

# Socio-Psychological Factors as the Motivator of Symbolic Consumption and Brand Consciousness

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## Abstract

The study aims to investigate the relationships among two socio-psychological and two marketing concepts. The survey method was used for data collection. 274 questionnaires were gained through convenience sampling. To test the model, structural equation modelling was applied. The results indicate that an individual who evaluate themselves highly are more concerned about public opinion regarding them. An individual who cares about him/her presence in society will use products that reflect his/her lifestyle and self. Consumers who make purchases that are congruent with their lifestyle and self are more brand conscious. When the literature is examined, there are either no or few articles investigating the influences of self-esteem and public self-consciousness on brand consciousness and symbolic consumption. Considering this issue, it is thought that this research is beneficial in terms of filling this gap. It is thought that researching this subject in Azerbaijan has an additional contribution.

**Keywords:** Brand consciousness, emerging economies, Public self-consciousness, Self-esteem, Symbolic consumption.

## 1. Introduction

Focusing solely on the functional needs of people often results in the competition being focused on price and ultimately causing companies to operate with low profit margins. However, people use products and services not only to meet their functional needs but also to meet their emotional needs (An & Lee, 2015; Fernandes and Moreira, 2019; Krey, Stephanie, Ramayah & Rauschnabel, 2019). People use products and brands as elements with which to develop and maintain their identities (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). This area constitutes the main differentiation area for companies. One of the main motivation sources of emotional needs is socio-psychological factors.

Motivation is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as "the need or reason for doing something". It links individual factors and purchasing behaviour (Wang, Sun & Song). In the marketing literature the influences that affect the consumer purchase decision are consolidated into personal, psychological, situational, marketing, social and cultural factors (Kerin and Hartley, 2017; Kotler and Keller, 2016). Studying these factors can present more detailed insights about motivators of behaviour (Chauke &

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Duh, 2019). The meaning of goods for consumers and for the members of their social reference groups is one of the main motivators for acquiring these goods (Shukla, 2010). Various socio-psychological models have been developed to understand and explain behaviour (van der Crujisen & van der Horst, 2016). Self-determination theory classifies motivation as intrinsic and extrinsic (Shao, Grace & Ross, 2019; Li & Wen, 2019). Externally motivated consumption can lead to more public consumption of goods and/or more conspicuous-style consumption. Internally motivated consumption focuses on the expression of intrinsic values and tastes, rather than the concerns of the group (Nabi, O’Cass & Siahtiri, 2019). Kasser and Ryan (1996) described these two categories of motivation more specifically in terms of their components: Extrinsic goals are characterized by a focus on wealth and financial success (money), gaining external rewards or approval (fame), and appealing appearance (image), whereas intrinsic goals are focused on individual psychology growth, self-esteem, and autonomy (self-acceptance), family life and good friends (affiliation), making the world a better place through one’s actions (community feeling), and attaining physical health and wellbeing (health) (Shao, Grace & Ross, 2019).

Individuals use the social aspect of consumption activity as a means of fulfilling several socio-psychological needs. Thus, consumption becomes a self-defining and self-expressing behaviour that serves to "create the desired self through the image and styles transmitted through possessions" (Shim, Serido & Barber, 2011). Social motivations to consumer are based on the relevance of conspicuous consumption and self-expression through conspicuous consumption (Martin & Turley, 2004). Based on consumer psychology, businesses and brands can affect consumer attitudes and actions using relevant marketing techniques and strategies (Jia, Shuhua & Arthur, 2018). Psychologists and marketers believe that the interpersonal influence (influence of others) is an important determinant of an individual’s behaviour (Kropp, Lavack & Silvera, 2005). Publicly self-conscious individuals are especially involved in their social identities (Huang, Pei-Chun & Wang, 2018). People desire to behave in a way that enhances or preserves their personal sense of worth (Kundu & Rani, 2007). As known, goods and services and their marketing activities are a good remedy for such situations. Demonstrative use of products can play an important role in reaching desired socio-psychological outcomes, such as smugness, a favourable impression, popularity or respect (Bharti, Suneja & Chauhan, 2021).

Researches that deal with socio-psychological concepts and marketing concepts are common in the marketing literature (Murphy & Carol, 2016; Sinha & Lu, 2016; Schmitt, 2013). Mandel, Derek, Levav and Galinsky (2017) investigated the psychological consequences of self-discrepancies on consumer behaviour. Mathras, Cohen, Mandel and Mick (2016) researched the impact of beliefs, rituals, values, and community on consumer. Mittal (2015) analyzed the role of self-concept clarity on consumer behaviours such as materialism, the use of shopping as an escape, the use of products as identity supporters. Wu and Doodoo (2020) examined the effect of social experience on consumer responses to advertisements. Jung and Moon (2018) investigated the mediation effect of self-esteem on the relationship between user satisfaction and social stability.

