with me and made me want to support the brand by buying their products." – Respondent F

5.2.2. Theme two – Brand Recall as a result of Storytelling

The ability of a story to be memorable significantly enhances brand recall and has a positive impact on purchase intentions. Respondent G recalled Adidas's "Impossible is Nothing" campaign. This highlighted the fact that a memorable story can leave a lasting impact and influence consumer decision making. Respondent B specifically mentioned the story of Nike launching the Air Jordans, depicting how the brand's association with the success of Michael Jordan has had a big impact on their purchase decision. Respondent A as well discussed the long-lasting impact that brands like Nike and Adidas have had on them due to the consistent storytelling. This demonstrates that strong and memorable stories are vital for having top of mind recall.

5.2.3. Theme three – Impact on Brand Perception and Appeal due to Brand Stories

Some of the respondents, including respondents A, C, and E, highlighted the power of aspirational stories. For example, stories that revolved around athletes such as Michael Jordan or Lionel Messi, who overcame significant challenges in their early years, to achieve greatness in their respective sports, resonate deeply with consumers. Whereas respondent H felt that the collaboration between Puma and BTS made the brand more relatable and appealing. These communications not only create a strong connection between the brand and their consumer, but also reflect the common human experiences of struggle and success. As a result, the product and the brand becomes more desirable and are looked up as symbols of achievements.

5.2.4. Theme Four – Professionally Aligned Endorsements

Many respondents hinted at being influenced by celebrities who endorse the products. Respondent E specifically mentioned buying football shoes because Lionel Messi wore the same ones. Respondent A too highlighted his admiration of brands like Nike for using prominent athletes in their advertisements, which creates a sense of aspiration and desire to emulate their success. Celebrity endorsements add an element of credibility and desirability to the product. When consumers see their favourite athletes or celebrities use and endorse any products or brands, it enhances its appeal as well as strengthens the emotional connect with the brand.

5.2.5. Theme Five – Influence of Social and Cultural Construct on Brand Storytelling

The social and cultural context under which a brand communicates to its consumers plays a significant role in its perception. Respondent A appreciated Nike's efforts to address social issues through its stories, which made the brand to be perceived positively, making it relevant and appealing. Similarly Respondent F mentioned about how he was influenced by the social and cultural context of the "Dream Crazy" campaign by Nike. This alignment of brands with social issues as well as highlighting the representation of different cultures through its stories, makes the brand more relatable to the consumers and leads to creating a positive brand perception.

5.2.6. Themes Six – Influence of Gender in Athlete Endorsements

Famous athletes, both male and female, have been used to endorse products, especially sneaker brands. However, most respondents talked about ads that had male athletes as compared to female athletes. Respondent F mentioned the "Dream Crazy" campaign featuring Colin Kaepernick, whereas Respondent C mentioned a campaign by Jude Bellingham, and respondent E mentioned the campaign of Lionel Messi. None of the respondents referred to any of the campaigns which featured a female athlete in their interviews.

5.3. To determine if emotional elements of storytelling such as achievements, personal journeys, values, etc. influence the buying behaviour of young adults.

The second objective of the study aimed to understand whether the emotional elements such as achievements, struggle, personal journeys, values, etc. which are highlighted in the story that a brand communicates, have an impact on the purchase decisions of young adults. The themes uncovered through the interviews are as below.

5.3.1. Theme One – Resonance of Brand Story with Personal Experiences

The elements of a story that resonates the most with young adults tend to be those that align with their personal experiences and values. Respondent A highlighted values as critical, as they reflect what the brand stands for and whether it aligns with the personal beliefs of the consumer. Respondents B, F, and G mentioned how stories of personal struggle and achievements had an impact on them. Respondent D echoed the same while also mentioning specifically the story of Michael Jordan. These elements have a strong impact among young adults as it reflects the challenges and struggles that they face, making the stories more relatable. This resonance personalises the marketing message to the consumer which results in an enhanced connection between the consumer and the brand.

