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An exploration of the impact of brand personality on consumer buying intentions toward specialist stationery products across age groups

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**An Exploration of the Impact of Brand Personality on
Consumer Buying Intentions toward Specialist Stationery Products
across Age Groups**

by
Chalinun Aurmanarom

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the award of
Bachelor of Business (Marketing) Honours

School of Marketing, Tourism and Leisure
Faculty of Business and Law

Edith Cowan University, Western Australia

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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

Abstract

The market for stationery products is constantly evolving particularly in light of technological influences and changes in the range of items available beyond single category products. Customers now seek more than pens and paper products; rather they are looking towards convenient specialist stationery one-stop-shop options.

This research aimed to provide insight into consumers' specialist stationery products (SSPs) purchasing intentions across different age groups. A qualitative design via focus groups was used to gather consumer information. This process allowed for expressions of personal feelings and emotions relating to SSPs purchasing experiences to be captured. The findings revealed that brand personality is a valuable asset in *bonding* consumers' relationships with SSPs. In conjunction with this emotional value, brand personality relates to the product's functional benefits and provides *both intrinsic and extrinsic value* in satisfying the consumers' specific needs – all of which are key factors in motivating consumers' SSPs purchasing intentions.

In this study preferred SSPs brand personality factors, such as Simplistic, Exciting, and Likable, were determined in response to the values sought by consumer in each age group. While strong brand personality values formed part of consumers' self-identity, they also demonstrate commitments to SSPs. Collectible behaviours were evident in this research and these behaviours formed strong brand loyalty. This emotional relationship ensured consumers' current and future positive SSPs purchasing intentions. The outcomes highlighted that brand personality values in SSPs are important and should be considered in differentiating marketing strategies. These strategies have the potential to influence consumers' decision-making, and therefore can assist marketers in responding to today's highly competitive stationery business within an advanced technological environment.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

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Date: July 2010

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Industry Background

The stationery industry emerged as a viable market when it became impracticable to sell one product category, that is, pens or paper as customers were seeking convenient one-stop-shop options (Anonymous, 2001). Stationery products include a wide range of materials, such as office supplies, writing instruments, greeting cards, plus a wide range of educational and office equipment/supplies (Datamonitor, March, 2004b; Holtzman, 1978; Kirk, 2003). Historically, these products have been associated with low-cost items, providing basic needs for ease and convenience in communication. The last decade has seen a change in this product category (Brooking, 2004; Holtzman, 1978).

In 2004 the Asia-Pacific (ASPAC) market, including Australia, was the second highest in the global stationery market, holding 29% share according to industry research (Datamonitor, March, 2004a) and this growth continues to the current time. The Australian stationery market is recognized as intensively competitive. European and American manufacturers have expanded their mass produced stationery products and have benefited from low cost production in developing countries in the ASPAC region (Datamonitor, March, 2004a). The ASPAC stationery market is saturated with domestic and international overproduction causing stronger buyer power but lesser supplier power (Datamonitor, September, 2009b; Thiele & Bennett, 2001). Due to ease of technological accessibility and product imitation, threats have increased from new competitive entrants (Bellis, 2009; Brooking, 2004; Datamonitor, September, 2009b). The stationery market continues to expand in spite of the significant growth in electronic networking, such as telephone services, internet and computers which has led to some substitution of paper-based communication products (Datamonitor, Jul, 2009, March, 2004a, September, 2009b; Kapur, 2003; Liu, 2004; Penrod, 2005).

The stationery market has been influenced by the nature and characteristics of its maturity stage in the market product life cycle (Chen, Chang, & Huang, 2009). Conversely, there has been a significant growth in the specialty stationery market, most noticeable in the stationery and cards industry. In 2008, stationery specialists

generated 52% (\$8,939 million) sales in ASPAC market (\$17 billion), leading to being the third key player of global stationery and cards market (Datamonitor, September, 2009a, September, 2009b). In the ASPAC region, Japan (37%), China (33%), and India (12.6%) dominated the major markets, whereas Australia along with Singapore and Taiwan constituted 11.8%. It is forecasted that there will be continuous growth in the specialist stationery segment in the next five years as the industry growth rate was 6% in 2008 and it is expected to reach 8.8% in 2013 (Datamonitor, September, 2009b).

The emphasis of psychological values in specialist stationery products (SSPs) have become an effective way of product differentiation. Currently, consumers are seeking more inherent-value to accompany utilitarian product benefits (Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2005; Sirgy & Su, 2000). Self-value hidden in the SSPs is the main attraction for niche markets (Bellis, 2009; Brooking, 2004; Maronick & Stiff, 1985; Milligan, 1987). For example, consumers express their emotions, convey their thoughts, and present distinctive personality factors that identify *who* they are or *who* they want to be seen as via the usage of a particular brand/product (e.g., fashion-oriented and eco-friendly stationery items) (Datamonitor, September, 2009b; Phau & Lau, 2000). Home and office style stationery products that offer multi-functions have also been in demand for consumers who are seeking convenience products in their busy lives (Kikki.K, 2007). Lastly, product collection strategies enhance consumer's self-image, provide longer lasting shopping experiences and create consumer loyalty (Belk, 1988). These *self-benefits* are the key values of **brand personality** influencing consumer preference in their choice of SSPs.

1.2 Research Problem

According to changes in market trends, specialist stationery suppliers are known to be increasingly promoting brand personality toward their target markets (Datamonitor, September, 2009b; Kikki.K, 2007). Limited empirical research is evident in relation to consumer behaviour toward SSPs. A gap has been identified within the SSPs research domain which has been a significant factor in selecting this current exploratory research project.

1.3 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to provide an insight into the impact of brand personality on consumers' choices for SSPs across different age groups. There are five primary research objectives in this research:

- To identify the major aspects contributing to consumer decisions in terms of SSPs and the degree of importance relating to these decisions.
- To observe consumers' views toward SSPs and to determine brand personality preferences in each age group.
- To examine the role of collectible behaviour toward consumers' SSPs purchasing intentions across specific age groups.
- To understand the demand for SSPs in the targeted groups and to establish their future purchasing intentions.
- To examine how information technology affects the use of stationery products.

1.4 Significance of Study

The key aim of this study is to provide information about the practical and theoretical marketing significance in regard to consumer purchasing behaviour for SSPs. Providing an understanding of brand personality characteristic will enable the marketer to identify key aspects that influence consumer choices in SSPs across age groups. This knowledge can assist in product improvement which in turn satisfies consumers' specific needs while strengthening consumer demand for the products. Marketers will then be in a position to make essential product adaptations and to develop effective marketing strategies beforehand, thus avoiding the risks associated with substitute products (i.e., information technology items). This rich source of information has the potential to create competitive advantages to businesses.

Moreover, the findings from this research will contribute to furthering the understanding of brand personality theory, general brand awareness, and brand loyalty across age groups. The SSPs market is interesting as it has increased in size and predicted to do so in the future even though technological advances propose people work in a "paper-less" society. Exploring consumer demand for SSPs offers significant insight into the way products transform over the product life cycle and survive.

Given the time factors involved in this project, the middle-class specialty stationery market will be the focus of this research. This market has been selected due to the significant growth of middle range specialist stationery suppliers in the Perth Central Business District (CBD), namely Smiggle, Kikki.K and Kimmidoll (Kikki.K, 2007; Kimmidoll, 2007; Smiggle, 2009) and to determine possible gaps in consumer demand between these high-end and low-end specialist stationery products which may in turn lead to potential business opportunities.

This thesis is structured in the following manner:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 3: Research Focus

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

Chapter 5: Findings and Interpretations

Chapter 6: Conclusions

In order to present the background research for this thesis the literature review is presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2 Introduction

As previously stated, there is a dearth of information relating to consumer buying behaviour toward SSPs including the possible role of brand personality on SSPs purchasing behaviour. Therefore, the focus of this literature review explores a number of different retail industries and aims to provide insight into brand personality as a factor influencing consumers' attitude and buying behaviours (Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007), in addition to the importance of brand personality in facilitating successful business strategies. This information has allowed marketers to develop concepts and to create strong brand personality types as a well-established brand personality is reported to result in greater trust and loyalty among consumers (Diamantopoulos, Smith, & Grime, 2005; Sweeney & Brandon, 2006). A concluding outcome of this review is that it demonstrates the power that brand personality offers relative to general stationery products and to SSPs (Brooking, 2004; McChristy, 2001).

2.1 Significance of Brand Personality

Brand personality is defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (J. L. Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Brands can be perceived as having a persona, for example, trustworthy, fun, and upper class. Consumers interact with brands like they do with people, that is, they carefully select the brand like a person selects friends or partners, particularly when brands are attached to meaningful objects, such as, cars (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). Ramaseshan and Tsao (2007) claimed that there is no *right* or *wrong* personality for brands, even though some personality traits may be preferable to others in consumers' choices.

A number of studies have investigated personality traits that best describe brand personality. The most widely used is the Big Five dimensions classified by J. L. Aaker in 1997 (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Mischel, 1999; Swaminathan, Stilley, & Ahluwalia, 2009). The Five dimensions in brand personality are Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness, related to factors in the 'Big Five' human personality characteristics proposed by McCrae and Costa (1989) – Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (OCEAN), see

Appendix A. While the OCEAN factors do not cover all human personality traits, they represent a broad spectrum of personality characteristics (Sweeney & Brandon, 2006).

Brand personality has been conceptualized as a part of brand image and brand association with consumers' memory which contributes to brand equity, thus creating desire for a particular product and consumer preference (Freling & Forbes, 2005; Phau & Lau, 2000; Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007). Brand personality is a valuable asset in *bonding* consumers relationships with a brand (Rowley, 2004). In order to avoid role conflict and consumer confusion, brand may also have either a strong or weak association with specific personality dimensions. An *ideal* personality can be allocated to a specific brand depending on its position in the market and target market (Diamantopoulos, et al., 2005). For example, Mont Blanc – exclusive stationery for upper class customers – is more likely to be perceived as sophisticated while appearing to have low level connection with ruggedness. Brand allows consumers to not only identify with its personality, but also explains the personality of the brand's consumers (Fennis & Pruyn, 2007; Sweeney & Brandon, 2006) as well as predicting consumers' preferred choice and behaviour (Mulyanegara & Tsarenko, 2009).

Consumers use brand personality as a communication vehicle to express their self-concept including such factors as: image, feeling, personality, social class and lifestyles (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Phau & Lau, 2000; Swaminathan, et al., 2009). Consumers possess and attach themselves with a particular brand to develop self-confidence; gain recognition; and as an ego factor (Belk, 1988). As suggested by Ramaseshan and Tsao (2007) these inner values are known as *symbolic concepts*. Hedonic values or *experiential concepts*, on the other hand, provide emotional and aesthetic values such as 'happy' or 'joyful' to consumers, that is, happy to be seen consuming the product in public (Ataman & Ulengin, 2003; Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007). Symbolic and experiential benefits are strongly associated with customer values which creates product differentiation and appears to be more meaningful to consumers than general utilitarian/functional values (Matzler, Sonja, & Sonja, 2006; Siguaw, Mattila, & Austin, 1999). These values become significant criteria when involved in consumers' product purchase value judgments. Subsequently many companies have maximized their marketing efforts in creating *personality in brands*,

in anticipation of motivating consumers' decision. (Diamantopoulos, et al., 2005; Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007).

It is easier to communicate the values and personality of the brand when consumers are aware of and recognise the brand. Therefore, promotional techniques, such as advertising, sales promotion, personal selling and public relations strategies are key factors in enhancing the level of brand awareness (Esch, Langner, Schmitt, & Geus, 2006; McCabe & Boyle, 2006; Romaniuk, Sharp, Paech, & Driesener, 2004). Freling and Forbes (2005) suggested that during the purchase stage, particularly where there are time constraints, it is critical that these marketing tools are employed repeatedly to keep the product foremost in consumers' mind. Consumers are more likely to recall and select the brand that they associate with clear concepts of its value and personality. Macdonald and Sharp's (2000) commodity product study reported that 86% of contestants tended to purchase higher awareness brands over lower awareness brands. Also, Freling and Forbes's (2005) empirical research demonstrated that 83% of consumers who receive brand personality information had strong attitudes toward the brand and were more likely to purchase the brand over an unknown personality brand. Hence, leading brands have an advantage as the product value and personality association in consumers' memory is stronger with easier recall due to significant advertising (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000; Oh, 2000).

Overall, brand personality's benefits resulted in stronger consumer brand preference (Siguaw, et al., 1999), plus a number of other factors. These included product differentiation (Arora & Stoner, 2009); generating positive emotions in consumers (Siguaw, et al., 1999); higher purchase intention and better brand attitudes (Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007); enhanced brand equity (Phau & Lau, 2000); improved level of trust and loyalty (Freling & Forbes, 2005); and expanded successes in product extensions (Diamantopoulos, et al., 2005).

2.2 Consumer Values versus Buying Intention

Consumer purchase intentions are motivated when customer value is recognised. Zeithaml (cited in Oh, 2000, p. 137) identified customer value as "the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perception of what is received and what is given". Customer value is positive when the perceptions of product

quality (value) are greater than financial outlay and purchase intention is high when products offer high value with low risk association (e.g., social risk and financial risk). As a consequence, the degree of consumer research for substitute options is less likely when the perception of consumer value is the greatest (Matzler, Sonja, & Sonja, 2008; Oh, 2000; Taylor, Celuch, & Goodwin, 2004).

Perceived quality can be presented as a subjective value (i.e., brand personality) (Pappu, et al., 2005) and as functional or utilitarian attributes (Sirgy & Su, 2000). However, consumers perceive product values differently due to the variation in their needs and wants and stage in life (Harradine & Ross, 2007).

2.2.1 Symbolic and Emotional Values

There have been a number of studies focusing on brand personality influences in consumer product choices that lead to an intended purchase of particular brand. These include fashion clothing (Mulyanegara & Tsarenko, 2009), tourism (Sirgy & Su, 2000) and motor vehicles (Heath & Scott, 1998). Aspects such as self-concept, self-congruity and self-expression are explored in the literature relating to brand personality and these are discussed in the following paragraphs.

2.2.1.1 Consumer self-concepts

Consumers purchase products for reasons other than an underlying functional value (Heath & Scott, 1998). Levy (1959, p. 118) suggested that “people buy things not for what they can do, but also for what they mean”. Consumers' decisions are affected by the symbolic concept of brand personality: the value of self-concept, self-congruity and self-expression (Phau & Lau, 2000).

a) Self-concept

Rosenberg (cited in Diamantopoulos, Smith, & Grime, 2005, p. 131) identified self-concept as “the totality of the individual’s thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object”. This includes self-image, ideal self-image (desired image), social self-image, and ideal social self-image.

Consumers are more likely to seek the brand that accentuates their personality in order to protect and enhance their ego, that is, emphasize their self-image to

others (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987). Hence they avoid divergent brands that may misinterpret their self-concept (Diamantopoulos, et al., 2005; Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007). Sirgy and Su (2000) added that consumer behaviour is also motivated by the need for self-esteem via ideal self-image brand. However, in the event that the purchase takes place with an inconsistent self-concept, Heath and Scott (1998) suggested that a repeat purchase of that product is unlikely. Brand personality, therefore, enables consumers to communicate who they *would like to be*, and this allows them to improve their self-confidence and social interactions as well as minimising the risk of group isolation.

The *fit* of social self-image is critical when the product is a *public item* (e.g., SSPs). People tend to maintain an image that others have of them by attaching themselves to a particular brand that has the potential to convey their personality (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Brand personality, with its offer of ideal social self-image, allows consumers to be seen by others in the way they want and hence to earn social approval. However, Sirgy and Su (2000) noted that consumers can feel uncomfortable with an ideal social self valued product due to inconsistencies in their personality and depth of knowledge. In support of this social-self conflict an exemplar was given as an unsophisticated person experiencing difficulties in an up-market luxury tourist facility - while wanting to be seen as a chic patron (Sirgy & Su, 2000).

Several researchers have suggested that consumer self-concept changes from time to time depending on their emotions, social situation and an expected role (Fennis & Pruyn, 2007). For instance, a business person may conduct his/her behaviour as conventional to reflect the ideal socially acceptable self-image during a commercial conference, but change being a very casual actual self when spending private time at home. This is supported by the concept of “we are what we have and possess” by Tuan (cited in Belk, 1988, p. 139).

b) Self-congruity

Consumers' self-schema is maintained via social situations that allow them to be themselves, thus they tend to purchase brand personality specific products that are congruent with their preferred persona (Phau & Lau, 2000). According

to Meenaghan (1995), the greater the self-congruity with a particular product, the more likelihood of consumers creating positive attitudes towards brands. Ataman and Ulengin (2003) also added that self-congruency ads influence consumers' brand preference and purchase intention.

Consumers who reflect specific brand personality factors appear to be dominant in a specific Big Five personality trait. For example, Sturdy and Competent fashion styles are more appealing to Conscientious consumers (Mulyanegara & Tsarenko, 2009). Also, a brand can act as a *good* consumer companion and guides the kind of people consumers want to associate with. An extraverted individual is more comfortable interacting with a friend who is exciting and stimulating, for instance (Phau & Lau, 2000).

c) Self-expression

Brand personality can be used as a method of self-expression (Phau & Lau, 2000). When brand has a strong association for consumers, it may become a form of user self-identity (Arora & Stoner, 2009); over time user and brand can merge into *one* which Belk (1988) suggests is an extended self. Lannon and Cooper (1983, p. 205) stated that "Brands tell you a great deal about who you are...brands are part of ourselves and we are part of our brands". Also, Parker (2009) suggested that self-enhancement usually occurs when the goods have social meaning association that enables consumer to obtain positive reaction from significant references.

Individuals purchase tangible products as an extension of self; however, these possessions are not just a part of the user's self, rather they are a progression of individual self-development and identity. As individuals learn, identify, and remind themselves of *who* they are, emotions can be attached towards *things* (possessions). According to Arora and Stoner (2009), the relationship between consumers and brand enhances, in turn evolves into, emotional loyalty. This results in consumers seeking happiness, experiences, achievement, status, and expressing themselves through their possessions (Belk, 1988).

2.2.1.2 Collectible behaviours

Collectible behaviour is a strong example of products becoming a part of the extended self (Belk, 1988). This behaviour is defined as “the process of actively, selectively, and passionately acquiring and possessing things removed from ordinary use and perceived as part of a set of non-identical objects or experiences” (Belk, 1995, p. 479). Bianchi (2002) refers to this as *Passionate Consumption*. There are noticeable behavioural difference between non-collectors and collectors: non-collectors only perceive a product’s attributes (ordinary use) as having a marginal value; whereas collectors seek additional values within the product, such as social and aesthetic values that determine the significance of the items (Carey, 2008).

Belk (1995), Bianchi (2002), and Carey (2008) highlighted the motivations associated with collectible behaviours, such as psychological security (i.e., social self-promotion), self-accomplishment, an extended expression of culture and art (i.e., novelty, nostalgia, notoriety, and aesthetics), and a sense of past (i.e. memories). Newman (1995) concluded that children find their extended learning, such as, in languages, culture, art, money, biographies, geography and history provides a connection with the process of collecting items.

Collecting is a highly individualistic activity whereby collectors can use their possessions as a means of expressing their personality, character, lifestyles and social status (self-definition) (Belk, 1988, 1995; Bianchi, 2002; Carey, 2008). According to Belk’s (1995) extensive collector-oriented research men mainly collected active masculine products, such as automobiles and guns to affirm power and strength; whereas women, on the other hand, were more likely to collect passive items, such as jewellery and house wares to represent their softer feminine persona. These collections also tended to reflect consumers’ culture, ethnicity and memories (Belk, 1995; Bianchi, 2002; Carey, 2008). Children collect things as a means of new world exploration and they tend to share this value with their friends, for example, trading the products. The common collecting items among children include rocks, shells, baseball cards and stamps (Newman, 1995).

Collectible items vary from inexpensive consumer goods (e.g., match boxes) to prestigious valuable products (e.g., Waterman fountain pens). Acquiring specific and

completed series can be challenging (Bopp, 2001). When collections are partially complete, collectors are willing to source and outlay more financially to complete the series to achieve their goals and to relieve underlying tension (Carey, 2008). This behaviour is also supported by collectors' family members, that is, they tend to purchase collectible items as gifts for the collectors (Belk, 1995). Belk (1988) also suggested that the completed collections enhanced collectors' self-esteem. This emotional appeal is a primary motivator for collectors' commitment which leads to loyalty behaviour (Bopp, 2001).

2.2.2 Functional Product Values

When consumers are unfamiliar with particular products, or when they have little or no knowledge about a targeted product, they access utilitarian factors. These factors include branding, price, quality of products and services (e.g., design and durability), symbols (e.g., celebrity endorser), and atmosphere cues are key product criterion in their decision making process. However, Seock and Sauls (2008) argued that experienced consumers also consider functional cues when comparing the brands that offer similar values.

Brand name followed by price is the most common criteria used to assume quality of the products. Macdonald and Sharp (2000) reported that a majority (86%) of consumers tend to choose a well-known brand over an unknown brand even when the price is higher. They also concluded that consumers may seek high price brands to ensure quality products and to gain a sign of social acceptance, alternatively lower priced products may be selected to avoid financial risk. Additionally, the association between company images and symbols (e.g., cartoon characters and logos) is used to create a strong sense of familiarity (i.e., brand recognition) and powerful brand personality in consumers' minds (Riel & Ban, 2001). This enables consumers to recall product information and to make easier purchase decisions. An exemplar of longevity in a successful symbol is *Hello Kitty* from Sanrio – the gifts and stationery company (Datamonitor, September, 2009b). Lastly, Seock and Sauls's (2008) research claimed that consumer perception toward brand/store is influenced by atmosphere cues, such as store layout.

Consumers purchase intentions are more likely when a match occurs between utilitarian values and consumer expectations – this is known as *functional congruity*. For example, recreational and social shoppers who buy products for what they want, rather than what they need, focus on a pleasurable shopping experience led by product design, a relaxed store atmosphere and courteous service personnel; whereas economically-minded shoppers are keen on the best bundle of quality and price (Seock & Sauls, 2008). To some degree functional congruity may influence consumer decisions and relate to self-concept (Mulyanegara & Tsarenko, 2009; Seock & Sauls, 2008). According to recent research, people who have high level of self-accomplishment and self-fulfillment tend to seek a superior level of functional value (Mulyanegara & Tsarenko, 2009).