In this paper, the relationships among two socio-psychological concepts (self-esteem and public self-consciousness) and two marketing concepts (symbolic consumption and brand consciousness) were examined. The main purpose is to identify the effect of two socio-psychological factors on the two marketing variables. There are many studies that handle these variables. For example, researchers have

examined the impact of self-esteem on impulsive buying behaviour (Dhandra, 2020), on adolescents' consumer innovativeness (Gentina & Kratzer, 2020), on switching responses to poor service (Consiglio & Osselaer, 2019). Millan and Mittal (2017) analyzed the impact of self-esteem and public self-consciousness on preference for the status meaning of clothing. Besides, researchers have investigated the influence of public self-consciousness on refinement in luxury consumption (Roux, Tafani & Vigneron, 2017), on compulsive buying (Xu, 2008), on gift-giving motives, on conspicuous consumption (Lewis & Moital, 2016), on brand consciousness (Giovannini, Xu & Thomas, 2015).

When the literature is examined, there are either no or few articles investigating the influences of self-esteem and public self-consciousness on brand consciousness and symbolic consumption. Considering this issue, it is thought that this research is beneficial in terms of filling this gap. As discussed previously, because of knowing socio-psychological factors that affect consumer behaviour is important for firms, this research will make a contribution to marketing practice as well. Studying this topic in Azerbaijan is worth doing, because of the below-discussed issues.

After the collapse of Soviet Union, people in Azerbaijan are seeking to redefine their ethnocultural, national, and individual identities. Three models are dominated to form these identities: the Russian Soviet, the Western model and Islamic model (Tohidi, 1997). Research demonstrates that individuals in emerging/developing countries, such as Azerbaijan, consume products and services for their symbolic meaning because they want Western consumer practices and lifestyles (Akbarov, 2022).

On the one hand, the collectivist culture of the Soviet empire and on the other hand, the individualistic culture of the West led people to both adapt to society and develop their individual identity. In this regard, it would be useful to refer to three theories: 1) According to social identity theory individuals inclined to engage in consumption behaviour in accordance with their group norms (Ganideh and Elahee, 2018); 2) According to self-congruity theory, consumers purchase products whose attributes are in congruence with their desired self-identity (Sirgy et al., 1991); and 3) According to impression management theory, individuals acquire products for the purpose of social identity/belonging, status or recognition and to reflect his/her own personality. In this context, symbolic products play an important role (Bharti, Suneja & Chauhan, 2021).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem is a personality dimension that has been well researched in consumer behaviour literature (Giovannini, Xu & Thomas, 2015). This concept is about individuals' self-evaluations across a wide range of situations (Bishop and Barber, 2012) and is a personal judgment of one's own worth (Silvera, Lavack & Kropp, 2008). Rosenberg (1965) defined it as: "An individual set of thoughts and feelings about his or her own worth and importance" (Singh & Nayak, 2016). Self-esteem is shaped by the dimensions of the self, especially feelings about one's personal appearance (Joung & Miller, 2006). The common side regarding self-esteem definitions is liking oneself or a sense of the goodness of the self (Sääksjärvi, Hellén & Balabanis, 2016).

Self-esteem motivates people to seek experiences that improve or preserve the self-concept (Banister & Hogg, 2004). Researches demonstrate that self-esteem plays a fundamental role in an individual's behaviour, reactions to situational variables, and interactions with others (Bristow & Klei, 1997). While

people with high self-esteem evaluate themselves positively, people with low self-esteem evaluate themselves negatively (Shin, Hwang & Mattila, 2018).

## **2.2. Public Self-Consciousness**

Public self-consciousness is about the public aspects of the self (Sun, Horn & Merritt, 2009) and appeals to the idea that people care about information from others (Heintz & Steele-Johnson, 2004). Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss. (1975) defined public self-consciousness as the "awareness of the self as a social and public object, and it dictates how certain individuals compose themselves in public" (Giovannini, Xu & Thomas, 2015). According to Levy, Albright, Cawley & Williams (1995) public self-consciousness refers to a "person's awareness of being observed in the presence of others" (Cheremie, 2014). It is the leaning to direct attention to the self as a social object (Huang, Lin & Wang, 2018) which other individuals can either observe or evaluate (e.g. physical appearance, expressions, behaviours) (Chiaburu, Baker & Pitariu, 2006). Public self-consciousness motivates individuals to have a positive public image and to abide by societal norms (Huang, Lin & Wang, 2018).