5.3.2. Theme Two – Impact on Brand Trust and Credibility

The emotional elements in brand storytelling also play a crucial role in building trust and credibility. Respondent A mentioned that brands which effectively incorporate emotional stories appear more authentic, which in turn builds trust. Respondent B pointed out that a combination of emotional stories and functional and innovative product features enhance the perceived value of the brand as well as increase trustworthiness. This results in creating a strong image of the brand which is both trustworthy and appealing. However, Respondent D offered a nuanced view, stating that while stories can enhance trust, other factors like price, product quality, and functionality are equally important. Respondent E noted that although emotional ads could prompt a purchase, brand trust is ultimately built through the actual use of the product. This distinction is important, as it suggests that while storytelling can draw consumers in, the quality and performance of the product would sustain their trust.

5.3.3. Theme Three – Communicating Brand Values through Storytelling

The stories told by brands often reflect their values and mission, which can have huge significance on how they are perceived by the consumers. The responses indicate that young adults are influenced by stories that convey the core values of a brand. For example, Respondent A emphasised on the importance of values in forming the foundation of a brand's narrative. Respondent F resonated with Nike's emphasis on empowerment and social justice. Respondent D suggested that when a brand's story aligns with their values, it strengthens their connection and makes them more likely to engage with the brand. Respondent B discussed how stories that focus on sustainability, like those told by the brand Thaely, which uses recycled materials, resonate strongly with them. This shows that when a brand's story aligns with the consumers' values, such as environmental consciousness, it not only enhances brand perception, but also strengthens consumer loyalty. This alignment can result in a more positive and enduring relationship with the brand, as the consumer sees the brand as an extension of their own identity and beliefs.

5.4. To explore if young adults are more loyal to a brand if they feel a strong connection with the story that the brand tells.

The third objective of this research tries to ascertain whether a strong connection with a brand story would lead to brand loyalty among young adults. The following themes came across during the interviews.

5.4.1. Theme One - Consumer Identification with the Brand

Several respondents mentioned that they identified with the brand based on their advertisements. Respondent H highlighted that he felt connected to Puma due to their focus on youth, dreams, and friendship, which reflected his own experiences. Similarly Respondent C identified with Adidas while Respondent B with Nike, specifically Air Jordans, for their stories of athletes overcoming their challenges, which could reflect their own fitness journeys. This identification makes the brand more appealing to the consumer. When consumers find some similarities between their stories and experiences, and the one that brands tell, it results in creation of a strong emotional connect between them and leads to brand loyalty.

5.4.2. Theme Two – Emotional Marketing and Brand Loyalty

The respondents provided examples of how emotional stories shared by brands have resulted to being loyal towards them. Respondent G and C are loyal towards Adidas, influenced by stories of athletes overcoming challenges, highlights how consistent and relatable storytelling can lead to consumer loyalty. Respondents A and B show a strong connection to brands with impactful stories such as Nike and its iconic athletes. Whereas Respondent D is focused on specific products like classic sneakers rather than overall brand loyalty. Respondent E illustrates loyalty to Nike driven by its ability to create hype and tell powerful stories. Loyalty driven by narrative can be a powerful tool to create and maintain brand loyalty, as it creates a stronger connection between the brand and its consumers.

5.4.3. Theme Three – Trade-off between Emotional Connect and Practical Considerations

While some respondents prioritised emotional connect to practical considerations, others gave both equal importance. For instance, Respondent A mentioned the long-term relationship with Nike and Adidas, which is not easily swayed by competing brands with potentially better features or prices. Respondents C and D value emotional connection but they also place emphasis on practical considerations such as fit, features and price. Respondents F and G indicated that they would choose a brand with a strong story even if it meant paying more. It suggests emotional marketing has the potential to create unique value propositions that resonates deeply with consumers, making them less sensitive to price and more loyal to the brand.

5.4.4. Theme Four – Impact of Storytelling on Brand Community

Some respondents indicated that brand stories have created a sense of community and belonging among its consumers. Respondent G felt that the stories that Adidas and Nike tell about athletes and their personal achievements made them feel part of a larger community. This sense of belonging strengthens the brand loyalty among consumers. Respondent H also appreciated Puma's focus on youth culture and collaborations which made them feel connected to a community of like-minded people. When brands are successful in creating a sense of community, they imbibe a feeling among its consumers that they are part of something big.