Brand personality elements can also act as utilitarian value factors. For example, reliable, sincere, and trustworthy brands are more likely to be associated with high quality and durable product characteristics (D. A. Aaker, 1996). It is common for Excitement, as brand personality factor, to be associated with colourful and attractive designs (e.g., Smiggle) (LeGallee, 1993; Smiggle, 2009). Brand personality can be used as a cue in conveying price to consumers, such as, the sophisticated personality of Mont Blanc can suggest a premium price. Nevertheless, brand personality must fit well with the product's attributes (features) in order to convincingly deliver the message of what the product/brand offers consumers.

2.2.3 Consumer Buying Intention across Age Groups

Consumer purchasing patterns can vary due to changes in lifestyles and financial positions (Phau & Lau, 2000) and as consumers move through the stages of family life cycle (Plummer, 2000). Indeed, different age groups have varied attitudes and motivations towards shopping (Harradine & Ross, 2007). The following paragraphs discuss the buying behaviours in three different consumer age groups: the younger tweens, older tweens and young adults.

2.2.3.1 Younger tweens (9-12 years old)

Younger tweens obtain product information from various sources, such as family, friends, and media (e.g., internet, mobile phones and computer games). They retrieve product messages and memorise information which can then be used in their decisions

(Harradine & Ross, 2007; Roedder & Mita, 1990). Being aware of this early stage is significant (to marketers) as it demonstrates the beginning of consumer brand recognition and purchase behaviours (Harradine & Ross, 2007).

Research in the United Kingdom (Jackson, 2006) revealed that “the average ten year old knows the name of more than 400 brands, and spends £30 billion of their parents’ money on them” (Harradine & Ross, 2007, p. 190). Children share information with their peer group and then use that acquired information to influence parents’ decision. According to BRANDchild research conducted in 2003 across 14 countries, including Australia, younger tweens are also engaging in up to 80% of final household decisions (Lindstrom, 2004). Harradine and Ross (2007) highlighted that the older the children were, the lesser parentally reliant their decision would be. Significantly the research indicated that parents’ role in influencing choices declined from 43% to 16% when children turn from five to ten years old.

Currently, children are more likely to be motivated by the need to belong to primary or secondary peer groups to satisfy their need for self-esteem and status symbol (Harradine & Ross, 2007). Conversely, they are less likely to rely on decisions made on Maslow’s hierarchy of basic needs, that is, physiological and safety needs. Children have become more brand-oriented due to the influence of fashion consciousness from modern parents and the power of media and their peer groups (Harradine & Ross, 2007). Ross and Harradine’s (2004) empirical research demonstrated that tweens believed that branded product would allow them to be unique and to stand out from the crowd as well as helping to preventing social isolation from their peer group. Over 80% of children preferred to own a counterfeit brand product that offered a similar look to a label brand, to owning an unknown branded product as they were afraid to be *laughed at* or excluded by their peers (Ross & Harradine, 2004). These are very common with the selection of fashion items.

Peer group acceptance and a sense of belonging are the main reason for younger tweens purchasing specific products/brands (Harradine & Ross, 2007). Lindstrom (2004, p. 176) reported that “Notions of individual brand loyalty do not exist any more. If the group decides to boycott a brand, no individual loyalty would be strong enough to go against it.” However, Ross and Harradine (2004) added that children

also seek basic functional product values, such as colour and comfort in their choice preferences.

2.2.3.2 Older tweens (13-16 years old)

Tweens in this group seek identity through object acquisition (Belk, 1988). As social connection is a major part of tweens, the purchasing process lessens their fear of peer group rejection and maximizes a sense of belonging. They are more interested in getting to know others in their age group and in building intimate relationships (Harradine & Ross, 2007; Swaminathan, et al., 2009). Therefore, sincerity brand factors are preferred by relationship-oriented tweens (Swaminathan, et al., 2009).

According to Kim, Rhee and Yee (2008), preferred product choices tend to be influenced by a popular junior high school class person. Older tweens obtained *what to buy* information from friends and schoolmates and they were interested in what others in their peer group purchase. This promotes similar product purchasing patterns, especially with fashion items, in order to gain group conformity. The ownership of these ideal social self-image products not only allow teens to gain social approval with their peers group, but also to enhance individual's self-efficacy (Chan, 2008). However, Block and Kollinger (2007) argued that high level peer influence is recognized when purchasing luxury products to be consumed in the public, and lesser peer power occurs with commodity goods for private consumption. Furthermore, Calvert (2008) suggested that celebrity role models, offering the ideal self-image, could significantly impact on tweens' preference choices as consumers in this age group tend to imitate the look and behaviour of those whom they like.

Understanding tweens' behavioural/purchasing patterns is critical as they appear to be price-sensitive and generate little loyalty due to their access to finances, fashion trends (Hervé & Mullet, 2009; Plummer, 2000), and their fluctuating moods (Seock & Sauls, 2008). Nevertheless, this group is reported to be future independent consumers (Harradine & Ross, 2007).

2.2.3.3 Young adults (18 years old and over)

Young adult consumers are known as independent consumers. They are more likely to select the affordable brand that has less mass-market appeal and specialty brands as

they are looking for uniqueness (Seock & Sauls, 2008). Sirgy and Su (2000) suggested that consumer brand choices can be affected by both private self value and public image as importance is placed on prestige and novelty values in order to satisfy needs as well as to gain social approval.

Experienced consumers are known to use a combination of previous shopping experiences and utilitarian cues when evaluating brand choices; whereas value expression (e.g., self-image and self-congruity) is a major criterion used by less experienced consumer in decision making (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Swaminathan, Stilley, and Ahluwalia (2009) also found that singles and recently divorced individuals are more likely to seek a brand that can fulfill their self-value concepts rather than individuals in stable relationships.

2.3 Consumer Loyalty Behaviours

The purpose of measuring consumers' buying intention is to understand how well customer values responds to consumers' needs and wants, and to identify the likelihood of consumers' future purchasing behaviours which may lead to loyalty behavioural outcomes.

Current consumer behaviour is identified via consumers' perception of product values and attitudes toward a brand (Matzler, et al., 2006). Esch, Langner, Schmitt, and Geus (2006) also suggested that past frequency of product purchase or consumption can identify the likelihood of consumers' current buying intentions. Similarly, future (repeat) purchase intention can be measured by the level of consumers' attitudinal loyalty which is derived from perceived value of the product (Oh, 2000). Purchase intention is favourable when a high degree of agreement is presented on these statements: "This brand makes me happy", "I feel good when I use this brand", and "I will buy this brand next time" (Matzler, et al., 2006, p. 429). Consumers' purchasing behaviours were more likely to occur when they gave commitment to the brand which leads to loyalty behaviour.

Consumer loyalty is significant to growth aspects in future sales and profits. Loyal customers tend to purchase repeatedly; generate positive word of mouth; demonstrate a willingness to pay more; are less likely to switch brands; reduce business costs, such

as lower customer retention outlays (e.g., five time less than attract new customers); and increase entry barrier for competitors (Blodgett, Wakefield, & Barnes, 1995; Harrington, 2007; Mooradian & Olver, 1997; Palumbo & Herbig, 2000).

Brand loyalty is also known to assist in building strong brand equity (e.g., brand awareness and brand image/personality) which influences consumer's current and future buying behaviours (D. A. Aaker, 1996). Lastly, consumer loyalty behaviours allow companies to expand their product line into the same or different product categories to protect market share, improve sales, and to control costs (e.g., in new product development) which is common in competitive businesses (Hui, 2004; Wu & Lo, 2009). Nevertheless, Diamantopoulos, Smith and Grime (2005) and Wu and Lo (2009) reported that extended product's brand personality must fit well with the core brand personality in order to receive the same support from consumers and to sustain intended consumer purchases. Conversely, original core brand personality can be damaged if deficits in personality fit occur and this may reflect consumer behaviours.

2.4 Brand Personality Measurement

Brand personality measurement operates to measure and construct the symbolic use of brand personality traits in general and within product categories specifically (J. L. Aaker, 1997). It also helps to explain the relationships between consumers' perception and brands, and the measurement provides a theoretical insight into what brand personalities direct consumer behaviours (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Fennis & Pruyn, 2007).

2.4.1 Brand Personality Scale

Brand personality scale (BPS) as proposed by J. L. Aaker (1997), consists of five distinct personality dimensions: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness (Appendix A (ii)). Forty two personality traits were identified to describe the scope of the five personality dimensions. This brand personality measurement method has been widely used by many research studies, such as commodity consumer goods (Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Guido, 2001; Freling & Forbes, 2005; Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007), shopping and luxury products (Arora & Stoner, 2009; Matzler, et al., 2006; Mulyanegara & Tsarenko, 2009; Swaminathan, et al., 2009) and service industries (Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007; Siguaw, et al., 1999).

Research utilising the BPS has involved both survey questionnaires and qualitative research methodologies, including open-end questions, focus groups, and in-depth interviewing. For example, participants were asked to rate the brand under 42 traits on the five-point Likert-type scale, (e.g., 1 = not at all descriptive and 5 = extremely descriptive) or a seven-point scale. The results were accepted only when there were ratings of 3 or over and 4 or more for five and seven-point scale use respectively. Participants were also asked to describe the brands relative to a person, animals, countries, and so forth for qualitative results (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Swaminathan, et al., 2009).

2.4.2 Limitations of BPS

The following factors are found to be limitations related to the use of BPS.

2.4.2.1 Big-five factors

It could be argued that only three brand personality dimensions were related to three “Big Five” human personality traits.

- a) Agreeableness and Sincere: representing warmth and acceptance
- b) Extroversion and Excitement: indicating sociability, energy, and activity
- c) Conscientious and Competence: meaning responsibility, dependability, and security (see Appendix A)

These three factors relate to internal aspects of human personality, whereas Sophistication and Ruggedness have been associated with *upper class* (i.e., glamour), sexiness and masculinity which related to individual aspirations, rather than personality dimensions (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003).

2.4.2.2 Traits adjectives selection

Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) argued that competence in BPS was applicable to brand. However, according to their analysis of McCrae and Costa's (1989) research, it was not strictly a trait that described personality from a psychological point of view. Additionally, reservations associated with selecting adjectives to describe brand personality have been explored; however, the outcomes were inconclusive (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Caprara, et al., 2001; Sweeney & Brandon, 2006). BPS was queried relative to its appropriateness in measuring every brand because adjectives used to describe human personality may convey different meanings to brand

personality (Bao & Sweeney, 2009; Caprara, et al., 2001). Sweeney and Brandon (2006) have suggested that brand personality would benefit from having tighter definitions.

2.4.2.3 Problematic items

Azoulay and Kapferer (2003), and Bao and Sweeney (2009) reported that items related to "masculine" and "feminine", and "western" (see Appendix A (ii)) could be problematic and called for a concise definition via methodological evaluation. They argued that describing a brand as either feminine or masculine could lead to confusion and misunderstanding because the brand may target both gender consumers. Also, according to human personality theory research, masculine and feminine are not personality traits (Bao & Sweeney, 2009). Furthermore, they claimed that "The presence of Western is a typical illustration of ethnocentrism in marketing research" (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003, p. 152). They introduced Asian or Latin as an alternative term to describe non-western brands.

2.4.2.4 Cultural differences

Collectivist cultural research noted that consumers from different cultures have diverse perceptions of brand personality (J. L. Aaker, 1997). For example, ruggedness was not well associated with consumers in some cultures and instead the dependence trait was suggested (Phau & Lau, 2000).

2.4.2.5 One-sided personality dimension (positive)

Bao and Sweeney (2009), and Sweeney and Brandon (2006) reported that the BPS personality traits only emphasize one-sided positive personality traits which may not suit some brands that intended to have disagreeable image. This marketing technique is commonly used with youth brands to present the opposing position (i.e., darkness of personality) to capture the public's attention and to highlight differentiations (Bao & Sweeney, 2009; Sweeney & Brandon, 2006).

Having given consideration to the BPS, an alternative framework to measure brand personality has been proposed, that is, the interpersonal circumplex (IPC) model. This model has the potential to allow a wider range of brand personality factors to be critically examined (Bao & Sweeney, 2009; Sweeney & Brandon, 2006).

2.4.3 Interpersonal Circumplex Model (and Limitations)

The IPC theoretical model focuses on fundamental interpersonal traits derived from a number of sources (e.g., Plutchik, 1980; Sullivan, 1953; Wiggins, 1979). Aspects of the IPC have been integrated in the framework of multi-disciplinary interpersonal studies including Sweeney and Brandon's (2006) in brand personality. Brand personality is defined as "the set of human personality traits that correspond with the interpersonal domain of human personality and that are relevant to describing the brand as a relationship partner" (Sweeney & Brandon, 2006, p. 645).

Interpersonal theory explains that personality is derived from the relationship between the individual and others. The IPC model is formulated from two of the Big Five human personality factors (McCrae & Costa, 1989), that is, Agreeableness and Extraversion, representing interpersonal dimensions (Sweeney & Brandon, 2006). Therefore, the key strength of IPC is the model's ability to offer a richer in-depth analysis of brand position using the two identified interpersonal factors. On the other hand, BPS encompassed all five (personality) factors while only Sincerity and Excitement are related to interpersonal relationships (see 4.2.1 – limitation of BPS) (Bao & Sweeney, 2009; Sweeney & Brandon, 2006).

The earlier IPC model has a large number of personality traits (Plutchik, 1980) depicted in a circular (continuum) pattern. The principle of this structure is that it has no beginning or end. A number of personality traits are located around the circle and it is suggested that the closer the traits, the similar they may be in essence (real meaning) to stated personality factors, and the opposite side trait (180 degree) presents the dissimilar personality factors (Sweeney & Brandon, 2006), see Appendix B. However, it was not clearly explained *how* each interpersonal personality factor was positioned in the specific location on the IPC circle. Also, what determined the distance between each factor was not mentioned.

Sweeney & Brandon (2006) proposed using an adapted IPC model which provides eight items in each of the 16 interpersonal categories (Wiggins, 1979), see Appendix C. According to Australian research, brand can have a negative personality concept (Sweeney & Brandon, 2006). Thus this model provides a more appropriate framework to describe brand personality factors as it included both positive (e.g., ambitious,

warm) and negative (e.g., quarrelsome, calculating, cold, and lazy) personality traits, whereas BPS only provides positive personality factors (Sweeney & Brandon, 2006). However, as IPC has not been widely applied in marketing research and as a number of IPC facets remain unclear, it would be of value in future brand personality research to integrate both IPC and BPS models.

2.4.4 Strengths and Weaknesses in Brand Personality Measurements

The purpose of brand personality measurement, both BPS and IPC, come from similar perspectives, that is, to determine what personality traits would be best suited to describing brand personality factors across a range of different product categories. Therefore, participants in brand personality studies varied in sex, age, income and lifestyles in order to gain the most generalizable research outcomes of consumers' perceptions as related to brand personality (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Bao & Sweeney, 2009; Caprara, et al., 2001; Freling & Forbes, 2005; Siguaw, et al., 1999; Swaminathan, et al., 2009; Sweeney & Brandon, 2006). Nevertheless, the research outcomes did not identify the potential target market of those who use brand personality as a product criterion. For example, Hallmark, the greeting cards and stationery company, is perceived as 'sincere' by consumers (see Appendix A (ii)). However, this factor failed to explain those who are (i.e., what age group) attracted by the sincerity personality type. Consumer purchase intention across different age groups was not examined within any of the previous mentioned research (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Bao & Sweeney, 2009; Caprara, et al., 2001; Freling & Forbes, 2005; Siguaw, et al., 1999; Swaminathan, et al., 2009; Sweeney & Brandon, 2006).

Across the brand personality measurement research younger participants/consumers (under 18 years old) were not as prevalent as those aged upward from 18 (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Caprara, et al., 2001; Matzler, et al., 2006; Siguaw, et al., 1999; Swaminathan, et al., 2009). Finally, deficits exist in brand personality research in specific industries. There is a dearth of knowledge relating to consumers' behaviours in the market for SSPs. Hence, it is anticipated that this thesis will offer insight into this neglected area. The following section outlines the background research of the stationery market.

2.5 Stationery Market Trend

'Stationery products' refer to writing instruments, greeting cards, and other office and school equipment (Datamonitor, March, 2004b; Holtzman, 1978; Kirk, 2003). In response to a number of factors, such as mature market characteristics (Chen, et al., 2009); an increasing number of new players are entering the field; and the ease of technological and resources accessibility, the stationery market is highly competitive (Bellis, 2009; Brooking, 2004). Manufacturers have had difficulty in introducing new products to attract customers as this market is known to experience marked (and rapid) product imitation (Brooking, 2004; Chen, et al., 2009). Consumers tend to be price-sensitive, have little brand loyalty, and are more likely to switch brand at anytime (Datamonitor, September, 2009b). The outcome has been that differentiation strategies were employed to preserve a company's market share and to eliminate customer loss. For example, Bic offers low-price and convenience value as a key to dominant lower-end market products (DiscountStoreNews, Oct 20, 1997), whereas Parker stays away from mass-market production and aims for higher-end market status (Brooking, 2004).

Parker was the first to modify its image and to offer customer value as a basis of brand loyalty by selling promotional pens, thus emphasising their brand as a status symbol (Brooking, 2004). This created a competitive edge and enabled the company to gain market prominence (McChristy, 2001). Eventually, other key players, such as Mont Blanc, Waterman Pen, and Alonzo T Cross tailored their premium products to consumer's specific demands (Brooking, 2004; LeGallee, 1993). Sophistication was added to the product to enhance its brand image and to associate it with consumer's social values (Bellis, 2009; Brooking, 2004). Professionals, namely business men, doctors, lawyers, and executive salespeople are known to be premium customers in the purchasing of these expensive pens. This purchasing pattern is based on the belief that the ownership of the top brands offers the owner a way to express their personality and lifestyle by presenting their social status and career achievements to others (Belk, 1995; LeGallee, 1993).

Fine pens are preferred as business gifts and awards, allowing the provider to express their positive sentiments about the recipient (Brooking, 2004; Guilfoil, August 17, 2008; McChristy, 2001). Some people also view the uniqueness of specialty products

as an art or fine jewellery, hence their purchase is mainly for collectors' purpose. It has been suggested that a prestigious fountain pen is the most apparent status symbol (and desired fine collection item) in high income society (Shay, 2001). According to the Guinness Book Records the most expensive pen is worth up to US\$125,000 (LeGallee, 1993; McChristy, 2001).

Current Specialist Stationery Factors

Modern specialist stationery stores with moderate priced goods have continued to emerge in today's market due to the gap between higher and lower-end products. Anecdotally, the demand for SSPs in Australia is greater in the Central Business Districts. There are a number of leading specialist stationery suppliers in Australia, such as Smiggle, Kikki.K, and Kimmidoll (Datamonitor, March, 2004b; Kikki.K, 2007; Kimmidoll, 2007; Smiggle, 2009). In recent years there has been an expansion of specialty stationery retailers in the Australian market and it is reported that the product line is expanding into different geographical locations including suburban shopping centres (Willey, 2009).

The major differences between these specialty shops and traditional office suppliers are in the distinctive creative products and the perceived benefits to consumers. Specialty shops offer outlets for consumers to select products *for what they want* rather than *for what they need* (Milligan, 1987). Customers view these venues as a new form of entertainment which provides them with uniqueness and product differentiation (Maronick & Stiff, 1985). Creative design, variety of choices, innovative facilities, and pleasurable shopping experiences are the main attractions; all of which are effective in communicating and creating favourable store-brand image/personality in consumers' minds (Willey, 2009). Additionally, the main purpose of purchasing SSPs is led by the values inherent in the brand itself. For example, the sense of belonging to a peer group increases in specialist product purchasers/users as does their social interaction. The marketing of SSPs no longer relies solely on competitive functional-product orientation, rather the strategies involve highlighting branded-value – or known as '*Brand Personality*' (Brooking, 2004; McChristy, 2001).

Nevertheless, in the 21st century, in addition to competitive markets, substitute products such as information technology items play a vital role in threatening the demand for stationery products (Datamonitor, September, 2009b). The way people use written communication (write) has changed; this change is extensively reflected in the introduction of computers and the Internet. Computer-based writing has become widely used in public communication as it saves time in processing data and it provides a cost effective means of disseminating information (Datamonitor, September, 2009b; Kapur, 2003; Liu, 2004; Penrod, 2005).

However, many scholars argued that traditional writing with pen and paper can be more effective for a number of tasks. For example, drawing a diagram, making a quick note, skimming reading, and reviewing or proofreading final documents (Brown, 2001; Haas, 1987; LeGallee, 1993; Liu, 2004). Therefore, it is proposed that even though consumers use computer technology as an alternative choice in written communication, there is little possibility that it will take over from the traditional form of writing and reading with pen and paper (Brown, 2001; Haas, 1987; Kapur, 2003; Kirk, 2003; Liu, 2004).

2.6 Summary

Today's consumers tend to have greater product and brand value consciousness than previously reported (Anisimova, 2007). To attract consumers' attention toward specialist stationery brand, product marketers need to offer more than functional benefits alone (Brooking, 2004; McChristy, 2001). Brand personality has become critical in understanding the psychological values that consumers attach to products in any category (Diamantopoulos, et al., 2005; Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007), including SSPs. A distinctive brand personality is the basis for product differentiation (Matzler, et al., 2006; Siguaw, et al., 1999) – one that is difficult to imitate. Successful effective brand personality creates consumer preferences and choices (Mulyanegara & Tsarenko, 2009); develops trust and loyalty relationships (Freling & Forbes, 2005), and thereby enhances brand equity (Phau & Lau, 2000). This could be a truly competitive advantage for specialist stationery business enterprise.