## **2.3. Symbolic Consumption**

The basic objective of all human action is the preservation, and improvement of the self-concept (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1998). The self-concept is a total of all that we call ours (Anand & Kaur, 2018) and is a primary determinant of individuals' self-presentation (McNeill, 2018). Thompson (1995), defined self-concept as a "symbolic project" and claimed that symbolic consumption behaviour constructs and protects it (Tangsupwattana & Liu, 2017). Because products serve as social signs, people strengthen and approve their self-concepts via the buying, demonstrating, and using of such products with symbolic value (Anand & Kaur, 2018). Symbolic reflects the individuals' lifestyle and self-concept (Tangsupwattana & Liu, 2017), and they prefer those goods and brands that match their self-concept (Anand & Kaur, 2018). Symbolic consumption is the purchasing of products that consumers expect will build, verify and communicate their identities (Tangsupwattana & Liu, 2018).

## **2.4. Brand Consciousness**

Brand consciousness implies consumers' mental orientation to select goods from a famous, expensive, and intensively marketed brand (Ye, Bose & Pelton, 2012). Brand-conscious consumers use brands to state their fashion consciousness, reflect their personality characteristics, and reduce risk in buying activities (Giovannini, Xu & Thomas, 2015; Soh, Rezaei & Gu, 2017). They have a high desire to exhibit their achievement, and they desire to get more attention from others. These customers tend to believe that higher-priced products have a higher quality level (Soh, Rezaei & Gu, 2017) and they buy and use branded luxury fashion products (Ngai & Cho, 2012) to show their wealth, prestige (Bian & Moutinho, 2011), and high social class status (Chiu & Leng, 2016).

Consuming branded products contributes to the construction of consumer self-concept (Solomon, 1983). Brand consciousness increases with the level of consumers' sensitivity towards normative interpersonal influences. In their research on Mexican consumers, Kim, Pelton, Knight and Forney (2008) determined that the normative influence (the need to create an image within the framework of others' thoughts through the acquisition and use of products and brands; the inclination to meet the expectations of others in buying decisions) has a positive influence on brand consciousness.

### **3. Hypothesis Development**

#### **3.1. The Impact of Self-Esteem on Symbolic Consumption, Brand Consciousness and Public Self-consciousness**

Attitudes play an important role in maintaining and protecting self-esteem. Self-esteem is one of the factors that affect consumption behaviour of individuals (Zahra & Anoraga, 2021) and its motivation functions to stimulate and deter individuals to consume particular products, brands, and clothing styles (Banister & Hogg, 2004). Marketing literature suggests that the need to sustain or grow self-esteem is related to purchases in esteem-enhancing product categories such as those that improve physical image, and to the degree to which people enjoy their material wealth (Silvera, Lavack & Kropp, 2008). According to Dunning (2007), self-esteem motivates consumers in their behaviour because consumers appraise both themselves and the world around them in a way that is compatible with a set of beliefs and motives. These beliefs and motives cause consumers to see their wealth/purchases as an extension of themselves (Bishop & Nelson, 2008). Individuals trying to enhance their self-esteem frequently emphasize several positive aspects of their lives through affiliations with specific brands. Symbolic brands tend to be preferred more for self-esteem and using symbolic brands is one of the ways to raise one's self-esteem (Zhu, Teng, Foti & Yuan, 2019). Thus, lower level self-esteem will result in higher level consumption of symbolic brands. Park and Ko (2011) argued that individuals with low body esteem should see symbolic products as a means of reinforcing appearance and raising self-esteem. They found that consumer's body esteem negatively affects symbolic consumption (Park & Ko, 2011). In the light of the above discussion, the below hypothesis is proposed:

##### **H1. Self-esteem has a significant negative impact on symbolic consumption**

According to Pettit and Sivanathan (2011), people with lower self-esteem commonly love to buy luxury goods (Singh & Nayak, 2016). Individuals experiencing a low level of self-esteem will incline to adopt/practice activities that can help to improve their self-esteem level. Well-known brands may be chosen or preferred as a way for consumers with low self-esteem to gain social approval (Giovannini, Xu & Thomas, 2015). Wadman (2000) stated that society transforms its self-esteem drive into the drive to have high-quality goods (Lewis & Moital, 2016). Truong and McColl (2011) identified a strong relationship between self-esteem and the consumption of luxury goods. Sivanathan and Pettit (2010) discovered that people with a low level of self-esteem used conspicuous products for the purpose of changing their status. People in low-power positions are prone to engage in compensatory consumption (Rucker and Galinsky, 2008). Brands, which help consumers strengthen key elements of their self-concepts, build meaningful relationships with consumers (Fournier, 1998). When reviewing literature, one may predict that self-esteem may negatively impact brand consciousness. However, Giovannini, Xu and Thomas (2015) found that self-esteem has a significant positive effect on brand consciousness of Generation Y consumers'. Also, Trudeau & Shobeiri (2016) specified that instant increases in self-esteem resulting from using the brand can fuel memories that affect brand attachment. Considering these contradicting results, the next hypothesis is proposed:

##### **H2. Self-esteem has a significant impact on brand consciousness**

As noted earlier in this paper, self-esteem is an evaluation of self-worth. If a person evaluates himself more positively, then he has a higher self-esteem. This situation diminishes the need for the favourable

evaluation of others (Heintz & Steele-Johnson, 2004). Thus, a person with a high level of public self-consciousness is associated with a low level of self-esteem (Xu, 2008). Greenwald, Bellezza and Banaji (1988) found that there is a negative correlation between self-evaluation and the concern about the evaluation of self by others. Neff and Vonk (2009) found the negative effect of self-esteem on public self-consciousness. On the other hand, Tan, Quoquab, Ahmad & Mohammad (2017) argue that "individuals with high self-esteem may be encouraged to perform prosocial behaviours and comply with social norms so they can consistently maintain self-image". In the light of these contradictory results, the below hypothesis is proposed:

**H3.** Self-esteem effects public self-consciousness

### **3.2. The Impact of Public Self-Consciousness on Brand Consciousness and Symbolic Consumption**

Individuals with a high level of public self-consciousness tend to be more concerned about others' impressions of them (Shim, Lee-Won & Park, 2016), give more attention to their public appearances, and tend to act in socially acceptable ways (Hart, Tortoriello & Richardson, 2019). This might be achieved by presenting themselves as owning socially attractive qualities (Doherty & Schlenker, 1991). Hereby, they consume products to generate the desired impressions, prefer expensive brands (Lewis & Moital, 2016). Brands, because of their capacity to reduce social risk (Keller, 2013), are good means to make good impressions on the public. Giovannini, Xu and Thomas (2015) found a significant impact of public self-consciousness on brand consciousness.

In the light of the above discussion, the below hypothesis is proposed:

**H4.** Public self-consciousness has a positive effect on brand consciousness

Choi, Xu and Teng (2018) argued that the tendency to conform to social norms can have a huge impact on consumers from collective culture. This will lead consumers to use brands with symbolic meanings (Choi, Xu & Teng, 2018). Tangsupwattana and Liu (2017) stated that the symbolic meaning integrated with products is a kind of social stimulus. Purchase, display, and use of these products communicate symbolic meanings (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967). These meanings may symbolize the essence of consumers' individuality and describe her/his desired connections with people (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). It is plausible to expect that individuals with a higher level of public self-consciousness would also be more likely than lower scorers to use products to generate and to improve positive impressions (Burnkrant & Page, 1981; Segev, Shoham & Ruvio, 2013). Because of people high in public self-consciousness need for social recognition and exhibition, it can be expected that they would be more prone to purchase conspicuous goods to satisfy these needs (Xu, 2008). Symbolic consumption is one of the ways by which consumers can categorize themselves in society (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998).

In the light of the above discussion, the below hypothesis is proposed:

**H5.** Public self-consciousness has a positive impact on symbolic consumption

### **3.3. Symbolic Consumption and Brand Consciousness**

Brand-related self-expression is a good means for consumers to better build and sustain their individual identities (Choi, Wang & Chen, 2019). Using certain brands associated with personalities

motivates social patterns (Islam, Attiq, Hameed, Khokhar & Sheikh, 2019). Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) argue that brands are substantially symbolic and individuals use them to express their self-concept, lifestyle, and social status (Tangsupwattana & Liu, 2018). Symbolic associations of certain brands are crucial to an individuals' sense of self (Dwivedi, Johnson & McDonald, 2015). Brands can be used by individuals to denote "who they are and where they are at" (Onkvisit & John Shaw, 1998). When consumers choose brands that support a particular image, they refer to the type of person they are or want to be (Vigolo & Ugolini, 2016). When a person integrates a brand with his/her self-concept, a bond is formed between him/her and the brand (van der Westhuizen, 2018). The acquisition of the product which consumers perceive as being more congruent to their self-concept will enhance the individual's self-concept (Abel, Buff & O'Neill, 2013).

Choi, Qiao and Wang (2020) reveal that self-enhancing imagery increases the intention of purchasing advertised products. Sprott, Sandor and Spangenberg (2009) found that consumers who view brands as components of their self-concepts are less sensitive to the prices of those brands. These consumers prefer higher (vs. lower) priced products from their favourite brands (Kelley & Alden, 2016).

In the light of the above discussion, the below hypothesis is proposed:

**H6.** Symbolic consumption has a positive impact on brand consciousness

### **3.4. Mediation Effects**

As stated earlier, self-esteem impacts public self-consciousness (Xu, 2008; Neff & Vonk, 2009). Also, there is an effect of public self-consciousness on symbolic consumption (Segev, Shoham & Ruvio, 2013). Even if one's self-esteem level does not directly impact his/her symbolic consumption behaviour, symbolic consumption level may indirectly be affected by self-esteem level. Namely, self-esteem will increase/decrease public self-consciousness (H3), in turn, public self-consciousness will increase symbolic consumption (H5) dependently on the level of self-esteem (Ceteris paribus..... If the self-esteem level is high, then symbolic consumption level will be high/low; If the self-esteem level is low, then symbolic consumption level will be low/high.). Based on these arguments, it would be expected that public self-consciousness will mediate the impact of self-esteem on symbolic consumption:

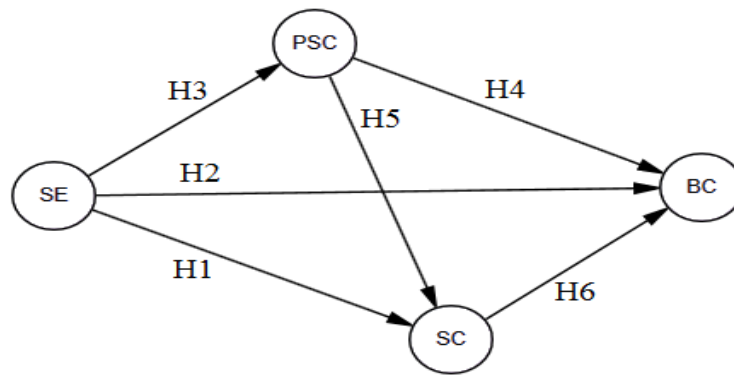
**H7.** Public self-consciousness mediates the impact of self-esteem on symbolic consumption

Literature review demonstrates that self-esteem will impact public self-consciousness (Xu, 2008; Neff & Vonk, 2009) and symbolic consumption (Park and Ko, 2011). There withal public self-consciousness (Giovannini, Xu & Thomas, 2015) and symbolic consumption impacts brand consciousness (Kelley & Alden, 2016). Even if one's self-esteem level does not directly impact brand consciousness, brand consciousness level may indirectly be affected by self-esteem level. Namely, self-esteem will increase/decrease public self-consciousness (H3) and will decrease symbolic consumption level (H1), in turn, public self-consciousness and symbolic consumption will impact brand consciousness (H4 and H5) dependently of the level of self-esteem. Thus:

**H8.** Public self-consciousness and symbolic consumption mediates the impact of self-esteem on brand consciousness

Based on a literature review (Segev, Shoham & Ruvio, 2013; Tangsupwattana & Liu, 2018; Onkvisit & John Shaw, 1998) it can be assumed that public self-consciousness will affect symbolic consumption and symbolic consumption will influence brand consciousness. Even if one’s public self-consciousness level does not directly impact brand consciousness, brand consciousness level may indirectly be affected by public self-consciousness level. Namely, public self-consciousness will increase symbolic consumption level (H5), in turn, symbolic consumption level will increase brand consciousness (H6) dependently on the level of public self-consciousness. Thus:

**H9.** Symbolic consumption mediates the impact of public self-consciousness on brand consciousness  
Based on the proposed hypothesis model in Figure 1 adopted for this research:



**Figure 1.** Research model

**Source:** authors.

**Notes:**

*Mediation Effects:* H7: Se-->PSC-->SC; H8: SE-->PSC/SC-->BC; H9: PSC-->SC-->BC

*Abbreviations:* SE-Self-Esteem, PSC-Public self-consciousness, SC- Symbolic consumption, BC-Brand consciousness

**4. Methodology**

**4.1. Sample and Procedure**

As the universe of research, individuals over 18 years old who are residing in Baku have been selected. The convenience sampling method was used for this study. The questionnaire was developed in Google forms and distributed to the universe through personal Facebook addresses (also using snowball procedure) and through the Facebook page of one of the university research centers. The post on the Facebook page promoted to reach more people. Some of the questionnaires distributed using the hand-to-hand method. All of these are considered to decrease sampling bias and improve generalizability (Neuman, 2014:248-249). A total of 274 questionnaires were obtained. Of the total participants, 117 (57.3%) were male, and 157 (42.7%) were female. Of the total participants, 72.6% (199) were aged 18–24 years old, and 27.4% (58) were above 25 years old. 65.7% (180) of respondents had a 0-250 AZN monthly income and 34.3% had above 251 AZN monthly income (1 AZN = 0.59 \$). 78.8% (216) of the respondents were single, and 21.2% (58) were married.



## 4.2. Measurement

Scale items were adapted from previous studies. Brand consciousness scale adapted from Ismail, (2017), self-esteem scale adapted from Rosenberg (1965) that is widely accepted in the literature (Bandyopadhyay, 2016; Matzler, Bauer & Moora, 2015; Singh & Nayak, 2016; Zhou, Xue & Zhou, 2015), self-concept scale adapted from Tangsupwattana and Liu (2018), PSC scale adapted from Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss (1975) that is widely accepted in the literature (for example, Huang, Lin & Wang, 2018). A five-point Likert-type scale was used to measure items (1 - "strongly disagree" and 5 - "strongly agree"). The data collection process took place in September 2018. The data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS.