5.5. Additional Theme

5.5.1. Theme One – Storytelling in the Digital Age

The role of digital platforms in storytelling was mentioned by some respondents. Respondent A mentioned that he came across brand stories on social media platforms which influenced his perceptions. Respondent F mentioned that they followed sneaker brands on social media pages to stay updated on their campaigns and offerings. The accessibility that digital platforms provide to brands to reach their consumers helps in amplifying the reach of the brand and make a campaign reach more consumers. The interactive nature of social media and digital platforms enhances the storytelling experience of a brand and leads to an impactful marketing campaign.

5.6. Summary of Findings

The findings of the eight interviews reveals multiple distinct themes related to the impact of storytelling in marketing of sneakers on the purchase intentions of young adults, the influence of emotional elements in these stories, and the impact of storytelling on brand loyalty. The findings highlight the significant role of storytelling in making the brands more aspirational, memorable, and trustworthy. Emotional elements such as personal challenges, achievements, values, etc. resonate deeply with the consumers and influences their buying behaviour. Furthermore, the influence of digital storytelling, understanding the social and cultural context, as well as consumer's identifying themselves with the brand, enhances brand loyalty.

The themes that have emerged from this study have resulted in useful insights for sneaker brands looking to make their mark. These will be discussed with respect to the existing literature in the next chapter.

Chapter Six – Discussion

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the findings from the interviews with young adults who are sneaker enthusiasts, would be compared with the literature discussed in Chapter Two. The findings will be presented according to each research objective:

6.2. To ascertain if there is a positive relationship between strong storytelling in marketing communication campaign for a sneakers brand and the purchase intention of young adults.

It became evident that there is a positive relationship between strong storytelling in marketing communications campaign for a sneaker brand and the purchase intention of young adults. The findings became clear through the themes examined which are discussed below.

6.2.1. Theme one – Emotional Engagement in Marketing Communications

The findings of this research agree with the literature available which identifies emotional marketing as a successful strategy that companies can use to stand out from their competitors and create a deep bond with their consumers (Sharma et al., 2022; Stout and Leckenby, 1986). The factors that have a significant influence on purchase decisions among consumers are emotional in nature (Pawle and Cooper, 2006).

It was evident from the findings that more emotional the marketing, more connected consumers feel to the brand. However, just being emotional may not make the cut, it is important to strike a chord with the consumers. This was evident when Respondent A mentioned –

“A story which has a human connection, you know, which brings out human emotions just like Nike does. Look at their stories, their ads, you obviously feel that you are like very close to that brand.”

The findings are also in line with the views of Vrtana and Krizanova, (2023) wherein they state that through emotional appeals in advertising campaigns, brands try to influence final purchasing decisions. Hence, sneaker brands can include more emotional content in their marketing communications, which their consumers can relate to.

6.2.2. Theme Two – Brand Recall as a result of Storytelling

The literature highlights the fact that storytelling has a huge impact on generating strong brand recall (Dias and Cavaleiro, 2022). They further go on to list storytelling as an additional antecedent of brand love. This is conclusive with the findings of this research which shows that a strong storytelling leads to a high brand recall among consumers. It is evident from the findings that many respondents have a high recall of some sneaker brands because they identify with that brand. This identification is a result of a strong story that the brand's conveys to its consumers. Respondent E highlighted that –

“Nike is my number one and then Adidas. Given a choice between Nike and Adidas, I would go for Nike as it is my number one choice, just because it resonates more with me, even though Adidas might be more good-looking shoe.”

All of the respondents of this study resonated slightly more with a brand as compared to other sneaker brands. The common factor for such brand recall is evidently due to relatability with the story that the brand communicates.

6.2.3. Theme three – Brand Perception and Appeal

In the literature that was reviewed, Williams and Heo, (2023) observed that highlighting the story of an athlete in advertisements lead to a positive impact on consumer purchase decisions. When a brand creates a collaboration with another entity, it adopts the brand appeal of that entity and results in the brand being perceived like the entity its collaborating with. This was also highlighted in this study. Respondent H mentioned that –

“Puma's collaboration with BTS was interesting. They focused on youth, dreams, and friendship, which made me feel connected to the brand.”