However, to a certain degree, consumers are sensitive to brand personality. This sensitivity relates to various factors including: self-concept (Phau & Lau, 2000),

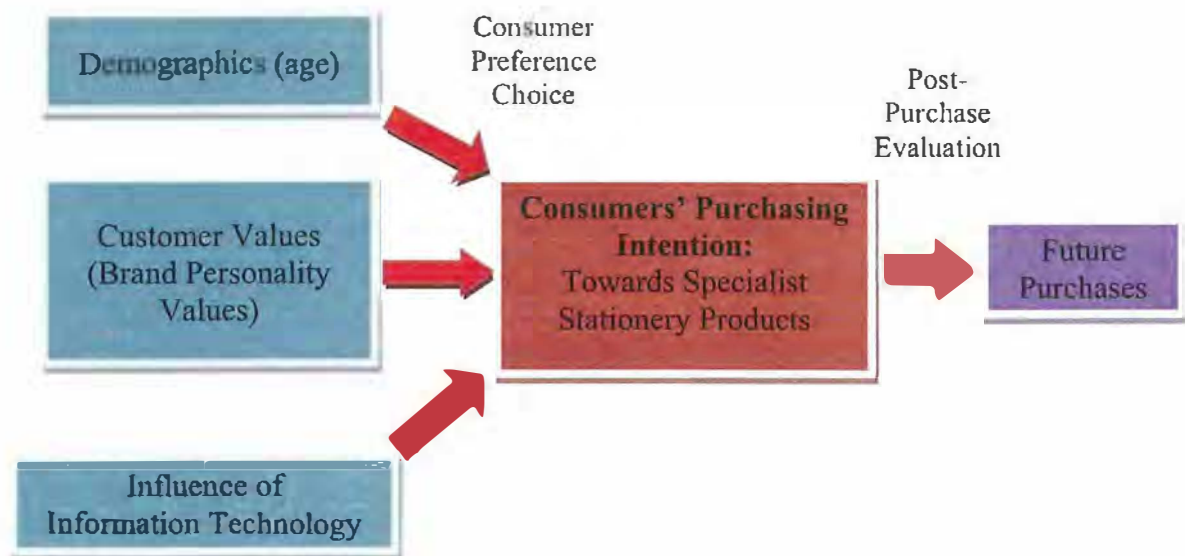
collectible behaviours (Belk, 1988, 1995; Bianchi, 2002; Carey, 2008), and consumer age differences (Plummer, 2000). These theoretical consumer behavioural concepts explain the relationships between consumer values (e.g., brand personality) and consumers' purchase intention in general. These behavioural factors also provide guidelines that can be applied to the choices in SSPs. For example, younger consumers may follow their friends' purchasing choices of specialist stationery brands in order to gain a sense of belonging (Harradine & Ross, 2007), whereas older consumers may be more likely to buy SSPs for self-expression purpose (Sirgy & Su, 2000). With this knowledge, marketers could maximize their insight into consumers' needs and wants, and explore what captures consumers' interests and the loyalty factors that motivate them to purchase a brand.

Lastly, consumers' purchase intention and brand personality measurement can be used to determine the main distinguishing customer values and personality traits associated with specialist stationery brands. This allows marketers to select the most effective method to convey the competitive characteristics of their brand to consumers (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Phau & Lau, 2000; Swaminathan, et al., 2009). On the other hand, essential changes and adaptations could be undertaken in situations where the brand may be misinterpreted or inconsistencies are determined in consumers' perception in the personality of the brand. By following these strategies progressive marketers are able to ensure the success of their brand. Combining information from the literature review the following chapter outlines the research focus for this thesis.

Chapter 3 Research Focus

The major dimensions of this study have been selected based on marketing literature and industry background. There is a multifactorial focus to this current exploratory research, that is, to explore the significance of consumer demographic factors (i.e., age); to understand the impact of customer values (i.e., brand personality values) along with the influences of information technology on consumers' purchase intention of SSPs; and ultimately to understand consumers' future purchase intentions. (Figure 3.1.)

Figure 3.1. Understanding Consumers' Purchasing Intentions



Footnote: Research focus outline adapted from empirical studies on consumer behaviour in different age groups (Harradine & Ross, 2007); customer value, behavioural intention, and loyalty behaviour model (Esch, et al., 2006; Freling & Forbes, 2005; Oh, 2000); and includes the trend of technology products suggested by industry research (Datamonitor, September, 2009b).

According to consumer behaviour studies (Harradine & Ross, 2007), consumers in different age groups make their decision differently based on various needs and wants, for example, need for comfort versus desire for recognition. These customer values and attachments motivate consumer buying behaviour as well as influencing consumers' choice of products (Freling & Forbes, 2005). However, the hazards associated with substitute products, for example information technology, could threaten consumer demand for stationery products (Datamonitor, September, 2009b).

Therefore, an investigation of these factors would allow current consumers' purchasing intention to be better understood and therefore assist in predicting the future purchases of SSPs.

The following chapter outlines the methodology utilised in this work. It provides an illustration of the processes and tools used to carry out the research and describes the resultant sample.

Chapter 4 Research Methodology

4 Introduction

This chapter outlines and describes the procedure for the current study, including population and sample selection, research design, research instrument, data collection and data analysis. Finally, in addition to this study's limitations, the ethical considerations have been identified.

4.1 Population and Sample

The target samples for this research have been categorised into three groups based on age:

- Younger tweens (8 – 11 years old) = 19 participants in total
- Older tweens (13 – 15 years old) = 8 participants in total
- Young adults (18 years old and over) = 13 participants in total

The reason for choosing younger consumers (i.e., under 18) was due to this age group receiving less attention from earlier research of brand personality (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Caprara, et al., 2001; Matzler, et al., 2006; Siguaw, et al., 1999; Swaminathan, et al., 2009). The limited research available on younger consumer (e.g., Harradine & Ross, 2007; Kim, Rhee & Yee's, 2008; Lindstrom, 2004; and Ross & Harradine, 2004) has indicated that they are brand-conscious consumers. Their buying powers are becoming stronger and most of the decisions are likely to be influenced by image and social value. Additionally, personal observation in specialist stationery retailers (e.g., Smiggle) in the Perth CBD suggests that a range of colour and design factors are used by marketers to emphasis the personality in their brand to possibly target the younger age groups (Author's personal observation, 2009).

Independent consumers (i.e., aged 18 years and over) were selected as this age group is known to have stronger purchasing power due to their disposable income (Belleau, Summers, Xu, & Pinel, 2007; Calvert, Spring 2008; Mulyanegara & Tsarenko, 2009). They tend to be trendsetters who have high sense of fashion and look for unique products (Belleau, et al., 2007); hence, they could be a potential target market for specialty goods, such as SSPs. The three age groups were also chosen to compare these three stages of consumption behaviour.

This research sought to explicitly understand the buying intention of the three different age groups. To achieve this intention, a non-probability snowballing technique (Neuman, 2006) has been employed as the sampling method. Given time and monetary constraints this population could not reasonably be accessed in any other manner, so taking this approach was justified (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Patton, 1990).

In order to ensure rich information sources, it was required that the participants were product users who had experience in purchasing or had recently used specialty stationery items. Although the intention was to conduct two focus groups in each targeted age-group, the number varied according to the availability of the participants as well as the consistency of information gathered and reviewed during data collection (Neuman, 2006).

4.2 Research Design

A qualitative research method was chosen due to the aims of this research, that is, to gain insight into the brand personality's benefits associated with individual consumer purchasing intention for SSPs. Information obtained from humanistic focus, such as emotional context, personal expression and internal feelings, offers contextual information relative to the aims of this project (Gephart, 2004; Neuman, 2006).

Qualitative inquiry methods permits an interpretive approach to describing the individual's multiple perspectives associated with human social reality and social interventions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), and hence enabled the participants' choices, perceptions and issues to be linked to their purchasing decisions. The outcome of this process was detecting the connections between the consumers' interactions with the functional and emotional value (i.e., brand personality value) of the products and their personal decision-making processes. The connections - the linking processes - and issues, were identified, analysed, and clarified (Wicker, 1989), that is, the findings at the end of each session were summarised and discussed with participants for correct understanding and ensuring the reliability of the given data.

According to Cresswell (1998), studies with a qualitative design allow participants to voice the *essence* of the meaning in their *lived experiences*, that is, this study gave the

participants an opportunity to voice their individual experiences relating to SSPs and to express their feeling freely. The process offered the means of understanding *how* they interpreted and navigated their purchasing experiences (Cresswell, 2003).

As stated previously, a sample of participants was recruited from a range of sources, principally personal contacts (e.g., friends, family) using a snowballing technique to obtain additional participants for the study. According to Cresswell (1998) a large number of participants is not required for qualitative studies. It is more important to ensure the data collected is broad and represents the expressions of participants as they intended. To this effect it is practice to keep sampling until repetition of themes occurs (Cresswell, 2003). This qualitative approach involved a wide and extended interaction with the data to develop interrelated meaningful patterns - themes - from the information obtained in the focus group processes (Moustakas, 1994).

The following section outlines the focus group questions which were used with each focus group. As required these questions were amended and adjusted.

4.3 Research Instrument

The interview questions were developed according to the research objectives and the literature review. To avoid miscommunication, plain language (with no specific marketing terms) was used to guide the focus group questions. There were six questions with several sub-sections (see Appendix D for focus group questions).

4.3.1 Question one: General information

Participants were asked to provide general information with regard to their experience of using SSPs. This was to determine their perceptions of SSPs, that is, to obtain knowledge of their awareness of specialist stationery brands and any purchasing patterns they may have.

4.3.2 Question two: Functional value versus emotional value

Section two allowed for an understanding of what factors contributed to participants' decision-making processes. According to customer value and behavioural intention literature it has been suggested that functional-product orientation (Oh, 2000) and

personality/psychological value associated brands may have been part of the participants product evaluation (Freling & Forbes, 2005).

4.3.3 Question three: Brand personality identification

All of the participants were asked to participate in a product-selection activity. This involved choosing a stationery product sample and discussing the reasons for their choice. In this way the most and least preferred brands were identified according to participants' responses. This activity allowed for individual information (verbal descriptions/images) to be linked to what the participants *saw* in each brand. This process was similar to J. L. Aaker's (1997) brand personality study, for example, relating a brand to the image/personality of the person using the product.

4.3.4 Question four: Collectible behaviours

The aim of this question was to obtain an understanding of the participants' SSPs buying intention as reflected in collectable behaviours. Previous research had suggested that collectable items may be purchased as a means of enhancing consumer self-concept (i.e., the extended self) rather than as a means in itself (Belk, 1988, 1995; Bianchi, 2002; Carey, 2008).

4.3.5 Question five: Future purchase intentions

The information from this question was designed to measure participants' SSPs buying future intentions, that is, to ascertain if there was a link between current purchasing patterns and ongoing purchase intentions (demand).

4.3.6 Question six: Trend for information technology

Due to continuing controversy associated with the impact of information technology on traditional stationery products (Brown, 2001; Haas, 1987; LeGallee, 1993; Liu, 2004), this question aimed to provide insight into participants' perceptions of the future trends in the demand for stationery products.

4.4 Data Collection

To further enhance the inductive qualitative methodology, data was obtained via focus group. The focus group technique was appropriate as it allowed participants to respond and discuss the researcher's questions freely (Neuman, 2006). There were a

number of prescribed steps in this type of data collection procedure. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.

4.4.1 Product Sample Preparation

A number of SSPs samples were assembled (e.g., Smiggle, Kikki.K, and Kimmidoll) to allow for participant discussion based on a range of actual items sold in Australia (see Appendix E).

4.4.2 Enrolling Participants

The main reference source of participants for this project was via family and friends. Parents and independent participants were contacted by phone, email, or personal conversation two to three weeks prior to the focus groups. A written information overview (Appendix F) of the project and the consent form were then forwarded by via email. Parental approval/consent (Appendix G) was obtained for the participants under 18 years of age and the participant's consent form (Appendix H) was signed prior the focus group. Date, time and location were determined in accordance with participant availability.

4.4.3 Conducting Focus Group

Over an eight week period, the focus groups took place in quiet, safe, and comfortable locations that were convenient for all participants. This included the ECU library and participants' homes. Given that the participants were required to spend approximately 45 minutes being part of the focus groups, they were offered a small incentive (i.e., snack). The same broad format of focus groups questions was used with every age group in order to ensure the completed outcome and the collection of information relevant to the research objectives. Audio recording was used and notes were taken throughout the conversations.

4.5 Data Analysis

Transcripts of the focus group were coded and manually analysed. Contextual aspects were further analysed, recorded and discussed for clarity of information (Mckee, 2005). Using participants' responses, content analysis was then used to identify major themes. With the aid of a matrix-display formats (i.e., rows and columns), the emergent themes were also further divided into sub themes as a means of discerning

the related in-depth information. An example of this process has been included as Appendix I (I, II). This tabular format provided an understanding of the relationships between brand personality factors and consumer perceptions.

In classifying participant personalities as these related to specialist stationery brands, brand personality dimensions proposed by J. L Aaker's (1997) five brand personality scale and the interpersonal circumplex model (Sweeney & Brandon, 2006) were used when applicable.

4.6 Limitations

This research aimed to obtain eight to ten participants in each focus group. However, due to the participants' availability and overall time constraints, the focus groups were conducted with a varying number of participants (range from two to eight participants) in each group.

There was limited access to participants aged 10 to 12 years old; therefore, with parental consent participants under 10 year of age (i.e., eight and nine years of age) were recruited into this study. It was difficult to encourage male participants in this age group to speak up during the focus group. This was believed to be the nature of male participants within this age group, as opposed to female participants who are prepared to share and give more information.

Contacting participants aged between 13 to 15 years of age proved to be the most difficult to access age group. There were either delayed replies or non-responses. Despite several attempts to fulfill the participant number requirement, this was not achieved. A confounding factor could have been that the recruitment phase occurred at an inconvenient time of the year for participants to join the focus group due to the exam and university entry preparation. Hence, the data collection phase concluded with smaller numbers in this age group. This is a significant limitation for this age group. Nevertheless, participants provided adequate data for analysis.

Additionally, as this is an exploratory research project, the selected samples of this research do not represent the population in each age group. That is, the research findings are based on the information received from three specific consumer segments (i.e., consumers with age of 8-11, 13-15, and 18 and over). Hence, the outcomes of

the research cannot be extrapolated across to consumer behaviour of other age groups. Lastly, specialist stationery markets in Australia have been the focus of this research project and as such the findings are not directly transferrable across other industries and countries.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

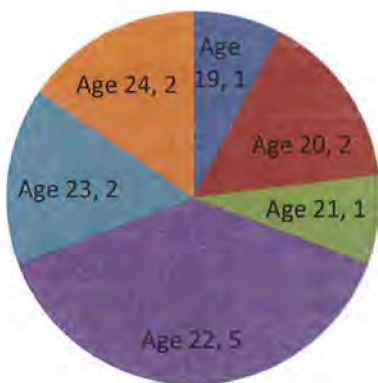
The importance of ethical considerations was foremost in this study. This qualitative research using question-response techniques involved social-contextual sharing of the participants' personal concepts and ideas when they gave *voice* to their thoughts. Therefore, to ensure that participants did not incur harm, embarrassment or loss of privacy, safe locations were chosen. Also, the letters to participants and the parental consent forms provided a written assurance their anonymity would be protected at all times. That is, the information derived would be treated confidentially and only used for this research purpose. Additionally, participants were informed that at the completion stage of this research, the information provided would be destroyed. Lastly, contact details of an independent person were included in the letter and consent form (see Appendix F and G). Every step in the research procedure followed ethical codes of conduct as required by Edith Cowan University (Edith Cowan University, 2008)

Chapter 5 Findings and Interpretations

5 Introduction

As previously outlined in Chapter Four, a qualitative method of inquiry was used to address the research objectives in this study and to answer the research questions relating to consumers' purchasing intentions toward SSPs. Based on the three age-related focus groups (see Figure 5.1.), data was obtained for this study from the following sources:

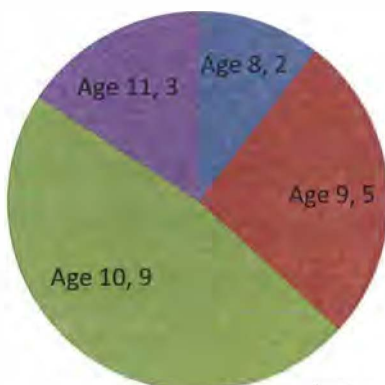
Figure 5.1. Overall Focus Group Demographics



Focus Group 1: In total this group consisted of 13 participants who have owned, purchased and experienced the use of SSPs. Demographically their ages ranged from 19 years of age to 24 years and there were three males in the group.



Focus Group 2: Participants in this focus group were aged between 13-15 years old. Several difficulties emerged during the recruitment phase, as mention in the previous chapter. Eight participants contributed to the research and there were three males in this age group.



Focus Group 3: Due to a difficulty in recruiting participants aged between 10 to 12, and under the guidance of the thesis supervisor, seven participants aged between eight and nine years contributed to the focus group in order to gain sufficient information. In total there were 19 participants engaged in this focus group and eight of them were males.

Guided by the research objectives the data from the three age-related focus groups was analysed. In the interests of clarity the findings from these groups have been presented under each of the resulting five overarching themes. These themes are: *Expressive Consumers and Functional Consumers*; *Individuality Influences Preferences*; *Pleasure in the Purchase*; *Category Variations*; and *Techno Savvy versus Artistic Traditional* plus a number of sub-themes. (Table 5.1.)

Table 5.1. Main Themes and Sub-Categories

Main Themes	Sub-Categories
Theme One: Expressive Consumers and Functional Consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design • Price • Function • Other
Theme Two: Individuality Influences Preferences	-
Theme Three: Pleasure in the Purchase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic Value • Social Self-Promotion • Memorabilia
Theme Four: Category Variations	-
Theme Five: Techno Savvy versus Artistic Traditional	-

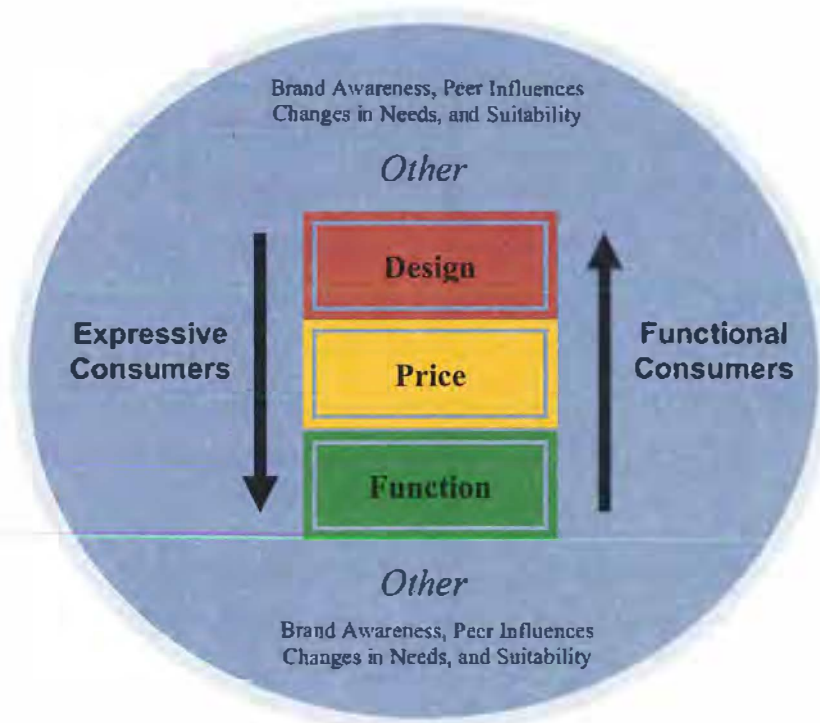
Prior to expanding on the findings as per the age-related focus groups, an explanation of each of the themes is provided. The intention of providing this explanation is to allow for an elaboration of the findings under each age group. Also, data interpretation/outcomes have been included at the end of each theme. This process offers a way of summarising the distinctive similarities and/or behavioural differences found in the three age groups.

5.1 Theme One: *Expressive Consumers and Functional Consumers*

Several key factors emerged from the prepared questions designed to answer research question one, that is: To identify the major aspects contributing to consumer decisions in terms of SSPs and the degree of importance relating to these decisions. For example, "What things - like their features (criteria) - do you look for in these products when purchasing them?"

Participants were asked to rank from the most to the least important product attributes involved in their decision-making processes when purchasing SSPs. It was evident that participants' decision responses could be classified into one behavioural theme with two dimensions, *Expressive Consumers* and *Functional Consumers*. Within this theme there are a number of subthemes, namely *Design*, *Price*, and *Function* - each having a somewhat different level of importance to the participants. Several minor factors also appear to influence the participants' decision-making process. These have been grouped as *Other* and they relate to whether the product is purchased for personal use or as an intended gift (Figure 5.2.). Figure 5.2 illustrates the relationship between *Expressive Consumers* and *Functional Consumers* indicating the importance of *Design*, *Price*, *Function*, and *Other*.

Figure 5.2. Theme One: *Expressive Consumers* and *Functional Consumers*



When purchasing SSPs *Expressive Consumers* look for creative value (i.e., design) in the product itself in the first instance. Price is of secondary importance in influencing their buying decision followed by the functionality of the product. Product function has the least significant effect on their choice of SSPs.

On the other hand, functionality of the product is the most influential aspect for *Functional Consumers*, as the name implies, when purchasing SSPs. Price maintains a secondary position in participants' decision-making followed by the product's design. Functional Consumer participants tend to have minimal interest in the design of the products when selecting SSPs, whereas this is an important factor to Expressive Consumer participants.

Therefore, *Design*, *Price*, and *Function* are the sub-themes that explained Expressive Consumers and Functional Consumer participants' SSPs purchasing behaviours particularly when the purchases are being made for personal use. Additionally, four product criteria factors emerged during the data analysis. These were *Brand Awareness*, *Peer Influences*, *Changes in Needs*, and *Suitability*, referred to as *Other* in the sub-themes. However, the significance of these factors varies across consumer decisions as will be discussed in the following sections.

5.1.1 Focus Group One

Expressive Consumers accounted for almost one quarter of participants in this age group with the remaining (participants) being *Functional Consumers*. Moreover, in this latter group there was a slight behavioural difference, that is, half of the Functional Consumer participants preferred functional SSPs for their own use and the other half tended to purchase mass production brands (e.g., Pilot, Pentel, Bic), that is, functional products that were used to satisfy basic everyday needs. This group nevertheless also indicated a requirement for SSPs to be used as gifts.

Both *Expressive Consumers* and *Functional Consumers* choice of SSPs was influenced by four factors, classified as sub-themes - *Design*, *Function*, *Price*, and *Other* as presented below in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2. Factors Influencing Expressive and Functional Consumer Participants:
Focus Group One

Purpose	Expressive Consumers	Functional Consumers
Personal use vs Gift	Design Price Function	Function Price Design
	Other - Changes in Needs - Brand Awareness - Peer Influences - Suitability	

5.1.1.1 Design

Participants used a number of descriptive nouns to describe *Design*. For example, two-thirds of the participants refer to design as "style, uniqueness, colour, cute", and "character"; the final third offered "outlook" and "pattern" as a means of expressing design.

SSPs, as opposed to regular generic stationery products (e.g., Bic), appeared to offer product differentiation when the Expressive Consumer participants made their purchase decision based on the design preference. They were attracted to the product's design which initially they reported as *liking* the product and expressed this as a means of driving their buying behaviour.

For example, an Expressive Consumer participant reported being attracted by the cute look of the product "...when I see something is cute I want it and I buy it." (female, 20); while others stated the product was liked due to the colour "I like Kimmidoll because it's colourful and eye catchy...I like it and buy it" (female, 21); and its uniqueness "I've got a lot of Hello Kitty and Winnie the Pooh...I just like it because it's unique" (female, 23).