## 4.3. Analysis Methods

Principal components factor analysis followed by a varimax rotation was performed to determine the factors. Structural equation modelling was used to test the model and to test the relationships revealed in the framework of the model. To investigate indirect effects, a bootstrapping procedure was implemented (n = 1000, BC - 95%) (Preacher and Hayes, 2004).

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis

After preliminary factor analysis (a principal components factor analysis followed by a varimax rotation) 6 factors (generated automatically by software) were determined. The reliability of two factors were below the acceptable lower limit of 0.6 (0.599 and 0.568) (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2014:123) and therefore the items that generated these factors were deleted (*I am concerned about what other people think of me* and *I usually worry about making a good impression*, and *At times I think I am no good at all*, and *I certainly feel useless at times*). Besides, one item (*I'm concerned about the way I present myself*) that had low factor load (0.501) and that worsened model fit were also deleted. The final results are given in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Factor analysis output*

KMO=0.821, Bartlett, df=153, Approx. Chi-Square=2008.012, p<0,000			
Factors	Factor load	Explained variance	Cronbach's Alpha
Self Esteem (SE)			
In general, I like the way I am	.727	16.667	0.788
Overall, I have a lot to be proud of	.705		
I feel that I have a number of good quality	.685		
In general, I feel satisfied with myself.	.684		
I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others	.634		
I am able to do things as well as most other people.	.581		
Symbolic Consumption (SC)			

It is important for me to use products that reflect my lifestyle	.878	15.756	0.866
I use brands that reflect my lifestyle	.832		
It is important for me to use products that reflect who I am	.821		
I use brands that similar to how I am	.678		
<b>Brand Consciousness (BC)</b>			
Sometimes I am willing to pay more money for products because of its brand name.	.837	14.775	0.814
I pay attention to the brand names of the products I buy	.764		
Branded products that cost a lot of money are good quality	.757		
Brand names tell me something about the quality of the products	.733		
<b>Public Self Consciousness (PSC)</b>			
I'm self-conscious about the way I look	.764	13.022	0.743
One of the last things I do before I leave my house is look in the mirror	.759		
I'm concerned about my style of doing things.	.726		
I'm usually aware of my appearance	.610		
Total Variance Explained	60.220		

**Source:** Research data (2019)

To test the common method variance, Harman’s single-factor method was used (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003). The result revealed that the total variance for a single factor accounts for 26.543 percent (less than 50%). Thus, a common method variance is not a problem for this study.

**5.2. Hypothesis tests: Structural Equation Model**

The correlations between research variables are provided in Table 2. As can be seen from the table, all variables were positively correlated. The results support that these constructs are positively related to one another, and these relationships simply make sense.

**Table 2**

*Correlations table*

	Self-Esteem	Public self-consciousness	Symbolic consumption
Public self-consciousness	.394**		
Symbolic consumption	.349**	.344**	
Brand consciousness	.303**	.227**	.411**

\*\* p<0.01

For investigating model fit, Relative Chi Square Index (CMIN/DF), Goodness-Of-Fit Index (GFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) were considered. In the first attempt, the model fit was not satisfactory; therefore, the modification indices were looked upon. After connecting the error terms e11-e14 and e17-e18 because of a large value of modification indices between them, the model fit improved. The results were as follows: 2.153; 0.902; 0.923 and 0.065 respectively. These results are in accordance with the values accepted in the literature (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2014).