Partnering with other brands or entity's that are valued highly has a positive impact on the holistic brand value (Cao and Yan, 2017). Both brands tend to gain out of such strategic partnerships by reaching each other's consumers. In some cases, if the partnership flourishes, it results in a positive impact on the brand appeal wherein they share each other's values and characteristics.

6.2.4. Theme Four – Professionally Aligned Endorsements

While reviewing the literature on the influence that celebrities have on the products that they endorse, it was found that by using athletes for endorsing the products, the brand can get access to a huge population of sports fans who follow the athlete or the sport (Williams and

Heo, 2023). One of important factors to consider here is that the brand and the endorser are aligned professionally. Each of the respondents mentioned that they are influenced by one or the other endorser of the product, whether athletes like Lionel Messi or Michael Jordan, as mentioned by Respondents A, C and E, or by BTS as highlighted by Respondent H. The common fact lies that for sports sneakers, the respondents tilted towards brands that were endorsed by an athlete and for lifestyle sneakers a pop boy band. Respondent A said –

“Nike’s use of athletes in their ads creates a sense of aspiration. Seeing my favourite athletes wear Nike makes me want to wear it too.”

Thus, this finding goes on to show the importance of endorsements by a celebrity that is aligned with the function of the brand or the product. The influence and credibility of the brand is enhanced when the endorser is aligned with what the brand stands for. When there are shared brand characteristics between the two, the endorsement feels genuine and not made up.

6.2.5. Theme Five – Influence of Social and Cultural Construct on Brand Storytelling

De Oca et al. (2022) observed that by being socially conscious in marketing, brands send out a message that in a world where people feel hopeless and overwhelmed, their consumption choices can have meaning and can positively impact the world. Thus, the use of relevant social and cultural context for marketing a brand like sneakers can be on the cusp. It may backfire for people who do not like the stand but can also lead to a huge positive impact for the brand to be perceived as a brand that is not afraid to take a stand.

Respondent A said –

“Nike’s campaigns addressing social issues are inspiring and culturally relevant. It makes me feel that the brand is in tune with what is happening in the world.”

Thus, the findings support the literature that was reviewed when it comes to the influence of social and cultural construct on brand storytelling. Using relevant social issues and staying true to the culture that a brand has set can lead to a positive influence among consumers. Thus, socially conscious marketing can transform the perception of brands from being exploiters of the insecurities of people, to being part of a movement where consumerism is associated with a purpose and is viewed as meaningful.

6.2.6. Themes Six – Influence of Gender in Athlete Endorsements

Ho Keat Leng et al. (2023) observed that when athletes are considered equal, irrespective of their gender, when it comes to attractiveness, trustworthiness, and perceived expertise, they are equally effective in product endorsements irrespective of their gender. However, this was not supported by the findings of this study. The respondents predominantly mentioned ads that featured male athletes.

Respondent C mentions that –

“Adidas as a brand has Messi or Jude Bellingham, who had humble beginnings and throughout their careers you have Adidas telling story of Messi through different advertisements.”

However, Lobpries et al. (2018) observed the existence of perceived barriers for female athletes in their brand building process. Sneaker brands need to take more cognizance of the under-representation of female athletes in their brand stories as compared to male athletes. As is evident from previous literature, the impact of athletes is the same irrespective of their genders. However, we still see brands focusing more on male athletes as compared to female athletes.

6.3. To determine if emotional elements of storytelling such as achievements, personal journeys, values, etc. influence the buying behaviour of young adults.

After studying the responses, it was established that the emotional elements that are used in storytelling have a positive influence on young adults. The findings were studied under the themes mentioned below.

6.3.1. Theme One – Resonance of Brand Story with Personal Experiences

Brand resonance refers to the strength or depth of psychological connection that a customer feels with a brand (Keller, 2009). The literature stresses on the importance that brand resonance holds to form a deep connection between a brand and its consumers.