Interestingly, it was also noted that product's design not only excited Expressive Consumer participants, but also captured Functional Consumer participants' attention first. Two-third of Functional Consumer participants reported liking the design of the particular SSPs when they first saw the product during the focus group. Design appeared to have the potential to influence their choice of products. However, whether

Functional Consumer participants intended to purchase the SSPs or not depended on the comparisons using other criteria:

[Livework] looks simple...I like simple. I will take a look inside and if it's good function I would probably [buy] it (female, 22). [WunYing Collection] design is special. The art is very alternative and traditional...it's attractive to me. Function seems to be fine...I may buy it (male, 22). I love Kikki.K I just know it and then like it. The design is very bold and simple...if I got extra money I will buy it (female, 22).

In this instance, product's design was reported to attract participant's attention, but then functional value and the price factor were involved in the final buying decision.

Moreover, ten Expressive and Functional Consumers participants' purchasing decisions were motivated by the products' appearance that suited their self-image. For example, their personality and preferences:

I like simple, minimal and not over the top...I really like Kikki.K. It's very designer, clean, minimal, simple but classy...it lets me add my personality onto it [and] because I like the design so it does reflect my personality. That's how it attracts [me] to buy it. I will clearly buy something that suits my personality. Kikki.K is my style (female, 20)...like clothes [people] express their personality through their clothes (female, 21).

I will buy any brands that is cute...[has] unique design, and colour I like... it's a part of me I like to get things that are different to others (female, 23). I will only buy [Kimmidoll] that I feel like it's more like me [such as] my favourite colour [and] bird prints (female, 21). I first see the outlook, is it cute, is it my favourite? [that is] colour, character and style (female, 20).

From the above responses, the first participant claimed simple design products represented her style and personality. This suggested that Kikki.K's simple overall design was selected to suit the participant's personality. On the other hand, participants who purchased products based on their strong personal preferences

sought stationery products that contained, for example, their favourite colour and character.

In other words, mismatched product presentation to participant's image tended to be avoided. For example, complicated looking products were of no interest to participants whose taste preference was for simple design product "[WunYing Collection] *is not my style, I don't like the design. I rather the stuff to look simple, I don't like too cluttered design...I like Kikki.K [because] it's simple*" (female, 22).

Similarly, products that offered colour or design choice that were not the participant's favourite were excluded to the extent that "*I would never go and buy any Kimmidoll item if I don't actually like...I wouldn't buy the brown one [or] the fans pattern*" (female, 21). Lastly, where there was an image or age misinterpretation these products were avoided, for example: "*I really like Kikki.K. It's not patronising it has more respect...but I feel like Smiggle is so patronising like the comic front they use like you are a kid*" (female, 23).

To conclude, in terms of design, the majority of the participants in this age-group matched their self-image with their chosen specialist stationery as a means of communicating *who they are* (e.g., their personality, preference and age).

5.1.1.2 Function

As opposed to Expressive Consumer participants, who were more influenced by the product design, product functioning was an important criteria for Functional Consumer participants. How effectively a product works and what it offers appeared to be the key to satisfying Functional Consumer participants' expectations. Other than using the word "*function*", most participants referred to "*reliability*". Also, "*comfort, quality*" and "*long lasting*" were occasionally used to explain the product's functional value by both Functional and Expressive Consumer participants.

It is worth noting that participants involved in this focus group were either full time employees or full time university students with part time work. Therefore, approximately half of Functional Consumer participants purchased SSPs on purpose to assist them in organizing their personal life:

I look for functional value. I like to buy diaries so it's easy for me to organize...Kikki.K has nice files and organizing material for people [who] start to work and want to organize their life (female, 22).

I like Kikki.K because they have very interesting way of helping you to organize your day like diary...There is one's like a calendar that helps you to change your habit in 21 days...so if you want to lose weight...it's what you have to do and how you gonna reward yourself, very interesting concept (female, 23).

According to the above responses, Kikki.K stationery products were not the usual functional stationery items, rather the difference was in the way they delivered the product values to the consumers. For example, the calendar was not just a calendar listing days/dates and months, instead more functions were added onto the product which translates and *talks* to the consumer - acting as a reminder or motivator to help consumers lose weight and maintain a healthy life style. These adding values were key motivating factors in participants' purchasing decision.

Moreover, half of Functional Consumer participants suggested that even though their decision was primarily based on product functional aspects, other criteria (i.e., price and product design) were also involved in their decision making evaluation:

Pentel rates 80% on function, 10% on price and another 10% on something else while Muji rates 70% on function, 20% on price and the last 10% on design...so we choose Muji because it works fine... better looking and cheaper than Pentle (Male, 22).

I like Muji because it's reliable...it writes well, cheap and simple...simple is the best design. It's [also] good value compared to other choices (Male, 22).

All product attributes were reportedly involved in participants' final purchasing decisions, for example, quality products, reasonable price, and suitable designs. Nevertheless, product functionality was preferred to other criteria by Functional Consumer participants:

On the other hand, functional value tended to have little effect on Expressive Consumer participants' decisions as the products may or may not be purchased for usage purpose as suggested: *"I don't use [SSPs] often enough to wear it out so I want the good [looking] one"* (female, 21)...*I just buy the unique pens to put in my collection, whether or not I use it depends..."* (female, 23). The creative value in product design was said to be significant in Expressive Consumer participants' choices.

5.1.1.3 Price

Price was the only factor that effectively influenced choices of SSPs in both Expressive and Functional Consumer participants. Whether the products would be purchased or not depended on price: *"When I walked into the shop... I found something I like...Ohh, it's really nice, how much is it?... if it's within what I'm willing to pay it's awesome"* (female, 20); and *"I like Kikki.K...it has a reasonable price for a good functioning item"* (female, 22).

It was reported by all participants that consumers buying intentions were more likely when the products were offered at reasonable prices as opposed to the anticipated product values, that is, either the creative or the functional value. This also means that if the product cost was in excess of what consumers were prepared to pay, purchasing behaviour can be postponed: *"Price is very important. If it's too expensive and not worthy, even though it's cute I won't buy it because I have a lot already"* (female, 20).

Therefore, to avoid unfavourable prices, a small number of participants who were born overseas reported purchasing SSPs from their home country due to the attractive prices (i.e., cheaper): *"I only buy [SSPs] when I go back to Asia [Taiwan] because it's really cheap there compare to here"* (female, 23).

Another reason why participants were price sensitive was because they often lost the items, as was suggested by almost half of Functional Consumer participants. As SSPs have added values (i.e., creative or functional value), they are priced higher than regular stationery products that offer minimal/standard values. Participants, therefore, also weighed between the price paid and the value they would get from it - and from how long they would get to use the product before losing it:

A pack of Papermate pens that I can get and throw away is good enough...cos stationery these days is very expensive...I've lost so many pens...so even when I go out and buy something like Smiggle pens and it costs me \$20 and I'll probably lose it the next day (female, 20 and 24).

This loss experience was significant as it could create an unfavourable demand toward SSPs. Some participants reported purchasing regular stationery brands over SSPs because there was no emotional connection (e.g., no effort put into owning the product) attached to the regular non-branded stationery; therefore it would not matter if they lost the item.

5.1.1.4 Other

The last sub-theme emerging from the influences on participants' purchasing decision is *Other*. This sub-theme included multi-factorial aspects, that is, *Changes in Needs*, *Brand Awareness*, *Peer Influences*, and *Suitability* - as identified by the participants in this age group. However, these factors may or may not be as significant as other sub-themes (i.e., *Design*, *Function* and *Price*) because some were not strongly evidenced by the majority of participants.

- a) *Changes in Needs*: Differences in participants' choice of products can be due to the changes in their needs. According to approximately half of Functional Consumer participants there were three reported factors involved in buying less SSPs for themselves. Firstly, as participants got older and moved onto the next stage in their life, their style, preferences, and needs also changed as the following exemplar reports:

I used Disney products when I was young...but when I turned to 14 I didn't use SSPs anymore because it doesn't impress me as it was when I was a child...I get myself a Pilot or Papermate...the shape of Papermate is quite comfortable with my hand and it's long lasting (male, 24).

Secondly, participants encountered different environments and situations (e.g., from high school to university) which led to different product requirements:

Papermate for me is just cheap, easy to hold and write and it wouldn't make my finger hurt...10 essays in 20 minutes [is] what stationery all about. It's not about the look like in high school..it's about doing your study (female, 24).

Now I'm studying architecture; I usually use Artline [because] it's appropriate for my course and I do a lot of drawing [so] I don't really look for SSPs now (female, 22).

Lastly, participants entering the workforce and therefore the product selection were in accordance with their new role, for example, as a professional worker:

I think up to certain point in your life, you use [Smiggle]...if you're working and you pull out these pens like I have a new pen...your boss gonna think you're weirdo or you don't take your job seriously or you are not a serious person (female, 23).

According to the above participant responses, stationery products have become a utilitarian product that serves everyday purposes. Thus, there was no reason for them to purchase SSPs. These changing needs in participants' lives would be significant for marketers as it could affect participants' buying intentions toward SSPs.

- b) *Brand Awareness*: Cumulatively, approximately one third of participants (in this focus group) reported that their product preferences and choices were influenced by the level of brand awareness. Participants were more likely to select familiar brands: *"When I was young I mainly [use] Disney and Kitty...even now I still like them...also it depends on what shows are on TV like cartoons"* (female, 20)...*I buy Disney and Kitty for my [younger] sister because I don't know many [other] brands... I get Muji for myself cos I've been using it for seven years... it's trustworthy for me"* (male, 22). These responses suggested that brand familiarity gave participants confidence in their product choices which in time also led to brand loyalty.

However, unfamiliar brands could present higher risk of being rejected since they were not widely recognized among participants "*Disney and Kitty you see often and you're familiar with the characters so you're more tempted to buy it...but those unfamiliar brands if you don't like the design and you don't know about it, you tend to leave it*" (female, 22). This response also suggests that product design was involved in evaluating unknown brands prior to purchasing decisions.

- c) *Peer Influences*: One-third of participants across this age group also shared their previous SSPs purchasing experiences. They reported purchasing specific products in order to avoid peer pressure and to feel a sense of belonging within their group:

In high school I had a surf brand bag and pencil case because it's normal and cool (female, 21)... it's cooler to have surf brand than K-mart brand...the real doggie kids have Woolworths and the cool kid have the latest Billabong...so it's normal to have it [surf brand] and not normal not to have it (female, 24).

According to the responses, it was identified that each stationery brand offered different images which could be transferred into enhancing participant's image (i.e., social self-image). That is, logo branded products equated to being the *in-crowd* (*cool kids*) versus supermarket brands were associated with less trendy people (*doggie kids*).

On the other hand, failing to gain a sense of belonging could lead to negative consequences, such as feeling isolated and insecure:

When I was in high school [if] something was popular I would get it and show to people...if I didn't have what my friends had, I would feel a bit left out...[but] now I use what I want (female, 22)...stationery in high school is all about fashion...you feel intimidated if you don't have what people have...what my friend had in school, I would have it but not now...I don't really care (female, 24).

However over time, participants developed their own strength and therefore peer pressure had no significant effect on their decision making.

- d) *Suitability*: This factor was associated with explaining participants' decisions when purchasing SSPs as gifts. The majority of the participants suggested SSPs for gift giving not only because of its differentiation values (i.e., creative, functional, and relatively costly), but also due to the emotional connection between giver and recipient.

I buy Kimmidoll for my elder cousin [26 years old]... she's bossy... likes to get thing done... so when she's at her study desk she prefers things that help calm her down and stay focus... [so] I think Kimmidoll is quite good at doing that for her...the design is quite simple compared to Disney stuff cos...its colour is too distracting (male, 24).

I got Kikki.K from my best friend...I feel like it's more special because I know it's more expensive compared to Bic. You can feel if someone buys you [SSPs] they care about you more in a way...there's a lot of thought that goes into the present (female, 23).

According to the above responses, it was suggested that in giving a SSP present that is positively received by the recipient, there is a two-fold benefit. That is, the giver's self-concept is strengthened (by being appreciated) and the receiver feels cared for.

Therefore, participants tended to purchase products that they believed would suit the recipients. This included the receiver's personality: "*Brand represents a person who I might buy for and what they like...for example, who has bubbly personality [may] like Winnie the Pooh*" (male, 24); their preferences: "*...depending on what they are into...I have a friend who is really into Kitty and has a strong passion for it so I will buy Kitty for her*" (female, 20); the person's age: "*I will buy Hello Kitty for little girl [and] Smiggle for young adults*" (female, 20); and known individual needs: "*...my friend starts to work in the office so I bought a paper from Kikki.K that has a weekly schedule and*

special features to suit what she needs" (female, 22). In conclusion, it was suggested that the *Suitability* factor played a significant role in influencing participants' purchasing decision for gift giving.

5.1.2 Focus Group Two

One-quarter of the participants in this age group (aged 13 - 15 years) were found to be *Expressive Consumers*, whereas the remainder were *Functional Consumers*. The following table illustrates the sub-themes that influenced Expressive and Functional Consumer participants' buying intention toward SSPs. (see Table 5.3.) While there were similarities to the Focus Group One, the difference was noted in the sub-group *Other*, that is, the absence in Changes in Needs.

Table 5.3. Factors Influencing Expressive and Functional Consumer Participants: Focus Group Two

Purpose	Expressive Consumer	Functional Consumer
Personal use vs Gift	Design Price Function	Function Price Design
	Other - Brand awareness - Peer influence - Suitability	

5.1.2.1 Design

The "*look, colour, character*" and "*patterns*" of the product were the most common descriptive words used when discussing SSPs' designs. As regular stationery items were perceived to be boring due to their minimalistic presentation style, Expressive Consumer participants' attention was readily drawn to SSPs offering distinctive designs:

Kimmidoll's design is nice...it's not boring and more interesting than this stationery [Bic]...I'd rather get cute stationery than boring stationery (female, 13)...like calculators are usually all flat and boring...[but] Smiggle calculators are nice...the shape and colours are different (female, 15).

According to the previous statements, Expressive Consumer participants were attracted to the different visual image of SSPs (i.e., Kimmidoll and Smiggle) including the shapes and colours. These product differentiation factors made SSPs stand out from regular stationery items leading to discernable product preferences in Expressive Consumer participants.

Moreover, Expressive Consumer participants were more likely to choose products to *fit* with their self-image. This included the following: Who they are/who they believe themselves to be, that is, a singularly focused individual not influenced by other people's thinking- *"I like Kitty because it's cute and quirky... people who use Hello Kitty will be more sure about themselves because they are not trying to follow the trend like Smiggle"* (female, 13); their age group (i.e., adolescence) - *"I used to like Princess and Winnie the Pooh and Mickey Mouse but as I grew up I use Kikki.K or Smiggle...I like Smiggle [because] it is more teenage and I'm teenage"* (female, 15); and what they like and/or dislike (e.g., colour, patterns, and characters) - *"I like products that have spot and dot patterns... I don't like yellow...I don't like WunYing because I have never seen it before. I don't know what those characters are supposed to be describing"* (Female, 15).

Products that failed to offer an identifiable favourable image were rejected by participants. In this instance, product as oppose to Disney's recognisable characters, WunYing stationery was not selected because participant did not know or understand the meaning associated with the cartoon characters. Hence this was linked to a lack of confidence in what the products had to offer.

Interestingly, two Functional Consumer participants reported being obsessive about SSPs when the products contained an image of their favourite super stars - *"I'm a MJ [Michael Jackson] fan. I will buy if they have a photo of MJ on notebook and stationery products otherwise I just [use] any pens. I don't fuss with other brands"* (female, 14), *"...same for me...I'm just interested in Twilight things"* (female, 13). In this case, Michael Jackson and Twilight identities were the stars who motivated these Functional Consumer participants to purchase SSPs. Hence, knowing what characters are favoured by consumers can be beneficial for marketers.

According to both Expressive and Functional Consumer participants' responses, it was concluded that half of participants in this age group tended to purchase the products that matched their self-image. This was interpreted as a way of individuals presenting themselves via their choice of products, for example, being independent; a Michael Jackson follower; or a fan of Twilight movies.

Lastly, the remaining Functional Consumer participants appeared to have minimal concerns relating to product design as their focal decision-making relied on product functionality, for example: *"I chose Muji because it's plain, simple and it's something I will use. It looks alright"* (male, 15); and *"I chose Kikki.K because it's quite appropriate for school, nice and clean, black and white"* (male, 14). From these statements, simplistic design was said to be closest to Functional Consumer participants' interests.

5.1.2.2 Function

Functional Consumer participants in this age group tended to use technology devices extensively in their everyday life (see Theme Five analysis), hence stationery products were more likely to be used at school, predominantly for writing tasks. Therefore, stationery products known for quality, trustworthiness, and appropriate use at school were preferred by Functional Consumer participants, resulting in less interest in the products' design:

I use Faber Castle or Stabilo [because] I can trust, it's a working pen and consistent ... I chose Muji because it looks like a brand that you can trust and it's popular [so] I guess they must work well (female, 14).

We have a check list for school that they want you to buy including the brand so I only get what they ask for... I chose this one [Kikki.K] because it's quite appropriate for school, nice and clean, black and white...I don't know what the brand is (Male, 14).

Usually I just grab whatever is there like Bic or Papermate... they are actually not bad, cheap and good for school...I don't really think quirky brand like Hello Kitty are good products...I don't use them (Male, 15).

According to the responses, Functional Consumer participants from this age group commonly sought functional value from quality stationery brands (e.g., Stabilo, Faber Castel) and regular brands (e.g., Bic, Papermate). Only specialist stationery brands (i.e., Muji, Kikki.K) that have the image of being functional products, by presentation and reputation, were selected. However, in claiming that eccentric stationery brands such as Hello Kitty gave an impression of minimal quality products, one participant gave this as the reason for not purchasing it.

Product functionality, on the other hand, was of little concern to Expressive Consumer participants: *"I don't really care about quality as long as it's not gonna fall apart in my hand after a week...[quality] doesn't really matter because [SSPs are] more like fashionable things"* (female, 13). SSPs appeared to have aesthetic value, thus the look of product was more important than its designed function in Expressive Consumer participants' purchasing decisions.

5.1.2.3 Price

With the exception of one Expressive Consumer participant whose parents purchased whatever she wanted *"...since I only buy four times a year [which is] not very often, they just buy what I want"* (female, 15), price significantly affected the majority of participants' SSPs purchasing decisions. The following factors were given as the key reasons why price was crucial for both Expressive and Functional Consumer participants.

Firstly, SSPs are more expensive than other regular stationery items. Therefore an Expressive Consumer participant who purchased the products for personal use had a definite budget and purchasing behaviour as indicated: *"I don't buy SSPs that often...I get it when I've got some money"* (female, 13).

Finally, the concept that most Functional Consumer participants tended to lose SSPs, or the items were stolen at school, affected the demand for SSPs:

Bic and Papermate are actually not bad, cheap and good...I think the ones for school should be cheaper in case you lose them (male, 14; and agreed by two males, 15).

I would rather to buy Smiggle because it looks really cool but I lose more stationery so I don't want to spend more money on something I will lose...if it's Smiggle or something expensive people at my school steal it... so people don't bother to get this stuff but Bic [you can] buy over and over again [because] it's cheap (female, 13 and 14).

This loss experience significantly impacted on Functional Consumer participants' buying decisions as they all intended to fulfill the need for stationery products with the regular stationery.

5.1.2.4 Other

Expressive and Functional Consumer participants' SSPs buying intention were also affected by the three factors emerged under this sub-theme: *Brand awareness*, *Peer Influences* and *Suitability*.

- a) *Brand Awareness*: Half of participants suggested that their purchasing decisions were influenced by their level of brand awareness. They reported that their most effective decisions were made based on popular well-advertised products: "I really liked the Finding Nemo movie so probably I'll buy [a Finding Nemo] pen...but if I hadn't seen the movie I wouldn't want it...the movie and the show make people want to buy their products" (female, 14); and "I like Twilight because of the movie...I've got a blanket, poster, books and pens" (female, 13). Movies appeared to be an effective marketing technique that increased participants' desire for related-movie products, including stationery products.

On the other hand, participants may seek more product-related information (e.g., product presentation and brand popularity) to evaluate unfamiliar brands/choices: "...I've never bought it before but I chose Muji because it looks like a brand that you can trust and it's popular [so] I guess they must work well" (female, 14). The purchasing intention was more likely if the available information was sufficient to enable the decision. In this instance Functional Consumer participants were satisfied with the quality image of Muji.

b) *Peer Influences*: Participants' decision for SSPs was influenced in a number of ways by their peer group as the following exemplars demonstrate. One Expressive Consumer participant claimed that friends were the greatest source of product information:

The society around you influences you...before if I didn't like Smiggle but everyone's got it I wouldn't just buy it for that...but since I didn't know what Smiggle was until I came to Australia and my friend showed me...well that's how I know it now and I like it because I like it (female, 15).

This statement suggests that friends acted as information sources by way of introducing the participant to the brand (i.e., Smiggle). However, the final decision was based on the participant's likes and dislikes.

Another Expressive Consumer participant added that even though friends may not directly influence choices of products, there was greater confidence in the decision to buy a product when others were using it: *"I like Hello Kitty because it's cute and quirky and also lots of my friends have it which make it slightly less quirky"* (female, 13).

Lastly, two Functional Consumer participants shared their experiences with SSPs in their younger years. The following statements indicated that they related this to having a sense of belonging to a group at that time which was a major reason for purchasing particular branded SSPs:

I used to buy a lot of surf brand [products] like bags, pencil case... so people can see it...in primary school all the friends use it as well...like the reason is a sense of belonging. If it didn't have a brand on it I wouldn't buy it...but if it's from Target I probably wouldn't want it... now I don't mind if it doesn't have a brand on it (female, 13 and 14).

These earlier purchasing behaviours created confidence by providing participants with connectedness within their social groups. Currently however, this peer pressure no longer plays a significant role in their decision-making.

- c) *Suitability*: Half of the participants in this age group viewed SSPs as ideal for gift giving due to the values associated with the products, for example, creative value and relatively high price. Therefore, they tended to purchase the products that matched the recipient's personality, age, and preferences as suggested in the following responses:

I buy Smiggle or Kikki.K for my friends because they're more for high school kids...it depends on who you buying it for and the age too...like a punk person will probably [prefer] black stationery products [and] you won't buy boys a Barbie... you'd probably buy them Superman (female, 15).

I will buy Smiggle because most people like to collect them (female, 14).
If I buy for people I usually try the recognized brand because you know they gonna like it so it's safe to buy Smiggle (male, 15).