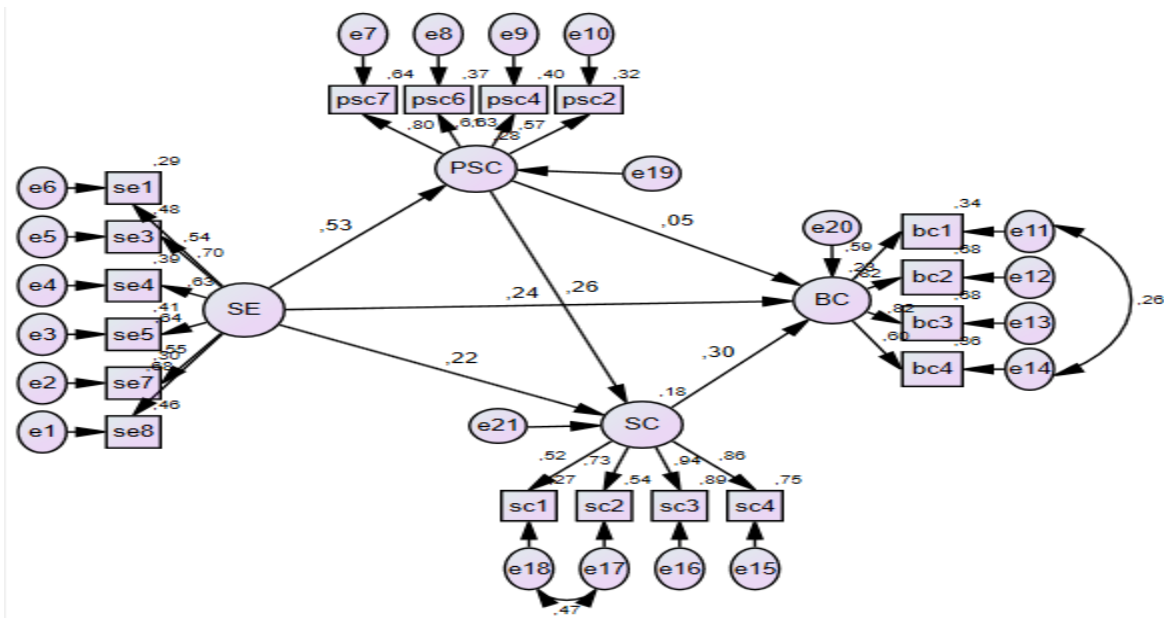


Figure 2. Structural equation model output - Standardized regression coefficients

Source: Research data (2019)

Results indicate that all direct effects except one (PSC on BC,  $p=0.542>0.05$ ) are significant. Thus, there are significant effect of SE on PSC ( $B=0.525, p<0.001$ ), SE on SC ( $B=0.219, p=0.012$ ), PSC on SC ( $B=0.260, p=0.004$ ), SE on BC ( $B=0.242, p=0.008$ ), and SC on BC ( $B=0.300, p<0.001$ ). Standardized regression coefficients and their level of significance are given in Table 3.

Table 3  
Standardized Regression Coefficients

Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Hypothesis	Status
SC <--- SE	.219	.081	2.500	.012	H1	Not Accepted
BC <--- SE	.242	.098	2.650	.008	H2	Accepted
PSC <--- SE	.525	.089	6.370	***	H3	Accepted
BC <--- PSC	.054	.089	.609	.542	H4	Not Accepted
SC <--- PSC	.260	.077	2.893	.004	H5	Accepted
BC <--- SC	.300	.095	3.671	***	H6	Accepted

Note: \*\*\* $p<0.001$

Source: Research data (2019)

As a result of the analysis, the indirect effect of SE on SC, SE on BC, and PSC on BC was found to be significant in 95% confidence interval (Table 4). The standardized regression coefficient, which shows the indirect effect of the SE on SC, is "0.137", SE on BC, is 0.135, and PSC on BC, is 0.078. Thus, the total effect of SE on SC is 0.356 (0.219+0.137), SE on BC is 0.377 (0.242+0.135), PSC on BC is 0.078 (the direct effect of PSC on BC is not statistically significant).

**Table 4**  
*Standardized Indirect Effects*

Path	Estimate	Lower Bounds (BC)/Upper Bounds (BC)	P	Hypothesis	Status
SC <--- SE	.137	0.044/0.261	0.004	H7	Accepted
BC <--- SE	.135	0.027/0.256	0.018	H8	Accepted
BC <--- PSC	.078	0.024/0.163	0.004	H9	Accepted

**Source:** Research data (2019)

**6. Discussion**

The purpose of this study is to research the relationships among two socio-psychological (self-esteem, public self-consciousness) and two marketing (symbolic consumption, brand consciousness) concepts. After the literature review, 9 hypotheses were proposed. All relationships except one (the direct effect of public self-consciousness on brand consciousness- H4) were statistically significant. Hypotheses number 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 were supported. The impact of self-esteem on symbolic consumption was statistically significant. However, these effects were positive, in contrast to the proposed hypotheses (H1).

Firstly, the results demonstrate that self-esteem is positively related to symbolic consumption. This result contradicts the proposed hypothesis (H1) and the literature (Zhu, Teng, Foti & Yuan, 2019). Consumers with higher self-esteem are more inclined to symbolic consumption; thus they use products that reflect their self and lifestyle. This result may be due to the sample, which consists of young people (mainly students). Such that this age group has higher self-esteem (Zimmerman, Copeland, Shope & Dielman, 1997) and they engage in symbolic consumption behaviour because of the transition process (Noble and Walker, 1997). Furthermore, this may be due to the cyclic process, in which symbolic consumption firstly increases self-esteem, and then, individuals being aware of this are more inclined to symbolic consumption. According to Tan, Quoquab, Ahmad & Mohammad (2017) individuals with high self-esteem may need consistently maintain their self-image. So symbolic consumption may play a role in maintaining their self. The indirect effect of self-esteem on symbolic consumption through public self-consciousness was also significant. Firms that possess products with symbolic implications may focus on people that higher self-esteem. Firms must determine the self-concept of the people with a higher level of self-esteem and stress on the symbolic meaning of their products regarding target groups' self-concept.