This was evident from the findings as well. Every respondent that had a slight bias towards a particular brand of sneaker, said that they resonated with it. Most respondents resonated with the struggle and achievements that are highlighted in the story that a brand tells. Respondent C said that –

“Stories about athletes overcoming struggles resonate deeply with me. It makes the brand feel supportive and encouraging.”

It can be understood from the findings that respondents were reminded of their own struggles while looking at these ads. This is where the brands positioned themselves in the minds of the consumer as relatable. They show stories of successful athletes overcoming their personal struggle which positions the brand in a positively among its consumers.

6.3.2. Theme Two – Impact on Brand Trust and Credibility

The findings of this study are with respect to Brand trust and credibility are in line with the literature. Chin et al. (2020) and Tzoumaka et al. (2016) observed that endorser credibility has a positive impact on the credibility of the brand as well as attitudes towards brands. Kim et al (2020) also suggested a strong connection between expert celebrity endorsement and brand trust and loyalty. They observed that when a product or a brand is endorsed by an athlete, the consumers tend to view it as superior in quality, thus gaining their trust.

When the respondents were asked about whether emotional ads make them trust the brand, most of them agreed. However, some respondents also said that it may make the brand look credible and make them buy the product, but trust would be established only after they use it. Respondent G said –

“Yes, because it feels authentic. When a brand shares real stories of real people, it feels like they are being honest and transparent, which builds trust.”

Whereas Respondent E said that –

“Yes, in a way, it would make me want to buy that product for sure, but trust would come when I use it and how I feel about it.”

Thus, it can be said that emotional ads with celebrities can lead to building brand credibility and can make the consumers want to interact with the brand. But trust can be earned only after the consumers use the product and feel genuinely happy about it.

6.3.3. Theme Three – Communicating Brand Values through Storytelling

Values tend to be more personally relevant to consumers as compared to brand attributes (Conejo, 2021). They are also instrumental in positioning of the brand as it results in occupying a specific space in the minds of the consumer. This study highlights how storytelling plays a crucial role in communicating brand values to the consumer. It complements the available literature by demonstrating how consumers look at an emotional advertisement and allot certain values to the brand.

All the respondents were influenced by the ads shown to them and some were reminded of the ads that they came across in their childhood. Looking at the stories in these ads, stories of struggle, achievements, overcoming hardships, etc. imparted values such as humility, grit, determination, etc. These are evident from their responses. Respondent D highlighted –

“So, take Michael Jordan’s example. He came from North Carolina and became the biggest superstar in in NBA Basketball. As we know today, so from rags to riches kind of a story, it resonates really well with you because all of us do come from very simple backgrounds and aspire to become rich billionaires, trillionaires, whatever you know. So, if one person can do it in spite of not having enough facilities, and that kind of a story can be depicted through a brand, correct, a definitely you. You would want to own those kinds of products in your closet, so definitely a product which brings that kind of a story, at least for me personally, I would want to own it for sure. It becomes an aspiration.”

When such emotional stories are shown as connected to a sneaker brand, the brand embodies these values. Thus, when consumers buy and use those brands, they seem to adopt these values, or make them even stronger in their mind. This makes the consumers feel more connected to the athletes or celebrities whose stories are used for marketing.

6.4. To explore if young adults are more loyal to a brand if they feel a strong connection with the story that the brand tells.

The third objective of this study was to understand that when a brand tells a strong and emotional story in its marketing communications, does that result in increasing brand loyalty among young adults. The findings show us that there definitely is a positive correlation between the two, and it was evident through the below themes.

6.4.1.Theme One - Consumer Identification with the Brand

Consumers are attached to brands that they can identify with (Zhang et al., 2023). Thus, it is an important aspect of a marketing campaign’s objectives to facilitate consumer-brand identification. The literature is evident that brands to are successful in creating a strong consumer-brand identification has a string influence on the purchase decisions of the consumers.

The respondents of this study conveyed their identification with their preferred sneaker brand during their interviews. Respondent E mentioned –

“I liked the samba which I assume was better looking in Adidas, but I still got the Nike just because it was in my wish list and from before. I think Nike resonates with me more.”

The findings support the literature with respondents highlighting their resonance with one brand over another. Thus, creating a strong consumer-brand identification through emotional marketing and storytelling leads to creating brand loyalty.