Comments from the first participants suggested that knowing the recipient's personality and age was vital when selecting a present because most receivers preferred product's that fit with *who they are*. For example, most boys would prefer Superman over Barbie stationery products. The other participants were more likely to purchase well-known brands and brands associated with a high customer preference because of the perception that recipients would also like the gifts.

5.1.3 Focus Group Three

All of the participants in this age group (aged eight to 11 years) were found to be *Expressive Consumers*, that is, no Functional Consumer behaviours were discerned from the responses. However, according to the information given by participants, it was determined that there were two somewhat different behaviours among the

Expressive Consumers groups. These behavioural responses are referred to as Buyers and Users and the major difference between them was the product price factor.

Over half of the participants in this age group were **Buyers**, that is, they *purchased* and *used* the products. Therefore, price played a significant role in their decision-making. The remaining participants were **Users**, that is, the products were for personal *use* only; hence product price was not a consideration. User participants, therefore, did not purchase SSPs, rather they tended to receive the items as gifts on special occasions (e.g., birthdays and Christmas time) from family members. Also, their preferences including brand, colour, and product characters were influenced by the giver's buying decision "...my mum buys me what she decides...and I'm ok with it" (male, 9), while others, for example, may tell their parents what they liked and wanted "...can I have Smiggle for my birthday?" (males, 9-10).

Overall, Expressive Consumer participants' decisions and product preferences were influenced by a number of factors, designated as sub-themes, that is, *Design*, *Function*, *Price*, and *Other*. Table 5.4 illustrates these factors.

Table 5.4. Factors Influencing Expressive Consumer Participants: Focus Group Three

Purpose	Expressive Consumers	
Personal use vs Gift	Buyers	Users
	Design Price Function	Design Function
	Other: - Peer Influences - Brand Awareness - Suitability	

5.1.3.1 Design

SSPs "*colour, look*" or "*shape*" were the most common descriptive words used by the participants during this focus group. "*Cute, smell, character*" and "*size*" were also stated a number of times in describing the overall product design. Product design was the most significant criterion among Buyer and User participants when judging product likes and dislikes. All participants agreed that SSPs offered product

differentiation as SSPs stand out against "*boring*" regular stationery. Their comments took on a familiar tone:

It's cool to have [SSPs] rather than the plain pens...they are boring (females, 10)...they're [SSPs] awesome; everyone likes it. It's not like ordinary stuff... it's appealing...attractive...and pretty (female, 10)...Smiggle looks good [because] the colour really stands out...looks different...it's not boring (males, 9-10).

Moreover, from their descriptions majority of the participants in this age group preferred products with similar values to themselves, that is, they tended to choose products that offered in their favourite colours and design "[Muji] *looks cool and good quality. It's blue and I really like blue*" (female, 10); and "*I like [Smiggle] because it looks interesting and it's puzzle. I like puzzle it keeps you active...I like normal design [that] looks more interesting than the plain one*" (male, 10).

Also, other participants added "*I like Kimmidoll because it's colourful [versus] Bic - it's boring and dull*" (female, 8); and "*I like Badz Badz [because] it's black like evil penguin. It's awesome and looks bad. I don't like Kitty because she is skirty [and] I never wear skirt. I don't like Princess too...I hate everything girly and pinky [because] I'm a tomboy... Aliens are cool*" (female, 10). Participants were not impressed with the products that did not relate to what they liked and *who they are*. As stated above, the first participant claimed to like colourful products over the plain "*dull*" stationery. On the other hand, the second participant preferred things that were associated with the dark side, such as black, whereas brighter coloured products with gentler tones were to be avoided because they did not suit *who she is* - tomboy.

Lastly, participants reported age-related influences as the following statements suggest: "*Hello Kitty is girly...when I was a baby I used to like it and it's really embarrassing. I wouldn't use it now*" (male, 9); and "*Happy House is for little kids 5-8 years old. I wouldn't buy it because it's too girly for me. I would buy more like boy stuff*" (male, 11). These participants were not only concerned with the choice of product to suit themselves (i.e., girly personality products versus boy consumers), but also to suit their age group.

According to the above analysis, it is concluded that products that reflected participants' self-image, including their preferred colour, design, personality, and age were more likely to be selected and vice versa.

5.1.3.2 Function

The second most crucial factor that influenced participants' product evaluation process was product function. Almost without exception, Buyer and User participants referred to product functionality as "*quality*" which included how well the product works, durability, long lasting, and usefulness. To persuade participants' decision-making, SSPs must not only look attractive, but also work effectively because stationery products were heavily used in their day-to-day activities (e.g., writing) particularly at school.

... if it's [SSP] cool...and got colour but it didn't work well like in a day run out... I wouldn't buy it again... even though it's all decorative, what's the point if it's gonna sit in your room...Smiggle is good [because] it's appealing [and] they don't break in two seconds. They work well [but] only one thing that let them down is pencil...it's very bad at sharpening (nine female participants, 8-10).

If it's not good quality it's not gonna be durable and you need something durable [for school] (males, 10)...Smiggle is good quality (male, 9).

All participants agreed that SSPs must have a good balance between how it looks and the expected quality, otherwise unfavorable demand could be created. In this instance, Smiggle was the *right* choice from the majority's perception.

5.1.3.3 Price

As User participants did not purchase the products for themselves, price had no bearing on their decision-making, whereas Buyer participants' decisions were significantly affected by product prices. This section analysis only involved the discussion among Buyer participants since price played a vital role in their choices.

Buyer participants reported receiving SSPs as birthday's gifts and on other occasions from their family. However, they also purchased SSPs for themselves as their parents tended to buy regular less attractively presented stationery for daily use purposes:

Sometimes my mum buy [SSPs] if I need it, but if it's something I just want my mom won't buy me (female, 10)...you just [have to] save money... my mum won't get me Smiggle...she'll get like a boring brand because it's cheaper (female, 10)... she doesn't really think that we need it but we still like it (female, 10)..so I buy [SSPs] when I got money from my birthday (female, 10)...or when we've done jobs...cos our room is very messy (female, 10).

According to the above responses, in parents' perspective, the reasons for not purchasing SSPs regularly were because there was no difference in using regular or SSPs other than SSPs are more expensive. Therefore, Buyer participants had to save up the money, for example, from their birthday or after housework, to purchase their own SSPs.

Due to participants' limited financial ability, SSPs values (e.g., product attractiveness and quality) were compared with price paid to ease their purchasing decision:

If this one [is] \$10 and there is another exact same thing but it wasn't Kitty and it's \$5 I would get it because it's cheaper...I probably wouldn't waste all my money on something that looks similar (female, 10). There are lots of brand that copy Smiggle and they're basically exact the same but cheaper... so I'd probably get it because I don't care about the brand name...I want to save money but it may not be [as] good quality (females, 10).

These Buyer participants were price-sensitive. Imitation brands were chosen because they were more economical even though some aspects of product values may be sacrificed, such as, brand recognition and quality perception. This factor also suggested that there was little loyalty among Buyer participants in this age group.

5.1.3.4 Other

Buyer and User participants' product choices related to *Peer Influences*, *Brand Awareness* and *Suitability* factors forming the sub-theme *Other*.

- a) *Peer Influences*: As SSPs were readily visible consumer items, approximately two-thirds of the participants in this age group reported two different ways of having their SSPs purchasing decision influenced by their peers. Firstly, participants preferred popular stationery brands as the products enhanced their social self-image (i.e., trendy image) and provided a sense of group belonging - *"It's kind of a big hit at school and lots of people have Smiggle... it's really cool if your other friends have it...it's kind of in-trend...you feel like you have an actual brand that everyone is into...it's like we are in the same group"* (females, 10).

These social value concepts also created higher desire for particular stationery brands, that is, Smiggle, in this instance - *"I'll probably buy more Smiggle because it's really popular now. Everyone is having it in my class and I'm the only one who doesn't... I don't feel bad but just wanna be in trend too"* (male, 11); and *"I buy [SSPs] because lots of my friends buy it...if you don't...you feel a little left out because everyone has it"* (female, 10). These factors suggested that failing to own the SSPs led participants to feel excluded.

Finally, participants claimed that showing-off new popular products to their friends not only enhanced their social relationships, but also allowed them to exchange product information which could be useful in their future purchase intentions: - *"You may not see it but they do so they show it to you [and] you can get it... it's like you got introduced new stuff"* (female, 10). This process demonstrated the potential to spread information quickly such that sooner or later it would become almost impossible to avoid people (from school) getting the same products - *"... my friend first had a new pencil case at school and then I'm gonna get it and then the next day I came to school and everyone had it [so] I didn't wanna get that anymore"* (female, 10).

This experience, however, was reported as being less satisfying because participants would not want to use/own the same products as others *"I feel a bit weird that we all have it. I don't like everyone else have what I like...I like to feel special with my own stationery"* (female, 10); and *"If someone's got something and you really want it you might think well maybe I should get something a bit different so we are not copying them"* (female, 10). Therefore, the suggested solution was to purchase items less like their friends' original ideas.

- b) *Brand Awareness*: A small number of participants reported that high brand awareness and strong media advertising had a greater impact on their choice of SSPs - *"I bought Disney [Finding Nemo] pen because I like the movie"* (male, 9). Movies played an important role in strengthening Disney brand awareness as well as creating demand for other products that were associated with cartoon characters (e.g., stationery products). Interestingly, these brand awareness aspects were similar to factors identified in Focus Group Two.

On the other hand, unknown brands were less beneficial in assisting participant's decision making when little or no information was accessible to them as the following statements report: *"I didn't choose Hello Kitty and Kikki.K because I don't know anyone in my class using them... so I don't know much about it"* (female, 10). Hence, in the absence of available product information participant lacked purchasing confidence.

- c) *Suitability*: All Buyer participants recommended SSPs for gift idea as the products are more aesthetically pleasing: *"[SSP] is better and looks more attractive than this pen [Bic]... If you bought a Bic pen they gonna like OK, but if you got them like an amazing, awesome, decorated pens and fancy stationery it will be more WOW like you're putting effort into the present"* (female, 10). However, User participants (in this group) had no thoughts of purchasing SSPs as gifts because they were not in the habit of purchasing the products.

It was reported that Buyer participants tended to purchase stationery products that they believed would suit their friends' wants and preferences: "[We] buy *Smiggle* for [our] friends because they are awesome, colourful [and] everyone likes it... lots of people are into *Smiggle*...they can show at class..." (females, 8-10). *Smiggle* appeared to be the dominant brand for gift ideas among participants. The reasons given were because *Smiggle* was liked; its designs are different from regular stationery items; and they are considered to be a prestigious products worth showing off in public.

5.1.4 Outcome: Theme One *Expressive Consumers* and *Functional Consumers*

The main theme, *Expressive Consumers* and *Functional Consumers*, resulting from this study revealed that the participants across the three different age groups made SSPs purchasing decisions predominantly based on a comparison between the perceived values (attached to the products) versus the *price* paid. There were different degrees of significance associated with the product values and participants' decisions. For example, according to their personality, individual preferences, needs and wants. *Expressive Consumer* participants were more likely to be motivated by the creativity value within the product *design* such that it emphasised their self-concept. Whereas *Functional Consumer* participants favoured the additional benefits associated with product multi-*functionality* in a way that satisfied their needs and also related to their self-concept (e.g., a role at school or in work environment). These results supported the previous studies by Oh (2000); Sirgy and Su (2000); and Pappu, Quester, and Cooksey (2005) which found that consumer purchasing intentions were positive when consumer values (i.e., subjective value or functional attributes) were recognised and these values were greater than financial outlay.

An additional price-related factor for almost half of Focus Group Three (FG3) participants in this study is that product costs were not significant in SSPs decisions as parents made the purchases - usually as gifts - therefore, the price did not interest them. This finding was somewhat consistent with Lindstrom (2004) and Ross and Harradine's (2004) research suggested that children influenced parents' purchasing decisions relative to the products that they wanted, however costs information was not determined in these earlier studies.

Nonetheless, this current research found that the hidden values in product design, functionality and relative high price were significant in participant decisions across age groups when SSPs were purchased for gift giving. Participants tend to select the product that offers similar value to the recipients (e.g., *suitability*, personality, preferences, needs) to ensure favourable responses. Additionally, the final factor influencing participants' SSPs choices in all age groups was *brand awareness*. It was found that unfamiliar brands were less likely to be selected whereas well-known brands were preferable due to confident choices. This finding supports the outcomes from other studies that examined the firm relationship between brand awareness and positive consumer decision-making (Esch, et al., 2006; Freling & Forbes, 2005; Macdonald & Sharp, 2000).

Conversely, across the age-groups (in this study) variations emerged in the factors that influenced the participants' SSPs purchasing decisions. *Peer* pressure plays a major role in the choice of SSPs among FG3 participants. This finding supports Harradine and Ross's (2007) study which determined that younger children were more motivated by the need for group belonging to satisfy their self-esteem. This peer influence, however, was moderately significant in Focus Group Two (FG2) participant decisions, while peers had little or no impact on the participants in Focus Group One (FG1) - due to their independent abilities. These results supported an adolescents' decision making investigation by Calvert (2008) and Kim, Rhee, and Yee (2008) that suggested older tweens' product choices were influenced by *what to buy* information from their friends and from imitating favourite celebrity images. The FG1 finding was also consistent with Seock and Sauls's (2008) research outcomes that examined the independency in individual buying behaviours.

Finally, *changes in needs* were the only factors identified influencing FG1 participants' SSPs purchasing decisions. This was evidenced by the experiences participants in this group gave relative to various situations and environments where the different needs for specific products could be required. For example, transitioning from high school to university society and entering the professional workforce. Hence this finding concurred with previous studies by Phau and Lau (2000) and Fennis and Pruyn (2007) that has also concluded that changes in lifestyles, social and

financial positions, and in an expected role (i.e., self-concept) led to variations in consumer purchasing patterns.

5.2 Theme Two: *Individuality Influences Preferences*

Theme Two, *Individuality Influences Preferences*, emerged from the participants responses to the inquiries associated with research objective two: To observe consumers' views toward SSPs and to determine brand personality preferences in each age group.

Having been shown a variety of SSPs, (i.e., 11 in total as listed in Appendix E), with the aim of choosing one or more liked and/or disliked items, the participants used their own words to describe the item. In responding to these requests, and according to J. L. Aaker's (1997) research, the relationship between the participants' perceptions of the brands, that is, product image/personality perceptions, and this author's Dominant Brand Personality (DBP) factors was determined. This interpretation of participants' perceptions allowed for factors that contributed to the most popular choices, for example, Kikki.K and Smiggle, and the least preferred SSPs brands to be identified across the different age groups in this study.

An illustration of participants' identified perceptions of specialist stationery brand personality factors is presented in Tables 5.5 and 5.6. These tables offer a visual perspective of the conceptual relationship between the individual stationery brands, and the participants' perceptions of the brands. The latter, for example, was derived from the participants' perceptions of product design, price, promotional marketing techniques, and target market. From these responses the DBP factors were determined (as depicted under the heading by the same name) and the specialist stationery brands were ranked.

5.2.1 Focus Group One

The most popular and the least preferred brand personality in SSPs have been summarised, identified and listed in Table 5.5. A full version of the table is available in Appendix I (I). In total there were eight brands selected by participants in this age group (aged 18 years and over), their perceptions ranged from Simplistic to Artistic, and Likable and Exciting were among the identified DBP factors.

Table 5.5. Specialist Stationery Brand Personality Description: Focus Group One

Brand name	Participants' Brand Perceptions (responses)	Dominant Brand Personality Factors	Rank
Kikki.K	Organized, simple, functional, clean, minimal, classy	Simplistic Organised	The most selected brands 1st
Kimmidoll	Clean and simple, original/oriental/tradition, characters, colourful, girly, collecting, nice, cute	Simplistic Likable	
Smiggle	Fun/not boring/functional toy/entertaining, colourful, scented, creative	Exciting	2nd
	<i>Negative perception:</i> Not creative, not good quality, not functional, no style. Less individual value	Disagreeable	
Disney	Disney characters, fairytale, original, classic, animation cartoon, colourful	Likable	3rd
Muji	Simplicity, plain, clear, cheap, affordable, quality	Simplistic	
WunYing Collection	Artistic, original/traditional/vintage/oldie/antique, professional, individualism <i>Negative perception:</i> Cluttered and confusing (design), unfamiliar characters	Artistic	
Hello Kitty	Character, nice, cute, childish, and colourful	Likable	4th
Livework	Simple, unique, alternative design	Simplistic	
Other brands	No information given by participants	Not been selected	

5.2.1.1 Most Preferred Branded Product

Kikki.K and Kimmidoll were the most popular specialist stationery brands as distinguished from the range of brands. Each of the former named products was selected by five participants. From the responses relating to Kikki.K support for the DBP factors was elicited, that is, Simplistic and Organised brand personality factors. The following is an example of participant's responses:

[Kikki.K products] are simple, nice and clean...a very organized person or micro-manager who wants to manage every detail in their life [would] probably buy it (female, 23).

What I like about Kikki.K is its design. It's clean and minimal, simple but classy... [It] is really for organized oriented people [who are] over 20 years old, more likely to be female (female, 20).

Kikki.K markets very well; they have nice files and organizing materials for people [who] start to work [or who] want to organize their life [such as] office ladies, mothers, and housewives (female, 22).

Data analysis of the above exemplars determined that Kikki.K's simple product design reinforced its Simplistic brand personality, and the functionality of the products provided a representation of an Organised personality factor. In applying DBPs Simplistic and Organised personality factors to stationery products it was concluded that these items would be of interest to younger female adults (e.g., participants in this focus group), managers, mothers and housewives in the selection of particular products, for example, Kikki.K.

Similarly, participants' responses indicated Kimmidoll's design was indicative of a Simplistic personality factor. Also, according to the participants the symbolic Kimmidoll characters (e.g., the characteristic meaning associated with these Japanese dolls) represented a DBP Likable personality factor. This factor contributed to their choice of stationery products as the following statements indicate:

...because [Kimmidoll's] design is quite simple... it can be applied to anyone (female, 20)...I like something simple and traditional [and] Kimmidoll is one of these...There are a lot of dolls to choose from and I think people who buy [Kimmidoll] like collecting them (female, 21).

...it has different styles, colours and costumes [which] represent something differently like *hope* and *luck* so you can choose your character...it's more than just a doll (male, 22).

[Kimmidoll has] nice packaging and combines Japanese names and meaning for the person who have [the] same value that is written down on the

description so you can feel like that person has a similar characteristic to the doll (female, 22).

The meaning associated with Kimmidoll supported participants' purchasing decision particularly as there was a significance attached to each doll, for example, *hope* and *luck*.

While indicating that the Kimmidoll market was broad, participants' responses suggested that in purchasing items from this range, having DBP Simplistic and Likable personality factors themselves was a contributing factor.

5.2.1.2 Second Preferred Branded Product

The second most frequently chosen brands were Smiggle and Disney with the endorsement from four participants for each of the brands. Smiggle was said to have favourable and unfavourable brand personality traits - as illustrated below. The overall analysis of these traits, plus the participants' descriptions of the product, had been combined to represent DBP Exciting and Disagreeable personality factors as the following comments suggest:

Smiggle is fun, funky, colourful and cute. It is a functional toy...it's entertaining...it makes life fun!... I like Smiggle because it's clever [and] it hasn't been done before. They've put lots of thought into the product (female, 20, 24 and male, 24).

You can tell certain people who are into Smiggle [that is] enthusiastic artists versus book keepers - those people are organized [and] boring...they have things for purpose...people who buy Smiggle wouldn't be super business oriented - more likely fashionable (female, 21).

Participants perceived Smiggle to be fun and entertaining due to product presentation and related concepts. Participants who were fashionable and less business-focused were more likely to like Smiggle. Therefore, the Exciting brand personality factor was most suitably represented in Smiggle brand/products.

On the other hand, approximately one-third of participants in this age group perceived Smiggle to relate to the Disagreeable personality factor:

I don't think Smiggle is that great. It's not creative enough, just different colours...I wouldn't buy it...Aussie products are plain (female, 23; male, 22)...I don't find it's functional...it's not handy, not professional, not looking very good and no style. I don't like it...I actually hate it (male, 22).

I have an image that [Smiggle] is not good quality by the way they sell it. Smiggle shops are so overcrowded you don't know what you are looking at. They don't value the individual product [it's] more like quantity rather than quality (female, 22).

In contrast with the previous comment, the latter comments suggested that there was a perception that Smiggle products lack creativity, functionality, quality, and overall value. Hence, Smiggle products were not chosen by some participants.

Unlike Smiggle's brand personality (i.e., Exciting), there were dominant claims to support Disney's Likable personality factors as reported in the following responses:

Talking about Disney, I think of Disney characters and fairytales. It's pretty childish but those are very classic...I like some of Disney animation cartoons (male, 22).

I really like Winnie the Pooh. The design is cute and original. I also like to watch the Pooh cartoons...I guess people who buy Disney are those who still like Disney characters like me (female, 22).

Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse and Winnie the Pooh are so cute...I think Disney characters are loved by any age groups (female, 23).

The DBP Likable personality factors was found in the classic Disney characters, such as Winnie the Pooh, Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse, and the cartoon animations.

Overall, participants also suggested that Disney products would appeal to any age group particularly younger age group and loyal Disney followers.

5.2.1.3 Third Preferred Branded Product

Muji and WunYing Collection ranked the third in the preferred stationery brands as each brand was selected by a quarter of the participants. The DBP Simplistic personality of Muji was implied as basic, that is, minimal design, reasonable price and standard quality:

I think whoever buys Muji is a simple, easy person, not fussy with anything like me I don't care much..I buy Muji because it's cheap, good quality and its simplicity is the best design (male, 22)...[Muji] is more for 15-22 years old people who don't mind having the same stuff as others...not like kids... they tend to mind a lot. Muji doesn't have much design, it's cheap and so so quality...it's good enough (male, 22).

Muji products were more likely to be appreciated by participants who were not into decorative products, but rather to be motivated by DBP Simplistic product values, including standard looks, price and quality.

On the other hand, WunYing Collection artwork leads to a perception of DBP Artistic personality as suggested following:

The art work is attractive to me...WunYing's design is very old, traditional, alternative, and antique...it's more for professional people or [who have] high degree of individualism, have their own design and thinking [probably] 25 years old and above (male, 22).

WunYing's design is very vintage and oldie (female, 22)...people who buy [WunYing] will really love it, you wouldn't buy it unless you love it...it suits quirky, artistic people who don't want anyone else to have it...but I like it (female, 21).

[WunYing] characters [may be] more rejecting [if] you don't know the character whereas Disney and Kitty you see often and you're familiar with the characters so you're more tempted to buy it... but for someone who like design and are into WunYing's design they will be happy to buy the product (female, 22).