Second, the relationship between self-esteem and brand consciousness was examined. The result indicates that the higher self-esteem, the higher brand consciousness. That is, the consumers with higher self-esteem are more brand conscious. This result is consistent with Giovannini, Xu and Thomas (2015) and Trudeau & Shobeiri (2016). Consumers who respect themselves believe that branded products are quality, and they tend to spend money on expensive branded products. They may want to reward themselves with brands. Besides, the indirect effect of self-esteem on brand consciousness through symbolic consumption and public self-consciousness was significant. Brands that rely on brand name

and apply price premium may use this knowledge in their communication activities, stressing consumers' self.

Third, according to the findings, there is no relationship between public self-consciousness and brand consciousness. This is in line with Rhee and Johnson (2012) (the finding of their study rejected the hypothesis that individuals who are high self-monitors will indicate a high number of favourite apparel brands), but inconsistent with Giovannini, Xu and Thomas (2015). This result may be due to the Azerbaijanis (public) indifference regarding the brand name or higher-priced products when evaluating somebody. Due to 70 years of living in the socialist Soviet Union and the various problems (for example, war) that followed, the perception of branding in the country is just developing, and the brand consciousness is not fully established. Furthermore, the low-income sample may also be a factor. Besides, Azerbaijan is a low indulgence country in the frame of Hofstede's cultural dimensions ([www.hofstede-insights.com](http://www.hofstede-insights.com)), and consumers may feel blameworthy for spending on the brand (Bharti, Suneja and Chauhan, 2022).

Although the direct influence of public self-consciousness on brand consciousness is not significant, its indirect influence on brand consciousness through symbolic consumption is statistically significant. For getting the attention of public self-conscious consumers, brands may communicate their benefit regarding social respect.

Fourth, people with a higher level of public self-consciousness are more prone to symbolic consumption. If one cares about him/her presence in society, he/she will use products that reflect his/her lifestyle and self. This result is in line with Rhee and Johnson (2012). They found that people with a high level of self-monitoring adjust their expressive self-presentation to sustain good public image. Firms that possess products with symbolic implications may focus on people who give importance to their presence in the community and care about it. Vice versa, to attract people with a high level of public self-consciousness, firms may emphasize the symbolic meanings of their products or services.

Results regarding hypotheses 4 and 5 may be explained by Azerbaijanians' cultural characters. Namely, collectivist culture is dominant in Azerbaijan (<https://www.hofstede-insights.com/>). Thus, people with high public self-consciousness levels are prone to use symbolic products, because of these products' conspicuousness. Both public self-consciousness and symbolic consumption are related to extrinsic motivation. On the other hand, brand consciousness is more about intrinsic motivation. The fact that the effect of public self-consciousness on brand consciousness is not significant can be explained by this situation.

Fifth, this research revealed that consumers who make purchasing that is congruent with their lifestyle and self are more brand conscious. This result is in line with Tangsupwattana and Liu (2017) (who found that self-concept has a positive impact on brand attitude), Hwang and Kandampully (2012) (who found that consumers' self-concept connection substantially boosts their emotional attachment to the brand and brand love) and Sprott, Sandor and Spangenberg (2009) (who found that consumers who view brands as components of their self-concepts are less sensitive to the prices of those brands). Targeting the consumers who purchase goods for their symbolic meaning is a good idea for brands. For this consumer group, brands may emphasize their name and prestige.

Sixth, self-esteem positively impacts public self-consciousness. Individuals that evaluate themselves high are more concerned about public opinion regarding them and are aware of themselves as a social object.

## **7. Conclusion**

The literature demonstrates that socio-psychological factors are one of the main motivators for consumption, and knowing these motivators are one of the main sources of competitive advantage for firms. However, when examining the literature, contradicting results emerge. Also, some findings of the current study contradict the literature. We tried to explain these contradictions via culture and sample characteristics. Thus, we suggest that future research address these issues more precisely.

Current research reveals that self-esteem positively affects consumer behaviour, namely symbolic consumption level and brand consciousness level of consumers. Its indirect effect on symbolic consumption and brand consciousness through public self-consciousness is also significant.

The other socio-psychological variable public self-consciousness positively affects symbolic consumption. But its effect on brand consciousness is not significant.

It can be concluded that an intrinsic motivator (self-esteem) is influential on consumption that focuses on the outside (symbolic consumption) and on consumption that focuses on one's own (brand consciousness). But an extrinsic motivator (public self-consciousness) is influential on consumption that focuses on the outside (symbolic consumption) only.

## **8. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

The main limitation is the sample. The sample consisted of fewer older, higher-income people, compared to the number of younger, lower-income participants. The sample structure could be modified for generalizability and inclusiveness. Second, the use of convenience sampling means that caution should be exercised in generalizing this study's findings to the entire population of Azerbaijan. The result shows some contradiction to previous literature. It may be due to culture. For this, we suggest that future research address issues regarding culture. Because the research sample consists mainly low income and younger people, analysing the moderating effect of income and age may reveal interesting and explanatory findings.

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