6.4.2. Theme Two – Emotional Marketing and Brand Loyalty

The literature delves into the relationship between emotional marketing and brand loyalty in a positive way. Francisco-Maffezzoli et al. (2014) stated that emotional experiences can lead to loyalty towards a product or a brand. When brands use emotional marketing to connect with their consumers, they try to create a space in the minds of the consumer which cannot be replaced easily.

Respondent A said –

“I’ve been a football person. I’ve always I looked at ads, and promotions about football, right, so Nike and Adidas has always been on top of a mind. So even today when I go to any shop to buy any new sneakers or anything, the first sneakers that I go to is Nike and then Adidas then if there are others, then I go to the rest.”

The findings are aligned with the literature and highlights the importance that emotional marketing plays in creating brand loyalty. Sneaker brands have the potential to create loyal consumers by using emotional marketing tactfully and creating resonance with them.

6.4.3. Theme Three – Trade-off between Emotional Connect and Practical Considerations

Ohlwein and Bruno (2022) observed that brands have a greater leeway when it comes to practical factors like price, when the brands have established a strong connection with the consumer. This is supported by the findings of this study as well. It is evident from the findings that brands which have a strong emotional connection with their consumers, they tend to have an advantage over other brands when it comes to practical considerations.

Respondent B highlighted the fact that she would prefer a brand that she had a connection with even if other brands had better prices or offers.

“I will choose the sneaker brand, which has a better story, because when you wear a shoe, and you tell the story that was behind this. And so, I will buy it.”

Although not all respondents strongly agreed with this trade-off, they did not completely decline it as well. Respondent D mentioned that other parameters are also equally important.

Hence, it is evident that though emotional connect can play a significant role in influencing purchase decisions among young adults, it may not be the only important aspect in some cases. It needs to be supported by other aspects of marketing like pricing, promotions, etc.

6.4.4. - Theme Four – Impact of Storytelling on Brand Community

The available literature tells us that stories rooted in shared experiences with the brand help imbue the brand with meaning and leads to forging connections between consumers (Muniz and O, Guinn, 2001). This connection is what binds together the consumers as a community with the brand being at the centre. The findings of this study have shown that when sneaker brands use emotional stories in their marketing communications, it resonates with the consumers. The emotional aspects of the stories, such as personal struggles, achievements, etc. connect well with the consumers.

Respondent G mentioned –

“Their stories about athletes pushing boundaries and achieving greatness resonate with my own fitness journey. It makes me feel like I’m part of a larger community.”

This highlights that the emotional elements that connect with the consumers, also leads to forming a community of like-minded individuals, all of whom connect with the brand. Thus, it can be said that the emotional elements in stories that brands tell, acts as a glue to bind sneaker brand communities together. This finding goes on to show the importance that emotional storytelling holds in building and nurturing brand communities.

Chapter Seven – Conclusion And Recommendations

7.1. Conclusion

The overall aim of the study was to understand whether Emotional Marketing and Storytelling have an impact on the Purchase Decisions of Sneakers among Young Adults. The research objectives were derived from the literature, and the researcher used a qualitative approach, conducting online interviews. The primary data was analysed, allowing the researcher to deepen their understanding of how emotional marketing and storytelling impact young adults' purchase intention for sneakers. The limitations that were identified for this research were –

- A. Scarcity of research literature on the topic
- B. Limited sample size
- C. Constraints on holding in-person interviews
- D. Personal connect of the researcher with the subject

The literature review emphasised the importance of a good story in marketing communications of a brand in order to connect with their consumers. The literature also looked at use of emotional marketing as a tool for marketing which marketers can use so as to influence the purchase decision of the consumer as well as to form a deeper connect with them.

The first objective of the study was to ascertain if there is a positive relationship between strong storytelling in marketing communication campaign for a sneakers brand and the purchase intention of young adults. The findings support the research objective and establish that there exists a positive relationship. Young adults are positively influenced by strong stories that brands tell in their marketing communications campaigns. This leads to them forging a deeper connection with the brand while aiming to personify the brand values while wearing the brand. Thus, marketers can take cognizance of this finding and include more emotional stories in their marketing communications campaigns. This would highlight the brand values as well as position themselves positively in the minds of young adults, thus influencing their purchase decisions.