Participants emphasized that WunYing Collection's traditional design attracted those who were into this typical art due to the strong semblance of individuality. In contrast, these products could be rejected by others in response to its Artistic personality related factors, that is, its distinctive design and unfamiliar characters.

5.2.1.4 Least Preferred Branded Product

Hello Kitty and Livework were each selected as preferred stationery items by two participants from this age group. The DBP Likable personality, represented in the lively Hello Kitty character, was the key attraction that motivated participants to purchase the products: *"Hello Kitty is very cute. I like Kitty since I was young and I still like it"* (female, 23); and *"I still buy Hello Kitty because I like the character. Kitty is just cute"* (female, 20).

On the other hand, Livework was said to have similar personality to Kikki.K, that is, the DBP Simplistic personality factor according to its product design resemblance: *"I don't really know this brand... [Livework] looks simple and similar to Kikki.K so I would probably buy it"* (female, 22); and *"I have never seen them before...but I like the solid colour and not much pattern of it... just simple"* (male, 22). Participants were convinced by the simple product design of Livework. However, it was concluded that the reason for this brand not getting as much attention as Kikki.K among participants was because participants had little awareness of the brand.

5.2.1.5 Non-selected Branded Product

Across this focus group no comments were made with regard to the remaining brands stationery products. These products included several retail outlet branded items (e.g., Happy House).

5.2.1.6 Preliminary Conclusion

According to a number of participants' endorsements, it was concluded that brand personalities preference in this age group are Simplistic, Likable, Organized, Exciting, and Artistic.

5.2.2 Focus Group Two

Brand personality preferences were not determined in this age group as there were wide inconclusive variations in the participants' choice of SSPs. For example, five SSPs brands were involved in the discussion and each brand was selected by one or two participants. Also, three participants did not indicate any SSPs as their preferred product. It was concluded that limitation resulted insufficient number of participants engaged in the focus group - as stated in Chapter Four.

5.2.3 Focus Group Three

The following table lists the most popular to the least preferable brand personality factors associated with SSPs. (see Table 5.6.) Full version of the table is available in Appendix I (II). In total six specialist stationery brands were selected by the participants (aged eight to 11 years) during the focus group.

Table 5.6. Specialist Stationery Brand Personality Description: Focus Group Three

Brand name	Participants' Brand Perceptions (responses)	Dominant Brand Personality Factors	Rank
Smiggle	Colourful, scented/smell nice, different/look interesting/design, funny/not boring, creative	Exciting	1st selected
Hello Kitty	Cute, Kitty, girly, colourful, sweet, collection	Likable	2nd
Disney	Characters (Mickey, Minnie Mouse, Pooh), colourful, cute, well known/famous, funny, creative		
Kimmidoll	Cute, collecting dolls, nice, colourful		
Kikki.K	Useful, good quality, arty, pretty	Competent	3rd
Muji	Good quality, simple, different looking - see through		
Other brands	No information given by participants	Not been selected	

5.2.3.1 Most Preferred Branded Product

In this age group, Smiggle was the most favoured stationery brand as indicated by three-quarters of participants. DBP Exciting personality factor appeared best able to describe Smiggle according to participants' responses:

I like Smiggle because it's colourful and funny...it looks interesting like this one has a puzzle in it... it has a nice design and it's fun... I can play with it...like I can write a word upside down with the calculator [and] I like to press it because it's soft (males, 8-10).

Everyone my age loves Smiggle because it's appealing...they have lots of decorations, and different colours to choose...it's scented which is very nice...Smiggle is different, how it's designed is not like any boring one [stationery products]...People who buy Smiggle are happy persons who likes fun stuff and have lots of friends [and] aged from six to 12... sort of like my age (females, 8-10).

Participants reported they were attracted to Smiggle's product design, colour and smell. For example, a maze pen was visually more interesting than the regular pen; variation in product colours allowed participants to choose their favourite ones; and scented-aromas distinguished Smiggle products from the others. All of these factors were associated with DBP Exciting personality and informed participants' preferences. Also, from their responses was concluded that Exciting personality could be linked to participants who were socially active among their peer group.

5.2.3.2 Second Preferred Branded Product

Hello Kitty, Disney and Kimmidoll were the second most preferred brands as indicated by one-third of the participants. These brands were strongly associated with DBP Likable personality factors according to the brand characters:

I like Hello Kitty because it's cute and I like collecting it (females, 10-11)...I like Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse...they're very cute...Winnie the Pooh is cute and colourful...Finding Nemo is very funny...I think whoever buys Disney products are those who like Disney characters (females, 10; male, 10).

Kimmidoll is not like ordinary products...it's colourful and it's nice to collect...there're a lot of them but you can buy the favourite one (females, 10-11).

It appeared that participants selected Hello Kitty, Disney, and Kimmidoll according to their favourite characters, such as Kitty, Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse, Pooh Bear, Nemo and individual Kimmidoll. The character preferences related to cuteness and colourful presentation. Additionally, participants suggested that purchasers of these brands would be those who liked the characters and possibly tended to collect them.

5.2.3.3 Least Preferred Branded Product

Approximately a quarter of the participants in this age group selected Kikki.K and Muji which made them the least preferred specialist stationery brands items. The positive perception of quality products relative to these brands led to the endorsement of DBP Competent brand personality factor.

Kikki.K seems to be good quality because it looks pretty firm and the ink doesn't run out quick...it is useful and looks pretty... (female, 10; male, 11).

I chose Muji because it looks really good quality...it's nice and different [because] you can see through...it's clear and got colour inside it...it's plain but look more interesting than the regular stationery (females, 10).

Kikki.K and Muji's appearance, that is, simple and minimal design led participants to the concept of higher quality products.

5.2.3.4 Non-selected Branded Product

Across this focus group no comments were made with regard to the remaining brands stationery products. These products included several retail outlet branded items (e.g., WunYing Collection).

5.2.3.5 Preliminary Conclusion

According to the data analysis, it was concluded that DBP Exciting brand personality is the most preferred by participants this age group, followed by DBP Likable and Competent personality factors.

5.2.4 Outcome: Theme Two *Individuality Influences Preferences*

As this research was based on the participants' perceptions associated with brand personality in SSPs, most of the emergent DBP factors are not entirely consistent with previous research as there is a dearth of studies specifically related to this topic. However, the factors that emerged from this study, that is, Exciting and Competent brand personality, are aligned to the Brand Personality Scale suggested in J. L. Aaker's (1997) brand personality study.

This study's second theme, *Individuality Influences Preferences*, revealed that the identified brand personality preferences in each age group varied according to differences in product values as sought by participants (and discussed in Theme One). The most noticeable difference between the two age groups was that FG1 participants appeared to be attracted to the Simplistic personality factor in SSPs (e.g., Kikki.K and Kimmidoll). On the other hand, FG3 participants were more interested in Smiggle products due to the Exciting brand personality factor. Interestingly, however Smiggle was also said to connect with unfavourable brand personality aspect, that is, a Disagreeable personality factor as suggested by a number of FG1 participants. This finding supported Sweeney and Brandon's (2006) brand personality interpersonal circumplex model which proposed that brand can be related to negative personality concepts. Therefore, it was concluded that participants in different age groups not only had varying brand personality preferences, but also perceived brands differently.

The only commonality between FG1 and FG3 was that they mutually preferred Likable brand personality which was associated with brand characters. For example, Disney's Mickey Mouse, Kitty cat from Hello Kitty, and the Japanese look-like collecting dolls from Kimmidoll. These Theme Two findings allowed for the information gap to be closed from previous brand personality studies (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Caprara, et al., 2001; Matzler, et al., 2006; Siguaw, et al., 1999; Swaminathan,

et al., 2009), that is, the deficits in identifying which brand personality was preferred by whom and in what age groups.

5.3 Theme Three: *Pleasure in the Purchase*

Representing the emotional attachment in the purchasing process, Theme Three *Pleasure in the Purchase*, emerged relative to participants' collectible behaviours. It relates to the third objective in this study, that is, to examine the role of collectible behaviour toward consumers' SSPs purchasing intentions across specific age groups.

Participants were asked to share their experience of collecting SSPs and how these collectible behaviours influenced their purchasing of SSPs. Predominantly the responses indicated there were degrees of anticipation involved in the purchasing processes. This suggested a range of influencing factors, or sub-themes, including the product's *aesthetic value*; the *social self-promotion* afforded by collectible item; and not surprisingly there was a degree of *memorabilia* associated with the product. When combined these three sub-themes explain the role of collectible behaviours in relation to participants' buying intentions. (see Figure 5.3.)

Figure 5.3. Theme Three: *Pleasure in the Purchase*



Footnote: Diagram developed by the author from the data.

5.3.1 Focus Group One

Three participants in this age group (aged 18 years and over) reported collecting SSPs and a further six recalled collecting SSPs when they were younger. The reasons given for ceasing to collect was that they had outgrown the use of the items and they had *"...moved on...so [they] no longer bought...or collected it."* (female, 22). Lastly, while the remaining participants (i.e., four participants) had owned SSPs, they had never collected it. Therefore, the discussion in this section focuses on the experiences of both the existing collectors and previous collectors to elaborate on the role of collectible behaviours. As stated above, the *Pleasure in the Purchase* theme has three components, that is, aesthetic value, social self-promotion and memorabilia factor associate with this behaviour.

5.3.1.1 Aesthetic value

The reason given by participants for collecting SSPs was because SSPs design was different from the regular stationery products (e.g., unique and cute looking). There was an innate aesthetic value in SSPs that attracted participants to collect *"I like [SSPs] because it's unique. You don't see it as much here...I put them [SSPs] in my draw [and] sometime I get it out and look at them"* (female, 23); *"I like cute stationery because it looks better... it's nice to collect them. I have a box to keep all my run out SSPs. I wouldn't just get rid of them"* (female, 21). There was also a feeling of enjoyment involved with collecting behaviours, either collecting the items or when looking at the collection.

5.3.1.2 Social self-promotion

Participants also show off their collecting items to others as a mean of presenting themselves: *"I buy unique pens because I like to get thing that are different to others...sometime I bring [them] to uni even though I don't really write anything...I show them to my friends."* (female, 23). This suggests that the item has become a part of participant presenting who she is, that is, she wanted to be seen as different.

Another two participants who used to collect SSPs also shared that:

I used to collect milky pens when I was 12 year olds. It's like a competition who got the most. You show it to your friends like *"you can use it but you*

have to give it back to me” you feel good when you show off to your friend (female, 22).

I went to Tokyo Disneyland when I was young and they sold the whole pack of different character pens [and] I used to have the whole set [of it]. I showed my friend one each day...because they don't have in Hong Kong [so] people asked me *'what is that?'* and I told them where I bought that thing...cos at that time Disney was not that accessible so people will think you are so cool (male, 22).

Cool means the image that you are the only person in your classes that go to Disneyland. The cool thing about stationery isn't the stationery itself but what it actually represents, especially when it is limited edition (male, 22).

According to the above responses, collecting items allowed participants to enhance their social self-image, that is, first participant wanted to be seen as a *master* who owned the most items among friends. The item became like a treasure because people had to ask for the item and return it to the owner. The second participant wanted to show off his friends as a way of sharing his Tokyo Disneyland experience and to give an image of being *cool* kid who had different items from others. In both cases, there was pride associated with showing off behaviour.

5.3.1.3 Memorabilia

Collectable items contain memories that connect the participant with the item. The associated sentimental value provides links to past experience and hence a reason for collecting SSPs.

Sometime I collect [SSPs] because they maybe like a souvenir, maybe they have sentimental value to me (female, 23)...when you're older you look at it...it's like a memory of what you collected when you were young (female, 20)...there is a story behind like why you buy that...like I got this Kimmidoll key ring when I bought a new car (female, 21).

Participants associated memories with collecting items as reminders of, for example, where they have been (e.g., a souvenir from different places); what they used to like when they were younger; and why they purchased the items.

One previous collector added that: *"When I did the dictation and I got full mark my teacher used to give me small pens and erasers. It's the reward [and] it's so cool. I feel like an achievement. It's something that everyone can't get it. You can buy the pens... but it's different when your teacher gave it to you"* (male, 22). The participant was fondly recalling early school year achievements and how important the teacher's recognition was at that time.

A role of collectible behaviours was reportedly increasing participant's SSPs buying intentions even though the items for collection may or may not be purchased for useful purposes: *"I [usually] pick Hello Kitty and Winnie the Pooh when I go to stationery shops... I buy them [and] put them in my collection, whether or not I use it..."* (female, 23); *"When I see cute stationery I buy it but I'm not going to use it"* (female, 20). Participants were more likely to increase their collection with the new items whenever they see what they like.

Moreover, the wider effect of collectible behaviours was that participants' family and friends were more inclined to purchase SSPs items as presents: *"My friends buy me Hello Kitty probably because I'm collecting it"* (female, 23); *"I was looking for stuff to put in my room when I first moved house and I got given a big bright colourful Kimmidoll money jar from my uncle...to add to my collection...I really like it"* (female, 21). It appeared that participants' family and friends supported participants' collecting behaviours by giving them more items.

5.3.2 Focus Group Two

One participant in this age group (aged 13-15 years) reported collecting stationery products and this was a regular stationery brand (i.e., Pilot). Another participant reported previously collecting SSPs and the remaining participants had no SSPs collecting experiences. According to those who had previously collected stationery products, the items aesthetic value was the only factor contributing to their behaviours.

5.3.2.1 Aesthetic value

A participant reported collecting Pilot because the products came in different colours which make the collection attractive: *"I collect them...and I have a range of different colours [and] it just looks nice"* (male, 15).

The participant who used to collect SSPs added that there was a feeling of happiness when interacting with the collected items: *"I used to love them...I'd just look at them and put them together nicely... it made me happy"* (female, 15); however, the participant stopped collecting when she outgrew the need to collect them: *"I still have my collection but I don't buy anymore...I used to collect erasers...I got up to 150 something and mom said you don't buy anymore"* (female, 15).

Additionally, participant's collectible behaviours influenced future purchasing intentions towards the products: *"I usually buy Pilot...after I finish I can put them into my collection"* (male, 15); *"You don't use it you just keep it...it makes me feel good when I buy them because I know that I could get so many of them"* (female, 15).

5.3.3 Focus Group Three

Two-thirds of the participants in this age group (aged eight to 11 years) were collectors, whereas the remaining participants tended only to use SSPs and had never experienced collecting the products. The reasons given for collecting SSPs were its aesthetic value and social self-promotion.

5.3.3.1 Aesthetic value

Participants were motivated to collect SSPs due to its visual appeal which included the products' design, the fragrance, and the colours. Eight participants gave a range of similar comments: *"I collect Smiggle because they are nice...smell nice...different colours and shapes... like different animals"* (females and males, 8-10).

Others also added that: *"It looks good if you have it [Smiggle] around your room because the colour really stands out"* (male, 9); and *"You can put it [Smiggle] up on the shelf and display it and it looks really nice"* (female, 10). Participants reported receiving pleasure when displaying or looking at their collection.

5.3.3.2 Social self-promotion

Collecting items were also used to improve participants social interactions with their peer: *"It's just cool to collect lots of stuff on one subject...your friends will be like 'wow' with your collection...I share sniff stickers with my friends - it's a sticker that smells like its fruit character. It's cool if you have the rare one you can show off to your friends"* (female, 10); and *"I bring some collections to school and show my friends...sometime I trade one eraser for another eraser"* (males, 9). Sharing and trading activities suggested interactive social relationships.

Participants' demand for SSPs was reportedly increasing as a result of collectible behaviours. Even though participants did not state their intention to collect the whole SSPs set, they intended to purchase more of SSPs to add onto their collection:

I'm collecting Smiggle and I plan to get more of it (males, 9)... Smiggle make new ones every three or six months and so you can buy more of them and since you own one you know you can get more (female, 10).

If you want to collect something usually you buy one thing that you really like to start off and then you wanna buy another and another and have lots of them...it's addictive (female, 10).

It was interesting to note that at this early age the collectible behaviours were referred to as *addictive* and for the participants to recognise this contributed to the need to purchase more items.

The outcome of collectible behaviour also reportedly influenced participants' friends and family buying decisions: *"I didn't intend to start a big collection but I got given about nine for my birthday and then people start getting me more of them"* (female, 10); *"I got one or two and my friend gave me a big pencil case and Smiggle erasers so I started collecting them more... it's kind of addictive"* (female, 10).

5.3.4 Outcome: Theme Three *Pleasure in the Purchase*

The results of Theme Three analysis, *Pleasure in the Purchase*, suggested three reasons for collecting SSPs items. Firstly, *aesthetic value* was a common finding

across all the focus groups as there was a sense of pleasure involved in the collectible behaviours, such as a feeling of joy and happiness. This finding supported Carey's (2008) previous study suggesting that collectors sought aesthetic values within the product as a means of determining the item's significance. Secondly, *social self-promotion* was claimed to be an important factor in collectible behaviours among FG1 and FG3 participants. However, there were slightly different intentions within these two groups which were also consistent with Theme One findings. That is, FG1 participants collected items as a mean of extended their self-image as they were more independent with their purchasing decisions, whereas FG3 participants used these items as prestige goods to improve their social self-image among their peer groups - potentially relating to peer influences. These behaviours supported Belk (1988); Bianchi (2002); and Carey's (2008) research which found that consumers use their possession to express their personality, character, lifestyles and social status (self-definition).

Finally, attaching *memorabilia* to the collected items provided sentimental value to FG1 participants. This factor emerged with this age group only due to the reality that they had had enough experienced to be able to reflect on certain items while the younger groups (i.e., FG2 and FG3) were still at the information gathering stage of their life. These findings were consistent with an earlier report suggesting that there was a *sense of past* attached to collected items (Belk, 1988).

According to the values associated with collecting items, participants in all focus groups claimed to have higher SSPs purchasing intentions, particularly the items that they were already collecting. This cumulative buying behaviour was proposed as loyalty behaviour in Bopp's (2001) earlier report. Additionally, these collectible behaviours were endorsed and encouraged by family and friends as FG1 and FG3 participants were given SSPs collecting items as presents. This is not a recent finding as Belk's (1995) had previous stated that "the majority of collectors' families supported this habit...buying them gifts related to the collection" (p. 482) . Furthermore, it was consistent with Theme One finding in that givers usually buy presents that, for example, suit the recipient's personality, preferences, and needs and wants to obtain positive response. In this instance the collectible items serve as a means to support the recipient's desire for self extension.

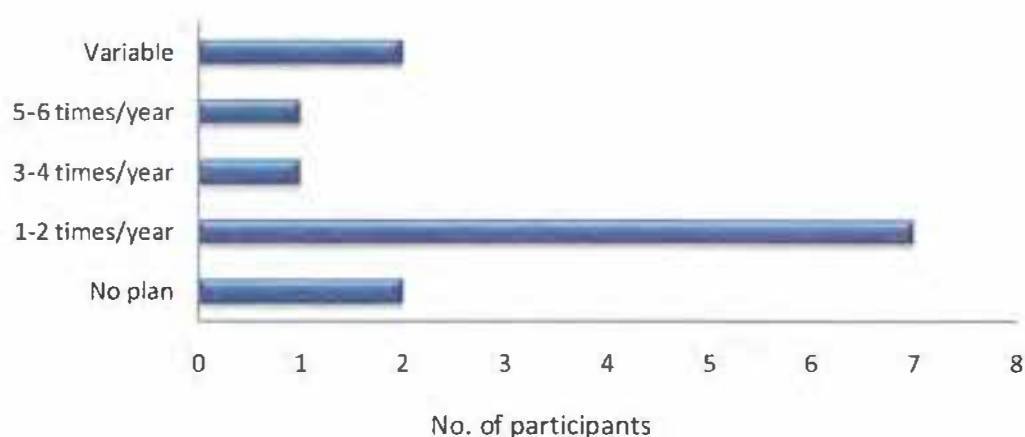
5.4 Theme Four: *Category Variations*

A range of *Category Variations* emerged from the participants' responses when determining the demand for SSPs and how this demand related to their intended future purchases. These inquiries were consistent with addressing the fourth aim in this study. Closer analysis of the data revealed three specific purchasing patterns, that is, a small group had no current plans to purchase SSPs, as opposed to the larger group made up of those who planned to buy SSPs and others who were keen to buy products but on an ad hoc basis.

5.4.1 Focus Group One

The following graph (Graph 5.1.) represents participants' SSPs purchasing intention in terms of intended frequency:

Graph 5.1. SSPs Purchasing Intentions: Focus Group One



A small number of participants (i.e., two participants) in this age group (aged 18 years and over) reported having no plan to purchase SSPs in the coming year. They claimed to have no requirement of SSPs for personal use *"I have no idea when I gonna buy [SSPs] for myself again, I use pen from work now"* (female, 22); also they were unsure if SSPs would be part of their future gift giving: *"I'm not sure who to give...there might be someone but just can't think of it now"* (female, 19).

On the other hand, the majority of participants were more likely to purchase SSPs one or two times a year: *"I'll probably buy once a year or every six months"* (female, 22). A small number of participants who were born overseas claimed to purchase SSPs

yearly when they returned to their own countries (e.g., Taiwan, Hong Kong) due to competitive pricing and a wider range/choice of products: *"I only buy when I go back to Asia because it's really cheap there"* (female, 23)...*and I can choose more*" (males, 22).

One participant planned to buy SSPs up to three to four times a year; however, the purchasing would be for gift giving: *"I don't actually buy for myself, but for other people maybe three to four times a year"* (female, 23). Additionally, another participant planned to purchase SSPs as often as five to six times a year *"...I used to buy a lot like whatever's new...[but] since I finished studying, I don't use a lot [of SSPs]...I buy maybe once in two months"* (female, 22). The final group of participants reported having variations in their buying behaviours due to the situation: *"I buy when I see something cute and I want it"* (female, 20); and their financial condition: *"If I've got extra money and I see something really cute I will buy it"* (female, 22).

All participants in this age group affirmed their SSPs purchasing intention would remain the same or similar in the future: *"It will probably be the same"* (female, 22). However, participants' purchasing intentions were not guaranteed in circumstances where the purchasing decision related to the extended product range from their favourite specialist stationery brands. Two participants stated they had no interest in new product categories that might be offered by the same brand:

I only stick with [Kikki.K] stationery because [of its] quality and functional value...I wouldn't buy [for example] a Kikki.K towel because I already had a towel and I could buy it cheaper somewhere else (female, 22).

Muji has lifestyle stuff but I only buy the stationery...because their style is simple so I'm not going to buy their clothes (female, 20).

Specific reasons, therefore, were given by participants for declining extended products; for example, differences in expected values from specific products. In the second instance the participant was not interested in Muji's Simplistic brand personality factor when these related to selecting from clothing items.