The second objective was to determine if emotional elements of storytelling such as achievements, personal journeys, values, etc. influence the buying behaviour of young adults. The results demonstrated that these elements of storytelling did have an impact on the purchase behaviour of young adults. Most of them were particularly drawn towards personal journeys, struggles, and achievements of the athletes whose story is shown in the ads. Most respondents seem to identify strongly with these ads and position the brand in their mind as

relatable. As a result, marketers should try and include these emotional elements in their stories. These elements make the brand more relatable as well as positions itself as an achievement, resulting into commanding a premium.

The third objective was to explore if young adults are more loyal to a brand if they feel a strong connection with the story that the brand tells. The findings showed that the young adults were loyal to a brand that they felt connected with. However, some young adults mentioned that there would be other factors involved as well including practical factors like price and comfort. Thus, marketers must be vigilant and not trust completely on emotional stories for brand loyalty. Other practical factors should also be looked at which would complement the emotional stories that brands tell. When both would work hand in hand, the brand can command loyalty from young adults.

The interviews shed light on miscellaneous findings as well which did not fit into any of the three objectives but was worth mentioning in the study. In the digital world that we live in, every aspect of traditional media has transformed, including storytelling. The use of AI in storytelling has evolved as well, as is mentioned in the reviewed literature. It can be argued that emotional storytelling needs human touch in order to bring out the necessary emotions from the consumers. However, the findings show the importance of storytelling in a digital age, and the current digital age is flooded with the importance of AI in all aspects of business. Thus, it is imperative for marketers to take note and implement digital tools like AI for emotional marketing and storytelling which would complement the human touch and not replace it.

This finding does call for future research to be done in the use of AI for emotional marketing and storytelling. Marketers can find out a way to bring in digital tools like AI that can assist humans and not just do their entire job.

Overall, the central question of the research was: *Does Emotional Marketing and Storytelling have an impact on the Purchase Decisions of Sneakers among Young Adults?*

This study has shown that emotional marketing and storytelling does have a positive impact on the purchase decisions of sneakers among young adults. The stories resonate well with the target audience and makes the brand more relatable as well as positions itself as a reward for achievement. Thus, marketers for sneaker brands can use this strategy to make their brand more relatable and create a deep, emotional connection with the consumers. This would result in the brand occupying a specific space in the minds of the consumer which can be hard to replace.

7.2. Recommendations for Future research

Throughout this research, it was noted that there has been prior research done on emotional marketing and storytelling as a tool for marketers, as well as on marketing of sneakers. However, both these aspects were not studied together and opens up on huge possibilities for marketers to explore. Though this study contributes to new knowledge, it shows that there is a broad scope to dig deeper and further enhance on the topic. One of the limitations of the study was a small sample size. Thus, it is recommended that a similar study can be done taking in consideration a larger sample size in order to check if similar results are observed.

Another recommendation which was mentioned earlier was to study the role that digital tools like AI can play in emotional marketing and storytelling. Although this was one of the findings from the interviews, it was not discussed in detail as it was outside the scope of this research. Hence, a deeper dive into the role that emerging digital tools can play and its impact on both, the consumers and marketers alike, can be studied. This research could shed light into viewing emotional storytelling and marketing from the perspective of the consumer as well that of the marketers and could lead to findings that can have immense contributions towards both sides of the coin.

Another study that can stem out from this study is to understand the touchpoints and media interactions most effective while consuming emotional stories and marketing for sneaker enthusiast. Digital and traditional media are often used by most marketers to connect with their consumers, however, among these, there is a scope to try and understand why one media can be more effective and efficient compared to others. This study would be beneficial particularly for marketers to put their marketing budget to optimal use and get the best out of it.

7.3. Self-Reflection

As the journey of the dissertation comes to an end, the researcher cannot help but reflect on the entire journey of MSc in Marketing. The importance of choosing a topic which is not only intellectually stimulating, but also personally meaningful cannot be overstated. This decision shapes the entire research process, right from the literature review to the findings and analysis, and ultimately determines the level of engagement and passion one can sustain throughout the challenging months of research and writing.