On the other hand, more than half of participants were unsure about purchasing from an extended product range. This appeared to relate to the type of products and the individual values associated with the extended products: *"It depends...I have to see what it is...I might buy if it's not too over the top...or if I like it"* (female, 21 and 22). The remaining participants were supportive of the extended product idea. The following is a list of the extended products that were drawn from participants' interests and expectations:

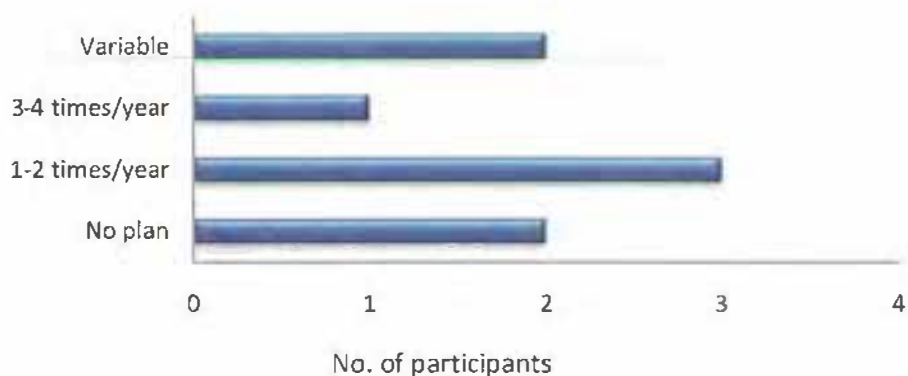
- Laptop cases and A3 bag from Kikki.K (female, 20)
- CD bag and iPhone accessories from Kikki.K and Muji (Male, 22)
- Technology appliances from Disney (Male, 22)

These product ideas were also suggested as a potential choice for participants' future purchases: *"I think Kikki.K style will suit other products like laptop cases...I'm happy to buy it"* (female, 20). The specific SSPs brand personality factors were suggested as being suitable in some product categories, for example Kikki.K's Simplistic personality could be applied to the design of laptop case.

5.4.2 Focus Group Two

SSPs buying intentions of participants in this age group (aged 13 to 15 years) is presented in Graph 5.2 to illustrate the range of the variations.

Graph 5.2. SSPs Purchasing Intentions: Focus Group Two



One quarter of participants had no intention of purchasing SSPs neither for personal use *"I don't really buy these [SSPs]...I just use random stuff I don't really care"* (male, 15); nor as gift ideas: *"I don't buy [SSPs] for friends"* (male, 14). On the other hand,

the remaining participants had different purchasing objectives. That is, three participants planned to purchase SSPs once or twice a year for personal use due to the product's high price: *"I don't buy [SSPs] very often...a few times a year...as they are expensive"* (female, 13); or for gift giving: *"maybe once a year...for friends"* (female, 14; male, 15). Another participant clearly linked the SSPs buying intentions to the four school terms: *"I'm still in high school so I buy every term...probably four times a year"* (female, 15).

The remaining participants suggested variable buying intentions as the purchases could be one off: *"I went shopping with my friends and got a few Smiggle and that was it...I don't know when I gonna buy it again"* (female, 13); or until they found what they were looking for: *"I never buy SSPs... I usually get it as a present...the only thing I would want to buy is sticky tape from Smiggle...I really want that sticker...I might buy it later"* (female, 14).

These stated purchasing patterns were endorsed by the majority of the participants' future buying intentions: *"I would say about the same"* (female, 13), with the exception of one participant who claimed to be aware of changes in her situation: *"I get my parents to buy SSPs now so I don't spend my own money...but probably I will not buy it as much after I finish school because it's expensive and I'll have to buy it for myself"* (female, 15).

Even though participants' future SSPs purchasing intentions were identified, as stated above, they tended to act differently with the demand for the extended product range. One participant reported being unimpressed with extended products due to the mismatched image or the personality of product varied from the original idea: *"I like Smiggle and I'm just gonna stay with the stationery products...I don't think it will work if they sell something else like Smiggle jeans...not a good idea...I wouldn't want my jeans to have the same design as my pen or pencil case..."* (female, 15).

However, although five participants were not confident with the idea of extended product range, they were undecided about completely rejecting thoughts of a new products should future the market offer them: *"These brands practically make almost everything you can think of...whether to buy new style products or not depends...I'd*

have to see what they've got" (female, 13). The remaining participants reported being interested in purchasing an extended product but to a limited degree. For example, if the idea of the new products was not too exaggerated: *"I'm happy to buy Hello Kitty purse and a watch but not clothing because it's just a little bit too much"* (female, 13). These statements endorse the concept that an extended SSPs product range could fit into certain product categories especially for those products that maintained the core brand image.

5.4.3 Focus Group Three

Participants' SSPs intended purchasing in this age group (aged eight to 11 years) varied according to the degree of parental dependence - particularly with regard to having their own money to buy what they wanted. Hence, parents exerted significant influence in SSPs purchasing patterns in a number of ways. Firstly, participants were usually allowed to buy or choose what they wanted for their birthday or on special occasions: *"...sometimes we get it particular stationery for birthdays...I actually ask for them"* (female, 10).

Secondly, in special circumstances, participants could get more SSPs when they asked their parents to purchase them: *"When I see something that I want and tell mum sometimes she buys it for me [but] it's rarely happen"* (female, 10). Finally, more than half of participants in this age group purchase SSPs for themselves when they have the money which tends to be when they did housework as an exchange for monetary rewards: *"We get pocket money from our parents when we've done jobs...like tidying our room"* (female, 10); or when they get additional money on their birthday: *"I buy [SSPs] when I get money for my birthday"* (female, 10).

These variable purchasing behaviours led to unpredictable purchasing intentions. Nevertheless, participants suggested their intention could range from four to six times a year or more: *"I just buy when I've got money but I would say probably every three months"* (female, 10); and *"...usually it wouldn't be once a month...probably equal to one thing every two months and sometimes more"* (female, 10). Participants in this age group reported having positive current SSPs buying intentions which also suggested that their future buying intentions would be: *"... about the same I recon"* (females, 10).

Moreover, participants demonstrated a favourable degree of interests towards the extended product ranges, that is, only four participants hesitated with the idea "*I don't really know how it would be...I probably still would buy them*" (female, 10). The majority of the participants, however, were excited when discussing the potential for future products from their preferred stationery brands. They indicated the products that they would want to buy in the future, exclusively from Smiggle, as follows: "*I would really want to see...*

- Smiggle school products: school books, scrap books, bigger rulers, different designed pens (males, 8-10)
- Mixture of coloured products (e.g., half pink and purple colour on an item), different patterns and animal shapes erasers, wrapping paper (female, 10)
- More vibrating products (male, 9)
- Eating erasers that are scented, rub-able and edible. For example, smell like strawberry and taste like strawberry (female, 10)
- Smiggle water bottles (male, 8)
- Functional Smiggle pocket stationery sets - come with pencil, eraser and scissors, for example like pocket knife (female, 10)

...in the future" (males, females, 8-10). Having improved versions or completely new products had the potent to increased participants' future purchasing intentions.

5.4.4 Outcome: Theme Four *Category Variations*

The outcome of the findings for *Category Variations* revealed that SSPs purchasing patterns across FG1 and FG2 was on a continuum, that is, purchasing intense ranged from no plan to changeable intention of one to six times per year to ad hoc. On the other hand, FG3 participants demonstrated strong variable purchasing behaviours as they firmly relied on parental financial support. With a minor exception in FG2, the future SSPs purchasing patterns remains the same for the majority of the participants across the focus groups. This finding was consistent with previous research by Oh (2000) and Esch, Langner, Schmitt, and Geus (2006) suggesting that past expenditure behaviour could determine consumers' current buying intentions and may influence the likelihood of future behaviours.

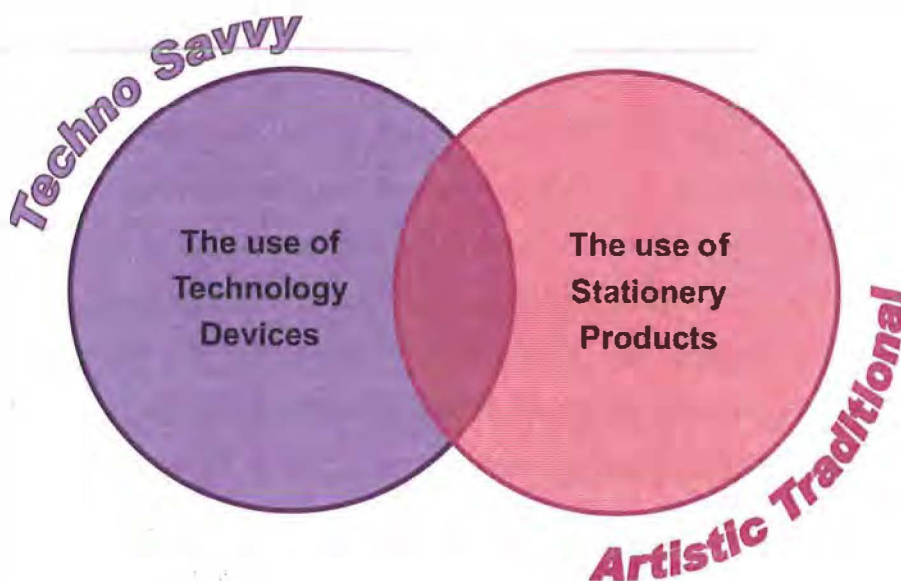
Moreover, future buying intentions with regard to extended product ranges varied across the age groups from being unconvinced to having some degrees of interests.

This depended on whether the existing brand personality or image of SSPs suited the new extended products or concepts. Firm support for this future buying intention finding was previously reported by Diamantopoulos, Smith and Grime (2005) and Wu and Lo (2009) who found that extended product's brand personality must fit well with the core brand personality in order to receive the same support from consumers and to sustain intended consumer purchases. Participants' willingness to purchase extended products also could lead to customer loyalty as suggested by Hui (2004) and Wu and Lo (2009).

5.5 Theme Five: *Techno Savvy* versus *Artistic Traditional*

The final theme, *Techno Savvy* versus *Artistic Traditional*, designed to address the fifth objective in this study, emerged in response to the questions that examined the future use of stationery products in light of progressive influences in information technology (IT). On a continuum, some participants indicated they were *Techno Savvy*, that is, they relied heavily on IT devices (e.g., computers, mobile phones) and had limited use for stationery products. This was followed by product usage variations that extended to a number of participants who remained constant users of stationery products - *Artistic Traditional*s. (Illustrated in Figure 5.4.) It is noteworthy to indicate that when referring to stationery products when discussing Theme Five, the participants were predominantly referring to pens and paper products.

Figure 5.4. Theme Five: *Techno Savvy* versus *Artistic Traditional*



5.5.1 Focus Group One

IT has become a big part of participants' lives especially in the area of communication. Participants (aged 18 years and over) responded that they all used mobile phones, computers and Internet as their daily communication sources. In this age group, three participants were referred to as Techno Savvy as IT items greatly influenced their everyday tasks: *"I try to use computer and iPhone for everything now"* (female, 23; male, 22). On the other hand, the remaining participants were deemed to be Artistic Traditional - those who balanced the use of IT devices and stationery products: *"I use both like sometime computer sometime pens"* (female, 22).

Both Techno Savvy and Artistic Traditional participants reported IT devices as having a number of advantages over stationery products. The IT devices were reported to be more effective and efficient to the end-user: *"I always type on my computer because it's faster and better"* (female, 23; male, 22); more economic and convenient: *"It's cheaper to send e-cards than actual cards and you can send it at midnight while you can't go to the shop and buy it"* (male, 24); and accessible: *"Most of the things are online now such as e-lectures...you can download anytime"* (female, 20).

Although IT devices are more advanced than stationery products to some extent, stationery products continue to be integral in participants' daily activities. It was strongly suggested by Artistic Traditional participants that writing stationery was preferred to computers in various tasks. Stationery products were more effective and efficient when there was a small degree of writing or quick noting involved: *"...you can't type when you answer the phone so you just write it down"* (female, 23); and *"I like jot down notes by hand because it's faster"* (male, 22).

Stationery also allowed participants to personalise their ideas in writing with minimal time spent: *"I prefer taking notes in pen because I can draw an arrow like how this relates to that but if it's done on computer I will have to go to many functions to find an arrow"* (male, 24). Moreover, minimal skills were required with stationery products whereas more knowledge, experience, and expertise were necessary when executing IT processes: *"I don't like using the phone calendar and applications because it's just so complicated and it slows me down when I'm trying to find it...I prefer my dairy and writing things down...it's easier for me"* (female, 22).

Lastly, as agreed by Techno Savvy and Artistic Traditional participants, stationery products can be more valuable and demanding than IT devices when there was a sentimental or artistic value associated with the items as following statements:

It's nicer to give someone a prestigious piece of stationery (male, 24)...also stationery is an art you can't replace it...you can't take away the artistic value of stationery that people put into (female, 19).

The handmade look is so popular and it will be a long long time. Generation pass and they don't appreciate everything computer generated (female, 20)...stationery reminds people of the personal touch and how much it means to see your written word rather than typing (female, 24).

Overall, from the given information, it was concluded that Techno Savvy participants use less of stationery products as they were more comfortable with the IT items. Whereas the demand for stationery products remains unchanged or slightly less among Artistic Traditional participants as they tended to make the most of both stationery and IT items.

From a different perspective, participants added that stationery retailer could use IT to their advantage by using cyber space as an alternative market channel: *"They can advertise on websites and people can see what's new now...or buy online"* (female, 23). This was believed to offer an increase in stationery products usage as well as the demand for the items due to higher product visibility and better product accessibility.

5.5.2 Focus Group Two

Participants in this age group (aged 13 to 15 years) were all studying at school. Due to limited availability of computers in school, stationery products continued to be used (during school hours) by the participants. However, according to their statements outside school time three-quarters of the participants in this age group were identified as Techno Savvy and only two participants appeared to be Artistic Traditional.

Techno Savvy participants reportedly preferred using IT items for almost every activity as this allowed them to do homework effectively and efficiently: *"I have a*

laptop so lots of my homework is done on it...it's easier and faster to type" (female, 14); and less time consuming when exchanging information or communicating with social groups: *"I use the computer a lot...talk on MSN, My Space and Facebook...you don't write letters any more...it could take days to get a letter"* (female, 13). However, the only time that Techno Savvy participants used stationery products was when they had to take quick notes: *"I only use a pen when I'm answering phone calls"* (female, 13).

Similarly, Artistic Traditional participants used IT items to facilitate completing the tasks (as stated above) - but to different degrees in that they used both stationery products and IT items. Stationery was preferred when this allowed participants to form an idea or make changes quickly *"I usually draft essays in pen because it's just easier for me to write down the idea and scratch it...but I edit it on computer"* (female, 13). Stationery was convenient to use when participants wanted to make a quick note: *"...I use a pen when I call or answer the phone...you wouldn't turn on the computer just to type that"* (female, 15).

It was concluded that for these school-aged participants the use of IT moderately changes the way participants use stationery products relative to the activity that was taking place. This suggests that the demand for stationery products remained the same during school hours; however there were different requirements for stationery usage outside school work.

5.5.3 Focus Group Three

As with the previous focus group, overall participants in this age group (aged eight to 11 years) indicated higher demand and usage for stationery products. This was principally due to limited access to IT at school. All participants reported being Artistic Traditional as they tended to use stationery products a lot more than technology devices.

Stationery products were commonly used for writing tasks especially at school for writing essays. However, computers were often required to finalise the documents: *"I only write in hand and I fix stuff on the computer...it looks nicer after I type it"* (males; females, 8-10). Moreover, as was evidenced in Focus Group Two, participants

reported using a computer to send information or to communicate with friends as it was more convenient and less time consuming: *"I talk to my friends online like MSN and sometimes send them e-mails...you don't send letters"* (female, 10).

Although there was a noticeable requirement for IT items, a number of participants claimed to use computers only occasionally as they had limited skills: *"It's not something I do daily like to go on the computer because I type very very slowly"* (females, 10). Moreover, the majority participants endorsed positive demands for stationery products as they enjoyed using the products: *"...no not really! I don't think computers will replaced stationery...we love stationery...it's fun writing with it..."* (females, 8-10).

5.5.4 Outcome: Theme Five *Techno Savvy* versus *Artistic Traditional*

According to the information obtained from the focus groups, the outcome of Theme Five, *Techno Savvy* versus *Artistic Traditional*, revealed that *Techno Savvy* participants had fewer requirements for stationery products while *Artistic Traditional* participants maintained relative greater demand for the products. However, the strongest use for stationery products was evident in FG3 participants (i.e., when compared to the other the two age groups) as they were all defined as *Artistic Traditional*. All participants across the focus groups reported that IT items were preferred for professional documents and online communications, whereas stationery products were chosen for speedy tasks, such as note taking. This latter finding supported arguments from a number of scholarly sources (Datamonitor, September, 2009b; Kapur, 2003; Liu, 2004; Penrod, 2005) reporting on the significance of stationery usage versus IT items.

However, the following findings arising from this current study have not been previously documented in the literature. Stationery products were widely used by FG2 and FG3 school-age participants as well as those in FG1 and FG3 who had limited IT operating skills. FG1 participants revealed that stationery products were preferred to IT devices when there was artistic or emotional value associated with the products, for example, the use of paper products to hold meaningful hand written messages or a thoughtful stationery gift. Furthermore, FG3 participants endorsed the concept that

stationery items would not become obsolete due to the pleasure attached to using the products.

The following chapter presents the conclusion for this thesis. The wide breath of information presented in this chapter is summarised according to the research objectives established in Chapter One.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

6 Introduction

This thesis aimed to provide an exploration into the impact of brand personality on consumers' choices of SSPs across different age groups. Based on the study's five objectives, the following paragraphs present a discussion of the findings linking them to previous research. It also provides and demonstrates how this information can be utilised by marketers and researchers.

6.1 To identify the major aspects contributing to consumer decisions in terms of SSPs and the degree of importance relating to these decisions.

Consumers' SSPs purchasing decisions are based on their assessment of the overall brand personality values principally obtained from product design, function and price. The difference between SSPs and uninteresting regular stationery is that the distinctiveness and creativity of specialist designs (e.g., colour, character, and patterns) enhances customer individuality (i.e., self-concept). Additionally, SSPs' functional values satisfy consumers' underlying stationery products needs while providing additional product usefulness.

The selected products fit with consumers' preferred self-image including their personality, preferences, and needs and wants. On the other hand, consumers tend to avoid products that relate to incongruent image (Diamantopoulos, et al., 2005; Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007). This self-concept value is a part of brand personality benefits that allows consumers to communicate who they are, what they like, and what their needs/wants are through product/brand choices (Sirgy & Su, 2000). However, to make a final decision, product values are compared with financial outlay, that is, positive consumer purchasing intentions are more likely when the product offers higher values than the costs involved and vice versa (Matzler, et al., 2008; Oh, 2000; Taylor, et al., 2004). These product evaluation patterns are also used when SSPs are purchased for gifts.

Additionally, consumers' SSPs decision-making is influenced by other factors including brand awareness, peer influence, and changes in needs. Popular stationery brands are more favoured when consumers are confident with their choices and

product values (brand personality values) are easily recalled and recognised (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000; Oh, 2000). An unknown brand, on the other hand, could delay customer decision making as further information may be required before the choice is made (Freling & Forbes, 2005; Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). Product information is sought in a number of ways, for example, via media advertising, friends and family. In addition, the product packaging presents an overall image or personality of the brand (Esch, et al., 2006; McCabe & Boyle, 2006; Romaniuk, et al., 2004).

Younger consumers are more likely to gain information from their peer groups in order to ensure the *right choice*, that is, the product that allows them to obtain sense of group belongingness and to maintain their social self-image (e.g., of being trendy) (Harradine & Ross, 2007). This peer influence, however, is less significant in late teenage consumers. Further to this older (i.e., late adolescents) consumers' decision-makings is more definite as they have developed individual tastes and are transitioning onto the next stage in their lives (Seock & Sauls, 2008). Therefore, different product values need to be available to address consumer's new needs, roles, and situations (Fennis & Pruyn, 2007).

Overall there are a number of factors influencing consumer's SSPs purchasing decisions to varying degrees depending on the individual needs and wants being met. Therefore, this finding can assist SSPs marketers to emphasise brand personality values (e.g., self-concept) associated with the product design, function and price that are known to be key factors in influencing their target consumers' purchase decisions.

6.2 To observe consumers' views toward SSPs and to determine brand personality preferences in each age group.

In this study, Dominant Brand Personality (DBP) in SSPs is identified according to consumers' brand perceptions (J. L. Aaker, 1997) relative to product design, price, promotional marketing techniques, and target market. Therefore, brands can be described favourably and/or unfavourably (Sweeney & Brandon, 2006). When selecting SSPs DBP factors Simplistic, Likable, Organized, Exciting, and Artistic are preferred by older consumers. On the other hand, younger consumers refer to their favourite SSPs as having Exciting, Likable, and Competent personality factors. These

brand personality factors are important according to consumers' needs and wants in their age-related decision making process.

This distinctiveness in preferred product choices explains consumers' purchasing decisions as they transition from their early years to late adolescence. For example, in this study colourful SSPs are perceived to be exciting and strongly connected to younger consumers' interests but less attractive to those in the older aged group due to the changes in product perceptions. That is, colourful products may be associated with lower quality items. As a result, older consumers have a preference for simple clear-lined products. It is concluded that consumers in different age groups vary in their product perceptions as well as in brand personality preferences.

Having an understanding of consumers' perceptions towards SSPs is significant for marketers. It offers an insight into integrating effective marketing practises (e.g., product design, price, and media advertising) to create and/or maintain the *right* image among targeted consumers. Also, in the event that there is brand misrepresentation, this information will allow alternative marketing strategies to be prepared.

6.3 To examine the role of collectible behaviour toward consumers' SSPs purchasing intentions across specific age groups.

Brand personality is used as a means of customer self-expression where there is strong product association as occurs in collectible behaviours (Phau & Lau, 2000). There are a number of aspects involved in consumers forming attachment to SSPs collectible items including its aesthetic value, social self-promotion, and memorabilia factors.

Consumers enjoy collecting SSPs as there is pleasure attached to the product's appearance, the range of designs, the colours used, and different patterns, (Carey, 2008). The process of collecting items is also used as means of promoting the owner's self, that is, relating to *who they are* or *who they want to be seen as*. This user self-identity creates an emotional connection between owners and the *collected* items. Over time, the items become part of the consumers' identity, referred to as the extended self (Belk, 1995). Lastly, older consumers are more likely to be attached to

their collection as it provides a sense of childhood connection (Belk, 1988). These collectible behaviours develop from an early age and as the process advances this makes for future consumer purchasing intentions - leading onto consumer loyalty (Bopp, 2001). It is important to note that family and friends have a significant role in supporting collectible behaviours when desired items are purchased as gifts (Belk, 1988), thus contributing to higher demand for SSPs.

Collectible behaviour can be a transient or life time activities. Maximising the aspects associated with this factor allows SSPs marketers to focus on progressively developing and maintaining these consumer behaviours from an early age. Also, understanding collectible behaviours allows SSPs marketers to improve their product's desirability and to employ marketing strategies that strengthen consumers' ongoing purchase intentions.

6.4 To understand the demand for SSPs in the targeted groups and to establish their future purchasing intentions.

The variations in consumer SSPs buying behaviours across the age groups range from no intended purchases to as many as one item every two months, plus whether or not the items are for personal use and/or gift giving purposes. Similarly, these purchasing patterns are likely to remain unchanged. SSPs purchasing patterns demonstrate a commitment factor that is significant for future sales as it can lead to loyalty behaviours (Matzler, et al., 2006). Moreover, the intention to purchase from extended specialist stationery brands varies according to what consumers are willing to purchase in new product lines to what fits within the core brand personality. In other words, consumers are less likely to be motivated by products that are associated with different values to those that existing brand can offer (Diamantopoulos, et al., 2005; Hui, 2004; Wu & Lo, 2009). For example, Muji's Simplistic brand personality factor is appropriate for technology accessories, but not for clothing.

It was determined that the power of SSPs brand personality greatly affects consumers' purchasing intentions. Marketers can use this information as guidelines for research prior to introducing extended product ranges; to control production; and to improve future sales while maintaining customer loyalty.

6.5 To examine how information technology affects the use of stationery products.

According to Datamonitor (September, 2009b) information technology (IT) is reported to be the most intrusive product substitute in the stationery industry. The increasing trend towards the use of IT items, such as electronic networking including computers, mobile phones and Internet service has curtailed consumer demand for stationery products as consumers embrace the advantages of advanced technology. These IT items offer more effective and efficient processes than stationery products in a number of ways, predominantly by creating professional documents and with timely interactive online communication. Therefore, as consumers rely more heavily on IT items there is less necessity for stationery products (Datamonitor, September, 2009b; Kapur, 2003; Liu, 2004; Penrod, 2005).

There is, however, a firm preference for stationery products in activities that involve quick writing of brief notes (Brown, 2001; Haas, 1987; LeGallee, 1993; Liu, 2004). Stationery products are also greatly used by school-age consumers whose hand writing skills are still developing and for those who have limited computing or technology-related skills. Most importantly, in situations where artistic value and emotional connections are associated with pen and paper products (e.g., special design stationery items or handmade products), stationery is preferred over uniform computerised productions. Therefore, although IT may have a great impact on consumer demand for stationery products, it will never entirely replace the need for and the meaning of stationery (Brown, 2001; Haas, 1987; Kapur, 2003; Kirk, 2003; Liu, 2004).

Although the finding from this research demonstrates the underlying threats to the sales of stationery products from IT, being aware of this trend allows marketers to add value to stationery products by way of product differentiation (e.g., SSPs). This in turn will assist in future stationery sales.

6.6 Summary Statement

The growth of SSPs is evident in the expansion of specialty stationery retail outlets and the extended product ranges that have resulted from increases in consumers demands (Datamonitor, September, 2009b; Willey, 2009). Additionally, the findings

from the current study highlight the power of SSPs brand personality in association with consumers purchasing intentions. This important information provides marketers with crucial insight into consumer behaviours. That is, it offers suggestions relative to differentiation in marketing strategies, which in turn can lead to success in an acknowledged competitive market.

6.7 Limitations and Recommendations

Being mindful that an Honours thesis is a one-year project, and time constraints were critical, several limitations were identified. A significant limiting factor was the timely recruitment of participants for the study particularly with regard to accessing the required number participants under 18 years of age. Also, with particular reference to reflecting the 13 - 15 age group, the findings were limited in scope in meeting objectives two and three as set by this research. With this in mind, future researchers intending to involve this age group would be advised to have wider alternative participant sources to avoid this limitation.

An additional confounding factor relating to consumers aged under 18 years was that young people, particularly eight to 11 years old, tend to rely on their parents' financial support when purchasing SSPs as they do not have their own income. In this instance purchasing decisions were complex and not entirely related to individual choice. Therefore, it would be advisable for future studies in this area to include parents in targeted samples in order to gain more in-depth information on consumers SSPs purchasing intention.

In the event that this research is replicated, the involvement of younger consumers (i.e., eight to 11 years old) is required. This would be to ensure that *Functional Consumers* behaviours were explored as this factor did not emerge within this age group.

Furthermore, there was limited personal budget available for this research project which led to restrictions in the variety of SSPs samples offered during the focus groups. Therefore, including a wider product range, plus different SSPs samples and brands in future studies could lead to more in-depth consumer information.

Finally, as there is a marked lack of empirical SSPs studies involving marketing theories, for example, brand personality theories and consumer brand loyalty as these apply to stationery products, these deficits represent opportunities for ongoing research. The resulting information would then be available to improve marketers' understanding of consumer SSPs purchasing intentions. Nonetheless, the identified Dominant Brand Personality findings in this current study can contribute to developing a framework for future research relating to the generalisability of SSPs brand personality factors.

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Appendix A

Human Personality and Brand Personality

(i) 'Big Five' human personality characteristics (OCEAN)

Big-Five human personality represents broad spectrum personality characteristics which lead to the theory of brand personality (Sweeney & Brandon, 2006, p. 653)

<i>Openness</i>	Reflective, questioning, uncomplex, uninquisitive
<i>Conscientiousness</i>	Orderly, reliable, inefficient, untidy
<i>Extraversion</i>	Firm, assertive, persistent, dominant, forceless, unaggressive
<i>Agreeableness</i>	Kind, cooperative, warmthless, cruel
<i>Neuroticism</i>	Tense, worrying, unselfconscious, efficient

(ii) Brand Personality Scale (BPS): The Big Five

Five-factor brand personality formed by consumers' perception toward brands (D. A. Aaker, 1996, p. 144)

Sincerity (Campbell's, Hallmark, Kodak)

- Down-To-Earth*: family-oriented, small-town, conventional, blue-collar, all-American
- Honest*: sincere, real, ethical, thoughtful, caring
- Wholesome*: original, genuine, ageless, classic, old-fashioned
- Cheerful*: sentimental, friendly, warm, happy

Excitement (Porche, Absolute, Benetton)

- Daring*: trendy, exciting, off-beat, flashy, provocative
- Spirited*: cool, young, lively, outgoing, adventurous
- Imaginative*: Unique, humorous, surprising, artistic, fun
- Up-To-Date*: independent, contemporary, innovative, aggressive

Competence (Amex, CNN, IBM)

- Reliable*: hardworking, secure, efficient, trustworthy, careful
- Intelligent*: technical, corporate, serious
- Successful*: leader, confident, influential

Sophistication (Lexus, Mercedes, Revlon)

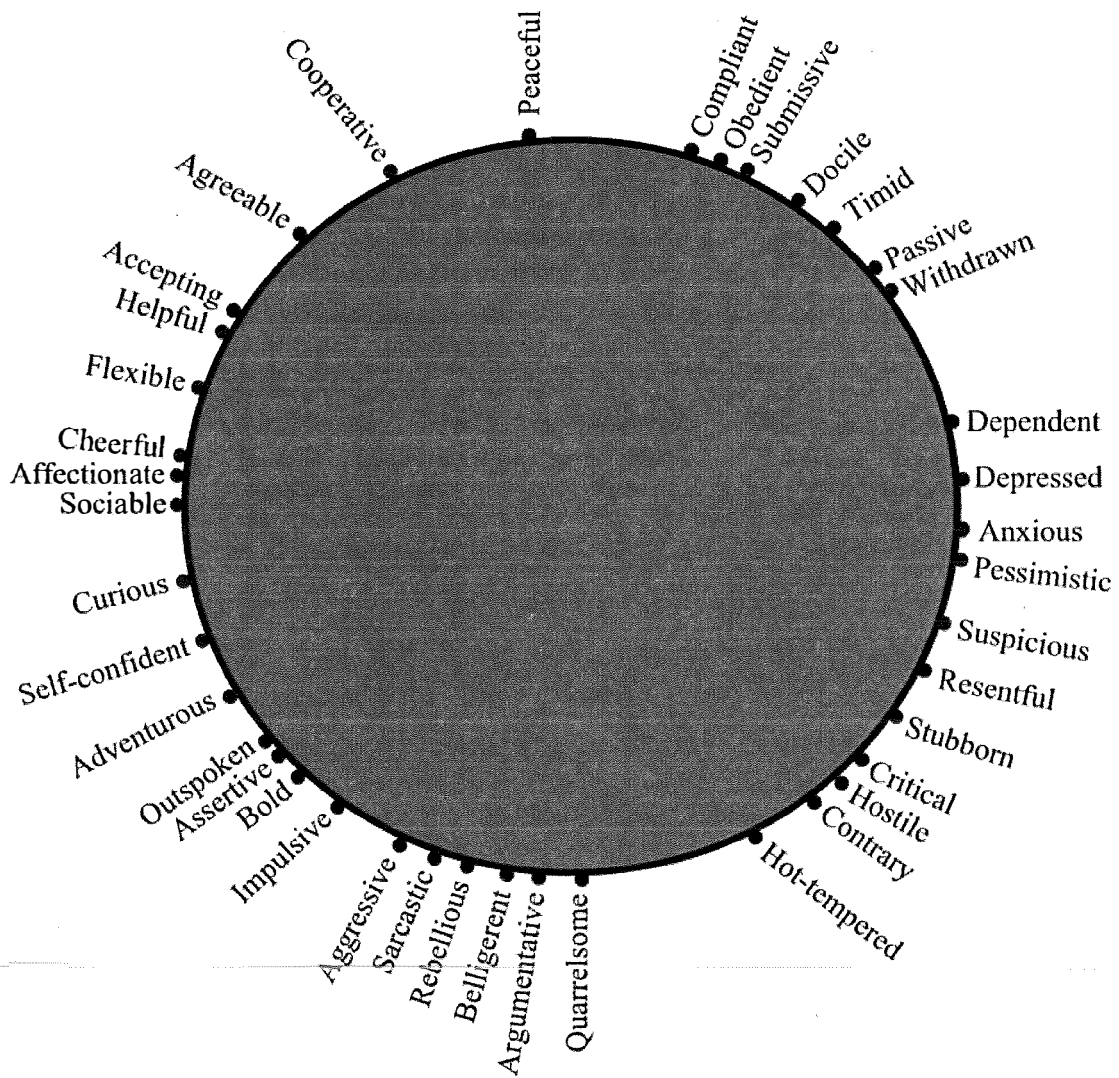
- Upper Class*: glamorous, good-looking, pretentious, sophisticated
- Charming*: feminine, smooth, sexy, gentle

Ruggedness (Levi's, Marlboro, Nike)

- Outdoorsy*: masculine, Western, active, athletic
- Tough*: rugged, strong, no-nonsense

Appendix B Interpersonal Circumplex Model

Example of Interpersonal Circumplex Model (Sweeney & Brandon, 2006, p. 647)



Appendix C

16 Interpersonal Categories

Summarized version of 16 personality traits explaining interpersonal circumplex used to measure brand personality. IPC model included both positive and negative personality (Sweeney & Brandon, 2006, p. 653).

<i>Ambitious</i>	Persistent, steady, industrious, deliberative
<i>Dominant</i>	Firm, assertive, impersonal, dominant, self-assured
<i>Arrogant</i>	Bigheaded, overforward, cocky, flaunty
<i>Calculating</i>	Calculating, exploitative, cunning, tricky
<i>Cold</i>	Warmthless, cruel, ruthless
<i>Quarrelsome</i>	Uncordial, disrespectful, ill-mannered
<i>Aloof</i>	Uncheery distant, unneighbourly
<i>Introverted</i>	Silent, unrevealing, bashful
<i>Lazy</i>	Lazy, unproductive, inconsistent
<i>Submissive</i>	Self-effacing, unaggressive, timid
<i>Unassuming</i>	Pretenseless, unconceited, undemanding
<i>Ingenuous</i>	Undevious, uncunning, unsly
<i>Warm</i>	Kind, emotional, sympathetic
<i>Agreeable</i>	Cooperative, well-mannered, cordial
<i>Gregarious</i>	Pleasant, genial, friendly
<i>Extraverted</i>	Outgoing, cheerful, jovial

Appendix D

Focus Group Questions

1. In general:
 - a. What do you know about stationery products?
 - b. Tell me what kind of special stationery products you've bought, owned or maybe you've received it as a present and what do you feel about it?
 - c. How often do you buy SSPs?
2. What things - like their features (criteria) - do you look for in these products when purchasing them?
 - a. Is it the design (suitability), price, quality of product (features & functional), image of brand, friend influence?
 - b. So tell me how these factors are so important to your decision?
3. Activities: a number of product samples are presented to the participants
 - a. Pick the product sample and discuss about your favourite and unfavourite ones, tell me why?
 - b. Describe the image and personality of the person who buy those brands (e.g., lively, fun, funky, and adorable)?
4. Do you collect these specialist stationery products – can you explain this further why?
 - a. How do you feel when you collect them and do you share or swap with your friends?
5. What special stationery brand do you intend to buy in the future
 - a. How often are you planning to buy one of these products in the future? Can you tell me more about that...?
 - b. Will you be interested in purchasing new products from a particular brand and what products would be of interest to you (e.g., personal items – bags, towel, and clothes)?
6. As we know, technological devices have become a big part of our communication so how does this affect or change the way you use stationery products for writing and reading activities?
 - a. When do you use a computer and stationery and for what purposes?
 - b. Does the ability and usage of computer/phone services change your purchasing intentions toward stationery items and how does it happen?

Appendix E Product Samples



Kikki.K

Source: <http://www.kikki-k.com/shop/category/products/>



Smiggle

Source: <http://www.smiggle.com.au/tem/home.tem>



Source: <http://www.kimmidoll.com/>



Source: <http://disney-stationary.com/>



Source: <http://sanrio.com/>



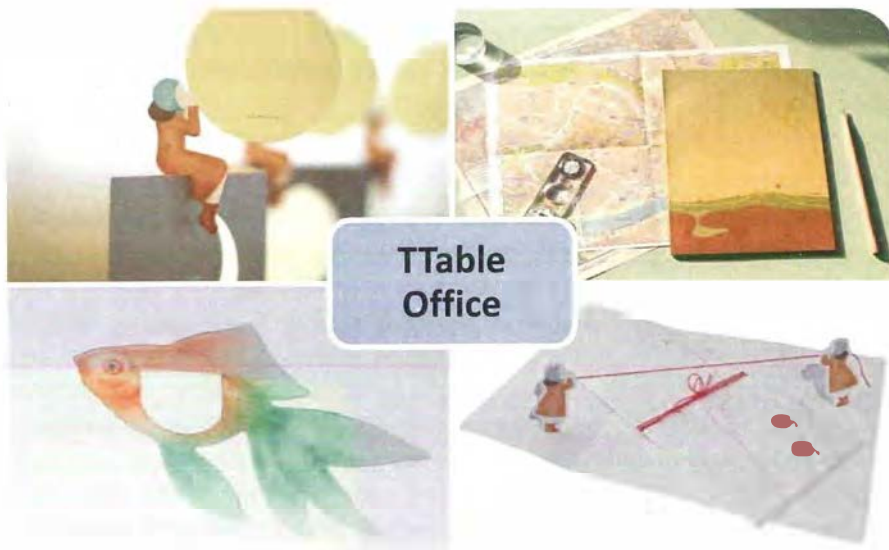
Source: <http://www.muji.com/playmuji/>



Source: <http://www.wunyingcollection.com/shop/>



Source: http://www.pigeonhole.com.au/shop/index.php?manufacturers_id=35



TTable Office

Source: http://www.pigeonhole.com.au/shop/index.php?manufacturers_id=46



Happy House

Source: <http://www.happyhouse.com.au/>



Surf Brand

BILABONG.

Source: <http://www.tactics.com/brands/surf>

Appendix F

Information Letter to Participants

The Impact of Brand Personality on Consumer Buying Intentions toward Specialist Stationery Products across Age Groups

You are invited to participate in this research, which is being conducted as part of the requirements for my Honours degree in Marketing.

We all use stationery products as a tool in non-verbal communication, such as writing and reading. However, people seek different values when it comes to purchasing these products. Therefore, I would like to find out how brand personality and other key factors influence consumer purchase intentions across a choice of specialist stationery products and across different age groups. The information you provide will enable the researcher (me) to gain greater knowledge of the relationship between brand personality and consumer buying behaviour within the stationery industry. To date this industry has received little attention from academic researchers. Moreover, the research findings are expected to assist marketers in understanding the different needs of consumers and thus existing products can be improved to suit those needs.

To ensure the success of this project and with your participation, I have organized to conduct a series of focus groups (8-10 participants) to examine several interesting questions. If you would like to be a part of this research, you will be asked to spend 45 minutes in a group participation environment. Your involvement remains voluntary and you may withdraw at any time – there will be no negative consequences.

Although the conversations will be audio recorded, I am the only one who will hear them. My university supervisor may read the transcript, however there will not be any way of identifying you or anything you tell me. Data collected will be used for this research project purpose only and will remain confidential. At the completion of my research, your information and details given for this study will all be erased. A copy of the research result will be made available upon request.

If you have any queries or concerns with regard to this research, you may contact me or my supervisor. Thank you for your contribution to my research.

Researcher:
Chalinun (Bee) Aurmanarom
Honours Student
Edith Cowan University
Ph: [REDACTED]
caurnana@our.ccu.edu.au

Researcher's supervisor:
Dr. Maria Ryan
Faculty of Business and Law
Edith Cowan University
Ph: 6304 5784
m.ryan@ecu.edu.au

Appendix G

Letter to Participants' Parents/ Parental Consent Form

Chalinun (Bee) Aurmanarom
Honours Student
Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup WA 6027
Ph: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear Parents,

Children tend to use a variety of stationery products as tools to develop their learning skills at school and throughout their tertiary education. However, technological devices (e.g. computers) have also become a large part of their skill development and education. I am conducting research to ascertain the demand for stationery products and to understand what factors influence consumers' choices of specialist stationery products across various age groups.

The study will involve myself (the researcher) meeting with two groups of 8-10 children between the ages of 10-12 years and 13-15 years old. These meetings will take approximately 45 minutes and will be held at a convenient location where both parents and children are comfortable. Parents are welcome to be present during the research.

The collected information from the focus groups will be used for this research purpose only and treated confidentially. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the information. Although the conversations will be audio-taped, they will be erased at the completion of my research. A copy of the research result will be made available upon request. Participation is voluntary and the interview can be stopped at any time with no negative consequences.

If you have any queries, please contact me on [REDACTED] or my supervisor, Dr. Maria Ryan, on 6304 5784.

If you give consent for your child to participate in the above research, please complete the following section.

I _____ give consent for my child or child in my care
(Parent/Guardian's name)

_____ to participate in this study.
(Child's name)

Parent/Guardian's name

Signature

Date

Appendix H Participants' Consent Form

The Impact of Brand Personality on Consumer Buying Intentions toward Specialist Stationery Products across Age Groups

I have been provided with a copy of the Information Letter explaining the project. I had an opportunity to ask questions and the answers I received satisfied my inquiries.

I understand that participation in this research project will involve 45 minutes focus group participation and audio recording will be used. Nevertheless, the tape will be erased at the completion of the unit and there will be no way of identifying me in any written assignment or presentation of the results of this project. I am also informed that my personal details and information I have given in this study will be kept confidentially during the research period and only been used for the purpose of this research.

I understand I am not obliged to participate in this study and I am aware that I can withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequences.

I _____ consent to participate in this study.
(Please print participant's name)

Participant's signature Date

Appendix I (I)
Specialist Stationery Brand Personality Description: Focus Group One

Brand name	Participants' Brand Perceptions (responses)	Dominant Brand Personality Factors	Rank
Kikki.K	Organized, simple, functional, clean, minimal, classy, modern, artistic, unique, girly, bold, colourful, Swedish, IKEA, good old time, environmentally friendly	Simplistic Organised	The most selected brands 1st
Kimmidoll	Clean and simple, original/oriental/tradition, characters (the doll's meaning), colourful, girly, collecting, nice, cute, calm, artistic, good gift, cultural (Japanese), caring, fun, fancy, expensive	Simplistic Likable	
Smiggle	Fun/not boring/functional toy/entertaining, colourful, funky, scented, childish, showing-off, cute, simple, clean and crisp, creative, clever, quirky, unique, Aussie	Exciting	2nd
	<i>Negative perception:</i> Not good enough – not creative, not good quality, not functional, not handy, not professional, no style. Less individual value – more quantity than quality, overcrowded, unpleasant colour (sharp colour)	Disagreeable	
Disney	Disney characters, fairytale, original, classic, animation cartoon, childish, colourful, vintage, and trustworthy	Likable	
Muji	Simplicity, plain, clear, cheap, affordable, quality, Japan (country of origin) and variety	Simplistic	3rd
WunYing Collection	Artistic, special (design), original/traditional/vintage/oldie/antique, fusion of modern and traditional design, professional, individualism, good material (recycle products), quirky, remind the good old time <i>Negative perception:</i> Cluttered and confusing (design), unfamiliar characters	Artistic	
Hello Kitty	Character, nice, cute, childish, and colourful	Likable	4th
Livework	Simple (look similar to Kikki.K), solid colour, cute, unique, alternative design, oldie, British	Simplistic	
Other branded	No information given by participants	Not been selected	

Appendix I (II)
Specialist Stationery Brand Personality Description: Focus Group Three

Brand name	Participants' Brand Perceptions (responses)	Dominant Brand Personality Factors	Rank
Smiggle	Colourful, scented/smell nice, different/look interesting/design, funny/not boring, creative, cute, nice, expensive, bubbly, appealing, cartoonist, modern, electric items, last long, tricky	Exciting	The most selected brands 1st
Hello Kitty	Cute, Kitty, girly, colourful, sweet, collection, Japanese, creative, skirty	Likable	2nd
Disney	Characters, colourful, cute, well known/famous, funny, creative		
Kimmidoll	Cute, collecting dolls, nice, expensive, trendy, pretty, colourful, good for present		
Kikki.K	Useful, good quality, arty, pretty and handy	Competent	3rd
Muji	Good quality, simple, different looking - see through		
Other branded	No information given by participants	Not been selected	