From the beginning, the researcher realised that his fascination with marketing extended beyond the traditional theories and methods. With marketers and researchers coming up with new strategies every day to market products, the researcher found himself with a plethora of options to explore. However, the researcher was drawn towards the emotional connection that

brands forge with their consumers. Sneakers, as a product category, offers a unique lens through which these emotional connections could be studied. They have transcended from merely being a functional product to a symbol of culture and identity. This connection between a consumer and the sneakers brand that they like was intriguing. Thus, it became clear that the research topic should be one that sheds light on the intersection of emotions, narratives, and consumer culture.

In conclusion, the journey of writing this dissertation has been much about academic enquiry as it has been about personal discovery. This alignment between personal passion and academic research not only enhanced the quality of the work, but also made the process more fulfilling.

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Appendix

Interview Guide Page 1

Interview Guide

A gentle reminder on what the interview is about. Show three ads of three different sneaker brands –

1. SUPERSTAR | adidas Originals
2. Create Now. Create Next. – Converse
3. Beyond | 'Dreams' by J Ivy | Jordan Brand

Objective 1: Positive Relationship Between Storytelling and Purchase Intention

1. How do you feel when you see a sneaker ad with a good story?

Aim: To gauge emotional reactions to storytelling in marketing.

2. Can you remember a time when a sneaker brand's story made you want to buy their shoes? What was the story?

Aim: To identify specific instances where storytelling impacted purchase decisions.

3. Do you think a sneaker ad with a good story makes you like the brand more? Why or why not?

Aim: To understand the perceived impact of storytelling on brand appeal.

Objective 2: Influence of Emotional Elements in Storytelling

4. Which parts of a brand's story (e.g., personal achievements, values, struggles) resonate with you the most?

Aim: To pinpoint which emotional elements are most impactful.

5. How do stories about personal journeys or achievements in sneaker advertisements influence your perception of the brand?

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6. Do emotional stories in sneaker ads make you trust a brand? Why?

Aim: To explore the relationship between emotional storytelling and brand trust.

Objective 3: Brand Loyalty and Emotional Connection

7. How important is it for you to feel connected with a sneaker brand?

Aim: To determine the importance of emotional connection in brand loyalty.

8. Have you remained loyal to a sneaker brand because of the emotional stories they share? If yes, can you share an example?

Aim: To explore specific examples of brand loyalty driven by emotional storytelling.

9. Would you choose a sneaker brand with a strong story over a brand that doesn't focus on storytelling, even if the latter offers better prices or features? Why or why not?

Aim: To understand the trade-off between emotional connection and other factors like price or features.

10. How does a brand's story influence your overall perception and long-term relationship with that brand?

Aim: To assess the long-term impact of storytelling on brand perception and loyalty.

Sample of Raw Data

Raw data from online interview with Respondent A

Interviewer: OK, so the first question is how do you feel when you see your sneaker ad which has a very nice story in it?

Respondent A: When I see any brand which has a story, it makes me feel that those brands are at least paying attention to human emotions. So, it makes me feel good about that brand. And when it comes to something like a sneaker, which is very, you know, there's a lot of competition in the sneakers.

So if those brands are to needs and when to a story, it makes me feel good about the brand and at least makes me consider them as something that I can relate myself to. So, I think story in any brand makes a really good impact for themselves and the brand.

Raw data from online interview of Respondent D

Interviewer

How do stories about personal journeys or achievements in these advertisements?
How do they influence your perception of the brand?

Respondent D

So take Michael Jordan's example. He came from North Carolina and became the biggest superstar in in NBA Basketball as we know today, so from rags to riches kind of a story, it resonates really well with you because all of us do come from very simple backgrounds and aspire to become rich billionaires, trillionaires, whatever you know.

So if one person can do it in spite of not having enough facilities, and that kind of a story can be depicted through a brand, correct, a definitely you. You would want to own those kinds of products in your closet, so definitely a product which brings that kind of a story, at least for me personally, I would want to own it for sure.

It becomes an aspiration.